

The Cold War Against Muslims Living in America A Christian Evangelist Visits Imam Khattab

I would like to share with you an article which appeared in a church paper entitled *The Ministry*. This article may help us, the Muslims living in America, deal with what can be termed the “cold war” directed against us from some quarters. Although we have no objection to a cold war being waged against us, but, at the least, we need to arm ourselves to face that war by knowing how to respond to it. Also, this article has some points which have struck me. These points remind me of my studies in Al-Azhar while working on my master’s degree in preaching, and they are specifically related to the subject of how to deal with people.

Sometimes people misunderstand what I say here in my sermons, and, in fact, the role of a preacher is a very thorny role. I can make an analogy with a farmer. The farmer, before planting his land, has to test the soil to determine what different crops the soil will grow. Some soils are best suited to soybeans, others to corn, while a third type will be best for watermelons, and so on. Before the farmer plants his land, he sends a sample of the soil to the laboratory to have it tested for the kind of crops he should plant. This is exactly the job of a preacher. He has to adapt himself to the environment and he

has to test the “soil” where he is going to “plant” his “seeds”. Maybe he will not be happy with certain kinds of “plants” but he has no choice until the “land” is prepared and the proper “plants” are growing. There are many ways of enriching poor soil, such as adding top soil, adding fertilizer, or adding water, and there are many other factors which will affect the measures needed to correct the situation. We can discern all these subtleties in the Islamic call when it first started.

When the Prophet, peace be upon him, started the Islamic call, he started it in secret. He was supported by the power of Heaven, but he started it in secret, and to be sure, there were some companions of the Prophet who were not happy with that situation. One day someone came to the Prophet and said: “Aren’t we following the truth in our life and in our death?” The Prophet said, “Yes.” The man asked: “Then why don’t we act according to our religion openly and with authority?” The question indicates that this particular companion was speaking up, and opposing the Prophet because his views differed from those of the Prophet. But, the Prophet knew what type of “soil” he was “planting” in, so he was following a gradual way. And it took three years until the

order came from above to Muhammad to preach to the way of God openly and not to pay heed to the idolaters.¹

In response to this command, the Prophet started with what is called *Al Hujja* – the plea. He went up high on a hill and called out to the people, like they used to do when there was a danger threatening. He started to call the tribes one by one by their names: *ya Quraysh*, *ya Hawāzīn*, and so on, calling everyone by name until they all quickly gathered because this was an indication of danger; something alarming had taken place and they had to see what it was. When they came, he asked them a rhetorical question, instead of telling them the news, or making a statement: “If I inform you that the army of your enemy is approaching in the valley behind us, and wants to occupy our land, will you believe me?” Their immediate answer was, “Yes, we believe you; we have never found you to tell a lie. You are a most truthful man.” They declared that whatever he said they would believe him. He said, “Then, my news to you is that I am the messenger of God, to you in particular, and to humanity in general.” First, he asked a question to put them on the spot. First, he got their total approval of him being the most trustworthy man, then he gave them the news or the statement, in effect, saying to them that if they believed him previously, then they should believe what he is saying now. That was the method of the Islamic call at its inception. We don’t use similar strategies nowadays, but, if we did follow those methods, our work would be very fruitful; maybe slow, but very fruitful. I am telling you this as an introduction to the article in *The Ministry*, which I am about to share with you.

This article is illustrated by a picture of the Islamic Center of Toledo at the top, which indicates two things: one, this Center is a point of attraction; people are fascinated by it and they like it. The tourism department, especially, likes it because it brings people to Toledo. It helps them economically. On the other hand, there are some people who hate to see this mosque. And I’ll give you my experience with regard to that.

About two months ago, a Christian priest from Bowling Green, Ohio, called me and wanted to know whether he could see me for a few minutes. I said he was welcome any time. The man came and sat with me and said, “I am a man of God and I speak the truth; I always say what is in my heart.” I replied that this is what I expect from a man of God. He said: “I pass by this mosque regularly, and when I see it, I feel

depressed and I pray for it to be moved from here. If you read the Bible, you will know that Jesus said the mountains could be moved by prayer; so, I’m following that verse in the Bible, and I would like this building to be moved from here.” He added, “Where do you want it to be moved? To India?” I said, no, if he could move it to Egypt it would be better for me because I am Egyptian. I would like it to be in Egypt, so I can have the privilege to stay with the mosque.² The man felt that I am not serious so he said:

“You are not taking it seriously but it *will* be moved.”

I said to him: “Wish you luck! We have a shed³ there that we would like to move to a location only 50 feet away and they are asking \$3000.00 for it to be moved. If you can move this huge building free, that will be fantastic!”

