

Proclaiming the Christian Gospel to the Muslims

Oladotun Paul Kolawole

Abstract

Over the years, there have been a great tension between Christians and Muslims. The Christians believe in one God who is triune but the Islamic doctrine of God is Unitarian in nature. Of a truth, the presentation of Messiah in the Quran is absolutely different from the Biblical messiah. This is because according to the Quran, Christ was not crucified since man's sin consists mainly in the ignorance of the divine will. Islam thus emphasize individual sin rather than to sin in the singular (as stated in the Genesis account of the Bible). This implies that Islam believes there is no original or inherited sin. The disparity between these two faiths is blatant; thus, the question that faces a Christian who is mission-minded is; how am I going to relate the gospel with a people who have been formed by a thoroughly anti-Christian theology? What approach is to be used? What other means can be employed in engaging a Muslim in view of a positive response as influenced by the Holy Spirit. In proclaiming the Gospel to the Muslims, Christians have a lot of roles to play; how will they hear if there is no one to speak? How will they understand if there is no one to explain? Above all, Christian Muslims belong to God not Christians; never the less, it is a privilege for Christians. The concern of Christians should be faithfulness to the Gospel message; Jesus is Lord; including the willingness to lovingly and patiently witness to Muslims today.

Keywords: Bible, Christian, God, Gospel, Muslim, Quran.

Introduction

The Christian Church is established on the foundation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Upon Christ ascension, he gave the gospel mandate – “The Great Commission” to all Christians.³⁸³ This mission is to be carried out in a peaceful manner and to be done with all sincerity, dedication and commitment. The imperative nature of the mandate makes it a must for all Christians. This is the reason, for which Christ died; to save the lost! It is disheartening that many Christians are no longer able to defend the uniqueness of Christianity.

Christianity has had little impact on Islam compared with the converts on those from other religion. Many Christians do not want to offend their neighbours who have come from other religions by affirming the uniqueness of the Christian faith. Also, the 21st century environment is not helping in the sense that, the government promotes multiculturalism that erases religious differences and supplants it with vapid spirituality. While many Christians are not willing to say explicitly that they no longer receive the Bible as the only word of God, they clearly exhibit lack of authority when they are unwilling to stand for the great theme of Biblical revelation.

The Gospel Concept

The concept of Gospel in Islam (referred to as ‘*injeel*’) is very much different from that of Christianity. This is because Gospel in Christianity points to the incarnate Son of God; the Good News about the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ – which can also be referred to as the ‘Gospel of God.’³⁸⁴ To the

³⁸³ Kolawole O. Paul, “The Great Commission Mandate of the Church in Matthew 28:18-20”, *Holiness and Discipleship; Word and World*, Vol. 40 [4] Fall. St. Paul, Minnesota: Luther North-western Theological Seminary, (2020), 419-426.

³⁸⁴ Kolawole Oladotun Paul, *The Reality of God’s Love for Mankind: A Sharp Lens on the Book of Genesis* (Mauritius: Blessed Hope Publishing Company, 2019), 45.

Muslims, the Christian Gospel is an aberration and abrogation of the person of God – in fact, it is blasphemy! This is because Allah is described as utterly removed from creation, by His holiness, but paradoxically, he does not seem to be overly concerned by ungodliness on judgment; rather, Allah demands only that good outweighs the bad on the scale.

The message of clarifying the gospel is a long and arduous task.³⁸⁵ The Christian Gospel reveals that God loves sinners but detests sin that is why He sent his only begotten Son as a ransom. “For God so love the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life” – John 3:16. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the son of God that you may know that you have eternal life and that you may believe on the name of the son of God” -1 John 5:13. “But God commends His love towards us...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” – Rom 5:8.

On a contrary, Allah hates sinners (*Surah* 2:190). “If you do love Allah and follow me, Allah will love you and forgive your sins; for Allah his oft-forgiving and most-merciful” – *Surah* 3:31. “And spend of your substance in the course of Allah and make not your own hands contributes to destruction; but do good, for Allah loves those who do good” – *Surah* 2:195. “Obey Allah and his messenger; but if they turn back, Allah loves not those who object faith” – *Surah* 3:32.

