

# JOYFUL WITNESS *IN* *THE* MUSLIM WORLD

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**Sharing the Gospel in Everyday Encounters**

EVELYNE A. REISACHER

  
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To my family, friends, colleagues, and students  
throughout the Muslim world  
with whom I have experienced countless moments of joy

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## Series Preface

A mission leader in 1965, not too long ago, could not have foreseen what mission looks like today. In 1965 nations in the non-Western world were gaining their independence after centuries of Western colonialism. Mission societies from Europe and North America were trying to adjust to the new global realities where Muslim nations, once dominated by the West, no longer granted “missionary visas.” The largest mission field, China, was “closed.” Decolonization, it seemed, was bringing a decline to missionary work in Africa and Asia.

On the home front, Western churches were in decline, and the traditional missionary factories—mainline churches in the West—were struggling with their own identity. Membership was then—and remains—in decline, and missionary vocations were following the same pattern. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches began to surpass mainline churches in mission, and then, just when we thought we understood the new missionary patterns, Brazilians began to go to Pakistan and Malaysians began to evangelize Vietnam and Cambodia. Africans (highly educated and strongly Christian) began to move in great numbers to Europe and North America. Countries that had been “closed” began to have large movements to Christ, without the aid of traditional mission societies. And in the midst of this rapid transformation of missionary work, the alarm came out that most of the Christians in the world were now in Asia, Latin America, and Africa rather than in the West.

What does it mean to be involved in mission in this new world where Christianity has been turned upside down in less than a century?

*This series is directed at this new global context for mission.* Fuller Theological Seminary, particularly through its School of Intercultural Studies (formerly School of World Mission), has been attentive to trends in global

mission for over half a century. In fact, much innovation in mission thinking and practice has emanated from Fuller since Donald McGavran moved from Oregon to California—as the first and founding dean of the then–School of World Mission—to apply lessons about church growth learned in India to other areas of the world. Since that time many creative mission professors have provided global leadership in mission thinking: Ralph Winter (unreached people groups), Paul Hiebert (anthropology for mission), Charles Kraft (mission and spiritual dynamics), and Dudley Woodberry (Islamics), among others.

This series provides the most recent global scholarship on key themes in mission, written for a general audience of Christians committed to God’s mission. Designed to be student, user, and textbook friendly, each volume contains voices from around the world speaking about the theme, and each chapter concludes with discussion questions so the books can be used for group studies. As the “fields” of mission are changing, shifting, and “shrinking,” the discussions connect the church and the world, East and West, North and South, the developed and developing worlds, each crossing cultural, political, social, and religious boundaries in its own ways and knitting together people living and serving in various communities, both of faith and of other commitments—this is the contemporary landscape of the mission of God. Enjoy the challenges of each volume and find ways to live into God’s mission.

Scott W. Sunquist

Amos Yong

# Acknowledgments

The idea for this book sprang from over a decade of teaching and research on Islam and Muslim societies at Fuller Theological Seminary and several decades of interactions and witness among Muslims in Europe and around the world. I am especially thankful for L'Ami, a Paris-based network of Muslim-born followers of Christ, where I experienced countless moments of joy and also developed exquisite friendships with Muslims. I owe a debt of gratitude to its founder, Dr. Farida Saidi, who has given me valuable advice for this book.

The series editors, Dean Scott Sunquist and Professor Amos Yong, invited me to contribute this volume. I am very grateful to them for their support along the way. Dr. Sunquist's close and cheerful reading of the manuscript has been a tremendous help. I am also thankful to one of my students, Gwen, who reviewed several chapters of this book.

During the months I was writing this book, my colleagues from the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary continuously cheered and prayed for me. They always greeted me with "Hi, How are you?" immediately followed by "And how is your book on joy coming along?" I have been enriched by many conversations with them around the themes included in this book.

Without Evelyne Richir and Clair and David Fung's generous offer of a pleasant place to write for a few weeks, I would not have completed the manuscript in time. They provided a calm oasis in the midst of hectic teaching terms.

Finally, this project could not have been completed without the help of the wonderful editorial team at Baker Academic, first by James Ernest and then by Brian Bolger. It was a true joy to work with them.

# Introduction

Did you say “joy”? You must be out of your mind! Surely you are not writing a book about the joy of witnessing in the Muslim world? Not now. Have you heard about the gruesome beheading of Coptic Christians in Libya? Have you seen images of bombs falling on Muslim civilians in Iraq? Are you blind to current events? Is it not insensitive in the face of the ongoing violence Muslims and Christians are suffering? How insensitive it is of you to talk about joy when Christian refugees by the millions have fled their home countries in the Middle East. And have you not heard about the burning of churches and mosques in Nigeria? What are you thinking? Could you not choose a better title, one more appropriate for a book about Christian witness to Muslims? This, in a nutshell, is what some friends said to me when I told them I was writing this book.

However, I have not undertaken this task lightly. I have pondered these questions for a long time. I have spent this past decade screaming to God, praying, fasting, and lamenting about the situation in parts of the Muslim world. I don't know how many tears I have shed. I have cried my heart out concerning the Muslim world. Each time I turn on the news I am afraid I will see more social or political unrest ruining Muslim-Christian encounters. Thus I can say, like Jeremiah, “My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground” as I see the destruction of people, children fainting in streets of cities, and entire countries in turmoil (Lam. 2:11 NIV).

On the other hand, how can a missiologist like me not mention joy, when joy is so deeply embedded in the biblical narrative and is so clearly at the heart of God and his love for the world? And having discovered this joy, how does one relate it to challenging, and even hopeless, contexts? This is exactly the goal of this book. I tie the missiology of joy to ordinary relations with

Muslims in order to help Christians witness for Christ in the Muslim world. I show that joy is an important and neglected aspect of God's mission. Current research on the nature of human attachment also reveals the importance of joy in the formation of healthy bonds. These two separate fields of study seem at first very far apart. They are not. Both mission and human attachment research deal with the joyful aspect of personal relations. When integrated, they strengthen each other. They also open new ways for witnessing in the Muslim world. After many years of teaching and visiting churches and Christian organizations, I have noticed that Christians dehumanize Muslims in certain ways. We see Muslims as targets of mission instead of accepting them as human beings with whom we interact in everyday life. Walls have been erected between Muslims and Christians by social and political conflicts and by theological debates that have given the impression that Christians are always meeting with Muslims in extraordinary contexts. This should not be so, since today, in our global village, Muslims and Christians are likely to meet each other in any place in the world, even the virtual one. Joy can be a catalyst to relationship and witness anywhere.

I wrote this book for those who are looking for mission motivations that do not involve fear, belligerence, or despair in interactions with Muslims. I refuse to add to the long list of essays on fear- or hate-mongering. Without neglecting to address these emotions,<sup>1</sup> I find it more important to focus on what might be called joy-centric mission. I hope that those who want to join me on the journey of sharing the gospel with Muslim friends, colleagues, or neighbors will read this book. No prior knowledge of Islam is needed. However, this book is not only for novices. It is also for experts who are looking for new models of witness that address twenty-first-century situations.

Readers will notice that I have included sidebars with reflections by scholars and practitioners from around the world. These are Christians who are willing to share their experiences and reflections on joy-centric mission. We need voices from all parts of the world in order to understand the current nature of Christian witness. People interpret issues related to Islam differently depending on where they live. I have noticed, for example, that Christians who live as a minority in Muslim countries sometimes disagree with ways churches in Muslim-minority contexts approach theological conversations with Muslims. Diverse voices do not need to be divisive. Global conversations can and should be joyful.

