

MY LIFELONG ENGAGEMENT WITH MUSLIMS AND ISLAM IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE UK

Tværkulturelt Center

Rev Colin Chapman

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Once again my subject was suggested to me by the organizers, and it's a new challenge to me. I don't enjoy speaking about myself. But I'm afraid I need to begin by explaining the story out of which I speak about my engagement with Muslims and Islam.

I was born in India in the days of the Raj, the British Empire. My father was not a missionary, but worked in the Indian Police. We returned to the UK in August 1945 at the end of the war and settled in Scotland, but my father continued to work in India until Indian independence and the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.

I mention this because it has meant that I have had to wrestle with all the ambiguities of empire. You Danes don't have anything like the same problem that we have as Brits, because you never had an empire. Our empire covered a large proportion of the world, and every Muslim-majority country in the world – except Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan – came directly or indirectly under western imperial rule for up to 200 years. Some of what we did was good and positive: we built railways, hospitals and schools. But there was also a great deal of economic exploitation and brutality. So I can fully understand why so many Indians wanted to get rid of the British and rule themselves.

My first degree at St Andrews University was in Greek and Hebrew, partly because I was thinking about the possibility of ordained ministry. These languages were an invaluable foundation for the study of theology at London Bible College, and Hebrew made the study of Arabic later on much easier.

I was ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church in Scotland, and worked as an assistant minister in a church in Edinburgh for three years. When I offered for service with the Church Mission Society (CMS), believing that God was calling me to go back to India, I was told that I had no chance of getting a visa because of the Hindu Party, the BJP, which was in power at the time. I was instead asked to go to Cairo, where I was on the staff of the Anglican Cathedral on the banks of the River Nile, and after a year of Arabic study at the American University of Cairo, was trying to teach Greek and Hebrew in Arabic at the Coptic Evangelical (Presbyterian) Seminary.

After three years I married Anne, whom I had first met at the CMS training college in London, and who had been sent to work as a nurse with Palestinian refugees at a Centre in Zerka in Jordan which was run by the Middle East Council of Churches. Anne found herself caught up in the Black September conflict – the civil war between the Palestinians and the government of King Hussein - in September 1970, and found herself nursing the Fadayin. They had come to her house in Amman with their guns asking for her to come to help their wounded. I mention this because it was through Anne that I first began to understand what the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was all about.

During my time in Cairo I got to know Kenneth Cragg, who was based in Cairo and working as an assistant bishop in the Anglican diocese of Jerusalem. I must have come under his spell at the time. But it was only later that I realised that he was probably the most influential Christian scholar of Islam in the second half of the 20th century.

After five years in Egypt, followed by two years as a tutor at the CMS training college in Selly Oak, Birmingham, my wife and I and our two children went to Beirut in October 1975, arriving there just six months after the civil war had started. I was working with Christian students as Regional Secretary for Islamic Lands for the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), trying to develop work among Christian students anywhere between Morocco and Iran, and between Sudan and Turkey.

I quickly came to understand how most Middle Eastern Christians think and feel about Muslims and Islam. And this drove me to two things: taking some academic courses in Islam at the Near East School of Theology (NEST), and preparing simple study material about Islam and relating to Muslims. This material developed into a 100-page booklet entitled *You Go and Do the Same: Studies in Relating to Muslims*, and later in 1995 into the book *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenges of Islam*, and a 5-session study course for churches, using much of the same material, which was offered through the Bible Society.

It was also in that context in Beirut that I wrote the book *Whose Promised Land*, which was first published in 1983. Having landed in the middle of a violent civil war, I was naturally trying to figure out the reasons for the conflict. My Lebanese friends helped me to understand that it was the presence of thousands of Palestinian refugees who had arrived in 1948 and 1967 which had upset the balance between the Christian and Muslim communities. In the book I tried to do three things: firstly to explain the roots and the history of the conflict between the Palestinians and the Zionist settlers; secondly, to trace the theme of the land in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation; and thirdly to present a way of interpreting the Bible that was different from the Christian Zionist interpretation. Those eight years in Beirut therefore enabled me to begin to understand Islam better, to explore what was involved in Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle Eastern context, and to understand how any engagement with Muslims and Islam must involve history and politics.

