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WITNESSING TO MUSLIMS PART ONE

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Because of the long history between Christians and Muslims, the Christian witness is viewed with great animosity by the Muslim. The roots of this tragedy go back to the Emperor Constantine, who after allegedly having had a dream of the cross (313), wed the sword to the cross. One of his successors, the Christian Emperor Heraclius (reigned 610-641) was a contemporary of Muhammad (reigned 622-632). "Holy War" (*Jihad*). Following Muhammad's death (632), Muslim armies swept the Christian Byzantines out of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt (636). Christians and Muslims have been at war with one another ever since.

Leaving aside the question of Muslim atrocities against Christians of both the East and the West, let me review the grievances of Muslims against the West, perceived as Christian. The Crusades (around 1050-1291) are painfully and permanently inscribed in Muslim memories. The Colonial Period (around 1450-1970), during which Western nations occupied about ninety percent of the Muslim world, has left the Muslim psyche with a deep sense of shame and humiliation that needs to be avenged. But above all else, the loss of Jerusalem to the Jews in 1967, after more than thirteen hundred years of possession, rankles daily in Muslim minds. This, of course, is blamed on the "Christian" West because of the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 — perceived as the greatest sin ever committed against humanity.

We need to remember, when seeking to witness to Muslims, that we are working in an atmosphere poisoned by the memories of these and more recent (e.g., the U.S.'s two invasions of Lebanon) Muslim casualties. It is only by the grace of God that we have as much opportunity as we do to work with Muslims. If we exhibit any form of cultural superiority, religious triumphalism, or selective amnesia concerning the sins of the West, perceived as Christian, we only make matters worse. More to the point, the denigration of Islam as a religion or slurs against its founder, Muhammad, will not be tolerated. Working with Muslims calls for an especially sensitive approach. Thus, although I will address apologetic issues later in this series, it is first of all important for Christians to know something about *how* to approach Muslims.

In orthodox Islam, God has supposedly not spoken to a single human being since the year Muhammad died (632). For this reason, giving your own testimony of how you became a Christian — of how God revealed Himself *to you* — takes Muslims by surprise. This is a thoroughly biblical approach (1 John 1:3). And there is no argument against a testimony.

Muslims are usually genuinely seeking to please God (as they understand him). They can be complimented, for example, on their practices of confessing God, praying five times daily, giving to the poor, keeping a month-long fast, perceiving themselves as pilgrims, and even striving (*jihada*) on the "way of God." Similar points of contact can be found in their belief system concerning God, prophets, holy books, angels and demons, the decree of God, and the day of judgment. Of course, on each subject there are points of variance between Islamic and Christian doctrine, but the point is to find a common starting place.

One will find that each subject can always be related to the teaching of the Lord Jesus and the apostles and other Scriptures. The Qur'an bears surprising witness to Jesus. It affirms His virgin birth, His ability to heal and raise the dead, that He is both a word from God and a spirit from God, that He is the Messiah,

an all-righteous one (sinless), among those nearest to God, that He is alive in heaven now and will return to judge the earth (Qur'an 3:45, 49; 4:158; 82:22). Muslims often are convinced that Christ is greater than Muhammad from just reading the Qur'an. These above points are excellent starting places in leading Muslims to *biblical* truth about Jesus.

Indeed, in our effort to bring Muslims to study the Bible, we have an unexpected ally in Muhammad's book, the Qur'an. In a careful reading of Qur'anic references (3:84; 5:51, 71; 6:34; 10:37, 64, 94; 46:12), we find that Muhammad affirmed his belief in what was revealed to Moses and Jesus. He taught that God confirms and guards all previous scripture, that Christians are to stand fast on their own books of the Law and the Gospel, and that none could change the Word of God. Finally, the Muslim is told that if he has doubts he should ask the Jews and Christians, who were reading the Holy Books before he was.

If and when a Muslim begins to study Scripture, he (or she) is going to be under suspicion by his family and friends. He will need strong support and encouragement from a Christian friend. This support is even more critical at the time of conversion, baptism, and post-baptismal trauma. One must be ready to die with his or her disciple (John 15:13).

Even before all of the above begins, the Christian worker would do well to find a way to minister to human need in the environment of the disciple. This could take the form of personal help, medical service, teaching, relief in times of disaster, and development programs of any kind to improve the quality of life (Matt. 25:31-46).

Finally, we must realize that this work is not simply an intellectual exercise; it involves the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. In utter dependence on Him, we receive the insights and ideas that grip the mind and heart of our Muslim friend. And similarly, the Holy Spirit works in our friend to give understanding, insight, and receptivity to the good news of Jesus Christ. This trust in the work of the Holy Spirit is something to be cultivated in prayer and faith by the Christian worker.

— Don McCurry