

## Spiritual Warfare and Islam

Islam is constantly in the news. Open any newspaper or magazine, turn on the radio or television, and there will be stories about Islam. Many news stories report on the resurgence of Islam, the increasing attendance at mosques, the devout observance of fasting during Ramadan, a proliferation of Islamic publications in print and audiovisual media, and increasing emphasis on "Islamic dress" in many parts of the world, especially for women.

In 1997 Malise Ruthven argued in *Islam: A Very Short Introduction* that the religious revival in modern Islam is a reflection of social and technological change in the Muslim world, particularly the disruptive effects of a rapid increase in urbanization. He also predicted not a Muslim confrontation with the West, but rather a retreat into the mosque and private family space. He also believed that the culture of Muslims is likely to become increasingly passive and consumer-orientated.

The September 11, 2001, attack on New York's twin towers showed that the religious revival is more than a reflection of social and technological change. It revealed a face of Islam Westerners find difficult to understand. What motivated the hijackers? Lead hijacker Mohammad Atta left behind a five-page handwritten document subsequently called a "suicide letter," in which he exhorted his fellow murderers, "Keep a very open mind, keep a very open heart of what you are to face. You will be entering paradise. You will be entering the happiest life, everlasting life."

Atta's document shows that his radical act is not based on supposed "cultural differences," with the West, or "oppression," or "hopelessness." It shows that we are not faced with a social problem, which liberal policies and public money can solve. We must open our eyes and open our minds to understand what these people who are willing to die for their version of Islam are about. Why is that in most of the violent conflicts throughout the world – whether in Africa, the Philippines, or the Middle East - one side is fighting in the name of Islam? Samuel Huntington, an influential Harvard professor, states that "Islam has bloody borders." He also predicts a "clash of civilizations" between "Islam," and the "West."

### The Religious Imperialism of Islam

Not every Muslim is either violent or a terrorist. Many Muslims are also innocent victims of terrorism. But why is it that Islam harbors so many terrorists in its bosom? Islam in its cradle was already an example of religious imperialism. Within fifty years of the death of Mohammad, Islam had by force of arm taken over Northern Africa, placing under the state of serfdom and deprivation of rights known as *dhimmitude* all Jews and Christians who did not convert or flee. Christianity there all but disappeared.

It is barely remembered today that the famous Church Fathers, including St. Augustine and before him Tertullian, lived in Northern Africa. And what about the treatment of the Copts in Egypt over the past 1,300 years? They have been reduced from being the entire population of Egypt, to about 10% of the population. They still suffer persecution and indignities. The little liberty they do have has been given on the basis of the tacit assumption that the Church must keep strictly to its business, to preach and to serve as a center of harmless edification. In Iraq there was a Christian presence before Muhammad was born. Why do terrorists burn and bomb churches in the name of Islam?

### **The World of the Islamist**

The Muslims involved in much of the violence are the so-called Islamists. They long for a return to the "golden age" when *dar alislam* (the sphere of war) was still expanding, and Muslim communities were said to excel in all the arts of civilization. They are rabid anti-Semitic and vehemently opposed to Christianity. They are modern in their methods, which may include sophisticated techniques of organization as well as the use of guns, rockets, and bombs. They are modern in that they absorbed into a "traditional" Islamic discourse many ideas imported from outside the Islamic intellectual tradition. Many Muslims had a well-documented admiration for the dictators of the 1930s. A number of Arab leaders had worked closely with Hitler in his campaign to exterminate the Jews and continued the fight against the Jews in the Arab world even after the end of the war.

A prime example is the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin alHusseini. As the leader of Arabs in Palestine during the 1930s he called a jihad to annihilate the Jews of Palestine. In his words: "I declare a holy war, my Moslem brothers! Murder the Jews! Murder them all!" He incited anti-Jewish riots that caused the death of hundreds of Jewish settlers, including the Hebron Riot of 1929, in which the entire Jewish population of Hebron was massacred. He was an early supporter of Hitler. When he was in Berlin, he gave a speech in which he called the Jews "the most fierce enemies of the Muslims" and an "ever corruptive element" in the world.

