

MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN COLLABORATION:
LOVING NEIGHBORS TOGETHER

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Introduction

neighbor

1. a person who lives near another.
3. one's fellow human being: to be generous toward one's less fortunate neighbors.
4. a person who shows kindness or helpfulness toward his or her fellow humans: to be a neighbor to someone in distress.¹

Today three major monotheistic religions -- Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- identify themselves as followers of the God of Abraham (*Ibrahim*). Together they represent 55% of the seven billion people in the world whose spiritual lineage is traced through Abraham's sons Ishmael (Islam) and Isaac (Judaism), and through Isaac's descendants, to Jesus of Nazareth (Christianity).² Each of these faiths call their followers to worship the one God of Creation above all else and to love neighbors as they love themselves. The following verses illustrate this point:

"You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." (Vayikra-Leviticus 19:18, *Torah*)³

¹ Dictionary.com, "Neighbor | Define Neighbor at Dictionary.Com," com, *Dictionary.Com*, accessed April 23, 2018, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/neighbor>.

² Conrad Hackett, Alan Cooperman, and Katherine Ritchey, "The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050," *Pew Research Center* (April 2, 2015): 8.

³ Chabad.org, "Vayikra - Leviticus - Chapter 19 (Parshah Kedoshim)," org, *Chabad.Org*, accessed April 24, 2018, https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9920/jewish/Chapter-19.htm.

“And He [Jesus] said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40, NASB, *New Testament*)⁴

“Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful.” (An-Nisaa’4: 36, *Qur’an*)⁵

Unfortunately, the history of relations among these religions shows a poor track record of being “good neighbors” to each other. Today new opportunities and challenges present themselves in parts of the world where significant refugee and immigration populations have migrated. This analysis answers the question of whether interfaith initiatives since 9/11 provide replicable models for fostering love between neighbors with different monotheistic beliefs -- if not globally, then at least in local community settings. Focusing primarily on the two largest religions of Christianity and Islam, this paper explores the underlying faith histories, beliefs, similarities, differences, opportunities, and challenges of becoming loving neighbors together.

⁴ The Lockman Foundation, *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 edition. (Anaheim, Calif.: Foundation Publications, 1997).

⁵ Quran.com, “Surah An-Nisa [4:36],” *Surah An-Nisa [4:36]*, accessed April 9, 2018, <https://quran.com>.

A Brief History of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

The Beginning of Judaism (c. 3500-1 BCE)

Many centuries before Jesus of Nazareth or Muhammad of Mecca arrived on the scene, the Hebrew *Torah* records that Abram of the Chaldeans (later renamed Abraham) faithfully followed God's command to leave his homeland of Ur for an unknown destination later disclosed as Canaan. There



Figure 1- Ancient Near East (1750-1500 BCE)



Figure 2- Kingdom of David and Solomon (877-797 BCE)

Abram had his first son, Ishmael, by his wife's servant, Hagar, and 14 years later, a son named Isaac by his wife, Sarai (later Sarah). The *Tanach* (i.e. *Torah*, *Prophets*, and *Writings*) records tribal leadership passing from Abraham to Isaac, and then to his son, Jacob (later renamed Israel), who died in Egypt about 1500BCE.

The next 1,500 years of Judaic history include:⁶

- 1429-c. 1313BCE: Descendants of Israel enslaved in Egypt.
- c. 1313-1020: Moses leads people of Israel out of Egypt; receives Torah at Mt. Sinai; wanders 40 years in wilderness; Joshua conquers Canaan and 12 tribal Judges rule land independently.

⁶ TimeMaps, "Ancient Israel," *TimeMaps*, n.d., accessed April 11, 2018, <https://www.timemaps.com/civilizations/ancient-israel/>.

- 1020-930: Kingdom of Israel united under Kings Saul, David and Solomon; First Temple built in Jerusalem (960); Israel was prosperous and controlled its largest land area.
- 930-722: Kingdom divided into Israel (north, 10 tribes) and Judah (south, 2 tribes); much infighting.
- 722-538: North (Israel) overrun by neo-Assyrians, 10 tribes exiled (722-720); South (Judah) conquered by Babylonians who demolished Temple and Jerusalem; most Jews exiled (586).
- 538-142: Persian ruler Cyrus II allowed Jews to return and rebuild the Temple (538-515); region conquered by Alexander the Great establishing Hellenistic rule (332-142).
- 142-63: Jewish autonomy/independence under Hasmonean monarchy.
- 63BCE-313CE: Jerusalem conquered by Pompey and Roman rule established.

The Beginning of Christianity (0-600 CE)

Herod the Great, a Jewish ally of Rome, was the governor of the province of Judea from 37-c. 4BCE and is known for leading massive construction projects in Judea, including the expansion of the second Temple in Jerusalem. Rome's primary concerns with its territories were that they continue to pay taxes into the national coffers and that the local rulers repress any signs of revolt or public displays of animosity towards Rome.⁷



In this setting, the *New Testament* describes the birth of Jesus (c. 4BCE-30CE) in Bethlehem (City of David) to a virgin named Mary and her husband, Joseph of Nazareth.⁸ A while later, wise men from the East arrived in Jerusalem looking for the Messiah foretold by Jewish prophets and now

⁷ Bible-History.com, "Bible Maps (Bible History Online)," com, *Bible-History.Com*, accessed April 10, 2018, <http://www.bible-history.com/maps/>.

⁸ The Lockman Foundation, *New American Standard Bible* Matt 2:1-12.

confirmed by a star that led them to Judea. After making inquiries at Herod's court, they proceeded to Bethlehem where they found the baby Jesus and then, heeding an angel's warning, returned home by a different route. After Joseph and family escape to Egypt, Matthew records that Herod ordered the killing of all male children of ages two and under in the Bethlehem area.⁹

There is limited information in the Scriptures regarding the early years of Jesus' life, but scholars believe that he had a traditional Jewish education in the synagogue and may have received formal rabbinic training. About 27CE, the *New Testament* reports that Jesus' ministry became public at his baptism by John the Baptist who affirmed "I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."¹⁰ Jesus went about Galilee and Judea for the next three years teaching and performing miracles as proof of his claim to be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament (OT, Christian name for the *Tanach*). On several occasions, religious leaders accused Jesus of violating Judaic religious laws including the ultimate sin of blasphemy. Jesus countered with a reinterpretation of key parts of the OT and challenged the leaders' historic understanding, application, and practices.

The *Gospels* (i.e. the first four books of the *New Testament*) indicate that by Passover week of 30CE, Jesus' reputation had spread to the point that his entrance to Jerusalem was celebrated by crowds like the arrival of a new king.¹¹ For the next several days Jesus taught in the Temple and walked about the city with his disciples. After supper on Thursday evening, Jesus was praying nearby in the Garden of Gethsemane when one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, led the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest him. Soldiers took Jesus to the high priest's residence where Jewish religious officials interrogated

⁹ Ibid. Matt 2:16-18.

¹⁰ Ibid. John 1:30-34.

¹¹ Ibid. Matthew, Mark, Luke & John.

him until morning. Afterward, they took Jesus to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, and demanded that he be crucified. Although Pilate was reluctant and tried to appease the mob in several ways, he eventually conceded, and the *Gospels* report that Jesus died on the cross in mid-afternoon on Friday.

Beginning Sunday morning and continuing for 40 days, the Gospels and the book of Acts tell of hundreds of witnesses who saw Jesus alive at locations across the region.¹² On the final day, while in the presence of his disciples, Jesus ascended to heaven from Jerusalem's Mount of Olives, promising to return again in the same way.¹³ Ten days later during the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, Jesus' Apostles (closest 11 leaders) and disciples were praying together when a strange phenomenon of wind, light, and sound came upon them and they moved excitedly out into the streets. They shared the Gospel of Jesus in languages previously unknown to them but understood by many foreign visitors in the crowd. The disciples explained that this was evidence of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus and several thousand joined the small Christian movement that day.¹⁴

From this beginning, Christianity quickly spread to major populations in the Mediterranean area and beyond. In addition to the Apostles, a Pharisee named Saul (renamed Paul) of Tarsus was dramatically converted on the road to Damascus and began ministering to Gentile (non-Jewish) people in Asia Minor beginning in the early 40sCE. Despite ongoing persecutions

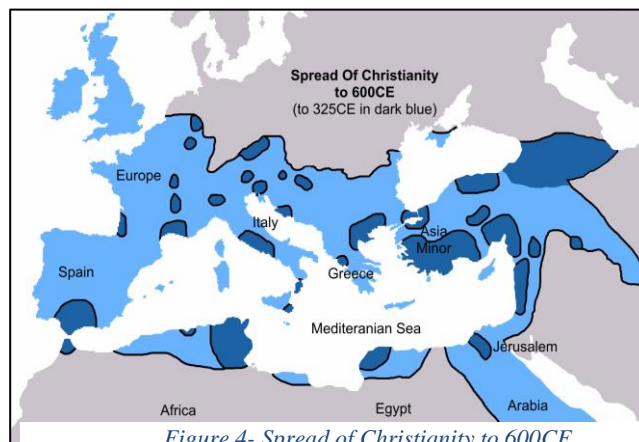


Figure 4- Spread of Christianity to 600CE

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. Acts 1:9-11.

