

**First Caribbean Conference on Islam
Bridgetown, Barbados
July 22- 25, 2003**

Bridgetown Declaration¹

WHEREAS we the assembled participants in the Caribbean Conference on Islam have carefully reflected on the current initiatives of Islam in the Caribbean and globally, in light of the history of Islam and that of the Caribbean; as well as on the teachings of Islam regarding Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, we do hereby and solemnly issue following statements of:

- I Recognition regarding Islam
- II Concern regarding Islam
- III Call to action for the church (us)

Based on these statements, we also propose a programme of action for the church in the Caribbean, in response to the challenge of Islam in the Caribbean, and in response to our responsibility to the Muslim people of the world under the church's apostolic mandate.

STATEMENTS OF RECOGNITION & CONCERN, AND A CALL TO ACTION

I. Statements of Recognition

1. We recognise that Islam arose as a monotheistic response to idolatry. It challenges the church to purify its teachings and practice; especially as regards the historic sins of the church regarding its syncretism with pagan elements, and its abuse of political and military influence.
2. We recognise that Muslims genuinely seek to serve God as they perceive him through the system of teachings, examples and laws worked out and promoted by Islam's founder and his early followers.
3. We recognise that Islamic civilisations have played an important role in preserving, transmitting and enhancing many key elements of mankind's common human heritage, in areas such as mathematics, astronomy, engineering, learning, the arts and culture.
4. We recognise that the current *Dawah* – Islamic mission – to the Caribbean is a zealous attempt to reach out to the region by building and strengthening a platform for a society and culture of Islamic order.
5. We recognise that Islamic scholars have sought to understand and address Caribbean needs and achievements.
6. We recognise that Islam has sought to apply itself to all of life, especially in family and community.
7. We recognise that Islam has sought to preserve certain objective moral standards.
8. We recognise that Muslims are determined to prosper and succeed in all aspects of life, especially business; and, that this benefits our region.

¹Available online: http://www.angelfire.com/pro/kairosfocus/resources/Bds_decl_03.pdf

II. Statements of Concern

1. We first and foremost express concern that in seeking to teach mankind concerning its duty to submit to and serve God, Islam has failed to address fully and fairly, the historic, authentic teachings of the Bible regarding the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. (Cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1– 8, 13– 25; Hebrews 1:1– 2:4 ; 2 Peter 1:16 – 2:19, 3:15 -18.) For, Islamic teachings²:
 - Seek to undermine the authority and the authenticity of the Bible;
 - Reject the key gospel facts of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection;
 - Deny the doctrine of the sin nature of man;
 - Misinterpret the concept of Jesus’ Eternal Sonship;
 - Deny the Deity of Christ and distort the doctrine of the Trinity; and,
 - Cannot relate to the concept of a personal relationship with God.
2. We express deep concern that despite overwhelming evidence regarding the authenticity of the Bible, some Islamic advocates have advanced false arguments claiming that the Bible is corrupt in order to discredit the gospel and the Christian Faith to those who are ill-informed.
3. We express concern that Islam has subjugated many peoples into a condition of *dhimmitude* under *sharia* that has robbed them of their dignity and liberty as people created in God’s image. It has also opposed (and even persecuted) the church in its God-given mission of faithful global witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. We express concern regarding the historic and ongoing role of violence, terrorism and wars of conquest in the promotion of Islam; with little condemnation or objection from Muslim leaders.
5. We further express concern that the Western Islamic community has not publicly and consistently opposed the persecution and suffering of Christians, Jews, and people of other faiths in the Islamic states; whilst exploiting Western freedom of religion to propagate Islam.
6. We express concern that Islam has not fully, fairly and accurately acknowledged and repented of its critical role in the enslavement of many African peoples, through the historic Trans-Saharan, Trans-Atlantic and Trans-Indian Ocean slave trade and even presently in places such as the Sudan.
7. We express concern that certain Islamic scholars have distorted and consequently failed to provide a fair, objective and balanced presentation of Jamaican and indeed Caribbean history.
8. We express concern at the growing trend in the Caribbean and elsewhere, whereby Muslims are demanding the right to openly criticise, challenge and ridicule Christians — who are then unable to communicate their beliefs or respond to Islamic criticism and ridicule without being threatened or condemned.
9. We express concern that, in a movement towards globalisation, the United Nations is placing pressure on Western countries to become more open to religious freedom; whilst it has failed to pressure Muslim states to move towards freedom of religion and consequently cease from discrimination against and persecution of Christians, Jews and people of other faiths.
10. We express concern that Caribbean Governments are becoming susceptible to Islamic overtures without thoroughly examining the possible social, cultural, political and religious implications for the Caribbean’s peoples.
11. We express concern that in many countries that have historically championed liberty, the concept of “freedom of speech” increasingly fails to apply to Christians openly speaking and living out their faith.

