

The Rise of Islam

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – the rise of Islam from Arabia and how its teachings affect the medieval Christian church
2. aim – to cause us to understand the nature of Islam and how it may affect the church today

b. outline

1. The Beginnings of Islam
2. The Rise of Islam
3. The Beliefs of Islam
4. The Effects of Islam

c. overview

1. the *Medieval Church* – c. 470–1517AD
 - a. the church in the W has brought order, converted the barbarians to faith or to Nicene orthodoxy, and has established itself as a “political” force under a single bishop in Rome
 - b. the church in the E continues on, deals with a number of Christological struggles, calls a number of ecumenical councils to resolve those issues, and *slowly* begins to divide from the W
 - c. but now ... the rise of a new threat to Christianity, coming from the Arabian peninsula ...

I. The Beginnings of Islam

Content

a. the quiet before the storm (early in the 7th C.)

1. the Arian invaders (i.e. the Germanic tribes) had been *assimilated* into Nicene Orthodoxy
2. the Franks were united in Gaul as new believers
3. in the British Isles, the church was growing, particularly from missionaries going there
4. the Byzantine Empire (Constantinople) still enjoyed peace, particularly in N Africa

b. the life of Muhammad

1. he was born in Mecca in 570; orphaned at an early age and raised by an uncle
2. he was a *merchant* by trade; was first married by age 25
3. he seemed to have deep religious interests, and intersected both Judaism and Christianity
4. he was discontent with his life, so he withdrew from Mecca to a cave for meditation
5. at 40 (during the month of Ramadan) he had his first “revelation” from Allah
 - a. about 3 years later he began teaching these revelations publicly
 - b. that “God is one” – a radical monotheism (in contradiction to his *perceived* views of Jesus)
 - c. that complete surrender (or *Islam*) is the only way acceptable to God
 - d. that he was a prophet and messenger of God (like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus)
6. in Mecca, Muhammad was a *minority* prophet (i.e. not well received by the locals)
 - a. he was met with a great deal of hostility, especially from local merchants
 - b. to escape persecution, he fled to Medina in 622
 1. this marks the *Hijra*, the beginning of the Islamic calendar
 2. it was here that Muhammad established the first Islamic “community”
 - c. in Medina, he united several conflicting tribes and warred against Mecca for 8 years
 - d. he and his followers conquered Mecca in 630
 - e. but, Muhammad died in 632
 1. by then, he had managed to convert most of the Arabian peninsula to Islam
 2. by then, he had managed to unite most the Arabian tribes under a single Muslim polity

II. The Rise of Islam

Content

a. the conquests of Islam

1. after Muhammed, leadership of Islam passed to a series of *caliphs* (or successors)
2. it was under these men that the Arabians began to move out in conquest

- a. their first victory over the Byzantines came in 633 under caliph #1 Abu Bakr
- b. they invaded Syria and took Damascus in 635 under caliph #2 Omar
- c. they took Jerusalem in 638, and by 640 they controlled all of Palestine
- d. they invaded Egypt and took Alexandria in 642 (establishing the city of Cairo)
- e. they continued along the N coast of Africa between 644 and 656 under caliph #3 Uthman
- f. they overran the Persian Empire by 651

b. the internal struggles of Islam

1. Islam was constantly struggling with inner struggles for power
 - a. of the first 4 caliphs, three were assassinated
 - b. the struggle of caliph #4 (Ali, Muhammad's cousin 656-661) resulted in the Shiite-Sunni split
 1. the Shiites supported Ali, the Sunnis his rivals (**i.e.** not a *religious* difference)
 2. Shiites insist that only a descendant of Muhammad (**i.e.** Ali) could be a caliph
 3. Sunnis insist that any descendant of the first 4 caliphs can rule
2. but, this internal strife would not dim the conquests of the Arabians
 - a. Carthage fell in 695 and (c. 711) a small group crossed into Spain and overran the Visigoths
 - b. they were (finally) defeated at the Battle of Tours (N France) by Charles Martel in 732
 - c. this battle is said to have kept Europe Christian (although this is disputed)
 - d. at this point Persia, Syria, Palestine, N Egypt, N Africa and Spain were in Muslim hands

c. the success of Islam

1. why were the Muslims so successful in such a short period of time?
 - a. they had strong armies *and* the nations they attacked were weak
 - b. the *disaffection* of those under Byzantine and Persian influence helped
 1. **e.g.** the theological squabbles and oppression of dissident groups (**i.e.** the Monophysites)
 - c. the *claim* by Muslim leaders that disaffected people would be respected also helped
 1. **e.g.** in Jerusalem – Jews and Christians would be respected in their property/customs – they would have to pay “tribute” like all others, but there would be no *coercion* on religious matters

