

**PREMISES
AND
PRINCIPLES
OF
MUSLIM EVANGELISM**

by

Gerhard Nehls

Life Challenge Africa

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DEDICATION

In a way this book ought to be dedicated to my friend, fellow labourer and wife Hannelore, whose input into this book has been beyond measure, or to my secretary and daughter Petra, who has put up with all the typing and countless corrections and changes which do happen when writing a book of this complexity.

But I like to dedicate this book to our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is so misunderstood and subsequently in the essence of His Being rejected by Muslims all over the world. Yet He did sacrifice Himself for the Muslim people as much as for us. May it be the purpose and result of this book that many of our dear Muslim friends may get to know Him.

But I also like to dedicate this book to each of its readers:

“This is my prayer:
that your love may abound more and more
in knowledge and insight*,
so that you may be able to discern what is best
and may be pure and blameless
until the day of Christ,
filled with the fruit of righteousness
that comes through Jesus Christ -
to the glory and praise of God”
(Phil.1:9-11)

* Greek '*aisthesis*' = perception, sense, intelligence

“There are only two kinds of people whom we may call sensible: those who serve God with all their heart because they know Him; and those who seek God with all their heart, because they don't know Him yet”.

(Blaise Pascal 1662)

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1. INTRODUCTION

No man may claim to know all Muslims in all ethnic and cultural settings. We are aware of this and do not wish to lay claim to a universal relevance of what is written here. Although principles and premises (bases) as assessed here are likely to cover most of the missiological situations, our own experience lies largely with urbanized, well-trained and orthodox Muslims who live in close proximity to *Christians*.

In the tradition of “How To Do ...” literature (How to win over depression - to build a boat - to be a better wife etc.), there is an increasing demand for “How to lead Muslims to Christ” type of literature. It is expected to give ready answers to questions likely to be expected from Muslims, and a recipe for a spiritual conversion with the least amount of effort, and the best guarantee for success.

While it may be quite possible to build a boat or conquer a depression in such a way, it is unlikely for someone to become an efficient evangelist to Muslims without seeing the need to come to grips with the real and deeper issues regarding what Islam is, to discover how a Muslim thinks and issues concerning cross-cultural communication.

It is, after all, not a method which leads to conversion, but the knowledge, realization and acceptance of the Truth. Consequently it should be our aim to lead people to the realization of the Truth. We must learn, to clarify all religious terms and concepts used also by Muslims, to induce the desire to objectively seek the Truth. This includes our readiness to expose ourselves to a Muslim’s arguments and contentions. We have to listen seriously, evaluate and answer.

It is quite impossible to learn to handle all eventualities. Neither can one write a “How To Do ...” book which fits all or even most situations. Firstly the Muslim who has no regular contact with Christians argues differently to one who has. Intellectual differences can be very vast. Muslims living in a tribal situation follow a form of Islam which is often largely a veneer over pagan practices, beliefs and concepts. Sufi mystics will largely be experience orientated (existentialists). We just cannot speak of “the” Muslims as a kind of prototype or uniform species.

It is not our aim here to answer the one or other argument, nor to work out a method or system, although this will feature, but to look at the underlying principles that govern a Muslim’s thinking and spiritual and intelligent communication of the Gospel.

Once we learn and understand to use a mathematical formula, we can apply it to every problem of a kind and find the solution. Likewise we see no need to work out all possibilities individually. When operating with “formulae”, the principle behind it will enable us to solve most. So here we want to detect and learn to apply the formulae, the premises and principles which govern Islam and the thinking of Muslims plus ways and means to reach them for Christ.

Such principles can be adapted and applied to Muslims of most walks of life, theological persuasions and ethnic and cultural groups.

A GUIDE

If we intend taking a journey into an unknown territory, we make sure we obtain a good map to guide us. However, even the best and most detailed map is of little or no use, unless we know where we are (on the map). Any scout knows, that when hiking or travelling with the aid of a map, one first has to establish ones standpoint from which to proceed.

If our trip takes us to unknown territory, we better get as much information as possible on it, so that we get the maximum success in achieving our aim.

When, years ago, we had the privilege of visiting the “Holy Land”, my wife was quite surprised that I took her through Old Jerusalem as though I knew the city. Well, I had never been there. But that does not necessarily mean that I did not know the city. I had studied the map and books to tell me about all places of interest - and I knew my way around!

When we engage in cross-cultural or cross-religious mission or evangelism, we also enter unknown territory. We need to know as much as possible about the culture, language, customs and beliefs of the people we try to acquaint to our Saviour. But also that we know where we stand in regard to our task (may we call all this the “WHAT”) and then we have to map out the route we travel (and that we shall call the “HOW”).

The pages which follow want to serve as a map to guide us through the often complex, bewildering and confusing scenes we have to pass to get to our destination. They also want us to rethink the premise we stand on (the “WHAT”) and from which we must determine the road we take (the “HOW”). We may even have to rethink our destination, i.e. the aim and purpose of our mission. As to the methods of approach we are indeed often exposed to conflicting thought, appealing, confusing, enticing or distressing, as the case may be. - Even so, we have to distinguish the best road, and that is the one that leads to our goal without deviating from the Word of God.

When speaking with Muslims, we soon realize that many are likeable, dedicated and sincere people. They are absolutely and utterly convinced that they follow the right, universal, divine truth which was ultimately revealed by Allah to his messenger Mohammed. This has been preserved totally unaltered, compared with all “former revelations”, which had been tampered with and subsequently have been corrupted and abrogated (invalidated and replaced). Islam now, in Muslim eyes, represents the only valid and reliable declaration of the will of Allah for mankind.

In order to understand the Qur’an fully, Allah gave to his messenger the interpretation and rules for its application, which were gathered and classified in the Hadis, a collection of the sayings and practices of Mohammed.

Islam understands itself as a universal religion. Every person born on earth is, according to Islam, a Muslim, until he or she adopts another religion or becomes a renegade. Muslims believe strongly that the time will come when all mankind will live under the rule of Islam. Islam to a Muslim is not only a religious faith. It is a complete guide in all matters of life: sociological, economic, commercial, anthropological, political, philosophical and eternal. It entails the total submission and surrender of ones life to the will of Allah, which is expressed in the Qur’an as well as the Shariah (Islamic Law), and these have to be accepted without question:

“Allah’s law is not to be penetrated by the intelligence, it is ta’abbudi, i.e. man has to accept it without criticism, with its apparent inconsistencies and its incomprehensible decrees, as wisdom into which it is impossible to enquire. One must not look in it for causes in our sense, nor for principles; it is based on the will of Allah which is bound by no principles.” (“Dictionary of Islam” by H.A.R. Gibb & J.H. Kramers, p.525)

This is outwardly displayed in the uniformity of the observances of the religious rituals and rules worldwide, something Muslims are very proud of, and which gives them security.

The framework and purpose of this book do not lend themselves to a fuller investigation of the development of Islamic doctrine and the development of Mohammed from a servant of “the Lord of this City” (i.e. Mecca) (S.7:91) (we have to really think of the implications of this statement in the light of its religious past!) or the Warner of the “Mother of Cities” (i.e. Mecca)(S.42:7) who confirms the Book of Moses in the Arabic tongue (S.46:12) so that it may be understood (S.43:3) and be made clear (S.14:4) - to the Universal Messenger (S.34:28) and the Seal of the Prophets (S.33:40). For a concise overall view of Islam we refer to our documented notes: “Islam, as it sees itself, as others see it, as it is” or our books “Christians ask Muslims”, “Christians answer Muslims” or “Truth and Reality”.

The Qur’anic assumption that the Bible and the Qur’an come from the same source and teach the same doctrines, and that Yahweh of the Bible and Allah of the Qur’an are identical spells conflict.

We are all too aware that we touch on very sensitive issues, and that abuse of what is being investigated here can lead to the closing of many a door and heart! We know that the general missiological trend of today is rather critical, not to say condemnatory towards a forthright exposure of Islam (as done by former missionaries like C.G. Pfander, W. St.Clair Tisdall, W.H. Temple Gairdner and Samuel Zwemer).

It might be appropriate here to quote from William Miller’s book “A Christian Response to Islam” (pp.144-150):

“In the past some very powerful books were written to demonstrate to Muslims the inadequacy of their faith. One of these was entitled ‘The Balance of Truth’ and was written by a German missionary, Dr. C.G. Pfander, who served Christ nearly a century and a half ago in the Middle East and in India. It was published in Persian and Arabic and English and probably in other languages, and produced an angry response from Muslims. However, it profoundly influenced a number of men, who became outstanding Christians. It appears that the age of controversy was blessed by the conversion of more great men than has been the present age of dialogue and conciliation.”

2. BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

We - and I would not be able to exclude myself here - are all selective in our intake of information. What we don't agree with we often disregard. We sift information and by that are tempted to expose ourselves largely to what we agree with and stand for. This is as true of the philosophical and political scene as it is of the spiritual. We have a conviction and select our reasons in support of that (Soren Kirkegaard). Friedrich Nietzsche, the German philosopher, rightly said that convictions are worse enemies of truth than lies!

But not only do we as individuals select information. The media does that before us. Whether we like it or not, we have, as a rule, only access to filtered information. The trend of the time, the current philosophical direction, is in a frightening manner taking control of all, including the Christian information. This makes it almost impossible to form an opinion based on facts without very considerable research. Tolerance based on the humanistic worldview is "in". Not to be "judgmental" or negative is the norm in the "Christian" world. Almost anything goes once it is perceived to be expedient. Experience is graded higher than the Word.

Into this situation we place the thoughts of this book. We touch on subjects likely to be new to even the specialist reader. We like to carefully weigh opinions and arguments, theses and anti-theses, to enable the reader to form a base for evangelism independent from the present world view or philosophy. To help this, much information is taken from sources prior to our present trend.

Our thinking determines our concepts. Therefore we will have to honestly ask ourselves again and again WHO or WHAT determines our thinking? The concepts and spirit of the world or God through His Word? This is not just a rhetorical question. We have to be wide awake to be able to detect the subtle influences which constantly confront us.

When we attempt to assess and evaluate Islam, this will essentially have to be done from a certain position, a fixed premise. In our case that is the Bible. But it is also determined by the information about and knowledge of Islam and the kind of selection of the available materials.

One will hardly escape the realization that there are differences between Allah, as he is portrayed in the Qur'an, and Yahweh as revealed in the Bible. I purposely use the two names to avoid confusion. The term "God" is etymologically of Germanic origin, and in modern usage makes room for just about any deity, including pantheistic concepts.

Without trying to dwell on the differences, these have to be articulated in order to escape an unrealistically romantic picture of Islam, which unfortunately most Muslims take to be the real one.

We will have to ask for instance, how big a difference must be before we decide that two are the same - or not. As evangelical Christians we are not likely to find ourselves in dispute over the question whether, say, the Hindu deities Vishnu or Krishna or Shiva are gods. The differences between these and Yahweh are too big. It becomes more difficult when we consider Allah.

The question we raise is intimately connected with another: Is the Qur'an what it claims to be, the original, full, final and total sum of all that has been revealed before, and by this the succession of Biblical Scripture (which, Muslims claim, it is abrogating or replacing)? If this is true, then it is only logical to conclude that the messenger of this revelation, Mohammed, was indeed a Prophet of Yahweh. All differences between the Bible and the Qur'an must then essentially be the result of corruption of the older revelation, i.e. the Bible. In this case the differences between Yahweh and Allah must logically be solved by accepting the latest, unspoiled revelation.

If we have reason to conclude that the internal and external evidence speaks against the assumption of the Qur'an that it is in agreement with and in succession to the Bible, then we must also question the integrity of its "prophet", and even more so when his recorded life style is in marked contrast to N.T. norms. We have to be aware, however, that the historicity of the Qur'an is very faulty and that its teachings in many fundamental points are in absolute disagreement with the Bible. In particular the presentation of Jesus: he was neither divine nor died on the cross, nor secured an atonement for sJn.

In the light of this it is clear that as Christians, we cannot accept the Qur'an as Scripture and Mohammed as prophet in succession to Jesus Christ with all this implies.

All the knowledge we have about Allah, besides some pre-Islamic or early Islamic sources, comes via Mohammed from the Qur'an. Both, the source and the mediator have not been divinely inspired by biblical standards.

The question which follows is, why a number of Biblical concepts and names appear in the Qur'an. The answer is clear. Mohammed is a historical person. He lived in an environment in which all the knowledge contained in the Qur'an including that of the Bible (distorted and inaccurate as it may have been),

was available. At least in the beginning of his career, Mohammed perceived himself to be a prophet in the biblical succession, coveting the allegiance of both Jews and Christians. This we may identify as an understandable effort from his side to be recognized as what he thought himself to be, namely a prophet.

The Qur'an is based on the premise that Yahweh is Allah (S. 29:46). However, we find in the Qur'an a contradiction to the biblical nature, character and quality of Yahweh Elohim, the triune God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Israel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him alone a relation between his holiness and his righteousness, mercy, grace and compassion can be found. This may need some elaboration. In biblical essence God's holiness and righteousness should exclude compassion, mercy and grace. Without trying to be anthropomorphic (i.e. to attribute human nature to God) we may say that holiness excludes sinfulness. Righteousness excludes mercy or grace. If a raw criminal is tried justly by the law, he will have to be condemned.

If we understand God's holiness rightly and likewise sin as it is viewed in Scripture, we have to realize that there just are no mitigating circumstances to allow for pardon, which would be grace and mercy. So God's holiness makes punishment imperative for everyone who rebelled against or was indifferent towards him. "They are without excuse", concludes the Bible (Rom.1:20).

In order to avoid God's wrath, someone else must suffer the inevitable punishment the offender has deserved. In theological terms we speak of a substitutional sacrifice. This was planned and ordained by God from the beginning of time in view of the ultimate and once for all valid sacrifice of Himself in Christ for us (Acts 20:28). When a sacrifice died, the committed sin of an offender was punished and dealt with. By that the justice, righteousness and holiness of God were satisfied. In His love God, by His suffering in Christ on the cross, pardons. We utterly depend on this. According to the revelation of God's plan and will, there is no other way by which His holiness and love, His justice and grace, His righteousness and mercy can be effected and displayed:

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to man by which we must be saved". (Acts 4:12)

God's offer of pardon is to all mankind. This in turn can only be understood by being aware of Yahweh's view of fallen man which the Qur'an rejects altogether, because it has an unbiblical view of sin. The Qur'an also has a pagan view of sacrifice (see pp.31-33, 45, 49). There is neither mention nor understanding of Yahweh's provision of a sacrifice as the only means for reconciliation, culminating in the substitutional death of Christ on the cross. On the contrary! It vehemently contradicts this. We are, in fact, confronted with a religion which in its essence opposes the Christian faith even more and stronger than any other religious concept, because it poses to come from the same source and uses biblical elements to confuse the uninitiated. The most convincing and dangerous deception is the one closest to the truth! Dr. Backeberg stated:

"I heard the argument: Muslims have a distorted picture of God, but it is still the same God. If X was in an accident and would be disfigured beyond recognition, it would still be X. The point is that the present, undistorted X, and the distorted X, cannot both exist at the same time. If the present X exists, the distorted X is imagination and does not exist. - It is therefore accommodative and an undue concession to Islam to state that Allah and the God we worship are the same".

We realize that many are likely to raise objections at this point: "Pragmatic considerations forbid us to take this position". "Christian love and ethics will not allow us to condemn what is right and holy to the other". "We will close doors by operating from such an unaccommodating premise. Muslims will not even want to talk to us, if they know we hold such a, to them, utterly blasphemous view".

"Why should we always dwell on the differences and not on that which we have in common? Why can't we accept Mohammed as a prophet? How can we love a Muslim when rejecting what he believes and lives for?"

All these statements and questions are neither arbitrarily selected nor theoretically constructed. We have heard them in a number of versions, unfortunately also from the opinion-makers! They may not always be so overtly put, though.

We are dealing here with a universal problem. It is syncretism, if I may use this term in a somewhat uncommon connection, namely the mingling of biblical evangelical Christianity and humanism.

As evangelicals, we can really have only one point of departure: What the Bible teaches. We have to ask what is right and what is true! But Truth may hurt!

We are painfully aware of the motives of many who object or take exception to an uncompromising position. It is all too often kindness, compassion and empathy. It is the wish not to hurt the deep seated feelings of the people we try to reach, to cushion the impact of a message which contradicts Islam on most

essential points and which by that makes this message revolting to Muslims. We do not want to build walls but bridges; we don't want the proverbial shutters to come down; we do not want doors to be closed. The subsequent approach should be "positive". Not apologetic. Non-contradictive.

We are here confusing the WHAT with the HOW. On the WHAT question we stand on a non-negotiable premise. How and how far to lean over to rescue the perishing, to speak metaphorically, is another matter altogether. This will be considered later in quite some detail.

We would like to ask the reader to graciously endure the following chapter which is difficult reading. This is caused by the complexity of the content and the many quotations from Islamic sources. Even so we ask you not to skip difficult passages, but rather to tackle them, for they have a bearing on the whole.

3. THE PREMISE OF ISLAM

Before we consider anything else, we have to categorically state that we must be careful not to confuse original Islam with the contemporary display of itself.

John Gilchrist very aptly stated that when searching for the purest and best form of Christianity, we have to go back to its origin. When looking for the best display of Islam we have to get away from its origin. But the original is the true form!

To establish the premise of Islam we see little need to look at or quote from modern interpretations and expositions of Islam. To do so would be much like assessing the Christian faith by an analysis of liberal, pluralistic or contextual theologies.

We rather base this evaluation of Islam and its premise on original sources (the Qur'an, the Hadith, the early biographies) for true identity. Let classical and generally accepted great teachers and expositors of Islam tell us about the premise of Islam, before we evaluate these.

Because all else is related to this, we should begin by trying to assess the concept, origin and the essence and nature of Allah.

3.1 ALLAH

To begin with let us take a look at the testimony of the Qur'an. Allah is the only one God. He is absolute in all ways. He has neither a son nor other offspring:

“Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him”. (S.113:1-4).

They say: ‘Allah Most Gracious has begotten a son!’ Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin; that they should invoke a son for (Allah) Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the majesty of (Allah) Most Gracious that He should beget a son (S.19:88-92).

Allah is the creator of heaven and earth:

“Your Guardian-Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days and is firmly established on the Throne (of authority): He draweth the night as a veil o’er the day, each seeking the other in rapid succession: He created the sun, the moon and the stars, (all) governed by laws under His Command. Is it not his to create and to govern? Blessed be Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds! Call on your Lord with humility and in private: for Allah loveth not those who trespass beyond bounds. Do not mischief on the earth after it hath been set in order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts): For the Mercy of Allah is (always) near to those who do good” (S.7:54-56).

“It is We Who have set out the Zodiacal Signs in the heavens and made them fair-seeming to (all) beholders; and (moreover) We have guarded them from every evil spirit accursed: But any that gain a hearing by stealth, is pursued by a flaming fire, bright (to see). And the earth We have spread out (like a carpet); set thereon mountains firm and immovable; and produced therein all kinds of things in due balance. And we have provided therein means of subsistence - for you and for those for whose sustenance ye are not responsible. [sic] And there is not a thing but its (sources and) treasures (inexhaustible) are with Us; but We only send down thereof in due and ascertainable measures. And we send the fecundating winds, then cause the rain to descend from the sky, therewith providing you with water (in abundance), though ye are not the guardians of its stores. And verily, it is We Who give death: it is We Who remain inheritors (after all else passes away). To Us are known those of you who hasten forward, and those who lag behind. Assuredly it is thy Lord Who will gather them together: For He is Perfect in Wisdom and knowledge” (S.15:16-25).

Allah is all-knowing, Lord of life and death, irresistible, the only protector and only reality:

“With Him are the keys of the Unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered), but is (inscribed) in

a Record clear (to those who can read). It is He Who doth take your souls by night, and hath knowledge of all that ye have done by day. By day doth He raise you up again; that a term appointed be fulfilled; in the end unto Him will be your return, then will He show you the truth of all that ye did. He is the Irresistible, (watching) from above over His worshippers, and He sets guardians over you. At length, when death approaches one of you, Our angels take his soul, and they never fail in their duty. Then are men returned unto Allah, their Protector, the (only) Reality: Is not His the Command? And He is the Swiftest in taking account” (S.6:59-62).

Allah holds all dominion and power over life and death, the creator, exalted in might - yet oft-forgiving, most gracious:

“Blessed be He in Whose hands is Dominion: And He over all things hath Power; - He Who created Death and Life, that He may try which of you is best in deed: And He is the Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving; - He Who created the seven heavens one above another; No want of proportion wilt thou see in the Creation of (Allah) Most Gracious, so turn thy vision again: seest thou any flaw? Again turn thy vision a second time; thy vision will come back to thee dull and discomfited, in a state worn out” (S.7:1-4).

The oneness of Allah [*tawhid*] is expressed again and again as well as his attributes ‘most gracious’ and ‘most merciful’. Allah’s mercy is expressed in creation, the alternation of day and night, ships, profit, rain and the resulting life, winds, clouds etc. (i.e. we must beware not to fill qur’anic words with biblical content!):

“And your Allah is One Allah: There is no god but He, Most gracious, Most Merciful. Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the Night and the Day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith, To an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; - (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise” (S.2:163-164).

To worship any other besides Allah as equal is the cardinal sin in Islam and deserves the ultimate penalty:

“Yet there are men who take (for worship) others besides Allah as equal (with Allah): They love them as they should love Allah. But those of Faith are overflowing in their love for Allah. If only the unrighteous could see. Behold, they would see the Penalty: that to Allah belongs all power, and Allah will strongly enforce the Penalty” (S.2:165).

Adding a partner or an equal to Allah (shirk) (as Jesus!) is the unforgivable sin:

“Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom he pleaseth; to set up Partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed” (S.4:48).

Allah raises and degrades as he pleases. He holds the supreme power. He is the Lord over day and night, and over life and death:

“Say: ‘O Allah! Lord of Power (and Rule). Thou givest Power to whom Thou pleasest, and Thou strippest off Power from whom Thou pleasest. Thou enduest with honour whom Thou pleasest, and Thou bringest low whom Thou pleasest: In Thy hand is all Good. Verily, over all things Thou hast power. Thou causest the Night to gain on the Day, and Thou causest the Day to gain on the Night; Thou bringest the Living out of the Dead, and Thou bringest the Dead out of the Living; and Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou pleasest without measure” (S.3:26-27).

Allah is the Lord over natural forces and uses it as he wills. His power supreme is indeed his main attribute:

“It is He Who doth show you the lightning, by way both of fear and of hope: It is He Who doth raise up the clouds, heavy with (fertilising) rain! Nay thunder repeateth His praise, and so do the angels, with awe He flingeth the loud-voiced thunder-bolts, and therewith He striketh whomsoever He will, Yet these (are the men) who (dare to) dispute about Allah, with the strength of His power (supreme)!” (S.13:12-13).

Therefore Allah is the unlimited master and his subjects are servants and slaves:

“Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (Allah) Most Gracious as a servant. He does take an account of them (all), and hath numbered them (all) exactly. And every one

of them will come to Him singly on the Day of Judgment. On those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, will (Allah) Most Gracious bestow love” (S.19:93-96).

The following verse is like a doxology or could be a part of a Psalm:

“Allah! There is no god but He - the Living. The Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth Who is there can intercede in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) Before or After or Behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory)” (S.2:255).

The above verses were arranged according to *Jalalu-din as-Suyuti* (died 1531 A.D.).

3.2 THE TESTIMONY OF THE ISLAMIC FAITH

“A belief in the existence of Allah, His Unity, His Absolute Power, and in the other essential attributes of an Eternal and Almighty Being, is the most important part of the Muslim religion, and is supposed to be expressed in the two clauses of the well-known formula:

*La ilaha Il-lu 'l-lahu
Muhammadun Rasulu 'llah*

There is no deity but Allah
and Muhammad is his Messenger
(taken from S.47:19 and S.48:29)

The first clause, “There is no deity”, is known as the Nafi, or that which is rejected, and the second clause, “But Allah”, is the Isbat, or that which is established, the term Nafi wa-Isbat being applied to the first two clauses of the Muslim’s Kalimah or creed. (T.P. Hughes “Dictionary of Islam”)

Let us consider the Kalima (Shahada), the creed, the absolutely non-negotiable confession of faith of every Muslim:

3.3 ALLAH ALONE IS GOD

The Qur’an presupposes that Allah is the author of all revealed books, including the “former books”, i.e. the Torah, Psalms and the Gospel. However, Islam projects its own perception of revelation and inspiration (*‘nazil’* = come down from heaven) of “books” onto the Bible, finds it in much disagreement with Islamic content and consequently unacceptable.

The Qur’an depicts Allah as the creator of heavens and earth. He is the absolute, the sovereign, who can do and does as He pleases, with no obligation to anyone. These attributes are inter alia manifested in the doctrine of abrogation and predestination (Islamic style).

“If it were Our will, We could take away that which We have sent thee by inspiration. Then wouldst thou find none to plead thy affair in that matter against Us” (S.17:86).

“When We substitute one revelation for another - and Allah knows best what He reveals (in stages) - they say ‘Thou art but a forger’: but most of them understand not” (S.16:101).

We have to explain here that a considerable number of verses in the Qur’an have been abrogated (i.e. withdrawn) and replaced by others during the lifetime of Mohammed, and the verse above serves as an explanation or justification to his critics.

The doctrine of *‘taqdir’* or *‘qaza’*, generally called predestination, is one of the six articles of faith (Iman) a Muslim is obliged to believe and submit to. The exact meaning is not, as we know it, a predestination based on the foreknowledge of God (Rom. 8:29; I Peter 1:2), but implies ‘to determine a measure’ or more straight forward ‘pre-decision’ or predetermination.

“Say: Nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us” (S.9:51).

Or as an earlier and by that more accurate translator puts it:

“All things we have created under a fixed decree” (S.9:51)

“Allah has created you and that you make” (S.37:96)

“Some of them there were whom Allah guided, and there were others decreed to err” (S.16:36)

“Allah does blot out or confirms what He pleases” (S.13:39)

“...they will not cease to dispute, except those on whom He hath bestowed His mercy. And for this He did create them: and the word of thy Lord shall be fulfilled: I will fill Hell with jinns (spirits) and men together” (S.11:118-119)

“With Allah is the argument that reaches home: if it had been His will, He could indeed have guided you all” (S.6:149)

“If Allah so willed, He could make you all one People: But He leads astray whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases, but ye shall certainly be called to account for all your actions” (S.16:93).

The Hadis confirms this concept in no uncertain terms. The Sahih Muslim (IV pp. 1396-1398) reports Mohammed relating a story of Adam and Moses (apparently in heaven), in which Moses blamed Adam for his sin which caused mankind to be excluded from Paradise, and lets Adam say: “You blame me for an act which Allah had ordained for me 40 years before He created me?”

Likewise Mohammed related (ibid): “Verily Allah has fixed the very portion of adultery which a man will indulge in, and which he of necessity must commit”; (another Hadis: “there would be no escape from it”).

3.4 THE NATURE, CHARACTER AND ATTRIBUTES OF ALLAH

as perceived by early Islamic theologians:

The well known, and by Muslims generally accepted, theologian and commentator *al-Barqawi* (AD 1132), commented about some of Allah’s attributes as follows:

“Allah Most High is alone to be adored. He has neither associate nor equal. He is free from the imperfections of humanity. He is neither begotten nor does He beget. He is invisible. He is without figure, form, colour or parts. His existence has neither beginning nor end. He is mutable. If He so wills, He can annihilate the world in a moment of time and, if it seems good to Him, recreate it in an instant. Nothing is difficult to Him, whether it be the creation of a fly or that of the seven heavens. He receives neither profit nor loss from whatever may happen. If all the infidels became believers and all the irreligious pious, He would gain no advantage. On the other hand, if all believers became infidels, He would suffer no loss”.

“He has knowledge of all things hidden or manifest, whether in heaven or on earth. He knows the number of the leaves of the trees, of the grains of wheat and of sand. Events, past and future, are known to Him. He knows what enters into the heart of man and what He utters with His mouth. He alone, except those to whom He has revealed them, knows the invisible things. He is free from forgetfulness, negligence and error. His knowledge is eternal: it is not posterior to His essence”.

“He is Almighty. If He wills, He can raise the dead, make stones talk, trees walk, annihilate the heavens and the earth, and recreate of gold or of silver thousands similar to those destroyed. He can transport a man in a moment of time from the east to the west, or from the west to the east, or to the seventh heaven...His power is eternal a priori and a posteriori. It is not posterior to His essence”.

“He can do what He wills, and whatever He wills comes to pass. He is not obliged to act. Everything good or evil, in this world exists by His will. He wills the faith of the believer and the piety of the religious. If He were to change His will there would be neither a true believer nor a pious man. He willeth also the unbelief of the unbeliever and the irreligion of the wicked and, without that will, there would neither be unbelief nor irreligion. All we do we do by His will: what He willeth not does not come to pass. If one should ask why Allah does not will that all men should believe, we answer: ‘We have no right to enquire about what Allah wills and does. He is perfectly free to will and to do what

He pleases'. In creating unbelievers, in willing that they should remain in that state; in making serpents, scorpions and pigs: in willing, in short, all that is evil, Allah has wise ends in view which it is not necessary that we should know. We must acknowledge that the will of Allah is eternal and that it is not posterior to His essence". (This is the '*ta-abbudi*' concept; see p.3).

"He speaks, but not with a tongue as men do. He speaks to some of His servants without the intervention of another, even as He spoke to Moses, and to Muhammad on the night of the ascension to heaven. He speaks to others by the instrumentality of Gabriel, and this is the usual way in which He communicates His will to the prophets. It follows from this that the Qur'an is the word of Allah, and is eternal and uncreated". (emphasis by G.N.)

Al-Ghazzali (*AD 1058), the equally or even better known scholar, commented in a similar fashion:

"Praise be to Allah the Creator and Restorer of all things; who does whatsoever He pleases, who is master of the glorious throne and mighty force, and directs His sincere servants into the right way and the straight path; ... As touching His essence, He maketh known that He is one, and hath no partner; singular, without anything like Him; uniform, having no contrary; separate, having no equal...He is ancient, having no first; eternal, having no beginning; remaining for ever, having no end; continuing to eternity, without any termination. He persists, without ceasing to be; remains without failing, and never did cease, nor ever shall cease to be described by glorious attributes nor is subject to any decree so as to be determined by any precise limits or set times but is the First and the Last, and is within and without".

"He, glorified be His name, is not a body endued with form, nor a substance circumscribed with limits or determined by measure; neither does He resemble bodies, as they are capable of being measured or divided. Neither is He a substance, neither do substances exist in Him, neither is He accident, nor do accidents exist in Him. Neither is he like to anything that exists, neither is anything like to Him; nor is he determinate in quantity nor comprehended by bounds, nor circumscribed by the differences or situation, nor contained in the heavens. He sits upon the throne...sitting far removed from any notion of contact or resting upon, or local situation".

"He is exalted above the earth, and at the same time is near to everything that hath a being; nay, 'nearer to man than their jugular veins'" (S.50:16) (which may well be perceived to be a threat, G.N.)

"He is too high to be contained in any place, and too holy to be determined by time; for He was before time and place were created".

"He, praised be His name, is living, powerful, mighty, omnipotent, not liable to any defect or impotence; neither slumbering nor sleeping, nor being obnoxious to decay or death. To Him belongs the kingdom, and the power, and the might. His is the dominion, and the excellency, and the creation, and the commander thereof. The heavens are folded up in His right hand, and all creatures are couched within His grasp".

"The effects of his might are innumerable, and the objects of his knowledge infinite. He, praised be His name, knows all things that can be understood, and comprehends whatsoever comes to pass, from the extremities of the earth to the highest heavens. Even the weight of a ant could not escape Him either in earth or heaven; but He would perceive the creeping of the black ant in the dark night upon the hard stone....He knows what is secret and conceals it, and views the conceptions of the minds, and the motions of the thoughts, and the inmost recesses of secrets".

"He, praised be His name, doth will those things to be that are, and disposes of all accidents. Nothing passes in the empire, nor the kingdom, neither little nor much, nor small nor great, nor good nor evil, nor profitable nor hurtful, nor faith nor infidelity, nor knowledge nor ignorance, nor prosperity nor adversity, nor increase nor decrease, nor obedience nor rebellion, but by His determinate counsel and decree, and His definite sentence and will".

"He is the creator and restorer, the sole operator of what He pleases; there is no reversing His decree nor delaying what He hath determined; nor hath any man any power to perform any duty toward Him, but through His love and will. Though men, genii, angels and devils, should conspire together either to

put one single atom in motion, or cause it to cease its motion, without His will and approbation, they would not be able to do it”.

“Furthermore, He doth speak, command, forbid, promise and threaten by an eternal, ancient word subsisting in His essence. The Qur’an, the Law, the Gospel, and the Psalms, are books sent down by Him to His apostles, and the Qur’an, indeed, is read with tongues, written in books, and kept in hearts: yet as subsisting in the essence of Allah, it doth not become liable to separation and division whilst it is transferred into the hearts and the papers. Thus Moses also heard the Word of Allah without voice or letter”.

“He, praised be His name, exists after such a manner that nothing besides Him hath any being but what is produced by His operation, and floweth from His justice after the best, most excellent, most perfect, and most just model. He is, moreover, wise in His works, and just in His decrees. But His justice is not to be compared with the justice of man. For a man may be supposed to act unjustly by invading the possession of another; but no injustice can be conceived by Allah, inasmuch as there is nothing that belongs to any other besides Himself, so that wrong is not imputable to Him as meddling with things not appertaining to Him. All things, Himself only excepted, genii, men, the devil, angels, heaven, earth, animal, plants, substance, accident, intelligible, sensible, were all created originally by Him”.

“He created all things in the beginning for the manifestation of His power, and His will, and the confirmation of His word, which was true from all eternity. Not that He stood in need of them, nor wanted them; but He manifestly declared His glory in creating and producing, and commanding, without being under any obligation, nor out of necessity. Loving kindness, the showing favour and grace, and beneficence, belong to Him; whereas it is in His power to pour forth upon men variety of torments, and afflict them with various kinds of sorrows and diseases, which, if He were to do, His justice could not be arranged, nor would he be chargeable with injustice. Yet he rewards those that worship Him for their obedience on account of his promise and beneficence, not of their merit nor of necessity, since there is nothing which He can be tied to perform; nor can any injustice be supposed in Him, nor can He be under any obligation to any person whatsoever. That His creatures, however, should be bound to serve Him, ariseth from His having declared by the tongues of the prophets that it was due to Him from them. The worship of Him is not simply the dictate of the understanding, but He sent messengers to carry to men His commands, and promises, and threats, whose veracity He proved by manifest miracles whereby men are obliged to give credit to them”.

While Christians may use some of these statements to describe God, many statements are, as diligent Bible readers will have noticed, in strong contrast to the essence and nature of Yahweh Elohim, the God of the Bible.

3.5 AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ORIGINAL CONCEPT OF ALLAH

It is an interesting observation that in the past years Muslims increasingly used the name “God” for Allah. In the more recent editions one of the most popular English translation of the Qur’an (by Yusuf Ali) the word “Allah” is replaced by “God”. We may, incidentally, observe a similar trend in Hinduism. One speaks now of “Lord Krishna” (and others), assimilating the titles of their deities to Christian usage. This is obviously done to create the impression that there is little or no difference between the (widely varying) objects of the respective worship. We have to note, however, that different religions do not just put different labels to the same god!

Looking at Islam we must first of all know that the name and concept of Allah is not an invention or innovation introduced by Mohammed. In pre-Islamic Arabia this name was in general use and seemingly already the pre-Islamic Arabic Bibles used that name for God.

If we go back to this time, we do get clues which give some insight into the original concept which filled the name “Allah”. Let us consider what the non-Christian Arabs understood by that term before or at the time of Mohammed in Mecca and Medina, where Islam came into being.

It is a well established fact that most Arabs of pre-Islamic times were idolaters. Scattered over the land were “holy places” where contact with the respective deities was sought. “There were several places of worship in Arabia, and each one seemed to have its annual main celebration with a major Hajj (pilgrimage)

and *Tahlil* (incantation or chant). The participation may often have been limited, but here and there it was extensive, like, for instance, in places like Gurash and Tabala ... surely there was more than one holy house which was the holy house for the adjacent inhabitants" ("Reste Arabischen Heidenthums" by J. Wellhausen, pp. 84-85). We know of Ka'bas (= cube) "*baithu'llah's*" (house of Allah) not only in Mecca, but also in Nejran and Syria.

There were three female deities, whose names are mentioned in the Qur'an (al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat, in S.53:19-20). The most popular one of these at the time shortly before Mohammed was al-Uzza, though she was "more recent than either Allat or Manat" ("Kitab al-Asnam" by Ibn al-Kalbi, p.16).

"Al-Uzza's idol was situated in a valley in Nakhlat" (ibid). Over it a house was built "in which people used to receive oracular communications" (ibid). It was in a grove of three thorn-trees. Manat had its abode at Hudhail and al-Lat (or Allat) in Ta-if, a little south of Mecca. All three were also worshipped at the Ka'ba in Mecca. "The Quraysh (Arabic tribe to which Mohammed belonged) were wont to circumambulate the Ka'bah and say: 'By Allat and al-Uzza, and Manat, the third idol besides, verily they are the most exalted females (arabic: gharanic = numidian cranes) whose intercession is approved (or to be sought)' (S. 53:19-20). These were also called 'the Daughters of Allah' (*al-Tabari: "Jami'al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an"* vol.27, pp.34-36) and were supposed to intercede before Allah" ("Kitab al-Asnam" by Ibn al-Kalbi).

It is of considerable significance that, after a rather fruitless time of ministry by Mohammed in Mecca, the just quoted passage was "revealed". This led to a wide acceptance of Mohammed in his home town. The news of this reached a group of emigrants, who had gone to Ethiopia to escape ridicule and persecution by the pagan Meccans for their newly found faith - and they subsequently returned. It must be added here, however, that according to Islamic tradition the last part of the verse ('whose intercession is to be sought') was inspired by Satan, instead of Allah, and was later abrogated and replaced by: "What! For you the male sex, and for Him, the female? Behold, such would be a division most unfair. These are nothing but names which ye have devised..." (Siratu'l Rasool vs.239, Ibn Sa'd I p. 236, at-Tabari I p.1192). This text is now found in the Qur'an.

Let us read what *al-Tabari* had to say about this event:

"Now the Apostle was anxious for the welfare of his people, wishing to attract them as far as he could. It has been mentioned that he longed for a way to attract them, and the method he adopted is what Ibn Hamid told me that Salama said M.B.Ishaq told him from Yazid b.Ziyad of Medina from M.B.Ka'b al-Qurazi: When the apostle saw that his people turned their backs on him and he was pained by their estrangement from what he brought them from Allah he longed that there should be to him from Allah a message that would reconcile his people to him. Because of his love for his people and his anxiety over them it would delight him if the obstacle that made his task so difficult could be removed; so that he meditated on the project and longed for it and it was dear to him. Then Allah sent down 'By the star when it sets your comrade errs not and is not deceived, he speaks not from his own desire', and when he reached His words 'Have you thought of al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat the third, the other', Satan, when he was meditating upon it, and desiring to bring it (i.e. reconciliation) to his people, put upon his tongue 'these are the exalted Gharaniq whose intercession is approved'. When Quraysh heard that, they were delighted and greatly pleased at the way in which he spoke of their gods and they listened to him while the believers were holding that what their prophet brought them from their Lord was true, not suspecting a mistake or a vain desire or a slip, and when he reached the prostration and the end of the Sura in which he prostrated himself the Muslims prostrated themselves when their prophet prostrated confirming what he brought and obeying his command, and the polytheists of Quraysh and others who were in the mosque prostrated when they heard the mention of their gods, so that everyone in the mosque believer and unbeliever prostrated, except al-Walid B.al-Mughira who was an old man who could not do so, so he took a handful of dirt from the valley and bent over it. Then the people dispersed and Quraysh went out, delighted at what had been said about their gods, saying, 'Muhammad has spoken of our gods in splendid fashion. He alleged in what he read that they are the exalted Gharaniq whose intercession is approved'.

The news reached the prophet's companions who were in Abyssinia, it being reported that Quraysh had accepted Islam, so some men started to return while others remained behind. Then Gabriel came to the apostle and said, 'What have you done, Muhammad? You have read to these people something I did not bring you from Allah and you have said what He did not say to you. The apostle was bitterly grieved and was greatly in fear of Allah. So Allah sent down (a revelation), for He was merciful to him, comforting him and making light of the affair and telling him that every prophet and apostle before him desired as he desired and wanted what he wanted and Satan interjected something into his desires as he has on his tongue. So Allah annulled what Satan has suggested and Allah established His verses i.e. you are just like the prophets

and apostles. Then Allah sent down: 'We have not sent a prophet or apostle before you but when he longed Satan cast suggestions into his longing. But Allah will annul what Satan has suggested. Then Allah will establish his verses, Allah being knowing and wise'. Thus Allah relieved his prophet's grief, and made him feel safe from his fears and annulled what Satan has suggested in the words used above about their gods by his revelation 'Are yours the males and His the females? That were indeed an unfair division' (i.e. most unjust); 'they are nothing but names which your fathers gave them' as far as the words 'to whom he pleases and accepts', i.e. how can the intercession of their gods avail with Him?"

One cannot blame us for asking some searching questions: Considering Islamic doctrine as reflected in the writings and in the light of the Islamic concept of predestination, how could it have been possible for Mohammed to produce and incorporate the so-called Satanic verse in the Qur'an without Allah's will? In S. 6:34 we read: "...there is none that can alter the Words of Allah".

We recall the words of *al-Barqawi* (p.18): "All we do, we do by His (i.e. Allah's) will: what He willeth not does not come to pass", or of *al-Ghazzali*: "He is...the sole operator of what He pleases...nor has any man any power to perform any duty towards Him, but through His love and will". Here we have a full view of the concept of '*qaza*' (= pre-decree or pre-decision). This is, of course, based on the Qur'an: "Nothing shall ever befall upon us except what Allah has ordained for us" (S. 9:51); "Allah has created you and what you make" (S.37:96) and, taken somewhat out of context without, however, introducing a false picture: "...ye will not, except Allah wills" (S.76:30). This is supported by the verse: "Of the people were some whom Allah guided, and some were decreed to err" (S. 16:36). The Hadis confirms this in many passages. May one be quoted? "Verily the Almighty and Glorious Allah finished five things for every man of His creation: his fixed term, His action, his resting place, his movement and his provision" (Mishkatu'l Masabih Vol.III p.117).

We ought to know that it was not the proclamation of Allah that repulsed the pagan Meccans to become Muslim, but his exclusiveness. Allah was well known before.

It may be added here that the generally accepted understanding, that in and around the Ka'ba of Mecca there were 360 deities which were destroyed when Mohammed conquered this city, is probably incorrect. Only the biographer *Vaqqidi* reports of this number. In his book "Reste Arabischen Heidenthums", p.72 (Remnants of Arabic Heathendom), J.Wellhausen writes: "After taking possession of Mecca, Mohammed is said to have destroyed hundreds of idols which were kept around, on the roof of and in the vicinity of the Ka'ba. Ibn Ishaq (the author of the best accepted biography, born 53 years after the death of Mohammed) knows nothing about this, but already *Vaqqidi* (born 120 years after Mohammed's death) tells about 360 idols, and the later reports the more determined and richer (embellished) they became (our translation).

We also should take notice of the perception of the "idols". Excepting three (Hubal, Isaf and Na'ilah), these were '*watham*' i.e. stones, not images. These stones were not considered deities, but the abodes of these. An image is a "*sanam*", which is a loan word from the Aramaic '*selem*', idol" ("Arabia before Muhammad" by de Lacy O'Leary, p.197).

According to Islam idolatry in Arabia at the time of Mohammed was a fairly recent development. It is said that before that time the faith of Abraham had been followed. There is no substantiation for or against this hypothesis, although it is highly unlikely that whatever Ismail and Hagar knew about the "religion of Abraham", which was neither then nor later in writing, could have survived by oral transmission for 2600 years. We have to dismiss this hypothesis as an expedient myth. It is quite clear that what Mohammed and his contemporaries (*Hanifs*) knew about Abraham, was what they have gleaned from the Jews and Christians who lived in Arabia and whose beliefs and practices were not obscure. Muslims like to trace all idolatry back to *Amr Ibn Luhaiy* (who introduced the images which he brought from Moab or Mesopotamia to Mecca) as the "*Siratu'l Rasool*" (vvs.50-51) by *Ibn Ishaq* does. This is generally accepted to have been shortly before Mohammed's time, which is contradicted by the fact that e.g. Allat is already reported of by Herodotus (I, 131; III, 8. +- BC 450!), well over 1000 years before Mohammed, and is mentioned repeatedly, as is Hubal, in the 'Nabathaeon Inscriptions', dated around BC 1 (A.B. Cook: "North Semitic Inscriptions", pp. 80,158 and "Corpus Incript.Semit." pp. 88, 117, 170, 182).

It is unfortunate that several purges of early Islamic libraries just about eradicated all knowledge of pre-Islamic history and particularly religion. The only somewhat comprehensive study (though post-Islamic) of pagan deities comes to us from *Ibn al-Kalbi* in his book "Kitab al-Asnam". He names 27 deities. J. Wellhausen (last century) has analyzed this writing and widened it by incorporating other tit-bits of information which survived the purges. He had no religious or other tendencies to be considered biased in his studies and conclusions, which make him a trustworthy researcher. So let us try to evaluate for our purpose what he and others have established.

As we have already seen, al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat were female deities and were called the daughters of Allah (S.16:57; 37:149,153; 4:117). The pagan Arabs already swore by Allah (S.6:109), recognized him as the creator (S. 23:84-89; 29:61). He was called the “Lord of this City” (S.27:91) and the “Lord of this house”, i.e. the Ka’ba (S.106:3).

“Allat is the female form of Allah. It is interesting to note that the Arabs never used the plural form of God as ‘*theoi*’ in Greek and ‘*dii*’ in Latin (J. Wellhausen, pp. 45, 219).

At this place it will be good to have a look at the linguistic origin of the word Allah. Most scholars agree that it comes from the term ‘*al-Ilah*’, meaning ‘the God’ (“The Qur’an and its Exegesis” by H. Gaetje, p.3) and/or from *al-Liah*, meaning ‘the one worshipped’ (de Lacy O’Leary, p.198). But there is also a close resemblance to the Hebrew ‘*Elah*’, which is found 89 times in the Old Testament (El = 224 times, *Elohim* = 3251 times). “If equal names guarantee equal concepts, the Hebrews and Arabs must have had the same concept of God. Naturally this equality disappeared very soon with the development of the religion and culture” (J. Wellhausen, *ibid*). As already observed, it is most unlikely that the concept of Allah can be traced back to Abraham, except by Jewish and Christian re-introduction. Therefore we suggest that the similarity of the terms is confined to the semitic origin of both languages.

“It must have been the language first of all, that created Allah, not the term, but God himself. As a king is called king in his country, and not William; and as father and mother, Mister and Missis are not normally called John and Jill, but father and mother or Mister and Missis respectively, so the Arabic tribal god was not, by his devotees, called by his name, but by his title. In addressing him one would always say *Rabb*, *Rabbi* or *Rabbuna*, i.e. my Lord, our Lord and then also *Ilahi*, my God or respectively your Lord, the Lord of my father, your God or e.g. ‘the Lord of the *Banu’l Barhisa*’, ‘the God of the Quraish’. For our Lord one can as well say the Lord: ‘the Lord lives during summer with al-Lat and in winter with al-Uzza’. Al-lat was always addressed by the *Thaqif* (Arabic clan) as ‘the Lady’ (female form of Lord). The title had completely replaced the name. In the same sense the word Allah must have been used and understood, not in contrast to the tribal deity, but as appellative attribute of the same. So at first Allah was the title used within each individual tribe to address its tribal deity instead of its proper name. All said Allah, but each one had its own deity in mind. The expression “the god”, which became the sole usage, became the bridge to the concept of an identical god which all tribes had in common”.

“Allah was now no longer a general title for each individual deity: he was differentiated from these deities by his new and common concept and came to be considered as above these and became a being ‘*sui genesis*’” (J. Wellhausen, *ibid* pp.218-219). “It so happened that celebrating people danced around *al-Uqaicir*, meaning Allah. Similarly Allah was viewed, already before Muhammad, as the Lord of the Ka’ba, while, if not surely, but very probably, this sanctuary actually was devoted to Hubal, whose image was placed inside” (*ibid* p.221). “While the rituals performed are still addressed to the respective deities, Allah is seen as the creator, the father and with that the superior Lord. But he is viewed to be too general, neutral and impersonal a Lord” (*ibid* p.219). “Allah became the Islamic substitute for any idol” (*ibid* p.85). “For the Arabs Allah emerged from the decay of the religious ethnicity. The basis of the different deities was the division into ethnic or tribal entities, and with the identification of the peoples their deities became mere synonyms in which only a general concept of a deity was still valid:” (*ibid* p.217). “How little the religious cult of the Arabs was attached to their hearts, became apparent at the decline of heathendom due to mass-conversions to Islam. At no time this decline displayed something tragic, often it was rather ludicrous” (*ibid* p.220).

To come to the point, we must have a closer look at Hubal, the image or idol which was kept in the Ka’ba before it was destroyed by Mohammed at his return to take control over Mecca (AD 630). Islamic tradition traces the import of this idol from Moab or Mesopotamia to Arabia to Amr Ibn Luhajj (“*Kitab al-Asnam*” by Ibn al-Kalbi p. 23 and *Siratu’l Rasool* vs. 51; see also “*Die Geschichte der Stadt Mekka*” by F. Wuestenfeld).

O’Leary in his book “Arabia before Muhammad” observes: “Ibn Hisham (*Sirat*, Egypt, edition 27) refers to ‘Amr b.Lahi as bringing from Syria the image of Hubal, a deity not known in Arabia proper outside Mecca, but mentioned in the Nabataean inscriptions (Euting 3). Hubal undoubtedly was a newcomer, but his image was used to represent the older ‘al-liah’, ‘the one worshipped’, the male supreme god of the Ka’ba ...”

To get to know Hubal a little better, let us read the account Ibn Ishaq provided for us: “It is alleged, and Allah only knows the truth, that when ‘Abdu’l-Muttalib encountered the opposition of Quraysh when he was digging Zamzam (the well of ‘holy water’), he vowed that if he should have ten sons to grow up and protect him, he would sacrifice one of them to Allah at the Ka’ba. Afterwards when he had ten sons who could protect him he gathered them together and told them about his vow and called on them to keep faith with Allah. They agreed to obey him and asked what they were to do. He said that each one of them must get

an arrow, write his name on it, and bring it to him: this they did and he took them before Hubal in the middle of the Ka'ba. (The statue of) Hubal stood by a well there”.

By way of explanation Ibn Ishaq describes the general role of Hubal in the Ka'ba: “If they wanted to circumcise a boy, or make a marriage, or bury a body, or doubted someone's genealogy, they took him to Hubal with a hundred *dirhams* and a slaughtered camel and gave them to the man who cast the lots; then they brought near the man with whom they were concerned saying, ‘O our god this is A the son of B with whom we intend to do so and so; so show the right course concerning him’. Then they would say to the man who cast the arrows ‘Cast!’ and if there came out ‘of you’ then he was a true member of their tribe; and if there came out ‘not of you’ he was an ally; and if there came out *mulsaq* he had no blood relation to them and was not an ally. Where ‘yes’ came out in other matters, they acted accordingly; and if the answer was ‘no’ they deferred the matter for a year until they could bring it up again. They used to conduct their affairs according to the decision of the arrows” (Ibn Ishaq's *Siratu'l Rasool*, vs.97-98).

He then carries on his specific story about Abdu'l-Muttalib, the grandfather of Mohammed, who, incidentally, took over the father role after Mohammed was orphaned: “Abdu'l-Muttalib said to the man with the arrows, ‘Cast the lots for my sons with these arrows’, and he told him of the vow which he had made.