The changing of times has not changed this spirit of hatred. Abroad Bahar, one of the main spokesmen of the political wing of Hamas said, "If Muslims all over the world unite, they can implement the empire of Islam. The Islamic empire. .. We would have a central leadership, a central army, and a central policy." Jews and Christians would be welcome to live as subject peoples (dhimmis) in this Islamic republic as long as they do nothing to oppose Islamic domination." He also said, "We look forward to a day when Israel will cease to exist."

The prominent Saudi government cleric Sheikh Saad al-Buraik harangued an audience at a Riyadh mosque against Americans. He proclaimed on April 11, 2002, that America "is the root of all evils and wickedness of Earth ... Oh Muslim Ummah, don't take the Jews and Christians as allies ... Muslim Brothers in Palestine, do not have mercy, neither compassion on the Jews, their blood, their money, their flesh ... Why don't you wage jihad? Why don't you pillage them?"

## **Loss of Religious Liberty**

The loss of religious liberty in the world of Islam is a burning issue for Christianity and Christian missions. Either all propaganda of a "foreign" religion is forbidden or it is made ineffective by the rule that one is only allowed to remain what one is or to become a Muslim.

For example, Saudi-Arabia, an ally of the United States in the war against terrorism, is a prime violator of religious freedom. It only tolerates Wahhabism, its own fiery brand of Islam. U.S. diplomats have complained to Congress that they are forced to hold church services on Sundays like secret conspirators, in specially guarded rooms in the U.S. embassy in Riyadh, or face arrest by the Wahhabi religious police.

How do we account for the resurgence of Islam? Pundits point to high unemployment among youth, poverty, and the lack of democracy in Islamic nations. Why are they so difficult to reach with the Gospel? The Dutch missiologist Dr. H. Kraemer points out that Islam has a grip on its adherents greater than any other religion has. He says that everyone who knows the Muslim world by personal experience will bear witness to the truly remarkable fact that a Muslim who is fervid and convinced, or a lukewarm believer, or even a secret disbeliever and agnostic, as a rule becomes beside himself with anger if a man turns Christian or changes his religious allegiance. And he notes that all over the world we know the curious and disquieting phenomenon that the average Muslim is ready to die for the sake of Islam, or to kill a man whom he considers to be a defiler of Islam. He concludes that from this superiority-feeling and from this fantastic self-consciousness of Islam is born that stubborn refusal to open the mind towards another spiritual world.

## **The Doctrines of Islam**

Islam cannot be regarded merely as an incomplete but honorable response to God. Of all the major religions of the world, only Islam arose after God's full revelation of Himself to man in His incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ, aware of Christianity yet contradicting it. It plainly contradicts the very foundations of the Christian faith. Islam acknowledges Jesus as a prophet, but just the same it says that Mohammad is far superior to Jesus. It denies the doctrine of the Trinity. When a Christian speaks of the Trinity, the Muslim immediately replies, "You have committed the sin of SHIRK. You have given God an associate. You have placed another beside Allah."

In Islam there is not room for a personal relationship with God. Allah is the wholly other and not our Father. One of Islam's favorite expression about God, which testifies to an intense religious feeling is, "He whom everyone needs and who does

not stand in need of anybody or anything." In Islam man is entirely absorbed in the greatness and majesty of God and vanishes away. There is no real place in the relation of God and man. Kraemer remarked, "Fellowship does not exist between God and man. God is too exalted for that, and the relation of Father-child between God and man is not primarily abhorrent to the Moslem because of the association of parenthood and sexual life, but because it suggests a sacrilegious lack of reverence towards the Divine."

My argument, therefore, is that notwithstanding its strong religious elements and devotion, Islam is the religion of the natural man in rebellion to the God Who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. In Pascal's short reflections on Islam in his *Pensees* he lays his finger on the sore spot. He says, "Mohammad chose the way of human success, Jesus Christ that of human defeat."

### **Spiritual Warfare**

But the key to the struggle with Islam is found in the invisible world. In the drama of world history or also called history of redemption, there are two powers engaged in a life and death struggle.

