

## INTERVIEW WITH FATHER ZAKARIA BOUTROS

*By Bob Blincoe*<sup>1</sup>

*Bob Blincoe, Ph.D., interviewed Father Zakaria Botros in May 2009. Father Botros is a Coptic priest who became an expert in Islam. He uses his television show, books, and website to answer questions about Islam posed by Muslims and Christians.*

*What follows is a live interview; only repetitions and minor grammatical errors have been edited. Bob says, “The Kurdish believers in northern Iraq hold Father Botros in high esteem.” Noteworthy is Father Botros’ surprising opinion—“Be as you are”—to Muslims who put their faith in Jesus Christ.*

**Bob Blincoe:** We are with Zakaria Botros, our honored guest. You are our teacher and the subject is Islam. This morning’s newspaper has an unpleasant article.<sup>2</sup> It says, “Saudi girl, 8 years old, was married to a 50-year-old man.” Recently she was granted a divorce from him. I quote: “An 8 year old Saudi girl has divorced her middle-aged husband after her father forced her to marry him last year, her lawyer said Thursday. Saudi Arabia has come under increasing criticism at home and abroad for permitting child marriages.” Of course we are all more than disturbed by this story. We are disgusted. It’s an outrage to every sensible person. But is child marriage a fundamental principle of Islam or is there the possibility that Islam could turn its back on this terrible practice?

**Fr. Zakaria:** That’s a good question. You know that for twenty-five years Mohammad was married to only one wife. She was called Khadija. She was older than he by about twenty-five years. And she was very rich. He was married according to the Christian law of marriage – one woman—because a priest of Mecca was a Christian but adhering to a cult called Ebionism, performed the marriage for Muhammad and Khadija according to the Christian law.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bob Blincoe served overseas in Thailand (two years) and the Middle East (seven years). He became US director of Frontiers in 2000.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.canadaeast.com/rss/article/652415>

But after Khadija died, Mohammad married thirteen wives – some died, some he divorced. In all he had 66 women, and one of them was a young child - Aisha. She was six years old when he married her. Six years old, and he had sexual intercourse with her after she became nine years old. So, “like prophet, like people.” They are following his steps. So that is very shameful, very shameful.

**Bob:** The next question I want to ask is about the Islamic teaching about al-dhimmi. This is the practice of treating Christians and Jews as second-class citizens. Is this a permanent unchangeable doctrine of Islam, and what has been the Coptic experience of dhimmi in Egypt?

**Fr. Zakaria** It’s very generous for Muslims to treat Christians and the people of the book — Jews and Christians — as second-class citizens. It’s very generous because the Qur’an Sura 9:5 says, “Kill them.” In their translation in the Qur’an to English they choose some beautiful words instead of the hard words. But the Arabic says, “Slay!” Slay those people who do not believe in God and Muhammad and his prophet/message. But when they translate it to English they say “Fight.” But, in Arabic it means, “Kill!” because it is from the verb qatilu, “Kill!”, not “fight.” So they have this verse to kill the people of the book who do not believe in Allah and his messenger Muhammad. But the verse says, “Kill them until they pay heavy taxes (jiziyah).” If they pay, leave them and treat them as second-class citizens.

**Bob:** I’d like to ask about the Shi’a doctrine of temporary marriage, al-mut’ah.

**Fr. Zakaria:** Yes. Actually, this is a verse in the Qur’an. “Give them (women) their wages while you enjoy sex with them.” And Mohammad applied this to himself and all of his followers. But the third caliph, Omar, stopped this. But the Shi’a do not follow the Caliph Omar, so they did not abrogate the verse. “Who is the Caliph Omar, to cancel the word of God?” But in Sunna, there are about 17 kinds of marriage. A male writes a female privately a paper, “I give myself to you.” And she the same; that is a marriage that lasts for ten minutes or half an hour. And he agrees to pay a

certain amount. And this is “zawaj al-urfi,” a paper marriage. Another kind of marriage: when you are on a holiday and you find a woman there, a man can marry her for a month, or any length of time, and marry her on paper. There is more about this on my website.

**Bob:** Honor and shame are important principles in the Arab culture. Can you help us to understand “honor” and “shame” in the Arab culture?

**Fr. Zakaria:** Honor is like “pride” in the Arab culture. It is like when a man has a daughter, when his daughter is unmarried and has sexual relations, her father is ready to kill to restore his honor. The society will allow the killing in order to restore his honor.

