

* Even if all of Jesus' disciples were not present at his crucifixion, they all saw the scars on his body. He himself invited them to take note of these scars on the night of his resurrection.

* The death of Jesus was foretold by the prophets and by Jesus himself well before it happened. It was not therefore an accident of history to which God responded by raising Jesus from the dead. Moreover, the resurrection of Jesus can be regarded as the act by which God gave him victory over his enemies, beginning with death, which is the true enemy of all men.

* It was God's eternal will that was done through the historical circumstances of Jesus' crucifixion. Thanks to his death the salvation of man was accomplished. The cross of Jesus shows us God's love, His righteousness and justice, His power and His wisdom.

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CONVERSATION TURNERS

by M.A.H.

Many workers among Muslims have a great burden to share their faith with those among whom they have come to live, yet find that the course of their conversations does not often naturally lead to religious discussions. Prompted by their concern for these peoples' spiritual condition, they may desire to "steer" the conversation to religious topics, yet be at a loss as to how to do so.

On other occasions in daily life, such as riding in a taxi or dealing with a peddler, one would like to sow a seed or give a witness for Christ, but there is only a limited time of interaction in which to do so. Having at your disposal a few "conversation turners" can often allow you to use the encounter to share spiritual truth by opening the door for a religious conversation.

Some may feel that reliance on such an approach is contrived, canned, and counter to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This of course is possible, as may also be the case with Bible reading, prayer and many other matters in our spiritual life. But the possible danger does not invalidate its legitimacy. On the contrary, it is the Holy Spirit who is the impetus to bold and creative witness. In the book of Acts, the primary purpose of the anointing of the Spirit was to enable Christians to witness for Christ with boldness; when we are filled with the Spirit we feel a great burden to share Christ, even when there are no "natural opportunities". It is His presence within us that inspires us to guide, steer, lead or turn our conversations to discussions of a spiritual nature.

To "manipulate" the direction of a talk to a spiritual plane is not an act of dubious nature. It is rather an evidence of love for one's fellow man and concern for his eternal and earthly well-being. Note how the Master Teacher very deliberately directed a conversation about water with a Samaritan women to a discussion of living water (John 4). The blessing of God on this device is evident from the result--the salvation of an entire village!

The ideas presented below can be viewed as tools for your evangelistic tool box. As a carpenter adds to his collection of tools he is then better able to find one that is appropriate to the job he wants to do. With experience he is able even to fashion his own custom-made tools to get the job done. God has used many of the following conversation turners to open up hundreds of opportunities for me to discuss spiritual matters, or present a witness for Christ and allow a Muslim to accept a gospel portion. If God has gifted you as an evangelist, you may have little need for what follows. But to those whose evangelistic opportunities are more limited, I would encourage you to consider adopting or adapting some of the ideas which follow, at least until you develop more suitable ones of your own. On one occasion, Dwight L. Moody was approached by a man who criticized his method of evangelism. Moody replied, "I don't like it either--what's your method?" When his critic stated that he did not have one, Moody retorted, "I like mine better."

--Heaven Street: I was first introduced to the use of conversation turners by someone who had ridden in a taxi with Dr. Lionel Guernsey, and later related to me this veteran evangelist's conversation with the driver. Having asked him how many years he had been driving a taxi, Dr. Guernsey followed with the statement, "with so much experience, you must know nearly every street in the city." The driver's ego was soon deflated a bit when Dr. Guernsey asked him if he could take him to "Shaari'a al-Jenna" (Heaven Street). When the puzzled driver confessed that he did not know where it was, Dr. Guernsey told him that he was referring to the "street" or path that leads to eternal paradise. Such an approach typically leads to a discussion on how to get to heaven--the Five Pillars, good works and the way of salvation. Here are some other ideas you could try.

--Residence [for those who are foreigners in the country]: When asked if you are residing in your host country, you could reply: "No I'm a traveler--we're all travelers on the earth, aren't we? We live here 70 to 80 years and then arrive at our final destination--our eternal dwelling place."

