

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 20

Volume 20 • Number 2 • April 1996

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*

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Published by
PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL FELLOWSHIP
Theological Commission p. 98

ISSN: 0144-8153
Vol. 20 No. 2 April-June 1996

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Editorial

Christian Mission and the Muslim Da'wah 'to call men into the path of Allah' affirm that both religions are missionary faiths, each with long memories of centuries of conflict between them.

In today's global context the conflicts continue unabated, though Christians, and to some degree Muslims, are actively engaged in dialogue to reduce misunderstanding, clarify issues and work for mutual respect without loss of integrity or commitment to mission. Minority and majority situations have a direct bearing on the success and failure of such dialogues. This issue of ERT seeks to reflect the complexity of our missiological task.

Two issues are central, one cultural and the other theological. Articles and personal stories used highlight the cultural gaps and the failure of both church and mosque to bridge them. The theological issues are not adequately dealt with in this number; the Asia Theological Association is publishing a major compendium on these issues later this year. However one observation needs to be made. From the perspective of Christian Mission our understanding of the depth of human sinfulness and action can be met only by God's gracious initiative in his saving act in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Muslim rarely uses the word salvation for he sees no need of God's unique and final intervention. Islam is *din al-fitrah*—natural religion. The Muslim needs only *hidayah*—divine guidance to know and live in obedience to the will of Allah.

The gospel is indeed good news to all alike—Christian and Muslim, but those who proclaim the Cross must be prepared to live by it. [p. 100](#)

Christian perceptions of Islam: Threat, Challenge or Misunderstood Ally?

Colin Chapman

Reprinted with permission from CMS Newsletter, November/December 1995, Number 527.

A Malaysian Christian friend has no difficulty in describing how he perceives Islam: 'If you put a frog into boiling water it will immediately jump out; but if you put it into cold water and gradually heat the water to boiling point, the frog *won't* jump out—and will soon be

dead. Isn't it obvious what the government is trying to do with its programme of gradual Islamization? Every small change in the law in an Islamic direction makes us Christians feel as if the temperature is being increased.'

Visitors to East Africa cannot help noticing the smart new mosques springing up along the main roads. Then they hear Christians talking about the plans of Muslims to build mosques at regular intervals along the highways between Lagos and Mombasa, Cape Town and Cairo. The possession of land, they are told, is particularly important for Muslims, who see the building of mosques as 'claiming land for Allah'.

Christians and other minorities in Pakistan feel extremely vulnerable because of the recent cases involving 'the blasphemy laws'. Although the charges against 14-year-old Salamat Masih and his uncle have been dismissed, they have had to leave the country for their own safety.

When Christians in Europe hear reports like these, they often conclude that the word 'challenge' is too mild, and start speaking of Islam as a 'threat'. They see the Muslim community around them increasing in size and influence, and sense that some (or is it many?) Muslims must have their own vision of 'winning the world for Islam'. What then are they to make of Christian leaders who consistently adopt a 'softly, softly' approach, who scold fellow Christians for misrepresenting Islam and see it rather as an ally, and who appear to fall over backwards to accommodate Muslim demands?

Amid this bewildering variety of [p. 101](#) Christian response to Islam in different parts of the world, is it possible to develop an approach which avoids *both* the paranoia and the conspiracy theories, which demonize Islam and make it into 'the Great Enemy', *and* the naivety which doesn't seem to understand the fundamental values of Islam and their many contemporary expressions, or to see what is actually happening in the world around us?

If it is worth trying to walk this difficult tight-rope, and if CMS has a contribution to make, it will be partly because of its history of engagement with the world of Islam in the Middle East, Africa and Asia for nearly 200 years and partly because of its present role in maintaining links between Christians living alongside Muslims in different parts of the world.

This cumulative experience may suggest five possible clues for charting this kind of 'middle way'.

1. A GLOBAL VIEW

It is always dangerous to make generalizations on the basis of experience in only *one* context in which Christians are engaging with Muslims. In parts of Africa, for example, Christians and Muslims have lived peacefully side by side for many years, with members of both faith communities in the same family. Christians in the Middle East, on the other hand, feel as if they have lived as second-class citizens under Muslim rule for almost 1,400 years.

My own sympathy for Arab Christians, however, has had to be balanced by my awareness of the vulnerability of Muslims in Britain today. On one of my visits with theological students to a mosque in Bristol, our Muslim host pointed to the wire grills protecting all the windows and said, 'We greatly appreciate your visits. At the very least they may mean one less stone thrown through our windows!'

Christian students from northern Nigeria who study Islam at the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations in Selly Oak, soon realize that there have been many periods in history when the two faith communities have lived together peacefully. And when they observe Muslim-Christian relations in Birmingham, they begin to

understand that many of the special factors which have created tension in Nigeria do not exist in every other country.

Philip Lewis, the Inter-Faith Advisor in the Diocese of Bradford, enjoys the respect and confidence of both Christians and Muslims in the city. His recent book, *Islamic Britain: Religion, Politics and Identity among British Muslims*, has been warmly recommended by reviewers of both faiths. Where he has been able to build bridges between the two communities, it is partly because he has lived and worked in Pakistan, the country from which the majority of the Muslim community in Bradford have come.

Similarly, John Ray, another returned CMS mission partner, is able to bring his long experience of education in Muslim Kashmir to his involvement in schools in inner-city Birmingham. Muslim school governors in Birmingham know very well that his values are not formed by the p. 102 secular ‘multi-culturalism’ of Britain, and sometimes they have to answer questions of the following kind which he feels obliged to ask: ‘Are governments in Muslim countries prepared to give the same rights to minorities that you are demanding in this country?’

What we are talking about here is the ability to understand the special dynamic which affects relationships between the two communities in *our own* situation, and at the same time to look over the garden wall and recognize the enormous diversity in *other* situations where Muslims and Christians live together. We need the humility to be challenged and informed by the experience of the Body of Christ in other parts of the world.

2. THE STUDY OF ISLAM

A recent doctoral thesis by Michael Shelley, an American Lutheran, describes Temple Gairdner of Cairo as ‘a scholar-missionary to Islam’, and explains, among other things, how a period of sabbatical study under Duncan Black Macdonald, an Old Testament and Islamic scholar, at Hartford Seminary in the USA profoundly affected Gairdner’s approach to Muslims.

Gairdner himself spoke of this whole experience as ‘my grand transformation drama’. Macdonald described what happened in these words. ‘When Temple Gairdner came to me to study Islam, he came seeking knock-down arguments against Muslims. I never gave him such, but he went away understanding the genius of Islam and able to enter into the minds of Muslims. He had passed from controversy to persuasion.’

If the word ‘study’ sounds very dry and academic, it is good to be reminded that Constance Padwick’s classic, *Muslim Devotions*, was a reflection on prayer manuals in common use all over the Muslim world. ‘... a stranger desiring not to remain a stranger,’ she explained in her Introduction, ‘could best feel the pulsing life of religion through a study of the devotions actually in use.’

Bill Musk has introduced a new generation of students to ‘folk Islam’ through his book *The Unseen Face of Islam* in a way that none of the traditional text-books about ‘ideal Islam’ has ever attempted to do. His gift for popular writing has been further demonstrated in *Passionate Believing: The ‘Fundamentalist’ Face of Islam*.

The discipline of studying Islam—in whatever way and at whatever level—should enable us to listen to Muslims more attentively. Instead of trying to tell Muslims what they believe, we will be allowing *them* to define their faith for us. We ought to be in a better position to recognize where the behaviour of some Muslims is inconsistent with the ideals of Islam. As a result, we may show greater sensitivity in the way we try to express our beliefs about Jesus, and we may be saved from the snare of comparing the worst in Islam with the best in Christianity and of judging Muslims of the past by the moral standards of our own times.

The study of Islam will also remind us of the rich diversity within Islam and discourage us from making those easy generalizations about p. 103 Islamic belief and practice. We will have to recognize that the more 'liberal' approach of Indian Islam, which fights to keep India a secular state, is probably just as legitimate a strand within Islam as the more 'fundamentalist' tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood or the spiritual disciplines of the Sufis.

3. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

A recent booklet produced by an evangelical mission includes the following in a list of dos and don'ts concerning witness to Muslims: 'Avoid politics. Politics and religion are closely linked in Islam.' My own experience makes me suspect, however, that there cannot be many countries in the world where it is possible for Christians to avoid talking to Muslims about politics.

In Nigeria, for example, it was only a united protest from all the churches in 1986 which eventually compelled the government to withdraw its secret application for the country to become a member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), which links together almost all countries with Muslim majorities.

Partnership with the churches in the Sudan has involved CMS in advocacy, both public and private, at Westminster and in New York. While it is a gross over-simplification to see Sudan's civil war as a conflict between Islam and Christianity, it cannot be denied that the religious question is *part* of the equation. Christians in southern Sudan are made to feel that they stand as an obstacle to the Islamization of Africa.

The conflict in Bosnia is probably even more complex than that of the Sudan. In Bosnia we are dealing with the aspirations of several different ethnic groups, with the legacy of 400 years of history, and with tensions between Muslims, Catholic Christians and Orthodox Christians. However, the perception of Bosnian Muslims is that they have been betrayed by the rest of the world, and Muslims in Birmingham fear that what has happened in Bosnia will be repeated in Britain before long.

In such a situation it has been a matter of concern to some that Christian leaders in the rest of Europe have spoken so little about Bosnia, and that what they have said has been so mild.

One of the most sensitive areas of debate in Britain today is the question of state-funded Muslim schools. If Anglicans, Catholics and Jews can have schools within the state system, it is said, then why not Muslims as well? Opponents argue that state-funded Muslim schools are not wanted by the majority of the Muslims themselves and that, if they did exist, they would simply complete the ghetto-ization of the Muslim community.

In case we begin to feel, however, that Muslims and Christians are bound to be in constant conflict over political and social issues, we need to be reminded of situations in which they have been able to join hands in their support of particular causes.

Muslims and Christians have been able to work side by side in South Africa in their opposition to apartheid. Also, while Palestinian Christians can hardly identify with the p. 104 more extreme Muslim expressions of Palestinian nationalism, they can generally stand shoulder to shoulder with moderate Muslims in their support of the Palestinian cause.

Perhaps we could even go one step further and suggest that Muslims and Christians should recognize that *both* communities face similar problems when they find themselves in a minority situation. Between one-quarter and one-third of all Muslims live in countries where they are a minority. What then would happen if, instead of trying to score debating

points against each other, we were to discuss openly our shared dilemmas of minority status?

The problem for some Christians is that they find it difficult to come to terms with the political face of Islam. If all they know is their own situation and if they have not attempted to study Islam, then they will not understand the motives which drive some (or, once again, is it many?) Muslims.

For those who *do* understand the logic of the *Hijra* (the migration from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD) and the status of Muhammad as *both* prophet *and* statesman, and who find themselves inevitably being drawn into political and social issues, the problem is to see what justice demands in any particular situation and to find that delicate balance between firmness and gentleness.

All of us, however, will need to understand why Lesslie Newbigin and others see Islam's claim to 'public truth' and its holistic vision for the whole community as a rebuke to all Christians who attempt to privatize their faith by evading political and social issues.

4. DIALOGUE AND MISSION

Michael Nazir-Ali has spoken frequently of the absurdity of trying to drive a wedge between 'dialogue' and 'mission', and one of his Newsletters on this subject has been included in his recent volume appropriately titled *Mission and Dialogue: Proclaiming the Gospel Afresh in Every Age*.

Unfortunately, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Christians on different wings of the churches find difficulty in integrating the two. In 1991, for example, the Islam in Europe Committee of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) produced a report entitled *The Presence of Muslims in Europe and the Theological Training of Pastoral Workers*, which calls for a 'fundamental rethinking of missiology' and for 'a theology with a view to dialogue and resulting from dialogue'.

In spelling out the aims of training for pastoral workers, the report recognizes that Islam and Christianity are both 'missionary' religions, and pleads for openness on the part of Christians, abandoning superiority and prejudice, taking risks, unlearning and relearning, transforming one's relationship to one's neighbour and opening up one's view of the world. However, there is no suggestion that pastoral workers might need to be trained to bear witness to their experience of Christ. All the emphasis is on ways in which Christians need to be changed, and nothing is said about the possibility that Christians might have something to share with Muslims.

I have often suspected that one of the most searching tests of our p. 105 approach to Islam and Muslims is to be found in the way we pray. Will western Christians, who struggle not only with the guilt of their colonial past but also with a massive loss of confidence in the gospel, ever be willing to pray as the first Christians in Jerusalem prayed when their backs were against the wall, and ask for the gift of boldness, confidence, freedom of speech, effective communication (*parresia*; [Acts 4:23-31](#))?

5. CONFIDENCE IN THE GOSPEL

Our willingness to pray the prayer of the early church may depend upon our confidence in the message about the crucified, risen and ascended Jesus. For no amount of global awareness of Islam, no amount of study, no amount of engagement with political and social issues, even with the most perfect balance between mission and dialogue, will forward the cause of Christ if Christians are—or appear to be—apologetic about the gospel.

We certainly have much about which to be ashamed in the ways in which we have related to the House of Islam in the past. But something must have gone seriously wrong if our silence, and in some cases our embarrassment, seem to extend to the heart of the Christian message itself.

The Secretary of a Christian agency in a certain European country recently reported that his organization had distributed blankets and Qur'ans to Bosnian Muslim refugees. When asked why the agency had not given portions of Scripture for distribution, he replied, 'But that would have been "mission".'

A group of church leaders in a certain Middle Eastern country had an audience recently with a well-known Muslim political leader and gave him a presentation copy of the Qur'an. To their surprise he rebuked them with the words, 'Why didn't you give me a copy of *your* Scriptures?'

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the clearest guidance that we have had in recent years about the 'middle way' which we have been seeking has come from Kenneth Cragg. For many he has been a consistent model of each one of the five clues which we have been exploring. In his first book *The Call of the Minaret*, written in 1956, he revealed some of the motives that have inspired him through more than five decades of engagement with Islam:

If Christ is what Christ is, he must be uttered. If Islam is what Islam is, that 'must' is irresistible. Wherever there is misconception, witness must penetrate; wherever there is the obscuring of the beauty of the Cross, it must be unveiled; wherever persons have missed God in Christ, he must be brought to them again ... In such a situation as Islam presents, the Church has no option but to present Christ.

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Does the Church Make it Difficult for Muslim Enquirers?

John D.C. Anderson

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'Sarah saw (Ishmael) mocking'—[Gen. 21:9](#)

'God heard the boy crying'—[Gen. 21:17](#)

One saw Ishmael as a rival, a competitor, an enemy. The other saw a boy in need, crying for water, alone in the desert. Sadly, it is the first of these two ways of looking at Ishmael which epitomizes the Christian church's attitude to the sons of Ishmael, the Arabs, and in particular the spiritual followers of Arabia's most famous son, Muhammad.

Muslims are not slow to sense the way many Christians regard them, as recent events in the Middle East have illustrated only too dramatically. There appears to be as great a communications gap between the Islam of today and the Christian church as there was in the days of the infamous Crusades. Our human tendency is to blame the Muslims for this wall of misunderstanding, and to dismiss them as being an ignorant, fanatical lot. We ask, 'Why is Islam so resistant to the gospel?' and assume that Muslims have seen such a beautiful display of God's grace in the Christian church that all blame for the Muslims' failure to become Christians must be laid squarely at their own door.

But is this assumption either logical or fair? Having worked for more than twenty years in Muslim lands I want to challenge the current view that Muslims are especially resistant to the gospel. That has not been my experience; however, I have found myself exceedingly resistant to admitting any need for change on my part. These two considerations lead me in this article to explore two urgent questions: first, have we Christians really been fair to our Muslim friends? Secondly, what is involved in evangelizing Muslims?

HAVE WE CHRISTIANS REALLY BEEN FAIR TO OUR MUSLIM FRIENDS?

In answer let us consider the following: **P. 107**

1 Muhammad and the Christian Church in Arabia

In the sixth century AD Arab Christianity was divided into Greek Orthodox, Nestorian, and Monophysite sects. The controversy concerning the nature of Christ was the ultimate cause of the churches of the East and West going their own ways, following the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. Sadly, the church's coming to terms with an extremely technical subject (i.e. the relationship of the two natures of Christ) demanded resources of grace, as well as of intellect, which were not conspicuously present. Robin Waterfield writes:

The differences were largely a matter of language and ways of thought. Once again we can see Western and non-Western ways of thinking in conflict. It is very difficult for us today to sympathize with those who fought so bitterly and so relentlessly for their own views on this matter. But for the early Fathers, schooled in the subtleties of a Greek philosophy and language, it seemed to be a matter of life and death. There is also no doubt that many personal and extraneous factors clouded the issue and obscured the real theological differences, which if they had been charitably and calmly discussed might have been amicably resolved.

However, they were not resolved, and seeds of disunity sowed then not only produced in the East a harvest of alienation and religious persecution between the rival factions of Arab Christians but also prepared the way for the use of violence to protect a religious cause. In AD 563 the famous Arab chief Harith went to Constantinople to see the Emperor,

... carrying a letter which shows plainly how the way was being prepared for Islam. One sentence reads: 'The Trinity is one Divinity, one Nature, one Essence: those who will not accept this doctrine are to be anathematized'. When two bishops refused to sign the declaration of faith he brought, Harith replied with the ominous words: 'Now I know that you are heretics. We and our armies accept this doctrine as do the orientals.' Here plainly is a claim of a native Arab Christianity stripped of the subtle refinements of the Greek theologians, and an explicit claim to the right to defend that faith by the sword (Guillaume).

2 Islam and the Crusaders

The mediaeval church misguidedly supported the Crusaders who sought to conquer Islam at the edge of the sword. And sadly that ambition to dominate, to conquer and to demonstrate 'Christian superiority' has left its mark even on the modern church. A cursory reading of western Christian commentary, down the centuries, on Islam, shows still a spirit very different from his who 'went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil', and in whose mouth there was no guile.

