

A second theme is that of authority. The understanding of Nicodemus was being reshaped. He recognized the authenticity and authority in Jesus's actions. Yet Jesus took him beyond looking at the signs to see the significance and necessity of new birth. Nicodemus appears almost childlike in his wondering and enquiring and displays a willingness to oblige. He is being led beyond normal human intellect to the spiritual realm.

The dialogue moves toward a conclusion, to a verdict on the claims of Christ, to judgment. It is not about scaring people; it is about expressing the love of God. There is no embellishing or sugar-coating of the message. The need for, and possibility of, being born again is stated more than once.

We meet Nicodemus later in the gospel story when he is involved in caring for Jesus's body (John 19:38–39), an act that demonstrated his willingness at this time to be more open about his identification with Jesus.

Do we want to see more people doing what Nicodemus did, seeking to meet with Jesus, exploring the claims of Christ, seeking salvation? In these days, many such people, including many Muslims, are coming. Do we attract people to ask, to seek us out? Are we living for the sake of those outside the kingdom who are searching for truth?

In this story, Jesus engages in a verbal battle while being attentive to the other person. He is alert to moments of openness. Likewise, we need to live and dwell with people. I love academics and digging deeper into the faith. Yet we must be careful about complexity in life and testimony. Is there an intellectual ground we can use to reach Muslims? Undoubtedly. It is good to build bridges and to become closer to the other. This is, I believe, part of being faithful to God and seeking a harvest.

So what kind of message are we giving when we relate to the religious other? Is it sufficient to speak about ethical living and about kindness and goodness? Sometimes we need to take a stand on the message of Christ. We need to ask God to use everything about us to express the need for salvation to those with whom we engage.

6.2 Qur'an Case Study: Questions the Church Asks

This case study introduces some of the diverse views of the Qur'an held by Christians. It was constructed by the IMES team from the experiences of several people. The characters are fictitious, but the questions raised occur in many settings.

Muhammad was raised in a strict Muslim family, wherein he memorized

his studies in Islam until he eventually became a preacher and a lecturer on Islam. After a period of researching and studying the Bible in order to prove that it is corrupted, Muhammad became a follower of Jesus Christ. He then decided to spend an extensive period of time studying the Bible.

During a Bible study group with other believers mainly from a Christian background, a conversation about Islam took place, specifically touching on the topic of the Qur'an. Samira, an evangelical Christian who regularly follows Christian television programs that speak negatively about Islam, shared what she had heard on one program that the Qur'an is demonic because it contains passages about killing and illicit sexual behavior that goes against humanity and the will of God. Samira went on to say that the God of Islam is indeed the devil because he orders his followers to kill.

There was silence for a few moments until Hakim, a devout Christian who occasionally attends the church, broke the silence by saying, "Not everything in the Qur'an is wrong. Why do you, Samira, say that?"

Samira replied in anger saying, "You, the Orthodox, are like Muslims in the way you think and worship!"

Then Samira turned to Muhammad and asked, "What do you think of the Qur'an and its content?"

Muhammad thought for a short period and then responded in defense of the Qur'an by questioning the Old Testament's inclusion of certain violent passages and events such as those in the book of Joshua. He also pointed to some other passages that are characterized by sexual imagery and language, such as in the Song of Songs. When Samira heard this, she got angry and responded aggressively to Muhammad, refusing to compare the Old Testament with the Qur'an. In her anger, Samira decided to leave the room. While the rest of the group tried to defend the Old Testament, Muhammad attempted to help them develop a fair reading of the Qur'an.

The next day, Muhammad received a phone call from one of the attendees, Milad, who asked Muhammad not to try to defend the Qur'an but to acknowledge its deceptive teaching. Milad further explained to Muhammad that his view of the Qur'an was leading Samira to question the legitimacy of his faith in Christ.

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6.3 Testimony : Muslims in the

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factors do you think influenced each participant with regard to their view of the Qur'an?

2. What in your opinion was Muhammad's goal in trying to compare the Old Testament to the Qur'an? Did his Islamic background influence his point of view concerning the Qur'an?
3. How do you explain Milad's request to Muhammad?
4. How do you explain Samira's questioning of Muhammad's faith in Christ because of his view of the Qur'an?
5. How might similar situations affect, positively or negatively, the practice of discipleship in the church?

6.3 Testimony 2: Amal Gendi on Ministry to Muslims in the West

interview by Emad Botros

Emad: We are two Egyptian men in conversation. Amal, do please introduce yourself.

