

Christian Responses to Islam: A Struggle for the Soul of Christianity

John Azumah

One of the crucial issues facing Christians today is finding the right balance in our response to Islam and engagement with Muslims. The quest for an appropriate Christian response to Islam has sadly polarized Christians along “evangelical” versus “ecumenical”, “truth” versus “grace”, “tough” versus “soft” or “confrontational” versus “conciliatory” lines. Christians accuse each other of spreading fear about Islam and engendering hostility towards Muslims (Islamophobia) on the one hand, and naïvely going soft on and becoming apologists for Islam (Islamophilia) on the other. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq war, the Madrid bombings, 7/7, etc, the division amongst Christians has deepened. But this division regarding a Christian approach to Islam is as old as Islam itself. Kate Zebiri chronicles the different approaches down the centuries and

makes the point that

In contrast to the Muslim view of Christianity, in the absence of any clear scriptural mandate there has never been, and there in the nature of things never could be, a unified or official Christian attitude towards Islam... Paradoxically, the lack of specific scriptural restraints accounts in part for both the greater virulence of Christian anti-Islamic polemic in the medieval period, and the greater flexibility and openness in the contemporary period.¹

Reflecting on the post 9/11 and 7/7 situation of Christian responses to Islam, Joseph Cumming talks of a titanic struggle, a struggle not between Muslims and Christians,

Revd Dr John Azumah, PhD (Birmingham, UK), is Lecturer in Islamics, and Director for the Centre of Islamic Studies at the London School of Theology. Originally from Ghana, he came out of a Muslim background. After doctoral studies in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Dr Azumah taught at the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad and at the Union Biblical Seminary in Pune, both in India. He then returned to Ghana and served as Research Fellow at the AKrofi-Christaller Institute, and became the founding Director for the Interfaith Research & Resource Centre of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. He is author of *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa: A Quest for Inter-Religious Dialogue*, and *My Neighbour's Faith: Islam Explained for Christians*.

a struggle not between Islam and the West, but “a struggle within Christianity itself, a struggle for the soul of the Christian faith”.² Cumming suggests that Islam *per se* is not necessarily the greatest challenge facing Christians today, but rather how Christians choose to respond to Islam. One of the biggest sources of the misunderstanding and mudslinging amongst Christians regarding an approach to Islam and engagement with Muslims is that Islam is often spoken about and presented as a monolithic entity. It is common to read or hear statements like, “Islam says or teaches X, Y, Z”; “Islam does not permit or teach X, Y, Z”. Such statements are rather misleading as they assume that there is one unified system of belief called “Islam”.

As we may all be aware, right after the death of the Prophet of Islam in 632 AD, Muslims have differed on many issues. The first civil war broke out as a result of the differences barely three decades after the death of Muhammad. Islamic scripture and traditions lend themselves to different interpretations. Islam is also domesticated in many different cultures around the globe and is one of the highly contextualized religions. Islam is therefore far from being a monolithic entity. Ebrahim Moosa, a leading South African Muslim scholar makes the following instructive observation:

No one has seen “Islam” in its transparent glory to really judge it. But what we have seen are Muslims: good Muslims and bad Muslims; ugly Muslims and pretty Muslims; just Muslims and unjust Muslims; Muslims who are oppressors, racists, bigots, misogynists, and

criminals as well as Muslims who are compassionate, liberators, seekers of an end to racism and sexism and those who aspire for global justice and equity.³

In light of all the above factors, it is important to state from the outset that as Christians, it is more appropriate to speak of “approaches” or “responses” rather than give the impression there can only be one Christian approach or response to Islam. One way of doing that is to identify some faces of Islam needing responses. I want to suggest four faces of Islam in need of considered Christian responses. These are: (i) The militant and violent face of Islam including Islamic terrorism; (ii) the ideological face of Islam in the form of Islamist conceptions of an Islamic State; (iii) Islamic/Muslim criticism, rejection and polemics against Christian beliefs; and (iv) Islamic missionary activity – *da’wa*. These faces of Islam impact Christians in different ways in different contexts and will therefore elicit different responses from Christians depending on the context.