¹⁴ Ibid. Acts 2:1-36.

and martyrdoms, the once Judaic sect of Jesus-followers grew into the official religion of the Roman empire with the help of Emperor Constantine (late 280s-337).¹⁵ Christianity continued expanding to other European nationalities and tribes over the next three centuries even as the Roman empire fell into decline. Ultimately, Germanic tribes (Goths and Vandals) overran the western territories of the Roman Empire and sacked Rome (c. 476).¹⁶ The eastern half of Christendom remained controlled by forces headquartered in Constantinople, later known as the Byzantine empire, from 476 to 1453CE when overtaken by Ottoman Turks.¹⁷

The Beginning of Islam (600-1000 CE)

Unlike Judaism and Christianity, the sacred text of Islam, the Qur'an, has little to say about the early years of its founder and prophet, Muhammad (c.570-632).¹⁸ Several other Islamic sources trace the genealogy of Muhammad to his father, 'Abdullah, to 'Abd al-Muttalib, to Hashim, and to 'Abd Manaf, whose lineage includes Ishmael, a son of Abraham. The Qur'an supports this tradition with references to a journey Abraham and Ishmael made to Mecca where they established the first site of worship to Allah, known today as the Ka'ba (Q2:125).¹⁹ Muhammad's father, 'Abdullah, died three

¹⁵ Geuiwogbil at Wikipedia, *Christianity's Spread to the Year AD 600.*, May 27, 2009, accessed April 15, 2018, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spread_of_Christianity_to_AD_600_\(1\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Spread_of_Christianity_to_AD_600_(1).png).

¹⁶ Cynthia White, *The Emergence of Christianity*, Greenwood Guides to Historic Events of the Ancient World (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 43–109, EBSCOhost.

¹⁷ History Channel, "Byzantine Empire - Ancient History," *HISTORY.Com*, accessed April 24, 2018, <http://www.history.com/topics/ancient-history/byzantine-empire>.

¹⁸ Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, Tra edition. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015).

¹⁹ Ibid., 58.

months before Muhammad was born and his mother, Amina, died when he was only six. Muhammad was adopted by his paternal uncle, Abu Talib, who was a successful merchant and trader in Mecca.²⁰

From a review of early Islamic authors,²¹ Gabriel Said Reynolds highlights three themes in the traditional narrative of Islam's emergence: 1) Islam declared itself to be "a religion that completes and corrects Christianity";²² 2) Muhammad is identified as the one who fulfills biblical prophecy; and 3) an ongoing struggle existed between Islam's monotheism and the polytheistic paganism that dominated tribal beliefs of the past.²³ Each of these themes is illustrated by stories about Muhammad's early life and the challenges he faced launching the religion of Islam.

The following verses from the Qur'an highlight the first theme regarding Islam's relation to Judaism and Christianity:

"Those who believe, and those who are Jewish, and the Christians, and the Sabeans [from southern Arabian Peninsula]—any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and act righteously—will have their reward with their Lord; they have nothing to fear, nor will they grieve" (Q2:62).²⁴

"Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a Monotheist, a Muslim. And he was not of the Polytheists" (Q3:67).²⁵

"O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion, and do not say about Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, is the Messenger of Allah, and His Word that He conveyed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and do not say, "Three." Refrain—it is better for you. Allah is only one God. Glory be to Him—that He

²⁰ Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*, 59285th edition. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), xxi.

²¹ Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam* Ibn Ishaq (d. 767), Bukhari (d. 870), Abu Jafar al-Tabari (d. 923).

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 12–13.

²⁴ Talal Itani, *Quran in English: Modern English Translation. Clear and Easy to Understand*. (ClearQuran.Com, 2014).

²⁵ Ibid.

should have a son. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and the earth, and Allah is a sufficient Protector" (Q4:171).²⁶

"You will find that the people most hostile towards the [Muslim] believers are the Jews and the polytheists. And you will find that the nearest in affection towards the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians'" (Q5:82).²⁷

These selections demonstrate that the Qur'an's view of other "People of the Scripture" ranges from recognition as fellow believers to hostile enemies and dishonoring polytheists. As will be discussed later in this paper, Islamic commentators subsequently developed a wide range of opinions as to how Muslims should relate to Jews and Christians.

The second theme of Muhammad's call is a major emphasis of Ibn Ishaq's biography, *Sirat Rasoul Allah - Life Of Muhammad*.²⁸ One tradition involves a Christian hermit (or monk) named Bahira who lived outside of Bostra. When Muhammad was twelve, Abu Talib took him on a trading journey to Syria and when the caravan passed by Bahira's cave he insisted they stop to eat with him. Bahira later explained that from a distance he saw a cloud hovering over Muhammad and, once he inspected the boy, found a mark on Muhammad's back that Christ said would indicate the one chosen to become a prophet. Bahira told Abu Talib to hurry back to Mecca and protect the boy from Jews and Christians who would want to kill him before he assumed his proper role as prophet.

The final theme deals with the struggle of monotheism against the pagan polytheistic beliefs entrenched in 7th Century Arabian Peninsula culture and commerce. Mecca's most affluent families, including Muhammad's own Qurayshi family, advocated polytheism for both religious and economic reasons. Muhammad's great-grandfather, Hashim, and his brothers established Mecca's Ka'ba ("Cube") as a holy worship and storage place for about 360 idols of nomadic tribes. Caravans from throughout the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasoul Allah -Life Of Muhammad*, ed. Michael Edwardes, n.d., 11–12, accessed April 12, 2018, <http://archive.org/details/Sirat-lifeOfMuhammadBy-ibnIshaq>.

region made annual pilgrimages to worship these gods, creating steady business demand for the merchants of Mecca. At age 25, Muhammad married an affluent and respected (older) widow named Khadija and assumed responsibility for managing her successful business. Now traveling among Mecca's social elite, Muhammad's aspirations grew much beyond those of a one-time orphan boy with little to his name.

Ibn Ishaq's biography relates that at some point Muhammad began retreating alone into the hills near Mecca. When he was about 40 years old, unusual things began happening as he approached a cave (Hira) where he liked to pray.

“When Allah had determined on the coming of the apostle of Allah, Muhammad went out on some business at such a distance that he left human habitation behind and came to deep valleys. He did not pass by a stone or a tree but it said 'Salutation to thee, o apostle of Allah!' The apostle turned to his right, to his left, and looked behind, but saw nothing except trees and stones. Thus he remained for some time looking and listening, till Gabriel came to him with that revelation which the grace of Allah was to bestow upon him when he was at Hira during the month of Ramadan.”²⁹

This was the first of many revelations that the angel Gabriel gave to Muhammad over the next 22 years that subsequently became the Qur'an. Emboldened by these messages from Allah, Muhammad began sharing what was revealed to him and preaching against the polytheistic religion that was the lifeblood of Meccan commerce. Initially only a few loyal followers embraced Muhammad's teaching, including his wife, Khadija, and her Christian-convert cousin, Waraqa. As Muhammad continued attacking inequities and hypocrisies of polytheistic society in Mecca, increasing persecutions of the young religion's converts forced some to emigrate to Abyssinia with the remainder following Muhammad on the journey (*hijrah*) to Medina in 622.

²⁹ Ibid., 20.

Andrew Rippen finds evidence of Muhammad's emergence as a strong religious and political leader in the treaties he negotiated during this timeframe. Muhammad successfully inserted himself as an inter-tribal mediator with the "Constitution of Medina" which describes his authority as emanating from Allah's messages about disputes.³⁰ Although his commercial status was growing rapidly, Muhammad was seeing fewer converts to Islam than he expected, particularly among the Jews who also proclaimed the God of Abraham. Disappointment turned into anger as Muhammad accused the Medinan Jews of treachery and chased them out of the city. Soon after, Muhammad shifted his focus on finding ways to gain access to Mecca and began orchestrating random attacks on annual pilgrimage caravans. This strategy elevated Muhammad's reputation as a military leader by putting pressure on Mecca's economy while filling the coffers of local Arabian tribes. A series of battles ensued between Medinan and Meccan forces from 624 to 627, eventually enabling Muhammad to negotiate safe entry for Medinan pilgrimages under the Treaty of Hudaibiyya. In 630, Medina's strength had grown to the point where they were able to conquer Mecca with little resistance. Muhammad then spent his final two years in Medina focused on consolidating power through alliances and increasing his influence through conversions to Islam by nomadic Bedouins.

