

# Islam Through the Years - Part 1

By Fr. Bill Turnbull W.F.

An element of the White Fathers' ethos has always been our involvement with Islam. This goes back to our origins in North Africa and the work of Charles Lavigiére, the Founder, and the first White Fathers. We have had a continual presence in Tunisia and Algeria since those days and have been involved with Muslims in many ways - from the intellectual side of studies, to the ordinary every day contacts with people (see the article on page 25).

In this article we concentrate on the historical development of Islam as a political and religious force in North Africa, the Middle East and parts of Europe. As with any religion it is very difficult to give an idea of what Islam is and how it has developed over the years. It is a faith which permeates a believer's life completely and guides every action. In Islam there is no division between the religious and secular as the whole of life is a unity based on the 'community' and in surrender to the will of God (1). This may be seen in the reality that political life, religious and family life in Islam, are all one and have been throughout history. We have lost this unity to a certain degree in our Western Christianity, but these elements are a common factor to the 'people of the book' - Christians, Jews and Muslims - and have been strong in our faith at different times.

## THE ORIGINS OF ISLAM

Islam has its origins in Arabia among the people who lived in Mecca around 610 A.D. (2). At that time the majority of the population were nomadic Bedouin Arabs. The merchants of the town controlled much of the caravan trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. These camel caravans passed along the west coast of Arabia so the towns on the route were

already open to many influences. The religion of the time was Semitic and the people worshiped a variety of deities though there was *al-Uzza*, 'the Mighty One', a supreme god. Mecca was an ancient pre-Islamic shrine and a place of pilgrimage which was centred on the *Ka'ba* and this helped in promoting trade. The Quraish clan looked after the *Ka'ba* which contained many statues of the local gods (2).

## MUHAMMAD (570-632)

It was into this world that Muhammad ibn Abdullah was born in Mecca about 570 A.D. His father, Abdullah, died soon before he was born and his mother, Aminah, died when he was six years old. Abd al-Muttalib, his grandfather, looked after Muhammad until he too died, in 578. He was then taken care of by Abu Talib, an uncle who was head of the Hashimite branch of the Quraish clan. With such a background and upbringing Muhammad knew the local traditional beliefs and he was familiar with those of Jews and Christians who had settled near by. Muhammad had no formal education and could not read or write. Despite this he got a job managing the caravans of Khadija, a local business woman, whom he later married. Together they had two sons and four daughters. Muhammad felt ill at ease with the materialism and inter-tribal warfare of the surrounding area and often went to meditate in a cave on Mount Hira. Around 610, while he was meditating, Muhammad began to receive messages from God. He sincerely believed that these were the direct speech of God given to him by the Angel Gabriel and that his role was to be that of a prophet or messenger. The revelations which Muhammad received were later put together in the Koran (Qur'an). (3) The gist

## ISLAM AND 'THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM'

*Islam* - *al-islam* - means the act of unreserved commitment (submission, resignation or surrender) and a Muslim is a person who makes such an undivided commitment to *Allah*. This faith is expressed in the 'Five Pillars of Islam' which are:

**THE PROFESSION OF FAITH (SHAHADA):** "There is no god but God and Muhammad is his Messenger".

This is repeated in daily prayer as a commitment to obey God and to follow his Prophet.

*Allah* is the one true, unique, merciful, creator and sustainer God in Islam. The greatest sin is *shirk* (blasphemy - the association of anything, or anyone, with God) and so there are no images of God or the Prophet in mosques. The Koran mentions twenty five *rusul* (prophets or messengers of God) including those of the Old Testament, Jesus and John the Baptist. Only Muhammad received the complete version and he is *the seal of the Prophets*.

**PRAYER (SALAH OR SALAT):** the compulsory prayers are said five times a day facing towards Mecca:

*Fajr* at dawn; *Zuhr* at noon; *Asr* at mid-afternoon; *Maghrib* in the evening; *Isha* during the night. There are also the Friday communal prayers at the mosque.

**CHARITY OR THE GIVING OF ALMS:** there are two forms of 'alms giving'. The legal *zakat* is a type of 'welfare tax' to support the needy of the 'community'. This is the minimum expected and is often calculated at one-fortieth (2.5%) of a person's income. The voluntary *sadaqa* (pillar of social action) is the other and is seen as being a way to atone for sins.

**FASTING (SAWM)** is undertaken during the ninth month of the year *Ramadan*. Adults refrain from eating, drinking, smoking and conjugal relations from dawn to sunset. Children and pregnant women are exempt. The intention is to cleanse the body; to have a time of reflection and thanksgiving, to foster obedience to God and unite the Muslims 'community'.

**PILGRIMAGE (HAJJ):** is the Pilgrimage to Mecca which is obligatory for every Muslim at least once in a life time (unless they cannot afford it or have ill health). The *Hajj* is undertaken in the month of pilgrimage (*Dhu-l-Hijja*) and is a time to find peace with oneself, with God and creation. When it takes place in other months it is called the 'little pilgrimage'.