Responding to Militant Islam

In our post 9/11 world, Islamic militancy seems to have become the main driving force or determining factor for Christian responses to Islam. The trauma of the attacks as well as the almost daily headlines of violence involving Muslims have had far reaching psychological and even theological impact on Christians as it has on the general non-Muslim world. The question baffling the minds of many is whether Islam as a religious belief system is intrinsically violent. Some Christian experts on Islam argue that violent acts committed by Muslims are

deeply grounded in the Qur'an, Traditions, Muhammad's example (*sunna*), Islamic history and jurisprudence. "The primary motivation of terrorists and suicide bombers", writes Patrick Sookhdeo, "is theological, compounded mainly of duty and reward... Without a theology to fuel it, Islamic terrorism would eventually shrivel and die".⁴ Some have no doubt that "the roots of the problem" is embedded "in Islam's own history, both distant and present".⁵

Others on their part are of the view that the root-causes of Muslim anger and violence are primarily geo-political, the Arab-Israeli conflict and unjust American foreign policies in particular. Ben White in his critical review of Patrick Sookhdeo's *Global Jihad*, criticizes Sookhdeo for downplaying and ignoring geo-political causes and motivations for violence

it is more appropriate to speak of "approaches" or "responses" rather than give the impression there can only be one Christian approach or response to Islam

carried out by Muslims. White then quotes from a Chicago-based political scientist, Robert Pape, that what "nearly all suicide terrorist attacks have in common is a specific secular and strategic goal" and that 'religion is rarely the root cause, although it is often used as a tool by terrorist organizations in recruiting'.⁶ These are very legitimate discussions. We need to know the causes in order to know how to respond. But we also have to bear in mind that when it comes to Muslim discourse on the relationship between religion and politics, the point has always been made that the two are

inextricably linked.

The question however remains, as to whether Islam as a religion is intrinsically violent. There are lots of ambiguities in the Qur'an as well as Muslim tradition and history on the issue of violence. For example, one key Qur'anic verse often quoted to back the thesis that Islam is a peaceful religion is 2:256, "... there is no compulsion in religion". Yet there are also verses like 47:4, "So when you meet those who disbelieve smite at their necks till you have killed and wounded many of them." But religious traditions themselves neither speak nor act. It is adherents who speak and act in the name of their traditions. And talking about adherents, there are Muslims who assert and genuinely believe that Islam is a religion of peace, while there are others whose discourse and activities proclaim the opposite. All of these groups are using Muslim Scripture and Traditions, and all claim their version of Islam is the 'true' Islam. As Colin Chapman rightly observes, "There is a convincing logic that lies behind both these ways of interpreting the Qur'an, because both are based on accepted principles of interpretation."⁷ So, Muslims may be singing from the same hymn-sheet, but they are singing very different tunes.

Western experts have tended to take sides in this intra-Muslim discourse. In my own research on the history of Islam in Africa, Western scholars overwhelmingly sided with eighteenth and nineteenth centuries jihadists as standard bearers of Islamic orthodoxy and branded as venal and corrupt those Muslims who opposed the jihadists' interpretation of Islamic sources.⁸ It is amazing how mainstream Western academia today has shifted camps, now siding with the moderate Muslim interpretation and branding the radical and

extremists fanatical as miscreants. I personally don't think it is appropriate for non-Muslims to get involved in pontificating as to what constitutes orthodox or heretical Islam. My own thinking on the issue of violence is that seeds of violence can be found in Islamic source books and history. But one cannot always and simplistically draw a straight line between a historic text and current practice. Individual human choice of hermeneutics intervenes, as do particular circumstances. Millions of Muslims around the world recite the same texts daily but do not go out to commit acts of violence. One has to consider the way particular circumstances, as well as historical and contemporary socio-political factors provide fertile soil for the seeds of violence in Islamic source books.

