

The Supernatural in Islam and Christianity

Vivienne Stacey, 22 October 1990

1 INTRODUCTION

According to T.C. Hammond, 'The Bible depicts God as sustaining and governing the whole natural order, and does not draw a complete distinction between His normal providential direction and His miraculous activity.' . Miracle and the supernatural are part of the cosmologies of both Christianity and Islam.

2 MIRACLES IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

2.1 *The greatest miracle in Christianity*

The greatest miracle in Christianity is the resurrection of the incarnate, living word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal God revealed himself finally to man in a person – the eternal living word Jesus Christ. John 1 v. 14

The purpose of this revelation was that Jesus might be revealed in the believer, Galatians 1 v. 16, and that he might know God, 2 Corinthians 4 v. 6. Commenting on this last verse, Professor RVG Tasker wrote: "Conversion was to Paul a miraculous new birth, a constantly recurring display of God's creative and redemptive power. The only adequate parallel to the penetration of the darkness of the sinful human heart by the kindly light of God's grace was the dispersal of the darkness that originally covered the face of the deep by the divine fiat, 'Let there be light' Genesis 1 v. 3."

2.2 *The greatest miracle and in Islam*

The greatest miracle in Islam is the Qur'an. According to early Sunni theologians God has an eternal essence and seven divine attributes. One of these attributes is speaking. A speaker must have a speech. The Qur'an is the speech of God in his

eternal quality of being a speaker. It is the eternal speech of the eternal God. The Qur'an as the word of God is neither identical with his essence nor separate from it. The prototype of the Qur'an is in heaven, written in Arabic on the "preserved tablet". Surah 85 v. 22. This is the "mother of the book". Surah 13 v. 39. It was revealed by the angel Gabriel piecemeal to the prophet Muhammad who wrote it down or got it written down. The eternal God has thus revealed his will to men in the eternal book.

The purpose of this revelation was that man might know God's requirements and instructions so as to obey them. Man was created to worship and obey God. Surah 51 v. 56 and surah 11 v. 7.

3 REVEALED RELIGION AND FOLK RELIGION

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, later became an object of worship which had to be destroyed during King Hezekiah's reformation. Numbers 21 vv. 4-9 and 2 Kings 18 v. 4. Jeremiah was ordered to condemn the mechanical reliance of the people on the presence of the Temple of God. Jeremiah 7v. 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 (the worship of the book) and bibliomancy (the magical use of the book) replace the proper reading of the inspired books. Charms and excessive veneration of saints replace reliance on God. Not only the illiterate and untaught 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 Quran over my head. I kissed it. And together we left for the airport to fly to the United States.” P45. 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?” P142. Bill, Musk in his recent book *The Unseen Face of Islam*, gives many descriptions of the folk practices of ordinary Muslims. It is the ‘supernatural’ in the practice of folk religion that absorbs the attention of many Muslims. Out of the mass of material, I purpose to stress that in which I have had some personal experience.

4 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF WHAT I HAVE OBSERVED OF SUPERNATURAL IN ISLAM

The Qur’an condemns witchcraft. Surah 113 v. 4. However, it makes no categorical condemnation of occult such as is found in the Bible in Deuteronomy 18 vv. 10-12. The Qur’an even hosts some of the animistic practices prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia, eg. Surah 56 v. 75.

4.1 Miracles at shrines

I once went with a group of students to the shrine of the 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 about 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 praying to the saint.

4.2 Exorcism

In Muscat, the capital of the Sultanate of Oman, I have heard Muslim exorcists at work for hours casting out evil spirits.

4.3 Relics

In the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan, I have visited the exhibition of twenty-seven relics which attract 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 battlefield at Karbala. Some of the viewers get as near as possible to the relics by rubbing the glass and then rubbing their faces to transfer the blessing from the relic to themselves. Others are moved to tears as they see the dust from Karbala.

4.4 Black magic

In one 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*.