--Nationality: When asked what your nationality is, say, "I'm from [your country's name] originally, but I now have another nationality that's even better than that. ... I am a citizen of the Kingdom of God. I do not say this from arrogance or self-righteousness; God bestowed this citizenship upon me as a gift!"

--Desire to Emigrate: You can tantalize someone who wants to emigrate with news of a fantastically beautiful country, everything one could want, justice, peace, etc. and it costs no money. The king has opened the doors to all who want to come--only there are some condi-

tions. After breaking the suspense by revealing that it is the Kingdom of Allah, read the conditions as found in the beatitudes, the sermon on the Mount, or in Matthew 18:1-9. One must become as a dependent child, submit to the reign of the King (Christ), etc.

--Occupation/work: "My occupation is teaching [business, etc.] but my work is to do the will of Allah whom I serve."

--Hot weather: "It's hot here, but do you know the hottest place in the world? He will guess several places to which you each time reply in the negative. When he finally gives up you answer: "Jahannem" (hell...whose fire is said to be 10 times hotter than fire on earth). You can follow up by advising that if one does not like such heat, one had better find the way to heaven, or you might give testimony to your assurance of salvation.

--Crowdedness: "This is a very crowded street! But do you know the most crowded street in the world?" Answer: the road to Hell! Read Matt. 7:13,14. "Many (billions of people) are choosing the road to destruction, while only a few are on the road to life." This passage could also be used in political discussions to show how not even democracy is a guaranteed solution for good government; often the majority are wrong and choose the path that leads to destruction.

--Need a flat in order to marry: Affirm that while it is necessary to have a place where one can go to at the end of the day, and we spend many years and much effort to obtain it, there is a flat more important than this--it's the one you will go to at the end of your life to spend eternity in. "Do you know for sure if you have such a flat in al-Jenna? Al Hamdu lillah, I do." Then read John 14:2,3.

--Life is hard! To one who complains about having to work two jobs or long hours to feed his family, etc., you can respond by asserting that we can't easily change our circumstances or quickly improve our economic prospects; the important thing then is to find a way to experience "rest" in the midst of difficult circumstances. "Al Hamdu lillah, I have found this rest." Here refer to Jesus' promise (Matt. 11:28-30) "come to me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ..."

One can also suggest that the reason people are weary is because they are living on a materialistic level; the inner person is not strengthened by material things. Read Matt 4:4 or Luke 4:4 "Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from God". People need spiritual food to strengthen their souls, the nourishment that comes from every Word from God. Emphasize that though Christ is the giver of the Injil (the gospel), He could not do without the Tawrah. On the contrary, he memorized it and quoted from it to overcome the devil's temptations. How much more do we need to know all of God's Word--not just part of it.

Illustrate this by referring to the virtues of beans (or the staple dish or bread of the country). As good as they are, if one were to eat nothing else one's health would suffer, because some nutrients one needs are missing in it. God has given us many kinds of food and we need more than just one kind. Likewise, he who reads only one

Book (in his mind the Qur'an) is like him who eats only beans. Then try offering him a copy of a gospel.

--The Fast of Ramadan: Ask your friend if he or she are fasting, and if so why; what is the purpose of fasting? Empathy for the poor may be a side-benefit, but if that is its primary purpose, then the poor need not fast; they feel hunger pains every day already! Suggest that the primary purpose of fasting is to free us from worldly affairs and allow us to pray in the best possible state, and to teach us to obey every word of God. Jesus' statement in Matt 4:4/Luke 4:4 is made in the context of his 40-day fast. In it he teaches us that obedience to God is life's most important issue; fasting simply reinforces this truth. When we feel hunger pains we are reminded that our real need is not for bread (which represents material things as well as food), but for spiritual food--every word from God--so that we can live by it. Here again, as discussed in the previous section, you can refer to Christ's example of memorizing the Tawrah to emphasize the importance of not neglecting any of God's Books.

