

# The Spirit-first Approach to Muslim Evangelism

The Spirit-first method is designed to overcome initial resistance to the Gospel because of its great appeal to Muslims. It will gain a favorable hearing to the Gospel and postpone discussion on the main objections raised by Muslims. Not only will it give a hearing to the Gospel but it will reveal the true source of their personal needs and empower them to satisfy their needs as they look to the Spirit of God.

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by S. P. Steinhaus

**M**ention the doctrine of the Trinity to a Muslim and you will probably get a debate. Speak of your faith in Jesus, and you will hear a defence of why Muslims reject his divinity. Start a discussion about the significance of the cross of Christ and you will be cut-off before you've begun.

Though the above statements are thankfully not always true, they do in fact represent something similar to what many of us have encountered when trying to share the good news with Muslims. Try as we may, seemingly the majority of Muslims just do not want to hear a gospel presentation. And the reason for it is simple: they think they know what we have to offer and they don't want it.

Due to this struggle of how to connect with Muslims, various suggestions have been advocated including the controversial idea of claiming to be a "Messianic Muslim"<sup>1</sup> or simply by avoiding debate and relying on our own personal testimonies and experiences with God. Many others have written on how to answer the perplexing Muslim apologetic questions. Nonetheless, many of us still find ourselves struggling with how to get to "first base" with a Muslim—that is, how to get their ear.

## The Spirit-first Approach

In this article I will discuss a method which I find helpful to overcome initial resistance to the gospel. Obviously, there is not one method which is the key to reaching unreached Muslims for Christ. However, from years of experience among staunch Muslims in S.E. Asia, I have found no other gospel presentation more appealing to Muslims. Since I have never heard of this idea through classes or books on Muslim evangelism, it is my desire to make it available to a broader audience with the hope that others will benefit and dialogue may proceed.

Simply put, my approach is to focus initial discussion on the Holy Spirit thereby initially postponing discussion of the person of Jesus. By first discussing the Holy Spirit, I am able to get a hearing for the gospel and to reveal the source for meeting personal needs without being immediately rebuffed by standard Muslim objections. Many times Muslims ask us, "What is your religion?" When we simply answer

"Christian," often the conversation is over. Instead of directly answering that question, I now tell them that what matters most is if we have the Spirit of God living in us, and he is the power source for us to live a life that is pleasing to God.

As I begin to discuss the Spirit, often interlaced with stories from my own walk with God and appropriate scriptures, Muslims become interested. Since I am not immediately discussing Jesus, they seem to be caught off-guard and don't feel that I am promoting "another god". I believe this approach works because Muslims have very little knowledge about the third person of the Trinity and therefore have not yet developed a standard polemic against this teaching. While we certainly cannot avoid the stumbling block of the cross, by focusing discussion on the other members of the Trinity (the Holy Spirit and the Father) we can help Muslims see the benefits of the Cross before we ever discuss it. Standard evangelistic methods usually present Jesus and his work on the cross immediately (a most con-

tentious issue with Muslims) and then only discuss the role of the Holy Spirit if a person responds. However, simply reversing this standard evangelistic order helps to open Muslims' minds and awaken their spiritual interest rather than ignite their reaction to defend Islam and attack Christianity.

Several times while talking about the Spirit with a Muslim I've been interrupted with this wonderful question, "Yes, but how does a person receive the Spirit".

Depending on the person and the circumstances, I may or may not immediately answer the question. But if I decide to go on, it is time to mention the fact that the Holy Spirit of God is just that—holy—and therefore he will never enter an unclean vessel. Usually Muslims are quick to admit that they are far from perfect<sup>2</sup> and that they, and all men everywhere, are unclean and therefore distanced from God<sup>3</sup>.