“It is alleged that Abdullah was Abdu'l-Muttalib's favourite son, and his father thought that if the arrow missed him he would be spared. (He was the father of the apostle of God). When the man took the arrows to cast lots with them, Abdu'l-Muttalib stood by Hubal praying to Allah. Then the man cast lots and Abdullah's arrow came out. His father led him by the hand and took a large knife; then he brought him up to Isaf and Na'ila (Tabari: two idols of Quraysh at which they slaughtered their sacrifices) to sacrifice him; but Quraysh came out of their assemblies and asked what he was intending to do. When he said that he was going to sacrifice him, they and his sons said ‘By God! you shall never sacrifice him until you offer the greatest expiatory sacrifice for him. If you do a thing like this there will be no stopping men from coming to sacrifice their sons, and what will become of the people then?’ Then said al-Mughira b.'Abdullah b.'Amr b. Makhzum b.Yaqaza, ‘Abdullah's mother being from his tribe, ‘By God, you shall never sacrifice him until you offer the greatest expiatory sacrifice for him. Though his ransom be all our property we will redeem him’. Quraysh and his sons said that he must not do it, but take him to the Hijaz for there was a sorceress who had a familiar spirit, and he must consult her. Then he would have liberty of action. If she told him to sacrifice him, he would be no worse off; and if she gave him a favourable response, he could accept it. So they went off as far as Medina and found that she was in Khaybar, so they allege. So they rode on until they got to her, and when Abdu'l-Muttalib acquainted her with the facts she told them to go away until her familiar spirit visited her and she could ask him. When they had left her “Abdu'l-Muttalib prayed to Allah, and when they visited her the next day she said, ‘Word has come to me. How much is the blood money among you?’ They told her that it was ten camels, as indeed it was. She told them to go back to their country and take the young man and ten camels. Then cast lots for them and for him; if the lot falls against your man, add more camels, until your lord is satisfied. If the lot falls against the camels then sacrifice them in his stead, for your lord will be satisfied and your client escape death. So they returned to Mecca, and when they had agreed to carry out their instructions, Abdu'l-Muttalib was praying to Allah. Then they brought near Abdullah and ten camels while Abdu'l-Muttalib stood by Hubal praying to Allah. Then they cast lots and the arrow fell against Abdullah. They added ten more camels and the lot fell against Abdullah, and so they went on adding ten at a time, until there were one hundred camels, when finally the lot fell against them. Quraysh and those who were present said, ‘At last your lord is satisfied Abdu'l-Muttalib’. ‘No, by God’, he answered (so they say), ‘not until I cast lots three times’. This they did and each time the arrow fell against the camels. They were duly slaughtered and left there and no man was kept back or hindered (from eating them)”.

Later, after Mohammed was born, Abu'l-Muttalib presented his grandson before Hubal in the Ka'ba: “It is alleged that Abdu'l-Muttalib took him (Tabari: before Hubal) in the (T. middle of the) Ka'ba, where he stood and prayed to Allah thanking him for this gift. (*Siratu'l Rasool* vss 97-100 and 1-3, also al-Tabari's *Tafsir* 1076 and 999).

What is the significance of all this? The careful reader will not have overlooked that Abdu'l-Muttalib calls on his sons to have faith in Allah, and took them to Hubal in the middle of the Ka'ba. (vs 97). Before Hubal lots were cast in an occult fashion to determine his will or decision or to obtain an oracle (vs 98). Then we read that “Abdu'l-Muttalib stood by Hubal praying to Allah” (vs 98). He then goes to a sorceress, who had a familiar spirit (‘demon attending and obeying witch’, *Oxford Dictionary*) to solicit her advice.

After leaving the witch, who obviously needed time to consult with her demon, Abdu'l-Muttalib prayed again to Allah - and promptly got an answer from the sorceress the next day. He was to bargain with Hubal and offer as substitute for his son camel sacrifices “until your lord is satisfied”. After returning to Mecca, Abdu'l-Muttalib was praying again to Allah while presenting his son Abdullah and the substitute

camels to Hubal. Later Abdullah's son Mohammed was presented to Hubal, again with prayer to Allah. We are, incidentally, also informed that Mohammed at a later stage offered a sacrifice to Hubal.

We have already considered the use of certain names: al-Rabb, al-Ilah, al-Liah in relation to the idols. How does Hubal fit in? The name cannot be explained from the Arabic ("Encyclopedia of Islam" by Gibb and Kramers). "It is presupposed by Muhammad and admitted by his opponents, that Allah is the lord of the Ka'ba. Is perhaps the Allah of Mecca Hubal? In other words, was Hubal called Allah in Mecca, as Yahweh was called Elohim in Israel?" asks J. Wellhausen ("Reste Arabischen Heidenthums" p.75) and explains that "Islamic legend had tried to reinterpret Hubal to be Abraham, or to degrade him by placing him among the many idols which filled the Ka'ba. These experiments failed, however, or at least could not obscure the fact that Hubal was the god in the Ka'ba".

It is, I suppose, not far fetched then, when Pocock (Specimen Historiae Arabum, ed. White, p. 98) suggests that Hubal is the equivalent to = haBaal in Hebrew, which, of course, means 'the Baal' or, translated, 'the Lord', or 'the possessor'. The suggestion that the idol originated from Moab, makes this a strong case indeed (Numb.25:1-3). In this case it is highly significant, that the Qur'an lets Mohammed say: "For me, I have been commanded to serve the Lord of this city, Him Who has sanctified it and to whom (belong) all things: And I am commanded to be of those who bow in Islam to Allah's will" (S. 27:91). In one of the very first revealed Suras (106) we read: "For the covenants (of security and safeguard enjoyed) by the Quraish, their covenants (covering) journeys by winter and summer, let them adore the Lord of this house (i.e. the baitu'llah, the Ka'ba), who provides them with food against hunger and with security against fear (of danger)".

"This explains why Hubal was played down by early Islam. The Qur'an never polemicizes against Hubal, but only against al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat. While the service to these deities was much wider in use than that of Hubal, one ought to expect that there would have been an urgent reason not to forget the specific Meccan deity" (Wellhausen, *ibid*).

Of course Mohammed did do away with all other deities. He did eradicate even the memory of these. He did pick out the one and already then generally accepted sum total of worship in Arabia, but by that virtue he did not retrace Yahweh Elohim, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Israel. The forms and rituals around the Ka'ba of today, which were almost in toto taken over by Islam, bear witness to this. The hajj (pilgrimage) as performed today as many other Islamic rituals and forms, have their roots deeply planted in pagan territory.

Islam attempts to give accreditation to this by making Adam the first architect of the Ka'ba, which was destroyed by the flood and by way of divine intervention and guidance rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael, to whom was given the formerly white, but now black stone built into the corner of the Ka'ba, we must reject as pure legend, not only because it has no biblical foundation, but also because the whole witness of Islam and its full content is hinged on the testimony of one person alone: Mohammed. Islam cannot claim any divine evidence of the truth of its premise (other than pointing to the alleged illiteracy of its prophet in relation to the literary quality of the Arabic Qur'an). The philological and cultural contemporary scene, the total lack of historicity and chronology and the contemporary availability of the information contained in the Qur'an, which contradicts much of the historical and doctrinal content of the Bible, stands in contrast to the evidence which give tremendous credibility to the Bible, and forcefully leads to one conclusion: Allah in essence, nature, context and origin corresponds well with what Miskotte calls "the arch (type) projection of an X god. In this, man has collectively accumulated human attributes and amplified and abstracted these into a personality with super-power". Hanna Kohlbrugge ("Tawid, das Herz der islamischen Theologie") aptly observes that "the proclamation 'there is no god except Allah' is no more than a tautology (= repeated statements in different forms) which says nothing as long as it is not based on the revelation of the Name...our God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Samuel and David, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". Again Miskotte states: "Of Yahweh we say by faith, that He also created the world. This faith has its origin in the Name. Wherever this is not understood - where it is stated that god X may also be called Yahweh - caves in the whole of the holy doctrine".

When Moses stood vis-a-vis the burning bush and Yahweh spoke to him, he replied: "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of our fathers has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses: "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites, 'I am has sent me to you...Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, appeared to me...'" The identification was extremely necessary to avoid the confusion which goes with the X god.

Whoever Allah is - the sum of pre-Islamic deities, the product of Mohammed's mind or imagination, the essence or a conglomerate of known objects of the religions there and then practised, or whatever, the

Qur'an is wrong when stating: "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which has come down to you" (i.e. the people of the Book, the Jews and Christians). "Our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)" (S.29:46). Apart from the facts stated here, a comparison of the nature, temperament and character of Yahweh and Allah will bear this out.

A very real problem arises at this point. In the Arabic world there is only one name for God, and that is Allah. Arab Christians read this name for Elohim (and El and Elah) and Theos in their Bibles, and did so before Mohammed was born. Shall we now begin to differentiate, use a new name for God in the Arabic Bible? I propose that this is neither acceptable by the Arab Christians nor practical. Somewhere we got to accept the status quo and, if necessary, define or explain our position regarding the God we serve. However, we shall resist the temptation to assume in our minds and hearts, that the Allah of the Qur'an and the Allah of the Arabic Bible are identical!

3.6 "THERE IS NO GOD BESIDES"

Allah is '*tawheed*' i.e. Allah is Oneness! While this concept was to differentiate Allah from the pre-Islamic concept, in which he was a kind of sum total of all deities, this was extended to reject the obviously misunderstood concept of the Sonship of Jesus and the Trinity:

"They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity" (S.5:76).

"Say not 'Trinity': desist: It will be better, for Allah is one Allah" (S.4:171).

It is then consistent to reject the sonship and with that the deity of Jesus Christ:

"...the Christians call Christ the son of Allah. That is a saying of their mouths; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them: How they are deluded away from the Truth" (S.9:30).

"It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah that He should beget a son" (S.19:35)

"Christ the son of Mary was no more than an Apostle. Many were the apostles that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food" (S.5:78)

How could they have been gods, if they had to eat (?!) is the apparent argument.

These passages have taken a very prominent place in Muslim thinking. We must therefore take notice of what every Muslim firmly believes - and what necessarily predetermines his perception of Jesus, the crucified Saviour:

"They (i.e. the Jews) said (in boast), 'we have killed Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, the Apostle of Allah'; - But they killed him not, nor crucified him but so it was made to appear to them. And those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no certain knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety, they killed him not; - Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is exalted in power, wise" (S.4:157-158).

We are aware that the quoted Qur'an texts totally reject Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world - the only hope a Muslim has. Nabi Isa, "the prophet Jesus", is another Jesus (2Cor.11:4). If we care to communicate the biblical Jesus Christ, we have to seriously rethink the use of the name "Nabi Isa", if we don't want to risk a Muslim keeping his utterly distorted understanding of the Saviour.

We are not unaware of Muslims who by reading the Qur'an have been and are attracted to Jesus Christ. This is indeed possible. But it is not possible to find Him as the crucified Saviour and Lord in that book unless by excellent persuasive power and an exegesis and hermeneutic which are untrue to the meaning of the qur'anic text. We have to think this over in a different chapter.

Who then is Allah? As he is depicted in the Qur'an or as he was perceived in pre-Islamic Arabia?

Another question arises from that: What does it matter? Can we answer this with an allegory?

If someone held a hand-grenade perceiving it to be a musical box, wanting to pull the string (to effect the detonator) expecting to set off the music, what would we do? Say: 'Well, it can't do any harm, for he indeed expects that it will play the tune to him!?' No! We would rather face the reality and by hook or by crook persuade him that the thing will blow him to pieces!

What I mean is simply that regardless of what people think, we have to face reality. If Allah is not the same as Yahweh and yet a reality, we have to act differently than if he is only an imagination in the mind of

Muslims or a somewhat distorted form of Yahweh Elohim. We have to come to grips with this issue - and from that premise do evangelism.

One may well at the end of this chapter ask what all this has to do with Muslim evangelism. Does it really matter whether Allah is a distorted form of Yahweh or a manifestation of the “Lord of this city” and by that an anti-biblical deity or a fictitious character and by that a non-entity? And what are we to tell Muslims about Allah? Does not even the Arabic Bible translate the word God as Allah? Will we not close doors to the hearts of Muslims when opposing the very foundation and hope and faith they stand on? Yes, it is necessary to make a right diagnosis in order to know what we stand against. It is not so much what our Muslim friend believes this to be, but rather what it really is! Of course it will not be necessary for us to reveal our thoughts and positions and our understanding of Allah to every Muslim we meet. But we will have to come to grips with the factual consequence of this; we have to realize the bondage under which most Muslims suffer when through and by their religious system all doors for salvation are closed. We have to understand against which principalities and powers we take a stand. It is necessary to know that we are not dealing with a misunderstood ally, but with a powerful enemy. I am convinced that the latter is true and that eventually a Muslim coming to Christ has to renounce his allegiance to Allah and commit his life to the triune God. Therefore it is necessary for us to know who Allah really is. And no pragmatism should govern our thinking on this fundamental point.

3.7. MOHAMMED IS HIS MESSENGER

In Islamic thinking this means no less than that Mohammed is the final messenger in the long row of 124000 prophets, who were sent before, and he was given the final revelation which was necessitated by the former ones having been lost or corrupted. He is by that virtue the only universal messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets (S. 34:28 and 33:40). All others including Jesus are considered regional prophets to a particular group of people e.g. the Jews. Consequently the only valid available revelation of God is the Qur’an which abrogated all others. Jesus is viewed as a prophet to the Jews, and not as a universal Saviour. Muslims support this with biblical statements like:

“...he will save his people from their sins” (Mt.1:21)

“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel” (Mt.10:5)

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (Mt.15:24)

They do not care, however, to consider these isolated statements in the context of the whole of the New Testament. Expediently Muslims also forget to quote the Qur’an on this issue, which states distinctly that Jesus will be:

“A sign for all people” (S.21:91) “and (it will be) that We (i.e. Allah) make of him a revelation for mankind...” (S.19:21).

However we are not attempting to provide answers here and refer to the mentioned complimentary reading.

When the fundamental differences in teaching between the Bible and the Qur’an became apparent, Islam rejected the Bible (in this case against the Qur’anic witness!) as having been corrupted and now abrogated in favour of the final and universally binding Qur’an.

3.8. THE MESSAGE

A messenger brings a message. In this case the message is claimed to have come from Allah. What is the essential part of it, the “bottom line”?

3.8.1 MAN

The character, position and purpose of man

Allah alone is God! He has no partners! He created man to do his will, and called him to turn away from idolatry and sin! Man is able to execute Allah’s will and is called upon to submit (= Islam) to him. Islam rejects the ‘fallen nature’ of man which is ‘inherited’ by every man (original sin). Allah does not expect or

demand from man what he is unable to do. So Islam calls on all people to submit to Allah, and with that accept the six articles of the IMAN (= faith of Islam).

To believe in:

1. Allah and his oneness (tawhid)
2. The revealed Books i.e. the Taurat, Zabur, Injil and Qur'an
(= Torah, Psalms, Gospel and Qur'an)
3. All prophets, including those of the Old and New Testament,
which are named, and Mohammed.
4. The existence of angels
5. The Day of Judgment
6. Predestination of all things by Allah.

Submission includes the meticulous observance of the "five Pillars of Faith", the DEEN (= practices of Islam):

The keeping of:

1. SALAT: To perform the five ritual prayers every day
2. KALIMA or SHAHADA: To testify to the truth of Islam: "There is no god besides Allah and Mohammed is his messenger"
3. ZAKAT: To pay the (poor) tax
4. SAWM: To keep the fast during the month of Ramadaan
5. HAJJ: To perform the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in the life-time (circumstances permitting).

3.8.2 SIN

We suggest that there are four fundamental factors which need to be clearly identified and defined. These must under no circumstances be slanted: The doctrine of GOD, MAN, SIN and ATONEMENT or RECONCILIATION.

We have seen that the doctrine of GOD and MAN in Islam differ dramatically and fundamentally from the biblical one. The rift deepens when we try to analyse what Islam teaches about sin.

Much of the "*Fiqh*" (systematic theology in Islam) and the "*Shariah*" (law of Islam) is occupied with sin. Let us have a brief look at the Islamic concept thereof. First of all we must understand that Islam with its integrated understanding of religion knows no separation between the temporal and the eternal. Law therefore includes civil law, criminal law and religious law. Man's sin against a fellow man subsequently does not constitute an offence against Allah.

Subsequent to a false understanding of the Holiness of God and the depravity of man, is a minimizing of sin.

"Observances of ... duties is called virtue, and the negligence or breach thereof is called sin. Virtue and sin result from lawful and unlawful things". "In every act there is sin and virtue".

"Any breach of the fundamental duties of which the performance is compulsory and obligatory is called a great sin. Any breach of other minor duties is called a minor sin. Breach of any duty which the Holy Prophet used to do constantly without any break is a great sin. Constant repetition of a minor sin makes it a major one". (Mishkatu'l Masabih III, pp. 121-129)

Subsequently Islamic theologians divide sins into *Gunahii-'kabirah'* and *Gunahii-'saghirah'*, great and little sins. Since Muslims are divided into four schools of law, those founded by Abu Hanifa, Malik, Ash-Shafi'i and Ibn-Hanbal, there is no agreement on the exact number of '*kabirah*' sins. The "Mishkat" lists 53 (vol.3, p.128), however one may consider the following seventeen as those roughly agreed upon:

1. Kufr (unbelief, spiritual infidelity)
2. perpetual commitment of 'small' sins
3. despairing of Allah's mercy
4. imagined immunity against the wrath of Allah
5. false witness
6. falsely charging a Muslim with adultery
7. perjury

8. practice of magic (although this is very commonly done by many Muslims - and in agreement with Islam)
9. drinking of alcoholic beverages
10. appropriation of the property of orphans
11. usury
12. adultery
13. unnatural crime
14. theft
15. murder
16. fleeing in battle before infidel enemies
17. disobedience to parents.

(from "Dictionary of Islam", p.594)

Several words are used to distinguish between degrees of sins:

'khati'a' = stumbling, missing the aim, committing an error; a sin committed on purpose

(see Suras 17:31 = khit, the same root word)

'zanb' = a sin, a crime (comp. Suras 24:14 and 81:9), also used for the 'faults' of Mohammed

(Suras 47:19 and 48:2).

'ithm' = anything forbidden in the law, a heavy sin

'shirk' = adding a partner to Allah, polytheism.

(from "Encyclopedia of Islam", p.250)

'Light sins' may be repaired by good works, 'heavy sins' require '*istighfar*', i.e. seeking forgiveness of Allah and 'shirk', the severest of sins, requires '*taubah*', i.e. repentance (ibid).

The Qur'an says:

"O my servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins, for he is oft-forgiving, most merciful" (S.39:53).

This view is, of course, contradicted by others.

"To Allah belongeth all that is in the heavens and on earth. He forgiveth whom He pleaseth and punishes whom He pleaseth: But Allah is oft-forgiving and merciful" (S.3:129) or

"He forgiveth whom He pleaseth, and punishes whom He pleaseth. For Allah hath power over all things" (S.2:284).

What the Qur'an teaches about sin

"Those who avoid great sins and shameful deeds, only (falling into) small faults, verily thy Lord is ample in forgiveness" (S.53:32)

"Nay, those who seek gain in Evil, and are girt round by their sins - they are Companions of the Fire: therein shall they abide" (S.2:81)

"Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you: Verily the killing of them is a great sin" (S.17:31)

"Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth... (S.4:48)

"Those who ... go on increasing in Unbelief - Allah will not forgive them..." (S.4:137)

"Those who reject Allah ... Allah will not forgive them" (S.47:34)

"... Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins..." (S.39:53)

"Allah, Who forgiveth Sin, accepteth Repentance, is strict in punishment..." (S.40:3)

“... believe in Him; He will forgive you your faults...” (S.46:31)

“... It is He who invites you, in order that He may forgive you your sins...” (S.14:10)

“Say to the Unbelievers, if they desist (from Unbelief) their past would be forgiven them...” (S.8:38)

“To Allah belongeth all that is in the heavens and on earth. He forgiveth whom He pleaseth and punishes whom He pleaseth...” (S.3:129)

“... He forgiveth whom He pleaseth, and punisheth whom He pleaseth. For Allah hath power over all things” (S.2:284)

What the Hadith teaches about sin

“Abdullah-b-Mas’ud reported that a man asked:... what sin is greatest near Allah? He replied: Your calling up a partner for Allah...What is next? He replied: Your killing of your child...What is next? He replied: ...adultery... “And those who do not call another god with Allah and do not kill one whom Allah has made unlawful except for just cause and those who do not commit adultery”.

“Abdullah-b-Amr reported that the Apostle of Allah said: The greatest sins are to associate a partner with Allah, to disobey parents, to kill a soul and to take false oath”.

“Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah said: Avoid seven harmful things...Setting up a partner with Allah, sorcery, killing a soul whom Allah has made unlawful except for just cause, devouring usury, devouring the properties of an orphan, keeping behind on the day of fight and slandering chaste, believing heedless women”.

“Abu Hurairah reported that the Messenger of Allah said: Verily Allah pardoned my followers for what their breasts prompt towards evil so long as they do not do it or utter.

“Mu’az reported that the Apostle of Allah instructed me with ten counsels. He said: Set up nothing with Allah...nor be disobedient to your parents...nor give up the compulsory prayers...nor drink wine...beware of flight from holy war...and spend for your family out of your means...”

“Safwan-b-Assal reported...Set up nothing with Allah, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill a soul...nor take an innocent man to a man of power that he may put him to death, nor practice sorcery, nor devour interest nor cast blasphemy on a chaste woman, nor turn back for flight...”

We know that the Bible contradicts such a view of sin altogether. A mild view of sin combined with the expectation of generous forgiveness and mercy does away with a need for salvation and a Saviour. Adherence to Islam and performing its rules is sufficient. As Christians we perceive this to be a detrimental act of deception. (All quotations from Mishkatu’l Masabih III, pp. 129-139).

3.8.3 REPENTANCE, FORGIVENESS, PARDON FOR SIN

As we have seen, repentance (*taubah*) is to some only considered necessary for the sin of ‘shirk’, i.e. adding a partner to Allah. One can atone for oneself in the case of ‘small sins’ and can ask for pardon (*istighfar*) to obtain it.

We are aware that sincere Muslims live and act in great reverence and fear, exerting themselves to keep all the rules in order to escape punishment - both in the grave and in hell. Real Muslims dread the day of death and the day of judgment. Fear determines every day’s actions, and yet no Muslim can claim to have forgiveness of sin and assurance of eternal life in the presence of God.

“The balance that day will be true (to a nicety): Those whose scale (of good) will be heavy, will prosper: those whose scale will be light, will find their souls in perdition, for that they wrongfully treated our signs” (S.7:8+9).

Muslims believe that, because they are believers in Islam they will, after having been punished for a time in hell, go to Paradise. This general belief is very difficult to verify from the Qur’an and the Hadith.

While Islam uses the same words we do, the impression is created that our faiths are very close and similar. If we, however, compare the actual contents of the words we find that they often have little in common.

When we look at the O.T. and N.T. doctrine of salvation, we cannot possibly exclude the sacrifice, the substitutional sin bearer, the blood shed for the forgiveness of sJn. Because of its false doctrine of God, man and sin, Islam has an insufficient grasp of God's requirements for forgiveness, pardon and salvation.

"...He (Allah) rewards those who do evil, according to their deeds..." (S.53:31)

"Those who avoid great sins and shameful deeds; only (falling into) small faults, verily thy Lord is ample in forgiveness..." (S.53:32)

"O ye who believe! Fear Allah and say a word directed to the Right: That He may make your conduct whole and sound and forgive you your sins: He that obeys Allah and His Apostle has already attained the highest achievement" (S.33:70-71)

"For those who reject Allah, is a terrible Penalty: but for those who believe and work righteous deeds, is forgiveness and a magnificent reward" (S.35:7)

"...If ye fear Allah, He will grant you a criterion...and forgive you: For Allah is the Lord of grace unbounded" (S.8:29)

"...If they repent and amend, leave them alone; for Allah is Oft- Returning, Most-Merciful. Allah accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them will Allah turn in mercy; for Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom" (S.4:16-17)

"And whosoever repents and does good has truly turned to Allah with an (acceptable) conversion" (S.25:71)

All these passages are, however, contradicted by the following:

"This is an admonition: Whosoever will, let him take a (straight) Path to his Lord. But ye will not, except as Allah wills; for Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom" (S.76:29-30)

"If We had so willed, We could certainly have brought every soul its true guidance: But the Word from Me will come true, 'I will fill Hell with Jinns and men all together'" (S.32:13)

"...Allah sendeth whom He will astray, and guideth whom He will. He is the Mighty, the Wise" (S.14:4)

"What aileth you that ye are become two parties regarding the hypocrites? When Allah cast them back (into disbelief) because of what they earned? Seek ye to guide him whom Allah hath sent astray? He whom Allah sendeth astray, for him thou canst not find a road" (S.4:88)

"...He sendeth whom He will astray and guideth whom He will..." (S.16:93)

"He forgiveth whom He pleaseth, and He punisheth whom He pleaseth" (S.5:20)

"Whom Allah doth guide - he is on the right path: Whom He rejects from His guidance - such are the persons who perish. Many are the Jinns and men We have made for Hell..." (S.7:178-179)

This all is confirmed by the utterances of Mohammed as recorded in the Hadiths:

"...Verily Allah can forgive all sins and He does not care" (Mishkatu'l Masabih III, p.761)

"...Who so sticks to seeking forgiveness, Allah will create for him a way..." (ibid p.759)

"...He who seeks forgiveness is not a confirmed sinner, though he returns (to it) seventy times a day" (ibid p.759)

“We were counting that the Prophet was saying in an assembly one hundred times: O Lord, forgive me and accept my repentance; verily Thou art the Acceptor of repentance, Forgiving” (ibid p.763)

“...The actions of any of you will never save him...except that Allah kept me covered with His mercy” (ibid)

“...O son of Adam! I will forgive you as long as you implore Me and hope in Me in spite of what you have done, and I don't care. O son of Adam! if your sins are so numerous as to reach the clouds of heaven and thereafter if you seek forgiveness from Me, I would forgive you and I don't care. O son of Adam! if you were to meet Me with an earth full of sins and then if you were to meet Me without setting up anything with Me, I would certainly come to you with an earthful of forgiveness” (ibid p.759)

Again this is contradicted by other passages:

“...There were two men out of the children of Israel. One of them strove hard in divine service and another used to say: I am a sinner...He said: By Allah, Allah will never forgive you and admit you in Paradise. Then Allah sent an angel to them and took away their souls and both were taken together to Him. He said to the sinner: Enter Paradise by My mercy. And he asked another: Can you deprive My servant of my mercy? ‘No’ he said ‘O my Lord’. He said: Take him to Hell” (ibid p.757)

“...There was among the Israelites a man who killed ninety-nine persons. Thereafter he came out to seek (repentance). He came to a hermit and asked him and said: Is there any repentance for me? He said: No. Then he killed him and began to make enquiry. A man said to him: ‘Go to such a village’. The Death then came to him. He inclined his check towards it (village) and then the angels of mercy and the angels of punishment fell out. Allah then revealed to it (village): Come near Me, and to another Go far away. He said: Measure the distance between these two. It was then found that this as nearer than a span and so he was forgiven” (ibid p.755)

This is in keeping with what the Islamic Commentator al-Barqawi (AD 1132) wrote (we quote again):

“He can do what He wills, and whatever He wills comes to pass. He is not obliged to act. Everything good or evil, in this world exists by His will. He wills the faith of the believer and the piety of the religious. If He were to change His will there would be neither a true believer nor a pious man.

He willeth also the unbelief of the unbeliever and the irreligion of the wicked and, without that will, there would neither be unbelief nor irreligion. All we do we do by His will: what He willeth not does not come to pass. If one should ask why God does not will that all men should believe, we answer: “We have no right to enquire about what God wills and does. He is perfectly free to will and to do what He pleases”. In creating unbelievers, in willing that they should remain in that state; in making serpents, scorpions and pigs: in willing, in short, all that is evil. He receives neither profit nor loss from what ever may happen. If all the infidels became believers and all the irreligious pious, He would gain no advantage. On the other hand, if all Believers became infidels, He would suffer no loss”.

We perceive from all this that Islam offers a forgiveness without atonement and reconciliation without the shed blood of a sacrifice. Judged by biblical Scripture, salvation in Christ is not just superior to what we just read. By scriptural standards Islam offers no salvation, or worse, deceives people to trust in a teaching which is not based on God's fundamental requirement: Without the shedding of blood there is not forgiveness of sin, and that it is the blood of Christ which alone cleanses or purifies us from all sin (Hebr.9:22 and I John 1:7). Islam totally contradicts by all this what God has said! With that it is “another Gospel” (Gal.1:6-9) (Greek = *heteros evangelion* = another of a different kind).

3.9 ISLAMIC RITUALS

To Christians who know the background, origin and sources of most of the Islamic rituals and practices, these are a cause of great concern. We ought to understand that rituals have an origin and convey a message. While most people observe rituals mechanically, it would be untrue to say that these have no influence on a person. While one may be able to accommodate some rituals like the set prayers and their set times (salat)

which originate from the Sabaeans, a group contemporary to Mohammed, the Hajj (prescribed pilgrimage to Mecca and surrounds) contains and conveys purely pagan content.

To be honest, we also have to look at Christianity and its remnants of pagan elements and traditions. We think of Father Christmas and the Christmas tree which in practice feature more prominently than the birth of Christ, or of Easter (named after the Germanic goddess of spring, Easter, who stood also as a symbol of fertility), where Easter-eggs and Easter-rabbits seem to have more prominence than the death and resurrection of Christ. While we do recognize the influence of pagan concepts which, probably by tolerance to pagan festivities which coincide with Christian celebrations, were assimilated into popular Christianity, we are quite aware that these do not represent a part of the original content of our faith and practice. They sneaked in, as it were, at a time when the biblical canon was well established. We have no traditions telling us of Paul and Peter seeking Easter-eggs or decorating a Christmas tree!

This is not true of Islam, where its founder Mohammed, distinctly practiced certain rituals and by way of the Qur'an and the Sunnat introduced these practices as part and parcel of Islam. The Hajj remained a highlight in Islamic ritual in which long established pagan practices became more centred in and around Mecca. It seems quite clear that Mohammed's initial total rejection of all heathen practices changed expediently in the years just prior to the time when Mecca fell to him. A vivid example of this is contained in the background story of the Treaty of Hudaibia. F. Wuestenfeld in his "Die Chronik der Stadt Mekka" compiled the following:

"After a whole year of no dealings between the Meccans and Muhammed, he had the idea to perform a pilgrimage to Mecca, for his teaching did not exclude, but even order the visit of the Ka'ba and he agreed almost completely with the accompanying rites of the pagan Arabs. He hoped the Meccans would not hinder him, provided, of course, he would come with peaceful intent. His plan found undivided agreement with his companions, of whom 1400 followed him. Leaving Medina in Dsul-Ca'da of the year 6 AH. However, the Meccans came out to meet him, determined to defend their city. When Muhammed changed his course to evade them they retreated to Mecca and by way of an emissary declared to him determinately that they would resist any attempt to advance by force of arms. Muhammed made camp at el-Hudaibia, a day's journey from Mecca ... There he demanded another pledge of allegiance from his followers, which was named after the locality of 'pledge of Hudaibia' or, because it happened under a tree, the 'pledge of tree'. Thereafter the Meccan emissary became more accommodating and at last a treaty was drawn up in which Muhammed waived his intention to enter Mecca that year on condition that permission for a pilgrimage would be granted for three days the following year. At the same time he pledged not to receive or accept any Meccans who would want to join his followers".

It seems that in order to make Islam more palatable to the pagan Meccans, Mohammed became more accommodating towards heathen practices, not so without reinterpreting some of them. We recall that he alleged that the Ka'ba was originally erected by Adam and, after having been destroyed by the flood was rebuilt by Abraham and Ishmael. Thus the Ka'ba is not a heathen temple, but the 'Baith'ullah' is the house of Allah. Alleged later introductions thereto like Hubal or other deities were removed in the purge. Likewise the idolatrously venerated Black Stone in the Ka'ba was reinterpreted to be a gift from Allah by way of Gabriel to Ishmael, and that it came from paradise to be built into the corner of the Ka'ba. Every Muslim, when observing his five daily prayers, will have to turn and worship in the direction of the Ka'ba. When going on pilgrimage, which is prescribed to be done at least once in a lifetime, circumstances permitting, every Muslim will have to adhere to all rules and regulations governing the Hajj. This includes circling around the Ka'ba seven times and the kissing of the Black Stone. A tradition tells us that Khalif Umar once stood before the Stone and said: "Verily I know that thou art but a mere stone having no power of doing any benefit or injury. Had I not seen the Prophet to kiss (thee), I would not have kissed thee". It goes without saying that he also kissed the stone (Mishkat III, p.604). Wellhausen in his "Reste Arabischen Heidenthums" observed:

"In the circling of the Ka'ba and the kissing of the Black Stone, in the ritual run between al Cafa and al Marva and in the feast of Arafa the Arabic cult has been kept alive in one of its main places, if not the main place. Muhammed made this prominent piece of heathendom a part of Islam after having reinterpreted and purified it. The conviction that the Ka'ba is the dwelling place of Allah he never gave up, as it seems. He has taken this concept from the old to the new faith and equated the 'Lord of the Ka'ba' with the one and true God, whom he proclaimed, even though he may not have been in agreement with all the rites of the cult there. This was the bond between Arabia and Islam which was

... tied more and more in the process to nationalize the new religion and to separate it from Judaism and Christianity”.

To the uninitiated, it may be added here that Safa (Cafa) and Marva are two little hills just outside the complex of the Great Mosque built around the Ka’ba. Isaf and Naila were two lovers who had during their pilgrimage chosen the Ka’ba for intimacy and were, so the legend says, transformed into stone. Their petrified images were displayed as tokens of warning, (Ibn al-Kalbi “Kitab al-Asnam”, p.8) but later worshipped as idols. The one was posted close to the Ka’ba, the other at the well of Zamzam (p.25). F. Wuestenfeld in his “Chronik der Stadt Mekka”, a historical study based on Arabic chronicles, relates that they were placed on the two hills al-Safa and al-Marva (p.13 and 18). Already way back in pre-Islamic times the pilgrims to Mecca used to run seven times between the two hills. This apparently worried some of the early Muslims. They did not want to continue in the former pagan practices. In his “Reste Arabischen Heidenthums”, J. Wellhausen quotes from a Hadis of al-Bukhari (3:85):

“Of Sufian of Acim b. Sulaiman of Anas b. Malik: We were of the opinion the run between al-Cafa and al-Marva is a pagan institution and refrained from it after Islam arrived, until Allah revealed in Sura 2:158 that this run is permitted and no guilt is involved”. The verse reads thus: “Behold! Safa and Marva are among the symbols of Allah. So if those who visit the House (i.e. Ka’ba) in the season (i.e. during Hajj or Umrah) or at other times, should compass them round, it is no sin in them, and if anyone obeyeth his own impulse to Good, - be sure that Allah is He Who recogniseth and knoweth”.

As part of the Hajj ritual, the offering of animal sacrifices is prescribed on Eid-ul Adha (the Great Feast) at Mina, near Mecca. This may, however, be performed anywhere else to remember “the transformation of Ishmael on the altar into a ram” when about to be sacrificed by Abraham (“Pilgrimage to Mecca” by Mohamed Amin). Though the Eid sacrifice can be traced back to the Jewish ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev.16), which Mohammed saw the Jews perform and copied, sacrifices were offered at Mina by pagans before Islam.

Moreover, the Qur’an teaches about sacrifices, that:

“It is not their meat nor blood, that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him” (S.22:37).

May these few examples stand for many. The question arising from all this is clearly: does the filling of these rites with new meaning abrogate its former pagan content or not? Have these rites not been given new meaning so that by the old falling into oblivion and obscurity these feasts and rituals have now become fully Islamic? Obviously they are now considered to be totally Islamic. But what if the original pagan content was more than just vain imagery? If it was an act of an inspired demon cult, as we have even today in Satan worship, then the faithful observance of these rituals may well involve and undesired effect, by the original “Lord of this house”, the “Lord of this City”!

Let us be reminded of the Egyptian “wise men”, sorcerers and magicians, who like Aaron threw down their staff which turned into snakes “by their magic arts” (Exod.7:10-12). When the Baal priests on Mt. Carmel called on the name of Baal they were surely expecting him to act. They did this because they had experienced Baal’s influence and were surprised and confounded when this time nothing happened. Little did they know this to be the result of the Greater being present. If a new meaning is given to the old “Lord” (Baal = Lord), whom do we expect to act? We have to seriously consider the possibility, that the new Lord is, in fact, the old. Heathen rituals have their root in occult manifestations. While idols are nothing (1Cor.8:4) in themselves, they are actually visual aids of the forces behind them. “The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God” (1Cor.10:20). The actual offering was done, no doubt, to the respective idols.

While seemingly they were offered to dead idols, the reality behind them is nevertheless to be reckoned with. This results in bondage. 1Cor.12:2 verbally translates about the former state of the Corinthian Christians that “to the voiceless idols you were led being led astray”. The context hardly allows this passive tense to mean that they were led astray by people.

We hold that the lack of responsiveness and receptivity to the Gospel by Muslims is effected at least partly by such bondage.

These are the intrinsic foundations, from which Islam developed and on which it stands and from which it cannot and will not move - not withstanding the fact that most Muslims, particularly those who adhere to simple folk Islam, do not know these facts.

The man in the street is unlikely to know about the origin of the concept of Allah and may believe sincerely that it is the product of the revival of the religion of Abraham in Arabia. We hold, however, that whatever of the teaching of Abraham in Islam is not from Jewish or Christian sources, is legendary, filled in by Mohammed and by that fictitious.

It is up to Islam to convince its critics of the historicity of its content or to provide tangible evidence that supports claims of its divine origin, particularly since it contrasts most of the Judeo-Christian sources which it claims to succeed.

At the end of this chapter I am tempted to propose that many Muslims, being unaware of the information exposed here, worship in their hearts and minds a concept of Allah which is indeed closer to Yahweh Elohim than to the original, even Qur'anic, concept of Allah. This has two causes. Firstly Christian thought, ethics and doctrine have influenced the doctrines and perceptions of Islam, at least in the Western context. Secondly I would like to draw our attention to suggestions of Thomas Aquinas, Don Richardson and others, that there is a general revelation of God to man, which is, if one may put it this way, effected by a collective inherent and untaught knowledge, somewhat like an instinct. All religions capitalize on this knowledge and claim to be the (sole) representatives of the object of it. Religions then "explain" this inherent concept in their own particular way, dogmatizing and interpreting it. Hence we may assume that people who are not heavily indoctrinated when praying perceive in their minds or hearts this revealed knowledge about God. If we compare notes with Muslims or even others on this, we are likely to find an astonishing agreement.

Is not Scripture striking when it says: "what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain" and that "God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Rom.1:18-20)?

Obviously the 'understanding' spoken of is only the deduction that this powerful divine Being is the author of creation and the laws governing the universe.

So when a Muslim prays, he is influenced by this, may I call it primary revelation, in proportion to his lack of religious instruction, which interprets this. Here we have common ground - until we talk about special revelation.

Be it as it may, this innate knowledge of God, or shall it better be called notion, is not enough to know Him fully, build a personal relationship with Him or to discover His plans for our lives. It is certainly insufficient to respond to His love revealed when in Christ He died in our stead to save us from the consequences of our sins and rebellion against Him. Special revelation is needed to enter that knowledge or realization, and that God gave in His Word. All counterfeits thereof have done little, but to lead people to a powerful potentate, who rules by inspiration of fear and leads men and women into the bondage of do's and don'ts, lawful and unlawful, and who lack the joyful assurance of having been accepted eternally by our almighty God and Father in heaven by His effected atonement.

APOLOGY

We are aware that the information gathered here is fragmented and that a more balanced picture could have been provided. Since for our purpose it was needful to show the differences rather than the agreements between the two Books, and since too voluminous a research would run the risk of not being read, we had to be content with sufficient information on what is little known, even among scholars, to make our point.

We should have added a chapter on the Qur'an's teaching on the "former books" and Islam's dilemma on this point and its endeavour to explain it away. We should have taken a deeper look into the role of a "messenger" or "apostle" or "prophet" in the Books and should have tried to compare this with the role of the Messiah as viewed by Islam and the Bible. We should have elaborated on the Islamic version of predestination and its reflection on Allah. Likewise a study of the Islamic and Christian concept of the devil and demons (created by Allah, S.15:27) would have been helpful. Last not least a comparison of the "eschatologies" of the two faiths would have contributed to the strengthening of our argument, that the fundamental differences between Islam and the biblical faith is such that a neglect or denial of this must lead to a romantic, un-factual and unrealistic assessment, which in turn is likely to lead to friendly discussion with possible syncretistic tendencies rather than meaningful evangelism.

A Word of God comes to mind:

"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,
who put darkness for light and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and
clever in their own sight"

(Isa.5:20-21).

4. THE PREMISE OF BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY

For no other reason than that the reader is likely to be very much better informed about the premises of the Christian faith as compared with that of Islam, this chapter can be kept short. Whereas seemingly very little knowledge exists, at least among Christians, but also among Muslims, about the former topic, abundant literature testifies to the biblical faith.

While we are aware of liberal and existential as well as contextual theologies, we deem these to be largely influenced by a pseudo-scientific, often rationalistic reasoning as well as humanistic thinking, thus deviating from the trusting faith and practice as taught in the Scriptures. Therefore we speak here of biblical content rather than the wide range of expedient and traditional interpretation thereof.

Is this fair, seeing that in the chapter before the writings of the traditions (Hadis) and of some Islamic theologians have been consulted? Yes. The Hadis is an integral part of Islam, even if lately a small number of Muslims, embarrassed by much of its content, claim that only the Qur'an is valid. In the introduction to the most popular Hadis collection, the "Mishkatu'l Masabih" we read quite plainly:

"Indeed the Qur'an minus Hadis remains unintelligible in many cases in the work-a-day life of a man. It is the very injunction of the Qur'an to follow the Prophet in all his deeds and sayings. Therefore, if the Qur'an is believed, there is no other alternative but to believe in the Hadis of the Prophet".

Regarding the quotation of some early Islamic theologians we like to state that these are very generally accepted.

4.1 FUNDAMENTALS OF THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE

4.1.1. GOD THE CREATOR

Yahweh Elohim is the creator of all there is. He created the universe by the Word of His power (Hebr.1:3; Col.1:15-17) from nothing. He has no beginning nor end and is everlasting.

4.1.2. THE NATURE OF GOD

Yahweh Elohim has ever been a triune God, of which the Old Testament as well as the New bear witness. The very word Elohim is the plural form of El, Elah or Eloah, and there is no *pluralis majestaetis* or royal plural in the Hebrew language. In the very statement of faith of Judaism, the "shema" (Deut.6:4), we read in the exact translation: "Yahweh our Gods Yahweh is one". Further evidence find in statements like Gen.1:26; 11:7; Isa.44:6 and 63:7-10 (note Saviour, Yeshuah or Yesha in Hebrew, the very name the Messiah was given in Mt.1:21 and which is the anglicized Jesus). The Old Testament implies Jesus Christ to be co-creator by stating His divinity (Isa.7:14; 9:6), and the New Testament confirms this (CoI.1:15-17; Hebr.1:2-3).

4.1.3. GOD IS NOT JUST A DEITY

Yahweh Elohim is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or Israel (Exod.3:6; 1Chron.19: 18 etc.). It is likewise a mark of identification from other deities. This does not mean that God is a tribal deity! To the contrary. It was not Israel which chose God, but God chose Israel as His people. He means to make Himself known to all peoples (by implication read Gen.3:15; 12:3 with Gal.3:8; 1Kings 8:43; Ps.67:1-2; Isa.11:10; 49:6 etc.). He claims absolute allegiance and superiority over all the world.

4.1.4 GOD IS HOLY

Yahweh Elohim is holy and righteous. This requires all men everywhere to be equally holy and righteous in order to have communion with Him in this life and in eternity (1Pet.1:15-16; Js.2:10; Numb.15:39-41; Deut.23:14b; Lev.10:10-11; Rom.12:1-2; 1Cor.3:16-17; 2Cor.6:16 - 7:1; Eph.1:4; 2:20-22 etc.).

4.1.5. GOD IS GRACIOUS - HE IS LOVE

Because of His holiness and righteousness He cannot tolerate sin or people who are sinners. But He prepared a way of escape to all who have sinned by justly carrying out the judgment, which we deserve, on Himself in Christ. By that act, justice is carried out, sin punished and the offender cleared, potentially made righteous by grace, by pardon. The Bible unequivocally claims that God is love (1Jn.4:16; Exod.12:12ff; 1Cor.5:7; Col.1:20; 2:14; Isa.53; Jn.15:13; Hebr.9:14; 10:10+14; Eph.2:1-9 etc.).

4.1.6. MAN AND HIS NATURE

Man on the contrary is sinful by nature and unable to live a holy life in total communion with God. "Original sin" in our lives disables us to be holy in ourselves (Gen.3:17-19+24; Rom.7:18-19+21-23; Eph.2:1-3 etc.).

4.1.7. SATAN - GOD'S ADVERSARY

Satan, the 'serpent' is the author and originator of sJn. He is not the product of God's creation, but turned by his own choice from Lucifer, the angel of light, into the *diabolos*, the accuser, tempting and deceiving mankind by means of his fallen angels, the demons (Isa.14:12-15; Hes.28:12b-18; Jn.8:44; 1Jn.3:8; Rev.12:9; Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2Cor.11:14). He is permitted by God to operate with certain restrictions, giving man the possibility of a (limited) choice to resist Satan and seek after God in order to follow Him (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; 2Cor.4:4; Eph.6:12; Gen.3:4-5). Man is encouraged to resist him (1Pet.5:8-9; Js.4:7).

4.1.8. SIN AND ITS EFFECT

Sin is one of the major themes of both the Old and New Testaments. Sin separates us from God (Isa.59:2; Eph.4:18) and is inspired by Satan. In principle man is not a sinner because he sins, but he sins because he is a sinner. No man has to learn sin. It is part of our human heritage.

Sin leads to depravity (Rom.1:28-32). The cause of all sin is the rejection of or indifference to God as Lord of our lives.

All unrighteousness is sin (1Jn.5:17; Js.4:17), and obviously the transgression of the laws of God (1Jn.3:4).

Sin is universal, no man is exempted (Ps.53:3; Prov.20:9; Isa.53:6; 64:6; Rom.3:23; Gal.3:22; 1Jn.1:8; 5:19).

4.1.9. SALVATION

Subsequently rescue or salvation can only come from God. Since good deeds are our duty to do (Lk.17:10) and are inclined to lead to self-righteousness and with that to self-sufficiency (Isa.64:6) if used as a tool to attain to justification, these are no means to make us acceptable to God.

Therefore God instituted from the very beginning a way by which a person could be made sinless again. This has remained the only way: sacrifice. While in the lives of the patriarchs this was not formulated as a doctrine, but simply, { ' practiced - no doubt under God's inspiration (Gen.3:21; 4:2b-5; 8:20; 12:8; 13:18; 15:9-17; 31:54; 46:1), under Moses in the Law it was clearly formulated how to obtain atonement when a commandment had been broken (Lev.1:2-17; 4:1-4+13;34; 5:14-19 etc.).

Unless the heart accompanied the sacrifice, God rejected the offering (1Jn.1:11-13). There were different kinds of offerings, here we concern ourselves with the sin offering only. It was the shed blood of a sacrifice, which effected atonement with God (Lev.17: 11). Without the shedding of blood was and is no forgiveness (Hebr.9:22). However, the New Testament reveals to us that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebr.10:4), indicating that these were only types of the real (Hebr.9:9), showing the severity of sin and its consequences in God's sight. The only valid sacrifice was and is Jesus Christ, who ratified all other sacrifices offered before by faith (Hebr.9:11-28). There is, consequently, no other way to be reconciled to God except by acknowledging and personally accepting by faith that Jesus Christ died on the cross for the offender personally (Jn.14:6; Acts 4:12).

4.1.10. JESUS CHRIST

“Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1Cor.2:2) is the central message of the Bible, prophetically in the sacrifices of old and as predicted by the prophets (‘sa.53; Ps.22:1 +6-18). The Old Testament had announced His coming and sacrifice in an abundant testimony, which verifies without any doubt the truth of the Gospel. He is the only Saviour from sin God provided, for He died for the sin of all mankind, people of all times, to provide forgiveness and grace and pardon to all who like to accept it by faith. Jesus Christ is called the Son of God (not to be confused with other such titles, but in the plural form!), possessing divinity from His Father and humanity from His mother. He is unique in all He was and did (Jn.3:14-21; 10:28; 12:44-46; 14;6; Acts 4:12; 1Jn.2:23; 1Cor.15:3-6 etc.).

4.1.11. THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The Holy Spirit, the third personality of the triune God, is already mentioned in the second verse of the Bible. He is co-creator. In or through the Holy Spirit God revealed His Word to the prophets and other recipients. He convicts the world (Le. all people) of sin and God’s righteousness (Jn.16:8) and indwells every believer (Jn.14: 12), if requested to do so (Lk.11: 13) by repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38) and when we are willing to obey Him (Acts 5:30-32). He causes a new creation in a believer (2Cor.5: 17) which leads a new and personal and real perception of Who God is and what He says (Eph.1: 17ff; 1Cor.2:9-14; 2Cor.3:3). He enables believers to serve God the right way (Rom. 7:5-6), teaches them all things (Jn.14:20), guides and leads believers (Ps.143: 10; Col.1 :9-11; Rom.8: 14-15; Lk.2:25-30; Acts 8:29-32), assists them in their prayers (Rom.8:26-27), sends and equips His messengers (Acts 13:1-3; 2Cor.2:12; Acts 16:7; 20:28-29) sanctifies them (1Cor.3:16-17; 6:19-20) and raises all believers to eternal life (Rom.8: 11). The presence of the Holy Spirit produces “fruit” in the believer (Gal.5:23) and gives “gifts” to the Church (1Cor.12).

4.1.12. ETERNAL LIFE

There is eternal life after death for all human beings. This is “spent” at the destiny of their “choice”: Those who chose to live with God and served Him and cared to accept His pardon for sin, will be promoted to live in God’s presence in the state of bliss. Those who rebelled against God, or were indifferent to His call or trusted in their own ability for salvation, will find themselves in hell. Two different words are used for this in the New Testament: *Hades* and *Gehenna*. The former is the abode of the dead before judgment, the latter by implication (Matth.18:8-9 with Mk.9:48, Lk.12:5) the eternal state of the unrepentend. This word is used only twelve times in the New Testament, eleven times used by our Lord Jesus Himself. Unlike in the Qur’an neither heaven nor hell are described except in spiritual or typological terms (Matth.24:51, 25:30,41,46, Rev.21:3-4 etc.).

5. EVALUATION OF THESE PREMISES

While on the more general terms (e.g. omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, the fact of creation, that there is a judgment to come and that there are heaven and earth) we do find a goodly degree of consensus, it is equally true that in many, not to say most, matters of detail as well as on the teaching on salvation, the personality and nature of God and the position of Jesus Christ, Islam and the Christian faith cleave widely apart.

There are various options one may choose to take. One may resort to the “crusader mentality” and fight Islam and the Muslims, denying them their human and religious aspirations and by that create an intolerable relationship between them and us. This is **un-Christian!** A much more popular way of evangelizing is to overlook the differences for the sake of an amiable and friendly relationship. To be tolerant and accommodating is broadly appreciated in these days. After all conflict leads nowhere. But this attitude is equally unacceptable. It is unbiblical.

Let us illustrate this point. In the book of the Judges (2:13) we read that “they provoked the Lord to anger, because they forsook Him and served the Lord”, or in 1Sam.12:10 they cried out to the Lord and said, we have sinned; we have forsaken the Lord and served the Lord, or in 1Kings 18:18.21 Elijah complained that “you have abandoned the Lord’s commands and have followed the Lord. How long will you waver between two options? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if the Lord is God, follow Him!” Of course neither of these passages makes sense when fully translated, as in this case here. We translated, as the Bible, the word Yahweh as Lord, but also the name Baal, which actually also means the “Lord”. We do not want to split hairs when differentiating between the two. They are not only different, but opposed to each other, never mind the identical titles.

Elijah when meeting the Baal priests on Mount Carmel (1Kings 18), did not invite them to a round of friendly discussions over a cup of tea, to decide how they may together help Ahab and Jezebel to build a better country agreeing that they were serving the same God, only that they had different names to call on him. We all see the point!

As Christians we are certainly not called upon to hate or antagonize Muslims or to look down upon them. Neither should our love and care for them make us blind to their deepest need. We have been entrusted with the commission to share the Gospel with them (1Cor.9:16-18)! That this must be done in an appropriate way, sensitive to their need and the situation they live in, goes without saying. Unfortunately the terms like “appropriate, sensitive” have been the subject of much discussion and disagreement. We will devote some time to this later.

Our Gospel is the Truth. It contradicts the Qur’an and the message of Islam, as we clearly saw. And as Christians we have to speak out the truth though with love (Eph.4: 15). Not only the positive truth regarding the Gospel, but also the negative truth regarding Islam, its book and its prophet. When and how this has to be said, we will have to consider later. But it has to be done! A Muslim will have to renounce Islam when becoming a Christian.