*Mecca* is the holiest place of Islam due to it being the birthplace of Muhammad. It is the capital of Hejaz Province, Saudi Arabia, about 45 miles (72 kms.) from the Red Sea in the Wadi Ibrahim. Each year 2 to 3 million Muslims go on the *Hajj* to Mecca. At the centre of the city is the Al-Masjid-al-Haram Mosque which contains the *Ka'ba* and can hold 300,000 people. The *Ka'ba* is a square stone building which encloses the sacred Black Stone. Muslims believe that it was the first house of worship to be built and it was later rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael.

*Medina* (Al-Madinah) is the second holiest city of Islam with the tombs of Muhammad and Aaron. It is about 300 miles (485 kms.) north of Mecca near the Hejaz Mountains. Pilgrims on their way to Mecca visit and camp around the old walled city in an area known as Al-Manakh. The Mosque of Quba, the first mosque built, is here and the Mosque of the Two Quiblahs, the monument to Muhammad's decision to change the direction of facing for prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca.

of them was that *Allah* is one, all merciful, all powerful, controls all events and would judge all people, according to what they had done in their lives, on the Last Day. God also expected people to be generous with their wealth. Muhammad preached on street corners, met and worshiped with a number of followers in Mecca. Some of the merchants of the town

were not happy when he criticised their way of life and spoke of the one God to whom they should commit themselves. The merchants still stuck to the old gods. As opposition grew, the messages which Muhammad received spoke of how the Prophets of the Old Testament were also not believed and that those who would not listen to them met with disaster.



For notes (1) and (2) see the box opposite

(3) see the box on page 6



## THE 'HIJRA' TO MEDINA (622)

Muhammad received some protection from Abu Talib but this ended when he died in about 619 A.D. As opposition grew to Muhammad and his followers, even from his own relatives, they decided to leave Mecca and go to Yathrib (later renamed Medina, 'city of the Prophet') which was then a fertile oasis. After sending a few of his people to stay with a group there, Muhammad and the remaining believers and their families went to Medina in 622. This came to be known as the *hijra* (emigration) and is taken to be the start of the Islamic era, the event from which the Muslim calendar is calculated. (4) In Medina Muhammad was

### THE KORAN (*Qur'an*)

Muslims believe that the Koran is the final, unchanging word of God which was revealed to Mohammad in Arabic, between the age of 40 and 62. The Prophet memorised these revelations and taught them word for word. They were collected and written down after his death. Tradition holds that Zaid ibn Thalbit, Muhammad's secretary, began to collate them when ordered by Caliph Abu Bakr (632-34) and the task was continued by Caliph Umar (634-44). This led to different versions and Caliph Uthman (644-56) ruled which were authentic. Copies were kept in Mecca, Medina, Kufa, Basra and Baghdad.

*Koran (Qur'an)* is often translated as 'to read aloud or to recite' and it is learnt by heart in Koranic schools. One who can recite the whole of the Koran is called a *Hafiz* and there are popular 'master reciters' called *Qari*. The Koran is divided into 114 *Surah*, or chapters, and the title of each *surah* is taken from a prominent word found in it. The Koran are treated with great reverence and it is studied and used in worship only in Arabic.

The Koran gives basic teachings about God and urges people to be totally committed to him. The themes covered: the oneness of God; the need for human kind to give thanks and obey him; God's part in history, from creation to the end of the world; and judgement and after-life. There is guidance for daily life and versions of Bible stories and it is seen as the clarification of Jewish and Christian scriptures. Muslims hold the Torah (the first five books of the Bible), the Psalms and the Gospels to be important and God's revealed word.

Muhammad interpreted the word of God by the way he lived (*summa*). Stories and sayings from his life are known as the *Hadith*. They are used for guidance in matters where there is no specific help in the Koran and together are part of the basis of Islamic Law (*Fiqh*).

accepted as both a religious and a military leader by the local population. The latter was divided into two groups and the new-comers formed a community of their own. His arrival was probably helped by the fact that the people had already heard from local Jewish clans that a messiah was expected and that they hoped he would help them overcome their divisions.

Islam began to take shape around the example and revelations given by Muhammad and from this time onwards it developed as both a religion and a political power. Many of the Jewish population aligned themselves with Muhammad, but they would not accept him as a prophet - some even opposed and mocked

the Muslim beliefs. This resulted in Muhammad expelling two Jewish clans and executing members of a third. He gradually took on a stronger political role as his community became involved in hostilities with local pagan groups. When possible Muhammad solved problems with diplomacy but at times he resorted to battle, such as the battle of Badr, in 624, when he beat the Meccans. This happened again in 627 when Medina's Jewish community was virtually wiped out because of the support they gave to Abu Sufyan, from Mecca, when he tried to take over the town.

Muhammad and his followers carried out many raids against Mecca and their caravans and by January, 630, he was strong enough to take the town. He found

little resistance and treated his enemies well, most of whom became Muslims and joined him. Many of the the gods in the Ka'ba were destroyed and Muhammad dedicated it to the One God, *Allah*. He reorganised the town's administration and put down any remaining opposition. Muhammad went back to Medina and carried out further work to unify the peoples of Arabia bringing them into his federation as converts to Islam. Thus a state was gradually formed with Muhammad as its unquestioned head and the foundation for the *Umma* (community) of Islam was created.

