

# My Questions to Muslims

## Flexibility

Islam claims to be the universal, God-given religion **for all times** and **for all of mankind**.

Let us look at this claim to universality in regard to two areas:

1. A universal claim needs to be supported with universally verifiable evidence for its truth. That will be the topic for the next article.
2. To be universal, a system must be flexible (adaptable) to the many different circumstances and cultures it is supposed to be apply to, but I detect much of rigidity in Islam and the tendency to force specific cultural behavior of 7th century Arabia on all believers everywhere, and not the flexibility to adapt the principles to an appropriate local application. This and related questions will be the focus of the present article.

Let me start off with one philosophical problem I see in a claim of Islam to be a universal message for all mankind and for all times.

Do you think there ever was a time where God gave imperfect or faulty revelation?

What do you think really is the "language of God" and His revelation?

Even though the Qur'an speaks of many earlier prophets, it only seems to speak of 5(?) books given through prophets.

Abraham (Suhuf-i-Ibrahim, nothing known about it outside the Qur'an)

Moses (Torah - law/instruction)

David (Zabur - Psalms/prayers)

Jesus (Injil - Gospel)

Muhammad (Qur'an)

Since we don't know anything about the book of Abraham, we will have to leave it aside. These earlier available books (before the Jesus) are written in Hebrew and Hebrew was the language of these prophets (Jesus also spoke Aramaic and possibly Greek). Hebrew was obviously good enough to convey God's perfect Word and Will. And God spoke through His prophets in this language for about 1500 years since Moses lived around 1450 B.C. and Jesus died about 30 A.D. Or 2000 years if we go back to Abraham.

Even according to the Qur'an therefore, God spoke revelation in Arabic for only 23 year years in comparison to at least 1500 years of Hebrew. Or 1100 years from the first to the last prophet in the Old Testament, looking at the available scripture, as the New was written down in Greek -- the world language of the day (similar to the role English has now) for maximum distribution and comprehension everywhere.

On what basis then do Muslims claim that Arabic is God's only holy language? Muslims claim, that if you really want to understand God and His will you need to understand Arabic.

Even the Jews have translated their Holy Scriptures into other languages (specifically Greek in around 200 B.C.) and especially Christians have translated their Scriptures from the earliest time [first century]

onwards. Why so? This is based on the clear understanding of the miracle that God did on Pentecost, clearly showing that He wants **all people** to hear the good news of salvation **in their own language** [so that they can truly and thoroughly understand it] and all languages are equally good means to praise God for His greatness and in a way that is pleasing to Him. [Please read all of Acts 2 on this topic and see if that is not a proper conclusion of what God is doing there. Let me just quote a few relevant verses:

4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.  
5 Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.  
6 When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.  
7 Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?  
8 Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?  
9 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,  
10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome  
11 (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs - we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!"  
12 Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

...

17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams....

...

21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' ]

Now, after God had already taken this approach of letting all people know about His will and love for them in their **own language** [another sign of His true love], why does He go back on that and chooses to reveal his supposedly "final and universal"[1] message in such an "incomprehensible"[2] language (Arabic)? Nobody has ever claimed that Hebrew or Greek was untranslatable and therefore they would have been so much more useful for conveying God's message to all people! And why did He make the only test for the "divine origin of the Qur'an" something which is absolutely unverifiable to at least 90% of the world's population, since hardly any non-Arabic speakers will ever reach a fluency sufficient to appreciate this claim of "unimitable eloquence" in the Qur'an at all?

Comments on the above:

[1] The Gospel itself has a clear universal claim in Acts 2 and is not only for the Jews! So, I can not accept that the Gospel was only of local and temporal significance as Muslims like to say - and my detailed exposition on Matthew 15 on this group recently has shown the same thing. And there are many further passages all throughout the Bible which make clear that God always had all the earth in mind. [2] or how should I understand the "quality" of Arabic being "untranslatable" and the instruction that I cannot understand God's word if I do not first of all learn Arabic?

Further thoughts on the "universality" of Islam:

If God has a real preference for Arabic, why are there at most around 250 million people with Arabic as mother tongue and nearly 1.5 billion with Chinese as a first language? That should make one think about God's language priorities, shouldn't it? This last observation is on the semi-humorous side. The next one is much more serious.

The center of any religion is the (right) worship of God. Islam demands that the recital of the Qur'an be done in Arabic and the ritual prayers be done in Arabic as the most important part of Islamic worship. And that holds for the majority of Muslims whose knowledge of Arabic is very scant. Most Muslims are expected to perform what is supposed to be a "meeting with their Creator" in a language they are not comfortable with if they even understand anything at all. This is exactly NOT the same for everybody, but for some it is their mother tongue and it is meaningful while for others it is just a sequence of sounds. In contrast, Christianity [not always, but usually] has emphasized, that all cultures and languages are equally created by God and equally acceptable to him and that we should and are allowed to approach God in a way that is really "us", including the use of the "heart language" for our worship in public as well as in private. In this it seems to me, Islam demands "provincial" rigidity, while Christianity offers truly universal flexibility without losing any content of faith. And who would argue that God doesn't speak all languages equally well? Is there really any need for God or for us that worship be performed in Arabic?

I know there are sure reasons one can advance for the positive side of all Muslims praying the same way... but if we look around in creation, don't we see that God delights in variety? Aren't all plants and all animals worshipping their creator **differently** in various sounds, colors and each according to its own kind... ? If Creation is any indication of God's will this should make one think why God does seemingly talk "variety" in creation and "uniformity" in his book/religion?

But it isn't only about the worship, "most" aspects of the life of Muhammad are taken by many Muslims to be the model par excellence. Most every act and habit of Muhammad, formed by this specific small cultural corner of the Quraish tribe, becomes the model all other cultures are supposed to adjust themselves to. In form of dress, of hair (beard) style, of "how to go to the bathroom" [that is what one Imam told us in his presentation of Islam], on which side you sleep etc. The "Sunna", the tradition (practice) of the Prophet is the second important element after the Qur'an for the majority of Muslims.

I have the impression that Islam in many ways is stuck in "Arabism" and provinciality with its insistence on 7th century desert tribe rules, clothing, and other "important items" of outward behavior which are just cultural expressions of the time of Muhammad, but have nothing to do with God's word (as I understand it). And note, I don't say these values and customs are bad. I only say this restriction doesn't mesh with the claim for universality in Islam. I could add a lot of detailed examples, but it isn't about one or two specific things, it is about the principle of rigidity inherent in the Sunnah that is in tension with the claim for universality.

Comparing Bible and Qur'an facts and the way the two speak about culture, it speaks against the claim of Islam to be "universal" and Christianity to be "local" and "temporal" in outlook. Christianity seems to have a much higher cultural adaptability than Islam. Just as you would expect it from a truly universal faith given by God. And I agree, there are also many bad practices in Christianity which don't always lend themselves as good illustrations of what I said here. But in this article we are looking at the claims, i.e. the theoretical and theological foundation of what each of these two religions are supposed to be. And for both we could quote good and bad examples of how their own ideal works out in practice.

In summary, God delights in diversity brought into unity of worship without the rigidity of uniformity. This is what I see both in the general revelation of creation and the special revelation of the Holy Scriptures. The Islamic provinciality expressed through a strictness in form [which really is inequality through discrimination against the non-Arabs] does not go well together with the claim of being God's universal revelation and religion.

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## 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