So this was the interchange between me and the priest who made a special trip to tell me that.⁴ In this article, by the way, they have made a mistake. They state: “In 1929 only one Islamic mosque existed in North America. Today, there are over 1200, like this one *in Michigan*.” We are not in Michigan, but in Perrysburg, Ohio. So, imagine, Detroit took it from you; *you* paid the money and Detroit took it!

The author of this article is an Arab – a Syrian Christian – and that is his picture.⁵ His name is Bassam Deeb. He is related to Salah Deeb who was a Prime Minister of Syria at one time. Bassam Deeb came here to America to study in the Evangelical seminary. He has been studying religion for seven years now, and they are preparing him, or, according to himself, he is preparing himself for a very arduous task. What is the task? To convert the estimated 6 million Muslims in the United States to Christianity.

In this article, he is criticizing the Christian ministers of America because they don’t know the Arabic language, and he is saying that, as an Arab, he knows how much the Arabs like their own language, and that when you talk to them in Arabic, it is like music in their ears. So, he suggests that they issue a magazine in Arabic to reach these people, and that they make the Bible available to them in Arabic. That is his task, and he is about to graduate from the seminary.

² Imam has laughter in his voice

³ Located on the Islamic Center land not far from the main mosque

⁴ June 1992. As of this writing, June 8, 2006, the mosque still stands

⁵ Holding it up for the audience to see

¹ 15:94

The Cold War Against Muslims Living in America

Is that scary for us? I don't think so, because, if a Muslim is truly steadfast, he will never leave his faith. But if someone is on the periphery, it is better to give him to Jimmy Swaggart. What impresses me in this article is that the people who brought him to America and are preparing him for that task are very strongly convinced that he's going to do a tremendous job. And this *could* work, and may succeed, unless we are careful, we keep our eyes open and know what our role is in a society like this. We are not interested in converting Americans to Islam, but our main effort should be focused on keeping our own generations Muslim. Are we doing this? We are not doing either!

Leave Toledo aside; go and see some other Muslim communities and you will find entire generations that are lost or, at least, have no religion. Maybe they are Muslims on their identification cards where it is written 'Muslim'; eventually, their descendants will be completely lost. People come to this country and are fascinated by the material life, and they forget their children. They feed their children's stomachs, but they don't feed their minds, and sometimes the fault is not the fault of the families only, but the fault of the Islamic institutions as well, because those institutions, sometimes, make a scary thing out of religion.

Today, 11:30 A.M., I was supposed to meet with a television announcer. The mother of this television announcer is Muslim, and she came twice this month to talk to me about her daughter. I told her to bring her daughter to the mosque so I can talk with her. The mother is from New York and she is the type of lady, who, when she came to the mosque, came attired in very, very decent clothes and even wore gloves in June. And that is how she was taught in New York. Her daughter, who is an announcer on television here,⁶ expressed her view to her mother that she is reading about Islam and that it is a good faith, but she didn't think she could do what her mother was doing; it would be difficult for her, at least from the aspect of her profession. She could not wear what her mother was wearing and go to work. And when her mother suggested that she come and meet with the Imam who would like to talk to her, she replied: "But, I have no clothes."⁷ I have no clothes of the type in which to meet the Imam." The girl,

maybe, has never seen a Muslim imam, and she visualized what a Muslim imam looks like – a big turban, a long beard, never smiling, otherwise the Day of Judgment will come early! She said that she was not prepared to meet the imam, in spite of my telling her mother repeatedly that she should just come in her ordinary clothes because she will find that even "born" Muslims are dressed like her and there is no difference. I explained to her mother that she should tell her that we don't even consider these appearances too much. We would like people to be attired very moderately: not too far to the right, or too far to the left, but in a modest way. Let her come in that modest way and we won't object. But she still had that picture in her head and, as a result, the appointment of 11:30 A.M. today was not fulfilled. It is the result of seeing her mother, and that is what I call, sometimes, very inflexible people when it comes to appearances. This comes eventually and gradually.⁸ When Islam came, it did not prohibit everything in one day and one night, but encouraged the people gradually. Liquor was not prohibited in the first year of Islam, but later on, and in several steps. All kinds of marriages were taking place before the advent of Islam, and they were not prohibited, except after a certain time *after* the establishment of Islam. So, Islam expects people to adopt its tenets gradually. But, no! We would like everything to be perfect from the first day, and from the first instance, and that is why it leads us to failure, sometimes.