We returned as a family to the UK in 1983, where for seven years I was teaching the Study of Mission and the Study of Religion at Trinity College, an Anglican seminary in Bristol. This was probably the first seminary in the UK which tried to introduce these two disciplines into the core curriculum of theological studies. And this was where I came face to face with the fears and prejudices of white British students about a religion that seemed so culturally foreign and so different from Christianity. I remember one occasion when a student called out from the back of the lecture hall, 'It's the smells of their cooking and the way they decorate their houses that I can't stand.'

Every year I would take groups of students to visit the mosque in down-town Bristol, and most found it a really helpful way of meeting Muslims on their own ground and listening to them. But a few students refused to come, believing that by entering a mosque they might be exposing themselves to satanic forces. I also began to understand how vulnerable that Muslim community felt. When I said to the Muslim leader who welcomed us, 'We have come to meet you here in the mosque. Would you and some of your community like to visit us in our college?' Every time his reply was either 'We are too busy looking after our own community,' or 'We're ordinary Muslim and don't know enough about our faith to discuss it with you,' or 'What would be the point of

meeting with you Christians? What would it be for?’ As a result I understood that we shouldn’t be surprised that it’s usually Christians who take the initiative in dialogue. We are the ones who feel very secure and are like a football team playing on our home ground and setting the rules.

After those seven years in Bristol I became Principal of the CMS college in Birmingham. During that time I studied for an MPhil at Birmingham University, where the subject of my dissertation was ‘Teaching Christians About Islam: A Study in Methodology.’ I also helped to set up a network which we later called ‘Christian Responses to Islam in Britain’ (CRIB), in order to bring together people from churches and mission agencies who were working among Muslims. This was where I saw the importance of Christians working together in these areas.

My last job was teaching Islamic Studies at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, where we had students from Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, Iran and the Sudan, and also a number of students and pastors from Denmark, Germany and Switzerland.

Since retirement – or rather semi-retirement – began in 2004, my wife and I have been living in Cambridge, and from time to time I’ve been returning to the Middle East to teach at NEST, the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut, Bethlehem Bible College and the Nazareth Evangelical Seminary.

Against this background let me try to spell out some of things I have learned about Christian-Muslim relations. I’ve tried to find 10 words that have been important for me, and to explain them with a simple sentence.

1. RELATIONSHIPS AND CULTURE: relationships are all-important, and we need cross-cultural awareness

This point may seem so obvious that it hardly needs to be spelled out. My starting point would be the commandment ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ But what does it mean to love our Muslim neighbour? When I first went to Egypt, I found myself caught in a Christian ghetto, and partly because of the political situation under Gamal Abdul Nasser, it was quite difficult for me as a foreigner to make relationships with Muslims. Even in recent years I have found that many Middle Eastern Christians are very cautious about building relationships with Muslims. When I arranged a few years ago to take a group of master’s students at Bethlehem Bible College to have tea with the imam at the nearby mosque, some of them were so reluctant to do so that they felt they had to ask their pastor for permission. One of these students said in class with great feeling, trying to describe how Christians in Bethlehem feel about the Muslim community which now outnumbers them ‘*nihna majruhin*, We are wounded.’

There are very good reasons – historical, theological, social and psychological – why Middle Eastern Christians think and feel in this way. And there are very good reasons why western Christians are cautious about relating to Muslims. But all our talk about Christian-Muslim dialogue is meaningless if we’re not prepared to work at personal relationships.

In this context, of course, we have to add the need to develop cross-cultural awareness. For me this has come through living for many years in foreign countries, learning the language, and making lasting friendships. And I can understand how difficult it often is for British people – and perhaps

also for Danes – who have never lived or even visited a foreign country. Many people are therefore held back because they are afraid of making cultural mistakes and doing or saying the wrong thing.

