

MUSLIM WOMEN, the SUPERNATURAL, the OCCULT and POWER ENCOUNTER

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1. Introduction: revealed religion and folk religion

Miracle and the supernatural are part of the cosmologies of both Christianity and Islam. The greatest miracle in Islam is the Qur'an. In Christianity, the greatest miracle is the resurrection of the incarnate, living word, the Lord Jesus Christ. At some points, the religions which claim to be revealed degenerate into folk religion. The serpent of brass, made by Moses at God's command in the wilderness (Numbers 21:4-9) later became an object of worship, which had to be destroyed during King Hezekiah's reformation. (2 Kings 18:4). Jeremiah was ordered to condemn the mechanical reliance of the people on the presence of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. They regarded the Temple as a kind of automatic insurance policy guaranteeing their protection and that of the city. (Jeremiah 7:4). In Judaism, Christianity and Islam practices sometimes show deviations from the ideal as set out in their respective scriptures. There are magical uses of the names of God. Bibliolatry or the worship of the book and bibliomancy or the magical use of the book replace the proper reading of the inspired books. Charms and excessive veneration of saints replace reliance on God.

Both men and women, the illiterate and the educated are involved. Benazir Bhutto in her autobiography *Daughter of the East* relates that before leaving Karachi in 1969:

"I stood in the carved wooden doorway...while my mother passed my new Holy Qur'an over my head. I kissed it. And together we left for the airport to fly to the United States."[1]

Before her father's execution he had urged her:

"Go to pray at Lal Shahbaz Qalander...I never got there last Eid'. Lal Shahbaz Qalander. One of our most famous saints. My grandmother had gone to pray at his shrine when my father became very ill as a baby and nearly died. Would God be able to hear a daughter's prayer for the same person?"[2]

The Qur'an condemns witchcraft.(surah 113:4). However, it makes no categorical condemnation of the occult such as is found in Deuteronomy 18:10-12. The Qur'an even hosts some of the animist practices prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia, e.g. surah 56:75 where there is a reference to astrology. The adoration of the sun and moon is forbidden in the Qur'an. (Q 41:37).

2. Miracles at shrines

I once went with a group of students to the shrine of Sufi Qamar Ali Darvesh at Shivapur, a village near Pune in India. We watched the phenomenon of the levitating rocks. Two large round boulders lay close to each other. We saw the larger weighing about seventy kilogrammes raised through the power of the saint to a height of nearly two metres. Eleven men using only an index finger each called in unison on the name of the saint and so raised the boulder for several minutes. Muslims, Hindus and Christians come in their hundreds each day to the shrine partly because of this miracle and partly to find healing through using the water of the nearby spring and by praying to the saint. In my estimation such miracles and such healings do not come from God. Here I would endorse what John White says in a recent book:

"Demonic power is nothing more than divine power corrupted. Water that is dangerously polluted does not cease to be water and may still look like, and even sometimes taste like pure water. So devilish miracles will deceive 'even the very elect'".[3]

Satan will appear 'as an angel of light'. Hell's power will, however, be progressively enslaving and end in death and destruction, while God's power will be redemptive, vivifying, cleansing, freeing and restorative." (2 Corinthians 11:14). Many people have problems grasping that what is or appears miraculous may have a source other than God.

3. Relics

In such a centre of orthodoxy as the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan, I have visited the exhibition of twenty-seven relics which attracts both Sunnis and Shias. One can see displayed behind glass Muhammad's walking stick, three of his sandals, his underwear, his banner with magic squares on it, Fatima's handkerchief and prayer-mat, and dust from the battle-field at Karbala. Some of the viewers get as near as possible to the relics by rubbing the glass with their hands and then rubbing their faces to transfer the blessing from the relic to themselves. Others especially the Shias are moved to tears as they see the dust from Karbala where Ali's son Hussain was martyred.

4. Exorcism

In Muscat, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman, I have heard Muslim exorcists at work for hours in the evening and earlier part of the night casting out evil spirits. To listen to the chanting of the exorcists and the shrieks of the afflicted is an eerie and chilling experience. The crucial matter in Christian exorcism is diagnosis. Without being sure that exorcism is needed it is unwise to proceed. Generally, it is wise to work with two or three others in a team. In

my contribution to *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*[4] I have dealt with the subject in some detail. However, here is another case study that occurred after I wrote that chapter. I was visiting a small Christian hospital in the Middle East. The Arab Medical Director of the hospital had invited me for a few days to give some Christian teaching. When I arrived he also requested me to help by joining the small team involved with a demonized nominal Christian woman. The team comprised of the husband who was a committed believer, a psychiatrist and the Medical Superintendent. We met the woman that evening in the church. I asked to be allowed to interview her through a translator and make my own diagnosis. It soon became apparent that she was not yet 'born of the spirit'. I tried unsuccessfully to help her see her need of Christ and his saving power.