I don't know if I have told you about the American guy who converted to Islam in Jeddah. The Egyptians, you know, have a sense of humor, and wherever they go they make some jokes. It is said that an American worker in the oilfields went to Jeddah and expressed his desire to become a Muslim. They took him to the Islamic court and he met with the judge who asked him to say: *Ashhadu Allah ilaha illallah wa ashhadu-unna Muhammad-ur Rasoolullah*.⁹ The judge said, now you have become a Muslim, but "there is a little something in your body that has to be cut." He meant the circumcision. So, they took him to the hospital and circumcised him, then started teaching him the prayer; he prayed; told him to fast; he fasted; give zakah; he gave two and a half percent of his check; pilgrimage; he went to Makkah and performed pilgrimage. Stop drinking. That guy was very heavy on alcohol. Three, four, five hours he

⁶ In Toledo, Ohio

⁷ Imam repeats this statement in a whisper, indicating the helplessness of her feelings. She was convinced she could only meet an imam dressed up like her mother

⁸ This "look": hijab and covered from top to toe and gloves in June

⁹ I bear witness that there is no god but one God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is his messenger

did not drink and his body started to shake and tremble. He wanted alcohol; his body wanted alcohol because it was physically dependant on it. He found *that* requirement in Islam very difficult. So, he went to the judge again and said, “Sir, I have discovered that this religion is very difficult. I have done many things that Islam required but that specific thing – prohibiting the drink – is very difficult. I cannot do it. Can I go back to being Christian again?” The judge said: “This is *ridda*¹⁰ and the punishment for that, in Islam, is to cut your neck.” The guy looked at the judge and said: “It means that anyone entering Islam is cut and anyone leaving Islam is cut.”

This is just to illustrate that we make things difficult and we don’t follow the priorities as Islam ranks them. Islam has several priorities starting with *Fard* – obligation, followed by *Wajib* – a rank lower than obligation, followed by *Sunnah muakkada* – the sure tradition of the Prophet, *Sunnah ghayr-muakkada* – a tradition of the Prophet which he used to do sometimes, and not do sometimes, *Ja’iz* – meaning possible – you could do it or not do it, it is up to you. There are ranks. And in the matter of prohibitions, also, there are ranks. *Moharram* – that which is prohibited, *Makrūh Tahreeman* – that which is “frowned upon” but it is very close to being *harām*.¹¹ Then there is *Makrūh Tanzeehan* – that which is “frowned upon” but it is closer to *halal*.¹² So, these are all ranks in Islam; sometimes we come to the lowest rank and enforce it, and we forget the top one: this is a problem in our mosques everywhere, which makes it difficult for our new children, born in this country, to be attracted to the mosque, especially because those kids have the idea that they are living in this so-called free country – at 16 years of age you are independent – father, mother cannot be in control. So, unless you make a thing lovable to the children, and attract them to a situation, you’ll lose the children, and you’ll find people are waiting outside ready to snatch them.

Thirty years ago, I met a man in North Dakota whose name was Muhammad, and he was Christian. He had never been exposed to Islam, but when he was, it was presented to him as being difficult, as something that cannot be practiced here in America. On the other hand, Jehovah’s Witnesses came offering him everything, saying that as soon as he accepts their message, he is saved; he is going to heaven in a

jet flight – a spaceship. They made it very easy, and this was thirty years ago. Fifty years, or one hundred years ago, you could teach the Qur’an and say, that is what the Qur’an says, that is what the hadith¹³ says, and the people responded “*ameen*” – no argument. Today, the people are different. You have to talk to their mind, appeal to their logic. They are looking for an answer for each and every “why”. And unless you proceed in that fashion, you’ll not be successful in your approach. That’s why I say when there is someone like our Syrian evangelist brother putting together a plan like that, it will claim some Muslims.

What attracted me in this article is that the priest is telling the seminary, in very apt language, that they are spending too much money by sending missionaries to the Muslim countries where they cannot function optimally because of the pressure of the communities and the governments restricting the freedom of the people: anyone who would like to convert is scared to death, if not from his family, then from the government, his friends, or someone else. But, he explains, God sent us fish to the United States; we have to be like the fishermen: we have 6 million Muslims in the United States, and they are like fish coming to our net, so let us work on them. Then he gave some very attractive advice, which is enumerated, and that is what attracted me most, because of the academic nature of the advice. [Imam reads from the booklet:]

1: “An adequate knowledge of Islam proves helpful in witnessing to a Muslim.”

This is advice for how to witness to someone who is a good Muslim. He is telling them not to go to a Muslim while totally lacking any knowledge about Islam. You have to know something about his faith. And this reminds me of an Egyptian priest in Detroit who wrote a book one day, and sent me a copy as a gift. He collected the verses in the Qur’an related to Jesus in one book. Some of the verses he cut in half and others he took only that half which suited him. And he avoided verses which did not serve his purpose, as for example “*qala inni Abdullah*.”¹⁴ This book is written in Arabic. When anyone who doesn’t know the Qur’an reads that book, which supposedly tells him the Qur’an is saying such-and-such about Jesus and it is written in chapter so-and-so, and verse number so-and-so, it could be very attractive to a Muslim. [Imam reads from the

¹⁰ Converting out of Islam, or apostasy

¹¹ That which is forbidden or sinful

¹² That which is permitted or allowed

¹³ A report or account of what the Prophet said

¹⁴ “Said Jesus: ‘I am a slave of God’”

booklet:]

2: “However, significant numbers of conversions have resulted from a personal witness of Christians to their Muslim neighbors. When witnessing to Muslims, remember the following suggestion: Regard your Muslim friend as an individual who is as much in need of salvation as any other human being.”