This then brings me to the necessity of being cleansed by the blood of Jesus. However, at this point in the conversation I have found that most Muslims are so interested in the Spirit that the traditional debates about Jesus as God, substitutionary atonement, etc., are not

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mentioned. And even if they are, they are not brought up in such a vitriolic manner. By emphasizing the need to receive the Spirit rather than Jesus, and by not debating our respective religious heritages, this method undercuts many of the initial problems faced in evangelistic presentation and paves the way to more open-minded thinking.

The Holy Spirit is the river of life that Jesus promised. He is the source, not only of spiritual power, but also to godly character. Freedom from anxiety, the ability to please God, increased spiritual devotion, the assurance of salvation, these are all blessings from the Spirit. And they are all things that many Muslims, both folk Muslims and Qur'anic Muslims, are seriously seeking and wanting today.

### The Holy Spirit is the Solution for Troubled Hearts.

Advertising and marketing people talk about the "WIIFM" principle of selling, that is, "What's In It For Me?" In advertising it is understood that people don't care much about your company or your product; what they care about is themselves. Therefore, the marketer's job is to demonstrate precisely how his product or service can benefit them as the customer. We must explain to them exactly what is in it for them. And unless the benefit is upfront in the sales appeal, it will likely fall flat.

It seems that this may be a basic problem in evangelizing Muslims. As Muslims look at the world, they are convinced that their way of life is better than ours. Furthermore, they believe they know our religion and they want nothing of it! After all, we're the ones who believe in three gods, who corrupted the *injal*, who eat pork, who made Hollywood, etc., etc. Therefore, if a Muslim is looking for answers to his problems, he normally will turn back to Islam for help, rather than looking outside his belief to Christianity. This is because he has already ruled out Christianity as a desirable choice, even if he has godly Christians living nearby. Thus, the challenge before us is to show them upfront what's in it for them!

Sensing this challenge, often the issue of assurance of salvation is addressed. But since Islam offers so little help in addressing the problems of this world, most Muslims are more concerned about "worldly" things than they are about eternity. They are wondering where they will find peace, how they will find a job, how they will learn to be disciplined, how they can sort out their problems, etc. This does not mean they are necessarily spiritually unreceptive or carnally minded. It is simply a challenge for use to show them how the gospel is relevant to the needs they are facing in their daily lives "where the rubber hits the road."

Arthur Glasser notes, "When the person set free by Christ meets the devout Muslim on a man-to-man basis, what surfaces is rarely the "ideal" Islam of dogma and practice. Indeed, both Christian and Muslim in that context recognize instinctively that little is to be gained through a discussion of the "*iman*" and the "*din*" (faith and religion). These are of little experiential consequence to the average Muslim. Of greater concern and preoccupation are his efforts to cope with the various acute problems and hostile forces which crowd his world and keep him from peace of mind and heart." (Glasser 1979:137)

If we consider Jesus' ministry, we see that he went out of his way to show us that by trusting in him, not by our own striving, we would experience peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (Jn. 14:27) By healing, exorcising,

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feeding, loving, blessing, talking, befriending, fishing, and by teaching, Jesus' ministry proved that peace was found by trusting in him alone. The reason Jesus taught us not to worry about life, bread and clothes is because God will take care of us if we let him, and not because these things are unspiritual. A life lived for Jesus offered eternal solutions to felt and daily needs as well as other deeper, unarticulated needs. Jesus never minimized the struggles people were facing in their everyday lives.

Consequently, as we share the gospel we must not simply jump over the troubling things in people's lives in an effort to speak to the legitimate but unarticulated need of their eternal destiny. We must show the world that the gospel is the "power of God unto salvation" and that salvation begins as soon as we trust Christ. This is no health and wealth gospel; it is a call to people to throw themselves wholly on the Saviour and trust him with their all. Only in taking his yoke upon us will we find rest for our weary souls (Mt. 11:28-30).

But that's where the trouble comes: presenting Jesus as the answer to felt needs more often than not is not heard because the name of Jesus (or *Isa*) triggers in the Muslim mind points of theological tension between Christians and Muslims rather than a bridge and a possible solution to their needs. The fallout of our 1,400 year long theological debate has created such antipathy that Jesus cannot be objectively evaluated. However, talking about the Spirit changes all of that and therefore finds a different response. Many times I've found an open door using the Spirit-first approach.