The two faiths differently present and explain the ‘Gospel’, which has a great bearing on the personality of God. The significance difference between Christians and Muslims is not

³⁸⁵ Mark W. Thomsen, “Christian Mission within the Muslim World” *Word and World*, Volume. XVI, Number 2, Spring (1992), 196.

history but theology.³⁸⁶ The starting point of the Christian Gospel is the unconditional love of God – the finished work of Christ.³⁸⁷ But in Islam, the love of Allah is conditioned by the love of man – salvation as that which is earned through good works. Love in Islamic concept of salvation is a desire for playback on the part of Allah. This is why the emphasis on God’s love should be made known to Muslims; God loved us first!

The Muslim Mindset

Muslims are historically conscious and aware of their great past.³⁸⁸ In fact, they consider their present stature as transitory; an unfortunate phase that will give way to a revival of their past glories such that Islam will triumph all over the globe. Here, this article explores the worldview of Muslims with reference to some elements of the Islamic environment. Muslim believes the attainment of eternal bliss in the paradise of Allah depends solely on the confession of the oneness of Allah and the apostleship of Muhammad, coupled with a life of obedience to the demands of the Sharia Law.

Muslims believe Christians are not privy to the Quran; meanwhile, keen familiarity with the Quran will enhance an effective Christian mission. Muslims consider themselves as the custodian of God’s final and complete revelation. Other sacred writings are viewed as abrogated and other religions inferior, including Christianity. Muslims are also taught to believe that they absolutely gain nothing by becoming Christians; crowned with victimization and capital

³⁸⁶ Jacob Peter Oluwashola and Kolawole Oladotun Paul, “Is the Bible the Word of God? A Theo-Apologetical Rethink”, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, volume 101, no 4, 2020.

³⁸⁷ Kolawole Oladotun Paul, “God’s Image in Man; A Biblical Perspective”. *American Journal of Biblical Theology: Illuminating God’s Word*, Volume 20 (14). April. (ed). John W.C. The Journal of Biblical Theology; Illuminating God’s Word, Vol. 2:3, July – September, 2019.

³⁸⁸ Bassam Michael Madany, *The Bible and Islam: Sharing God’s Word with Muslims* (Bukuru: ACTS, 2013), 126.

punishment of death sentence, especially in Muslim countries. In view of this, Muslims engage in a global effort to spread their faith, calling people to Islamize (*Dawah*); sometimes in a peaceful manner or through *Jihad* (Holy war) when opposition is encountered. This implies that while conducting Christian missions, the mindset of an average Muslim is to engage a blunt counter-offensive endeavor.

The radicalism and advocacy of Muslims to absolutely shoulder *Jihad* as a straight-ticket for *Aljannah* forms the Islamic worldview. This makes the Muslim view of the world more complicated.³⁸⁹ The world according to Islam is categorized into two; *Daru'l Islam* (House of Peace) and *Daru'l Harb* (House of war).³⁹⁰ The Muslim interface with the western world has formed another hardened structure, having to do with seeing Christianity as western. Therefore, the prevailing secularization in the west is often used by Muslims to present Islam as a solution to the chaotic moral and spiritual condition.

Cautions in Witnessing to Muslims

A witnessing Christian must carefully follow the biblical history. With great difficulty encountered in conversing with Muslims, on the narrow-shared accounts of the Bible and Quran; Christians should avoid reducing the Good News to a bare minimum bland theism in order to make the Christian Gospel logical, presentable and acceptable. Christians must bear in mind the biblical doctrine of the radical nature of sin. This is because it is only after a Muslim has acknowledged the necessity of divine redemption due to the radical nature of sin that he is ready to consider the claims of Jesus Christ, the Savior.

³⁸⁹ Guru Nanak born in Talwandi, a village in Punjab in 1469 challenged the fanaticism and inheritance of the Muslims; this brought about Sikhism. Charlse Waddy, *The Muslim Mind* (London: Longman, 1976), 151.

³⁹⁰ White L. Vibert, *The Nation Islam: A Historical and Personal Testimony by a Black Muslim* (Orlands: University of Florida Press, 2001), 34.

Emphasis should be made on the fact that the Christian Gospel is not based on human logic, but on a divine action that took place in real history. The truth that the biblical doctrine of man and salvation has not been coined out of man's independent theologizing should be expressed. In view of this, Christians witnessing to Muslims must speak as one who has already tasted the salvation of the Lord. The primary concern should be the faithful proclamation of the word of God in the language of the people and in harmony with the historic Christian faith. "...Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17). Preaching this whole counsel of God will then disintegrate the perceived disposition that the Gospel lack concern for the culture of the non-western people.

