

## CHRISTIANITY THE ETERNAL RELIGION -1988

Views expressed by Muslim enquirers

By Shirley W. Madany

(Note: The following article was written in 1988 for the Missionary Monthly. Out of the 250,000 letters received during 36 years of broadcasting the Word of God to the Arabic-speaking world, these selections barely touch the surface.)

It is not easy for the average Western Christian to understand the impact the Gospel can have on someone brought up in a totally Muslim environment. That person's beliefs will have been formed by centuries of prejudice and disinformation about the Christian faith.

A Muslim living in an urban area will have been hearing the call to prayer from the nearest minaret ever since birth. He or she will have heard parents, neighbors, friends, and local sheikhs talk about the superiority and finality of Islam. Such a person will have accepted, without a question, the teaching that Muhammad was the greatest prophet sent from God to all mankind.

For many Muslims, it would seem to be fruitless even to investigate the claims of Christianity. After all, they have been told that the Bible has been corrupted. Since Christianity is a redemptive religion based on the fact of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, all of which is denied in the Quran, what are the Muslims to think but that the holy book of the Christians is filled with untruths?

It is thrilling, then, to receive the following observation from a Muslim studying in another country, who has heard the good news by radio. This is how it happened and how it struck him:

In the name of the Merciful and Compassionate God.

Dear Sir, the broadcaster of Saatu'l Islah [The Reformation Hour]:

I send you the greetings of respect. I am very impressed by the programs of Saatu'l Islah. One morning, having gotten up early, I turned on the radio looking for something interesting on the short-wave bands. It was on 19 Meters that I discovered you. From that day to the present, I have become a habitual listener. What is so distinctive about your program is the fact that it is teaching me the Christian religion.

I had previously the idea that Christianity was a thing of the past and that it had already served its purpose. Whatever remained of it today was corrupt, I thought. But thanks to your broadcasts, I have come to realize that the Christian religion is the eternal religion. Everything you mention through your broadcasts has a deep connection with our life,

both present, and future. It is really a meaningful faith. I realize also that whatever I have learned from listening to your broadcasts must be just a little part of a greater whole.

This is the beauty of a teaching/preaching ministry. The broadcasts are not a bait with which to catch the attention of people in hopes of meeting them and discipling them at some future time. Rather, rightly used, radio missions are the means of teaching, preaching, and follow-up.

In a somewhat different vein, we find that sometimes the broadcasts touch the heart of a devout Muslim who has risen for his early morning prayers.

In the name of the Merciful and Compassionate God, I greet you with peace, mercy, and blessing of God.

I am one of those who listen to you from the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Early in the morning, after I perform the duties of the Prayer of the Dawn, I usually listen to the morning message of our Saudi Radio station. It happened that on Wednesday, 14/2/1408 (which is October 7, 1987), having listened to the Station of the Quran from Mecca, I was fortunate to discover, while dialing my radio on the Medium Wave band, the broadcast of the "sheikh" (official Islamic word for preacher) who was speaking about Jesus! At the end of the program he mentioned a book on meditations and prayers, which I would very much like to have. Thank you, and please accept my expressions of gratitude.

Disillusionment is a frequent theme in the Muslim world. Power and intrigue, war and hatred, and the radicalization of Islam are all uppermost in the Middle Eastern section of the Arab world. Strife in the Gulf, in Iraq and Iran, and now in Israel, as well as the uncertainty in Lebanon, is beginning to have its effect on young people who are extremely concerned about their future.

One such man in a Gulf state had our "comfort" tract put into his hands. A message based on Isaiah 40, the tract seems to strike a responsive chord in many hearts. The young man wrote:

Around me I see so much corruption and so many temptations. I personally have nothing to do with my own religion of Islam. Please rescue me. I want to know your message, and I am asking for your spiritual help. I am tired of living in this repressive atmosphere.

Another young man, who had decided to follow the new wave of radical Islam and join the forces of Khomeini in Iran, was completely disillusioned by the reception he received when he got to that country. First he lost his passport. Then he was robbed of his money. After other misfortunes, he began to take a different look at the whole situation. His fervor cooled and he wrote descriptively of his change of mind.