### THE CALIPHATE (632-661) (5)

When Muhammad died, the 8th. June, 632, he left a religion which was shared by a federation of tribes. His 'successor' was Abu Bakhr (632-34) who was the Prophet's father-in-law and the first *Caliph* - 'successor' or 'deputy' of Muhammad. Abu Bakhr completed the conquest of Arabia and entered Palestine. At this time there was never any lengthy peace between the nomadic Arab peoples as they were always raiding each other. Muhammad and the first four Caliphs used this to their advantage and organised *razzias* (raids) from Medina into Syria and Iraq. In this way they filled the power vacuum between the declining Roman, (Christian) Byzantine and (Zoroastrian) Persian Empires and brought back booty. They gradually established forward base camps instead of returning to Medina after each raid. The Byzantine and Persian Governors fled and treaties were made with the local people.

They gave the status of 'protected minorities' to 'people of the book', those who believed in one God and had written scriptures such as Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians. These were treated well and this set a pattern which was to be repeated wherever Islam went. They were not forced to become Muslims but their conversion was a gradual process over the years. This rapid expansion led to the previously dominant religions - Christianity, in North Africa and the Byzantine Empire, and Zoroastrianism, in the Persian Empire - being almost completely wiped out. Elements of these religions were incorporated into Islam as it progressed. Between 634 and 656 - under Caliphs Umar I (634-44) and Uthman (644-56) - the Muslim armies used this method to conquer the whole of the Arabian peninsula, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Syria, and parts of Armenia and Persia. Umar I and his troops took Damascus (635) and Jerusalem (638)



(4) The Muslim Calendar is entirely lunar and is not adjusted to keep in step with the solar year, which is 10 or 11 days longer. Muslim dates differ from the Western solar calendar and the years are counted from the Hijra and are known as 1 A.H. (After Hijrah) - so the year 2000 A.D. is 1420/21 A.H.

(4) The Muslim Calendar - continued: The Months are: Muharram, Safar, Rabi' I, Rabi' II, Jumada I, Jumada II, Rajad, Sha'ban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhu-l-Qa'da, Dhu-l-Hijja.



Above: a Koranic school at Mopti, Mali

and beat the Romans, under Heraclius, at Yarmuk (636). After the assassination of Uthman disagreements broke out over the right to the Caliphate. This was at the time of the fourth Caliph, Ali (656-61) Muhammad's son-in-law. He moved the capital to Hufa and the outcome was a division in the Muslim community and it split into the 'Shiites' and the 'Sunnites'. Ali in turn was murdered and when Muawiya I, the former Governor of Syria, came to power though the Shiites would not recognise him.

#### THE Umayyad DYNASTY (661-750)

The Umayyad dynasty, founded by Caliph Muawiya I (661-80), made Damascus their capital and expanded further. The only major power, save 'Christendom', to stand against them was the Byzantine Empire - with their capital at Constantinople. Muslim troops conquered Tunisia (670), Morocco (690), and reached the Atlantic coast of North Africa by 710. They crossed the Strait of Gibraltar in 711, overran Spain (720) and continued into France, as far as Narbonne, only to be defeated by King Charles Martel at Tours and Poitiers in 732. In the east they ranged into Persia and Afghanistan, as far as the Indus (Pakistan). These military expeditions, though having the main aim of enrichment, were called *Jihad* or 'holy wars'. The Muslim armies were mainly Arab until 700, then converts to Islam (Persian, Berber and Turkish) joined the ranks as other lands were conquered.

The Umayyads brought about legal and administrative reform in their Empire. Art and architecture developed greatly, one example of which is the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. By 750 the Empire extended from Spain in the west to India and China in the east. With stretching of resources, a lack of manpower led to the Umayyads being weakened and they were still unable to control the Shiites.

#### THE ABBASID DYNASTY (750-[936]1258)

The Abbasid Dynasty was founded by al-Mansur (the Victor) and they ruled for the next 500 years. They toppled the Umayyad with the help of the Shiites and moved the capital to Baghdad (762), claiming to be descendants of Mohammad's uncle al-Abbas. The Abbasids reacted against the Umayyads and tried to make the Caliphate follow a more orthodox Islam. Caliph Harun al-Rashid (786-809) set up 'tribunals' to enforce orthodoxy and began the *jihad*. It was during this time that Islam developed greatly and that the *Shari'a* law began to be formulated and it took the central role in higher Islamic education. Despite this change in emphasis religious leaders were given positions in administration, such as advisers, judges and lawyers. (6)

The Abbasids killed Marawan, the last Umayyad Caliph, in Egypt, and chased his supporters across North Africa. Some of them escaped to the Iberian peninsula and later founded the 'Moorish State' in Spain (Cordoba Caliphate, 756-1031), which the Abbasids never managed to control. They developed the Arab-Islamic culture and merged it with that of the Persian Empire, replacing the Arab bureaucracy with an Iraqi and Persian civil service and local provincial governors. This restructuring gave rise to the multi-cultural Islam which developed when members of the 'community' were chosen on religious, not racial grounds. This 'melting pot' of race, culture, art and learning set the foundation for Islam to be built upon and helped the Empire survive for so long. Much of the Greek sciences, literature, arts, government were taught and the books of the time were translated into Arabic. The Universities which were established rivalled those of Europe. The Abbasid Dynasty also travelled and conquered over great distances. For example Harun al-Rashid sent embassies to Charlemagne (797 and

801) and made an alliance with the T'ang emperor in 798. The cross-fertilisation of cultures had begun - with Muslim merchants in Canton (Kanfu) and Chinese in Baghdad. The majority of the Abbasid Caliphs were toppled in military coupes. They gradually began to lose control of their distant provinces, where local governors with strong armies chose their successors. In this way their central authority was weakened and in 945 they even lost their power in Baghdad which was ruled by the Shiite Buyid Dynasty (945-1055). The latter were replaced by the Seljuks, Turkish Muslims, who ruled for 150 years. The Abbasid Caliphs remained as Caliphs in Baghdad until the Mongol invasion of 1258.

