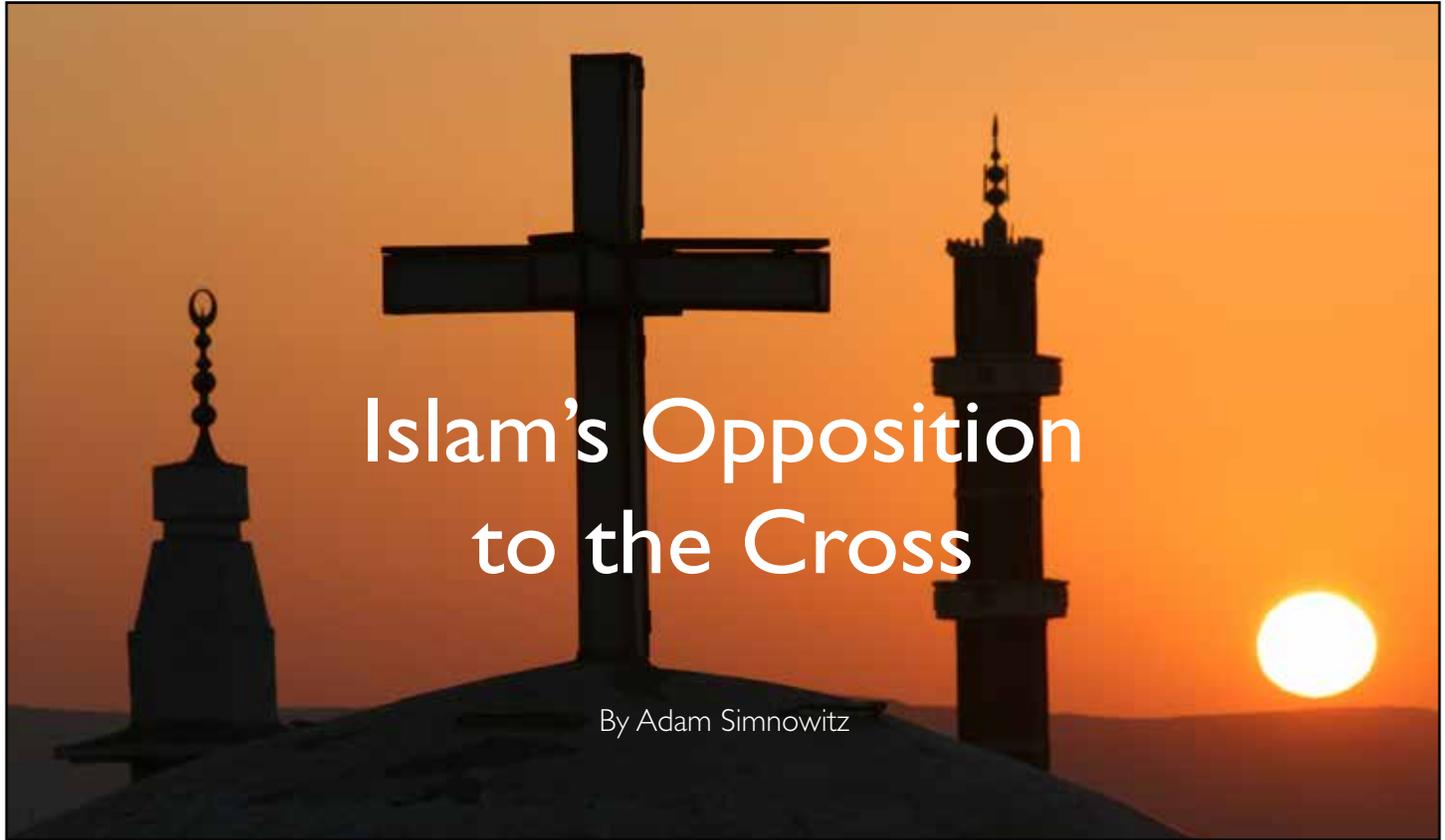


INTERCEDE

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Islam's Opposition to the Cross

By Adam Simnowitz

Charles Doughty, the Englishman who traveled throughout parts of the Arabian Peninsula in the latter part of the eighteenth-century, gives the following account in his book *Arabia Deserta* under the subtitle, 'Fanaticism':

