

## **“SEEING VARIOUS WORLD RELIGIONS AS BOTH OPPORTUNITY AND THREAT”**

Well, there is *one* thing that can be said about the 2016 presidential campaign: It has elicited tons of conversation! Of course, some candidates have generated more heat than light, have offered an unprecedented lack of substance on major issues and, unfortunately, have made quite a number of false and misleading statements. Nevertheless, several *important* matters have been surfaced. One of them, of course, is that of our country’s relationship to Islam, Muslims and, especially, ISIS.

In the absence of in-depth factual information from presidential candidates and the media, along with uncorrected misinformation, I have tried, to an extent, to fill the vacuum by providing some of what was lacking. Since I am a pastor and not a politician, my comments have been limited to issues that are integrally connected with religious concerns as well as our well-being and survival, both as individuals and as a country.

In order to fill the gap of missing factual data, I decided to make a helpful contribution from *four different perspectives* and to present only one each month.

First, in March, I delivered a sermon entitled “ISIS AND TERRORISM.” WHAT YOU NEED MOST TO KNOW NOW,” in which I limited my sources to the Koran, the Hadith, and articles that were written by prominent Islamic scholars. I followed that presentation with what I hope was a spiritually-based response to some admittedly serious challenges from more hardline violent, Islamic interpretations of the religion—being careful to point out that the vast majority of the followers of Islam are not terrorists.

Now it is April—time for my *second* of four anticipated efforts to give you information we all need but to which most people do not have easy access. The presentation *this* month will take place at our next worship gathering on April 10th. I will be responding to some conversations I’ve heard, some radio and television commentators, and statements of presidential candidates regarding *God’s* reaction to the adherents of Islam! It is ironic that the persons who spoke so “authoritatively” on what *God* thinks and how *God* will deal ultimately with Islamists had no formal theological training, no

degree in religion, and used no factual information upon which to base their opinions. The title of my message will be broad: “WHAT WILL BE THE FATE OF *NON-CHRISTIANS*?” But can we know? The answer is, *possibly*. I will be sharing some plausible *clues* in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as some very powerful insights from Jesus, Paul, and a few other biblical writers; so our usual discussion following the message should be extremely interesting!

What about the *third* effort to enlighten us on our relationship to people of other religions—*especially* fundamentalists who want to annihilate us? In May, on Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup>, I’ll be sharing with you an extremely sobering undercover video containing footage shot secretly by a few Muslims who are working to *protect* people from ISIS and who risked their own lives to get this information to us. Indeed, two or three of them were caught and, for their reward, were stoned to death. Few (if any) of us probably have been aware of the full *extent* of the violence and brutality of which ISIS is capable until this video, filmed on location, became available. To say that it is an eye-opener may be an understatement; and since the ultimate goal of ISIS is to bring their sub-human savagery to bear on Christians in the United States, this video should be a wake-up call for all of us. The presentation will begin at 10:00 a.m. sharp and will last for about 50 minutes. We’ll reserve a half hour for discussion and adjourn at about 11:30 a.m.

That leaves my *fourth* effort to be of help in raising our collective consciousness. That will occur in our worship gathering in June (Sunday, June 12<sup>th</sup>) when we’ll have an honored guest to speak. Our distinguished visitor will be Iman Oman Shaheed, the spiritual leader of a local mosque with which our church established a meaningful relationship following 9/11. We extended a hand of friendship and exchanged valuable visits with each other. Iman Shaheed is what I consider a progressive voice in the Islamic community and will highlight the differences between his branch of Islam and some radical jihadist groups. Indeed, his presence will remind us that all adherents of Islam are *not* identical and that we need to distinguish carefully (and caringly!) between peaceful Muslims and the radical fundamentalists who give Islam a bad name.

From March to April, May and June, I hope that this series will be both stimulating and immensely helpful to you. Since each of our times together

will address the issue of our relationship to ISIS, terrorism, and Islam from a refreshingly *different* point of view, being present for all four opportunities will give a more holistic perspective to help formulate reality-based attitudes and actions that will help us to be wisely vigilant but, also, profoundly spiritual in our approach.

Please pay careful attention to all parts of our upcoming newsletters; because other interesting opportunities will be occurring each month in *addition* to those I have mentioned here.

Thank you for your dedication, interest and involvement. Your participation and excitement make CCM the vital fellowship it is. No wonder I love and appreciate you so deeply!

**Your pastor and friend,  
John.**

## **IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM!**

**Sunday, April 10th (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month)**

10:00 a.m. WORSHIP GATHERING

Today is the time for our *second* of four gatherings during which we will be seeking to understand the relevance of several spiritual teachings to important issues that face us all. As indicated in the Pastor's Paragraph, John will be responding to what he believes are probably *misinterpretations*, even in many churches, of what will happen to religious people who are different from ourselves. The sermon, "WHAT WILL BE THE FATE OF *NON-CHRISTIANS?*" just might *revolutionize* your understanding of a very important matter. As usual, an informal discussion of the topic will follow the message. (Out by about 12:00 noon)

**Sunday, April 24<sup>th</sup> (4<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Month)**

**10:00 a.m. FORUM: WHAT IS PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY?**

This Sunday, we'll have a *double* emphasis at our gathering. The *first* part of our time together will focus on Three Keys to Transformative Christianity—that is, a spirituality that makes a *positive difference* in our life *and* that of others. We'll look at what's *involved* in the vital process of helping us to become more whole.

The *second* part of our time together will give us an opportunity to share life with one of our valuable members: Gloria. As you know, Gloria recently underwent open heart surgery. What you might *not* know is that she had what she describes as a spiritual awakening *during* the surgery. Under heavy sedation, with her heart stopped, she had an experience which she can't explain but remembers clearly and can easily describe. During the last 30 minutes of our time together, Gloria will have an opportunity to share that experience with all of us. (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)