

Appropriate Spiritual Authority

LCA Advanced Module 3 (14.02.2009)

Introduction

In missiological discussions about how best to present the Gospel to people who do not know it yet, the issue of contextualization is very important. How do we best present the Gospel in an appropriate way, so that people would understand it well in their particular culture and worldview? How should churches function, how do we pray and worship, what kind of songs do we sing, how do we dress, what do we best wear in order not to offend the people we want to reach – all these questions are important.

A lot of these questions deal with the cognitive and structural dimension of the Christian faith. How to explain the trinity, how to help people understand the issue of sin and salvation – all this has to do with communicating knowledge. But as we read the Bible we see that there is a great concern about our relationship with God, a relationship that starts with commitment or allegiance to Him. How do we best put this relationship issue in a context that makes sense to the people we want to reach? What are culturally appropriate ways of showing commitment and relationship to God through Jesus Christ?

Another area that is often not dealt with – and this brings us to the topic of our module course – is the issue of spiritual power and authority. Spiritual power is high on the list of priorities of most of the peoples of the world, including Muslims. How do we explain this issue to them? Might there not be culturally appropriate differences in the ways God's authority and power are to be exercised from society to society?

1. Contextualization in three crucial dimensions

Charles Kraft is a well-known American missiologist who has written a lot about communicating the Gospel across cultural borders. Much of what I present in this talk is from his writing.¹ Kraft talks about three encounters that are crucial to the experience and communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He calls these encounters:

- Allegiance (or commitment) encounter
- Truth encounter
- Power encounter

Each of these encounters leads to a very important dimension of Christian experience:

- Allegiance / commitment > Relationship
- Truth / knowledge > Understanding
- Power (spiritual) > Freedom

¹ Charles H. Kraft (ed) 2005. *Appropriate Christianity*. Pasadena: William Carey, chapters 7, 21, 22.

Each of these areas is a crucial dimension of the God-connected life. These areas of encounter are pointing to the three crucial dimensions of Christian experience and witness. Because these dimensions are so important, we need to think about how we can put these issues into the context of the people we want to reach, how we can make these dimensions understandable for them.

Let's look at how these encounters help to address some of the problems people have:

- Knowledge is an appropriate way to overcome ignorance and/or error.
- Spiritual power is what is needed when the problem is satanic captivity, harassment or temptation.
- Allegiance / commitment to Jesus Christ is needed to replace any other allegiance that a person has made primary in his/her life.

Each one of these areas of problems can only be addressed with the appropriate encounter. We can not fight ignorance or error with allegiance, but we need knowledge. We can not fight power with knowledge, but only with power. And we can not fight allegiance with power, but only with another allegiance.

Therefore we need to give all three areas or encounters proper attention as we share the Gospel with Muslims. We need appropriate ways of expressing each of these areas.

Another way of distinguishing these dimensions is to look at the differences in the content of each dimension.

Relationship dimension:

Love, fruits of the Spirit, faith, repentance, prayer, fellowship, intimacy with Christ, other factors that have to do with our relationship with God and other human beings.

These aspects of life are quite different in experience from the things we deal with in our thinking behavior. Though we can think about, talk about, and teach about relationships, none of these knowledge aspects of the subject is the same as *participating in a relationship*. Indeed, there are people who can talk a lot about relationships, but they do not seem to do well in their own relationships.

Truth-understanding dimension:

All of the cognitive aspects of Christianity. Doctrinal and theological topics like our understanding of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, humanity, sin, redemption, faith, Satan and demons, the church, the Kingdom of God, etc.

This dimension is the easiest to deal with, because it has to do mainly with the transmission of information. But communicating knowledge about spiritual issues is easier if people are spiritually free from satanic power and if they live in a solid relationship with God.

Spiritual power dimension:

This involves working in the power of the Holy Spirit to bless, heal (both physically and emotionally), cast out demons.

As with relationships, it involves *doing* something, not just thinking and talking about it. Jesus taught and demonstrated that we are at war with a powerful enemy but that we have authority and power to defeat him (Lk 9:1). The exercise of that power, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, constitutes a dimension distinct from the other two but working in close connection with

them. This is the case because the power we use must come from the true Source of power and the authority to work in that power from our relationship with Him.

2. The power-freedom dimension

Jesus said he came to set captives free (Lk 4:18). In making such a statement, he implied both that there is one who has captured many people and that people need the freedom God offers. People need freedom so badly that he, Jesus, came to earth to offer this freedom. He then demonstrated throughout his ministry what he meant by this statement.

In Philippians 2:5-8 we read that Jesus laid aside his divinity and worked totally as a human being in the power of the Holy Spirit while he was on earth. He set people free from the power of darkness, he healed sick ones, all in the authority and power given him by the Father, never using his own divinity while on earth.

He did this to demonstrate God's love (a relational thing), to teach us what God and the Christian life are all about (knowledge/truth things) and to free people from Satan (a power thing). Jesus gave us the same Holy Spirit under whom he worked, saying that whoever has faith in him will do the same things he did and more (Jn 14:12).

When Jesus left, he gave us power in his name. We, then, are to operate in his authority to achieve the same results as he did. We want to bring people into a relationship with God as Jesus did. But we have to recognize, as he did, that many are in captivity and, therefore in need of freedom from the hold of the enemy. Only when people are freed will they be able to understand the gospel and commit themselves to Christ.