³⁰ Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, 4th edition. (Abingdon, Oxon ; N.Y., N.Y: Routledge, 2011), 44–46.

Muhammad died in 632 without naming a clear successor, therefore causing debates between Islam's Meccan and Medinan leaders. Finally, a consensus was reached in favor of Muhammad's closest companions from Mecca initiating the first Islamic dynasty, the Rashidun or "Rightly Guided" Caliphate (632-661). The first Caliph was Muhammad's father-in-law, Abu Bakr (632-635), followed by another father-in-law, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (634-644), then a son-in-law, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan (644-656), and finally 'Ali ibn Abi-Talib (656-661), another son-in-law who married Fatima, the only child of Khadija and Muhammad. This

dynasty's military conquests rapidly expanded Islamic control to include the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, the Levant (Israel, Jordan, Palestine, and Syria), Iraq, and much of the Near East and North Africa.³¹

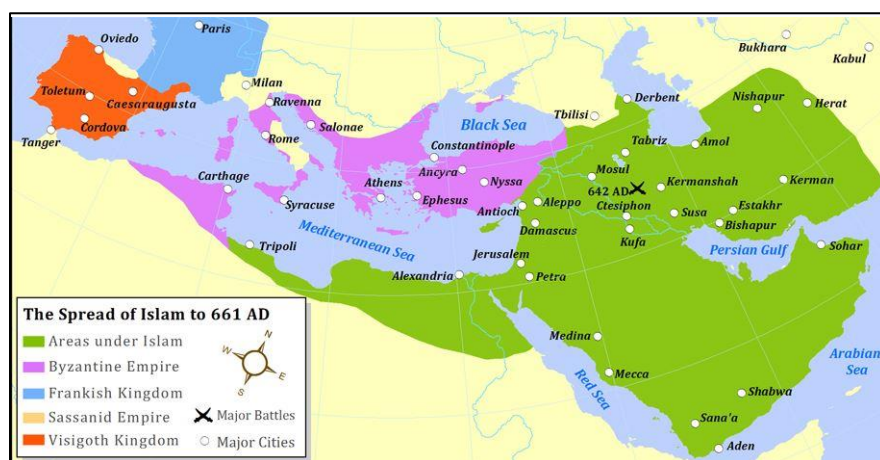


Figure 5- Muslim Controlled Lands (661CE)

Canons of Scripture

Having laid the historical foundation for this discourse, the following discussion focuses on each religion's approach to selecting ancient sources as its best records of original teachings. Such decisions typically result in the formalization of a canon (fixed consensus on the content of sacred literature) for each major sect or denomination of the faith. Using a variety of methodologies for testing and reaching a decision, religious leaders and scholars ultimately must choose a standard set of sources in

³¹ "The Rise of Islam," accessed April 15, 2018, <http://explorethemed.com/riseislam.asp>.

order to encourage a common set of beliefs within their religious body. Once decided, this standard becomes the “canon” or collection of documents accepted by the consensus of the church authorities.

The Hebrew Bible (*Tanach*)

According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*,³² the oldest extant documents and letters written using the Hebrew alphabet include papyri from Yeb and Assuan (494-407BCE) and Edfu (400-499BCE), all from Egypt. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in several sites near the Dead Sea, with the oldest known copies of biblical works found in eleven caves near the site of Qumran. These include scrolls dating from the third century BCE (Second Temple period) to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70CE. Among these scrolls are both partial and complete copies of every book in the Hebrew Bible except the book of Esther. About a dozen copies of some of these holy books were written in ancient paleo-Hebrew (the script of the First Temple era, about eight century BCE). Additional sites contain mostly documents and letters, especially papyri that had been hidden in caves by refugees from wars. Other scrolls from the Judean Desert are dated from the second century BCE to the Bar-Kokba War (132-135), including some written or dictated by Bar-Kokba himself.³³

The Hebrew Bible (*Tanach*) consists of 24 books (one per scroll) typically grouped into *Torah* (Pentateuch, 5 books), Prophets (5 major plus 12 minor in a single book) and Writings (13). According to Scripture, Ezra read “The Torah of Moses” to Jerusalemites indicating this first segment was in use as early as 444 BCE. Later rabbinic tradition asserts that prophecy ceased with the conquest of

³² Encyclopedia Judaica, “Hebrew Manuscripts,” *Jewish Virtual Library. a Project of AICE*, n.d., accessed April 15, 2018, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hebrew-manuscripts>.

³³ Israel Antiquities Authority, “The Dead Sea Scrolls - Featured Scrolls,” org, *The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library*, accessed April 16, 2018, <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/featured-scrolls>.

Alexander the Great in 332 BCE thus closing the prophetic canon. The Writings are a diverse collection, including some predate the Prophets, with differing literary form or perceived degree of divine inspiration. Although a version was in evidence as early as second century BCE, debates over the closing of the canon of Writings (especially Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Esther) lasted well beyond the destruction of the Second Temple in 70.³⁴

By the time Jesus Christ arrived in early first century CE, scholars believe the *Tanach* was available in both the Aramaic Hebrew (post-Babylonian exile) and Greek languages. The *Letter of Aristeas* (2nd century BCE) reports that the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek was done at the request of King Ptolemy II by 72 Jewish scholars from Jerusalem sent to Alexandria, Egypt during the third century BCE. Called the *Septuagint* (or LXX meaning 70), this translation appears to be the most frequent source of *Torah* references by *New Testament* authors and became the standard for canonical decisions made by the early Christian church. The adoption of the *Septuagint* by Christians appears to have been one factor prompting Rabbinic Judaism to abandon it in favor of the *Masoretic* translation of the Hebrew Bible, completed between the 7th and 10th centuries CE.³⁵

The New Testament of Christianity

Soon after the crucifixion of Jesus (c. 30), Cynthia White identifies two groups of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem – Aramaic-speaking Christian Jews and the Hellenized, Greek-speaking Christian Jews.³⁶ While the Aramaic-speaking Christian Jews (led by Simon Peter and James) continued

³⁴ Encyclopedia Judaica, "Creating the Canon," *My Jewish Learning*, n.d., accessed April 15, 2018, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/Bible/Origins_of_the_Bible/Other_Ancient_Texts/Bible_as_Ancient_Literature/Canonization.shtml.

³⁵ Paul Lawrence, "A Brief History of the Septuagint," org, *Associates for Biblical Research*, last modified May 31, 2016, accessed April 17, 2018, <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2016/03/31/A-Brief-History-of-the-Septuagint.aspx>.

³⁶ White, *The Emergence of Christianity*.

worshipping in the Temple in Jerusalem following Jewish laws and traditions, they distinguished themselves by professing belief in Jesus as the Messiah. The Greek-speaking Hellenized Christian Jews also claimed Jesus as the Messiah but identified with the larger Greco-Roman world by meeting in synagogues and reading the *Septuagint*. Stephen, a leader of this group, was martyred in 35 by Jewish vigilantes in the presence of the Pharisee persecutor, Saul (later renamed Paul) of Tarsus. Two years later, Saul/Paul experienced a dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19) and began carrying the message of Jesus to Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) throughout Syria, Asia Minor and Greece.³⁷ Paul wrote or dictated several letters (c. 51-65) exhorting and encouraging the new Christian churches that he planted. In the same general timeframe (c. 40-100), the Apostles (the Twelve called by Jesus, minus Judas Iscariot) recorded accounts of Jesus' life ministry (Gospel or *Injil*) as well as several letters and teachings to followers. By the end of the 1st Century, all the Apostles including Paul were dead -- most martyred -- and their writings had been verified, copied, shared, (although not as a single collection) and read regularly in worship along with the Septuagint OT as the authoritative messages of God to his people.³⁸

In the next era of Christian church development, known as the Patristic Period (100-500CE), a new generation of leaders faced many challenges to the rapidly expanding movement. Now recognized as operating independently from its original Jewish roots, Roman authorities saw the sect as a potential threat to stability and frequently used cruel methods to try to halt its spread, including jailing, beating, and killing any Christians refusing worship Caesar. Some rulers extended the purge to destroying church buildings and any copies of Christian writings they found. In addition, several false teachers like Marcion appeared promoting ideas that were radically different from OT and Apostolic teaching. These threats brought a new sense of urgency to identifying the key Apostolic writings known to be authentic and

³⁷ Ibid., 9–11.

