

PART 2: BOOK REVIEWS

Joyful Witness in the Muslim World: Sharing the Gospel in Everyday Encounters

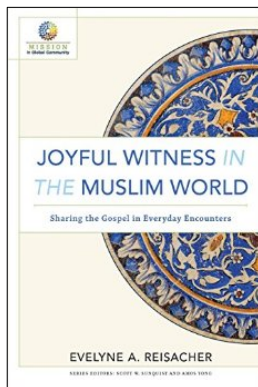
By Evelyne A. Reisacher

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016. 182 pages.
ISBN:978-08010308040.

Befriending, talking and hanging out with Muslims has long given me *much joy*, so I was immediately drawn by the title of Evelyne Reisacher's book. If one were to know only what is talked about in major news outlets, joy seldom seems to be a part of Muslim and Christian interaction. That's why it's very encouraging to read a book that expounds, in diverse and creative ways, how we as Christians can experience joy, share joy and pass on joy as we befriend Muslims in our work places, communities, neighbourhoods and travels.

Writing out of lifetime of living and ministering among Muslims in France, and more recently, through teaching at Fuller Theological Seminary, Evelyne is able to illustrate her discussion with countless personal joy-giving encounters with Muslims in many countries around the world. Having had the pleasure of encountering Evelyne at several conferences in recent years, I can say that though she can be very serious and is always thoughtful, she clearly communicates an infectious joy in God and in life—she practices what she preaches in her book. Out of the plethora of books published on sharing Christ with Muslims in the last decade, I warmly welcome the tone and content of this book and believe it contributes a unique and much needed *new perspective* to our ongoing conversations about Christian witness among Muslims.

So, what does Evelyne attempt to do in *Joyful Witness in the Muslim World*? Building on her extensive friendships with Muslims over decades, she draws upon literature about how friendships are created and how people connect with each other in healthy ways, especially across difficult barriers. Underlining how much the Christian life, and salvation itself, is often characterized by abounding joy, she invites us to consider a variety of new ways in which Christians can engage with Muslims, especially in everyday situations, in ways that will bring joy to both us and them. In the first two chapters she sets the theoretical framework and demonstrates how joy ought to characterize our lives as Christians and how, when it also characterizes our connections with Muslims, those friendships can be healthy and fruitful in all sorts of ways.



Having set this solid and creative foundation she then explores *representative ways* in which we Christians can connect joyfully with Muslims in cyberspace (Ch. 3), through shared joy in art and artistic expression of all kinds (Ch 4), in shared activism caring for God's creation (Ch 5), in serving the underprivileged, neglected and victimized (Ch 6), and in engaging creatively with Muslims in cities across the globe (Ch 7). Having thoughtfully suggested multiple creative ways that we Christians can find natural and meaningful ways to meet and befriend Muslims in daily life, she then turns to the challenge of actually talking about Christ and the gospel with Muslims in the final chapter. Any question that may have arisen about Evelyne's desire to see Muslims come to Christ in reading the earlier chapters are put to rest here. One can easily hear her heart: 'Inviting (not forcing) others to follow Jesus is a characteristic of Christian witness. One of the greatest joys in my ministry is seeing people come to Jesus... I have seen scores of Muslims come near Jesus in all kinds of contexts' (174-5).

In her sensitive exploration of how Christians can share with Muslims in the joy of art, dance and music, she tells of the first time she was surprised to be pulled into the joyous dance at a gathering of North African women. She shares the awkwardness she felt and feeling frozen with fear at being expected to dance with them. Then, delightfully, she finishes this as follows:

Today, many years later, after hundreds of celebrations and festivals with Muslim friends, I have to confess that when I hear the first notes of a North African tune, I am up on my feet dancing and whirling with joy. As I reflect on this now, I can see how much I have identified with the culture of my friends. I now can appreciate what they like because of my willingness to enter into some of their joyous forms of art. (73)

One of the most enduring and transformative lessons that I myself learned from living among Muslims in North Africa concerns the importance of generously giving and receiving hospitality, especially in our homes. In her chapter on ministering to the poor, Evelyne stresses the biblical theme and motivation for exercising hospitality towards all, and especially towards Muslims. Citing missiologist Tobias Brandmer, she suggests that our evangelism is 'inviting others to experience the redemptive hospitality of God' (118). She continues:

It is not just our hospitality that we want to extend. Instead, we want to show Muslims how God extends generosity, compassion, and hospitality in the biblical narrative.... Nowadays hospitality may not seem as critical for survival as it was for bedouins who lived in the desert and depended on generous hosts to feed and protect them, but it is still as critical for people's salvation. In effect, without joining God's banquet table, Muslims will not experience the fullness of what the Triune God has offered to humanity. (118)

In discussing caring for the needy Evelyne helpfully reminds us that Muslims, too, often exercise much compassion for those in need. She tells of various Muslim relief organizations doing great work among the poor and then makes it personal by telling a story of being on the receiving end of generous hospitality while visiting Cairo:

I started this chapter with a story in which I was at centre stage, caring for the needy, but a few days later, the situation was reversed when I visited a Muslim family in a poor neighbourhood of Cairo. When I arrived at their house, they welcomed me with a royal meal. I knew that what they served me was equivalent to their week's food consumption. Their hospitality was exceptional. I was traveling at the time with a friend, who realized that she did not have her diabetes medication. As soon as they found out, one of the sons of the family ran out to a store through the back door and came back with her medication. As hosts, they showed exemplary sensitivity to our needs. (125)

This last citation well illustrates a pervasive value that Evelyne demonstrates throughout the book. While acknowledging many of the very difficult realities of extremist Muslim violence and persecution of Christians, she continually seeks to be careful to treat Muslims well and portray them in a generous and warm-hearted way. She clearly loves Muslims deeply. Her joy would be dampened were she to meet Christians who are generalizing negative traits on 'all Muslims'. Muslims are good and decent people who have made her live immeasurably richer and she loves them and cares deeply that they come to know Jesus.

Who would most profit from reading this book? Though every Christian will be blessed by reading this book, as would most Muslims, let me suggest that there are four primary types of Christians who would especially benefit from reading this invitation to joyful witness: (1) ordinary Christians living among Muslims in the West, or in any city globally. There are many inspiring examples and suggestions for people who may be afraid of Muslims and unsure of what to do when they meet a Muslim. It will embolden them to reach out in genuine interest and love to any Muslim who crosses their path. (2) Anyone taking a course on Islam and ministry to Muslims. I plan to make this *required* reading in the 'Engaging Muslims' courses I am teaching in two colleges next year. (3) All pastors and Christian educators and leaders would be informed and challenged by this book. And (4), I especially think that the people who normally read SEEDBED, workers living and serving among Muslims, will be especially challenged, encouraged and inspired to greater creativity and boldness in their daily encounters with Muslims through reading this compelling call to joyful witness.

I can't help but think that it is not a coincidence that the two Christians whom I know to be among the most fruitful in their decades-long ministry to Muslims are both *women* (Evelyne Reisacher, and Joy Loewen, author of *Woman to Woman: Sharing*

Jesus with a Muslim Friend, 2010) *who find great joy* in their relationships with Muslims. I heard Joy Loewen express, on more than one occasion, how she simply loves spending time with Muslims and how they give her so much joy and teach her so much about what it is to be human. I think that the contagious joy that they experience in their friendships with Muslims has a lot to do with why they are so fruitful in seeing Muslim women come to know and love Jesus along with them.

Reviewed by Don Little

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My Muslim Neighbour: Communicating Well with your Muslim Friend

By Stafford Allen, Foreword by Martin Goldsmith

West Knapton, North Yorkshire: Gilead Books
Publishing, 2016. 300 pages.
ISBN: 978-0993209062.

Stafford Allen has condensed a lifetime of ministry among Muslims into fifteen very readable chapters. In the first two chapters, he establishes his ministry principles drawing on theological and anthropological insights. His fundamental desire is to communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ and to do so in a language that is understood by the Muslim to whom he is talking. To achieve this, he summarises his methods to include finding a context and ‘being there,’ making sincere relationships, showing genuine love, watching, asking questions about what you see and hear, listening, asking more questions, and learning. This is not rocket science but a good reminder that ministry is relational.

Some of Stafford’s chapter titles are original, such as chapter 3, ‘God, etc.’ in which he covers Allah, the Qur’an, the Prophet and other goodies as a background to the remainder of the book where the subjects are dealt in greater depth. Fear is not normally a chapter heading or a central emotion addressed in similar introductions, but chapter four confronts it head on. Having recently had a long discussion with a BMB friend about the role of fear in Islam I am very pleased to see Stafford prioritizing it.

Chapter 5 is a ragbag of recalled experiences relating to Islamic culture which moves us, in the author’s words, ‘a long way from classical Islam.’ The next two chapters continue in the same vein of ‘walking around’ the subject and are peppered

