

I am Christian, there is no doubt about it. I do have to confess, though, that I learned a few things upon my recent visit to the Islamic Center of Cleveland.

On December 1st, we were invited to the Grand Mosque in Parma, where a gentleman named Ahmad Ansari sat us down and gave us a personal view about the religion of Islam. The mosque itself is a grand looking structure upon approach. One cannot help but notice the two golden domes that sit on top of the building, a lesser one in front with a larger one situated center. The structure is a brilliant white with a pleasing blue trim. It gave the temple a simple, yet grand, appearance.

We entered the mosque into a hallway with plenty of shelving, which is provided for the worshippers' shoes. No shoes on the inside. This is to keep the carpeting clean, as Muslims spend their time on the floor during worship. As I entered the sanctuary, I couldn't help but notice how spacious and grand it was, yet void of seating, icons, or any other symbols we would typically see in a traditional church. There were seven pillars in the center, which looked to be suspending the domed ceiling, from which a large, but beautiful, crystal chandelier hung. On the far wall hung a large portrait of the "Kabah" in Mecca, but this provided the only decoration on the walls, as far as I could see. The only other adornment was a plaque above the pulpit area with the Arabic scripture for "Allah". The carpeting was themed in red with the images of arched pillars in white. This was all very tastefully done. The people who come here to worship should be proud of their temple.

Mr. Ansari was extremely friendly and congenial. He had us sit as he gave some history and background to Islam, taking the time to explain some of the reasons on why the worship is done in their fashion. The one thing that struck me the most from his lecture was how the religion of

Islam is one of peace and togetherness. That is a point that I believe even most Christians miss, but enough of my opinions.

Mr. Ansari was kind enough to field questions at the end of his lecture, giving frank answers, sometimes lined with a hint of humor. If anyone had any apprehension when we entered the mosque, I am quite sure that those feelings dissipated upon the conclusion of Mr. Ansari's lessons. I, for one, could not help but feel the friendliness that was bestowed upon us during our visit.

We were then invited to remain and observe a prayer session. There were mostly children, the boys to the front and the girls to the rear, as is in the Islamic tradition. This is for the purposes of modesty, not for any male dominance issues, as outsiders may guess upon observing this tradition. Most mosques are arranged this way during prayer, but this particular mosque had a balcony where the woman would go on days when the temple was full of worshippers. The leader stood up front and began with the call to prayer, then all knelt and prostrated, their foreheads to the floor, a sign of complete submission to God. The prayer session lasted only about 10 minutes, but all moved in unison, aware of how to properly show their respect to God. It was simple, yet solemn.

The entire experience left me with a simple hope that it is truly possible for all people to get along and respect each other. My faith in Christ remains unchanged, but now I believe that since we all worship the one God, that there may just be a chance that there is peace and tolerance in the future for us all. It is amazing what one can learn if he or she is willing to reach out and visit among the faiths, learn about their teachings, and try to find common ground that can bring us all peace and tranquility, the very thing that is in short supply in this world.