

Christianity & Islam

Items: 08-04 Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations

08-02 On Removing the Confusing and Theologically Incompatible Call for Christians to Engage Other Faiths

(See also 13-05 On Protecting Christians in the Muslim World, in Committee 13: Peacemaking and International Issues)*

GA Committee Assignments: 08 Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

Summary of the business and what it wants the Assembly to do:

08-04 is sponsored by the General Assembly Mission Council and wishes the GA to approve the paper “Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations,” as well as its recommendations.

08-02 The Yukon Presbytery asks that several recommendations such as worshipping with other religions be removed from the assembly paper “Call for Tolerance and Peaceful Relations Between the Christian and Muslim Communities” approved as Item 07-01 by the 218th General Assembly (2008).”

Background:

08-04, which includes both the paper “Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations,” and its recommendations, is a response to the 218 General Assembly’s instruction to the Offices of Interfaith Relations and Theology and Worship to conduct a study of “current and evolving Presbyterian theological understanding of our relationships with Muslim sisters and brothers.”

Analysis of the business and how it would affect the Church:

08-04 offers several important recommendations for dialogue and friendship with Muslims. It also explains important ethical similarities as well as theological similarities and distinctions in each faith. However the paper fails to make a distinction between the different gods of each faith suggesting instead that there are different understandings about the same God. The authors write that “Both Muslims and Christians who speak Arabic call God ‘Allah.’ Christians who are not Arabic speakers often assume, wrongly, that because Muslims use the word ‘Allah’ it means they have a different name for God, *or are referring to a different deity than Christians.*” (Italics mine)

However, most Christians understand that Allah is the same name for two different deities. If 08-04 is accepted by the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) will be acknowledging that the God of Mohammed is the God of Jesus Christ. This would be idolatry.

08-02, “On Removing the Confusing and theologically incompatible Call for Christians to Engage Other Faiths” asks the 219th GA to remove the wording “celebrate diversity” from number 3 in the “Call for Christians Document.” It also asks the GA to remove from number 4 the words “To encourage

An Advisory on Business to the 219th General Assembly (2010)

From the Joint Renewal Team

congregations of these faiths to celebrate religious holidays together, setting aside days of worship during which there can be congregational suppers, and dialogue groups.”

Originally “Call for Christians to Engage Other Faiths” was another paper that attempted to say that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Although that part was removed by the 218th GA, the paper still has problems. To celebrate diversity of religions suggests that Christians are celebrating the rejection of Jesus Christ. And to set aside days of worship with other faiths will lead to false worship by Christians. Since the main focus of 08-02 is with Islam, its passage would help Christian believers discern the difference between true dialogue with and witness to other faiths instead of a general acceptance of pluralism.

Pertinent Resources:

“Toward an Understanding of Christian-Muslim Relations”: a critique See
<http://naminghisgrace.blogspot.com/2010/04/toward-understanding-of-christian.html>

A dialogue between a Christian and a Muslim. See
<http://naminghisgrace.blogspot.com/2009/05/dialogue-between-christian-and-muslim.html>

Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?: Understanding the Differences between Christianity and Islam, by Timothy George: <http://www.mtio.com/articles/bissar90.htm>

The Gospel for Muslims: An Encouragement to Share Christ with Confidence, by Thabiti Anyabwile: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabitianyabwile/>

Action by GA that will help the Church:

Approve Item 08-02. Disapprove 08-04.

*Item 13-05, if approved, would give to the PC(USA) its first resource for upholding Christian brothers and sisters who are suffering under both state-sponsored and religious-sponsored persecution. It is a need that many in the denomination have desired for several years. The item asks the PC(USA) and other denominations to appeal to the United Nations “to exhort the religious and political leaders of Muslim nations to moderate extreme behavior and protect its religious minorities from such harm ...”