Some issues regarding the power-freedom dimension:

- 1. The primary concern is freedom.**
2. The power in focus here is spiritual, not political or personal.
3. This dimension recognizes that humans are held captive by Satan.
4. Jesus worked in the power of the Holy Spirit to set captives free (Lk 4:18-19), he did nothing under the power of his own divinity (Phil. 2:5-8).
5. Jesus passed this power on to his followers (Lk 9:1; Jn 14:12; Acts 1:4-8).
6. Satanic power must be defeated with God's power (it can not be defeated simply with truth or a correct allegiance, though these help).
7. Under this dimension, the church is experienced both as a hospital where wounds are being healed, and by doing this freeing people, and as an army that attacks the enemy and defeating him.
8. Awareness of the power dimensions of the Gospel needs to be taught both cognitively and, especially, experientially (as Jesus did).
9. Theology is experienced as victory in warfare resulting in freedom to relate and think.

3. Appropriate expressions of spiritual power leading to freedom

What, then, are biblically, culturally, and personally appropriate expressions of the dimension of spiritual power that lead to freedom? How can we apply the biblical principles in our outreach to Muslims?

We can expect that there will be culturally different ways of expressing spiritual power and of experiencing freedom from demonic oppression. But how do they look like in an Islamic environment in East Africa?

In communities dominated by Islam there are already those who practice spiritual healing and even driving out demons. The fakih and sheikhs are involved in such activities. Is there anything that Christians should learn from these “spiritual specialists?” Charles Kraft seems to suggest that we should do so. What do you think?

I personally do not think that we should model a Muslim sheikh or fakih, because as followers of Jesus we do not want to be put in the same category as they. We are not power people who manipulate the spirit world, who do some magic in order to achieve miracles. I believe we should use a low-key approach:

- We do not advertise certain “powerful” people.
- Spiritual authority has been given to all believers, not only to some specialists.
- We use our authority quietly and humbly.
- We do not take payments for such ministries.

Caleb Chul-Soo Kim and John and Anna Travis have written a chapter in the book “From seed to fruit” about relevant responses to Folk Muslims (265-278). In this chapter they suggest the several appropriate expressions of spiritual power that will lead to freedom. The rest of this talk is based on their suggestions.

In response particularly to the worldview, practices and needs of folk Muslims, Christians should use three types of prayer: *Breaking prayer, healing prayer, and deliverance prayer.*

Breaking prayer

This prayer deals with breaking spiritual bondages. It is characterized by a specific renunciation and repentance. We should talk with Muslims who want to follow Jesus Christ about their possible involvement in occult practices in the past. If there are any signs that spiritual bondage is present, we should encourage them to confess this involvement at the time when they pray to accept Jesus, or afterwards. They should be led in a prayer of renouncing any involvement with dark spiritual forces. It is appropriate to bring this issue into the open, make it a topic to talk about, and deal with it in spiritual authority. But it is important that the person pronounces that he or she wants to separate himself or herself from these powers, this is not something that can be done by the person who is leading him or her to Christ.

Healing prayer

This kind of prayer consists of both physical healing and inner healing. As Christians who witness to Muslims we should pray for their needs, for sick people. Also in fellowship groups

and house churches we should offer regular prayer for diseases, injuries, and physical handicaps and bring it before the Lord in prayer.

Inner healing deals with wounds of the heart, painful memories, and destructive thought patterns. In a personal counseling setting, as the two talk and pray together, there might be issues coming up of this sort that can be brought to the Lord in prayer. In the presence of God the person who has the inner wounds can describe to God again what he or she felt at that time. The two will wait before the Lord for some time, listening to something that God might bring to attention, revealing something about himself; assuring that he was there in the midst of the hurting situation. Then God will bring healing.

Deliverance prayer

This kind of prayer is ordering out demons from the life of the person in trouble with the authority Jesus gave us. If sufficient breaking prayer and healing prayer have occurred, this process of ordering demons to leave can be quite simple and straightforward. At other times it can involve a longer struggle.

An important aspect of deliverance prayer is that it should not be seen as restricted only to evangelism or witnessing. Probably there are also a number of new followers of Jesus from a Muslim background who need this kind of deliverance prayer months or years after their conversion. Healing and deliverance are often a process and after some time God can bring out other issues that have not been dealt with.

Holistic healing prayer and the three encounters

It is helpful to look at prayer as a form of power encounter in light of the three encounters we discussed at the beginning of this talk.

An encounter through a spiritual power dimension can open the heart of Muslims to experience God's truth, which will hopefully lead to a new allegiance to God through Jesus Christ. So a power encounter can lead to a truth encounter and then to an allegiance encounter.

This means that holistic healing prayer is not an end in itself, but rather is part of a larger divine plan of seeing all people turn in allegiance to God through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Jesus loves Muslims. He came for them; he died for them. He longs for them to enter the Kingdom and experience all that God has for them. Many Muslims, particularly from a folk Islamic background, seek healing, blessing, deliverance from evil, and the hope of a better life both now and in the hereafter – just what the people of Palestine sought in Christ's time. God has equipped his people with spiritual authority in Christ and power to heal and cast out demons in his name. With love, humility, and Spirit-breathed boldness, let us take this healing power to Muslim brothers and sisters whom our Master has called us to serve.

Reinhold Straehler
LCA