Amal: I describe myself as Egyptian by birth, Canadian by choice and Christian by grace.

Emad: Well you might live in the West, but I understand that your work is focused on Arab people. Please summarize your portfolio of Christian ministry.

Amal: I work in education with a focus on discipleship and training for those from Muslim backgrounds. Above all, I long to equip local people as pastors within their communities. One emphasis has been on the Arabian Peninsula, which was the focus of my doctorate.¹ In Canada, I am active in teaching. I am also involved in raising awareness of Islam among Christians in Canada with the central message of "love your Muslim friend," urging people to explain the gospel to Muslims in the light of the fact that Islam is not all about killing people. Islam denies the reality of who Christ is; we must reach out with a message of hope to Muslims.

Emad: The case study above is based on a real event. What do you think of the characters?

Amal: Muhammad's behavior is natural, rooted in his tribal heritage: he responds to any attack on the Qur'an as an attack on himself. He cannot move beyond this reaction overnight. Is he challenging Christians here? This is his initial response. Samira appears superficial and heavily influenced by the media; she has not studied the Qur'an for herself. She attacks Muhammad and then leaves the room. In such scenarios, some people try to compromise while others try to be peacemakers. I want to discuss Hakim's approach without condemning him. In my opinion, it is better to ask questions than to make statements. Why? Because this is a route to dialogue, to engagement with the other in order to help them explore further. I handle the Bible passages about war by assisting people to explore the context as a route to understanding.² I encourage others to apply the same methodology to the Qur'an. I think that we should not be afraid of the Qur'an. It is the sacred text of Islam, and I believe that it is beneficial to us to study it.

Emad: How should we respond to the qur'anic passages that deny the divinity of Christ?

Amal: We might see them as demonic. Yet this does not detract from the other contents.

Emad: Do you use the Qur'an in your ministry?

Amal: My aim is to assist Muslims to explore truth. So one approach is to start with the Qur'an and then move to the Bible. One thing I find helpful is to use any reference to sacrifice as a bridge to Christ on the cross.

Emad: In the case study, Samira reacts strongly to Hakim's view of the Qur'an. She addresses him in a very negative, even derogatory tone.

Amal: We need to be careful in our use of the Qur'an. I make it clear that I handle it as the sacred text of another religion, but it is not the sacred text of my faith. Consequently, I do not regard it as divine revelation.

Emad: What do you think that the characters in the case study need the most?

Amal: Muhammad need be better equipped to use more deeply and be less Milad, well, he spoke fir

Emad: Can we discuss th demonization of Islam? F in the church?

Amal: I am not in favor of God can make use of such plete and full presentation be using media to present a both Christian and otherw We must be aware of the n by some. Jesus was compas religious leaders. In a simil ideology and Muslims as p always be loving toward M

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6.4 The Honorable Q Book

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Amal: Muhammad needs more spiritual growth and discipleship in order to be better equipped to use the Bible wisely. Samira needs to look at the Bible more deeply and be less influenced by stereotypes presented in the media. Milad, well, he spoke from his heart.

Emad: Can we discuss the role of the media in Western contexts in terms of demonization of Islam? Further, how might we critique similar presentations in the church?

Amal: I am not in favor of polemical approaches, although I do recognize that God can make use of such methods. The gospel is based on love, and a complete and full presentation must be centered on love. As Christians, we should be using media to present a positive message about Christ. Media are powerful, both Christian and otherwise, and many Christians are influenced by them. We must be aware of the negative, hateful view of Muslims that is presented by some. Jesus was compassionate with lay people but sharply rebuked many religious leaders. In a similar manner, we must distinguish between Islamic ideology and Muslims as people. We might critique the former, but we must always be loving toward Muslims as people.

Emad: Thank you for sharing with us.

6.4 The Honorable Qur'an: From Revelation to the Book

Issa Diab

The Qur'an is considered by Muslims as the word of God, revealed directly to Muhammad in Arabic, both literally and in substance. Accordingly, to all Muslims regardless of their sects and schools, the Qur'an is viewed as the primary source of doctrine, legislation and jurisprudence, as well as the ultimate reference in every issue pertaining to doctrine and conduct. Muslims likewise believe that the Qur'an in their possession today is the same as the one that was revealed to Muhammad, whether in its wording, text or content, with no alteration or modification whatsoever across the ages.

