



Abrahamic Dreaming: Is Abraham a Point of Unity for Islam, Christianity, and Judaism?

By Mark Durie

The expression “Abrahamic Religions” has become widely accepted in academic and popular conversations as a cover term for a genetically connected “family” of three religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In Religious Studies departments on campuses across the Western world, the term has become the standard way to refer to the three monotheistic religions, in contrast, for example, to Indian religions or East Asian religions.

As Canadian academic Aaron Hughes (2012) has pointed out, this invocation of Abraham expresses a “wistful hope for coexistence” (*Abrahamic Religions: On the Uses and Abuses of History*, 144). It conjures up a fantasy, which belongs alongside the ahistorical myth of an Andalusian utopia, in which the three religions live side-by-side in peaceful coexistence. The Abrahamic ideal offers a tempting escape from deep-seated fears over the clash of civilizations. It smooths the way to acceptance of profound spiritual shifts, an invitation for Europe to pivot away from a “Judeo-Christian” historical identity toward an “Abrahamic identity,” in which Islam is no longer viewed as something alien, but as indigenous to the West. It functions as a bridge to the Is-

lamization of the West. It is because of fear that the use of the term “Abrahamic,” in reference to the three faiths, only really took off in the years which followed 9/11.

The expression “Abrahamic Religions” has become especially popular among Jewish and Christian liberal progressives on the one hand, and Muslim apologists on the other. It supposes a unity or brotherhood, a family resemblance across the three faiths, grounded in a common origin, in shared genetic spiritual material, labeled “Abrahamic.” The claim is that Abraham is “shared” as a point of common origin by all three monotheistic religions, and naming him as their shared identity is meant to signal that these three faiths are linked together in some kind of theological continuity. But, is the construct of “Abrahamic religion” helpful, or quite the opposite, a bad idea, based in an imagined and unreal wishful thinking? Is the multi-faith, ecumenical Abraham really the same person found in the pages of the Bible?

Divergent Views Regarding Abraham

To be sure, Christianity and Judaism do have the Abraham of Genesis in common. This is the Abraham of covenant and



Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Brink

International Director
Global Initiative:
Reaching Muslim Peoples



As the spiritual darkness of our world intensifies, the light of the gospel of Christ becomes brighter and more obvious. The same reality manifests itself in ministry to Muslims and in the Christian response to the spread of Islam in our world. The increase of radical Islamic governments and their suppression of Christians are clearly evident in places like Nigeria and Pakistan. In contrast to this Islamic oppression, it is encouraging to see an increased number of Mus-

lims coming to faith in Jesus Christ in recent decades and an intensified effort to send workers to Muslim people groups.

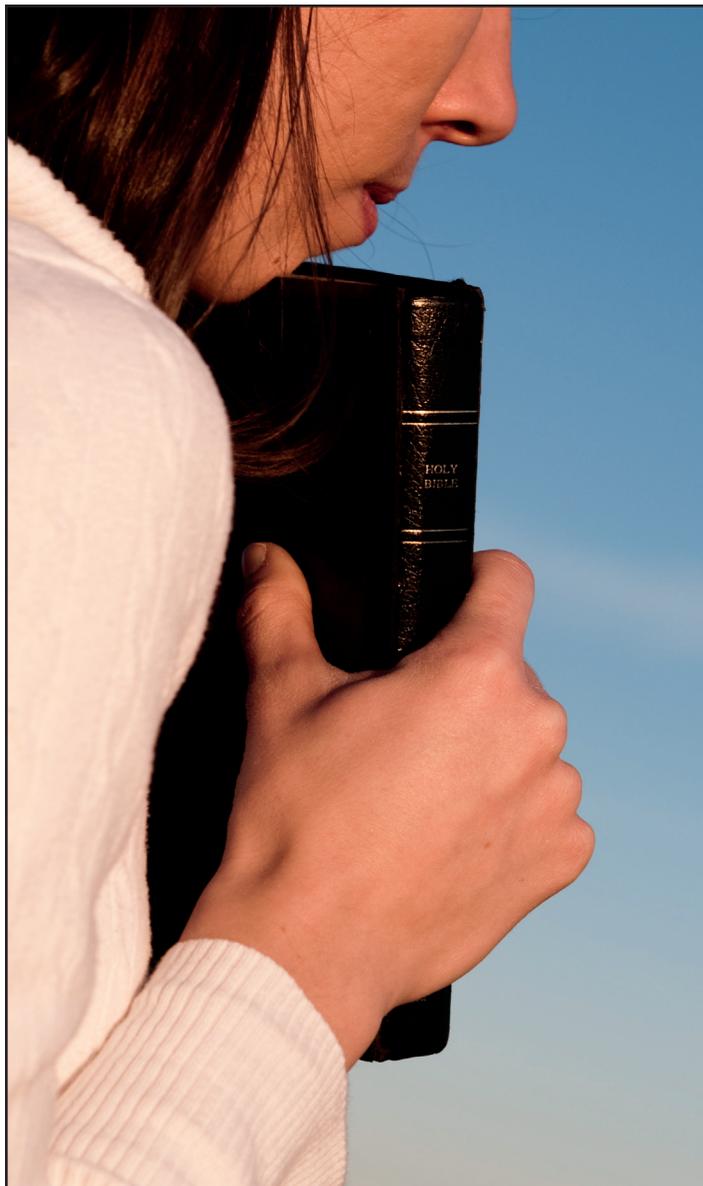
Prayer movements, such as *Jumaa Prayer Fellowship*, are a key factor for increased harvest in Muslim lands. This indicates the advance of the work of the Holy Spirit who has renewed the efforts of believers in the areas of proclamation of the Good News to Muslims and prayer for them to come to Christ. The dichotomy between darkness and light is extreme. As the Lord's return for His Church draws near, we must not be blinded to this contrast of light and darkness.

