

“Islam’s view of God’s presence and how to communicate the Holy Spirit with Muslims”

1. Introduction:

Check out on your smart phones, “the fastest growing evangelical churches in the world”
Operation World: Iran, Afghanistan, 6 out of top 10 are Muslim countries

The Global context of God’s work in the Muslim world:

A Wind in the house of Islam
Miraculous Movements
Dreams and visions
Too many to jail

For many of us, it is like the book of Acts

Acts 1:8, [Jesus said:] **“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and the end of the earth.”**

Acts 2:9-ff, the nations present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost

God is doing something new in our generation. The Gospel is moving forward among the nations. There is opposition and persecution. But Jesus is accomplishing his purposes for the church. Reality is not defined by what you watch on CNN or FOX news, but by the promises of Jesus Christ and he has promised that he will build his church and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it! Mat. 16:18.

We need to be confident that the Spirit of God is already at work in the Muslim world. Let us not be paralyzed by fear, anger or prejudice, but let us move forward and engage Muslims with love, boldness and humility **I John 4:4** (the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world).

We don’t communicate the Holy Spirit with Muslims by giving a detailed theological exposition of the third Person of the Trinity but by living in the fullness of the Spirit and demonstrating with our lives the fruit of the Spirit.

As Craig Kenner says in his book, *Gift Giver: The Holy Spirit for today*:
“The Holy Spirit, like the Father and the Son, is not just a doctrine, an idea, or an experience to be tagged on to the other doctrines and experiences of our Christian life. He is the God who has invaded our lives with his transforming presence.” (p. 18)

And as Gordon Fee says:

“We must not merely cite the creed, but believe and experience the presence of God in the person of the Spirit.”

2. The dilemma within Islam about the presence of God:

In Orthodox Islam (Sunni and Shi'ite), Muslims face a distant, transcendent God who is not intimately present with the believers—a vague doctrine of omnipresence but no relationship, no intimacy, no knowledge of God.

[Al-Faruqi: “Christians talk about the revelation of God by Himself...but that is the great difference between Christianity and Islam. God is transcendent, and once you talk about self-revelation you have immanence and then the transcendence of God is compromised. You may not have complete transcendence and self-revelation at the same time.”

Kenneth Cragg: “Entire transcendence is in the end a blank agnosticism.”!!!

Shabir Akthar: “Muslims do not see God as their father or equivalently, themselves as the children of God. Men are servants of a just master, they cannot in orthodox Islam, typically attain any greater degree of intimacy with their creator.”

W. Montgomery Watt: “Qur'anic conception of the relation of the human race to God is dominated by two words, *abd* and *rabb*. In relation to God a human being is an *abd* or 'slave', while God is the *rabb*, usually translated 'lord' but perhaps connoting rather something more august such as 'sovereign.’”]

So many Muslims are drawn to saints, Imams, spiritual leaders as intermediates between man and God. Many almost divinize Muhammad or Ali or Mahdi, the 12th Shi'ite Imam in order to fill the void for a God who is too distant to relate to.

[hadiths about Mohammad's pre-existence, Muhammad being the reason that God created the world, God first created “the light of Muhammad” and then proceeded to create the rest of the universe from it, 99 names of God but Muhammad had two hundred names and then even reached a 1000 names, titles like 'Lord of the Universe’.

Bishop Nazir-Ali: “The extent of this veneration [for the prophet] in modern Pakistani society is astonishing. The society nominally adheres to Sunni orthodoxy. But Muhammad veneration is projected through the mass media, school books and cultural events all of which contribute to the deification of the Arabian prophet.” the saying, “if Muhammad had not been, God himself would not have existed!”

Similar adoration and deification of Ali or Mahdi about in the Shi’ite world—i.e. the poem in my home where Ali was speaking as being present though all history “I was the one who spoke to Moses through the burning bush, I spoke from the mouth of Christ in the cradle, etc.”]

In reaction to Islamic Orthodoxy, there is Sufi Islam, a protest against the formalism of orthodoxy. There is a lot of talk about love and intimacy with God, but if you pay close attention, human beings are constantly the ones looking for that intimacy with God and God “plays hard to get.” God is immanent but it becomes a pantheistic view of God, God is more like a force or an “it” (like the ocean and we are drops on the way to join the ocean and become one with the ocean).

Parshall: In Sufism, “God is in all things and all things are in Him. All visible and invisible beings are emanation from Him, and are not really distinct from Him.”

Islamic panentheism leads to the famous doctrine of *fana* or annihilation. The ultimate goal of human beings is the absorption of human personality into the being of God. Ignaz Goldziher, cites a Sufi authority:

“When the temporal associates with the eternal, it has no existence left. You hear and see nothing, but Allah when you have reached the conviction that nothing besides Allah exists, when you recognize that you yourself are He, that you are identical with Him, there is nothing that exists except Him.”

The path to God is long and arduous. Only few saints reach God after a life long struggle. The rest of the people have to rely on the saints, sheikhs, pirs or other spiritual leaders as their intercessors.

3. The Holy Spirit and the nearness of God in the Qur’an:

Clarifying the confusion about the Holy Spirit and the Angel Gabriel (Sura 19:15-19; Sura 2: 90-94 compare to Sura 16:100-104). See Mark Durie, *Revelation: Do we Worship the Same God? Jesus, Holy Spirit, God in Christianity and Islam*.

In the Qur’an God’s “spirit” can also refer to his creative word or breath of life.

“They will question thee concerning the Spirit. Say: ‘The Spirit is of the bidding of my Lord. You have been given of knowledge nothing, except a little.’” Sura 17:85

Lack of development on the theme of God’s intimacy and nearness in the Qur’an:

Sura 2:186 “when my servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close to them: I listen to the prayer of every supplicant when calleth on Me.”

