

A Response To Asian Christians for the Muslim World

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Today we, as non-Western churches, have the privilege of bringing the gospel to the Muslim world. I agree with Dr. Kim's description that the Western churches find difficulties in reaching Muslims. However, it is not due to the skin color problem, rather I think it is because the wrong view of Muslim towards Christianity. In Indonesia and perhaps in some other Asian countries, many Muslims regard Christianity as a religion coming from the West.

In Muslims' eyes, Christianity is similar to white people. In addition, Muslims always remember the war between Muslims and Christians known as the Crusades. Therefore, Christians are regarded as their ultimate enemy that needs to be defeated. As a matter of fact, the enmity between Christians and Muslims is taught in Muslim's schools. Usually the Muslim teachers have brainwashed their students since childhood.

It should be remembered too, that ever since the destruction of the World Trade Center , the United States, accompanied by some Western countries, has been involved in a war in Iraq and Afghanistan (confronting the Taliban). Consequently, it has created a deeper enmity among the radical Muslims towards Christianity. As a

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result, Western churches are mostly rejected by Muslims. The preaching of the gospel brought by the Western missionaries has lost its salt.

Dr. Kim, in his paper, states that Western missionaries have been trying their best to approach Muslims through dialogue and working together with the non-Western churches. However, the Western approach is yet based on the apologetic proclamation (there is no detailed description about it), the polemic debates, and sympathetic approach (no description about the meaning of sympathetic approach).

Dr. Kim also describes that in the eyes of the Western missionaries, Islam is heretic even demoniac. This causes Western churches to be reluctant to approach Muslims. The negative Western attitude towards Muslims has also influenced Asian and African churches. As a result, many Asian churches are not ready to reach Muslims with the gospel.

I am convinced that the negative view towards Muslims needs to be changed so that Western missionaries and non-Western churches will be able to see some positive aspects of Muslims. In Indonesia, especially in Semarang, Central Java where I live, my church has taken a bold step: that is, to accept Muslims to be our friends and fellow workers. We are not arguing about the doctrines and some other religious dogmatic teachings, but rather we honor them as our close friends. We try our best to build a close relationship with our Muslim brothers and sisters. We appreciate their prophet Muhammad and their sacred book, the holy Qur'an. Also, we work together to accomplish humanitarian projects, such as helping the poor people, medicating those who are sick, and distributing medicines and vitamins to support the people's health.

Our church does not do the effort alone; we also invite all churches in the city of Semarang to build a friendship with Muslims. We thank God that almost all churches are agreeing with our idea to renew our view towards Muslims. We build our communication through music, traditional dance, and arts. I remember in one

special musical event that was held a couple of months ago. The Muslim musicians presented a song that is similar to the Christmas carol, Silent Night. This caused an influential Muslim leader to encourage the entire audience consisting of Christians and Muslims to sing together reverently. The next day, our singing together was published in the local newspaper, circulating throughout the whole central Java province.

Dr. Kim clearly explains that Muslims have felt that they have been rejected since the birth of Islam. When the prophet Muhammad began his work, he was strongly rejected by his own people, Jews, and Christians. Ever since, rejection has been a basic feeling of Muslims. In one of the five pillars of Islam, Muslims during the Hajj ought to walk hastily seven times between two hills (Safaa and Marwa in Mecca) for the purpose of remembering how Hagar and Ishmael were abandoned by Abraham. Thus, rejection has been experienced by Muslims since Abraham.

Also, when Muslims were defeated by the West during the Colonial era, the sense of trauma strongly appeared. This created a feeling of deep hurt in the life of Muslims. They could not overcome the trauma because they did not develop the theology of suffering. Asian churches need to understand the Muslims' traumatic feelings of rejection, abandonment, humiliation, and frustration in order that Asian churches may build a new perspective in approaching Muslims.

Dr. Kim suggested four missionary approaches to the Muslim world, namely (1) a positive perspective: not Islam but Muslims, (2) dialogue in sympathy and empathy, (3) healing approaches, (4) and cultural advantages and translation of Jesus. Based on my experience in dealing with Muslims in Indonesia, I also want to propose four practical approaches.

1. To build a friendship based on love. Through friendship, Muslims' trauma may be minimized even removed and mutual trust can be established. Sincere

friendship needs to be practiced in order to establish a close relationship between each other.

2. To develop an excellent moral performance. In Asian countries, such as Myanmar, Philippines, and Indonesia, corruption, sexual-abused, drugs, gambling, drinking, and some other destructive behavior are practiced by many people. In Indonesia, which is known as a religious country, those negative deeds are rampant. Asian churches need to display a positive excellent moral performance with the purpose of being the light and salt to win the hearts of Muslims.

3. To demonstrate a good will of working together. To wipe out the trauma felt by the Muslims, Asian churches need to work together with Muslims to achieve the target of the agreed project. Prejudice towards Christianity that fills in the heart of many Muslims can be left out and as a result a unity between Christians and Muslims can be built.

4. To help them who are in need. In some Asian countries, Muslims consist of poor people. Many of them are facing education and health problems. Christians need to follow the example of the Good Samaritan so that they may help the poor Muslims without persuading them to be Christians. Let their hearts convict them about the love of Christ that has been demonstrated in the life of Christians. We, as Christians, expect Muslims may discover the way, truth and life in Christ through Christian's excellent deeds.