## **The Holy Spirit Meets the Need for Spiritual Power**

In the Asian country where I am currently living, syncretistic Muslims can do all sorts of strange things including fire walking, rolling in shards of broken glass, inserting knives into their bodies, etc., all without suffering harm. In an effort to understand these strange phenomena, I began asking both friends and also magic practitioners how they do such things. Usually they are quite reluctant to explain it, but in the end the answer is always the same: it is done by the power of a spirit.<sup>4</sup> When I ask them what would happen if I tried it without the invocation of a spirit, they always exclaim, "Oh don't...you'll get hurt!"

Muslim mullahs in our region are loathe to commend such practices, yet because of the exciting power demonstrated, the mullahs seem to have little ability to put an

end to them. I believe the reason for this is that the high religion of Islam does not meet the felt needs of the people, in particular the desire for power over nature. Bill Musk states, "Ideal Islam has few resources for dealing with the everyday concerns and nightly dreads of ordinary Muslims; popular Islam, on the contrary, knows an abundance of remedies (Musk 1989: 238).

Paul Hiebert and Eloise Meneses elaborate on this problem of powerlessness brought on by the failure of "high religions":

Formal or high religions often leave unanswered the questions of everyday life. How can we prevent calamities such as drought and plagues? Why did my child die so suddenly in an accident and not someone else's child? How can we guarantee success in crops or business, and whom should I marry?

People know they need to care for their bodies to be healthy and to plant their fields to produce crops. Their formal religion tells them how to get to heaven or gain nirvana. But how do they deal with the droughts, plagues, disaster and uncertainties that neither their science nor their high religion can prevent?

To deal with these problems the peasants turn to animistic beliefs and practices that they retain despite the coming of formal religions. (Hiebert and Meneses 1995: 213)

Indeed Islam offers no other source of spiritual power. It is the letter of the law without the spirit. Thus despite the fact that there has been a long-standing antipathy between the traditional spiritists and the mullahs in our area, still today nearly everyone goes to the former in times of fear, sickness, misfortune, poor harvest, demon possession, etc. This proves that the need for spiritual power of folk Muslims is not being met in orthodox Islam.

Could it be that a Biblically-informed relevant presentation of the Holy Spirit would find eager listeners among folk Muslims (most Muslims) world-wide?

### The Holy Spirit Gives the Ability to Fulfill the Law of God

Consider again the above story about people performing magical acts by the power of spirits. This has proven to be a perfect lead-in to the gospel to more orthodox Muslims in our area as well. As I tell them about my experiences seeing people do such feats (they always are familiar with these types of things already) I then apply this princi-

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ple to one's relationship with God. "So it is with God", I say, "if we try to do his will without the Spirit, we fail. It is impossible."

If the subject of magic doesn't come up, but questions about my religion do, my answer is almost the same, "What matters isn't religion, but whether or not we have the Spirit of God. If we try to do God's (Allah's) will without the Spirit, we fail. It is impossible to please God if we do not have his Spirit within us."

I have found this simple idea resonates powerfully in the ears of devout Qur'anic Muslims, not just folk Muslims. They know the struggle of trying to fulfill the letter of the law, and to stay clean before God. They have been trying for years to faithfully perform their *shalat*, and they have kept the fast for as long as they can remember. Yet there is still an inner testimony that they are unacceptable to God. They may be doing everything right but they still lack the assurance that God will find them pleasing. Moreover, they struggle with the battle against the flesh. Lust, greed, malice and other such vices rage in their hearts even though they know they should not. Yet after years of struggling against them, the battle rages on.

Paul's description of the life he lived under the Law in Romans 7 is analogous to that which every religious person faces. For Muslims who are trying to keep the law, many confess to similar spiritual battles.