Joseph Hall, a 17th century preacher, described Muhammad as 'that cozening Arabian whose religion, if it deserves that name, stands upon nothing but rude ignorance and palpable imposture ... a subtle devil in a gross religion ... a monster of many seeds, and all accursed' (Chew 1937). Among scholars of the West there has been a tendency both to doubt the efficacy of the p. 108 Muslim's faith and to question the relevance, and even the sanity, of the Prophet Muhammad. David Penman writes,

It has been this emphasis among even the more serious students of Islam that has made a genuine understanding and rapport very difficult to achieve. Thomas Carlyle in a public lecture in Edinburgh on 'Muhammad and Islam' (Friday 8 May 1840) was aware of the strength of this prejudice and spoke out strongly against it:

Our current hypothesis about Mahomet, that he was a scheming imposter, a Falsehead incarnate, that his religion is a mere mass of quackery and fatuity, begins really to be untenable to anyone. The lies, which well-meaning zeal has heaped around this man, are disgraceful to ourselves only ... the word this man spoke has been the life-guidance now of 180 millions of men these 1,200 years.... Are we to suppose that it was a miserable piece of spiritual legerdemain, this which so many creatures of the Almighty have lived by and died by? I, for my part, cannot form any such supposition.... One would be entirely at a loss what to think of this world at all, if quackery so grew and were sanctioned here (Penman 1969).

3 Controversy with Islam

Some missionaries of a past generation attacked Islam or argued against it with powerful tracts, which tended more to infuriate the Muslim than to win him for Christ. Argument alone seldom brings people to Christ. As Edgar P. Dickie has written in a slightly different context: 'Proofs of the existence of God have made many sceptics. The declaration of the love of God has made many saints.'

4 A Christian bias towards Israel?

Muslims have gained the impression that the West, which they tend to equate with Christianity, gives uncritical support to the State of Israel, and fails to understand the plight of the Palestinian refugees. Some Christians argue that the Bible prophesies a return of the Jews to Palestine and that we should therefore support Zionism. But this is a logical *non sequitur*. It could equally be argued that since Christ himself predicted famines, apostasy, and social disruption before his return, therefore the Christian should support these things too! On the contrary, wrongs and injustices of any kind should be resisted—even if they are 'signs of the times'. So, omitting different Christian views of prophecy for the moment, on what just grounds can the legitimate interests of displaced Palestinians be denied? A sympathetic attitude to the national aspirations of Jews need not blind Christians to a basic injustice which is at the root of the Middle East ferment.

5 Muslim lands neglected

The modern missionary movement has tended to neglect the Muslim world, either on the grounds of its unresponsiveness or because many Muslim lands are said to be 'closed to

the gospel'. In fact, we owe them the gospel, so that to neglect them is to sin against them. The excuses for this neglect are touched on briefly below.

6 Evangelism without integrity?

Some recent attempts to reach the so-called 'closed' lands have used methods through which Christianity p. 109 has become discredited, and its workers have appeared subversive, politically dangerous, or hostile to the unity or best interests of the nation, or even sometimes to be men of deceit and subterfuge—especially when they have been caught breaking the law or found to have engaged in using 'double-talk' to hide their activities.

7 What can we say to a hungry world?

The divided, luxury-loving, middle-class, western church spares but a few crumbs from its rich man's table for the under-privileged and hungry Muslim Lazarus of the Third World. And the fact that some Arab sheikhs are fantastically wealthy should not close our hearts to the millions of North Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East who are living below the breadline.

8 The isolation of the convert from his culture

But perhaps our greatest mistake has been that of trying to persuade Christian disciples to come out of Islam, when we should have told them to witness for Jesus Christ within the culture in which God had placed them. We have thus robbed Islam of the most powerful reason why it should reconsider Jesus Christ—namely, the Christian convert within the culture of Islam.

Is it any wonder that Islam remains today almost untouched and unmoved by Christianity? This may be an overstatement of the case. But I want to stress here not so much the solidarity and resistance of the faith which claims the allegiance of one in seven of the world's population but the failure of the church at large which, it seems, has yet to learn how to apply not only the Great Commission, but also the Great Commandment, to Islam.

Of course there are other ways of explaining our failure to get many converts from Islam. First, we often excuse our failure on the grounds of Satan's great power. So one frequently hears expressions which describe people as being in the 'grip of Islam', 'held in the bondage of Islam', etc., or, as the hymn puts it,

Let the song go round the earth!
Lands where Islam's sway
Darkly broods o'er home and hearth,
Cast their bonds away!

But may this excuse not represent a rationalization of our failure? As Christians, we believe that the gospel brings deliverance from Satan's bondage. In any case, Jesus Christ has 'all authority in heaven and on earth' ([Mt. 28:20](#)).

In the second place, we can blame our lack of success on the fanaticism with which a convert is hounded out of 'hearth and home' by his erstwhile Muslim friends and threatened with death, if not actually killed. We can argue that our Lord prophesied that his servants would be thus treated, and so we may even regard this vicious hostility to a convert as evidence of the work of the Spirit in his heart and life. But, we might ask, 'persecuted for what?'

In New Testament days, the real issues were usually quite clear when a Christian was persecuted; and that very persecution led to an even wider spread of the gospel. The same cannot be said today when a modern Muslim becomes a Christian. [p. 110](#) All too often the real issues are quite unclarified and consequently the persecution is entirely unproductive. The explanation for this would not be far to seek if we only took the trouble to ask the persecutors one simple question: ‘What is this man’s sin, that you treat him so?’ They might well answer like this: ‘His sin, first, that he is a blasphemer of our Holy God; second, that he is a traitor to our country and culture; thirdly, that by his apostasy he has brought great dishonour and disrepute on his parents, who not only brought him into this world, and taught him the true Islamic faith from his childhood, but who have given him love and care all his life.’ And they would be sincere, and perhaps also right, according to their understanding. For the Christian has somehow produced the image of being not a true worshipper of Allah, but a blasphemer; not a good citizen of his country, but a quisling; not a man who honours his father and mother, but a reprobate son. So once again the real issues are befogged.

But what is at fault here? Is it the fanaticism of the persecutors? Or is it the immaturity of the Christian convert? I suggest it is neither. It is the traditional ‘cultic’ approach to Islam which is adopted in the name of Christ that is primarily at fault. I am taking the word ‘cultic’ here—and there may be a better term—to describe that preoccupation with outward form and merely sectarian views, which effectually diverts us from a primary stress on our personal relationship with God and our neighbour.

There is both historical and contemporary evidence that where evangelism has been liberated from the temptations of the proselytizer (that is to make converts for his own group) Muslims respond as readily as other human beings to the gospel. This leads us immediately to our second question.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN EVANGELIZING MUSLIMS?

For this God-given task we need a God-given model, and Jesus Christ is that model.

He is our model for getting our priorities, our methods and our message right. We should ‘follow in his steps’ ([1 Pet. 2:4](#)).

Jesus—the Model for our Priorities

For Jesus Christ the needs of human beings took priority over the obligations of traditional religious observance. He saw religious observance as a framework to help man, not as a fetter to bind him. The Sabbath rest is one obvious example. Jesus was really angry when the Pharisees and their like made strict Sabbath observance a priority in itself, even above the healing of a man with a shrivelled hand ([Mk. 3:5](#)) or of a woman bound by Satan ([Lk. 13:16](#)). Tithing is another example. The Pharisees gave a tenth of their spices, but neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. Jesus told them, ‘You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.’ That is a good example of getting one’s priorities upside down! In Muslim evangelism it is possible to [p. 111](#) be so concerned that the would-be convert should repudiate everything Islamic—prayer five times a day, alms-giving, observance of the Month of Fasting, recitation of the creed, etc.—that he should confess that Jesus is the Son of God,¹ that he should be baptized, that he should join the Christian church, and so on, that there is little time left for the top priority in evangelism

¹ Does he understand exactly what that means? Does the evangelist for that matter?

which is to introduce him to Jesus Christ, so that he responds to him in adoration, love and obedience. It took the church centuries to grapple with the theology of the Person of Christ. Why do we expect our converts to find the task any easier? Personal recognition and worship of Christ must take priority over precision in our intellectual understanding or theological formulation of him. This is not to belittle theology, but only to ask for patience about it. Correct biblical theology matters very much. However it is evident from the gospels that faith in Christ as a person preceded any clear intellectual understanding of who he was. People responded to him because he was there to respond to. His total availability to people and his acceptance of them drew them to him. They responded to him as a person at many different levels—but whenever there was even the flicker of a response it was accepted. It is man's response to Jesus Christ as a person that the evangelist should seek as his top priority. Indeed Jesus himself is our model for this. It was not just the teachers of the Law he encouraged to come to him, but also the theologically illiterate Samaritans, and even the tiny children. Response comes first: understanding later.

It is this writer's experience that Muslims respond to Jesus Christ. Of course he is held in the highest honour in the Holy Qur'an, but when his love is experienced in the prayers or ministry of his people Muslims begin to respond in faith.

Michael Nazir Ali of the Theological College in Karachi recently presented a significant paper entitled, 'A Christian assessment of the cult of Muhammad- veneration'. After a careful evaluation of the veneration of Muhammad in Islamic literature, Nazir Ali concludes:

Many Muslims are coming to the conclusion that though Muhammad may be admired as a great leader, as a founder of a new civilization, as a clever military commander and even as one with a certain amount of religious insight, nevertheless as far as veneration is concerned he comes a poor second to Jesus. He does not seem to be a person one could follow in the spiritual sense, he does not inspire imitation, he has too many worldly concerns to be a model of life devoted to God. Jesus on the other hand strikes them as one who has indeed surrendered all to God and was in this sense the truest Muslim. Muhammad then may be accepted by them as the founder of their culture, but it is a figure like Jesus that they want for spiritual veneration. And so it may be that the veneration of Jesus as the Logos which was transferred to Muhammad by overenthusiastic mystics may yet return to its rightful owner.

Bruce Nicholls asks, 'But where will the Muslim seeker find this model of veneration?' He gives his [p. 112](#) own answer: 'Christ must be made visible and that can only happen in the incarnational witness of his followers.'²

Jesus—the Model for our Methods

How did Jesus seek to win mankind? First and obviously through the Incarnation. He identified himself totally with mankind yet without ever compromising his separateness and his integrity. He was able to accept people just as they were, and could be trusted to make himself completely available to them whatever the cost to himself. Thus, he, a Jew and a man, could accept a Samaritan woman and even make himself indebted to her for a drink. He allowed a prostitute to wash his feet with her tears in public and to kiss him. He accepted publicans and sinners, the blind and the leper, the social outcasts of his time and responded to their need. This involved for him a loss of reputation, in some people's eyes, misunderstanding, criticism and persecution. But people mattered to him more than

² B.J. Nicholls, *A Christian Response to Islamic Renewal* (TRACI/ETS Journal), September 1979 p. 4.

these things. He accepted Jewish culture, subjection to his parents, the Roman occupation of his country, not to speak of the unbelievable sufferings of the Cross—all in the interests of identifying with needy people and extending God's unconditional love to them. That was Jesus our model.

How would Jesus set about winning Muslims? Would he have harangued the Prophet as some missionaries have done in the past? It is not difficult to imagine what he would do. For the gospels almost shout the answer. Perhaps it is wiser to ask questions and pray for the Holy Spirit to answer them. Would he dress like a Muslim? Would he eat and drink with them; sitting where they sit? Would he pray with them where they pray? Would he be all things to all men? Would most people assume that he was a Muslim? What answer would he give to the questions: Do you believe that there is no God but Allah? Do you believe that Muhammad is the Apostle of God?

The Christian evangelist to the Muslim has to expose his own heart and mind to these questions. They raise the same kind of inner conflicts for some Christians as questions like, 'Would Jesus drink beer in the local pub?' For some the answer is very clear; for others much less so. This writer believes that probably each person must ask God to show him the answers.

Islam is a culture and not simply a belief system, though the two are inextricably bound together. Like all cultures, Christian or non-Christian, there is much that is good and beautiful and true in Islam with an admixture of the bad, the ugly and the false. To touch a leper is 'bad' from one point of view, but what if it results in healing? For a Christian woman to wear the veil may appear to be compromise with an evil system. It may also be a door to the hearts of many women. To sit in a mosque and pray at the funeral of a Muslim friend may seem like a denial of the Christian faith to some. Yet it has opened the hearts of men to the love of God in a way that possibly few Christian tracts have [p. 113](#) done. To pray at the *Muslim* hours of prayer with shoes removed, to make Friday the Christian day of rest and worship, to fast during Ramadan may seem to be nothing but acts of blatant compromise. But if a Christian can do these things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—'as unto the Lord and not unto men'—in order that by all means he may save some, can anyone say that he is wrong? The fact is that Islam is ripe for harvesting—but few of the labourers dare actually go *into* the harvest field for fear of losing their identity. That is probably why not many Muslims are yet turning to Christ. Very few of his followers get near enough to them. But there are exceptions in some countries, like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia. Phil Parshall writes:

In the past four years, over seventy-five Muslims in Bangladesh have become believers. This is almost insignificant when measured against a population of 70 million Muslims. It is important, however, to realize that this probably exceeds the total number of Muslims converted in Bangladesh during the past fifty years.

These converts call themselves 'Followers of Isa' (Jesus) which has a less negative connotation to Muslim society. Phil Parshall adds:

We are in the early stages of forging a new path in Muslim evangelism. Perhaps a model will evolve that will apply to the larger community of 700 million 'Sons of Ishmael' scattered throughout the world.

Acceptance of Muslims does not mean agreement with all they believe but understanding why they believe as they do. It means empathy—a feeling into the heart of the Muslim and an ability therefore to listen and to learn. When Jesus was a boy of 12 years his parents found him 'in the temple courts, *sitting* among the teachers, *listening* to

them and *asking* them questions' ([Lk. 2:46](#)). His perceptive questions were a prelude to his perceptive answers. He is our Model.

Jesus—the Model for our Message

It is clear that what he taught we must teach ([Mt. 28:19, 20](#)). The good news he brought was not simply *about* himself. He *was* the good news, and he appealed to men to accept him, believe on him, feed on him, drink from him. His apostles first and foremost preached Jesus Christ as Saviour ([1 Cor. 2:2](#)) and as Lord ([2 Cor. 4:5](#)). With the presence of the Holy Spirit with them, given for this very purpose ([Mt. 28:20](#); [Jn. 16:7](#); [Acts 1:8](#)), a new transcendental dimension was introduced into their preaching: the issue became primarily one of response to a living person. But this issue is clear only when Jesus is central in the Christian's ministry.

IN SUMMARY

To ask whether Muslims are resistant to the gospel is probably the wrong question since the gospel was designed for them as for everybody else. What we should be asking is whether we are making it unnecessarily hard for them. A like problem existed in Antioch in the first century when for the first time Gentiles came in large numbers to faith. The Judaisers were all for insisting on circumcision. A chastened Peter, now clear on the issue, opposed **p. 114** them ([Gal. 1:11](#); [Acts 15:7](#)). Finally, James summed up in these words, 'It is my judgment, therefore, that we should *not make it difficult for the Gentiles* who are turning to God ...' ([Acts 15:19](#)). He then gave instructions that would make it easier for the two different cultures to live together and accept one another in Christ.

One question haunts me: Does the Christian church 'make it difficult' for the Muslims who are turning to God?

Dr 'Jock' Anderson, an ophthalmologist, served in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and was consultant ophthalmologist at University hospitals in Southampton and London. **p. 115**

How a Sufi Found his Lord

L. Bevan-Jones

(abridged)

Rev Bevan-Jones tells the story of the pilgrimage from Islam to Christ of Abdus-Subhan. His parents were pious God-fearing Muslims; and though they were deeply grieved at their son's defection to Christianity, they never persecuted him and always made him welcome at home.

The abridged section of this story tells of his brief excursion into the Roman Catholic Church, his appointment to head of the new department of Islamics at the Methodist Theological Seminary at Bareilly, his service with the Henry Martyn School of Islamics at Hyderabad and his election in 1945 as a bishop of the Methodist Church in Southern Asia. Bishop Subhan is remembered as an evangelist to his Muslim people. This booklet 'From Islam to Christ' was published by the Fellowship of Faith for the Muslims.

The Editor

Abdus-Subhan's ancestors had held high office at the court of the Mughal emperors in Delhi, but with the removal of that court to Oudh they had taken up their residence in Benares. There, in the turbulent days of 1857 when Muslims who had been associated with the Mughal rulers were hunted down as rebels, his father, Hafiz Allah Bakhsh, sought security in a change of occupation, and in time became highly efficient in the art of gold embroidery. Having gathered round him a group of craftsmen he eventually moved to Calcutta and there established a thriving business.

Thus it came about that, in 1897, the subject of this memoir was born in that great metropolis, far from the old family home. He had the inestimable advantage of being reared by affectionate parents; indeed, the tributes he pays to the love and tender care of his mother are both many and moving.¹ It was she who taught him and his three brothers to scorn to say or do anything that was deemed dishonourable. His father, equally puritanical, was nevertheless liberal in his views on religion, and among his books was to be seen a marked copy of the Bible.

While still a child Subhan revealed a strong inclination towards religion and this encouraged his parents to p. 116 hope that he might one day become a *maulvi*,² even a *hafiz*,³ and, in fact, by the age of ten he had read the entire Qur'an. But by now he was more than puritanical in his observance of Muslim practices; he was a veritable 'boy-fanatic'. Cherishing a blind faith in Islam, he viewed all other religions as of the devil, hotly denouncing Hindus as idolaters and Christians as polytheists.

This was a zeal beyond the liking and purpose of his parents and elder brother; consequently they changed their plans for his education and, in the hope that it would curb his excessive ardour, had him enrolled at the Calcutta Madrasah. This was run on more modern lines and included the study of English.

