

Jesus in Islam

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Introduction

As a religion, a faith, a culture, and a political system, Islam presents a number of challenges to the world. Of all these, the most important to the Christian community (and perhaps to the world in general) may be the spiritual one. At any rate, none is more *fundamental*. To face it successfully, we need, as Christians, to be involved in prayer and witness, evangelism and mission; we need also serious theological reflection and understanding of Muslim faith and practices. It is vital that we develop creative ways to make known our faith and to communicate genuine concerns to Muslims. Within such a program, a careful consideration of Jesus in Islam may help us to better understand Islam and Muslims; it may also act as a catalyst for renewing our own thinking about some of the issues relating to Jesus in Christianity and in the world. One thinks, of course, of the plethora of contemporary images of Jesus (from the sweet Saviour to the superstar, from Jesus “down in my heart” to that of the famous “Jesus Seminar”). For a number of reasons, the topic “Jesus in Islam” repays serious study:

1. Jesus, in his person and ministry, is central to Christian faith and life; foundation for the first, source for the second.
2. To a large extent, Jesus is looked upon favorably even in a society that disdains the Church. His figure commands respect among non-believers; some of his teachings are valued by non-Christians and others are part of general culture, albeit at a superficial level.
3. The topic has a strategic importance for evangelism. Muslims claim to respect Jesus and to receive him as a powerful prophet from God. Frequently, they voice a reproach, that appears to be quite valid from their perspective, to Christians: “Why don’t you give any hearing or consideration to our prophet Muhammed, when we accept the status and teachings of Jesus?”¹ Hence, serious consideration of Jesus in Islam could at least open the possibility of a dialogue with a religion that otherwise is reputed to harbor conceptions of God and faith that are diametrically opposed to the Christian ones.
4. Christians need to be acquainted with the Muslim Jesus (or ‘Issa as he is respectfully called in the Qur’an and Muslim tradition) because of the very respect shown ...

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