Jennifer Rothchild, a healthy young girl, dreamed of being an artist. However, in her early teens, she developed retinitis pigmentosa, a genetic eye disorder that causes blindness. By the age of fifteen, Jennifer was completely blind. With tenacious faith in Christ, she has used her disability to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ through song and presentations to thousands of people. In her testimony she states, "When you wake up every day in the darkness, it becomes normal." She encourages people not to walk by physical sight alone but by faith in Christ. Jennifer learned to turn her personal darkness into a platform to spread the light of Jesus Christ.

Jennifer's words prick my heart as I think about the over 1.7 billion Muslims who daily wake to the spiritual darkness of the world of Islam. I asked myself the hard questions:

- Do I have spiritual retinitis pigmentosa?
- Have I become so accustomed to encroaching darkness that I've lost my vision for perishing souls around me and around the world?
- Does it really bother me that millions of Muslims are dying every day without a witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
- Am I as fervent for the lost as I was when I first had my eyes opened by the love of Jesus Christ and His cross?

I plead with you. Don't develop spiritual retinitis pigmentosa in regards to the lostness of our world and Muslim people. Join with us at *Global Initiative* as we intercede for the salvation of Muslims around the world.



Muslim World News



Nigeria: Teen Imprisoned for Blasphemy

The United Nations children's agency Unicef has called on Nigerian authorities to urgently review an Islamic court's decision to sentence a 13-year-old boy to ten years in prison for blasphemy.

The boy was convicted in August of making uncomplimentary remarks about God during an argument with a friend in northern Kano state.

Kano is one of twelve Nigerian states practicing the Sharia legal system alongside the country's secular laws. Muslims form the majority in the north.

The 13-year-old's sentencing "negates all core underlying principles of child rights and child justice that Nigeria—and by implication, Kano state—has signed on to," said Peter Hawkins, Unicef's representative in the West African state.

On September 9, the boy's lawyer, Kola Alapinni, said he had filed an appeal against the judgement.

"This is a violation of the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of a Child. A violation of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," he added.—*BBC*

Pakistan: Life Sentence for Quran Desecration

An additional sessions judge has sentenced a man to life in prison over desecration of the Quran.

According to the prosecution record, the Sera-i-Saleh police arrested Ch Mohammad Ayaz, a resident of Baldhair village, on a complaint by his wife on September 13, 2015.

The complainant told the police that she was living in a rented house with Ayaz and three children. On September

13, after heated arguments with the complainant over some family matter, Ayaz, in a fit of anger, took out a copy of the Quran from the cupboard and defiled it.

The police recovered the desecrated copy of the holy book and registered a criminal case against the accused under section 295-B of the blasphemy law. After a five-year trial, the court of additional sessions judge-III, Shah Wali Khan, convicted Ayaz and sentenced him to life.—*Dawn*

Mozambique: Islamic State Arrives

ISIS militants have taken over several islands in the Indian Ocean, burning down hotels and imposing *sharia* law.