A change was, indeed, wrought in him, but not the one hoped for by his parents, nor expected by himself; and it was certainly not due to his study of English. An influence other than human had begun a good work in him; as he strikingly records: 'It was God's search for His lost child'; for now, at the age of 13, he felt his heart thrill at the call to set out in search of some treasure unknown.

Back of this new quest was an influence resulting from his reading of the Qur'an. He had been impressed by the frequent reference there to 'Books of God' given to Moses, David and Jesus. Where were these to be had? For read them he must. Yet, he felt, there could be no assurance that his heart's yearning would be satisfied even if he read them. To do so might gratify his thirst for knowledge of God but not his hunger for him.

Dissatisfied with a purely legalistic Islam, Subhan had turned aside, even at so early an age, to the study of Islamic mysticism; and it was through this that he came to distinguish, as the mystics do, between the mind's desire to know God and the hunger of the heart for him.

Concluding that mysticism was to be his supreme concern, he became interested, through the books he read, in magic and the use of charms, even allowing himself, for a time, to be used as a medium. His story might have ended very differently but for the wise counsel of his maternal grandfather—himself a mystic—who affectionately urged the

¹ cp. his autobiography, *How a Sufi found his Lord*. (Lucknow Publishing House).

² A learned man.

³ One who has learnt the whole Qur'an by heart.

infatuated lad to aspire to be a *Kamil*,⁴ and not a mere *Amil*.⁵ The occasion marked a turning-point in his religious experience.

Life henceforth was to be a Journey, himself a Traveller, and the quest for God not a matter of book-knowledge but spiritual experience. But this Journey could be attempted only under the direction of a Teacher, and so he sought to be initiated into the Quadri Order, of which his grandfather was a member. All unexpectedly he reached another 'milestone' in his Journey, when one day a copy of the Gospel was given to him by a Muslim friend who had himself received it from a Christian.

This then, he reflected, was the Book against which his Muslim mentors had warned him as being spurious, blasphemous, and injurious to p. 117 the faith; a copy of which he had once, in his blind fury, torn to bits! Yet now a secret longing to acquaint himself with its contents overcame his aversion and he began to study it, but warily. The result was dramatic. Far from finding in it anything that could possibly corrupt him, he soon recognized its teaching to be sublime and became convinced that this *Injil*⁶ of the Christians was true. There was that in it which spoke to his inmost soul, as nothing else had done, of the deep things of God. But, best of all, he found in the Central Figure there portrayed the object of his heart's secret search.

It was a momentous discovery, but of a nature so revolutionary that he perceived, even then, that it was God's doing. It was the Loving Heavenly Father making himself known to his erring and once proud child.

There was now nothing for it, he must become a Christian. But he was to learn that to make the resolve to take this step was one thing, to put it into effect quite another. To begin with: to whom in that great metropolis should he, could he, disclose his heart's desire? He knew no Christians, had kept himself aloof from them; who now would be his counsellor and friend?

Picture him, then, as day by day he walked the streets of that great city waiting expectantly, hoping that someone would turn up to whom he might open his heart. Was it, for instance, this apparently well-known European, garbed in cassock and girdle, whom grown men followed and children hailed with delight? But no, as it turned out later in an interview, the padre knew no Urdu and Subhan's attempts at English proved incomprehensible. Once he ventured into a Roman Catholic Church while a service was in progress, but his too great curiosity in what he heard and saw was frowned on by the worshippers and he soon left. On another occasion he felt more hopeful on hearing an Indian Christian preacher addressing a crowd in Hindustani at a street corner. The man was urging his hearers to accept Christ as the only Saviour from sin. At the close Subhan made known his desire and was invited by the preacher to his home. That was the first of several visits and the talks they had proved helpful, but he found his friend's tendency to dwell on the one theme of how to meet Muslim objections to Christianity not only boring, but quite unsuited to his need; so he discontinued his visits.

Some compensation for this disappointment now came to him through a more systematic study of the Bible. He had procured a copy in English, with marginal references, and it became his delight to search out Old Testament prophecies that received their fulfilment in Christ. Moreover, he was able to compare and contrast the truths of Christianity as set forth in the New Testament with the distorted form of them current among Muslims. He gratefully acknowledges that all through this period, when he

⁴ One perfect in the Mystic Way.

⁵ One who practises magic.

⁶ The Gospel.

had no human counsellor to guide him, his Teacher was the Holy Spirit. Such manifestly divine aid enabled him to grasp p. 118 something of the doctrines of the Sonship of Christ and the Trinity, and to see that they are not blasphemous. He was experiencing the fulfilment of Christ's own promise, 'He will guide you into all truth'.

After an interval spent in such study, the guiding hand of God led him one day to the door of the central YMCA building in Calcutta. The door-keeper was distributing handbills about certain lectures to be delivered there and explained, in reply to Subhan's questioning, that the object of the institution was to help people to become Christians. 'Just the place for me,' he thought. On an appointed day he met one of the secretaries, the Rev F.W. Steinthal, of Denmark. This good man, though totally blind, welcomed the visitor and listened with deep interest to his story. Now it so happened that Dr S.M. Zwemer, then on a visit to India, was the one who was to give the advertised series of lectures, commencing that very evening. Once more we see how God was working his purpose out.

The lad understood only a little of that first lecture, but at the close he was introduced as an inquirer. In the course of conversation Dr Zwemer quoted from the opening chapter of the Qur'an the words: 'Guide us in the straight way', and went on to explain how Christ himself is the straight path and the real answer to this oft-repeated prayer of the Muslims. He also quoted Christ's own words, 'No one cometh unto the Father but by me'. The talk made a deep impression on young Subhan's mind and heart, because it encouraged him to believe that God had answered, in him and for him, this very prayer which, while still a Muslim, he had constantly repeated.

There followed a weekly appointment with Mr Steinthal for Bible study. Subhan could have had no more sympathetic and helpful teacher, for Mr Steinthal was a man much given to prayer, and Subhan was never allowed to leave his presence without a period spent on their knees before God. Hitherto, prayer for him had been mostly a matter of ritual, but when Mr Steinthal prayed he seemed to be looking on things unseen and to be speaking heart to heart with God. These new contacts and experiences only increased the lad's longing to become a Christian, but he was told that his baptism could not be considered yet because he was under age.

Once when with Mr Steinthal he was introduced to a visitor. This friend spoke to him on the closing portion of the first chapter of the Gospel of John. He called his particular attention to the fact that Andrew, on finding Jesus, went to tell his brother, Simon; and that Philip had declared to Nathaniel, 'We have found the Messiah'. Then he asked him whether he had been witnessing for Christ, stressing the fact that this is a primary obligation resting on all believers. Here was something entirely new for the young convert, and he was very conscious of the challenge it presented. But he courageously accepted it and was given grace to avail himself of an early opportunity to bear witness.

The very next day on arriving at school he began to speak to his class-mates about Christ, declaring p. 119 his new-found faith in him as his Saviour and Lord. Imagine the consternation! The news spread like wildfire through the assembling boys, and some seniors warned him that unless he retracted what he had said, such nonsense would be knocked out of him. When the class assembled boy after boy stood up and pointing at him, shouted: 'Christian!' 'Christian!' The teacher, taken aback, asked Subhan if it was true, thus giving him the opportunity to declare his faith; and this he had the courage to do. Pandemonium ensued, the boys all shouting: 'Blasphemy!' 'Blasphemy!' The scandalized teachers met and summoned him before them. They put to him question after question intended to shake his faith in Christ, but his answers only confounded them. Discomfited, they lost their temper and hurled curses at him, and he would have been instantly expelled from the school had it not been for the intervention of a non-Muslim teacher and the European Principal. As it was, Subhan left the institution that day, before the classes

finished, bearing on his clothes the marks of the indignities heaped on him by the students. They had spat upon him the red juice of the betel nut they were chewing. But he walked home in a strange exhilaration of spirit, rejoicing that he had been counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.

His father persuaded him to go with him to the school next day that he might find out exactly what his future was to be, and to give this son of his an opportunity to apologize to his Muslim teachers for his audacity in answering them back. The boy was prepared to apologize, should it be proved that he had been rude, but retract any part of his professed faith in Christ he certainly would not!

A surprise, however, awaited the father. The teachers refused to have anything to do with the young apostate, declaring that he was like one possessed and that nothing they could do would avail to bring him back to the fold of Islam. This attitude aroused the father's anger and scorn, and he let them know what he thought of their incompetence as professed teachers of the faith, seeing that they could not deal reasonably with a boy still in his teens.

This painful incident did two things for Subhan. It closed a door behind him; he had finished with Islam, and, though this was not his wish, his former friends were now his foes. On the other hand, he was proclaimed a Christian, and as such entered into the fellowship of those who owned the same Lord.

At this point we may again trace the merciful over-ruling of the Heavenly Father. Dismissed from one school he yet found admission to another, contrary to all expectation. It was the CMS (St Paul's) High School in Calcutta. The rule here was that none but Christian boys were to be admitted; even so, the Principal, the Rev S.D. Hinde, waived the point in the new convert's favour, and out of the kindness of his heart took him in.

The young boy now entered upon a period of supreme happiness. He not only found himself among keen Christian lads of his own age, but was initiated by them into various forms of service which they themselves had planned as part of the [p. 120](#) Christian duty. With them he took part in street-preaching and hospital visiting, rendering such help as he could to the patients.

It was still early days for him at St Paul's when the Principalship was assumed by one who was destined under God to do more for him in his growth in the Christian life than probably anyone else. This was the Rev J.H. Hickenbotham, 'a man of the most saintly character'. That is Subhan's tribute, and this: 'No sacrifice was too great and no suffering too painful for him to bring one individual to the knowledge of his Master. It seemed as if he had a share in his passion to save souls'.

Subhan was to find out during the vacations that his friend was an ideal missionary for work among Muslims. A man of the humblest disposition, he took every possible step to identify himself with the simple folk around him, eating Indian food and wearing Indian clothes. He spoke Bengali with as great fluency as he did English, and always the great longing of his heart was to win Muslims to his Saviour. To that end he laboured and prayed as a loyal ambassador of Christ, specially when in charge of the school at Chapra, in the district of Nadia, East Bengal.

Vacation tours along with other young Christians and in the inspiring company of their beloved Principal, exercised a formative influence in the life of our young friend. He took his full share in the communal life of the students' camp and was even privileged to join in the work of preaching to the simple villagers, although till then he had not been baptized.

Hitherto his desire to take this step had not been gratified, but now he began to plead with Mr Hickenbotham to arrange for it to be done. The latter, made wise by long experience, arranged in his own way to achieve this object. During a vacation he took the

boy with him into the interior, among a colony of Christians, most of whom were converts from Islam. Of that time Subhan writes: 'It was one of the happiest holidays that I have ever spent'; and with good reason, for here were those who had made a like momentous decision, so that he had much in common with them.

On returning to Calcutta, the Principal, well knowing what it would involve, advised him to come and live in the hostel as a boarder. This the lad was quite prepared to do, but the announcement of his plans at home positively shocked his mother. Undeterred, however, he gathered up the few things he required and left home to take up his residence at the school.

That night it was his turn to be surprised. He was called out after dark to the main door and found standing there his dear mother, who had come escorted by another son. It had cost this gentle lady much to risk such publicity, because she was one who practised the strictest *parda*.⁷ There she stood, pleading tearfully that her wayward boy should return home. Looking back over the intervening years Subhan declares that he was at this point involved in one of the hardest struggles of his life. Here was no ordinary mother. Time after time he had had p. 121 proof of her boundless love for him; was he now to turn a deaf ear to her pleading? In his extremity the word of his Lord made clear his duty. 'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.' Nevertheless he told his mother that he would go back if she would allow him to declare himself a Christian. To this she was prepared to agree, provided that he kept the fact of his conversion a close secret from their friends and neighbours. Once again he remembered the Lord's word, 'Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's glory, and of the holy angels.' He therefore told her that such a compromise was out of the question. Were he to act in that cowardly fashion he would prove himself to be unworthy of Christ, and less than honourable as her son.

At this juncture Mr Hickenbotham came on the scene and expressed a desire to speak to the mother. That for her was another ordeal, because she had never been face to face with a European. In the course of conversation it became clear that the real cause of her distress was her anxiety lest her son should come to harm while away from her protection.

But a brief talk with the Principal revealed to her the affectionate nature of the man in whose charge her son was to reside. Thus reassured, she not only consented to his residence in the hostel, but promised that no legal steps would be taken to extradite him on the grounds that he was under age; nor, when he should come to be baptized, would any disturbance be created by members of the family or their relatives. In the event this meant much for Subhan, and though, normally, few Muslim mothers would have given such an undertaking and fewer still have had the power to implement it, this lady's influence with her family and friends was so exceptional that she was able to make good her promise.

A load was now lifted from the lad's mind, and the knowledge that no opposition would be made by his own people to his baptism filled him with happiness. Moreover, throughout those days of conflict and tension, his Lord had been teaching him some precious lessons. He would recall his mother's tears and the insistent counter-claim of his Master to his loyalty, and gratefully acknowledge that as he had held on in sheer faith, God had upheld him.

Steps were now taken to gratify his wish. On Monday, July 1st, 1912, in his fifteenth year, he was enrolled as a catechumen, it being arranged that his baptism should take

⁷ Seclusion, and the use of the veil.

place the following Sunday. Now it so happened that, on the preceding Saturday, a Bengali Christian worker from the Nadia District, a friend of Mr Hickinbotham, was in Calcutta and met Subhan. They talked of his forthcoming baptism, and all at once the visitor startled the lad with a stern challenge to his faith. Where was the evidence, he asked, that he was really relying upon God? Was he not putting his trust in the Principal, and counting on the presence of friends and the protection of the hostel? Had he yet been to tell his family and acquaintances the day and time of his baptism? And had he invited *them* to come and witness it? p. 122

Subhan winced under this interrogation, but once again he accepted the challenge. Off he went, on the spur of the moment, and with sublime courage proclaimed to relatives and friends not only the fact of his new-found faith in Christ, but the time and place of his baptism, adding an invitation to come and witness it.

He was away from the hostel for some hours, going to as many homes as he could in the time at his disposal. Meanwhile his Principal, duly apprised by the Bengali visitor of what had taken place, passed an anxious time, fearing lest the lad should suffer rough treatment at the hands of his friends. Great was his relief when at last the boy returned.

The baptism took place at the school church of Holy Trinity, during evensong. Principal Hickinbotham and one of the Bengali teachers beloved of Subhan, stood as his god-fathers. The church was filled to capacity when the Bengali pastor, in procession led by the choir, walked to the baptistry. There, after making his confession in the words of the Apostles' Creed, the lad was immersed. The name then given to him was John. Following the ceremony the pastor preached an inspiring and memorable sermon, on the words recorded of the apostle Paul after his baptism: 'When he had received food, he was strengthened'.

In common with many another convert from Islam, Subhan was to suffer some disillusionment of his preconceived notions concerning the spiritual life of the members of the Christian community. But whereas others have in consequence lost much of their early fervour, he found in the fellowship of the students and teachers of the school both refreshment and strength. He continued with unabated zeal to take part in the evangelistic activities of the students, and to prosecute his studies in the Bible at the YMCA. Meanwhile his pastor was preparing him for full membership in the church, and he was subsequently confirmed by the Metropolitan, Bishop Copleston.

The course of events in his life now took a new turn. Rather naturally he wished to study the Urdu and Persian languages for his matriculation examination, but no provision was made for these subjects in the curriculum at St Paul's. This, and the fact that he had been in poor health, led to his transfer to St John's School, at Agra.

But Agra was not Calcutta, nor was life in St John's hostel what he had known at St Paul's. He missed, above all, the comradeship of the Christian students' 'Brotherhood'. Fortunately for him the chief Warden of the Agra hostel at that time was Mr Shoran Singha, an Indian gentleman with a real concern for the spiritual welfare of the boarders. To him Subhan unburdened his soul, telling him frankly how he missed the spiritual fellowship with the students such as he had known in Calcutta. Mr Singha listened very sympathetically to what he had to say, as did another friend of the boys, Mr George Ingram, who frequently called in at the hostel to pray with the lads and urge them to make full surrender to Christ. The upshot of their talks was that the three of them resolved to start a Christian Union in the hostel. The p. 123 idea was first broached to a chosen few and these were led to share with the leaders a concern for the salvation of their classmates. Fruitful seasons of prayer followed, leading on to evangelistic services. On one occasion this small group of boys arranged on their own for a team of 'preachers' to accompany the school hockey team when it went for a match up to the famous Hindu city

of Muttra, a place given up to idolatry. While the players were at their game, a smaller team of three took their stand in the crowded market-place and proclaimed the message of God's redeeming love in Christ to a huge crowd of Hindus. They met the expenses of that preaching trip out of their own pockets.

Taking advantage of the keenness created by this adventure, there was inaugurated on the morrow (a month after Subhan's arrival in Agra), the St John's Christian Union. Its first official meeting was held in the Warden's house. New members pledged themselves to devote a certain amount of their time to some form of evangelistic service. There resulted a series of meetings for the deepening of the spiritual life, and regular preaching campaigns followed the services on Sundays. The activities of this Union awoke in the boys a new zeal for Christian life and witness.

Meanwhile Subhan was steadily advancing in the Christian way of life. His devotional study of the Bible and his contacts with senior teachers and friends led him to appreciate more truly the demands of a holy God upon his soul. This was particularly true regarding his conception of sin. As a Muslim he had thought of it as something not essentially evil, but only evil through the arbitrary decree of God. It was an external act, to which was attached a painful result—the pangs of hell. But with his acceptance of Christ and through gazing upon his Cross, his eyes were opened to see what sin is in the sight of God—an affront to his holy love, involving separation from him, and final death.

However, this fuller understanding did not, of itself, exempt him from temptation nor keep him from falling. That victory came to him through increasing experience of the grace of God; the grace that forgives when we repent of our sins, and the grace that avails to keep us from sinning.