4.5 Demon infested buildings

I have stayed in quite a number of buildings which Muslims claimed were inhabited by evil spirits. Our experiences confirmed these claims.

5 THE SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT IN THE OUTREACH TO MUSLIMS I.E. THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO ENCOUNTER WITH THE EVIDENCE OF SUPERNATURAL ACTIVITY IN ISLAM

After more than thirty years of living, working and travelling in the Muslim world I have concluded that Qur’anic Islam and folk religion 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 breaking of the bonds and the release of captives among the people of the mosque and shrine. In ministering to Muslims we are involved in areas of spiritual warfare.

First, let us define spiritual warfare. It is 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 Testament gives more space 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. It is not a warfare which focuses only on the supernatural manifestations of evil. Bearing this in mind, we can turn to the Christian response to encounter with the evidence of supernatural activity in Islam.

5.1 Prayer for the sick

Both Christians and Muslims are people of prayer. Sick Muslims are often grateful for the prayers of their Christian friends. I have prayed individually and in family groups with hundreds of Muslims after asking their permission to pray for them in the name of Jesus the Messiah.

Generally I begin with praise to God, and thanks for His love, then pray for the patient by name, sometimes quoting the words of a prophet, eg Isaiah 53:5. If the patient is not healed, it is no dishonour to the name of Jesus and if he is healed the Muslim is generally open to learning more about Jesus.

Sometimes illness is directly Satanic in origin as was 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 authority to deal with illness of Satanic origin in a similar way in His name.

5.2 Breaking curses

Several of my friends have been severely affected by curses until broken by Christ's power.

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.

5.3 Exorcism

The crucial matter in 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' (Marc USA, 1989), I have dealt with the subject in some detail in chapter 17, 'The practice of exorcism and healing'.

5.4 The Cleansing of Buildings

Muslims sometimes refuse to rent buildings 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.

Christians have sometimes undermined their own ministries by not cleansing a building before dedicating it and living in it. 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. Sometimes, previous owners or tenants have practised magic or some occult activity. A quiet service of cleansing including casting out, praise and prayer might be needed.

5.5 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 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 had such visions or dreams. If someone came to you and said he 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.

5.6 Charms or amulets

These 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. I sometimes ask someone wearing a charm around the neck what is in it, and on hearing that it is a verse, ask whether the wearer thinks God prefers his word around our neck or in our hearts. I then offer to teach a word of God to put in the heart, eg Romans 5:8.

5.7 Curses and the Evil Eye

Several of my Christian friends have been severely affected by curses until they have been detected and broken by Christ's power. Many Muslims are afraid of the evil eye. We can share how Christ helps us to deal with fear.

5.8 Binding the powers of Satan

The exercise of our Christ-given authority 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).

5.9 Standing in the evil day

In spiritual warfare, to stand is to overcome (Ephesians 6:10-19). The guidance, filling and anointing of the Holy Spirit are requisites for an effective ministry to Muslims and to all people. We rely not on our methods and rituals but on the power of the living, triune God.

6 CONCLUSION

Renouncing the devil and all his works was often part of the early baptismal creeds of the church. In some places baptism was followed by the administration of the oil of exorcism. The lack

of such a deliberate renunciation of the devil may account for why some converts revert to Islam. They were never fully set free.

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 to all people. We rely not on our methods and rituals but on the power of the living, triune God.

7 SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What Biblical evidence is there that unbelievers need release from bondage?
2. How do we apply this in our ministry to Muslims today? Why is the declaration of Christ as the liberator more meaningful to the Muslims than the promise of the assurance of the forgiveness of sin?
3. Should we be praying for Jesus to reveal himself in visions to Muslims? If a Muslim came to you describing a vision he has had of Jesus, what would you say to him?
4. How should we prepare ourselves to pray for Muslims, in their presence, for healing or in some crisis?
5. In what ways do we need to seek God's protection before becoming involved in power encounters?

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