

# Foreword

The piercing, amplified voice carried through the din and clatter of the dusty streets. Men rushing and jostling through the crowds stopped suddenly. As one they turned to the mosque centered in the village. They removed their shoes and washed their hands and faces at fountains placed alongside the walls of the mosque. Then they disappeared, ornate rugs rolled under their arms. When they next appeared, I was shocked by what I saw. Several had prostrated themselves with such fervor on their prayer rugs that their foreheads were bleeding. I felt ashamed as I contrasted their religious passion with my own.

Such was my first encounter with the Muslim world. The college summer I spent doing mission work in East Malaysia was my invitation to a larger world. Like most American Christians, I had little exposure to Islam and even less understanding of its beliefs and spirit. Until September 11, 2001, most of us were content to remain ignorant of this remarkable spiritual and cultural movement. Since that tragic day, much of what we think we have learned has come through the distorted prism of caricature and second-hand expertise.

We can no longer afford such ignorance. Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world, and in America. More Americans seek God through Islam than through Episcopal and Presbyterian churches combined. The Muslim faith has actually made great strides toward acceptance in our society *after 9/11*, as cultural influencers have legitimized this religion as simply another way to worship the same God. As Islam impacts our lives even more significantly in coming years, Americans and Christians desperately need an objective guide to this spiritual phenomenon.

The volume you hold is the most unique answer to this need available today. Dr. Abraham Sarker possesses remarkable qualifications as our guide to the Muslim faith and its significance. Abraham grew up in Islam, the disciple of his village's spiritual leader. His intellectual brilliance marked him as a future leader of great promise within the Muslim world. He came to America to spread the message of Islam within our culture. What happened next is a modern-day book of Acts miracle.

Today Abraham is dedicated to helping American Christians understand the Muslim world and relate our faith to its followers. He knows Islam not from world religions textbooks but from first-hand experience. He understands the Christian faith as one of its most passionate advocates. He is able to relate the Muslim culture to American society on a level possible only to one who has lived in both worlds. And he is a daily example of the gracious and compassionate spirit he advocates as our most effective witness.

Abraham is a faithful member of the congregation I pastor, and my dear friend. He has impressed our entire church family with his communicational brilliance and personal warmth. He has taught our people many of the insights you will discover in his book. We are far better equipped to understand our faith and to share its grace with our culture than we were before Abraham joined his ministry to ours.

When I served on the faculty of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth, Texas, world religions was one of my areas of responsibility. For several years I taught the biblical worldview in contrast to the worldviews of mankind's great religions. I have found Abraham's discussions of Christianity and Islam to be historically and biblically accurate, and academically brilliant. And his personal story makes his intellectual presentations compelling and unforgettable.

I pray that *Understand My Muslim People* finds its way into the hands and hearts of Jesus' followers across our nation and beyond. Abraham's work will equip us with crucial insight in understanding our post-9/11 world. His insights will guide us to our Muslim neighbors with the good news of Jesus' love. And his personal encounter with the grace of God will draw us closer to the one whose Son is the way, the truth, and the life.

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