Having duly matriculated, Subhan entered upon his studies at St John's College. In this larger world, offering more numerous contacts with members of the Christian community, he found rare friends and wise counsellors in the Rev Norman Tubbs and Canon A.W. Davies, Principals, respectively, of the School and College. Another friendship formed was with Professor Rajendra Chandra Das, who had joined the staff of St John's from Serampore College, Bengal. Under his inspiring leadership the college Christian Union experienced a genuine spiritual revival, and Subhan, as the Union's secretary, was privileged to share in the blessings that followed.

He gives us some interesting information about himself during his time at the college. He became acquainted with the late Dr J.N. Farquhar's comparative study, entitled [p. 124](#) *The Crown of Hinduism*, much in vogue in those days; and the theme suggested to him that a somewhat similar approach might be made to educated Muslims in commending the claims of Christ and Christianity in a friendly spirit.

He wrote at some length about this literary venture to his trusted friend, Mr Steinthal. While the latter appreciated Subhan's concern to break new ground in a friendly approach, and recognized his qualifications as an ex-Muslim for the task, he nevertheless uttered a word of grave caution. Dr Farquhar's title, he said, had been misleading, and so would 'The Crown of Islam' be. Christianity can never be proved to be the 'fulfilment' of Hinduism or any other religion, for 'truth can never be the fulfilment of error'. And later, long after Subhan had come to see that his project was a mistake, this friend had pointedly added: 'The only way to conquer the darkness is by letting in the light'.

But the mischief was done; the first part, 'The Truth of Islam', appeared as a separate volume and received a cordial welcome from the Muslim press. The second, 'The Crown of Islam', in manuscript form, was borrowed by an Indian Christian from another province and never seen again. Very humbly our friend records that his views on this question of approach underwent a radical change and that he came to see that Mr Steinthal's contention was true: truth can never be the fulfilment of error.

Once, on the occasion of the annual convention for the deepening of the spiritual life, the Rev Norman Tubbs arranged for him to join a party of his students at Sialkot, in the Punjab. It was a unique experience for Subhan, because he met there some of the choicest souls in the Christian Church in India. He heard inspiring messages from such men of God as Bishop Brenton Badley, and Sadhu Sundar Singh. 'I felt,' he tells us, 'as if I was privileged to taste some of the joys of fellowship which the saints will have in heaven.'

The Cross had always occupied a central place in his thought about Christ; he loved to dwell on its beauty, meditate on its glory and draw strength from its power. And now, at this convention, he was to be led with a host of fellow-believers to the foot of that same Cross as Bishop Badley presented Christ, crucified for them all. The hallowed influence of that hour remained for years as an incentive to more holy living.

He returned to Agra with a greater desire than ever for a closer walk with God. The college possesses a beautiful little chapel in a crypt and this became for Subhan a sanctuary to which he would retire for meditation and prayer. At the time of a college holiday he sometimes went to Sikandara, five miles distant, to spend the day in solitary reflection on the roof of the mausoleum of Akbar, the Mughal Emperor. On one such visit he had an experience to which he refers in some detail because of the effect it had on him. While wrapt in meditation he had a vision. Raising his eyes to the sky he beheld the figure of Christ upon the Cross. He was strangely moved. He felt as though his heart was on fire and experienced a sensation of 'pain p. 125 mixed with joy'. There ensued a state of ecstasy, but an ecstasy very different from the kind he used to have as a Muslim mystic. He might be said to have been 'caught up', like the apostle of old, and permitted to hear unspeakable things. The experience led him to a new dedication of his life to Christ.

This incident took place at 4 p.m. on 23rd September, 1919, when he was 22 years of age. He remembers the time and date because he made a record of his experiences. It was a time of solemn re-consecration. He then framed for himself these 'commandments':

Thou shalt freely confess Him whenever and wherever an opportunity offers.

Thou shalt feed thyself daily on Him.

Thou shalt retire in solitude to meet Him.

Thou shalt look into His face when the tempter comes to thee.

Thou shalt not do what thou wouldst not like Him to see, or go where thou canst not take Him with thee.

Thou shalt not put thyself in any place, company, sport, or amusement, or read or write any books or papers which even for a moment would drive Him from the centre of thy consciousness or interrupt the light which proceeds from Him towards thy heart.

It is in the fitness of things that this narrative should close with Bishop Subhan's tribute to his Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ: 'In accepting Christianity I accepted the leadership of One who is able to change life, and give strength in weakness. He enables me to overcome things which mar and destroy life, and gives peace in my heart and grace to live victoriously, and grants the right of citizenship in Heaven. I find that Christianity is Christ, and that to be a Christian means to live in His fellowship, so that when faced with temptation and assailed on every side by the rising tide of doubts and despair or grief, it is enough to look into His face and yield all to His safe keeping, and He does the rest. My manifold needs are met by His manifold grace.'

'When I look back at the path already traversed in life, I find it strewn with many failures and faults and shortcomings, but it is marvellous how He has sufficed, and how He has made me rise when I fell and has given me strength when I proved to be too weak to walk.'

Yea, through life, death through sorrow and through sinning,

On the Nature of Islamic Da‘wah

Isma‘il Al-Faruqi

*Reprinted with permission from International Review of Mission,
Volume LXV, No. 260, October 1976*

This paper was presented at the Conference on Christian Mission and Islamic Da‘wah, Chambésy, Switzerland, June 1976. It was sponsored by the CWME of WCC Geneva in consultation with the Islamic Foundation, Leicester, UK and the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham UK. Dr Al-Furuqi’s paper is an incisive statement on Islamic Da‘wah.

The Editor

Allah, *subhānahu wa ta‘ālā*, has commanded the Muslim: ‘Call men unto the path of your Lord by wisdom and goodly counsel. Present the cause to them through argument yet more sound’ (Qur’ān 16:125). *Da‘wah* is the fulfilment of this commandment ‘to call men unto the path of Allah’. Besides, it is the effort by the Muslim to enable other men to share and benefit from the supreme vision, the religious truth, which he has appropriated. In this respect it is rationally necessary, for truth wants to be known. It exerts pressure on the knower to share his vision of it with his peers. Since religious truth is not only theoretical, but also axiological and practical, the man of religion is doubly urged to take his discovery to other men. His piety, his virtue and charity impose upon him the obligation to make common the good which has befallen him.

I DA‘WAH METHODOLOGY

A Da‘wah is not coercive

‘Calling’ is certainly not coercing. Allah (*s.w.t.*) has commanded, ‘No coercion in religion’ (2:256). It is an invitation whose objective can be fulfilled only with the free consent of the called. Since the objective is an exercise by the called of his own judgement that Allah is his Creator, Master, Lord and Judge, a forced judgement is a *contradictio in adjecto* and hence punishable with *jahannam*. Humanistic ethic regards coerced *da‘wah* as a grave violation p. 127 of the human person, second only to homicide, if not equal to it. That is why the Holy Qur’ān specified the means of persuasion to be used. ‘Argue the cause with them [the non-Muslims] with the more comely arguments’ (16:125). If they are not convinced, they must be left alone (5:108; 3:176–177; 47:32). Certainly, the Muslim is to try again and never give up that God may guide his fellow-man to the truth. The example of his own life, his commitment of the values he professes, his engagement, constitute his final argument. If the non-Muslim is still not convinced, the Muslim is to rest his case with God. The Prophet himself allowed those Christians who were not convinced by his own presentation of Islam to keep their faith and return home in dignity.

From this it follows that the societal order desired by Islam is one where men are free to present and argue their religious causes with one another. It is a kind of academic seminar on a large scale where he who knows better is free to tell and to convince, and the others are free to listen and be convinced. Islam puts its trust in man's rational power to discriminate between the true and the false. 'Truth is now manifest from error. Whoever believes [i.e. accepts the truth] does so for his own good. Whoever does not believe [i.e. does not accept the truth] does so to his own peril' (39:41). Islamic *da'wah* is therefore an invitation to think, to debate and argue. It cannot be met with indifference except by the cynic, nor with rejection except by the fool or the malevolent. If it is met by silencing force, then that force must be met by superior force. The right to think is innate and belongs to all men. No man may preemptively deny it to any human. Islamic *da'wah* operates only under these principles. Thomas Arnold's *The Preaching of Islam* is a standing monument to *da'wah* written by a Christian missionary and colonialist.

The principle that Islamic *da'wah* is non-coercive is based upon the Qur'ān's dramatization of the justification for the creation of man. The Qur'ān represents God as addressing the angels in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*, verse 30, with the words: "Lo! I am about to place a *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth." The angels replied: "Will You place therein one who will do harm and will shed blood, while we sing Your praise and sanctify You?" He said: "Surely I know that which you know not." ' In another verse of the Qur'ān, *Sūrat al-Ahzāb*, 72, we read: 'Lo! We offered Our trust to heaven and earth. They shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. But man assumed it ...' Both these statements are understood by Muslims as defining the purpose of man's existence, namely, that he is God's *khalifah*, carrier of the responsibility entrusted to him for the fulfilment of the divine will. That will is already fulfilled in part, within nature as natural law, and not yet fulfilled in another part, by man as moral law. This constitutes man's distinction from all other creatures. Only he acts freely and thus enables himself to actualize the moral part of the divine will. His essence is his capacity for responsible moral action. Coercion is a violation of this freedom and responsibility, and is utterly inconsistent with man's relation to the divine will. [p. 128](#)

B Da'wah is not a psychotropic induction

It follows from the nature of judgement that *da'wah* cannot have for objective anything but a conscientious acquiescence to its contents on the part of the called. This means that if the consciousness of the called is in any way vitiated by any of the common defaults or defects of consciousness, the *da'wah* is itself equally vitiated. Thus a *da'wah* that is fulfilled through, or whose fulfilment involves in any way, a lapse of consciousness, a lapse of forgetfulness, a lapse in *ta'aqqul* or the intellectual binding of ideas and facts so as to make a cohesive and consistent whole, or a transport of emotion and enthusiasm, a sort of 'trip', is not Islamic *da'wah*. *Da'wah*, therefore, is not the work of magic, of illusion, of excitement, of any kind of psychotopia. In such work, the subject is not in control of his power of judgement, and hence, his judgement cannot be properly said to be his 'personal free judgement'.

The presence of God, that is as Ultimate Reality, Creator and Lord of the Universe, Judge and Master of all men, is a fact which can indeed enter common consciousness. Indeed, Islam holds that were consciousness to be tampered with, the object perceived would not be God, but something else. Under the tremendous impact of revelation itself, the Prophet's consciousness neither lapsed nor became vague as in a mystical experience, but continued to function normally and was even enhanced in its clarity and perception. That is why Islamic law does not recognize the conversion to Islam of the minor child; for his consciousness is presumed immature until he comes of age.

The principle that *da'wah* has nothing to do with psychotropic induction preserves the freedom and consciousness of choice which cannot be affirmed in case of dilation of consciousness by chemical or mystifying means. It protects the *da'wah* from being conducted for pleasure, happiness, freedom from care, *eudaemonia*—indeed, for anything but the sake of Allah. Any ulterior motive would vitiate it in both the giver and the recipient. On the other hand, unconscious conversion of any person who has been tricked into entering Islam is evil; more evil, of course, is the trickster.

C Da'wah is directed to Muslims as well as non-Muslims

It follows from the divine commandment that *da'wah* must be the end product of a critical process of intellection. Its content cannot be the only content known, the only content presented. For there is no judgement without consideration of alternatives, without comparison and contrast, without tests of inner consistency, of general consistency with all other knowledge, without tests of correspondence with reality. It is this aspect of *da'wah* that earns for the called who responds affirmatively to its content the grace of *Hikmah* or wisdom. Allah (*s.w.t.*) described His prophets and saints as 'Men of *Hikmah*' precisely because their Islam was a learned thing, not a narrow-minded addiction to a single track of thought, certainly not a 'pre-judgement'. That is why *da'wah* in Islam has never been thought of as exclusively addressed to the non-Muslims. p. 129 It is as much intended for the benefit of Muslims as of non-Muslims.

Besides stemming from the fact of all men's equal creatureliness in front of God, this universalism of *da'wah* rests on the identity of imperative arising out of conversion to Islam. All men stand under the obligation to actualize the divine pattern in space and time. This task is never complete for any individual. The Muslim is supposedly the person who, having accepted the burden, has set himself on the road of actualization. The non-Muslim still has to accept the charge. Hence, *da'wah* is necessarily addressed to both, to the Muslim to press forward toward actualization and to the non-Muslim to join the ranks of those who make the pursuit of God's pattern supreme.

The directing of *da'wah* to Muslim as much as non-Muslims is indicative of the fact that, unlike Christianity, Islamicity is never a *fait accompli*. Islamicity is a process. It grows, and it is sometimes reduced. There is no time at which the Muslim may carry his title to paradise, as it were, in his pocket. Instead of 'salvation', the Muslim is to achieve felicity through unceasing effort.

D Da'wah is rational intellection

Since *da'wah* is a critical process of intellection, it is of its nature never to be dogmatic, never to stand by its contents as if by its own authority, or that of its mouthpiece, or that of its tradition. For it to be critical means that it should keep itself always open to new evidence, to new alternatives; that it continually cast and recast itself in new forms, in cognizance of the new discoveries of human science, of the new needs of human situation. In making the *da'wah*, the *dā'iyah* labours not as the ambassador of an authoritarian system, but as the co-thinker who is co-operating with the *mad'ū* (the called) in the understanding and appreciation of Allah's double revelation, in creation and through His Prophets. So much for the standpoint of the *dā'iyah*.

From the standpoint of the *mad'ū*, his process of intellection should never stop. His *īmān*, should be dynamic and always growing in intensity, clarity of vision and comprehensiveness. Moreover, conversion to Islam is not a sacrament which, once it takes place, becomes an eternal *fait accompli*. Islam knows of no 'justification by faith', certain of no 'justification' in the sense of *justi facti*. If lethargic and stagnant, *īmān* degenerates into narrow-mindedness and gradually impoverishes its subject. On the

other hand, its dynamism—its openness to new knowledge, new evidence and new life-situations, new data, problems, as well as creative solutions which may or may not be derived from the tradition—makes it a source of enrichment for the subject. Fortunate is he whose *īmān* increases in ‘*yaqīn-ness*’ (certitude) with every new day.

As rational intellection, *da‘wah* shows that in Islam, faith has to do with knowledge and conviction, whereas in Christianity it is, as Pascal found out, a blind wager. The Arabic word *īmān* does not mean ‘faith’ as Christians use the term. Rather, it means ‘conviction’. It does not involve the functioning of a sacrament. p. 130 There is no *ex opere operata* principle in Islam.

E Da‘wah is rationally necessary

Islamic *da‘wah* is therefore the presentation of rational, i.e. critical, truth. It is not the proclamation of an event, or even of a truth (idea), but the presentation, for critical assessment as to truth value, of a proposition, a factum, which has theoretical (metaphysical) and practical (ethical) relevance for man. As to the recalcitrant will, Islam recognized it for what it is, namely, recalcitrant and delinquent, and left the subject of that will to himself until God guides him to the truth. It respected his will and his judgement and, indeed, it extended to him its protections and *Pax Islamica*. But it asked him to respond equally with peace and not to interfere with his neighbour’s right to listen and be convinced. Moreover, the Muslim of history has always presented his case in the open, never entered or practised his Islam in secret. His *dāwah* preceded his entry onto any international or interreligious scene. In consequence, he interpreted the killing of the *dā‘iyah*, the silencing of his *da‘wah*, as a hostile act, a rejection of the peaceful call to reason and argument, and not merely the opposition of a recalcitrant will. That is also why, once his call is answered not with conversion but merely with ‘yea, I will think’, the Muslim of history has spared absolutely nothing in so presenting his argument as to make it convincing; above all, embodying it forth in its universalism, justice and brotherhood.

That *da‘wah* is rationally necessary is implied by the fact that in presenting its case, Islam presents it as natural or rational truth. ‘Rational’ here means ‘critical’. Men differ in their use of reason but there would be no point to our dialogue unless we assume the truth to be knowable, that is, unless we believe it possible to arrive at principles which over-arch our differences. Therefore, the standpoint of Islam is not an ‘act of faith’, but one of ‘conviction’. It is one of knowledge, of trust in the human power to know.

F Da‘wah is anamnesis

In commanding the Muslim to call men to the path of Allah, He (*s.w.t.*) did not ask him to call men to anything new, to something which is foreign or unknown to them. Islam is *din al-fitrah* (*religio naturalis*) which is already present in its fulness in man by nature. It is innate, as it were, a natural constituent of humanity. The man who is no *homo religiosus*, and hence *homo Islamicus*, is not a man. This is Allah’s branding of His creation, namely, that He has endowed all men, as His creatures, with a *sensus numinus*, a *fitrah*, with which to recognize Him as Allah (God), Transcendent Creator, Ultimate Master, and one. It is history which confirms this natural faculty with its primeval perceptions and intellections, cultivates and enriches it or warps it and diverts it from its natural goal.

Da‘wah is the call of man to return to himself, to what is innate in him, to ‘objective’ or ‘phenomenological’ (i.e. with suspension of the indoctrinations and inculcations of history) reexamination of facts which are already given, and so in him. It is the p. 131 nearest thing to Platonic *anamnesis* without the absurdity of reincarnation or transmigration of souls. As such, the claims of *da‘wah* are necessarily moderate, nay humble! For the *dā‘iyah* is to do no more than the ‘midwife’, to stir the intellect of the

mad'ū to rediscover what he already knows, the innate knowledge which God has implanted in him at birth.

