

The word “Allah,” Arabic for “God.” The principle of God’s oneness, majesty, and mercy is central to Islamic worship, art, architecture, and daily life. This message of monotheism is the heart of the Qur’ān, Islam’s holy book.

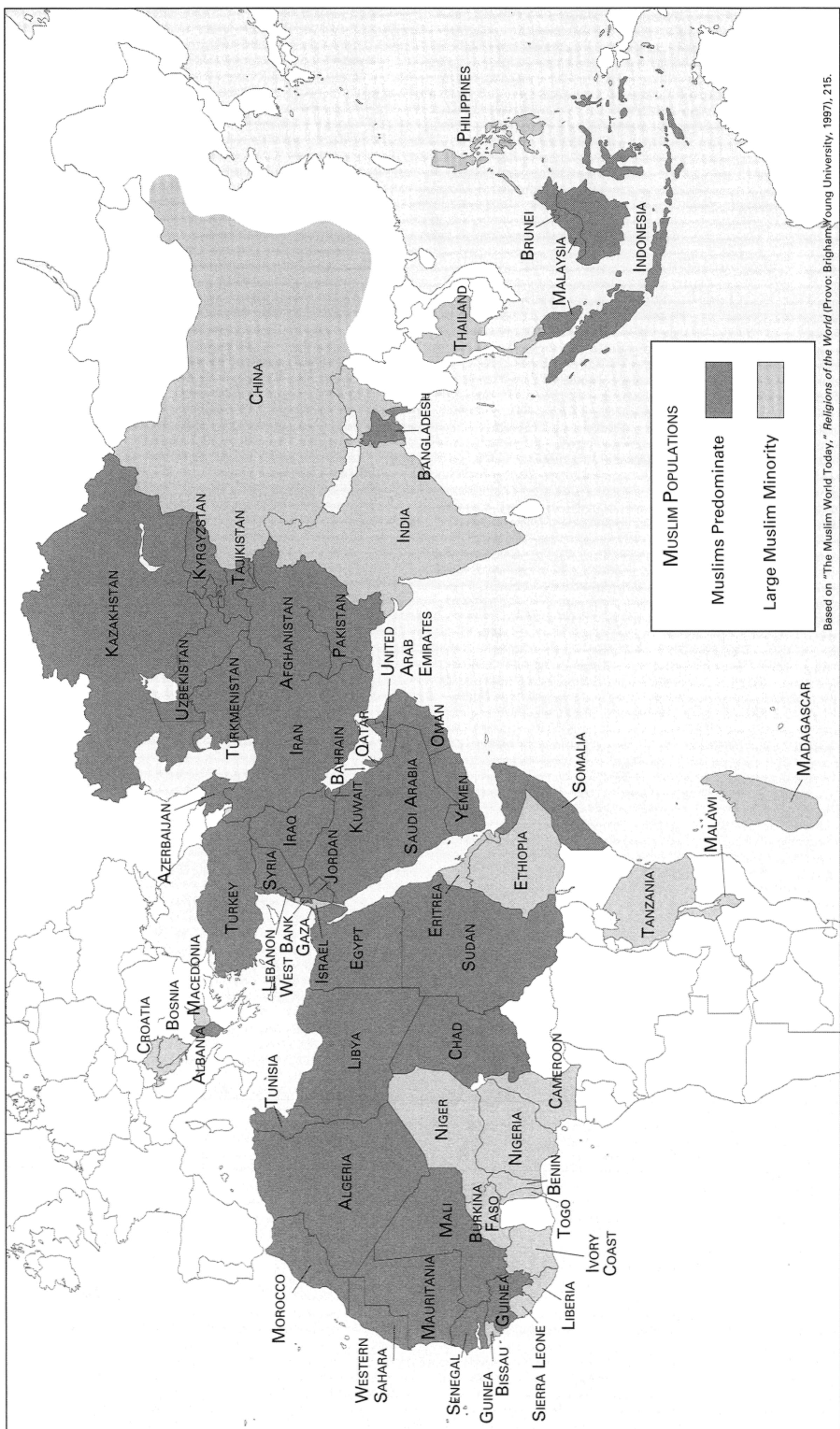
# Islam

## An Introduction and Bibliography

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Long before the events of September 11, 2001, *BYU Studies* began working on this special issue focusing on Islam. The authors and editors who worked on this issue have tried to capture the spirit of a religion that provides guidance to the lives of millions of people worldwide. The ever expanding influence of Islam extends to the prominent and often controversial role that Islam plays in contemporary politics. In addition, Muslim theology, scripture, art, science, and communal values have made significant contributions to world civilization. And in quiet yet significant ways, dialogue and contact between Latter-day Saints and Muslims have increased. Consequently, the editors of *BYU Studies* believe an issue devoted to Islam will increase understanding and allow for continued dialogue and friendship between members of the two faiths. But for such a journey to be successful, one must first understand the basic features of Islam.

Islam is one of the world's largest and fastest-growing religions. With more than one billion adherents (almost one-fifth of the world's population) and with high rates of birth and conversion to bolster its ranks, Islam could surpass Christianity in the first half of the twenty-first century as the most populous religion in the world.<sup>1</sup> The geographic expanse of the Islamic world, those areas in which Muslims are the majority population, is also vast, reaching from Morocco's western shores on the Atlantic to Indonesia's eastern archipelago in the Pacific, and from the northern borders of the Muslim republics of central Asia to the southern borders of Sudan and Nigeria in Sub-Saharan Africa (see map). It is a common misconception that most Muslims are Arabs who live in the Middle East. In fact, the vast majority of Muslims (about 75 percent) are non-Arabic speaking peoples living primarily in countries like Indonesia (the most populous Muslim country in the world), Malaysia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and China. Islam's vast number of adherents and geographical expanse invite all people to apply the admonition of Doctrine and Covenants 88:78–79 to a study of Islam: we should diligently seek knowledge of things at home and abroad, countries and kingdoms, and the wars and perplexities of nations.



The World of Islam

## Role in International Politics

Beyond its impressive demography and geography, Islam is a religion that deserves study because of its prominent role in contemporary international politics. The Arabic word *islam* means, literally, submission or surrender, and the related word *muslim* means a person who submits or surrenders. The etymological root of *islam* (s-l-m) is associated with the idea of peace (*salaam*), and the implication in a religious context is that a person who submits his or her will completely to the worship of the one God (*Allah*) finds peace, safety, and salvation. For both etymological and theological reasons, then, Muslims commonly speak of Islam as “the religion of peace.”

