

THE EFFECT OF ISLAM ON EVANGELIZING WOMEN  
IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The major threat to Christianity and her evangelistic efforts in the world today is Islamic religion. It is a religion where women do not have equal rights and privileges as men. Consequently, making a number of Muslim women to live under seclusion (purdah), for a substantial part of their lives. These and other hindrances have made evangelism difficult or impossible.

Through this research work, the major problems and hindrances being confronted by the Muslim women were revealed. God is counting on His Church to make use of these information on how best to reach the Muslim women of Northern Nigeria with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Church can do this by lovingly and prayerfully strategizing to meet the felt needs of the Muslim women. Consequently, making millions of these women to respond positively to the love of God, by accepting Jesus Christ into their lives as Lord and Saviour.

Other areas of interest could include: The effect of Islam in evangelizing women in other parts of Nigeria. And the differences in the effect of Islam on urban and rural women in Northern Nigeria.

To understand the ways of life, and the world-view of a Muslim, a brief look was made on Islam, even before the reviews.

The results of the questionnaires reveal that Islam has a strong hold on all adherents especially women. Since most of the rural women in the Northern part of Nigeria are not formally educated they believe whatever their husband and their religious leader tell them without asking questions or trying to verify what they have heard. Also the purdah, that is seclusion of woman in Islam, that hinders them from going out of their homes and freely mixing with the outside world. It is also observed that many Christians do not know customs of these women, nor are they ready to respect these women, while a few individuals and churches are trying to reach Muslim women with the good news of Jesus, others are busy trying to find ways of exploiting them, and extorting money from them.

## **B. Recommendation**

In the light of what has been obtained as results of the questionnaires, interviews and library search, and things observed in working with the Northern Muslim women, the writer of this paper wishes to make the following recommendations. It is hoped that they will help break or soften the effect of Islam on the Muslim women of Northern Nigeria .

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13 say,

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing; If I give all I possess to the poor and

surrender my body to the flames but not love, I gain nothing . . .  
 And now these three remain. Faith, hope, and love. But the  
 greatest of these is love Corinthians 13:1-3,13.(NIV).

Love can break any barrier. No matter how hardened the hearts of the Muslims are, when we turn the other cheek when slapped, the hardened heart gradually starts to soften. The first thing the Christians in Northern Nigeria need to do to evangelize the Muslims around them is to show them unconditional love. The way Christians handle issues such as cattle grazing on unharvested farms, have a way of opening or closing the hearts of the Muslims.

Along side showing love, Christians have to be very prayerful. Prayer must be said at all times for the souls of these Muslim women not to perish. Prayers must be said to encourage those that are persecuted. Prayers must be said for barriers to be broken down and prayer must be said for sustenance of those who do the work of evangelizing this women, so they will not be discouraged.

According to the Christian witness to Muslims, the Thailand report of June 1980 which says, "Christians must also be willing to care and serve these women. "We are trying to meet human need in order to be able to preach the gospel and win converts. Rather, we see loving service of our neighbour as an obligation that is laid upon us. The second of the two great commandants says, 'love your neighbour as you love yourself' (Luke 10:27). We find it impossible to separate service from proclamation, because we cannot separate physical and material need from spiritual need. We believe that the Good News of Jesus is for the whole man (Luke 4:16-19). Even

institutions of considerable restoration, we believe it is possible, in the context of real friendship and loving service, to bear witness to the One in whose name we serve."<sup>71</sup> The willingness of Christians to leave their comfort zone to go to any godly length to help these Muslim women might be the key to opening the closed door to evangelizing them. Dr. & Mrs. Zwemer said,

Owing to the fact that the mother's influence over the children, both boys and girls, up to about ten years of age, is paramount, and that women are the conservative element in the defence of their faith, we believe that missionary bodies ought to lay far more emphasis on work for Muslim women as a means for hastening the evangelization of Muslim lands.<sup>72</sup>

To help make work amongst women easier good health care is required, but it was observed that most of the rural women rarely take their children to good hospitals in the case of ill health, especially since in the case of Goble State where sharia has been instructed, women do not feel very free with male doctors, Sommer and Zwemer agree that, we should have many more women missionary doctors and qualified nurses, especially those skilled in midwifery.<sup>73</sup> It is pathetic to observe that many rural Muslim woman still practice the old tradition of women delivering to their babies at home, thereby endangering both the mother and the baby.

The need for sound formal education cannot be over-emphasized. Since the shari'a law prohibits females and males moving freely, single sexed

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<sup>71</sup>*Thailand Report Christian Witness to Muslims* (Pattaya; Thailand, June 1980),16.

<sup>72</sup>Samuel M. Zwemer (D. & Mrs.). *Moslem Women* (West Medford, Massachusetts: The Central Committee on the United Study of Foreign Missions, 1926), 170.

<sup>73</sup>Annie Van Sommer and Samuel M. Zwemer, eds., *Our Moslem Sisters* (Network: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907),293.