Luxury islands off the coast of Mozambique, where A-list celebrities spend their holidays, have been overrun by insurgents linked to ISIS.

Luxury hotels, wildlife, and homes have been torched and "reduced to ashes" in the militant attacks. The ISIS insurgents have ordered residents to abandon the islands of Vamizi and Mecungo—where celebrities like Daniel Craig, Bono, and Prince Albert of Monaco have holidayed.

Burnt-out beach huts and torched safari cars were pictured on Vamizi Island.

The ISIS-linked militants also captured and occupied the port town of Mocimboa de Praia on the Mozambican mainland—telling locals that it would become their new capital, run under Islamic law.

In the past year, the militants have taken credit for the brutal insurgency, naming themselves the Islamic State Central Africa Province.—*Christian Post*

Abrahamic Dreaming: Is Abraham a Point of

continued from

promise, the “father of many,” and “patriarch” of Israel, but also a symbol of God’s benevolence to the nations. While no model of moral perfection, the Abraham of Genesis is nevertheless the prototype or forerunner of someone in intimate, personal, covenantal relationship with God, a state to which the Hebrew Scriptures testify on almost every page.

While the overlap between Judaism and Christianity in their appreciation of Abraham—embodied in the Genesis account—is profound, there are important differences in how these two faiths understand him. Neither Judaism nor Christianity is content to read Abraham solely through the lens of Genesis.

For Christians, it is Paul who frames Abraham, casting him as someone justified by faith (Romans 4:22; Genesis 15:6). Paul’s Abraham might be considered as the prototype of a de-Judaized, Gentile Christian, liberated from the shackles of the rabbinical Law. While for Jews, Abraham’s paternity is through literal descent, Christians consider themselves to be Abraham’s children “by faith,” following Paul who calls Abraham the “father of all who believe” (Romans 4:16). This involves a new lineage for Gentiles. On the other hand, Jews read Abraham through the Oral Traditions (the Talmud), which portray him as an idol-destroying monotheist and a forerunner of Torah observance.

Christianity and Judaism share the Abraham of covenant, the father of many, patriarch of the nation of Israel, and a blessing to the world through Israel, but despite the shared biblical narrative, Abraham stands as a divisive figure between the two biblical faiths. For the Jews, he is the very model of a Torah-observant Jew, but for Christians he is the man saved by faith, a figure who stands opposed to Jewish adherence to the Torah. Far from being a point of unity, Abraham is a bone of contention and point of division between Jews and Christians.

In the Quran, Abraham is the second most frequently mentioned biblical figure after Moses. Like other biblical references in the Quran, the material appears to derive from Jewish traditions circulating in oral form in the seventh century A.D., for there is little or no evidence that the human author of the Quran had a first-hand acquaintance with the Bible.

Unlike the Bible, the Quran normally does not have one specific section devoted to telling the story of individuals but instead prefers to treat them allusively, making multiple references, some of which are fragmentary.



There are allusions in the Quran to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, which mention Abraham (e.g. Sura 26:160ff), and to the visit of angels to establish a covenant (e.g. Sura 11:69-73). In addition, there are extra-biblical legends, such as the Talmudic narratives of Abraham’s destruction of his father’s idols (Sura 21:58) and being thrown into a fiery furnace, a trial the quranic Abraham survives (Sura 21:68-70). Throughout these scattered references, Abraham is presented as a proto-typical messenger of Islam: a model monotheist. Strikingly, Abraham is also said to have been the one who called people by the name *Muslims* or “submitters” (Sura 22:78). In the same vein, the Quran asserts that Abraham taught the religion of Muhammad, which was the same as the religion of Moses, Noah, and Jesus (Sura 42:13), and just like Muhammad, Abraham is said to have had received scripture from Allah (Sura 87:16-19; 4:54; 19:41).

Instead of calling Abraham the “father of nations,” the Quran describes him as the *imam* or “leader” of nations (Sura 2:124), and from his line other “leaders” will come, namely Muhammad. Thus, instead of Abraham being a blessing to the nations, he is an ancestor of Muhammad by the line of Ishmael. He is wheeled in by the Quran to validate the claims of its prophet.

