

MUSLIMS, CHRISTIANS AND JESUS: GAINING UNDERSTANDING AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

By Carl Medearis

Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2008

Carl states his reason for writing the book in the 'Introduction', 'my intention is to give you some information to help you befriend a Muslim and practical tips on how to live a life that's truly Good News to a Muslim'.⁴⁸ The format of this introductory book on Islam and relationship building with Muslims makes for easy reading. Throughout the text Carl recounts personal experiences to illustrate the points he wants to make, calling them, 'A Story of Faith'. In these cameos Carl communicates something of the tremendous sense of hope, that Jesus is indeed drawing Muslims to himself in creative and powerful ways.

The first chapter is called, 'Before the Pillars: The Foundations of Islam', in which Carl succinctly surveys the historic background of Islam, with a humorous illustration of Arab Muslim family culture. The name Allah for God is briefly considered, Carl makes the comment that rather than talking about 'the wrong God', it is more helpful to show our Muslim friends how they can believe in God more fully, in and through Jesus Christ (p.31). This chapter ends with some useful practical tips on relating to Muslims. His bottom line is summed up in these words, 'The most important thing we can do as followers of Jesus is to do just that. Follow him. Jesus himself is the Good News. The message that we carry is Jesus' (p. 33).

In chapter two Carl considers, 'The Teachings of Islam: The Articles and Pillars of Faith'. He reviews the longer 'creedal' formula from the hadith, often called 'The Six Articles of Faith (Iman)', 'I believe in God, his angels, his books, his prophets, in the last day, and in God's predestined will'.⁴⁹ The chapter ends with the 'Five Pillars'. In the middle there is an interesting 'Story of Faith' sub-entitled 'An Iraqi Muslim Sheikh and Jesus'. Carl re-emphasises the importance of focusing on Jesus in our relationships with Muslims. He writes, 'Muslims are happy to talk about matters of faith and about Jesus specifically' (p. 47). Like Mark Siljander,⁵⁰ he prefers to use the term 'Isa al-Mesiah' (and other Islamic terms for Jesus), encouraging the reader to 'tread lightly around the issues of the deity, the sonship and the cross of Christ' (p. 49). Again, like Mark the author prefers to call himself 'a follower of Jesus' (p. 51). There is also a section on the concept of jihad, the Islamic state and democracy. He throws in some revealing asides like this one, 'Due to strong tribal aspects of most Muslim countries, as well as Muslims' high view of authority and sovereignty, democracy is often a difficult proposition. God is not elected, he simple is, and his authority is

unquestionable' (p. 54). The chapter ends with some more practical suggestions for interacting with Muslim friends.

Chapter three is titled, 'Islam's Holy Book: What the Qur'an says about Jesus.' There is a short introduction to the origins of the Qur'an and then a very useful seven-page section on verses in the Qur'an that refer to Jesus and correlating verses from the Bible. It is worth buying the book for this section alone. As with the previous chapters, Carl ends with some further insights under the heading, 'A Christlike Perspective' in which he writes about '*real* friendship' (p. 81) that is 'sacrificial' (p. 84).

'Women and Islam: Protecting the Purity of Women' is the title of chapter four. Carl points to the Islamic value of honour that is behind many of the behavioural practices that the West interprets as demeaning to women. The 'Story of Faith' recounts an encounter he and a friend had with a Saudi princess in the presence of male relatives that ends with this sentence, 'She then prayed for God's kingdom to enter into her heart through the anointed one – Jesus' (p. 96). There is no mention in the conversation of sin (or shame), the cross, resurrection or repentance. Like Mark, we discover that Carl is fearful of using the 'Christianity' and 'religion' words, but more of this later.

Chapter five is titled, 'Common Questions: A Knowledgeable Response' in which Carl addresses the top five questions his Muslim friends ask:

1. Do you believe the Qur'an is God's inspired book?
2. Do you believe Muhammad is a true prophet of God?
3. Has the Bible been changed?
4. How can God have a son?
5. Was Jesus crucified?

Here is a quote from each section, giving you a flavour of his responses and approach.

1. 'Look at the Qur'an as a book that can propel people to become curious about Jesus' (p. 102).
2. 'Recognize that Muhammad wanted his people to return to the true God, and demonstrate your respect for that tradition' (p. 103).
3. 'I think it is better to bring all of the relevant material back to Jesus and keep the discussion there, because Jesus reveals truth' (p. 104).
4. 'It often works to explain that the Bible does not teach that God was a man who had a baby named Jesus' (p. 108).
5. 'We do present 'Christ crucified' but not necessarily on day one' (p. 110).