In approaching Muslims, Christians must be careful and cautious because Islam is encompassed with laws here and there; thus, defy can be regarded as an insult.

"Just like several Christians, Henderson (Shane and Cheryl) wondered why it was difficult to form a relationship with their Muslim neighbor. Askars settled in their new home next door to the Henderson, soon Henderson appeared at Askars door to offer a loaf of freshly baked bread. Askar politely rejected the kind gestures...after a few other self-conscious and clumsy approaches, Shame Henderson gave up. Then one day Mr. Askar noticed that Sham was struggling to carry arm loads of groceries from the car, he then came over to help; Shane jumped on the gesture, extending the only hand he had free – the left to Mr. Askar. Instead of shaking it, Mr. Askar

stared at it a moment and then excused himself.”³⁹¹

Many well-intentioned Christians just like the Henderson stumble into gregarious insults against their Muslim acquaintances. This is a result of ignorance of lesser-known prescriptions of Islam. The Quran contained teachings that Muhammad believed he has received directly from Allah. But some of the more cultural rules are actually in the *Hadith* (the sayings of the prophet) and *Sunnah* (the examples of the prophet). Shane and Cheryl Henderson would have been embarrassed to learn that the Hadith prohibits that eating land baked goods and shaking with left-hand is insulting.

A critical study of the *Hadith* and *Sunnah* reveals that every action of Muslims, from how they approach people in discourse to how they brush their teeth has precedents. When in doubt, to avoid offenses, Christians should allow Muslims to act first. For instance, referring to a Muslim as ‘my brother’ like many Nigerian Christians would say could be regarded as insult, bringing an aggressive reaction. This is because the term brotherhood assumed theological agreement in Muslim circles. To avoid mixed-feeling, it is appropriate to approach a Muslim with ‘my friend’. This is preferable since it does not assume any agreement of philosophy or belief.

“A minister preached on a crusade ground in a mission field. He repeatedly spoke of accepting Jesus in your heart. When he inquire why so few people grasp the invitation; he learned that many of his listeners assumed that the invitation was to agree to surgery”³⁹²

The Christian message to the Muslim must be presented in a clear manner. Praying with Muslims after discussion or in

³⁹¹ Ergun M. Caner and Emir F. Caner, *Unveiling Islam* (Nassarawa: Evangel Publishers, 2002), 96.

³⁹² Caner and Caner, *Unveiling Islam*, 103.

whatsoever instance should not be sermonic; rather, short and simple. The term 'Lord' can be used for God. Many Christians could not witness effectively not because they do not have the passion or the leading to do so, but the usage of Church terms breaks the message flow. Examples of such words are: born again, atonement, saved and lost, among others. Christians use these words with the plain assumption that Muslims should comprehend the meanings in Christian context; meanwhile, these words are foreign vocabularies to Muslims. Speaking in clear language without using language that assumes previous knowledge will help greatly in the Gospel.

Christians should not rush Gospel presentation within minutes of introduction (especially tentmakers who have several opportunities of meeting again) due to eagerness. Islamic culture forbids casual conversation with the opposite sex. A Christian man who speaks to the Muslim woman without her husband being present insults the husband. Therefore, Christians should be gender relation conscious; the gospel is not an affront.

Means to Reach-out to Muslims

The start-point of witnessing to Muslims should be the location of every Christian.³⁹³ It is of great significance that Christians witness to Muslims anywhere and everywhere they reside. Witnessing to Muslims in their homeland might sound like a mission impossible, considering the strict adherence to the Sharia Law of Apostasy. This implies that Christian mission to Muslims who are out of *Daru'l Salam* is more easy. With the testimony of contemporary Christian missionaries like Rev'd Bassam Madany who is privileged to bring the Good News of Christ to the Arabic world for 36 years, one would find

³⁹³ Kolawole, "The Great Commission Mandate of the Church in Matthew 28:18-20", 426

solace in the fact that God is still building individuals who will proclaim the whole counsel of the Gospel no matter what.