So when I'm speaking to Christians, there's not much point in giving talks about Muhammad, the Qur'an or Muslims beliefs if I don't also talk about relationships and address cultural issues.

2. ACTION: we need to be doing something for and with Muslims

Assuming that we have some relationships with Muslims, I want to emphasise the importance of doing. And once again I begin in the Middle East. A former Anglican bishop in Jerusalem used to say that the church's institutions – like schools, hospitals, clinics and orphanages – are 'the arms and legs of the church.' The vast majority of people who benefit from them are Muslims, who are seeing the love of God in action.

Dudley Woodberry of Fuller Seminary in the US tells a powerful story of relief work carried out by Christians in an area of Pakistan that had suffered from the Taliban mujahidin:

'A Christian organisation imported thousands of sandals for children in a very primitive Afghan refugee camp in Peshawar. However, they decided not just to hand out sandals, but first to wash the feet and dress the wounds of the children. Months later, a local school teacher asked her class, "Who are the best Muslims?" A girl raised her hand and said, "the Kafirs." When the shocked teacher asked why, the girl responded, "The mujahidin killed my father, but the Kafirs washed my feet."'

In situations like this where extremist Muslims are active, we can begin to see the relevance of the words of the Apostle Peter: 'It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men' (1 Peter 2:15).

Notice, however, the two prepositions that I used: 'doing things for Muslims and doing things with them.' Several years ago Leif Munksgaard told me of a project in Odense in which he was involved. Christians and Muslims worked together to build models of a church and a mosque. This wasn't Christians doing something for Muslims. Both were working together side by side.

Sami Awad of the Holy Land Trust, based in Bethlehem, is working closely with Muslims in projects seeking to build up civil society from the ground up. In difficult situations like this, change is not likely to come from the top down through government projects, but rather from social action at the grass roots in which Christians and Muslim are working together.

3. UNDERSTANDING and EMPATHY: we need to understand Islam at its best and as it is, and we need to be able to feel with Muslims

In the first session of an 'Introduction to Islam' course in a seminary, I try to explain what I mean by an approach to Islam that is both sympathetic and critical. We need to try to understand Islam, as it were, from within – from the inside. We need to try to sit where they sit and see the world as they see it. This means not just seeing Islam at its worst (as in ISIS), but seeing Islam at its best.

One of my heroes has been Temple Gairdner, who was a CMS missionary in Cairo from 1906 to 1928. Half way through his time there he had a sabbatical in which he spent time with Duncan Black Macdonald, an Old Testament and Islamic scholar at Hertford Seminary in the US. Later he described this whole experience as ‘My grand transformation drama.’ This is how Macdonald described how Gairdner’s thinking and his approach to Islam changed during that time:

‘When Temple Gairdner came to me to study Islam he came seeking knock-down arguments against Muslims. I never gave him such but he went away understanding the genius of Islam and able to enter into the minds of Muslims. He had passed from controversy to persuasion.’

But as well as understanding Islam at its best, it’s important that we understand Islam as it is actually lived and practised by Muslims all over the world. Some missionaries have said that their academic study of Islam in a university or college in the West didn’t prepare them for living among Muslims in another country, because the Islam that they read about in textbooks bore little resemblance to the lives of the Muslims around them.

This is where anthropology is so important because of the way it helps us to understand what is generally called ‘Folk Islam’ or ‘Popular Islam.’ Writers like Paul Hiebert and Bill Muck have helped us to see that most Muslims in the villages of Egypt, Africa or Indonesia are more interested in finding a source of supernatural power to deal with the problems of everyday life than in knowing the truth about the universe. What do you do when your child is sick or your business is collapsing? Doctrine and law can’t provide much help in these situations. So understanding how Muslims actually live is just as important as understanding ideal Islam.

