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The Role of the Mosque in Islam

Mosques are the outward and visible symbol of Islam. The mosque is the most important institution in Islam, serving as a house of worship and as the center of authority and of communal life for Muslims throughout Islamic history. It has also been the central point for the dissemination of Islamic beliefs and practices.

The word 'mosque' (*masjid* in Arabic) is derived from a root meaning 'to prostrate,' one of the postures of Islamic worship. Another commonly used word for mosque is *jamaa*, derived from a root word meaning 'to gather' or 'gathering.'

There are two kinds of mosques: small mosques serving a specific local population for the five daily prayers, and large congregational mosques where the Friday congrega-

tional sermons are delivered and where a large part of the population can gather. Historically the congregational mosque was at the center of every Muslim city, its heart and pulse. Muslims like to live close to a mosque – both for convenience and the belief that they will obtain greater blessings if they do so.

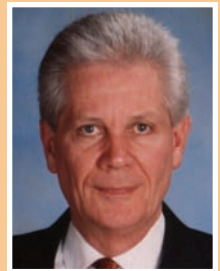
The mosque is much more than a place of worship. Muslims declare that they follow Muhammad's example in making the mosque a place of prayer, reflection and retreat, communal activity, dispute settlement, welfare and education, and a social and administrative center. In many places the mosque became the focal point of a complex of buildings that served as religious schools (*madrassas*), hospitals and shelters for travelers.

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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

Jim Bennett
Global Initiative:
Reaching Muslim Peoples



An estimated 45 billion dollars has been spent by the Saudi Arabian government financing mosques and Islamic schools in foreign countries. Travel almost anywhere in the world, especially the developing world, and the proliferation of mosques will astound you. The Saudis and other Islamic countries and organizations have discovered the importance of ‘mosque planting!’

To understand Muslims it is vital to understand the powerful role of the mosque in their lives. Our lead article is entitled “The Role of the Mosque in Islam.” Since the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan will begin near Aug. 1 and end near Aug. 29, we will use this space to explore the role of the mosque during Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is considered to be Islam’s holiest month. Muslims believe it was during this month that Muhammad received his first revelation.

Muslims are expected to fast from dawn until sunset for the entire 30 days. Many mosques will host *iftar* dinners after sunset and the fourth required prayer of the day, *maghrib*. Some mosques will also host *suhoor* meals before dawn for those attending the first required prayer of the day. Mosques will often invite poorer members of the Muslim community to share in beginning and breaking the fast, as providing charity during Ramadan is regarded in Islam as especially honorable. Following the last obligatory daily prayer (*isha*) special, optional *tarawih* prayers are offered during Ramadan in larger mosques. During each night of prayers, which can last for up to two hours each night, usually one member of the community who has memorized the entire Quran will recite a segment of the book.

During the last 10 days of Ramadan, larger mosques within the Muslim community will host *itikaf* (seclusion). Muslims performing *itikaf* are required to stay within the mosque for 10 consecutive days, engaging in prayer and Quranic recitation, or learning about Islam. As a result, the rest of the Muslim community is responsible for providing the participants with food, drinks, and whatever else they need during their stay.

Also during the last 10 days of Ramadan, larger mosques will host all-night programs during *Laylat al-*



Qadar, the night Muslims believe that Muhammad first received Quranic revelations. *Laylat al-Qadar* is alternately referred to as the ‘Night of Destiny’ or the ‘Night of Power.’ During the ‘Night of Power’ some congregants participate in *dhiker* (remembering) during which the name of Allah is repeated or remembered for the entire night. According to a strong tradition (al-Bukhari), Muhammad said, “Whoever prays during the night of Qadr [power] with faith and hoping for its reward will have all of his previous sins forgiven.” Mosques or the community usually provide meals periodically throughout the ‘Night of Power.’