³⁸ Michael J. Svigel and Nathan D. Holsteen, eds., *1: Exploring Christian Theology: Revelation, Scripture, and the Triune God* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2014), 57–66.

taking steps to ensure their survival. Modern era archeological excavations (e.g. the Muratorian Canon Fragment in 1740s) discovered manuscripts dating back to 180 that show that the vast majority of the 27 NT books now in our Bibles were already in use in the early Christian church. The 27 books in the NT canon were formally proposed by Jerome (347-420) and approved for exclusive use in worship by the Council of Rome in 382.

The Qur'an of Islam

Unlike Judaism and Christianity, Reynolds states that prevailing Islamic tradition views the Qur'an as the word of God that has always existed with God in Heaven (the "Preserved Tablet" in Q85:21-22).³⁹ Thus, the Qur'an is not viewed as having been authored by Muhammad (inspired or otherwise), but the exact recording of God's words as transported by the angel Gabriel and revealed to Muhammad. These exchanges began on the "Night of Decree" (first night of Ramadan) in 610 while Muhammad was meditating in a small cave on Mount Hira near Mecca. Islamic tradition tells that the archangel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad telling him to read ("recite", Q96:1) but Muhammad responded that he is unable to read. The angel squeezed Muhammad tightly and asked again with Muhammad giving the same reply. After repeating this sequence three times, Gabriel gave the first words of the Qur'an to Muhammad in Arabic and he memorized them. When the angel left, Muhammad hurried back to town and shared the message with his closest followers ("Companions") telling them to memorize them. Such revelations from Gabriel to Muhammad continued intermittently over the next 23 years, and each time, Muhammad memorized the new messages and shared them with his Companions to memorize (and possibly write them down).

³⁹ Gabriel Said Reynolds, *EdX: Intro to the Quran*, n.d., sec. 4, accessed February 23, 2018, <https://courses.edx.org/courses/course-v1:NotreDameX+TH120.2x+1T2018/0f5df00769ec43549e9e8f83cccccfd/>.

Following Muhammad's death in 632, Abu Bakr al-Siddeeq became Islam's first Caliph and commissioned Zayd b. Thabit to lead a council commissioned to record the entire text of the Qur'an. After comparing various recitations and written versions, the council wrote an authoritative text on a collection of loose sheets. When Abu Bakr died, these sheets passed to the next Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, and on his death, were given to his daughter and widow of the Prophet, Hafsa. According to tradition, the third Caliph, Uthman ibn 'Affan, was asked by his general Hudhayfa to provide an official version of the Qur'an so that his soldiers would stop fighting over the proper pronunciation of the text. Uthman recommissioned Thabit and his council to review the original sheets with all other recited and written versions of the Qur'an to establish an official version of text to be bound, copied and distributed to major cities across the growing empire (c. 653). Uthman also commanded that all other versions of the Qur'an be destroyed so that all Muslims would be united by a common Qur'an. By most accounts, this initiative expunged variant texts from regular public readings and established the *codex of Uthman* as the standard text.⁴⁰

With the Qur'anic text standardized, reading and reciting the Uthman codex was inconsistent due to frequent use of consonants without diacritical marks (dots). This introduced local variations in public readings and confused meanings of some Arabic words only distinguishable by such marks. Over time Muslims in different regions read, interpreted and wrote commentaries that conflicted with each other due in part to this confusion. In 1923, the Egyptian Ministry of Education in Cairo found this issue to be serious enough that they assembled a council of scholars to review all regional variations of the Qur'an and establish a new standard version with diacritical marks known as Hafs 'an 'Asim. All other

⁴⁰ C Gillot, "Creation of a Fixed Text," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Quran* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 41–58.

versions were reportedly gathered up and thrown into the Nile River. This version of the Qur'an is today the most widely accepted canon of Islam for public reading and reciting of the text.⁴¹

As noted above, the Qur'an contains only the messages conveyed by Gabriel to Muhammad and serves as the primary source of authority, law, theology, and identity in Islam. The Qur'an often provides only general guidelines for some of its instructions and may be silent on other Islamic beliefs and practices. Further details elaborating on the teaching and laws are derived from the *sunna*, the example set by Muhammad's life, and in particular from *hadith*, the body of sayings and practices attributed to him. As with other documents, these writings have various sources and require a systematic effort to identify the most credible sources of authority. Below are the *hadith* collections deemed most reliable by many Muslims.⁴²

- **Sahih Bukhari** Muhammad ibn Isma`il al-Bukhari al-Ju`fi (810-870, Persia) was an Islamic scholar whose hadith collection is recognized by the Muslim world as one of the most authentic sources of the sunnah of the Prophet (SAW).
- **Sahih Muslim Imam Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj** (c.815-875, Persia) was a student of Imam Bukhari who also collected ahadith. Each report in his collection was checked for compatibility with the Qur'an and traces its chain of reporters carefully.
- **Malik's Muwatta** Imam Mālik ibn Anas (c.715-795, Medina, Arabia) was a prominent scholar of Islam and originator of the Maliki judicial school of thought which trained over one thousand students in his lifetime. Malik steadily revised his Muwatta over a forty-year period ending with several thousand hadith in his collection.
- **Shama-il Tirmidhi- Imām at-Tirmidhī** (824-892, Termez, Uzbekistan) built a collection on the theme of the Prophet's physical description and character organized into 397 ahadith and is divided into 55 chapters.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Hadith Collection," *Hadith Collection*, accessed January 23, 2018, <http://hadithcollection.com/>.

Major Beliefs, Similarities and Differences

Christian

Christian doctrine has evolved over nearly 2,000 years of scholarly debate and aligns itself within major faith families and denominations identified by 70% of the US population according to Pew Research Center's 2014 *Religious Landscape Survey*.⁴³

% US Population- Christian		
(2014 Religious Landscape Study, Pew Research Center)		
Faith Tradition	Major Denominations	% US Pop.
Evangelical Protestant	Baptist-Southern & Indep (9.2), Nonden-Evang (4.9), Pentecostal (3.6), Lutheran-MO/WI (1.5), Presby Ch Amer & Evang (0.8)	25.4
Catholic	Roman Catholic	20.8
Mainline Protestant	United Meth+ (3.9), Evang Luth Ch Amer+ (2.1), Amer Baptist+ (2.1), Presby-USA+ (1.4), Episc+ (1.2), Nonden-Oth	14.7
Historically Black Protestant	Natl Bap+Prog Bap+ (4.0), Pentecostal (1.0), Afr Meth+ (0.5)	6.5
Mormon	Ch of Latter Day Saints	1.6
Other Christian	Jehovah's Witness (0.8), Orthodox Christ+ (0.5)	1.7
Total	All Christian Denominations	70.7

Figure 6- 2014 Religious Landscape Survey, Pew Research Center

While recognizing that each of these denominations are unique, Michael J. Svigel describes the following as traditional orthodox beliefs as held by most Christian churches.⁴⁴

1. **The Triune God as Creator and Redeemer- God is Trinity**—one divine essence in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All things have been created and will be redeemed from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit.

⁴³ Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study," org, *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, last modified May 11, 2015, accessed July 5, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

⁴⁴ Michael J. Svigel, "You Are Here: What Does It Mean to Be an Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical Church?", March 25, 2018.

2. **The Fall and Resulting Depravity-** Due to the disobedience of the first man and woman, all humanity and creation fell into a state of depravity, unable to save themselves.
3. **The Person and Work of Christ-** The eternal Son of God became incarnate through the Virgin Mary and was born Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human, two distinct natures in one unique person. He died as a holy substitute for sinners, rose victoriously from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come again as Judge and King.
4. **Salvation by Grace through Faith-** Because of humanity's depravity, people are unable to save themselves. Therefore, grace is absolutely essential to salvation, resulting in faith in God and eternal life.
5. **Inspiration and Authority of Scripture-** The Holy Spirit moved the prophets and apostles to compose the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inspired, inerrant, authoritative norm for the Christian faith.
6. **Redeemed Humanity Incorporated into Christ-** The church is Christ's body of elect, redeemed, baptized saints who by faith partake of the life and communion with God through Jesus Christ in the new community of the Spirit.
7. **Restoration of Creation-** One day Jesus Christ will return to earth as Judge and King. All humanity will be resurrected bodily—those saved by Christ unto everlasting blessing, the wicked unto everlasting condemnation. The physical creation itself will also be renewed, and sin, death, and evil will be eternally vanquished.

The Protestant Reformation (1517-1564) began when a group of Christian church leaders (e.g. Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli) broke away from the Roman Catholic church disputing several church doctrines and practices, including the acceptance of church tradition and the Magistrate (Pope and Bishops) as authoritative sources of God's revelation. Svigel recaps the Reformation's theology of salvation with the following four "*Solas*" (Latin for "only").⁴⁵

SOLA SCRIPTURA—Neither papal decrees nor church councils, but *scripture alone* is the only divinely inspired authority for faith and practice, containing all things necessary for salvation.