4. HISTORY: to understand Islam in any particular country it’s important to know something about the history of Islam in general and the history of that particular country

We’re talking of course about a world religion and people who are proud of their long history. Within a century of the death of Muhammad, there was a great Muslim empire stretching from Morocco and Spain in the West to the borders of India and China in the east. A great Islamic civilization flourished for several centuries in Baghdad. And there have been three great Islamic empires – the Ottomans in Turkey, the Saffavids in Persia and the Mughals in India. From the 18th C most of the Muslim world came under the control of western colonial rule in one form or another, and it wasn’t until the middle of the 20th C that they gained their independence. Muslims are generally very aware of both the highs and the lows of their history.

There are three areas in particular where I believe an awareness of history is important:

- Understanding the origins of Islam. The most convincing account that I have found suggests that Muhammad did not set out from the beginning to confront Jews and Christians. Rather he probably saw himself as a prophet called to give the Arabs a contextualised version of Judaism and Christianity. While the Jews and Christians had their scriptures in their own languages, the Arabs didn’t have any scriptures in the Arabic language. Muhammad probably expected Jews and Christians to recognise him as a prophet in the line of all the OT prophets and of Jesus. And he was surprised when they didn’t accept him. From then on his approach to them became more and more confrontational. This theory helps to explain all that Islam owes both to Judaism and to Christianity, and why there was such a painful parting of the ways – both during Muhammad’s lifetime and in later centuries – with so much misunderstanding and conflict.

- Understanding the history of Christian-Muslim relations. When the Muslim Arab armies burst out of Arabia and conquered the whole of the Middle East and North Africa, a few thousand Muslim Arabs were ruling over a population that was largely Christian. A document known as the Code of ‘Umar spelled out very clearly the conditions under which Jews and Christians lived under the rule of Muslims as *dhimmi*s: for example, Christians were to wear distinctive dress; they could not build new churches; they could not ride on horses. It went without saying that they could not do anything to evangelise Muslims. It wasn’t until the 10th or 11th C that Muslims became the majority as a result of a gradual process of conversion.

It took me a long time to understand that Middle Eastern Christians even in this century are still living with the legacy of the *dhimma* system and the Code of Umar. While it is not part of the law code of any country, it is still deeply ingrained in the minds of Christians. It’s probably also there in the minds of Muslims, and some Islamists make no secret of the fact that they would like to revive the whole *dhimma* system and have Christians and Jews living under their authority.

- Understanding the recent history and conflicts of the Middle East. (see Talk 1)

5. POLITICS AND SOCIETY: we cannot avoid political and social issues

Muslims all over the world – and especially in the Middle East – find it difficult to understand how so many western Christians are so enthusiastic about the creation of Israel as a Jewish state and are so supportive of all its actions. It’s not an exaggeration to say that Christian Zionism has become a major stumbling block for the gospel. ‘How is it possible,’ Muslims often say, ‘that you Christians can support what seems such an obvious injustice? How can you expect us to listen to the gospel if this is the kind of God that you believe in?’ It was my experience of living through the civil war in Beirut that I began to understand the importance of political and social issues in our relationships with Muslims.

A Syrian Christians told me once that his father, who had been a leader in one of the well-known Syrian political parties, had rejected his Christian faith because of Christian Zionism. He only came back to his faith some years before his death when he discovered that there was a convincing alternative to Christian Zionism – an alternative which made sense both of scripture and of history.

In the UK context, questions about *halal* meat in schools, hospitals and prisons and about Muslim chaplains in hospitals and schools were dealt with many years ago. In Birmingham we had much public discussion about whether the Muslim Call to Prayer could be broadcast during the hours of daylight. The practice of female genital mutilation was banned by law many years ago, but it’s only very recently that anyone has been convicted in a court of law. In response to Muslim calls for *shari‘a* law to be practised within Muslim communities, the government commissioned a report last year which totally rejected the idea that *shari‘a* law could be a parallel system alongside the law of the land, insisting that there must be one law for every citizen. One specific recommendation, however, was that every Muslim marriage should be combined with a civil marriage, in order to give wives legal protection when there is a divorce. I understand that one issue in Denmark is where Muslims should be buried.