A special holiday called *Eid al-Fitr* (Fast Breaking) marks the end of Ramadan. It begins on the first day of the month that follows Ramadan and continues for three days. Most communities have a variety of festivities, often centered on the mosque, and meals to mark the end of the day.

I close by reminding you to pray for Muslims – especially during Ramadan – and even more so on the Night of Power, when 1.5 billion Muslims will hope for the forgiveness of their sins. Pray that a powerful revelation of Jesus Christ will break through their veil of darkness. 🕊

Ramadan Prayer

To receive the ‘30 Days of Ramadan’ prayer brochure, access the pdf version at www.globalinitiativeinfo.com or www.jumaaprayer.org — or e-mail contact@globalinitiativeinfo.com to request free copies.

Muslim World News



Nigeria

84 churches destroyed

The president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor, has formally released the report on the damage to properties during the last post-election violence in northern Nigeria, saying that 84 churches were burned by Muslim extremists during the mayhem.

Oritsejafor said CAN was calling on the government to rebuild the churches burned by the extremists or compensate the churches in monetary terms. The CAN president said he would not want to release the list of the number of Christians killed during the mayhem, saying that CAN had already submitted such to the probe panel set up to investigate the killings.

He called on President Goodluck Jonathan to summon all the 36 state governors and the leadership of all security agencies in the country to a crucial meeting where the governors should make a commitment to maintain peace and guarantee security of lives and property. — *P.M. News*

Bangladesh

Judge exonerates jailed evangelist

A judge exonerated a Christian sentenced to one year in prison for selling and distributing Christian literature near a major Muslim gathering north of the capital city, his lawyer said.

After reviewing an appeal of the case of 25-year-old Biplob Marandi, the magistrate in Gazipur district court on March 29 cleared the tribal Christian of the charge against him and ordered him to be released, attorney Lensen Swapon Gomes told *Compass*. Marandi was selling Christian books and other literature when he was arrested near the massive Bishwa Ijtema (World Muslim Congregation) on the banks of the Turag River near Tongi town on Jan. 21.

Marandi was sentenced in February for “creating chaos at a religious gathering” by selling and distributing the Christian literature.

The judge reviewing the appeal ruled that Marandi proved that he sells books, primarily Christian literature, for his livelihood. — *Compass*

Pakistan

Blasphemy laws a growing threat

Pakistan’s notorious “blasphemy” laws can put even children at risk, and Christians say the days when they could teach their offspring pat answers to protect them from accusations of disparaging Islam or its prophet seem to have passed.

A 30-year-old Pakistani woman who grew up in Lahore said her Christian parents taught her formula answers to keep from falling prey to accusations under the blasphemy statutes, such as “I am a Christian, I can only tell you about Him.” But even back then, before radical Islamists began influencing Pakistani society as they have in recent years, schoolchildren were taught not to discuss religion, she said.

She was imbued with the fundamentals of the Christian faith and learned that she should discuss it only with her parents. The Christian faith is inherently evangelistic, but the need to remain silent is even more important today, she added. — *Compass*

The Role of the

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The second obligatory pillar of Islam, prayer (*salat*), is of unique importance in a Muslim's life. The prostrations during prayer symbolize the essence of Islam, submission to the will of Allah. Muhammad, in various *hadith* (traditions), emphasized the importance of performing the prescribed prayers at their allotted time. Muslim men are required to pray as many prayers as possible in the congregation within the mosque and must attend at least once a week for the *jumaa* or Friday prayer. Women were traditionally encouraged to pray in their homes with children. In the modern era, especially in the West, women might attend mosque prayer, but must pray separately from the men.

The migration (*hijra*) of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 signaled Islam's change from a persecuted religion to the ruling religion. In Medina Muhammad erected a simple mosque beside his house. This mosque assumed roles far beyond that of a center for prayer and worship. It became both the religious and the political center for the early Muslim community. In it prayers were held, negotiations conducted, pledges of loyalty received, military actions planned, prisoners of war held, the wounded treated, disputes settled, and gifts received and distributed among Muhammad's companions.