Let us look here, first of all, at the given premises. According to biblical theology and doctrine there is no doubt that a Muslim, unless he finds salvation in Christ, is lost eternally. This is and always will be an unacceptable statement to any Muslim.

The second premise we want to establish is, that while the Bible has an abundance of internal and external evidence for its divine origin, and by that virtue may claim to be Truth, Islam rests entirely on the sayings of one person.

We view with deep concern that Mohammed is the sole instrument for the establishment of the Qur’an which brings the message about Allah and Islam. He does not have the biblical credentials of a prophet of Yahweh and since his message contradicts to a large extent and in very fundamental points the “former revelations (i.e.the Bible), we find him unacceptable. The “evidences” of his prophethood given by Islam are at least by biblical standards, altogether unsatisfactory (i.e. the literary quality of the Qur’an, the assumption that it was received by illiterate Mohammed and that a number of Muslims are able to recite the whole Qur’an from memory).

If then the Bible is trustworthy and the Qur’an is not, and if the biblical message once known and compared, is ever so much preferable, more desirable, historically reliable and spiritual than that of the Qur’an, what hinders Muslims to accept this Gospel, seeing they are, at least to an extensive degree, more sincere in their devotion to the religion than nominal Christians?

A right diagnosis is likely to lead to the application of the right therapy. In reverse, a wrong diagnosis is going to lead to a wrong therapy.

Let us try to identify the possible causes:

1. The absolute and total conviction by Muslims to follow the (now) only valid, authentic and unadulterated religion, which has led to a kind of superiority complex.
2. The almost “watertight” indoctrination of a Muslim, particularly with its anti-Christian stance, to which most Muslims have been exposed already in the very tender and formative years.
3. Psychological influences: “Muslims are the best of peoples...” (S.3:110); fear nothing but Allah (S.10:62); hold together (S.3:103); Muslims are protected from harm (S.3:111; 5:108); prefer other Muslims for friends (S.4:144; 5:60-61); reject any partner of Allah (S.23:57); are not weary and faint-hearted (S.7:35); protect each other (S.9:71); practice prayer and charity (S.14:31); evil will be blotted out from them (S.29:7); receive special mercy, light and forgiveness (S.57:28); trust in Allah (S.64:13). These perceptions of themselves strongly fortify their position.
4. The discouragement of Muslims to think and test analytically what they are taught to believe. The Bible teaches us “not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirit to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1Jn.4: 1).

This places the responsibility squarely on man’s shoulders to make certain that what he accepts as revelation is indeed so. To enable him to do that, God has given him the means to discern. We think here particularly of the evidence proved in fulfilled prophecy.

The faith of Islam is not so much based on understanding its content and theology but on unquestioning submission to what has been revealed. That excludes critique of any kind. As already observed, the Arabic term for this doctrine is “*ta-abbudi*” which translated means to be accepted without criticism. The reason is that revelation cannot be penetrated by intelligence, despite apparent inconsistencies. Islam is to be accepted, not critically evaluated. It follows then, that faith must deny itself the satisfaction of the knowledge, that what one believes is indeed from God and by that virtue, right and trustworthy. This type of faith is emphasizing the reading or reciting of the word without necessarily analyzing, comprehending or even understanding. It is meritorious to read it in Arabic – even though most Muslims are not likely to understand its content. (Concept from “A Comparative Study of the Proposed Revelation of the Qur’an”, by J.Gilchrist). A Muslim will, of course, deny such an accusation, for he is unable to compare with any system outside Islam. To Islamic clergy textual research and criticism is nothing short of blasphemy. Allowing this would inevitably lead to exposure, something Islam cannot afford.

Islam demands ‘ta-abbudi’. If a Muslim questions the Qur’an or part thereof, he is by that attacking the whole system. For this reason Islam has never allowed a text-critical study of its book. It is to be believed without attempting to ask critical questions.

To illustrate my point I like to use a touching incident. In an issue of a Muslim paper (“Al Balaag” Nov./Dec.1988) an extract of a book by Hafiz Muhammad Savar Oureshi (Hafiz = someone who has memorized the whole of the Qur’an) was printed:

IN DEFENSE OF THE HONOR OF MUHAMMAD

Peace and blessing of Allah be on him.
by Hafiz Muhammad Sarwar Qureshi

One day in April 1978, I was studying Maudoodi’s famous commentary on the Qur’an, Tafhimul Qur’an, volume 4. I had to look up something concerning the wives of the Prophet. Suddenly I read this about Maria the Copt (may Allah be pleased with her): “(The Prophet of God) took Maria Qabtia, who has been sent by the Maqauqus (ruler) of Egypt, especially for himself. The three first mentioned he freed and married but with Maria he had intercourse on the basis of his having her in his power. It is not proven about her that he freed her and married her”. (Tafhimul Qur’an, vol.4, commentary on sura al-Ahzab, verse 50, note number 88, pages 113-114).

Such was the effect of this reading on my mind and soul that, without exaggeration, for three straight days, I could no longer believe even in the prophethood and messengership of Muhammad (may the peace and blessing of Allah be on him). Again and again I said to my friends: See and check. Has Maudoodi actually

written that about Maria the Copt which I have understood? Or is there something which I have not understood? At my insistence, my friends again and again read the relevant passage and said to me: “Surely this writing means what you have understood it to mean”.

I cannot explain fully what was the condition of my mind at that time. Strange doubts and fears of a nature that would put me outside the limits of Islam arose in my mind about the mission of the leader and seal of the prophets. I was so disturbed because the ugly act which Maudoodi was attributing to the messenger of God was so hideous that even a sinful person like myself could not have committed it or thought of committing it. How could a great messenger of God, walking on the path of Truth, have done such a thing? Whatever else such a person might be, he certainly would not be the messenger of God. Consider what would happen when this extremely misleading commentary would be translated into the English language and other international languages and would reach the nations of the world! What opinion would they form of the best of men, Muhammad, (peace and blessings of Allah be on him) after reading Maudoodi’s commentary when they (especially the Europeans) are already very much prejudiced against the Prophet owing to other misleading and distorted versions of Islam which have reached them! Alas, would there be such a true believer who, out of sheer love to the truthful Prophet, make sure that this misleading commentary would not be able to do the harm it is capable of doing? Perhaps such a believer could use my book *Namoose Rasool (The Honor of the Prophet’s Household)* to prove to the non-Muslim peoples that the ugly tradition of slavery and concubinate was not invented by the Messenger of God.

Some people may object to the weakness of my faith; however it is not a question of the weakness of my faith but of the credibility of my appropriate witnessing. We know from the Qur’an that it is correct to assume that faith can increase and also become weaker on the basis of reason and reliable evidence. My faith is based on the truthfulness and justice of the holy Qur’an and the highest moral and ethical example of the messenger of God referred to in the Qur’an as “the pattern of excellence”. Hence imagine my mental condition when the greatest scholar and thinker of Islam in these times comes forward as a witness and testifies that whatever the enemies of Islam had been saying in their malice and hate about the messenger was partially, if not entirely true. The stories that the Prophet was a lustful person and used women as concubines (O Allah forgive us) and that Muslims could take men as slaves, even without war, and take women from decent households and use them as concubines and ‘keeps’ without benefit of marriage, was being given the seal of authenticity by a scholar of Islam.

It is clear that Mary the Copt was not taken prisoner in a war. And according to Maudoodi, the messenger of Islam took her as his concubine without any fault of hers and entirely according to the tradition of the unbelievers. This would go even against what the generality of Islamic scholars say and agree upon, that Islam did put an end to slavery that was rampant among the unbelievers and the associators (*mushniken*), and that whatever slavery Islam did ‘permit’ had to do only with the prisoners of war. Even if this viewpoint is true (the writer disproves this later - KS.), how would it be proper to justify the enslavement of Maria the Copt by the great moral messenger? Was she being treated as a prisoner of war? Or has she been taken and enslaved merely on the basis of the established tradition of slavery, among the associators (*mushnikens*) and unbelievers?

Thus when we get this witness from the greatest scholar of Islam in our time, that ‘in fact’ the messengers of Islam had not even been forced by the conditions of war but had merely, according to un-Islamic culture then prevalent, taken Maria as a slave girl, and that too without marriage, and forced her entry into his household, then who would conscientiously believe in the messenger-ship of such a person? Surely this was a deed which went against the very Qur’an which the messenger had been sent to teach and publicize. It is of course true that some other Muslim commentators and historians have also written that Maria was the slave girl of the Prophet. This took the meaning in my mind that originally she was a slave girl but the messenger of God must have married her. This did not leave a bad impression. But the words Maudoodi use, that it had not been proven that the Prophet ever married her, were shattering. Such misleading words I had not come across from a scholar of Islam.

Who of us is not moved by the sincerity and integrity of the writer? Who cannot feel with him in the soul agony of his inner strife? But the learned writer concluded, and obviously without consulting the authentic sources, that the famous commentator must have been wrong, because it does not befit the image of his prophet to do a thing like this. He furthermore promotes the idea to do away with the offending commentary in order not to cause others, particularly non-Muslims, to doubt the integrity of Mohammed.”

We do not wonder that a whole page of the same newspaper was devoted to “prove” that Mary the Copt was actually Mohammed’s wife. The authentic sources, and these are, of course, all Islamic, decidedly state that she was not. The demand for allegiance to Islam is stronger than the love for the truth.

5. The regulation of all matters in life (religious, social, economic, personal, matrimonial, educational, criminal, political etc.) by the Islamic system, to which a Muslim is to submit without argument or question.
6. Forms and rituals in Christian worship are likely to be misunderstood by Muslims (prayer done when sitting on benches, singing etc.) and interpreted to be lax. This may be caused by a lack of inculturation of a church in Muslim countries, but equally by an Islamic interpretation of contextualisation (see under this heading).
7. Fear of making the wrong decision which would surely mean eternal condemnation.
8. Fear of the unknown (picture yourself making a commitment to Islam and now going for the first time into a mosque).
9. The “*Ummah*”, the congregation of Islam and its closely knit homogenous system, which alone seems to offer to Muslims a sheltered existence and which has shaped his values and conscience. Stepping out of it is equal to high treason bringing shame on the family and resulting in loss of all context of life and utter rejection. This is followed by fear and rejection in case of conversion to Christ.
10. Communication problems. The ability of a Muslim to perceive and comprehend naturally bases on the (to him) known. All his religious terms and their meaning are, however, filled with Islamic meaning. He most likely will misunderstand the Christian message conveyed to him.
11. Spiritual bondage, caused by the religious system of Islam.
We do not want to suggest that Allah is an idol. This would be absurd to assume. The pagans (ethnos = peoples groups in contrast to Israel and the Church) were influenced and led astray to idols (1Cor.12:2). An idol is nothing (1Cor.8:4), but there are indeed many gods and lords and the sacrifices offered to an idol was in reality offered to demons (1Cor.10:20), not to God. There is one God, namely the triune God, the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

It is therefore right to deduct the following:

- a) There is only one God.
- b) An idol (Greek = *eidolon* = something which can be seen) is nothing, is “made by the hands of man”. Idols have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see, they have ears, but cannot hear, nor is there breath in their mouths” (Ps.135:15-17), i.e. they are dead.
- c) Yet there are many so-called gods (*theoi*) and lords (*kyrioi*) and the sacrifices (or worship) offered to idols are in reality offered to demons, who apparently have inspired the concepts of heathen gods and images (i.e. idols). “Evil demons... assuming various forms so astonished mortal minds with the wonders which they displayed that men, not knowing them to be evil demons, styled them gods and addressed them by the name which each demon imposed upon himself (Justin Martyr, Apol. p.55, Paris ed.). The word demons (Greek = *daimon*) is formed from an adjective meaning “knowledge” or “intelligence” (Plato’s ethymology). All demons are evil. Their influence causes spiritual, mental, moral and physical depravity. By casting out demons, and by commissioning his disciples and us to do the same, our Lord Jesus exposed demons as a reality with which He was at total enmity; and the demons were and are subject to Him.
- d) Full truth comes from God alone. Lies and semi-truths (for the purpose of deception) come from the “father of lies”, the devil and his demons. We better not accredit half-truths, for their purpose is to let the false to appear true!
- e) “Every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus (as portrayed in Scripture!) is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist” (1Jn.4:3). “Such a man is the antichrist - he denies the Father and the Son. No-one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1Jn.2:22-23). “Anyone who does not believe God has made Him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about His Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1Jn.5:10-12).

In the light of these Scriptures and based on these, we will have to seriously ask, whether Muslims, who vehemently deny all the above points, are under a spiritual bondage.

12. The suggestion by Islam that western modernity and decadence and godlessness is actually the product of Christianity.

We do have to accept that not just one of those points mentioned is solely responsible for the Muslim's resistance to the Gospel. It is almost always a combination of points, possibly of all. This should make it clear from the start that Muslim evangelism is not an easy task for which to seek shortcuts.

Invariably one point after another has to be addressed and false conceptions and perceptions have to be rectified in order to create a basis for evangelism. This pre-evangelism is time-consuming and to members of our "instant" society frustrating. In addition the witness needs to be well informed, not only about his own faith, but also on many facets of Islam.

A lack of these fundamental requirements and a lack of popular source materials in the past, led to a kind of unplanned (at least from the Christian side) moratorium.

The latter part of this book will inquire more deeply into some of these points, as these effect evangelism.

A premise of Islam is to present the original religion of (a misunderstood! Watt: Muhammad in Medina p. 204-206) Abraham (S.6:132; 3:95). Islam claims to be in succession of the "former religions" and Mohammed is a prophet in the line of the biblical ones. It assumes that Islam is founded on the original heavenly uncreated word of Allah (while the Jewish and Christian Scriptures have been corrupted and are now abrogated).

Islam, however, is a religion rejecting the main theme of the Bible, which it supposedly agrees with: (S.10:37; 5:48-50,71) Atonement by way of a Sacrifice.

We maintain as a principle: WHENEVER OR WHEREVER THE MIND IS EXCLUDED, ERROR OR DECEPTION COMES IN!

5.1 SPIRITUALITY IN ISLAM

We heard someone speaking about spirituality in Muslims. We would have to make an assessment of or seek to define of what spirituality is.

Devotion is not spirituality. Neither is sincerity. The sincere and even devoted performance of religious duties and rites is not spirituality. Even a modernized form of Islam, which now adapts Christian elements, is by that not spiritual.

Spirituality comes of course from the word spiritual (*pneumatics*). Spiritual people perceive what is taught by the Spirit (1Cor.2:13) because they received the Spirit of God in their lives. They "live by the Spirit" (Gal.5:16).

Spiritual people are likened to living stones built into a spiritual house (1Pet.2:5), they are the temple of the living. God, and He lives in them and walks among them and is their God and they are His people (2Cor.6:16). They are offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (1Pet.2:5). The gifts God gives to His followers are called 'spiritualities'.

May we in the light of this assume that a non-believer is spiritual? May we assume an adherent of a non-Christian religion to be spiritual? Can he pray in the Spirit (1Cor.14:15 and Jude 20), walk in the Spirit (Gal.5:16)? Can he have spiritual wisdom and understanding (1Cor.1:9)? Can he worship "in Spirit and Truth" (Jn.4:24)?

A non-Christian, be he a nominal church member or Muslim or Buddhist or whatever, is a natural man. As such "does not accept (or receive) the things of the Spirit of God... and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1Cor.2:14).

Jesus Christ said: "Except a man is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (Jn.3:3). Spiritual vision is effected by the Spirit of God! To ascribe spirituality to a Muslim is to alter the Biblical meaning of this concept.

To ascribe spirituality to a Muslim presupposes that he is able without conversion to receive the Spirit of God in his life and be guided by Him in religious content. This in turn can only be supposed when Allah, to whom a Muslim submits, is in fact Yahweh, who sent His Spirit. In that case the Spirit of Allah/Yahweh leads also Muslims into all the Truth. We see the folly of such deductions.

However, I do like to testify, that I know many Muslims and non-Muslims who are also not regenerated by Christ, who are touchingly sincere in their faith. They may be entirely devoted to it and are radiating this. We know people who have calluses on their forehead from touching the ground in prayer. We met a young lady who was engaged to be married, who related to us that she was still saving up to go on the pilgrimage (Hajj). Marriage had to wait until after her return. Years of sacrificial savings went into this Hajj which could have comfortably furnished her house.

But we know also of a devoted Communist in Central America, who broke up his engagement. In a letter he explained this decision. He wrote: "I am married to the Communist Party and want to give her all my loyalty, even unto death". This is touching, but not spiritual!

As much as it may hurt, as much as we may wish it to be otherwise: Even a devout and sincere Muslim cannot be spiritual until the Spirit of the living and triune God reveals His son to him - and he responds to God's call and receives Christ as Saviour and Lord.

The task of Evangelism is to convey a spiritual message which is understood by spiritual people to an unspiritual recipient (*anthropos pneumaticos* - *anthropos psychicos* or *physicos*). Spirit and soul are not alike!

If a Muslim were spiritual, he would, despite indoctrination, perceive the spiritual nature and content of God's word and respond. It should make us think why Muslims are possibly the least responsive of all people. And they do not get an inferior message presented by inferior means by inferior witnesses than anyone else, as has been suggested by the one or other critic.

If the Qur'an is the Word of God, then Mohammed is a prophet of God and this God is the same as the One in the Bible. Then we are obliged to accept the Qur'an as revealed Truth and to obey it.

Contrary, if the Qur'an is not revealed Word of God, then Mohammed is essentially a false prophet and one would have to investigate the sources of the inspiration, if there was any in Islam. At best then, i.e. if the religion of Islam bases on purely human intent and volition, a misunderstood image of the one living God would be the result.

If, however, supernatural inspiration or revelation were involved, and if these revelations differ from what we have strong evidence to believe to be divine revelation, then we deal in Islam with a pseudo-deity, never mind the many attributes Yahweh and Allah seem to have in common.

It is subsequently of great importance for us Christians to find the right premise from which to evangelize. A wrong diagnosis leads to a wrong therapy, and this is likely to prove ineffective.

In short: a Christian intending to evangelize Muslims must have a clear position on which he stands.

How are Christian Missions and their efforts viewed by Muslims?

5.2 ISLAM AND THE WEST

Islam fears and utterly rejects the "West" and tries by all possible ways to isolate itself against its influence. It propagates that the "West" is a product of decadent Christianity. In reality, however, Islam is now beginning to experience what Christianity has experienced 200 years ago when the "Enlightenment" Philosophy began to conquer Europe. It was rationalism combined with secularism, materialism and the development of humanism, however, which struck the traditional "Christian" society, wherein many a man of the clergy was won over and liberal theology began to eat away the heart of the Church.

We must realize, however, that it was a hollow, traditional Christianity which fell for it, namely by having too little spiritual substance. This is why England, at least at first, did not fall to the revolution. The revival of the Church under the ministry of Wesley saved that country from the atheistic impact from France.

In the rest of Europe (and also North America) the living church not only survived but was consolidated. It was in this time that the modern missionary vision and movement had its origin.

By now, however, the evangelical Church also is suffering under the impact of materialism and secularism, but is adjusting and even beginning to thrive in it.

Islam is being hit by this powerful force for the first time. While in exclusively Islamic societies the impact is very strongly cushioned by lack of exposure often accompanied by poor education and poverty, the Muslims who are now living under the influence of the "West" are in very real danger of being swept away by its flood of secularism. Islam never really had to cope with this and tries to stem the tide by trying to minimize the impact through isolating of its members. This is not sufficient a tool to succeed, however. While resentment against the "West" is being created, secularism runs strongly parallel to the Islamic fundamentalism, which is supposed to be the barrier against it.

The very fact that the Islamic revival is largely caused by its financial strength which led to a kind of bribing of potential converts and the building of prestigious mosques all over the world, often only being little more than tokens of its influence, power and prestige, and the upgrading of its propagation machinery, reveals its spiritual weakness.

It may be said here, that Islam does not have, and never had, spirituality as we know it. To be spiritual one is totally dependent on the indwelling of God's Spirit, which cannot be said of anyone who has not been born of the Spirit (Jn.3:5). While we in no wise want to question a Muslim's sincerity and devotion, he cannot be spiritual.

Therefore it is no question that Muslims are and will be heavily pressed by and subjected to by what Os Guinness called "modernity". And because Islam offers no answer or solution to this, excepting ignorance from it or rules against it, it will suffer its full impact in the years to come.

Islam will have to learn that "the West" is not an outcome of Christianity, but in fact its deadly enemy, as it is of every religion, ideology and even political system. The "West" is the logical product of the development of nations and people who are advancing to a higher state of economy by industrialization. This is an irreversible trend and a price to pay by even those who object to it.

The new Islamic fundamentalist leaders have realized the danger looming over Islam and expediently blame the "Christian" West for this.

6. UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

While up to now we looked at the premises, the bases, the foundations of Islam and the biblical faith, the “WHAT”, we endeavour now to look at the principles of Muslim evangelism, the “HOW”.

We are likely to meet problems on our way together, of which we like to identify some straight away to avoid misunderstanding.

Everyone with little or much knowledge of Islam and Muslim evangelism has obtained it from somewhere, either by experience, by reading or by personal contact. Consequently everyone has a somewhat different kind of information, and that may not coincide with what is written here.

Further one must consider that writings of, say, 50 or 100 years ago, or even further back, will have assessed Islam differently, and that had to do with the changing world view. An older reader will have grown up and have been somewhat shaped by conceptions of the time of his or her formative years. Likewise a younger reader.

We further do not meet the same people, who influence our thinking. It does make a difference whether I have met, say, 3 Muslims or 300, whether these are rural or urban, educated or simple people, whether they follow a popular or folk Islam or orthodox fundamentalism.

It also matters of what temperament we are and what character traits we have. We may be good or poor communicators or observers, be empathetic and considerate or not. We may be outgoing or inhibited, male or female, have met strong opposition or friendly hospitality in Muslim homes. All this will contribute to the forming of an opinion.

While it is good to form an opinion, it is better to consider other options as well. Experience cannot substitute knowledge and vice versa. So let us try together to find a tailor-made, i.e. individual position from which to evangelize.

We may all go about our task differently and yet rightly by making allowances for our individual differences, experiences and standpoints, but without negotiating the Truth.

As the title of this chapter already indicates, this is not a do-it-yourself manual with step-by-step instructions. We try to understand some of the principles which govern learning, evangelism, communication etc. and watch out for possible pit falls which may occur when principles are applied to members of other cultures. Anyone unwilling to leave familiar grounds or methods in order to strive to be better informed and equipped or to be more skilful as a communicator, should stay in his familiar surrounds. Cross-cultural evangelism demands the readiness to understand the other, personally, culturally and religiously. And that does not happen by reading a book either, but by personal contact, by preparedness to learn from and about the other. The following pages want to stimulate this, question popular practices and concepts and offer other, maybe new, considerations without trying to be imposing.

It also needs to be stated emphatically, that here and in the previous chapters we did and do not intend to ridicule or degrade Muslims, however much we disagree with Islam. No-one of us intends to offend or hurt a Muslim friends by the information given.

But hurting is an unavoidable part of witness. We have to tell a Muslim that what he deeply rejects in his heart is the Truth, and what he believes to be God’s revelation is not. Here I need to state a fundamental premise, which I have quoted many, many times. Never forget this please: **We have no right to hurt a Muslims by what we say, except it hurts us more to hurt him, than what we say hurts him!**

The understandable effort by many a loving Christian to avoid controversy and confrontation and by that hurt, can hardly lead to the knowledge of the Truth and is therefore sentimental. Francis Schaeffer in his book “The Great Evangelical Disaster” wrote (pp. 64,69):

“Truth carries with it confrontation. Truth demands confrontation; loving confrontation, but confrontation nevertheless. If our reflex action is always accommodation regardless of the centrality of the truth involved, there is something wrong. Just as what we may call holiness without love is not God’s kind of holiness, so also what we may call love without holiness, including when necessary confrontation, is not God’s kind of love. God is holy, and God is love.

If we use the word love as our excuse for avoiding confrontation when it is necessary, then we have denied the holiness of God and failed to be faithful to him and his true character. In reality we have denied God himself”.

True love does not make us argumentative bulldozers either. We will be constrained to present the truth in a spirit of love and holiness.

In short, our learning about Islam is not a weapon we use to win arguments or to show our superiority. This learning helps us to understand the frame of a Muslims, his hopes and expectations, his fears and frustrations - in short him. But it will also have to help us at an advanced stage of a relationship to show him the lack in Islam and its untrustworthiness.

Once we know and understand the principles, we can apply these within the given framework of our personality, circumstance and background. We will not learn to operate alike, using the same methods of approach or even a strict outline of what to say or which Scriptures to use. To the contrary. Let us rehearse a little Christian liberty and be what God has made us, but to bring in all our gifts, enriched with information and knowledge to carry out the great unfinished task to the glory of God and for the salvation of lost sinners, particularly those who traditionally have been most disadvantaged, the Muslims.

6.1 WHAT IS ISLAM?

The very word means submission. A Muslim (one who submits) yields himself or herself to Allah, to what is laid down in the *Qur'an* and to what Mohammed directly or indirectly taught, e.g. the Sunnah, which in actual fact means the imitation of Mohammed by acting on all he did, said, permitted, tolerated or forbade.

Islam, Muslims claim, is more than a religion. It is a way of life. We already observed that this is true indeed. It offers a frame to all activities and thoughts. There is not division between religious and secular sectors in a Muslim's life. His matrimonial affair is as much part of Islam than his ritual prayers. His business dealings as the fasting, his dress as the pilgrimage are all governed by Islam.

Not to understand Islam means not to understand a Muslim, and not to understand a Muslim means not to be understood by him in our witness.

But Islam is not the same to every Muslim. Although Muslims boast about the unity, or shall we rather call it uniformity, in Islam, in practice this is not quite so. Most Muslims have little more than a goodly insight into the mechanics of Islam and its very basic teachings.

To know Islam is to know its Scripture, the *Qur'an*, and, maybe, to a lesser extent, also the Hadis, the collected records on the life of Mohammed and some biographical writings of old, which alone are deemed to be the tools to make an exegesis of the *Qur'an*, since only the recipient of it is considered able to interpret the Book. Out of this evolved, Islamic customs, the SHARIAH (Laws), the IMAN (faith) and DEEN (practice) of Islam.

Although Mohammed is said to be no more than a normal man, in practice he is regarded to be the very model of excellence for all mankind and is surrounded by a veil of legends, which definitely provide him with a supernatural flair, though few Westerners when acquainted with the more historical side of his life will be able to share this view.

Islam claims to be the last revealed religion in a chain of former ones, which it abrogated because of decay and corruption of its revelations, i.e. "Books". This can hardly be substantiated from the *Qur'an* though.

Although Islam was at first propagated by the sword - a fact vehemently denied by most Muslims today, but nevertheless very well documented - it slowly spread by word of mouth, not by professional missionaries, but rather by traders who integrated into a host community. As Christianity, Islam is a missionary religion and expects to be in control of the earth eventually.

If we say that the Christian faith has made little indentation on Islam, the opposite is equally true. However, throughout the history of Islam a kind of dialogue with isolated Christians happened here and there. Increasingly Islam has developed an anti-Christian apologetic which was heightened in recent decades by publications which are as aggressive as they are slanted, unreasonable and distorted.

Islam has, besides the orthodox view, a large mystical and popular lobby. As mentioned before the Sufi movement decidedly has Hindu content and features and popular Islam which is practised very widely, particularly in Asia, incorporates various forms of the occult and mystical elements of religious content which dates back to the time before Islam was accepted by the community. Seemingly Islam is not terribly sensitive towards syncretism in many instances.

Untold millions of Muslims seek guidance and healing from departed "saints" on whose tombs a shrine is erected, often called *kramat*, really after the "holy person" in it.

But in all its diversity, Islam views itself as a religion of unity. Muslims are proud to belong to the Ummah, the great congregation of all Muslim believers, who all do the same things the same way worldwide at the same time. This imparts a sense of belonging and security.

Perhaps this is the place to briefly consider the resurgence of Islam. I am glad that this word has generally been chosen and not revival, for the 'viva' in it stands for 'Life'. For centuries Islam existed in oblivion. Much of this is blamed on colonialism, but there are many other contributing factors.

Did we notice how this resurgence began and how it became a popular movement? It would be interesting to do the research on this and to compare it with Christian revivals as under the Wesleys, Spurgeon, Finney, Moody and others.

The seed for today's resurgence was planted by the great Jamal ai-Din al-Afghani (born 1838 and died 1897). Because of his controversial and outspoken nature he had to change his base many a time and lived in Afghanistan, India, Egypt and Turkey, from where he travelled widely including the USA and Europe. He was a philosopher and politician although he may well be called a theologian as well. "He agitated for their (Le. Muslim countries) liberation from European influence and exploitation, for their independent internal development by the introduction of liberal institutions for the union of all the Islamic states (incl. Shi'ite Persia) under a single caliphate and the creation of a powerful Muslim Empire capable of resisting European intervention" (Encyclopedia of Islam by HAR. Gibb and J.H. Kramers).

Power came with the petrol dollars and the idea of a truly Islamic state was compounded by the Ayatolla Khomeini.

Hanna Kohlbrugge ("Tawid - das Herz der islamischen Theologie", p.41) well observes that "Islam includes religion, politics and way of life. By joining religion and politics it can renew the lost self-esteem and will on a permanent basis solicit recognition from the world. The restoration of Islam in its original, strong, dynamic form is the only viable answer to the challenge of the West".

After considering the power aspect within the theology of Islam, she states: "The seeming revitalisation could only happen by way of politics; here the hearts are enthused for the ancient call: 'There is no god but Allah! Allah is great! ...' Concerning Allah for the man in the street there is only this knowledge: 'There is no god except Allah' and the foggy imaginations which tie up with this, until some political situation moved the minds into action", Let us listen what Khomeini has to say on this topic:

"If we want to gain the final victory, we have to know exactly what to do. Else we will have to share the same fate as Hitler who committed suicide. In the early days of Islam the unbelievers were continuously hit with the sword on the head that they may become Muslims. Many were killed To date we have not killed a single human being, but only purified, arrested and liquidated (killed) attacking wild beasts" (idea spektrum 1989 "Wort zum Mittwoch").

While we Christians formulated the aim to evangelize the world by the year 2000 (Lausanne II in Manila 1989), Muslims have formulated their own plans for 2000 already in 1980 in an Islamic convocation in Lahore. The Turkish newspaper "Dunya" reported about the plan for the wider Middle East:

"The whole area is to be Islamicized by the year 2000 and in the Middle East in a way that all those alive who refused to become Muslims, the Coptic Christians in Egypt, the Christians in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, the Assyrians, Chaldaeans, Syrian-Orthodox Christians, Armenians, Nubians and Israelis must be totally annihilated" (ibid 1989).

Ironically at the same time the Islamic World Congress initiated a petition to be handed to the United Nations in which Islam in Germany is to be granted the same status as the Church to test whether "the principles of freedom and equality really exist in the European countries or whether again chauvinism and the crusader mentality would keep the upper hand" (ibid). We may classify these happenings as fundamentalist excesses. But they are fundamentalist, Le. the closest in essence to real Islam. From the London based "Muslim Institute" its director Kalam Siddiqi signalled that the cells of the Islamic movement are divided over the whole of the globe and that in case of restrictions underground centers can take over immediately. "Islam is invincible and the world of 'Kufr' (i.e. unbelief) must be destroyed".

After perusing this and linking it up with our own experiences and with the developments accessible to all, particularly in the Middle East, one can hardly feel, however, that this statement went amiss. While we should joyfully recognize the exception, we should realize that the rule seems to be a militant and fanatical display of power in Islam. And that can hardly be different, because Allah in the *Qur'an* is presented as the potentate who rules from a position of unlimited power. Likewise it is true to say that Islam from its inception strove to supremacy by power. It is Islamic to see the earth divided into two spheres: *Dar-ul-Islam* and *Dar-ul-harb*, the "Land under Islam" and the "Land of War" Le. where Islam has not as yet supremacy.

In fairness it should be stated, that in history more acceptable interpretations have been formulated. To play this down is to be sentimental and not fact-orientated.

Here we become aware of the fundamental differences in the biblical teaching, as unpractical as it may be viewed by Muslims or others. When, surely not without a human reason, Jesus' disciples ask Him: "Lord, do you want us to call fire from heaven to destroy them?", He rebuked them and said: "You do not know what kind of Spirit you are on" (Luke 9:56).

Of course one may find ample examples of actions by Christians and those who call themselves by that name, which match the Islamic practice. There is one fundamental difference, though. Muslims do it in agreement with the teaching of the *Qur'an* and the example of their prophet and caliphs. Christians would contradict the Scripture and their Lord!

Understanding this will make us realize what a folly it actually is to bow down to Islamic demands in Britain or any other Western country which becomes more and more settled with Muslim immigrants. They forcefully demand what they are not prepared to grant to Christians in many of the countries under Islamic rule (Arabia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Malaysia, to name by a few). This is natural to the way they see it! Humility and fairness will automatically be viewed as weakness and an encouragement to demand more - until all the earth is rightfully subjected to Allah.

All this made Islam the determining factor in the lives of the vast majority of Muslims, even if they do not observe the prayers faithfully or cheat in the fast of Ramadaan. There was a time, and not so long ago, when in Christianity we could have observed the same phenomenon. As we will observe later, secularism or modernity has undermined this to the detriment of the Church, a very real danger facing Islam now.

Although being out of step with Islam (by non-observance of the Deen) is generally tolerated, stepping out of Islam is considered a major catastrophe. While the former will generally be viewed with some concern, the latter invariably leads to the rejection by and expulsion from the family and community. This factor is so fear-inspiring that many a Muslim, having heard and understood the Gospel and consented to it, still feels unable to openly respond to it.

As a whole, Islam has well succeeded in protecting its adherents from outside influences. Apart from the fear of leaving Islam, the influence of the Madrassa (*Qur'an* School) on Muslim children can hardly be overestimated. This is not a fleeting experience, for this may well mean two hours a day instructions seven days a week for ten or more years! This is not only the place for positive instruction in Arabic, the *Qur'an* and the Hadis, but also where the children are systematically biased against other likely (religious) influences.

In countries with a Christian presence the children learn how to react against all forms of Christian influences and witness. We often wondered about the close to perfect indoctrination which makes it almost impossible for a Muslim to perceive the Christian message rightly. Just about every presented aspect of the Gospel is likely to be failed as a result of the programming of the mind of seemingly every Muslim, who is most likely to totally misunderstand its meaning. And I don't want to give the credit to the Madrassa teachers.

If we as Christians seek an opportunity to witness, we can hardly bypass an understanding on what exercises the greatest influence on a person, and to a Muslim this, as a rule, is Islam. It is therefore hardly an optional extra for someone witnessing to Muslims to explore his world, world view and day by day reality, and that demands personal touch, the listening to the answers to many questions, the reading of the *Qur'an* and some Hadis literature as well as source studies and, perhaps, some works on more contemporary Islam.

It goes without saying, that our knowledge about original Islam provides stimulating material for asking searching questions which lead to doubts about his religion in a Muslim's mind. At first glance this does not seem ethical, but who or what determines our ethics?

Scripture teaches:

"Let no-one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light (for the fruit of the light consist in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them". (Eph.5:6-10)

"For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, not do we put on a

mask to cover up greed - God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else". (1Thess.2:3-6)

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ". (2Cor.10:3-5)

"Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, 'Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant'". (Jer.1:9-10)

Let each one make sure before God, however, HOW things are said and WHEN! I am convinced that in most situations in evangelism **a Muslim is not even willing to consider the Gospel and Jesus Christ as a possible alternative to his faith until he begins to doubt his own position.**

If this is correct, and I firmly believe it is, our ministry should have this double edge: Positively we present the Word of God - and we are not limiting this to a "Gospel message" - defining and explaining it to make it accessible to a Muslim way of thinking. Negatively, at the *Kairos*, the time of God, we raise the kind of questions which will force a Muslim to re-think his religion and his own standpoint. This will have to be done with love and care and caution. It might lead to a deadlock, but this would have come anyway when the Gospel is eventually presented in all its glory, but also intolerance. On the other hand it might lead to a wholesome shock which affords a Muslim the chance to re-think his loyalties and the question of Truth!

6.2 UNDERSTANDING THE MUSLIM - A REQUISITION FOR BEING UNDERSTOOD

In the previous chapter we already observed that Muslims are people just like us, and that there is no such person as "the Muslim". We would rob a Muslim of his individuality, dignity and integrity by simplistically classifying him like this.

A Muslim, like everybody else, is first of all a human with human needs and hopes. Like all of us he or she has an inner desire to be loved and to be recognized and accepted *for* what he or she is. A Muslim as a rule has a strongly developed god-consciousness.

6.2.1 CULTURAL BARRIERS

Yet the mentioned traits are channeled by way of a specific culture which is inclined to make these appear strange in the sight of someone outside this or a similar culture. As we will enlarge on later, culture is the framework in which a community lives, that determines its expressions and feelings besides its value system, world view and customs. All this is, however, determined by the religion this group professes. While we are able to speak of a distinctly American, German, Japanese or Zulu culture, the strong influence of Islam on nations or groups led to what one may call an Islamic culture. Obviously there are variations, *for* the extent of the influence of Islam in time and intensity is a determining *factor*. We also do not want to suggest that the national or group characteristics have been eliminated. Even so Islam generally dominates the thinking and expression of its peoples. Individualistic thinking on religion is not encouraged. This may be said of Europe in the Middle Ages until the time of the Renaissance, and in parts beyond this even into our Century.

6.2.2 MUSLIMS GENERALLY HAVE A VERY ROMANTIC UNDERSTANDING OF ISLAM

This stimulates an interesting comparison. During the Middle Ages the State was largely subject to the Church, which then represented a formidable force through its clergy assuming to be representatives of God and by that – largely ruling by ignorance and *fear* - controlled the minds and consciences of the people.

Stepping out was unthinkable, *for* there was no way a person could associate outside the rule of the Church. "Heretics" had no chance to survive. All allegiances were via the Church outside which, so it was declared, was no salvation. Yet the Church was at that time ruled and controlled by people who had little or

no biblical or spiritual qualification and who determined what Christianity is, falsely. Scripture became subject to tradition and with that to man.

I am tempted to liken this situation to Islam today. How many Muslims have knowledge about their religion beyond what they are taught by Madrassa teachers, and this is largely legendary and idealized content? How many Muslims are radical (from lat. radix = root!) enough to study for themselves what Islam really is? How many make use of the information materials we used in these studies here? They are exclusively Islamic and available! How many Maulanas or Shaikhs after having studied 8 or more years have learned this at al-Azar university or in their training centers in Bombay or Medina? Many Muslims are quite shocked when they realize that original Islam contains doctrines and practices which they find very difficult to accept! Some have learned to 'interpret' this away, though.

Whenever access to original information is discouraged, 'interpreted' or withheld, in whatever *form*, the mind is restricted or even shut out. Whenever the mind is closed, Truth walks out and superstition, ideology and deception take control.

Subsequently we find that 90 % or more of all Muslims believe and follow what cannot be really classified as original Islam. They are captives of a religious system which to an alarming extent enforces its influence and power by granting no right to exist to those who, *for* instance, step out of Islam after having chosen to follow Christ and the Bible.

It is heartbreaking to speak to Muslims of all walks of life and different cultural backgrounds only to find that they all believe the same fables, bring up the same type of arguments, also against the Bible, claiming that they arrived at this opinion or conclusion on their own through comparative study of the *Qur'an* and the Bible of which they often have very little knowledge. These may be hard words, but they are backed by many years of experience.

Do we blame the Muslims for this? Absolutely not! They are victims of an integrated system which has managed to "protect" them against most "outside" information by instilling fear. A Muslim does, as a rule, fear to think what he ought to think. Fear isolates Muslims even on a Western University Campus. The Christian faith is stigmatized from childhood on, not counting the few exceptions, and thus a Muslim becomes immunized against it for life. The shutters are down and all that is let in, is filtered by the programme which has been set before.

The now fairly frequently held "debates" between Muslims and Christians are largely carried out on an emotional level and nobody seems to listen with an open mind.

To us, who like to share the Gospel with Muslims, it is therefore imperative to listen to our Muslim friends. We have to become vulnerable by listening to all their anger and sentiments, and seek the Truth together. A Muslim must learn from us how to do that. He has no experience in this! He or she is captive to a system which will not let him or her go. A Muslim's mind is, at least where any Western or Christian influence is feared, closed to reasoning due to a subtle programming of his or her mind.

May it be added here that this is not, as we saw already, exclusive to Islam! Any system, ideology or religion which cannot objectively and honestly verify its content or which is not prepared to subject it to a justifiable scrutiny, or which has an exclusive and strong leadership has to resort to this kind of self-protection. In varying forms we find this in political and ideological systems (French Revolution, Nazism and Communism to name some) as well as religious systems (medieval Christianity, a number of sects like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons or the group which committed communal suicide under their pastor Jim Jones in a jungle hide-out of Guiana), but also and strongly so in Hinduism and Buddhism.

This is amplified by the fact that most Muslims live within an extended family. Western individualism has led to disintegration of family-ties which exercised a strong influence on the respective members. This is not so in most Islamic families, where the members live closely together and where interdependence economically and socially is so strong that even the choice of a spouse is in many cases determined by the family or the heads thereof. This dependence exercises a very strong influence on personal actions and convictions, particularly religious ones. This way the community is a very strong and determining factor which makes a choice outside the given system almost impossible.

Concurrently with what has been observed above is the strong conviction by almost every Muslim to belong to the best religion. This is based on the understanding that Islam is not only youngest in the chain, but also the original one; Islam does not see its origin in or through Mohammed, but Adam. Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus are, at least by implication, considered Muslims (S.42:13; 3:84,52,67; 5:113-114). It is believed that every person born is born a Muslim and stays such until by word or deed he or she leaves Islam. This happens e.g. when someone "becomes" a Hindu, Christian or Jew. Other religions are merely perverted remnants of original Islam. Why should a Muslim return to such?

Ironically this understanding may also explain a goodly amount of tolerance in Islam. Although members of a missionary religion, Muslims are often experienced as being friendly disposed towards Jews and Christians accepting them as half-brothers, so to say. While infidels and idolaters were under threat of death, unless they would turn Muslims, Jews and Christians were not under such pressure, being considered the “People of the Book”. Even so it is the hope of a good Muslim to see Jews and Christians converted to Islam which eventually, so they believe, will bring all mankind to submit to Allah (S.8:39; 9:33; 61:9).

6.2.3 ISLAM IS SUBMISSION

Something which baffles every Westerner is a kind of dichotomy in the thinking of just about every Muslim. It is the absolute conviction of being right and the seeming disability to substantiate the claim to the truth rationally. This is rooted in the very foundation of Islam: **Submission**.

Obviously God may demand this rightfully, **provided He allows His followers to ascertain the origin and trustworthiness of what they are to follow**. But to question Islam is an unthinkable and monstrous act to a Muslim. To critically question the credibility of its only (!) messenger, the veracity of what he claims was revealed to him and the source it came from, simply does not occur to a Muslim. He is to do what he is told. No questions are to be asked -and there are many we would like to have answered. We, on the other hand, strongly agree with Os Guinness, when he says that the trustworthiness of a witness is of crucial importance. An intimate study of the moral life of Mohammed, for instance, would strongly question his integrity as a witness.

Consequently the *Qur'an* is read by most Muslims not so much in order to understand its content, but because it is meritorious to do so. It is the book, the pages, not so much the message, from which a Muslim seeks help. Little wonder then that countless millions wear portions of the *Qur'an* as amulets or charms for protection or “good luck” and that the book as such is revered, always given the place of highest honour, while the vast majority of Muslims are satisfied not to study it intelligently themselves, but to read it in Arabic, although in most cases this language is not or only marginally, understood. If questions occur, they refer to the specialist, the Sheikh or Maulana, depending on their answer.

Submission definitely includes subjection to the demands of the religious duties, the keeping of the “Deen”, the practice of Islam. Of these the performance of the five daily ritual prayers and the observance of the annual 28 day fast but also the pilgrimage to Mecca exercise a very strong influence on a Muslim. Doing this and obeying the hundreds of other little functions or rituals leads to identification. This identification leads invariably to the collective building of a wall around the Islamic community, if it exists in another context. This wall is to keep Islam and all that goes with it in, and everything else out. Any Christian with a word of witness is viewed as a missionary and this word makes shutters fall down.

All this emanated obviously from two basic intentions: to control these inside and to protect from the outside. Both have led Muslims willingly or unwillingly into a bondage, a prison. The driving power seems to be fear rather than concern. Why else would a system apply such pressure inwardly and outwardly? Our Lord Jesus told the people: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn.8:31-32). Do we see the difference? Although the *Qur'an* in one instance says, and this is endlessly quoted: “There is no compulsion in religion”(S.2:266), a Muslim may not compare, assess and choose the truth without most serious consequences. There is no “IF you hold to my teaching”. There is very little choice. A Muslim will be able to define **what** he perceives to be Islam. But he is unable to relate **why** he believes what he believes. This seems to him totally immaterial. He submits! What more does he need?

Therefore any form of independent (from the clergy) research and reasoning is just not done. And this is precisely where we as Christians can apply the lever. “Tell me **what** you believe!” is a question which is followed with much response. “**Why** do you believe this?” stuns a Muslim. He might be able to recall the two reasons he learned in Madrassa: 1. How can an illiterate man like Mohammed produce a book like the *Qur'an*? And 2. because there are many Muslims (Hafis) who can recite the whole of the *Qur'an* from memory! While this sounds somewhat impressive at first sight, when one is aware that it takes years of rehearsing to acquire this skill and that the content of it is less than the new Testament (there are 6616 verses in the *Qur'an* and 7959 verses in the N.T. of roughly the same length on an average), it is quite within our capability to learn this. Regarding Mohammed it ought to be considered first of all that it is by no means established that he actually was illiterate, but even if he was, he was certainly not unintelligent! It must be stated that all the knowledge contained in the *Qur'an* was available at the time of Mohammed in Arabia. To ascribe the literary style, which at that time was not unique, except, perhaps the coining of new words

derived from the Aramaic and Persian languages, to divine intervention, is as simplistic as to say that Shakespeare's writings or for that matter, the Rolls Royce are of divine origin, just because they happen to be the best of man's achievement.

Our conversation with Muslims should seek to establish, first of all, where and what the Truth about God and man and their relationship is. Search for the truth is first of all and essentially an objective task where sober and rational thinking and deduction have to take place. That this is not common to a Muslim does not mean that one has to give upon this premise. To the contrary! A Muslim must be challenged to use the God given faculties to divide truth from error and to choose what can be established as divine revelation.

This brings in another difficulty. And that is a Muslim's perception of revelation. He essentially thinks of inspiration (*wahy*), which is not what we or the Bible mean by revelation (= God reveals Himself). When he opens the Bible and reads of books by Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul and others, he will obviously ask where to find the Gospel which had been given by God to Jesus, for this alone is authentic to him. He is not interested to read what other writers have to say. He wants to read God's Word, the "thus says the Lord...", as it come down to Jesus! We know that there was never such a Gospel and that the suggestion that there was, stems from the Islamic concept of what Principles of Muslim Evangelism revelation is. But the *Qur'an* says there was! His conclusion is essentially that this original Gospel got lost and that the four Gospel recorders wrote down how they perceived Jesus. The Epistles have still less credibility with a Muslim. He knows in his heart that the *Qur'an* was actually sent down to Mohammed to replace corrupted Scripture which originally were pure and true, but over the centuries were changed and corrupted and in need for replacement.

Do we blame a Muslim whose mind has been coined this way, when he starts to attack the Bible? Even if some of his argumentation is totally without knowledge and often ridiculous, it bases on some real difficulties and sentiments he has.

6.2.4 THE HARD SHELL OF THE HEART

We ought to be aware that Muslims argue often enough among themselves in similar fashion with equal intensity.

Perhaps it is not inappropriate to consider for a moment what the angel of the Lord said to Hagar when expecting her child:

"You shall name him Ishmael (i.e. God hears), for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers" (Gen.16:11-12).

Does this not vividly depict the Arabs, or more generally Muslims as we know them from history, the very first of them, their leaders not excluded? Do we wonder when we read, despite the image of the unity and brotherhood in Islam, in internal magazines, tracts or article show people of different standpoints are abused? Many Muslims do not recognize the Saudi Government, which assumes the role of the protector of the holy places in Mecca. Yet, is a paragraph like this proper?

"Today we commemorate the first anniversary of the martyrdom of the hundreds of *hujjaj* who were so brutally murdered by the imperialist Americans at the hands of their Saudi lackeys. The Saudi-Quraishi regime, under the direct control and supervision of the enemies of Allah, saw it fit to massacre hundreds of Muslims who were fulfilling their obligation to Allah".

The reader may recall that during the Pilgrimage to Mecca in the eighties a group of Iranian Shiah Muslims seized control over the most sacred mosque around the Ka'ba, but was eventually overpowered. This article appeared at the first anniversary of this event (*Hujjaj* = pilgrims).

To be able to assess the following article, we will have to understand a little of the actual religious hierarchy in Islam, which understands itself to be a theocracy. As a general rule, one can say in essence that there is no professional clergy or priesthood in Islam.

It is the practice that prayers in a mosque are led by an Imam, a recognized person for this purpose, and that more prestigious mosques employ the services of an *Alim* (pl. *Ulama*), meaning a man of (theological) learning, who also functions as a local magistrate or judge, ideally both in civil and criminal matters. Other names may be given to that office. A Maulana or Shaikh for instance will clothe the same position. Such a person will as a rule have studied theology, function as a teacher of Islam, preach the '*Khutbah*', the sermon on Friday in the mosque, and perform certain ritual functions. He also enjoys esteem

in his community. This does not necessarily mean that he also will enjoy a salary. Many a Maulana lives of his daily toil.

However, in an open letter a group of Muslims opposed this system. Be they right or wrong in their assessment. Can a letter like this not be worded more considerate and more civil?

TAJDID AL-ISLAM

(The Coalition for the restoration of Islam)

An open invitation to all Muslims

“For many decades now the self-appointed and undemocratic Muslim clergy (ulama) have styled themselves as the so-called “high priests of the faith”. However, this status is completely incompatible with the basic tenets of the Holy *Qur’an*. In fact, in Islam there is supposed to be no priesthood or clergy class at all”.

“But owing to a number of factors, several partly-educated Muslims have pushed themselves over the years into what they falsely consider to be the “learned elite”. This semi-literate group has then manipulated the religious life of all Muslims”.

“With no proper counter-force to check their theological impropriety or ethical excesses, the Islamic religious hierarchy (particularly the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), (which should stand for the MANIACS & JOKERS CLUB) has now become a law unto itself. So much so, that they have been unaccountable for any misdeeds or wrongdoings committed in their individual or institutional capacity, This gross dereliction of public responsibility and duty has resulted in growing misbehaviour by these ‘ulama’”.

“Numerous high-handed practices such as illegal “instant” divorces; the blatant siphoning off of funds; the sinful conversion of Allah’s mosques into their own private domain; a ruthless anti-heretical witch hunt; the cruel breaking-up of families; the ugly blackmailing of businesses and other professional people; the un-*Qur’anic* ejection of worshippers from mosques; the scandalous sale of *waqf* property; the deplorable halaal food racket; the brutal terrorization of dissenters; the ritualization of faith; the condoning of backward customs; the big secret monthly bribes for the ulama from the CIA-backed *Rabitah* as well as many other outrageous deeds have all been justified in the name of Islam”.

“By their appalling actions and absurd antics, the narrow-minded Muslim leaders have distorted, twisted and destroyed the original message of Islam for their own selfish gain. In this manner, they have brought grave dishonour, shame and humiliation to Islam. Muslims have now become the laughing stock of everyone”.

“Not surprisingly, the rapidly worsening situation within the Muslim community (stemming from priority politico-social problems and the ridiculous obsession with *kufr* and heresy) has reached crisis point which demands prompt remedial action before large scale turmoil erupts and imbalances and social equilibrium”.

“In the absence of any legal ecclesiastical authority to curb the mounting acts of un-Islamic hooliganism, a new watchdog has been especially started to monitor and combat all theological lawlessness and religious dictatorship. This unique and courageous goal will be a Cape “first” and will be copied elsewhere”.

In the light of this given situation, how can we ever hope to penetrate to the mind and heart of a Muslim? Is Muslim evangelism not doomed to fail when we consider this multi-faceted and deeply rooted aggression which is so much part of Islam?

The following chapters will look into this question a little deeper and suggest ways and means to reach through the defense system in order to present Jesus Christ to a Muslim so that he can begin to understand what we mean to say and be able to appreciate and accept Him as the only means of rescue out of his human and divine dilemma.

