

Christ's message - salvation by grace



Karen, a MECO worker living and working in Lebanon with her family, reflects on attitudes Christians and Muslims can have about each other and how unhelpful these can be to our Christian witness.

"That's the difference between us Christians and the Muslims," the taxi driver informed us proudly. "We have the teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught us to love our neighbours. You sense it when you come out of church - everyone comes out like an angel."

This was too much for my husband: "Do they really come out like angels? How then do you explain some of the massacres done by Christian militias during the civil war?"

"That's different. You have to understand ..." The conversation lasted a while, but in the end the driver had to admit that if Christians don't actually love Muslims in practice, they can't expect Muslims to be impressed with the teachings of our Lord. Time to take the log out of our own eye!

Of course, it happens the other way as well. Once I was sitting with a group of Muslim women when one of them, with a view to establishing the superiority of Muslims over Jews, expressed her indignation. "The Israelis don't give all Muslims free access to al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, a source of great merit if one prays there. If we Muslims controlled such a source of merit, we would open it freely to all!" The other women squirmed and looked at the floor. Their friend had forgotten that non-Muslims

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'Love your neighbour as yourself' Luke 10:25



like myself are totally banned from entering the cities of Mecca and Medina.

Making comparisons

The game of 'one-upmanship' is one of the most popular sports in the world, and the Middle East is no exception. A great deal of what passes for Christian witness or Muslim da'wa is simply self-praising propaganda. Every day we hear people comparing the ideals of their own religion with the worst practices of someone else's - our faults need to be understood as exceptional and unfortunate necessities, but their faults reveal who they really are.

For all have sinned

It's tempting to get caught up in the game - tempting, but fatal. As soon as we start making comparisons, we lose our message of salvation by grace. It will not help my Muslim neighbours to be convinced, even if I could convince them, that Christians are superior. They need to know that Jesus died to save all people from sin, Muslims and Christians alike. Nor will it help my Christian neighbours to see themselves as superior - we have all failed. Therefore, we must excuse ourselves from the game of one-upmanship: "We do not preach ourselves, but Christ ..." (2 Corinthians 4:5). ■

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