After a while, I told the translator that I would pray for her but in English so there was no need for him to translate. She knew no English. I prayed aloud for about ten minutes but when in my prayer I quoted Isaiah's word about the cross of Christ "by his stripes we are healed", the woman who had been quiet and normal until this point lost all self-control and behaved in a demented manner. Her husband and the doctor carried her from the pew to the chancel and it took three people to hold her down. I was convinced that their diagnosis was correct and that she was demonized. The demons, and there were several, could not stand the mention of the blood of Christ. I then tried to find out how and when they had entered her. Apparently, her parents had taken her on one occasion to a Muslim shrine for some specific spiritual purpose. Her trouble seemed to have dated from then. We struggled with her and the evil powers for three hours each evening. She was not delivered during my visit but some months later I heard of her deliverance and of her new life in Christ. Praise be to God.

5. The cleansing of buildings

I have stayed in quite a number of buildings that Muslims claimed were inhabited by evil spirits. Our experiences confirmed these claims. Muslims sometimes refuse to rent buildings for their own use, which they perceive to be the dwelling place of evil powers. Spirits generally inhabit a particular part of a building. The cleansing of a building by the power of Christ can be a convincing testimony to Muslims. It should also be noted that Christians have sometimes undermined their own ministries by not cleansing a building before dedicating and living in it. "The Christian's home or 'tent' must ever be holy ground, even although all around be evil, for the Embassy is privileged land and here the Ambassador enjoys extra-territorial rights".[5] We never know what has occurred on the land on which a house is built, nor in what ways the builders have appeased evil spirits as they built. Maybe they made an animal sacrifice before laying the foundations. Sometimes previous owners or tenants have practised magic or some occult activity. I was involved in the cleansing of a house in which a fortune-teller had lived for some years. There were weird markings in paint in unexpected places and a feeling of oppression in certain areas of the house. It is interesting that the next tenant who was a Christian who knew nothing about the history of the house and the service of cleansing remarked how the house seemed so full of peace and the presence of the Lord.

Sometimes a place is influenced adversely by the environment or those who visit. A quiet service of cleaning including casting out, praise and prayer might be needed. Recently, one of my friends wrote:

"The house-warming we discussed took place two days ago. Alan, our Rector, prayed so beautifully, thinking first about houses Jesus was invited into in the New Testament. Then he went on to think about not only my house, but all the houses in the Avenue. There were fourteen of us, just enough to sit comfortably... Although not

many of my neighbours were there, I have a lot of openings into houses as a result."

6. Black magic

In a Punjabi village in Pakistan my two companions and I experienced the full force of black magic practitioners. I have described this in my book *Christ Supreme over Satan*. Each evening after a day of ministry in other villages, we returned to the one-roomed house which was our base for ten days. We ran an evening service for the Christian community about twenty of whom came and sat in the courtyard. Beyond the courtyard in the village square hidden by the darkness up to two hundred Muslims used to listen in - a silent, voluntary, hidden congregation. This probably enraged the practitioners of black magic. Sudden illness, nightmares, shapes in the darkness, a scorpion at the head of the bed, strange knockings and peculiar bloodstains with unnatural patterns - all this and more. God demonstrated his power by instant healing, keeping one of the three of us always watching and praising God, a wall of light marking a compound across the square where devil worship was practised and the banishing of fear as we all prayed together. (Zechariah 2:5). The exercise of our Christ-given authority of binding the power of Satan sometimes frees the way for the proclamation of the gospel and the practitioners of black magic can be rendered ineffective. (Matthew 18:18; Mark 3:27).