If you have ever been visited by Jehovah’s Witnesses, you may have noticed that they say they have come to “save you”. They don’t say we came to convert you, or we came to change your faith, but they say we came to “save you; you are our brother, you are our sister, and we cannot leave you in the dark, we would like you to be saved with us.” So, that is the approach. [Imam reads on:]

3: “Show genuine Christian love in words and in deed.” [Imam repeats that for the sake of emphasis, then explains:]

When you deal with your Muslim neighbors, you are to treat them in practice, as well as in theory, with Christian and brotherly love. That is opposite to what we, the Muslims, are doing. Notice that we always have a stick; we even drive some people to the mosque to pray by force in some Muslim countries. [Imam reads on, then explains:]

4: “Present Christ, not Christianity. As a system or culture, Christ is highly revered and exalted in Islam.”

So, he says, when you talk to the Muslims, don’t talk about Christianity, but talk about Christ himself because the Muslims believe in Christ and they revere him.

5: “Share your personal testimony and how, as a person, your life was radically changed by the teachings and power of Christ, and stress the crucial differences.”

That is very tactful advice, also, especially since the emphasis is to *stress the crucial differences* between the two faiths: like Jesus, Son of God, or God himself, as the Christians believe, versus Jesus the Messenger of God, as the Muslims believe. In other words, he is telling them to stress that Jesus was killed and crucified, whereas the Muslims believe he was neither killed nor crucified. In Christianity, they believe in the Trinity which consists of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – the three in one – while Muslims believe one God and no Trinity. These are the main differences which are to be emphasized according to his advice.

6: “Avoid using technological terms, which are foreign to your Muslim friends, if you must try to clarify meanings and implications.”

This means that when you are dealing with religious concepts, exactly like medical or engineering concepts, explain them rather than using complex terms. Some religious concepts, for example, *tayammum*,¹⁵ are not translatable, so, you have to explain it to clarify its meaning.

7: “Invite him to church and introduce him to your pastor. Trust the Holy Spirit to bring the lost sheep into the fold.”

This is a very important point, also. When you come to a place of worship and find it quiet and nice, it attracts you. If you go to a house of worship and find the people are beating each other with chairs because of the election – fighting over the presidency and the vice presidency – it leaves an opposite impression. So, he says, bring him to church, introduce him to your pastor, and when you are doing this be sure that the Holy Spirit is supporting you: you are doing a good thing and the Holy Spirit is with you. And the final point:

8: “Be patient. Be ready to answer your friend’s objections. Encourage him to ask questions.”

In preaching any ideas to anyone you have to be patient. We find that the Qur’an itself advised the Prophet with patience. A lot of patience is recommended. These pieces of treasured advice are in our Qur’an, but we don’t heed them and don’t use them. Don’t be angry with the one who is objecting to you, or your views, but answer him diligently and calmly. Smile at him. And encourage him to ask more questions; the more questions he asks the more it indicates that he is interested; he is coming, attracted.

Lastly, in this article they have mentioned something of which I am wary. They state that Islam is spreading in the United States as a result of waves of Muslim immigrants, and also through conversions: a lot of American people are converting to Islam because of these mosques and because of the Muslim students in the universities. The conversions – I don’t take them seriously. Nearly *every* week, I have someone here for conversion. I don’t applaud the conversions and I don’t make it easy for them. I give them a hard time by requiring a lot of study and testing, to be sure that they truly

¹⁵ See the sermon on *As-Salah – Prayer* (#5) for an explanation of this term

mean business from their hearts, because I have been deceived before, and I learned a lesson the hard way. I know that there are a lot of American girls interested in Islam, and when you dig around, you find that these girls have their eye on a certain Kuwaiti, or Saudi, or any Arab guy at the university, thinking that every Arab has an oilfield in his backyard! That is what they believe. On the other hand, there are some women who convert because they have studied Islam, are convinced, and they truly mean business in their heart. One must be very careful in this respect to distinguish between the two categories of women converts.

And I hope that it will be publicized among the Muslims everywhere in America that the harsh and tough Islam will not work here. The lenient and immoderate Islam is not acceptable to us as Muslims either, but we have to take the middle course. And that is what the Qur'an advised us to do. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that with your lives you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Messenger might bear witness to it before you” [2:143].

Salām-u-‘Alaykum wa Rahmatullah.