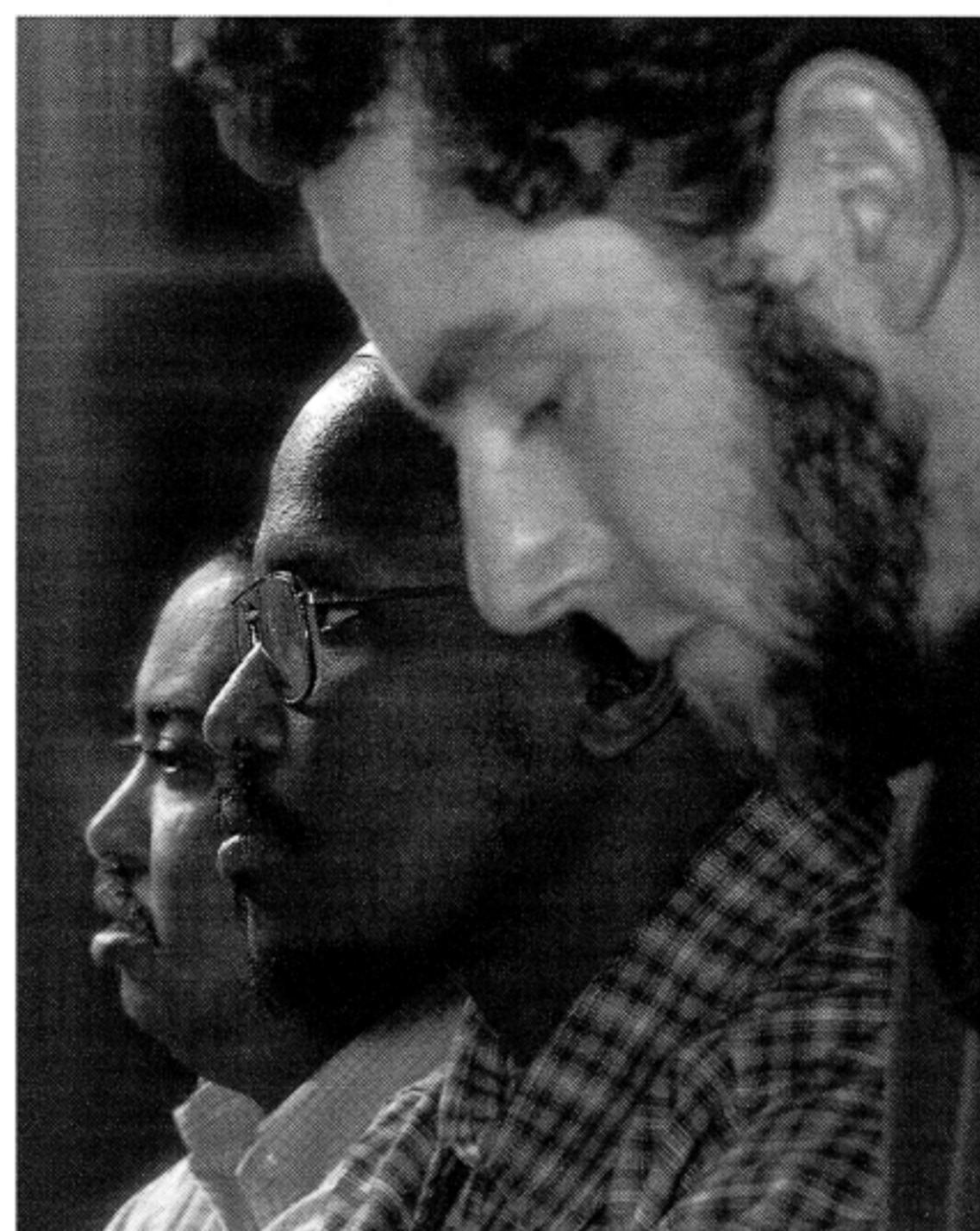
It is a source of great concern to Muslims, therefore, that Islam has come to represent in the minds of many people throughout the world the antithesis of peace. A complex interplay of historical, political, and social factors gave rise to highly publicized events that heightened our consciousness and shaped—often negatively—our opinions of Islam. The clash of Jewish and Arab nationalisms in the Middle East led to wars in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973. For many Latter-day Saints and other Christians, this renewal of conflict in the Holy Land was of intense interest because it also carried theological and eschatological overtones. Social ferment in the Islamic world, aroused by political repression, military defeats, and economic hardship, led to the rise of political and religious movements that heavily influenced relations between Islamic and Western nations. For many people in the world, vivid memories and strong feelings still linger from the Camp David peace accords between Egypt and Israel; from the Iranian revolution and holding the U.S. embassy hostage; from the Gulf War with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, or the Palestinian grass roots rebellion, called the *intifada*; the death sentence issued by the Iranian mullahs against British Muslim author Salman Rushdie; in addition to acts of violence carried out by Muslim, Jewish, Kurdish, and Armenian extremists.

In the United States, Islam has had a long history dating back to the arrival of the first slave ships from Africa. Beginning with the social unrest of the civil rights and anti-war movements in the ’60s and ’70s, Muslim ideology has attracted increasing attention as an alternative to the social and religious status quo (fig. 1). The Muslim community acquired a higher profile as the cultural spotlight focused on the activities of well-known converts like Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali), Cat Stevens (Yusuf al-Islam), and Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul Jabbar). The events of September 11, 2001, riveted the attention of the world on Islam, eliciting outrage but also questions as Americans sought to understand the roots of this tragedy, the reasons for the animosity in the Islamic world toward the United States, and the means to prevent such catastrophes in the future.

In short, while Islam is one of the world's most dynamic religions in terms of its geographic coverage and rapid growth, it is also one of the most misunderstood and maligned. This paradox must be dealt with carefully if we are to gain an accurate understanding of Islam. The challenge for students and observers of Islam is to open-mindedly address questions such as these: Which picture of Islam is accurate—the religion of hatred and conflict, or the religion of peace and harmony? If Islam is a malicious religious ideology that promotes violence, why does it continue to be so dynamic and popular throughout the world, even in Europe and the United States? If Muhammad was in fact a deceitful, corrupt impostor, as he is often portrayed in Western scholarship, why has the religious movement he initiated continued to prosper and expand so successfully? What are we to think of his visions, miracles, and teachings, and in particular the sacred text, the Qur'an, revealed to him? What about social and family life in Islam? Is Islam essentially tolerant or intolerant in its relations with other religious groups?

## Brief History of Islam's Beginnings and Contributions

Any attempt to describe the impact of Islamic thought and life on world history must begin with the story of a young man from Arabia and his quest for spiritual understanding. Muhammad was born in about 570 C.E. to the Banu Hashim clan of the powerful Quraysh tribe in the city of Mecca.<sup>2</sup> Orphaned at an early age, Muhammad experienced firsthand the sting of poverty and ignorance and the prejudices of the materialistic society of sixth-century Mecca, then an important center of pilgrimage and commerce. After he became a caravan leader, Muhammad's unique talents of wise arbitration and industriousness caught the eye of his employer, a wealthy widow named Khadijah. It was she who proposed marriage, becoming Muhammad's greatest champion and his most loyal spiritual and emotional supporter until her untimely death. During their marriage, Muhammad never took another wife.



Courtesy William S. Dant

**FIG. 1.** At the Masjid Al Noor Mosque in Salt Lake City, 2002. Osman, Ali, and Eugene sit together in the library area after midday prayer. A cross-section of U.S. society is increasingly reflected in the American Muslim community. Approximately 15,000 Muslims live in Utah's urban areas.