Yet Paul gives the solution to such futility in Romans 8, that is living by the power of the Spirit. He writes, "...the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do, God did...in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit...The mind of a sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace. The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you" (selected from verses 2-9).

Words such as these hold great promise to a man whose religion is only one of law.

### Qur'anic Teaching about the Holy Spirit is Helpful.

Samuel Zwemer once stated, "the illiteracy of Muslim lands means that people know, not Qur'anic Islam, but popular Islam" (Musk 1978: 212). However, that was a different era. Today more and more Muslims are educated, literate and skilled in reciting and even interpreting the Qur'an. Therefore, as we discuss the Holy Spirit with Muslims today, we must also be knowledgeable about what the Qur'an teaches about the Holy Spirit. In fact it is well worth our while as the Qur'anic material overall is quite helpful.

The Qur'an mentions the "Holy Spirit" four times and the "Spirit" an additional 17 times. Many Muslims have been taught that when the Qur'an refers to the Holy Spirit or the Spirit, that it is simply referring to the angel Gabriel. However, a closer look at the Qur'anic verses reveal that it is not that simple. In fact, even the verses that can be interpreted as referring to Gabriel can also be understood by a Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. Be that as it may, the Qur'an is far from uniform in its depiction of the Spirit. For simplicity, I have grouped the Qur'anic references into four categories:

1. Those that can easily be interpreted as referring to Gabriel (Surah 16:102; 17:85; 19:17; 26:193; 40:15);
2. Those which talk of God breathing his Spirit into man during the process of creation (Surah 15:29; 32:9; 38:72);
3. Those which speak of a Spirit whose role is to strengthen and indwell Jesus and believers (2:87; 2:253; 5:110; 58:22);
4. Those that are hard to interpret (4:171; 12:87; 16:2; 42:52; 66:12; 70:4; 78:38; 97:4). The references especially problematic for the traditional Islamic interpretation (viz., Spirit = Gabriel) are 70:4; 78:38; 97:4 as well as those under category "3".

First we need to consider the following three verses:

"Whereby the angels and the Spirit ascend unto Him in a Day whereof the span is fifty thousand years." (Surah 70:4)

"On the day when the angels and the Spirit stand arrayed, they speak not, saving him whom the Beneficent alloweth and who speaketh right." (Surah 78:38)

"The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the permission of their Lord, with all decrees. (Surah 97:4)

These three verses are especially confounding, yet many still interpret them as referring to Gabriel. However, others don't see why Gabriel, an angel, would be separated from "the angels". Such commentators would say that whatever their meaning, they don't believe that they could refer to Gabriel as a possibility. Yusuf Ali, translator and commentator of the most widely used English Qur'an translation, is among those who hold this view.

However, out of all the Qur'anic verses listed above, it is the verses under "3" that are most useful to our discussion here. These are verses which seem to speak of the Spirit's role as that of an indwelling presence which strengthens the righteous.

Surahs 2:87 and 2:253 both state "we strengthened Jesus with the Holy Spirit". Then in 5:110 it is stated of Jesus, "I strengthened thee (Jesus) with the Holy Spirit so that thou spakest unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity". This verse seems to say that the Holy Spirit not only strengthens but also gives miracle working power.

But the Qur'an doesn't only depict the Spirit as interacting with a prophet such as Jesus, but also says he strengthens common believers. Note the next verse and compare with Ephesians 3:16:

"...As for such, He hath written faith upon their hearts and hath strengthened them with a Spirit from Him"-Surah 58:22

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being"-Eph. 3:16

Surah 58:22 above reads very similar to three other references which speak of Jesus being strengthened or supported by the Holy Spirit, however, it is applied generally to believers (Muslims). This expanded meaning then seems to teach that the Holy Spirit is available for every believer. Yusuf Ali, sensing this theological difficulty comments in a most amazing way in his footnote #5365 on this verse, "Here we learn that all good and righteous men are strengthened by Allah with the Holy Spirit... Whenever anyone offers his heart in faith and purity to Allah, Allah accepts

it, engraves faith on the seeker's heart and further fortifies him with the Divine Spirit, which we can no more define adequately than we can define in human language the nature and attributes of Allah."