As *anamnesis*, *da'wah* is based upon the Islamic assertion that primeval religion or monotheism is found in every man (*din al-fitrah*), and that all he needs is to be reminded of it. The function of the prophets is to remind people of what is already in them. Christianity has approached this position in the literature of the Apostolic Fathers and particularly in the Enlightenment. But it receded from this position in the nineteenth century because western man was too deeply committed to his ethno-centrism to accept the universalism implied in that position. Let us remember that Immanuel Kant, the prince of the Enlightenment, held that 'to be black is an argument', and categorized the world's races in order of ascendancy with the Europeans on top. This was a failure of nerve on the part of Christendom.

G Da'wah is ecumenical par excellence

Islam's discovery of *din al-fitrah* and its vision of it as base of all historical religion is a breakthrough of tremendous importance in interreligious relations. For the first time it has become possible to hold adherents of all other religions as equal members of a universal religious brotherhood. All religious traditions are *de jure*, for they have all issued from and are based upon a common source, the religion of God which he has implanted equally in all men, upon *din al-fitrah*. The problem is to find out how far the religious traditions agree with *din al-fitrah*, the original and first religion; the problem is to trace the historical development of religions and determine precisely how and when and where each has followed and fulfilled, or transcended and deviated from, *din al-fitrah*. Holy writ as well as all other religious texts must be examined in order to discover what change has befallen them, or been reflected in them, in history. Islam's breakthrough is thus the first call to scholarship in religion, to critical analysis of religious texts, of the claim of such texts to revelation status. It is the first call to the discipline of 'history of religions' because it was the first to assume that all religions had a history, that each religion has undergone a development.

Islam does not claim for itself, therefore, the status of a novelty, but of a fact and dispensation at least as old as creation. The religious life of man, with all its variety across the ages is rehabilitated under this view not as a series of vagaries, but as attempts at true religion, Monotheism is said to be as old as creation.

Islamic *da'wah* begins by reaffirming this ultimate base as genuine and true. It seeks to complete the critical task of sifting in the accumulated traditions the wheat from the chaff. We are not impressed by the claim of latter-day ecumenists, advocates of interreligious dialogue, toleration [p. 132](#) and co-existence, who assert the ultimacy of any religious system because it is religious. For such a claim is the absolutization of every religion's propositions, which is nothing short of cultural relativism. Indeed, such ecumenism is non-representative of the religions which claim that what they propose is *the* truth, and not merely *a* claim to the truth among many claims. And it is rationally inconsequential because it counsels the juxtaposition in consciousness of contrary claims to the truth without the demand for a solution of their contradiction. By avoiding all these pitfalls and shortcomings, Islamic *da'wah* is ecumenical, if ecumenicity is to have any meaning besides kitchen cooperation among the churches.

Da'wah is ecumenical *par excellence* because it regards any kind of intercourse between the Muslim and the non-Muslim as a domestic relationship between kin. The Muslim comes to the non-Muslim and says 'WE are one; we are one family under Allah, and Allah has given you the truth not only inside yourself but inside your religious tradition which is *de jure* because its source is in God.' The task of dialogue, or mission, is

thus transformed into one of sifting the history of the religion in question. *Da'wah* thus becomes an ecumenical cooperative critique of the other religion rather than its invasion by a new truth.

II DA'WAH CONTENT

Islam's view of other faiths flows from the essence of its religious experience. This essence is critically knowable. It is not the subject of 'paradox', nor of 'continuing revelation', nor the object of construction or reconstruction by Muslims. It is crystallized in the Holy Qur'ān for all men to read. It is as clearly comprehensible to the man of today as it was to that of Arabia of the Prophet's day (570–632 AC) because the categories of grammar, lexicography, syntax and redaction of the Qur'ānic text, and those of Arabic consciousness embedded in the Arabic language, have not changed through the centuries. This phenomenon is indeed unique; for Arabic is the only language which remained the same for nearly two millennia, the last fourteen centuries of which being certainly due to the Holy Qur'ān.¹ For Muslims, this essence has been on every lip and in every mind, every hour of every day.

The essence of Islam is *tawhīd* or the witnessing that there is no god but God. Brief as it is, this witness packs into itself four principles which constitute the whole essence and ultimate foundation of the religion.

First, that there is no god but God means that reality is dual, consisting of a natural realm, the realm of creation, and a transcendent realm, the Creator. This principle distinguishes Islam from p. 133 trinitarian Christianity where the dualism of creator and creature is maintained but where it is combined with a divine immanentism in human nature in justification of the incarnation. *Tawhīd* requires that neither nature be apotheosized nor transcendent God be objectified, the two realities ever-remaining ontologically disparate.

Second, *tawhīd* means that God is related to what is not God as its God, that is, as its creator or ultimate cause, its master or ultimate end. Creator and creature, therefore, *tawhīd* asserts, are relevant to each other regardless of their ontological disparateness which is not affected by the relation. The transcendent Creator, being cause and final end of the natural creature, is the ultimate Master Whose will is the religious and moral imperative. The divine will is commandment and law, the 'ought' of all that is, knowable by the direct means of revelation, or the indirect means of rational and/or empirical analysis of what is. Without a knowable content, the divine will would not be normative or imperative, and hence would not be the final end of the natural; for if the transcendent Creator is not the final end of his own creature, creation must be not the purposive event consonant with divine nature but a meaningless happening to him, a threat to his own ultimacy and transcendence.

Thirdly, *tawhīd* means that man is capable of action, that creation is malleable or capable of receiving man's action, and that human action on malleable nature, resulting in a transformed creation, is the purpose of religion. Contrary to the claims of other religions, nature is neither fallen or evil, nor a sort of *Untergang* of the absolute, nor is the absolute an apotheosis of it. Both are real, and both are good—the Creator being the

¹ Controversies have arisen, as they certainly may, in the interpretation of the Qur'ānic text. What is being affirmed here is the fact that the Qur'ānic text is not bedevilled by a hermeneutical problem. Differences of interpretation are apodictically soluble in terms of the very same categories of understanding in force at the time of revelation of the text (611–632 AC), all of which have continued the same because of the freezing of the language and the daily intercourse of countless millions of people with it and with the text of the Holy Qur'ān.

summum bonum and the creature being intrinsically good and potentially better as it is transformed by human action into the pattern the Creator has willed for it. We have already seen that knowledge of the divine will is possible for man; and through revelation and science such knowledge is actual. The prerequisites of the transformation of creation into the likeness of the divine pattern are hence all, but for human resolve and execution, fulfilled and complete.

Fourthly, *tawhīd* means that man, alone among all the creatures, is capable of action as well as being free to act or not to act. This freedom vests him with a distinguishing quality, namely responsibility. It casts upon his action its moral character; for the moral is precisely that which is done in freedom, i.e., done by an agent who is capable of doing, as well as of not doing, it. This kind of action, moral action, is the greater portion of the divine will. Being alone capable of it, man is a higher creature, endowed with the cosmic significance of that through whose agency alone is the higher part of the divine will to be actualized in space and time. Man's life on earth, therefore, is especially meaningful and cosmically significant. As Allah has put it in the Holy Qur'ān, man is God's *khalīfah*, or vice-gerent on earth.² It is of the nature of moral action that its fulfilment be not equivalent to its non-fulfilment, that man's exercise of his freedom in [p.134](#) actualizing the divine imperative be not without difference. Hence, another principle is necessary, whereby successful moral action would meet with happiness and its opposite with unhappiness. Otherwise it would be all one for man whether he acts, or does not act, morally. Indeed, this consideration makes judgement necessary, in which the total effect of one's lifetime activity is assessed and its contribution to the total value of the cosmos is acknowledged, imbalances in the individual's life are redressed and his achievement is distinguished from the non-achievement of others. This is what 'The Day of Judgement' and 'Paradise and Hell' are meant to express in religious language.

Fifthly, *tawhīd* means the commitment of man to enter into the nexus of nature and history, there to actualize the divine will. It understands that will as pro-world and pro-life and hence, it mobilizes all human energies in the service of culture and civilization. Indeed, it is of its essence to be a civilizing force. In consequence, Islamic *da'wah* is not based upon a condemnation of the world. It does not justify itself as a call to man to relieve himself from the predicament of an existence which it regards as suffering and misery. Its urgency is not an assumed 'need for salvation' or for compassion and deliverance from anything. In this, as in the preceding aspects, Islamic *da'wah* differs from that of Christianity. Assuming all men necessarily to be 'fallen', to stand in the predicament of 'original sin', of 'alienation from God', of self-contradiction, self-centredness, or of 'falling short of the perfection of God', Christian mission seeks to ransom and save. Islam holds man to be not in need of any salvation. Instead of assuming him to be religiously and ethically fallen, Islamic *da'wah* acclaims him as the *khalīfah* of Allah, perfect in form, and endowed with all that is necessary to fulfil the divine will indeed, even loaded with the grace of revelation. 'Salvation' is hence not in the vocabulary of Islam. *Falāh*, or the positive achievement in space and time of the divine will, is the Islamic counterpart of Christian 'deliverance' and 'redemption'.

The Islamic *da'wah* does not, therefore, call man to a phantasmagoric second or other kingdom which is an alternative to this one, but to assume his natural birthright, his place as the maker of history, as the remoulder and refashioner of creation. Equally, his joys and pleasures are all his to enjoy, his life to live and his will to exercise, since the content of the divine will is not 'not-of-this-world', but 'of it'. World-denial and life-abnegation, asceticism and monasticism, isolationism and individualism, subjectivism and relativism

are not virtues in Islam but *dalāl* (misguidance). Islam stands squarely within the Mesopotamian religious tradition where religion is civilization and civilization is religion.

Finally, *tawhīd* restores to man a dignity which some religions have denied by their representation of him as 'fallen', as existentially miserable. By calling him to exercise his God-given prerogatives, Islamic *da'wah* rehabilitates him and reestablishes his sanity, innocence and dignity. His moral vocation is the p. 135 road to his *falāh*. Certainly the Muslim is called to a new theocentrism; but it is one in which man's cosmic dignity is applauded by Allah and His Angels. Christianity calls man to respond with faith to the salvific act of God and seeks to rehabilitate man by convincing him that it is he for whom God has shed his own blood. Man, it asserts, is certainly great because he is God's partner whom God would not allow to destroy himself. This is indeed greatness, but it is the greatness of a helpless puppet. Islam understands itself as man's assumption of his cosmic role as the one for whose sake creation was created. He is its innocent, perfect and moral master; and every part of it is *his* to have and to enjoy. He is called to obey, i.e. to fulfil the will of Allah. But this fulfilment is in and of space and time precisely because Allah is the source of space and time and the moral law.

Man, as Islam defines him, is not an object of salvation, but its subject. Through his agency alone the moral part, which is the higher part of the will of God, enters, and is fulfilled in, creation. In a sense, therefore, man is God's partner, but a partner worthy of God because he is trustworthy as His *khali'fa*, not because he is pitifully helpless and needs to be 'saved'.

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A Christian among Muslims

Bishop Kenneth Cragg

Reprinted with permission from Evangelical Presbyterian, September 1991, Volume 41:3

When Paul, in [Romans 5:8](#) tells his readers that God commends his love to us in that Christ died for us, he uses a very intriguing Greek word *sunistemi*. It means to cause to consist, 'to substantiate'. In Christ and his death for us sinners the love of God presents its credentials, evidences its true nature. From this follows the old translation: 'God commends'. In all commendation there is a search for recognition but a search based on the belief that what is made evident reaches into a capacity to be recognized which the other party is felt to possess. Credentials, by definition, are always this way. What they offer is related to what can reciprocate. To 'commend' is not only to authenticate but to expect. The truth has to find its acknowledgement in the other's consent. It is looking for that in the other party which can be its ally in receiving it.

All this is very central to the business of witness. God does not 'impose his love upon us'. Nor does he dictate it. 'Behold I stand at the door and knock.' This is the divine pattern. For only the free can be the faithful. So there is no place for 'imposition' in the trust of the

gospel or for 'infallibles' which are not presented freely to the mind and will. Truth can 'require' recognition only in terms of its own integrity and these include the dignity of the hearer. 'How shall they hear without a preacher?' is a very fair question but it also reverses into 'How shall they preach without a hearer?' For 'preaching' is not declaiming into the void. Nor is it in that sense merely proclaiming like a town crier 'lifting up his voice in the streets'. It is the quest for and into the other's heart.

This would seem to mean in turn that anyone's quest for the other mind and heart needs to understand where the quest is going as well as what is being taken in it. And, as a realist has written: 'The beginning of an acquaintance whether with p. 137 persons or things is to get a definite outline for our ignorance.'

Such reflections are specially apposite in the Christian quest for the Muslim mind because Islam has long suffered from a sense of 'enmity-relations' with the church and with 'the West'. The reasons are not hard to identify. When Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* ponders going through the earth and coming out in Australasia she refers, with a slip of the tongue, to the folk there as 'the people of the antipathies', meaning 'the Antipodes'. Church and mosque have long been seemingly 'people of the antipathies'. Christians have resented the degree to which the Muslim Qur'an disallows the central truths of 'God in Christ', of 'the Word made flesh' and Jesus crucified. Islamic conquest displaced Christianity across wide areas of North Africa and penetrated western Europe almost as far as Paris. When later the 'Moors' were evicted from Spain, western Europe developed the idea that a similar eviction should be attempted also in the 'Christian' east—a task which, in the papal view, the eastern Orthodox had failed to do. Hence the Crusades with their long legacy of alienation.

In the demise of the Ottoman Empire, many Muslims have seen a perpetuation of the Crusades in the forms of western penetration—political, imperial, commercial and intellectual. An influential Persian book in the seventies, *Gharbzadegi*, excoriated this malign western influence under the imagery of the plague. Iranian society was suffering from 'Westitis', analogous to 'neuritis' or any other noxious disease. Hence the aura of the Ayatollah Khomeini. Islamic mentality is 'much offended' by what it sees as the (false) image-making of the western media. Even scholarship in the West is implicated. Edward Said's *Orientalism* presents a picture of a totally politicized western 'Islamicism' funded by the CIA or in other ways dishonest and unworthy. Muslim scholars are found trying to attain a purely Islamic sociology, indeed 'an Islamicization of all knowledge' so that Muslims in higher education may be preserved from the vagaries of western secularism. In this mood they do not realize that there is no Islamic aeronautics, just as there is no Christian geometry in any exclusifying sense. Yet the will to face the neutrality, religiously, of the several sciences is hard to attain in the stress of emotional self-preservation.

A right reaction to these 'facts of the psyche' is not just to try to qualify them by argument but rather to recognize their nature and see how, mutually, they might be mitigated in the will to achieve genuine engagement with each other. Certainly, for Christians, they point to that 'meekness and gentleness of Christ' of which Paul often spoke as something his hearers would at once appreciate and emulate.

All this makes it imperative to identify and recruit all that within Islam which can avail in the commendation of 'God in Christ'. It is important for Christians to enter into the Qur'an's world. We can do so without finalizing the issues of authority or its status as a 'scripture' but simply on the ground of its being where Muslims themselves begin and end. By and large historically, p. 138 the Qur'an has been dis-esteemed by Christians. We have failed, for example, to realize its celebration of the magnanimity of God in the natural order, the bounty of creation delivered into the responsible custody of man as the 'caliph' or 'dominion-holder' (as in [Genesis 1 & 2](#)) of the good earth. If we rejoiced with the

psalmist in 'the heavens declaring the glory of God' or in the majestic sun 'as a giant running his course' there is no reason why we should not also do the same when the Qur'an echoes these strains of praise and worship.

The doctrine of man as in a sacramental order of things, in which sexuality, procreation, the techniques of science, the arts of agriculture are all occasions of divine beneficence and trust is not less true for being Quranic than for being biblical. These common territories are precious and vital. They are the arena of what the Qur'an calls 'the signs of God' meant for our reverent perception and our responsible custody.

Such rapport with the insights of Islam, insofar as we can truly share them, is the best way into the vexed questions which deeply divide us. For we truly reach these only within the context of faith in the reality of God, the divine unity and sovereignty and the dignity and destiny of man. Broadly Islam teaches that man is capable of achieving his true being under the aegis of Islamic revelation. To know is to do. Prophethood, and Muhammad's most of all, informs and guides. Thus 'ignorance', the worst foe, is overcome. To know is to do, the more so if we are disciplined by the habit of daily prayer, annual fast, annual pilgrimage, and by the social responsibility inculcated in the duty of alms (*Zakat*). All these, further, are sustained by the enormous solidarity which Islam represents and by the organ of the political state which in varying forms Islam has always seen as indispensable to the 'good' of man. These prescripts of 'salvation'—revelation, habituation, solidarity, statehood—achieve the human good. Islam to that extent is optimistic, refusing the deeper Christian perception of the sinfulness which, in man, can know well enough and not do, which can 'hate the good and love the evil'.

So we commend a gospel of divine love which moves beyond prophethood into incarnate grace and does so in response to what is known to be a deeper tragedy of human despair and guilt. It is here that the crucial witness belongs concerning 'God in Christ reconciling the world ...' Here we understand what Paul called 'the necessity of the cross' and the 'glory of the gospel'. But the Muslim sense, already present, that humanity was meant for obedience to God has to be our ally in 'commending' how God pursues those divine ends on the 'givens' of human lostness as history makes it plain.

In that 'commendation' the understanding of the person of Jesus is paramount. Muslims understand him as no more than a prophet, a faithful messenger who corrected what was astray in the perceptions of his own Jewish people. Christianity has 'Hellenized' Jesus into the Christology of e.g. the Nicene Creed and the Council of Chalcedon. Islam 're-Semiticizes' him and does not allow [p. 139](#) him to be veritably crucified. In some sense the death of Jesus at the cross was 'only apparent', not real. (Surah 4.157) Jesus was vindicated from would-be crucifiers by being raptured to heaven. There are elements of the heresy 'docetism' in this account but it arises from Muslim confidence that God acts in power on behalf of his 'anointed ones' and could never be party to the kind of humiliation of them explicit in crucifixion. Moreover, divine forgiveness being effortless needs no redeeming intervention. The cross of Jesus is thus non-historical, unnecessary and, as Christians interpret it, essentially immoral.