In order to think of a Christian response to Islamic militancy, it is vital that certain facts are stated. For as Jesus said in John 8:32, there is freedom in knowing the truth. (i) Firstly, apart from instances of communal violence in places like Indonesia and Northern

*one of the contributions Christians
are uniquely placed to make is to
resource the secular authorities
(politicians, security forces and public
policy makers and opinion shapers)
to understand, appreciate and engage
intelligently with the strategic role of
religions in public policy matters*

Nigeria, Christians are not the primary targets of jihadists Muslims. The targets are specific governments and states, including Islamic

states. Western democracies have tended to be prime targets. (ii) Second, whilst Christians and several other non-Muslims have been victims of Muslim militancy, the actual number of Christians killed in jihadist violence pales into insignificance when compared with the number of Muslims killed. In other words, Muslims are the main victims of jihadist violence. (iii) Third, research shows that Islamic militancy creates disaffection in Muslims about Islam, resulting in some converting to Christianity (where there is a friendly Christian presence) while many others simply backslide.⁹

All the facts are that Islamic militancy is more of a threat to Muslims and Islam than it is to Christians and Christianity. For Christian citizens, whose nations are targets of Islamic terrorist groups, Paul makes clear in Romans 13 that dealing with such threats is the responsibility of governments and state security forces. In times like these, Christians should remain as patriotic citizens without compromising their prophetic calling or sacrificing their pastoral care for the weak and vulnerable. As part of their civic responsibilities, one of the contributions Christians are uniquely placed to make is to resource the secular authorities (politicians, security forces and public policy makers and opinion shapers) to understand, appreciate and engage intelligently with the strategic role of religions in public policy matters. This should be done, not only by way of showing how and why religious motivations are part of the problem, but how religion in general can be part of the solution. That is our field of expertise.

Responding to Islam as an Ideology

Related to but different from Islamic militancy

is the Islamist concept of an Islamic State where Shariah is enforced as the legal code in civil and criminal matters. The history of early Islamic conquests of Palestine, Syria and North Africa, teaches us that Muslim militancy *per se* has never been the main factor for demographic changes in favour of Islam. As Muslim conquests and rule gained roots over Christian populations, “circumstances [became] such that it took considerable tenacity, often a kind of hopeless doggedness, to remain Christian”¹⁰ let alone to propagate Christianity. Quoting extensively from the Covenant of Umar and elaborating on the discriminatory prescriptions of the Shariah against Christians, a leading eighteenth-century Egyptian Muslim Jurist by the name of al-Damanhuri had no doubt as to the desired effects of the Shariah. He wrote:

The Companions [of the Prophet] agreed upon these points in order to demonstrate the abasement of the infidel and to protect the weak believer's faith. For if he sees them humbled, he will not be inclined toward their belief, which is not true if he sees them in power, pride, or luxury garb, as all this urges him to esteem them and incline toward them, in view of his own distress and poverty. Yet esteem for the unbeliever is unbelief.¹¹

In the words of Hans Kung, therefore, “Islam did not prevail by missionary activity in our sense; as a system, it is simply not designed for that sort of thing. But, perhaps without always realizing it, Islam exerted social pressure on the unbelievers, and that, in the long run, is stronger than religious conviction.”¹²

The social pressures imposed by an Islamic state on minority groups pose a serious challenge to Christians in Muslim majority countries. Speaking about social pressures, secular, humanist and atheist ideologues are to Christianity in the West what Islamic ideologues are to Christianity in Muslim majority countries. Both systems have the same strategy of pushing Christianity out of the public arena and making it as unattractive and inconvenient as possible. Christians in the West should therefore be equally if not more concerned about secularist forces as Christians in Muslim countries are about the enforcement of the Shariah. Well meaning Christians have spoken and written in favour of the Shariah as a personal-status code for Muslims. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams' suggestion of “a constructive accommodation with some aspects of Muslim law” in the British context is well known.

Such calls for the Shariah as a legal code for Muslim personal and family matters fail to take into full account its implication for religious freedom. As perceptively pointed out by Kenneth Cragg,

As long as religious communities have an exclusive prerogative over matters of marriage, divorce, and inheritance, relating to their members, there will remain a serious infraction of genuine religious liberty. Change of status will not be freely possible if marriage rights, inheritance, and the rest are not brought into line.¹³

For instance, converts from Islam may not be subjected to capital punishment under such a provision but they will still be subjected

to disinheritance and forceful divorce from their Muslim spouses. Shariah, even as a code for Muslim personal and family matters, is therefore still problematic in a religiously pluralistic context. Hence, in light of 1 Corinthians 12: 25-26, Christians everywhere have a duty to stand in solidarity with and speak on behalf of Christian minorities who are subjected to the socio-religious and political pressures in Islamic countries. These pressures are very powerful especially in developing countries where poverty and corruption are rife. This does not mean, for example, that British Muslims should be demonized for the treatment of Christian minorities in Pakistan. Indeed, such advocacy can and should be done in partnership with Muslim scholars and activists who feel equally strongly about human rights and religious liberties issues.