One of the more striking quranic depictions of Abraham comes in the later “Medinan” chapters, when Muhammad is waging war on non-believers. To justify enmity against

of Unity for Islam, Christianity and Judaism?

t from page 1



former friends and relatives who have refused to toe the line, Abraham is invoked as a model of hostility and hatred:

There was a good example for you in Abraham, and those who were with him, when they said to their people, ‘Surely we are free of you and what you serve instead of God. We repudiate you, and between us and you enmity has shown itself, and hatred forever, until you believe in God alone.’ (Sura 60:4; see also Sura 9:114)

Another interesting aspect of Abraham in the Quran is the report that he and his son Ishmael built the Kaaba in Mecca and established it as a place of worship for Allah (Sura 2:125) Of course, as the English scholar Alfred Guillaume (1956), in his book entitled *Islam*, pointed out, “there is no historical evidence for the assertion that Abraham or Ishmael was ever in Mecca, and if there had been such a tradition it would have to be explained how all memory of the Old Semitic name Ishmael...came to be lost. The form in the Quran is taken either from Greek or Syriac sources” (61-62). The point Guillaume was making is that the form of the name “Ishmael” found in the Quran is borrowed from Greek and Syriac (from the biblical traditions). It is implausible that a tradition of the Kaaba being built by Abraham and Ishmael could have been passed down but preserved only in Greek and Syriac (i.e. Christian) traditions, while the name “Ishmael” was forgotten by the Arabs for centuries.

Depicting Islam as the True Abrahamic Religion

What is particularly interesting about the Quran is that the expression “the religion of Abraham” is emphasized repeatedly in its pages. What is this “religion of Abraham”? It all becomes very clear when the Quran commends the “religion of Abraham” to Jews and Christians, rebuking them for having rejected it: “Say: God has spoken the truth, so follow the creed of Abraham...” (Sura 3:95). So the “religion of Abraham,” according to the Quran, is none other than the message being brought by Muhammad (Sura 16:123).

Thus, according to the Quran, it is Islam, in contrast to Christianity and Judaism, which represents Abraham’s faith. It is the followers of Muhammad who have the “best claim” to Abraham: “Surely the people nearest to Abraham are those indeed who followed him, and this prophet [i.e. Muhammad], and those who believe. God is the ally of the believers” (Sura 3:68; see also 4:125). If you accept the premise that Islam is “Abrahamic,” then it follows from the claims of the Quran that the one authentic Abrahamic faith is Islam.

In the Quran, Christians and Jews are rebuked for commending their faith to the Arabs. Muslims, the Quran asserts, are following the religion of Abraham (Sura 2:135). Furthermore, the Quran claims that Abraham was “neither a Christian nor a Jew” (Sura 3:67). He was a Muslim.

Islamic Command to “Make No Distinction”

It is an article of faith in Islam that Muslims are commanded to “make no distinction” (Sura 2:136) between the messengers—i.e. they should accept Abraham just as they accept Muhammad. The flip side of this is that all who accept Abraham should also accept Islam: if you accept Abraham, you should also “make no distinction” and accept Muhammad as the Messenger of God.

There is an inner logic to Muhammad’s repurposing of Abraham as “Ibrahim.” In the Quran, Muhammad consistently invokes messengers or prophets from the past to validate his own mission. Every time Muhammad is criticized, the Quran insists that this is just what happened to past messengers. In accordance with this logic, biblical figures get repurposed to fit whatever circumstances the messenger of the Quran finds himself in. When Muhammad is issuing warnings about an imminent destructive act of God, he cites the story of Abraham (Sura 11:76) as a model of forbearance, to strengthen the believers (Sura 11:115, 120) as they wait for the end to come. On the other hand, when Muhammad is pursuing violence and enmity against former friends and relatives, he co-opts Abraham for that too (Sura 60:4; 9:114).

continued on page 6

Abrahamic Dreaming

continued from page 5

If hatred was good enough for Abraham, it was good enough for the Muslims.

Abraham, the Prototypical Muslim

From a quranic perspective, Abraham was the prototypical Muslim, used in the Quran as a stick to beat over the heads of Christians and Jews. In reports of disputes with the Jews of Medina, the Quran essentially says, “You quote the name Abraham to me, but Abraham was a Muslim, one of a long line of prophets. If you accept Abraham, you must accept me.”