But before doing so, we need to look at a couple of other aspects.

As before we cannot but stress that a working knowledge of principles is ever so much preferable to the adapting of a set of rules. We are not working with machines or with uniform type of 'souls', but with people who are all different - as we are different. It is plainly simplistic to pretend that we are all alike and respond to the same pattern of approach because we all have different backgrounds, education, problems, interests, temperaments, character and world views. And as little as Christians are alike, so are Muslims.

On the other hand Muslims do have similarities far greater than found among Christians. This is firstly based on the intricate and yet common practice of their religious forms, but also on common characteristics, which have developed from certain dogmatic premises. To overlook or minimize this, can have serious consequences.

6.2.5 THE POWER PRINCIPLE

When a Christian is asked which would be the most outstanding attribute of God, one would hardly expect another answer than love. Likewise in Islam the answer would be an unequivocal one: power. Consequently Christians are likely to value love as the highest virtue, whereas Muslims from the very beginning of Islam saw power as a virtue. This may partly be traced back to pre-Islamic times, when controversies were often settled by eloquent debates and the declared winner was the one who could silence his opponent. Hence the religious (public) debate is still a favoured form of expression in Islam. When Mohammed gained recognition and leadership in Medina after the Hegira ("flight" from Mecca), the struggle for power in militant expressions though at first rejected and disliked by his companions, became the norm. The later following assassinations of Mohammed's personal enemies, largely carried out by volunteer 'hit squads', only confirmed this as well as the rapid military expansion of Islam, particularly in the Century following the inception of this new religion. These "holy wars" which were conquests to conquer large territories from the Indus River in the East to Spain in the West, did not so much as one may expect, serve to convert the people - though pagans had no other choice if they wanted to stay alive - but to gain tribute.

But even among themselves the leaders were in constant conflict. Little wonder then that 4 of the first five Khalifs were assassinated, creating much bitterness, suspicion, division and hatred.

All this seemed to be governed by the Islamic theological concept of theocracy. Allah is the supreme ruler, and he must rule everywhere by way of the Shariah, which must be established in every country. As already mentioned earlier, the world is divided by Muslims into *Dar-ul-Islam* (the territory of Islam) and *Dar-ul-harb* (territory of war). Where the Shariah, the Islamic Law, is not yet established and practised, is still war territory, for this still has to be conquered and subjected to Allah. It is simply unrealistic to expect a Muslim to understand and appreciate the Christian view point of humility or even loving ones enemies. The militant conflict in the Middle East including the assassinations, genocide and hostage taking are not to be viewed as excesses, but as normative. The fanaticism of the soldiers or even youth who ran seemingly mindless into battle or minefields can only be understood in the 'light of the doctrine of martyrdom, which promises total absolution and immediate promotion to heaven, an advantage not to be expected by anybody else!

This thought pattern is applied to other spheres of life resulting in an intricately devised aggressive anti-Christian propaganda to which all Muslims are subjected who live somewhere near a Christian influence. Not only the content, but also the method of application seems to be very carefully calculated to silence any opponent.

Every Christian witness to Muslims should know about this precondition for on this develops a spiritual conversation. However, we have to retreat somewhat on this statement to allow for the many lovely, friendly, peace-loving or spiritually uneducated Muslims, who do not fall into this category at all. The Sufi, for instance, might see little or no point in an argument with doctrinal content, for he is not interested in this. Yet in orthodox Islam the religious polemics is definitely "in" and on the increase.

A softening of the argument by Christians to avoid confrontation or to take a humble position in a debate will essentially create an impression of weakness. Based on this pattern of thinking it is ridiculous to a Muslim that Jesus washed his disciples feet or 'worse', to offer Himself as the substitutional sacrifice for sinners. The idea of "going the second mile", to accept humiliation, to "offer the other cheek" or to deny oneself, are, as a rule, very strange to a Muslim. He demands what he deems as his right and, if need be, fights for it. This is leading to an ever increasing tension in areas where Muslims and Christians live side by side as, e.g. in Nigeria, Lebanon, Britain or Indonesia.

To understand this helps a witness to adjust to a given situation. The advice to avoid polemics and not to use apologetics in favour of showing a Christian live style in humility and love to attract Muslims to

Christ is simply based on the assumption that Muslims think and act like Christians. This does not mean that a Muslim is not attracted to loving and caring people! Weakness in his eyes is despicable though he will not say this - and a decided victory for him and Islam. Christian life style without a clear vocal testimony is not witness at all, for a Muslim will suppose that the influence of Islam on the Christian is beginning to bear fruit.

There is decidedly no wisdom in beginning a polemical argument with a Muslim! Yet one can very often not avoid it without losing ground. As a Muslim testifies and stands up for his religion, so he expects and honourable Christian to stand his ground. We do this, perhaps quite unexpectedly to him, with genuine love and concern, though, not to win an argument, but to show him the superiority of the Gospel.

6.2.6 THE DOING ASPECT OF ISLAM OVERAGAINST BEING A CHRISTIAN

Another religious position of a Muslim is his preoccupation with what Islam is and what he does. I just had a long, amiable and to the point debate. The witness of the Muslim friend centered on the superior way Muslims perform their personal hygiene, how they pray, fast, give alms etc. I could lead the conversation to the content rather than the form. Every Muslim is bound by strictly defined forms he has to observe, to give validity to his action. A wrong position of the feet in prayer, for instance, invalidates his exercise.

We, on the other hand, showed him what Jesus taught, on uncleanness. Observation of ablutions and dietary laws meant very little to Him. What defiles a person come out of the heart, the thought world which then formulates and wills sJn. A clean heart is the issue, not so much clean feet. How can we obtain a clean heart?! We drew attention not to the form, but the content of prayer. To us it is not a duty to be performed, but a privilege to speak – and listen! - to God Almighty. In all politeness and with much consideration we challenged him almost a dozen times to consider the content and not the form which is only of any use, if it holds content.

This was, no doubt, a new experience to him. He had never thought this way. We pray that what was said may leave a deep impression and create a hunger for this in his own heart.

While we did not dominate the conversation, we distinctly and specifically made our points.

6.2.7 EVANGELISM PRINCIPLES

Evangelism is first and foremost the conveyance of information about God, man, sin and the remedy for this: atonement through the shed blood and death of Christ. But this must always happen in the specific situation in which people with a particular background live. They will feel deeply threatened by what we say. The frame has to be such as not to intimidate a person and yet be distinct.

Further our rather differing concepts of the nature and character of God is likely to inhibit a spiritual conversation. There is no point in an approach based on “My daddy is stronger or better than your daddy!”

To a Muslim, Allah is up in the highest heights. He is far removed, absolute and sovereign and can only be worshipped in a master-slave relationship. He is feared! To many Muslims the *Wali* or ‘holy man’, even or particularly when he is already departed and consulted at the ‘*kramat*’ (tomb) is in practice more of a confidant and consultant in personal affairs than Allah, who is addressed largely in prescribed words and forms. Heavily practised witchcraft is likewise an expression of greater confidence in djinns or spirits than in the personal interference of Allah.

One needs to understand this position, in order to sensitively lead a Muslim further to an understanding and appreciation of our premise: God is a personal God. He cares. He listens to us. We can approach Him as His children. He wills good for us. While we decidedly revere Him, we do not fear Him. We fully confide in Him alone and need no further agencies. He is not preoccupied with Himself so that He has not time for us. He does not exercise revenge when we fail and approach Him for forgiveness of our sin. Unlike Allah, He is predictable. He has committed Himself in His Word and will not retract even a letter from it. We know where we are with Him, for if we confess our sins in repentance, He **will** forgive us, for He committed Himself in His Word to do so - and this Word is evidences divine.

This puts each Christian in the position to assess his standing before God. We can say ‘we have been saved!’ We can gratefully acknowledge that we have been forgiven, that the separation from God is over. When we die, we - know where we will go.

These are presumptuous statements to Muslims, for Allah is not predictable. He acts as he wills. Nothing commits or binds him. If we understand a Muslim's sentiments, convictions and premises, we will be able to communicate the Christian message much more understandably and will fulfill our task much better and more effectively. And yet, the Holy Spirit may have prepared a person or speak and convict a person that all our labour may seem unnecessary. But let us bear in mind. As a rule we have to make the message clear to him.

“And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ...” (CoI.4:3).

6.3. UNDERSTANDING CULTURE AND ITS ROLE

6.3.1 A DEFINITION OF CULTURE

Someone once said: “We don't see things as they are, but as we are” What we are is determined by a number of facts, of which culture is a very prominent one.

Let us have a good look at what we call culture. It is “the integrated system of learned patterns of behaviour, ideas and products characteristic of a society”, says Paul Hiebert, anthropologist of Fuller Seminary. “Culture is the totality of man's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly, behaviour acquired through social learning” (Robertson McQuilkin). But “culture is not an odd assortment of patterns. These patterns relate to each other and fit into a fundamental set of assumptions about the way the world really is put together, and how it ought to function - namely, to a world-view. Different cultures do not simply give different labels to the same world - they create different worlds” (Paul Hiebert). Bruce Nicholls supports this when he writes: “Culture is never neutral. Every culture reflects this conflict. Religion is never purely a human affair, but an encounter within the supra-cultural realm of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan” (“Contextualisation = a theology of Gospel and Culture). R. John Rushdoony concludes rightly: “The religion of a culture is that motive force which governs human action in every realm and embodies itself in the life, institutions, hopes and dreams of a society”. To put it simply. Religion is the soul and heart of each culture. “Every culture is a religion externalized, a faith incarnated into life and action. The main spring of every culture is its basic faith, its religious beliefs which undergird its hopes, actions and perspective. When that faith begins to decay, the culture decays” (R.J. Rushdoony: “The One and the Many”).

Bruce Nicholls in his already mentioned very helpful booklet .Contextualisation: A Theology of Gospel and Culture”, quotes G. Linwood Barney, saying that he “suggests that **each culture is a series of layers, the deepest of which consists of ideology, cosmology and worldview. A second layer which is closely related and probably derived from it is that of values. Stemming from both of these layers is a third layer of institutions such as marriage, law, education. These institutions are a bridge to the fourth and surface layer of material artefacts and observable behaviour and customs.** This surface is more complex and abstract, and it is more difficult to define the functional relationships between them”.

Francis Schaeffer adds to this: “When we talk of our view of the world, we talk inevitably of our view of God. Our world-view is the echo of our God-view. And our God-view shapes and forms our world-view” and the Bible says: “You are from God...they are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them” (1Jn.4:4).

Nicholls compounds this by stating that “where Christ is truly Lord of His Church, the cultural design for living of its members will be different from those of the wider community. There will be a progressive movement towards a “Christian culture”, which will reflect both the universality of the Gospel and the particularity of the human environment. The life style of the Indian Christian Church, for example, will have distinctive qualities similar to those of any other national Christian Church. It will manifest the fruit of the Spirit”. **McQuilkin** says the same in other words:

Culture ... is the vehicle of Scripture and at the same time, that very culture is the object of change demanded by Scripture... Virtually all teaching of Scripture is cultural- human behaviour, morals, values, ways of doing things are evaluated, prohibited, enjoined. It is not too much to say that the purpose of divine revelation is to create a culture, a special people of God” (Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible).

Equally the opposite may be said of culture which is not subjected to Scripture. Bruce Nicholls writes:

“Because of the ‘total inclusiveness’ of sin, all of culture ‘is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic’. Thus every segment of culture - world view institution, artifacts and outward behaviour - are perverted and abused” (See Rom.1:18-32).

So the problem we face is to indigenize the Bible without compromise, accommodation or syncretism. We also have to acknowledge that culture and its expression are dynamic. They constantly evolve, which becomes visible in the cultural expression: philosophy, literature and art (e.g. music, painting, sculpture, architecture) and in that order. Under an ecclesiastical or clerical rule these center in the expression of the respective religious content. In a more liberal ‘enlightened’ society the philosopher sets and defines the direction and trend, the writer popularises this and the artists express it in the art frames.

The exposure to new ideas, even of foreign content exercises an influence on a given culture and effects change. Trade, industrialisation, migration, education, philosophical and political thought and proposals are positively and negatively constantly in the process of cross-fertilisation. This essentially leads to a constant influence from “outside” as well as infiltration, accommodation and absorption of hitherto “foreign” thought which has its effect on a culture.

There is a constant challenge regarding the veracity and relevance of ones culture. The more liberal a society has become, the stronger the challenge becomes and the faster the changes.

The stronger the center of a culture is, i.e. the stronger the general religious convictions are, the more resistance to change is offered. The more liberal a society is, the more it is open to decadence and decay, as may well be observed in the European, US or in short Western countries. This may be perceived to be freedom from conservatism or whatever, but leads people to moral and spiritual depravity, as Rushdooney well observed.

Resistance to change can only delay and not avert it. This can either be directly done by force (as it was under Communist and Fascist dictatorships) or by denying exposure to new ideas, or indirectly by installing fear, creating guilt feelings or by “brain-washing” people, with the desired effect that they will not question their absolute or ultimate. Mind you, fear of exposure is always a sign of insecurity.

But when speaking of culture in the context of missionary work, we are likely to think firstly in terms of language, context of life, housing, food, habits and behaviour patterns. We think in other words, of cultural forms, which are determined by the cultural content. And that is indeed necessary, but not by seeing it independently of the content. Any person who is superficial on this point risks to miss the point altogether.

We do not want to waste time by repeating how essential it is to have a really good command of the language of people we try to evangelize, and that our general context of life must not clash with those we endeavour to reach - and that may mean many different things to many people. “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” is a text to be heeded in the full context of that chapter (Rom.14:5).

6.3.2 THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN MUSLIM EVANGELISM

WE LIVE IN AND ARE AFFECTED BY OUR OWN CULTURE

Before we think of a foreign culture and our adaptation to it, we have to think of our own. And before we think of our own, we have to consider that the message of God to man in the Old and New Testaments were revealed into a specific culture as well.

The Word of God was, over an extended period revealed to Hebrew, Greek, Roman and other people who lived in their specific cultures. No doubt these gave expression to the Word given into these cultures. When the Gospel came to Europe it had this coating which the missionaries must have brought along. In Europe over the years more or a different coating from the various cultures there was given. Although we read the Word of God in its revealed form, we are hardly able to interpret it free from these trappings. We ought to be aware of this! Else we not only take the Gospel to a people of a to us foreign culture, but also our specific understanding of it influenced by our own national or regional situation and culture, which would add to the already complex task of trans-cultural communication.

A neglect of this fact has led in several places to the understanding that the Gospel is “Western” and alienates the convert from their own to a foreign culture.

THE GOSPEL MUST BECOME ROOTED IN EACH CULTURE- AND TRANSFORM IT

Before we look at the positive possibilities, let us take heed to a warning, again from the able pen of Bruce Nicholls (“Contextualisation: A Theology of Gospel and Culture”):

“...Biblical content and form carries its own objectivity. It is not dependent on the relativity of the interpreter’s own culture or the culture into which he contextualizes it”.

“Hermeneutics begin with the recognition of the distinction between the two supra-cultural kingdoms - the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan - and the distinction between the church and the world”.

“Cultural syncretism...may result from an enthusiastic attempt to translate the Christian faith by uncritically using the symbols and religious practices of the receptor culture, resulting in a fusion of Christian and pagan (or for that matter Islamic, G.N.) beliefs and practices”.

“...if the gospel only modifies or changes a person or a community’s observable behaviour without producing an equivalent change in the fundamental world view, the level of communication is superficial”.

What that entitles is quite clear from Scripture:

“You...are from God and have overcome them (i.e. false prophets and spirits, G.N.), because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the **viewpoint of the world**, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood” (1Jn.4:4-6)

And yet the Gospel must be rooted in each host culture, and that is a process which can at best be aided by a foreign missionary, but not effected. The young church will have to read the Scripture and be taught to understand its theological, typological and symbolical content well, but then resist to copy the forms and cultural expressions of expatriate workers and teachers.

Obviously this needs a considerable time of guidance of new believers. This process needs much prayer, dedication, empathy and scholarly care!

J. Robertson McQuilkin asks a pertinent question about biblical interpretation and application and gives the answer:

“How does an understanding of the cultural context fit the task of interpretation and application? It is helpful in establishing the meaning of the passage to see it in the cultural context of the author and his original audience. Furthermore, it is helpful in making an authentic application of biblical truth, to see it in the cultural context of the contemporary audience”.

May I simplify and amplify this statement? For the purpose of evangelism-and that is what we are concerned with - **the understanding of culture and its role is to help communicate the Good News, the Gospel, in the peculiar circumstances of a given culture and to implant it into this so that it can become part of it, indigenous.**

Here theology, anthropology and communication fuse or merge. Let me define this a little better to avoid misunderstanding, **The knowledge about God and of God has to be translated not only into another language, but into another way of thinking and human experience.**

Without trying to minimize its use in the “home front”, **we have to scrap just about all evangelism concepts and slogans in preference of one designed particularly, meticulously, methodically, understandingly, with empathy and bearing in mind the philological as well as perception and comprehension difficulties, in order to present to the select cross-cultural audience an understanding, a realization, a cognition which exactly reflects in their minds and world the truth of the eternal Word of God.** This was a big sentence. Let us try to break it down.

Almost the sole tool for the transmission of abstract thought is language. Language has organically grown and developed within an culturally integrated society over a long period in which intercultural contact was, unlike now, the exception. Consequently the words grammar, phrases and idioms are embedded in a collective as well as individual realm, which is determined by the experience within a given culture.

In a society, in which, as we experienced, the wife approaches her husband in a bent down position and converses with him kneeling while he sits in an easy-chair, there will be a different understanding of the

meaning of the word love than, say, in a carnival situation in Germany or when a young man proposes to the choice of his life in Mexico or when a jubilee couple after the celebration of their anniversary confirm their love for each other. We consider not just different words for love, but different meanings as well. In a language study we will learn the choice of the right word. Culture fills these words with differentiated content.

CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS

When we try to compile a Gospel message and transmit it into Urdu, Malay or a Sudanese dialect, but depend Entirely on a dictionary, the content is likely to be unintelligible to the addressee. Technically, for instance, the word “wind” may mean the winding of the clock, or a wind which blows, or something a baby “brings up”. The word uniform may mean unvarying or a type of dress etc. The meaning of such words is given by their context. This pertains to language study. Much more complex matters become, when we try to convey spiritual content, in which words may carry a grossly different meaning or content: ‘Conversion’, ‘salvation’, ‘repentance’, ‘grace’, ‘accepting Christ’, are words full of meaning to an Evangelical. A catholic will get quite a different message from these words and how much more a Hindu, Muslim or Buddhist! Other concepts are more complex still: ‘Son of God’, ‘Trinity’ and ‘Crucifixion’, to name but a few connotation and instigation words!

Anyone seriously intending to share the Gospel with his contemporary, cannot just go ahead and say his thing, however true this may be. He has to differentiate between an Agnostic and a cynical Marxist, a Catholic, nominal Protestant or Mormon, a teenager, Jappie or senior citizen, a manual labourer or academic in order to truly communicate. This includes, at least a general knowledge of the content of this person’s religious convictions or life philosophy, but also of his comprehension of the religious terminology one uses. How much more understanding should we have when witnessing cross-culturally! **The understanding only comes, deepens and matures, by listening to and learning from the people** who have learned to confide in us because they accept and trust us.

After having said all this we have to add, however, that this rule has its exceptions. We are befriended with a professor of Hindu philosophy who, on his way to university, provided a daily lift to a very simple workman, who happened to be a Christian and witnessed in his simple way to the learned man - who saw the truth, informed himself on a broader level and turned to Christ for salvation.

The learning about a specific culture is the key to an understanding of the people who belong to it and by that the foundation of being understood. As said elsewhere, we do not want to minimize the work of the Holy Spirit in the understanding of spiritual truth! But we likewise do not want to allow for laziness and lack of care in conveying the Word of Life. **We should never attempt to do what only God can do -on the other hand we should not expect God to do what He ordered us to do!**

IS THIS TOO MUCH FOR US?

Obviously too much what has been written here will seem to be as a discouraging or even deterring barrier to Muslim evangelism. A truly biblical question arises anew: “Who is equal to such a task?” (II Cor.2:16). Thanks be to God who provided a unique answer! “Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent...” (II Cor.3:5-6). And to decode the message a little, we read how this is implemented: “In Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God” (2 Cor.2:17). It is indeed worth and necessary to contemplate on these words for a while. Later we will in greater detail devote some time to this most important and difficult subject.

6.3.3 CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND TRAPS IN MUSLIM EVANGELISM

I do not know whether anyone would voluntarily choose to do mission work among Muslims. Only the constraining love of Christ (2 Cor.5:14), which desires deeply to see the blind and lost Muslims see and saved, can be a motivator. It is this love which makes men and women sit down to consider the best ways and means to get through to those beloved, lost people.

THE INFLUENCE OF IDEAS AND VALUES AND SUCCESS

But even missionaries, be they fulltime or not, are human beings, brought up and taught in and by a world which is governed by ideas, which are by no means all bad, but are not necessarily biblical and yet influence the thinking of all Christians. In this world the value which is attached to a person and which gives him self-esteem is derived from very few, let me say qualities for lack of a better word: possession, position, power, intelligence and attractiveness. Anyone of these or better still, a combination of several secure the much coveted success and prestige. "Let us make a name for ourselves" (Gen.11 :4), is an abiding desire, as we can well see from the biblical reference.

Without attaching any value to it we realize that success and prestige thinking has not stopped at the church doors. No elaborating is needed for this statement. While a TV star evangelist and a few others do experience "success" and recognition, the pastor from the church up the road, the itinerant evangelist with a tent which draws an obligatory audience of supportive believers who come out of a sense of duty, the missionary working on the edge of a desert in his make shift clinic, get pretty little boost for their ego.

Moreover, financial support for missionaries often increases or diminishes with their success story (= usefulness) or lack thereof. It has been earnestly suggested to forget Muslim evangelism because of the small response to it! All this has resulted in practical terms that very few missionaries indeed (by comparison, at least) have gone to the Muslim world. To illustrate this, let us take note that in the 1960's or 70's there have been more missionaries working among the Eskimos of Alaska than among all Muslims worldwide (Herbert Beerens).

WHOSE FAULT IS THE LACK OF SUCCESS?

In a society in which productivity, usefulness and success are key issues, obviously many questions concerning the 'why' have been raised, and as many answers have been provided, many from the desks of learned men who teach the next generation to do missionary work. The observing reader will have noticed that up to now we have in our investigations put the 'blame', if one can use this word at all, on the Islamic system which resulted in an almost total closing of the Muslim's minds to any outside influence. Only secondary we rated the lack of understanding of the psyche of the Muslim and his religious system by the witness. Unfortunately this has not been recognized by many scholars and multipliers, for two reasons: an assessment of Islam based on the touching sincerity of many of its followers rather than by source and historical studies (and a comparison of this with biblical fundamental truth) which led to the conclusion that at best the missiological approach and method to Muslims has been at fault, or worse, that the missionaries, lacking the necessary qualifications (e.g. anthropology, sociology, psychology etc.), by their controversial ministry closed the doors to the hearts of the Muslims.

While as a Christian I am all too aware that "nothing good lives in me" (Rom.7:18) and that "there is no one righteous, there is no one who understands" (Ps.14:1-3;53:1-3; Rom.3:10-11), I am also aware that God has given me, my fellow believers all over the world, and mankind as a whole, a dignity which flows from the fact that He created us, and loved us to the extend of His sacrifice on the cross for us. To criticize former witnesses for not acting on or teaching value and knowledge premises of today is neither just nor appropriate.

OUR MISSIONARY FORE-FATHERSON TRIAL

What do I aim to say? That I like to take up the case for our pioneer fore-father missionaries, who went on fragile ships to Africa, Asia or America, not for personal gain, but because they followed the call of Jesus Christ, just as we do. They went to kinds of people they had never seen or experienced before, whose language they could not understand, whose culture appeared altogether strange, because they had not been introduced to them in a TV programme. They had to lower the quality of life dramatically and give up their customary context of life altogether. They lived in circumstances which afforded most of them a life expectancy of less than a couple of years. If they lived longer and were married, they had to part with their children - should these survive - to afford them some education back "home" with some relatives, with hardly a chance to ever see them again. They did it, because they loved the Lord and wanted to be faithful and obedient to Him by bringing the only valid message of reconciliation, forgiveness and spiritual renewal, in other words salvation, to the countless people for whom Christ died without them knowing it. These missionaries were no academics, but tradesmen or peasants. They knew little or nothing of the social sciences, for these were not as yet formulated; and because they taught the people whom they evangelized

some or other trade, they now stand accused of having predestined their flock to become ready objects of capitalist exploitation and imperialist colonialist expansion. But they brought what they had. First of all themselves and their lives and the Gospel, the Word of Life.

SOME RESPONDED- OTHERS NOT

While their labour for the Lord was very fruitful in some cultures and ethnic groups, it was not so in others. An evangelical assessment of their lack of success is now being made. It is not as malicious as that of the liberal or left wing, mind you. It is less condemnatory and much more in the spirit of "let's do it better". But out of this "failure. to produce success" grew several new missiological approaches which we ought to try to investigate briefly.

We are all aware of varying theological positions within the Church. In our time and age philosophical, social and political considerations and attempts to solve problems have created a new vis-a-vis which also has dividing effects within the Evangelical camp. Those who have, consciously or unconsciously been influenced by a Marxist social analysis and have begun to follow its suggested efforts for a remedy, are opposed by those more on the right, who don't expect diagnoses and solutions from that angle. The conservative lobby rather supports the free market enterprise philosophy, which carries the name Capitalist System, which is equally loaded with all kinds of negative sentiments.

WHICH IS OUR WORLD VIEW?

These theories are often not overtly adhered to, but even so we must take it, that these two opposing economic and socio-political positions have created a definite schism which causes endless debates. It is not our object to prove the one position right and the other wrong, but rather to make us aware that we read the Bible through the glasses of our respective world views. And that lets us interpret Scripture to the people we witness to!

Depending on or analysis of the cause of poverty, injustice and political oppression in this world, we will seek to implement the cure. While the one camp will blame unjust structures - and the definition of **what** is unjust and **why** varies widely again - and economic as well as political exploitation by the West for the misery in the world, the other will list with concern the population explosion, political and economic corruption of new leaderships, lack of motivation and productivity as causes. Some will deem that lack of productivity -coupled very often with the abuse of vices such as alcohol - is caused by exploitation and poverty, while others believe this to be the cause. Both sides act from the premise of their conviction and tackle the immense problem of this world in different ways. I like to state here, that it is my conviction that, leaving aside some vociferous propagandists, each follows, driven by concern and love, the two "greats" of the teaching of Christ, the Great Commission and the Great Commandment (Mt.28:18-20 and 22:37-40). Far be it from us to judge lightly our brothers' sincerity and devotion to Christ and His cause when they differ on the way the goal is to be reached! This should not mean, however, that we should stop learning and to be constructively critical towards our own position and that of other.

As already said, I view people with concern who take the missionaries of old to task for what they deem to have been failures in methods or character. One does not want to cover up sin, which was committed, but seeks to justify what has been done by faith and deep inner conviction by much sacrifice. Obviously we do things differently today. But we live in quite another world today!

THE "WRAPPING" MAY CHANGE - NOT THE CONTENT

While the world and its dilemmas change, the Word of God is eternal. Therefore, while the wrapping, the form or method of communication must change, because it has to meet today's people and situations, the content, the message, must never be altered. As we will later consider, it must be the aim of the communicator by his way of presentation, to create in the mind of the other person, which is deeply coined and influenced by another religion, perception and world view, an understanding of the exact replica of what the Bible really teaches and means.

It is at this point, that different ways of proclamation are developing. let us have a look at this. It is obvious, that it is necessary for a cross-cultural worker to learn the language of the people he or she is sent to, in order to communicate the Gospel. While most of us believe that God can overrule this basic requirement

by direct revelation, and it has happened and does happen, we will still learn the language in order to communicate.

TEACHING IN WORD AND DEED

But as children will not develop properly by learning through instruction alone, but also by imitation and deduction, so it is in the proclamation of God's Word. Unless the Christian acts as a model by which an unbeliever can see what we mean to say, only theoretical knowledge can be conveyed. What is prayer, sanctification, the fruit of the Spirit? The life of a Christian evangelist or counsellor will have to spell this out: If it is not the prescribed performance of the *Salat* or the following of the rules which determine what is lawful or unlawful according to the *Deen* or the *Sunnat* -what then is it? The Christian individual or better community will teach that (hopefully) by their actions and life style.

I strongly believe it to be an overstatement, however, when people say that our actions speak louder than our words. This is only true in a negative sense. Actions without words will surely create in a Muslim's mind the impression, that the Christian is slowly but surely accepting Islam! But the message and the model of the messenger can convey the content of the Word of God.

The desire to do this, to display the love and concern of the messenger, has led to a dangerous attempt. It says that as Jesus Christ who is God (Eph.3:6) became **incarnate** in this world and made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, so we also as ambassadors of Christ must leave behind our human identity, and make ourselves servants in another community. This is perceived to mean a total **identification** with the people to whom we are sent.

DANGER POINTS

This involves a two-fold aspect. The outer identification and the inner one. The first is clear: to live, speak, dress and behave like the people around us -yet without sin, naturally. This entails the identification with the artefactual and customary parts of the host culture. The second is much more complex, of course, for it involves the "inner layers of the onion", to fall back on the picture we used before. This would mean identification with the institutions (e.g. marriage, law and education) in a given culture. If this culture expects or demands a single missionary to be married (perhaps by arrangement), or that the law (i.e. the *Deen*, *Shariat* and the *Sunnat*) is to be followed - and that means in no uncertain terms identification with Islam - and that the children of the witness will have to be educated in the Madrassa system, and not sent "home" for education, for that would betray our identification to be untrue and only a means to an end. I do not even want to go deeper to the next layers of values and world-views, ideology and cosmology or, in other words, religion.

When we speak of "inculturization", how do we define this word? I know of commended missionaries who identify so much with the forms of Islam, that they follow the set prayer times and practices with slight variations, observe the annual fast and even worship in a mosque with all the required rituals. The reasoning behind it is a misunderstood version of what Jesus and Paul and Peter did. They went into the synagogue to worship and to teach. Scripture make~ it quite clear that Paul says that he became a Jew to the Jews, came under the Law and became weak and all things to all men to save some (1Cor.9:19-23).

In order to make a point we ought to ask a question. Did Paul also include idol worship, immorality, murder, gossip or whatever in his "all things"? Did he become immoral or an idol worshipper to save some? Obviously not. So there is a limit or principle involved.

The synagogue was a place of worship and instruction for the (then) people of God. Jewish worship was centered on Yahweh Elohim and His Word, the Old Testament. That makes it decisively different from any other place of worship. We have no record, for instance, that Paul went to the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love to worship. We better be careful not to point at Paul's sermon on the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16-32), for a careful study will disqualify many an argument in favour of contextualisation in this exposition.

To equate a synagogue with a mosque simply speaks of ignorance either of Islam or hermeneutics or both. Conscientious witnesses will even in the case of assimilating to forms of Islamic content apply scrutiny. Scripture gives many a warning in this direction (Gen.34:23 (contextualisation); Lev.18:2-33; Judg.2:13 and 1Kings 18:18), as may be seen from Lev.20:23):

"You must not live according to the customs of the nations...! Abhor them."

said the Lord, simply because these customs carried a meaning and content which was and is in contrast to God's purpose.

All this falls under the broad term of contextualisation and divided missionaries of different view points, often overlooking the consequences, which may be anticipated. Both should be concerned about the effectiveness of their witness and the perception of their actions by the Muslims.

Another word, of caution needs to be added here, it seems to me. It concerns a kind of anthropomorphism. In order to understand and communicate with people (of another culture), we try to put ourselves into their position and try to discover what their seeming lack, their "felt need" is, in order to find a point of contact and to be more acceptable by them. This may easily lead to false decisions, for we project our feelings or desires or values into **their** lives.

When trying to locate the best position of a new missionary in a rural Muslim society, we asked one of the very isolated Christians there for his opinion: "What is better, to move into the village and live among the people to befriend them and share in their daily lives, to be one of them - or to move a little up the mountain outside the village so that inquirers may go there with little fear of being seen and stigmatized?" After some consideration he answered: "Up the mountain! He comes as a religious teacher. That indicates dignity and propriety. A teacher must not go to the people, the people must go to him!"

When we asked the next day in a neighbouring village for the house of a missionary who was committed to "incarnational living", the people pointed out his house: "Oh - you want to visit the foreigner!" This "foreigner" and his wife had done what they could to be part of the community. They confided to us that they had been close to quitting a little time before. It is hard and frustrating work! They obviously still suffered a guilt feeling for "living way up" materially, for they owned a fridge and an old vehicle, which they rejected to use except under special circumstances in favour of bicycles on which they rode to the nearest town to secure their supplies and fetch the mail. One may say that this is close to an obsession. What about the time wasted travelling these distances by bike? This is true and yet we must appreciate their aim and commitment, and also the difficulty in their conscience.

Missionaries do not come from a vacuum. They come from real life situations in which they were exposed to ideals and theories, concepts and ways of doing things. When trying to identify with other cultural situations, times come, where the reality challenges our ideals. Then one easily grinds ones teeth with the determination to stick it through. In case of break-down or failure one may blame oneself for this, instead of adjusting to find a tolerable solution. An added consideration comes once children are added to the couple. Since this is a controversial topic, laden with emotion, we only mention this to strive for a balanced position, in responsibility to God and the children and oneself.

Of course we are all different individuals. Let us assume that an extrovert, sanguinic person from a rural background moves into these circumstances. There is not likely to be much conflict. But if an introvert, choleric person coming out of a somewhat sophisticated city life gets there, the likelihood is that tension and frustration will lead to depression and inactivity and becomes by that counterproductive. This cannot be evaluated as an indication of lack of spirituality. Wise leadership and sensitive selection are indeed recommended in the placement of missionaries. But that is not sufficient. An assessment based on a real understanding of the local situation, culture and custom, and not our own projection of things, is equally needed.

The tragedy is, that it may be observed that persons of a certain persuasion, glory in their achievement, reflecting a judgment that those who do not think and act like themselves are (still) on a lower level of commitment and spirituality.

Let us try to define the areas of concern. While average missionaries these days often appear to be object-orientated managers to the indigenous people, those who endeavour to invest themselves in 'incarnational living' are likely to overspend themselves, unless this type of life corresponds with their temperament and/or experience. This may lead to frustrations which may even lead to an inner anger against those for whom they sacrifice themselves, for somehow one does expect a reward, which may never come. In addition one will have to carefully assess whether a Peter can expose himself in the same way as a Paul. I refer here to their respective matrimonial status. Most of all we recommend a really careful study of how the indigenous people perceive and understand what we do or not do. We might unwittingly pass on the opposite message of what we really intend to convey. An inappropriate familiarity can be quite embarrassing to people as well. So discretion and a goodly dose of sensitivity must accompany all our action.

Why have we said so little about those who come to the mission field or other ministries with attitudes of superiority. The person who is so highly qualified, the one who knows so many ways of doing things better and eagerly displays his keenness to help the ignorant and primitive people, to whom they condescend?

I suppose that unless we are conceited, we have just now all been addressed. Of course, we all do know that we can do things better (of course we don't say it or brag about it!), else we would not endeavour to advocate our ways and methods, be they medical, educational, agricultural or whatever. Unless we think we can do something better, we would hardly dream of "helping" people.

And there are so many people who want and need to be helped too! And it gives us the sense of being needed, being accepted! It gives so much fulfillment!

We will have to decide whether or not all this is wrong, preposterous or presumptuous and instigated by pride or whether this is a natural phenomenon, and that we all need a feeling of being accepted, of self-worth. Is this part of our humanity, part of the spring which keeps us moving, a need such as that for food, shelter and recreation? Or is this the 'flesh' in us which we may classify as pride?

We are people. We cannot escape our humanity. But we have to anxiously guard that this is not driven by the flesh, but that, whatever we do, we do it to the honour and glory of our beloved Lord (1Cor.10:31-32), and that we do it to make Him known!

As in all the other chapters, we do little to offer do-it-yourself solutions. We try to look together at the principles that govern, and here in particular at our culture, other cultures and the people in these systems, including ourselves. This may well help us to look at many an unrecognized facet, to take this into account and to understand better what we may do and how we can do it to clarify the message which has been entrusted to us to be conveyed to those who do not as yet know it, or refuse to consider it - out of ignorance.

We may have different temperaments, intellects and social backgrounds. We may attempt to go new ways, or be compelled to walk the old, approved one. Let us do this in unison and harmony and according to the gifts, given to each of us.

In an orchestra many instruments are played. Some are played by soloist. But together they produce a gripping, beautiful symphony - under the leadership of one conductor. Let all of us be expert players; and let us strive to produce something of utmost harmony. And let us leave the leadership to our Conductor, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. And let us play according to the sheet music, and not our individualistic fancy!

6.3.4 CONTEXTUALISATION AND CONFRONTATION

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of God". (2Tim.2:15)

WHAT CONTEXTUALISATION IS

The word "Contextualisation" is not in the Concise Oxford Dictionary (7th edition), probably because it is a relatively new creation. As the word suggests, it is a contextual theology. The object is quite clear: to introduce the Gospel to people living in the context of a foreign culture, who by its different content, perception and world view have difficulty in understanding and accepting it. It is to serve as a bridge. It wants to diminish unnecessary obstacles in the way of understanding and comprehension of the Gospel by members of a particular culture or religion.

What does this word 'contextualisation' actually imply, how is this concept applied? In a way the contextualist is reacting to what is perceived to be the confrontationalist. Unfortunately many of its proponents are not quite sure how to go about things and get caught in the peripheral. Other concepts, like 'friendship evangelism', 'felt-needs-ministry' etc. are linked up with it and form a united front against the 'controversialists', 'apologists' and 'confrontationalists', referring to missionaries of earlier generations like C.G. Pfander, St.Clair-Tisdell, Samuel Zwemer or Temple Gairdner and those who do not avoid discussions or debates with Muslims on points of disagreement, but have built up a case for the Christian faith and also against Islam, operating from a predominantly theological position.

On the other hand all these terms are lacking a precise definition and thus convey only a vague identification. When, a couple of years ago, we had the privilege to meet a mission leader and we discussed the question of contextualisation, he decidedly classified himself to be a contextualist. In the ensuing conversation we discovered, however, that we held largely the same position - and I had been classified to be a confrontationalist, which I do not approve of, mind you. Because labelling can easily create suspicion and mistrust, we like to endeavour to clarify terms and investigate the need for various roles to be assumed.

IS CONTEXTUALISATION THE ONLY METHOD OF EVANGELISM?

Sharing with a group of missionaries to Muslims in South East Asia the questions went, as usual, much in this direction. Besides the dedication and zeal a definite insecurity as to which way to take could be sensed as much as disagreement on that very point among the team members. By way of illustration I likened missionary work to a carpenter shop in which it was decreed that from now on only planes were allowed to be used. No more sawing, chiseling or drilling! The point got home.

If I go to a family with, say, matrimonial problems, I am a 'felt-need-minister'. To my neighbour I am a friendship evangelist - and that involves more than just friendship! When someone argues that 3 cannot be one - referring to the teaching of the Trinity, or that God cannot have a son, or that Jesus did not die on the cross or that the Bible has been corrupted, I am an 'apologist' and when I present the Gospel it may well be that I have to be a confrontationalist, for the 'Gospel' and the 'Jesus' a Muslim is talking about are not the biblical ones. We have to find the Truth together, and that will more often than not only be possible by a confrontation of the 'truths'.

What matters is that all of this is done in **love**. Not sentimental love, but the love **of** Christ (not even **for** Christ) **will dictate how we speak the Truth** (Eph.4:15). We will feel so much for, and understand our hearer so well that, **whatever negative we say, will hurt us at least as much as him**. Schaeffer called this a '**loving confrontation**'.

LIMITATIONS AND PROBLEMS

The missiologist Samuel Schlorff proposed a general principle for contextualisation: "Islamic linguistic and socio-cultural **forms** may be adopted or adapted by the young church **provided** that such use does not involve, either explicitly or implicitly, the assimilation of Islamic **meanings**" ("Towards a Mission Position on Contextualisation").

Facing the difficulty of translating the Christian message into another thought world with strongly varying imagining, meaning, content and symbolism, sensitive Christians have at all times tried in sometimes quite opposing ways to do justice to this need.

I take it, that real evangelical contextualisation is to make the Gospel comprehensible, intelligible and relevant to our various hearers. The question arising is **which** obstacles must be removed and which dare we not remove to enable communication of the Gospel as perfectly as possible in the light of the given religious and cultural situation. Differences and dangers arise not so much from the principle of this, but rather from the implementation. Obviously problems arose as to what the best methods of communication are, after all, contextualisation is a form of communication.

THE ART OF SPEAKING MEANINGFULLY

As we already observed, one form of contextualisation is called 'incarnational living':

Bashir Abdol Massih, an evangelist among Muslims in the Middle East, in his contribution to "The Gospel and Islam Compendium" (MARC 1978) says:

"Christ must become incarnate in specific cultural forms. The incarnational witness is one in whom love has worked so deeply that he seeks in every way possible to become like the hearer so that he can manifest the Gospel in thought, communication, and religio-cultural forms that relate meaningfully to the hearers."

So far so good. The difficulty with such ambiguous statements, however, becomes obvious when people of different backgrounds try to implement this. By implication we read here that those who are not 'incarnational' witnesses do not love deeply. Here one's conviction about a method of operation becomes the measure of everybody's depth of love! What do we mean by 'in every possible way' and 'to become like the hearer'? And in religio-cultural forms? In the forms of the Bible? Or Islam?

We see how dangerously close we can come to syncretism without clearly defining what we mean to say.

Donald R. Rickards, Professor of Missions at Liberty University, states in the same Compendium:

"As much of the cultural background must be preserved as possible, the point being, to help the Jesus Muslim to see that in coming to the Lord he has not had to cross over from his culture to an alien culture".

Again questions come to mind. What is a “Jesus Muslim”? Can he yield his life to Christ and stay a Muslim? Remain submitted to Allah? Is there no need to differentiate between Allah and Yahweh Elohim, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the triune God? What does ‘crossing over to an alien culture’ mean? When we use the word culture, do we mean forms and customs? Or institutions, values and world-view? One does not want to be difficult, but precise answers to these questions are vital to the concepts and implementation of these ideas. It is clear from the context of this article, that the concern of Prof. Rickards is to avoid the impression in the Muslims “that if he accepted that message (Le. the Gospel), he would be expected to join our culture, or at least leave his own”. And has he not got a point? How many preachers seemed to have linked conversion to the wearing of tie and collar or what else was or is deemed to be ‘proper’.

But becoming a Christian means leaving Islam, and on this point I am quite dogmatic. How can one stay in an Islamic culture when rejecting Islam? Again we do not mean the artefactual and customary part of culture, but the core, the Islamic culture, Of course one can have long see-saw conversations on this topic. I personally resent compromise as much as Muslims do. **Assimilation** is not only a whitewashing of Islam, but also an obliteration of the distinction and difference that Islam as anti-Christian religion shows as compared with the content of the Christian message. The next step is **syncretism**.

While we all are for building bridges rather than building walls, we have to make sure that no false signals are conveyed, no compromise is entered into and the content of the Bible is not blurred or obscured by the methods we use, for these are also forms of expression.

To balance this we have to caution that what is right is not always practical or pleasant. As Christians we better not always seek pragmatic solutions which might well be blunting the cutting edge of the Gospel. The cross is and always has been a “*skandalon*” (offence) to those who believe to be able to earn their salvation, which is the total misjudgment of the holiness and righteousness of God or the depravity of man or both, as in Islam. Bruce Nicholls says: “The Word of God changes the direction of culture and transforms it”, Not vice versa! “Throughout the history of Western Christian theology the truth of the Gospel has suffered from an unconscious assimilation of conflicting tenets and practices”.

Francis Schaeffer confirms this:

“The problem which confronts us as we approach modern man today is **not** how we are to change Christian teaching in order to make it more palatable, for to do that would mean throwing away any chance of giving the real answer to man rather it is the problem of how we may communicate the Gospel so that is understood”.

Therefore the presentation of Christ, His cross and His salvation cannot but be a challenge to other “truths”. Wherever the Truth question is not raised, the absolute claims of Christ are negated. Therefore, “Truth is always a confrontation with non-truth” (F. Schaeffer). We all do agree on this.

THE SPECTRUM BETWEEN THE EXTREMES.

If we would place the ardent ‘contextualist’ on the left side of the spectrum, we will have to place the ‘confrontationalist’ on the right. Both aim to communicate the Gospel as acceptably as possible, but disagree on what that means. While the former majors on the socio-cultural issues, the latter is more concerned about the right perception of theological ones. Both methods aim in the same direction, but both have excesses and pitfalls.

In responding to a paper presented by Harvey Conn in 1978 at the ‘North American Conference on Muslim Evangelisation’ under the heading ‘The Muslim Convert and His Culture’, these responses are recorded (“The Gospel and Islam Compendium”):

Conn has shown masterfully that the barriers are not in Islam but in Western Christianity and we can now move from apologetics to anthropology”.

Referring to a comparison of Jewish and Islamic cultures, it was said that

“we believe that much of Jewish culture was God given...we do not believe that Muslim customs and cultures are in the same way God given”.

Opposing an earlier statement it was said:

We don’t need to dislocate them (i.e. the Muslims) out of their culture, but we need to dislocate them out of their religion”.

Regarding the avoiding of unnecessary offenses to be put in the way of Muslims to come to Christ it was commented:

“Who is offended by the cross, they or we? Everything is offensive to the Muslim so we change it all. But what shall we do with the cross? We cannot translate it, we cannot change it. It will always remain an offense. There is a danger of our becoming men of anthropology, sociology and culture but failing to be men of the Spirit”.

“The motifs of Islam and Christianity are opposite - the *hijra* and the cross (standing for flight from consequences and facing them! G.N.). Thus the differences are more than terminological- they are profoundly theological and practical”.

“It’s simplistic to say the theological barriers are not primary - they are monumental”.

USING THE QUR’AN IN OUR WITNESS

An attempt to use the Qur’an to “prove” to Muslims the veracity of the Bible and to “preach the Gospel from the Qur’an” was answered by Samuel Schlorff in his paper: “The Hermeneutical Crisis in Muslim Evangelisation”. He assesses the situation as follows:

“At the heart of the problem is the question of using the Qur’an as a “bridge” in Muslim evangelization. Actually this is nothing new. From the beginning of Christian-Muslim relationships, the Christian side has always made use of the Qur’an in one way or another...”

“To begin, what precisely is meant by “using the Qur’an as a bridge”? Unfortunately, there has always been a certain ambiguity in descriptions of the method. As a matter of fact, the Qur’an has been used in several very different ways. Without being exhaustive let me mention a few:

- (1) One of the more innocuous ways is to use Qur’anic vocabulary, literary forms and style to express Gospel content.
- (2) Another is to use Qur’anic data as evidence for historical facts, e.g. that Muhammad himself never claimed that the text of the Old or New Testaments was corrupted.
- (3) Then there is one, which I shall call the Christian Qur’anic hermeneutic. Earlier polemicists such as Pfander also used this method but later writers have developed and refined it. The “bridge” idea refers really to this method. Using the “Christian potential” of the Qur’an is, strictly speaking, a matter of giving the Qur’an a Christian interpretation. What is involved is appealing to certain Qur’anic data or expressions having a verbal affinity with certain Biblical data as evidence for a Christian interpretation of that data, and of the Qur’an as a whole. For example, Qur’anic references to Christ as “Word of God” and “a Spirit from Him” (Sura 4:169) are often given as proof of a high Christology...”

“The Christian Qur’anic hermeneutic assumes an essential agreement between the Qur’an and the Bible on many points. In so doing, it creates an authority conflict for Muslim inquirers and converts, and for the emerging Muslim convert churches”.

“The fact is that commitment to Christ inevitably involves commitment to the authority of the Bible. When a Muslim inquirer is confronted with the claims of Christ through the Scriptures, he is faced with a choice: he must either commit himself to the Bible and the Biblical view of Christ and forsake the Qur’an, or commit himself to the Qur’an and the Qur’anic view of Christ and reject the Scriptures. Even when the Muslim is initially led to the Scriptures and to Christ through his own study of the Qur’anic witness to Christ, the choice is still clear-cut; he is unambiguously confronted with a supernatural Christ only in the Scriptures, so if he would follow this Christ, it must be through the Scriptures”.

“However, these principles really represent an evangelical interpretation of Scripture and find no support in Judaism or in Islam”.

“It is this method which is at the root of the hermeneutical crisis in Muslim evangelization, Part of the problem is that many sincerely do not recognize it to be a problem, Who has not read of converts from Islam, here or there, for whom the Qur’anic witness to Christ has played a role in their conversion? While their number may not be large, their very existence does give pause for reflection. And, of course, who has not found that quoting the Qur’an is a sure way to get the Muslim’s interest? Moreover, does not good pedagogy dictate that one proceed from the known to the unknown?”

“However, when it comes to evaluating the method, a few favourable results are not sufficient evidence. When one considers the results throughout history, it must be acknowledged that, to say the very least, its effectiveness is ambiguous and even dubious”.

“A second problem with the Christian Qur’anic hermeneutic is that it introduces an authority conflict into the Church, It tends to compromise the unique authority of the Scriptures by an implicit recognition of the divine authority of the Qur’an”.

While agreeing with most of what has been stated here, we have to allow for one problem. While Schlorff criticizes a “Christian interpretation” of the Qur’an, he cannot be sure that the ‘*Tafsir*’, the Islamic interpretation, is more correct. One will have to find out what the original meaning was, and so this becomes an exegetical question, rather than a hermeneutical one, and I am not at all sure that Muslims will be able to substantiate their argument.

FORMS AND SYMBOLS CARRY A MESSAGE !

There is another aspect to which Samuel Schlorff directs our attention. It concerns the danger of using Islamic forms without being aware of the meaning they signal. In another paper (“Towards a Mission Position in Contextualisation”) he warns that:

“In general, a major weakness in many of the proposals is their hermeneutics; they pay insufficient attention to the meaning communicated by the Islamic cultural forms they propose to use. The well-known dictum ‘the medium is the message’ applies here. For example, forms of a ritual nature have the function of symbolizing, and therefore reinforcing, in a concrete way, the meanings (the beliefs and ideology) of religion. To try to give Christian meanings to Islamic forms which convey distinctly Islamic meanings, can only result in communicating conflicting messages, Such a situation creates theological confusion and invites the assimilation of Islamic meaning in the young church, despite good intentions I suggest as a general rule of thumb that any use of Islamic forms that communicates conflicting messages should be considered syncretistic”.

WHAT CAUSES THE RESISTANCE TO THE GOSPEL?

He then continues by assessing the role cultural factors play in his opinion:

“I feel that there has been an exaggeration of cultural factors in the Islamic resistance to the Gospel. It is being said that the major reason for the failure to plant the Church in Islamic society is cultural, not theological, in that missionaries have brought the Gospel in western trappings unfamiliar to the Muslim. I would not belittle the cultural factor in church planting or deny the inadequacy of many missionary efforts of the past and present in that respect, But as it stands, the judgment is one-sided and exaggerated, in that it lays all the blame for the lack of results on the missionary One need only point to the western-ness of many thriving third-world churches to show that it is not necessarily the cause of a lack of results. The perceived western-ness of the Gospel is important, but it should not be blown out of proportion.

My main criticism of this judgment is that it simplistically ignores a major reason for the Islamic resistance to the Gospel: Islamic ideology (the concept of the *Ummah*), which requires the social segregation of Christians from Islamic society. This is clearly something that is more than cultural, although it certainly has important cultural ramifications. Any approach which treats this as mainly a cultural matter is superficial. Any approach to contextualization in Islamic society will have to take the full measure of this barrier and together with the young church come up with some innovative solutions”.

Elsewhere John Gilchrist picked up this thought in a paper (“A Biblical Re-Evaluation of the Theory of Contextualisation in Muslim Evangelism”). He is equally critical about the diagnosis that the failure by the Mission to have an appreciable impact on Islam is the lack of concern for its cultural wrapping.

“It is said that they (i.e. missionaries) concentrated too much on theological issues while failing to realize that the key distinction between us and Muslims lies in the different cultures we have, and that if Muslims could only be left free to follow their cultures upon conversion, greater results would follow”.

“I would agree that we should avoid any attempts to persuade Muslims to adopt our cultures, in particular to Westernize or Americanize them once they profess faith in Jesus. I also agree that there is nothing wrong with a convert’s desire to continue to dress, live and work in a predominantly Muslim society according to legitimately minimize the effects of conversion on the relationship the convert enjoys with his nearest friends and especially his family”.