The Independent Kingdoms (909-1258) began in the last 300 years of the Abbasid Empire. Several were Shiite, including the Imamite sect ('Twelvers'). Other Dynasties which also emerged were the Carmathians, Ghaznavids, Almoravids and the Almohads (see issue no. 334, June-July, 1997). The Fatimid Dynasty (909-1171) are a good example of these kingdoms. They took their name, and right of descent from Muhammad's daughter, Fatimah. They were a Shiite group who had links with the Ismaili, 'Seveners', founded in 765, in support of Ismail who claimed to be the seventh Imam. Their leader was Ubadayyah al-Mahdi and he founded a rival Caliphate to the Abbasids in Tunisia (took over from the Aglabid Dynasty 800-909) and Egypt, where they established the city of Cairo and the al-Azhar University (970) which has always been one of the foremost universities in the Islamic world. The Fatimids claimed to be 'the sole rightful heirs to the Caliphate' but internal strife stopped them establishing a Caliphate.

In 1094 the struggle for control came to a head when two brothers, al-Mustali and al-Nizar, and their followers fought. Al-Mustali won and remained Caliph until Saladin founded the Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1250) in Egypt.

#### THE CRUSADES

In the West the first well known 'clash' between Christianity and Islam is the Crusades (1096-1254). We forget that Muslims and Christians had been in contact with each other for over three hundred and fifty years before the First Crusade. They had lived together in Arabia and North Africa and only began to fight on a



large scale when Muslim armies invaded Europe in 711.

In the early 11th. century the Seljuks (nomadic Turks) seized Baghdad (1055) from the Abbasids who were controlled by the Buyid Dynasty (945-1055). They ruled in the name of the Abbasids and established a dynasty which lasted from 1038-1194. The Seljuks did not claim absolute authority and were led by their political head, the Sultan (not Caliph), who had the authority to protect the Muslim 'community' and the faith by *jihad*. Gradually the Seljuks spread into Iraq, Persia and parts of Anatolia (modern Turkey). They made alliances with merchants and landowners and as a result they became prosperous and formed a new type of Muslim state. The bureaucracy which held them together was based on people of Persian and Arab origin, all with Arabic as a common language. They imposed a common law and developed trade along the sea routes of the Mediterranean, Black Sea, Indian Ocean and the over land routes to Asia and Indonesia. This successful expansion set the stage for an eventual 'clash' with the various European powers.

The Crusades were the result of a variety of social, economic and religious elements which came together in the second half of the 11th. century. These included the regeneration of the Church, the defeat of the Byzantines (1071) by the Seljuk (when the Byzantine Emperor asked the Pope for help) and their occupation of Jerusalem. The new Christian fervour rekindled the concept of pilgrimage and the holy war against 'the heathen' and the wish to come to the aid of the Christians in the Orient. After the Synod of Clarmont, 26th. November, 1095, Pope Urban II convinced leaders that the Crusade was a worthy cause. The first attempt (1096) was an unorganised adventure led by Peter of Amiens, a hermit who inspired people through his sermons to fight to liberate the Holy Land. Then the First

Crusade (1096-99) got under way with an army mainly from Flanders and France. The Crusaders had a series of victories culminating in the capture of Jerusalem on the 15th. July, 1099. The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the smaller Crusader States were then established. The seeds were sown for the Second Crusade (1147-49) when Edessa was taken by Imadeddin Zenkis, the Emir of Mosul, in 1144. This expedition was fated due to the disunity between the French and German forces and led to defeats at Dorylaeum and Laodicea, and ineffective campaigns against Damascus and Ascalon.

In 1187 Sultan Saladin retook Jerusalem and the Third Crusade (1189-92) began two years later. Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa led virtually the whole of the 'western world' on this Crusade. They had a victory at Iconium, but the Emperor was drowned in the River Saleph on 10th. June, 1190. His son, Duke Frederick of Swabia, led an army against Acre but also died in 1191. Richard I, the Lion-Heart, and Philip II of France took Acre the same year. Richard and Saladin made peace and came to the agreement that the coastal strip from Tyre and Jaffa was given to the Christians, and that they could make pilgrimages to Jerusalem.

In 1197 Emperor Henry VI set out to win the Holy Land and conquer the Byzantine Empire, but due to his sudden death only an area near Antioch was taken. Pope Innocent III called for the Fourth Crusade (1202-04) and many of the French Nobility answered. Constantinople eventually fell to the Crusaders in 1204. The Fifth Crusade (1228-29) was led by Emperor Frederick II. He made a treaty with Sultan Elkamil of Egypt taking Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. In 1244 Jerusalem was retaken by Muslims.