According to the Quran, not only Abraham, but Moses and Jesus were also Muslim prophets. By this view, Islam is the true heritage of Jews and Christians, and Jews and Christians who convert to Islam are actually reverting to the faith of the patriarchs, coming back to the one true religion. According to this quranic perspective, the “religion of Abraham” is a kind of code for Islam’s precedence over other religions. Islamic *da’wa* or mission to Christians and Jews involves calling them to the “religion of Abraham,” i.e. to Islam. Shamin A. Siddiqi, in his comments to Daniel Pipes, clearly states this position:

Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad were all prophets of Islam. Islam is the common heritage of the Judeo-Christian-Muslim community of America, and establishing the Kingdom of God is the joint responsibility of all three Abrahamic faiths. Islam was the *din* (faith, way of life) of both Jews and Christians, who later lost it through human innovations. Now the Muslims want to remind their Jewish and Christian brothers and sisters of their original *din*. These are the facts of history. (<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/reader-letters/islam-here/> paragraph 4).

This vision, clothed in harmonious-sounding language, is in fact of a *sharia*-compliant America, led by Muslims and created with the help of Jews and Christians. It is “Abrahamic” in the sense that it is Islam itself which is understood to be the common heritage of the three faiths.

Divisive Nature of the Term “Abrahamic Religion”

Today, the phrase “Abrahamic religion” has become a touchstone of interfaith dialogue and unity between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Ironically, this phrase is itself derived from the Quran, where it refers to Abraham as a Muslim prophet in opposition to Judaism and Christianity.

In reality, Abraham is an intensely divisive figure between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. For Christians, he is

the apostle of salvation by faith alone, in opposition to Torah-observance. For Jews, he is the Torah-observant father of the Jewish nation, and a reminder of God’s irrevocable covenant with the Jews. For Muslims, he is the archetypical Muslim prophet, a prominent forerunner who validates Muhammad’s claims that Islam both predates and supersedes the biblical faiths.

The most important and influential advocate for the Abrahamic fantasy was a Lebanese Maronite priest, Youakim Moubarac, following in the footsteps of his teacher, Massignon, who regarded Islam as a faith of genuine revelation—and Muhammad as a prophet—but in more primitive stage than Christianity. Moubarac devoted his 1951 doctoral dissertation, *Abraham dans le Coran*, to the topic of Abraham in Islam. He subsequently exerted a significant influence on Vatican II’s policy on Islam, which has shaped the current Catholic Catechism §841, in which Islam and Christianity are seen as united by adoration of the one God: “The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day” (https://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a9p3.htm).

Moubarac had a vision of a political and spiritual reconciliation between faiths based upon a shared identity as followers of “Abrahamic faith.” However this vision was fundamentally flawed, because it leads to Islamization. A society based on the idea of the quranic Abraham is a *sharia* state, which by virtue of the structure of Islamic law, is devoted to the decline of Christianity and Judaism.

Conclusion

The promotion of the “Abrahamic faith” as the touchstone of interfaith religious dialogue found its origins in a vision of a Middle Eastern utopia in which Christians, Muslims, and Jews would live side by side in unity, set in an Islamic frame. The concept of “Abrahamic faiths” is a fallacy. Its contemporary influence was, tragically, born out of a century of Christian suffering in the Middle East and foisted upon an unsuspecting West. This construct is a theological Trojan horse designed to promote an Islamic worldview of relations between faiths. However, in reality, Islam’s theology and whole worldview is not only different from—but opposed to biblical understandings.

[Dr. Mark Durie is an academic, human rights activist, author, and Anglican pastor. For information about his books, blog site, and ministry updates, go to markdurie.com.]



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Jumaa Prayer is now on
Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, November 6, 2020. Please pray for

...*church planting teams* seeking “Holy Spirit direction” to reach Northern Uzbek cities with the gospel. Of Uzbekistan’s population of 33 million, 83% are Muslim.

...*the small but growing Pulaar-speaking Church* numbering several hundred believers in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. A generation ago there were no known Christians in this strongly Muslim people group.

...*four Iranian converts from Islam* (Hossein, Khalil, Kamal, and Muhammad) who have been imprisoned for “acting against national security” by leading house churches.

Friday, November 13, 2020. Please pray for

...*Burkina Faso*, where churches are repeatedly attacked by Muslim radicals. The country is listed on Open Doors’ World Watch List of 50 most dangerous countries for Christians. Of Burkina Faso’s population of 21 million, 55% are Muslim.

...*workers in the Kurdistan region of Iraq* to have witnessing opportunities while distributing food and hygiene packages to Sunni Muslims and Yazidis in refugee camps.

