

to engage a religion, a culture completely foreign to Judeo-Christian culture, and the events calling for this have an urgency to them we ignore at our peril. May God guide and empower us for this task by the power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of His Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

produce one convert — certainly this is not the way to make the Church grow. We need to set up parish programs by which our people will be helped to do their part. In this the priest must take the initiative. We need especially to help our people to overcome their timidity and reluctance in speaking about Catholicism. Classes on apologetics will instill confidence so that when a non-Catholic raises an objection to the Church that person will have the knowledge necessary to overcome misunderstandings.

Further, there is sufficient information published to guide those interested in evangelization at the parish, community, or diocesan level.

The priest as the representative of the hierarchy can provide the training primarily by forming small groups who talk over the problem, set goals and objectives, and assign tasks. They do not have to have any special abilities.

Inquiry forums must be set up, with qualified teachers able to answer questions from prospective candidates.

RCIA programs must primarily focus on Church teaching and the foundations for these beliefs.

Though a lay training program may seem difficult to fit into a priest's busy schedule, he will find it eminently worth the sacrifice. He will find the help mates he needs to carry on the work and at the same time help parishioners to grow. Constant experience shows that where Catholics are involved in trying to bring others to Christ, they themselves are drawn closer to him. The Mass, prayer, and the sacraments — all mean much more to them when they are conscious of being co-workers with Christ.

The laity have a special part, which cannot be performed by the clergy. It is the work of parents, for example, to teach their children about God and train them in Christian morality; this cannot be left to the school or any other entity. It is the work of lay

Catholics to manifest Christ to their family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and in short, to everyone with whom they come into contact. They have a need and a right to responsible participation in order to fully develop as Christians. Religious instruction alone will not do it. Only responsible participation makes for maturity, and for lack of it many Catholics today are spiritually very immature. This explains the inability of so many to stand up to the evil influences around them.

The specific vocation of the clergy is pastoral; the laity are simply helpers in this area. The specific vocation of the laity in the Church's work is apostolic; this they have from God because they are laity, each at his own level. They also are Christ, sent to make Him known around the world. They should bring Him everywhere they go and to be ready to present Him to all they meet.

We should not expect a person to do the work of a priest without the necessary training. Nor should we expect a person to do the work of an evangelist without training.

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Pamphlet 248

## **Preaching Christ Crucified**

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In 1959, I was born into a Muslim family, in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq. I was the fifth child of a large family. The Arab culture and the religion of Islam were the dominant influences, overshadowing the three other nations in Iraq, the largest of which are the Kurds. I began the formal study of Arabic at the age of twelve. By the time I was 16, I was writing poetry in Arabic, some of which was published as early as 1976.

My political activities in the Kurdish opposition against Saddam Hussein spanned most of my adult life in Iraq. Saddam Hussein, in one of his many attacks on the Kurds, forcibly moved large populations from their homes, banishing them to other parts of the country, so as to grab and secure his control over the Kurdish oil fields. This began in 1975, my active effort to free the Kurds and to unite them politically. For this, I suffered jail and torture a number of times at the hand of Saddam. My close encounters with death were seen as "luck" when armies invading Kurdistan took the lives of my fellow fighters. Numerous times God saved me from death: by a judge's decree, by the chemical bombs raining down upon the Kurds, by near-drownings, and serious woundings. However, I did not then recognize that it was the hand of God. I continued in my freedom fighting, often spending months in the mountains, suffering cold and hunger, raw fear and my people's utter abandonment by the nations of the world. In 1988, I saw my most loved friends die in the horrors of the chemical attack on the town of Halabja. I came to understand the frailty of every man in his sin, and the utter hopelessness of life without God's intervention and protection.

Since the early stages of my life, I was interested in Christian ways of life due mainly to my earliest memories of our Christian neighbors, many of whom were beautiful examples of Christ's love. Remembering them leaves me with the precious realization that God was calling me to Him, even from my childhood. One day, an Armenian Christian

chanced to give me a book on the martyrs of the early Church. I read it and was inspired to live and die for the freedom of my people, the Kurds. I had a voracious appetite for reading during my youth, and read widely in theology, philosophy and history. I became fluent in English, reading Voltaire, Hegel, Dickens, to name a few. Eventually I went on to avidly study the giants of the Christian faith, St. Thomas Aquinas among them. By consistent investigation and comparison of Islamic and Christian theology, I came to recognize the truth of Christianity in early 1982. But this remained an intellectual acknowledgement only. I recognized Jesus was the Messiah, but I did not know Him personally.