As part of a Christian response, there is also a need to resource churches in Muslim majority countries to theologically and biblically reflect on their engagement with Islam. In many of these places, Christians are preoccupied with bread and butter issues, and in some cases, even life and death matters, with the result that theological and biblical reflection either takes a back seat or is skewed. A sound theology of the cross, for instance, is crucial

As part of a Christian response, there is also a need to resource churches in Muslim majority countries to theologically and biblically reflect on their engagement with Islam

if churches in Muslim majority countries are to avoid the two extremes of cultivating a

dhimmitude mentality preoccupied with self-preservation as is the case in some parts of the Middle East and other Muslim majority countries, or the so called *third cheek theology* in the name of self-defence, as is happening within some Nigerian and Sudanese Christian circles where Christians seek to respond in kind to Muslim pressures. In both of these cases, the biggest casualty is Christian witness.

Responding to Islamic Anti-Christian Polemic:

In its Scripture and Traditions, Islam is generally critical and polemical of Christianity. Anti-Christian polemic is deeply rooted in Islamic source books and individual Muslims and groups have taken it up as their vocation. I have had occasions to challenge my Muslim friends to substitute the term “Muslim” into every place the word “Christian” appears in the Qur’an and to read the passages and tell me how they would feel if they were reading that about Muslims from the Bible. Of course, I also tell Christians that in order to appreciate the Qur’anic anti-Christian material, they should read what the New Testament, especially the Gospel of John, says about Jews in general and Jewish religious leaders in particular. Many prominent Muslim scholars, activist and preachers have employed anti-Christian polemic in their works down the centuries;¹⁴ the most notorious Muslim polemicist of our time being Ahmed Deedat (d. 2005) of South Africa.

The question therefore is not whether Christians should respond to Islamic anti-Christian polemic but *how* they should respond. In past and contemporary times, Christians have sought to respond in kind to Muslim polemics. Christian anti-Muslim

polemics reached its peak in the nineteenth century in India as Christian missionaries engaged Muslim and Hindu preachers in open debates. The debates produced some of the most outstanding literature in the field of polemics, with Gottlieb Pfander's *Mizan ul-Haqq* standing tall amongst the lot. The problem with the polemical approach, in the words of J. S. Trimingham, was that the missionaries

gave a dogmatic presentation of Christianity. They thought that it was their work to attack and break down the Islamic religious system, and their method was developed accordingly ... They sought to prove to the Muslim by argument and controversy that Christianity was better, and to force an intellectual assent. They failed, for they were fighting on the Muslim's own ground.¹⁵

The missionaries might have thought they won many of the debates, but what is evident is that they made few converts. On the contrary, the controversies fomented hostile anti-Christian feelings and directly contributed to the birth of the most virulent anti-Christian Islamic movement, the Ahmadiyya Movement,

The question therefore is not whether Christians should respond to Islamic anti-Christian polemic but how they should respond

which has specialized and championed anti-Christian polemics in the last century. Ahmed

Deedat was set on his path of anti-Christian polemics by the constant attacks mounted by a Christian missionary in South Africa. Together, the Ahmadiyya and Ahmed Deedat have subverted the cause of the gospel amongst Muslims and converted more Christians in Africa to Islam than anyone could ever have imagined. Chawkat Moucarray is therefore right that polemics “is counter-productive as it usually inspires Muslims to become more radical in their beliefs, and often provokes an offensive reaction too — Muslims attacking Christianity even more vehemently.”¹⁶

I have heard some Christians say the best form of defence is attack. I personally don't like the word “defence” let alone “attack”. That sounds to me like seeking revenge, which, I think, is unbiblical (Rom 12:19). The Bible is clear in defining the role expected of Christians, which is to be that of *witnesses* (Acts 1:8), not “defenders” of the faith. Now let us imagine a courtroom scenario as a metaphor to clarify what we are driving at here. In a courtroom, some of the principal characters include the judge, advocate/lawyers, witnesses, and, of course, the accused and accuser. The duty of the advocates or lawyers is to argue the cases in order to seek conviction or acquittal; the witnesses are simply called upon to testify to what they have seen, heard or experienced; the judge has the task of passing judgment as well as the sentence. If we apply this to biblical teaching, God (and Jesus in his Second Coming) is the one and only Righteous Judge with the power to pass judgement and sentence. The role of the advocate or lawyer is that of the Holy Spirit. Christians are the witnesses. Throughout the book of Acts and the Epistles, the apostles reminded their audience that they were merely testifying to what they had

witnessed in the life and works of Jesus, as well as his death, resurrection and ascension.

