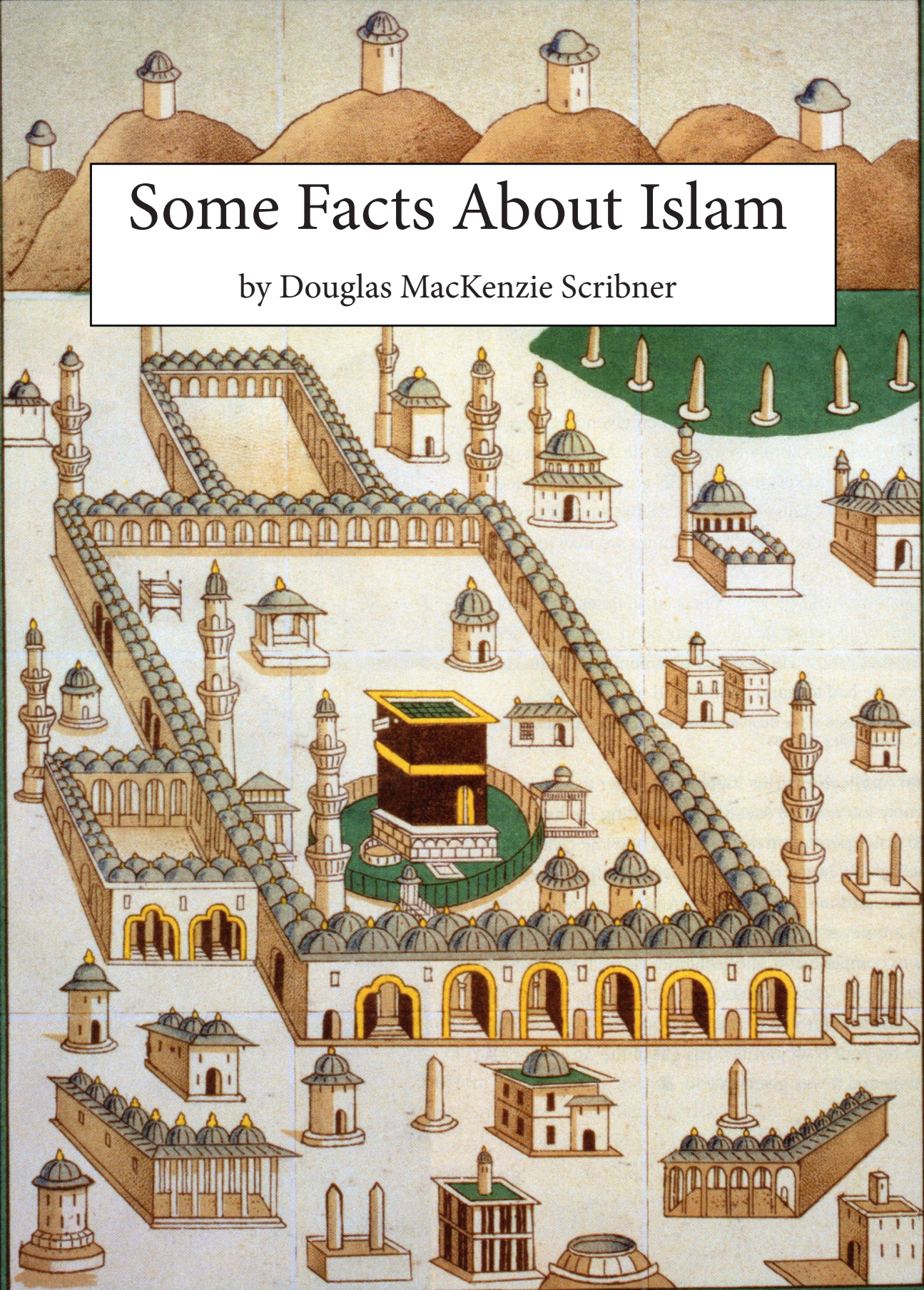


# Some Facts About Islam

by Douglas MacKenzie Scribner



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The founder of the religion known as Islam was a man named Muhammed who was born in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, near the coast of the Red Sea, in the year 570 AD. He had a difficult childhood because his father died six months before he was born and his mother needed help from foster parents to raise him. His mother, Amina, also died when Muhammed was only six years old. He was then raised by an uncle named Abu Talib, who was a merchant. Muhammed often travelled with his uncle on camel caravans to nearby foreign lands in pursuit of business opportunities. He thus became acquainted with many different cultures and religions. At age twenty-two he began working for a wealthy widow named Khadijah in the mercantile business. When Muhammed was twenty-five, he married Khadijah even though she was fifteen years older than he was. Her wealth permitted him to spend most of his time in religious matters.