“When it comes to Islam, however, I have serious reservations about some of the things that are labelled as innocent Muslim cultural forms. It is often suggested that Muslim believers in Jesus should continue to wash before they pray, to remove their shoes on entering a place of worship (or “Christian mosque”), to place the Bible on stands and tables alone, to read and recite it in Arabic, to follow Islamic forms of prayer etc. Here the difficulty arises. In Islam religion and culture are so intertwined that it is almost impossible to distinguish between them. Muslims boast that Islam is a complete way of life and the forms of worship and religious practice in Islam are so integrated with the religion itself that it is extremely difficult to see how a convert could, with a clear conscience, inwardly express his faith in Jesus as the lord and Saviour of all men while outwardly adhering to fundamental Islamic forms that are identified directly with a religion which denies these two great titles”.

“From Morocco to Indonesia, from Arabia to China, from the desert to the jungles, the form of worship in Islam, in particular the five daily Salat, are uniformly the same. Such forms are not part of the Chinese, Libyan, Syrian or Indonesian cultures, they are thoroughly Islamic forms which have been imposed on the cultures of the nations as they have embraced Islam. It is my sincere conviction that believers in Jesus cannot adopt Muslim forms of worship without giving the inevitable outward impression that they are Muslims at heart”.

BIBLICAL CONTENT IS NOT CULTURAL FORM

He then goes on to evaluate another problem, that of equating biblical terms with theological and typological content with cultural forms.

“P.G. Hiebert makes a fair statement in principle when he says “We must recognize that there is a fundamental difference between the gospel and a culture” (The Gospel and Islam, p.6). Yet he opens himself to criticism when he goes on to assess the Acts 15 conference between the representatives of the Jerusalem and Antioch churches as a debate on cultural forms. He speaks of the “cultural forms of circumcision and keeping the Sabbath” (op.cit.) and states that the decision reached at the conference was that Greek and Roman forms could be used instead by Gentile believers to express their faith in Christ”.

“I beg to suggest that this was not the issue at all. The whole get-together began when some men came down from Judea and were teaching the Gentile believers “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved”(Acts15:1).The issue was far more dramatic than the subject of cultural forms of worship. It was the whole basis of Christian faith that was at stake. Circumcision and Sabbath-keeping were not cultural forms of Jewish worship, they were essential facets of Judaism as a religion and, insofar as that religion was based on keeping such forms as essential to salvation which was considered to be by works of law, it was irreconcilable with the Christian religion which was based on salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone”.

Reflecting on the claim that the New Testament offers no clearly defined ritualism or form, he observes:

“There is a freedom in the Gospel, but not to adopt forms of worship that are identified as works by which salvation is earned. This is the very problem with Islam. The observance of the five daily

prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan, ablutions, the pilgrimage to Mecca, etc. are all rites and practices which must be observed if the Muslim is to obtain salvation. The freedom of the Spirit can only be quenched if converts from Islam remain persuaded that they should continue to maintain these very same forms. Would not Paul have had the same to say to them as he said to those who wished to follow Jewish forms - "This persuasion is not from him who calls you" (Gal.5:8).

Concerned with the quality of faith and the commitment of the converts from Islam which contrasts the trend to assimilate this faith to Islam and by that to minimize the very content of repentance and conversion – namely a turning away, he writes:

"Does the glory of God depend on the numbers of those who, one way or another, profess some faith in Christ, or does it depend on the quality of faith in those who really do believe and are prepared to openly suffer the consequences of that belief? Jesus often had people around him who were outwardly prepared to follow him. Some told him plainly "I will follow you" (Luke9:57; 9:61), but Jesus made them count the cost carefully before doing so. At other times "many believed in his name" yet "Jesus did not trust himself to them" (John 2:23-24)".

METHODS AND RESULTS

While all this sounds pretty hostile to the idea of contextualisation, it is really only a reaction against practices which tend to go overboard or at least the intended or unintended impression of this given in several books which propagate contextualisation. Here we think particularly of those by Phil Parshall (and I want to pause to say that we are befriended and work in the same mission!) which are seen by some to hold a kind of miracle key to the hearts of Muslims which opens the way to evangelistic success. While it is true that by the use of this concept people have found the Lord, it is equally true of the opposite. An ex-Muslim evangelist, Rocky-Bell Adatura, of West Africa, has reportedly won many more by what cannot be described other than confrontation. He has 'fiery debates' even in public places including mosques. He estimates that as many as 800 decisions for Christ have been made in 1988 by Muslims ("The Daily News", the Official Newspaper of Lausanne II in Manila, issue 7). While not everyone, and I include myself, will choose or be gifted to work this way, there is obviously room for it. A cautious remark: "While we may be able to see at least partly the positive results of our labour and methods, we will hardly become aware of the number of people we 'put off'!

We also feel that there is room for learned public debates as has taken place between Ahmed Deedat and Anis Shorosh (Royal Albert Hall in London 1986 and Birmingham 1988). Obviously the emotions are pitched and the opposing fronts are hard. But if done spiritually and scholarly the Christian speaker can stimulate a desire to search for the eternal truth.

On quite another level we have seen a spiritual revival which operated as innocently about understanding Islam and methods of communication, as it was powerful. Under the spiritual leadership of Pastor Mathias Munye almost 100 simple bush churches were formed in a predominantly Muslim area in the heart of Africa over 15 years. About half of these at present 5000 members come from Islamic background, though strongly mixed with animist content.

ISLAMIC REACTION TO OUR USE OF ARABIC TERMS

It is surely significant, that Muslims in Malaysia have managed to see the 'Control and Restriction of the Propagation of Non-Islamic Religions Bill 1989" passed, which prohibits non-Muslims from using expressions of Islamic origin to describe anything pertaining to non-Muslim religions. Words like 'Allah' and '*rasul*' fall under this category... Since 1981, the Malay-language Bible, known as the al-Kitab, has been banned because it used words like Allah (for God) and *rasul* (for prophet) ("SIM NOW" Sept.-Oct. 1989).

This seems to indicate that Muslims - against the teaching of the Qur'an, mind you - begin to make a distinction between Yahweh Elohim, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Israel and Father of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and Allah - and this while Christians try to pull in the opposite direction.

CONFRONTATION - A NECESSITY?

Christians must wake up to face the reality of our time. Islam has in a vastly increasing manner and with enormous effort not only instructed Muslims and given them first class materials as arguments against the

Christian faith and its propagation, but is making inroads to proselyte non-Muslims, including Westerners, even if this is only very marginal and mostly on the basis of marriage.

Christians, on the other hand, are seemingly satisfied to ignore this or at best to keep on re-acting. Because of their systematic training and the available literature, video and audio-tapes etc. Muslims feel vastly superior over against the mild Christians. Not in their dreams would they consider the Christian message as an alternative to theirs, never mind the fear of rejection and persecution, which would follow a conversion. Therefore we do have to present the Christian message over against Islam, exposing its origin, roots and deficiencies. When and how this must be done, is a sensitive factor, but to avoid it will mean that a Muslim will never be convinced in his heart, that he must turn away from Islam to become part of Christ. This is not negated by Scripture passages like Acts 11:22ff and 1Cor.9:19.

Let me quote Francis Schaeffer again in this point:

‘Truth carries with it confrontation. Truth demands confrontation; loving confrontation, but confrontation nevertheless. If our reflex action is always accommodation regardless of the centrality of the truth involved, there is something wrong. Just as what we may call holiness without love is not God’s kind of holiness, so also what we may call love without holiness, including when necessary confrontation, is not God’s kind of love. God is holy, and God is love’ (“The Great Evangelical Disaster”).

The tendency to avoid conflict or controversy prevents a full communication, as is necessary, for without a clear statement of the truth, nothing can be achieved.

This is indeed supported by Scripture in no uncertain terms. Paul on his travels ‘argued’ (Gr. *dialegomai*) particularly with those who had knowledge of Biblical content, the Jews in Thessalonica, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, Rome, and with Felix:

“And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ’. And some of them were persuaded, and joined Paul and Silas; as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women”.

“So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there” (Acts 17:2-5,17).

“And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the Kingdom of God; but when some were stubborn and disbelieved, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the Hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:8-10).

The same is said of Steven:

“From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe” (Acts 28:23-24).

“Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedman (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke” (Acts 6:9-10).

Equally confrontational is the calling of Jeremiah:

“The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations’, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord’, I said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child’. But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, I am only a child’. You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you’, declares the Lord, Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant’” (Jer.1:4-10).

Elsewhere we read:

“Some suspect us of acting in worldly fashion. Though we live in the world we are not carrying on a worldly war, for the weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2Cor.10:3-5).

“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Eph.5:11).

All this must be commanded by love and concern for the lost. Let Francis Schaeffer come to formulate this again:

“Love is not an easy thing; it is not just an emotional urge, but an attempt to move over and sit in the other person’s place and see how his problems look to him: love is a genuine concern for the individual. As Jesus Christ reminds us, we are to love him’ as ourselves’, This is the place to begin”.

Without a spiritual and right attitude all this is a senseless and cruel undertaking. Love, not sentimental love, but the love of Christ (not even for Christ) will dictate how we speak the truth (Eph.4:15). We will feel so much for, and understand our hearer so well, that whatever negative we say, will hurt us at least as much as him.

The word confrontation may, of course, also mean a harsh, unkind, even violent conflict. This is not meant here! Rather that one - at the right situation and time - does not avoid to speak about things necessary for Muslims to know in order to understand the Gospel and also their deception within their own religion which keeps them away from the realization of the Truth. That this is to be done kindly, lovingly and in a considerate and tactful manner needs not to be emphasized.

FINDING THE BALANCE

What are we to do with the often conflicting views about confrontation and contextualisation? Apply wisdom! What the contextualist ought to teach us is to be mindful of the altogether other kind of thinking, perception and culture in our Muslim vis-a-vis, and to learn to speak and act in a manner understandable and meaningful to him. A ‘hot-gospeller’ type of proclamation would not happen in such cases. The confrontationalization the other hand should encourage us not to get lost in niceties and friendly chatter, but to come to the point. We can also learn from the Muslims, namely that they do not know a hide-and-seek type of witness. They do not ‘beat around the bush’ when it comes to a religious conversation - yet this is often embedded in hospitality and kindness. They profess what they stand for, and I take it, expect the same from us. If we avoid the controversial issues when we are challenged, and we are once we confess our spiritual standpoint, we will certainly be viewed as men or women with little conviction.

All this will vary from person to person and society to society. But no one is exempted from sensitively and lovingly exploring the best means to present the ever so superior Gospel to his Muslim neighbour -and do it!

MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

When we speak of loving Muslims, which indeed we ought to do, we will have to define accurately what we mean. The most important act of love is certainly not to please him or not to offend him by withholding part of the Gospel which he is not likely to agree with. Love dictates two things: Firstly I must accept the other without prejudice, and secondly I will learn so much about him, that I become able to relate the whole Gospel to him in such a way that he will be able to comprehend and understand it. Mere outward assimilation (does a Muslim really expect that anyway?) is not as yet love!

This, of course, involves speaking on his terms, so to say. Our vocabulary has to be in accordance with our Muslim friend’s perception. I suggest, however, that this must be accompanied by definitions of what we mean by that.

Concerning the use of Arabic names or concepts, I recommend this to be done knowingly and wisely. Muslims in countries with a Christian presence are, as a rule, informed what the Gospel is, and then one does not need to speak of the ‘Injil’, which no doubt conveys an Islamic meaning. The ‘Injil’ is understood to be a book which was given to Jesus by the angel’ Jibrail’ from heaven. This obviously got lost, for the Christians now have four Gospels, and none is true, for one was written by Matthew, one by Mark, Luke and John! None of Jesus! So a definition and explanation is essential when using potential connotation words.

Using Islamic names for biblical people or concepts (e.g. Moosa, Dawood, Isa, Injil etc.) in a Western context has often triggered off misunderstandings, and should be avoided. The witness will be identified as a

missionary to Muslims (who else cares to know these names in Arabic anyway!) and he uses this to insinuate himself into the Muslim society. It is his trick to gain trust. Besides, Muslims as a rule are scared of Christian missionaries.

As observed before, misunderstandings of Islam, or worse, 'little dishonesties' can backfire badly. At a widely publicized international symposium between a Muslim (Ahmed Deedat) and a Christian (Jimmy Swaggard) in the USA, which was also videoed and is now in wide circulation among Muslims, Jimmy Swaggard, touching on what is now named 'power encounter', presented a case of some Muslim who was sick (or possessed, I cannot exactly remember that). So a Muslim Imam or Maulana was called and he prayed in the name of Mohammed with no effect. Later a Christian missionary or pastor came, prayed in the name of Jesus, and the Muslim was healed.

When this tape is screened and one hears Jimmy Swaggard say that the Imam or Maulana prayed in the name of Mohammed, a text is inserted which states that no Muslim will ever pray in the name of Mohammed. And that is true! A Biblical practice is not essentially an Islamic one and vice versa. All the visible sincerity and Christian integrity of the speaker is negated and destroyed by one statement!

But also other subtle misunderstandings may wait. A witness in a conversation with a Muslim kept on speaking about 'Nabi Isa' (= Prophet Jesus) to use a term familiar to Muslims. At the end the Muslim clapped him on the shoulder and commended him: 'You are the first Christian I have met who admitted, that Jesus was only a prophet!' It is indeed simplistic to assume one communicates well when replacing some words with Arabic ones.

THE ISOLATION OF THE CONVERT

One of the major concerns of missionaries to adopt contextualisation is Islam's total rejection of converts to Christ. Original Islamic doctrine asks for the execution of such an apostate, a practice no more adhered to in most countries. Even so imprisonment and the total isolation of a convert from family, society and his economic context made it necessary for most to seek a home and economic base elsewhere. This, or course, strongly inhibits the forming of a local church, if this is at all possible under such circumstances.

If the convert is not isolated from his society, he will eventually be accepted in it and can be a witness to it, it is reasoned. The onus for the rejection is subtly shifted from the Islamic Ummah to the missionary, who is blamed for alienating the convert from his society by alienating him from it and westernizing him. Here the cause and effect are confused.

I have difficulty not to see here a malicious attempt to debase former missionaries and their efforts to bring the Gospel to people in an attempt to get laurels oneself.

While one does not want to excuse many a mistake done by missionaries, well meaning as they might have been, it was always the Ummah which violently rejected apostates from Islam, and not the attempt of missionaries to alienate them from their society.

Indeed, it might be perceived that in defiance of the local culture Christians created Gothic cathedrals and translated Wesleyan hymns into the respective vernacular, which today may well be interpreted to be manifestations of European imperialism, intolerance and a lack of flexibility and appreciation of the cultural heritage of the people to be reached with the Gospel.

To plant an English type of church with a bell tower and a cross on the spire in a Muslim land and to sing in it songs with unexplained biblical content almost literally translated for people of an Islamic culture from a European or U.S. background, was and it, to say it mildly, insensitive or unintelligent. But how could those who did it learn, except by experience? And how can we?

May we conclude this thought on alienation with a Word from Scripture:

"Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God" (Jn.12:42-23).

ISLAMIC PERCEPTIONS OF CONTEXTUALISATION

After having considered contextualisation and confrontation from a Christian view point, let us have a look how Islam perceives it:

What will I be perceived to be when I wear Islamic garb, a scull-cap and a beard, and go on Friday to the Regents Park Mosque in London to perform my *Juma* (Friday) prayer? Obviously everyone will take it,

that I am a Muslim. If I then clarify that I am not, what options are there alternatively? Only two. That I am a disillusioned Christian who seeks to become a Muslim or a deceiver (missionary) who tries to hide his identity in order to lure people away from Islam. Maybe there would be different reactions in other places of the world, like in Teheran, Jeddah, Tripoli, Bombay, Jakarta or in a village in central Bangladesh, East Africa or Turkey. Or to reverse the picture, imagine for a moment Islamic missionaries in a “Christian” country contextualize and transfer the *Jamiah* prayer to Sunday, when they also celebrate communion and baptize people. How would we react? The same way Muslims do, I presume.

Perhaps we be warned by those reactions we are aware of. An example of this may be read under the heading “The Christian Islamization of Christianity” in the “Muslim Journal” (July 1987) which reflects on a book on contextualisation by a Christian author:

“Contextualisation on the surface appears as a litany of deceit, of ‘convert at any cost’”.

“But the deeper process involves setting aside Christian practices to embrace the pillars of Islamic action. A quick look at (the authors) recommendations reveals the deep structure of contextualisation”.

“Old missionaries, a la Zwemer, wrote endless vitriolic condemnations of Islam and Muslims. Newer missionaries take a more “compromising” stance. Without embarrassment (the author) can write, ‘without compromise, we can appreciate the good in Islam’. Their stance weakens from rejection to compromise. The next step is adoption”.

“(The author) feels compelled to say, about Muslims, that “they must be convinced that the rituals Christians follow to assist them in knowing God are indeed superior to their own highly formalized and ritualized system of religious expression”. That is the rhetoric, but look at the actual practices - relinquishing baptism, observing the Ramadan fast, donning *hijba* and Islamic dress, and affirming the truthfulness of Islam. Perhaps (the author) like many missionaries is discovering that the rituals that actually assist them in knowing God are from the Qur’an and the Sunnah rather than Christian tradition. Perhaps (the author) and the Christian missionaries will discover that Allah (SWT) is using their deceptive “contextualisation” as the occasion of their own Islamization. ‘Allah (SWT) is the best of planners”.

Can we blame Muslims for such an assessment? When we get the impression that the extreme forms of contextualisation are the only way to witness to Muslims, and that only here true communication happens, and that this method is approved because it has secured the results to prove it, we are surely out of balance. This is the way it may appear. In the light of this we should indeed seriously consider the words of 2Cor.4:2

“We have renounced secret (actually hidden G.N.) shameful ways: we do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God”.

THE PLACE IN THE MIDDLE

After having been somewhat stern in my assessment of the contextual method, what do we have to say about the confrontationalist? This word was really only coined by the contextualist to contrast himself and his method from the excesses experienced. We do not think excesses of any kind are commendable. Belligerent crusaders, who go out to bulldoze their enemies, can hardly be called witnesses. But if we move over from the right a little to the center, the confrontationalist or controversialist is likely to use a more theological approach than the contextualist, who will be rather careful to avoid a clash of convictions and seek more at length a way to the heart of the Muslims by displaying social concern and by trying to build a friendship situation.

Experience shows, however, that the resistance to the Gospel is just as firm after a prolonged social contact as before. However, a position of mutual trust and confidence does secure a much better base to share the Gospel.

One would have to weigh quality against quantity, though. A witness may well get fully occupied for years maintaining contact to a very limited number of people, when trying to secure credibility. And he may find that none of the contacts wants to accept the Gospel and the Saviour at the end. Again we would have to trust the leading of God’s Spirit and assess our temperament, gifts and experience to choose what our place and method of service is. But we have to beware of choosing the easier way of better acceptance for personal gratification!

6.4 UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION AND ITS FUNCTION

1933 Hitler came to power in Germany. I was 5 years old at that time - and wore my first brown shirt (i.e. Nazi uniform).

The superiority of Germany and the Nazi ideology was accepted unquestionably by me - and my parents. The media, as everything else, were fully under the influence of the Nazis. Only people who lived under such influence will appreciate what effect this has!

It was with enthusiasm that I joined the "Jungvolk" at 10 and "Hitler Youth" at 14 and that I volunteered for military service at 15 which led to me being in combat before turning 16. While I was 16 the last year of the most terrible war in history raged. The catastrophic end was foreseeable, but we red on the walls of the ruins of all German cities: "Our walls may break - not our hearts!" When we were fighting on the Western front and heard the gunfire from the Eastern front my serious consideration was rather to die than to live under the degrading and humiliating circumstances which we believed to be our fate. So I was fighting seeking to die in battle rather than to live as a degraded slave of capitalism.

Well - I am still alive. I survived. After an extended, most horrible period of imprisonment under the Soviets, I was at long last released. Moving to the Western part of Germany I discovered a whole new world: freedom in democracy. This was as totally different to what I knew, as it was better.

Many of us have grown up to believe that the only right and satisfying way to live is ours. Being part of our specific group gives us assurance of that and a protective shelter. We even may consider dying for our convictions which are so real and genuine. The propaganda against the enemy, whatever or whoever that is, makes us fear the worst of the other side.

This is true also of religion. Until quite recently and even now the various denominations view each other with suspicion, more so different religions. If we had to give a detailed account of why we are Christians and not Muslims, Presbyterian and not Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons or New Apostolics, our reasoning is likely to be dismal. We proceed from our subjective reality which we (or anybody else, for that matter) perceives to be the Truth. If someone attacks our position we withdraw or argue our point, and even if we totally lose the argument - will still stay what we are, perhaps a little more doubtful. Many Christians have heard or read the forceful attacks against the Bible and Christ by Muslims and were silenced because they had no answer. Yet they will hardly consider to become Muslims. And Muslims will react the same way, even worse.

IS EVANGELISM COMMUNICATION OF THE NON-COMMUNICABLE?

This sounds strange, but is ultimately what we are requested to do. Let us have a look at what I like to call the spiritual rationale, actually a contradiction in terms:

"This is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy". (1Cor.4: 1-2)

The word used in the original for 'steward' is '*oikonomos*' which is the source of our word economy. A servant of Christ is expected to be a faithful (Gr. *pistos*) householder or economist. Of what? Of the mysteries of God. The original Greek text says '*mysterion*' which means something which is only known to the initiated.

This word is used elsewhere:

"...and pray for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak". (Col.4:3-4)

Ephesians 6:19 speaks of the mystery of the Gospel. So ultimately the mystery of God, the mystery of Christ and the mystery of the Gospel are only accessible to the initiated, those to whom God the Holy Spirit reveals this.

To complicate matters we read that:

"...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God". (2Cor.4:4)

What on earth are we expected to do? To bring to spiritually blind people an understanding (rational) of God's revelation (spiritual), which is a mystery.

I can see that there are two parts in this. What God has done or can or will do, and what He expects us to do. Paul says:

“Pray for me, that utterance may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel...that I may declare boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph.6: 19-20)

How did he get access to the mysteries?

“God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness - the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed (revealed) to the saints” (CoI.1:26)

What was revealed to Paul and John and Matthew and Mark and John etc. makes up the New Testament: It is Christ! So God revealed Himself and His will in His Word. That was God’s part. He adds to this the illumination of His Word:

“But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (Jn.14:26)”

The disciples of Christ are given the task to proclaim this mystery (Eph.6: 19), to make it clear as one ought to speak (Col.4:4), Le. with knowledge (CoI.4:6; 1Pet.3:15), wisely (CoI.4:5), graciously (vs.6) and boldly (Eph.6:20). In order to be able to do this and to allow for the opening of the minds of the unbelievers we are called on to pray (see ‘Spiritual Warfare’).

In this chapter we will try to enter a little deeper into what one calls communication, and we shall try to keep a balance between the rational and spiritual, as indicated.

We meet a difficulty here, and that is that communication takes place within a culture. What had to be said about culture per se has been said. But there is an overlap, so we will not be able to avoid some repetition in thought.

THE MECHANICS OF COMMUNICATION

“Communication means that an idea which I have in my mind passes through my lips and reaches the others person’s mind. Adequate communication means that when it reaches the recipient’s mind, it is substantially the same as when it left mine. I will have substantially realized the point I wish to convey. The words that we use are only a tool for translating the ideas which we wish to communicate...”. (“The God Who is There” by Francis Schaeffer)

Besides body language we have no other tools then words to convey thought. This is easy when we deal with mundane issues. It is more difficult to convey abstract thought, but most difficult to transmit a spiritual message. Let us try to analyze this. Words are relative to their users.

When I say ‘I am hungry’, then this will mean something different to a man in a Soviet concentration camp in Siberia than to an American looking into a full refrigerator half an hour before supper. When I say it is hot or cold I convey a different message in terms of expected degrees to an Eskimo or a man in Mombasa in East Africa.

The more specific a word becomes, it is likely to differ in content from that of a different culture. Let us investigate this. Donald N. Larson, a linguist at Bethel College, USA, observes:

“When Christians and Muslims meet, therefore, it is not with clean slates but under conditions established in their respective groups and in terms of what each knows at that point in his life and how it is organized in his mind. They engage each other as outsiders. Well-defined boundaries keep them separate. They may be able to talk freely about the weather, but when it comes to the central issues of life, like their respective worldview and lifestyle, they tend to avoid each other. When they cannot, they tend to collide”.

“Cultural collisions are exacerbated by differences in the way each uses language to map culture into sound, for because of such differences, each reads the meaning of the other’s message in terms of his own system”.

Every person is, when confronted with something unknown, depending on a comparison with what is known. Naturally the characteristics of the know thing will be transferred to the unknown. Let us try to illustrate this. When a Christian learns that Muslims believe in one god, it is natural to identify him as Yahweh, and to impute that his characteristics and nature are those of Yahweh.

The question therefore is not: Do we believe in one god?, but how has this god revealed himself? What is he like? What is the name which identifies him? The careful student will not only look at superficial similarities, but also at the fundamental differences. Those pertaining to the nature of God and the consequences which flow from that. Larson continues:

“In principle, at whatever points the cultures and languages of Christian and Muslim are similar, mutual understanding comes relatively fast. Where differences are many and great, mutual understanding comes slowly and only with great expenditure of effort”.

“The Christian must know something of what the Muslim knows in order to make effective use of his own knowledge and experience”.

“Only when the Christian can understand and appreciate the Muslim’s reality as he does can he talk about his own Christian reality in terms which the Muslim can understand and in ways that enable him to appreciate the Christian’s point of view.”

“Therefore, if the Christian hopes to touch the Muslim at significant points in a significant manner, he must be prepared to talk, but he must also be prepared to listen”.

“The Christian may jump to the conclusion that his communication problem with a Muslim lies in the language being used when in fact it may lie in the gap between the Muslim’s experience and his own. One’s experience is too limited to perceive the meaning in the message which the other is sending”.

“When Christian utterances enter Muslims ears, the meaning of those utterances are organized on the basis of what is already in the Muslim’s mind. Likewise, when Muslim utterances enter Christian ears, the meanings are organized by the Christian on the basis of what is already in his mind”.

“To put it somewhat different, as a Christian transmits what he knows, the Muslim takes it, compares it with what is already in his mind and processes it accordingly. In the same way, as the Muslim transmits what he knows, the Christian processes it on the basis of what is already in his mind. That is, the Muslim organizes what the Christian sends according to what he knows, and the Christian does the same thing. Each controls his own output. However, neither exercises much control over what the other does with what he transmits. Neither can withdraw what is already in the other’s minds. At best he can say things which may supplement or rearrange it”.

“The less knowledge and experience the Christian and Muslim have in common, the more important it is for them to engage each other in this way if they hope to convey what they know in an effective way”.

“The general problem boils down to the specific problem of belonging. Christian and Muslim belong to different “tribal” traditions. In their respective groups each comes to know different things, map them into language in different ways, meet others under different conditions and hold different beliefs”.

“When members of mutually exclusive groups meet, they tend to avoid each other. When they cannot avoid each other, they tend to collide”. (“The Gospel and Islam Compendium”) (my emphasis G.N.)

In the same book, Paul Hiebert, Professor of Anthropology at Fuller Seminar, adds that:

“When Christianity enters a new culture, it must not only be translated into a new language, but also into the thought forms, symbols and customs of a new culture”.

Muslims, Christians, Hindus and others have an integrated thought structure. Words, and these may be the same as in other languages, have been coded by the religion, culture and sociological factors. It is a presupposition to successful communication that we learn to decode the message they contain in order to code what we want to say so that our message is readily understood. Scripture puts it this way:

“...we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand. And I hope that, as you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully...” (2Cor.1:13-14)

“We do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we command ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. (2Cor.4:2)

This is confirmed by another passage:

“All over the world this Gospel is producing fruit...just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard and understood God’s grace in all its truth” (Co1.1:6).

If we are to choose key words to overcome the problems outlined just now, it must surely be UNDERSTANDING coupled with INFORMATION. We also realize that here is a strong overlapping of concepts like communication, contextualisation and culture.

While we do not pretend that Muslims are alike and think alike, there is a far greater affinity in religion and uniformity of thought among Muslims than among Christians, the reason being a far greater individualism and much less religious exposure in their case.

Therefore it is much easier to define the religious concepts, beliefs and practices of Muslims collectively than of any other religion, indeed and advantage.

As we already read in the statements of Donald Larson, it is therefore imperative for a (potential) Christian witness to Muslims to listen and learn. A theological explanation of the need for atonement because of man’s sins and depravity by the blood of a sacrifice to become acceptable to God is as right as it seems totally illogical and thus incomprehensible to a Muslim. His likely conclusion is that Christians must have a sick mind. If that is coupled with their very competently designed anti-Christian polemics, a Muslim is very unlikely to listen to us.

A MUSLIM WILL UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL IN PROPORTION TO HOW WE UNDERSTAND HIM AND HIS RELIGION.

Of course God the Holy Spirit can intervene in a direct manner - and does so quite frequently in no uncertain ways to open the mind. But as a rule spiritual advancement and conversion comes by consent to what one has realized and accepted to be the Truth. And this realization comes through an understanding of spiritual content, and the conveyance of this depends on our speaking intelligibly to a Muslim. And that we can really only do when we understand him and his religious disposition.

This includes not only that we understand the personal disposition of our Muslim friend, but also what the content of his faith is, and what it means to him and what his objections against the Christian message are, and what the content of religious terminology conveys to him. Apart, of course, from his personal disposition the other points are quite uniform among most Muslims, as was already observed.

How can we obtain such inside knowledge? As a rule not only from Christian books about Islam. Ideally one builds up a personal relationship with a relatively well trained Muslim. The resulting conversations lead deep into what we like to know and understand. This needs time, and again the key word is listen. Islamic books are somewhat acceptable substitutes and it must be a variety. Of course you cannot ask books any question. A book wants to pass on a message. No more.

How long must we wait, what level of knowledge and understanding must we have before we qualify sufficiently to secure a somewhat acceptable communication?

Obviously every Christian witnessing to Muslims thinks he or she has it. Otherwise they would not undertake to evangelize Muslims. And fortunately or unfortunately there is no agency from which to obtain a certificate of competence. Even involving the risk of discouraging the one or other dedicated witness - and far be it from me to intend this - I must say that far too many eager but ill-equipped Christians try to witness to Muslims with the result that not only they are not understood or misunderstood, but they contribute to a Muslims perception that Christians follow an illogical and corrupt religion. I do not think that we should comfort ourselves too easily with the assumption that they have heard the Word of God and that in itself will do its work. While this may indeed be so, the rule is: IT IS NOT WHAT I SAY WHICH MATTERS, BUT WHAT THE HEARER UNDERSTANDS.

Let me refer back to what is quoted from Dr. Francis Schaeffer at the beginning of this chapter:

“Communication means that an idea which I have in my mind passes through my lips and reaches the other person’s mind. Adequate communication means that when it reaches the recipient’s mind it is substantially the same as when it left mine”.

6.4.1 OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE COMMUNICATION

What is real to us need not be a reality to others. The way Tom feels, who is deeply in love with Lisa is very real to him. Lisa’s mother also loves her, but is not the same reality. Her colleagues also ‘love’ her, but

Tom's love is another experience. Of course, her colleagues also were or are in love, with other girls. They surely have a very real experience of what falling in love is. But Tom only experiences what being in love with Lisa really is. It is his unique experience and reality. This does not mean that to others in love this is not a reality. But it is not Tom's reality!

My love for my Lord and Saviour is equally unique. No one experiences this quite the same way. When I therefore use my testimony, i.e. my personal experience, my very personal reality, to communicate Christ and His Good News, it is quite likely that a devout Sufi Muslim may say: "That's exactly how I experience religion! When I pray my reality is a feeling of deep bliss, an experience of one-ness with almighty God!" And we dare not contradict him! That may well be very real to him. May I label this subjective communication.

When we testify: "I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded..." (2Tim.1:12). A Muslim has no difficulty to agree wholeheartedly, because he also thinks of a subjective experience.

Although objective communication in the realm of faith may be very difficult and incomplete for several reasons, it should be, as the name suggests, fact-orientated - and not experience (feeling) orientated.

We live in a world where everything is considered relative, where one becomes reluctant to make absolute statements, where one can without reserve say this is right or wrong, truth or error or lie. Everything is perceived to be relatively right and relatively wrong. This seems necessary to escape being labelled high-minded, arrogant or haughty, becoming an intolerant and inconsiderate hardliner, particularly in a Christian context. But God has given absolute standards in His Word, and we do well to accept these. "What do you mean 'God said this'", I hear someone object. Perhaps meaning which of God's Words? The Vedas, Upanishads, the Ramayana or *Baghavat Gita*, the *Tripitaka*, the Bible or the Qur'an?

6.4.2 EVIDENCES FOR TRUTH

Let me illustrate what I want to say. We knew of a young man, let us call him Goolam, who had become a Christian, but then reverted to Islam. We went to visit him. He was of the type of whom it is reported "when Jesus saw him He loved him" (Mk.10:21), an open faced, unpretentious lovable person. After some introductory small talk he came straight to the point: "I know why you come. You want me to come back to the Christian faith. I appreciate this, but like you to be considerate. I really meant what I said and did when coming to Christ. It was a big step and it upset all my life and context totally. Yet I believed that I did the right thing. But then came disappointments and I returned to Islam. I am happy again, am settled and have my peace. Please leave me my peace!"

What an understandable request! It was, as it were, a cry of his heart. We were deeply touched by his honesty and openness about a past which must have embarrassed him now.

What did he mean by 'peace'? By 'coming to Christ'? What was his understanding of Christian faith? Was he converted? After assuring him of our empathy, I asked him without apology: "But Goolam - where is the Truth?" After giving it a little thought, he countered: "What is Truth? You have your truth and we have our truth! What is the issue?"

I became more precise: "As you know, the Bible says that Jesus was crucified and that He died for our sins. The Qur'an contradict this by stating: "They killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them...for a surety they killed him not!" (Sura 4: 157). Surely both cannot be true. If Jesus was not crucified or killed, then all Christian follow a lie and are lost, because that is their only hope! If, on the other hand, He was crucified and died for our sins, then the Qur'an is untrue and all Muslims are lost, because they reject their only hope for reconciliation with God".

Goolam became quite thoughtful. Then he replied: "No one can establish anymore with surety whether or not Jesus was crucified and killed. Where is the Truth?"

Of course we came into a situation where much of a primary conversation was no more necessary. That is why we could come to the point so quickly. But how could we answer this uncompromising question? Certainly not by referring to how he felt when he received Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Lord, how, perhaps, prayers were answered, what he experienced when reading the Bible etc. These must have been realities to him! We could not doubt his sincerity and integrity if he yielded his life to Christ. No Muslim will do this lightly!

No, I asked him, whether he really wanted to establish the Truth. He emphatically consented. And then we sat down next to each other. I asked him whether he would object to me reading Scripture to him. He did not. And then we looked into the Old Testament. I let him read with me the most important prophecies regarding Christ. We read of His pre-existence and the place of His coming (Micah 5:2). We untangled the

mystery of the time of His coming (Dan.9:24-27) and then the mode of His coming, His virgin birth (Isa.7:14) and reading about His status, 'wonderful counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father, prince of peace'. We looked at the predictions about His great deeds (Isa.35:4-5 etc, etc.), but particularly about His end: Entering Jerusalem on a donkey (Zech.9:9), His betrayal (Ps.41 :9), for 30 pieces of silver (Zech.11: 12-1~), His suffering (Isa.53) and His crucifixion and death (Ps.22: 1, 7-9, 13-18). We did not forget to read about His resurrection either (Ps.16:8-10).

I had made no reference as to the person we were reading about. It was not necessary. When I asked him he solemnly expressed it: "Jesus!"

We had to turn to Deuteronomy 18:21 and other Scriptures (Isa.41 :21; 44:7,26; Amos 3:7 and Zech.4:9) to establish the purpose of Biblical, divine prophecy: to distinguish God's Word from man's word. But that was self-explanatory anyway. Who could foresee and foretell such distinct events in history in such unambiguous ways hundreds of years before? The obvious answer is God alone.

The responsibility of man towards God rests on the possibility to hear, perceive, recognize or realize what He revealed in Scripture - and what not! If God's Word were not verifiable, God could hardly hold man responsible for not accepting it because of doubt which of the multitude of religious books claiming inspiration is true and which false.

Therefore we must "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1Pet.3:15). It is good that another sentence is added: "But do it with gentleness and respect".

This is, what I like to call objective communication. Before we accept the content we look for its veracity. How did Schaeffer formulate it? The Gospel is propositional, verificational and personal. To stay with the second attribute, it is an undeniable fact that Old Testament prophecies more than sketched the totally unusual life of Jesus, Hence the many references to the Old Testament prophecies in the Gospel recordings (24 times in Matthew alone!) to verify Christ's identity and divinity.

Perhaps it is worth telling that Goolam was convicted by this evidence and rededicated his life all alone to the Christ Whose message is so verified. A few weeks after this event he was "called home" in a tragic accident.

As a principle we should not expect anyone to accept and believe what he has not understood. Of course there are limits. Who can 'understand' God, eternity, infinity etc.? But what can be understood must be interpreted into the framework of the relevant culture, religious understanding and bias against the Christian faith - without overlooking the danger of assimilation and accommodation which would make a person listing on the other side.

But there are more evidences which further verify the Word of God. Every serious witness ought to acquaint himself / herself with these.

ARCHAEOLOGY has contributed strongly to verify Scripture. Although liberal theology expediently overlooks these statements of eminent archaeologist, they are nevertheless noteworthy, W.F. Albright, one of the most eminent Biblical archaeologist, wrote that "archaeology confirms Biblical history". Nelson Glueck in his book 'Rivers in the Desert' states: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference". In the same volume he writes about "the almost incredibly accurate historical memory of the Bible".

In HISTORY we find more evidences. Tacitus, one may well call him the greatest Roman historian, was not exactly friendly disposed towards Christians, which can be seen by his writings: "The name Christian comes to them from Christ, who was executed in the reign of Tiberius by the Procurator Pontius Pilate; and the pernicious superstition, suppressed for a while, broke out afresh and spread not only through Judaea, the source of the malady, but even through Rome itself, where everything vile comes and is feted". Another example may be found in the "*Antiquitates Judaicum*", a history of the Jews, written by Flavius Josephus, who was a Jewish general defending Jerusalem in AD 70, but was taken Roman prisoner and became their historian:

"Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was (the) Christ.' And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him for he appeared to them alive again the third day as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day".

We are aware that the Encyclopedia Britannica suggests that this is an interpolation, but there is no evidence whatsoever to support this. It just happens not to fit into the “post Christian era” and needs to be reasoned away.

Let us be fact orientated. And what about the evidence of the New Testament EYE WITNESSES. Well, one may reason, they were the apostles and could hardly contradict themselves. But these evidences are so unassuming and unplanned, that they speak loudly for themselves:

When the Gospel was written down by the four recorders and the teaching of the Gospel defined in the Epistles, the whole of Israel would have stood up in protest against these if they were forgeries. On the contrary, the Apostles often challenged the people to question the many eye-witnesses. Paul in his defence before King Agrippa said:

“I am speaking the sober truth. For the king knows about these things and to him I speak freely, for I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26).

Also Peter on the Day of Pentecost, shortly after the crucifixion, said to a great multitude of Jews:

“Men of Israel, hear these words. Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty words and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourself know - this Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it” (Acts 2:22-24).

Let us for a moment imagine what the Jews would have answered Peter, if this had not happened! Or how the recorded Gospel would have been received, had it not been true!

We note that the Jews never denied the execution of Jesus by crucifixion. They only denied that He was the Messiah.

Paul likewise referred to the double security it is “in accordance with the Scriptures” (reference to prophecy of the Old Testament) and evidenced by many witnesses of whom at that time most were alive to be questioned. This was mentioned to the people in Greece, for in Israel there would have been little need to mention it.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all Apostles” (1Cor.15:3-7).

This again is supported by the Apostle Peter at a slightly later date emphasizing the eyewitness report but pointing at the fulfilled prophecy as “more sure”. A witness may lie. Even many witnesses may lie. But in prophecy and its fulfillment can be no flaw!

“We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’, we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to his as to a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (I Peter 1:16-21).

It must be added here that Peter was awaiting execution at the time this was written. One more reason to trust his statement, for he would hardly be prepared to lie in the face of judgment and eternity.

The only ‘academic’ among the Gospel narrators, Luke, begins his account thus:

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you...” (Luke 1:1-3).

Who will, in the face of all these evidences, believe one man who witnessed to the contrary, Mohammed?

6.4.3 ACCOMMODATION, COMPROMISE, SYNCRETISM

Neglecting the mentioned or other evidences means to give up a strong premise, and this is likely to steer towards dialogue with Muslims. Not the way this was done in Scripture, but in the modern way, as is displayed in the editorial of a newsletter of an institution which I may not name here, and which used to propagate Christ to Muslims:

“Fortunately for us in India, secularism has had a slightly different meaning. It does not signify the rejection of religion but the acceptance of *sarva dharma sambava*, that is, the attitude of equal respect for all religions”.

“If we are to eliminate violence between communities and the hydra headed monster of fundamentalism, we must practice and promote true religion - one’s own religion, whatever that may be”.

“What we call ‘communal harmony’ is not simply the absence of conflict between various groups. It is a dynamic interaction springing from a deep commitment to one’s own neighbours. By trying to discover and understand the profound spiritual heritage of other groups and communities we can transcend our own narrow communal self-understanding of the one Reality which is worshipped in its many diverse forms and manifestations, in a variety of cultural and religious traditions”.

“The tragedy in this article is that all fundamentals of the Biblical Scriptures are trodden under foot, and yet one sails under the banner “Christian”. One does not wonder about the rejection of fundamentalism in this context. It is revealing to quote how the ‘Concise Oxford Dictionary’ defines fundamentalism: “strict maintenance of traditional orthodox religious beliefs such as the inerrancy of Scripture...”. And what is orthodox? “...generally accepted as right or true esp. in theology, in harmony with what is authoritatively established, approved, conventional...”. We would legitimately ask what is so monstrous about that? Of course, when one wants to give Scriptures an alienated meaning and purpose, fundamentalism is an enemy. Have we noticed, that we felt ourselves somewhat uneasy when reading the word ‘fundamentalism’? That is the subtle result of infiltration of liberal thought into the evangelical world! Who of us still likes to be labelled ‘fundamentalist’? Simply because this word has been given a negative, even ‘monstrous’ connotation.

This becomes worse when people who so obviously deviate from the meaning of God’s Word affirm that they do so on service for God:

“We Christians affirm that God is actively at work in our midst leading the whole of humanity with all its peoples, races and religions towards a realization of God’s design: communion and fellowship in love, truth and justice. Our scriptures symbolize this reality as God’s kingdom. Our whole effort to build communities with brothers and sisters of other faiths is a collaboration with God’s purpose. Traditionally our churches by their strong institutionalization, their slavish attachments to the West in their thinking attitudes and way of life, consequent upon the history of missions in the colonial period, are seriously handicapped in their ability to engage in dialogue and to be true signs of the kingdom of God in our countries”.

“We believe that we can set out to serve God’s design in our context only in dialogue with peoples of other faith. It is in fostering relationships with them that we come to a deeper awareness and realization of the nature and implication of God’s kingdom. Therefore, it is presumptuous on our part as Christians to think and act as though we alone are capable of bringing about the advent of God’s kingdom”.

“We in Asia are heirs to varied religious traditions and rich spiritual resources. They are for us a call to discern the working of God’s spirit in our histories and peoples and to work with them in close collaboration for the enrichment of our national life. We must safeguard the multi-religious character of our society, which is a gift of God of Asia, and to seek for each religious community equality and freedom to practice, witness and foster their respective faith-commitments. God’s call comes to us in every moment of our history with specific challenges. At this point of the history of our peoples, we discern that the Spirit impels us to stand in solidarity with our people in our common struggle for life rooted in our cultures, traditions and religions as a safeguard against the threats that seek to wipe away their national character and cultural identities”.

It would be interesting to establish what or whom the word God in this article means. Here we are at the end of the road of a well meaning but pragmatic reinterpretation of Scripture: Syncretism. Bruce Nicholls identifies the cause very well in his booklet on contextualisation:

“In a synthesis of Christian faith and other faiths the biblical message is progressively replaced by non-Christian assumptions and dogmas, and the Christian expression of the religious life of worship, witness and ethics increasingly conform to those of the non-Christian partner in dialogue. In the end, the Christian mission is reduced to a so-called “Christian presence” and at best to a humanistic social concern. Syncretism results in the slow death of the church and the end of evangelism”.

We have been deviating a little, but use this as an example of the subtleties in communication when words or concepts are not properly defined.

Let Robertson McQuilkin come to word again. He writes:

“Any word derives its authority from its source. Tell me who said it and I will tell you what authority the word has. If God says something, that word is absolutely trustworthy and it is authoritative. How much of the Bible is true and authoritative? Well, how much of it is from God? I hold that all of it is from God. I do so for two reasons. First of all I hold that all of it is from God and, therefore, trustworthy because that is the way Jesus Christ treated the Bible he had and he is my Lord. There is also a philosophical reason. If I select from among the teachings of Scripture those that are true and those that are in error, Scripture is no longer an independent authority. The person who makes that judgment is the final authority.

“God chose to reveal His truth in the form of words bearing meaning. This form and this meaning are permanent”.

“It is difficult for me to conceive of true meaning being communicated apart from true words. If the words themselves are in error how much more the meaning for which they serve as a vehicle! Thus to me inerrancy is the predictable result of divine inspiration”.

“Therefore, because of the Bible’s ultimate authority, to understand the meaning God intended is of first importance. And this meaning cannot be discovered apart from the verbal form in which it was given, nor can it be in conflict with that form”.

I would, looking back over a few pages, add here, that this Scripture bears the undeniable evidence of its divine author in prophecy and its fulfillment.

6.4.4 TRUTH BRINGS WITH IT CONFLICT

Scripture is Truth, reliable Truth. And without a clear statement of the Truth, this cannot be communicated. The tendency to avoid conflict or controversy likewise prevents genuine communication. Shall we recall the words of Francis Schaeffer? He said:

“True Christian faith rests on content. It is not a vague thing which takes the place of real understanding” (“The God Who is There”).

“Here is the great evangelical disaster - the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this - namely accommodation: the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age. There has been accommodation on Scripture, so that many who call themselves evangelical hold a weakened view of the Bible and no longer affirm the truth of all the Bible teaches”.

“If the truth of the Christian faith is in fact truth, then it stands in antithesis to the ideas of our age, and it must be practised both in teaching and practical action. Truth demands confrontation. It must be loving confrontation, but there must be confrontation nonetheless” (“The Great Evangelical Disaster”).

A Christian entering into spiritual conversation with a Muslim must expect conflict and this conflict is likely to lead to confrontation, simply because the Qur’an is in conflict with the Bible and confronts it and its content with anti-Biblical concepts and teachings. All depends on how this conflict or confrontation is solved. It needs spirituality, humility, intimate knowledge of Scripture and a goodly knowledge of Islam plus

a lot of love and patience.

Not to touch on the controversial issues means sacrificing communication of the Truth altogether. To agree with Islam means, besides anything else, to deny the Biblical Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. Of course there are points of agreement between the Bible and the Qur'an. It is quite a legitimate starting point. But one must not stop there! It is our problem and task to solve this conflict without arriving at a dead-lock. And this can often not be avoided either.

As we will see later (chapter on Spiritual Warfare) a clash of world views - as between the Christian and Islamic faiths - often involves a clash of competing powers. This is most of the time not very apparent because of similar spiritual experiences, as we already noted.

6.4.5 THE DIFFERENCE OF GOD IN THE MINDS AND BOOKS OF SEEKERS

We ought to consider what may be termed a collective spiritual subconscious awareness planted by God into every human soul, which is likely to affect that a Muslim, Hindu or followers of other religions may address the same mental 'image' when they pray. Whether we like it or not, children and also adults, when hearing about God, interpret this concept into for them real terms, i.e. some kind of 'form'. Depending on what comes first, the concept or the teaching about it, but also on our expectations (God must be a super-human-being, he must be like father, the priest etc.) this mental image forms. In the case of little or no religious teaching filling in the detail, and in the relative absence of negative associations, the 'subconscious awareness', as I tried to call it, of God will form and later the teaching will be interpreted by that form. Even if a child will grow up in a home full of images, it may project deeper and view these as pictures of a real God who is there. Subsequently at prayer, when communication is sought with God, in his mind the worshipper may 'see' God in the 'form' He planted into the soul of man. Don Richardson's book "Eternity in their Hearts" gives a lot of food for thought in this.

However, when a person is now taught in his religion, his instructor will explain and interpret this 'image' or 'form' to be the god of Islam or one of the many deities of Hinduism or popular Buddhism. So this 'form' is overlaid with a teaching which debar the worshipper from the grace of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord, and subsequently salvation is vainly sought in doing certain rites or deeds instead of receiving it by faith as a gift from God. So it is always the task of a Christian witness to restore the original in case it is still hidden away, in the depth of the heart of a seeker after God.

6.4.6 THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE CONSCIENCE

Everyone who has spoken to people from the Orient, and often enough these are Muslims, will have observed that our Western style rational argument means very little to him. He lives in other realities. The concept of 'maya' in Hinduism and 'kismet' in Islam may stand as examples of what we mean. Many books have tried to explain this. Much of it may indeed be a reality, but I am little convinced of the causes and cures which are offered.

For years I could not find a convincing answer to a vital question in evangelism, and this is intimately connected with our problem: WHAT MUST I ADDRESS WHEN SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH PEOPLE, THE HEART OR THE MIND? I realized that many people responded to emotional appeals. Others maintained that the appeal should be in the Word, Le. Christ. Does the consent to the Gospel come from the heart? Or does it come from the mind?

In two successive years I had the chance to inquire from two well qualified Christian anthropologists. The first answer of a missionary lady working in Burkina Faso was plain and simple. A spiritual message, like any other, goes via the senses (ears and eyes as a rule) to the mind. The 'heart', that is the emotional reaction, weighs the like and dislike of the messenger and the message. But this should be preceded by an analysis of the mind to be of any real and lasting value.

This was in a little more detail confirmed by Prof. Paul Hiebert. He illustrated the process somewhat like this. Both the cognitive and the emotion influence a decision, but the extent to which the one or other comes to bear differs from person to person. This may be caused by temperament, up-bringing or cultural influences. However, the senses send the message with the connected impression to the mind. The mind likewise asks the question: *Is it true? Is it false?* If the message is identified to be false, it is likely to be discarded. If it is perceived to be true, the assessment is carried on by the emotion, which asks: *Do I like it?*

Do I dislike it? From there the message is coming to the final assessment before a decision is made. This is done by the will, or perhaps one should prefer to say conscience. It asks the moral question: Is it right or is it wrong?

Here is where the inner conflict comes in. I may not like the message, but realize that it is true, or right. If this model is right, and I believe this to be so at least in principle, then we have a chance of 2 : 1 to convince a person. We can present to him or her:

The facts of the Gospel

I believe this is not at all clear to many a Christian. This Gospel has so much content that it is practically not possible to present it in an evening or two without the recipient having background knowledge. In our streamlined no-nonsense society in which nobody bothers to study the 'small print', we have become used to uniformed approaches which are supposed to secure instant results. These do not work with Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists, simply because of the vastly misunderstood message we try to communicate. Even if there is an illusion of communication, an intelligent and binding decision cannot be made without the recipient having understood the message. What then comprises the Good News?

First of all that there is an eternal, holy, almighty, all-knowing, all present, righteous GOD, who is the personal creator of all and by that has a claim on our lives. In the beginning of all spiritual conversation must be a presentation of God. Not as an impersonal, remote super power, but as a personal loving God.

In contrast to God is MAN who, because he has been created in God's likeness, was given, above all other creatures, a will to make decisions beyond the immediate mundane every day; ones immediately connected to survival. Man has violated the holy will of God consciously, willingly and constantly. The first sin led to the Fall of Man and this led to a permanent persisting urge of man to SIN, which in turn led to the separation of man from God. C.S. Lewis in his beautiful book "The Problem of Pain" says:

"We must look for sin on a deeper and more timeless level than that of social morality".

"This sin has been described by Saint Augustine as the result of Pride, of the movement whereby a creature (that is, an essentially dependent being whose principle of existence lies not in itself but in another) tries to set up on its own, to exist for itself. Such a sin requires no complex social condition, no extended experience, no great intellectual development. From the moment a creature becomes aware of God as God and of itself as self, the terrible alternative of choosing God or self for the center is opened to it".

"The gravitation away from God, 'the journey homewards to habitual self, must, we think, be a product of the Fall".