² Cf. Explanatory Appendix A , p. 4 below.

12. We express concern that Islam is subtly infiltrating the Caribbean culture by manipulating our core cultural issues.

III. A Call to Action for the Church (us)

1. We call the leaders and members of the church to educate and equip themselves with the Word of God, return to Biblical values and be prepared to contend for the faith through the truth in love.³
2. We call the church to research and thus to inform, educate and counsel the region about Islam: its history, claims, teaching and evident intent in the Caribbean.
3. We call the church to embrace the full implications of the gospel of Jesus Christ so that we can effectively relate the truth of the gospel to core cultural issues in the following areas:

Personal Godliness	Social Godliness
Personal Justice	Social Justice

Fig. 1: Gospel-Related Core Cultural Contexts⁴

4. We call the church to identify, examine and embrace the core cultural issues facing their communities and so better meet the intellectual, social, cultural and spiritual needs of our peoples.
5. We call the church to better express love and concern for the Muslim people through appropriate ministries.
6. We call the church to discern and oppose potentially destructive agendas hidden beneath cultural, economic and political overtures.
7. We call the church to learn, pray and take appropriate action regarding international issues and especially issues concerning our suffering sisters and brothers in the global church⁵
8. We therefore, finally, call the church to be alert; to pray without ceasing; to try the spirits; and, most of all to in all things act by the truth in love.

In the Name of our Lord and Risen Saviour; Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.

- AMEN -

³ Cf. survey on Islam as an apologetics issue at http://www.angelfire.com/pro/kairosfocus/resources/Mars_Hill_Web/Islamism.htm

⁴ Cf. discussion at http://www.angelfire.com/pro/kairosfocus/resources/Ethics_and_development.htm as well as those at http://www.angelfire.com/pro/kairosfocus/resources/Leading_Cells/MISSION.htm and http://www.angelfire.com/pro/kairosfocus/resources/Why_not_Now/Why_Not_Now.htm

⁵ Cf. http://www.angelfire.com/pro/kairosfocus/Resources_and_References.htm#global

APPENDIX A:

A note on the significance of Islamic denials of several key, Gospel-related Biblical teachings

The principal concern stated in this declaration is that “ We first and foremost express concern that in seeking to teach mankind concerning its duty to submit to and serve God, Islam has failed to address fully and fairly, the historic, authentic teachings of the Bible regarding the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ.” The following specific concerns (which expand the bullet points in the main body of the declaration) indicate that the Islamic teachings highlighted reflect profound misunderstandings of the essential points of the gospel message.

For, the key Islamic teachings⁶:

- Seek to undermine the authority and the authenticity of the Bible through making ill-founded accusations of textual corruption. [Cf. 2 Tim. 3:1– 4:5; 2 Peter 1:16 – 2:19, 3:15 – 18; vs. *Surah* 5:12-19. Also cf. <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Index/T/tahrif.html>, and <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Hahn/integrity.html>.]
- Reject the central, historically rooted, eyewitness-authenticated gospel facts: (1) *Jesus died on a cross* (as an atonement for our sins), (2) *he was buried*, and (3) *he rose on the third day* (as the victorious Lord and loving Saviour of all men). [Cf. Acts 2:17– 39, 4:9 – 12; 1 Cor. 15:1 – 8; Col 1:19 – 23; vs. *Surah* 4:156 - 158. Also cf. <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Index/C/crucifixion.html>.]
- Deny the central biblical doctrine of our inborn fallen-ness/sin nature, and thus its implications: (1) that we all need a Saviour/Redeemer, and (2) that apart from Spiritual rebirth and the indwelling Spirit, we cannot consistently act in accord with God’s righteous requirements/laws. [Cf. Rom 3:9– 5:2, 5:12 – 20, 7:14 – 8:17, 9:30 – 10:17, 13:8 – 15:6; Gal. 3:1 – 29; Col 2:8 – 3:17. Also cf. <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Index/S/sin.html>]
- Deny the Deity of Christ and distort the doctrine of the Trinity⁷, especially by misinterpreting the New Testament concept of Jesus’ status as The *Unique, Eternal* (as opposed to physical) Son of God. [Cf. Mark 2:1– 11 (& Dan. 7:13– 14); John 5:1– 30, 11:17 – 44, 17:1– 5 & 24; Phil. 2:5 – 11; Col. 1:1 – 23; Heb. 1:1 – 2:4; vs. *Surah* 4:48, 171 & 5:116. See also http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Intro/islamic_jesus.html, <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Trinity/index.html> and <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Index/T/trinity.html>]
- Turn away from the gracious, life-transforming blessing that we may have a personal relationship with God through (1) receiving Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and thus (2) being born of and indwelt by the Spirit; who (3) seals our inheritance as co-heirs with Christ, (4) empowers us to grow in love, truth, purity and power, and also (5) bears Divine witness to our adoption as children of God. [Cf. John 3:1 – 21, 5:16– 29, 7:37– 39; Rom 8:9– 17; Eph. 1:11– 14; Col 2:8 – 3:17; 1 John 1:1 – 2:11, 3:1-19. Also cf. <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Index/S/salvation.html>]

