

ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT, IMAM SAYS

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Muslims, Christians and Jews are cousins whose faiths share much in common, according to Imam Mohammad Jamal Daoudi of the Islamic Center of West Virginia.

Daoudi gave the final talk Sunday at the West Virginia Humanities Council 2005 Little Lecture series.

He emphasized the similarities among the three faiths. All are monotheistic and all spring from Abraham, for example.

In Islam, Moses and Jesus are seen as great prophets, on the same level as the final prophet, Mohammed, he said.

“We are cousins and brethren, long separated from each other,” he said. “We have left each other, and we have been looking for one another for a long time.”

Daoudi attempted to clear up several misconceptions about Islam. He said Muslims do not worship Mohammed or believe he is a god.

Also, he explained the true meaning of jihad, a phrase he said is much misunderstood and twisted by those who commit terrorism.

Jihad means “struggling for the best” in Arabic. The highest level of jihad is the internal struggle to follow God’s will and fight against “that whisper of evil in your ear.”

The second level of jihad is that of spreading the knowledge of God. The goal is not to force anyone to convert to Islam, he said, but to enlighten people about its teachings and let them make up their own minds.

The lowest level of jihad, what he said Mohammed called the “minor” jihad, is the jihad of the sword. Such a jihad can only be called by the “highest authorities,” and is only justified when Muslims are being prevented from worship, or if one’s country is under attack.

“There is no justification for jihad in the United States,” he said, where freedom of religion is protected.

Daoudi described the five pillars of Islamic faith, or five duties every Muslim is expected to uphold:

- Shahada, professing one’s faith, that there is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is his messenger.
- Salat, praying at five specific times of the day.
- Zakat, contributing 2.5 percent of one’s income to the needy.

- Sawm, fasting and abstaining from bodily pleasures during Ramadan, the ninth month in the Muslim calendar.
- Hajj, making the pilgrimage to Mecca, the most holy place in Islam.

Daoudi said different Christian groups have similar customs, such as parishioners who tithe, Christians who travel to Jerusalem or monks who pray at certain times every day.

Of course, not everything is the same. Instead of believing that Jesus is the only son of God, Muslims believe he is one of 25 great prophets.

“Yes, we have differences, slight differences,” he said.

For example, Muslims believe God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael, considered the ancestor of modern Muslims. In the Jewish and Christian scriptures, the son at issue is Isaac, the ancestor of David and Jesus.

Also, Muslims believe that the prophets of the Old Testament were perfect in character, he said. So, they don’t believe that Abraham would have a concubine, or that Lot got drunk and slept with his daughters.

But the similarities are much stronger than the differences, he said.

Another common struggle for the different faiths is the role women should play in worship.

The issue was brought to light by a 38-year-old Morgantown woman last year. Asra Nomani asked to change a rule that women should enter the mosque through a side staircase and pray separately from the men.

In Morgantown, the women were praying in a completely isolated, separate room from the men, Daoudi said. In Charleston, the women and men pray together, although they are separated into two groups, he said.

Daoudi said some things are negotiable, but that a call for women to be imams could never happen.

“That’s like going to a Catholic Church and saying women should be priests,” he said. “I agree, she has some points ... She went a little far in her points.”

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CLARIFICATION

05/26/2005

A Monday article about a lecture by Imam Mohammad Jamal Daoudi of the Islamic Center of West Virginia should have included that Daoudi said women can lead an all-women group in prayer, but not a mixed group of men and women, according to the fundamentals of the Muslim faith.