Two years ago a new initiative was launched through the network of Christian Responses to Islam in Britain (CRIB). We have called it ‘Christians and Muslims in Public Life,’ and have held several

seminars in which we have tried to bring Christians and Muslim together to discuss issues in schools, integration, Islamophobia and the portrayal of Muslims in media.

6. THEOLOGY: theology is important

Let me give three examples of where I have found biblical and theological study specially valuable.

Firstly, I have never forgotten hearing Kenneth Cragg in the early 1970s in Cairo explaining the significance of the account in Mark's gospel where Peter responds to Jesus telling them that he was going to suffer and die. Cragg suggested that Peter's thinking – that if Jesus was the Messiah, he must be successful and victorious – was very similar to the logic behind the denial of the crucifixion in the Qur'an: if Jesus is God's messenger on earth, how could God possibly stand by and do nothing to protect the honour of his representative? What government would do nothing to protect its ambassador if he is humiliated and insulted in public? Peter eventually came to understand the logic which demanded that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer. So if we can understand the thinking of Peter before this incident, we can perhaps be more sympathetic to the Muslim instinct that God must surely protect his messenger and vindicate him by rescuing him before he is nailed to the cross.

Secondly, it's valuable for helping us to appreciate both the common ground and the differences between Christian and Muslim belief. It seems to me that there are five main areas where there are fundamental theological differences:

Revelation: can God be known?

Inspiration: in what sense is scripture the Word of God?

Human nature: what is the true diagnosis of the human condition?

God's provision for humankind: what has God done to deal with human sin?

Forgiveness and salvation: how does divine forgiveness work? What is the meaning of salvation?

Thirdly, there have been many debates in mission circles in recent years on the subject of contextualisation. Since the title 'Son of God' is so offensive to Muslims, for example, how should we translate the expression in Bible translations for Muslim readers? Is it possible for a Muslim disciple of Jesus to remain part of his family and community – if necessary as a secret believer?

7. EDUCATION: we need to give some thought to how to teach Christians about Muslims and Islam

My experience of teaching Christians in many different contexts suggested to me that there should be five important stages in the whole process, and these are developed in the *Cross and Crescent* book and the study course.

1. Relating to our Muslim neighbours
2. Understanding Islam
3. Entering into discussion and dialogue
4. Facing fundamental issues
5. Sharing our faith

Some Christians are hesitant about studying another faith, out of fear that it might weaken their own faith. But in my experience, teaching Christians about Islam helps not only to understand Muslims and communicate better with them, but also to appreciate the distinctives of the Christian faith. Some years ago I led a Lent course in a church in Birmingham entitled 'My Neighbour's Faith and Mine'. In each study we looked first at an important aspect of Muslim faith and practice, and looked at the same subject in our own faith. People felt that their own faith was enriched and deepened by studying another faith.

Under this heading I want to quote some words of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who came to Holland originally as an asylum seeker from Somalia and eventually became a member of parliament. Although she has completely rejected her Muslim faith, this is how she writes about the challenge and the opportunity facing Christians in Europe:

'I have a theory that most Muslims are in search of a redemptive God. They believe that there is a higher power and that this higher power is the provider of morality, giving them a compass to help them distinguish between good and bad. Many Muslims are seeking a God or a concept of God that in my view meets the description of the Christian God. Instead they are finding Allah.'

8. DIALOGUE: we need to take every opportunity to engage in dialogue with Muslims on any subjects and at every level

Many Christians are hesitant about the idea of Christian-Muslim dialogue because they are afraid that it seeks only to find the common ground between the two faiths and to minimise the differences. They say it's all about compromise and the lowest common denominator. Another fear is that because dialogue about theological issues is so difficult, it is often avoided completely, and the discussion focuses on social, moral and political issues.

