

Muslims, Christians and Jesus

Books | 7/2/2012 @ 14:21

Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships

This book isn't just another missionary's handbook, neither is it an exhaustive compendium nor an ultimate recipe to bring people of "wrong religion" into that "correct one". Rather than attempting to write such things, Carl Medearis decided to depict the very position of Muslims on their journey towards God and suggest relevant ideas and (non-)methods for reaching them on heart level.

While reading this book, you'll find your views on Islam stuff changed and your desire to meet some Muslim growing.

Author: Carl Medearis

Published by Bethany House Publishers (2008)

ISBN: 978-0-7642-0567-5

191 pages

- Foreword

As the world watched smoke and ash spew into the Manhattan sky on September 11, 2001, I was (ironically) busy teaching a bunch of students in Kansas City about loving Muslims.

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- Introduction

In fact, when I'm asked—as I often am—what is the answer to the issues in the Middle East and I answer "Jesus," I am often mocked as being simplistic, even by my committed Christian friends.

They are looking for a political answer that simply doesn't exist.

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- 1. Before the Pillars: The Foundation of Islam

- At first, Muhammad was accepted both by Christians and Jews for putting stress on submission to one true God.

Those who did follow Muhammad's teaching were called *Muslim*, which means, literally, "submitted to God."

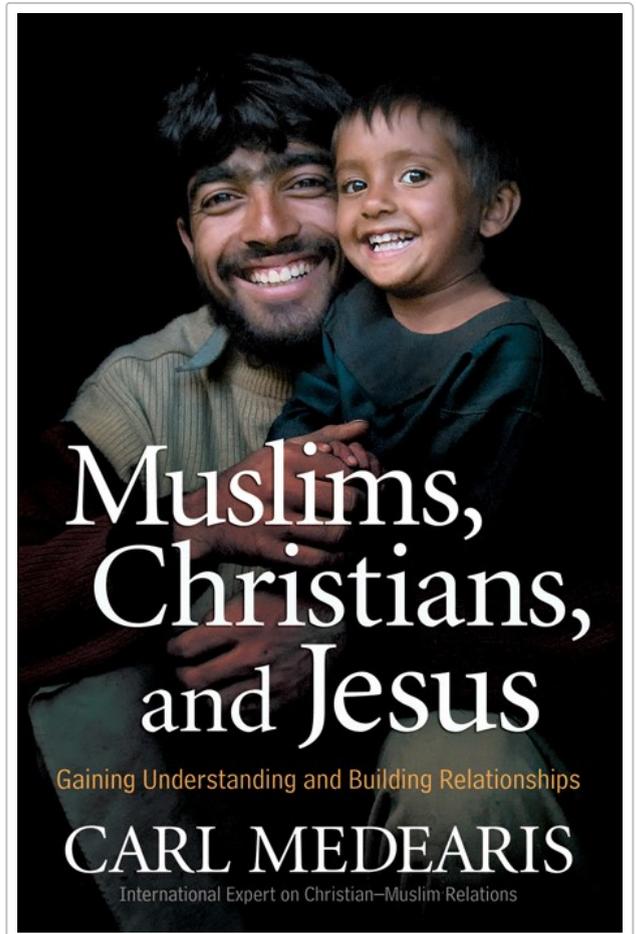
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- After some time, it became clear, that Muhammad won't fit into either Judaism or Christianity. He ended up speaking primarily to his own tribal countrymen.

One of our most cherished values—individualism—isn't known quantity to most Muslims. They would say, "If it's been good enough for our forefathers, it's good enough for us!"

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The word *Allah* was used by Arab Christians during Muhammad's time, and it is still used today. Christians in the Arab world—even as you read this—pray to Allah every day.



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- Even English word *God* came from Germanic *Gut*, which came from *Khoda* from Farsi.

The most important thing we can do as followers of Jesus is to do just that. Follow him.

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• 2. The Teaching of Islam: The Articles and Pillars of Faith

In a side-by-side comparison, the Muslim statement of faith is missing one primary thing: Jesus.

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Christians, when they first encounter the differences between the Muslim and Christian perception of God, are often tempted to begin introducing the “Christian God”. I believe this is an unnecessary step—even a mistake. Why?

God is who he is.

