

Muslims, Money & Mayhem – Part I

The world has been deluged with analysis and retrospective since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. No doubt, the world has never experienced such concentrated media coverage and expert commentary on any one single event in history. Yet, more than one year later, the popular conclusions remain largely misdirected. Very little truth and insightful perspective has yet to trickle into the public arena ... certainly so in the Western world.

A global perspective may help to understand some of the key schisms between Islam and modern Christianity. That is the objective of this next series of four columns entitled *Muslims, Money & Mayhem*. It is an attempt to look at the world from afar ... from above the biases of cultural, religious and societal differences. Keeping to the theme of this column series — money and its endtime roles — we will be investigating how differences in attitudes towards commerce and money have played a significant theme in increasing global tensions.

Even as secular society struggles to understand terrorism, Christians are asking a whole different set of questions. Why did God let it happen? Is there a connection to endtime developments? And more, ominously, could there be any message that He wants us to hear? Though we know that God is not the author of evil, could this criminal act funded and propagated by Koran-believing Muslims also serve as an admonishment? If so, to whom?

If my reactions are any guide, the analysis and conclusions of this article series may seem unsettling to many readers. Why? Because these may challenge us to re-evaluate the expressions of our Christian faith. To be honest, I struggle with the implications myself. Therefore, wherever possible, I provide facts in this series so that you can draw your own conclusions. We'll take it a step at a time, taking care for accuracy and understanding. In the end, your eyes will be opened to some very, very significant trends, evils and spirits at work in our world today. *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* (Ephesians 6:12)

Beyond a doubt, a main cause of world unrest today is found in the differing religious perspective on money and its uses between the world's two monotheistic religions — Islam and Christianity. Not only are the religious views different in this respect, matters are made worse because of the deep hypocrisy on these issues.

A Cauldron That is Heating Up

Tensions between Islamic countries and the Western nations have risen substantially since the events of September 11, 2001. A major catalyst for this shift has been the realization that much international terrorism has been financed by Saudi money. Osama bin Laden himself was a Saudi Arabian national. As well, 15 of the 18 terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks were citizens of that country. Therefore, the convenient relationship between the US and oil-rich

Saudi has been sorely tested. Annoyed with the many lawsuits of US private citizens against its banks, individuals and charities and the heightened scrutiny of the financial dealings of its citizens around the world, many Saudi investors have been shifting tens of billions of dollars out of their US holdings.

Not that temperatures hadn't already been rising. The truth is that the perspectives and conditions that ultimately have given rise to various terrorist activities targeted against the US and other countries have been building for decades. In recent times, America and other western industrial nations have often been castigated as the "satans" of the world by the fundamentalist factions within Islam. The United States specifically is often referred to as the "great Satan."

But why? Can we understand the Islamic perspective that breeds such malice? What issues lie at the root of the schisms between the Muslims and the West? What is it that irks orthodox Islam? While these are difficult queries, the truth is that most people living in the Western world remain largely blinded to the fundamental issues that lie behind these tensions. Even Christians living in wealthy countries such as the United States, Canada or the European Union are really quite ill-suited to address these and other questions. To them, Muslim society and its conventions seem largely incomprehensible. Residents of Europe or North America can hardly understand the apparent hatred directed against them. As is well known, many Muslims celebrated the 9/11 strikes, venerating the terrorists and justifying their heinous activities in the name of Allah and jihad (*holy war*). Striking out against America was seen as a mission worthy of Allah's blessings.

Yet, the popular media likes to portray the actions of terrorist groups as the work of a few Muslim extremists who are disobedient to the greater values espoused by Islam. In this view, it is the aberrant behavior of a few "crazies" that led to the 9/11 attacks. Catch and eradicate them, and our problems will be over. This belief couldn't be further from reality. Even worse, not only are such misconceptions a denial of the real problems, they lead to ever worsening tensions as we will discover. Largely, it stems from the differences in religious beliefs between Christians and Muslims.

Interestingly, our brief snapshot of Islam and world conditions will show that it is these differences that have given rise to some great imbalances in world power today — financially, economically and politically.

An Endtime Manifestation of Religious Differences

What is it that is associated with America and its allies that merits such harsh judgment and wrath from Allah? We see that it isn't only the policies with respect to Israel that have added fuel to the fire, as not all Western nations are as pro-Zionist as is the United States. As Arabs are the original people of Islam (*today accounting for 20% of all populations of predominantly Muslim nations*) issues surrounding the Jews and the existence of Israel cannot be overemphasized. Yet, a great arena of rivalry has opened up between Islam and Christendom in the area of modern money — as I call it, the *Age of Global Capital*. It represents

the present economic power structure of the world. In this, both religions share some blame. And it is at this crucial juncture that we can connect Islamic militancy against Christendom as an endtime development. To understand why and how, an investigation of Islamic perspectives in light of endtime developments is helpful.

Muslims in a Materialistic World

Consider how the world has changed over the past century ... in fact, even the last 20 to 30 years. The shifts have been epic, like none ever experienced in human history. Today, we live in the *Age of Global Capital*, an era that by some measures has really only bloomed into great power since the early 1970s. Today, financial might is the root of world power. A past column series entitled *Signs of the Financial Endtimes* already chronicled an enormous endtime boom in wealth and the emergence of a massive global, commercial colossus. Financial power today rules the world. Consider that financial capital in its various forms may now amount to more than 5 to 6 times annual world economic output, twice the proportion of only a few decades ago.