"This act of self-will on the part of the creature, which constitutes an utter falseness to its true creaturely position, is sin. For the difficulty about sin is that it must be very heinous, or its consequences would not be so terrible".

Sin is man's declaration of independence from God. His assumption to be able to live without Him in time and eternity. Unbelief is sin (Rom.14:23). The transgression of the Law of God is sin (1Jn.4:3), in fact all unrighteousness is sin (1Jn.5: 17), and it is inexcusable (Rom.1 :20; 2: 1; Jn.15:22).

"They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more" (Eph.4:18-19)

says God in His verdict, really repeating from the Old Testament the horrible fact of their fate:

"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God" (Isa.59:1-2).

Depravity resulting from sin have made man too insensitive to see and understand God's position. And this sin is not just the trespassing of the one or other rule, or the omission to do a right thing, as Muslims view sin, but the total depravity of man in all his ways, which is displayed in his preposterous prideful assumption that he is able to help himself out of the dilemma and earn merit before God, compensating for his sin and by that saving himself.

This blindness to the holiness of God Who does not overlook such spiritual pride and rebellion, is sin

which to his own detriment hinders man to seek, see and accept God's offer of RECONCILIATION, because it is folly to him.

From the time God branded sin as rebellion against Him, He made the offer of atonement and reconciliation to Himself by the blood of a sacrifice. All those who believed God offered their sacrifice for sin, and made peace with God. Ultimately JESUS CHRIST is that only sacrifice of God Who takes (potentially) away the sin of all humanity (Jn.1:29). But this offer of God must be accepted and man must seek salvation in no other way (Acts 4:12). This is safe vouched by the already mentioned evidences embedded in the Word of God. Gratitude to Christ for this total liberation of the past and present and His power in reconciled man, conforms him to Christ's likeness (Rom.8:29; 1Jn.3:2; 1Pet. 1 :4; 2Cor.3: 18), by that restoring man to his original position.

In this new position man becomes part of God's plan for mankind, to RESCUE out of the world of sin and blindness all those who want, by intelligently and intelligibly sharing these Good News with them. But more. God created man as an object of His love. Believers enjoy this love and the undisturbed closeness to the triune God and respond by offering their love and worship in a never ending way, the consummation of GOD'S PURPOSE.

All this and much more is the content of the Gospel. To reduce this to some clichés or formulae is not only insufficient, but missing the point altogether. Presenting the Gospel is telling the love story of God, His utter disappointments, His suffering and His expectations, but also His fulfillment (Eph.1 :23; 4: 13).

Each part of this Gospel needs to be presented to be understood. And the listener must be aware that our heart is in this. This is not applied systematic theology, but a loved one describing the love of his / her life (subjective part). This should constantly be backed by Scripture (objective part).

The evidence of the Gospel

We already looked at some of these. Men more than women need the objective evidence of the Truth to be presented so that they can rest assured and build their lives not on the saying of some religious fanatics from another faith, but on the attested Word of God. We must realize that the other kindness of the Gospel as compared with Islam is extremely difficult to contend with by a Muslim. He needs all the supporting evidence we can give him to accept the Bible as the authentic Word of God which can be trusted fully. The Apostles used this (Acts 2:25ff; 3:18-24; 1Cor.15:3; Lk.1:1-4; Acts 1:3; 1Jn.1:1-3), why not we?

The demands of the Gospel

But we do not end here either. The Lord confronted the people by telling them:

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower, will he not first sit down and consider the cost...?”
(Lk.14:28)

The Gospel is Good News. But also Bad News! For those who reject the Good News, of course. There is some reckoning and reasoning to be done (Isa.1: 18). We have to give people we witness to an opportunity to consider what God expects from them when they turn to Him: Repentance (= turning away from the old lives), and baptism (Acts 2:38; 3:19), faith (Acts 10:43; 13:38-39), the willingness to obey (Hebr.5:9) and to continue to the end (Hebr.3:6; Rev.2:10; Mt.24:13). While the sinner ought to strive for salvation, the believer must strive for holiness without which no one shall see the Lord (Hebr.12:14; 1Pet.1:13-19). Finally God wants us to be His co-workers (Mt.28:18-20). Again these words, strange to most people, need to be defined.

The promises of the Gospel

We can end our presentation on this wonderful note. What an abundance of hope, joy and encouragement God has given to us! Just consider it: He assured us of His mercy (Ps.103:7), forgiveness (Ps.1 03: 12; Isa.59:2; 43:25; 44:22; Jer.31:34 etc.), eternal life (Jn.10:22-28; Mt.25:34, 46b), a new type of life here on earth (2Cor.5:17), rest (Mt.11 :28; Rev.14:13), His continued presence (Mt.28:20b). He wants to give us what all the world is striving for, but not getting: love and joy and peace (Jn.14:27; 15:9,11; Gal.5:22). He also promises heaven (Jn.14:3) where His beloved shall reign with Him (Rev.5:10). To do our tasks well on earth, we are also given the needed gifts (1Cor.12:8-10; Eph.4: 11; Rom.12:6-8, but most of all Acts 2:38b).

At the end of this chapter we have to ask ourselves an honest and heart-searching question. Is there

more that the heart, mind and conscience of man needs to be totally satisfied in this world and the next? Is there any other religion or faith which can offer anywhere near to what the Gospel offers in content and assurance and evidence?

If the reader is able to answer these questions knowingly, he will have to confess that there is absolutely none. So we can be assured that nobody has ever offered something better to mankind - and established the truth of it with supporting evidences. Let us then go with confidence and love and knowledge to share it! (Hebr.13: 12-13).

But even so - the response is not likely to be dramatic among Muslims. Francis Schaeffer expressed this in his own way very rightly:

“The true scandal is that however faithfully and clearly one preaches the Gospel, at a certain point, the world, because it is in rebellion, will turn from it. Men turn away not because what is said makes no sense, but because they do not want to bow before the God who is there. This is the ‘scandal of the cross’”.

The cross stands for the inability of man to save himself. It is the severest attack against his imagined integrity. But it is his only hope for time and eternity.

6.4.7 AN EXERCISE IN UNDERSTANDING

Much is being written in the field of Muslim Evangelism. Some of it is good, some bad. Much is experimental and listing to one side or another, But then one reads a piece which is written with insight, concern and understanding. One such article was written by Miss Ida Glaser, a former student of All Nations Christian College in England and published in *Themelios* (April 1982). With the kind permission of the author I like to quote from this article to illustrate how sensitive and sensible one can go about understanding and communication.

“The Christian looking at the Qur’an will naturally approach it with a pre-understanding shaped by his knowledge of the Bible; and the Muslim will approach the Bible with a pre-understanding shaped by his knowledge of the Qur’an, Because there exist similarities between the two religions, and in particular because of the Muslim’s contention that Islam is a continuation and completion of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is sometimes assumed that similar criteria can be validly used in considering the two revelations. It is my contention, however, that there is a wide gulf between understandings of revelation in these two faiths, so that such an assumption leads inevitably to misunderstandings.”.

“The Muslim affirms that the message of Jesus was similar in content to that in the Qur’an, Yet when he comes to the New Testament he finds a violation of his idea of a revealed book, and finds it difficult to understand how the Christian can accept it as such, The Christian, on the other hand, finds the Qur’an something of a puzzle. It differs widely from the New Testament in structure and approach, and yet it bears some resemblance to other parts of what he recognizes as revealed writing: namely parts of the law, psalms and prophetic writings in the Old Testament. Accustomed to analytical thinking, he is likely to concentrate on discussing and criticizing the content of the Qur’an, avoiding as far as possible considerations of its form”.

“I am fully aware that many who adhere to one revelation prefer to judge another in their own terms - and in such terms it will inevitably fall short, However, I am concerned here with understanding rather than assessment or criticism, since it seems to me of enormous importance that we understand a thing before we assess it. We are otherwise likely to be guilty of assessing a figment of our own imagination, and not what we claim to be studying”.

Looking at the differing forms of the revelations she considers Islam first:

“In Islam, revelation is embodied in the Qur’an, which came as a direct message from God to man through the prophet Mohammed, The key here is that God’s words came to man, the prophet being only the channel for communication. His title is ‘the messenger of God’, which well describes him as one who takes the message and relays it to the recipient”

“The mechanism of communication is simple: the Qur’an is considered to have been written in Heaven from eternity. Books have been given to many prophets in different languages and cultures

from Adam onwards, but all have, it is said, been lost or distorted. The final revelation of the eternal Qur'an in the Arabic language was given to Mohammed to be preserved in all its purity for the remainder of human history...

“There are various points of interest here, Firstly we see a direct mode of revelation, where the angel Gabriel was sent from God to give the exact words of the message. Mohammed then transmitted it to his disciples, who later committed it to writing, Secondly, we notice Mohammed's insistence that he could not read, This is taken by many to symbolize and ensure the purity of the message - as the virginity of Mary can be seen as symbolizing and ensuring the divine purity of Christ. Some would even consider Mohammed's purported illiteracy necessary to the faithful transmission of the message: the message must be entirely of God and not of Mohammed...”

“Mohammed's illiteracy exemplifies a third emphasis in the record of revelation: that of the miraculous. The Qur'an is in the highest style of Arabic poetry so that its very language rejoices the heart of the reader. In fact, Qur'anic language is considered the highest form of Arabic, and so lofty is the style that it is seen in itself to be sufficient proof of the miraculous nature of the revelation. When asked what miracle he wrought to validate his prophethood, Mohammed pointed only to the Qur'an; and the stress on his own illiteracy implies the divine origin of the miracle”.

It may need mentioning that Mohammed's illiteracy is by no means established. It is highly unlikely that a merchant, what he was before his calling, could read or write. The assumption of Mohammed's illiteracy is largely based on a text from the Qur'an: .

“Those who follow the apostle, the unlettered prophet, so believe in Allah and his apostle, the unlettered prophet” (5.7:157-158).

The words ‘unlettered prophet’ in Arabic are ‘*an-nabiyyal-ummi*’, the prophet of the ‘*ummi*’. We do well to look at another text to find a clue to the word ‘*ummi*’:

“It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered an apostle from among themselves...” (5.62:2).

In his commentary to this verse Yussuf Ali writes (footnote 5451):

“The Unlettered: as applied to people, it refers to the Arabs in comparison with the People of the Book” (i.e. Christians and Jews).

The word Unlettered here is rendered ‘*ummiyyun*’. It is indeed not wrong to assume that Mohammed considered himself - and was considered by his followers - the prophet (*nabi*) of the unlettered, i.e. unscriptured people who did not have Scripture. We refer to the excellent chapter on this topic in “Muhammad: His Life, Personality and. Ministry” pp. 95-98 by John Gilchrist.

We may well refer also to the biography of Mohammed by Ibn Sa'd “Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir” II, p.302 in which Mohammed on his death bed called for an ink-pot and something to write on. “I shall write for you a document and you will never be misguided”.

While the idea of an illiterate prophet is surely attractive to enhance the miraculous reception of the Qur'an, the argument is surely not well supported.

To complete her trend of thought on this topic, Miss Glaser continues:

“Finally, we can notice a stylized form of language, and see this as an example of the centrality of language in the Islamic revelation. If the wording of the traditions is important, how much more is the wording of the Qur'an itself! It contains the exact words given by God through Gabriel and represents the eternal Word written in heaven. There is therefore virtue in using its exact wording in prayer, and in reading it aloud or memorizing it”.

Miss Glaser then compares this concept with the Christian one of the Bible and illustrates how difficult it is for Muslims to accept this as revelation:

“Most of the Bible is clearly written by men, and bears the stamp of their personalities and cultural contexts; and it is largely devoted to records of events in human history, together with human responses, feelings and reflections on those events. It is hardly surprising that many people find it difficult to equate such a motley collection of human writings with divine revelation. The mode of production of the Qur'an seems much more appropriate”.

She continues to explain that (unlike in the Qur'an) we see God's actions and reactions in the history of man,

and that:

“The supreme point of this interaction is in the person of Jesus Christ - the ultimate interaction of God with man, and therefore the ultimate revelation of God and his relationship with man. The biblical writings represent records of these interactions, together with reflections on their significance. They are produced through interaction between God and man, and are therefore necessarily thoroughly human as well as being thoroughly divine. It has been pointed out that, in the Christian faith, divine activity and human activity do not grow in inverse proportion, but in direct proportion. Thus the biblical writers were not merely channels whose will and intellect were overruled by God, but rather consciously used their human faculties to co-operate with God in the context of their relationship with him”.

Evaluating these differences she writes:

“The above discussion indicates enormous differences in attitudes and expectations regarding revelation in the two systems. Perhaps the reader is already coming to realize why Muslims and Christians may find each other’s sacred books unacceptable. We now need to seek reasons for their divergent views”.

“In each case, we are considering a process of communication by God to man through man. We have already explored something of the ‘through man’ aspect, as this is the part of the process most easily studied. But the mechanism of communication through man is likely to be dependent on other factors, namely, the nature of God, the nature of man, and what is communicated. The dependency here is hierarchical: what is to be communicated depends on the natures of man and of God, and the nature of man is determined by God himself.

After having considered the form she looks at the content. She asks what is being communicated, firstly in Islam. She well observes that:

“The Qur’an is characterized as a warning (18,4), a reminder (81,27), a guide and a witness (46,12). It warns of the judgment to come, reminds of sacred history and present responsibility, gives guidance for conduct and witnesses to God and his messengers. Perhaps the essential description of the Qur’an is as a book of guidance for mankind: a guidance for all aspects of life. Together with the Traditions, it gives a basis for guidance not only in religious matters, but also in matters of personal and family lifestyle and in social, political and economic affairs. Every aspect of human life comes under this guidance from God. The Qur’an then informs man of all he needs to know about God, and reveals the way God wills man to live, together with witness and warning that urge obedience to that will”.

Comparing this with Christianity she continues:

“The biblical writings are seen as having been produced in the context of the writers’ relationship with God, and are therefore an expression of that relationship. In few cases do they represent dictated messages from God: they rather express God’s relationship with his creatures, and their response to him;. This, we have suggested, is the essential revelation. It is not so much a revelation of what God wills man to do, as a revelation of God himself in what he has done, and of how man can relate to him”.

“It is of interest that the Gospel writers do not even record Jesus’ words in their original language, and, judging by the variations between the Gospels, they are not particularly concerned with recording precise wordings. Moreover, most of the Gospel writings are concerned with Jesus’ actions as well as his words; and this is not so much to give us an example to follow as to indicate his nature and the response of people to him. Finally, there is great stress on the crucifixion and resurrection”.

“All this suggests that it is not so much the message of Jesus that is being communicated as the person of Jesus, and his work which makes possible relationship between God and man. Jesus himself shows us the essential content of Christian revelation. He shows us God himself is the supreme relationship between God and man, and is also the way to relationship with God for other human beings”.

As we did earlier, Miss Glaser now investigates the perception the Qur’an and the Bible have of man and God. In Islam

“Man is God’s creature, to whom God condescends to communicate. However, the communication must occur in such a way that man does not alter it in any way. His action on the divine Word would invalidate it; so we see that man is completely other than God”.

“Further, we have seen that what is communicated is essentially information which shows man the will of God and encourages him to submit to him. This has two important implications. Firstly, it implies that what man needs is essentially to be informed. His major predicament is that he is ignorant of God and of his will and mercy. He has forgotten what he perhaps knew at first concerning God’s unity and the coming judgment, and needs to be warned and reminded about these things. He then needs to be told how he should act in order to serve God and to avoid judgment”.

“Secondly, it implies that man is able to obey God’s commandments. God would never demand the impossible of man. Hence Islam’s vehement rejection of any idea of original sin, however interpreted, In the Qur’anic accounts, Adam and Eve were forgiven as soon as they realized that they have wronged themselves (2,35ff; 7, 1 Off). Sin is seen as something that hurts the sinner, and not as hurting God and God can forgive directly, without mediation or sacrifice”.

“Thus Islam gives man a very high position: by God’s mercy he has the possibility of obeying God as far as he demands, and needs only to be given the right guidance to be able to please God and to be forgiven, if God so wills. On the other hand, God’s demands on the individual are never greater than he is able, with God’s help and by God’s will, to fulfill”.

This is opposed by the Biblical view of man:

“Here we see a lower view of man’s abilities, but a higher view of God’s demands on him. We have already noted that specific commands in the Bible are often based on the idea that man should reflect something of the moral character of God. This seems a strange demand: it implies either that God requires the impossible of man, or that man is in some way able to be like God. The former suggests injustice, but the latter might appear to border on blasphemy; and it is anyway obvious to most of us that man is not normally capable of reaching such sublime moral heights”.

“Let us return to our discussion of revelation, to seek clues to an understanding of this problematic view of man and his responsibility towards God. We remember that the Christian view of revelation is centered in the idea of relationship between man and God - which immediately eases the difficulty. If God and man can relate, then there must be some similarity between them. Man, although a creature, must reflect something of the nature of God; and God, although uncreated, must be in some sense ‘person’”.

This is actually suggested in II Peter 1:4, where we read that God “has given us very great and precious promises” that through these we “may participate in the divine nature”.

“However, this removes only half the difficulty. It is still painfully obvious that man does not meet God’s demands. In fact, it was necessary for God to reveal himself, and to reveal also a way for man’s relationship with him to be established. In other words, man is only potentially related to God. Outside of the revelation, the relationship is broken, and man cannot satisfactorily respond to a message from God. The revelation leads to relationship between God and man, and gives guidance that can be followed only in the context of that relationship”.

“Man’s predicament outside this relationship is not, then, essentially one of ignorance’ - or even of weakness. It is not knowledge but blood that makes relationship. Man’s predicament is that he is out of relationship with God; but the Bible teaches that this was not man’s original state. At the beginning, the relationship was there, but it has been broken by man’s rebellion: a rebellion which not only harmed man, but also severed him from God, Therefore, man needs not information, but restoration; and that can be achieved only by God himself.

“In Islam, then, man has no need of salvation; he has already the capability of obeying God, and needs only to be guided and strengthened in order to fulfill his responsibility towards his Creator. He is not potentially related to God, in the biblical understanding of relationship, since he is completely other than God. The Christian, on the other hand, sees man as greater in potential, but - until he is restored -

debased in actuality. Unless he is saved through Jesus Christ, he realizes only a glimmer of his potential, and can never by his own efforts please God”.

After this very precise and concise assessment a look at the differing concepts of God in Islam and Christianity is attempted:

“There is much said about God in the Qur’an, and his creation is said to give an indication of him; but the essential nature of God is other than that of his creatures, and cannot be grasped by man. We know that God is one, that he has certain names and attributes, and that he is all-powerful to do whatever he wills...”

“God in himself is great, and infinitely other than what he had made. At the center of his attributes appears to be his great power, and his will. These imply that he is also the Knower of all, the Wise, the Hearing, the Aware, the Judge, the Glorious, the Rich, the Independent, the Unique and the Supreme Lord. Such a picture makes sense of our previous discussion. This God would not relate to man as a friend, a brother or a father, and could not be in any way affected by man’s actions. The idea that he might be hurt by man’s sin is ludicrous, if not blasphemous; the biblical idea of the fall in such a context is nonsensical, and that of salvation superfluous. Since the main effect of sin is to hurt man, and not to sever his relationship with God, no restoration of relationship is required. The God of all power can forgive as he chooses; no mediator is necessary; and indeed none is possible, since nothing and nobody can be associated with God. This, however, is not a complete picture of God. God had not remained totally aloof from his creation, but has chosen to speak to man through his prophets. Without this revelation, man would be in ignorance and under judgment; but God has shown mercy to him in his predicament. He has revealed not only the certainty of the judgment day, but also how man should act in order to live well on earth and hope to gain paradise after death. So we see that God, in his power and wisdom, has chosen also to be the Speaker, the Guardian and True Guide of man, the Generous and Benevolent, the Loving and Provider, the Forgiving and the Merciful. In his beneficence and mercy, he has not only created man and provided for all his needs, he has also given him his revelation and guidance in the Qur’an”.

The Christian, or better Biblical perception of God is quite different:

“Firstly, God must be in some sense like man if the two are to relate. In biblical language, man is made in the image of God. Of course, that image has been distorted by sin, but we should be able to understand something of God from our knowledge of man. The characteristics of man necessary for relationship include abilities to love and hate, moral consciousness, emotion and language, and all of these are seen as reflections of corresponding characteristics of God. The Christian God is a personal God...the essence of God includes relationship...”

“Next, God is the one who is revealed in history. Thus we can see what God is like from what he has done. He is more often described as the God of Israel or the Father of Jesus Christ than in terms of his characteristics, so we can expect to understand him best through accounts of his actions and through personal experiences of his actions towards us. Thus it will often be more appropriate to describe God as one who does something rather than one who is something. Supremely, God is a God who cares, who loves, and who saves. He is also a God who judges and destroys wickedness. The supreme revelation of God in history is in Jesus Christ. ‘No man has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known’ (Jn.1: 18). The question, ‘What is God like?’ is ultimately to be answered through a study of the person of Jesus Christ in the New Testament records, which is left to the reader”.

In her conclusion Miss Glaser returns to the beginning by showing up the differing perceptions of Christians and Muslims about the two Books and then presents her point:

“To the Christian, the Qur’an has a monotonous and stylized form. He is not accustomed to the idea of a sacred language, and anyway does not usually have sufficient Arabic to be able to appreciate its poetry. More importantly, it fails completely to do what he expects a revelation to do: it does not relate to man’s need for forgiveness, salvation and relationship with God as he understands it. And, of course, it also contains denials of some of his fundamental beliefs, including the death of Jesus Christ, his deity, and the doctrine of the Trinity. To the Muslim, on the other hand, most of the biblical writings are of obviously human origin and do not resemble what he recognizes as divine revelation.

They look more like the Traditions, but even here they fall short of expectation by their failure to give clear guidelines on life-style. They do not record details of Jesus' manner of life that can be used to regulate everyday living, and do not even give the original language of his message. Moreover, the position given to Jesus in the New Testament amounts to blasphemy, and the emphasis on salvation through his death is at best superfluous. It is my contention that, if Christians and Muslims are to understand each other's Book, they cannot do it only by concentrating on points of similarity. Neither can they do it by applying their own criteria to the other's revelation. They must rather seek to recognize and understand fundamental differences in ways of thinking and then - and this is important - take the different way of thinking seriously".

The direction of this serious thinking will be determined by our spiritual position and purpose. In our context we obviously want to learn to understand the person or persons we try to introduce to the Truth, and while it is not necessary to agree on all the points raised, we all can learn that understanding Muslims is a time consuming undertaking. But since it is the key to communication, we should be ready to invest!

6.4.8 THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE ABSOLUTES

To a Christian the final authority on all matters is God. Without trying to be difficult, we nonetheless have to qualify that we mean here Yahweh Elohim, the God of Israel, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What we know about Him besides His revelation in creation and history, we find in the Bible, and by that merit Scripture is likewise final authority to a Christian. Subsequently to that we believe that Christ is the only way, the only means by which man can be reconciled to God after having sinned.

To a Muslim the final authority is Allah, as he is revealed in the Qur'an, and a somewhat lesser authority is Mohammed, who is believed to have received the Qur'an and with it its interpretation and meaning.

These respective authorities are not negotiable. They are absolute or ultimate, because "man is unable to go beyond them in his questioning mind", to quote Prof. Klaus Nuernberger. According to him an ultimate cannot be invented or created by man, but man is convicted and convinced of its claim to be absolute truth. In his study notes on Theological Ethics (UNISA), he states that:

"Ultimates constantly question each other and man has to make up his mind which of these claims to truth is valid and which is not. But that only means that the power of conviction of one ultimate is stronger than that of another on the battlefield of man's consciousness. Once an ultimate is established, man no longer questions it. He accepts it as valid and binding - at least for a particular case and for the time being until something more convincing turns up".

If that is correct, and I take it to be so, this widens what we already discussed under the broad umbrella of communication. We fully realize the power an ultimate, a conviction, has over a person. Countless thousands have valiantly and willingly died for whatever their ultimate was, religious or political.

The ultimate gives purpose and meaning to a person as well as a group. The closer knit this group is, the stronger is the influence of their ultimate on the individual. This is very true about Muslims.

Prof. Nuernberger mentions the reciprocal effect:

Groups..."grant a sense of acceptance and belonging. Every person needs the assurance that he had the right to be what he is, to do what he does, to strive for what he cherishes. The right of existence is granted him by the group to which he belongs. He is surrounded by people who have similar views, values and interests. He becomes certain that it is 'normal' to be what he is and to do what he does. For this reason the individual identifies with the group. Touch the 'honour' or integrity of a group and you have attacked each one of its members personally! This deeper necessity of man to be assured of his right-to-be thus creates a bond of loyalty amongst the members."

"The group, on the other hand, depends on the loyalty of its members for its continued existence. It grants recognition, status, acceptance and belonging only under certain conditions. You have to know and accept the rules of the game if you want to join a football club. Acceptance in any group is conditional. And that is the pointer to the fact that groups 'stand for' something bigger than themselves. They represent an ideal, a value, a conviction of some sort - thus an ultimate. Should the group collapse, the ultimate would be disempowered (sic). In the name of the ultimate the group therefore punishes deviant behaviour with contempt, ridicule, harassment or rejection. The group may

question or withdraw the right of existence it granted. But to be an outcast is tantamount to ‘spiritual death’. All this is what we call ‘social control’”.

“Social control leads to the fact that all groups are more or less homogeneous within themselves. Members think, behave and relate to each other in a similar fashion. They are different from those outside. All groups have boundaries, composed of their conditions of entry. There are always those outside (called the ‘outgroup’). There is a wall in between to keep those inside in and those outside out”.

Regarding ‘outsiders’, he writes:

“It is, however, not the outsiders themselves that present the problem for the group, but what they stand for. They have a different system of values, norms and beliefs. They represent another ultimate. The very existence of another ultimate presents a threat to the unquestionable validity of the ultimate of the group itself. But once its validity is challenged, its function as a justifying authority for the group and each of its members is questioned. That is why the in-group turns against the out-group. In the first place it isolates itself from the out-group. Communication with outsiders is restricted and controlled. Information from the outside is scrutinized and filtered. In the second place, the out-group and the ultimate it represents are consciously deprecated. Their system of values and norms is considered to be amoral. The members of the out-group are forced into a stereotype such as ‘the’ Jew, ‘the’ Communist, or ‘the’ Afrikaner. A deeper understanding of the other group and what it stands for is prevented because it is dangerous for group certainty and group loyalty”.

We all have realized that:

“Since members have identified themselves with their group and its ideology, they experience any attack on the latter as an attack on themselves. They become defensive or, if threatened, aggressive. Irrational outbursts show that the foundations on which they have based their self-understanding and self-confidence have been touched”.

“It sweeps its own yard clean, as it were, and throws the rubbish over the fence into the yard of its neighbour. We call this “scape-goating”. The group will see only those aspects of reality that support its views. This is called selective perception. It will interpret the world in the way that is most profitable to it. We call this bias. It will build up a system of clever arguments with partial truths and a twisted logic to prove its views to be correct”.

All those acquainted with Islamic-Christian polemics are painfully aware of the truth of the above statement. I cannot acquit Christians either. While we feel for and understand emotional reactions when our ultimate is provocatively attacked - and in Islamic presentations and Islamic-Christian debates this is often violently the case - we still have to assess an unbiblical (and uncontrolled!) reversal as wrong and damaging to the cause of Christ.

While none of us is likely to fully escape selective perceptions, it ultimately is ceding defeat. When rational and factual argument is truly on our side, we need not fear - at least not for ourselves and less for God! Our only fear should be the total closing of eyes and ears of the Muslims.

As we already noted, the feeling of belonging and acceptance is vital to man. Nuernberger ably puts it like this:

“It is important to note that the right to existence is more basic than existence itself. Once a man is sure that he is what he should be, and is doing what he is meant to do, that he is acceptable in the ultimate sense of the word, that he is true to his real being, that he found his authenticity - or whatever you want to call it - he is able and willing to sacrifice social, economical and political interest, possessions and privileges, family and friends, yes, even his own life”.

“Ultimates normally grant the right of existence only under certain conditions. Man has to fulfill certain prerequisites, live according to certain rules, subject himself to specified norms and criteria of acceptability. Again the social group can serve as an example”.

Again we can identify ourselves (or have we only identified Muslims when we read this?). We will have to honestly ask ourselves who or what is determining our prerequisites, rules or norms. While it is obvious that Scripture sets our terms, who interprets Scripture for us? Here the hermeneutical question arises again. Should we really succumb to standards which are clearly group related or dictated? But then there may be

moral or ethical considerations which are clearly time - or region bound and not universal. It is quite legitimate to adopt these, provided they are not in contrast to God's Word.

Obviously the Ummah in Islam is a group which fits the last quotation. We do well to consider this and its implication in evangelism.

All this points again at conflict, for evangelism is essentially a challenge to the ultimate in a Muslim or, for that matter, Islam. Why do we evangelize if not because we offer an alternative to a Muslim's ultimate.

To strengthen this point, Prof. Nuernberger continues:

"Controlled by an ultimate, man will act in a certain way, argue in a certain way, strive for certain things. Challenge an ultimate and the person concerned gets uneasy, his face darkens, he may become emotional, aggressive or even fanatical. If a person is taken over by emotions it is usually a sure sign that an ultimate has been hit".

"If you effectively attack an ultimate on which he has built his identity or his right to be what he is, you will get the reaction of a drowning person. Try it out with a Muslim, a believer in apartheid, a stout capitalist liberal, or even a Christian fundamentalist. As long as these people remain calm, you have not yet penetrated to the level of the ultimate".

Who then is a fanatic? It has been suggested that a fanatic is someone with an open mouth and a closed mind. A very important point is made not only regarding the feeling of acceptance by and security in a group, but also the conviction to go with it:

"They firmly believe that they are right and view reality quite objectively, while the other party is believed to be distorting the truth to serve its own ends. But then they also lose their capacity to recognize and rectify their own mistakes and to shoulder their own share of the responsibility. Instead of courageously tackling what is wrong in its own sphere of influence, each group blames the others and waits for them to act".

Again we have a typical feature of Islam on display. It must be emphasized, however, that the writer did by no means intend to single out Islam, for this study is on Theological ethics. The honest reader will also reflect on our own position. And I like to make the point here that rejecting another premise than ones own without somewhat unbiased knowledge makes us qualify well to be addressees of the last quotation. Obviously there are many practical limitations. But even so the message is clear. To win others for Christ means exposure to other concepts and views. Perhaps not all can do this or are equipped to do so. But if we claim to have and follow the Truth, we should not be afraid to listen to the other side, to present the Christian position positively and also to clarify why we believe and trust it. The Word of God supports this:

"In our hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (1Pet.3: 15-16)

If we do not take this to heart, i.e. if we believe without a sure basis, or if our reason is simply that we accept what we have heard without thinking, we are not likely to be evangelists across the line to other faiths, and if we do we may well be viewed to be fanatics, and not without a cause.

Prof. Nuernberger well observed that:

"...obsessive and compulsive power over people...may catapult vast masses of people into hysterical action or resistance. Mobbing and rioting may be the result."

"Ideology is based on a selective and biased observation of reality; it uses reason to build up a system of arguments in its own favour; the real motivation behind an ideology is desire and self-interest and it therefore contains an element of dishonesty. But all this can be quite unconscious. In fact it must be suppressed into the subconscious if the person concerned is to believe in his own integrity".

Unless we think of the "dark ages" and the crusaders, it is not likely that Christian groups can be identified here. This cannot be said of Islam, of which the latest history in Iran bears witness.

While a person or group of persons might seem to be intricately and intangibly caught in the system of Islam with no way to intelligently and soberly assess the system and teaching of their religion and the Christian faith, we know of people who came out, and these are by no means only those on the periphery or

fringe. Prof. Nuernberger reveals in his studies the motivating force behind this and we do well to study this carefully:

“But the confirmation of our right of existence by the social group to which we belong, is not the last word. Once a man has a more profound ideal or conviction, he is willing to serve it even if this may lead to conflict with the group to which he belongs. The deeper his life is rooted in an ultimate, the less dependent he becomes on his social environment for recognition and acceptance”.

“To effect a change one has to expose to alternative ultimates. That is the only way. Man simply cannot do without a basis for his life and you cannot expect him to move before he is convinced that his foundations have given way and that he has been presented with a more valid and stable alternative”.

This confirms the thesis of a loving confrontation in which a conflict is not avoided, but in which in a kind, unemotional, factual and spiritual manner the Gospel in all fullness is presented, but in which also, at the right time in the right way, the insufficiency, yes, the error of Islam is exposed.

6.4.9 THE PERSONAL DISPOSITION OF THE COMMUNICATOR AND THE RECIPIENT

While until now we thought almost entirely about communication from a Christian to a Muslim, let us, last not least, now add some thoughts on communication from a Christian to a person as such. I am thinking here particularly of the human aspect. Apart from striving to understand spiritual content in the other in order to communicate a spiritual message successfully, there is very much a human aspect as well that we cannot overlook without appearing to be cold-blooded salesmen. We are associating with people, not just ‘souls’ that have to be saved. If we do not develop a genuine and deep concern for them, our communication is likely to stay on a kind of business level. While a salesman may fake an interest in our welfare (in the poor housewife which needs a vacuum cleaner, because he is a vacuum cleaner salesman!), we ought to have a real concern. When Muslims come to us to seek counsel when their marriage or business is in jeopardy or when their car needs attention, we may well assume that a personal affinity, a human relationship has been or is being built.

But then we have to be careful not to project our concepts good and bad, of right and wrong on them, unless it is clearly a case of biblical ethics. I have often been shocked how ‘counselling’ involved the imposition of the counsellor’s concept and understanding of things, based on his background and experience rather than on a compassionate assessment of a given situation and the possible solution - not overlooking the context, character and temperament of the person seeking the counsel.

While there are situations which disallow a compromise, there are others where a compromise is the only reasonable solution. We all know what I am trying to say: let us not be propagandists of Christianity, but friendly, sensitive, considerate, kind-hearted, tactful and compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ, who aim not only to say their thing, but also to be a true neighbour and friend, as long as that has its biblical limits. The Lord Jesus Christ can also here be our perfect example.

6.4.10 CONCLUSION

Despite its sketchiness, we have seen the complexity of the topic of this chapter: the difficulty to convey spiritual content, especially to people of other religions in a cross-cultural situation, the ‘mechanics’ of understanding and communication, the problem arising from a subjective sharing of spiritual thought and the art to be objective. We also could see the fine line between a dedicated effort to understand people and minister to them on terms acceptable to them, and the danger of compromising of the Gospel by accommodation and eventual syncretism. At all times the witness ought to distinguish between association, which is good and right, and accommodation, which is wrong.

We looked at the essential conflict which arises when the Christian message is presented to Muslims irrespective of its wrapping, and the hurt which we want to avoid, but dare not. But we also considered the qualities Christian witnesses should aim to attain, the exercise to indeed bring the Gospel in its fullness and attraction, supported by all the evidences which together should convict the conscience of the hearer and question his ‘ultimate’ so providing the precondition for his genuine consideration of a new one: God Who became the Saviour in Christ to provide what Islam or any other religion fails to provide: salvation from sin and the terror of judgment and eternal condemnation.

As in previous chapters we outlined principles rather than solutions, trusting that each one of us will apply and teach to apply these principles sensitively to each individual and particular situation.

This will enable us all to remove a heap of unnecessary obstacles and obstructions. But there remains yet one very formidable obstacle in the way: spiritual blindness. There is no trick, method or even right perception or assessment which can remove this. Only spiritual warfare against the forces that bind the spirit and mind of a person!

6.5 SPIRITUAL WARFARE

The tackling of the theme of this chapter makes me feel presumptuous. Who am I to attempt to write on such a subject? But then who is qualified except our Lord Himself? Perhaps I raise more questions than I can or dare to answer. And yet it is impossible to skip or neglect a topic of this magnitude.

Before attempting to look at this topic, we must realize that understanding of Islam and the Muslim, as well as skill in communication in no ways replaces spiritual warfare - neither is spiritual warfare a remedy for proper communication and understanding.

Let us, right at the outset of an examination of the Biblical evaluation of this concept, state that there are no such words as “spiritual warfare” in Scripture. What then do we find in Scripture to alert us, or to challenge us to ‘fight the good fight’ (1Tim.1:18; 6:12; 2Tim.4:7) like ‘a good soldier of Christ Jesus’ (2Tim.2:3)? It is well to note that the words ‘*agon*’ and ‘*agonizo*’ are used here in the Greek original, meaning to agonize, contest. While we do find a number of passages which deal with demon possession and exorcism, we find surprisingly little on our topic, unless we include exorcism as part of spiritual warfare. This is, of course, absolute legitimate, though not really helpful in our particular topic of cross religious evangelism.

6.5.1 POWER ENCOUNTER

The word ‘Power Encounter’ or ‘Power Evangelism’ has come into the foreground lately and became particularly popular through the ministry of John Wimber. Is this identical with spiritual warfare? Seemingly it is, although we like to differentiate between them in this context, for the thrust is going in different directions. While spiritual warfare is primarily concerned with an active attack on the domain of the devil and his host of demons with the object of liberating people who are under some form of spiritual bondage (from demon possession to spiritual blindness), power encounter is more concerned with the results signs and wonders may produce in the onlooker, i.e. evidence of the power of God to persuade people to repent and be saved.

“And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (Mk.16:17-18).

The Apostle Paul explains, though in another context (1Cor.14:22), that a sign is not for believers, but for unbelievers.

We remember the story of the widow at Zaphath (1Kings 17), in which we read of her son having died and how Elijah brings him back to life again. She concluded:

“Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth” (vs.24).

Likewise we read repeatedly how people marveled at what Jesus did, which was indeed a sign to them:

“In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, “Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!” “Be quiet” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him. All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!” And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area” (Lk.4:33-37).

Paul witnesses to the same effect when it is written through him:

“I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have d and done - by the power signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit” (Rom.15:18-19).

Exorcism was obviously one of the purposes Christ meant the Apostles or even every disciple to pursue:

“He appointed twelve - designating them apostles - that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mk.3:14-15).

“He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness” (Mt.10:1).

All this has only a very limited application in Muslim evangelism. There may well be Muslims who are oppressed or possessed seeking deliverance through a Christian - and finding it. That same applies to healing. However, as a rule this will not be of as dramatic a consequence, as in Hinduism or Buddhism.

However, we like to identify with David Prior (“Jesus and Power”) when he says: “Jesus steadily refused to perform signs in order to prove who he was (Emmanuel, ‘God with us’, ‘the Lord among us’) or to prove what he could do, so that men and women might be compelled to believe” (p.39). He enlarges that “competitiveness results from the human need to succeed, to produce results, to be recognized and to be in the lime light” (p.82). Whenever popular approval dominates, truth is the first casualty” (p.149).

In a publication of Fuller Theological Seminary named “Ministry of the Miraculous” (edited by B. Smedes) we are rightly warned that “the difference between God and a shaman is not that God does better magic. The difference between Christianity and folk religions is not that Christianity is stronger than medicine. The Lord Christ is not a magician” (p.60).

Power encounter is not a new concept either. It denotes the effort to let opposing deities or powers prove their superiority over the other. Much of the world of animism and ancestor-worship, but also of all Eastern religions, including Islam, are occupied with spirits (*jinn*s), charms and spells which are intended to do harm or to protect and heal. He who has the strongest magic is by that the most feared person in a society. (In every culture the ways and symptoms of “Power Encounter” differ, sometimes widely. Islam has its own way. A large advertisement in a most prominent newspaper may illustrate this:

QADIYANI’S CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

The ULEMA OF ... hereby accept the challenge
issued by Mirza Tahir Ahmed in the “Star” and
in the press in ... (other cities) on Friday, 14 October to make:
MUBAHALAH
against him in accordance with the verse of the Holy Quraan which
he has cited (chapter 3 v.61).

After a description of the Ahmediyya movement as seen by the Sunnis and a clear dissociation from it, the article continues to explain the issue:

The object of Mubalah is to publicly make the Almighty the judge in the matter of who is lying and who is telling the truth on a basic religious question, by calling down the curse of the Almighty on the party who is lying. It is extremely rare for Muslims to resort to this, but if anyone issues a challenge against us then we have no hesitation in responding.

The two parties should meet in a public place, bringing with them their womenfolk and their children. Then each party should pray to the Almighty and call down His curse on those who are lying.

The signatories are the local Jamiatul Ulama and the Muslim Judicial Council.

The Qur’an from which this practice is taken, writes:

“The truth (comes) from Allah alone, so be not of those who doubt. If anyone disputes in this matter with thee, now after (full) knowledge hath come to thee, say: ‘Come! Let us gather together - our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves; then let us earnestly pray, and invoke the curse of Allah on those who lie! (S.3:60-61)

The background story is, interestingly enough, this: In the year AD 632 (10 A.H.) a Christian embassy arrived at Medina from Najran. They were invited to accept Islam but declined to accept it. On which words and disputation increased between them. (W. Muir: .The Life of Mohammed”). This caused Mohammed to challenge the Christians as outlined in the Qur’an. Understandably they refused. How can they curse anyone?

But since then this has been an Islamic way to settle disputes: Power Encounter!

This may not be a very common practice, but we know of several such challenges, including one presented to us.

We are also aware of a Power Encounter in a symposium between Ahmed Deedat and a Reformed minister in which the latter called for any visibly sick person to come forward to be healed by prayer in the name of Jesus. A person came up and was actually healed instantly. Indeed a strong testimony to the thousands of Muslims present - but how many did interpret this event their own way? How many interviewed the healed person to verify the miracle? We would hesitate to recommend such a venture without unmistakably calling from God to do so.

On the other hand we are glad to acknowledge and announce that the curses invoked on us by Muslims are and will be without effect. The One in you is greater than he that is in the world" (1Jn.4:4).

Lastly a fundamental kind of Power Encounter may be considered. Let me put it somewhat crudely. There are people (say boxers or gangsters) whose expression of power is violence. To them there is no such thing as intellectual power or even the power of love. The higher the elevation of one's own standpoint, the more one is able to see and understand different standpoints. Islam in its manifestation has been and still is rather on the physical level. Power is seen in terms of subjugation, "holy" wars, even in assassinations or expulsions of Christians. Hence it seems to many Muslims a sign of weakness if one does not react in like manner. Muslim polemics are in their expression so vastly different to ours, that they do not seem to recognize the power in the Christian argument.

6.5.2 SPIRITUAL WARFARE IN CROSS-RELIGIOUS WITNESS

What then do we actually mean by spiritual warfare? In our case we mean, as indicated earlier, the liberation of the spirit and mind of a Muslim to enable him or her to understand and receive the Gospel. But even in the best known passage of this nature (Eph.6: 10-19), we find little specific instruction in this regard:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel".

We are made acutely aware that as Christians we are - whether we realize this or not, whether we like it or not involved in a 'struggle' 'against 'the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms'.

Verse 12 defines the powers of darkness and verse 10 opposes this with "the Lord's mighty power" - no doubt with an intended duplication or amplification in these words (i.e. mighty power).

We are made aware of the adversary and the need to be equipped and alert against his attacks. But it concerns itself largely with the protection of the believer (vss.18-19). Truth, righteousness, readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation is, as the context explains, defensive armour. The only offensive weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. And this is to 'fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel'.

We do, of course, have stories in the Old Testament which, besides the historical report, have a metaphorical message. I think of David and Goliath (1Sam.17:32-52) or the story of Elijah and the Baal priest on Mount Carmel (1Kings 18: 16-40) and perhaps many more. We may also consult many most valuable typological messages from the Old Testament such as the liberation of Israel in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea and later the Jordan, or the battle for Jericho. But it is hardly legitimate to formulate a doctrine from these, as valuable devotional material they may contain.

A little more precise and accentuated for our need is a passage from the first epistle to the Corinthians:

“I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power” (1Cor.2:3-5).

and also:

“...our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction” (1Thess.1 :5).

What exactly Paul meant by the words ‘demonstration of the Spirit’s power’ is not explained. The context does not suggest signs and wonders, but rather spiritual insight through the work of the Holy Spirit. Scripture here disqualifies ‘miraculous signs’ as much as ‘man’s wisdom’, influence, intelligence and noble birth, because ‘God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong...He chose the lowly things...so that no one may boast before Him!’ Jesus Christ has become our wisdom and glory (Gal.6:14). Paul ‘resolved to know nothing...except Christ and him crucified’ and that was the very reason why his message was not in wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, for what ‘no eye has seen, nor ear heard, no mind has conceived...God has revealed... by His Spirit’ (1Cor.2:9-10). ‘We have not received the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we’ - and no doubt also Muslims - ‘may understand...spiritual truth in spiritual words’. The logical conclusion is that ‘the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God...he cannot understand them’, he is spiritually discerned. The word ‘discerned’ is best explained by opposing it with the word ‘concerned’, of which it is the contrary. The man without the Spirit has no concern!

We see another facet when we read:

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2Cor.10:3-5).

Here the word ‘war’ (Greek *strateuo*) is coming into focus. ‘The weapons we fight with’ should rather read as in the AV. ‘the weapons of our warfare’ (Greek *strateia*’).

The Greek word *stratos*’, meaning an encamped army, indicates armed conflict, here obviously a spiritual conflict.

When we speak of spiritual warfare directed against satanic forces which bind people and blind them so that they become unable to consider and understand the only offer of God to lost man which is evidently valid and true, then the above is the key passage. Closely connected, it seems to me, is the following Scripture:

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1Tim.4:1).

I do not think that the cutting out of the context distorts what is written here. Let us try to consolidate what the above texts say:

1. There are arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against the knowledge of God.
2. People will abandon the (Biblical Christian) faith following deceiving spirits and things taught by demons through hypocritical liars without a conscience.
3. We (ought to) demolish such arguments and pretension.
4. This amounts to a war against ‘the rulers, authorities and powers of this dark world and against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places’ (Eph.6:12).
5. Such warfare is not worldly, but the opposite, namely spiritual. The weapons to be used have divine power to demolish the enemy’s strongholds, are a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.

It will be necessary to identify from Scripture who or what liars are. We are aware that our Lord called the devil a liar and the father of lies (Jn.8:44). It is clear that ‘spiritual lies’ are made up to contradict spiritual

truth, to make truth inaccessible or at least to confound the seeker. Scripture makes it quite clear who liars - that is the human counterpart of the father of lies - are:

“I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ... Such a man is the antichrist - he denies the Father and the Son. No-one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1Jn.2:21-23).

“We accept man’s testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God which he had given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made Him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about His Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1Jn.5:9-11).

We have to stop here a little. This is indeed a ‘hard saying’. Can one think, never mind say such explosive things? Scripture does! Of course this was inspired before Mohammed came, of whom we all thought when reading this text. Is it wise to think such thoughts? I suggest this depends on which premise we stand, and whether we (intended to) ‘wage a war as the world does’ or whether we seek to have the mind of Christ. To suppress the truth is asking for God’s wrath because it is godless and wicked (Rom.1: 18).

When we want to look at the perfect model, we look at Jesus Christ. When we observe how He was speaking to lost sinners we can learn that:

1. He never withheld the truth.
2. He did not confound people with clichés, but addressed each person individually on her or his own level of understanding and addressed the very point at which they were caught either in their sinfulness or their lack of loyalty.
3. He did this kindly and not condemnatory. He sympathized with the sinners because He loved them to the end (Jn.13: 1). He became a ‘merciful and faithful high priest’ because he was ‘made like his brothers in every way’ (Hebr.2:17). He was ‘able to sympathize with our weaknesses’ because He ‘has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin’ (Hebr.4:15).

In short, Christ spoke the truth in love. And, according to Him again, the truth alone shall set people free (Jn.8:32). We have been warned again and again against false prophets, i.e. against those whose message is not from God:

“Dear friends” do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world” (1Jn.4:1-3).

Strictly speaking Islam confesses that ‘Jesus has come in the flesh’, and by this agrees with this particular verse, but it denies that He is the Son of God, that He died on the cross for sinners and that he is the Saviour of the world. The above passage is directed against Gnostic Docetism, which taught that Jesus was not truly man and consequently did not really suffer on the cross because He had a phantasmal (spirit) body.

We are clearly prompted to make a sensitive, sober, intelligent, truthful and biblical-spiritual assessment whether or not Mohammed spoke divinely inspired truth. In the light of what we read, we have to confess that Mohammed’s revelations contradict the Bible in the very center of its message. This makes the Qur’an and with that Islam anti-Christian. Since convincing evidences which suggest Islam to be a religion revealed by God are simply not existent whereas the Bible is most convincingly supported by divine evidences, we have to conclude that the Biblical revelation is truth and Islam a deception.

In assessing Islam we do not deal with an ally who is somewhat deviated from the center, but with an enemy of the triune God. Obviously Islam carries true statements about God and even the Lord Jesus. But its principal message is a massive thrust against the Biblical revelation and deprives all its followers of eternal salvation.

Of course, as every other religion, Islam poses to be the truth and light bringer. “No wonder”, says

Scripture, “for Satan himself masquerades as servant of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness” (2Cor.11: 14). It is likewise consistent with the teaching of Christ that the “enemy” sows weeds (Gr. *zizanion* = darnel) among the wheat (Mt.13:24ff). The tragedy is not so much that the fields look untidy, but that the sown weeds are deadly poisonous and can hardly be identified from the wheat!

The system of Islam is diabolical in that it not only contradicts the ‘former Scriptures’, Le, the Bible, but devised a system which indoctrinates, deceives and captivates its followers ‘So completely, that it is most difficult, even for sincere seekers and finders of the truth, to come out of it.

Spiritual warfare, however, does not direct itself against those who have been deceived, but against the deceiver, and that is the devil and his ‘angels’.

6.5.3 DECEIVING AND TERRITORIAL SPIRITS

When we read the Biblical reports, particularly in the synoptic Gospels and in Acts, we notice that the demons are mostly spoken of as ‘unclean spirits’ and sometimes ‘evil spirits’, I take this to be the counterpart, the opposition to the Holy Spirit. In this case it will be right to reverse the qualities, task and operation of the Holy Spirit to discover what the unclean, evil spirits are, plan and do. The book of Revelation gives us some examples:

“Then I saw three unclean spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty” (Rev.16:13-14).

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called, Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns... Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and his army” (Rev.19: 11-12, 19).

“Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring - those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev.12:17).

“Men worshipped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast and asked, “Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?... He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. He who has an ear, let him hear”. (Rev.13:4,7-9).

In Daniel we further read in the same vein:

“He (Le. ‘another king’) will speak against the Most High and oppress His saints (Le. believers) and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him. But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the Kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His Kingdom will be an everlasting Kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey Him. This is the end of the matter” (Dan.7:25-27).

Who is not reminded of the short passage in PhiI.2:9-11:

“Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven (I) and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is lord”.

All this speaks in no uncertain terms of spiritual conflict, spiritual battle, though at the end times at the consummation of the present dispensation. Although this may be an amplification, we can easily see the same kind or nature of this warfare in operation now.

The unholy trinity consisting of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet sends out unclean spirits to recruit for the battle against Christ and those who are His faithful followers and to set up the anti-Christ in the place of Christ. While we know that anti-Christ will not be able to overcome the faithful (Rev.12:7-11),

he has over the ages managed to blind and deceive many. I do not think it to be unreasonable to state that Islam has proved itself to be in the front line of this.

In our effort to try to identify in which way our spiritual warfare ought to be directed, we must not overlook a somewhat strange passage in Daniel. Daniel had mourned (I) for 3 weeks rejecting choice food. This was followed by a vision at the bank of the river Tigris. Daniel saw what the others could not see: 'A man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude'. Calming the terrified Daniel he spoke and said:

"Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. "So he said: 'Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No-one supports me against them except Michael, your prince)" (Dan.10: 12-13,20-21).

I do not want to attempt to expound this text here. I just like us to note that this mysterious 'man' who came in response to Daniel's request to gain understanding was detained for three weeks by the prince of the Persian kingdom! He needed Michael's intervention and help to get to Daniel to tell him what is written in the Book of Truth.

This fight was obviously not yet over. The 'man' intended to go back to fight the prince of Persia with that ones seeming ally, the prince of Greece - not without the needed support of Michael 'your' prince, Le. Daniel's prince.

We have to rule out that this depicts a normal human fight or quarrel. This text rather suggests a celestial conflict, the 'princes' of Persia and Greece being the territorial spirits of these regions, who try to resist and sabotage the execution of God's will and purposes on earth. They are 'the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms' (Eph.6:12).

I suggest that here is the place to apply the lever in spiritual warfare. We all know so little and most Christians lack the experience and the confidence connected with this to begin to tackle the enemy who is bluffing practically the sum of the believers.

