

My Questions to Muslims

The question of authentication

Muslims acknowledge that there have been many prophets, but they claim that Muhammad is the only universal prophet, that he is the last prophet and his message is for all times. The other prophets have only been of local or temporal significance.

Muhammad is not the only one who has claimed to be a messenger of God. There are many people who claim(ed) to be "prophets" or "messengers" even right up to our own times. Some of them even came "out of Islam" itself like Baha'ullah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, Rashad Khalifa. Others have proclaimed messages with superficial similarity to Christianity like Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons.

These men and their messages are rejected by the majority of Muslims and Christians alike. Obviously we need some "standard" against which we can test whether somebody claiming to be a messenger from God is an imposter or really does have an authentic message from God.

And it has to be a "test of prophethood" which is reasonable, which can be verified by anybody who is serious to do so. And it has to be a test that all true prophets pass and all wrong prophets fail. We cannot just make up a new test for every new prophet. Otherwise it would just be arbitrariness and every group will devise a test which lets "their" prophet pass [on whose authenticity they have decided beforehand] and as such it is not a real test at all.

It has to be an unambiguous test, and an objective test. If the message is only intended for a certain restricted group of people, it might be okay to give an authentication for the message that is meaningful to only this group, but if the message is intended to be universal, then the test has to be universal as well, and that means it must be intelligible to all people.

And exactly here is one of the philosophical problems with Islam. Muslims claim that Muhammad is a prophet with a universal message and expect everybody to believe this, but the authentication for the message is claimed to be the "literary miracle" of the Qur'an which supposedly nobody can appreciate who has not reached a highly sophisticated knowledge of the (classical) Arabic language. If anybody else finds that these claims don't make sense then the answer is all too often: "Well, if only you could understand Arabic, then you would see the miracle and you too would believe."

It is impossible to reach a high proficiency in any foreign language without investing several years of hard work in it.

Essentially Muslims demand that we believe that Islam is true without being presented with the authentication for the message. We are supposed to believe blindly. The message is "universal" but the "proof" is provincial or local. This does contradict all reasonability. It demands gullibility to a considerable extent.

The miracles of all the earlier prophets in the Bible were an authentication which was the same for everybody. Healing people, prophecies about historical events, parting the Red Sea, the raising of dead people, etc ... all these authenticating evidences stay the same in whatever language they are translated.

Interestingly, so Muslims seem to claim, all these miracles were to authenticate an only temporary and locally significant message, while this same God then issued his universal message for which he gave an

authentication which hardly anybody can verify for himself! [Just how many people out of the world's population have sophisticated enough an Arabic knowledge to test this "literary miracle"?] This is "not in character" with the God of the Bible, who always gives clear evidence for his messages, meaningful to all those to whom it is addressed - and beyond. Nothing mysterious which you first have to believe in order to have enough motivation to study hard to find out if there really is an authentication for it in the first place.

This whole approach does not "ring true" and is philosophically not defensible in my eyes. Just one more example to illustrate to you why this isn't viable:

The Hindu Brahmins have a similar claim. They say: If you are not born a Brahmin, then you cannot understand the Vedas. Now, just bring together an Arab Muslim and a Hindu Brahmin and let them discuss about the truth of their respective religion and you will be no more intelligent after the discussion than you were before. The Muslim says, sorry, but your objections aren't valid you first have to study Arabic for many, many years before you are qualified to make any objections at all. And the Brahmin says, you don't even have a chance in this life, you first have to be reincarnated and if you behave well enough in this life, [which includes believing as I tell you] maybe next time you come back as a Brahmin and you can understand it then.

Where does that leave anyone who is sincerely seeking the truth?

