

healing proved his authority to forgive sins and the attendant claim of divinity (Luke 5:22–24). Forgiveness of sins is an invisible action, contrasting with the highly visible physical healing.

The outcome was that many were amazed and glorified God (Luke 5:26). Yet some were fearful. There are always mixed reactions to Jesus, especially to his claims to divinity. Is Jesus God incarnate or just a morally upright, good man?

7.2 Muhammad Case Study: Questions the Church Asks

This case study, compiled by the IMES team, is fiction based on oversimplified yet all too typical conversations among disciples of Christ. May it stir our minds and hearts as it introduces the subject of this chapter.

Boulos, an elder at the Church of Grace in Beirut, Lebanon, leads a small group of Muslim background believers (MBBs) as part of his church's outreach ministry. Boulos gets excited to see Muslims becoming Christians and, in the process, publicly renouncing Islam. He encourages these people to stand firm for the truth without compromise by telling their families that Muhammad is the Antichrist and a false prophet. He believes that this bold practice will shock Muslims and cause them to turn their eyes toward Jesus.

Imad, an MBB and member of the same church, leads a small group of MBBs in the Beirut suburb of Mansourieh. He is a friend of Boulos. Imad encourages MBBs in his group to become a living testimony to their families and to speak about the love of God, avoiding discussions about Muhammad as much as possible. Having once heard from a Western scholar of Islam that Muhammad might not even be a historical figure, avoiding the prophethood of Muhammad altogether makes sense to him. It is Imad's hope that Muhammad's influence in the lives of those he disciples will gradually diminish as they learn to follow and obey Jesus. To Imad, Muhammad was an ordinary person who had both good and bad issues in his life, but it is not necessary to label him as a false prophet.

Rima, also an MBB but a much more recent disciple and cousin of Imad, was visiting him at his home one day when Boulos dropped by to check on

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You are asked to
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Questions for Discussion

1. With whom
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3. How do Christians
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4. Suppose there were
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to ministry

7.3 The Quest for Martin Accad

The Muslim world has
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centuries after Muhammad
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narrative reports that in
western Arabia, to the
his Arab people to say

she left the room. Imad was embarrassed because of the awkward situation and stood by, silent but angry.

You are asked to gather together Boulos, Imad and Rima in order to help each of them understand the point of view of the others.

Questions for Discussion

1. With whom, among the three characters, do you most identify?
2. What would you see as being the goal or goals of such a conversation? Would you try to convince them to adopt a particular view on the issue, or would you simply seek to help them understand their different attitudes and positions?
3. How do Christians in your community typically view and talk about Muhammad? Do you think this view is consistent with the facts of history?
4. Suppose Muhammad never claimed to be a prophet, but instead, two hundred years after his death, the Islamic community fabricated his life's account and claimed he was a prophet whose ministry superseded and replaced previous revelations. Would this have any implications for how you think about Muhammad or your approach to ministry practice?

7.3 The Quest for the Historical Muhammad

Martin Accad

The Muslim world has lived with a particular representation of Muhammad that has emerged from traditional narratives developed during the first two centuries after Muhammad's death (roughly mid-seventh to mid-ninth centuries), which we may refer to as the "Muhammad of faith." The traditional narrative reports that Islam's prophet was born in Mecca, a city in the Hijaz in western Arabia, to the polytheistic Arab tribe of Quraysh, and that he invited his Arab people to embrace the worship of the One God of Abraham, Moses and other biblical prophets, warning them of eventual doom and hell's fire if they did not do so. It affirms that, after a period of rejection and persecution