

**Cross and
Crescent:
Responding to
the Challenge
of Islam**

By Colin Chapman.
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**Reviewed by
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Colin Chapman, brings to this work years of experience as a Christian missionary in the Muslim world. He has worked with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students in Egypt, Lebanon and Cyprus, as well as with Church Missionary Society (CMS) in England. As such he is a recognized authority on Islam.

**Author's Purpose and
Methodology**

The author's purpose in this work is to present several elements of a Christian

response to Islam, with a view to helping Christians share their faith with Muslims. This is of particular interest, or should be, to the Caribbean evangelical as it addresses its Muslim neighbors in the region.

In formulating his response, Chapman takes the reader inside the world of Islam through the eyes of Muslims themselves. In so doing, he bridges the gap between Muslims and Christians, a quintessential step in leading Muslims to Christ. His approach is appropriately that of a Christian anthropologist (Hiebert 1976, xx). Through anthropological methods he investigates their history, social customs and worldview. At the same time, he does not lose sight of his evangelistic aim. To facilitate this, he weaves into his anthropological approach the exegetical and comparative methods. He does exegetical analyses on both Quranic and

biblical passages (324-332). He raises key questions, and investigates them by objectively comparing and contrasting Muslim beliefs and practices with those of the Christian faith (250, 252).

Development of Ideas

Chapman develops his ideas in accordance with his purposes. The book is organized into five parts, each of which presents a different aspect of a Christian response to Islam (11). Parts 1 and 2 are concerned with knowing and understanding Muslims and their faith. This is the logical place to begin in formulating a response. Chapman makes the all-important point that before we meet them as Muslims we must meet them as persons (15). The stage having been set for understanding, Part 3 discusses Muslim objections to Christian beliefs and practices. These range from theological questions, such as the belief in the Trinity, to more practical issues, such as the eating of pork. Part 4 provides more in-depth discussion of some fundamental theological issues. Part 5, the final section, presents practical models for sharing the Christian faith (12). Thus, the author succeeds in moving the reader through a five-part Christian response to Islam. Chapman notes, however, that the key is not in learning special techniques, but in a genuine Christian lifestyle characterized by love (298).

Chapman does not pretend to have the only response. He makes clear in his introduction that he is offering elements of a response, and that there are other possible responses (11). He allows the reader the opportunity to think through the issues and develop other possible responses through the study questions, sections for further study and by referring the reader to resources for further study. Chapman notes in the introduction that the book is intended for

individual or group study. These sections go a far way in facilitating this goal.

Contribution to the Field of Cross-cultural Anthropology and Cross-cultural Missions In the Muslim World

This work is a great plus to the field of cross-cultural anthropology. In true anthropological style, the author enters into the Muslim world taking the reader with him. He has the distinction of describing Muslims and their faith from their point of view, a posture not taken by many Christians before him when talking about Islam. The use of quotations from Muslims has been very helpful in bringing this across. Every effort is made to use Muslim rather than Christian or Western categories in defining the worldview and beliefs (62). This is the incarnational posture described by Phil Parshall in his work *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* (1980, 98-102). This was the posture God took toward sinful humanity when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14). For Chapman, missions to Muslims is not about bringing Muslims into the "Christian" world, but rather about meeting them on their turf, taking Christ into the Muslim world. This needs to be the attitude of any Christian considering missions to Muslims.

The discussion of the commonly raised issues in Christian/Muslim dialogues will also prove very useful for missionaries to Muslims, as well as for those considering such a career. Thinking through the issues outside of an actual dialogue is beneficial, as it helps the Christian to be aware of what he believes and why, and to be better equipped when these issues do arise in an actual dialogue. Such issues include the Trinity and the nature of Jesus Christ. It is important for all Christians, and, even more so, missionaries, to have responses to these questions. This

book helps the reader to do just that, and to come up with practical yet biblically sound ways of reaching out to Muslims.

His integrative approach can be adopted by Christian anthropologists. He makes use of anthropological research methods primarily but, for purposes of comparison and scriptural study, he does not hesitate to adopt the comparative and exegetical methods.

Strengths

In addition to the strengths already mentioned above, one of the biggest strengths of this work is the presentation of different models for sharing the Christian faith with Muslims. These include making use of natural, everyday opportunities (299), responding to the felt needs in folk Islam, using the Bible, and restating the Gospel using the Qur'an. This final model is worthy of special note. Others have seen the value of exploring the common ground of the Qur'anic and Old Testament views of God in witnessing to Muslims (Parshall 1980, 75), but starting with the Qur'an seems to be an idea unique to Chapman (317). He could have stopped short of such practical suggestions having already given the reader much to think about. These models however give the novice a much-needed push-start.