Both religions protect themselves against critical evaluation and therefore make it basically impossible to scrutinize them in a search for truth. The difference is only one of degree not of kind. They both demand, that we have to commit ourselves to a substantial degree first before we are promised to see the evidence that would warrant such a commitment. And since the length of our life is not in our hands but in God's, the years I am still left with in this life might actually not be enough to reach the necessary level of Arabic fluency and in effect the Hindu and the Muslim demand becomes the same then. Only that you have another chance in your next life in the Hindu frame of thought, while it is over if the Muslim is right. And wouldn't a true Muslim try to urge anybody who is considering Islam not to wait too long exactly for this reason that the time of death is not in our hands and we need to be ready to meet our creator at any time?

A further remark: I have even seen one more stage of this, used for those who indeed know sufficient Arabic [there are after all a good number of Arab Christians, either from Christian families or converts from Islam]. **Then** the reasoning includes that "you are reading it with the wrong attitude" and the beauty and truth of the Qur'an only discloses itself to those which approach it in humble acceptance. With that, every critique is "successfully" countered. The problem is that this argument works for each and every religion, is hence useless, and clearly is the descent into utter subjectivity.

Basically, we are not given evidence which can be tested in a reasonable way and with reasonable effort. Commitment is demanded **before** evidence is given.

The evidence for the truth of the Bible is visible just as much in any good translation as it is in the original, because it is a **test of content and not of form**, a test of the message itself and not of some elusive quality of "eloquence" which is lost in a translation. Why - IF this is THE most important revelation of God - did He make it so incredibly hard to verify for a seeker whether it is indeed true? Especially since God seems to have already had better methods during the time of his earlier revelation. It doesn't make much sense.

But there is another logical blunder in the Muslim reasoning since they themselves apply their own argument very selectively.

Since you say, you need to be able to read the revelation in its original language, otherwise you are not qualified to even criticize anything in it, and since hardly any Muslim knows the Hebrew or Greek language well enough to be called 'fluent' ... nevertheless AGAINST his own standards the Muslim still rejects the Old and New Testament of the Bible without ever having read it in its original language [and most of them not even in a translation into their mother tongue].

Do you think it is wrong to call you to account and ask you to apply the same standards to Bible and Qur'an BEFORE you decide on the truth content of any of the two?

And if you are satisfied to read the Bible in translation and critically examine it, would you please allow us to do the same with the Qur'an? You tell us, what you consider a good translation and then let's talk about the issue of content. And please do not evade the topics by pointing for each and every difficult question to the excuse that we do not understand the original Arabic, and if only we could ... then we would understand that there is no problem. This is one of the biggest "cop outs" of Muslim reasoning in dialog with other faiths. You simply declare yourself "uncriticizable" and therefore to be right on this ground. But it is merely evading the issues and nothing else.

If you say, there is no good translation, then you basically say, that God was not able to express Himself clearly, because all clear thoughts can be expressed in any language as any competent linguist will tell you. Some languages can do so more concisely in one area whereas other languages are higher differentiated in other parts, but all languages have the capacity to express any clear thought in a comprehensible way.

It makes NO sense to claim a UNIVERSAL message for ALL mankind and then to say, but you have to trust us and we are sorry, you can't understand it for yourself and any critical thought on it is invalid because you don't understand Arabic (well enough). This is plain fallacious reasoning in any logical category.

This approach looks to me like Muslims do have something to hide.

Yes, understanding the original language of the Bible is useful and we do have good commentaries which are a wonderful help for growing in understanding of God's word, but any Christian would be comfortable and hand you a Bible in your mother tongue and say, just read and pray that God will speak through His word to you and give you understanding. Because the Word of God is alive. He uses the feeble attempts of the translators and then gives His Holy Spirit's support and guidance to anyone who seeks Him with all His heart and God is not hampered in any way by a maybe less than perfect translation.

Let me summarize my main points again:

1. Islam has the claim to be the universal message from God to all mankind. But it does not provide evidence for this claim that is appropriate. Universality claims have to provide "universally" testable evidence if they should be reasonable.
2. Forcing "7th century Arabism" on all believers seems to be a step back from the flexible and open approach God has taken for the spreading of the Gospel in which the value of all cultures and languages was affirmed.

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My Questions to Muslims: Table of contents

[Answering Islam](#) Home Page