6.5.4 WHO SHOULD DO WHAT? HOW?

The observant reader has already concluded that we have to identify two realms to avoid confusion. There is the 'struggle' of the believer against 'spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms' and the actual warfare of which we are so little aware. And that is indeed carried out in the very 'heavenly realms' as we have seen from the sparse accounts in Scripture, particularly in Daniel and Revelation. In no way are the believers or even individual ones selected and charged to participate in this warfare. It is God's battle. He employs His hosts to wage this war, and indeed even to them it is a tremendous struggle. But we have been revealed the end, and that is consoling indeed (Dan.7 and PhiI.2).

What applies to other matters is also relevant and important to realize here: For a believer to attempt what only God can do must essentially result in frustration and failure. We believe that God is in control and will gain the ultimate and final victory over Satan and his host.

Tom White in a paper on Spiritual Warfare (presented at a 'workshop' at 'Lausanne II' in Manila 1989) outlines some very balanced points which we should ponder on.

Speaking fundamentally of the onslaught of Satan already in the O.T., he says:

"The primary framework is that of idolatry, false deities that vie for the attention and adulation of mankind. The implication of the second commandment, 'you shall have no other gods before me' (Deut.5:7), is that there are other gods that compete with the Almighty. The challenge to Israel is to maintain commitment to the covenant relationship with Yahweh. There is thus no clear mandate to war against supernatural forces. This is Yahweh's role as 'warrior' (Exod.15:3)".

He carries on to say:

"Until the Day of judgment, God allows these forces to remain in the heaven lies in spite of their disobedience. Mankind thus lives in the tension of a temporary, traditional dualism where victory has been won, but where also the redeemed continue to struggle against evil, as test and toughener of faith.

The insidious powers continue to work through human governments, religions and select personalities to keep people in bondage to religious codes, social systems, and moral compromises that separate souls from knowledge of truth in Jesus Christ. Their role is to deceive the minds and pollute the wills of men, diverting them from redemption”.

He confirms what we just stated:

“It must be that we discerningly allow Jesus Christ, as Commander of the hosts of the Lord, to stage and wage our spiritual battles. Pride and fascination with power creep close by the tent of the warrior. Genuine faith in the Almighty must expose and check a fanaticism that flows from fleshly zeal. At this level of supernatural encounter, we may grandiosely and dangerously presume ourselves to be God’s chosen vessels for the advancement of His kingdom. As Jessie Penn-Lewis pointed out, there are demonic ‘eagles’ that hover about the peaks of Christian leadership that stir the subtleties of pride, power and self-importance. Such demonic schemes have been painfully evident in the church in America of late”.

In a rather modest and none-sensational manner Tom White goes deeper into the Warfare and analyses that:

“There are two distinct dimensions to power encounter that must be understood as separate, yet related functions. The first is godward - a sensitive abiding in and listening to the Source, a receiving of clear impression and direction from Jesus Christ. Living a lifestyle of prayer is enhanced by the regular practice of praise (Eph.5: 19,20), and the out-breathing of petition and the inbreathing of the Spirits ministry of peace and empowerment (PhiI.4:6,7). The second dimension is satanward - a resistance rooted in authority activated by prayer, empowered by objective truth. This resistance is not itself ‘prayer’, It is encounter, engagement, ‘struggling’. We do not ‘pray at’ the devil. We fight him with heavenly weapons. This manner of strategic praying has several elements that should be understood and practised as ingredients of success in these endeavours. Genuine unity of heart among the participants is pre-assumed, a relational commitment to one another as well as to the cause (Acts 1; 14; 4:32). In seeking God’s mind, there must be agreement in Jesus’ name to ask according to His will and purpose (Mt.18: 18-20; Acts 4:30). The faith level of the group is to be visionary and unwavering (Mk.11 :22-25). And there must be the realization that a strategic stand will be tested - perseverance through persecution, trial, even death, are predictable (Lu.18: 1-8).

The perspective advanced in this paper discourages an approach to power encounter that ‘takes on’ the principalities of evil with a view to staging a knock out punch that will drive them out of a territory. Rather, it is my view that a proper interpretation of ‘struggling’ means entrance into a deeper, prolonged form of prayer, a laying hold of God that pleases Him and prompts Him to act. It means a commitment to practice the witness of oneness with fellow believers, and a commitment to bold incarnational truth, living those values of the kingdom that weaken and render ineffective the influence of evil. This takes both spiritual courage, and a radical commitment to live according to kingdom values. In light of Ephesians 3:10, God is making known the ‘mystery of Christ’ (in the building of the church body) to the ruling powers. This occurs when the church is living in the dynamic *koinonia* of the Spirit and living out the Lordship of Jesus in daily life. This is not big splash stuff. Most flashy agendas are of the flesh. God reserves the paradoxical right to choose the weak and the weird to boggle the minds of the wise. Something dynamic and eternal occurs in the heavenly realm when truth is lived. It is not usually immediately apparent or measurable. God’s measure is character distilled through trial. Such character demonstrates the superiority of the way of Jesus and puts evil in its place”.

These observations, both biblical and born by experience, also direct the place of the Church and the belief, this spiritual battle. It is neither bombastic nor attractive:

“The church is to stand against and extinguish schemes of evil as they present themselves (Eph.6: 1 0-18), being alert to such schemes (2Cor.11 :3,14; 1Pet.5:8). We are given practical instruction on how to ‘resist the devil’ until he flees (James 4:6-10). The conditions for such resistance are all centered on strengthening personal relationship to God. We are called to live the mystery of love, demonstrating the miraculous unity that is possible only in Christ (Eph.3:1-13), We are exhorted to earnestly pray for those in positions of governmental authority (1Tim.2; 1-13), that the gospel may be lived and promoted. The spontaneous, Spirit-led expansion of truth through the children of light is the normative means of advancing the kingdom. This will only occur in the context of bold, holy obedience. What, we may now ask, are the extraordinary means of expanding light in the darkness? In the face of the

flood of evil in our day, God leading His people at this time to more discerningly recognize the higher sources of evil, and restrain their influence”.

“The direct exposing and dealing with higher powers of evil should only occur in the context of setting individual souls free from the grip of darkness. In the course of deliverance work, we will customarily encounter lives that are more strategic than others, lives that have been specifically targeted. In a sense, these are the valuable ‘chess men’, the taking of which draws the attention and stirs the anger of forces that have invested considerable effort in maintaining a stronghold. When such powers manifest to pressure the man of God to back off though fear and threat, it is time to stand ground, claim ownership of the souls for Jesus, and speak judgment on the darkness. As the Spirit guides, it is an imperative point of spiritual warfare that we do not go looking for this level of battle, but that we let it find us.

When we speak of evil at this level, we are in a sense describing the ‘Board Room of Hell’, acknowledging that there are high ranking C.E.O.’s (Chief Executive Officer) responsible for the major movements of deception and destruction of human life in our world. To illustrate, there likely are principalities that promote the proliferation of New Age metaphysics, the rise of ritual Satanism, the production and provision of drugs, sexual perversions and pornography, the militant force of the Islamic movement. Thus, we can clearly identify the fallen forces of evil that seek to blind the minds (2Cor.4:4) and bind the lives of the unbelieving world (I Jo.5:19). The question at hand is, ‘how are ambassadors of Jesus Christ to wage war against the rising tide of darkness in the remainder of this century?’

I personally would have avoided the words ‘militant force of’, because Islam as it is, represents militancy according to the Qur’an. The bottom line, it seems to me, is the Word which says:

“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom.16:20).

However, here and now we do well to heed the words of Scripture regarding our part in the spiritual struggle, as Tom White already suggested. Within this framework we have been given divine authority. The Lord Jesus said and I take it that this word is not confined to the Twelve:

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven and I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Lk.10: 19).

The context suggests that this authority is over evil spirits, demons. The words ‘snakes’ and ‘scorpions’ are obviously allegorical (Gen.3:1; Rev.12:9 and 1Cor.15:55b) and refer to spiritual forces of the evil one, as also the words following, underline (‘all the power of the enemy’). ‘Nothing will harm you’ shows the clear limitation of Satan, as we can already read in Job (1:9-12; 2:3-6).

The offensive forces are, however, nowhere clearly defined excepting the casting out of demons. And the authority to do so is delegated authority. The seventy-two disciples who were addressed, had just come back rejoicing that ‘even demons submit to us in your name’. The authority comes from Christ alone, Who defeated Satan’s power over us on the cross and will destroy him once for all at the end of time.

6.5.5 SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS, OPPRESSION AND POSSESSION

A study of the Biblical perspective of these words, does not render much material. We are, of course, all acquainted with the word ‘possessed’, which is indicative of ‘being in the possession of ‘ and is normally connected with evil spirits or demons who control a person. Liberation was and can be effected by exorcism.

It would be a false assumption, or at least a gross overstatement to say that a Muslim is possessed. While this is not impossible, it certainly defies the Biblical usage of the word to say that an unbeliever in the Bible is by that fact demonized and that is the correct translation of the Greek word ‘*daimonizomai*’!

While demonization is not apparent in orthodox Islam, it is not uncommon in folk-Islam, indeed a very substantial part of Islam. In Sufism, for instance, Hinduistic concepts have a very strong influence on Islam, and with that demonic control is quite common in some form or other. Veneration of departed ‘saints’, practice of one or other form of witchcraft or just the emptying of one’s mind and the readiness to experience some sort of supernatural ecstasy very often subjects a person to demonic influences or even control.

The word ‘oppression’ is generally used in Scripture for exploitation or suppression of man by man. Only once (and only in the translation of the A.V.) the word is used in spiritual terms, where it is reported that the Lord Jesus went about “healing all that were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38). The NIV translates this more accurately by saying that He was “healing all who were under the power of the devil”.

Spiritual blindness has a little more coverage:

“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ” (2Cor.4:4).

“...you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts” (Eph.4:18).

In the Gospel report, the Lord Jesus mentioned a prophecy of Isaiah, saying:

“You will ever be hearing but never understanding; you will ever be hearing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have dosed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them” (Mt.13:14-15).

Unfortunately we have to resist the temptation to make an Exegesis of this text and its variation from Isa.6:9-10 here. Let us just take note that Jesus speaks not of the people’s hearts, but heart. There was a common factor in the people of Israel, and there is a common factor in Muslims regarding hearing and seeing.

Let us try to evaluate the above passages, which are fully representative of this topic in Scripture:

1. The ‘god of this world’, obviously Satan, has blinded the minds of unbelievers.
2. This leads to a darkened mind and thus darkened understanding of spiritual content.
3. The cause is the closing of their eyes and ears by inspiration of Satan, leading to the hardening of their hearts.
4. If they would open their eyes and ears they would not need to live in the futility of their thinking, because they would no more be ignorant, they would be understanding and perceiving, their hearts would turn and they would be healed. An act of will is necessary!

It would be justified to call such a spiritual condition bondage. How can people under bondage be liberated? Jesus Christ Himself gave the answer to the very same question which He posed:

“How can anyone enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house” (Mt.12:29).

Both, the text and the context, make it quite clear, that the ‘strong man’ is Satan. To take away what is in his possession is not possible - unless the strong man is bound first.

Can we Christians bind the devil? Let us recall Lk.10:18-19:

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you”,

I take this and the broad context of Scripture to mean that Jesus defeated Satan and bound him:

“Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (CoI.2:15).”

“...so that by His death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is the devil...” (Hebr.2:14).

Predicting His death on the cross, Jesus said:

“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out” (Jn.12:31).

Elsewhere we read:

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1Jn.3:8)

Two questions may be raised here:

1. If Satan is defeated, cast out of heaven, subjected to the (delegated) authority of the believers, if he is

disarmed and including his work destroyed, if he has been judged and driven out - why is the world still in such a mess? Why do we still have to fight temptation? Why are people still in darkness and bondage?

Let us try to find an answer before coming to the second question. By faith we accept that Scripture is true. In Rev.12:7-13 however, we read just about the same account- but to happen during the Tribulation. The great dragon, Satan, is 'hurled down, and his angels with him. He leads the whole world astray. Then a voice in heaven says:

"Now have come the salvation and the power and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brother...has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony...But woe to the earth...because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because his time is short".

We will have to accept the tension of the victory already accomplished by Christ on the cross: Satan cast out of heaven, disarmed and destroyed - yet with permitted power and great fury, able to keep in his dependence all those who have closed their eyes and minds, and accusing the brothers until the full consummation of God's plan. We can only guess the reason. "He is patient with you (believers!), not wanting anyone to perish..." (1Pet.3:9). I take this to mean that God is patient with His people who do so very little about the perishing, because He wants to extend their opportunity. Without Satan, mankind cannot really decide whom they want to follow and serve for lack of a choice. Love for God, on the other hand, necessitates a choice! Therefore Satan still has to play his role, though he is doomed already.

2. Are we not told by Christ that we have been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and that what we bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever we loose on earth, will be loosed in heaven (Mt.16: 19 and 18: 18)? Does this not give us the authority to bind Satan and loosen those bound by him?

The immediate context (18: 15-17) does not seem to suggest this meaning. The wider context, as we already saw, clearly states that Christ has done this.

Even so, there is a vast task left for us. Wherever there is demonic possession of what sort ever - and we better make sure that we have the right diagnosis! - we are expected to liberate such a person by casting the demons out. We should, however, carefully learn about this from God's Word - and not neglect fasting.

As *kerux*, proclaimer, herald, we are to share the Good News, making quite sure it is understood in the context and perception of the hearers, and pray God that He by His Holy Spirit may open the spiritual eyes of the listener, to enable him to understand the ultimate implication of a pending decision, and to open God's Word in a very personal way to him. All this is bedded in Christian love, concern and compassion.

As a word of concern and comfort let us take notice of the Words of Christ:

"This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain..." (Mk.4:26-28).

The seed (the Word of God) is to bear fruit, not the sower, when the time (*kairos*), moisture arid temperature, i.e. conditions, are right, and the birds (evil one) do not snatch away the seed (Mt.13:4,19), the fruit should come. The right and circumspect sowing is the Christian's responsibility. The response is the responsibility of the hearer.

6.5.6 EVALUATION

"And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him" (Rev.12:7-9).

As we already concluded, the spiritual war takes place on two levels. One we cannot participate in - the one in heaven - the other we ought to.

Except for the clear commission, part of the Great Commission, to cast out demons, we are left with very little concrete information and instruction. Had the Lord intended us to take more specific action, He had, no doubt, left us both. We do know that:

“His intent was that now, through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord” (Eph.3:10-11).

As Tom White rightly indicated, this is effected by the righteous life of the believer, also under trial (Job), and by a dedicated and deep life of prayer, our total devotion and availability to God.

Coming to specifics, how does all this apply to Islam and Muslims? Denying the fundamentals of God’s salvation in Christ, Islam is clearly and manifestly anti-Christian. Consequently the false message of Islam must be exposed. How this ought to be done we will investigate later.

The Muslim is trapped by the anti-Christian system of Islam and is convinced of its exclusive properties. A Muslim, as a general rule, is not demon possessed! He is a captive of a diabolical system of thought, its danger being the compulsive following of concepts, precepts and forms, which in themselves are not essentially bad, in fact often highly ethical. But these are believed to effect salvation, which they by no means at all do!

We suggest that in Muslim evangelism the need is not so much one of exorcism, but of prayer. Prayer as a means of entering right into the very presence of God with the object and intention to live in His light, but also to intercede for those who are so smugly satisfied with what they do and so that the veil in front of their eyes be lifted by God that they may be convicted of sin, not by man, but by the Holy Spirit, God Himself. But we also ought to pray that we may go to Muslims, and that we may go well prepared. It is the knowledge and understanding of the Gospel that a Muslim needs - but in forms and terms which are comprehensible to him without giving any credit to Islam or assimilating the Gospel by accommodation.

Hardly any of us feel uninhibited when the topic of prayer is raised. We all know that we do too little of it, and what we do is too shallow. We are feeling guilty of producing too little quantity and quality. While guilt must be dealt with at the cross, guilt feelings ought to be tested for their validity. A stop watch is a poor measuring instrument for prayer. And deep and intimate oneness with God in prayer cannot be produced or induced on request.

Our total dependence - even in prayer - is the object of prayer. We are deprived, often quite unholy in our thoughts and even speech and action. This is not uncommonly the product of stress without which modern urban people cannot live. But God holds the key! He can cleanse us, make us worthy to be His witnesses. He can equip us. If I can let Him, that is. We can listen to Him - in Scripture. We can ask for strength to follow and obey. We can intercede. Our requests are heard, even if we think our quality is inferior including our prayers. Surely they are. But God is our Father. He understands. He listens. He answers.

While we may seek the dramatic in prayer, God wants our dependence on Him and our faithfulness. He loves us! He promised His disciples to be with them to the end of time! There is a condition attached to that, though: GO!

6.6 PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF MUSLIM EVANGELISM

6.6.1 PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS

Whereas up to now we concerned ourselves with premises and principles of Muslim evangelism, we now have to touch on the nitty-gritty of it with some practical suggestions and hints.

Let me right at the outset of this make a categorical statement: no knowledge or skill, no method, strategy or trick of any sort will have any spiritual effect, except God draws a person, here particularly a Muslim, to Himself:

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...” (Jn.6:44).

While we are commanded to make known the Good News, we have to be content with doing just that - and a little more: we should be faithful and patient in doing this, persuade - and even argue or reason as Paul did. Christians must not hide in a pseudo-spirituality, ‘leaving everything to the Lord’. Let us recapitulate a little:

“He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him” (Acts 9:29).

“As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead” (Acts 17:2).

“So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there” (Acts 17:17).

“Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4).

“They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews” (Acts 18:19).

“Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:8-9).

But we can neither convict of sin, convert or save. We like to suggest that what we are expected to do, we do with a deep sense of responsibility, not as a duty to be observed. If we want to act responsibly, we will prepare ourselves in the best possible way. Every rep deserving this name is trained and keeps on training himself in order to make the best presentation of his goods. How much more should we constantly be eager to learn, prepare to improve our skills. I suggest that the seemingly spiritual position in which an evangelist ‘relies solely on the prompting of the Holy Spirit’ is self-conceited.

This does not mean, that we should not devotedly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit! But we do our home work as men like Paul, John, Stephen and all the other saints did, as can be seen from Scripture.

It is the Holy Spirit Who will teach all things and will remind the disciples of everything the Lord Jesus had taught them (Jn.14:26). This presupposes that there is something to be remembered!

We are equally aware that a spiritual battle cannot be fought or won by carnal means. But a thorough preparation for a task can by no means be considered a carnal effort.

John Stott, addressing a Student Conference for Evangelisation in Europe in 1988 suggested that there are three reasons for evangelisation; firstly obedience towards the Great Commission, but above that love. Love for Christ who loved us first, but also love for the people who don’t know Christ, for ‘the love of Christ constrains us’. He then continues (and I retranslate this from German):

“Yet I believe that there is a third motivation which is higher still. I mean a jealousy for the honour and name of God. But is jealousy not sin? No! Jealousy means to abhor the presence of a rival. Whether jealousy is good or bad, depends on whether the rival has a right to be there...You can see that jealousy may well be justified. It can be pure. In this sense God said of Himself that He is a jealous God (Exod.20:5). For He alone is God and there are no other gods beside Him (Isa.45:5). He will not share His honour with anyone else...”

We should hate everything that tries to rival God. We should burn with jealousy for the honour of God. And because God shares His Throne with Jesus, Who sits at His right hand, and because He gave Jesus majesty and honour which are above all so that every knee shall bow before Him and every tongue confess Him as Lord, therefore we should also be jealous for the honour of Christ. We should labour that Jesus will be given the honour which is due to Him”.

Interestingly John Stott later observed a point we like to make as well. He says:

“At the end of a missionary journey (of Paul) we do not read of how many people got converted, but how many were persuaded”.

In a way we are trying to sell a ‘product’. Like any good salesman or saleslady we will have to know and understand our product, which we, likewise, always have on display (Christian life style). However, we will also have to know the product of our competition to be able to convince a prospective customer of the superiority of our ‘product’. So, while we try to persuade people to ‘buy’ our ‘product’, we also dissuade her or him to get something which ultimately does not work. We can do both convincingly, for, unlike most salesmen, we know with great confidence that our product is the only one which fulfils what it promises.

Success in Muslim Evangelism?!

Then we will not fall into the trap which dominates not only society, but also the Church to a large extent: success orientation. In the world performance and achievement are the key to success. Everybody seeks success. It is not only the strife for physical and emotional well-being, which is understandable, but also for status, for recognition. The urge for success-experience has not spared pastors and missionaries either. Hence

the calling to become a missionary to Muslims met with so much consternation, for the chances of success were and are deemed to be very slim indeed, if not non-existent.

This has become a vicious circle. A call was not heeded, because the expectation of success was poor. The churches did not think much of supporting a missionary without some or other success story behind him, and the Muslims subsequently had too little exposure to the incomparable Christ and His Gospel to be able to consider Him as Saviour and Lord. And few supporter meant also too little prayer!

God seems to overrule this state just now, however. Many, many more missionaries and theological students prepare to work among Muslims than ever before. A fair selection of literature on Muslim Evangelism is available, which could hardly be said 15-20 years ago. Even so, there is hardly a seminar which I present, at which not someone asks about the success-rate we can provide. This demands a return question: "What do you mean by success in Muslim evangelism?" The answer is invariably "how many people got saved?". Can I save? Obviously not! What are we to do then? Communicate the Gospel as understandably and comprehensibly as possible to as many people as possible. And here we can indeed be very successful. (Eze.3:17-19).

Who am I, Lord?

After having said this we have to look at another obstacle: our sufficiency, or rather the lack thereof. This is, of course, not a new one. We do recall Moses' reply to Yahweh at the time of his calling: "Who am I, that I should go...?" (Exod.3:11). Moses a little later explains his reason for not wanting to go: "O Lord, I have never been eloquent...I am slow of speech and tongue!" - Or of that of Isaiah: "I am a man of unclean lips, and live among a people of unclean lips..." (Isa.6:5). Mind you, he changed his mind after his guilt was taken away, his sin atoned for, and when a seraph had touched his lips (vs.7). To the question of the Lord "whom shall I send? And who will go for us?", he responded: "Here am I, send me!".

We may also think of Jeremiah who had a really valid reason to decline God's call: "Ah, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak, I am only a child!" (Jer.1:6). The Targum paraphrases this correctly "I cannot prophecy", i.e. I have not those powers of oratory necessary for success (R. Payne Smith, former Dean of Canterbury in 'Cook's Commentary of the Bible'). The word 'child' was only used of a person until Bar-Mizvah, i.e. thirteen years of age! How did God view this? "Do not say, 'I am only a child'. You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you". After having touched his mouth God said: "I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and to tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer.1:7-9).

This may well agree with 2Cor.10:5 and Eph.5:11 where we read of demolishing arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and exposing the fruitless deeds of darkness - but it certainly clashes with today's philosophy and world view coined by humanism.

The point is that in ourselves we are not 'equal to such a task' (2Cor.2:16). Nobody ever was! Paul, who is likely to have had a speech impediment, was inspired to write: "Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (2Cor.3:5).

Again we like to caution, however, that this is not a licence to be lazy and not to prepare!

Being called to witness cross-culturally, and here particularly among Muslims, we must realize that a Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah or Paul were people like us. They were individuals living in a specific situation with quite a distinct temperament, character, background and gifts. Just like us. Nobody could really copy them, in fact nobody did! And yet we know of Moses being prepared by God for his task for 40 (!) solid years. Paul, though he had theological training under Gamaliel, spent probably 3 years in seclusion in Arabia, little doubt for preparation.

Today, however, the trend is to copy, to make uniform, to follow cliches. As we already observed in the beginning, there is no end of how-to-do instructions, how 'to win souls for Christ', how to pray, worship, exorcize, to 'plant churches' etc., etc. Who has not witnessed a pitifully, comical attempt to copy one of the renown T.V. preachers? They have success. So copy them! As though walking on the stage with a microphone in one hand is a key to spiritual communication.

Let us be us! God has made us! Even to the tips of our fingers (fingerprints) He has made us individually. Why then copy anybody else? We can only really be ourselves, so let us also have the courage to be ourselves! Who should coin us, except our Maker?

Over against this stands the biblical concept of the Church, the spiritual house made of living stones (1Pet.2:5) in which God is pleased to live, for this is His Temple (1Cor.6:19-20 and 2Cor.6:16-18)(= His abode). Into this Church - and that is not only the little local church, I suggest - God implanted gifts, Christ

apportioned them, all by grace, i.e. given as an undeserved gift 'for the common good', not to satisfy an unholy individualism or ego (Eph.4:7; 1Cor.12:7)! Being a 'living stone' in the glorious Temple in which God pleases to live, we are no more than a part of it. God 'arranged the parts in the body', some seemingly weaker (namely those who are given greater honour). He also combined the members of the body, and there should therefore 'be no division in the body' (1Cor.12:18-25). These gifts given to individuals are not for their own glory, but 'to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...until we all reach unity in the faith...and become mature...' (Eph.4:12-13).

This is not intended to be a Bible study, but rather a reminder how the Church is supposed to function and why. Besides worship the very purpose of the Church is mission. A church which does not efficiently reach out is not only useless, it is doomed to insignificance. We need to find our place in His church as individuals made the way we are - excepting our sinfulness, of course - without being individualistic. We all are to contribute to the body of Christ of which we are not only part, but on which we so much depend.

To sum up what needs to be said, we should endeavour to be careful that we are sensitive to God's calling, fit in with the plans of God according to this calling within the framework of the Church, but without allowing us to be robbed of our individuality and bring in and unfold our gifts, that together we may help build Christ's kingdom by investing ourselves to the end that has been declared from the beginning, that **all** should hear God's call to salvation which is exclusively and uniquely effected by Jesus Christ on the cross.

"You are worthy...you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from **every** tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev.5:9).

An unholy omission

For whatever reason, the Church has favoured some tribes, languages, people and nations at the expense of others. Let me illustrate my point. According to missiologists there were until recently (about 1975) more missionaries sent to the Eskimos of Alaska than to all Muslims worldwide. Of the approximately 16.000 Protestant missionaries sent to Africa, 15.750 worked among roughly half of its population, those who follow animism or 'natural' religion and Christians. The remaining 250 worked among the other half of the population: the Muslims. This meant, of course, that those few also secured a minute prayer cover for the field they worked in. Needless to say that all this worked not in favour of the execution of the Great Commission. This dilemma was further extended by newly developing soft approaches which were expected to yield better results, a hope which has in no way been fulfilled. Although this situation has by no means been overcome, we do see the beginning of a new awareness and prayer concern. We believe God is at work!

One hears it said that God has His own time for the evangelisation of a group or nation. We do not want to comment on this, for we feel incompetent to do so. But we will have to choose between two points of departure, God and His Word concerning His will and man's ambitions and expectations. We all know which to choose and what is commanded!

Let's be practical

We already noticed the absolute necessity not to overlook our personal and individual temperaments, characters and characteristics, backgrounds, educational standards, gifts etc. and not to aim for uniformity. This would mean a stream-rolling of our God given distinctions.

But there are other considerations which will fundamentally have to determine our approach to Muslims and that is **their** individuality.

Apart from their own personal traits are those that are determined by religious, cultural and the sociological make up of the general society:

- Do we speak to people in an Islamic state?
- To Muslims living as a minority in a "Christian" environment, which has influenced their perception of Christian values - or the lack thereof?
- Are we witnessing in a country with a sensitive balance between Muslims and Christians (like Nigeria and Tanzania) and in which the government is concerned to avoid tension? Do we witness to rural or urban people?
- Are they largely influenced by orthodox Sunni or folk-Islam?
- Or are they motivated by the new Shiah style Islamic revolution?
- Are they amiable or fanatical?
- Educated or not?

- Trained in their faith, or do they rather follow popular magic and are concerned with spells and the protection from these?
- Are they 'at home' or in a diaspora (migrant) situation?
- Are they militant?
- Polemical?

Not to consider these factors are very likely to lead to ineffectiveness, if not even to counter-productivity, not only closing the doors unnecessarily, but blocking them for other witnesses also.

To avoid a hit-and-miss type of evangelism, every witness, be he full-time or part-time, ought to develop a personal method and strategy within the framework of a group of witnesses, if such exists. Every individual and group witness should work on such a strategy, be it designed for one person or a nation. And this will have to be designed with above factors in mind.

We can hardly expect Muslims to adapt to our way of thinking and doing things. We have to adapt ourselves as best as we can to be ambassadors for Christ.

6.6.2 THE WITNESS

It is very difficult to separate the issues pertaining to the various topics in this book. An overlapping cannot be avoided. We already looked at some aspects of this topic earlier on, and will find more in later chapters.

Let us again look at the key Scripture:

“In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do it with gentleness and respect” (1Pet.3:15).

If we meditate for a while on this passage, we become aware that everything pertaining to evangelism is contained in it. Even so, it will be helpful to analyse its content a little. The first sentence clearly indicates the foundation of any witness: The Lordship of Christ in his life. This implies that we should not do as **we** please or think, but as **He** directs.

“To give an answer to everyone” in today’s world is pretty well impossible. How can we know **all** about the Agnostics, the Watchtower movement, Communism, Hinduism, the New Age philosophies, Free Masonry, The New and the Old Apostolic Church, Islam and the other thousands of directions people follow in their search for meaning, purpose, security and eternal welfare to let our knowledge of this make a meaningful communication possible. But we can prepare to witness to those people we are likely to meet - or whom we seek out: In our case the Muslims. Preparation includes learning about the other so that one is able to convincingly lead him from where he or she is, to Christ.

“To give the reason for the hope that we have” points us again to the Christian evidences, which are so convincing - to people who need to know this before putting their trust in Christ. I love those last words too: “Do it with gentleness and respect”! Is not this the very characteristic of a Christian witness? And this brings us to a very important point:

ATTITUDES

Dr. W. Backeberg in a paper presented on “Three Conflicting Mentalities in Muslim Evangelism” identifies from the text of Jn.18:33-38 three attitudes, and I find this worthwhile to consider.

The Accommodative Mentality

He shows that our Lord, even in His very crisis situation before Pilate, was not accommodative: “For this was I born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth”.

Truth in the biblical sense is much more than the correctness of a statement. This may be mathematically, scientifically or factually true and also logically convincing, and still not comply with the biblical yardstick of truth.

Dr. Backeberg sums up by saying: “Whenever one of His (i.e. Christ’s) witnesses calls something true, which, measured by biblical terms, is not true, he (or she) becomes guilty of applying the accommodative mentality which is rejected by Christ”.

We have to be aware that the Qur’an does indeed contain true statements. This is not denied. But, being mingled with untruth, the quoted truth is in fact a seductive factor.

The Crusading Mentality

We read in verse 36:

“My Kingship is not of this world; if my Kingship were of this world, my servants would fight...”.
very interesting grammatical usage in the original helps our understanding of this text. This pertains to the use of the conditional clause in the Greek text in the words: “...would fight”. Dr. Backeberg writes:

“In Greek we have two types of conditional clauses:

a) Real or open conditions, e.g. ‘If the weather is fine on Sunday, we shall sit in the sun for the communion service’. It is real, open - it can happen.

b) But if I say: “If I had wings, I would quickly pay a visit to my daughter and grandchildren in XYZ this afternoon”, the condition is called an “irrealis”; it is out of question that it happens!
We must here note that both the condition (that I have wings), and the event (that I visit my daughter), are out of question.

The conditional sentence in Jn.18:36 is unmistakably an irrealis. “If my kingdom were of this world, my subjects would have fought”. With these words our Lord totally rules out “that his kingdom is of this world” and “that his servants fight”.

While the original crusaders fought with swords and spears - which all Christians utterly abhor and reject - we may well have a crusader mentality by endeavouring to fight Islam. This will, no doubt, be reflected in our attitude towards Muslims and will lead to unnecessary confrontation. We ought to note, however, that there is a confrontation which should not be avoided - and that is between Truth and untruth.

The Missionary Mentality

“We must remember that our Lord, as the accused, was here being cross-questioned by the highest judge. The judge asks Him whether He pleads guilty or not: “Are you the King of the Jews?” And now the unexpected, the unheard-of happens - that the accused comes with a counter-question; he queries the source of information, and the motive of the judge. “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Was this not impertinent to the judge? Why did our Lord ask this counter-question?

I am convinced that in this moment our Lord foresaw a day when Pilate’s and His role would be exchanged; when He would be the Judge, and Pilate the accused. He was in the process of paying the price for Pilate’s sins as well. When He said: “**Every one** who is of the truth hears my voice”, Pilate was clearly made to understand that it included him as well. We do not know how long Pilate pondered on this question. All we know is that he brushed it aside by escaping into the philosophical sphere. Shrugging his shoulders, and with the rhetorical question “What is truth?”, he walked out, and thereby sealed his eternal destiny.

Our Lord had, however, shown that He was a soul-winner up to his last breath. The **missionary mentality** was at the heart of his work of salvation.

We all will, no doubt, opt for the missionary attitude, as it was already portrayed in the opening verse of this chapter. But what does this contain? Let me try to look at our attitude in two areas:

1. **Our attitude to our Lord.** We read these words: “In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord”. What does this mean in real terms to us in the context of our topic? I suggest the following:

- * We take seriously His Word and His call to do missionary work.
- * We are willing to make a commitment. We will not be directed by our fancy or the pleasures or importance we might derive from this.
- * We are willing to overcome fear. Particularly house-to-house visiting needs courage, for rejection or even hostility can be experienced. We are executing God’s will!
- * We do God’s will because we love Him more than anything else.

2. **Our attitude towards Muslims.** We remember the words: “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do it with gentleness and respect”.

- * The Muslim is a person for whom Christ died, reason enough to love him or her with the love of the Lord.
- * We are not just going to a Muslim to say our thing - however good and right and necessary this may be. We take him/her seriously as a person and associate on an honest and sincere basis.
- * A witness lives so that he provokes questions.
- * He is working conscientiously to prepare in order to give relevant answers.
- * As witnesses we are gentle and respectful.
- * We will endeavour not to provide pat-answers or speak in cliches. We will try to speak sensibly to Muslims to help them understand the Gospel despite their opposing religious concepts and reasoning. What we say must make sense to them.
- * Although Islam is an anti-Christian religion and probably more hostile to the Christian faith than any other religion, we accept Muslims, even while in our hearts we reject Islam for what it is.

All this is summed up in this Word of God:

“We have courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the face of great opposition. For our appeal does not spring from error or uncleanness, nor is it made with guile; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never used either words of flattery, as you know, or a cloak for greed, as God is witness; nor did we seek glory from men, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gently among you, like a nurse taking care of her children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember our labour and toil, brethren, we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our behaviour to you believers” (1Thess.2:2-10).

Our attitudes determine our relationship and ultimately the outcome of our effort to truly share the Gospel with a Muslim. It is a matter of life and death !

APTITUDES

Feeling reluctant to discourage someone with a willing heart from considering Muslim evangelism, one will still have to look at qualification a witness needs to have.

This depends largely on the situation and intensity of involvement. On a local level every Christian should be able to be a witness to his or her Muslim neighbour or colleague. Even so we suggest that preparation is an absolute necessity, even if it is very basic.

We hold that those who would like to participate in Muslim evangelism should work to attain to certain abilities and to enhance their gifts. This can be learned. However, most of the basic qualities should be natural to every Christian:

- * **Compassion** for those men and women who live without the Saviour, who have been deceived or live in a system which does not afford them any knowledge of the Bible and its teaching. They are lost though they may be very zealous and sincere people:

“I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness” (Rom.10:2-3),

which, of course, is received by faith and is based on what Jesus Christ did. There is hardly another passage of Scripture which fits a Muslim so well.

- * **Empathy.** Without the desire to understand our opposite we will hardly be able to communicate properly, particularly so in a cross-religious situation:

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under

Christ's law) so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1Cor.9:19-23).

- * The **ability to formulate and communicate difficult thought in simple and understandable ways:**

"We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1Cor.2:12-13).

"And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col.4:3-6).

- * **Courage** to go where others shrink back, to share the faith in love even in a hostile situation:

"But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved" (Hebr.10:39).

- * **Humility** to speak on the same level with a Muslim, not down to her or him.

"For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that did not receive?" (1Cor.4:7).

"For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you" (Rom.12:3).

"...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil.2:2-3).

- * **Faithfulness.**

"This is how men should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (or faithful) (1Cor.4:1).

"Stick-ability" is perhaps the quality most lacking in Muslim evangelism.

- * The **ability to debate** 'hot' issues **soberly** and without getting upset. This demands knowledge of the subject - usually apologetics - and restraint, but also the ability to analyse and clarify the issues involved lovingly.

"Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1Pet.1:13).

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1Pet.5:8).

- * The willingness to **pray**. Prayer is a key issue in our struggle against the principalities which blind and bind (Eph.6:10-20).

6.6.3 PREPARATION AND EXPERIENCE

It should be obvious that preparation is not exhausted after having read a book on Muslim Evangelism or after having attended a seminar in this field.

Whether or not we are gifted to communicate the Gospel and be understood, no person can know until he has practised it long enough. No person is able to find out whether he or she is gifted to play the piano, unless lessons are taken and many hours of exercising and rehearsing have been done.

Skill comes with learning and experience. This does not exclude the possibility to make mistakes. Every witness will have to be content to learn from these mistakes and not to repeat them.

What we learn from books or in a classroom can never be an alternative to experience - as important as this may be. On the other hand, experience without instruction will only in very exceptional cases lead to knowledgeable and effective communication.

But we know also from Scripture, that “if I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1Cor.13:2). This is followed by those most beautiful words: “Love is patient, love is kind...it does not boast (!), it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails!” This may well be supplemented by ch.8:1: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”.

There are so many Scriptures which promote knowledge. It is, in fact, one of the spiritualities (or spiritual gifts in 1Cor. 12:8). Therefore we should not reject it. It is human nature which is gullible as to get puffed up with it. Even so - love is the crown of Christian characteristics. It corresponds with the greatest attributes of God.

So it is preparation, i.e. knowledge and love coupled with experience which makes the best witness. Love will make us patient -even when we fail - to continue to go after the ‘lost sheep’, just as the ‘great shepherd of our souls’ did. Yet, we do not want to overlook another ingredient without which the other three will not even begin to function: prayer.

6.6.4. PRAYER AND WITNESS

Prayer needs discipline and time. There is little purpose in mechanically saying “our little prayer” before going to bed. Prayer is the very breathing that enables us to live and work. Here half the battle of service is fought. But here in addition we realize that we also must do the other half with God’s help!

Every Christian that goes to witness to Muslims will face more discouragements and spiritual opposition than in most other fields of service. We become acutely aware that “we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places” (Eph.6:12ff). We cannot possibly take it on ourselves to war against these without the whole armour of God: truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God! And faith takes hold of the promises of God! One such promise says: “The powers of death (hell) shall not prevail against it”! (Mt.16:18).

All the knowledge about Islam, all our feeling for and understanding of the Muslim, even our intimate knowledge of the Bible will not in the final analysis make us fit enough for outreach work. It is what God does through His available and loving servants that matters. When His power, love and compassion operate in us, we are indeed His witnesses. What we are and say, however, is implanted when we live in His presence.

We presuppose that every witness is totally aware of his or her own incompetence without divine help: “Without me you can do nothing” (Jn.15:5). This knowledge leads us to the point of absolute dependency upon God. We are aware that in us “lives no good thing” (Rom.7:18). Nonetheless we have been “entrusted with a commission” (1Cor.9:17) that we cannot dream of executing without God’s support and guidance all the way!

Prayer recognizes God as Who He is. This evokes in us a state of awe in His presence in which we constantly live. Prayer also reveals our own inadequacy. In prayer I stand before the reality of the living God. I begin to see myself as He sees me. A new and true perspective is created. We are stripped of our “glorious” self-image and self-sufficiency, but stand in His presence as those “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph.1:6). This leads us to worship, adoration and thanksgiving; for we have been made acceptable to the Father by Christ and His work on the cross.

In the presence of God we become aware of snares that bind an overwhelming number of real Christians and render them ineffectively and obsolete. But “you shall receive power...when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). This happens at conversion and is restored and fortified in the presence of God - in prayer. The receiving of power is not an end in itself: “You shall be my witnesses!” The Holy Spirit does not come to us to generate joy and happy feelings in us, but comes rather to prepare us for service. Joy and happiness may or may not be present. These should be considered a by-product that can be acknowledged thankfully.

6.6.5 BASES AND FORMS OF EVANGELISM

Forms we should liken to containers. Their fundamental purpose is to hold the content. When we buy a tin of jam, this tin has no other function than to provide us with the desired sandwich spread. The tin is then discarded and no more than garbage. When we now look at forms and methods, these are only containers to help us share the content.

It is a sad reality that forms increase in importance in the measure the content decreases.

When we speak of bases, then these have to rest on the one foundation: "No man can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1Cor.3:11). He is made known to man by the Word, the Logos: "The word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn.1:14). The Word is Jesus Christ, our Lord, and He is the Logos. This word is "Good News", '*euangelion*', the Gospel.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

"In the New Testament it denotes the good tidings of the Kingdom of God and of salvation through Christ, to be received by faith, on the basis of His expiatory death, His burial, resurrection and ascension" ("Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W.E. Vine).

This is a rather technical formulation, but it conveys the biblical content of what the Gospel is.

Perhaps it is good to also say what the Gospel is not. It is not a means to obtain "cheap grace", as Dietrich Bonhoeffer has phrased it. He writes:

"Cheap grace constitutes the squandering of grace, squandered forgiveness, squandered comfort, squandered sacrament; grace as an inexhaustible larder of the church from which irresponsible hands hand it out, thoughtlessly, without bounds; grace without price, without cost ... In such church the world finds a cheap way to cover its sins, which are unrepented of, and freedom from which is not desired ... Cheap grace is justification of sin, and not the sinner. Because grace alone does it, all can stay as it is ... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without cross.

Precious grace is the treasure hidden in a field. To obtain it a man goes with joy and sells all he has. It is the costly pearl. To possess it the merchant gives all his other goods. It is the Kingdom of Christ. To get it, the disciple leaves his nets and follows Him, and to maintain it he gouges out his eye and throws it away, because it causes him to sin.

Precious it is because it costs a man his life, grace it is, because it gives him the life. Precious it is because it condemns sin, grace it is, because it justifies the sinner. Precious it is, most of all, because it has cost God the life of His Son: "You have been bought with a price", and because nothing can be cheap to us that is precious to God. And grace it is especially, because to God His Son was not too precious to help us gain life, but gave Him up for all of us. Precious grace is that God became man!" ("Nachfolge" by D. Bonhoeffer).

Increasingly the grace of God is offered like merchandise which is on sale because it goes out of fashion or because it threatens to spoil. Increasingly the Gospel is offered as a means to enrich our lives, as a trouble and problem solver.

Instead the Gospel is God's offer of forgiveness, of reconciliation to the holy, eternal God of heaven, of acceptance by Him. He wants to be our Father. But it is also an absolute rejection of all efforts by man to deserve this based on his own efforts or quality.

Acceptance of the grace of God through the death of Christ on the cross for us, if seriously done, effects a change of life, attitude, priorities and loyalty. It is the return to our original destiny and creates a new relationship with our Father.

This presupposes a cognition and understanding, as was already said earlier, of the nature of God, man, sin and atonement. A superficial 'commitment' to Christ, may well be none at all.

Receiving the Gospel of Christ is an admission of guilt and an act of will to forsake all other for Him. That 'all other' essentially includes Allah, Islam, the Qur'an and Mohammed. Because they stand in contrast to the Logos, they must be forsaken. Compromise is not in agreement with Scripture. God's Gospel is serious. So is the act of receiving it.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

A witness should be conscious of the fact that this Gospel is supra-cultural. No-one needs to change his or her culture in order to comprehend the Gospel - or even to accept and follow it. Naturally the Gospel always was

and should be embedded in a given culture and is being expressed in different cultural forms. These may well be an unnecessary stumbling block to members of another culture. While absolute no concessions may be made regarding the content of the biblical faith, we have no mandate to force traditional cultural forms on anyone else.

This asks for skill and knowledge to make a clear distinction between the form and its content. As observed earlier, we have to take notice, however, of the religious effect on culture. This is more difficult to distinguish in an Islamic culture. The problem often is that what we deem to be cultural forms, may well be Islamic symbols with Islamic content. If we allow this to come into the church, the danger of syncretism becomes very real indeed. Since we have already considered culture and its role to some extent in principle, we only need to consider some practical aspects by which a witness may unwittingly offend a Muslim friend. These may not even apply to every culture. There may be different, or stricter or more liberal rules. One will have to carefully observe and sensitively enquire in a defined local situation, what may or may not be done or said. In general we should consider the following:

Male-female contacts are viewed with much more suspicion, rigor and concern in Islam than in the West. Therefore a witness must make quite sure not to trespass on taboos. What may be quite a normal chat to us may be considered immodest, even offensive, in an Islamic setting. Even shaking of hands, particularly after the ritual washing before the *Salat* or *Namaaz* prayer, may be considered defiling. One should indeed be careful not to expose a person of the other sex by being alone in a conversation with her or him. It goes without saying that a male witness speaking to a lady Muslim will be viewed in a much more serious light than the other way round.

Dress is an aspect of increasing importance in the Islamic world. Ladies cover more and more of their bodies with less and less attractive clothes. This is viewed as a token of modesty, excluding any possible charm which may be expressed otherwise. We will have to understand in this regard the altogether different perception of modesty or morality. While in original Islam and even today in territories of the Shiah sect "*mut'ah*", i.e. temporary marriage for a few hours, days or even weeks was or is legal, it is till very much the practice that a young couple to be married will never be allowed to meet without a chaperon. The extensive covering of the body in some cultures including the '*burka*', i.e. veil covering the face, is practised not to attract men. Christians find it difficult to understand such forms, because we are to practice modesty and morality from the heart; not for lack of opportunity, but because of a different type of relationship with ones wife or husband and out of love and respect for Christ.

Not to be offensive a Christian lady having contact with Muslims will consider dressing in ways which will not make her the object of the lust of the men, nor offend the given cultural taste or standard. Covered shoulders with half sleeves and no decollete and an acceptable hemline would be quite acceptable in most situations. One will have to beware, on the other hand, of being accused of assimilation with the motive of deception, as happened to missionaries we know for wearing traditional dress.

Consideration and tact will let every witness find the right medium - without imposing own rules to others.

The right hand is used for 'clean' activities such as eating, the left for 'unclean' ones, such as cleaning after the use of the toilet. This somewhat stigmatizes the left hand - something to be aware of. In many Eastern cultures eating is done with the right hand only, while the left hand is kept below the table. While Eastern hospitality is often considerate enough towards Westerners to provide the 'tools' to eat, the witness be well aware to use his right hand, if not.

Hospitality is of greatest virtue to just about every Oriental, also, of course, to Muslims. To refuse it may be very offensive. One should, on the other hand, not insist to keep on inviting Muslims who decline. They have a good reason:

The halaal law. In Islam behaviour and action of every sort is basically divided into two groups: lawful and unlawful. W.H. Temple Gairdner describes the basis of it: "The decree pronouncing certain things right and certain others wrong is more of the nature of an administrative act: it does not so much create them "right" or "wrong", as "permitted" (*halal*) or "not permitted" (*haram*) (tabooed!), not as odious in themselves, but as intriguing the fiat of the Absolute Sultan" ("The Reproach of Islam").

Food laws are naturally also covered by this system. Like in Judaism the kosher law, the halaal food laws have been extended much beyond the original intent and purpose, it seems to me. Basically a Muslim is only

allowed to eat meat slaughtered by an Islamic ritual, by cutting the throat of the animal and bleeding it to death, excepting fish and locusts. Unlawful is the meat of predators as well as of pigs, canines, donkeys, mules and a host of others.

A Christian may buy food from a Muslim butchery when entertaining a Muslim friend, and yet he may well be suspicious and feel very uncomfortable eating with Muslims. The pots and pans may have been used for preparing pork. Worse, one hears stories of Christians deceiving Muslims by adding pork fat to food offered to them. And that has been done! Obviously by nominal Christians, though. It has been brought to our knowledge that certain Christians demanded from a Muslim to eat pork before receiving her or him into a Christian fellowship after their conversion. What a disgusting and unbiblical thing to do! And yet one can understand it, when, like in the Middle East, Muslims fake to become Christians with the object of marrying Christian girls, only to return to Islam when they have succeeded.

So let us not be over-persuasive when inviting Muslims, when we sense a reluctance or evasiveness on their side. Generally speaking it is our experience that a Muslim feels much more at ease in his own environment.

Holy books are highly esteemed by most Muslims. These include in particular the Law of Moses, the Psalms of David, the Gospel of Jesus and the Qur'an, or, shall we rather say the Bible and the Qur'an.

Obviously Christians also have a deep reverence for the Bible, but in quite another way. While we may underline important passages in the Bible and write on the margin our reference or even gloss and deposit our Bible on the bedside table or desk, this borders on desecration to a Muslim. He may rarely open the Qur'an to read it - this we would take as a token of devotion - yet he will always keep the Qur'an on the highest shelf, probably have it wrapped in a special cloth and will wash his hands before touching or opening it. Folk-Islam will provide portions of the Qur'an as amulets or charms for protection. Can we see the difference? In Islam it is the Book as such which is revered. We value the content of it, the message. A Muslim may be offended, if we put it to him like this, but the fact remains that the average Muslim does not bother to study the Qur'an by himself. The uniform opinions in Islam are rather the product of the teaching in the Madrassa classes than the results of personal studies.

Zionism and Islam are enemies to each other. But deep down it is more than Zionism that is resented by Muslims. It may well be an anti-Judaism (one can hardly say anti-Semitism for Arabs themselves are Semites). Traditionally Christians have been - and should be - pro-Jewish. But they should also be considerate and loving and understanding towards Arabs (Muslims). To take the side of Israel and the Jews can be hurtful, even offensive, to Muslims. On the other hand it is difficult to take the side of the Arabs, when it comes to the biblical occupation rights of Palestine or Israel by the Jews, however. We resent injustices and hardships they have to suffer. Like in politics Christians should be understanding, and kind-hearted to both sides -without calling wrong right or vice versa.

The Crusaders have been military aggressors against Muslims in their own territory. This was not without provocation, mind you. Even so, these actions cannot be called Christian by any standard. Understandingly the crusaders are still viewed by Muslims with contempt. Do we understand what they feel when invited to a "Gospel Crusade", where, perhaps, the people sing "onward Christian soldiers..."? Perhaps we have been, and sometimes still are, too inconsiderate and insensitive towards people who take a deep offence at words or concepts which we just repeat thoughtlessly.

The 'Lord Jesus' or the 'Prophet Mohammed' are titles of honour. When conversing with Muslims, we should acknowledge that and use these titles honestly. Jesus is my Lord. He is not the Lord of a Muslim. Mohammed is viewed by Muslims as a prophet (*nabi* or *rasool*), i.e. someone inspired by God or given a special mission. A Christian finds this difficult to accept. Worse still if a Muslim calls Jesus a prophet, for he is certainly more than a prophet, which is rejected by the Qur'an. How should we sort this out? What should we say? I would suggest that we are honest about this. When speaking to a Muslim, I prefer to call Jesus by His name and, perhaps, add 'the Messiah'. This gives me in addition the chance to explain what the Messiah is, for this term is used in the Qur'an, but never explained. When I speak of Mohammed, I likewise avoid the title 'prophet', for he is not a prophet in the biblical tradition.

There would be many **other considerations**, for instance the role of a dog in Islam, which is seen as an unclean animal and patting a dog may be viewed with concern. In certain cultures sitting cross-legged is considered rude and pointing ones foot (the lowest part of the body) towards a person is taken to be highly

offensive. Every considerate and polite and loving witness will find a way to act and behave in a way which presents no unnecessary offence.

FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

As we already noticed, almost all abstract - and that is also religious - communication of thoughts is done by words, spoken or written. While the same words may be used, the forms may differ. There is the conversation, a discussion (from Latin: *discutere* = to divide up, cut up), public or private debate (from French: *debattre* = to beat, to 'batter' someone with words in a discussion), a presentation or a symposium (a set of contributions on one subject from various points of view). But there is also an essay, a treatise, an article, a novel or a poem. All of this may be presented on an audio or video-cassette, it may be illustrated by words or sketches, or pictures. Which of these forms may one choose to communicate the Gospel to Muslims?

Of course, each of the forms may be used, although some fit some occasions and others would be more useful in a different setting. So the form has to agree with the situation. Making a friendly contact with a Muslim is hardly the time for a symposium!

Since such a lot of background knowledge is desirable to have a truly meaningful conversation or discussion, and since only very isolated Christians have this or desire to obtain it, specialized media are an obvious choice. When we classify here 'specialized', we mean something particularly designed with a Muslim reader, listener or viewer in mind. After all, **he** is meant to understand the message.