Muhammad was born into a world rife with both political and religious tensions. The Near East was torn between the corrupt and abusive Christian Byzantine Empire, centered in Constantinople, and the decadent Zoroastrian Sassanian Empire of Persia. Much of the population of Arabia was still pagan with admixtures of both Christian and Jewish sects. Religious adherence was tied closely to tribal affiliation and/or place of residence within village and urban contexts, a phenomenon that divided society into contentious factions. The Christian sects in particular were characterized by bloody arguments over the nature of the Godhead and were threatened spiritually and doctrinally by the adoption of pagan customs into the liturgy of the church. Zoroastrianism, the official religion of Persia since Cyrus the Great, had been weakened by splinter groups such as the Manichaeists, whose prophet, Mani, attempted to meld Eastern thought with paganism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity, thus attempting to create a universalist whole. It was indeed a time of religious and social turmoil, a time when a sincere and spiritual man like Muhammad was driven to find critical answers concerning life, death, and the role of humankind within the cosmos. Retreating to the caves in the harsh mountains above Mecca to contemplate these great universal questions, Muhammad was visited by the Angel Gabriel, and the revelations that would become the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an, began to come forth.<sup>3</sup>

The beauty of the Qur'an's unique style of prose (especially given the rustic origins of the orphaned Muhammad) is considered a powerful proof by Muslims of its divine origins as the final word of God to humankind and of God's choice of Muhammad as his Messenger. The message was simple and yet profound for a world plagued by religious conflicts, tribal confrontations, and developing urban materialism. It consisted of an uncompromising belief in the oneness of God, a reestablishment of the Abrahamic covenant, and a system of five major principles of faith and action (called the Five Pillars) to bring the individual in direct submission to the will of Allah.

The revelations of the Qur'an emphasize the holy missions of all prophets since Adam, proclaim the virgin birth of Jesus but deny his divinity, and provide a basis for conducting all aspects of life and human relationships. Thus, in the theoretically perfect Islamic society there is no separation of religion and government. Ideally they are one, promoting God's causes and the ability of devoted believers to bring the fruits of spiritual and intellectual paradise to the human community through the implementation of God's word. For Muslims, God's word is found both in the Qur'an and in the *Sunna* (his model words and deeds recorded in the *hadith* literature) and is codified in the comprehensive system of law called *shari'a*. The teachings of the Qur'an and Sunna advocate the establishment of a just, peaceful, and prosperous society by banishing social classes,

## Understanding Islam's Rapid Growth

After Muhammad's death, Islam continued to expand rapidly beyond the borders of the Arabian Peninsula. The Persian Empire, weakened by a long war with Constantinople, fell quickly to the Muslim armies. The Byzantines also offered little resistance. Within a hundred years, the Muslim advance reached west across North Africa and into Spain and France and east as far as Pakistan and India. Over the next few centuries, Islam gradually but steadily extended its influence until it became the dominant religion and culture in much of the Subcontinent and Southeast Asia. How does one account for this phenomenal success? A balanced assessment must take into account a complex interplay of historical, economic, and sociopolitical factors.

First, Islam's military expansion was not incongruous with the prevailing historical norms. International laws governing relations between nations and stipulating respect for human rights were not widely codified and observed until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Principles such as separation of church and state and respect for national or imperial boundaries (which were, in any case, ill-defined) were virtually unknown. Nearly every sociopolitical community in history has resorted to warfare, whether defensive or aggressive, in order to protect and promote its interests. To the assertion that Islam was propagated and enforced by force, Ameer Ali provides a candid response: "Every religion, in some stage of its career, has, from the tendencies of its professors, been aggressive. Such also has been the case with Islam; but that it ever aims at proselytism by force, or that it has been more aggressive than other religions, must be entirely denied."<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, Elder Dallin Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve has called for caution in passing judgment on individuals who lived long ago: "We should judge the actions of our predecessors on the basis of the laws and commandments and circumstances of their day, not ours."<sup>2</sup>

Second, the scholarly consensus today is that the primary motive of the Muslim conquests was not to win converts to Islam *per se* but to extend and consolidate Islam's new political, economic, and social order. An eminent Western historian of Islam has noted that the conquering of surrounding nations arose naturally from the Qur'anic mandate that Islam encompass both spiritual and temporal matters. The conquerors believed that "the superiority of Islam . . . in providing for social order, would justify Muslim rule: would justify the simple, fair-dealing Muslims in replacing the privileged and oppressive representatives of the older, corrupted allegiances."<sup>3</sup>

The process of Islamization in the Indian Subcontinent followed a general pattern: expansion of political and financial control through military conquest of urban centers, followed by a slow process of social and religious change that spread out to the rural areas.<sup>4</sup> This policy stemmed in part from practical considerations. Since a main source of revenue for the Islamic state

was the payment of a poll tax by non-Muslims, widespread conversions would have weakened the economic base of the empire. Moreover, the Muslims knew their control over vast lands and subject populations was tenuous; common sense dictated avoiding undue provocation.

Third, several sociopolitical factors explain why Muslim governance flourished and the Islamic religion gradually took root in conquered territories. It would be disingenuous not to acknowledge the role of military force. The zealotry of Muslim conquerors in some cases created an atmosphere of coercion and intimidation—at times overt, at times more subtle—in which indigenous peoples felt threatened if they did not convert to Islam. But, on balance, Muslim leaders were remarkably tolerant (relative to the prevailing political climate), granting their non-Muslim subjects full rights in the *umma* if they converted to Islam and according them status as *dhimmis*, “protected citizens,” if they chose not to convert. Those who did convert to Islam were often drawn by the new religion’s doctrine of theological and social unity. In India, for example, Hindu workers and artisans were attracted by the caste-free nature of Islam and its greater “possibilities for development.”<sup>5</sup> Others converted, no doubt, when they perceived the political, social, and economic advantages to being a Muslim in a Muslim-dominated state. As second-class citizens, *dhimmis* were required to pay special taxes and act deferentially toward Muslims and were forbidden to serve in the military, ride horses, or propagate their own religion. But they were also given opportunities unusual for the times, including the right to practice their religion and hold high office in the Muslim government. Furthermore, in lands such as Syria, Palestine, and Iraq, the transformation to Islamic rule caused little upheaval, because “the Arabs brought a new version of a basically familiar religious and ethical system to peoples whose native language was . . . closely related to the language of the Qur’an.”<sup>6</sup>

In sum, a combination of factors explains Islam’s unprecedented early expansion: the weakened state of the Byzantine and Persian empires; the zealotry of the Muslim armies who sensed a divine mandate, a moral imperative, and an economic opportunity; the comparatively tolerant treatment of conquered peoples and enlightened administrative practices that enabled the Muslims to maintain control of a vast empire; and the intrinsic familiarity of Islamic religious beliefs to neighboring Semitic peoples.

1. Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (London: Chatto and Windus, first published 1890; eleventh impression 1978), 218.
2. Elder Dallin H. Oaks, “Joseph, The Man and the Prophet,” *Ensign* 26 (May 1996), 72.
3. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 185, 199.
4. Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 4.
5. Schimmel, *Islam in the Subcontinent*, 10.
6. Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 93–94.

materialism, tribal affiliation, and economic selfishness that inevitably lead to strife and suffering.<sup>4</sup>

Within one hundred years of Muhammad's death in 632 C.E., the armies and beliefs of Islam had spread west to southern Spain and east to Persia. Islamic art and architecture and Islamic intellectual and scientific achievements contributed to the revival of Europe during the Renaissance.<sup>5</sup> Muslim scholars, in their efforts to understand and transmit the Qur'anic revelation, retrieved, preserved, studied, and elaborated on most of the great scientific, medical, philosophical, and mathematical treatises of the ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greco-Roman worlds. Their efforts helped fuel the eventual development of the Renaissance in Europe, a fact not often taught in the Western histories of the world. Because many extant ancient texts were brought together, translated into one language (Arabic), studied, and transmitted to others, an explosion of knowledge occurred, and Arabic became a language of primary importance in Europe both for scholarly research and for commercial ventures to the East.

## The Five Pillars

Islamic life revolves around the Five Pillars, which are witness of faith, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage.

**Witness of Faith (*Shahada*).** The Witness of Faith is a two-part declaration that embodies the central beliefs of Islam: "I witness that there is no god but Allah, and I witness that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah." To be or become a Muslim, one must embrace this statement as inviolable and recite it with conviction. The centrality of the Witness of Faith in Islamic religious life is evident in many rituals: it is customary for a father to whisper the shahada into the ear of his newborn infant, and five times each day it is broadcast from the tops of the mosques to call the faithful to prayer.

*Allah* is the word for God used by all native Arabic speakers, whether Muslim, Jewish, or Christian (native Latter-day Saints use the word *Allah* when they pray). The phrase "no God but Allah" states succinctly the cardinal tenet of Islam: strict monotheism, the uncompromising unity of God, which Muslims call *tawheed*. God is one, eternal, uncreated, and totally other than anything human finiteness can comprehend or describe. It follows, then, that polytheism is anathema in Islam. Muslims refer to this heresy as *shirk*, which means ascribing partners to God, and the Qur'an repeatedly enjoins believers to accept *tawheed* and avoid *shirk*.

The Qur'an teaches that Allah created the world and all things in it and that in time he will bring the world to an end. Then all human beings will be resurrected, judged according to their deeds and observance of *tawheed*, and assigned to paradise or hell for eternity. Paradise is portrayed in Islamic literature as a place of endless delights, pleasures, and rest, where

## Islamic Contributions to the West

While the Western world struggled through the Dark Ages, Islamic civilization was vibrant and progressive. In fact, the West is forever indebted to the Islamic East for literally paving the way for the Renaissance in philosophy, mathematics, the natural sciences, literature, astronomy, medicine, the arts, and architecture.

The works of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek and Latin Classical philosophers and scientists were actually passed on to the West from Islamic scholars, who preserved, expanded, and refined these works. Sophisticated Muslim mathematical and navigational skills contributed to the voyages of Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and other Western explorers. Muslim physicians and philanthropists developed specialized hospitals, physician training, and insane asylums in the tenth century, developments lacking in medieval Europe. Up until the sixteenth century, European medical schools used the great textbook *al-Qanun* to create their curriculum. Islamic influences also appear in the Western literary tradition. Classics such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* have intriguing similarities to Islamic texts written centuries earlier. While the Islamic influences in Western literary development is subtle, in the arts it is unquestionable. Much of our Western cloth, crafts, architecture, music, and opera were originally modeled or designed after Islamic Arab, Persian, and Turkish patterns and traditions. Perhaps one of the simplest ways to observe the vastness of the Muslim influence is through its echo in the English language. Hundreds of words for things in daily life come from the Islamic world. For example, the word "orange" comes from the Arabic word *naranj*, meaning "bitter orange"; "mattress" comes from *matrah*, which means a place where "something is 'thrown down';" and "chess" comes from the term *shah*, which means "king." One may wonder why we say "checkmate" when the opponent's king is caught—it comes from the Persian phrase *shah mat*, meaning, "the king is dead."

Indeed, the Western world owes a great deal to the world of Islam. Although recognition has often been neglected in Western historical texts, we would do well to acknowledge and appreciate the rich contributions that Islamic civilization has made to the world.

—Kristen M. Allred, summarized from Daniel C. Peterson, *Abraham Divided: An LDS Perspective on the Middle East* (Aspen Books, 1995), 195–212.

every pious desire of the believers, both men and women, will be fulfilled. Hell is portrayed as a place of endless punishment for those who oppressed other people, performed evil deeds, and denied the Oneness of Allah.

The second half of the Witness of Faith, belief in Muhammad's prophethood, implies acceptance of a broad view of God's relationship to humanity throughout history. For Muslims, Islam is God's revelation to humanity "for all times and all places," as they are fond of saying. Allah's communication did not begin with Muhammad's prophetic call in the cave at Mount Hira' in 610 C.E. (see fig. 2 on p. 99); rather, he has spoken to many prophets beginning with Adam and including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and many other biblical and extrabiblical figures.

The view of sacred history in Islam is, in many respects, analogous to the idea of dispensations in Latter-day Saint doctrine. Before the time of Muhammad, distortions and corruptions—apostasy—gradually eroded the pristine revelation of each prophet of God, necessitating the raising up of another prophet who would reestablish tawheed as the only true form of worship. Muslims, in witnessing that Muhammad is the prophet of God, accept the truths taught by previous prophets and sacred books, including the Torah and the Gospels in their original "pure" versions. But Muslims hold that Muhammad is the last and greatest of all in the prophetic pantheon—the "seal of the prophets" (Qur'an 33:40)—and that Allah revealed to him a complete and perfect Qur'an that will never be corrupted, obviating the need for any future prophets or scriptures.

**Prayer (*Salat*).** Islam teaches that God is to be remembered at all times and in all places, and the Qur'an encourages Muslims to pray frequently and to await Allah's answer: "And your Lord says: 'Call on Me; I will answer your (prayer)' " (40:60). A prophetic hadith suggests that believers supplicate God in their every need, no matter how small: "Ask Allah for all your needs, even for the thong of your sandal when it breaks." Muslims engage in many forms of prayer: sometimes they are informal, private, and intensely personal; sometimes they are more formal in nature and address specific communal needs, as in the case of special prayers for rain during seasons of drought. Simple, formulaic prayers are normally uttered before and after a meal.