All these are massive tasks for patient 'commendation'. Perhaps we can begin, however, from the same sense with which we agreed with Paul, namely of seeking that which can 'substantiate' what we bring from what is already there with the other party. In all prophethood a personality is present as more than a mere utterance of words. The question of hearers: 'What is he saying?' inevitably deepens into: 'Who is he anyway?' It was emphatically so with Muhammad into the Qur'an. Moreover, how the prophet responds to the world he addresses—its hostilities, its reckoning—perceptibly enters into his significance. This reality is at the heart of the Christian understanding of the Incarnation. 'Truth is not only *by* but *in* personality.' 'The Word is made flesh.' Addressing humanity, it

is in the human that God does so. There is a clue in prophethood itself to the meaning of 'God incarnate'. What has to be said lives a human life. 'That which we have seen' is 'the Word of life'.

Nor need we think of the Christevent (as Muslims do) as somehow derogatory to God. It is only by his own will that it brings him into limitation and humility, just as it is the very authority of the shepherd that takes him to the wilderness. He is not disqualified by being there; he would be disqualified if he were not—the sheep being out there. And self-expenditure is always the prerogative as well as the nature of love.

Our Christian 'commendation' of Christ crucified is the same. The Muslim mind is urgent about 'vindication' of messengers. They should be seen to succeed in what the Qur'an often calls 'manifest victory'. But what is really 'victorious'—the love that suffers or the power that intervenes to frustrate the evildoers? In the latter case their enmity is never 'borne' never taken away, never 'forgiven'. It is merely deceived into frustration; it remains embedded in the wilful heart. The only power that overcomes evil without a residue is not retaliation, not Stoic unforgiving sullenness, not a false indifference—only love that suffers. This alone is 'the name given under heaven whereby we must be saved'. Where at the cross we see qualitatively, what evil does to love, we also see what love does with evil. Not being overcome it overcomes. This is the faith which we commend in the confidence that its capacity to be received for what it is belongs in part with what is already present in the faiths of men. Ours is the task of eliciting the ability to receive—always in entire dependence on the Holy Spirit. [p. 140](#)

Some may enquire why it all matters. Are there not far more urgent tasks to be tackled in the world—ministry to human need, peace-making in the political order and all the duties of an acknowledged pluralism of human cultures and societies. Indeed, all such tasks are urgent but they do not exclude the ultimate witness to the being and nature of God. It is there that Christian witness takes us. For God is always the question of questions.

So 'commendation': it must be reverent for all we meet, honest about all we explore, hopeful about all we identify and wisely entrusted with the Lord's own commendation of himself.

Bishop Kenneth Cragg was Bishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East. [p. 141](#)

The Church in the Sudan The International Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity, London, England

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'The Church in the Sudan' is extracted from The Status of the Church in the Muslim World (Monograph No. 1 of IISIC), a survey of difficulties faced by Christians in Muslim majority situations (Egypt, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkey) published in

1992. The compilers of the report also recognize that where Muslims are a minority, particularly in the west, they too undergo various forms of discrimination and for these they deserve redress.

The Editor

The Democratic Republic of Sudan, the largest country of Africa, is an ethnically complex nation dominated by the contrast between the twelve provinces of northern (i.e. northern and central) Sudan and the three provinces that constitute southern Sudan. Nearly 50% of the population are Arab or of Arab origin, a further 20% are Nubian—both groups are almost entirely Muslim and live in the north and centre of the country. The remaining 30% of the population live in the south and are mostly African by race. The majority of these follow tribal religions but a large minority are Christian, constituting about 9% of the total population of the country. Christians dominate the educated elite in the south, which hence has a western value system, as distinct from the Islamic and Arabic values of the north. Southerners come from about 130 different tribes, speaking 47 main languages, and have ethnic links across the borders with Kenya, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Zaire and Uganda. The poor infrastructure makes travel around the country very difficult, so northerners and southerners know very little about each other. The general attitude of the more-or-less Arab Muslim majority in the north towards the black Christian minority in the south is relatively tolerant; Muslims realize that they benefit from Christians in various ways, for example in education which is available to both Christians and Muslims.

HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH

How did such a difference between north and south come to exist in this **P. 142** country? The area which is now modern Sudan previously existed as a collection of small independent states. The northern two-thirds was Christian until the advent of Islam when gradually, by invasion and by treaty, Islam became established in its place. The south, which retained its original tribal religions, was frequently a source of slaves for Arab slave traders in the north. In 1820–21 Sudan was conquered and unified by Turkey and Egypt. During the period 1899–1954 Sudan was administered jointly by Britain and Egypt (in practice mainly Britain) and north and south were kept virtually separate. European Christian missionaries were active in the south but not allowed to work in the north. Indeed, a passport was needed by anyone who wished to go from south to north. The south was left undeveloped economically whereas the north was far more developed.

NORTH-SOUTH CIVIL WAR

The first independent Sudanese Parliament was inaugurated in 1954, and complete independence achieved in 1956. The new government was composed mainly of northerners, i.e. Muslim Arabs, and it attempted to integrate the south into the rest of the country by discouraging Christianity and insisting on the use of Arabic as the official language. Southerners, fearing that this was going to happen, began to react against it with violence from 1955. In 1958 an earlier agreement concerning a federal arrangement between north and south (i.e. that they should be governed separately) was abrogated. Triggered by this, the unrest amongst Southerners developed into a full-scale civil war which lasted until 1972.

The peace treaty of 1972 granted autonomy to the south to be a single self-governing region. However, in the late 1970s, oil was discovered in the south. This prompted the central government to re-classify the oil-bearing regions as part of the north. In 1983 the

south was re-divided into three parts to be ruled directly from Khartoum, and in September President Nimeiry imposed Shari'ah law over the whole country. These innovations were, of course, far from welcome in the south. Southerners were also dissatisfied because development programmes announced for the south had not been implemented. (In a secret policy statement, Nimeiry's State Security described the south as a 'vacuum of uncivilization' which they intended to keep undeveloped until it could be Islamicized.) These factors prompted southerners to rebel again, and war has continued ever since.

THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS

Sudanese Christians have suffered with the rest of the south in the prolonged civil war. Many thousands (some estimates say hundreds of thousands) have been killed or have died of disease or starved to death. Thousands more have fled from rural areas to the towns or to neighbouring nations such as Kenya, Uganda, Zaire and the Central African Republic. Some 12 per cent of Sudan's population are now displaced people. The Government continuously relocates **P. 143** the internally displaced victims of the civil war thereby ensuring its control over them. Frequently, Christians are harassed by the regime, notably by having their dwelling demolished, and there are reports of Christians being crucified in the camps. The Khartoum area is populated by nearly two million displaced southerners, who are either Christians or practice traditional African religions.

It should be noted that the various Southern guerilla movements, which are splinter groups of the secessionist Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), have themselves committed atrocities such as massacres and mass rapes and been involved in corruption, such as diverting aid. The U.S. Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1994* state that the SPLA also engaged in torture, arbitrary execution, and the killing of villagers in the Nuba mountains who refused to co-operate with them. Both their war against the Government and their conflicts with each other ironically assist the depopulation of the south and consequently, the oppression of Christians.

Some Christians believe there is a deliberate government policy to starve Christians to death. For example, between November 1991 and March 1992, 400,000 southern and western southern Sudanese, who had fled to Khartoum for safety, were evicted from the shanty towns and rubbish tips where they were living and taken to desert areas. No preparations had been made for their arrival—there was no food and no water. Relief aid is the only means of sustenance for very many in the south, especially in the town of Juba, but in some areas this is provided only to those who will recite the Muslim creed. The starving people of Chot Bara, a remote village in South Sudan, walked up to Khartoum in February 1994 in response to a Government offer of clean clothes and a supply of food to all who would present themselves in the North and sign a paper saying they were willing to convert to Islam and pray in Arabic five times a day. Two months later they walked home. (During the journey they were infected with *kala-azar* [*leishmaniasis*], which is usually fatal if untreated.) It should be noted that whilst Muslim charities operate freely, some areas are altogether closed to Christian institutions—even indigenous ones.

According to a 1994 report by the U.S. State Department, in certain parts of Sudan there are credible reports of massacres, kidnapping, forced labour, conscription of children, and displacement. Whilst in some cases these human rights abuses are the responsibility of local militias of the Popular Defence Forces (PDF), exceeding their orders, in other cases the degree and scale of abuse point to Government instigation. In March 1993 troops massacred almost a thousand people between Manwal station and Aweil, and captured 300 women and children. They also burnt granaries and fields, and

stole cattle, resulting in the starvation of many who had eluded the soldiers. When troops in the south lose vehicles to mines of the secessionist SPLA, they engage in collective punishment, by burning the first village they encounter and massacring its inhabitants. The PDF [p. 144](#) often plunder aid intended for southern refugees.

Sudan has a policy known as ‘the marriage of the fifty’, in which Arab Muslim soldiers are encouraged to wed southern (i.e. Christian or animist) women they capture. Soldiers who father children from these marriages get special premiums. The children are, of course, raised as Muslims. Effectively, this practice encourages the enslavement and rape of Christian or animist women. This procedure seems to be part of an overall plan to Islamize the country through converting the children, as is evidenced by the practice in displacement camps whereby some Islamic charities offer to feed, clothe and educate destitute southern children—but on condition that their parents have no contact with their offspring. Where education exists in the camps, all children must study the *Qur’an*. It should be noted that whilst non-Muslims can join the PDF, all recruits must submit to Islamic indoctrination (this is true of the armed forces in general).

In addition to this, Christians suffer many forms of discrimination. It is difficult for anyone with a Christian name to get a job. Indeed many destitute Christians without food or shelter change their names in order to increase their chances of getting employment. When severe flooding destroyed many homes four years ago, food was offered only to those who replied ‘Yes’ when asked ‘Are you a Muslim?’. Many young people are forced to agree to fight in the armed forces (i.e. against their own people) or to join the police in order to get food and clothing. It is harder for Christians than for Muslims to attend any educational institution for which they are qualified, and church-run schools among some refugee communities have been forcibly closed down. Non-Muslims are generally kept out of positions of authority in the army and civil service. They are also barred from any ‘ministry of sovereignty’ in the government, for example, Prime Minister, Attorney-General, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Education, President or Speaker of the Assembly. Non-Muslims are required to pay a special tax for their protection, as specified by Shari’ah law.

It is difficult to get permission to build a church or other Christian institution. An atmosphere of suspicion against Christians, in particular Christian leaders, has been created by accusations in the media. All Christian exhibitions were removed from the National Museum on the grounds that they were ‘relics of the colonial past’. The traditional Christmas procession through Khartoum has been banned.

Since independence in 1956 various measures designed to restrict the spread of Christianity have been imposed. Both the quota of missionaries and the Christian school system have been frozen at their positions in 1956. When missionaries leave permanently, their replacement is hampered by many bureaucratic obstructions. In 1957, all 295 mission schools in the south were nationalized. In 1962 a Missionary Societies Act was passed resulting in strict government control of all public Christian religious activity. By this Act, it became illegal for any church or mission society to perform ‘any missionary act except in accordance [p. 145](#) with the terms of the licence granted by the Council of Ministers’ and in practice such licences were not issued. The Act also forbade the construction of church buildings without government permits. According to the US Department of State’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1990*, none of these permits has been issued for more than ten years. The Act is couched in broad terms and, to quote the US Department of State, it is ‘often capriciously interpreted by local officials’. In 1963–4 all foreign missionaries were expelled from the south. Since then the situation for foreign missionaries has varied according to the war situation and the need for food and foreign aid. For example, after the peace agreement of 1972 was signed, missionaries

were again allowed to enter Sudan but only if they were primarily involved in development rather than evangelism. Since 1967 there have been restrictions on foreigners travelling in the country. The press was nationalized in 1970, and since then church-owned publications have been suspended.

The brief of the Minister of Religious Affairs is confined to Islamic affairs. Government funding is given to mosques but not to churches. There is no government budget for the teaching of Christianity in schools: Christian teachers must be financed by the churches. The government gives radio and television time for Muslim religious programmes, but severely restricts Christian use of these media. Evangelistic radio programmes are legal but cannot in practice be broadcast because Muslim fundamentalists would attack the radio stations. Christian proselytism of non-Muslims is permitted but proselytism of Muslims is discouraged. (Proselytizing by Muslims is allowed.) Priests in northern Sudan are harassed, beaten and evicted from their churches. In April 1990, land in the Khartoum area belonging to the Catholic Church was arbitrarily expropriated by government authorities, apparently to prevent the construction of a school on the site. Christian preaching in the north is permitted only within church buildings. Special permission—‘sanctioned freedoms’—must be obtained for other events, such as a large Christian rally, and this permission may then be withdrawn again before the event occurs. There is greater freedom to preach in the south i.e. amongst non-Muslims. In the Southern town of Damazin, the town commissioner tried to close the church, but protests from both Christians and Muslims forced him to give way.

Reports last year described how Christians are followed even when going from one house to another for a Bible study. If a group of Christians want to meet together in someone’s home to study the Bible, they have to take care to arrive separately, in case the house is being watched. In 1994 the Sudanese authorities killed seventeen Christian women in Khartoum because of a women’s protest over the killing of a woman and her children.

The same year a Sudanese Christian woman, Roda Kuku, found guilty of adultery, was sentenced to death by stoning. Her Muslim lover was also found guilty by the court, was sentenced to stoning with 100 pieces p. 146 of rock (unlikely to be fatal), 100 lashes and a one year prison term. After a campaign led by Roda’s father, an Anglican clergyman, her sentence was commuted to 100 lashes. Roda would have been the first woman to be put to death by stoning since Sudan imposed *Shari’ah* (Islamic law) in September 1983. It is reported that in Sudan the most brutal *Shari’ah* punishments (such as amputations) are rarely carried out against Muslims, only against Christians.

Nuba Mountains

The Nuba mountains are a non-Arab enclave inhabited by Christians and Muslims in the Muslim part of Sudan. The Government has destroyed at least 140 villages in the region, destroying churches but leaving the mosques intact. There have been a number of massacres, and over a hundred Christian men have been crucified. Survivors of the campaign are herded into desert ‘resettlement camps’ where men are separated from women. The Government has encouraged local Arab tribes to assist the campaign, with the incentive of gaining Nuba lands as incentive.

Apostasy

The law on apostasy ante-dates the current National Islamic Front regime, being introduced by President Nimeiry in 1983. A Muslim political dissident, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha, was executed under its provisions in 1985. Section 126 of the 1991 Penal Code expressly mandates the death penalty for apostasy that ‘is committed by any Muslim

who advocates apostasy from Islam or openly declares his [her] own apostasy expressly or by categorical action.’ Unless an apostate recants within a time specified by the court he will be executed except when he is a recent convert, in which case the sentence is at the discretion of the court. It should be stated that the law seems to be directed against not only Christian converts, but also Muslim political dissidents who object to the policies of ‘the Islamic State’, and thus the ‘laws of God’. The provisions of the law with respect to execution were first put into practice in 1994.

Christians who have converted from Islam are particularly persecuted. They may be taken to court and imprisoned. Not only the police but often their own relatives too will be trying to track down the convert to arrest him. Bribery or other pressures may be applied to try to make the convert return to Islam. Many live in fear of being murdered by their own families. Converts are often reluctant to be baptized, in case there is a spy in the congregation who will take note of those who have converted. It even happened at Easter 1991 that when an Arab Christian Sudanese from a Christian background gave his testimony publicly he was taken away by the police for questioning because they suspected he might be a convert from Islam. Other Christians are afraid to visit new converts or help them when in trouble, and so the converts lack fellowship and support.

ISLAMIZATION AND ARABIZATION

The process of Islamization and Arabization, begun after independence, [P. 147](#) reinforced the already existing north-south differences and has continued until now. All three of the main political parties, the Umma, the National Islamic Front (NIF) and the Democratic Union Party, are dominated by the Arab Muslim elite and share a desire to see the Islamization and Arabization of the whole country. Ibn Rahma quotes from a recent party document of the Democratic Unionist Party which begins by referring to the deliberate division of the south into three administrative units:

The continuation of the South divided as three regions and without economic power will keep them dependent on the Central Government (*sic*) and on the two Islamic Organizations—The ‘Daawa’ and Islamic Relief ... the party’s executive committee blessed the move which Nimeiri did in redividing the South as a service to Islam through his policy of divide and rule and it is a policy that could be applied at this moment as a vital service for the establishment of an Arab Islamic State ...

It is of vital importance that Arabic language should be spread in all parts of the South and the Nuba mountains. Hence, Arabic language is the most important element in the modern society and for a strong administration needed for the spread of Arabic and Islamic cultures especially now that the audio-visual apparatus has been established in the pagan lands of the South and the Nuba mountains.

These are difficult times when things connected with Religions are not easily accepted so the only easier avenue to achieve this is through the spread of the Arabic language and which is one of the fields of ‘jihad’ in the name of God and Arabism.

The current president, Omar el Bashir, has extended the process of Islamization and Arabization of Sudan. Women wear the black chador, not coloured clothes, and must be veiled. An unveiled woman will be turned away from her workplace. School girls and women university students must all obey these dress rules too. These rules apply to non-Muslim women as well as to Muslims; the daughter of a Christian minister was flogged for wearing African dress which reached only to knee-level. All schools and universities must teach in Arabic language instead of in English as at present. This covers both public and private schools, including church schools. An Islamic banking system is being implemented, which will be applied to all banks. Christians are not allowed to work in

Islamic institutions. Students who do not take classes in Islam will be automatically failed. The government has renamed the army 'Jundy Allah' (the army of God), and it is said to be fighting a jihad against the Southerners. Indeed, while northern Sudan is categorized under Islamic thinking as Dar-al-Islam (the abode of Islam), the south is classified as Dar-al Harb (the abode of war—a term which covers every part of the world where Islam does not hold sway, because of the Islamic obligation to conquer and subdue it).