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According to one particular verse in the Qur'an, called the verse of abrogation (Q 13:39), all later verses supercede earlier ones. To Muslim, this also includes teachings prior to the Qur'an. Thus, In Islam, because the Bible was written before the Qur'an, it is subject to the Qur'an. So in a case of disagreement—i.e., the Bible vs. the Qur'an—the Qur'an “wins.”

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- Islam has six major prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

All infidels (people who don't believe in God, which according to the Qur'an does *not* include Christians or Jews) will fall into hell and stay there for eternity.

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For centuries, many people have reduced the conflict to a simplistic generalization, *Christianity vs. Islam*.

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Jesus doesn't come loaded with bias, prejudice, conflict, or war. Christianity oft does.

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While it's true that some terrorists utilize the banner of Islam to kill and destroy, the majority of Muslims are far more concerned with obeying the commandments of God, ...

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Islam is based largely on works. As in many religions, there is not always a passion for genuine spirituality, but rather a fear of God's wrath and the consequences of angering him.

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Tradition holds that Muslims have always prayed in the direction of Mecca because it is the birthplace of the prophet. However, most historians now agree that for a short time, in the beginning, they prayed in the direction of Jerusalem, the city of David and Jesus. Due to some conflict with the Jews in Medina, the original followers decided to pray a little further to the southeast, toward the city of Muhammad's birth.

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It is commonly believed that a clean outside reflects a clean inside, and you will note that most Muslims are extremely clean and tidy.

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Muhammad taught that Jesus was born of a virgin (Q 19:20), worked miracles (Q 3:49; 5:110), had no sin (Q 19:19), and was the Word of God (Q 4:171), and he even went so far as to call him “Jesus the Christ” (Q 3:45).

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- 3. Islam's holy Book: What the Qur'an Says About Jesus

Many Muslims consider the Bible to be a holy book, but they are reluctant to read it because they think the Qur'an says that early Christians and Jews changed the original wording. However, this is one example of how many Muslims are not very knowledgeable about the Qur'an. It does not say the Bible has been changed, though it has become commonplace to believe it has been changed anyway.

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Although I repeatedly use the term *friendship*, I am not in any sense intending the connotations of so-called friendship evangelism, which I believe to be mistaken method of bringing people into the kingdom using relationship as collateral to motivate conversion.

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The key point is, don't be intimidated by the close-knit Muslim community. Jump right in. Introduce yourself and befriend the whole lot. They'll love you all the more for being brave enough to do that.

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I recommend that you *don't* try to argue that Jesus is the Son of God. Don't deny it either, but remember that God will reveal himself to each individual in a unique way; we are only participants in God's grand plan for this person. Arguing the deity or sonship of Jesus will only reinforce preexisting barriers until the time is right. God may be saving some information for later, allowing each person to digest the truth one piece at a time.

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Throughout my time in the Middle East, whenever we would host interns or different youth teams at our facility, I always had one rule: Be honest, be real.

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- 4. Women and Islam: Protecting the Purity of Women

In Islamic states today, the legal valuation of a woman is approximately half that of a man. It's an actual judicial stipulation in court cases, for inheritance, and for compensation.

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Remember too that the goal is to bring Jesus into your friendship—*not* Westernism, materialism, postmodernism, feminism, capitalism, or any other -ism.

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It's always a matter of the heart, and hearts changed by God lead to changed cultures.

So it is with women of Islam.

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- 5. Common Questions: A Knowledgeable Response

- 1. “DO YOU BELIEVE THE QUR'AN IS GOD'S INSPIRED BOOK?”

Look at the Qur'an as a book that can propel people to become curious about Jesus.

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...there's no way you can make decisions regarding truth in its contents without being knowledgeable enough to do so anyway.

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- 2. “DO YOU BELIEVE MUHAMMAD IS A TRUE PROPHET OF GOD?”

Here's my advice: Recognize that Muhammad wanted his people to return to the one true God, and demonstrate your respect from that tradition. But don't get caught in a debate about Muhammad. Always move back toward common ground: Jesus.

(103–104)

- 3. “HAS THE BIBLE BEEN CHANGED?”

Numerous times the Qur'an says of itself that it is a confirmation of the book (the Bible) that “was before it,” including: *“And this Book [the Qur'an] which we have sent down, bringing blessings, and confirming (the revelations) which came before it [the Bible]” (Q 6:92).*

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Prayer is a key factor in relating to our Muslim friends in a spiritual fashion. Unfortunately, Muslims often think that Christians don't believe in prayer because they don't see us praying formally the way they do. It's the same with fasting. Because we don't fast with them during the month of Ramadan, they assume we don't fast at all. While we don't want to make public display out of our faith by praying or fasting just to be seen (Jesus tells us not to do this), we can let our Muslim friends know that we do pray by praying with and for them—out loud, while together.