1. Evelyne A. Reisacher, "Fear and Muslim-Christian Conflict Transformation: Resources from Attachment Theory and Affect Regulation," in *Peace-Building by, between, and beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*, ed. Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Augsburg (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 157–70.

This book is not about current hot-button issues, such as jihad, polygamy, veiling, terrorism, and so on. Although these topics appear here, they are treated as concerns of Muslims in their everyday lives. I discuss six contexts in which I have observed that joyful witness to Muslims takes place: social media, art, caring for the earth, caring for the needy, urban life, and theologizing together. The outline of the book reflects the way I integrated these issues with various topics related to joy. Chapter 1 discusses joyful witness from a missiological perspective. Chapter 2 looks at joyful relations from a human attachment perspective. Chapters 3 through 8 describe how joyful witness occurs in the six types of encounters mentioned above.

## Joyful Witness

I have met many Muslims since my first conversation at age thirteen with a neighbor who wanted to know more about Jesus. When I attended college, I joined a Christian student group. On campus, I used to host an exhibition table every week, presenting Bibles in many languages. I held countless conversations about my faith with Muslim students, who were often surprised to see an Arabic Bible for the first time. After college I worked for twenty years with Christian fellowships of Muslim-born followers of Christ in France. These connections led me to North Africa and the Middle East, where many of my Muslim friends had been raised. Later, when I started teaching at Fuller Theological Seminary, my Muslim networks expanded even further. I arranged for my students and myself to meet Muslim scholars and practitioners. Even now, I continue to visit Muslim-majority contexts worldwide to teach and visit churches. Many stories in this book come from the happy times that I have spent with Muslims throughout these years.

I was first attracted to the theme of joyful witness when I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the nature of the relationships between North African and French believers in evangelical churches in France.<sup>2</sup> While Muslims were turning to Jesus in increasing numbers, their relationships with local churches were often less than joyous and natural. In that research, I drew heavily on the findings of neuroscientist Allan Schore, who described the neurobiological mechanisms of human attachment.<sup>3</sup> Human attachment is one way of measuring human love and commitment. Joy plays a central

2. Evelyne A. Reisacher, "The Processes of Attachment between the Algerians and French within the Christian Community in France" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001).

3. Allan N. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1994).

role in Schore's theory of human bonding. Chapter 2 will explain this in more detail.

As I immersed myself in neuroscientific literature on joy, I was curious to explore that theme in the Bible as well. Did joy play any significant role in the earliest Christian mission? How has it applied to Muslim-Christian relations in the past? I felt encouraged when I met several theologians who were interested in joy. Recently this theme has gained even more attention from Christian scholars and missiologists, as evidenced by the recent research project on the "theology of joy" at Yale Divinity School<sup>4</sup> and the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis concerning the joy of the gospel.<sup>5</sup> This trend toward more joyful witness will be discussed in chapter 1, where I design a conceptual framework to explore joy in witness among Muslims.

This trend toward more joy in witness has often been absent from missiological literature. I remember that the first books I read about mission used phrases like "hard"<sup>6</sup> or "impossible" to describe this pursuit.<sup>7</sup> Christians have often been fearful and unwilling to reach out to Muslims because they didn't see many Muslims being converted through the ministry of others, and if some were converted, they would most probably suffer as apostates. Recently, the discourse has changed. More evangelical authors stress the importance of love and empathy. Instead of favoring confrontation and fearmongering, they highlight positive aspects of mission among Muslims and explain how those who reach out to Muslims are blessed by their encounters and positively transformed as they proclaim the gospel.<sup>8</sup> These authors prefer mission practices such as dialogue, friendship, and peacemaking. Sometimes, reacting against a strictly polemical approach, they feel compelled to remind their brothers and sisters in Christ of the importance of love and care for Muslim people. Recently, for example, Fuller Theological Seminary has been involved in a three-year project on peace building between Muslims and evangelicals,

4. Yale Center for Faith and Culture, "Theology of Joy & the Good Life," <http://faith.yale.edu/joy/about>.

5. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium* [The joy of the gospel], November 24, 2013, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

6. Charles Marsh, *Too Hard for God?* (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic Media, 2000).

7. Miriam Huffman Rockness, *A Passion for the Impossible: The Life of Lilius Trotter* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2003).

8. See, e.g., Shirin Taber, *Muslims Next Door: Uncovering Myths and Creating Friendships* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), or Carl Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus: Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2008). Also read Benjamin L. Corey, "The Call for Christians to Radically Love Our Muslim Neighbors," *Patheos: Hosting the Conversation on Faith* (blog), February 17, 2015, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/formerlyfundie/the-call-for-christians-to-radically-love-our-muslim-neighbors/>.

which resulted in a multiauthored book<sup>9</sup> by Muslim and Christian scholars and in several peace-building workshops held in churches and mosques across the United States.

But despite these encouraging approaches, I found that the theme of “joy” rarely appears in mission discourse on Muslim-Christian relations. While anecdotal research shows joyful witness among Muslims, it is often not systematically reported. I write this book to begin to change this trend and make room for joy in our encounters with Muslims—a theme that is much more true to the biblical witness and to our theological commitments.

## Joyful Encounters

Missiologists have long been interested in the impact of relationships on sharing the gospel. They have noted that generally, when relations are bad, either witness turns clumsy, ineffective, or insensitive, or no witness is borne. Obviously, when Muslims and Christians are estranged, afraid of each other, or at war with each other, the proclamation of the gospel suffers. Conversely, good relationships can advance the gospel. J. Dudley Woodberry, who researched over 720 former Muslims, found that most of them who became followers of Christ said it was because of the lifestyle manifested in those who shared the gospel.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, today, Muslim-Christian relationships are often weak. In 2010 a survey of 2,700 Christian leaders at the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in Cape Town revealed that 67 percent of them viewed Muslims, as a religious group, unfavorably.<sup>11</sup> Although the word “unfavorable” was not clearly defined, these findings seem to corroborate other accounts that show that Christians often find it difficult to engage with Muslims. Given the poor quality of many relations and given that the theme of this book is joyful witness, we must explore how Muslims and Christians can develop healthier bonds. After a brief historical review of Muslim-Christian relations, chapter 2 explores healthy relations with a special emphasis on joy.

By looking carefully at everyday encounters, one can find examples of joy. In my classes and church meetings, I often show a YouTube video in which

9. Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Augsburg, eds., *Peace-Building by, between, and beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010).

10. J. Dudley Woodberry, Russell G. Shubin, and G. Marks, “Why Muslims Follow Jesus,” *Christianity Today*, October 24, 2007, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/october/42.80.html>.

11. Global Survey of Evangelical Protestant Leaders, Pew Research Center, June 22, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/06/22/global-survey-of-evangelical-protestant-leaders/>.

British Muslims sing and dance along to Pharrell Williams's hit tune "Happy."<sup>12</sup> The "Happy" video surprises many Christians. It is almost as if many could not imagine that Muslims could be happy! Furthermore, it is hard for them to conceive that witness in the Muslim world can be pleasurable. Therefore, in chapters 3 through 8, I review ordinary encounters between Muslims and Christians. I hope this section will help Christians discover the joy of sharing the gospel with Muslims.

In the past, those who witnessed among Muslims were often experts on Islam or members of specialized mission organizations. Those with little or no knowledge felt they were not ready. But, despite the timidity of grassroots Christians, God has often used them. I can think of scores of testimonies that describe how Muslims met Jesus in everyday encounters. One woman became a follower of Christ because her colleague at work had left a Bible on her desk. Another, a friend of mine, heard the gospel through a nurse visiting her home. Through many other similar, ordinary encounters Muslims have been led to Christ. As readers look at the various types of encounters in this book, they may discover that they have connections with Muslims that they have not even considered.