In 610 AD, when Muhammed was forty years old, he claimed to have a vision while he was in a nearby cave to meditate. At first he was uncertain about the source of this spiritual experience, but he soon became convinced that it was the angel Gabriel with the following message: “*Muhammed, thou art called to be the Apostle of Allah* (the Arabic word for God).” Over the following twenty three years, he claimed to have repeated spiritual encounters with this angel who gave him revelations which were to be recorded. Various scribes wrote down these revelations including his son-in-law named Uthman who later became the Caliph (leader) after Muhammed died. These writings were compiled into a book known as the Qur’an.<sup>1</sup> The chapters in the Qur’an are not organized chronologically but are recorded by length with the longest ones first.

Muhammed began preaching his religion in Mecca, the city of his birth. His words in the Qur’an from this period were generally gentle and kind. He was trying to spread his religion by being compassionate and loving. However, his message was generally not well received. The leaders of surrounding pagan religions ridiculed and mocked him. So he and his followers moved about 250 miles north to the city of Medina. The words he added to the Qur’an while in Medina were much harsher, especially toward those did not agree with him. The following verses from the Qur’an serve as examples from both periods. The word *Surah* means chapter, followed by verse.

Some of Muhammed’s gentler words from Mecca:

- Surah 2:62 -- “*Verily, those who have attained to (our) faith, as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians – all who believe in God (Allah) and in the Last Day, and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve.*”
- Surah 2:256 – “*Let there be no compulsion in religion.*”
- Surah 4:171 – “*Oh followers of the Gospel, do not overstep the bounds of truth in your religious beliefs, and do not say of Allah anything but the truth. The Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was but Allah’s Apostle – the fulfillment of His promise which He had conveyed unto Mary – and a soul created by Him. Believe then in Allah and His Apostles, and do not say that God is a Trinity. Desist from this assertion for your own good. Allah is but one God.*”

Then some of his harsher words from Medina:

- Surah 2:191-193 – “*Fight them on until there is no tumult or oppression and there prevails justice and faith in Allah.*”
- Surah 9:5 – “*Fight and slay the pagans (those who ascribe divinity to ought beside Allah) wherever ye find them, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every conceivable place.*”
- Surah 9:29 – “*Fight those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Days.*”

- Surah 4:3 – *“And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among other women such as are lawful to you – even two or three or four ...”*
- Surah 4:34 – *“And for those women whose ill-will you have reason to fear, admonish them first, then leave them alone in bed, then beat them ...”*
- Surah 4:82-95 – *“Will they not, then, try to understand this Qur’an? Had it issued from any but Allah, they would surely have found in it many an inner contradiction ... Fight thou then in Allah’s cause – since thou art but responsible for thine own self – and inspire the believers to overcome all fear of death ... How then could you be of two minds about the hypocrites, seeing that Allah has disowned them because of their guilt? Do not take any of them for your ally or giver of succor ... Hence if they do not let you be, and do not offer you peace, and do not stay their hands, seize them and slay them whenever you come upon them: for it is against these that we have clearly empowered you to make war ... Such of the believers as remain passive cannot be deemed equal to those who strive hard in Allah’s cause with their possessions and their lives.”*

Based on these harsh words recorded in Medina, Muhammed established a religion whose followers formed an Islamic state and its adherents enforced their beliefs with violence. This religion was male dominated and those converted were organized into an army. It became clear that his intent was to convert all of the surrounding cities so between 624 and 626 AD six towns on the Arabian Peninsula were attacked and the residents were told to convert or die. The Historian William Federer <sup>2</sup> recorded that the most horrendous act occurred in 627 AD when Mohammed and his army attacked one of the few remaining Jewish cities, called Banu Qurayza, in a siege that lasted for twenty-five days before the city yielded to their conquest. Muhammed then had 700 Jewish men and boys decapitated and had their bodies thrown in a ditch. The women and girls were divided up among his warriors. This war, known as the *“Battle of the Trench”* struck fear into the residents of Mecca so in the year 630, when Muhammed and his army returned to that city, the people received them peacefully and eventually all its citizens embraced Islam. By the time of his death in 633 AD at the age of 63, most of the Arabian Peninsula had been conquered and forced to convert to the Islamic religion. Prior to his death he stated, *“I therefore, the last of the prophets, am sent with the sword! Let those who promulgate my faith enter into no argument nor discussion, but slay all who refuse obedience to the law.”*

