

A Statement on Muslim-Christian Relations

from the Alliance of Baptists

April 25, 2003

As Christians in the Baptist tradition, we are the inheritors and the transmitters of a theology which largely ignores fifteen centuries of Muslim development by viewing contemporary Muslims from a monolithic perspective. This perspective belies the vibrant diversity found within the larger umbrella of the Islamic family. We have held to a theology which has valued conversion over dialogue, invective over understanding, and prejudice over knowledge a theology which does not acknowledge the vibrancy, vitality, and differences of the Muslim faith.

The madness, the hatred, the dehumanizing attitudes which led to the Crusades during the Middle Ages, the Inquisition, and to the colonial domination for Western gain during the more recent history of the Middle East, have left the Christian community with a sad legacy ranging from anger and distrust to outright hostility toward our Muslim neighbors. Moreover, it has left Muslims with a mental and emotional imprint that Christians are consistently biased against them, hostile, domineering, and exploitive. Globally, our worlds, which have more often than not been separate, are becoming more intertwined politically, culturally and economically. Yet, most Baptists have done little or nothing in regard to studying and understanding our own history or adjusting our theology which nurtures an attitude of cultural supremacy among Western Christians over the adherents to Islam. Either we have fostered rather than defused such hatred, or have failed to expend the energy needed to develop bridges of understanding between Christian and Muslim which counter the centuries of prejudice.

In recognition that Baptists, both past and present, have joined their voices with those of other Christians in perpetuating negative stereotypes and myths concerning Muslims, we, the Alliance of Baptists, meeting in convocation on April 25, 2003, at Vienna, VA, adopt as an Institutional Understanding for Muslim-Christian Relations the following:

As individual members and as churches of the Alliance of Baptists, we:

- Confess our sin of complicity and silence by not defusing hatred and failing to expend the energy to develop bridges of understanding between Christians and Muslims;
- Confess our sin of interpreting our sacred writings in such a way that we have ignored our common roots in Scripture and thereby foregone an opportunity to establish a relationship of understanding, and mutual respect;
- Confess our sins of indifference and inaction to the horrors which have been perpetuated against Muslims by non-Muslims since the time of the Crusades;
- Confess our sin of perpetuating prejudices of stereotypes against Islamic peoples; and
- Offer this confession with humility and with hope for reconciliation between Christians and Muslims toward which end we will work.

Islam has always presented a theological challenge to Christians. We have historical ties as monotheistic faiths which affirm the covenant of God with Abraham and we both affirm the teachings of Jesus. This challenge prompts us, as it does our Muslim neighbors, to turn with a fresh vigor to an understanding of our scriptures, traditions and legal systems which give shape to our communal life.

Recognizing that important contributions can be achieved as Christians and Muslims work together in areas of common concern such as racial and social justice for the oppressed, the provision for and defense of human rights, the safeguarding of religious freedom, the resolution of national and international conflict, the care of the earth and the care of the homeless, we, as fellowshipping members of the Alliance of Baptists:

- Affirm the teaching of the Christian Scriptures that God has not rejected the descendants of Abraham and thus recognize our common historical roots with Muslims, along with the Jews, in the faith of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar.
- Renounce interpretations of Scripture which foster religious stereotyping and prejudice against the Muslim people and their faith;
- Seek genuine dialogue with the broader Islamic community, a dialogue built on mutual respect and the integrity of each others faith;
- Lift our voices quickly and boldly against all expressions of racism, bigotry and religious bias which target followers of Islam;
- Educate ourselves and others on the often peaceful and at times tumultuous history of Muslim-Christian relations from the seventh century to the present, so as to understand our present by learning from our past;
- Commit ourselves to rigorous consideration of appropriate forms of Christian witness for our time; and
- Commit ourselves to work for full religious freedom, including the right to practice the faith of ones choice, and for equality of citizenship for all persons in all societies, whether Muslims or Christians or others, whether in the U.S. or elsewhere.

Adopted April 25, 2003

Vienna, Virginia