"In an evening I had wandered to the oasis side: there a flock of the village children soon assembling with swords and bats followed my heels, hooting, 'Nasrany! Nasrany!' [Christian, Christian] and braving about the kafir [unbeliever, a non-Muslim] and cutting crosses in the sand before me, they spitefully denied them, shouting such a villanous [sic] carol, 'We have eaten rice with halib (milk) and have made water upon the salib (cross) [i.e. they urinated on the signs of the cross they had drawn in the sand].'" (*Arabia Deserta*, vol. 1, pp. 155-156)

The behavior of these youths, though in a sense extreme, is consistent with the attitude that most Muslims have toward the cross. In multiple conversations with Muslims from varying backgrounds, I have experienced similar hostility. Some of my Christian friends from Muslim backgrounds regularly face threats from family and friends when sincere-

ly defending their belief in the crucifixion. For those who regularly interact with Muslims, it is no secret that Islam exhibits overt contempt for the cross.

Muslim hostility toward the cross is rooted in the core Islamic belief that Jesus was not crucified. That position is primarily based on interpretations of the following quranic passage by their most authoritative commentators:

"And for their saying, 'We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah' — yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty — no indeed; Allah raised him up to Him; Allah is All-mighty, All-wise." (Sura 4:157-158)

For both major branches of Islam, Sunni and Shia, the standard interpretation of this passage can be summarized as follows: as Jesus was on His way to the cross, Allah supernaturally "lifted Him up to heaven" while simultane-

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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Brink

International Director
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Reaching Muslim Peoples



At Global Initiative we continue to hear of supernatural signs and wonders occurring among Muslim people groups around the world. The Holy Spirit sovereignly uses such occurrences to open the eyes and hearts of Muslims to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In a survey done among hundreds of Muslim converts to Christianity, the second most prominent factor influencing their conversion (after “friendship with a Christian”) was “experiencing the power of God in answered prayers and healings.” Based on that survey, I am reminded that a Spirit-empowered witness, one operating in the gifts and anointing of the Holy Spirit, is an indispensable part of reaching Muslims for Christ.

In his book, *Power Encounter*, Denzil Miller states “Spirit-empowered preaching accompanied by supernatural signs and wonders is a vital key to our reaching the world with the gospel. We must, therefore, understand clearly what it means to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit with signs following.” Signs and wonders in our ministry should not be an anomaly, but we need to fully expect such confirmations as a result of rightly proclaiming the gospel.

Why is it so important to have the enduement of power called the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

- First, *recognize* that Satan and his minions are real. They seek to steal, kill and destroy. They are at work blinding and binding Muslims in darkness. Holy Spirit-empowerment enables us to discern exactly who the enemy is.

- Second, *realize* that we are in a spiritual battle and it will not be won by human effort. We cannot rely on weapons of the flesh to fight spiritual warfare; we must rely on the Spirit’s work and gifts.

- Third, *remember* that the task is too large for us to accomplish apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. Most of the world’s 1.6 billion Muslims have not heard a clear presentation of the gospel. For this to effectively happen, we urgently need Spirit-empowerment.

As we join together in this great task of taking the gospel to 1.6 billion Muslims, may we pray as the early Church did

in Acts 4:29-30: “And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with boldness, *while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed* through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

The lead article of this *Intercede* will remind you that a primary tactic of Satan in Islamic countries is the removal of any vestige of the cross. Through lies, deception, and overt persecution Islamists stand ready to remove even the mention of the cross. National believers, missionaries, and especially Muslim converts to Christ who live in majority Muslim contexts come under enormous pressure to compromise the message of the cross. Thank you for regular intercession for these brothers and sisters in Christ.





Muslim World News

Four Years of Imprisonment Ends

Iran

After four years' imprisonment for "violating national security", Iranian Christian Maryam Naghash Zargaran was released from Tehran's Evin prison on Aug. 1.

Naghash Zargaran, 39, a convert from Islam, was first questioned by intelligence officers in January 2010 because of her work with underground churches, or "house churches".

In January 2013, she was arrested alongside Iranian-American pastor Saeed Abedini in connection with their work at an orphanage and both were sentenced a few months later. (Abedini was released in January 2016, following pressure from the US government.)