The defence of the Gospel is the sole duty of the Holy Spirit. The Greek word used for the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, 26; 15:26 & 16:7 and translated as Counsellor or Comforter, is *parakletos* which means one who pleads another's cause before a judge, a pleader, counsel for defence, legal assistant, or an advocate. The scoring of points in order to seek conviction is the duty of the Holy Spirit. Of course the Holy Spirit works through witnesses, and that is precisely why they are duty bound to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23. The point here therefore is that we should guard against confusing and assuming the role of God or that of the Holy Spirit.

Others say we can't avoid confrontation because the truth has to be told and falsehood has to be exposed. While exposing falsehood and upholding the truth are essential components of Christian witness, it is the message that confronts and exposes, not the messenger. Furthermore, Christian witness is about calling people into a *relationship* with God and others, and we do not argue people into relationships! Witness can be compared

***While exposing falsehood and
upholding the truth are essential
components of Christian witness,
it is the message that confronts and
exposes, not the messenger***

to courtship. The use of polemics as a form of witness to Muslims is like trying hard to point out to a young lady in courtship how terrible and bad her family situation is, and why that is

a good reason for her to leave her parents and come marry you! How many young ladies can be won into marriage by such an approach?

The Bible warns us very clearly not to judge: "Do not judge, or you too will be judge" (Matt 7:1-2). Paul warns against passing judgements in 1 Corinthians 4:5, and goes on to make it even more explicit in 5:12: "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?" Does this make the task of the witness any easier or less crucial? Definitely not! When faced with strong evidence in a law court, attorneys normally try to question the credibility of the witness in order to undermine the evidence. In the same way, the cause of the gospel can and has been undermined by Christian witness. That is why Paul warned the believers in Rome that "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you".

Furthermore, some of the images used by Jesus to describe his followers in the world include *leaven*, *light*, *salt* and a *city on a hill*. It is not by accident that Jesus uses the images of light or lamp and salt. Salt and lamp/light are the most silent yet most effective agents of change. Christians are familiar with expressions such as, "I am on fire for the Lord!" The mentality of "being on fire" has with it ideas of burning, destroying, getting rid of, which in turn harbours notions of judgement. A student once asked me whether higher studies have "quenched my fire". My reply was YES! I added that I have ceased burning and only started shining! I don't believe Christians are called to "burn". We are called to shine or glow.

But my biggest reservation about polemics as an African has to do with the dogmatic presentation of Christianity for the purpose

of intellectual assent. For non-Westerners, religious phenomena are much more than propositional statements or creeds that have to be logically explained and intellectually subscribed to. Religious phenomena include mysteries that are deeply rooted in the metaphysical world. These defy logic and argumentation. What they call for is faith, which as defined in Hebrews 11:1, is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” The writer of Hebrews goes on to add that it was “by faith that the ancients were commended for”, not by logical reasoning. Having said that, I acknowledge that in Western societies, the intellectual side of religion has deep roots, and in such a context, a case could be made for logical argumentation in the form of polemic. But that I leave to Westerners to decide!

Finally, a lesson we can learn from the early Christians. This is found in the story of the Christians from Najran and their meeting with Muhammad in Medina in 630 AD. After discussing and disagreeing with each other on the divinity of Jesus, Muhammad challenged the Christians to a mutual invocation of cursing.¹⁷ The Christians resisted the temptation to take the bait. A biblical example can be found in the story of the temptation of Jesus when Satan challenged and provoked Jesus to prove himself. Jesus refused to give in to the provocation. Likewise, it is my considered opinion that rather than pander to the provocation of Muslim anti-Christian polemics in a tit-for-tat game, the aim of our response should be to correct and remove the misunderstanding as far as we are able. My own view therefore is that robust apologetics, not polemics, should be the Christian response to Islamic anti-Christian polemic.