Mosques Express Islam's Victory and Superiority

As a religion Islam sets great store by a public demonstration of its power and strength. As a result of the principle that "Islam must be above and not below," mosques became higher, larger and grander than adjacent churches. This is especially important in non-Muslim majority lands, where the superiority of Islam over the surrounding culture of unbelief should be demonstrated by the grandeur of its mosques. In Muslim countries minarets are always taller than church towers or steeples in order to provide a concrete demonstration of Islam's superiority.

The placement of mosques throughout history has often been an expression of conquest and superiority over non-Muslims. The proposed 'Park51' project near Ground Zero in New York City has focused renewed interest on this concept. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, a Kuwait-American Muslim Sufi, and current Imam of a nearby mosque, is the chief proponent of Park51. Park51 is a planned 13-story 100 million dollar Muslim community center to be located two blocks from the World Trade Center site in Lower Manhattan. The project was originally called Cordoba House, then renamed Park51, referencing the street address on Park Place. Imam Rauf said the name Cordoba House



was meant to invoke 8th-11th century Cordoba, Spain, which he called a model of peaceful coexistence between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Opponents of the project say the term Cordoba House was a deliberately insulting term which symbolizes the historic Muslim conquerors' victory over Christian Spaniards – and noted that Muslims at Cordoba had converted a Cordoba church into the third largest mosque in the world. Most opponents to Park51 believe that Islam builds mosques on 'conquered territory' as symbols of victory and conquest.

During early Islamic conquests, victorious Muslims often transformed synagogues, churches and Zoroastrian fire temples into mosques. Cities that made treaties with the Muslims were allowed to retain most of their churches. Those that fought the Muslims had some churches destroyed and others converted to mosques.

Mosque in Islam

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In Damascus, Christians had to turn 15 churches over to the Muslims to become mosques, including parts of the Cathedral of St. John. The Umayyad Caliph Abd al-Malik is said to have transformed 10 churches in Damascus into mosques. Several churches of the Byzantine era on Cyprus became mosques. The Abbasid Caliph al-Mamun (813-833) was known for converting churches into mosques. Over the centuries, many churches in Egypt were also converted into mosques. The Ottomans converted nearly all the churches, monasteries, and chapels in Constantinople into mosques, including the famous Hagia Sophia, after capturing the city in 1453.

For Muslims, every mosque is considered permanent for all eternity and must always be used as a mosque. It should not be allowed to fall into disrepair or be used for any other purpose. A mosque is a place where Islam rules

and is to be actively defended. Mosques, once built, become sacred spaces that may never be given up or demolished. The organization Hizb ut-Tahrir (Freedom Party) commented on the demolition of a mosque in Khartoum by the Sudanese government:

The 'Ulama' of the Ummah have agreed that when a part is designated for prayer by speech then it becomes excluded from private ownership and it becomes public property for all Muslims. The Shariah prohibits the destruction, sale or obstruction of a mosque even if the locality was ruined (Media Office, Hizb ut-Tahrir in Sudan, May 15, 2005).

Mosques and Politics

Mosques are sometimes compared to Christian church buildings, but this is misleading. Although in medieval times the church building had a significant social and economic role, mosques perform many political functions not usually associated with churches.

In Islam the secular and the sacred, the religious and the political are welded together. From earliest Islamic history the mosque has been the place of assembly, a religious and political center for the community. Congregational mosques provided a platform for political pronouncements at midday prayers on Friday. Sovereign edicts and tax decrees were proclaimed from the pulpit of the mosques. Caliphs and sultans preached in the mosque.

The caliph led the prayers and delivered the Friday sermon (*khutba*) in the main mosque. The pulpit (*minbar*) was his seat of sovereign authority. In the provinces, governors had the same authority (delegated by the caliph) in their local main mosques.