According to *Mohabat News*, quoting part of Naghash Zargaran's conviction letter, the court sentenced her to four years' imprisonment for acts that were "in line with England and Occupied Palestine's [Israel's] anti-security agenda to spread Christianity in Iran in order to pervert Iranian society from Islam". – *World Watch Monitor*

'Spy' Pastor Faces Life in Prison

Turkey

Almost a year after arresting him, Turkey piled on new charges of "spying" and "insurgency" against American pastor Andrew Brunson on Aug. 24, demanding four consecutive life sentences in prison against the 23-year resident of Turkey.

Jailed since his surprise detention without charges last October, Brunson was eventually accused of membership in an unnamed armed terrorist organisation. Turkish authorities

later identified the unnamed group as the Islamic network of Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish cleric living in the US.

Nearly 11 months after his arrest, the Presbyterian pastor and his lawyer continue to be denied access to the legal file of detailed charges and alleged evidence against him.

Investigations by the chief prosecutor's office in the coastal city of Izmir submitted "new" evidence that Brunson had obtained confidential political and military information for espionage purposes, specifically to "overthrow" the Turkish Parliament and government and undermine the constitutional order of the state.

The latest allegations were immediately labelled "absurd" by Ihsan Ozbek, the Turkish pastor leading the country's Association of Protestant Churches. "Andrew is not a spy," Ozbek told the *Wall Street Journal*. "It's a political case."

Brunson flatly denied all the charges read out against him in a video conference call linking him to a judge of the Izmir Second Criminal Court from the maximum security prison in Izmir where the pastor has been held since late July.

"I have never in my life met with a member of the Gülen movement," he told the court. "I have never attended any of their meetings. I do not have a single link with FETO (the Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organisation). I would never support a Muslim movement."

"I support the undivided unity of Turkey. I started a church; I am a man of religion who did this with the state's knowledge. My aim is to tell about Jesus Christ. I didn't do espionage. I demand an explanation as to when, where and how I conducted espionage." – *World Watch Monitor*

Islam's Opposition

continued from

ously someone else was made to look like Jesus. The crowd then crucified the substituted person – thinking they were crucifying Jesus. Some Muslims suggest that the actual crucified person was Simon of Cyrene; others someone else. Most Muslims, however, believe the substitute was Judas Iscariot. The standard Muslim explanation for the “miraculous ascension” of Jesus is that Allah would not allow any of his prophets to die such an ignominious death. For Muslims, Jesus’ ascension to heaven, *and thus His avoidance of crucifixion*, was Allah’s way of honoring Him.

Opposition to the cross, which is at the same time a polemical attack against Jesus’ atoning death for sin and a denial of history, permeates the teachings and practices of Islam. The following two examples illustrate this:

First, in a saying attributed to Muhammad, Jesus will return to the earth during the last days. His first action will be to “break the cross”:

“Allah’s Apostle said, ‘The Hour will not be established until the son [Jesus] of Mary descends amongst you as a just ruler, he will break the cross, kill the pigs, and abolish the jizya tax. Money will be in abundance so that nobody will accept it [as charitable gifts].’” (Sahih Bukhari, Book 43, Number 656)

Second, is the matter of precedent as set by the ill-named “Pact of Umar.” According to the Islamic narrative, during the 7th century expansion of Islam, Umar, the third Muslim caliph, imposed on Christians precise conditions by which they were to abide under Islamic rule, including: “We shall not display our crosses or our books in the roads or markets of the Muslims.” (<http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/pact-umar.asp>) This condition is cited by militant Islamic groups who include crucifixion as punishment for “Christian pact-breakers.” On recent occasions, even otherwise ‘ordinary’ Muslims - incited partially by provisions in the Pact of Umar - have destroyed crosses on church buildings and attacked those who wear them in public.

Muslim opposition to the cross is so strong that in spite of the fact that the Quran mentions Jesus’ death (Sura 3:55; 5:117; 19:33), these passages are torturously interpreted in order to make them agree with the orthodox Islamic interpretation of Sura 4:157-158. A few Muslim commentators have



questioned this interpretation, but their views have done virtually nothing to change the minds of professing Muslims.