**Bob:** When you lost your brother, what helped you to love and honor Muslims instead of fearing and despising them?

**Fr. Zakaria:** That is a good question. When I lost my brother, I was not a true believer; I was overcome with sadness and grief when



Muslims tore out his tongue for preaching the gospel. But when I became a Christian, I discovered that these people are victims of the doctrines of Mohammad, who told his followers to kill Christians. So I had pity on them, and I began to pray for them, that they be delivered from their satanic religion. And in time

God gave me a ministry to rescue them from darkness and bring them to Christ.

**Bob:** In this office, our ministry is praying to God to send out laborers into His harvest. Our message is that Americans should sell their possessions and leave all that they know to make disciples in the Muslim world. What advice do you have for us to prepare us to go?

**Fr. Zakaria:** We have to follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. When God wanted to save people, He came as a man to live among us, to feel what we feel, to share life with us. So, if any person wants to serve God and reach Muslims, he should “incarnate” as a Muslim. He should adopt his language, his culture, his way of thinking. He should learn the lifestyle; speak Arabic to Arabs. Arabs have a stumbling block; they hate the foreigners, because it reminds them of the invasions of the West; the French into Syria and Lebanon, Italy into Libya, the British to Iraq and Egypt and Jordan. Islam is not just a religion; this is a misunderstanding in the West. You think that Islam is like Judaism or Christianity or Buddhism, so we give Islam lots of opportunities to grow in the West. No, Islam is a State, and religion is a factor to establish this state. It is a Kingdom, the Kingdom of Islam. Non-Muslims in their country are invaders. The invaders brought missionaries with them.

So, if you want to reach Muslims, it’s a very hard thing, but we are obliged to do that. We are obliged to learn their habits and their language and to adopt their culture, as God did, when He came as a man and spoke as a man, and lived among them, and behaved like them. So I think any missionary should know that he is not preaching his culture, but He is preaching Christ. Samuel Zwemer wrote a book analyzing why the West failed in its mission to succeed among Muslims. He said that we have too much preached our culture and too little preached Christ. St. Paul said, “I became a Jew for the Jews, a Gentile for the Gentiles, in order to win them.”

**Bob:** We look at Matthew 10 and Luke 10 where Jesus sent out His disciples, and sent them out to find the “man of peace.” Jesus said, “When you find the man of peace, stay with him.” We are trying to understand what Christ means to find the “man of peace” or the “woman of peace” in the Muslim world, that is, to find the influential believer through whom many, many more Muslims will come to faith. Would you comment?

**Fr. Zakaria:** Yes. This is Biblical teaching. It’s good. It’s right. But all missionaries have to learn the right words in order to reach

Muslims. It is good for Americans to go and preach, but success depends on learning, learning, learning.

**Bob:** Our ministry at the US Sending Base is praying to God to send out laborers into His harvest. Our message is that Americans should sell their possessions and leave all that they know to make disciples in the Muslim world. What advice do you have for us to prepare us to go?

**Fr. Zakaria:** It is good for Americans to go and preach, but success depends on learning, learning, learning.

**Bob:** We believe in starting churches of Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). That is, we accept a cultural difference between historical churches and Muslims, and we promote the gathering of Muslims, after they believe and worship God through Jesus Christ, with like-minded people, based on the decision of the Jerusalem Council, Acts 15:19, “Let’s not make it difficult for the Ethne/Gentiles who are coming to faith.” What do you think of starting churches of Muslim-Background believers, with elders appointed from a Muslim background, elders who see their identity as people who are culturally Muslims?

**Fr. Zakaria:** Yes. This exists. I want to say that there are MBBs in every Arab country. And this idea is a good idea; I know many MBBs in Arab countries and here in the West. I think this is very important because Christian churches are afraid to accept MBBs into their congregations. The churches are afraid of the Muslim governments. The church leaders will whisper to the MBBs, “Don’t make trouble for us; don’t come back.”

The only thing that I want to say is that we have to take care not to divide the body of Jesus Christ: “These are MBBs; those are Protestants; these are Catholics; those are Orthodox.” We need to be united. Yes, it may be that there are many denominations, but we have to be united in love, together, because we are the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. We are one. So it is good to make local churches of MBBs; only take care not to divide the body of Jesus Christ.

**Bob:** And this problem of unity is one we have yet to solve in our movement; we have not thought through how to make true our faith in the one body of Christ.

