



• Ministries to Muslims •

Why the West fears Islam

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The question that is addressed in the book *Why the West Fears Islam: an exploration of Muslims in liberal democracies*, by Jocelyne Cesari, is one that I deal with a lot in my interaction with Christians in Europe. Fear is probably the word that best describes the attitude Christians in Europe have when they think of Islam and Muslims.

The Bible insists that Christians “no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.” (Ephesians 4:17) and urges us “to not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2). Thinking differently and consequently living differently from those who do not acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord of their lives, should be a key characteristic of those who call themselves Christians: followers of Jesus Christ. Our thinking and behaviour should be in agreement with the character, words and deeds of One and Only God, who is revealed to us in the Bible and in the life of Jesus Christ, “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being” (Hebr. 1:3).

Unfortunately, a different way of thinking about Islam and consequently a different way of behaving towards Muslims in Europe, is absent among the majority of Evangelical Christians in Europe.

When describing the attitude of European citizens towards Islam and Muslims, Cesari writes:

“A review of the most significant public opinion polls and surveys among Europeanconducted in the past decade confirms the widespread negative feelings towards Muslims and Islam..” (13)

She believes that these negative feelings and discomfort are based on *“a widespread association of Islam and Muslims as a force of unwanted, and potentially irreversible, change.” (14)*

She identifies four convictions that lay behind these feelings:

- 1) Muslims have not and will not integrate.
- 2) Muslims are a threat to national identity now and in the future.
- 3) Public practices, such as mosque-building, prayer, and clothing should be kept to a minimum.
- 4) Islam and Muslims are incompatible with national and Western values.

She concludes: *“A common point across surveys is that non-Muslims mostly fear that the presence of Muslims will affect their way of life or alter the norms of an assumed mainstream. In other words, while non-Muslims may not have a direct problem with Muslims or individual Muslims, they fear that Muslims – particularly growing numbers of them – will impose unwanted changes in their countries.” (15)*

Yes, the presence of Muslims in our countries, towns and streets might affect our way of life and might bring about changes in our societies. But is this something we should fight against or something we should learn to adapt to?

Our identity is not wrapped up with our national citizenship or being European. Our identity is found in our relationship with God, in being reconciled, forgiven, accepted and adopted by Him.

This identity is secure and untouchable in the hands of a sovereign God, who has become our Heavenly Father. He can be trusted to fulfill His promises. As people whose citizenship is in heaven, we are supposed to be aliens and strangers in Europe. Yes, we are called to fear - not to fear circumstances, changes, nor even people, but to fear God. Fearing God means, among other things, to allow Him to be the judge, to allow Him to craft the future for Europe, to allow Him to give and to take freedom, welfare and security. Trusting in the sovereign God creates space in our hearts for His love, compassion, kindness, hospitality for our Muslim neighbors. Through the empowerment of the Spirit, Christians can become trendsetters, not trend followers.

I pray that our Muslim neighbors will see that we are different from the average European citizens, because we have come to know Christ, who also died for their salvation.