Jesus told us that we would know false prophets by their fruits (Matthew 7:15-20). Wherever Islam goes it produces in its adherents implacable opposition to the cross, a reflection of Satan’s opposition to the cross – as revealed in the Scriptures:

“And He [Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But turning around and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’” (Mark 8:31-33)

on to the Cross

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From a human standpoint, what Peter said to Jesus was quite reasonable, even compassionate. Peter no doubt felt that Jesus was speaking of the most common form of capital punishment – crucifixion. Crucifixion is a cruel way for anyone to die. Crucifixion is meant to humiliate the person being crucified; thus Peter might be seen as seeking to uphold Jesus’ honor. An important lesson we can recognize from this passage is that Satan opposed Jesus’ death on the cross.

The cross was the very reason why Jesus came (Matthew 20:28; John 12:23-33). Satan does not want people to be forgiven of their sin and reconciled to God. He is opposed to all that is good. His very name means “adversary” or “opponent” (I Peter 5:8; Zechariah 3:1).

As the ultimate thief, Satan’s only plan for humankind is to “kill, steal, and destroy.” Jesus’ plan, however, is to give us abundant life (John 10:10). Immediately after mentioning abundant life, Jesus spoke about His own death:

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. ...For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.” (John 10:11, 17)

The abundant life that Jesus gives, as opposed to the killing, stealing, and destruction of Satan, only comes through His voluntary death. In keeping with this theme, Jesus later stated that to willingly die for another is the greatest possible expression of love:

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you.” (John 15:12-14)

As the sinless Lamb of God, Jesus fulfilled His own words by dying on the cross for the sin of the world (John 1:29). Jesus’ death on the cross is God’s greatest expression of love for humankind. The following passages state this:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

“By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (I John 4:9-10)

“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.” (Romans 5:6-10)

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It is one thing to willingly offer to die for another, but quite another thing to willingly offer up your one-of-a-kind son. Similarly, it is one thing to die for someone deserving of such sacrifice, but quite another thing to die for someone who is undeserving. Further, it is one thing to die for a friend or a stranger, but quite another thing to die for an enemy. At best, human love, as powerful as it can be, is still limited. God's love, however, far surpasses even the best expressions of human love. Such love was displayed when Jesus died on the cross for our sins – unlimited, unconditional, and unfailing. The cross is indeed God's greatest expression of love for humankind.

If Jesus' death on the cross represents God's greatest expression of love for humankind, opposition to it constitutes Satan's greatest expression of hatred. To reject the cross is to reject the only way possible for sinners to be reconciled to God. Without Jesus' crucifixion, everyone would perish in sin – without hope of forgiveness. Acceptance by God and access to His presence would be impossible if Jesus, the eternal Son of God who became the Son of Man, had not died on the cross for the sins of the world.

The belief that Jesus did not die on the cross undermines the entire teaching of the Bible. Such a notion contradicts the following essential biblical truths, truths necessary to be saved from sin through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ:

- Prophecies in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah's death (Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:12).
- Jesus' own teaching that His mission on earth was to fulfill Old Testament prophecies regarding His crucifixion (Matthew 16:21; 20:17-19; John 3:14-17; 8:28; 12:23-33).
- God's plan of redemption being the fulfillment of the entire Old Testament sacrificial system for sin (Genesis 3:21; 22:1-19; Exodus 12; Leviticus 17:11; Zechariah 9:11).

Further, if Jesus did not die on the cross, then it follows that He did not rise from the dead! Once again, God's Word provides profound clarity about Christ's resurrection:

“Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.

Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.” (I Corinthians 15:12-19)

There is no mystery as to who is animating the Islamic rejection of the cross. It is Satan himself, the father of lies and the source of murder (John 8:44).

In the aforementioned exchange between Jesus and Simon Peter as recorded in Mark 8:31-33, Jesus forcefully rebuked Peter's suggestion that He should not be killed [crucified]. However, it is encouraging to see that after rebuking Peter, Jesus continued to disciple him. He did not remove Peter from being the leader of the apostles. Jesus did not expel Peter as a false disciple. Our Lord continued to love him by being patient with him and forgiving him. In principle, in this passage Jesus shows us how to deal with any circumstance that opposes the primary reason He came to the earth: to die on the cross for the sins of humanity. Jesus affirmed the importance of “setting our minds on God's interests, not man's.” God's interest, obviously, was to offer His Son as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity, and that included the cross. Knowing that it would be an offence, Jesus offered nothing less than the truth, while exercising patience and loving-kindness toward the offended. In the case of Muslims, we understand that they continue to be offended by the cross. Nevertheless, unprecedented numbers are being saved, but not one apart from acknowledging the essential truth of Jesus' death on the cross.

