

The 10 Things

the Church Must Know

About Islam

*A briefing for Christian leaders from sixty years
of scholarship and engagement with the Muslim world*

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A companion resource to
Future History: The Rise and Demise of Islam or Christianity

with Foreword by Dr Mark Durie

A Word Before We Begin

I have spent sixty years studying Islam, engaging Muslim communities, training Christian leaders, and watching the Western church largely fail to reckon with one of the defining realities of our age.

This briefing is not a summary of alarm. It is a summary of what I believe every pastor, elder, ministry leader, and serious Christian lay person needs to understand — clearly, accurately, and without flinching.

It is also written in love. I want to state that plainly at the start. I have lived among Muslim people. I have friends among them. I have prayed for them, argued with them, wept with them, and watched extraordinary numbers of them come to know Jesus Christ. Nothing in this briefing should be read as contempt for Muslim people. The analysis is of Islam as a system — its theology, its jurisprudence, its history, and its advance. That is a very different thing from hatred of the people who have been shaped by it.

The ten things that follow are drawn from sixty years of scholarship, direct engagement, and the research behind my book *Future History: The Rise and Demise of Islam or Christianity*. They are offered to church leaders who want to understand — not panic, not posture, not be paralysed — but understand, and then act with courage and love.

Dr Stuart Robinson

Author, Future History

01

Islam Is Not Merely a Religion

It is a comprehensive legal, political, and civilisational system

Most Western Christians approach Islam the way they approach other faiths — as a private belief system that shapes personal spirituality and community worship. This fundamentally misreads what Islam is and how it functions.

Classical Islam — Sunni and Shia — makes comprehensive claims over every domain of human life: law (Shariah), economics, politics, family structure, warfare, and governance. The distinction between religion and state that the West takes for granted is a category that traditional Islamic jurisprudence does not share. In the classical formulation, there is one sovereign — Allah — and one law — the Shariah — and all human authority is ultimately derivative from and accountable to that framework.

This does not mean every Muslim personally affirms every aspect of classical jurisprudence. Many do not. But it does mean that any serious engagement with Islam — and with Muslim communities navigating life in Western pluralistic societies — must grapple with this foundational reality.

"Islam is not merely a private faith. It is a total system with claims over every dimension of human life — including law, politics, and governance."

The practical implication for church leaders: when you engage with Islam in your community, you are not engaging with a private spiritual preference. You are engaging with a system that has its own account of law, community, identity, and ultimate authority. Understanding this is the beginning of understanding.

02

The Advance Is Real and Documented

Not anecdote — census data, demographics, institutional records

The global advance of Islam is not a matter of alarmist projection. It is documented in census data, demographic analysis, and institutional records across every inhabited continent.

In the United Kingdom, Muhammad has become the most commonly registered name given to newborn boys in England and Wales — a demographic indicator of extraordinary significance. In Europe more broadly, Islam is now the fastest-growing religion by absolute numbers. In Sub-Saharan Africa, Islam has expanded dramatically across regions that were, within living memory, predominantly Christian or traditional. In the Middle East, ancient Christian communities that trace their origins to the first century

have been reduced to remnants through a combination of persecution, flight, and attrition.

In the United States and Australia, mosque construction has accelerated significantly over the past three decades. Muslim communities have established a visible and growing institutional presence — schools, charities, political organisations, and media.

"The church cannot make good decisions about the Muslim world while refusing to look at what the data actually shows."

This is not presented to provoke fear. It is presented because a church that refuses to look at reality cannot respond to it wisely. The first obligation of leadership is accurate perception.

Source: UK birth name data: Office for National Statistics. Demographic trends: Pew Research Center Global Religious Futures Project.

03

The Same-God Question Has a Theological Answer

And the answer matters for mission, worship, and truth

One of the most common pastoral errors in Western Christianity is the assumption — usually well-intentioned — that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, just differently. This claim deserves rigorous theological examination rather than diplomatic acceptance.

The God revealed in the Bible is triune — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is not a peripheral Christian doctrine. It is the irreducible centre of Christian theology, Christology, and soteriology. The God described in classical Islamic theology explicitly and emphatically denies the Trinity, denies the divine Sonship of Jesus, and denies the crucifixion and resurrection as historically and theologically meaningful.

The medieval Islamic scholar Al-Ghazali, one of the most authoritative voices in Sunni theology, was explicit: the God of Islam is not the God of the Trinity. The attributes are different. The relationship to humanity is different. The path of salvation — if that category applies — is different in kind, not merely degree.

"To say 'we worship the same God' may feel kind. But it is not kind to Muslim people to agree with them on a question where the truth of the gospel is at stake."

