

Question 6: How can Christians witness effectively to Muslims?

As last week, a story of Nigerian wisdom to begin with, this time Christian. Pastor Ezekiel Nyajo, a young pastor when I arrived in Nigeria in 1966, knew how to keep his audience spellbound. His first call was to the CRC of Ibi, a Muslim town. He enthusiastically began an evangelistic campaign in which he soon learnt a few important basics. One that he shared with me and I never forgot: *If you wish to evangelize people from another religion, discover the best things and the strengths of that religion and build on or relate to them, not on its worst and weakest aspects.* I want all you readers to remember that maxim when you approach Muslims. Absolutely true and absolutely necessary to adhere to.

Secondly, you must be aware that most Muslims have from their earliest childhood on been indoctrinated to believe in the absolute superiority of their religion vis a vis all others, including Christianity. Now that may have been true of my generation of CRCers as well, but I sense that there is a humility, true or false, that has crept into the hearts and minds of my generation and that is advancing among subsequent generations. We tend not to be quite so absolutist about other religions anymore. Without necessarily having thought through the issues arising from such humility, we are slowly sliding into greater openness to them. This, you *must* know, is not the case with Muslims, not even with non-practicing cultural Muslims. It is not a hopeless situation, but it seldom happens in response to direct evangelistic witness. They will hardly give you a chance; they will preach at you without stopping. It is not the way to go.

If your church wishes to engage in evangelism to Muslims, I recommend two simultaneous approaches, communal and individual: (1) Employ a spiritually sensitive ex-Muslim who knows Islam well, continues to adhere to much of their culture and has retained his respect and love for Muslims. Let him be your front runner. There may come a time you can invite a group of Muslims for a church or restaurant dinner and be prepared to have it reciprocated.

(2) Befriend Muslims in your community and develop an active and trusting social relationship with them. Demonstrate your Christian way of life and answer any question they may pose, but do not overtly evangelize or witness to them. Feel free to ask them questions in a respectful way. This may encourage them to ask questions as well. Go to a movie together, a meaningful movie.

Play chess. Do a picnic. Invite them into your house for a breakfast or dinner. Whatever fits their social life. Remember, often women to women works best and men to men. Keep asking your front runner for information and advice.

Throughout the Muslim world, thousands of Muslims have come to Christ through dreams that are remarkably similar. A white-robed figure tends to appear to them who identifies Himself as Christ and invites them to follow Him. This is often the result of having heard about Christ through some channel—radio, TV, a book, *a conversation that could have been with you*. You just sow the seed and leave the harvest to Him. Pray, but don't worry about it. He has His own ways.

There is also the global situation that has filled Muslims with mistrust and, often, hatred towards the West and its Christians. We must be aware of the imperialistic way in which the West has treated the Muslim world. The current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are seen as mere continuations of a long imperialist tradition that sought to exploit them and impose secularism on them. Some writers, even in the *CC*, apparently want to ignore or deny the true impact of that history. However, we must acknowledge it not only, but also do all we can to transform our national governments and corporations into peaceful and just directions that are more in conformity with the way of Christ. *Christians must be seen and heard by Muslims to be doing so*. At least, if we are interested in correcting the image of Christ that Muslims everywhere have. To Muslims, politics and economics are tools of mission. The Christian dualistic separation of these two is an unbelievably naïve and, pardon the expression, stupid approach. *You want to improve the image of Christ in the Muslim world? Then work hard at reforming/transforming our international politics and economics*. Witness is no child's play!