...*Rahema, a 24-year old Ugandan convert from Islam*. Her father beat her, poured gasoline on her, and tried to set her on fire. A neighbor intervened and helped her escape. Rahema remains in the hospital and is “determined to follow Jesus.”

Friday, November 20, 2020. Please pray for

...*fresh anointing on Simon*—a bicycling evangelist who heads up church planting efforts among Muslims in a rural area of Bangladesh. Of Bangladesh’s population of 164 million, 87% are Muslim.

...*protection for secret believers* in the Arab Gulf country of Bahrain—especially that they could meet together and worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. Of Bahrain’s population of 1.6 million, 84% are Muslim.

...*the country of Malaysia*. Pray that the constitutional decree—that to be Malay is to be Muslim—will be annulled, paving the way for Malays to “legally” embrace Jesus. Of Malaysia’s population of 32 million, 56% are Muslim.

Friday, November 27, 2020. Please pray for

...*a church planting team* in Indonesia who report that “God is drawing Indonesian Muslims to himself through dreams, visions, miracles, and the loving witness of followers of Jesus.”

...*persecuted Christians* in the Muslim majority Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique who express the desire “to be strong witnesses of Jesus in this volatile region.” Of Mozambique’s population of 31 million, 17% are Muslim.

...*God’s comfort for persecuted Christians in Nigeria*. A recent report from the International Society for Civil Liberties states that at least 632 Christians were killed in the first five months of 2020 alone.

*I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and
thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV*



JUMAA PRAYER FELLOWSHIP

*Jumaa Prayer is now on
Facebook. Please join today:
[Facebook.com/JumaaPrayer](https://www.facebook.com/JumaaPrayer)*

Friday, December 4, 2020. Please pray for

*...a powerful anointing on the Al Massira (Arabic “The Path”) courses, which sensitively present the Christian faith in 13 sessions to Muslim inquirers. The videos are now dubbed from Arabic into 11 languages, and subtitled into 27 languages.
...wisdom and protection for Alia, a young Azerbaijani lady convert from Islam. Alia works in a busy store and prays for opportunities to share her faith with Muslims.
...workers who are preparing to go to the Nalu peoples in Guinea, West Africa. The Nalu follow “folk Islam,” a mixture of traditional religion and Islam. Of Guinea’s population of 13 million, 88% are Muslim.*

Friday, December 11, 2020. Please pray for

*...Samira, an Afghan Muslim girl who phoned the Christian Pamir radio follow-up number and said, “Your programs are teaching us to walk in the right path. Where can I find a Bible?”
...a strong anointing on The Light of Truth magazine in Arabic and English, which is being distributed throughout the Muslim world, especially to Arabic-speaking Muslims.
...new groups of Muslim background believers in Tunisia who are joining together online to worship Jesus.*

Friday, December 18, 2020. Please pray for

*...wisdom and protection for several converts from Islam in two European countries. They are being harassed, threatened, and persecuted by Muslims around them.
...the family of a Korean missionary to Turkey—Jin-Wook Kim. He was stabbed and killed after sharing the gospel with Muslim neighbors in Diyarbakir. A eulogist at his funeral said, “We know this will cause more prayer for Turkey.”
...a stop to riots in a predominately Muslim city in Ethiopia. In a land dispute, Muslim radicals stormed the properties of Pastor Isaias and Pastor Tesfaye and beheaded both men—setting off new clashes between Christians and Muslims.*

Friday, December 25, 2020. Please pray for

*...continued success for internet and smartphone ministries that are reaching out to Muslim youth in the country of Azerbaijan. Of Azerbaijan’s population of 10 million, 85% are Muslim.
...Yasin Bakari, a Kenyan convert from Islam. After his decision to follow Jesus, Yasin’s wife took their two children and left the home. His home has been destroyed and Yasin is now being sheltered by friends.
...the Bible translation project in Pulaar; a dialect of the primarily Muslim Fulani “language chain,” spoken from Senegal to South Sudan. Pray that nothing would obstruct the translation work for this “gateway” people of the Sahel.*

Intercede is a bimonthly publication of Global Initiative: Reaching Muslim Peoples
P.O. Box 2730, Springfield, MO 65801-2730
1-866-816-0824 (toll free)
www.reachingmuslimpeoples.com
www.jumaapraye.org