Ironically here we see a Muslim scholar struggling with the same issue that we Christians struggle with when we are asked to explain the Trinity! However, he is struggling with it not because of the New Testament's revelation, but because of the teaching of the Qur'an!

Therefore, it seems to me that there is ample material in the Qur'an to engage any serious orthodox Muslim on the basis of his book alone. Alongside of the Qur'anic material, let us point them to a fuller understanding which only comes through the *injl*. Rather than use Qur'an 58:22 to force Muslims to try to explain how God could be "two" (God + the Divine Spirit) let us focus instead on the fact that both the Qur'an and Bible discuss the Spirit and his life strengthening power. The important issue then becomes "Do we have the Spirit? If not, how do we get him?"

## **Biblical Considerations of a Spirit-first Approach**

Can we biblically justify an evangelistic approach that emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit that initially minimizes the person of Christ? At first glance,

this seems to undercut one of the key tenets of evangelicalism. But does it really? Perhaps we should consider such an approach legitimate contextualization.

Much has been written on the subject of contextualizing the presentation of the gospel to Islam (e.g. Parshall 1980; 1983; 1989; Woodberry 1989; Dretke 1979; Kraft 1979). What we are all trying to do is to find a way to help Muslims think outside of religious categories so that they may consider the claims of Christ more objectively. That is, rather than trying to get Muslims to consider Christianity as opposed to Islam, or trying to get them to accept Jesus—a prophet they consider to have been remade into a god—could we instead initially present the Holy Spirit as the key to what they want and then later let the Spirit lead them into an understanding of the work of Christ? Such a strategy postpones or even sidesteps our clear religious differences and allows Muslims to consider what we are saying rather than simply rejecting our message out of hand upfront.

It seems to me that this is precisely the goal of contextualizing. We are not trying to deceive; we can be very open about the fact that we are Christian and that we are not trying to proselytize them to our dogma. Rather than comparing religions, we are interested in discussing the question whether a person can be acceptable to God if he doesn't have God's Spirit? This is the foundation on which we help people to begin thinking "outside the box" of religions and by so doing be open to the need of meeting and knowing Jesus. In other words, this is a way to move people towards Jesus, rather than trying to totally describe the work of Christ on the cross at the initial stages of discussion.

In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas are in Lystra. After a lame man was healed, the excited crowd assumed that the gods

Zeus and Hermes had come to them. Paul and his companions rushed out and tried to calm the crowd. What they said is recorded in verses 15-17, "Men, why are you doing this? We too are human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and seas and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy". That is the extent of the words we have recorded for us from that "sermon." Notice that nowhere in these words do we find mention of Jesus. We are not told why. Was it only that Paul didn't have time to finish his speech, or was he just trying to make one simple point, to be followed up at another time and place?

If we are looking for someone who consistently gave the whole gospel message of the salvific work of Christ to his listeners, it's hard to find anyone that we can point to in the whole New Testament. Instead, Jesus and his apostles tended to give people seeds of truth rather than the whole message at once. There were occasions where a more complete gospel was presented in one meeting<sup>5</sup>, however, these are in the minority. Especially with Jesus, we find people being given short but pointed messages that often left them puzzled. This bewilderment is apparently something Jesus was hoping for—for it could open the door to deeper thinking and consideration of truth embodied in him.

When Jesus met the rich young ruler, he let him go away "troubled" (Mt. 19:22). When Jesus healed people, he often left it at that—without a follow-up sermon. Jesus taught in parables and stories. I believe he did that in part to get inside people's heads in a way that a logical, point by point outline would never do. He was not unconcerned about people knowing the full gospel, but he seemed to desire to make people hungry for more rather than just throw "pearls before swine" (Mt.7:6).<sup>6</sup> Certainly Jesus was not compromising the gospel, but instead he was seeking to penetrate the hearts of people in ways that they could understand and that would bring them back to him for more, when they were ready.