Public meetings

Muslims have challenged often unwary Christians to participate in a public or semi-public debate or symposium. What is the value of such? I would say that this depends entirely on the knowledge and oratory skills of the speakers, the spirit in which such a debate or symposium is conducted and the set objective(s). More often than not such meetings result in highly pitched emotions, particularly in the audience, which makes each participant listen so selectively that they only take in what coincides with their already formed opinion. Debates in smaller groups after such a meeting are generally of a fanatical nature: everybody talks and nobody listens. This need not be so, however, once the speakers do not intend to perform a kind of verbal boxing match, but present their relative cases with dignity and knowledge and support their statements scholarly with substantiated facts. This gives the hearer the opportunity to soberly compare, assess and judge the content of the presentations which should help him to a better understanding of the issues involved.

A word of warning must not be left out at this point. A Christian who is bending over backwards not to be argumentative not to offend or hurt anyone and who aims to be truly humble in his presentation, is likely to be misunderstood and unable to make his point and loose the debate.

Personal conversations

These may equally have many faces. Each one will depend on the personality of those engaged in them, the occasion, the level of acquaintance or friendship and how knowledgeable the participants are. To avoid unnecessary controversies, emotional upsets, jumping from subject to subject without any conclusion and repetitions, conversations need to be lead, possibly planned, without making a conversation a presentation - although this may not be out of place in certain situations, such as house to house visitation.

An **assessment** of the person involved in a conversation will determine the level on which it is held, but in each case the witness will have to speak in a way understandable to the listener. He will also have to **DEFINE ALL POINTS AND RELIGIOUS WORDS AND CONCEPTS** he is trying to make and should be diligent to **ILLUSTRATE** his **POINTS**. When our Lord used parables, He chose the best way to make a lesson real in the terms of his listeners.

The best way to open a conversation is by **ASKING QUESTIONS**. This gives the other person an opportunity to share his or her life and convictions - provided we are willing to listen! When a personal bridge has been built - and that only happens, when we take the time to honestly listen to the answers to our questions - it becomes natural to move to the spiritual realm:

- I understand that you pray five times every day. How do you do that?
- Is it true that Muslims offer sacrifices? Why, when and how is this done?

- Is it your aim to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca, or have you already been? What do you expect to experience?
- Is there any significance in wearing a special kind of dress, or is it purely a cultural matter? I am thinking of men wearing a skull cap / long shirts over the trousers, women covering hair etc.
- Do you have family devotions, like we have, in which you read and study the Qur'an and respond in prayer to what you read?

These - and there is no end to similar questions - if not asked in a kind of cross-examination, will yield a lot of interesting insight into the life and religious practice of our Muslim friend, and will lead to true exchange of spiritual thought.

- How do you expect to find forgiveness?
- Can you know that your sins are forgiven? How?
- Are you sure to go to heaven when you die?

These are follow-up questions which lead to a genuine conversation, and by that the witness may also present the Christian Gospel.

Questions will be put to the witness also. These are likely to question the Bible and its content. In a non-offensive manner answers can be provided. Perhaps the witness needs to study the subject in favour of giving a pat-answer, which normally isn't one anyway. This also gives the opportunity, if the right sources are used, to give a 'specialist' answer without being labelled a 'missionary', a title not very popular with persons of another faith.

But all the time the witness should be mindful to present the "WHAT" and the "WHY" of the Gospel.

Contacts made this way may become long and deep. Faith in the Bible and its plan of salvation in Christ will have a chance to grow organically and naturally. It is not just an "eat-or-die" kind of presentation. It is human as well as spiritual.

Literature is a very crucial way of either contact making or evangelism, particularly for those thousands of Christians who cannot be equipped for this kind of evangelism or feel not gifted to do so. "I have read this booklet. I wonder whether I can get your opinion on it?" A specialized booklet can communicate more precisely and faster. One cannot argue with it. If sensitively written, it will open the mind of a Muslim, although he may not like what he is reading. But if a follow up is intended, the witness must be acquainted with whatever he is giving out. He must be able to identify with its content and understand it. This applies to all media used.

No time limit should be aimed for, except when the Muslim is intent on breaking the relationship or when it is clear that no spiritual conversation is wanted. We deem it folly to try to convey the Gospel in one evening - except there is a great eagerness to hear. Otherwise **let us try to get across one point of importance**, and then ask about social or personal matters. Else we may create confusion rather than clarity.

Making contact. Most Westerners consider the subject 'religion' highly private, and with that somewhat taboo, unless one is well acquainted. This is not so with the people of the East. To a practising Hindu, for example, the world around us, that which keeps our full attention, is '*maya*' - illusion. The only reality is the 'spiritual' world. Likewise there is little easier than to start a spiritual conversation with Muslims. To them there is no schism between personal and family life, social life, politics, economics and religion. Besides many real Muslims seizes any given opportunity to win others to Islam.

Obviously our approach must be appropriate and we will be aware of human, cultural and intellectual factors to be observed.

Perhaps the most difficult situation arises during systematic door-to-door evangelisation. We knock at a door - and it opens. What do we say? We are all different and that is why I suggest not to follow a universally set pattern. Our listeners are also individuals and it might rightly be considered offensive to treat all alike. They are young or old, open faced and friendly or stern, professionals or 'blue-collar-workers', female or male, educated or illiterate. I suggest one needs some creative introduction to overcome the first minute of assessment, tension and suspicion. "We are robbers! We like to steal 10 minutes of your time", may be an effective means in doing this. "We come to ask you a sincere question: If you would die today, and God would ask you for what reason He should let you into His Heaven - what would you answer?" has been used as an

opening by others. Perhaps one could use the approach of introducing a family devotion to every household. "We would like to introduce to your family a daily devotion, which you can conduct in your home at your own time to get to know God in a more intimate way". (The people will know: they are Christians and want us to read the Bible). Their likely reply: "We are Muslims!" Our answer: "So?" "We pray every day (five times)". "Oh yes, we would like to commend you for **that**, but we are actually thinking of a devotion. Certainly there is a need for speaking to God (prayer). But there is an equal need to listen to God! You will want to do God's will, but how can you, unless you know it intimately? We like you to read every day a small portion of God's Word - meditate about it - speak about it and pray about it". "We read our Qur'an!" "Every day?" "Well...". "Even so, we would like you to consider reading a portion of the Bible as well", etc. etc.

Now we are in the midst of a spiritual conversation. Of course, there are hundreds of other ways to think of. Let us be inventive.

We are likely to detect what we may term a **superiority complex** in many Muslims, who are so utterly convinced of the superiority of their faith over against all others. This may be experienced as rather unpleasant and the temptation to retaliate in some way or other is strong. This would be the wrong spirit. He who boasts has a need for this!

We are aware that Islam of all religions has put up the most effective resistance mechanism against the Christian faith. Of course, of all religions, Islam is the only post-Christian one. Misunderstood biblical components, of both Judaism and the Christian message which are found in the Qur'an, led to the allegation that the Bible and the Jesus of the Bible have been subjected to corruption. Else Islam would have had to admit the errancy of the Qur'an. Besides, a Muslim views himself as part of the best of people (S.3:110), being in possession of the last (S.33:40) and perfected religion (S.5:4), which he views as naturally superior to what Christians or Judaism offer. All this is deeply engrained into every Muslim's mind.

Paul Tournier in his book "The Strong and the Weak" gives us some guidance here:

"Open the Bible, and this is what you see: he was severe and implacable with the strong, the powerful, the virtuous, the rich and the great ones of this world. Not, indeed, in any spirit of animosity, but in order to smash that confidence in themselves which closed to them the road to humility. But with the weak, with those whom society condemned and crushed, with the poor, with those whom sickness or sin had thrown into despair, he had only words of tenderness, gestures of encouragement, and a way of looking upon them which banished all their distress".

While we should be truthful with the integrity of a Christian, we will likewise be considerate, friendly, tactful, polite, wise, understanding, reverent, positive and sensitive.

We aim to extend our **WITNESS TO A WHOLE FAMILY**. However, it might not be wise to do so, when one member of the family is open to the Gospel, but must fear strong pressure and intimidation from his family before he or she is ready for this. So when we are engaged in a spiritual conversation and **someone else comes in**, our host will appreciate a sensitive change of subject. He will feel betrayed, even threatened, otherwise.

While we need to know as much as possible about Islam, in order to understand it and also its pitfalls in order to share this at the right time and occasion, **it is clearly unwise to say all we know** at every opportunity. Closed doors will then be inevitable. If we pose as 'specialists' on Islam, a Muslim may feel intimidated and seek to avoid us.

The aim of a conversation is to positively and clearly present the Gospel message as comprehensively and understandably to a Muslim as necessary, and negatively to correct his false information about it - and about Islam.

Here the *Islamic Propagation Center* plays unwittingly into our hand by distorting and falsely presenting the Christian message, which we are more than justified to correct.

It will be senseless to speak derogatory of Islam, the Qur'an or Mohammed, although at an advanced stage of a spiritual conversation, and that will hardly be in a couple of months, we may -in fact should - draw an enquirer's attention to the problems of Islam in order to help him see the inadequacy, yes, uselessness of Islam in his quest for truth, salvation and reconciliation with God.

How can one **answer questions** like, "**What do you think of Mohammed?**" or "**Why don't you want to accept Islam?**" truthfully and yet without unnecessary offence? I never found antagonism when replying something like, "I think highly of Mohammed as a statesman, social reformer or general. He may well compare with the greatest. But biblical standards do not qualify him as a prophet of God". This provokes a return question: "What do you mean?", which gives us an opening to relate Deut.18:21-22, which explains that a prophet deserves this title by his divine gift to prophecy unpredictable and distinct events of the future. We can

now go into some practical detail to illustrate our point by showing predictions and their fulfillment in Scripture.

In the case of the second question, I would answer that I have not been convinced that Islam can offer me something superior to what the Bible does. Besides, I would desire to see divine evidence of its sources. This puts the ball squarely into the Muslim's court, for the onus is on him now to do the convincing, which will be met by the Christian message with its evidences.

It is important for a witness to avoid or defuse silly arguments. This is certainly not done by way of ridicule or retaliation, but rather by appealing to his sense of dignity.

It is seldom profitable to have a **RELIGIOUS DISCUSSION IN A GATHERING** of any sort. There are normally people who feel called to be abusive in order to torpedo any sensible debate while most others would rather not risk to create the impression that they show an interest in the Christian message.

ARGUMENTS CAN HARDLY BE AVOIDED in Muslim evangelism. While we might have to expose stupid disputations for what they really are, we will be very conscientious in trying to answer any real questions put to us by Muslims. We do owe them a clear evidenced and documented testimony to the truth. Many a question is hard to answer for the mind can hardly fully comprehend eternal content, leave alone who God really is. Most can and should be answered, although this may take time, since Islamic concepts, say that of revelation, differ from the biblical ones, and that needs to be clarified fairly comprehensively.

When we back up our statements with references and evidences it is only fair that we expect Muslims to do the same. They are inclined to make statements which they cannot substantiate. With a friendly insistence, we should expect them to back up their statements in order to be acceptable to us. Let them search and find out! It is good for them to discover that much of what they believe is, in fact, not as historical as they assume.

We will find out that Muslims are not as generous in accepting questions on their religion as they are in **attacking the Christian faith**. Public debates throughout the world have titles like "Is the Bible the Word of God?", "Was Jesus crucified?" or "Is Jesus God?". We don't hear of debates on topics like "Is the Qur'an the Word of God?" or "Was Mohammed a prophet of God?" Mind you, a debate between Dr. Anis Shorrosh and Ahmed Deedat in Birmingham had (on the insistence of Dr. Shorrosh) the title "The Qur'an or the Bible - which is the word of God?", but we have every reason to believe that this will not be repeated by Mr. Deedat, or anyone else, for that matter.

I think we should expect that, when it comes to religious debate be it privately or publicly, **the same rules should apply to both parties**. Just imagine that a soccer game is convened and after the starting whistle one team plays by rugby or American football rules, while the other sticks to soccer rules!

When **Muslims attack the Bible**, I have repeatedly taken the liberty to say that those sitting in a glass house should not throw stones. The immediate reaction is, of course, that unlike the Bible, the Qur'an has been preserved totally unchanged in its pristine purity. Every Muslim strongly believes this. But it is not true! When we now invite a Muslim to compare notes with us, playing by the same rules, we will be able, after listening to him, to uncover the myth of the revelation of the Qur'an by investigating the Doctrine of Abrogation and what the Hadith says about passages which have been in the Qur'an, but are not now, and those which were interpolated and the revision of the Qur'an under Khalif Uthman and the well documented "seven forms" in which the Qur'an was originally revealed. It should also be wise to mention the host of rival codices which were destroyed by Uthman, the reactions to that, and the fact that many portions of these variant codices have been preserved in early theological writings of Islam and that we have access to these (in A. Jeffrey's "Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an").

At the same time we can look at the Islamic theories of the many versions of the 'corrupted' Bible. We will find that most Muslims believe that the various versions (A.V., RSV, Douai Version, A.S.V., the 'Kingdom Bible', the N.I.V., the Living Bible or the Good News Bible, to name some) are arbitrarily composed Bibles by different denominations. This problem is easily solved by showing a Muslim several versions and let him choose a verse from one and let him compare this with the others. More difficult this becomes when he has been trained to look for the few passages, of which the footnote states, that this text or verse is found in some, but not in other manuscripts. Here text-critical work and apologetics become indispensable.

We can see that the result of such more in-depth-study with Muslims has more than one advantage. Firstly the complexity of archaeological, philosophical and historical study on Scripture surfaces. There are no slogans which can help. But this way the reliability and truth of the Bible, when coupled with its evidences, becomes apparent, particularly over against the unreliability and questionable origin of the Qur'an - both totally unexpected by Muslims.

Unfortunately at this point we have to expect many a Muslim to withdraw. Fear sets in, that his religious beliefs may collapse, if he or she continues. We remember, a Muslim must not question his faith. He must

believe it! But even so, he will have to live with this knowledge and his conscience many not give him or her rest. The Ultimate, the Absolute has been questioned and his faith challenged. If he withdraws now, dishonesty based on fear has got the upper hand. Truth is always a confrontation with non-truth!

I, for one, do not like doing this. But I do it none the less, because a decision is best based on insight and knowledge.

Of course, we will not seek disputes of such sort! But we do not escape from them, when we are challenged.

The content, the actual message about God, man, sin, judgment and atonement, is what we aim to present. But it is wrapped, so to say, in a form which is conducive to establish its absoluteness and Truth.

We promote Bible reading! We offer a special Bible correspondence courses (for Muslims) with it, to afford the student the chance to study the basic content for himself. Again it is the same message: God, man, sin, judgment and atonement, supplemented with, the evidences and extended by a study of the Church and its people and their faith and ethics. (our 'Al-Kitab' contains these topics).

To hand a person a Bible and expect him to just read it without guidance, is most likely to result in even the serious reader getting bogged down in Exodus 22 or 27 and putting it aside. When Philip asked the eunuch who was reading the prophet Isaiah "Do you understand what you are reading?", he openly and honestly confessed, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me?"

So as Christian witnesses we become guides into the Scripture. In there we find in many-fold ways and illustrations and types and symbols God, man, sin, judgment and atonement! This may be questioned or doubted. That is the right of every man. It is neither wrong nor sinful. But God gave man an answer to his problem of doubt: His evidence!

The Word holds the answer to man's deepest needs and longings, it can totally satisfy his heart. The evidences in it can satisfy his curiosity or doubt!

We can see that the sharing of the Gospel is many-faceted. It involves a patient, loving, empathetic, stirring, upsetting witness. It brings, however, the indisputable, wonderful, joyous, healing and satisfying message from God that He has done it all! His grace is great enough to justify the basest sinner. He Himself in Christ has paid the price for our sin! Therefore He has opened the way of reconciliation. This is the Truth, although the system of Islam brands this blasphemous. Is it not worth it to invest time and love to see that this devilish veil is removed from the eyes of those for whom Christ died?

No doubt, God has a plan for and an influence on every person. Our witness may only be a very small part thereof. But the Holy Spirit will draw a person to Him, and if there is understanding, honesty and willingness to obey, conversion will take place.

We have been deeply touched by reports of new Christians from Islamic background telling of experiences which cannot be interpreted other than to be God's direct intervention. These individual experiences prepared the ground so that the Gospel was received quite naturally.

Extraordinary divine interventions

It is with a natural shyness that I share these experiences, because of their subjectivity on the one hand, and because of their sensitivity and very personal character on the other. These experiences lend themselves to sensationalism, something we should avoid at all cost. But because individual reports of this kind become more and more frequent, let me expose a few of people I know or have known, and who have related this to me personally.

A. is travelling every day in a suburban train to work. One day he sits, hands on his lap, waiting for the train to drop him at his destination. Suddenly something falls into his hands. It is a Bible. It is not upside down, backwards or even open with the pages fanned out. Just so that he can read it: The holy Bible. There is no explanation as to where it came from. Was it in the luggage rack overhead? No one will ever know. But A. became deeply disturbed by this sign and, discussing it with Christians and learning about the Gospel, he yielded his life to Christ.

N. is a simple char-woman. Her Hebrew-Christian employer asks us to speak to her about the Gospel. She cautions us not to be pushy - something we are not by nature. Then, was it at the third or fourth visit, she greets us with a big smile: "Guess what happened!" How could we? She then tells us that she awoke, quite unusually, on Ascension Day at 3 am. She thought about what she had heard and did what Muslims just don't do. She felt an urge to pray to Jesus and to ask for forgiveness. "Do you also have this funny feeling?" she concluded. We asked what she meant by 'funny feeling'. "I feel so clean as though I never sinned!" was her reply.

M. is an eager young lady. She saves to fulfill her dream to go on pilgrimage to Mecca. One night she dreams that she died and stands before the proverbial 'pearly gates'. Someone whom she perceives to be Jesus meets her with great kindness and tells her, that He cannot let her in, for she does not yet belong to Him. Remembering the dream, she ponders on it, goes to a church, hears the Gospel and responds. She is now married and a faithful witness for her Lord.

Mrs. A. and her husband are somewhat abrasive at our first visit. A remarkable and unexpected change is noticed at the second or third call. We feel actually welcome, even expected. Soon she comes up with a question, "What does this mean: 'The Lion of Judah shall break every fetter and shall set you free?'" What a question, I must think, and explain that this is a line of a Christian hymn. It is a symbolic figure mentioned in the book of Revelations (5:5) and refers to Jesus Christ. She thinks for a moment and asks on, "and what is a fetter?" Her home language is not English, so this is an understandable question. I explain with some gesture: "A chain that binds us, that makes us un-free". At this point comes the realization experience: "Oh - now I understand!" I enlarge on the bondage of sin - and she understands better. But now comes my return question: "This is a very strange question about a very rare line of a hymn. How did you come across this text?" "That's what is it!", she replied, "when I was a young girl - around 16 or so - I was washing dishes at home on a farm, when I heard it. I asked a number of people, but you are the first to explain this to me". "Who taught you this line?" "No one! There was nobody in or around the house". I cannot doubt the sincerity and integrity of Mrs. A. To her it was a supernatural experience which ended with the interpretation thereof. But she continued, "Can you interpret dreams also?" "No", I assured her, but she insisted that I must listen to the dream she had that very week - and she was actually awaiting our visit to hear the meaning: "I saw a young shepherd boy in Arab garb. He had a kind of sling in his hand and showed me five pebbles, saying 'You must pick the right stone and not miss the aim!'" Well, I could interpret this dream as any of us could have. This was David, the type of Christ, the lion of Judah, who slew Goliath. I could explain the typology of this uneven fight between the giant who defiled God and His people, and David, the untrained youth who boldly declared: "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord Almighty...!" (1Sam.17:45).

Then we looked at the phrase: 'you must not miss the aim', (Hebr. '*chata*', Greek '*hamartano*') which the English translation of the Bible translates 'sins'. Some introduction to this concept was of course needed. And then we began 'picking the right stones' in Scripture. These were to fight Satan (Goliath) and his actions and destroy them. In a way the pattern appeared: God - man - sin and atonement.

Mrs. A. was convicted on the grounds of her supernatural experience, believed the explanation given from the Word of God and there and then before her gathered family committed her life to the Saviour.

Another Mrs. A. (with another name) had already faith and had been reading the Bible. Her husband was violently opposed to this and had destroyed several Bibles. One evening she just about burst to relate a certain Bible passage to her husband. When a favourable occasion arose, she did. In a violent temper Mr. A. got up and threw his wife to the floor to assault her. At that very moment two Christians of one of our team doing systematic house-to-house visitation, knocked at the door. Mr. A. quickly shoved his wife and the Bible into the bedroom and then opened the door: "Do you mind, if we come in for a little while to speak with you about eternity?"

Mr. A. did not respond, although he gave this time and listened. Such occasions are not irresistible or compelling. But just work out the chances of this to happen at that precise moment!

I suggest we ask God in our ministry to work in His own way to prepare the people He is leading into our way!

God is a personal God

We all know that. However, it is only recently that I realized that individual people want and perhaps need to be meant personally. A technical presentation of the mechanics of theology will have to be done. After all, without an understanding of the terms and issues no one can make an intelligent decision. But the people we address equally need to experience that God means them, individually, personally. The described experiences above brought that very message home. God means me! He, the eternal God, is not too remote, too great, too busy with running His world, to recognize and relate to me! He takes me, my world, my problems seriously. He listens when I speak to Him! I am the object of His love! I am never alone. He grieves when I am indifferent to Him and His Word. God means not just mankind collectively. He means me!

After a seminar on an Indian Ocean island a young man from Islamic background spoke with us, and then shared something very precious to him with us. He unfolded a piece of paper on which was written a prophecy which a missionary had allegedly received for him.

This is not the place to discuss the Scriptural validity of what is perceived to be prophetic word. We certainly have to be on our guard against deception, wittingly or unwittingly, by men and women with an urge for recognition which is met by them playing a prophetic role. But in our case this personal message from God became something tangible, something to hold on, to strive after. Of course there is a danger in this. This subjective message may be put above God's Word, it may be viewed as a special token of God's favour which may lead to pride, even unteachableness. But it also can be a precious token of God's love and concern.

What I mean to say is simply that in God's Word we not only have a general teaching about theological issues, but also the Saviour addressing us individually, encouraging and instructing us, giving hope and correction, assuring us of His concern and love, more, dying for us, personally, to save us from the devastating consequences of our sin and indifference, lack of love and concern for Him. He gives meaning and value to each one He loves and died for. Ultimately we will individually stand before Him - and be known and addressed by Him. He gives us individual gifts too.

It might be good in this unpersonalized world to remember John, the evangelist, on Patmos when he met with Christ in His glory and fell at His feet as though dead. "He placed his right hand on me and said: 'Do not be afraid!'" (Rev.1:17). When Jeremiah was called to prophethood and in his fear argued that he does not know how to speak because he is only a child, we read that "the Lord reached out his hand and touched" his mouth (Jer.1:9). Isaiah, when called, had similar scruples. A seraph flew to him, a live coal from the altar in his hands and touched his lips, whereupon he could answer God's call gladly. "Here I am, send me!" (Isa.6:6-8).

Do we not all remember a special hour or occasion when we just knew, He means us, very personally? Let us share this precious knowledge with those, to whom God is a remote and impersonal ruler.

The word of God and the testimony of the witness

While a person needs to be provided with the 'technical' information to know God, himself as God sees him, and God's action to save her or him, this ought to be presented in a form which allows a listener to perceive this personal loving God Who personally calls a sinner to repentance. May we call this the **subjective experience** which is **coupled with the objective information**. This is the personal testimony of the witness woven into the fabric of the revelation of God.

It goes without saying that this does not just mean a conversion story or, worse, an "I thank and praise the Lord for saving my soul..." or such like of a stereotype cliché, however genuine this might be meant. We should also be careful not to place our testimony before the Word of God, but rather to enhance it by testifying to a personal experience of what God says or promises or has done. And I also would make sure not to be trivial, e.g. that the Lord helped me to catch the bus in time though I was late. This might be a very real answer to prayer to us, but might well cause amusement or even ridicule in a person we relate to. A testimony is to reflect a personal relationship, no more. It is not there to relate our life story, but to glorify God.

Reaction : confrontation - what now?

However kindly, conscientiously, understandingly, warm-heartedly and truthfully with integrity the Gospel may be shared with a Muslim, the chances are, that he will react by using his text-book approach challenging the Christian faith after the motto, attack is the best defensive. This may be done in a machine-gun pattern or by heavy artillery. How do we react?

First of all by not losing our disposition. A Muslim who has been reared with an anti-Christian stance and is convinced of his position, has a right to find out what of this knowledge is true and what not. To resort to retaliation by attacking Islam, Mohammed or the Qur'an is certainly not the right spirit. Although we already acknowledged the need at an advanced stage of our conversation to expose certain fallacies of Islam regarding its spiritual content, it would be totally out of place to begin a 'spiritual' boxing match to measure one another's skill and stamina. This does not exclude the already mentioned 'glass-house' approach, however. I am all for not succumbing to a one-way street aggression with just a humble effort to defend the Bible and Jesus Christ. But if a Muslim questions about the veracity of the Bible or parts thereof are genuine, we have to make every effort to answer these or clarify misconceptions. This obviously needs a good background knowledge of the typical Islamic polemics and the relevant answers, but this is not difficult to obtain. (We recommend our book "*Christians answer Muslims*", available from SIM International).

When it comes to questions regarding the canonization of the Bible and somewhat variant readings in biblical manuscripts, or the validity of the apocrypha, one can hardly avoid to point out the age of the texts and the copying by hand of the oldest of these over a period of 3000 years (!) and in case of the New Testament over 1500 years the materials and storage conditions which in no way compare with today's standards - but

also that, unlike the Qur'an, the Bible was not revised and variant texts were not destroyed in order to compound a uniform text. In a scholarly discussion the mentioning of the problems of Islamic writings, which, though half a millennium younger, are of a much more serious nature and may be hurtful, but will generally be taken in a composed manner. This brings the discussion onto a higher plane, besides, of course, showing the superiority of the Bible regarding its background, reliability, content and evidence for its divine origin. (May we recommend our book "*Christians answer Muslims*", available from SIM International).

It is important, however, that we strive to play to the same rules and that we do this graciously and not gleefully. Remember: **we have no right to hurt a Muslim's feelings, unless it hurts us as much to say so, than him hearing it.** In this spirit just about all things may be articulated.

The defence of the faith, and that includes the answering of allegations against it, is called **apologetics**. The Greek word '*apologia*' means 'to give an answer in defense of'. It is a biblical word: "Always be prepared to give an answer (*apologia*) to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1Pet.3:15)

The verbal translation (Nestle, "Interlinear Greek-English New Testament) of this text is even more graphic: "...ready always for defence to every one asking you a word (logos) concerning the hope in you".

To begin a spiritual conversation with the topic atonement, for instance, is putting the cart before the horse. Until a Muslim has a somewhat biblical understanding of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man, atonement makes no sense whatsoever. It is therefore necessary - and that can be said in general - to be somewhat systematic and to **have an order of thought that leads a person from where he is, with all his religious concepts, to where he ought to proceed, or, to put it differently, to build a case which is able to satisfy both the mind and the heart.**

CONVERSION AND FOLLOW UP

THE DECISION

Somebody once said that a Muslim is converted in stages. This is theologically incorrect, yet in practice it appears that all the basic knowledge that a nominal Christian has, even if it is not strictly biblical, but from our "Christianized society" and its ethics, can hardly be expected to be in the mind or consciousness of a Muslim. One must realize that all those stages of spiritual realization that one so often overlooks, yet passes through before one's own conversion, are absent in the life of a Muslim.

As any sinner who becomes aware of his position before the holy and almighty God, so also Muslims need to repent and trust in the completed work our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished. He is the way, the truth and the life, and without Him no man can come to God the Father (Jn.14:6).

An intelligent decision is made after having acquainted oneself with the pros and cons one is able to consider. I am inclined to say, the more the better. A decision to accept God's offer of reconciliation is, like any other **decision, an act of will** of the enquirer. A decision that I would not repeat tomorrow, next month or in two years time is a false decision. Such a decision should never be made. But a decision is also **the result of someone's witness** for Jesus Christ and who He is and what He did. And yet, ultimately it is **the work of God** through His Holy Spirit, who draws a person to Himself: Jesus said, "...no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him ... no man can come to me unless the Father has enabled him" (Jn.6:44, 65).

We must, however, under no circumstances confuse an emotional state, possibly created by a specific atmosphere initiated by ourselves, with the drawing of God. The latter will be evident in the Christian life that results. The inquirer will also have to consider the consequences of his action before deciding. Only when someone knows that Jesus Christ cannot become the Saviour without becoming the Lord and that God expects us to live a life of holiness in obedience and love, will a decision lead to true conversion.

While a witness will induce a decision for Christ, he will also have to make sure that it is not done prematurely, i.e. without the person having a basic knowledge of what this involves, or by undue persuasion or personal pressure. Responsibility will let us wait for God's time (Jn.1:13).

AFTER THE DECISION

When a commitment for Christ has been made, the new believer will need even more care and attention than before. The aim of all evangelism is not just conversion, but discipleship (Mt.28:19-20). What is true for the conversion of a nominal Christian is all the more true for a Muslim who is added to the Church of Christ: he will suffer persecution. Although Islam claims tolerance in matters of faith ("there is no compulsion in

religion”, says the Qur’an), the opposite is true. The new Christian generally faces total and often irreparable rejection by parents, marriage partner, children and brothers and sisters. In many Islamic countries he is still in grave danger of being ‘executed’. He will also be disowned. He or she will be considered a traitor to God and society and a disgrace to the family.

It should be needless to say, that an individual or a church that is not willing to offer the convert a new home, family and context of life with new and loyal friends should not even attempt to evangelize Muslims. All this, we must understand, needs to continue, even after the novelty has worn off.

As we saw already, Muslims have fundamentally different concepts and practices to those of the Christian faith. They are not likely to have much understanding for Christian concepts and practices, probably as little as the average Christian has for Islam.

To expect a practising Muslim to take the step from Islam and its practices to a church and its practices without very real problems is rather unrealistic. Muslims prostrate when praying and do it 17 times in 5 sessions every day, repeating a prescribed Arabic prayer. Imagine him comparing the forms he is used to with those of Christians who sit in a meeting, eyes closed. Muslims do not normally sing in their worship. When a Muslim now witness a Christian service with hymns sung which focus on Jesus Christ more often than on God, and when in addition he finds the type of music is loaned from the pop, or even the rock scene, he might well be shocked out of the church about this irreverence, and maybe not without reason. Muslims take off their shoes when entering the mosque and wash their face, hands and feet and sit on the floor while Christians just walk in and sit down in the pew.

What are we to do? Should we change the forms of our worship for the sake of the few ex-Muslims that might happen to come to our services? We already looked at this possibility earlier (pp. 107ff). The answer should generally be found elsewhere: in the house-church type of meeting. We think of some believers who are acquainted with Islam and Muslims and who conduct Home Bible Studies for the new believers. Here they can get the biblical foundation. Here they are introduced to our forms - but not without explanation.

Thus **THE HOUSE-CHURCH BECOMES THE STIPPING STONE TO THE CHURCH**. Not just a day, a week or even a month. It may take a year or more. Most important is, of course, that the new Muslim convert receives all our love, care and enough attention on every level to experience the Christian faith in action.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that it is not right to automatically expect a convert (of any background) to join our own church, as much as we would like him to do so. Why not?

A church is made up of a group of believers. They have the same Lord and build their lives on the same Word of God. But we all differ in temperament, education, culture, taste and many other ways. Some of us grew up in church, others not. Subsequently some Christians like fellowship where the services are solemn, others more outgoing and joyous. Some like to stick to old traditional forms, others like to go with the time. Some are counting on the preacher, others on open worship and others on both. Some like crowds in big meetings, others the personal and cosy atmosphere of a small fellowship. Some like to ‘dress up’, because they like to honour God even that way, others put all the weight on the condition of the heart and don’t bother much with dress.

Who is right? All have their point. As long as the message and faith are biblical! I think we are under an obligation to allow our Muslim convert his preference of a church or fellowship is concerned. We should, in fact, provide him with such a choice by taking him to fellowships which vary in style but are true to God’s Word and stay by him until he fully integrates. Only now our task for such a person is completed.

6.7 STRATEGIC MODELS FOR MUSLIM EVANGELISM

That evangelistic work and ‘church planting’ has not always been done with much imagination is lamentable. In Muslim evangelism the witness has to think even more of new and different ways, for we are speaking to a different people. For this reason a special kind of strategy is called for.

Muslims can generally only be reached one by one by individual Christians. Muslims are not very likely to come to Christian ‘Gospel Crusades’, and must consequently be contacted where they are: at their home or their place or work, in a train or hospital, and there are various ways of doing that.

It needs to be mentioned at the outset, that situations are so very varied that again we can speak only in broad principles, and these are likely not to apply to a number of them. This should not hinder concerned Christians to go ahead, make contacts, learn from their mistakes and eventually come up with their own strategy, which will have to be revised repeatedly, until the right note has been hit.

The fact that most Muslims in locations in which an exposure to Christian witness is anticipated, are well prepared for a confrontation, creating the need of all witnesses to be trained. This training needs to be reasonably comprehensive, indeed a retarding factor in Muslim evangelism.

One will have to think of ways to inform and challenge the Christians to get trained and involved. Are there capable teachers who are both learned and experienced enough? If not can one be invited? What are the most suitable training materials available? How can financial liabilities be met? Which will be the target group to be reached? The religious leaders? The ‘multiplicators’, influential people like teachers etc.? **Do we aim for broad evangelism or deep evangelism?** The one will stress more the quality of contacts maintained, the other more on literature drives or the like. **Essentially both should be aimed for.** The answers to these questions will soon begin to structure the needs and promote the shaping of a strategy. Depending on all these factors one will, probably, opt for one or even two of the following models:

6.7.1 FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

THE PROBLEMS OF FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

While there are very fine and workable definitions of this term, ultimately the Scripture says:

“You are from God...they are of the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world” (1Jn.4:4-5)

“Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

Obviously we have to differentiate between the “world” and people. But these people have, to say the least, a divided loyalty in terms of earthly things and allegiance to Christ, our Lord.

Of course, we do not want to entertain friendship with the religion of a person, but the person himself! But can the two be divided? With a deep sigh a Muslim “friend” of ours once exclaimed: “Can’t you just be my friend? **Must you be a Christian too?**” This man had understood the issue better than many a well meaning and enthusiastic missionary.

The Scripture further teaches:

“Come ye out from among them and be separate..., says the Lord Almighty” (2Cor.6:17). The reference in this text is to “unbelievers”. I take it that Muslims are not believers in the biblical sense. More specifically our Lord Jesus taught in His last discourse:

“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you...If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (Jn.5:19-20).

While we do not want to generalize (and we are all inclined to generalize our personal experiences which are normally confined to a specific peoples’ group), we can say that Muslims who are instructed somewhat in Islam and who live in a somewhat Christian context, strongly oppose Christians - at least when it comes to a clearly defined spiritual conversation.

But let us give an ear also to what the Qur’an has to say about cross-religious friendships:

“O Believers, take not the Jews or Christians as friends. If any one of you taketh them for his friends, he surely is one of them!” (S.5:58).

“Never will the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion” (S.2:120).

“Let not the Believers take for friends or helpers unbelievers...except in the way of precaution that ye may guard yourselves from them.” (S.3:28)

A DEFINITION OF FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

We realize that there is a need to define and identify what we mean by this fashion word Friendship Evangelism. I suggest that on biblical grounds as well as the very foundations on which a real friendship rest,

i.e. a deep soul communion, it is not possible to entertain a friendship with an unconverted person. This is not meant to pass judgment on the character or nature of such a person, mind you.

It is true that we should befriend people and cultivate a fruitful, amiable and hospitable relationship which is just about the only premise for a meaningful conversation leading to a meaningful spiritual communication. But ultimately this should be in response to God's entrusting to us the message of reconciliation, so that God can make His appeal through us (2Cor.5:19-20). Because of this commission we seek to 'proclaim' the message of the Gospel (= the WHAT) in the best possible way (= the HOW). Just about the only way to communicate the message intelligently and to a Muslim understandably is comprehensive communication. And that bases on the building of relationships in a friendly, and for this purpose conducive atmosphere. Perhaps a more appropriate name for such evangelism will be coined in time to come.

Categorically I must state that a friendship - never mind how long it has been cultivated - is likely to cave in when evangelism begins. Friendship and evangelism are here largely mutually exclusive. Therefore care should be taken not to over-invest in time and not to assume that our way of doing things will essentially result in a positive reaction to the Gospel of the crucified Saviour. Should we circumnavigate and avoid the central issues which divide us, as the crucifixion of the Saviour as only means of salvation, the unique Sonship of Christ and His deity, in fact all that really matters, we may be able to maintain a lovely and agreeable relationship, but on the expense of the Truth!

We should also know that soft-paddling of issues and purely social contact serves no purpose. To the contrary! A longish social contact (friendship) in no way guarantees a better listener to the Gospel later.

What we are not saying here is that we should just go, and in the usual crusader pattern challenge a Muslim into his face - and feel like a martyr for being rejected outright.

THE FATHER CHRISTMAS SYNDROME IN MISSIONS

Material issues are relative to the widely varying cultures and are certainly subject to debate regarding their value. Westerners are easily aroused to compassion, when meeting with poverty and hunger. Yet they may be quite indifferent when a person goes through the traumatic experience of rejection and abuse within a broken marriage - albeit in the 'comfort' of wealth. I vividly remember a slum dweller show me around her old corrugated iron - plastic sheet - cardboard home, and it was neat and cosy inside, stating with obvious pride: "This belongs to me! We built it ourselves. We do not owe a cent on it!"

I would feel guilty of making such a statement, if I could not recall times of extreme poverty and prolonged hunger and destitution in my own life. It hurt! It was an existential need. But I was more concerned about dying without having found meaning in life! This was before I found Christ.

We should also not be unmindful of another side. Muslim opinion makers falsely accuse Christians who do philanthropic work of using this as a means to deceive unaware Muslims. If what we do is not constantly based on real compassion, we may easily become welfare managers and workers.

We are all aware that it is ever so pleasant to be appreciated for what we bring and do. Philanthropists are well like everywhere for what they do. This cannot be said of someone who brings a message contrary to what everybody believes and for which, after acceptance, a person will be alienated from his family and social context, having been rejected as a renegade, the very scum of the world. The temptation to act like a Father Christmas, distributing our goodies and be rewarded by being well liked and popular, will have to be resisted. Else our mission will be crippled.

What we do not want to say is that caring is unwanted or unnecessary. But caring must have a beautiful face. It must be appropriate. It must be specific. It must, most of all, be personal. It must be sensitive and sensible. Caring is not a substitute for witnessing either. I will ever fail to communicate the Gospel by what I do. At best I will be viewed as good person coming close to the Islamic ideal. My caring way, however, does underline my witness.

That is why we must resist our natural desire to be esteemed, recognized, applauded. Rather let us do and say what is right, what God wants, and care the way our Lord did, assessing each individual situation and person. Love is to actively want the best for the other person, someone once said. I like to improve on that. Love is to really accept the other person and to lead him or her to salvation and healing in Christ.

Let us sum up in closing:

* Friendship evangelism is not to avoid or postpone the unavoidable conflict! But it will avoid hostility, paternalism or arrogance. It will be hospitable, friendly and loving, but not accommodating (i.e. not prepared to negotiate one's faith).

* Friendship evangelism is expressed by caring enough for a person to spend all the time necessary to listen to the other and to answer all his questions, to learn to truly communicate spiritual content instead of saying ones sales talk spiced with some - to the Muslim normally unintelligible - Bible verses as though there is a kind of magic in this.

* Friendship evangelism is to leave no stone unturned to truthfully present the Gospel: who God is, who man is, what sin is and how we can be reconciled to God. But it also contains the duty to uncover where and how our contact is hooked and to help him to be unhooked. And that is negative, requires substantial knowledge, understanding and love.

* Friendship evangelism should be the aim of every Christian with the opportunity to do so - at work, in the neighbourhood, or wherever.

6.7.2 DOOR TO DOOR EVANGELISM

This seems to be the only systematic way of reaching communities. If this is coupled with friendship evangelism it is bound to make an impact.

A lot of exposure to the Gospel from many sides is likely to motivate a sincere seeker after the Truth to look in a reasonably unbiased way at both sides, considering the evidences which speak for or against a statement in case of any contradictions. The topic is important enough, to invest sufficient time! But how? By personal witness to people where they are.

Let us imagine a (not very likely) situation, for the sake of illustrating a point: Before Mr. Abdullah travels to work he listens to the radio. The morning devotion is on! His wife goes a little later by train. A Christian next to her seeks a conversation which leads to a short testimony. It makes her think. At work, Mr. Abdullah overhears a religious discussion between two colleagues and begins to participate. It is about biblical prophecy in the Old Testament which was in great detail fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He is impressed and wonders. At lunchtime Mrs. Abdullah does some quick shopping, and is given a booklet, wisely selected. The distributor notices by her dress that she must be a Muslim and passes on a message particularly relevant and appealing to Muslims. She reads it on her way home.

Daughter Abdullah participates in religious instruction periods in High School. The teacher is a believer and is sensitive enough to regard Muslim pupils in her class. She speaks in a way that does not create confusion in the young, indoctrinated Muslim minds. She understands how Muslims feel about these issues and feels her way into the minds and hearts of her class.

Son Abdullah attends the same school, but he is in his final year. He is rather critical of things he cannot see, feel or smell. He is a thinker. One of his classmates invites him to the Christian Union during the long break. The speaker was made aware of his presence and, knowing Islam and its negative disposition towards the Christian faith, chose a topic not unfamiliar to Muslims. From there he leads on to present the Jesus of the Bible. Son Abdullah is disturbed, for although what he hears is contrary to what he has learned in the *Madrasa*, it makes sense, since the speaker does not just make unsubstantiated statements. He provides the necessary evidences and references to prove his point.

At supper time the whole family Abdullah is united again. Just as the dishes are being washed, there is a knock at the door. Son answers the call. Two people introduce themselves and ask to speak to the family for a few minutes. They turn out to be Christians who would like to introduce the Abdullah family to a daily devotion.... In bed Mr. and Mrs. Abdullah share and reflect on their experiences of the day. "You know", says Mrs. Abdullah, "what worries me most is that all this makes a lot of sense - and what ever these Christian say they back up by their conduct as much as with facts and figures. I wonder! I wonder whether we should not make an honest assessment of our religious situation, our own faith - and Christianity. After all, it is a matter of eternity!" Son Abdullah feels much the same, and so does his sister, who is asleep already.

All this will never happen - unless many Christians begin to equip themselves for that task and begin to be such witnesses.

Shall we call this an "exposure" or "infiltration" or "saturation" process? It will not happen in a day like in the illustration. Perhaps not even in a year. But it can happen to almost all families like the one in our illustration.

Door to door evangelism is not an easy task. It is demanding and can be disheartening too. But it should be introduced wherever a situation is somewhat suited. Ideally this should be done on an interdenominational plane. Let us construct a way how this may be implemented:

1. Each participating church will attribute to the campaign the necessary priority and status.
2. In each participating church a mission's secretary is appointed, who will liaise with the other fellowships, will recruit co-workers, organize training and literature as well as prayer support.
3. A strategy is now worked out by all mission's secretaries to suit the local situation. Say, the plan is to evangelize suburb ABC. It is a middle-class area with 985 dwellings, of which approximately 50% are occupied by Muslims. There are two fellowships committed to the outreach to Muslims but two others from an area with no Muslim presence could be interested to co-operate. A challenge to all Christians represented by the four fellowships yield 16 men and women, who are prepared to do house visitation. If these are forming teams of two (preferably across the denominational, sex and ethnic line), they can form eight teams. If we will allocate 50 Muslim households (i.e. in the case of a 50% Islamic population 100 homes) to each team, we will avoid duplication as well as sporadic and, with that, unsystematic work.

However, 985 household divided by 100 homes (per team) needs 10 teams. A drive to secure four more co-workers provides these at last.

All 20 missionaries (that is what the team members actually are) are backed by their fellowship in prayer. All former tasks within their church have been taken over by someone else. The hardest work should be done by the best people. They are the outreach arm, the missionaries of their fellowship.

4. Now an adequate training programme is planned. It is not conducted in addition to, but instead of another weekly church activity. All members of the fellowship are urged to participate. After all - all are needed in some way! It is wise to invite the groups to a neutral venue, though. Wherever possible, training should be done by an experienced person with a thorough knowledge of the topic. These would, as a rule, be trained teachers who specialize in Muslim evangelism.

Our experience teaches us that too little information of Islam, the Islamic-Christian controversy and communication, is as trifling to the cause of the work as too much of it. This may sound strange, but prospective co-workers get easily discouraged when they feel too much is expected of them. A basic knowledge is, in fact, all he needs. Detail can always be filled in later, when the need arises.

Five evenings (of two 45 minute periods each) spread over 5 weeks (or weekends) should allow enough training for our purpose.

5. As soon as the seminar is concluded, "fields" are allotted. Every team gets its permanent mission field, to which they will soon get well acquainted. Any town with a Muslim population can be divided into mission fields of about 50 Muslim households, or even less, and each team of two can take responsibility to thoroughly evangelize this area. Each team keeps a record of the visits, the main topics discussed and literature left, together with the name of each family. This will avoid repetition. The teacher and co-ordinator attaches himself for at least one evening to each team the first time they go out. This allows a little "on the job training", which gives at least some confidence to the team.

Now all teams agree on a given evening of the week on which they will now go out. They may meet at 18.45h, prepare in prayer and visit from 19.00h to 21.00h, while the other Christians pray. Obviously all this has to be adjusted to every given situation to be effective.

6. The cost for specially selected literature should be borne either by the individual witness, who will purchase it, using part of his offering to God or by the sending church. This way not only the work is shared, but the cost as well.

If people are open to the Gospel, regular visits alternate with new contacts. Now a fundamental and systematic and informal study of the Bible can be started.

As a matter of ethics, and as said before, a witness should be encouraged to introduce converts to his/her own fellowship. We strongly recommend, however, that the zeal to take them with us be subjected to the choice of the convert. So we should have the love to introduce them to other fellowships also. We are aware that not all fellowships are alike - neither are all people.

6.7.3 MEDIA EVANGELISM

Acknowledging the difficulty of mobilizing and recruiting enough Christians for personal evangelism among Muslims as well as the problem that many a Christian may not be willing or able to properly prepare for such a multifaceted task, the role of media comes to the fore-ground.

TV and the radio are the first to be considered, of course. There is little chance that state-controlled stations will make time available for Muslim evangelism. Private stations are not operating in many lands where Muslims are listening, and where they transmit, the cost is forbidding. That leaves the Christian radio station, which already do a good work, but, because most people tune in to the popular FM stations, have not big enough a hearing to have a strong impact. While some people may have influence to extend and improve on this given situation, most of us will have to consider extra means.

We suggest there are three: literature, video and audio tapes and newspapers.

LITERATURE EVANGELISM

This has probably the greatest potential - provided it has the right type of content. Else it may have a reverse and detrimental effect.

While in some "third world" situations the offer is very limited and with that the quality of a secondary concern, we believe only well adapted sensitive knowledgeably composed and circumspectly written materials should be used.

May we first of all distinguish between three categories of literature which must in no way be confused. There is training **material for Christians who like to learn about Muslim evangelism**, and that should be for Christians only.

What we are mostly concerned with here is **pre-evangelistic and evangelistic literature**. Being aware of the need to define, explain and correct false concepts, literature directed to Muslims can hardly be as short, as one could write it for nominal Christians who already have some knowledge and perception of the content of the Christian faith and would not be as prejudiced. I believe that tracts can really only serve as contact makers, arousing curiosity. One cannot possibly expect to unfold the way of salvation plausibly to a Muslim on four little pages. The answer would be booklets. And these will have to contain, probably separately, the basic Gospel message, well adjusted and defined, the WHAT, and apologetics, i.e. the WHY, explaining the trustworthiness of the Bible, indirectly invalidating the anti-Bible stance in Islam.

Lastly one needs **follow-up literature**. A Bible Correspondence Course, again specifically written for Muslims, is probably the most important tool. A well designed Bible Reading Plan for a year to lead an interested person into Scripture should be provided, but also some materials explaining the content of the Christian life for genuine enquirers.

Except for the first, we suggest that these materials should not be done by outsiders alone. While expatriates can play an important role regarding scholarly Islamic and apologetics, only the nationals are likely to deeply understand the cultural base, educational substance, mentality and indigenous patterns of thinking and language in a given area. A joint effort to produce the right type of literature would therefore be advisable.

Literature can be widely distributed without the need for qualified witnesses, as long as there are some, who can be called upon to explain and lead further. Important is, however, that the Christian distributor knows what he gives out and will be able to pick the right piece for a person. By literature distribution in a systematic and organized fashion, most Muslims in many countries can be reached in a skilful manner. As a bonus, the literature distributor or colporteur will get a vision and gradually accumulate knowledge which makes him a better witness for Christ.

VIDEO AND AUDIO TAPE EVANGELISM

These serve much the same function as literature, although the use would have to be adjusted to that medium. Ideally a witness will try to view or listen to a tape together with a Muslim. This is particularly relevant, when Muslims invite Christians to listen to their own tapes, which largely occupy themselves with polemics. This is just about an invitation to bring a response tape.

But it is also easy to suggest to a Muslim friend to listen to a tape message with a view of exchanging thoughts on this later. Particularly less forceful personalities will welcome such an approach. Unfortunately there is to date very little material available.

NEWSPAPER EVANGELISM

This will attract only certain gifted people. For commercial and other reason most newspapers will hardly allow evangelistic articles to be printed, particularly when people of another faith are addressed. However, many newspapers have a "Reader's Letters" column, where individuals may react to certain articles or events. As a whole Muslims seem to make more use of such opportunities to witness to their faith than Christians do. Of course, a Gospel message will hardly be printed, although this could happen. But one may emphasize a particular point in question.

The best opportunity, however, is offered by advertising space. That must be bought, but is affordable when compared with printing and distribution costs, which would have to be raised to have a similar impact.

Again the same principles apply as have already been outlined earlier, regarding communication, literature and cultural considerations.

The need is enormous. The fields are neglected and wide. The time for Muslim evangelism has never been as favourable as now. May the Christian leaders catch the vision and act - now!

6.8 THE CHALLENGE OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

The Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ compels **all** his disciples to reach out to **all** people everywhere. **He** alone assessed the task rightly and understood what the difference between eternal life and eternal desperation really is. **His** great love for man made **Him** go **all** the way to Calvary. With that, the salvation of the world and all human beings was potentially accomplished.

"But **how** are men to call upon **Him** in whom they have not believed? And **how** are they to believe in **Him** of whom they have never heard? And **how** are they to hear without a proclaimer?" For "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ." (Rom.10:14,17)

Each individual Christian and each Christian church and fellowship has to answer these questions honestly and pertaining to the situation in which they live and work. These questions were and are asked with a purpose. They indicate that we have been given a responsibility!

"**Go**...make disciples of **all** nations...teaching them to observe **all** that I have commanded you; and look, I am with you always..."! (Mt.28:19-20)

"**Go** into all the world and preach the Gospel to the **whole** creation"! (Mk.16:15)

"...he who does not gather with Me scatters"! (Lk.11:23)

We have to ask the serious and legitimate question of how determined the Christian Church really was and is in fulfilling the repeated order of the Lord Jesus to go and proclaim the "Good News" everywhere.

The honest answer can only be, that generally the Church was and is so divided, so unconcerned and so preoccupied with itself that not once in the close to 2000 years of Church History it could say: "Lord, you said on the cross "It is finished!". You gave yourself for us that we might finish the work of salvation. Because we love you, we also have given something of ourselves. We went and sent and now we come to tell you: the work you left for **us**, the work you told **us** to do: it is also finished!"

Today 71% of the world population is not even nominally Christian, despite the fact that no religion can offer a message to even faintly match the Gospel!

The biggest part of the Church has been introspect, short-sighted and unwilling to share - neither its manpower nor material resource in proportion to the need of the whole world: 29% for the local need - 71% to carry out the Mission in the unreached world. Be it out of ignorance or lack of concern - this is perhaps **the** sin of the Church!

The fact that the commanded missionary effort is not anywhere near to being carried out cannot be blamed on those who went. It is also unacceptable to blame the circumstances. Love always finds a way!

Andrew Murray once wrote:

"The enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God is missing - because there is so little enthusiasm for the King!" ("Key to the Missionary Problem").

We all have to ask ourselves the heart-searching question: "Is it true of me, Lord?"

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