SOLA GRATIA—Salvation, from beginning to end, is by God's *grace alone*, not by human effort or unaided free-will.

SOLA FIDE—The free gift of salvation is received not through meritorious works, but through *faith alone*.

SOLUS CHRISTUS—Salvation is in and through *Christ alone*, not by any other means or mediator. He accomplished for us and in our stead everything necessary for salvation.

⁴⁵ Michael J. Svigel, "You Are Here: What Does It Mean to Be an Orthodox, Protestant, Evangelical Church?", March 25, 2018.

Finally, Svigel goes on to define Evangelicalism as “an interdenominational Protestant movement emphasizing a saving relationship with God through faith in the person and work of Christ, which insists on the paramount place of Scripture as final authority in matters of faith and practice, adheres to essential orthodox doctrines of the Christian faith, and seeks to engage the world through evangelism and mission.”⁴⁶ Evangelicals generally hold more conservative theological views as compared to liberal Christians as described in the following table.⁴⁷

Conservative Christian Theology	Liberal Christian Theology
God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who reveals Himself	God is love, who is discovered by reason or experience
Christianity is faith and love toward God and others	Christianity is ethics and social or cultural progress
Scripture is the inspired Word of God	Scripture is one of many sources of truth
Salvation is redemption from sin by God’s grace through faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ	Salvation is personal morality and cultural change
Mission is making disciples by evangelism and teaching	Mission is social and political action

Figure 7- Comparing Christian Theologies by Michael J. Svigel

Islam

According to *Islam-Guide.com*⁴⁸, the basic beliefs of Islam can be described under six major headings.

1. **Belief in God-** “Muslims believe in one unique and incomparable God, who has no son or partner, and that no one has the right to be worshipped but Him alone. He is the true God, and every other deity is false. He has the most magnificent names and sublime perfect attributes. No one shares His divinity or His attributes (Q112:1-4).”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Islam Guide: Some Basic Islamic Beliefs,” accessed April 23, 2018, <https://www.islam-guide.com/ch3-2.htm>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

2. **Belief in the Angels-** “Muslims believe in the existence of the angels and that they are honored creatures. The angels worship God alone, obey Him, and act only by His command. Among the angels is Gabriel, who brought down the Qur’an to Muhammad (PBOH).”⁵⁰
3. **Belief in God’s Revealed Books-** “Muslims believe that God revealed books to His messengers as proof for mankind and as guidance for them. Among these books is the Qur’an, which God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBOH). God has guaranteed the Qur’an’s protection from any corruption or distortion (Q15:9).”⁵¹
4. **Belief in the Prophets and Messengers of God-** “Muslims believe in the prophets and messengers of God, starting with Adam, including Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Jesus (peace be upon them). But God’s final message to man, a reconfirmation of the eternal message, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBOH). Muslims believe that Muhammad (PBOH) is the last prophet sent by God (Q33:40). Muslims believe that all the prophets and messengers were created human beings who had none of the divine qualities of God.”⁵²
5. **Belief in the Day of Judgment-** “Muslims believe in the Day of Judgment (the Day of Resurrection) when all people will be resurrected for God’s judgment according to their beliefs and deeds.”⁵³
6. **Belief in Al-Qadar-** “Muslims believe in Al-Qadar, which is Divine Predestination, but this belief in Divine Predestination does not mean that human beings do not have freewill. Rather, Muslims believe that God has given human beings freewill. This means that they can choose right or wrong and that they are responsible for their choices. The belief in Divine Predestination includes belief in four things: 1) God knows everything. He knows what has happened and what will happen. 2) God has recorded all that has happened and all that will happen. 3) Whatever God wills to happen happens, and whatever He wills not to happen does not happen. 4) God is the Creator of everything.”⁵⁴

These beliefs are reflected in major practices or duties of a Muslim summarized as the “five pillars” or acts of worship in Islam described in PBS’ Frontline “Muslims” report.⁵⁵

- **The Declaration of Faith (shahada):** The first act of worship is the declaration that "There is no deity except God and Muhammad is the messenger of God." Muslims repeat this

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ PBS Frontline, “Beliefs and Daily Lives of Muslims,” org, *PBS Frontline Teacher Center*, accessed April 23, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/teach/muslims/beliefs.html>.

statement many times a day during their prayers. If someone wants to become a Muslim, he or she makes this profession of faith as an entry into Islam.

- **Prayer (salat):** Islam prescribes a brief prayer or ritual worship five times a day: at dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset and night. Muslims perform ablution before prayer -- a brief prescribed washing of the hands, mouth, nose, face, arms and feet. One may pray alone or in a group in any clean location, including a mosque. The Friday noon prayer is special to Muslims and is done in a mosque if possible. Muslims face in the direction of Mecca when they pray.
- **Charity (zakat):** Muslims are required to give to the poor and needy. Islam prescribes an obligatory charity, known as zakat, based on two and a half percent of one's income and wealth. In addition to this prescribed charity, Muslims are encouraged to give as much as they can in voluntary charity throughout the year.
- **Fasting (sawm):** Muslims are required to fast from dawn to sunset during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the lunar calendar. People gather in the evenings for a festive breaking of the fast. When fasting, Muslims refrain from food, liquid, and sexual activity. During Ramadan, Muslims are also supposed to abstain from negative behaviors such as lying, gossip, petty arguments, and negative thoughts or behaviors, including getting angry. Muslims are required to start fasting when they reach puberty, although some younger children may also fast. People who are sick, traveling, menstruating, and pregnant or nursing may break their fast, but may make up the days later in the year. The elderly and people with disabilities are excused from fasting. Ramadan was the month in which the revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad began. Therefore, Muslims are encouraged to read the Qur'an during this month and often gather in the evenings in mosques to listen to recitations from the Qur'an.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj):** Every Muslim is required to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, located in Saudi Arabia, once in their lifetime if financially and physically able. Mecca is home to the first house of worship of God, the Kaaba, said to have been built by the prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. Muslims all over the world face towards the Kaaba when they pray. All outward symbols of rank and wealth are erased during the pilgrimage, as Muslims from every part of the globe come together for the purpose of worshipping God. Muslims who complete the pilgrimage are referred to as "Hajji" and greeted with great celebration and respect in their communities when they return.⁵⁶

Similarities of Christianity and Islam

In looking at the descriptions of Jesus, Josh McDowell and Jim Walker find several areas of agreement in the Bible and Qur'an.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Josh McDowell and Jim Walker, *Understanding Islam and Christianity: Beliefs That Separate Us and How to Talk About Them* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2013), 15–34.

- Jesus' birth was miraculous- Jesus was born to a virgin, Mary, after visitation by an angel who revealed his name (Matt 1:18-25; Q 3:45-47).
- Jesus was sinless- Jesus lived a perfect life of obedience to God (John 8:45-47; Q 19:17-22).
- Jesus was a prophet- Jesus had a unique and divine calling in bringing God's message to people as a prophet (Matt 13:53-57; Q 19:30).
- Jesus was a great teacher- The fact that Jesus was a gifted minister and teacher appears in both books (John 3:2; Q 5:110).
- Jesus ministered the Gospel- God gave Jesus the Gospel message ("good news" or *injil*) which Christians should follow (Mark 1:1; Q 3:3; 5:47-48).
- Jesus performed miracles- Both holy books declare Jesus to have performed miracles of healing the blind, the lepers, and even raising from the dead proving God anointed him in power (Mark 5:21-43; 10:46-52; Q 3:49).
- Jesus was the Messiah- Unlike anyone else, the Qur'an uses *al-Masih* (most Anointed) eleven times as the unique title of Jesus, the equivalent of Messiah in Hebrew or Christos in Greek (John 10:22-28; Q 3:45).⁵⁸

McDowell and Walker further highlight the high opinion ascribed to the Bible by the Qur'an and taught by Muhammad and early scholars, as shown in the following examples:⁵⁹

- "And in their footsteps, We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah." Q5:46 (Y. Ali)⁶⁰
- "It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the criterion (of judgment between right and wrong)." Q3:3 (Y. Ali)⁶¹
- "That which We have revealed to thee of the Book is the Truth, - confirming what was (revealed) before it: for Allah is assuredly- with respect to His Servants - well acquainted and Fully Observant." Q35:31 (Y. Ali)⁶²

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 255–260.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 258–260.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

John Esposito also highlights commonalities shared by Judaism, Christianity and Islam.⁶³

- Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all monotheistic faiths that worship the God of Adam, Abraham, and Moses – creator, sustainer, and lord of the universe.
- All believe in the oneness of God (monotheism), sacred history, prophets and divine revelations, angels, and Satan.
- All stress moral responsibility and accountability, Judgment Day, and eternal reward and punishment.
- Peace is central to all three faiths; however, all are prepared to enter “holy wars” to defend their communities or empires.
- All emphasize their special covenant with God, for Judaism through Moses, Christianity through Jesus, and Islam through Muhammad. The distinction is that each religion sees its new covenant as superior to the earlier ones.⁶⁴

Differences in Christianity and Islam

According to the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Church, the following table compares the major doctrinal positions of the Muslim and Evangelical Christian faiths.⁶⁵

BELIEF	ISLAM	CHRISTIANITY
God	Only one god - called Allah	Only one God in essence, within which three persons exist - Father, Son, Spirit - a divine mystery
Jesus	A prophet who was virgin-born, but not the Son of God	Divine son of God who was virgin-born. He is God's Word and Savior to humanity
Jesus' Crucifixion	Jesus was not crucified. Someone was substituted for Jesus and He hid until He could meet with the disciples	A fact of history that is necessary for the atonement of sin and the salvation of believers

⁶³ “How Is Islam Similar to Christianity and Judaism? - IslamiCity,” accessed April 23, 2018, /4654/how-is-islam-similar-to-christianity-and-judaism/.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “Comparison Chart -- Islam and Christianity,” *NAMB*, accessed April 13, 2018, <https://www.namb.net/apologetics/comparison-chart-islam-and-christianity>.