Nabeel Qureshi, a former Muslim and Oxford-trained scholar who became a Christian, argued powerfully before his death that the same-God assumption is one of the church's most damaging intellectual concessions — not because it offends, but because it removes the urgency of mission.

The pastoral implication: this is not a question to be politely avoided in sermons or small groups. It is the question that determines whether Muslims need the gospel at all.

Source: Al-Ghazali, Faysal al-Tafriqa. Nabeel Qureshi, Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus (Zondervan). Dr Mark Durie, The Third Choice.

04

Islamic Jurisprudence Has Specific Teachings on Non-Muslims

These require careful, accurate, pastoral engagement — not avoidance

Classical Islamic jurisprudence — developed across the major legal schools over many centuries — contains specific provisions regarding relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. These provisions

are not hidden or obscure. They are documented in authoritative scholarly texts that Muslims themselves regard as foundational.

These include jurisprudential frameworks governing: the status of non-Muslims in an Islamic political order; the conditions under which relations with non-Muslims may be permitted or constrained; the treatment of apostasy; and the theological categories through which non-Muslims are understood.

It is important to state clearly: not every Muslim lives by or endorses all of these provisions. Many Muslim people in the West live in full civil coexistence with their non-Muslim neighbours, colleagues, and friends. The point is not to impute the doctrines to every individual, but to understand that these doctrines exist, are taken seriously in many contexts, and shape — at least in part — the framework within which some Muslim communities and institutions operate.

"Avoiding difficult content does not make it cease to exist. It simply leaves the church unprepared to engage it wisely."

Church leaders who understand this doctrinal landscape are better equipped to engage Muslim neighbours honestly, support converts from Islam pastorally, and understand the dynamics at work in communities where Islam is a significant presence.

05

Muhammad Is Not an Optional Figure — He Is the Model

The Quran itself instructs Muslims that Muhammad is 'a good example'

In Christian theology, Jesus is not merely a moral teacher whose example we may optionally follow. He is the incarnate Son of God, Saviour, and Lord. In the same way — though theologically very different — Muhammad is not merely a historical founder in Islamic theology. He is the normative model for human life.

The Quran explicitly instructs Muslims: 'There has certainly been for you in the Messenger of Allah an excellent example' (Quran 33:21). To obey the Messenger is to obey Allah (Quran 4:80). This means that Muhammad's words (recorded in the Hadith) and his example (recorded in the Sira, the biography of his life) carry decisive authority for Muslim belief and practice.

Understanding Muhammad's life — his teachings, his political leadership, his conduct of warfare, his treatment of different communities — is therefore not an exercise in historical curiosity. It is essential context for understanding how significant portions of Islamic doctrine and practice are justified and applied.

"The question 'What would Muhammad do?' carries in Islam something of the weight that 'What would Jesus do?' carries in Christianity. This is not a trivial observation."

For the church leader: knowing something about Muhammad's life and teaching is not optional if you intend to engage seriously with Islam or with Muslim people seeking to understand their own tradition or questioning it.

Source: Quran 33:21; 4:80. Ibn Hisham, Sirat Rasul Allah (The Life of Muhammad).

06

Western Institutions Have Often Misread Islam

With real consequences for law, policy, and public life

Since at least the late twentieth century, many Western institutions — governments, media, academic institutions, and some churches — have treated Islam primarily through the lens of religious pluralism: as one private faith tradition among many, entitled to the same protections and subject to the same limits as other private beliefs.

This framework, while understandable as an expression of Western liberal principles, has consistently struggled to account for the civilisational, legal, and political dimensions of Islamic doctrine that do not fit

the private-religion model. The result has been a pattern of institutional underestimation — of the theological differences at stake, of the dynamics at work in Muslim communities, and of the implications for religious freedom, education, family law, and public life.

This is documented in court records, parliamentary inquiries, academic critiques from within Islamic studies itself, and in the written analysis of scholars including Dr Mark Durie, Dr Raymond Ibrahim, and others.

"Many Western leaders have repeated reassuring phrases about Islam that collapse under theological and historical scrutiny. The church should not make the same mistake."

The church does not serve Muslim people or its own members by adopting institutional frameworks that have consistently misread the reality they are meant to describe.

07

Religious Freedom Is Not Reciprocal in Many Islamic Contexts

Apostasy, conversion, and minority rights require honest pastoral understanding

One of the most pastorally urgent things for church leaders to understand is the reality facing Muslims who come to faith in Christ. In many Islamic contexts — cultural, familial, and where relevant, legal — leaving Islam carries serious consequences.