III. The Beliefs of Islam

Content

a. the beliefs of Islam

1. the Qur'an contains the *Ayah* (or signs of God) recorded by Muhammad throughout his life
 - a. Qur'an = recite – in his first vision Muhammad was told to recite what he heard
 - b. the Qur'an (then) is a record of his visions down through time (much of which *change*)
2. the **Five Pillars of Islam**
 - a. *shahadah* – a proclamation of radical monotheism and of accepting Muhammad as Allah's messenger: “*there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah*”
 - b. *salat* – the 5 daily prayers, said at specific times of day while facing Mecca
 - c. *zakat* – alms-giving; a personal responsibility based on *ability* (**i.e.** ~2.5%); designed to aid the poor and distribute some amount of wealth equality
 - d. *Ramadan* – the forced fast of Muslims in the daytime during the month of Ramadan
 - e. *hajj* – a pilgrimage to Mecca during the 12th month of the Islamic calendar; every able-bodied Muslim is required to make this journey *once* during their life

b. the contrasts of Islam to Christianity

1. Jesus was *not* divine, but only a prophet and *superseded* by the teachings of Muhammad
2. although spoken of as “the People of the Book” in the Qur'an, most references to Christians (later) only warn them not to treat Jesus as the Son of God, but to do good
3. the resurrection of Jesus is denied by most Muslims (or that he was crucified), but they *do* accept his virginal conception and role as a great prophet
4. Allah is seen as distant and “uninvolved” in the ordinary lives of people (mercy is foreign)
5. salvation is (ultimately) a combination of keeping the rule of the Qur'an and the will of Allah on the day of judgment (thus the *radical* concept of martyrdom)
6. there is *no* concept of substitution or grace in Islam; only radical obedience saves

IV. The Effects of Islam

Content

a. the effects of Islam on Christianity (by the 8th C.)

1. most of the ancient centers of Christianity were under Muslim rule (**i.e.** Jerusalem, Antioch, Damascus, Alexandria, and Carthage)
 - a. Christians in these areas were *seldom* persecuted
 - b. but, conversions to Christianity were harshly punished
 - c. and, any defense of Christianity (apologetics) was seen as an offense against Muhammad
 - d. thus, Christianity in most of these areas either disappeared entirely or ceased growing
2. the Byzantine empire was pushed back to Asia Minor (Turkey) or to its holdings in Europe
 - a. because many of its *dissenters* were now under Muslim rule,
 - b. the Byzantine church no longer felt the need to take their views into account,
 - c. thus, the Monophysites and Nestorians *disappeared* from the Eastern church
 - d. but, the fight over the use of *icons* (or images) emerges in the 8th C. (**see before**)
 1. responding to the Muslim belief that any icon or image was forbidden
3. Christianity began to be *militarized*
 - a. the earliest Christians were largely *pacifists*, responding to Jesus' voluntary death
 - b. but, during the Imperial Church, many Christians were converted from *within* the military
 - c. and during the Imperial Church, the safety and order of the state fell to Christians
 - d. now, with the invasions from the N by the Germanic peoples and the invasions from the S by the Muslims, military force seemed to be the *only* way to stop further loss of territory (and people)
 - e. so, Christianity became radically militarized, resulting in **the Crusades** a few centuries later

b. the effects of Islam today (in the 21st C.)

1. once again, there is a great advance of Islam taking place in the world (although differently)
2. once again, the "weakness" of the West makes it an easy takeover target (culturally)
3. once again, *significant theological* differences makes it necessary for good catechesis
 - a. **although:** Islam is *far less* of a threat to the church today than W culture itself