

Misconceptions About Islam, Part 3

We shall continue our discussions about some of the widespread misconceptions about Islam and discuss more topics in our endeavor to reach a good understanding of this beautiful religion.

One of the questions that one may have is this: If Islam is a purely monotheistic faith, and if Islam opposes idol worship, why do Muslims pray to a square structure? The answer to this question is that that simple cube-shaped stone building located in Makkah is called the Ka’bah or the Sacred House. It is the point toward its location that Muslims turn their faces when they pray. Although Muslims face the direction of Ka’bah during prayer, they do not worship it. It is not even mentioned in their prayer with a single word. Muslims worship and pray only to God.

The Ka’bah was built by the prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael (peace be upon them) in response to God’s command over 4,000 years ago. Abraham consecrated the House for the worship of the one true God and invited all of humanity to visit it for that purpose. Even today, Muslims who are physically and financially able are required to make a pilgrimage to it once in a lifetime. The Ka’bah has remained at the center of a continuous tradition of worship and devotion up to the present day, symbolic

of permanence, constancy, and renewal.

There were periods in human history during which mankind deviated from the monotheism taught by God’s prophets. Before the advent of Muhammad (pbuh), religion among the Arabs had degenerated into polytheism and paganism, and Makkah was completely submerged in idolatry; some 360 idols had been placed in and around the Ka’bah to be worshipped there along with God. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was sent to restore to mankind the pure monotheism taught by all the messengers of God and reinstate the worship of Him alone. This he accomplished, and the Ka’bah was finally cleared of all manmade deities.

Walking around the Ka’bah is one of the ancient religious rites particular to it. This suggests the integrating and unifying power of monotheism in human life and how a Muslim’s existence should revolve around a pure devotion to God. The Ka’bah symbolizes the unity of the believers, the brotherhood of all the prophets (pbu them), and the essential consistency of their message.

When Muslims pray facing toward this single central point, they are reminded of their common purpose and long-term goal. Even when standing directly before the Ka’bah



Guest Column

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in prayer, one is not to look at it but rather at the ground before him. The spiritual focus is on God alone and never on any created object.

All the above is just a try to justify the meaning of facing the Ka’bah, but for any Muslim, if you ask him this question, she will answer directly that as believers in this face, we’re asked to face the Ka’bah in prayers and this is what we do. If we trust the Creator with everything, justifications come second to this trust and this belief.

Another misconception about Islam is that women are oppressed under such faith, and among the signs of this oppression is the use of head covers (or scarfs) that are called “the Hijab” [Also, Hegab.] To address this point, I say that the Islamic veil or “hijab” refers to the loose-fitting, opaque outer garments with which a Muslim woman covers her head and body. Muslim women cover themselves with such garments before all men apart from their closest relatives. They do not do so to please their fathers, brothers, or husbands but only because

God has ordained the hijab. In reality, Islam did not introduce modest dress but merely endorsed it as part of God’s religion. Yet, dress is only one aspect of a total concept. “Hijab” is not simply a concealing garment but includes proper behavior, manners, speech, and appearance in public.

To accept any law or instruction, a person needs either to be convinced of its benefit or to trust in the wisdom of the one who prescribed it. Muslims believe that God’s wisdom is absolute and perfect and that He knows the nature and best interests of His creations (mankind included) better than they do themselves; thus, a believer willingly obeys God’s directives as much as he or she is able.

To some, women’s dress might seem trivial. Islam, however, assigns it moral, social, and legal dimensions. When women observe proper Islamic dress, they protect their dignity and reputation and contribute greatly to peace and order.

Islam demands modesty as a virtue of both men and women, not only for the protection of women but to maintain the spiritual uprightness of men. Given the sexual anarchy that prevails in many parts of the world, the need for modest dress and behavior in both men and women is obvious. However, on

account of differences between males and females in nature and temperament, a greater amount of privacy is required for women than for men, and this relates, among other things, to their manner of dress.

Islam has no fixed standard for the style of dress or clothing that must be worn. However, it must be wide and thick enough not to reveal the contours of the figure. Muslim women are responsible for making their homes attractive and comfortable, and Islam encourages a woman to beautify herself for her husband and immediate family members rather than publicly exhibiting her physical charms and worldly possessions.

Muslim women who cover themselves do not find it impractical or interfering with their activities in the various fields of life. It is often forgotten that the modern Western style of dress is a recent phenomenon. Looking at the clothing of women as recently as seventy years ago, we see that it is similar to the dress prescribed by Islam. Those hard-working, active Western women were not at all inhibited by their long, full dresses and head coverings.

The covering of women’s bodies is not a logical basis on which to claim that women are subservient to men. It would be far more appropriate to charge a society with the exploitation

of females when it tolerates pornography rather than when it encourages modesty. Ironically, uncontested freedom is granted to those who publicly expose much of their bodies. At the same time, severe censure is launched against women who consider that modest covering is a religious obligation that cannot be disregarded.

Islam teaches that women should be evaluated for their intelligence, opinions, skills, deeds, and inner qualities rather than physical appearance. A Muslim woman who covers her body is making a statement about herself and her identity; she has dignity, respectability, and self-esteem and is proud of her Islam. Whoever sees her will know that she is not available to men or interested in advances, that she has an upright moral character, and that she will not permit sexuality to enter into any of her necessary interactions with the opposite sex. Women often see their Islamic dress as empowering because they are taken seriously and respected rather than being viewed as sex objects – they are judged only by their character and conduct. A Muslim woman wants to look like Mary in her veil and dress as most (if not all) nuns dress!

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Vatican will prepare a document on the role of women in leadership in the Catholic Church

VATICAN CITY – The Vatican said Tuesday that its doctrine office will prepare a document on women in leadership roles in the Catholic Church, a new initiative to respond to longstanding demands by women to have a greater say in the church’s life.

The document will be written by the Dicastery of the Doctrine of the Faith as its contribution to Pope Francis’ big church reform process, now entering its second main phase with a meeting of bishops in October, known as a

synod.

The Vatican announced the details of the doctrinal document shortly after its news conference – led by four men – on the preparatory work for the October meeting, leaving journalists no chance to ask for more details about it.

A group pressing for women’s ordination promptly dismissed the significance of it as “crumbs,” noting that ordained men would once again be making decisions about women’s roles in the church.

Pope Francis called the synod over three years ago as part of his overall efforts to make the church a more welcoming place for marginalized groups, and one where ordinary people would have a greater say. The process, and the two-year canvassing of rank-and-file Catholics that preceded it, sparked both hopes and fears that real change was afoot.

Catholic women do the lion’s share of the church’s work in schools and hospitals, and tend to take the lead in passing down

the faith to future generations. But they have long complained of a second-class status in an institution that reserves the priesthood for men.

Francis has reaffirmed the ban on women priests, but has named several women to high-ranking jobs in the Vatican and encouraged debate on other ways women’s voices can be heard. That has included the synod process in which women have had the right to vote on specific proposals — a right previously given only to

men.

Additionally, during his 11-year pontificate, he responded to demands for ministerial jobs for women by appointing two commissions to study whether women could be ordained deacons. Deacons are ordained ministers but are not priests, though they can perform many of the same functions as priests: preside at weddings, baptisms and funerals, and preach. They cannot, however, perform Mass.

– AP

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Amos 5:24

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