Young people seem to be fearless in their criticism of their environment. In many Arab countries unemployment is shockingly high, and this is true also in the youthful population. These young people are very concerned about spiritual matters. This is a definite contrast to many young people of the Western world who have turned their backs on God. For example, note this excerpt from a letter:

I send greetings to all those in charge of Saatu 'l Islah. Let me begin by thanking all of you for preparing these programs of reformation. They are very important to the young people of today. We are suffering from psychological and intellectual disintegration.

Frankly, I find myself extremely attached to your program. You see, I am a university student, and I believe your program is guided by objectivity and seriousness. It is also free of empty platitudes and false slogans. Please accept my gratitude.

Letters reveal so much when they come from an Arab culture. The opening greeting immediately shows whether the person is a Muslim or a Christian. Usually, a Muslim begins his letter from the opening verse of the first chapter in the Qur'an. Christians begin their letters by invoking the name of the Holy Trinity.

Letters also reveal the important role, which friends play in the writer's life. Note how this person was brought to hear the Gospel by the suggestion of a friend:

Greetings to my beloved broadcast. I am so happy to be one of your listeners. A friend of mine helped me to discover this broadcast, which spreads the Christian religion. He had talked to me about the virtues and qualities of Christianity. I owe so much to him. By the way, he is encountering many difficulties in his spreading of the Christian message (so much intolerance).

What I find in your broadcast is a feeling of comfort that comes over me when I listen. Please send me all of your tracts except No. 1 that I already have, and which attracted me so much. (This was another reference to Isaiah 40 and our tract, "Comfort in a Comfortless World.")

The next letter reveals the excitement felt by a listener who is discovering the contents of the Bible through our broadcasts. Remember, the writer is hearing Scripture for the first time in his native tongue:

I have become a habitual listener to Saatu'l Islah. This rich program helps us to approach God in a reverent way. I appreciate so much the voice of the broadcaster, which is clear and strong. So please keep on broadcasting. May the Lord's hand be with you-that powerful hand which you mention so often in your lessons over the airwaves.

I have been so blessed with your program that I refuse to leave the house in the morning without hearing it. I knew nothing about the Lord, the Messiah. I simply knew nothing of the stories of the Triumphal Entry of the Messiah into the Holy City, or the Feast of the Passover. I knew nothing of the Bridegroom who comes "as a thief in the night." I had never heard in my life about the Wise and Foolish Virgins! Certainly, this is a most important program and I am positive that it has a great response in all the lands of the Arabs. Its success will depend upon the blessing of the Lord, the Messiah.

Please accept me as one of your friends.

As the broadcasts could be picked up in Europe as well, we receive mail from students and immigrants living there. Here is a moving letter from a Muslim studying in East Germany. His comments should encourage all of us. We may not be aware of the fact that our very body language can be a witness for the Lord! Here is the letter:

In the name of the merciful and compassionate God

I send you my best greetings, you people who are spreading the truth in a world filled with wrongs and wars. May the great Creator help you and give you success as you spread His love and peace.

I was so happy to discover your program on the air. I appreciated the fact that you mentioned your address at the end of your program. I took a piece of paper immediately to write to you. I just hope that this is only the first in a series of letters to you as I need help to solve my spiritual problems.

I am studying medicine here in East Germany and attempting to learn German. The majority of the people around me are unbelievers and communists who deny the very existence of God. And yet there are some people who have been led to the truth and it appears on their faces as brightly as sunshine. I often go to the public square of this city, where there is a big church, just so that I can catch a glimpse of their shining faces. I am convinced from the bottom of my heart that there is a great secret behind the light that shines from their faces. One day I hope to discover what it is. Maybe then I would arrive at the Truth. This is my goal in life-to discover the true Truth. How I am hoping that you can help me to reach this goal!"

May God bestow upon you his blessings, may you succeed, and may your life be filled with happy days.

Surely the Christians of East Germany were witnessing to their faith even more than they were aware. The letter was signed: "A person who is looking for Truth."

Speaking of body language, how well we remember the overall impression of darkness that seemed to emanate from a normal restaurant scene in Casablanca, Morocco. When we returned to Spain we looked around us at the happy families out for a late evening together and could not help comparing them with where we had just been. In Morocco, a restaurant would have had only male customers, with no women or children in sight. The contrast was striking.