Furthermore, today, occasions for meeting with Muslims are almost limitless. Contemporary societal changes in the Muslim world make new kinds of mission practices possible, many of which are presented in this book. What guided my choice of areas to address was a class that I teach at Fuller called Muslim Societies. Students in this class study Islam through social sciences rather than by a more traditional approach through theology or history. They learn a lot about Islam by studying people. After teaching this class for several years, I have identified certain areas that have been deeply neglected in missiological writings on Muslim societies. Though not comprehensive, my list is nonetheless useful. I hope that future research will broaden the scope of this study and that Christians will continue to explore new avenues for sharing the gospel in a world that continues to be transformed.

Mission among Muslims is not "extraordinary" or an "impossible challenge," though too often Christians have seen it as such. I have attended too many meetings where, when I have announced that I am sharing the gospel with Muslims, I have been treated like a rock star. It is perceived as a miracle, a unique experience! This trend has to change. We must produce mission practices that are connected with the everyday realities of people, where people actually live and hurt and hope in local communities. Witness

12. Pharrell Williams—Happy British Muslims!, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVDIXqLLqSM>.

among Muslims happens in the most ordinary places and in contexts that mission has not yet imagined.

Perhaps one reason why Christians have not engaged with Muslims in ordinary encounters is that many have been exposed to the study of Islam from a classical approach.<sup>13</sup> In his chapter titled “Considering ‘Ordinariness’ in Studying Muslim Cultures and Discipleship,”<sup>14</sup> missiologist and Islamicist C. S. Caleb Kim explains that “conventional approaches do not seem to help outsiders to grasp what ordinary Muslims experience socially and psychologically, how they experience their religion in daily life, and whether and how they struggle to implement their religious ideologies practically.” Other authors, outside the circle of missiology, have also underlined this scarcity of resources on “ordinary” Muslims.<sup>15</sup> The lack of focus in mission on the study of Muslims’ ordinary life experiences, as described by Gallup researcher Dalia Mogahed,<sup>16</sup> may explain why Christians have not engaged with Muslims and have let “experts” reach out to them.

Yet Christian encounters with Muslims would grow exponentially if Christians recognized how many opportunities are available for such encounters. Many meetings that are already happening are not so unfamiliar and foreign as they have been made out to be in the past. As I present new and innovative models of engagement for the twenty-first century, I trust that my readers will find resources for making their journeys in the Muslim world more pleasurable. Please enter this journey with great hope and with the joy of the kingdom.

13. C. S. Caleb Kim uses the phrase “classical approach” to refer to an approach whose “focus lies mainly on historical events, theological issues, political relations, and sociological implications, thus scarcely presenting cultural experiences actually lived by ordinary Muslims.” C. S. Caleb Kim, “Considering ‘Ordinariness’ in Studying Muslim Cultures and Discipleship,” in *Discipleship in the 21st Century Mission*, ed. Timothy K. Park and Steve K. Eom (Euiwang, South Korea: East-West Center for MRD, 2014), 177n27.

14. *Ibid.*

15. See, e.g., John R. Bowen, *A New Anthropology of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2, 5.

16. Dalia Mogahed, “Ordinary Muslims,” Gallup World Poll Special Report: Muslim World, 2006, <http://media.gallup.com/MuslimWestFacts/PDF/GALLUPMUSLIMSTUDIESOrdinaryMuslims030607rev.pdf>.

# 1

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## Toward Joyful Witness

The first book I read on mission in the Muslim world was sad and depressing. It told the story of a country without an evangelical church. The handful of followers of Christ from Muslim families ended up arrested or dying in a car accident. When I reached the last page of that book, joy was the least of my emotions. A similar mood prevailed in my own Christian circles. When I shared my desire to witness to Muslims, my friends would usually give me a strange look as if I had told them I was sent to the galleys (or to the gallows!). And what about you? Have you heard stories of joyful witness in the Muslim world? Or, like me, have you only read the stories of suffering, pain, and loss?

Christian witness among Muslims is usually characterized as difficult and fear triggering. I often wondered why joy was missing in mission discourses related to the Muslim world. Intrigued by the lack of references, I investigated biblical texts and writings by theologians and missiologists that relate joy to the witness of the Christian community in general.<sup>1</sup> I found more resources than I anticipated. This should not surprise us, though it did astonish Swiss theologian Karl Barth in the mid-twentieth century, prompting him to observe “how many references there are in the Old and New Testaments to delight, joy, bliss, exultation, merry-making and rejoicing, and how emphatically these

1. At first, seeking a theoretical framework for joy in Christian witness among Muslims, I wanted to title this chapter “Toward a Missiology of Joy.” Although what I have achieved here cannot be called a missiology of joy, the chapter offers enough evidence that future research likely will make my framework more robust.

are demanded from the Book of Psalms to the Epistle to the Philippians.”<sup>2</sup> A brief review of such references naturally supports missiological concepts that lead to joyful witness among Muslims, by both full-time missionaries and ordinary Christians.

### Joy-Centric Worship

Does God dance? I raise that question in my class titled *World Religions: Art and Symbols*. Hindu traditions, for example, do not shy away from representing their gods dancing, playing an instrument, and radiating joyful energy.<sup>3</sup> But Christian students are often speechless about the idea of a dancing God. It is hard for them to imagine God in the same postures as Shiva in its cosmic dance or Krishna in its dance of divine love. To draw them further out of their comfort zone, I usually show paintings by Christian artists from a Hindu background, such as contemporary Balinese artist Nyoman Darsane’s representation of Jesus dancing.<sup>4</sup> After that, the class usually takes up an animated discussion of divine joy and bliss.

I must confess that, like many of my students, I have long resisted the idea of portraying God dancing. Early in my Christian life, I imagined him sitting on a throne, like some emotionless icons I had seen in churches or museums. Undoubtedly, church controversies about divine emotions and the impassibility of God had affected me. Centuries after his death, church father Origen was still whispering in my ear, “The divine nature is far removed from every feeling of emotion and alteration; it always remains motionless and unperturbed on the summit of blessedness.”<sup>5</sup> The iconoclastic period, with its prohibition of representations of God, also left an imprint in my mind. Later I discovered theologians who were not afraid of representing God and describing divine emotions. They challenged apathetic theology and dared to talk of “divine enjoyment.” With Jürgen Moltmann I discovered that God has feelings,<sup>6</sup> and with William A. Dyrness that the church has

2. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, *The Doctrine of Creation, Part 4* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961), 375.

3. See, e.g., the section on “Dance in Hindu Mythology” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, ed. Frank Burch Brown (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 192–96.

4. See Victoria Emily Jones, “Jesus the Dancer, Part 7: The Art of Nyoman Darsane,” *The Jesus Question*, March 25, 2012, <http://thejesusquestion.org/2012/03/25/jesus-the-dancer-part-7-the-art-of-nyoman-darsane/>.

5. Origen, *Sermons of Numbers* 23.2, quoted in William E. Phipps, *Wisdom and Wit of Rabbi Jesus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 84.

6. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

often represented God artistically.<sup>7</sup> While theological controversies continue to linger, I have slowly learned to appreciate Indian paintings of a dancing Jesus. They highlight joyful aspects of God that I had not noticed before.