In the Sixth Crusade (1248-54) St. King Louis IX of France wanted to destroy the power of Egypt. His army took Damietta

(1249), but they were defeated and taken prisoner at Mansura. Louis was only released after a ransom was paid in 1254. The Seventh, and final, Crusade (1270) was also fated when Louis IX went to Tunis where he and many of his army caught the plague. 1291 saw the Mamelukes (Mammaluks) (1250-1517) take Acre, while Tyre, Beirut and Sidon were abandoned by the Christian armies. The Lusignan Dynasty continued to rule Cyprus until 1489 and the Knights of St. John in Rhodes until 1523.

The Crusades cannot be viewed in isolation as the fight against the encroaches of Islam into Europe was going on elsewhere at the same time. The idealism of the Western powers was overtaken by national concerns as commercial and political interests came to the fore. Many say that what resulted was an opening up of the West to the East - both in culture and trade. Trade with the East flourished and many Mediterranean ports and states became rich. The West also became more aware of its own culture because of the contact with that of the Byzantine Empire and Arabs.

The Seljuks Dynasty began to weaken in the second part of the 12th. century with the Mongol advance. European states also began the 'Reconquista', to reoccupy lost territory, and they pushed the Almohads back to North Africa. Only the Kingdom of Granada remained of Muslim Spain and that ended in 1492. The unification of the Kingdoms of Aragon and Castile, with the marriage of Ferdinand II and Isabella, gave a united Spain, which was able

to bring about the demise of Muslim Spain, though individuals did remain behind until their final expulsion, by edict, in 1614.

#### THE MONGOL EMPIRE (1206-1405)

The eastern Islamic empire came under attack from the Mongols, nomads from Siberia and central Asia, in the 12th. and 13th. century. Their most famous leader was Genghis Khan (Temujin)(1162-1227) who gave rise to the Il-Khanid Dynasty (1256-1353) which ruled areas of Persia, Iraq and Anatolia (modern Turkey). Genghis Khan managed to unite the various Mongol tribes by 1206. He then led them to invade the Chin Empire of northern China in 1211, breaking through the Great Wall and eventually taking Peking in 1215. After his death his grandson, Batu, led the invasion of Europe. Northern Russia was gradually occupied between 1237-38 and Kiev was destroyed in 1240. The next year a joint



Polish-German army was routed at Liegnitz and the Hungarians at Mohi. The Mongol Empire grew out of their strategy and mobility. They began to slow down and eventually to decline due to the deaths of their leaders, especially the 'Great Khans'.

The original Mongol religion was a type of Shamanism but as they moved along they came into contact with three other major religions - Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. It was only after they took Baghdad (1258), and overthrew the Abbasids, that Islam became dominant amongst them. Mahmud Ghazan (1295-1304) was the first Il-Khan to convert to Islam though not all the Khans were favourable to the new faith - such as those ruled by descendants of Chaghatay (1227-41), one of Genghis's four sons. The conquests of the Mongols led to Turkic people moving all over western Asia. The Mongols were not numerous so they recruited soldiers from other peoples especially from Turkey, and Turkish became the dominant language. Their Empire was from Germany to Korea, from the Arctic Ocean to Turkey and the Persian Gulf, at one time they even attempted a seaborne invasions of Japan and Java. As a result of their incursions the Seljuk's hold was destroyed and the foundations laid for the later Ottoman Empire.

With pressure from the Crusades the Muslim Empire in the Middle East began to weaken. Under Hulagu Khan, another grandson of Genghis, they sacked Baghdad in 1258 ending the Abbasid rule in Iraq. In 1260 the Mongols were eventually stopped by the Mamelukes at the battle of Ain Jalut, near Jerusalem. The Mameluke Sultans ruled Egypt and had invited the Abbasids to Cairo. In Persia the Il-Khanid Kingdom was established by the time of Timur Lenk (Tamerlane 1336-1405) a Muslim Turkoman Prince from Samarkand in Transoxiana. He was closer to the Turks and made Samarkand his capital.

From there he conquered the area from southern Russia, northeast to Mongolia and south to India, Persia and Mesopotamia.

#### THE SAFAVID DYNASTY (1501-1732)

The Safavids developed from a Sufi brotherhood in Azerbaijan, central Asia, which had been founded by Shaykh Ishaq Safi al-Din in the mid 13th. century. They had been Sunni Muslims but became Shiite in the 15th. century (7) Their first ruler was Ismail (1501-24) and he conquered Azerbaijan in 1501 and Iran by 1510. The Shiism, the 'Twelvers', practised was imposed as a state religion which meant that Shiism changed from being a sectarian movement to a national religion, uniting Persia and leaving its mark until today. The Ottomans attacked this as being 'heretical' and fought the Dynasty. These assaults led their capital to be moved from Tabriz to Qazvin and then to Isfahan.

The Persians took control of the eastern Causus and the Persian Gulf. The Safavid's decline began around the time of Shah Abbas II in 1666 with clerical opposition to the monarchy, anti-Shiite forces from Zandahar region of Afghanistan. By the beginning of the 18th. century it was too late and the empire was breaking up and the governor of Afghanistan, Mir Way, declared independence. Mir's son, Mahmud, then invaded much of Persia in 1722, devastating cities, the economy and reviving tribalism.

#### THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE (1453-1924)

The Ottoman Turks were descendants of Turkoman nomads who arrived in Anatolia in the 11th. century as part of the Seljuk army. Their name comes from Osman I (the Turkish pronunciation of Uthman, the Arab Muslim name) the son of their founder (Ertoghrul, a 13th. century Turkish chieftain) who succeeded his father in about 1285. Osman gained

independence for his people and began to expand by mainly fighting the Tatars and the Byzantines. The Ottomans saw themselves as *ghazis* (fighters for Islam) and carried out guerrilla attacks principally against the Byzantines at first. It was during the reign of Orhan a vital part of the Ottoman army was created in the corps of *Janissaries* - derived from the Turkish 'yeni cheri' meaning 'new troops'. They were made up of slave conscripts from occupied peoples - such

as young Christian men from the Balkans. Those who joined the corps were chosen for their qualities and given special education and training, during which they converted to Islam. Gradually over the years these recruits worked in administration, as well as the army, and had a great influence on who would become Sultan and rule the Empire.

The expansion continued to the west and the Empire began to encroach into the Aegean and the Balkans. At the same time they were fighting off Tamerlane and the Mongol armies from the East. There were several attempts to take Constantinople but these were unsuccessful until 1453 when Sultan Mehmed II (1451-81) conquered the city and renamed it Istanbul. This brought the Byzantine Empire to an end and Constantinople became their capital. The expansion continued - to the west Herzegovina and Bosnia (Balkans); the east the Crimea; through Syria, Egypt and North Africa.

Up to this time the Ottoman Empire had no central government and administration,

which was amazing considering the diversity of peoples, cultures and religions which were involved. Now the centralised administration evolved which was controlled by the Sultanate. The Empire was generally tolerant with less than half the population being Muslim, and under direct rule. A key element in the new administration was the 'millet system'. A 'millet' was an autonomous part of the Empire based on a community's religion which was also allowed to keep its own leader and customs. The leader was responsible to the Sultan, or his representatives, for things such as the collection of *jizya*, a type of poll tax levied on non-Muslims for the upkeep on the army. Muslims had to do military service, whereas others did not but supported it financially. Along side the 'millet system' there grew a system of 'guilds' of artisans and popular mystic orders. The 'guilds' often cut across religious boundaries and included many peoples with the same skills.

Expansion slackened during the reign of Bayazid II (1481-1512) with the rise of the

Safavid dynasty in Persia - who threatened them. The Ottomans defeated the Mamelukes in Iraq, Syria and Egypt. In the 15th. and 16th. century the Ottomans restored the Caliphate and conquered south-eastern Europe. They had military, diplomatic and commercial dealings with many European states. Sultan Selim I (1512-20) conquered Egypt, Syria and the Arabian Peninsula, and defeated the Safavids of Iran at the Battle of Caldiran (1514). Next came the well known Suleiman the Magnificent (1520-66) who enlarged the Empire even more to cover most of the Near East, northern Africa, western Asia, the Balkans and Hungary. He built up the state structure, gave prominence to Shari'a law and brought in the Koran as the basis of education. The arts and architecture flourished especially in Constantinople. The Muslim world was united and Suleiman developed the Ottoman

army and navy in the Mediterranean so that the Empire became one of Europe's greatest powers. With the death of Suleiman in 1566 the Empire began to slowly decline due to nepotism, corruption and internal feuding. Amidst it all the Sultan and the ruling class (Turko-Islamic aristocracy) tried to hold on to power at all costs but eventually they fled.

The 17th. century saw attempts to restore the Ottoman Empire by such people as Sultan Murad IV (1623-40) and the Koprulu family of Grand Viziers (chief executive officers), who dominated the administration from 1656 to 1702. The Empire's navy met with its first major defeat in the Battle of Lepanto (1571) but despite that it still dominated the eastern Mediterranean. The invasion of central Europe ended in failure and the Ottoman army began to collapse. There were a series of other losses which continued into the 18th. century with the Russo-Turkish Wars.

Again there were attempts to reform the Ottoman system and to model the army on those of the West. Eventually getting rid of the Janissaries ended in disaster with them being wiped out, along with their ally the Bektashiyya Sufi brotherhood, by Sultan Mahmud II in 1826. The Sultans had begun to see the Janissaries in the same light as the Sufis - subversive mystics. Further defeats by European powers and the rise of Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman Governor of Egypt, did not help the situation. Mahmud tried another series of Western reforms in all areas of Ottoman life. These were continued throughout the Tanzimat reform era (1839-76) and the reign of

Abd al-Hamid II (1876-1909). Despite such efforts the internal problems of the Empire took their toll as did the external incursion by the major European powers. The French took Algeria (1847) and Tunisia (1881), the British Egypt (1882), the Italians Libya and an Anglo-Egyptian rule began in the Sudan (1892). The territories of the 'Sick Man of Europe' were ready to be divided up, but the balance of power had to be kept.

Abd al-Hamid held the inevitable at bay with skilled politics - in dealing with the European powers, and in developing the pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic movements. He brought in a parliament and constitution (1876) but soon reverted to an autocratic rule. This nurtured opposition and the 'Young Turks' began to take the lead and forced Abd al-Hamid to restore the parliament and constitution (1908). The change did not last long and the 'Young Turks' dethroned Abd al-Hamid the following year and Mehmed V Rashid (1909-18) took over.

