

## **Exploring Islam in the light of Scripture (conclusion)**

Why should Christians take the Gospel to the world of Islam? For centuries, missionaries experienced it as a difficult mission field; they felt they were ploughing on rocks. And it is not much different today. Muslims are still hard to reach with the Gospel. They feel superior to Christians. They believe they don't need the Gospel. They say, "We already worship God. We have a holy book which corrects the Bible. We have a long history. Islam is our life. We don't privatize our religion. Our culture and our religion are one." Islamist Abdul A'la Mawdudi, one of the chief architects of contemporary Islamic resurgence, wrote that if we profess belief in Islam, "we must jealously guard and uphold the prestige of Islam. Our sole guide for our conduct must be the interests of Muslims at large and the service of Islam in the face of which all our personal considerations must sink low."

Jihadists (holy war advocates) are constantly in the news. Who can forget the Danish cartoons of Muhammad which resulted in riots? And recently churches were torched, the pope burned in effigy and Christians attacked because his Regensburg (Germany) lecture offended the sensibilities of Muslims. But why the double standards? Why do Islamists use the freedoms in the West to freely spread their message while denying the same opportunity to Christians in Islamic nations? While mosques multiply in Europe and North America, Bibles are confiscated at the border of many Muslim countries where worship and witness by Christians (infidels) is prohibited.

If mission work among Muslims is so difficult, why do it? As I mentioned in previous articles, Allah is not the same god as the God of the Bible. Allah is only majesty, never Emanuel, God with us. Islam is not a religion of redemption. There is no room for the doctrine of sin, for the Cross and the Resurrection. Jesus is mentioned, but only as the prophet who prepares for the last prophet, Muhammad. The doctrines of Islam are very distant from Christianity.

### **Missions to Muslims**

Ever since Islam came on the scene, missionaries obeyed the Great Commission amid Muslims. Despite the minimal fruit produced, they were still driven to bring the Gospel. They didn't make an essential distinction between the missionary mandate as it relates to Islam on the one hand and non-Christian religions on the other. The Great Commission is the greatest command for the church. We can show no more love for God and our neighbour than to bring the wonderful Gospel of eternal salvation to our neighbour, and thereby seek to praise our Triune God. I am convinced that more than ever, missions to Muslims is an urgent task of the Church now and in the future. A church unwilling to reach outside of its walls for the lost is a disobedient church. A faithful mission church becomes strengthened in faith, hope, and love. An inward looking church is no longer the salt and light in the community. The more mission-

minded a church becomes, the less opportunity the devil has to sow discord and evil.

Although I have written about Islam and its beliefs and practices, in this concluding article the focus is on the Muslim as a person. Any abstract discussion of Islam carries the danger of doing injustice to the living person, because in practice we never deal with 'Islam,' but always with a Muslim and *his* or *her* Islam.

Muslims are no longer the "people out there in the Middle East." Some may live in your neighbourhood. Perhaps you rub shoulders in the business world with Muslims. To understand them, we need to learn about the basic tenets and practices of the followers of Islam. There are plenty of resources available to help for this purpose. We should never misrepresent the beliefs of Muslims. We must listen to them before we speak. "He who answers before listening - that is his folly and shame," says Prov. 18:13. Why is it important to listen? It is not enough to know what a person's religion teaches. It is also necessary to find out how he or she experiences it. When we witness to Muslims, we will have to lean over toward them as far as possible in order to bring them into as close contact as possible with the heart of the Gospel. We must never stand *above* but always *next* to them.

The starting point in missions still is in being humble, in developing relationships. Ex-Muslim, Dr. Mark Gabriel suggests the best method for Muslim evangelism is building relationships one-on-one. He says that we should give some thought to those with whom we speak. "Friendships should be man to man, woman to woman, young to young, old to old." Furthermore, our faith in the absolute truth of God's revelation in Scripture is foundational. The first Christians were overwhelmed by the power of the truth of the Gospel. The Bible has authority of its own. It is the Word of the living God. If His revelation is denied or its truth relativized, we can't be persuasive proclaimers of the Gospel. We approach Muslims, or anyone else for that matter, with the assurance of faith - regardless of science, culture, and circumstances - that the Bible is God's sure Word. Through that Word we know that our Redeemer lives, and is the anchor of our sure hope. Our Christian Renewal readers may say, I believe the Bible from cover to cover. But my question is, "Are you a student of Scripture?" Scripture knowledge is essential in any outreach ministry.