Are these characteristics of God found in the Bible? Several references suggest pleasant relationships between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For example, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism, a voice from heaven declared, “Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22 RSV). Later, Jesus is depicted as full of joy in the Holy Spirit and praising God (Luke 10:21). Theologian John Jefferson Davis, of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, captures this reality: “Joy is a fundamental characteristic of the inner being of the Trinity; the Father rejoices in the Son, and the Son rejoices in the Father, in the communion of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. We as the redeemed people of God are on a journey into the joy-filled heart of the Triune God.”<sup>8</sup> Raniero Cantalamessa, a Catholic priest, echoes Davis: “The Latin tradition has always left wide room for the theme of *gaudium Trinitatis* (‘trinitarian joy’), with the Holy Spirit as the personification of that joy.”<sup>9</sup> He further describes an “intratrinitarian life with fervent images of intimacy and of kisses, images that most powerfully evoke communion, enjoyment and joy.”<sup>10</sup> Richard Burnett, quoting Karl Barth, reports that “when the doctrine of the Trinity is denied, the result is ‘a God without radiance and without joy.’”<sup>11</sup>

And as if he wanted to confirm my earlier observation, Davis notes that “the joyfulness of the inner life of the Trinity” is missing from some of the symbols and artistic representations of the Trinity displayed on buildings where Christians worship.<sup>12</sup> Could this be another reason why my students and I hesitated to picture God dancing? We ought to heed these authors’ observations and attend to the joyful nature of the Triune God.

Trinitarian joy is further evidenced by the way it irradiates creation,<sup>13</sup> including humankind. The Old Testament depicts God rejoicing over his people

7. William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

8. John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 58.

9. Raniero Cantalamessa, *Contemplating the Trinity: The Path to the Abundant Christian Life*, trans. Marsha Daigle-Williamson (Frederick, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2007), Kindle edition, location 419.

10. *Ibid.*, location 429.

11. Richard E. Burnett, ed., *The Westminster Handbook to Karl Barth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox), 125.

12. Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God*, 58.

13. In Isaiah 44:23, the entire creation is called to rejoice: “Sing for joy, you heavens, for the LORD has done this; shout aloud, you earth beneath. Burst into song, you mountains, you forests and all your trees, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, he displays his glory in Israel” (NIV).

(Deut. 30:9; Isa. 62:5; 65:19) and commissioning his servant to pour oil of gladness over them (Isa. 61:3). Zephaniah assures Zion, “The LORD . . . will rejoice over you with singing” (3:20 NIV). God delights in his people (Ps. 149:4). The Aaronic blessing manifests God’s shining (or radiating) face turned toward people and offering his grace and shalom to them (Num. 6:22–27). I devoted significant time during my doctoral research to this priestly benediction and proposed that God’s shining face serves as a metaphor for mission.<sup>14</sup> It invites believers to look into God’s face turned toward them to receive his blessings, and consequently adopt that same attitude of turning their face toward others, wishing them grace and peace in God. The same image is given us in Psalm 67:1–2 (NRSV): “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.”

Another sign of trinitarian joy is its repercussion or reflection on people it irradiates. God’s joy resonates in us. According to Richard Burnett, Karl Barth believes that “there is both an indwelling joy of God and a joy that God’s glory awakens in us.”<sup>15</sup> God’s presence becomes a source of joy for those who follow him (Eccles. 2:26). They are filled with joy in his presence, with eternal pleasures at his right hand (Ps. 16:11); their heart is filled with “gladness,” “more than when their [i.e., others’] grain and wine abound” (Ps. 4:7 NRSV); they delight in him and their soul rejoices in him (Isa. 61:10). This joy becomes one of the hallmarks of the journey with God. Neuroscientists have discovered that mutual joy is one of the necessary features of healthy human bonds; so also with the relationship between God and the worshiper. Angella Son discusses this type of bond in her *Spirituality of Joy*,<sup>16</sup> and elsewhere defines joy as “that which is experienced when we are relationally connected to God.”<sup>17</sup> Biblical texts are familiar with her argument, or, to put this in the correct order, her arguments flow out of Scripture. For example, the psalmist shouts, “Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy” (Ps. 43:4 NRSV). He is attracted by this joy that pulls him toward the altar of God. John Piper calls this form of pleasure experienced in relationship with God “Christian hedonism.”<sup>18</sup> Those who “attach to God”

14. Evelyne A. Reisacher, “The Processes of Attachment between the Algerians and French within the Christian Community in France” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001).

15. Burnett, *Westminster Handbook to Karl Barth*, 125.

16. Angella Son, *Spirituality of Joy: Moving beyond Dread and Duty* (Seoul, South Korea: Joyung Communications, 2013).

17. Angella Son, “Agents of Joy as a New Image of Pastoral Care,” *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 18, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 70.

18. This is how John Piper summarizes Christian hedonism: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” “We Want You to Be a Christian Hedonist!,” *Desiring*

will, beyond question, experience the same feelings as they participate in this joy-centric worship.<sup>19</sup>

How does our discussion of the joy felt in worshipping God relate to the primary concern of this book, which is witnessing? Simply put, this joy is essential. If we believe that mission is first and foremost the mission of God (*missio Dei*),<sup>20</sup> we must anticipate that joy will characterize his mission. This is not always communicated in missionary literature. The love and compassion of God have been greatly emphasized, but references to the joyful mission of the Triune God are sparse. I wonder what would change in Muslim-Christian relations if Christians were more aware of this important aspect of mission? I imagine that they would be inspired by God's delight, pleasure, and joy as he reaches out to the world as the missionary God. They might even learn his blissful and energetic dance!

## A Joyful Lord

One of the most vivid illustrations of God's joy is the incarnation. A significant number of the many biblical references to joy allude to this historical event. Mission historian Scott Sunquist claims the incarnation is "a divine shout of joy regarding this world of time and matter."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the birth of Jesus irradiated the world and the cosmos with joy. Earlier, the Old Testament anticipated the excitement concerning the arrival of the Messiah. In Isaiah 61, messianic prophecies announced "oil of gladness instead of mourning" (v. 3 NRSV), as well as times of rejoicing and exultation in the Lord. It is therefore no surprise that the narrative of Jesus's birth is bathed in joy.

Plenty of indicators of joy appear in the biblical narrative of Jesus's birth, despite the painful fact of Joseph's shame from not being the actual genitor, the murder of children in Bethlehem, and the forced migration of Jesus's family to Egypt. The baby in Elizabeth's womb (John the Baptist) leaps for

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God website, August 31, 2006, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-want-you-to-be-a-christian-hedonist>.

19. See, e.g., Deuteronomy 12:12; Ezra 6:16; Nehemiah 8:10; Psalm 16:11; Isaiah 51:11; Jeremiah 33:9.

20. Scott Sunquist defines *missio Dei* as "the mission of God to bring about redemption of the world." *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 7. David Bosch defines *missio Dei* as "God's self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God's involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate." *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 10.

21. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 25.

joy at Mary's visit (Luke 1:41). The angel greets Mary with a resounding "Rejoice!" (Luke 1:28 NKJV).<sup>22</sup> Later, she finds words to return this greeting: "My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47 NASB). The angel of the Lord announces to the shepherds, "I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10–11 NIV). Finally, the Magi are "overjoyed" when they see the star pointing them to the place where Jesus was born (Matt. 2:10).