--Children: When talking about your children or theirs, or how many they or you have, you might exclaim, "al-mal wal-banoon zeenit al-Hayaat id-dunya" (possessions and children are the adornment of the life of this world--a quotation from Sura 18 [the Cave]: verse 28). From there you can go in couple of directions:

a. The Zabur says that children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:2), that is, we have children by God's grace, not because of our merit. (A good man may not be blessed with children, while a wicked man might have many). State that you are of the opinion that the best things in life are those which come as gifts of God's grace--children, a good wife, and the best gift of all which is forgiveness.

b. Although children are a lot of work and a heavy responsibility, it is God's desire that we benefit from them, by learning from them important spiritual truths, e.g.

- Matt 18:1-9. We must become as little children to enter the kingdom of God (We are also severe warned against causing Jesus' "little ones" to stumble).

- Matt 7:7-12 If we are evil, and yet give good gifts to our kids, how much more will God give what is good (the Holy Spirit--Luke 11:9-13) to those who ask Him.

--Is Arabic difficult? "No, it's not difficult..., it is mustaHeel" (impossible)! Ha-ha! "Actually, there is a language which is much more difficult than Arabic, but the amazing thing about this language is that once you have learned it, you can communicate with anyone in the world with it--even if they never learned this language. Do you know which language I am referring to? It's the language of LOVE. The reason it's so difficult to learn is that there are no teachers, schools or institutes that teach it. Everyone wants to be loved, but who is willing to be first in sacrificing himself to give love. The only One who can teach the language of Love is God. We must experience God's love in such abundance that we can give it to others from the overflow of His love to us." One can then go on to discuss such

things as how to have this kind of relationship with God, what it is that keeps us from experiencing His love, how God demonstrated this kind of love in Christ.

--Are you a Muslim? One can often elicit this question by a generous use of such "Muslim" expressions as "al-Hamdu-lillaah" [Praise God], "in shaa' allah" [If God wills], and "Salaamu 'alaykum" [Greetings!], and the like. To such a question one might reply, "Yes, I am Muslim, but not the way you understand the term. I am Muslim according to the real meaning of the word, that is, one who surrenders his entire life to God. I am Muslim like Sayyidna Ibrahim, 'aleeh is-salaam [Abraham, peace be upon him], who was willing to sacrifice his son to God. Because he was completely surrendered to Allah, he is called Muslim. However, I am not Muslim, if you mean by that one who "prays the required prayers and then goes out and steals" [yisalli il-farD wa yunqub il-arD --an Arabic proverb]. Do you know that according to the Qur'an the disciples of Christ [al-Hawariyyum] are 'Muslim'?" Here you could state that you believe in one God and are surrendered to Him as the disciples were. Therefore, you are a Muslim according to the real meaning of the word, but not because "Muslim" is written in your identity card!

--Fear: Deliverance from fear is a felt need, especially among women. "I used to be afraid of everything, especially death, but Christ [Sayyidna al-mesiH] came to free those enslaved to the devil by their fears. He gives me peace when I am afraid."

--Christmas Tree: When visitors to your home are seated near your Christmas tree, you might ask if they know why you have a tree. You could answer that the evergreen is a symbol of everlasting life which Christ can give us. Or that the tree symbolizes the fact that Christ was born to take the curse of death for us by being hanged on a tree (Galatians 2:22ff).

--Easter [Eed al-qiyama - "Feast of Resurrection"]: "Do you know the story about why we celebrate Resurrection Day?" (Most think it is about Christ's Ascension to heaven, not His resurrection from the dead.)

It is hoped that the readers will experiment with some of the above "conversation turners," and come up with adaptations which are suitable to their own personalities and their situations as I did. By using others' "training wheels," I was able to ride the "Conversation Turner Bike" and eventually get the hang of it so that I could eventually do it myself, adapting, innovating and developing my own Conversation Turners with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*e.g. Sura 3 Imran vs.52: "The disciples of Christ said, 'We are God's helpers; we have believed in God and testify that we are Muslims.'" Note that translations of the Qur'an may not indicate that the Arabic word is "Muslims."

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