Two significant things happened to preserve and expand Islam following the death of Muhammed. The first was the selection of Muhammed’s father-in-law, Abu Bakr, followed by his son-in-law Uthman to be the next Caliphs. They had ridden with Muhammed on all of his conquests and were determined to continue the expansion of the religion by forceful means. The second factor was the declaration of the *“Ridda Doctrine”* which stated that if someone converted to Islam decides to leave the religion, they should be killed. This averted what otherwise might have been a large apostasy from that faith. Within the first one hundred years following the death of Muhammed, Islam expanded rapidly until it became the ruling force in Egypt and North Africa as well as northward into countries now known as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey, Greece and even into Spain.

At this point there began to be significant conflict between the Muslim people and the Christian followers of the Catholic Church based in Rome, Italy. Christianity had moved northward from Rome and had expanded as the predominant religion in what we now know as Spain, France, Germany and England as well as eastward into Hungary, Poland and Russia. However, in the year 1066 there was a split in this predominant Christian Religion with the Western countries of Europe, which were Roman Catholic, separating from the Eastern Orthodox version of Christianity. European Catholicism, led by the Pope in Italy, decided that it was necessary to stand up against the rapid and violent invasion of Islam.

Historian Thomas F. Madden recorded, *“In 1071 Emperor Romanus IV arrayed his forces against the Turkish assault on Asia Minor at the battle of Manzikert (but) the Turks destroyed his Byzantine armies and captured the emperor. ... Many feared that the long-lived Roman Empire had finally come to an end.”* However, the Catholic Pope Gregory VII saw the emperor’s appeal for aid as an opportunity to employ Christian warriors in the service of God and to eliminate Islam from Europe. Madden went on to say *“By 1095, when Alexius I Comnenus sent an envoy to request*

*aid against the Turks, the papacy had the moral and political authority to make Gregory VII's dream a reality. On November 27 of that year, at the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II preached the First Crusade.”*<sup>3</sup>

The widespread appeal of the Crusades was not only to remove Islam from Europe, but also to rescue Jerusalem from Muslim control. The Crusades became a series of Holy Wars between the loyal followers of the Catholic Church and the Muslims, predominantly the Turks, which extended over 470 years. It finally came to an end because of the beginning of the Reformation. Thomas F Madden states, “*Pope Leo X was so involved in preserving Christendom from the dire threat to the East that he failed to recognize the danger from within. Martin Luther ... published his famous ‘Ninety-Five Theses’ ... With the help of the printing press Luther’s ideas spread quickly across Europe. ... The Turkish threat distracted the pope and the Holy Roman Emperor long enough for Luther to nurture his movement and secure his position.*”<sup>4</sup>

During the 1700s European countries were more interested in expansion into the Americas and Asia so they were less eager to continue their conflicts with Turkey and other Islamic nations. During that same period those Islamic nations focused their efforts on conquering countries like Indonesia and Malaysia as well as the countries of Central Africa. They even attacked Russia in the 1710 Russo-Turkish War. In 1776-1784, America was engaged in the Revolutionary War with England to establish the United States of America as a free and democratic nation. Meanwhile Turkey had formed what was known as the Ottoman Empire which included the four Barbary nations of North Africa, namely Morocco, Algeria, Tunis and Libya. Its capitol was Constantinople which was then renamed Istanbul. In 1793 and again in 1795 Barbary Pirates along the Mediterranean Sea captured US cargo ships, plundering their goods and imprisoning their crews. At this time Thomas Jefferson was serving as the Minister to France and John Adams was the minister to England. Together they met with Tripoli’s ambassador, Sidi Haji Abdrahaman and asked how the Barbary States could justify making war upon nations who had done them no injury. Abdrahaman explained that according to Muhammed’s Holy Book, the Qur’an, “*all nations which had not acknowledged the Prophet (Muhammed) were sinners, whom it was the right and duty of the faithful to plunder and enslave.*”<sup>5</sup>

Then in 1801, when Jefferson was the president, Tripoli in Libya declared war on the United States because we would not pay their ransom for our captured sailors. President Thomas Jefferson sent newly completed US warships into the Mediterranean Ocean in what became the first of three Barbary Wars. Finally Turkey and its Barbary States were defeated. Thus the Marine Hymn states, “*From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli, we will fight our nation’s battles on the land and on the sea.*”