Christians embrace this festive mood at Christmas when they decorate their houses with ornaments and place joy-shaped stocking holders on fire-place mantles. They hum along to Isaac Watts's hymn "Joy to the World" when musical flash mobs surprise shopping-mall customers by performing that song. And when, after Christmas, symbols and trimmings return to their storage boxes, awaiting the following year, this joy often fades away. Believers wait for another birthday of Jesus to experience that same thrill. Recently I had dinner at my dean's house and noticed that the sign "Joy to the World" still hung on his dining room wall. Seeing my surprise (it was February), his wife, Nancy, told me that this year they had deliberately left the sign up when Christmas was over. I like that. It is good to be reminded of this "joy to the world" all year round!

Likewise, in the Bible, joy does not stop after Jesus's birth. A message of joy issues from the core of Jesus's ministry. The so-called Nazareth Manifesto is often called a declaration of good news (Luke 4:18–19). According to Angela Thomas, the good news is a "message bringing joy."<sup>23</sup> Moltmann promotes this idea: "In the Old Testament, to proclaim a gospel means bringing a message of joy, heralding a victory, announcing salvation. Anyone who proclaims a joyful event is himself the bringer of joy, and is honoured accordingly."<sup>24</sup> Darrell W. Johnson shares the same opinion: "Joy is the dominant emotion of the one declaring the good news, and it is the dominant emotion of those who hear the good news."<sup>25</sup> When there is good news, people rejoice, as God, through his prophet Zechariah, commands his people to do: "Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you" (2:10 NIV). This exuberant joy was reiterated

22. The Greek behind this greeting literally means "to rejoice."

23. Angela Thomas, *Choosing Joy: A 52-Week Devotional for Discovering True Happiness* (New York: Howard Books, 2011), Kindle edition, location 461.

24. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 95.

25. Darrell W. Johnson, *The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God's Transformation of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 81.

when Jesus, Immanuel (“God with us”), came to dwell on earth (John 1:14). Creation rejoiced because he chose to take up residence on earth (Ps. 96:11–13).

Given that Jesus brought good news, some people wonder if Jesus’s life matched what he preached. Did Jesus have a joyful personality? Apparently yes, because he referred to it when speaking to his disciples shortly before his death: “These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11 NASB). But is there further evidence of such joy in other places in the Gospels? In her book on joy, Swiss theologian Lytta Basset tries to identify passages where the Gospels specifically mention Jesus’s joy,<sup>26</sup> but she finds few.<sup>27</sup> After a more careful look at the biblical texts, however, she finds more joy in Jesus’s life than anticipated. Interactions between Jesus and others reveal many happy moments. People who walked with Jesus experienced joy. Take, for example, John the Baptist, who stated that the beginning of Christ’s ministry made his joy complete (John 3:29), and recall that “all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him” (Luke 13:17 RSV).

Commenting on Jesus’s personality, Lebanese writer Jean Maalouf writes,

Is it conceivable that Jesus, for example, didn’t smile at those little children whom He allowed to come and sit down and maybe play with Him? And is it conceivable that He didn’t have a friendly smile for His disciples and for all the people who came to Him? And is it conceivable that He didn’t laugh with His family and closest friends at life’s incongruities? And how, without laughter, could He attend parties, eating and drinking, and mixing with different people?<sup>28</sup>

Theologian George Eldon Ladd agrees when he describes the table fellowship of repentant sinners and Jesus:

So typical of Jesus’s ministry was this joyous fellowship that his critics accused him of being a glutton and a drunkard (Mt 11:18). The same note of messianic joy is heard in Jesus’ answer to the criticism that he and his disciples did not follow the example of the Pharisees in fasting. Fasting does

26. Lytta Basset, *La Joie Imprenable*, new ed. (Paris: Albin Michel, 2004).

27. The major references to Jesus’s joy that Basset found are when Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (Luke 10:21 NRSV) and when at the end of his journey on earth he says to his disciples: “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11 NRSV).

28. Jean Maalouf, *Jesus Laughed: And Other Reflections on Being Human* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1996), 12.

not belong to the time of a wedding. The presence of the bridegroom calls for joy, not fasting (Mk 2:18–19).<sup>29</sup>

Unfortunately, church history seldom has focused on Jesus's humor and laughter, picturing him as an emotionless character similar to people in nineteenth-century black-and-white photographs, with stern faces because exposure time was too long to hold a smile. I wonder what would happen to our witness for Christ if we could remember the happy moments that Jesus had on earth and the joy he communicated to those around him.

The residency of Jesus on earth is intermixed with times of joy on the one hand and, on the other, times of temptation, rejection, persecution, and finally martyrdom. The path Jesus walked did not consist of ceaseless joy or nonstop excitement, just as our human path does not. But Jesus's horrific death on the cross could not eliminate divine joy. Jesus knew it would survive, as attested by the author of the book of Hebrews: "For the joy set before him he [Jesus] endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (12:2–3 NIV).

This joy that Jesus was anticipating was manifested after his death. It is difficult to say whether it is the birth or the resurrection of Jesus that is the most joy-filled event. Missiologist Lesslie Newbigin seems to favor the latter by calling the resurrection an "explosion of joy."<sup>30</sup> To me, Eastern Christian traditions are the most in tune with this vibrant joy—particularly during paschal festivities. I love the ritual practiced by Orthodox churches early on Easter morning, when parishioners knock at the church door searching for the King of Glory. A priest stands behind, ready to open the door. When he does, people greet each other with a resounding, "Christ is risen," while others respond, "Indeed he is risen." As Coptic father Tadros Yacoub Malaty states, "The Holy Week of Easter (Paschal/Passover) begins with joyful processions and ends with joyful celebrations due to the Lord's Resurrection."<sup>31</sup>

Note that the disciples did not feel that joy right away. They first hid behind closed doors, and felt happy only when they grasped what had really happened. I have always been stunned that after Jesus left the disciples on Ascension Day, they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple

29. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 74.

30. Lesslie Newbigin, *Lesslie Newbigin: Missionary Theologian; A Reader*, comp. Paul Weston (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 231.

31. Father Tadros Yacoub Malaty, "The Celebration of the Resurrection and the Rejoicing Processions," trans. Mary Rose, 1999, <http://www.st-antoniou.org/Downloads/Article%20%20Fr.%20Tadros%20Malaty3.pdf>.

blessing God” (Luke 24:52–53 RSV). Why were they so happy at the departure of Jesus? Don’t good-byes usually induce more sober feelings, especially if heaven is the traveler’s destination? Days earlier, the disciples were frightened, startled, and perplexed. Now, they were filled with joy. As Moltmann so eloquently stated, “Out of the resurrection of Christ, joy throws open cosmic and eschatological perspectives that reach forward to the redemption of the whole cosmos. . . . In the feast of eternal joy all created beings and the whole community of God’s creation are destined to sing their hymns and songs of praise.”<sup>32</sup> I believe, with Moltmann, that the disciples’ joy had gained new heights: “The hymns and praise of those who rejoice in the risen Christ are, as they themselves see it, no more than a feeble echo of the cosmic liturgy and the heavenly praise and the uttered joy in existence of all other living things.”<sup>33</sup> The disciples also understood that they were part of the great plan that God had for all things: “The risen Christ does not come just to the dead, so as to raise them and communicate to them his eternal life; he draws all things into his future, so that they may become new and participate in the feast of God’s eternal joy.”<sup>34</sup>

This explosion of joy was an incredible moment in history. Paul says, “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14 RSV). What propelled people into mission was the joy of the resurrected Savior and the Holy Spirit, whom theologian John Painter calls the “presence of the absent Jesus.” It seems that the joy of the disciples is now complete, as attested by Painter when he says, “In this way the grief of the disciples is turned to become an abiding and indestructible joy (Jn 16:20–24) which is bound to the word of Jesus spoken to prepare them for their witness and work in the world.”<sup>35</sup> This is what gave the disciples the courage, the strength, and the boldness to return to their neighborhoods and their communities.