We must recognize the reality of the spiritual realm, including Satan and demonic powers. The conflict with Satan and his powers is at the very center of Christ's ministry. According to 1 John 3: 8b, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." A spiritual battle is being waged between the kingdom of God and the god of this age, and demonic presence and activities are part of the non-Christian religions and ideologies.

In *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith & Mission*, Harold Netland points out: "Too often Western Christians have adopted a functional naturalism that, while theoretically acknowledging the supernatural dimension, in practice ignores it." He also observed, "A genuinely biblical perspective on other religions should recognize that much religious activity and belief is influenced by the Adversary, Satan." In other words, we overestimate the political and social solutions in the struggle against Islamism but underestimate the spiritual dimension.

The greatest missionary of all times, the apostle Paul, declared, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12) The apostle Paul reminded his readers that the pagan sacrifices in Corinthian religion, which might have seemed quite innocent, were in fact offered to demons (I Corinthians 10:20). Satan has one goal - to deprive man of salvation, of eternal happiness - and one of the ways to achieve that goal is through

the propagation of false religions, the primary victims of which are its own adherents. Wherever the Gospel is preached, Satan opposes it.

### **Satan and His Mission**

Satan's name means "adversary," since he is the adversary of man's salvation. He is also called "disrupter" or "destroyer of peace," "the tempter," "the god and prince of this world," the "chief of demons," "a murderer from the beginning," "a lion looking for someone to devour." He is also called the "father of lies." The lie is the deliberate twisting of truth. Demons enjoy perverting truth. Why? Because their adversary is Christ is the King of truth (John 18: 37). Therefore, we see the powers of the father of lies do their utmost to destroy the truth, to undermine the Gospel. Scripture speaks of those who are not yet saved as "spiritually blind" and under the power of the "god of this age" (II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 4:17-18).

Certainly Satan uses false teaching and deception to blind followers of other religions. Satan blinds so that people cannot see God's saving truth. The apostle Paul saw this happen repeatedly. Wherever he went in the service of Christ and His gospel, he was confronted time and time again with the dark forces of evil. When Paul preached the Gospel in Cyprus, he was confronted by Elymas, a sorcerer. Paul told him, "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13: 6-11)

No wonder that Paul in his letters repeatedly testifies that he sees Satan busy to frustrate his work on behalf of Christ in many different ways. Paul shows that there is an intelligent power called Satan at work behind the scene who tries to lead as many people to perdition as possible. Satan has standard methods with which he operates and forces that he exploits to try to bring about the loss of as many souls as possible. He always tries to bring discord and division on earth. Islam is used by Satan to oppose the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and stir up trouble for the Church.

### **Satan: the Defeated Foe**

When we survey the powerful forces opposing the Gospel, the picture looks grim. We can become so impressed by the power of Islam and the forces of the prince of darkness at work in the world, that we are tempted to minimize the victory of Christ and become defeatists. But we dare not give up hope. Jesus is the conqueror over evil. He faced every combination of wickedness on the cross, and He overcame. The cross spelled the defeat of evil in God's world.

Michael Green noted that it is a shallow theology which dismisses Satan as unreal. The great anti-God is very much in business still. But he is still a defeated foe. He met his match in Christ on Calvary. Green is right. The power and success of the

Evil one must be seen in the light of the victory of Jesus Christ. In this world, full of lies and temptations, in this world divided by the work of Satan, the Lord said, "you will have trouble," But He also said, "But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Christ's victory is the guarantee of our victory.

The power of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is able to deliver Muslims from the grip of Islam. We still have a wonderful opportunity to bring the Gospel of the meek Savior to the world of Islam. And reports from the world of Islam tell about conversions. There are Muslims who have learned to see that the only true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is totally different from Allah. The born again Muslims no longer recognize Mohammad as supreme, but Jesus Christ as their Lord. Although the foes are fierce, the Gospel must be proclaimed to the end of the earth and to the end of time. There is no other remedy for a sin-sick world.

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