7. Illness, healing and prayer

Sometimes illness is directly satanic in origin as it was in the case of Peter's mother-in-law when Jesus rebuked the fever and she was immediately healed. (Luke 4:38-39). Jesus has given us authority to deal with illness of satanic origin in a similar way in his name. The satanic element in illness can be eliminated the most easily. Strangely, we often consider it as the last option. Often the reasons

for illness are complex. Sometimes healing comes through prayer and treatment. In this too Jesus gives us an example. (Mark 8:23-25). Healings often give further opportunities for sharing the gospel with the patient and the family. Sick Muslims are often grateful for the prayers of their Christian friends. If the patient is not healed it is no dishonour to the name of Jesus and if he or she is healed the Muslim is generally open to learning more about Jesus.

8. Visions and dreams of Christ

There are many accounts of Muslims having had visions or dreams of Christ. Seppo Syrianen in his limited survey in Pakistan discovered that the hearing or reading of scripture, the love of Christ seen in a person and visions or dreams of Christ were the three main influences in bringing Muslims to Christ. Over half of those he interviewed had such visions or dreams. We can pray for Muslims to have visions or dreams of Jesus the Son of God. One veteran missionary to Pakistan wrote in a letter dated March 2, 1994: "The 27th night of the month of Ramadan or Ramzan is very special to Muslims. They ask God for special revelations that night. He sometimes appears to some of them telling them about Jesus, the Lamb of God." At least 35% of all recent Turkish conversions were probably in response to dreams and visions of Jesus as the Son of God. In many other Middle Eastern countries people have had dreams in which they are instructed to search for and read the Christian scriptures. It has been noted that when they have found the written Word (often in remarkable ways) the dreams and visions cease. If someone came to you and said that he or she had had a vision of Christ, what would you say? The main point is not to try and establish whether the experience is from God or some other source but to point that person to the Jesus of the Bible. The real Jesus is to be found in the scripture.

9. Charms or amulets

Charms generally contain the names of God, or verses from the Qur'an or their numerical equivalent. Charms can also be eaten or drunk and sometimes increase the person's bondage to Satan. Even Christians can be enslaved unwittingly. I sometimes ask someone wearing a charm round the neck what is in it and on hearing that it is a verse I ask whether the wearer thinks that God prefers his word around our necks or in our hearts. The answer is always in our hearts. I then offer to teach a word of God to put in the heart e.g. Romans 5:8. I have never met a Muslim woman to whom I quoted this verse who was worried about its theology even after I had explained it carefully.

10. Curses and the evil eye

Several of my committed Christian friends have been severely affected by curses generally in the form of illness and depression for months or even years until they or someone else has detected and broken it by Christ's power. Many Muslims are afraid of the evil eye. We can share how God helps us to deal with fear and how he guides us with his eye. (Psalm 32:8).

11. Conclusion

After over forty years of living, working and travelling in the Muslim world I have concluded that Quranic Islam and folk Islam are inextricably linked especially in that the Qur'an seems to host animism. Unquestionably there is evidence of Satanic activity in folk Islam. There is a need to pray for the breaking of the bonds and the release of the captives among the people of the mosque and the shrine. In ministering to Muslims we are involved in areas of spiritual warfare against Satan who certainly manifests his power in counterfeit miracles, the supernatural and the occult. But Satan's use of the supernatural is only part of his strategy. The New Tes-

tament gives more emphasis to Satan's attack through human frailty than to his use of the supernatural. (Galatians 5:19-21). All Christians are, therefore, involved in spiritual warfare as it is not a warfare which focuses only on the supernatural manifestations of evil. However, we especially need to seek God 's protection before becoming involved in power encounters.

Renouncing the devil and all his works was often part of the early baptismal formulas of the church. In some places, baptism was followed by the administration of the oil of exorcism. The lack of a deliberate renunciation of the devil may account for why some converts revert to Islam. They were never fully set free. We might reflect on the Biblical evidence that unbelievers need release from bondage and why the declaration of Christ as liberator is generally more meaningful to the Muslim than the promise of the assurance of the forgiveness of sins.

Teaching always, and signs and wonders sometimes, should be the general pattern of our ministry as it was for Paul. (Romans 15:18-19). The guidance, filling and anointing of the Holy Spirit are the requisites for an effective ministry to Muslims and all people. We rely not on our methods and rituals but on the power of the living, triune God.

[1] p.45.

[2] p.142.

[3] *Greater than Riches*, IVP, 1992, p.155.

[4] Chapter 17 *The Practice of Exorcism and Healing*.

[5] Mildred Cable and Francesca French, *Ambassadors for Christ*, extract from the chapter entitled *The Splendour of the Embassy*, pp.152-54.