The Bible is clear that the Holy Spirit does not seek glory unto himself but seeks to glorify Jesus (Jn. 16:13-14). In fact, the Holy Spirit is not working separately from the interests of Christ but "will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (Jn. 14:26). Thus, the Holy Spirit's role is to work in our spirits so we will be moved to listen to, believe, obey, and glorify Christ. Is this not our desire for Muslims? If we are relying on the Holy Spirit in each stage of our evangelism, can't we trust him to point those that are interested in him eventually to the Son as well?

In Acts, the single most important event in the book is the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Therefore, some have suggested that the book of Acts, with its fifty-five

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references to the Holy Spirit ought to be renamed "the Acts of the Holy Spirit" (Kane 1976: 125). Truly He is the unseen Actor providing power behind nearly everything happening throughout the book including speaking/preaching (1:8), signs and wonders (2:17), visions (7:55), directing and guiding (8:39), encouraging (9:31), anointing (10:38), appointing leaders (20:28), prophecy (21:4), etc. He is also the one who baptizes and fills believers (1:4-5; 8:16-17; 9:17) and confirms who is a believer and who is not (11:15; 15:8). He is so closely aligned with Jesus that he is called the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:7, cf. Rom. 8:9).

In fact, the Spirit's role was so central in Acts that at least one sought after him wrongly. In Acts 8, Simeon the magician desired to receive the Spirit with impure motives. He said, "Give me also this ability so everyone on whom I lay hands on may receive the Holy Spirit." But instead of receiving the Spirit, he got the sharp rebuke of Peter.

Some have suggested that this Spirit-first approach to evangelism is analogous to the situation in Acts 8. However, I do not think that a Muslim seeker who desires the Holy Spirit is in anyway like Simeon. There are at least three reasons: 1) According to Acts 8:13, Simeon had already professed faith in Christ and was baptized. This is not at all similar to a Muslim just beginning to consider an option outside of Islam. 2) Simeon was rebuked, not because he wanted to Spirit's power for himself, but in order to have this power to bestow on others. This is similar to a magician looking for a new spell to use in his shows, not a seeker looking for spiritual power to face his problems. 3) Simeon tried to buy the Holy Spirit in a monetary, physical transaction rather than a spiritual one. Apparently this was particularly irksome to Peter since it was the first part of his reply, "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!..." Suggesting that Muslims seek to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit then is not something that in principle can be likened to the account of Simeon. Instead, let us boldly proclaim to Muslims that there is a Spirit awaiting for anyone who sincerely calls upon the name of the Lord.

## In Conclusion

Discussing the Spirit and his role in our lives with Muslims should at the very least raise the question if we personally are living in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). It seems to me that we as evangelicals have under-emphasized the Person and role of the Spirit, especially in our mission efforts. This may be due in part to a desire to distance ourselves from an over-emphasis which is evident in certain wings of the church, yet it is to our loss. In fact, whenever I talk to a Muslim about the Spirit, I am reminded of my own shallow experience with him and yet God's willingness to "give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Luke 11:13). I believe this promise extends to Muslims as well.

Recently as I was talking in a restaurant to a young Muslim man, he shared openly with me about various problems he was facing. His problems were legitimate, and they had been exacerbated by the Asian economic crisis. He was looking to me for advice. I knew as he talked that his real problems were not just those he was articulating, but in fact betrayed the existential struggles of a person who doesn't have the Spirit of God living in him. If he did, the Spirit would be guiding him, counselling him, comforting him, directing him. Instead, he faced tough problems alone.

So I told him that his problems were not financial or economic or anything else but spiritual. At the core they were spiritual problems caused by a life that was spiritu-

ally empty. If he really wanted to solve these problems, what he needed was the Spirit of God.