I want to ask you ask you about using the Qur'an in order to bring Muslims to the truth of Jesus Christ. Some of us are open to using the Qur'anic references to Jesus and the Bible and to "people of the book" in order to find "common ground." What is your opinion of this approach?

**Fr. Zakaria:** It is good to take this approach. We have to start with what they know and what they will accept, and move them gradually to the full light. So I use that style and method. I take some quotations from the Qur'an or the hadith in order to reach that person. So, that is good.

**Bob:** In the Qur'an we see that Jesus' disciples are called "Muslims." Is it possible that Muslims, after coming to faith in Jesus Christ, and submitting to the Bible, will still refer to themselves as Muslims?

**Fr. Zakaria:** This is a good question. I encourage that in my ministry. Why? Because Muslims don't care if any Muslim becomes an atheist, or denies God, or undermines Mohammad. They don't care. But if any Muslim becomes a Christian, ah! No! They kill him. Why? Here is an example from the soccer clubs of Cairo. There are two main soccer clubs, "Al-Ahli" and the other, "Zamalik." They don't care if a member of one club changes to another club, but if one from Al-Ahli goes to Zamalik, then they want to kill him. These are the enemy clubs. Muslims look to Christianity as their enemy. Better to become an atheist! But don't convert to Christianity. What do I do in order to avoid this? And how have we reached many Muslims with the gospel? I tell them, "Be as you are! Muslims! Or remain Buddhists! Or what you are!" We are not preaching a religion, or Christianity. We are preaching a man: Jesus Christ. Be a Muslim, and accept Jesus Christ only; he will lead you in the way.

**Bob:** Muslims oppose the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, but in your book *God is One*, you refer to the Qur'an to support the Christian Trinitarian belief.

**Fr. Zakaria:** Yes. There is one verse in the Qur'an that says Jesus Christ is the Word of God and the Spirit of God (Surah 4:171). So, this is our key. God has a Word and has a Spirit. It is also true, as the Muslims say, that Jesus is a messenger from God, and this speaks of Jesus' humanity. But then we have this reference in the Qur'an to Jesus as the Word of God and the Spirit of God, so you can use this verse.

**Bob:** Few of your Muslim listeners know their religion as well as you do.

**Fr. Zakaria:** Even if the Muslim has no formal knowledge of Islam, he knows many things about the differences between Christianity and Islam. He knows that Christians are "infidels." So I simplify my words, to tell the truth simply, so that any Muslim can come to the truth. Even the poor Muslims have satellite dishes on the roofs, and they can follow our lessons.

**Bob:** What truths about Islam help wake up the Muslims? What are the most surprising, shocking teachings in Islam that make Muslims want out of Islam?

**Fr. Zakaria:** As we have experienced our ministry over the years, the most effective thing is the Islamic doctrine of breast-feeding adults. "What!" they react, "No, we don't have this doctrine." But they do, and we show it to them in their books. On a television show, a sheikh of al-Azhar admitted that this teaching is valid in Islam. That is, it is legal for a woman to breast-feed any man, in order to sit privately with him. This was a shock for all Muslims. So we send inquirers the TV episode of the sheikh of Al-Azhar.

One story: A young man came to talk about this story. His father was a sheikh in Sweden. The young man went to ask his father.

"Why do you ask?" said his father.

"There are people who say that we have this story."

“Don’t listen to those people.”

“But I want to understand my religion.”

The father denied the story. But the father went to his room to study, and closed the door, and stayed two weeks, and studied for himself. His wife brought him food and water. And after two weeks, he opened his door. The father passed by the son, who watched as his father threw all his books into the trash. Then the father came to the son, and hugged him.

“Thank you, my son.” And the father and mother and their son and others in the family were all baptized on one day. And they bought some cakes to celebrate. But the father’s brother heard of this, and challenged him.

“What did you do?”

“We were baptized.”

“You became a Christian!”

“Yes, today.”

The father’s brother took a knife and killed his brother on the spot. The killer was arrested and jailed. The dead man’s son visited his uncle, the killer. “I forgive you,” said the nephew. “My father is in heaven, but I pray that you will not go to hell.” In time the uncle too was baptized in prison. Praise the Lord.

**Bob:** Thank you. We will close the meeting here.

**Fr. Zakaria:** God bless you and bless your ministry. Jesus Christ is very happy that many workers are preaching the gospel to lost people. God bless you more and more.