I would argue that we don't need to be afraid of the word dialogue, and that we should be taking every opportunity to talk to Muslims. Dialogue isn't only for academics and religious leaders. Every single Christian needs to be encouraged to take initiatives in talking with Muslims, and we don't need a lot of training to share our faith in a simple way. We also need to be prepared to talk about anything and everything that Muslims want to talk about.

It may be helpful here to explain the difference between polemics, apologetics and dialogue. Polemics (from the Greek word *polemos*, meaning war) is attacking the other faith in order to discredit it. Apologetics (from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning defence) is the defence of the Christian faith against challenges. Dialogue (from the Greek word *dialogia*, meaning simply a conversation between two people) is having open-ended discussion between two parties who meet on a level playing field.

Anyone who has ever had a discussion with Muslim about faith will have heard the most common objections: 'You seem to believe in three gods. How can Jesus be the Son of God? How could God allow Jesus to be crucified? Your scriptures are corrupted.' Every Christian who is serious about relating to Muslims, therefore, needs to be taught some basic apologetics.

But what about polemics? For many years until his death in 2005 Ahmad Deedat, a South African Muslim polemicist, went round the world conducting debates with Christian speakers which were rather like boxing matches, with each side attempting to criticise the beliefs of the other and expose

them to ridicule. I know Christians like Jay Smith, the founder of the Hyde Park Christian Fellowship, who regularly speaks at Hyde Park Corner in London, and engages in confrontational debates. He believes that there should be no distinction between apologetics and polemics and encourages Christians to engage in polemics.

I suggest, however, that the study of Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle East over the first five centuries shows that while there were some examples of genuine dialogue, for much of the time Muslims and Christians were engaged in polemics against each other. Polemics over several centuries led to a dead end, and became more and more bitter and controversial. When you're attacking the other person's faith, you're not seeking to understand it, but only to demonstrate how foolish it is. It's easy to engage in polemics through the media – and especially on television – but it doesn't help much when you're living alongside Muslims.

I have developed a simple diagram to suggest how genuine dialogue about belief can work in practice, as an attempt to simplify some of Kenneth Cragg's ideas. It consists of two overlapping circles, and in the area of overlap, we can write seven simple sentences which both Muslims and Christians can agree on without hesitation. The problem is, however, that while we can use the same words, we don't understand them in the same way. The seven simple sentences are:

God is one
God creates
God reveals
God loves
God forgives
God judges
God reigns

So I can say to my Muslim friend 'Please tell you what you understand by the sentence "God loves", and I will tell you what I understand by them.'

9. COMMUNITY: our churches must provide a real, welcoming community

I hardly need to develop this point because I know that you in Denmark have a lot of experience in this area, and know very well what's involved in welcoming new Christians from a Muslim background. The title of a recent study course on this subject produced in the UK, *Joining the Family*, sums up the challenge we face: how can the Christian community fill the vacuum for people who have been cut off from their families, their culture and their homeland?

There is just one subject that I want to open up under this heading – that is the very negative views of Islam in the minds of some Muslim background believers. I believe there are at least four reasons for these negative attitudes:

- Sometimes it's because of the bad experience they have had of Islam. Some of them say, 'If the Islamic Republic of Islam is Islam, I don't want to have anything to do with it.'
- When new believers are trying to establish a new identity as Christian believers, they may feel that the only way they can to this is by distancing themselves from everything to do with Islam.
- Sometimes it's the influence of western Christians who have very negative views of Islam.

- I find that these attitudes are more common among very conservative or fundamentalist Christians, and in charismatic churches.

How then do we engage with these attitudes? Here are some suggestions:

- ‘Don’t we have to admit that some expressions of Christianity have been and still are satanic? How did Jesus respond to Peter when he exploded at the idea that Jesus would suffer? He said: “Get behind me, Satan!”’

- In 1 Peter 3:15 Peter says: ‘Be prepared to give a response to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.’

- ‘Let’s use some basic psychology. Do you really think that you can win people over by attacking Islam? The more we attack Islam, the more we encourage them to attack Christianity.’