Thus, sadly, there are major misunderstandings in the Islamic picture of the Christian Faith, of the depth of the human bondage to sin, and of the blessed hope given by the gospel to break free from the guilt and power of sin, to walk in the good works which God has laid out in advance for us to do. [Eph 1:11 – 14 & 2:8– 10.]

For, the core gospel issue is our enslavement to sin even in the teeth of delighting in laws that identify and command what is good and right, and our consequent profound need for Salvation and transformation from within by the Spirit of God. To access that hope and transforming power, we must put our trust in the Incarnate Christ and Eternal Son of God, who came in love, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of dying on a cross for our sins as our sinless substitute; and then rose in power on the third day as victorious Lord, in order that he might fill all things with his grace and glory.

⁶Cf. <http://www.answering-islam.org.uk/Nehls/Abdallah/index.htm> for a relatively simple discussion.

⁷E.g. *Surah* 4:48, 171 & 5:116.

⁸The Islamic view on the Trinity reflects Islam’s early encounters with heretical sects in Arabia rather than the biblically rooted orthodox Christian understanding of the Tri-unity of the Godhead. [Especially see Heb. 1:1 – 14, John 1:1 – 14, Phil. 2:5 – 11, 1 Cor. 12:2 – 6, Acts 5:3 – 4.] The historic Christian teaching asserts that God is One, a complex unity: a unity of Eternal being, integrated with a diversity of personal manifestation: Father, Son and Spirit. (It bears noting that Son, here, is not used in the physical sense; the incarnation is not at all parallel to the pagan tales of gods and their proclivities for pretty girls.) Thus, the tension between unity and diversity in the cosmos finds its resolution in the inherent nature of the Godhead. This is mysterious, but it is not contradictory, for even water, ice and steam share a common nature while being vastly diverse as to manifestation. More profoundly, “God is Love” [1 John 4:8] — an interpersonal, relational concept — is viewed by Christians as integral to the essential nature of God.

APPENDIX B:

A GLOBAL EVANGELICAL AFFIRMATION REGARDING MISSIONS:

Why do we share the good news about Jesus with all peoples, including Muslims?

First of all, it is important to realize that everyone has an internationally recognized right to discuss his or her faith with others, no matter where we live or visit. As members of the United Nations, 180 nations have signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."^[1]

There should be no double standards. Muslims who live in the West are free to respectfully express and share their faith. Followers of Jesus who live in the Muslim world should be equally free to respectfully express and share their faith.

But why and how do we share about Jesus with Muslims?

We are followers of Jesus, called Isa al-Masih by Muslims. This means that He holds supreme importance for us. We seek to center our lives on Jesus and the good news about Him.^[2]

What is this good news? We have experienced peace with God, the forgiveness of our sins, and the hope of eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. ^[3]

It is our delight to share this good news with others. ^[4] It is also our duty to share the good news with all the peoples of the world, because Jesus instructed us to do so. ^[5]

Therefore, we seek to live in the world as peacemakers, inviting men and women everywhere to be reconciled to God and to one another. ^[6]

We, who come from many cultures, countries and backgrounds, offer this message of peace to all people in love, with respect and cultural sensitivity, without coercion or material inducement. ^[7]