The old distinction between domestic and foreign mission is outdated. Millions of Muslims are now living in the West; also, a great numbers of Christians from America, Europe and Africa are now working in several parts of the Muslim world. Thus, there are ample opportunities for Christian missionary activities. Madany, an experienced missionary to the Muslims said; “I did not have the privilege to baptize converts or organize national Church, I have no doubt that many converts persists in their personal testimony. Here, Madany concluded that the owner of Christian missions is God; it is just a privilege that Christians are partakers of this mandate.³⁹⁴

What people see as Muslim wickedness is an expression of religious fervor. Muslims are not only ready to kill; they are also ready to die foe Islam. Effective Christian witness entails love. Christians must love Muslims but hate the demonic Islamic system by which they are bound. The love that does not help to reach out to those hurting is not God’s love (Matt 5:44). Proclaiming the Gospel to Muslims in the northern part of Nigeria looks like signing up for war. This inherent fear should not hinder Christians from spreading the good news. Unlike the northern part, reaching out to southern Muslims in Nigeria is somewhat down-to-earth; in the sense that southern Muslims view Christians as their brothers. In fact, there are several families with Muslim and Christians, even to the length of co-habiting without any problem. While Christians should beware of syncretism (an opinion that all religions are means to the same God), it is an established advantage with which the gospel can be proclaimed without noise, via the families and neighborhood. Either in the north or in the south, the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ should not be limited to carrying a bell, sharing tracts along with other Christians. Although plausible, this expression

³⁹⁴ Madany, *The Bible and Islam: Sharing God’s Word with Muslims*, 132.

must be implicitly and explicitly accompanied with true Christ-like living. Thus, many Muslims can get a glimpse of what it means to be in an intimate relationship with God through His son, Jesus Christ.

Christians must repent of wishing Muslims ill. Many Nigerian northern Christians are not willing to reach out to Muslims; in fact, they wish Muslims die and go to hell because of the unbearable abrupt and unjust hostility perpetuated (killing of Christians, burning of Christian properties, and Churches among others). Unfortunately, Christians who fall in this perspective can be termed as more dangerous. The proclamation of the Christian Gospel to Muslims is a spiritual exercise. Muslims need Christian love and prayers. While Christians intercede for missionaries, it is also important to commit the heart of Muslims unto God. This will help free them from the bondage in which they are enslaved.

Missionaries who have devoted themselves to reaching out should be helped with finance. These are men and women wholly committed to discipling Muslim converts, guiding them to grow and realize their true identity in Jesus Christ. They should be encouraged not only in prayers alone, but also in cash. Some missionaries do not have means of livelihood due to the nature of the field they find themselves. While those who are tentmakers have source of income in a bit, some do not have that privilege. Therefore, to ensure that the proclamation of the Christian Gospel to Muslims continues, financial support (including generous gifts) to missionaries is paramount. This is one of the mediums through which people who are at home can reach out to people of other faith; by financially helping missionaries who spearhead the Gospel proclamation in a particular territory.

The technological advancement can be of great help to the proclamation of the Christian Gospel to Muslim.³⁹⁵ The internet is a common and viable means with which Christians can easily engage in missions. However, this should be done by rightful interpretation; the use of the Bible in order to preach Jesus, the Messiah.³⁹⁶ Christians must be alert, especially in dealing with the Old Testament books, lest Muslims takes the Christian Gospel as that which they can understand without taking cognizance of the person and work of Christ.

Also, the radio is an important means. Has a large coverage, because its broadcast is very wide. Via this means, people sit are the comfort of their homes and the Good News is preached and heard. The coverage of this means is wide, unlike individual encounter. However, the coverage nature of this means of communication does not in any way relegate individual proclamation of the gospel. Rather, it creates a platform for personal encounters. In Nigeria, several Christian denominations make use of this platform to reach-out. Since radio channels not owned by the Church is patronized by several secular organizations for the advancement of their goods and services, Christian groups who are not financially buoyant finds the means extremely difficult. Thus, some who reach-out through this means might not be able to continue due to insufficient fund.

³⁹⁵ The world is a global village and everything is becoming highly advanced. Gone are the days of telegram and letters as major means of communication, one can easily send or receive information as fast as possible now. In amazement one may ask the question of how the world will look technology wise in the decades to come. This implies that technology in this generation is improving greatly. Thus, taking into cognizance several aspects of advancements like communication devices, phones, radio, audio visuals, modern medicine, and transportation among others, there has been great progress. Advancements in technology have brought a new face to the world and it serves as a great tool for the Gospel proclamation. Kolawole Oladotun Paul, "An Evaluation of the Use of Technology in the 21st Century Nigerian Church". *Pharos Journal of Theology*, no 4, Volume 100, (2019).