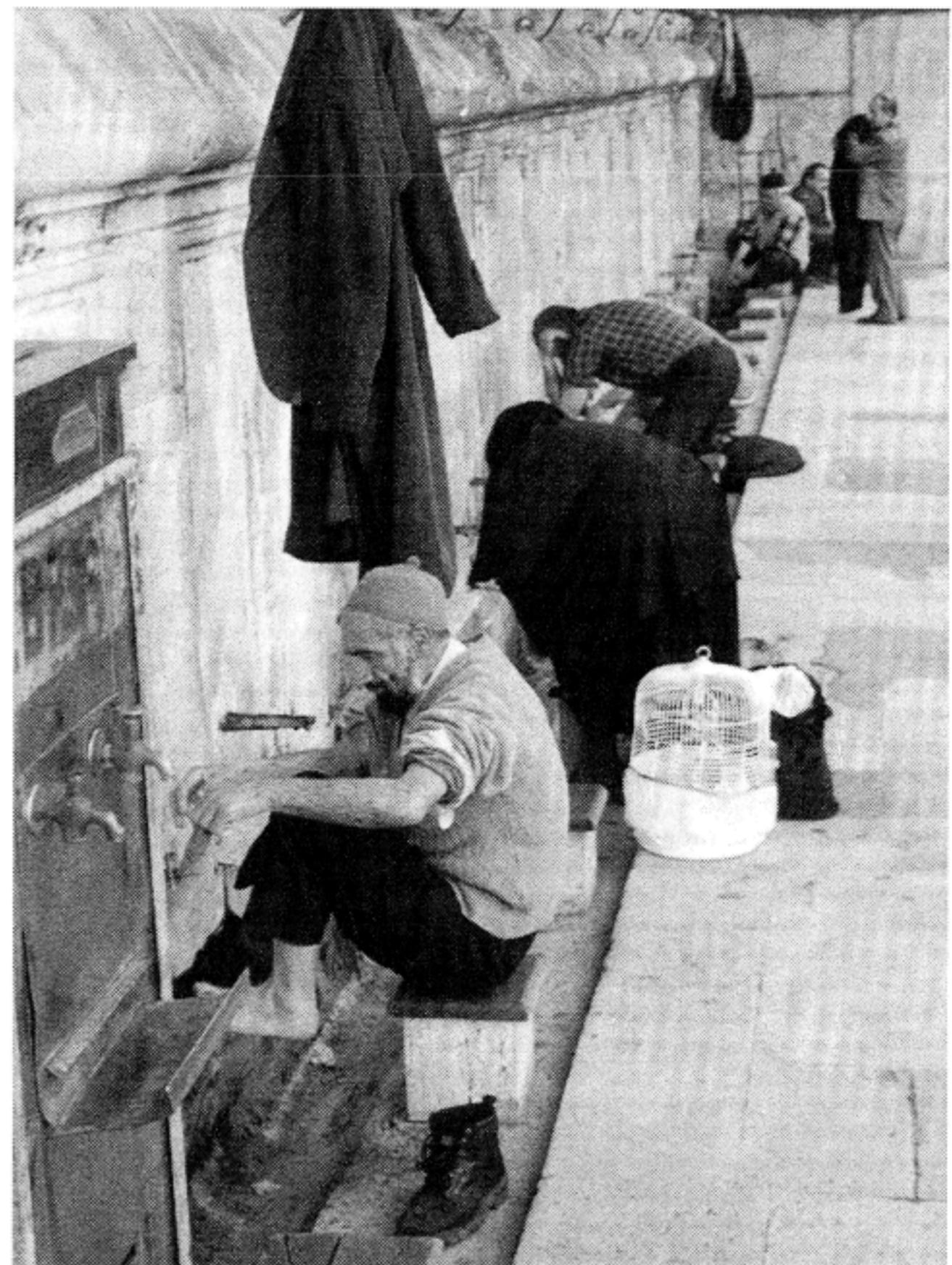
But the centerpiece of Islamic worship is the ritual prayer called *salat* that is conducted five times each day and involves performing a prescribed set of physical movements designed to turn heart and mind toward God. In preparation to perform *salat*, a Muslim must first have righteous intent (*niyya*) in his or her heart and must perform ablution, a washing of face, hands, and feet with water, symbolizing one's purity and readiness to approach God in prayer (fig. 2). The times of prayer are determined by the position of the sun in the sky and therefore vary somewhat according to

season of the year, geographical location, and daylight savings schedules. But generally speaking, the five prayer times are dawn, midday, late afternoon, sunset, and early evening. Salat is the focus of personal and communal worship in Islam, a powerful ritual that binds the *umma*, or worldwide community of Muslims, together despite differences of language, nationality, or religious interpretation (fig. 3).

**Almsgiving (Zakat).** The principle of *zakat*, or almsgiving, is designed to care for the poor, to foster empathy and compassion in the community of believers, and to provide for the building and maintenance of mosques and other Islamic institutions. The Qur'an states that charity and compassion, as opposed to mere mechanical observance of rituals, define one's worthiness in God's sight:

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and give Zakat, to fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing. (2:177)

Islam distinguishes between two forms of charitable giving: *zakat*, a legal duty obligatory for all Muslims, and *sadaqa*, a free will offering that is spontaneous and intended specifically to help the poor and those in need. According to Islamic law, *zakat* is to be paid at the end of each year, and the amount is designated as 2.5 percent of a person's personal wealth.



Courtesy James A. Toronto

**FIG. 2.** Men and women performing ablutions before praying in a large congregational mosque in Istanbul, Turkey. The ritual washing of hands, arms, feet, and head symbolizes one's purity of intent and prepares the worshiper's heart and mind to make the transition from the secular world to the Divine Presence. If water is not available for ablutions (as is often the case in arid, remote regions), Islamic law provides for alternatives, such as clean sand or dirt.



Courtesy Chad Emmett

**FIG. 3.** Muslim families leaving the Haram al-Sharif after Friday congregational prayers in Jerusalem. It is customary for many Muslim families to attend Friday noon prayer together. During communal prayers, men and women are separated in different sections of the mosque in order to avoid distractions during worship. The tradition of segregating the sexes during prayer has a long history not only in Islam, but in Judaism and Christianity as well.

It would be a mistake to view zakat too narrowly as simply a financial transaction mandated by religious law. The notion in Islam of contributing 2.5 percent of one's personal possessions is parallel to the principle in Latter-day Saint thought (and in many other religious communities) that the stipulated tithing or other donation is merely a beginning point, a minimum. God is less interested in teaching the faithful to calculate precise percentages of their income than in inculcating a spirit of benevolence and concern for the welfare of other people. In this sense, zakat becomes, not a mechanical performance, but a state of mind and heart, a personal impulse and a community ethos that promote the well-being and safety of every individual.

**Fasting (*Sawm*).** Fasting plays a central role in individual spirituality and in the annual cycle of Muslim religious festivals. For Muslims the observance of fasting, especially during Ramadan, strengthens one's relationship with God, affirms one's religious identity in the umma, and promotes social harmony and equality.

The Qur'an and the Sunna of Muhammad emphasize the efficacy of frequent fasting (*sawm*) as a means of achieving islam—complete submission to Allah—and of promoting individual and communal well-being:

“O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint” (see Qur'an 2:183–88). Statements of Allah, quoted by Muhammad but not found in the Qur'an, extol the benefits of fasting: “Fasting is a protection and a shield”; “The bad breath of one who fasts is sweeter to God than the fragrance of musk.”<sup>6</sup> Muslims view sawm as having a dual purpose: to bring about a state of humility and surrender of one's soul to God, and to foster compassion and care for the indigent in the community. Thus, fasting and almsgiving go hand-in-hand: denying of oneself cannot be complete without giving of oneself.