## **Word and Deed**

The Gospel is at the heart of missions, but its proclamation is commended by the deed, including martyrdom. Word and deed are not identical, but they cannot be separated. The deed may never be divorced from the Word, since it is only through the Word that the deed can be understood in its true significance (Eph. 3:18,19 cf.). We shortchange a person when we only want to save "his soul" but neglect to look after his physical needs. But we also shortchange him when we look after his physical needs and forget about his spiritual condition. What shall it profit a man if he gain the world but lose his soul? We are commanded, not only to love God, but also our neighbour and to accept responsibility for him. We cannot love at a distance. A Muslim is someone with a great need, since he or she doesn't know the Saviour. There is still a heaven to be gained and

a hell to be shunned. Therefore, a Muslim without Christ is lost. Real love is not cheap. It is costly. Christ did not die for the nice and respectable people, He died for us while we were still sinners. Are we spiritually ready for evangelism among Muslims? Do we live the Gospel?

## **The Gospel**

Times changed, the Gospel has not. The Gospel is God speaking and dealing with people. The Gospel is not a human religion, what people think and say about God. The Gospel is about what Jesus taught, did, suffered, His death, resurrection, ascension and return. We don't offer our own opinion. We proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. The resurrection of Christ creates a new age and promises the "restoration of all things." Jesus is Lord of all of life. The Gospel permeates the whole of human life. It strives to impress the seal of the will of God upon everything. There is no division between secular and sacred. In other words, Islam is not the only faith that is holistic.

We call upon people everywhere to be reconciled to God. The apostle Paul grasped the universal thrust of this message of reconciliation, and that Christians would have to be "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20). He was not ashamed of the Gospel as "it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). We must be clear about the heart of the Gospel, which is the uniqueness and finality of Christ. Rev. Bassam Madany, retired radio-pastor of the Back to God Hour, rightly said, "If consistent Christians appear to be so inflexible in their attachment to their heritage, this is not due to ethnic pride or arrogance, but simply to the great affirmations of the Scriptures regarding the uniqueness, finality and superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ." There have been examples of courageous witnesses for the Gospel. There was probably no such apologia over against Islam that succeeded more fully than the treatise *Concerning the Only Way for the Salvation of Men*, written by George Scholarius. As Gennadius II, he was the first patriarch of Constantinople after its conquest by the Turks in 1453, and he wrote his confession in response to the request of Sultan Muhammad II for a summary of Christian beliefs. He presented a compassionate and yet uncompromising exposition of the Christian doctrine of salvation, "without which it is impossible for man to reach his goal." He pointed out that at the heart of this doctrine was Trinitarian monotheism. Men lost the way of salvation when they departed from faith in the one true God. Salvation came from "the one and only God in a Trinity of Persons," as Gennadius II said in the conclusion of his confession.

## **Conclusion**

Pray for your Muslim neighbours. Ask God to break down the stranglehold their faith exercises. Pray for missionaries to work among the large Muslim populations in North American cities. The missionaries are few, while the field is large. Pray for a breakthrough in reaching out to Muslims worldwide, specifically in Islamic countries, breaking the anti-Christian spirit of government leaders who make laws which prohibit Christian mission activity. The temptation is to give up on prayer. I read about a

missionary who had for twenty years prayed daily for the conversion of an influential and gifted Muslim. One day the moment he had been waiting for came by way of an invitation to visit this Muslim leader. When the latter turned to Christ, the whole surrounding area followed his lead. "For twenty years I have been waiting for this moment," the missionary testified . Thank God for His faithfulness.

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