Jesus' Resurrection	Since Muslims do not believe in the Crucifixion, there is no need to believe in the Resurrection	A fact of history that signifies God's victory over sin and death
Trinity	A blasphemy signifying belief in three gods. In Islam, the Trinity is mistakenly thought to be God, Jesus, and Mary	The one God is eternally revealed in three coequal and coeternal persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit
Sin	Sin is disobedience to the established law. Sin does not grieve Allah.	Sin is rebellion against God. Sin grieves God
Man	Man is created by Allah and is sinless	Man is created in God's image and is sinful by nature
Salvation	Salvation is achieved by submitting to the will of Allah. There is no assurance of salvation - it is granted by Allah's mercy alone	Salvation is a gift accepted by faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ on the Cross and provided through God's grace
Bible	Muslims accept the Bible (especially the Pentateuch, Psalms, and Gospels) insofar as it agrees with the Qur'an	The Bible is the inspired Word of God that is complete and not to be added to
Qur'an (Koran)	A later revelation that supersedes and corrects errors in the Bible	Not accepted as divine revelation
Muhammad	The last in the line of prophets and, therefore, the final authority in spiritual matters	Not accepted as a prophet or legitimate theological source
Angels	These divine messengers are created from light and are not worshipped. Satan is an angel	Angels are defined in the Bible as heavenly servants of God who act as His messengers
Last Days	There will be bodily resurrection and final judgment with final destination. All Muslims go to heaven, though some must be purged of their sins first. All infidels are destined for hell	There will be bodily resurrection in the last days. Final judgment and eternal destination (heaven or hell) will be decided based on acceptance of Jesus as Savior and His removal of the sin which separates each person from God

Muslim-Christian Collaboration

Public Discourse

As referenced earlier in this paper, history provides many examples of governing authorities mixing religion with political and social agendas to achieve their objectives. They often appropriate

religious themes to gain follower's support for acts against "the other", such as discriminatory persecutions, trade and economic sanctions, penalizing legislation, radical "holy wars" and disproportionate military responses. To the discredit of religious people who embrace such polemic views, these acts increase biases against "faceless" people at the expense of fairness and justice for all individuals.

A recent example is the global concern over terrorism and many governments responding with added scrutiny of visa applications, tighter immigration law enforcement, and increased border security measures. In such a climate, it is not surprising that a general distrust exists of anyone holding religious beliefs claimed by violent radicals. The Pew Research Center's 2017 report entitled "*U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society but Continue to Believe in the America Dream*" confirms this case for Muslims in America.⁶⁶

- "The early days of Donald Trump's presidency have been an anxious time for many Muslim Americans, according to a new Pew Research Center survey. Overall, Muslims in the United States perceive a lot of discrimination against their religious group, are leery of Trump and think their fellow Americans do not see Islam as part of mainstream U.S. society. At the same time, however, Muslim Americans express a persistent streak of optimism and positive feelings. Overwhelmingly, they say they are proud to be Americans, believe that hard work generally brings success in this country and are satisfied with the way things are going in their own lives – even if they are not satisfied with the direction of the country as a whole."⁶⁷
- "Indeed, nearly two-thirds of Muslim Americans say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the U.S. today. And about three-quarters say Donald Trump is unfriendly toward Muslims in America. On both of these counts, Muslim opinion has undergone a stark reversal since 2011, when Barack Obama was president, at which point most Muslims thought the country was headed in the right direction and viewed the president as friendly toward them. In addition, half of Muslim Americans say it has become harder to be Muslim in the U.S. in

⁶⁶ Pew Research Center, "U.S. Muslims Concerned About Their Place in Society, but Continue to Believe in the American Dream," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, July 26, 2017, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/findings-from-pew-research-centers-2017-survey-of-us-muslims/>.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 5.

recent years. And 48% say they have experienced at least one incident of discrimination in the past 12 months.”⁶⁸

- “In general, Americans continue to express mixed views of both Muslims and Islam. But on some measures, opinions about Muslims and Islam have become more positive in recent years. ... And a large – and growing – majority of the public says that Muslims in the United States face a lot of discrimination, while roughly half of U.S. adults say media coverage of Muslims is unfair. Still, overall opinion on many questions about Muslims remains divided – and deeply fractured along partisan lines. Indeed, Americans – especially Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP – view Muslims far less positively than they view members of most other major religious groups. Half of U.S. adults say Islam is not part of mainstream American society. And the U.S. public is split over whether there is a “natural conflict” between Islam and democracy.”⁶⁹

In light of the above issue, this paper now turns to the question of what can be done to improve Muslim-Christian relations, particularly through collaborative interfaith efforts. A survey of global Muslim-Christian interfaith initiatives is next followed by the case study of a local interfaith community experiment.

Global Initiative Survey

“A Common Word Between Us and You”

Global relationships between Muslims and Christians since 9/11 have been particularly tenuous with both sides highly sensitive to public comments and critiques of the other. In September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI triggered a Muslim firestorm when he quoted a 14th-century Byzantine emperor’s derogatory remarks accusing the Prophet of commanding the spread of Islam by the sword in the region now called Turkey.⁷⁰ An unusually consolidated response came from 138 leading Muslim

⁶⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 122.

⁷⁰ “Papal Address at University of Regensburg” (org, Munich, Germany, September 12, 2006), accessed April 25, 2018, <https://zenit.org/articles/papal-address-at-university-of-regensburg/>.

scholars, clerics and intellectuals on October 13, 2007 entitled “A Common Word Between Us and You” (ACW).⁷¹

“Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world’s population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity. ... Thus, in obedience to the Holy Qur’an, we as Muslims invite Christians to come together with us on the basis of what is common to us, which is also what is most essential to our faith and practice: the Two Commandments of love.”⁷²

Christian responses came in a variety of forms, from warmly open to curt declines on the grounds of fundamental conflicts over the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Trinity. Among the positive responses was one drafted by Yale Divinity scholars which broadly endorsed the ACW proposal and principles. It then challenged all “to move beyond ‘a polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders’ and work to reshape relations between our communities and our nations ...”⁷³

Representing the opposing side was the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) which affirmed the pursuit of peacebuilding with Muslims, but not without also addressing the fundamental differences. WEA interpreted the letter’s frequent use of Qur’an verses emphasizing that “God has no partner” as a calling for Christians to give up their beliefs about Jesus Christ as a prerequisite. Instead, WEA insisted that religious freedom should be at the forefront of discussions as a basic human right and the true test of loving neighbors.⁷⁴

⁷¹ The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, Jordan., “The ACW Letter | A Common Word Between Us and You,” 2007, accessed April 25, 2018, <http://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/>.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Harold W. Attridge et al., “‘A Common Word’ Christian Response | Yale Center for Faith and Culture,” accessed October 23, 2017, <http://faith.yale.edu/common-word/common-word-christian-response>.

⁷⁴ Vebjørn L. Horsfjord, “World Evangelical Alliance: We Too Want to Live in Love, Peace, Freedom and Justice,” in *Common Words in Muslim–Christian Dialogue* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Interactive Factory, 2017), https://brill.com/view/book/9789004358232/B978-90-04-35520-0_006.xml.