We believe that only God can convert people. Christianity and Islam agree on this point. ^[8] For many, the titles "Muslim" and "Christian" define an external, cultural identity. Instead of focusing on external labels, we invite all people, including Muslims, to an inward change through Jesus. ^[9]

We rejoice that when the gospel brings inward change to believers who embrace it, they then bring positive transformation to the communities where they live. ^[10]

As followers of Jesus, we are motivated to do good deeds. In this way we imitate Jesus, honor God, and seek to heal a hurting world. ^[11]

For us, all of life is devoted to Jesus. Therefore, wherever we live and whatever our occupation, our work is witness and we witness at work. ^[12]

Jesus and the good news about him are so precious to us that we are willing to sacrifice and suffer in order to give people an opportunity to know the good news about him. ^[13]

Endnotes:

Unless noted otherwise, all the verses from the Bible are taken from the New International Version.

[1] Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html> , which has been signed by more than 180 nations.

[2] For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil 1:21). May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Gal 6:14).

[3] All the prophets testify about [Jesus] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:43). ... Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ... (Rom 5:1). ... The gospel I preached to you ... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ... that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures ... (1 Cor 15:1-4). For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord ... (Rom 6:23).

[4] For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died (2 Cor 5:14). ... Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph 5:2).

[5] Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you ...' (Matt 28:18-20).

[6] Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matt 5:9). All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18).

[7] Do everything in love (1 Cor. 16:14). Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone (Rom. 12:17-18). For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men (2 Cor. 8:21).

[8] Jesus pointed out, "No one can come to me, unless the Father who sent me makes them want to come" (John 6:44 Contemporary English Version). The Qur'an agrees, saying, "God converts whom he will" (al-Nur 24:46; Fatir 35:8). In fact, both are missionary religions with a message for all people (Qur'an 25:1; 38:87; 3:20; John 3:16). Both faiths claim the final messenger (Qur'an 33:45; Heb. 1:1-2). Both groups are called to be witnesses (Qur'an 2:143; Matt 28:19-20). Both scriptures make exclusive claims for their message (Qur'an 3:85; John. 14:6; Acts 4:12). Yet both are called to witness in a gracious manner (Qur'an 16:125; 29:46; 1 Peter 3:15).

[9] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:17-20). Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again....I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' (John 3:3-7). I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Eze. 36:26-27).

[10] Historically, religious voluntary organizations have had a huge positive impact on international development in non - Western countries. It has been estimated that such organizations are responsible for roughly 70 percent of the work of international development, having founded, for example, more than half of the colleges and hospitals of Africa and Asia. (R.D. Winter, William Carey International University catalog).

[11] These good deeds are often reflected in the kind of jobs we do in the countries where we have chosen to live—including relief and development, teaching, and business development. Many of us are laypersons, not preachers or pastors—ordinary people practicing ordinary professions in order to help others. ... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven (Matt 5:16). God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and ... he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:38). In everything, set them a good example by doing what is good. ... [Jesus] gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. ... Our people must devote themselves to doing what is good (Titus 2:7, 14; 3:14).

[12] And whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. ... Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men ... (Col. 3:17, 23). So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

[13] For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him ... (Phil. 1:29). The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name [of Jesus] (Acts 5:41).

APPENDIX C:

A CONGREGATIONAL MISSIONS WORK-SHEET/BIBLE STUDY

OWNING AND SUPPORTING THE MISSIONARY VISION:

1. The Antioch Time-Line

A ———	B ———	C ———	D ———	E ———	F ———
Church	Church	Relief	Missionaries	Missionaries	Further
Planted	Strengthened	Effort	Sent out	Report	Ministry
Ac. 11:19 - 21	11:22 - 26	11:27 - 30 12:25	13:1 - 3	14:26 - 28	15:1-6 ff. 15:35, 40

(NB: 11:26 — B to D took about a year; please prayerfully cf. Heb. 5:11 - 6:3)

2. Let us reflect . . .

- Our Congregation is at Stage: A B C D E F
- To make further progress, we need to . . .

3. Messengers of the Good News need "Feet":

Rom. 10:14, 15 shows that gospel messengers must be trained, briefed, sent, supported, and eventually replaced. When daughter churches have been planted, they need strengthening to become strong, vibrant, and missions-minded in turn .

- How can we raise up those who can be sent?

- How can we support them and their work?

- How will we help to strengthen daughter churches?

- What are some "ripe fields" [cf. Lk. 10:1 – 16] to send out labourers to in the next 3-5 years?

- How will we raise the required resources?
