

Christianity Today 50th Anniversary
(August 7, 2006)

1. There is ample evidence today that God is drawing Muslims to himself as never before. In West Africa, a former student of Columbia International University says evangelism among one particular people group (1992-2003) has resulted in thirty-five assemblies of former Muslims. In Central Asia, another CIU alumnus, estimates there are 5-6000 recent MBBs in each of the three most responsive countries. In Bangladesh, Muslims are embracing Christ--if not by the hundreds of thousands--at least by the tens of thousands. As for Iran, it is hard to put a figure on actual converts, but eye-witness accounts speak of thousands. For the last quarter of a century God has been at work among Iranians all over the world.

2. Reasons for Muslim receptivity:

- Politics: Despite the euphoria in 1979 when the Ayatollah Khomeini took over from the Shah, Iranians quickly became disillusioned by the cruelty and harshness of the new Islamist regime. When General Zia ul-Haq in Pakistan imposed the rigid rules of Islamic law in the late 1970s, applications for Bible correspondence courses and the sale of Christian literature increased dramatically.
- Suffering: In most cases where Muslims are turning to Christ it has had something to do with suffering. Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) suffered unspeakable cruelty at the hands of fellow Muslims in 1971. Kurds experienced genocide under Sadaam Hussein and are now more open to the Gospel. A similar case can be made for increased receptivity to the Gospel in Algeria where horrendous atrocities were carried out in the name of Islam.
- Supernatural means: In certain areas where folk Islam is strong, Muslims convert because of their desire for *baraka* (blessing) and need for power over evil spirits. They usually point to at least one dream, but when facing persecution for their testimony, some attest to being strengthened by successive dreams of Jesus.
- Sovereign work of God: Christian workers believe prayer is the answer to Muslim receptivity and urge their supporters to pray diligently for responsive hearts.
- Theological reasons: Former Muslims may answer that it was the unconditional love and forgiveness of God that touched their hearts. Others, in contrast to what they see in Muhammad, say it was the moral beauty of Christ, as well as his power to intercede, deliver and save from sin.
- Contextualization: In some contexts, like Bangladesh, the *Camel Method* (building on the Qur'anic Jesus) has been successful, but not always in other places. What is clear is that Christianity has a far better chance of taking root in Muslim hearts if people understand they can embrace Christ without abandoning their culture.

3. In light of the current Islamist penchant for violence all over the world, there are indications that some Christians are beginning to hate Muslims. “Unveiling the Truth about Islam” (*Christianity Today*, June, 2006) found that American evangelical attitudes toward Muslims since September 11, 2001, have hardened: “Apparently, a lot of us [Christians] simply dislike Muslims (usually without knowing any).” If Satan can get Christians to hate Muslims, he will succeed in hindering their growing receptivity to the Gospel. The greatest challenge in the 21st century, therefore, is not Muslim resistance but Christian failure to reach out to Muslims with love and understanding.

4. The only solution to this challenge is to promote love and understanding of Muslims in the church, the public sphere and the academy. Diligent research must be carried out for each Muslim people group and Christians must be equipped. One hundred years ago, Samuel Zwemer, the greatest missionary the United States has ever sent to the Muslim world had this to say:

If the Churches of Christendom are to reach the Moslem world with the Gospel, they must know of it and know it. The Cairo Conference (1906) marked a new era in the attitude of Christian missions toward the subject. This Conference, through its reports and the other missionary literature resulting from it, made clear the unity, the opportunity, and the importunity of the task of evangelizing Moslems everywhere. Missionary leaders felt that the Church was called to a deeper study of the problem, as well as to a more thorough preparation of its missionaries and a bolder faith in God, in order to solve it. To this end there is need for a common platform, a common forum of thought; a common organ for investigation and study (*The Moslem World* Vol. 1, January, 1911).

Zwemer went on to call for “a deeper study of the problem [Islam], as well as a more thorough preparation of its missionaries and a bolder faith in God,” in order to understand Muslims. He desired to interpret Islam as a world-wide religion in all its varied aspects and its deep needs, ethical and spiritual to Christians. He wanted to be of practical help to all who toil for this end, and to “awaken sympathy, love and prayer on behalf of the Islamic world until its bonds are burst, its wounds are healed, its sorrows removed and its desires satisfied in Jesus Christ.” Can we do less?

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