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- 4. “HOW CAN GOD HAVE A SON?”

It often works to explain that the Bible does not teach that God was a man who had a baby boy named Jesus.

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- 5. “WAS JESUS CRUCIFIED?”

We do present “Christ crucified” but not necessarily on day one. Let the story be one with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

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Drop the arguments and forget the fight. It isn't about who's *more* right and who's *more* wrong. It's about pointing toward Isa (Jesus) and allowing his Spirit to do the heavy lifting.

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- 6. Jesus Meets Jihad: Overcoming Fear With Love

It's spoken of widely on TV and in print that the ones who are most hurt by terrorism are Muslims themselves. Unfortunately, we don't get to see that in the Western media.

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Controlling, conniving, and often corrupt, these colonial usurpers maligned the character of Jesus. They often did the opposite of what he had preached: “If anyone asks for tunic, give him your shirt also.” The colonial powers did not give—they exploited. While traditional Islam described Jesus as a sinless prophet, Muslims saw sinful profit. At *their* expense.

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Our compassion has encouraged us to stay behind the Jewish people as they regain their homeland. And many of those returning to Israel have been our very own neighbors. Finally, our shared historical and theological/biblical heritage provides a natural bridge with our Jewish friends.

Still, we have sometimes taken this too far. Does God love one people at the expense of others? Amazingly, I have heard comments from the pulpit proclaiming the virtues of the nation-state of Israel while at the same time encouraign the virtual extermination of Palestinian Arabs attempting to share tha same land.

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- 7. Standing on the Bridge: Muslims Who Follow Jesus

I had to ponder that for a minute, and then it hit me: Accepting Jesus as his teacher had taught Ali to make Jesus his leader, and in turn, had taken him to the revelation of who Jesus *really is*—Savior and Master. At no point had Jesus ever said to my friend, “You must change your name, go to a Western-style church, and give up your family and tribe.”

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The Sufis believes that to serve God was to love God, purely and simply. They rigorously expended themselves in songs and dances, in pure worship of this creator God who made them so that they could live in a love relationship with him. They believed that all else was nothingness, a waste.

One eight-century mystic, a woman named Rabia al-Adawiyya, said, “If I worship you [God] for the fear of hell, burn me in hell.”

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Another Sufi, Ibn Arabi, who was loved by many and hated by more, is considered one of the greatest of all muslim thinkers. He believed that Jesus was the word, the spirit, and the servant of God. Even God's mouthmiece. He once wrote, “The person who catches the disease of Christ can never be cured.”

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In actuality, Jesus never used the word *Christian*. For that matter, neither did Paul. Peter did once, telling others that they might be insulted because of the name of Christ: “If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed...” (1 Peter 4:14–16)

...

A much better phrase, one I use myself, is “follower of Jesus.” This defines. It explains. It's dynamis and real. We really *are* following Jesus.

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But is there a thirs way? Can they stay in their own countrym not have to live in hiding, and still talk openly about Jesus? It is possible!

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Muslims who become “Christian” are not persecuted (usually) because of their deepened commitment to God, but because they've joined “the other side.”

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- 8. Love Your Neighbor: Practical Ways to Reach Out to Muslims

As we've discussed, Jesus seems to have a favorable bias toward the “wrong crowd.” I hate to say it, but Muslims probably fit into this category! They're outsiders here in the West: wrong religion, wrong language, wrong temperament. Sounds like Jesus' kind of people.

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- Don't be defensive. You have nothing to defend. God doesn't need help with his reputation, and the Bible can stand on its own. The defensive one in an argument is usually the one who is standing on shaky ground. Religious people are defensive.
- Don't argue. Just don't. See what happens the next time someone says something you don't like or you don't agree with. Try just not arguing. No matter what. Religious people love arguments.
- Don't carry yourself as if you know all truth. We know the One who is the Truth and, as we grow closer to him, we understand more. But how much of Jesus do you know? My guess is, I'm up to around 0.1 percent.

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- About the Author
 - Appendix: Statistics, Related Reading Lists, and Glossary of Terms
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