



A LION IN THE STREET?



I was asked to write about the many different varieties of Islam that I come across from day to day. My problem is how to categorise all the different Muslims I meet. When I began witnessing to Muslims 17 years ago, every North African looked alike and 90% of them were named Muhammed. They all seemed to bring up the Trinity, Jesus not being the Son of God, his not dying on the cross and the Gospel having been changed. Today, no two Muslims seem alike. Each is an individual with a different background. There are similarities, but the differences are vast.

Many think that witnessing to Muslims is “dangerous” and therefore “you must be brave!”. If we’re talking about personal witness to Muslims in Western Europe, that is simply wrong. There is no more danger in witnessing to Muslims than there is in witnessing to anyone else. Have I ever been threatened? Have I ever felt scared? Yes, I have. But I’ve worked in inner-city areas and less affluent neighbourhoods, so that is hardly surprising – and the Muslims were far less threatening than the other characters around. Every community has its drug addicts, alcoholics, mentally and emotionally unbalanced, thugs, and so on. The Muslim community is no exception, but on the whole they respect sincere Christians. My friend was working in the North of England and was approached by some young Muslims who asked what he was doing because everyone there was a Muslim. He replied that he believed in peace and that God was a God of peace and that he was seeking to share the Gospel of how we can know peace with God. They had a good conversation together. My experience has been the same.

What about the terrorists? Have I met any? I think I probably have. Some Moroccan students I knew in Paris were very forthright in their condemnation of the West and the King of Morocco. As they saw it, taking up arms was a duty and the only truly Muslim state they respected was the Taliban in Afghanistan. But did they take up arms against me? Of course not. We spoke in depth about the Gospel and I often wonder what became of Mustafa. Did he and his friends go on to commit terrorist acts? Or did the power of the Gospel bring about a change in their hearts? I don’t know but I thank God for the opportunity given me to have witnessed of Christ. There was no “lion in the street”.

Leaving aside certain major differences, such as nationality or which branch of Islam, what are the differences which affect our daily work? There are different communities. There is the student community which we meet with when we do our monthly university book table. There are the asylum seekers, of whom there are many in our area. Then there is the local community, in our area mostly from Asia.

University students are great. Although the Islamic societies are active and many have heard and read material from Muslim Apologists like Deedat and Badawi, nevertheless they’re open to talk. They’re free from the usual pressures of family, community and, often, country. We sat drinking coffee with a Saudi from a wealthy family; his openness to talk about the Gospel was wonderful but university provided him with a unique opportunity to do that. Recently I had 3 good conversations with Muslims; that would have not been possible in their own countries. Thankfully there are groups active in





The younger generation are harder to understand. Islam has become the only identity that many are proud of. They can be passionately Muslim while living blatantly sinful lives. My neighbour at the market can talk piously one moment and then make incredibly crude comments to girls the next. His friend was discussing the Bible with us and then called to someone passing to ask if he had any drugs available. A Christian just cannot understand this mentality, but they just seek to set the scales right later on with some extra good works. Even hell is only a temporary threat for a Muslim; he will go to paradise afterwards.

To be fair, not all the younger men are like that and often the women are more pious. One friend training to be an Imam told me there is a huge problem amongst young people and he knew of hardly any who were serious about practising their faith.

witness across our university campuses. It is an exciting and profitable work.

Asylum seekers present another unique opportunity. We presently have over 10 coming to Sunday morning services, some are Muslims who now profess to be Christians. There are many more that we visit and witness to. Most have been met through our weekly market stall. They are far more complex and it is often difficult to discern spiritual interest from other understandable motives. Often, they're in desperately sad situations, devoid of security and vulnerable. In our experience, friendships made during this period have often continued after they have been granted asylum. One Libyan family we have known for years finally came to a Gospel supper last Christmas. While being wise, this opportunity is one we cannot ignore.

The local community is the group that weighs most upon my heart. In France, as in England, they are the most neglected in evangelism. They are the hardest to reach because the pressure of family and friends is enormous. No Muslim becomes a Christian within his local community without enormous pressure and probably persecution. They risk having to leave home, losing their partners and children, losing their job and even being physically abused.

There is a great mixture in the local community. The older generation often speak poor English and are difficult to reason with. Their thinking is often superstitious and simplistic. One man I visit told me he knew the earth was not old because he had only to look at the dirt in his garden! We seek to keep visiting them and leaving them with material in their own language. As they gain confidence in you it is surprising to see what they are prepared to share.



Something I have learnt is that religion does not produce love. Islamic communities have no power to overcome sins such as bitterness, hatred, dishonesty and jealousy. As with all of us, all the works of the flesh lie underneath the surface. Families are often sadly divided, many Muslims mistrust other Muslims. This has often given us an opportunity when we visit families who tell us they are totally disillusioned with their fellow Muslims. The challenge to us as Christians and churches is to be out there, being seen to be different and showing that, through the grace we have experienced in Jesus Christ, ours is a living relationship with God. ■

Kevin