In conclusion, the cross to which Muslims are opposed is the only thing that can save them from their sins. Thus, even in the face of Islam's continuing opposition to the cross, we reaffirm our task as captured in Acts 26:17b-18:

“...I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me [Jesus].”



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Friday, Nov. 3, 2017. Please pray for

...*Mehmet and Fatima*, a formerly Muslim Kurdish couple who heard the gospel at an underground church in Turkey and accepted Jesus as Savior. They have received death threats and request prayers for protection.
...*Holy Spirit empowerment for local church workers in Germany* who are developing ministries for Muslim refugees.
...*for courage and succor* for the estimated 90 imprisoned Christians in Iran.

Friday, Nov. 10, 2017. Please pray for

...*national churches in India* who are engaging Muslim unreached people groups in the northern part of the country.
...*a group of Christian Arabs from Muslim backgrounds* who live and work in an East African country. As new worshippers of Jesus, they desire teaching and fellowship.
...*the Xinjiang Province of China*. Xinjiang's population of 21 million is 61% Muslim.

Friday, Nov. 17, 2017. Please pray for

...*"some good soil to sow into"* among the hearts of Muslim Baloch and Pashtun people groups in South Asia.
...*favor for servants of the Lord* who labor faithfully among Muslim migrants in Mildura and Sydney, Australia.
...*Lina, a young North African Christian woman* from a Muslim background who recently reached France as a refugee. Lina's family has rejected her because of her "new" Christian faith.

Friday, Nov. 24, 2017. Please pray for

...*Christian expatriate domestic workers* who labor in Middle Eastern countries.
...*the occurrence of Holy Spirit "promptings"* in the prayer times of the growing number of Jumaa Prayer intercessors. Intercessors faithfully plead that the truth about Jesus will penetrate the Muslim world.
...*a new Turkish children's program* that has been launched on a major satellite station.

I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV



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Friday, Dec. 1, 2017. Please pray for

...*Pastor Jamal, in Iraq.* He states, "Since the beginning of this year, I have met over 40 Muslims who became Christians as a result of dreams and visions."

...*for an end to the rise of Islamic terror in Mali, Africa.* Mali's population is 18.6 million; 87.6% are Muslim.

...*guidance* for Latin American churches as they identify opportunities to share Christ with growing numbers of Muslims.

Friday, Dec. 8, 2017. Please pray for

...*Ghada, a new convert from Islam in Kazakhstan;* there are no churches in her village.

...*divine protection for Christians and churches* in the southern Philippines as Muslim insurgent groups foment unrest.

...*discipleship training among new Christians* from Muslim backgrounds in the United Arab Emirates.

Friday, Dec. 15, 2017. Please pray for

...*Hamdi, in a Middle Eastern city.* He says, "I was hopeless and bound in Islam. A taxi driver gave me a Bible, in which I discovered Jesus. My whole life has changed and I want Jesus to use me."

...*perseverance and spiritual growth among nomadic Fulani Christians* from a Muslim background in Niger.

...*wisdom for a local underground church* in an Arabian Peninsula country.

Friday, Dec. 22, 2017. Please pray for

...*outreach ministries* to Muslims in Spain. Spain's population is 46 million; nearly 2 million are Muslim.

...*the growth of the church in Morocco,* where "seeds of suffering" have been planted over the years.

...*Muslims around the world* who will observe Christians celebrating the incarnation of Jesus during the Christmas season. Pray that the spiritual eyes of seeking Muslims will be opened to the truth of "God with us – Immanuel."

Friday, Dec. 29, 2017. Please pray for

...*discipleship efforts among Afghan refugees* in Turkey who have responded to the gospel.

...*for Somalia* as Al-Shabab jihadists increase terror attacks. Somalia's population is 11 million; 99.5% are Muslim.

...*for wisdom for Christians* in the West Java province of Indonesia. Following protests by Islamists, authorities banned two congregations from holding services. West Java's population is 46 million; 97.6% are Muslim.

**All personal names used herein are pseudonyms.*

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