Just where do Muslims fit in this endtime world of booming wealth and financial power ... an age defined in terms of “monetary” and “market” economics?

Consider these revealing facts.

- People living in 52¹ nations of the world that are predominately Muslim (*only 22 of these are Arab*) have an average annual income of \$1,028². That compares to an average per person income for the world’s 52 high-income nations of \$27,757³. Put another way, the people of the rich nations have 27 times the average income of Muslims (*and 15 times the average income of \$1,849 for the Arab nations*⁴).
- Though the populations of the Muslim nations (*1.25 billion or so, of which 277 million are represented by predominantly Arab countries*) represent 20% of the world population, they accounted for only 4.2% of world

¹ The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund do not publish information on 8 of these countries ... i.e. Iraq and Afghanistan. Their omission causes a slight overstatement in the average income and other financial and economic figures cited.

² The supporting statistics for these income comparisons are mainly derived for the World Bank, 2001 World Development Indicators. All figures have been converted to US dollars. A total of 212 countries have been classified according to their dominant religion based upon research from various sources.

³ The World Bank defines “high income” countries as having greater than 30,000 in population and annual gross national income (GNI) per person of \$9,266 in US dollar equivalents. 17 of the 52 countries categorized as high-income, are comprised of small city states, protectorates, or tax havens accounting for a total population of only three-tenths of one percent of all high-income countries. Interestingly, removing all those countries from this category with population sizes of less than any of the 10 largest cities in the world (less than 12.5 million), leaves a sample of only 10 nations. All of these, with the sole exception of Japan, are historically Christian.

⁴ Economic statistics for the 22 Arab nations do not include Iraq, Libya and Somalia as they are not available.

economic output in 2000. The Arab nations account for approximately only 1.7% of world economic activity.

- The Muslim countries hardly have any presence in the modern financial world. The stock markets of these countries do not even account for 1% of the total value of world equity market values.
- The outstanding bond market of Muslim countries amounts to only 0.6% of the global bond market value (*which at last count tallied to more than \$35 trillion!*)
- Though the Muslim countries may account for a fifth of the globe's population, their economies and financial institutions account for only 10% of the monetary reserves of the world's central financial institutions⁵ and only an infinitesimal fraction of all broad money (*all forms of monetary assets*) in the world.
- Muslim nations account for virtually zero of the notional value of world derivative markets. (*These are highly sophisticated and powerful financial instruments. Bank of International Settlement reports this value at a remarkable \$115 trillion at mid-year 2002*⁶.)
- Arab nations are also far behind in the areas of information and communications technology (ICT), a capability essential to the fast-moving world of financial and economic dealings. In fact, as a region, Arab nations have the lowest ICT density of any region on the globe.⁷

The picture couldn't be clearer ... or starker. The Muslim world is a non-entity in terms of the power structure of the *Age of Global Capital*.

For a number of reasons, this couldn't be more humiliating. For one, it represents a big comedown from the days of Muslim and Arabic glory of the past. Even as late as the early 20th century the Ottoman Empire still existed, though in a very deteriorated state. In earlier centuries, Muslim nations had ruled much of the world, commanding prosperous economies and enormous wealth. The Arabs, particularly, were known to be legendary traders. Arabia's major cities were the cultural centres and crossroads of the civilized world. Were it not for their scholars, much of antiquity and history would have been lost during the Dark Ages. The world has much for which to thank the Arab people.

Yet, today, the Arab and Muslim world has come to naught ... or so it seems to the Western or high-income nations of the world. To their modern standards

⁵ Money reserves, otherwise known as monetary reserves, are the very foundation of financial systems. They represent the base capital upon which banks extend credit and conduct their business. Since Islamic banking institutions do not lend money in the same way as other banks, the total money in monetary circulation is much smaller. Comparing reserves therefore, greatly overstates the financial influence of Muslim nations.

⁶ It should not go unnoticed that American money-centre banks control over 90% of the trading of these powerful financial instruments.

⁷ Arab Human Development Report 2002, published by the United Nations Development Program. Significant measures of this status are the number Internet hosts and telephone lines per 1,000 people.

and values, Arabs and the Muslim world are thought to be caught in a time warp. Even worse, the major institutions of the world (*which are mostly dominated by the interests of the high-income countries*) openly consider the Muslim (*and Arab*) nations to be backward and undeveloped according to the definitions of modern financial and economic measures.

So it is that Islam has very little influence in a modern world ruled by money and “market” economics. It also means that Islam could not be more removed from the altars of materialism and modern humanism.

In the next part of this series we learn why Islam can never be part of the current endtime power structure of the world and why tensions with Western Christendom can be expected to heighten.

Wilfred J. Hahn is senior partner with *Hahn Investment Stewards & Company Inc.* a global portfolio management firm. For more perspectives and resources on world economic and financial trends of interest to Christians, visit the website www.eternalvalue.com of the Mulberry Ministry for additional resources and subscribe to the free newsletter *Eternal Value Review: World Review and Market Monitor*.