The 'Young Turk' era (1908-18) saw much modernisation in every aspect of life and the secularisation of the state. Their leader, Enver Pasha (1881-1922), drew the Empire into World War I, on the side of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Their defeat led to the final collapse and division of the Ottoman Empire. Most of these changes were accepted but Turkish nationalists disputed the control of Anatolia, which resulted in the Turkish war of independence (1918-23). The dispute was finally settled in the Treaty of Sevres (1920) and Turkey became a republic under Mustapha Kemal (Kemal Atatürk, president of Turkey 1923-1938), and was recognised in the Treaty of Lausanne. The Caliphate was finally abolished in 1924. Claims of sovereignty over the Muslim world were given up and the new Turkish state was created - a constitutional republic based on secular law, not Islamic law.

#### SUFISM (7TH. C. - PRESENT DAY)

'Sufi' comes from the word *suf*, which is the simple woollen robe the Sufis wore. It is a mystical tradition with an aim of gaining union with God. This is achieved by various practises such as abstinence, poverty and meditation. There have been many different Sufi *tariqas* (orders or brotherhoods) over the centuries and some still survive today.

Their origins are disputed but it is believed that they began in the 7th. and 8th. century. Some say that this type of mysticism was practised by the Prophet, others that it began as a way of restoring Islamic purity during the Umayyad dynasty. It was influenced by the ascetic practices of Syrian Christian monks, Zoroastrians in Persia, and Hindu Vedanta. Hasan al-Basri (642-728) is known as the 'father of Muslim mysticism' and his followers founded a monastic community at Abbadan, near Basra in Iraq. Other schools developed at Baghdad and Kufa - al-Muhasibi (781-857), who was at the former, was very influential.

The Sufi 'golden age' was between the 11th. to 13th. century when the brotherhoods developed. They lived a monastic life-style, in community in order to discover the nature of true self and its purpose. They developed music, drumming and dance as part of their worship. Probably the best known brotherhood is the Mevlevi ('Whirling Dervishes') of Turkey.

This article will be continued in a future issue when we will look at some of the trends in Islam during the last two hundred years. We will also have other items concerning Islam. For more information on Islam and work which White Fathers do with Muslims please see issue no. 311 of August-September, 1993.



(7) see the box above

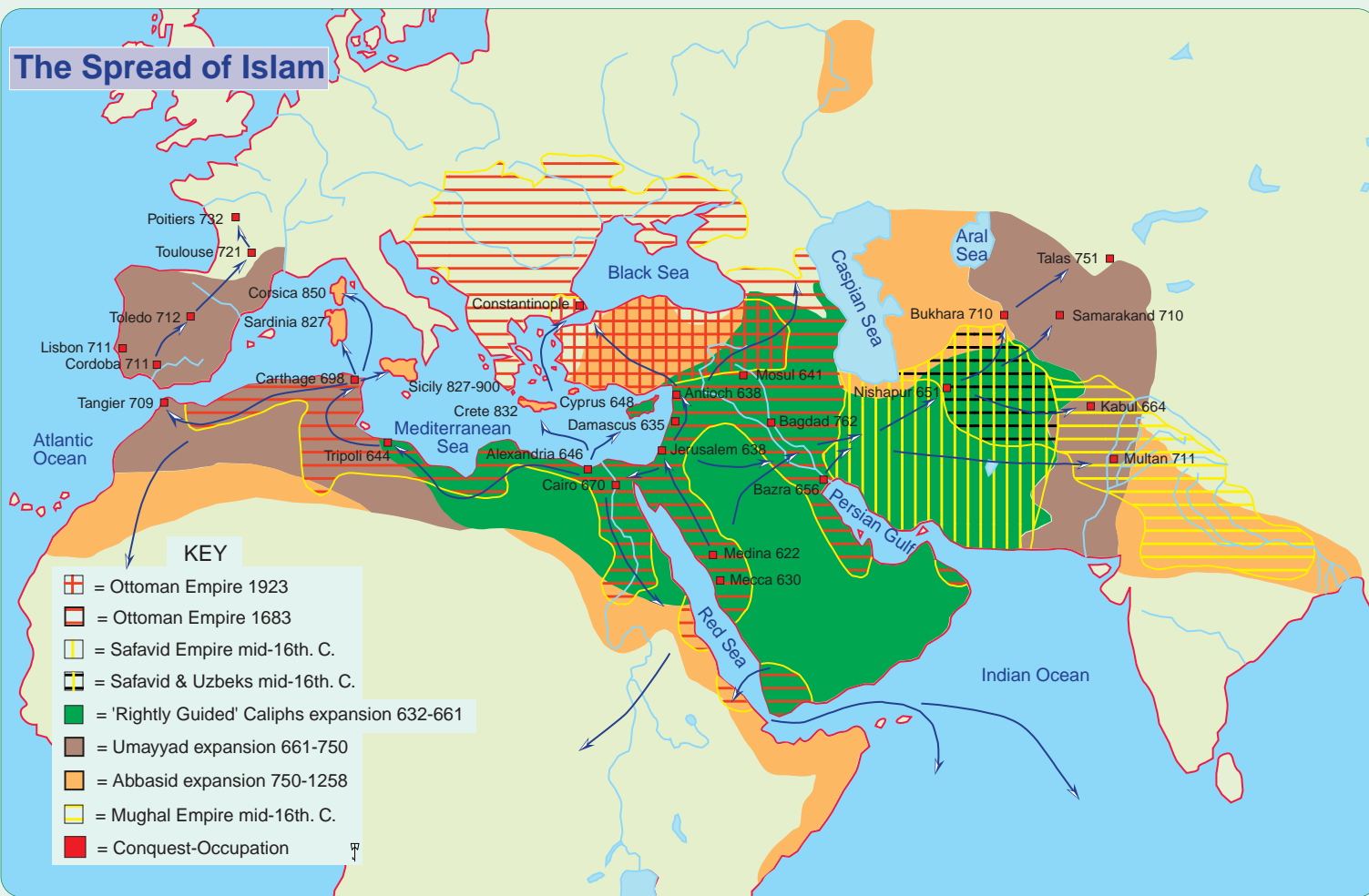
The beautiful minaret of a mosque in Dakar, Senegal