Now, ten years after this flurry of interfaith dialogue and debate, it is difficult to measure the significance of changes occurring in global Muslim-Christian relations. One of the more visible results has been the founding of the Vatican-endorsed Catholic-Muslim Forum in 2008 which concluded its fourth seminar in October 2017 at Berkeley, CA. Twelve participants and six observers from major Catholic and Islamic institutions heard scholarly presentations on the theme of “Integral Human Development” (including body, soul, intellect and spirit) and endorsed nine statements of agreement. Among these are affirmation that (1) God created humans; (2) each human has inalienable dignity and value regardless of race, gender, religion or social status; and (3) every individual deserves freedom of conscience and religion which should be protected by governments.⁷⁵

John Esposito, founding director of the Alwaleed Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, recently said the ACW initiative “spawned a number of important personal and inter-institutional relationships” that are still important today.⁷⁶ In addition, the United Nations has passed a number of resolutions since 2008 encouraging dialogue on tolerance and a culture of peace among different faiths and religions by sponsoring the annual World Interfaith Harmony Week (latest was Feb 1-7, 2018).⁷⁷

⁷⁵ “Final Declaration of the 4th Catholic-Muslim Forum (8 November 2017, Berkeley, USA),” accessed April 26, 2018, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/11/10/171110c.html>.

⁷⁶ “‘A Common Word’ 10 Years on: Christians and Muslims Must Work Together for Peace,” *National Catholic Reporter*, last modified 3:00am, accessed April 25, 2018, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/common-word-10-years-christians-and-muslims-must-work-together-peace>.

⁷⁷ United Nations General Assembly, “World Interfaith Harmony Week,” com, *World Interfaith Harmony Week*, accessed April 26, 2018, <http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/>.

Additional Global Organizations and Initiatives

The [World Council of Churches](#) (WCC, Geneva) describes itself as “the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian unity”.⁷⁸ Today its membership includes 348 Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant church denominations in more than 110 countries, representing over 500 million Christians. In cooperation with several Islamic institutions, WCC has lent its support to the Al-Azhar Al-Sharif International Conference on Supporting Jerusalem (Cairo, Jan 2018), KAICII conference of Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders from the Arab region (Vienna, Feb 2018), and the Muslim World League symposium “The Role of Religions on the Strengthening of World Peace” (Geneva, Nov 2017). They have also participated in the 9th Meeting for Dialogue between the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue and Civilization of Iran and the World Council of Churches (Tehran, Aug 2017) and “Islam and Christianity, the Great Convergence: Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights” (Geneva, March 2017). In addition, WCC also recently published an English translation of *Divine Hospitality: A Christian-Muslim Conversation* by Gadi Daou and Nayla Tabbara.

The [Universal Peace Federation](#) (UPF) founded by Rev. Sun Myung Moon as an international and interreligious network of individuals and organizations, is dedicated to achieving world peace. UPF is an NGO in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations supporting the UN’s work on interfaith peacebuilding, peace education, and the strengthening of marriage and family. Its principles include the following: (1) God- We are one human family created by God; (2) Spirituality- The highest qualities of the human being are spiritual and moral; (3) Family- The family is the “school of love and peace”; (4) Service- One must live for the sake of others; and (5) Unity- Peace comes through cooperation beyond the boundaries of ethnicity, religion, and nationality.

⁷⁸ World Council of Churches, “What Is the World Council of Churches? — World Council of Churches,” Page, accessed April 26, 2018, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us>.

Frank Fredericks, Founder and Executive Director of [World Faith](#) (New York), started the organization in 2008 with a mission to end religious violence. The NGO pursues this mission by engaging religiously diverse youth to lead development projects locally in their community. This reduces violence through the “Contact Theory”, which sociologist Robert Putnam describes as “knowing someone within a particular religious group means a more positive assessment of that group in general – whether you have known that someone for a long time or not.”⁷⁹ World Faith’s focus is on the issues of women’s empowerment, children’s education, and public health. In addition to New York, the organization currently has chapters in Africa and India.

Community Case Study

As part of this research, the author was invited to participate in a series of interfaith dinners structured to foster personal dialogue and relationships among neighbors attending four local congregations. These meetings had their start in 2015 when the clergy began sharing lunches and coffees in an effort to get to know each other better. As their friendships grew, they began exploring ways they might enable others to build such camaraderie across historic barriers of faith and culture. In 2016, the leaders of Trinity Fellowship Church (E-Evangelical Christian), the Islamic Association of North Texas (I-Islamic), and First Unitarian Church of Dallas (U-Unitarian/Universalist) announced the opportunity for 30 members of each organization to meet for three dinners over three months to learn about and possibly make new friends from different faiths. The response was very positive and has continued for two additional classes under the name, [Friends for Good](#) (FFG). The last class included the addition of a fourth local congregation, Temple Shalom (J-Jewish Reform).

⁷⁹ E. Pluribus Unum and Robert D. Putnam, : : *Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century*, n.d.

In addition to allowing observation, the leaders of these congregations provided time for one-on-one interviews covering a series of questions regarding their experiences and suggestions for others considering such an interfaith endeavor. This approach generally followed a framework developed by Peter Riddell in his article on “Christian-Muslim Dialogue into the 21st Century”.⁸⁰ The following paragraphs summarize their responses under each survey question.

Question 1: In which of the following areas have you participated in Muslim-Christian collaborations?

a) Community meetings

All congregations are active in local interfaith alliances and support emergency needs of their neighbors through direct benevolence and cooperative programs (listed below).

- [Richardson Interfaith Alliance \(Richardson, TX\)](#)- (E, I)
- [Interfaith Council at Thanks-Giving Square \(Dallas, TX\)](#)- (I, U)
- [Faith Forward Dallas at Thanks-Giving Square \(Dallas, TX\)](#)- (I, U)
- [Network of Community Ministries \(Richardson, TX\)](#)- (I)

b) Clergy action

Each leader is intentional in developing relationships with other pastors/clergy in and out of their own faith tradition.

- First Unitarian (U) welcomed the first Muslim congregations arriving in Dallas in the 1970s by providing temporary space for worship and prayers.
- Co-founders of [Friends for Good](#) (FFG) invited Temple Shalom to join this year.
- E and U stood with IANT when protesters marched against Sharia law (2017).
- Some participated in interfaith vigils following Dallas Police shootings and immigration rallies at Thanks-Giving Square (E)

c) Social action and advocacy

Each support a broad range of social initiatives aligned with their congregation’s principles and values.

- Trinity Fellowship pastor addressed IANT congregation’s concerns about Evangelical Christian beliefs following election of Donald Trump as US President.
- IANT Imam taught a class on Islamic history and beliefs for Trinity Fellowship congregation.

⁸⁰ John Azumah and Peter G. Riddell, eds., *Islam and Christianity on the Edge: Talking Points in Christian-Muslim Relations Into the 21st Century* (Brunswick East, Victoria: Bible Society Australia, 2013), chap. 12.

- IANT helps many immigrants who are reluctant to seek help elsewhere for fear of retribution. (I)

d) Education

All congregations provide support youth and adult religious education programs at their facility as well as in local public/private schools.

- FFG is considering a FFG youth program but has yet to work through concerns about possible conversions and other questions.
- One of the congregations has its own school providing K-12 and adult education courses. (I)

e) Worship

All welcome opportunities for visitors to observe and/or join in worship and study programs; some aspects may be limited to believers in each faith, but no concerns about others observing the service (e.g. Lord's Supper).

- Each leader regularly prays for the good of other FFG participants.
- Most FFG leaders said they have not yet provided opportunities for another to lead worship services, primarily because of differing beliefs, traditions, and teachings contrary to each congregation's doctrines. (E, I)

Question 2: With which Muslim or Christian subgroups have you had the following interactions (e.g. sects or denominations)?

a) Dialogue on religious experience

FFG leaders have invited each other to teach about their faith beliefs and practices as an educational opportunity, but both the Evangelical and Islamic clergy are cautious about a full "pulpit swap" until congregational leadership feels comfortable with such an experiment.

- Leaders seek to model respect and understanding when facing sensitive areas of religious conflict.
- FFG encourages participants to be open to personal testimonies about faith experiences once there is trust in a relationship, but this is not usually something done in group settings at this point.
- FFG works best when there is assurance of confidentiality in all personal conversations.
- FFG discourages proselytizing at its events; responding to questions about your faith is encouraged but needs to stay within the boundaries of information sharing rather than "selling".

b) Dialogue on social concerns

This is generally allowed within respectful discussions; table facilitators are authorized to interrupt speakers who give extended answers so that all have an opportunity to share.

- FFG seeks to be "neighbors that care" and thus are intentional in praying for the good of all people in our community.

c) Campaigns on advocacy and justice

FFG places no limits on the causes that an individual or group may choose to support provided they do not present themselves as speaking on behalf of FFG; due to diversity of beliefs, the

positions taken on sensitive political and social concerns may have constituents on both sides of an argument.