After the Gulf War, I married Sara, an American Christian, telling her that I believed Jesus was the Messiah, but admonishing her that she was not to try to convert me to her religion. I did this despite the fact that I did profess to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Muslims understand these terms quite differently than do Christians. She knew this was a solemn agreement, and for the next two years, we endured all the storminess of an inter-cultural and inter-religious marriage. Through the many arguments and bitter disagreements, I slowly came to see that Sara constantly forgave me, loved me, and wanted me more than she wanted her own way. Unbeknownst to her, she was being the living testimony of the Person of Christ in our marital struggles. Eventually, I began getting up at night to secretly read the New Testament. I was coming ever closer to the Lord. I was secretly meeting with Him in His holy Word, the Bible.

We came to the United States, early in 1993, and continued a small business Sara operated at the time. I had studied Islamic and Christian theology for the most part of my life. This study took me on a journey that led me finally to Jesus Christ, who I intellectually recognized as the Messiah. Even at this point in my life I did not make the final commitment of baptism.

One day, I was approached by my dentist, Doc Blevins, who prayed with me, and eventually brought me to faith in Christ, during the summer of 1995. I was baptized into the Body of Christ on September

17, 1995. Everything was changed. I began immediately to tell my Muslim friends why I had converted, and made great efforts to evangelize them. I studied the Bible until I could quote chapter and verse, and began to witness to everyone who would listen. Many did listen, intrigued by this Kurdish convert with so much enthusiasm for Jesus and the Bible. I knew that I now had what was needed for my entire nation, indeed, for all of the Muslims, and the unreached world. I had the Gospel, and nothing could keep me from sharing it!

For the next year or so, I read for hours every day, witnessing to hundreds of customers at work, and finding that I had a gift to bring people to faith in Christ, or to get them to be once again active in their faith. In my small business, in our neighborhood, among strangers and friends, I found nothing worth speaking of anymore but Jesus Christ. It has now been eight years; during that time the Lord has used my witness to win many people to Himself, some of them Muslims, some of them backsliders, and some of them atheistic fence sitters. "Whoever is ashamed of Me and of My words . . . the Son of Man will be ashamed of when He comes in His Father's glory" (Mark 8:38).

Soon after my baptism, Sara and I began a neighborhood Bible study for anyone, from any denomination who would come. To this Bible study came a nine-year-old neighbor boy, Joe Sobran, who would read questions and answers from his Baltimore catechism. Sara and I were shocked at the unique questions, and were floored by the simple and profound answers in the back of each chapter. Little Joey did not give up, asking us why we were not Catholic. He would plant seeds every time he spoke to us of the faith.

One evening, Sara and I were watching television, and happened upon EWTN, at the exact moment of the Consecration where the priest was elevating the Host. We were shocked by this simple and beautiful respect for Jesus. Then the priest elevated the Chalice, and in its ornate beauty. The priest's vestments had a beauty, which showed that only the best we can offer is good enough for God. Sara and I suddenly understood the beauty in the

Catholic Church was there because it was truly the HOUSE of GOD.

In 1996, Sara and I were introduced to the late Catholic theologian, Father William G. Most, who taught us Catholic theology. He generously gave every Sunday for a year and a half to bring these two fundamentalists around to joining the Catholic Church. We were received in the Catholic Church, July 13, 1998 at a special Mass.

Before Father Most died, in January of 1999, he and I discussed forming a forum in which Christians and Muslims could dialogue. Father Most was a great encouragement in the founding of the Christian-Islamic Forum, as well as in every way he lived in his last months. It was an eternal blessing to have sat at his feet and learned the Catholic faith.

After the death of Father Most, I carried on my life mission of reaching Muslims. Early in 2001, after returning from a pilgrimage to Rome, along with some friends, I begin the work on the legal framework for the non-profit Christian-Islamic Forum, Inc. On August 13, 2001, the Christian-Islamic Forum officially came into being.

The very first introductory meeting of our new organization was to be held at Holy Spirit Catholic Church, in Annandale, Virginia, on September 11, 2001. The meeting was cancelled, because of the terrorist attack against our country. The conclusion Sara and I drew from the horrific events was that God was telling everyone it was time to pay attention to the Muslims. Either they were going to aggressively "evangelize" the West through their various forms of Jihad, or we were going to have to evangelize them with the Good News of Jesus Christ. I've been called on to speak numerous times in the last months since the tragedy. These talks have been about the realities of Islam, their strategies for converting us to Islam and what we can do to successfully be heard and received by them. In the past, Christians have depended on the Bible to evangelize Muslims. This strategy has been largely unsuccessful because Muslims consider the Bible to be corrupted and falsified by Christians and Jews. We are developing a method to reach out to Muslims using only their sources, the Qur'an, Mohammed's Tradition, etc. All of us in the West, are having to study now, and learn