According to Yousef al-Qaradawi, a popular Islamic cleric and scholar, and a spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad built the mosque in Medina as a spiritual center for worship as well as a university for study, the headquarters of the Muslim outreach and mission and the seat of government:

The example of the Prophet (peace be on him) in relation to business and trade is sufficient in itself. On the other hand he was eager to nurture the spiritual aspect; thus, he built the mosque in Medina on the foundation of piety and seeking the pleasure of Allah, as a gathering place for wor-

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ship, as a university for teaching and learning, as the headquarters for the call toward Islam, and as the seat of the government (The Lawful and Prohibited in Islam, p. 64).

Jihad was often proclaimed in the mosque. Weapons were and still are stored in some mosques in various contexts. Mosques in some parts of the world have been used in recent times as the bases for insurgency.

Mosques in Modern Society and in the West

In modern society, the mosque serves as the single most important visible symbol of Muslim identity and values, a vital center of political, intellectual and social activities. The resurgence of Islam since the 1970s has increased the importance of the mosque. Friday prayers in large mosques attended by presidents and kings are shown on television. Friday sermons are widely distributed by modern means of communication.

In some Muslim states, the mosque has become a focus of opposition to the government. Ideas generated in the mosque quickly permeate markets, slums, and villages. In many Muslim states mosques are tightly controlled by the state security services to ensure the regime's survival. Often even the Friday sermons must be presented to the security services or the Ministry of Religious Affairs for censorship before they can be preached.

Mosques in the West now fulfill a newer and larger role, attempting to reproduce the comprehensive and varied Islamic infrastructure present in Muslim states. They have become the main centers and identity markers of their communities, seeking to legitimize the community's presence in the non-Muslim majority culture. Contemporary large mosques have developed a variety of amenities to serve the Muslim community and are often termed "Islamic Centers." They provide additional facilities, including education (libraries and Islamic schools), health clinics and gymnasiums.

Muslim communities in the West have slowly and steadily built an Islamic infrastructure centered on their mosques. Many mosques in the West cater to specific ethnic, linguistic and confessional groups rather than for the wider Muslim community. They offer religious, educational, and social amenities as well as a refuge from a seemingly hostile environment. Most mosques in the West are aligned with Islamic umbrella organizations.

Mosques As Tools of Islamization


Organized Islam tends to use the building of mosques to widen its geographical rule and sphere of influence. In Islamic thinking, mosques function as territorial bridge-heads in the struggle to overcome unbelief in *Dar al-Harb* (territory not under Islamic rule) and establish *Dar al-Islam* (territory under Islamic rule). Some mosques are misused (even in the view of some moderate Muslims) for political agitation, radicalism, preaching of hatred, violence and terrorism.

The call to prayer via loudspeaker involves a public statement of Islamic faith and its content, inviting non-Muslims to pray in the mosque and thereby in effect convert to Islam. It also raises the question of noise pollution and may well infringe on noise prevention laws.

There are over 1,700 mosques in the U.S., over 1,700 mosques in the U.K., over 1,600 in France, and over 1,000 in Germany. The largest and most ornate mosques are often funded and supported by Islamic states and/or Islamic organizations. The increasing numbers of mosques, and their magnificence, speak of the presence and permanence of Islam in the West and reflect the growing confidence of Muslim minority communities.

A Muslim Brotherhood document, presented in a law case in the U.S. in 2007, proposes that the building of mosques and Islamic cultural centers be accelerated as part of a long-term strategy to Islamize the West and diminish its Christian and secular culture (see Ikhwan in America, www.nefafoundation.org, Sept. 12, 2007). In this context the rapid increase in the number and size of mosques in the West should call the church to full attention.

In Acts 17:26-27, the Apostle Paul says "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us."

While the church must remain circumspect about the growing number of mosques in the West, our first priority should be on engaging Muslims with an adequate presentation of Jesus Christ. For the first time ever for many Muslims, they are hearing the truth about Christ. He is our hope – and every Muslim's hope. 