The tandem relationship between fasting and almsgiving is most clearly in evidence during the month of fasting called *Ramadan*. The hadith make it clear that fasting during Ramadan is intended to be a time for reflecting upon one's spiritual life, seeking forgiveness of sins, and caring for the poor: “When there comes the month of Ramadan, the gates of mercy are opened, and the gates of Hell are locked and the devils are chained”; “The best charity is that in Ramadan.”<sup>7</sup> The entire month is holy for Muslims because the Qur'an and Sunna prescribe fasting for the faithful from sunrise to sunset (twelve to sixteen hours depending on the season of the year) for thirty days in a row. One of the two major religious holidays in the Islamic world, *Eid al-Fitr* (The Feast of Breaking the Fast), is observed at the end of the month of Ramadan. It normally lasts three days into the new lunar month and is a time of rejoicing and prayer.

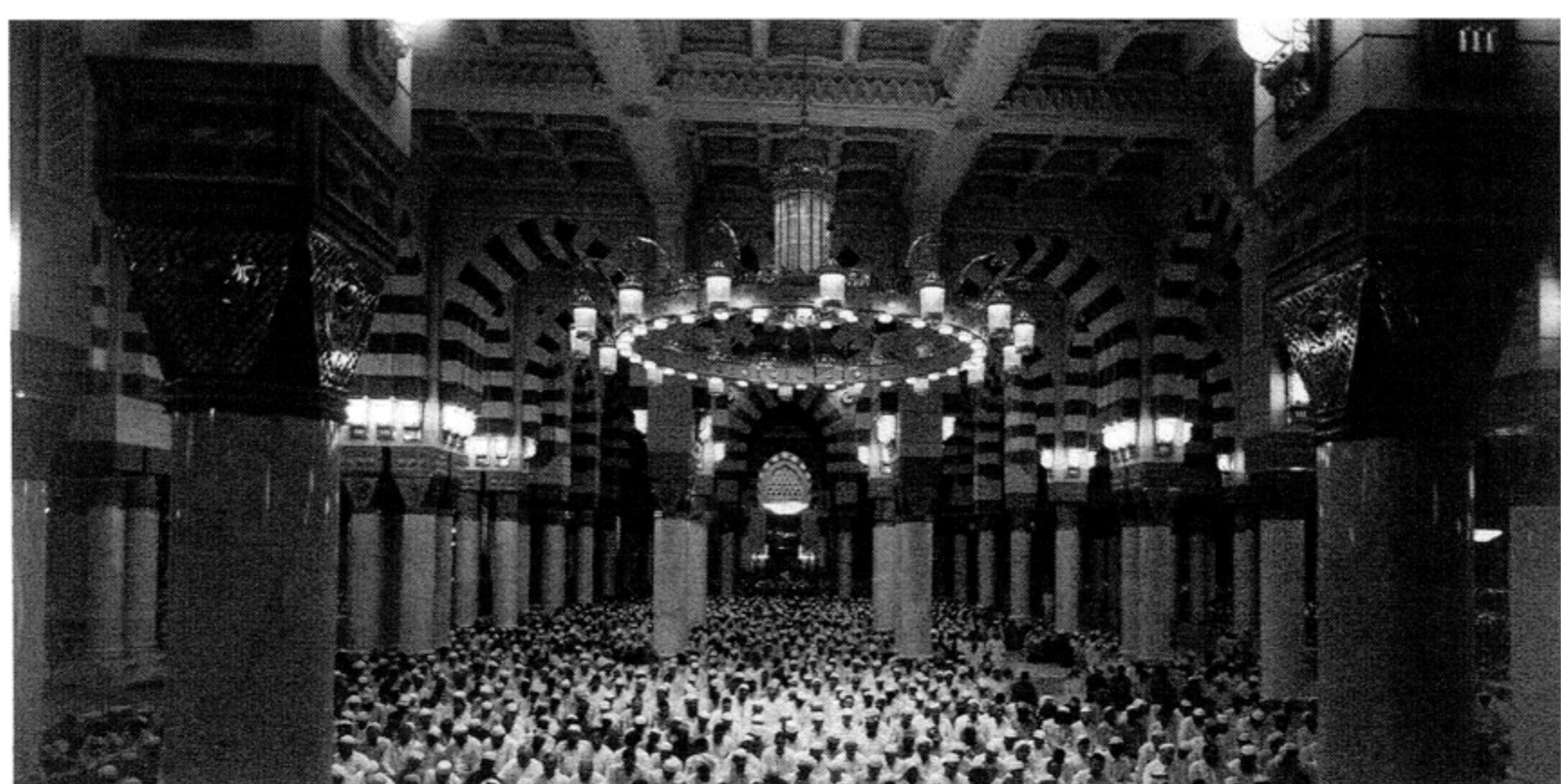
**Pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj).** Every Muslim who is physically and financially able is required to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca, or the *hajj*, at least once in his or her lifetime (Qur'an 2:196–203; 3:97; 5:98). The *hajj* is the highest act of devotion for a Muslim. It is a time of spiritual reflection, of rededication to Allah and the Islamic faith, of purity and self-denial, and of peace with one's fellow beings. The coming together of more than two million people from myriad nations and from every walk of life, all dressed in white robes and worshipping Allah in unison (see fig. 3 on p. 172), reaffirms powerfully the unity and diversity of the worldwide umma and reinforces the faith and identity of individual pilgrims. The *hajj* is in a very real sense the Muslim equivalent of the Latter-day Saint temple endowment combined with the communal aspects of general conference, for it reminds Muslims of who they are and what God has done and still does for them. The central shrine, called the Ka'ba, is believed by Muslims to be a remnant of a place of worship originally constructed by the Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. For Muslims, the Ka'ba is thus strongly associated with the Abrahamic covenant established between Allah and humankind. The rites performed there bind Muslims to one another and to God in the cosmic struggle against evil.

Muslims who have performed the *hajj* describe it as a profoundly moving, ineffable experience that changes their life, solidifies their faith, and deepens

their spiritual enjoyment.<sup>8</sup> A charming form of folk art has arisen out of the hajj tradition: the homes of pilgrims are often painted in bright colors with pictures of the Ka‘ba, Mecca, airplanes, or other scenes from the pilgrimage experience (see fig. 4 on p. 126). It is interesting to note that the hajj can be experienced vicariously as well. Islamic law allows for a son or daughter to act as proxy in performing the hajj on behalf of a father or mother who passed away before having the opportunity or means to go to Mecca.

The most important religious holiday in the Islamic world, *Eid al-Adha* (Feast of Sacrifice), occurs at the end of the hajj when the faithful who can afford to do so sacrifice an animal (usually a sheep or goat, but often a cow or camel) in commemoration of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael (see Qur’ān 37:100–111). The meat from the sacrifice is divided into thirds: one-third for the immediate family, one-third as a gift to neighbors and friends, and one-third as a zakat offering for the poor. Muslims throughout the world join with the pilgrims in Mecca in celebrating this rite, and the holiday lasts for at least three days as families and friends congregate for exchanging gifts, sharing meals, and enjoying picnics and games. The sacrifice completes the official hajj ritual, but many participants feel their pilgrimage is incomplete without a visit to Medina (about two hundred kilometers northeast of Mecca) to honor the memory of Muhammad by performing salat at the mosque where he is buried (fig. 4).