In classical Islamic jurisprudence, apostasy (riddah) — the leaving of Islam — is among the most serious offences. In countries governed by versions of Islamic law, apostasy can carry legal penalties. In many Muslim-majority contexts, it carries severe social, familial, and employment consequences even where no formal legal sanction applies. In Western Muslim communities, the pressure on those who leave Islam or convert to Christianity can be significant — including isolation, threats, and family rupture.

The case of Asia Bibi — a Pakistani Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy — is one documented example of the stakes involved. The documented testimonies of Muslim-background believers across the Middle East, South Asia, and diaspora communities tell a consistent story about the cost of conversion.

"Every church that ministers to Muslim-background believers — or hopes to — must understand what it costs to follow Christ from within a Muslim identity. This shapes everything: pastoral care, discipleship, community, and welcome."

Religious freedom as we understand it in the West — the right to change one's religion without civil or social penalty — is not a principle that classical Islamic jurisprudence shares. The church must engage this honestly if it is to support those who cross that boundary.

Source: Asia Bibi case: documented by international religious freedom organisations including Aid to the Church in Need and Open Doors.

08

God Is Moving Among Muslim People — Remarkably

The largest turning of Muslims to Christ in recorded history is happening now

Here is what most Western Christians have not been told: God is moving among Muslim people in ways that are, by any measure, extraordinary.

In Iran, following the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic's enforcement of Islamic law had an effect no one anticipated: it produced mass disillusionment with Islam itself. Over the subsequent decades, documented reports from multiple independent mission organisations and researchers indicate that hundreds of thousands — some estimates suggest over a million — Iranians have come to faith in Christ, largely through underground house churches. The Iranian church, nearly eradicated in 1979, has become one of the fastest-growing Christian communities in the world.

Similar reports emerge from the broader Middle East, from Muslim diaspora communities in Europe and North America, and from Sub-Saharan African contexts. Dreams and visions of Jesus — consistently reported by Muslim converts across completely independent contexts — have become a documented phenomenon in mission literature.

"The largest turning of Muslim people to Christ in recorded history is happening in our lifetime. The Western church, largely, does not know about it."

The missiological implication is profound: this is not a closed door. This is an open one. The church's responsibility is not simply to understand Islam — it is to go to the people within it with the love and truth of the gospel.

Source: Iran church growth: Operation World; Duane Miller, research on Muslim-background believers; multiple mission agency reports.

09

The Church Has Been Largely Silent — and Silence Is a Choice

Equipping and courage are the pastoral response

There is a scene in the book of 1 Samuel that I have returned to many times in my sixty years of this work. For forty days, the army of Israel stood in their camp while Goliath shouted. Not one soldier moved. It was not cowardice in the simple sense — these were trained fighting men. It was a failure of theological and missional nerve: no one had yet understood how to frame the confrontation.

I believe the Western church has been in a version of that camp for a long time when it comes to Islam. The silence has had many justifications — politeness, fear of misrepresentation, institutional caution, a genuine desire not to be associated with bigotry. These are understandable. But silence is not neutral. A church that does not equip its members to understand Islam cannot support Muslim-background believers, cannot engage Muslim neighbours honestly, and cannot pray intelligently for the Muslim world.

The pastoral response to this is not alarm. It is equipping. It is the slow, careful, loving work of helping Christian communities understand what Islam is, who Muslim people are, what God is doing among them, and what the church is called to do.

"Day 41 in the camp is the day someone stops waiting for conditions to be comfortable and walks out. I believe the church is at day 41."

The question for every pastor reading this briefing is simply this: what will your church know about Islam and about Muslim people that it did not know a year from now? That is not a question about politics. It is a question about obedience.

10

Muslims Are Not the Enemy — They Are the Mission Field

And the church is the only institution called and equipped to reach them

I want to end where I began: with love.

Everything in this briefing has been about Islam as a system — its theology, its jurisprudence, its history, and its advance. None of it has been, or should be read as, a statement about Muslim people as people. These are men and women and children made in the image of God, loved by God, and — as

the extraordinary reports from Iran and beyond confirm — being reached by God in ways that should fill the church with hope and urgency.

The Christian response to Islam is not nationalism, not political mobilisation, not cultural defensiveness, and not hatred. The Christian response to Islam is the same response it has always had to every system that holds people captive: the gospel, offered in truth, in love, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

"Muslims are not the enemy. They are the mission field. And the church is the only institution on earth called and equipped — in Christ — to reach them."

My prayer, after sixty years, is that the church will recover the courage to say so — and the love to go and do it.

That is why I wrote Future History.

Dr Stuart Robinson

Author, Future History: The Rise and Demise of Islam or Christianity Foreword by Dr Mark Durie

Read the Full Account

Future History: The Rise and Demise of Islam or Christianity
by Dr Stuart Robinson
with Foreword by Dr Mark Durie

Available in print, ebook, and audiobook.
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