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Friday, July 1, 2011. Please pray

...for the people of Albania and Macedonia. Money from the Arabian Gulf is driving a resurgence of Islam. New and refurbished mosques are found in most cities.

...for the Muslims of Iran. Iran is a nation of 66 million people; two-thirds of the population is below 30 years old. Christianity is opposed, Bibles are restricted, converts from Islam face potential death, and evangelism is illegal.

...for Muslims in Birmingham, England. With one of the largest Muslim concentrations in the U.K., the city has over 100 mosques. Pray for Christian outreach currently going on in Birmingham.

Friday, July 8, 2011. Please pray

...for MBBs (Muslim Background Believers) across the Muslim world. Pray they would receive true shepherding and encouragement from fellow Christians.

...for the island of Zanzibar. Located in the Indian Ocean, it is a part of the African nation of Tanzania. It is predominately Sunni Muslim, and radicals have carried out several recent attacks against Christians.

...for the country of Lebanon. Christians have left in large numbers and the potential for sharia law is growing.

Friday, July 15, 2011. Please pray

...for the Muslims of Uzbekistan. Christian witness is very difficult; the Uzbeki government has made unregistered religious activity a criminal offense. The government has complete control over the definition of religious activity.

...for the people of Sudan. Despite U.N. peace efforts, stability is lacking and persecution of Christians continues.

...that God will protect Indonesian house churches. Underground believers risk financial loss, imprisonment and death.

Friday, July 22, 2011. Please pray

...for the continent of Africa. Oil money from the Arabian Gulf continues to fund mosques and schools at a rapid pace.

...for Muslims in Nigeria. Pray that despite violence and radicalism, Muslims would hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

...for Christians in Pakistan. Cases involving 'blasphemy laws' continue to mount. Trumped up charges regarding Quran desecration or utterances against Muhammad are often used as a basis for judicial persecution of Christians, often resulting in lengthy prison terms.

Friday, July 29, 2011. Please pray

...for Muslims in Bulgaria, which has a higher percentage of Muslim population than any country in the European Union.

...for radio and satellite broadcasts reaching Muslims. Pray for a genuine move of the Lord through this medium.

...for the Muslims of Australia. Pray for those witnessing to approximately 300,000 Australian Muslims.

***I URGE, THEN, FIRST OF ALL THAT REQUESTS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSION AND
THANKSGIVING BE MADE FOR EVERYONE. – 1 TIMOTHY 2:1, NIV***



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Friday, August 5, 2011. Please pray

...for Muslims across the globe during this Ramadan month of fasting. Pray that they would have unprecedented opportunities to hear the truth and love of Jesus Christ.

...that during Ramadan, as many Muslims seek God, they will have a miraculous encounter with Jesus Christ.

...for Christian workers and expatriates during the month of Ramadan. Pray they would be ready when the opportunity comes to give testimony to the love and truth of Jesus.

Friday, August 12, 2011. Please pray

...for the country of Morocco. No Moroccan church has yet been recognized by the government.

...for the 9 million Uighur Muslims of Northwest China and neighboring Kazakhstan.

...for the country of Pakistan, where extreme violence against Christians continues.

Friday, August 19, 2011. Please pray

...for religious freedom in the Maldives, where the government claims a 100 percent Muslim population. Pray for protection for secret believers in Jesus Christ.

...for the 25 million Muslims of Saudi Arabia. Pray they would receive a true witness of Jesus Christ.

...for the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan. The opportunities for Christian witness continue to diminish as political tensions mount.

Friday, August 26, 2011. Please pray

...for Christian workers and missionaries in Muslim communities. Pray for spiritual, mental, emotional, and financial support, and for a strengthening of the vision they have been called to.

...against the fear that often grips Muslims and hinders many from making a commitment to Jesus Christ — as they are fully aware of the consequences of conversion to Christianity.

...for the Muslims of Senegal. Located south of Morocco in Africa, Senegal is home to 12 million Muslims.

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