Responding to Islamic *Da'wa*

Islam and Christianity are the two main missionary religions. While both religions have always taken their missionary calling seriously, it could be said that from the late 18th up to the mid 20th century, Christian missionary activity far outstripped their Islamic rival. However, since the post-colonial era (late 1950s onwards), Christian mission in Western hands has come under lots of suspicion, accusations and attacks. It has since been on the retreat into University departments and theological seminaries. The few who venture into missions in Muslim countries do so clandestinely. During this same period, Muslim governments and organizations embarked upon very aggressive *da'wa* in Africa, Asia and the West. The dissemination of Islam is an integral part of Saudi Foreign Policy. Islamic *da'wa* itself however is not the real challenge to Christianity.

The challenge lies in the criminalization of Christian missions resulting in Christian missionaries resorting to strategies that raise serious questions about the credibility of the gospel and the integrity of missionaries. Another challenge is governments (mainly Islamic) and fundamentalist groups who put legal impediments in the way of people who want to change their religion, especially conversion to Christianity. Under such circumstances, Christian mission in an Islamic context should go beyond the making of converts. As the only two missionary religions, it is in the interest of adherents of both traditions to have an open discussion on missions itself. In such conversations, the point has to be made that there can be no missions unless there is freedom of religion; and that there is an inherent contradiction between mission or

da'wa and apostasy laws. As Kenneth Cragg puts it, "A true understanding of freedom, as freedom of movement of mind, demands that the option should exist" and "freedom of belief must include freedom of disbelief". This is so important, Cragg believes, because "Freedom of conscience has an absolute value that transcends all special pleading. We are not seeking such changes primarily for the benefit of potential converts. Nor should thoughtful Muslims resist them for the sake of deterring such converts."¹⁸

A belief system that denies freedom of disbelief is a prison and no self-respecting faith wants to be a prison. Also, Muslims have to recognize the changing face of Christian missions in the twenty-first century, which is now borne by the Church from the Global South. This means that instead of continuing to beat the dead donkey in western Christianity, Muslims have to engage with World Christianity, particularly taking into account the way Christians from the Global South understand missions. For the majority of Christians from the Global South, missions is to the Church what water is to a fish. Worship and witness, profession and proclamation,

A belief system that denies freedom of disbelief is a prison and no self-respecting faith wants to be a prison

are to the Church in the Global South like breathing-in and breathing-out. The question Christians need to raise with Muslim scholars, activists, governments and organizations in particular, is how Islam can criminalize an activity it is itself actively engaged in across the world.

Christian mission in an Islamic context should therefore involve open and consistent conversations on religious freedom instead of the present situation where missionaries are forced to behave like drug traffickers or terrorist operatives constantly devising ways to evade law enforcement agencies. Timothy Tennent is right in observing that the clandestine behaviour that has characterized Christian missions in Muslim countries in the last couple of decades is unethical and damaging to the credibility of Christians, breeding further distrust towards missions. I share Tennent's counsel that: "A more open witness in a straightforward, but contextually sensitive way seems to hold the greatest promise for effective and ethical Christian penetration into the Muslim world."¹⁹

Christian Response as a Witness to Islam

It is essential that any Christian response to Islam be not seen to be driven by fear and self-preservation. Jesus is very clear: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it." The crusades are a very good example of a Christian response to Islam undertaken out of fear and self-preservation. The legacy of the crusades and the witness they left in the Muslim psyche about Christianity speaks for itself. To quote Joseph Cumming once more:

It used to be commonly said that Islam was Satan's greatest masterpiece. I believe that is not true. I believe that Satan's greatest masterpiece was the Crusades. Why? Is it because the Crusades were the worst atrocity that

ever happened in history? I think Hitler was worse. Stalin was worse. Pol Pot was worse. What is so horrible about the Crusades is that it was done under the symbol of the cross, that Satan succeeded in distorting the very heart of the Christian faith.