34:50, “It is he who hears all things and is ever near.”

56:85, “But we are nearer to him than ye, and ye see not.”

57:4, “And he is with you wherever you may go. And God sees well all that ye do.”

“... We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.” Sura 50:16 BUT the CONTEXT is that of judgment and warning not intimacy and friendship and love.

“It was we who created man, and we know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him, for we are nearer to him than his jugular vein.” vss. 17-29 continue to speak about the angels recording all your deeds and the threats of hell and the day of judgement!

4. Highlighting some aspects of the work of the Spirit in communicating with Muslims:

[not covering the theology of the Holy Spirit here; i.e. that the Holy Spirit is God, he is personal (distinct from the Father and the Son), he has mind, purpose, desire, will and emotions. read Grudem, p. 634]

“The Spirit is none other than the fulfillment of the promise that God himself would once again be present with his people.” Gordon Fee

[Ezekiel 36: 26-27, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” also 37:14]

“The Christian life in all its aspects...is supernatural; only the Spirit can initiate and sustain it. So apart from him, not only will there be no lively believers and no lively congregations, there will be no believers and no congregations at all.” J. I. Packer

“The whole of life under the new covenant is now lived in and by the Spirit.” Gordon Fee

Everything in our life has to do with the work of the God's Spirit, but I want to focus on a few:

(II Cor. 13:14) **“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”** Read Gordon Fee, pp. 40-41

In relationship to God, our heavenly Father

a. knowing God's heart of love and God's mind

Rom. 5:5 **“...because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.”**

I Cor 2:10-12, 16 **“But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 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.**

...But we have the mind of Christ

b. coming to God as our abba father

Rom 8: 15 **“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry ‘Abba’ Father.”**

Gal 4:6-7 **“Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. The Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba’ Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”**

c. living our lives as God's beloved children

I John 3:1 **“How great is the love that the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.”**

Rom 8: 14, 16-17 “Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God...The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ...”

[Sura 5:20; “And (both) the Jews and the Christians say: "We are the children of Allah and His loved ones." Say: "Why then does He punish you for your sins?" Nay, you are but human beings, of those He has created, He forgives whom He wills and He punishes whom He wills.”

You can see from the Quranic verse above that Muhammad refused to accept Christians and Jews as God’s children because He disciplined them. However, both the Old and New Testaments Bible teach that a loving father disciplines his children.

Hebrews 12:7-11

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.]

Some suggestions to live these truths out in practice as we engage with Muslims:

1. “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven”. don’t just love those who love you, greet only your brothers; pagans do that too! “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matt 5:44-45, 48.
2. Be real and vulnerable about your brokenness (Paul in Rom 7:7-25) Because of grace, we don’t have to hide, we don’t have to live in shame, we don’t have to pretend we are better than we are, we don’t have to wear a mask of piety, we don’t have to live as if our acceptance is conditioned on our own merit and goodness. Demonstrate with your life that we are not defined by our successes or failures. Show that your most important identity in life is the fact that you are a beloved child of God. [Brennan Manning and Henri Nouwen]
3. Be God centered in your approach to ALL of life. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” I Cor. 10:31. See Gary Thomas’s

Sacred Pathways and James Bryan Smith's *The Good and Beautiful God, Life and Community*.

In relationship to Christ, our Lord and Savior

a. glorifying Christ

John 14:15-18, 26 “If you love me, you will obey what I command...I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you...But the counselor, 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.”

15:26 “When the counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.”

16: 14 “He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.”

b. believing in Christ

John 3:3-8 “unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...born of the Spirit.”

16:8-11 “When he comes, he will convict the world...because men do not believe in me...”

c. testifying to our transformation by Christ

ICor. 6:11 “...you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Some suggestions to live these truths out in practice as we engage with Muslims:

1. Focus on Jesus in your engagements with Muslims (not the superiority of Western civilization, American foreign policy, Christianity is better than other religions, etc.)
Read Carl's example.
2. Share your testimony about how Jesus has changed or impacted your life!
Read Joseph Cummings' story.

3. Read the Bible on a regular basis (because you love Jesus and want to obey him. “If you love me, you will obey what I command...Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.” Jn 14:15, 21) and show how you work on applying the Bible to your daily life. Most Muslims DO NOT read or study the Qur’an at all!
Read David Shenk.

In relationship to our own individual lives and our lives within the Christian community

- a. demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit

Gal. 5:22-23 “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

- b. living out the reality of being the temple of the Spirit--holiness, prayer and worship

I Cor. 3:16, “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”

6: 19-20 “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?...”

John 4:21-24 “...yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and truth.”

Eph 5: 18-20 **“...be filled with the Spirit...hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.”**

6:18 **“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...”**

c. loving one another in unity

John 13:34-35 **“All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”**

17:20-23 **“May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me...”**

I Cor. 12: 4-20 one body many gifts

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit, there are different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men....”

Some suggestions to live these truths out in practice as we engage with Muslims:

1. Focus on joy and peace in your life (Muslims are especially looking for that). Iranians' favorite verse, Matt 11: 28-29, “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”
2. Don't badmouth other Christian bodies. Don't get into denominational issues. Show respect and love for the body of Christ. Show appreciation for all branches of historic Christian orthodoxy. Refer to Schaeffer's *Mark of the Christian*.
3. Pray in front of your Muslim friends about all aspects of life. Invite them to a dynamic church. They love the singing and the joy they see in the church. Welcome them in the church!!! Read Philip Yancey's *CT* article.