When Jesus left, his disciples were not alone. He sent the Holy Spirit. The references to joy associated with the Holy Spirit are so numerous that they would require an entire chapter. The kingdom of God is a matter of “joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). Earlier we saw that Jesus rejoiced because he was filled with the Spirit. Acts 13:52 tells us that “the disciples were continually

32. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 338.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. J. Painter, “Joy,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 396.

filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (NASB). The effect of the joy flowing from the Holy Spirit is further described in Ephesians 5:18–19, where believers are invited to “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all [their] heart” (RSV). One kind of fruit of the Spirit is joy (Gal. 5:22).

Newbigin best explains why joy is so important for our discussion on witness: “The tomb is empty, Jesus is risen, death is conquered, God does reign after all. There is an explosion of joy, news that cannot be kept secret. Everyone must hear it. A new creation has begun. One does not have to be summoned to the ‘task’ of evangelism. If these things are really true, they have to be told.”<sup>36</sup>

### Bringers of Joy

If joy is fundamental to the character of God and of Jesus, and if the gospel is fundamentally news of great joy, then those who bear witness to it are essentially bringers of joy. But what is the nature of the joy that they bring? The Bible guides us here, as in other matters of faith. Indeed, Sri Lankan Christian leader Ajith Fernando claims, “The Old Testament oozes with the theme of joy.” But defining the meanings of joy in the biblical context is not simple. Fernando, for example, found twenty-three different Hebrew terms for joy and claims that “in two verses in Zephaniah alone (3:14, 17) seven different words for joy are found!”<sup>37</sup> Painter finds “no less than seven words” to express joy in the Gospels.<sup>38</sup> He finds so many references to this emotion in Luke that he calls it the “Gospel of joy.”<sup>39</sup> In his chapter titled “Lucan Joy,” Jesuit scholar John Navone proposes ten different Greek expressions used for joy in Luke-Acts.<sup>40</sup>

“Joy” can refer to a sense of belonging to God, eschatological joy, kingdom joy, and many other concepts. It comes in different intensities and forms, such as exuberance, jubilation, or exaltation.<sup>41</sup> I was glad to find an entry titled “joy” in the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*.<sup>42</sup> Its recommendations may be helpful to those who want to learn more about ways to be joyful. The point is, joy is a complex experience, and its complexity is reflected in the

36. Newbigin, *Missionary Theologian*, 231.

37. Ajith Fernando, *The Call to Joy and Pain* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 16.

38. Painter, “Joy,” 394.

39. *Ibid.*, 395.

40. John Navone, SJ, *Themes of St. Luke* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1970), 71–87.

41. *Ibid.*, 71–72.

42. William D. Thrasher, “Joy,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 527.

diversity of ways in which Christians interact with others when telling them the good news.

### Splashes of Joy

The bringers of joy lead others to the source of joy and in so doing experience joy themselves. Theologian William D. Thrasher writes, “The mission of the church is to lead the nations to the Source of true joy. . . . The truth that joy can be found in God’s person, work, provisions, rule, and presence is to be shared with the world.”<sup>43</sup> One cannot imagine leading someone to the source of true joy and not simultaneously receiving splashes of joy. Navone affirms, “The call to salvation is also a call to joy”; the new experience of the joy of being saved calls both the new believer and the witness to seek more joy—to continually seek renewal of joy.<sup>44</sup> Navone states in the same passage that “Joy is related to the recognition of the present salvation process and experienced in the measure that one participates in it.” Thus, it becomes a matter of not just hearing about this joy but also participating in it. This joy is infectious. Moltmann describes the joy that people experience when they meet Christ: “The first experience that has to be mentioned is the feeling of rapturous *joy*. . . . People lift up their heads, possessed by the indescribable joy that we find in the Easter hymns.”<sup>45</sup> When the gospel was preached in Samaria, there was great joy (Acts 8:8). When the jailer and his family accepted Christ, he was filled with joy (Acts 16:34). Thus when a person comes to Christ through the testimony of a Christian, joy splashes in all directions.

### Unusual Joy

Does joyful witness include “self-happiness,” that is, happiness about one’s own situation? Although Christians don’t witness simply to feel good or make others feel good, that does not mean they can’t feel good after witnessing. Christians have ample opportunity to experience such happiness. In the history of mission, some Christians have thought that witness meant giving up all pleasure. As noted earlier, however, Jesus himself enjoyed table fellowship and laughed with people, and many think he was also humorous. However, joy does not mean that people must be happy all the time to honor God in

43. Ibid.

44. Navone, *Themes of St. Luke*, 73.

45. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 31.

their witness. We will discuss later how suffering is not dissociated from a joyful life in Christ. Today, even secular literature does not assert that endless happiness is possible or that it is even healthy. The cover of a recent issue of *Psychology Today* shows a smiley face covered by a huge ink spot with the following title: “Happiness? The Upside of Negative Emotions: Why You Need Boredom, Regret, Envy, Anger—More.”<sup>46</sup> Scientists now understand that negative moods are not necessarily the opposite of a joyful life.

In spite of that, biblical passages such as “Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom” (James 4:9 NIV), addressed to those who sinned against God and were double-minded, have led some Christians to adopt these attitudes in a permanent lifestyle of mourning or asceticism, perhaps for fear that they could not live a life in complete submission to God otherwise. They also quote a warning of Jesus to the Twelve: “Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy” (John 16:20 NASB). I am not trying to ignore these debates. But I believe that it is not joy in general that Jesus condemns, but the joys that separate us from God. It is likely, according to Painter, “that Jesus taught the superficiality of attachment to earthly joys . . . (Mark 4:16 par. Matt. 13:20 and Luke 8:13).”<sup>47</sup> It is possible that some joys are more important than others for our walk with God. If not, then in the passage in Matthew that follows the one cited by Painter, Jesus would not say, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field” (Matt. 13:44 RSV). One may have to give up some earthly joys to experience a greater joy. Thus an article summarizing a video-recorded interview with Moltmann points out: “According to Moltmann, joy is quite different from fun, which ‘is a superficial feeling which must be repeated again and again to last but joy is a deeper feeling of the whole existence.’ He further explains that joy can only be experienced with the whole heart, soul and energies, noting that joy is thought to be of divine origin.”<sup>48</sup> This feeling that is so unique may be what Jesus described when he said, “Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete” (John 16:24 NIV).

Joyful witness also has supernatural aspects that combine with natural joy.<sup>49</sup> Thrasher defines supernatural joy as “a delight in life that runs deeper

46. *Psychology Today*, February 2015.

47. Painter, “Joy,” 395.

48. “Finding Joy with Jürgen Moltmann,” (text introduction to a video of an interview of Moltmann by Miroslav Volf), Yale Center for Faith & Culture, September 24, 2014, <http://faith.yale.edu/news/finding-joy-jurgen-moltmann>.

49. Thrasher, “Joy,” 527.

than pain or pleasure. This kind of joy is not limited by or tied solely to external circumstances. It is not a fleeting emotion but a quality of life that can be experienced in the midst of a variety of emotions.”<sup>50</sup> When retracing his journey of faith, C. S. Lewis expresses a similar perspective. He describes an “authentic ‘joy’” which is “distinct not only from pleasure in general but even from aesthetic pleasure. It must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing.”<sup>51</sup> He wrote, “The subject [of joy] has lost nearly all interest for me since I became a Christian. . . . I now know that the experience, considered as a state of my own mind, had never had the kind of importance I once gave it. It was valuable only as a pointer to something other and outer.”<sup>52</sup> Regarding this supernatural joy, one may want to ask whether it is so different that it cannot be measured in an fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) machine. I think it can. Biblical characters rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, for example, displayed verbal or behavioral indicators. Some leaped for joy, others sang, others jumped and danced; all these behaviors can be scientifically observed. What might surprise the scientist, however, is that in the Bible he or she may find joy with narratives related to the script of God—narratives different from the ones the scientist is familiar with.