- ‘Can’t we recognise some of the good things in Islam? Have you never met God-fearing Muslims who lead good lives – lives that put many professing Christians to shame?’ Louis Massignon was a very influential French Christian scholar of Islam. He was brought up as a catholic, but completely rejected his faith as a young man. When he was travelling in Iraq he became seriously ill, and was nursed back to health by a devout Muslim family. He later said that it was through their Islamic faith that he rediscovered his Christian faith.

10. SPIRITUALITY: everything we do must be grounded in worship and prayer

What is it that motivates me to continue to work at Christian-Muslim relations? I suppose it’s a combination of the Great Commandment (‘Love God and love your neighbour as yourself’) and the Great Commission (‘Go and make disciples of all the nations’). If we believe that God has demonstrated his holy love supremely in the person of Jesus; if we have seen the glory of God on the face of Jesus; and if the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, I can only respond by seeking to love God and love my Muslim neighbours, and the Great Commandment and the Great Commission need to be taken closely together.

So with some of my Christian friends who question the whole idea of mission to Muslims, I want to say that the Great Commission still stands. With some of my Christian friends who put all the emphasis on ‘Muslim evangelism’, I want to say ‘Yes! But are we really loving our Muslim neighbours in the difficult contexts in which we find ourselves today?’

All our thinking and reflection about Christian-Muslim relations needs to be grounded in corporate worship and prayer. There are so many difficulties, frustrations and disappointments that we face, that it is all too easy to give up.

And I want to end with the suggestion that the prayer of the early church recorded in Acts 4 might be a model of how Christian churches should be praying about our mission. Peter and the apostles have been called up before the Sanhedrin because they have been preaching publicly about Jesus. When they are released, they meet together with the church and join in united prayer. They address God as the Lord of history. And when they make their petition, they do not pray for protection. This is what they pray for:

‘Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable us your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of our holy servant Jesus.’ (Acts 4:29-30).

This prayer is especially relevant for Christians living in the Middle East at the present time who have been profoundly affected by extremist jihadis in Egypt and Iraq. So they are saying, 'Lord consider the threats of the jihadis in Iraq who were writing the Arabic letter *nun* on the houses of Christians in order to identify them for attack.' And instead of asking for protection they are praying, 'Lord, release us from our fears, which are the product of centuries of history, and enable us to communicate your message with freedom and boldness.' I believe that God has been answering this kind of prayer in many different ways – for example through SAT-7, which has the wonderful strap-line 'Making God's Love Visible.' These television programmes have given Middle Eastern Christians a new boldness and new skills in communicating their faith. 'Lord, enable us to do what we can do, while you stretch out your hand and reach into the lives of our Muslim neighbours to demonstrate your power and love through the risen Jesus.' Many Muslims who have become disciples of Jesus speak of how God has broken into their lives – through dreams, visions or healing. They have often experienced the power of Jesus before they have fully understood who he is and what he has done.

CONCLUSION

I count myself extremely fortunate to have lived for 18 years in the Middle East and been able to spend my working life divided between two different worlds.

The Middle East is where Islam came into being. This is where Christians and Muslims have lived side by side in a very complex relationship for 1400 years. And this is where a new cold war has developed which involves the Jewish people, the Muslim world, Christians and the post-Christian secular West.

Europe is where Christians and Muslims are now living side by side as neighbours in a secularised world. Will Europe be Islamised? Or will Islam be Europeanised? And if the churches still have any sense that they are involved in God's mission, what does it mean for Christians to engage in mission to Muslims and Islam?

I offer my ten points as a kind of check-list. And dare I suggest that every single one of the ten points needs to be attempted by the church as a whole. None of us of course will be experts in every area – some will put their energies into relationships and action, while others will be addressing political and social issues.

If I've been looking back and reflecting on my past, I hope it may help us to understand the present and prepare for the future. And I end with some verses from Isaiah which encourage us to look to the future:

'Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?' (Is 43:18-19)