

Missionary Encounters with Other Faiths & No Faith



General Overview:

✓ **What Evangelism Is**

"This is not evangelism of a proselytizing, triumphalist sort that plots to destroy Islam. Rather it sets forth Jesus as the fulfillment of the hearts of all of us longing for peace with [Allah]. It is an expression of hospitality in which one wants to give only one's best to one's companion at the common meal. And the best we can offer is Jesus, the seal of the prophets. It is one beggar saying to another beggar, 'We have found bread; come, eat with us.'" - Harvie Conn

✓ **Paul's Example of Contextualizing**

"For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. . . To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." (1 Cor. 9:19-23)

✓ **Our Goal**

Sifting through the culture wars and secondary issues, to get to the core. We must prioritize Jesus, the gospel, and conversion before morality, political issues, "current events," etc.

✓ **Keep the Bigger Perspective!**

We don't have to be "sealing the deal" instantly. You don't know what role you're playing in God's providence in this person's life; and don't forget the essential role of the Church and our full view of conversion.

Part I - Becoming both “Sympathetic Insiders” and “Critical Outsiders”

1) Becoming a “Sympathetic Insider”

- a)** Knowing the other person/culture well enough to know its longings and noble dreams (D.T. Niles: *“Before you can really understand any religion you have to be tempted by it”*)
 - i)** If you want to understand a religion, you must try to feel and sense what questions they are asking. What are the fundamental longings?
 - ii)** Knowing and listening to the other - *“The first task of contextualization is to immerse yourself in the questions, hopes, and beliefs of the culture so you can give a biblical, gospel-centered response to its questions. When Paul began to speak to the philosophers in Athens, he began by saying he had carefully studied their objects of worship (Acts 17:23). We should do the same”* (Tim Keller).
- b)** “A” Beliefs and “B” Beliefs
 - i)** *“When we enter a culture, we should be looking for two kinds of beliefs. The first are what I call ‘A’ beliefs, which are beliefs people already hold that, because of God’s common grace, roughly correspond to some parts of biblical teaching”* (Keller).
 - ii)** Meanwhile, ‘B’ beliefs (also called ‘Defeaters’) are beliefs of the culture that lead listeners to find some Christian doctrines implausible or overtly offensive. ‘B’ beliefs contradict Christian truth directly at different points.
 - iii)** We enter the culture by pointing people to the overlapping beliefs they can easily affirm: *Do you see this in your culture? Do you see this well-known belief? The Bible says the same thing—even more strongly, even more clearly!*

2) Becoming a “Critical Outsider”

- a)** Seeing where it’s not enough - Our task is to hear the cry of the heart and say, we believe your religious beliefs will never truly answer the cry of your heart, but Christ can and does.
- b)** Beginning with the common heart longings will enable you to invite them further into a discussion about Christianity; i.e. *“If you believe ‘A’ about God—and you are right—how does that lead to your belief in ‘B’?”*
- c)** *“In Manhattan, what the Bible says about turning the other cheek is often welcome (an ‘A’ belief), but what it says about sexuality is often resisted (a ‘B’ belief). In the Middle East, we might see the opposite—turning the other cheek seems unjust and impractical, but biblical prohibitions on sexuality make sense”* (Keller).

3) An example of what this might look like with Islam

a) Being a Sympathetic Insider

- i) God is the creator and sustainer of the universe, and he relates to them in a personal way.
- ii) God controls history and will bring it to an end in judgment.
- iii) God has revealed his will to people through prophets and apostles, and sacred scriptures.
- iv) All men, women and angels have the privilege and duty to worship God.
- v) Part of our duty to God is to exercise social and moral responsibility.
- vi) Security in life is dependent upon the mercy and compassion of God.
- vii) Men and women may bring their requests to God in prayer, knowing that he will hear them and can effect his will in the world.

b) Being a Critical Outsider

- i) Jesus - he is considered as a very prominent prophet, but not the Savior, not divine, and didn't die on a cross
- ii) The Cross - this is an utter scandal to Muslims (as it should be to everyone!) because it seems to say that God is weak. The need of sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins is not a part of Islam. For Islam, we make ourselves righteous, God does not make us righteous.
- iii) God's love - Muslims teach that God is loving, compassionate and merciful, but not in the same way as what Christians teach and believe. Again, this will depend on each individual Muslim, but there is no question that it does not hold the center of the religion as it does for Christians.
- iv) Intimacy with God - because of their concern for monotheism and God's transcendence, God does not enter the world and there is no human fellowship with Him.
- v) Sin - For Islam, sin comes from ignorance, bad habits, lack of judgments, etc., and so can be effected and curbed by moral and social adjustments.
- vi) Assurance - with everything from above, Muslims can obviously not have assurance of heaven or God's favor, and the amazing grace that Christians can have assurance should be a focus for our lives and interactions with Muslims!

PART 2 – The Centrality of the Cross of Christ in Our Missionary Encounters

“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).

Different Angles into the Atonement: What did Christ accomplish on the Cross?

I) Sacrifice - removing the shame barrier

- a) Sin is impurity, a defilement that makes us unfit for community. This creates shame and a sense of being unacceptable.
- b) But on the cross Jesus was shamed and excluded (Matt 27:46; Heb 13:11-13) so that we could be purified and cleansed from sin (Heb 1:3, 9:13-14).

2) Debt - removing the debt-barrier

- a) Sin is a broken obligation (cf. Matt 6:12). When we cannot pay our debts this entails slavery (in ancient cultures) or bankruptcy (today).
- b) But on the cross Jesus paid a ransom (Mark 10:45) so that we could be redeemed out of bondage (1 Tim 2:6; 1 Cor 6:20).

3) Battle - removing the power of evil over us

- a) Sin is an evil force of self-centeredness and power-accrual that works in the world and in our hearts.
- b) But on the cross Jesus unmask and disarms evil powers (Col.1:12-14, 2:14-15; Jn 12:31-33) by a complete reversal, through self-sacrifice and service (1 Cor 1:18-31).

4) Relationship - removing the hostility-barrier

- a) Sin is a broken relationship, refusing God his rightful centrality in our hearts. God is alienated from us and us from him (Rom 5:10).
- b) But on the cross Jesus removes God's anger from us (Heb 9:5; Eph 2:3-5; 1 Jn 2:1-2) and turns our hearts to him as Mediator and Advocate.

5) Law - removing the guilt-barrier

- a) Sin is a violation of God's righteous character and law. This creates guilt.
- b) But on the cross Jesus stood in our legal place (Is 53:11, 12; cf. Lk 22:37) and took the judgment we deserved (1 Pet 3:18; Rom 3:21-26; Gal 3:13) so we can get the treatment he deserved (2 Cor 5:21).

At the Heart of All These: SUBSTITUTION - "The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone." – John Stott

Aspects of Penal Substitution:

- 1) **Retribution** - Wrath is a just penalty of which all men are without excuse and without hope of escape apart from Christ. (Rom.1:18ff)
- 2) **Solidarity** - Christ is the second Adam. He carries our identity at the cross. (2 Cor. 5:14)
- 3) **Mystery** - Such love is mysterious to us. (Rom. 5:8); The "God-man" is mysterious to us.
- 4) **Salvation** - Freed from the bondage and oppression of sin
- 5) **Divine Love** - Not of a kind that merely placates a fierce Father, but one that is compatible with the father's justice AND love.

PART 3 - Discussion on how to "Get To The Gospel" in conversations with people of other faiths and no faith

Let's take some examples of conversations where we need help steering the conversation to the gospel.

(This and other resources may be found online @ cpcnewhaven.org/culture-and-practice-of-evangelism)