³⁹⁶ Jacob and Kolawole, Is the Bible the Word of God? A Theo-Apologetical Rethink, 6.

Ministering to Muslims is not just like any other works; therefore, it is to be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. The faithful testimony of the cross is blessed by the Holy Spirit and it brings about a radical change in the heart of Muslims. While this article emphasizes the roles of believers in this divine enterprise, the place of the Holy Spirit cannot be minimized. This gives Christians boldness and courage; “for God has not given us the Spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord...but be partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” 2nd Tim1:7-8. Therefore, Christians must build bridges and friendship, so as to enable the Gospel presentation. God promises to open door for witness if we are faithful to discern what is appropriate in time and place.

Conclusion

A survey of what Muslim believes creates the need to adequately acclimatize oneself with argument strategies. Christians should defend the bible wisely and biblically. The demonstration of inability to convey God’s message might turn a Muslim off the access point. Christian need more than theological argument which could prove that Islam is not God’s true message for mankind. The credibility of Christian missions is dependent on the distance from the secular lifestyles that surrounds. Unless Christians constantly and evidently lead lives that are different from the secular citizenry, Muslims will not seriously consider what the Christian Gospel have to offer. The basis of every true Christian mission is built on the truth that it belongs to God, not any man; therefore, it is a privilege that Christians are invited to partake in it.

Christians in Nigeria who think fleeing to the Southwest for safety is the solution to the Muslim terror needs a re-think. Muslims still eyes the South, this is naturally because of their interest which is to the bounds of Atlantic Ocean. In view of

this, the viable solution Christians have is evangelism. This is why Jesus during his earthly ministry emphasizes the need for ‘making disciples of all nations’ as a divine activity that must continue. Muslims will cease to be threats if Christians witness more. In other words, we do ourselves favour if we heed God’s call; further delay could be more disastrous.

It is the task of all Christians to be among Muslims as witnesses and proclaimer of God’s love in Christ. This task requires Christian to understand Muslims and be understood by them. We must find ways of introducing them to the Lord Jesus; this keeps them open to the gospel, the doctrine of trinity and incarnation comes after only after Muslims understand Jesus Christ. If proclaiming the Gospel will be effective, Christians have much to learn from the first three hundred years of the Christian era, when to be a Christian meant a marked separation from the corrupt heathen environment, likewise engaging it with the bold Christian word and life testimony; Jesus is Lord.

Sources

- Caner Ergun M. and Caner, Emir F. *Unveiling Islam*. Nassarawa: Evangel Publishers, 2002.
- Jacob P.O. and Kolawole O.P. “Is the Bible the Word of God? A Theological Apologetical Rethink”, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, volume 101, no 4, 2020.
- Kolawole O.P. “An Evaluation of the Use of Technology in the 21st Century Nigerian Church”. *Pharos Journal of Theology*, no 4, Volume 100, 2019.
- Kolawole O.P. “God’s Image in Man; A Biblical Perspective”. *American Journal of Biblical Theology: Illuminating God’s Word*, Volume 20:14. April. ed. John W.C. The Journal of Biblical Theology; Illuminating God’s Word, Vol. 2:3, July – September, 2019.
- Kolawole O.P. “The Great Commission Mandate of the Church in Matthew 28:18-20”, *Holiness and Discipleship; Word and World*, Vol. 40:4 Fall. St. Paul, Minnesota: Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, 2020.
- Kolawole O.P. *The Reality of God’s Love for Mankind: A Sharp Lens on the Book of Genesis*. Mauritius: Blessed Hope Publishing Company, 2019.
- Madany, B.M. *The Bible and Islam: Sharing God’s Word with Muslims*. Bukuru: ACTS, 2013.
- Thomsen, Mark W. “Christian Mission within the Muslim World” *Word and World*, Volume. XVI, Number 2, Spring, 1992.

Vibert, White L. *The Nation Islam: A Historical and Personal Testimony by a Black Muslim*. Orlands: University of Florida Press, 2001.

Waddy, Charlse. *The Muslim Mind*. London: Longman, 1976.