## SOME MAJOR ISLAMIC DYNASTIES

Date	Name	Centre/Territory
632-61	'Rightly Directed' Caliphs	Medina
661-750	Umayyads	Damascus
750-1258	Abbasids	Baghdad, Iraq
756-1031	Umayyads	Spain
789-926	Idrisids	Morocco
800-909	Aghlabids	Tunisia
819-1005	Samanids	Khurasan, Turkestan
860-1281	Zaidi Imamas	Yemen
867-1495	Saffarids	Eastern Persia
869-905	Tulunids	Egypt, Syria
894-1100	Carmathians	Arabia
909-1171	Fatimids	N. Africa, Egypt, Syria
932-1062	Buyids	Persia, Iraq
945-1004	Hamdanids	Syria, Jazira
972-1148	Zirids	Tunisia, E. Algeria
977-1186	Ghaznavids	Khurasan, N. India
992-1211	Karakhanids	Afghanistan, Turkestan
1015-1152	Hammadids	E. Algeria
1038-1194	Seljuks	Iraq, Persia
1056-1147	Almoravids	Morocco, Spain
1077-1307	Seljuks of Rum	Turkey
1090-1256	Ismailis of Alamut	N. Persia
1130-1269	Almohads	N. Africa, Spain
1169-1260	Ayyubids	Egypt, Syria
1196-1465	Marinids	Morocco
1226-1502	Golden Horde	S. Russia
1127-1222	Zangids	Jazira, Syria
1228-1574	Hafsids	Tunisia
1229-1454	Rasulids	Yemen
1230-1492	Nasrids	Granada, Spain
1250-1517	Mamelukes	Egypt, Syria, Hejaz
1256-1353	Ilkhanids	Persia
1261-1517	Abbasids	Cairo
1281-1924	Ottomans	Constantinople
1370-1506	Timurids	Turkestan, Persia
1378-1508	Akkoyunlu	Turkey, Azerbaijan
1380-1468	Karakoyunlu	Azerbaijan
1500-1598	Shaybanids	Turkestan
1501-1732	Safavids of Isfahan	Persia
1511-1659	Saadids	Morocco
1526-1858	Moguls	Delhi
1779-1925	Qajars	Tehran, Iran

## The Spread of Islam



## THE SHARI'A LAW

*Shari'a* may be translated as 'the way to a watering-place'. Some say that the basis of Shari'a is found in pre-Islamic Arabian customary law and from the early administrative practices of Islam. The interpretation of the Shari'a, known as *fiqh* (knowledge), varies. Some see it as being unchangeable while others believe that it is a developing code. The Shari'a is derived from four

sources: the Koran; the *sunna* ('customs') of Muhammad, as seen in the *hadith* ('tradition'); *qiyas* ('analogy') using earlier judgements and applying them to new matters; and *ijma*, the 'consensus' of the 'community' of believers. The end result is a personal rule for all aspects of life, as well as a system of law which passes on the rights and duties given by God.

There are several *madhhab* (schools) of Islamic law. The Sunni people recognise four schools which are named after their founders:

The School	The Founder	Places Practised Today
the Hanafi (Hanafites)	Abu Hanifa (699-767)	Balkans, Afghanistan, Central Asian Reps., Middle East, China, Pakistan, India
the Maliki (Malikites)	Malik ibn Anas al-Abahi (713-795)	Andalusia, Gulf, Algeria, U. Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, W. & C. Africa
the Shafii (Shafiites)	Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi (767-820)	Palestine, Jordan, Yemen, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Egypt and E. Africa
the Hanbali (Hanbalites)	Ahmad ibn Hanbal (780-855) reformed by Abdul Wahhab (18th.C.)	Official law of Saudi Arabia and of great influence with 'Fundamentalist'

Most Shiites follow Imami law which was formed by Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Qummi (d.903). Imami practice, unlike the orthodox schools, does not use *qiyas* to deal with a problem that cannot be resolved by referring to

the Koran or Hadith. Instead they believe that their divinely inspired Imam (religious leader) alone has the right to elucidate an area of law. The Shiite law also differs in regard to inheritance law.