### Amplification of Joy

Joy is for sharing! As a child I was given a small booklet that I read so many times that my mother trashed it because it was completely worn out. I have since tried, without success, to find the name of its author. It contained a story about a small boy who so coveted the sun that he decided to catch it and bring it home to keep it all to himself. On his journey to the sun, he passed beautiful fields and forests, with all sorts of plants, trees, and animals. When he arrived at his destination, he put the sun in a big sack that he had brought with him. On his return journey he passed the same places, but everything looked dark, dull, and dead. Without sun, life had stopped. In wanting to keep the sun all to himself, the boy destroyed its reason to exist: bringing life to the world through its shining. Like the sun, joy cannot be kept in a sack. Theologian Basset talks about an orientation toward joy, a joy shared with God and a joy that cannot exist outside personal

50. Ibid.

51. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), Kindle edition, location 72.

52. Ibid., locations 237–38.

relations.<sup>53</sup> This relational aspect of joy is a key characteristic of the joyful witness of Christians. Russian Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov writes, “Easter is the joy about the neighbor, as it is proper for a lover to delight in his beloved.”<sup>54</sup>

Joy is also communal. The Old Testament talks about celebrations, festivals, and table fellowship. The New Testament also is filled with references to joy shared in the context of community (e.g., John 15:11; Acts 5:41; Phil. 4:1; Col. 1:24; 1 Thess. 1:6; 1 Pet. 1:8–9; 1 John 1:4). Kenneth E. Bailey, a biblical scholar who specialized in Middle Eastern readings of the Bible, eloquently stresses this communal aspect. He identifies joy as characterizing the climax of the famous Lukan parables that are Jesus’s response to those who accuse him of eating with the tax collectors and the sinners—in other words, with those whom the Jewish leadership considered traitors and violators of the Mosaic law.<sup>55</sup> Jesus relates the story of a shepherd who searched for one of his hundred sheep, which was lost, and who was filled with joy when he found it (Luke 15:4–7). Bailey describes the shepherd rejoicing, laying the sheep on his shoulder, and sharing in the joy of restoration with his community.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, in his reading of the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8–10) Bailey describes the “joy in community over restoration” when the woman finds the precious coin she had lost.<sup>57</sup> Finally, in the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11–32) Bailey points to the joy expressed in “finding and in celebrating communally the restoration of the one lost.”<sup>58</sup>

These three parables emphasize personal joy that resonates with the entire community and is thus amplified. Basset reminds us that the parable of the prodigal son is a parable of inclusion. Joy is an emotion that is best expressed together. Sam Wells, a priest of the Church of England, writes, “The discipline of joy means not just reflecting on your own happiness, your own sense of certainty, exhilaration, and clarity, but also having a community experience, a sharing, walking together, and discovering from one another.”<sup>59</sup> A true story from our own time illustrates the same theme as the parables analyzed by Bailey. A few years ago, an Algerian woman who had attended the same Bible study group for years suddenly jumped out of her seat during a meeting and

53. Basset, *La Joie Imprenable*.

54. Sergius Bulgakov, *Churchly Joy: Orthodox Devotions for the Church Year*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 115.

55. Kenneth E. Bailey, “Poet and Peasant” and “Through Peasant Eyes”: *A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

56. *Ibid.*, 146–53.

57. *Ibid.*, 156–57.

58. *Ibid.*, 205.

59. Samuel Wells, *Be Not Afraid: Facing Fear with Faith* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011), 170.

shouted, “I want to follow Jesus.” Like one person, the attendees, all North African Christians, jumped up from their seats and danced with joy, ululating and praising God. After the meeting, they all had a big meal together. Splashes became showers as the joy was amplified in the context of a community, which had long been praying for this woman.

### Joy as Motivation for Mission

Christian mission of the last couple of centuries has not always been motivated by joy. Hudson Taylor wanted to “save the heathen from damnation.”<sup>60</sup> Samuel Moffett advocated for “obedience.”<sup>61</sup> Samuel Zwemer, often called the Apostle to Islam, began a long speech pleading for Christians to witness among Muslims as follows: “The Christian watchwords ‘Love, Joy, Peace,’ are not those of the Moslem world. Instead of joy, the Moslem hearts today are filled with a great sorrow, and instead of peace, the newspapers tell of wars and rumors of wars.”<sup>62</sup> Even as Zwemer acknowledges the need for joy, he fails to develop this theme further. He motivates his audience by calling on them to see the great needs of Muslims, describing the compassion of God and pleading for eagerness to defend truth. He often focuses on the urgency of the task.

Have other missiologists chosen “joy” as their central motive? Dutch missiologist Marc Spindler may have woven this theme into his scholarship of mission more extensively than any other scholar. He posits that joy is both at the origin and at the end of the missionary relationship and is, indeed, “the climate of mission.”<sup>63</sup> In the final lines of his book on mission he uses the term “joy” to describe the mission of Jesus Christ to humankind. “Joy,” he writes, “is the very human ‘complement’ to the glory of God, the fruit of the Spirit which ripens in the missionary encounter, and which is echoed in heaven, since angels have joy each time a sinner repents (Luke 15:7).”<sup>64</sup> Finally, he adds, “Our mission is not a spiritual imperialism but the sharing of an enormous joy received from above, a work of God, which continues through

60. Paul A. Varg, “Motives in Protestant Missions, 1890–1917,” *Church History* 23, no. 1 (1954): 71.

61. Samuel Hugh Moffett, “Why We Go: Recapturing Our Motivation for Missions,” *Christianity Today*, November 14, 1994, 53–55.

62. Samuel M. Zwemer, “God’s Will for the Muslim World,” *Missionary Review of the World*, December 1920, 1089.

63. Marc Spindler, *La mission: Combat pour le salut du monde* [*Mission: Struggle for the salvation of the world*] (Neuchâtel, Switzerland: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1967), 241 (my translation here and in the following notes).

64. *Ibid.*, 239.

us, for the joy of God, for our joy, and for the joy of each human and of all creation in expectation of its fullness.”<sup>65</sup> I have embraced Spindler’s motive of mission more and more since I first read it. After interacting with people who minister among Muslims over several decades, I have heard all kinds of motives. Many were fear based. Others grew out of a spirit of conquest. Others were motivated by love. Very few were joy driven!

Spindler is not the only missiologist to call for a greater emphasis on joy in mission. For example, Navone, the Jesuit scholar cited above, writes, “The joy of participation in the divine mission ultimately derives from the fact that the disciples belong to God.” This “is a deeper motive for their rejoicing rather than their power over demons.”<sup>66</sup> Likewise, according to Newbigin, witness is not about making converts but about joy. Given that the church has known the joy of the gospel, she “will indeed—out of love for them—long that they [nonbelievers] may come to share the joy that she knows and pray that they may indeed do so.”<sup>67</sup> These examples remind us that joy in ministry does not result from names checked off on a conversion list, or winning the battle over souls between Muslims and Christians, but from sharing the joy that flows from God.