Unlike Siljander, who seems to play down the theology of the cross, the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, Carl comes clean at this point. He writes, 'Now, you may be wondering if I think it's important for my Muslim friends to

know and understand the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of course! Vital' (p. 110). In this chapter he draws on Fouad Accad's work.⁵¹

'Jesus Meets Jihad: Overcoming Fear with Love' is the title of chapter six. Carl follows more common material with other peaceable approaches to Islam. However, it is simplistic to lump the Wahhabi sect of Saudi Arabia with the Taliban of Afghanistan or the Muslim Brotherhood (p. 119). He bravely addresses the issue of Christian Zionism without naming it when he writes, 'The very idea that a Christian should call for the destruction of Muslim people is absolutely contrary to the perspective of Jesus, who healed Gentile and Jew alike' (p. 128).

This is where the writings of Medearis and Siljander could be said to converge, with the agreement that the Messianic Muslim and 'insider movements' are viable long-term options for Muslims who come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Chapter seven is titled, 'Standing on the Bridge: Muslims Who Follow Jesus'. This is where the writings of Medearis and Siljander could be said to converge, with the agreement that the Messianic Muslim and 'insider movements' are viable long-term options for Muslims who come to faith in Jesus Christ. Like several other writers on the subject, Carl uses the 'Sufi' tradition as his primary rationale, especially the martyrdom of Hussein Ibn Mansour Hallaj. Indeed, if some Sufi Muslims were 'Messianic Muslims', which is questionable, then their deaths indicate the precariousness of such 'followers of Jesus'. In the 'Christlike Perspective' section, Carl distils his discovery, 'I learned that by following the Holy Spirit and being obedient to the teachings of Jesus, I could watch God save a person. I learned that it is the Spirit's responsibility to bring people to himself, and not mine' (p. 145). This is basic theology and one wonders why this was not his starting point? The chapter ends with the description of a 'Messianic Muslim' he knows and admits that his 'Is a precarious place to live' (p. 150). There are echoes of Mazhar Mallouhi in the account.⁵²

The final chapter is titled, 'Love Your Neighbour: Practical Ways to Reach Out to Muslims'. In it Carl presents us with; Five Thoughts, Twenty-One Basic Dos and Don'ts, a section on getting to know the Muslims around you and some short final thoughts. His thoughts are; have fun, have no agenda, be a-religious, no [avoid] Western and Christian culture and be yourself. His approach is to leave the difficult bits of the Bible, Christian theology and the nature of the church until later. The 'Dos and Don'ts' list is fairly comprehensive for the beginner and there are lots of other useful ideas in the closing pages of how to build relationships with Muslims.

The way Carl expresses his non-polemical, non-confrontational approach to Islam is refreshing, honest, reflective and realistic. In many of his ministry experiences with Muslims it has proven effective, though we are sometimes left asking the question, 'What happened next?' There is one unexpected typo on page 25 where Medina is spelt Median. His straightforward, non-technical

writing makes Islam accessible to people who may have distorted perceptions of Islam and Muslims. The book will undoubtedly encourage many readers to launch out into relationships with Muslims and so begin a journey of discovery of their own faith as 'followers of Christ' and of those 'submitted to God'. But it is only a beginning . . .

Reviewed by Keith Fraser-Smith

PS. I would like to acknowledge and thank my novelist friend Davis Bunn for recommending these two books to me to read.

48 Carl Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* (Bethany House 2008) page 18.

49 Bukhari 2:36.

50 I would like to acknowledge and thank my novelist friend Davis Bunn for recommending these two books to me to read.

51 Fouad Elias Accad, *Building Bridges – Christianity and Islam* (Navpress 1997).

52 Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road – Exploring a New Path between Two Faiths* (Cowley Publications 2007).

GOD'S TERRORISTS: THE WAHHABI CULT AND THE HIDDEN ROOTS OF MODERN JIHAD

by Charles Allen

London: Abacus, 2007 (ISBN: 978-0-349-11879-6)

Drawing upon extensive research and an intimate knowledge of the history of Muslims in the Indian subcontinent, Charles Allen presents an extensive and disturbing account of the historical origins and roots of the present day Wahhabi ideology, ideologues, and terrorist leaders and organizations. Writing as a scholarly critic who is very unsympathetic to this politicized Islamic cult, Allan traces, in exhaustive detail and with many compelling and chilling stories, the centuries long saga of the Wahhabi ideology. He describes its long standing significant backing and financial support by the House of Saud (Saudi Arabia's ruling oligarchy), and how it has borne fruit in contemporary groups like the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and such terrorists organizers and charismatic leaders as Osama Bin Laden.

Of particular interest to SEEDBED readers will be the history of the Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, and how the early leaders of the house of Saud turned to the influential but largely discredited and marginalized Wahhabi sect in order to gain the political and ideological strength (the fanatical Wahhabis made great warriors) that helped give Islamic legitimacy to Ibn Saud's ambition to conquer the entire Arabian Peninsula early in the 20th century. Equally disturbing is the