At the time of the re-introduction of Shari'ah in 1991, 'Popular Committees' were set up in every residential area to watch the conduct of everyone and inform on any violation or suspected violation of the Shari'ah. So people are encouraged to report each other to the police, who may then come and search the house for incriminating evidence etc. p. 148

THE CONSTITUTION

The Sudan Transitional Constitution of 1956 quoted verbatim from the Self Government Statute of 1953 in which religious freedom was guaranteed: 'All persons shall enjoy freedom of conscience, and the right freely to profess their religion, subject only to such conditions relating to morality, public order or health as may be imposed by law.' The amended Transitional Constitution of 1964 also used the same wording. However, a new constitution dated 12 April 1973 began its preamble with the words 'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, the creator of peoples and granter of freedoms'. Part I Article 9 states that 'The Islamic Law and custom shall be the main sources of legislation. Personal matters of non-Muslims shall be governed by their personal laws.' Article 16 runs as follows: '(a) In the Democratic Republic of the Sudan Islam is the religion and the society shall be guided by Islam being the religion of the majority of its people and the State shall endeavour to express its values (b) Christianity is the religion in the Democratic Republic of the Sudan, being professed by a large number of its citizens who are guided by Christianity and the State shall endeavour to express its value. (c) Heavenly religions and the noble aspects of spiritual beliefs shall not be insulted or held in contempt. (d) The State shall treat followers of religions and noble spiritual beliefs without discrimination as to the rights and freedoms guaranteed to them as citizens by this Constitution. The State shall not impose any restrictions on citizens of communities on the grounds of religious faith. (e) The abuse of religious and noble spiritual beliefs for political exploitation is forbidden. Any act which is intended or is likely to promote feelings of hatred, enmity or discord among religious communities shall be contrary to this Constitution and punishable by law.' Article 38 states that all Sudanese are 'equal before the courts' with 'equal rights and duties, irrespective of origin, race, locality, sex, language or religion'. Article 47 states, 'Freedom of belief, prayer and performance of religious practices, without infringement of public order or morals, is guaranteed.' When Omar el Bashir came to power in a military coup in 1989, the Transitional Constitution was suspended.

SHARI'AH LAW

Since independence there have been calls by Muslim traditionalists for the law to be based on the Shari'ah. As mentioned above, it was the imposition of Shari'ah which triggered the second outbreak of civil war in 1983. In 1985 the implementation of its more severe punishments was suspended. In their Sudan Charter, issued in 1987, the NIF proposed a federal system in which Shari'ah law was applied only in Muslim-majority regions. In 1989 a review of the Shari'ah law was begun, and this ended in January 1991 with the re-implementation of Shari'ah once more. This has begun with the amputation of the hands

of two men convicted of stealing food. If the same pattern is followed as when Shari'ah law was implemented **P. 149** between 1983 and 1985 (during which time about 200 people were punished by amputation) then most of the amputees will be Christians. This is partly because it is mainly Christians who are so poor that they need to steal and partly because Muslims usually have influential relatives who can exert pressure to prevent amputation occurring. It would be legal to execute anyone who converted from Islam to Christianity. (Probably the person who did the converting of the other would also be killed—not officially, but by incensed Muslims.)

ISLAMIC MILITANCY

Islamic fundamentalists are gaining increasing 'behind the scenes' political power in Sudan. A 40-man committee from the NIF effectively runs the government. Almost all government undersecretaries are NIF members. Although the ministers may be from the south, they are only figureheads. The leader of the NIF, Hassan Turabi, has 'enormous and growing influence' over President el Bashir and his government. Turabi's vision is to transform Sudan into the new centre of Islam worldwide. He feels that Saudi Arabia is compromised because of its links with the West in the Gulf War of early 1991. In April 1991 Turabi called a conference in Sudan, with representatives from 55 nations, which resulted in the creation of a new international Muslim organization, the Popular International Organization, intended to rival the Riyadh-based Organization of the Islamic Conference.

RESPONSE BY THE CHURCHES CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The situation of Christians in Sudan is succinctly summed up in a pastoral letter dated November 16, 1991 from the Catholic Archbishop of Khartoum and three other Sudanese Catholic Bishops. It is entitled 'The truth shall set you free' and quoted almost entire (in English translation) below:

THE PRESENT SITUATION

Although the government professes and advertises that all Sudanese are equal on human rights ... we see the real situation differently. The government policies are intended to create one nation under Islamic-Arab culture, regardless of other religious, ethnic and cultural considerations. These policies are manifest in the below mentioned areas:

Education

The government discriminates between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens as proved by the introduction of Arabic language as the only medium of instruction even in private schools which conducted instruction in English; the intended objective is to facilitate the process of Islamization. Christian students are forced to attend Islamic lessons and Sundays are officially working days during which Christians are forced to work. Passing the subject of Islamic Religion has now become a precondition for admission to higher studies.

There is a re-writing of the history of the Sudan in which the entry of Islam to Sudan is considered the starting point of Sudanese culture, **p. 150** ignoring the Sudanese Christian heritage, and other ethnic cultures of tribes such as the Nubas, Hadandawa, Zande, Dinka, Nuer, Fur and the Bari.

Church-based or Christian schools are being continuously attacked in the media, thus belittling their role in education in the Sudan.

Freedom of Religion, Worship and Conscience

The Sudanese who is not a Muslim is now viewed as a stranger, putting the rights of a non-Muslim and a non-Arab Sudanese in jeopardy.

In view of the above practices, we refuse the imposition on non-Muslims of the Islamic Shari'ah laws, as we did in 1984 when President Jaafer Nimeiry first imposed the Islamic Shari'ah law.

Evidence of the Containment and Restriction on Christians

1. In Damazin, capital of the South Blue Nile province, Christian evangelism has been forbidden; land and other property has been confiscated by the government.
2. The priests and catechists in Dongola, capital of the Northern region [state] have been arrested.
3. Closure and destruction of chapels and church buildings in displaced people's residential areas of the Greater Khartoum and El Obeid suburbs.
4. Repeated refusal, in all places, to allow new church buildings to be erected.
5. The attempt to equate the Christian churches in the Sudan with Western foreign forces!
6. The government makes accusations against the Church, through the media, that Christianity is against Islam.
7. There is continuous harassment of priests, sisters and other Christian leaders in the Sudan.
8. Non-Muslims and Christians in prison are being pressured to become Muslims as a condition for their release. [This applies to both political prisoners and ordinary criminals.]
9. Government Islamic institutions do not employ people who cannot prove that they are Muslims.
10. In certain areas relief is provided with conversion to Islam as a prerequisite. Christian-based relief agencies, including the Sudan Council of Churches, have been forbidden to distribute relief to the displaced, while the Islamic relief agencies have been encouraged to do so.

All the above practices, and many more, do not justify the 'creation of a new modern Sudan' for which the regime stands. Instead, they create fear, lack of confidence in the government and hatred among non-Muslim and non-Arab Sudanese.

The letter supported such actions as sit-ins. On January 13, 1992, the central security administration declared that the letter violated national security and provoked civil strife, and ordered the bishops to surrender all copies of the letter. The signatory bishops, including Archbishop Gabriel Wako of Khartoum, were called to a meeting in the capital with security officers on January 15.

ANGLICAN LAMBETH CONFERENCE

At the 1988 Lambeth Conference of the Anglican communion, resolutions included: **P. 151**

23. Freedom of Religious Activity

This Conference calls upon all governments to uphold religious freedom, including freedom of worship and freedom to teach and evangelise, as a fundamental human right, the denial of which threatens all other liberties.

Explanatory note: We are concerned here for minority religious groups, but have a special concern for those in Islamic states.

25. Iran

This Conference, recognising the positive development of recent events in Iran, and in the light of a declared policy of religious tolerance in that land, respectfully requests the Islamic Republic of Iran to facilitate a positive response to the many requests, sent on behalf of the Diocese of Iran, the Primate of the Anglican Communion, and the President Bishops of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East, concerning all the claims of the Church in Iran.

61. Islamic fundamentalism

This Conference:

1. Expresses concern that the emergence of Islamic religious fundamentalism has resulted in serious violation of fundamental human rights, including the right of religious belief, practice and propagation, as well as destruction of property or Christian Churches in such places as Northern Nigeria and the Sudan.
2. Urges the Anglican Consultative Council to find ways and means of bringing these concerns to international Islamic organisations and the United Nations, and encourages dialogue with countries where pursuit of Islamic religious fundamentalism has led to such violations of human rights.

Explanatory note: This is a real issue in Sudan and Nigeria.

62. Peace in the Sudan

This Conference:

1. Commends the effort of the Christian Churches in the Sudan in seeking peace and reconciliation between southern and northern Sudan.
2. Urges the government of the Sudan to take the initiative in beginning negotiations with the Sudan People's Liberation Army as a first step towards peace in the Sudan, and further.
3. Urges the Sudanese Government to consider accepting a third party to initiate peace talks, e.g. World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches.

63. Shari'a Law in the Sudan

This Conference:

1. Notes with great concern that the Government of the Sudan wishes to reintroduce Shari'a Law and impose it upon the people of the Sudan.
2. Respectfully requests the Government of the Sudan to reconsider its decision on this matter and replace *Shari'a* Law with some other more humane legislation for punishing offenders.

There is an urgent need for action on behalf of our brothers and sisters in the Muslim world. The call of the Russian Orthodox priests to the world church, as represented by the World Council of Churches, was heard and resulted in international Christian concern, prayer and action for the Marxist world. Christians in the Muslim context are now crying out to the rest of the church to stand by them in their suffering. They are appealing for action to be taken. [p. 152](#)

Costly Discipleship: Two Stories from Iran

Christy Wilson

*Reprinted with permission from More to be Desired than Gold by
Christy Wilson (1994)*

A MUSLIM PRIEST BECOMES A BELOVED PHYSICIAN

Dr Saeed Khan was formerly a Kurdish Muslim priest whose job was to call the people to prayer from the minaret of his mosque. He wanted to study Christianity so that he could win its followers to Islam. So when he had a chance to buy a stolen Bible in the bazaar, he quickly seized the opportunity. But it was while Saeed was reading the Bible that he came to faith in Jesus Christ.

When Saeed Khan read in the New Testament about communion and how Christ said to do this in remembrance of him, he longed to take communion with his Lord. But there were no other Christians around. So he went out to a nearby vineyard, with a loaf of bread, picked some fresh grapes and squeezed them. Then, all alone, he ate the bread and drank the grape juice, just as Jesus had told his disciples to do. That was the only way he, a Muslim priest, could have communion with the Lord.

Here he was a Christian—yet he was still serving as the *muezzin* of a mosque, giving the call to prayer. At first he changed the words so that they sounded similar. But he wasn't satisfied with that.

Finally Saeed Khan could no longer keep silent about his newfound faith. He told his family that he had become a Christian. When his own brother Kaka tried to shoot him, Saeed fled from Kurdistan, in north-western Iran.

He came to Hamadan, which is the old Ecbatana mentioned in the Bible, in [Ezra 6:2](#) and which had once been the summer capital of the Persian empire. There he met some Christian missionaries who welcomed him into their home. But when the people of Hamadan heard that a Muslim priest had become a Christian and was with the missionaries, they began rioting and set out to lynch him. [p. 153](#)

The angry mob attacked the gates of the mission compound, trying to force their way in. But the gatekeeper had the presence of mind to ask them calmly:

'Why are you all excited about this man? He is not a Shi'ite Muslim but a Sunni. So what if a Sunni becomes a Christian. Why are you so excited about *that*?'

Well that hit home. These two divisions of Islam had been fighting each other for centuries. Almost immediately the Shi'ite leaders dismissed the mob, and the crowd dispersed.

Yet the missionaries knew that if Saeed stayed in Iran, he would be killed. So they sent him to study medicine in England and stay with Christians there. After he received his degree, he returned to Iran as a doctor. He even became the private physician to the Shah or King.

In time Dr Saeed Khan became known as 'The Beloved Physician of Tehran'. His patients adored him. After treating his patients to the best of his ability, he would say to them: 'Now I've done everything for you that my medical training has taught me. But there is still one thing more I can do for you.'

'What's that?' they would ask him.

'I can pray for you. Would you give me permission to pray for you?' And with that, Dr Saeed Khan would kneel down beside the patient's bed and ask the Lord to heal the person not only physically but spiritually as well.

Time after time, attempts were made on Dr Saeed Khan's life but in every instance God delivered him in a wonderful way. As the Psalmist writes in [Psalm 34:7](#):

The angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear him and delivers them.

Dr Saeed Khan was not afraid of death. He knew God's protection.

Once when he was travelling to another city, he and his party decided to take a different route than they normally took. Later he learned that an ambush had been staked out on the original route, and he would have been killed had he travelled that road.

I remember hearing Dr Saeed Khan give his testimony in the church in Tehran, when I was a young boy. My parents had sent me to Tehran for one year of schooling in the eighth grade before I came to the States. Inside, the church was packed. Outside, a heavily armed police guard surrounded the building to protect him against any assassins. The government of Iran respected Dr Saeed Khan so highly that they did not want anyone to endanger the life of the man all Iran knew as 'The Beloved Physician of Tehran'.

His life story appears in the book *The Beloved Physician*, co-authored by Cady Allen and Jay Rasooli (Bromley, UK: STL, 1975).

'FATHER, FORGIVE THEM ...'

Hassan Dehqani-Tafti was born in a little village in Iran called Taft.

Hassan left his village to attend the Christian school in Isfahan, the artistic centre of the Muslim Shi'ite world. His father would cast lots each year to determine whether or not he should send Hassan to the Christian school, and every time the lot indicated that he should. [p. 154](#)

It was there that Hassan came to Christ.

I met Hassan at Cambridge University in England in the spring of 1948, when we were both students there.

At Cambridge, Hassan had been confronted by higher criticism of the Bible for the first time, and it really concerned him. I remember the long hours we spent talking and praying together. He said that he knew the Bible was the Word of God because it was through the Bible that he had come to know the Living Christ who had forgiven his sins and given him a new life. Yet now he was being taught all the things that were wrong with the Bible. He wondered if perhaps the Bible were like a beautiful stained glass window in a church which, although cracked, yet looks beautiful when the sunlight streams through it.

I tried to show Hassan that it wasn't the Bible that was cracked—it was the people who were teaching these doctrines!

Hassan and I had great times together there as students.

Then Hassan went back to Iran and became the Bishop of the Anglican Church there.

As a Christian leader in a Muslim country, Hassan had several attempts made on his life.

Shortly after the Ayatollah Khomeini took over Iran, several men broke into his bedroom early one morning and shot at him repeatedly as he lay in bed. His wife Margaret threw herself over him, and a bullet wounded her in the arm. Her blood soaked his pillow. However, he was untouched. The bullets ricocheted around his head but missed him completely.

The assassins then fled, thinking they had killed him.

After this, Hassan escaped from Iran and went to live in Cyprus.

He had an only son Bahram, who graduated from Oxford and was teaching English in Tehran. While Bahram was driving home one day, another car suddenly swerved in front of him and cut him off. Several men leaped out, dragged him from his car and threw him into their own. Then they drove outside the city limits where they shot and killed him.

Bishop Hassan Dehqani-Tafti couldn't return to Tehran for his son's funeral, since Khomeini was then in power. However, he sent a father's prayer for his son's murderers by telegram.

I would like to include it here. I believe it is one of the most powerful prayers I have heard in recent times. It reminds me of our Lord's intercession on the cross when he prayed: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' Hassan's prayer is written in the same spirit. It is called 'A Father's Prayer for the Murderers of His Son'.

Oh God, we remember not only Bahram but also his murderers, not because they killed him in the prime of his youth and made our hearts bleed and our tears flow, not because, with this savage act, they have brought further disgrace on the name of our country among civilized nations of the world, but because through their crime we now follow Thy footsteps more closely in the way of sacrifice.

The terrible fire of this calamity bums up all selfishness and possessiveness p. 155 in us. Its flame reveals the depth of depravity and meanness and suspicion, the dimension of hatred and the measure of sinfulness in human nature. It makes obvious, as never before, our need to trust God's love as shown in the cross of Jesus and His resurrection. Love which makes us free from hate towards our persecutors. Love which bring patience, forbearance, courage, loyalty, humility, generosity, greatness of heart, Love which more than ever deepens our trust in God's final victory and the eternal designs for the church and for the world. Love which teaches us how to prepare ourselves to face our own day of death.

Oh God, Bahram's blood has multiplied the fruit of the Spirit in the soil of our souls. So when his murderers stand before Thee on the Day of Judgment, remember the fruit of the Spirit by which they have enriched our lives, and forgive.

Hassan tells his story in the book, *Design of My World* (London, UK: USCL, 1962). He went to school in Isfahan, the capital of the empire. Isfahan was developed by one of the great Persian kings, Shah Abbas, a contemporary of Shakespeare in the early 1600s. Impressed with the Armenian Christians who lived to the north and were very accomplished in artistic crafts, the Shah transported an entire village of them down from their home in the Caucasus and settled them outside his capital city of Isfahan, on the other side of the river, so that they could introduce their arts and crafts to his entire empire.

Ever since then, Isfahan has become the artistic capital of the Middle East. In fact, the Iranians have a saying '*Isfahan Nisfi Jahan*', which means 'Isfahan is one half of the world'.

There you find people painting pictures and delicate miniatures. In one bazaar, you will see them fashioning beautiful brass vases and trays. In another, they are weaving exquisite rugs and carving designs in wood to stamp on decorated cloth.

The Shah Abbas hotel, which Khomeini destroyed, was one of the most beautiful in the world. Each room had an exquisite hand-painted mural. Everything was artistically designed.