- The only exception to the above might be FFG taking a position in support of freedom of religious choice and practice.

d) Traditional missions (e.g. evangelism, proselytizing, da'wa)

FFG discourages such activities at their events; however, responses to direct questions of faith are encouraged (within reason).

e) Debates/ apologetics

FFG sees debates as an ineffective method of building relationships due to the difficulty of ensuring a mutually respectful and constructive atmosphere; leaders try to steer away from speaking engagements that include openly hostile interviewers or opponents.

Question 3: Based on your experience in these discussions ...

a) In what areas do you find common beliefs or understandings?

Most FFG participants report their surprise at the high levels of agreement once they get to know each other and understand the context and assumptions behind any concerns; some of the major areas of commonality are listed below, but there are certainly many more.

- Broadly stated, participants from every faith tradition share the inherent love for members of their families and close friends.
- Generally, a sense of compassion is felt towards anyone suffering from unusual hardships (e.g. Hurricane Harvey in Houston), especially the vulnerable in our society like children, the poor, homeless, etc.
- There is a desire for justice in society, where everyone is assured a fair and safe place to live according to personal beliefs (without harming others).
- Protection of children and the vulnerable is important and includes the assurance of adequate food, shelter, and educational opportunities for them.
- Each believes in respecting one another as fellow members of the human race who have similar needs.
- The clergy share similar challenges in serving their congregants, such as the needs for pastoral and family counseling, providing guidance in personal decisions about marriage and having children, and providing comfort in times of trial or death of a loved one.
- Muslims and Evangelicals tend to have similar views on issues regarding homosexuality, gay marriage, and gender identity concerns.

b) In what areas do you find contradictory beliefs or understandings?

Each FFG leader's concerns tended to fall in line with the authority placed in their respective holy books (e.g. Bible or Qur'an) and the conflicts that may arise from its teachings about "the other".

- Unitarian/Universalist's view a comparatively wide range of personal choices as acceptable within the faith's covenant of Seven Principles affirmed by all U/U congregations (listed below).⁸¹
 1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person
 2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
 3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in their congregations
 4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
 5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within their congregations and in society at large
 6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all
 7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which they are a part
 - Islam provides clear guidance on many aspects of the follower's life based on the teachings of the Qur'an and ahadifs; areas of particular challenge highlighted in this interview include the following.
 1. Understanding God's desires for mankind and how they should influence national or state laws involving abortion, homosexuality, gay marriage, and similar concerns
 2. Understanding God's desires for mankind and allowing a faith community to establish governing rules for its members (e.g. "Anti-Sharia Law" movement)
 3. Disputes over "Holy Lands" (e.g. Israeli-Palestine conflict)
 4. How to deal with apostacy within a faith community
 - Evangelicals see the Qur'an as providing little room for mutual agreement on the central focus of their belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and biblical teachings which go against Islamic traditions.
 1. Although honoring Jesus as a prophet, Muslims do not believe in Jesus' deity or unity in one essence with the Father and Holy Spirit (The Holy Trinity).
 2. The concept of loving your enemies is not found in Islam's Qur'an or other writings; however, there is support for preferential treatment of all "People of the Book" (i.e. Jews and Christians).
 3. Christians and Muslims have quite different views on the role of women in family, religion and society (e.g. polygamy, "submission as a chosen way of honoring God", separate worship areas).
- c) What did you learn that is helpful in advancing collaborative efforts?
- Overriding concern should be to show respect for one another while allowing for differences in beliefs and opinions; all should feel free to share their view, however not expect that each view will be accepted or affirmed by the group. (I)
 - Acknowledge that while we may have disagreements within our faith-based collaborative group, the higher concern should be for sharing God's message with those who are not in a relationship with God (e.g. "nones" and non-believers). (I)
 - Building relationships requires an intentional approach to learning about the other person; start connecting on a personal level by sharing details about your families, backgrounds, and life experiences before engaging on more sensitive discussions of faith. (E)

⁸¹ Unitarian Universalist Assoc, "Unitarian Universalism's Seven Principles," org, *Unitarian Universalist Assoc*, last modified November 24, 2014, accessed April 27, 2018, <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>.

- Generally, it is better to spend more time asking questions and listening rather than trying to expound on your own ideas. (E)
- Remember that you are both trying to serve the call of God and share in many of the same challenges (particularly as pastors/Imams/church leaders); the diversity of cultures and beliefs within the Muslim community makes leading a mosque a particularly difficult challenge. (E)
- Ask how you can pray for the other person. This can demonstrate that you really care about him. (E)

d) What did you find to be disruptive or a barrier to collaborative efforts?

- First, be ready for people in your own church or other Christians to be fearful and potentially hostile towards the idea of directly engaging with Muslim church leaders. (E)
- Social media is a popular source of criticism; be prepared to get criticized by people who might not be willing to say such things to you directly; you are going to be questioned and misunderstood by some so expect it. (E)
- Be alert to some invitations coming from people with an agenda or hostile attitude; there are those who would like to humiliate you in a public forum. (E)
- The tendency is for others to believe generalizations about a people group (e.g. by race, culture, faith, nationality, etc.) and make assumptions about an individual who shares some aspect of that group; for example, assuming all whites are racists, all Hispanics are illegal immigrants, all Muslims are radicals, all Germans are anti-Semitic; this discourages investing in personal relationships and understanding each other as individuals. (I)

Question 4. What advice would you offer to others considering such activities?

- Clergy should lead by forming relationships with one another in a community; once friendships are in place they can better “shepherd” congregants in developing personal relationships across faith boundaries. (I)
- Clergy could also help one another to develop common skills like pastoral care and family care; this would be especially helpful to clergy who do not have local seminaries or other pastoral education facilities nearby. (I)
- Measure progress by: (I)
 1. Periodic surveys of participants
 2. Encouraging/tracking participant-initiated group activities (e.g. social, service, other)
 3. Encouraging/tracking individual relationships developing outside of group activities
 4. Monitor growth in participation over multiple sessions
 5. Monitor growth of interest expressed by other organizations seeking to do similar work within their communities

Note: In the case of FFG, recent metrics show positive trends that are encouraging leadership to consider additional sessions and ways to assist other communities with initiating their own sessions using a similar model. (I)

- Set a humble tone in your conversations and ask for understanding and forgiveness if others are offended by something you do or say (out of ignorance). (E)

Observations and Recommendations

First and foremost, it is important to express great appreciation to those pursuing solutions to such complex challenges as building new models of Muslim-Christian collaboration. The fog of distrust since 9/11 among the monotheistic faith family of Abraham reveals a natural bias towards operating under limits of human capability rather than trusting in the wisdom and empowerment of our divine Maker. Intercessory prayers to our God for the success of these initiatives would be the best place for everyone to begin. Such initiatives deserve the support of all who value peace in our time.

On the macro scale of global organizations, small but significant progress is evidenced by formal statements of agreement on critical issues such as religious freedom and having respect for every life regardless of race, culture, religion, nationality, or economic status. Continued focus on manageable pieces of this enormous task requires patience and persistence, but the payoff in global salvations of unreached people in every land is worth the hours invested by God-honoring people.

In addition, much credit should be given to those who blazed trails and left maps for others to follow. The vast body of global work now available on the topic of Muslim-Christian collaboration is ready for mining by a new generation of explorers. Organizing these sources into a segmented bibliography took a significant amount of time to research. Hopefully this contribution will provide shortcuts to those seeking to build on the foundations of this important topic.

There is also much to be learned from the community case study of Friends for Good (FFG). This program's results confirm the belief that having personal relationships are the key to dispelling fears and biases against "the other". Another strong finding was that leadership must pave the way before others will follow. The preparatory time spent becoming real friends with fellow leaders is key to the spiritual growth of leaders and congregants alike. Finally, from the joy seen on the faces of FFB participants from all walks of life, it is clear that one can never have too many good neighbors to share life's ups and downs.

If this all sounds a bit too soft and fuzzy in a world that operates on hard metrics and return on investments, then you may have recognized the first hurdle in crossing the chasm of interfaith collaboration. There are no “bottom lines” to measure unless they are the seats filled by people eager to learn more about each other’s stories. There are no thermometers to measure changes in once cold hearts as they warm towards a woman joyfully wearing traditional clothing to honor the God of creation. The payoff from these investments may only be evident when future generations look beyond external differences and see the greater value of knowing and loving “the other” as their own good neighbor.

Conclusion

This research provided benefits far greater than this author anticipated in new friendships and understandings made by reaching across yards, streets, cities, and oceans. It is especially affirming to see the light of God shining in the face of another who worships God and loves others as themselves. By placing these commandments – or messages for a better life – at the forefront of our daily prayers, the reality of living in a peace-loving community seems to be growing closer each day. With such an encouraging thought in mind, this report closes with sincere thanks to all who helped make it possible and prayers for all who continue to make our world a better place – one neighbor at a time.

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