So, what has changed since then? One thing was in 1825 when Sir Walter Scott published a novel titled, *The Talisman*, which described Muslims as peaceful and sophisticated while the crusaders were invariably barbaric and ignorant. This popular novel began a general acceptance of Islam as an appropriate religion. America was too involved with its own issues of growth and Civil War to pay much attention to the Muslim people during this period. Islam had divided into two rival categories, *Sunni* which was prevalent in Saudi Arabia and other nations and the more militant *Shi’ite* in countries like Iran. These two factions would fight among themselves so most other nations, including America, just left them alone until we finally entered the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.

In the twentieth century public opinion became focused on being “politically correct” so, for example, the PBS Timeline for Islam leaves out many of the more militant episodes of Muslim history. Orlean Koehle, in her recent book “*Islam Rising – Christianity Waning*” points out numerous times that the PBS account of Muhammed’s life and legacy – which is used in our education system – fails to include Islam’s atrocities. However, in recent years one thing has changed. Open immigration in European countries has opened a floodgate of Muslim refugees pouring into these nations. Orlean, and her husband Kurt Koehle, have spent much of their lives either living in or visiting European countries. Kurt was Swiss – German born and they lived there for three years after they were married. During their more recent visit in 2016 they went to five countries in twelve days during which there were four acts of radical Islamic terrorism, one in a city where they had just been the day before. Orlean wrote, “*With the exception of one, they were all performed by newly arrived Muslim ‘refugees’ who had recently been brought into France and Germany. ... The radical Muslim terrorist group, ISIS, took credit for all the attacks.*”<sup>6</sup>

So, the tactics have changed. Some of the refugees are from countries like Syria, which have been torn by civil war, but they are only a small percentage of the total. Orlean points out that many are from Turkey and that “. . . government officials are finding out in Europe and the USA (that) only a small percentage (2.65%) of the people flooding into their countries are genuine refugees. Others are seeking a better economical- life and they like the idea of free welfare. Many are coming with the main purpose of ‘immigration jihad,’ which they believe they are commanded to do – to immigrate to help spread their religion and convert the whole world to Islam and Sharia Law . . .”

It is clear that there are many wonderful Muslim people. They focus on those parts of the Qur’an that are loving and kind. At various times leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have recognized the virtues of these good people and the faith they have in God. Daniel C. Peterson, professor of Islamic Studies at BYU, gives credit to these wonderful people and their contributions to society over the years. He also quotes some of our Church leaders like Elder George A. Smith (1817-1875) who said, “Muhammed ‘was no doubt raised up by God on purpose’ to preach against idolatry.” Professor Peterson also refers to the February 15, 1978 statement by President Spencer W. Kimball and his counselors stating that Muhammed was among “the great religious leaders of the world.”<sup>7</sup>

It is equally clear, based on the harsher and more violent words in the Qur’an, that there are and always will be radicalized members of the Islamic faith who are quite willing to die in the process of destroying others who do not share in their beliefs. These acts of terrorism, which began in America on 9/11/2001 have continued with increased frequency, though on a smaller scale. As Christianity wanes in Europe, empty cathedrals are turning into mosques and, with open borders, Muslim immigrants are living in growing clusters in each country to gain political power and form centers of Shari’a law. A similar pattern is growing in various cities in America.

We need to have a balance in the United States which still reaches out to the people who come to America seeking freedom and a new life, and still protects us from potential dangers of an “Immigration Jihad.” Most importantly we need to present a truthful and balanced picture of Islamic History in our schools to avoid white-washing the past in an effort to be non-discriminatory. We still believe in that patriotic hymn, “Give me your tired, your poor, your hungry masses yearning to be free,” but we must do it carefully, legally, and without deceit.

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### (Endnotes)

1 “The Message of the Qur’an” Translated and Explained by Muhammad Asad.

2 “What Every American needs to know about the Qur’an,” by William Federer.

3 “The New Concise History of the Crusades” by Thomas F Madden, pages 6-7.

4 Ibid. pages 208-209.

5 “Thomas Jefferson and the Tripoli Pirates” by Brian Kilmeade, page 14.

6 “Islam Rising, Christianity Waning in Europe and the USA” by Orlean Koehle, page 2.

7 “Understanding Islam” by Daniel C. Peterson in the April 2018 issue of the “Ensign Magazine,” pages 43-49.