This was something we had talked about before, but this day I decided not to cut the conversation short, but to talk to him as long as he wanted. When he asked me how to receive the Spirit, I told him plainly of his need to repent and ask God to send the Spirit to him. He told me that all he needed was peace in his heart, and if God gave him peace he would know that the Spirit had indeed entered him.

Before I arrived home he was already there waiting for me. He was freshly showered and wore a beaming smile. I knew before he even spoke what had happened. As he unfolded the details of his personal testimony to me, he told me that he asked God to prove himself to him by giving him peace in his heart. If God could replace the fear and uncertainty in his life with peace, he would know that the Spirit had truly come upon him. He got onto his knees and began repenting of his sin and begging the Holy Spirit to come in. He testified to me that day that as soon as he asked the Holy Spirit to come in, the peace came too. Instantly he started becoming a new person, even his roommates and his friends saw the change. And why not? That's exactly what he asked for.

The method I've described in this article should be seen as an entry point, a way to get Muslims to listen and to see that the gospel may have something to offer them. It's a bridge, if you will, to their world that they seem willing to walk on—rather unlike many other conventional approaches. I am not advocating any kind of trickery or easy believe-ism. I do present the "full gospel" but only after they are ready for it. In other words the Spirit-first approach is a means to get them ready for it—hungry and thirsty for the full gospel.

Therefore, this is not necessary relevant to the question of perseverance or persecution. Once they fully grasp the implications of the gospel and allow the Spirit to really control their lives, they enter the "black box". The "black box" is a term we use to refer to that nebulous period of time when we on the outside cannot ascertain whether they are "in" or "out" of the kingdom. Only God knows. Sometimes this period lasts weeks, but more often it's months or even years. This is the unfortunate reality of working with Muslims. This period often is marked by persecution and their response to it.

Some people take the "C5" approach and try to claim they are some kind of reborn Muslims. Others take a more confrontive approach and boldly attest to "having become a Christian". But no matter what approach they take, eventually the pressure comes and then we have to wait and see where they will come out. We seek to encourage, help, train and teach. But in the end, it's up to their own decision and personal walk and commitment with the Lord. I've known people that I thought would never make it out of "the black box" that have become pillars in the church, whereas others that I thought we're rock solid are now floundering so bad that I've just about lost hope.

So, my conclusion on this matter is that the "Holy Spirit Method" is just that. It's an approach or method that we can use to get their ear. But it may not be the thing that helps them persevere under persecution. I've found this approach helpful in getting around the common objections so that we can really begin to talk. What will be key in keeping their faith strong relates more to their own application of living in the Spirit.

"Zal", the new believer I wrote about in the article, is right now still in the black box! For a while (when I wrote the paper) he was a rock. Now, he's up and down. Where he'll end up God only knows. Please pray for him and others like him.

## Endnotes

1. See *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, October 1998, pp. 404-417 and *IJFM* Vol. 17:1, 2000.

2. If a Muslim contests this point, minimizing the gravity of his sin, I simply ask him how many sins Adam committed before he was thrown out of the garden.
3. It is important to avoid debate at this point on the issue of original sin. The important thing initially is to establish that we all have done things which are wrong and which have made us unclean and imperfect in God's sight.
4. Most are quick to point out that these are "good" spirits and they only use "white" magic, which is defined as magic used only for noble purposes.
5. John 3:1-21 is probably the clearest presentation of the gospel we have from the lips of Jesus. However, it is interesting to note that in this discussion with a devout religious person Jesus emphasized the Spirit and the need to receive new birth by the Spirit.
6. By "knowing the full gospel" I mean an adequate understanding of all the essential elements or teachings of the Word of God concerning the gospel, especially related to salvation and redemption in Jesus Christ by faith and obedience to him. Many of Jesus' hearers, i.e., the people of the crowds that followed him, were not ready to hear nor able to understand the essential teachings of the gospel. For that reason he spoke to them in parables. (See Matthew 13:13ff.)

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