So important is this joy factor in mission that Newbigin wrote,

There has been a long tradition which sees the mission of the Church primarily as obedience to a command. It has been customary to speak of “the missionary mandate.” This way of putting the matter is certainly not without justification, and yet it seems to me that it misses the point. It tends to make mission a burden rather than a joy, to make it part of the law rather than part of the gospel. If one looks at the New Testament evidence one gets another impression. Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy. The news that the rejected and crucified Jesus is alive is something that cannot possibly be suppressed.<sup>68</sup>

Inspired by these statements by Newbigin, Krish Kandiah, president of the London School of Theology, recently wrote an article that urged Christians to connect joy to mission. “Many of our churches,” Kandiah lamented, “have failed to make the connection between joy and mission.”<sup>69</sup> This contrasts sharply, he observes, with the experience of the earliest church, for

65. *Ibid.*, 240.

66. Navone, *Themes of St. Luke*, 74. See also Luke 10:20.

67. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 182.

68. *Ibid.*, 116.

69. Krish Kandiah, “An Explosion of Joy: What It Means to Be the Apostolic Church,” *Christianity Today*, June 1, 2014, 49.

which (borrowing Newbigin's cherished expression) "Christ's resurrection, the gift of the Spirit, and the bestowal of the Father's authority resulted in an explosion of joy that propelled the church on its mission."<sup>70</sup> He continues, "An apostolic church, therefore, is one that spills over with the same joy that launched the apostles on their mission."<sup>71</sup> This characteristic of joy, its ability to propel people to action, is probably the reason neuroscientists describe joy as an attachment emotion; contrary to shame, which makes people want to disappear from the eyes of others, joy opens us to others.

### Eschatological Joy

However, witness may not always result in instantaneous joy. It may at times remain "the joy set before [us]" (Heb. 12:2). Such eschatological happiness characterized the life of many biblical characters and has been embraced by many missionaries. William Carey, a British missionary to India during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, encouraged Christians "to aspire after heavenly reward via missionary labors." He goes on to say "that that heavenly treasure is the 'crown of rejoicing' mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 2:19."<sup>72</sup>

I could have written an entire book on suffering that I have witnessed in ministry to Muslims. Because there are so few texts about joy in mission, I chose that theme instead. However, the joy that I explore here is not foreign to suffering. As Thrasher observes, the Bible makes it clear that joy "can be experienced in sorrow and trials (Hab. 3:17–19; Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 6:10; 1 Pet. 1:6)."<sup>73</sup> Affliction and joy sometimes mingle: "You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:6 NIV). Numerous biblical accounts describe how joy can be found in the most difficult places. When Paul was chained in Philippi, he wrote one of his most popular statements: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4 NIV).

Many missiologists have underlined the unique relationship between joy and suffering in the Bible. Scott Sunquist titled his book on mission *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory*. He explains, "Mission

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Travis L. Myers, "Tracing a Theology of the Kingdom of God in William Carey's *Enquiry*: A Case Study in Complex Mission Motivation as Component of 'Missionary Spirituality,'" *Missiology* 40 (2012): 40.

73. Thrasher, "Joy," 527.

is . . . carried out in suffering in this world for God's eternal glory."<sup>74</sup> His words resonate well with the "dialectic of joy and suffering" that Moltmann used to describe the church's experience.<sup>75</sup> In the Bible joy and sorrow sometimes go hand in hand and may even seem impossible to separate. Thus joy is not an antidote to suffering. The relationship between the two is much more complex, I believe, and has been well expressed by missionary-surgeon Paul Brand: "I have come to see that pain and pleasure come to us not as opposites but as Siamese twins, strangely joined and intertwined. Nearly all my memories of acute happiness, in fact, involve some element of pain or struggle."<sup>76</sup>

Thus missiologists of joy are not surprised by suffering. They understand that it is part of the Christian journey. This is what gave me the courage to write this book in the midst of traumatic Muslim-Christian relations. As I wrote this chapter, horrific events took place. In Paris, people were murdered at the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine headquarters and at a kosher store. In Niger, churches were burned. During the same period, two Japanese hostages and twenty-one Coptic Christians were beheaded. A hotel was bombed in Tripoli. Millions of Muslim and Christian refugees are trying to stay alive while facing dire circumstances. Borders between several African countries are riddled with Muslim-Christian conflicts. And the list goes on and on. How can I write about joy in this awful climate, if joy is not merely happy endorphins?

But the tie between joy and suffering is not mere coexistence. "Suffering need not hinder one's joy," Thrasher points out. "In fact, suffering for Christ can even be a cause for rejoicing (Acts 5:41)."<sup>77</sup> Recently the book *The Privilege of Persecution* caught my attention.<sup>78</sup> One of the authors, Carl Moeller, who at the time was president of a ministry for persecuted Christians called Open Doors USA, must have witnessed firsthand the suffering of many Christians in Muslim contexts. Such a title might cause some of us to choke: How can one say that persecution is a privilege? And yet throughout church history there have always been people who believed and understood something of joy wrapped in suffering. Consider the following verse: "But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation" (1 Pet. 4:13 NASB). Another verse talks about the blessing of persecution, a concept that is not

74. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 136.

75. Richard Bauckham, *Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (London: T&T Clark, 1995), 134. See also "Finding Joy with Jürgen Moltmann" and accompanying video.

76. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, "And God Created Pain," *Christianity Today*, January 10, 1994, 21.

77. Thrasher, "Joy," 527.

78. Carl A. Moeller and David W. Hegg with Craig Hodgkins, *The Privilege of Persecution: And Other Things the Global Church Knows That We Don't* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011).

too far from the title under discussion: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10–12 NRSV). Although I would not encourage anyone to seek persecution to earn more joy or blessing, God seems to give a special kind of joy to those who suffer for his sake.

There are many stories of persecution in Muslim societies. At times the state persecutes, at other times society or family. Although following Christ is sometimes only an indirect cause (more direct causes being cultural insensitivity, economic factors, political turmoil, or wars), persecution is still an important issue for the church in Muslim contexts.

## Conclusion

I hope you are more ready to smile when considering witness to Muslims, because joy is central to such witness. The reminder of God’s infectious joy may transform the way we look at mission, especially given the many references to joy in the Bible. Verses such as “Always be joyful” (1 Thess. 5:16), “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4), and “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10) are only a few of the most famous. As a body, the Bible’s references to joy reveal patterns that highlight characteristics of joyful witness, the heart of God’s mission in the world. First, though greatly neglected in the past, joy is a biblical stimulus to missionary work. Second, joy is eschatological—a future hope—but it is also experienced now. Third, joy is divine but is also felt as a human emotion. Finally, joy and suffering are not antagonistic but, like a fabric, form the warp and woof of a beautiful tapestry.

Readers who have no joy in witness will be tempted to fake it and adopt a smiling face, like artists who artificially display emotions with theatrical masks. But God’s joy is no gimmick! It flows from a vibrant relationship with him, the source of joy-filled life and witness. The shining face of God irradiates his followers and transforms them into bringers of joy. But joy can also be buried under a mountain of trouble. In my travels across the Muslim world, I have encountered scores of people who have lost feelings of joy. I have attended conferences for mission workers in the Muslim world where there was no reference to the “explosion of joy” or the “divine shout of joy” that we mentioned in this chapter. This is understandable in the sense that some contexts are difficult, discouraging, and even dangerous. Perhaps, as

we further reflect on how God's joy is experienced in these dire situations, we will discover fresh models of joy-driven witness, different from those in peaceful and favorable contexts.

### **For Discussion**

1. Is the Triune God joyful? How do you know?
2. What are the characteristics of joyful witness?
3. Give examples of joyful witness in your own life.