The cross is at the heart of the entire Christian faith, and for the Muslims and the Jews of the world, what does the symbol of the cross now signify? The cross now signifies, “Christians hate you enough to kill you.” What is the cross suppose to signify? It is suppose to signify, “God loved you enough to lay down his life for you, and I love you enough that I would lay down my life for you.” Satan succeeded in taking the very heart of the Christian faith, and turning it around to mean not just something different, but to mean the exact opposite of what it was supposed to mean.²⁰

Christian mission in an Islamic context should therefore involve open and consistent conversations on religious freedom

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will like to reiterate the following: Does Islamic militancy, terrorism, ideology, anti-Christian polemic and *da'wa* pose challenges and even in some cases threats to Christianity, Christian values and rights of Christian minorities? YES! The danger however is to let radical Islam succeed in radicalizing

ourselves and the gospel. Some Evangelicals are very close to allowing radical Islam to not only define and drive their missions, but also their attitude towards Muslims and even other Christians who think differently. Archbishop Desmond Tutu is reported to have said to black South Africans: “Be kind to the Whites. They need you to rediscover their own humanity”!

The main casualty in the collateral damage of radical Islam is the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23, expressed in qualities such as love, peace, compassion, gentleness, kindness, etc. These biblical characterisations of Christ-likeness have, unfortunately, become virtually dirty words in some Christian circles as far as engaging with Islam and Muslims is concerned. Some Christians enthusiastically use the fruit of the Holy Spirit in anti-Muslim polemic to show the superiority of Christianity to Islam, while at the same time dismissively brand their fellow Christians as going ‘soft’ on Islam and thus betraying the Christian cause when they call for a greater demonstration of Christ-like graces towards Muslims. Such sentiments only betray what’s on the inside, for Jesus says in Matthew 7:16-20 (NIV),

By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.

There may be no scriptural texts dealing

with Muslims or Islam in the Bible, but that doesn't mean Jesus did not leave us without a witness on how to relate to Muslims. For he says in Matthew 7:12 that "in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets". Some of us believe Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and there is no other way in engaging with Muslims than the Jesus Way! And that is not a 'soft' option. On the contrary, it is tough one! ■

.....

Endnotes

¹ Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 6 & 7.

² Joseph Cumming, "Toward Respectful Witness", in Dudley Woodberry, ed., *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008), 319.

³ Ebrahim Moosa, "The Debts and Burdens of Critical Islam," in Omid Safi, ed., *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications), 115.

⁴ Patrick Sookhdeo, *Understanding Islamic Terrorism* (Pewsey: Isaac Publishing, 2004), 143-217.

⁵ Peter G. Riddell & Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Conflict: Past, Present and Future* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 7 & 8.

⁶ Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (New York: Random House, 2005), quoted in Ben White's review at <http://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=380> [accessed 30 May 2010].

⁷ Colin Chapman, "Christian Responses to Islam, Islamism and 'Islamic Terrorism'," *Cambridge Papers*, 16 no. 2 (June 2007): 6.

⁸ See John Azumah, *The Legacy of Arab-Islam: A*

Quest for Inter-Religious Dialogue (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 80ff.

⁹ Moussa Bongoyok, "Islamism and Receptivity to Jesus," in Woodberry, ed., *From Seed to Fruit*, 297-310.

¹⁰ Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 307.

¹¹ Perlmann Moshe, *Shaykh Damanhuri on the Churches of Cairo (1737)*, translated and edited with an introduction and notes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 55-57.

¹² Hans Kung et al., *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1993), 106-107.

¹³ Cragg, *Call of the Minaret*, 310.

¹⁴ See Lloyd Ridgeon, *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001); also Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face*. Of course, there are also irenic voices that take exceptions to the anti-Christian polemic and seek to engage with Christianity from the point of view of Christians. Some of these are also represented in the above books.

¹⁵ J. S. Trimmingham, *The Christian Approach to Islam in the Sudan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 45-6.

¹⁶ Chawkat Moucarray, "A Plea for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims," The Lausanne Movement Global Conversation, March 2010. <http://conversation.lausanne.org/resources/detail/10023> [accessed 30 May 2010].

¹⁷ A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 277.

¹⁸ Cragg, *Call of the Minaret*, 306-11.

¹⁹ Timothy Tennent, "Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 'High Spectrum' Contextualization," in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23:3 (Fall 2006): 113.

²⁰ Cummings, "Respectful Witness," 322-3.