**Jihad.** Muslims sometimes speak of the principle of *jihad* as a sixth pillar of Islam. The word is usually mistranslated in English as “holy war,” but the Arabic root does not denote holiness or war. The literal meaning is “struggle” or “striving,” meaning to exert oneself in the service of Allah.



Courtesy Information Office, Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia

FIG. 4. The Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, filled with pilgrims paying homage to Muhammad. Muslims respect all prophets but worship only Allah.

The Qur'an teaches that jihad involves violent struggle only under certain well-defined and restricted circumstances, such as defending family, home, religion, and innocent people against outside aggression. In everyday practice, jihad is a word that encompasses virtually every aspect of a Muslim's life and signifies the daily striving for self-improvement and the prosperity of the umma: "Those who believe, and emigrate and strive with might and main, in Allah's cause, with their goods and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of Allah: they are the people who will achieve (salvation)" (Qur'an 9:20). One hadith states that Muhammad, while returning from a battle with the Meccans, informed the Muslim combatants that they were leaving behind the "lesser jihad" (military struggle) and taking up again the "greater jihad" (the struggle against the evil inclinations of the soul).

### **Contact and Dialogue between Latter-day Saints and Muslims**

Over the years Church leaders have expressed admiration for Islam and for the spiritual contributions of its central leader, Muhammad. As early as 1855, at a time when Christian literature generally ridiculed Muhammad as the anti-Christ and the archenemy of Western civilization, Apostles George A. Smith and Parley P. Pratt delivered lengthy sermons in which they demonstrated a balanced understanding of Islamic history and spoke highly of Muhammad's leadership. Elder Smith observed that Muhammad was "descended from Abraham and was no doubt raised up by God on purpose" to preach against idolatry. He sympathized with the plight of Muslims who, like Mormons, find it difficult "to get an honest history" written about them. Speaking next, Elder Pratt acknowledged the prejudice with which Europeans and Americans typically regarded Islam, then went on to express his admiration for Muhammad's teachings, asserting that "upon the whole . . . [Muslims] have better morals and better institutions than many Christian nations."<sup>9</sup>

Latter-day Saint appreciation of Muhammad's role in history can also be found in the 1978 First Presidency statement to the world regarding God's love for all his children. This declaration specifically mentions Muhammad as one of "the great religious leaders of the world" who received "a portion of God's light" and affirms that "moral truths were given to [these leaders] by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals."<sup>10</sup>

In recent years, Latter-day Saint respect for the spiritual legacy of Muhammad and for the religious values of the Islamic community has led to increasing contact and cooperation between Mormons and Muslims around the world. This is due in part to the presence of significant Latter-day Saint congregations in areas such as the Levant, North Africa, the Gulf, and Southeast Asia. The Church has sought to respect Islamic laws and

traditions that prohibit conversion of Muslims to other faiths by adopting a policy of nonproselytizing in Islamic countries of the Middle East. Examples of dialogue and cooperation include visits of Muslim dignitaries at Church headquarters in Salt Lake City; Muslim use of Church canning facilities to produce *halal* (ritually clean) food products; church humanitarian aid and disaster relief sent to numerous Muslim areas including Jordan, Kosovo, Turkey, and Afghanistan; academic agreements between Brigham Young University and various educational and governmental institutions in the Islamic world; the existence of the Muslim Student Association at BYU (fig. 5); and expanding collaboration between the Church and Islamic organizations to safeguard traditional family values worldwide.<sup>11</sup> The initiation of the Islamic Translation Series, cosponsored by BYU and the Church, has resulted in several beneficial exchanges between Muslim officials and Latter-day Saint Church leaders. A Muslim ambassador to the United Nations predicted that this translation series “will play



Courtesy James A. Toronto

FIG. 5. Officials of BYU and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at a reception held in their honor at the El-Fayez family farm in Amman, Jordan, in 1998. Five of the El-Fayez's children have attended and graduated from BYU. Many families in Jordan and Palestine have sent children to BYU. Each year, about sixty Arab students (most of whom are Muslim) attend BYU from countries such as Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Kuwait, and Oman. Pictured here, among others, are General Hmeidi El-Fayez, former advisor to His Majesty, King Hussein (far left); Elder and Sister Jeffrey R. Holland (next to Gen. El-Fayez); Dr. Jeffrey Tanner, associate dean of admissions at BYU (back row, middle); Nayyef El-Fayez, advisor to Queen Rania (to Dr. Tanner's right); Dr. Kamal Abu Jaber, former Jordanian Foreign Minister (to Nayef's right); Sultan El-Fayez (behind Dr. Abu Jaber); Elder and Sister Charles Didier, President of the Europe East Area (far right); and Haya, Rula, Ghadeer (president of the BYU alumni chapter), and Yara El-Fayez (all kneeling).

a positive role in the West's quest for a better understanding of Islam."<sup>12</sup>

A cabinet minister in Egypt, aware of the common ground shared by Muslims and Mormons, once remarked to Elder Howard W. Hunter that "if a bridge is ever built between Christianity and Islam it must be built by the Mormon Church."<sup>13</sup> The examples of Mormon-Muslim interaction mentioned above, together with the Church's 1989 establishment of the Jerusalem and Amman centers for educational and cultural exchange in the Middle East, reflect the attitude of respect for Islam that Church leaders have exhibited from earliest times (fig. 6). These activities represent tangible evidence of Latter-day Saint commitment to promote greater understanding of the Muslim world and suggest an emerging role for the Church (as Elder Hunter's friend hinted) in helping bridge the gap that has existed historically between Muslims and Christians.

President Gordon B. Hinckley, speaking in October 2001 general conference, referred to the events of September 11, 2001, and the beginning of the bombing in Afghanistan and admonished Church members to be tolerant and understanding in their relations with Muslims:

This is not a matter of Christian against Muslim. I am pleased that food is being dropped to the hungry people of a targeted nation. We value our Muslim neighbors across the world and hope that those who live by the tenets of their faith will not suffer. I ask particularly that our own people do not become a party in any way to the persecution of the innocent. Rather, let us be friendly and helpful, protective and supportive. It is the terrorist organizations that must be ferreted out and brought down.<sup>14</sup>



Courtesy Haws Marble

**FIG. 6.** Three Religions. Jerusalem's significance to Jews, Muslims, and Latter-day Saints is captured by this view of the Western Wall (lower right), Dome of the Rock (left center), and the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies (upper right). Dedicated in 1989, the Jerusalem Center has been home to hundreds of students and is a popular site for wedding portraits of Palestinian couples.

The Western Wall, Dome of the Rock, and BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies.