Another strength of this work is that it is very comprehensive, covering a wide range of issues that would be of concern to Westerners. These include not only theological concerns, but also political and social issues. The discussion of recent social and political events is very helpful. These would still be fresh in the minds of readers and will no doubt bring others to mind. These discussions force the reader to rethink personal positions on these issues in order to enter the mind of the Muslim. The question facing the Christian is how to deal with the atrocities that seem to result

from the Muslim faith while trying to be objective and sympathetic.

The theological issues raised are important for any Christian desiring to witness to Muslims. One such issue is the relationship between Jesus and the Qur'an. Most Christians have assumed that what Jesus is to Christianity, Muhammad is to the Qur'an. It is an eye-opener to realize that this is not the case. The correlation is not between Jesus and Muhammad but between Jesus and the Qur'an (76). Just as Jesus is the revelation of God in Christianity, so is the Qur'an the revelation of God in Islam. This realization can help the Christian to avoid fruitless discussions which pit Jesus against Muhammad.

Another strength of this work is its language and style. The language is fairly simple, even in the discussion of heavy theological topics. Much of the book is written in note form which makes it easy to read, and desired topics easy to find. As such, it can be used as a handbook. Adding to its user-friendliness are the short quotations and the introduction at the beginning of each part. These make it clear that the author is seeking understanding in order to have more effective dialogue, and as such serve as a constant reminder of the author's ultimate evangelistic purpose. The text is practical throughout, moving the readers not only to reflection but also to action. In this regard, the two final sections, "Strategies for the Church" and the conclusion "Walking the way of the cross," are an excellent climax. Here, through very practical suggestions which do not involve any great geographical displacement, the author aggressively grabs and shakes the reader, asking directly what the reader, and the reader's church, is going to do to get directly involved in Muslim evangelism.

Finally, though Chapman makes every effort to point out similarities between the two faiths in order to bridge the gap between Muslims and Christians, he does not lose sight of the crucial differences between the two (245).

Weaknesses

Though much is said about the identity of Jesus, only a small section has been allotted to the important issue of the unity of God versus the Trinity (248-250). This is perhaps one of the most crucial differences between Christianity and Islam; hence, it deserves more investigation.

Chapman's discussion on whether Allah is the same as the God of the Bible is crucial for missions to Muslims. He notes that several Bible translators in Islamic nations have opted to use the word "Allah" for the God of the Bible, although many others have refused to do so. He seems to side with the former group on both linguistic and theological grounds. Linguistically, he reasons that because of the relationship between Semitic languages, *illa* and *Allah* are quite likely the generic term for God just like the Hebrew "EI", and so linguistically there should be no barriers preventing the use of the word *Allah* for the God of the Bible (262-265). Theologically, he uses Paul's address to the Athenians concerning "the unknown god".

His linguistic argument lacks scientific objectivity. Though this argument seems plausible, it is unfortunate that he does not give a reliable source for the etymology of the word "Allah", which could give with certainty the meaning of "Allah" before the advent of Islam. This would have added credibility to his argument, which is otherwise fairly weak. It is important to note that against Chapman's argument, others, such as M. Ali, a Muslim convert from Nigeria, have argued passionately against the use of "Allah" for the Christian God. Ali claims

that "Allah" was simply the name of one of the gods of the Ka'ba during the *jahiliyyah* (period before the advent of Islam). If this is so, even if this god has been redefined to mean the supreme being, then continuing with the same name could imply an unholy compromise. Had Chapman given a reliable source, then the reader would be more readily convinced.

Like his linguistic argument, his theological argument (228-230) comes up short. Though biblically sound, it does not go far enough. It would have been helpful to consider the nature of both the God of the Bible and the god of the Qur'an in order to decide whether they are the same. The fact that "nothing in the Qur'an suggests that the Jews and the Christians . . . were worshipping a different God" (230) may not be a strong argument if one considers the source of the Qur'an. The enemy has always wanted all people to believe that they serve the same God and so no conversion is needed.

Finally, the lack of a subject index is a serious drawback. A general index is always helpful, especially in books designed for study purposes such as this one was. This would aid the reader/student in finding and relocating certain topics.

Overall Impression

In spite of the few weaknesses mentioned, Chapman's work is very comprehensive. It is a very useful tool in the hands of missionaries to the Muslim world, as well as to any Christian who wishes to find a bridge between himself and his Muslim neighbours. As Chapman himself has stated, he has not given *the only* Christian response to Islam, but has made a valiant effort in this direction, leaving the door open for others to make their contribution.

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