## Special Issue on Islam

Islam is a world religion in every sense of the word. From humble beginnings, it successfully transcended boundaries of space, time, culture, ethnicity, gender, and language to become a faith tradition of worldwide scope and impact. Despite the negative image of Islam in the West, it continues to be a dynamic, rapidly-growing religion, providing spiritual comfort and guidance to millions of people in nearly every country in the world. It is important for Latter-day Saints to attempt to understand the basic beliefs, history, aesthetic values, and contemporary issues of Islam. By endeavoring to comprehend and appreciate the soul, aspirations, and spiritual potential of another religious tradition, we often find new avenues of self-awareness, truth, and spirituality ourselves.

This issue of *BYU Studies* is an attempt to address a cross-section of important questions about the relationship of the Islamic world to the West and to the Latter-day Saint community in particular. The articles featured here have been written by Latter-day Saint scholars who are specialists in the topics they treat. Their research and analysis exemplify the fascination, respect, and appreciation that many Latter-day Saints feel for the complex attributes of Islamic civilization and for the religion of Islam as a prominent spiritual and cultural force in both the past and present. Given the diversity of Mormons and Muslims, as well as the complexity and richness of Islamic religious experience, inevitably some readers will disagree with some of the ideas presented here. We only hope that readers will recognize that great efforts have been taken to portray Islam in a well-researched, balanced, respectful, and insightful manner. Our intent is to provide research and perspectives that will foster understanding of other peoples and places, stimulate thoughtful discussion of difficult but vital issues, and promote greater tolerance and peace in a world that has too little of both.

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1. Studies of converts to Islam indicate that two factors are uniformly attractive: the simplicity and power of the doctrine of *tawheed*, one God, and the sense of egalitarianism and acceptance that pervades the Muslim community.

2. When writing about non-Christian cultures and religions, courtesy dictates using B.C.E. (Before the Common Era) and C.E. (the Common Era) rather than the dating system based on Christ's birth. The Islamic calendar is lunar and begins its year one with the date of Muhammad's emigration from Mecca to the city of Yathrib (later named Medina) to escape persecution. Year 1 of the Islamic calendar thus corresponds to approximately 622 C.E. See Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 14–21.

3. The angel commanded, "Read! [The word can also be translated 'Recite!' or 'Proclaim!'] Read in the name of thy Lord who creates. Creates man from a clot. Read

and thy Lord is most Generous, who taught by the pen, taught man what he knew not.” Qur'an 96:1–5. Thus, from the classical Arabic root *to recite* or *read* comes the title given to the Qur'an. The word implies that the Qur'an must be read, recited, and proclaimed to humankind. All Qur'anic citations in this article are from Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, ed. and trans., *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Medina, Saudi Arabia: The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, 1413 hijri [1992/93 C.E.]).

4. With the death of Muhammad, the faith of Islam was eventually fractured over the question of who his successor should be. Eventually, the Sunni and Shi'ite divisions within Islam have also been further subdivided by questions of doctrinal interpretation and issues of community and spiritual leadership. Sufi Islam also represents a particularly mystical aspect of Islamic practice emphasizing the attainment of a spiritual union with the Divine. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam* (San Francisco: Aquarian, 1994).

5. See John R. Hayes, ed., *The Genius of Arab Civilization: Source of the Renaissance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983).

6. These extra-Qur'anic divine utterances are cited in Mahmoud Al-Sirtawi, “Ramadaniyat: Al-Sawm Junna,” *Al-Ajniha* (February 1996), 15–16. See also the English translation of Mahmoud Matraji, trans., *Sahih Muslim* (Beirut: Dar El-Fikr, 1993), 2:355.

7. Matraji, *Sahih Muslim*, 2:275; Al-Jaza'iri, *Methodology of the Muslim* (Beirut: Dar el-Fikr, 1994), 376.

8. In describing the spiritual rewards of hajj, Muslims often use terminology that is familiar to Christians. For example, a Jordanian friend said that the effect is “as if you are born a second time, feeling the purity and happiness and innocence of a small child.”

9. See George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 3:32, 35, September 23, 1855; and Parley P. Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:41, September 23, 1855.

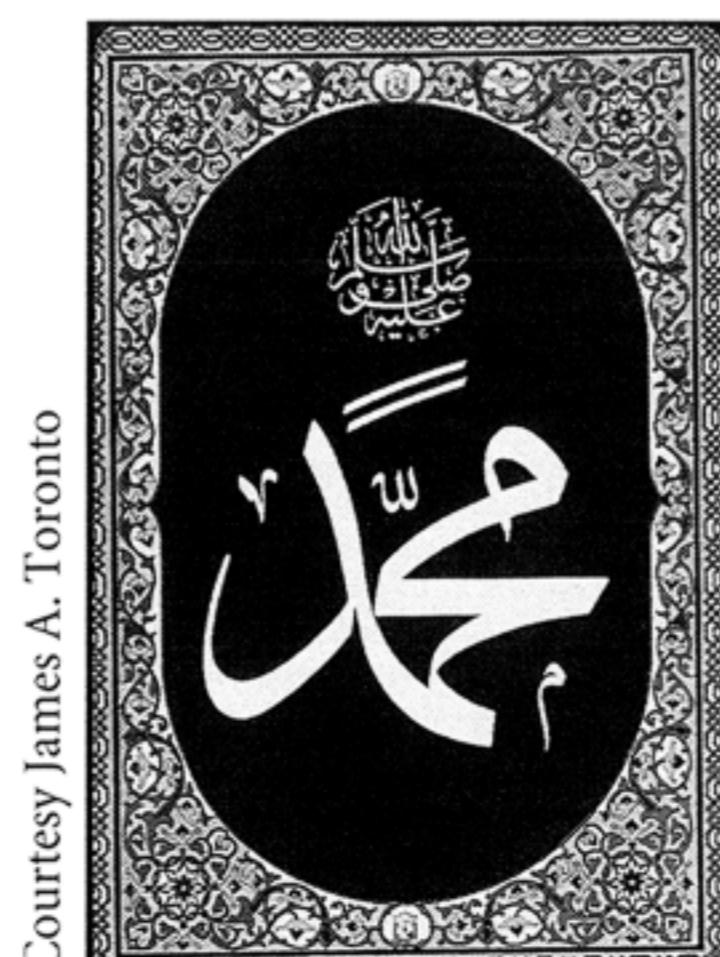
10. In Spencer J. Palmer, *The Expanding Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), v.

11. These activities are coordinated by the World Family Policy Center at Brigham Young University in partnership with the World Congress of Families.

12. “Islamic Diplomats Hosted in New York,” *Church News*, published by *Deseret News*, April 3, 1999, 6. See also “News of the Church,” *Ensign* 29 (June 1999): 74.

13. Howard W. Hunter, “All Are Alike unto God,” *BYU Speeches of the Year* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1979), 36.

14. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The Times in Which We Live,” *Ensign* 31 (November 2001): 72.



In large letters is the Arabic word for Muhammad, considered by Muslims the last and greatest of many prophets of God. The small Arabic inscription at top is the traditional invocation recited by Muslims each time Muhammad's name is mentioned or appears in print. It means, “May God bless and preserve him.”

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