Dr J. Christy Wilson Jr. was born in Tabriz, Iran. He served in Afghanistan 1951-1973, taught at Gorden-Conwell Theological Seminary and the Zwemer Institute of Muslim Studies in the USA. p. 156

Honour and Shame

Bill A. Musk

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This chapter from Dr Musk's latest book is a lively and fascinating survey of areas of the Muslims world-view inadequately understood by western Christians. It will help Christians to read the Bible with new eyes and discern the strengths and weaknesses of both Islamic and western cultures. It is a sequel to The Unseen Face of Islam and Passionate Believing, both published by MARC.

The Editor

He who has no sense of shame does as he pleases.

Loyalty to family and kin is fundamental to Middle Eastern societies. In cultures in which bonds between persons count for so much, it is not primarily law which channels and corrects human behaviour. Rather, it is the connected concepts of honour and shame.

GROUNDS FOR PRIDE

Honour (*sharaf*) refers to uprightness of character, integrity, glory even. It evolves from and announces the stainlessness of one's way of living. Honour may be derived from a variety of sources. It might come from one's lineage. An Afghan friend, for example, described to me how three major family groupings in his country carry prestige: the *Sayyids* (deriving from Prophet Muhammad), the *Khawajas* (deriving from Caliph Abu-Bakr) and the *Hazrats* (deriving from Caliph Umar). It is joked that 'he who has no family has no backbone'.

Piety brings honour. A person may be blind, or lacking many social graces, but if he has learnt the Qur'ân by heart, he is honoured as a *ḥâfiẓ*. A lovely tale is repeated amongst the Nubians of Dahmit in Upper Egypt about a local saint named Hazim Zild Mahmoud. This man was a humble Nubian shepherd. As far as formal education was concerned, he was a simpleton. He knew only two words in Arabic, those meaning 'stick' and 'goat'. Therefore, as the story goes, whenever he wanted to recite the formal p. 157 prayers of Islam, he would say 'My goat and stick. Please God, make my prayer longer'. One day a scholar from al-Azhar University in Cairo came to the village to bring some formal religious education to the primitive people. Included among the students was the native saint. After several months, the Azharite felt that he had accomplished what he set out to achieve. With a big fanfare, he left the village by boat, setting off down the Nile. The local saint, Hazim, was left on the bank where he turned to say his prayers. A blank descended on his brain and out came the old familiar words, 'My goat and stick. Please God, make my prayer longer'. In frustration Hazim shouted after the departing Azharite, but the scholar couldn't hear him. In the end the saint walked over the water, caught up with the departing boat and asked the Azharite for assistance in remembering the lost phrases. The Azharite turned in amazement to Hazim and said, 'Don't worry about the formal prayers, the *baraka* you have is plenty! Pray how you like!' The simple saint's personal piety so overwhelmed the northern scholar that he could not but honour the charismatic southerner.¹

¹ This story is recounted by Nowal Messiri in her essay 'The Sheikh Cult of Dahmit' in John E. Kennedy (ed.), *Nubian Ceremonial Life: Studies in Islamic Syncretism and Cultural Change*, (The University of California Press: Berkeley, 1978), p. 66.

Hard work, wealth, success, generosity—all bring honour. Honour commands politeness and respect. The father of a Lebanese friend of mine grew the nails of his little fingers about three quarters of an inch long. He was declaring his status as that of a person above involvement in manual labour, a point of honour. I also remember my frustration and anger when the company I worked for in Beirut moved offices. The two other foreigners and I rolled up our sleeves and helped in the hard work of hauling books, filing cabinets and furniture. We 'got our hands dirty'. The Lebanese who functioned at an equivalent level to ourselves in the company dressed as chic as normal and lifted not a finger to help. We got mad at them and they at us. In reality, we all got the kudos we were aiming for. We foreigners made it a matter of pride that we had mucked in and helped. Our Lebanese colleagues made it a matter of honour that they weren't seen to be involved in any menial tasks!

Age brings honour. Children frequently hear such sayings as 'He who is one day older than you is wiser by one year'. In societies in which vertical relationships dominate, children are brought up to respect the wisdom of grandparents, uncles and aunts, as well as parents. Any member of the older generation may participate in the disciplining of a child. The child's learned role is to show exaggerated respect. There is honour in having a hoary head.

In traditional Bedouin society the tented area reflects the honour of its inhabitants. It is a space entered only by invitation, except in special circumstances. A tribesman who has committed a crime might seek temporary refuge from his enemies in such a tent complex. The honour of [p. 158](#) the lineage protects him until the dispute is settled. Generosity and hospitality, attitudes for which the Bedouin are justly renowned, still lie close to the heart of most Arabs. It is a point of honour to be hospitable.

Relationships between the sexes are governed by what the 'group' prizes. Here we need to note that concepts of honour strongly inform the preferences of the 'group'. It has to be admitted that there seems to operate a considerable double standard with regard to sexual behaviour. There is a rigorous compulsion upon women to retain their premarital virginity and later to refrain from any extra-marital sexual relationships. They are to keep their *'ird* (female honour) free from contamination at all costs. Similar restrictions do not apply to men, considerable numbers of whom (at some stage of their life) visit prostitutes in the towns and cities with comparative freedom. It is no loss to a man's honour to play with a prostitute, for she is nothing anyway. The Arabic word for 'virgin' (*'adhrā*) is a feminine noun always used to refer to women. There is no masculine equivalent. A phrase has to be utilized to express the fact that a male has had no sexual experience before marriage. Perhaps the 'double standard' diminishes in intensity when it is understood that honour requires the protection (not restriction) of females because they are a precious commodity. In their purity is invested the honour of all the lineage.

The Semitic culture of Old Testament times reflects the tensions of a society operating along equivalent lines. At one stage a wronged woman, Tamar, made use of the accepted male access to prostitutes to claim the justice owing to her by her father-in-law, Judah. Old Judah, founder of one of the tribes of Israel, had a problem. His eldest son had married Tamar and had died, leaving her childless. He consequently married his second son, Onan, to her as custom required, but the relationship didn't work out. Onan was punished by the Lord for refusing to allow Tamar to have children by him. The penalty was death! Judah was fearful of marrying his third son to the woman in case he also ended up as a corpse. So he prevaricated. Eventually Tamar's patience wore out. She decided to trap Judah into acknowledging that he had not dealt properly with her. She dressed as a prostitute and sat by a road used by Judah. Soon he walked by, was attracted to the girl by the roadside and made an approach. A little later he was sleeping unwittingly with Tamar, thinking he

was merely playing with a harlot. Ironically, as a result of their intercourse, Tamar conceived twins. When Judah later heard that his widowed daughter-in-law was pregnant he was furious. She had dishonoured his family's reputation and he wanted to burn her to death. She, however, had proof that Judah himself was the father of the boys in her womb. The tribal leader had to admit that his failure to preserve the honour of the family (by refusing to marry his third son to her) had caused the situation in which she had to behave like a woman with no honour ([Gen. 38](#)). p. 159

WALKING THE TIGHTROPE

It emerges, therefore, that a major goal in many Middle Easterners' lives is to accumulate honour and avoid its erosion by shame. Social control, for such people, is essentially exercised by the dynamics of shaming. Such a control depends on everyone knowing everything about everyone. This is quite easily achieved in a community-oriented society. 'Gossip' is the public expression of the shaming mechanism. Saving face is all-important to such a culture. A single shame experience threatens to expose and damage the whole self.

Rarely, in the relating of Christian missionaries to Muslims, and especially to believers from a Muslim background, is the seriousness of 'saving face' understood. Western Christians, for example, consider dishonesty a serious sin. I have smacked my daughter once for doing the bad deed, whatever it might have been, and once more 'for lying to me about it'. At all costs, honesty must be adhered to. That same presupposition about the primacy of honesty dictates how I relate to brothers and sisters from a non-western background. What happens if the Muslim, or the believer from a Muslim background, gives the Westerner like myself an answer which he thinks the Westerner wants to hear, even though the answer isn't strictly truthful? In his view, he has 'lied' in order to preserve the Westerner's honour and to save his own face. To question the Middle Easterner, even in private, is to question his integrity. It is to announce that he has got his priorities wrong. It is to communicate that it is more important (more Christian?) to walk all over relationships for the sake of some impersonal ideal concerning 'honesty'. It is to shame him. Of course, lying is not approved of in Muslim cultures any more than it is in western cultures. There are subtle ways, however, of letting the other person understand that you know what is really the case. Those subtle ways maintain the human relationship:

'Face' [*wajh*] is the outward appearance of honour, the 'front' of honour which a man will strive to preserve even if in actuality he has committed a dishonourable act ... One is considered justified, for instance, in resorting to prevarication in order to save one's face. If it comes to saving somebody else's 'face', lying becomes a duty.²

Lying and cheating in much of the Middle Eastern world are not primarily moral matters but ways of safeguarding honour and status, ways of avoiding shame. The Shī'a concept of dissimulation (*taqīya*) is a case in point. This allowance whereby true Shī'a Muslims may act as if they are not true Shī'a Muslims was actively promoted by Iman Khomeini during the Shah's reign. It was only at the appropriate moment that the dissimulation was laid aside and the true colours of Iran's clerics and people shown to the light of day.³ Temporary marriage is another concept (seemingly hypocritical with p. 160 regard to

² Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*, (Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1973), pp. 101 and 105.

³ See Kenneth Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim: An Exploration*, (George Allen & Unwin: London, 1985), pp. 280f. for a fuller explanation of the philosophy behind *taqīya*.

fidelity) which is intermittently promoted by Shī'a Muslims. A man away from home may take a 'wife' for the duration of his absence in order to stop him from flirting with other men's wives or behaving in equivalent, dishonourable ways. Again, the message is that the avoidance of shame ensuing from likely misconduct is the predominant concern. It eclipses any recognition that temporary marriage might be construed as straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel as far as sexual purity is concerned.

Often, in Middle Eastern cultures, a person will offer to accomplish something in order to save face, knowing that he cannot deliver the goods because he doesn't have the connections to achieve the promised end. The ensuing delays, postponements and renewals of promise are a bluff, providing time for a human connection to emerge which might save the day. A Westerner caught up in such dynamics quickly concludes that the person stringing him along is being dishonest. In reality the Middle Easterner is avoiding shame by making the promise today and not worrying about the consequences tomorrow. 'Not worrying about the consequences' in the future is less of an evil than the possibility of losing face should he not make the promise now.

Another common dynamic in Arab contexts is the expressing of generosity by one person towards another while the very person making the expansive gestures is actually plotting against the other. In these situations, everyone except the foreigner knows what 'games' are going on. High at stake in those games—higher certainly than any superficial reading of 'right' and 'wrong'—is the matter of honour and shame.

In the story *The Haj* by Leon Uris, the patriarchal father of the main Palestinian family in the book finally dies when he is told about an incident in his family's life that had been kept hidden from him for years. Earlier, during a civil disturbance and consequent act of punishment by the authorities, Iraqi soldiers had run amok in the quarter of Jaffa where the family lived. The father, Haj Ibrahim, was absent at the time and, sadly, his womenfolk had been horrifically raped. Towards the end of the book, Haj Ibrahim murders his daughter after she defiantly refuses to marry a relative of his choosing, announcing that she is a virgin no longer but has willingly slept with men. Haj Ibrahim's son, who had witnessed the scene in Jaffa when he was a young lad, hates his father for killing his beloved sister. He seeks to avenge her death by telling his father about what had happened those many years before:

'Oh yes, yes. I am going to kill you Father, but I'll do it my own way. I don't need your dagger. I'm just going to talk. I'm going to talk you to death. So open your ears, Father, and listen very carefully.' He stared at me. I began. 'In Jaffa, I witnessed both of your wives and Fatima being raped by Iraqi soldiers!'⁴

The old man cannot believe it, but his son insists it is true and crudely describes the scene in detail. The shock of Haj Ibrahim's immense loss p. 161 of honour gives the old man a heart attack and he dies of shame.

The holy cities of Mecca and Medina are out of bounds to non-Muslims. Why? Because they are places, supremely, where the integrity of Muslim peoples must not be contaminated by the intrusion of non-believers. Even the more general geography of Arab territory has to be kept intact from any incursion that would bruise Arab pride. The United States of America learned, during the Gulf war, how critical it was to keep Israeli warplanes from overflying Arab territories despite the Jews' desire to avenge the Iraqi SCUD attacks on their country. With Arab already fighting Arab, it couldn't possibly be allowed to look as if some Arabs were actually co-operating with the Israelis.

⁴ Leon Uris, *The Haj*, (André Deutsch Limited: London, 1985), pp. 560f.

Shame is a social phenomenon. It is equivalent to disgrace or humiliation. It operates as a form of control on behaviour. ‘What people say’ or ‘What people might say’ is a strong constraint on actions.

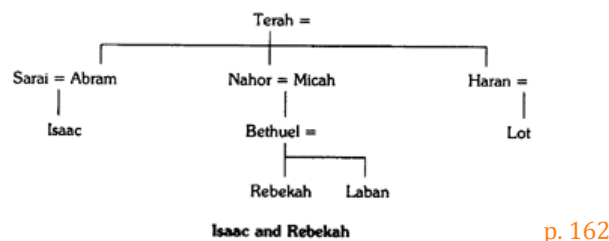
The use of oaths in such profusion in many Middle Eastern societies illustrates the lengths to which people go in order to avoid being shamed. Their frequent use betrays both the universal distrust and untruthfulness which abounds and the attempt to cover it up. Preserving appearances is very important. As one proverb declares: ‘Eat for yourself and dress for others.’

Shame comes from being a ‘bad’ person. One may lose esteem through cowardice, having no money, being menial, remaining unmarried, letting down one’s family or religion.

A POWERFUL THEME

In the honour/shame syndrome lies a strong motivation for making a success of a marriage. Personal human relationships, in Arab cultures, mostly begin with family honour and, hopefully, move on to mutual love. One is reminded of the story of Abraham’s provision of a wife for his son Isaac. The girl has to come from his own extended family and that will require a long journey back to Babylonia for his trusted servant Eliezer. The faithful servant is led by the Lord to the very girl who would be most appropriate for Isaac to marry. She is the daughter of Abraham’s brother’s son (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.



Eventually, Eliezer conveys the second cousin back to the Negev and Isaac married Rebekah. The Genesis account states: ‘So she became his wife, and he loved her’ ([Gen. 24:67](#)). This arranged marriage began with honour and progressed to love. In Arab cultures, a couple are encouraged to live in a harmonious relationship with each other partly because a divorce would bring unbearable shame on the whole extended family.

In the West, public interaction is ordered on a written, contractual basis. In a culture where human relationships predominate, oral contracts are deemed preferable. Written contracts imply distrust, constituting an insult to a person’s honour.

The Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be understood apart from the intense shame the Arabs suffered in the overwhelming defeats they sustained in the 1948, 1956 and 1967 wars. A redemption of Arab honour on the battlefield was desperately needed, and sought. The Arab ‘victory’ of 1973 made it possible for peace in the Middle East to become part of the Arab agenda. Now, at last, they could sit across a negotiating table from Israelis as men of honour and integrity.

Inequality through performance is prized by Westerners. We don’t mind promoting some people to high office and assigning others to menial tasks, but we do it on the basis of individual ability. In fact we make differentiation along the lines of personal achievement one of the major goals of our educational and economic systems. Inequality through honour or shame is despised by Westerners. ‘Equal opportunities’ is one of our slogans. We don’t appoint people to lectureships in our universities because they happen to be upright relatives of the Chancellor or President. For Arabs generally, the shoe is on

the other foot. Honour and human connection are greater promoters of advancement than individual achievement. In international incidents like World War II, therefore, the Arab is not so much swayed by arguments of 'right' and 'wrong'. Rather, he will wait until he perceives who might win a contest and thereby gain honour. He will then want to join that team.

In the Old Testament, the word honour and its derivatives occur 115 times, and 73 times in the New Testament. Jabez, for example, is specially remembered for being 'more honourable than his brothers' ([1 Chron. 4:9](#)). Our western eyes quickly skip over this accolade. The culture of which we are a part would possibly commemorate a man for academic, political, sporting or media achievement, hardly for being honourable. In Semitic cultures, however, honour is carefully celebrated.

As a consequence, 'sinning' tends to be perceived, according to the evidence of the Bible, as the violating of honour. Such a perception is not just a facet of popular culture but is part of the authoritative teaching of the revealed text. In the case of Amnon's physical assault on his sister, a sense of shame pervades her being, although she has done no wrong. She pleads with him not to rape her, predicting the sure result in terms of a shattering of her honour: 'What about me? Where could I get [p. 163](#) rid of my disgrace?' ([2 Sam. 13:13](#)). Job's confused complaint about his situation revolves around the fact that God has stripped him of his honour ([Job 19:9](#)) and yet the upright man is unaware of any disloyalty on his part.

The ultimate test of Jesus' loyalty to his Father is couched precisely in terms of the violation of honour. Is he willing to suffer unjust shame? The Son proves willing in the garden of Gethsemane. Hours later, at Calvary, he 'endured the cross, scorning its shame ...' ([Heb. 12:2](#)). Not long after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, his apostles are twice arrested for preaching in his name in the centre of Jerusalem. Although they are saved from death by the judicious Gamaliel, they are all beaten severely and banned yet again from preaching. The apostles leave the Sanhedrin rejoicing 'because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name' ([Acts 5:41](#)).

One of the loveliest parables in the New Testament is often lost on western Christians who have learned to see it only in terms of 'the prodigal son'. Jesus' own introduction should at least warn us that as much attention should be paid to the two other main characters in the story: 'There was a man who had two sons' ([Lk. 15:11](#)). The story is about disloyalty, the breakdown of commitment to kith and kin. The younger son wants his father dead so that he can receive his inheritance straight away. The older son abandons his expected role of reconciler and mediator between violated father and disloyal younger brother. The stow is full of shame—easily perceived perhaps in the prodigal's abandonment of personal integrity, so that in the end he is worse off than the despised, unclean pigs. The older son is disloyal also, though more subtly so. He does not play his required role in the family when relationships begin to disintegrate. At the end, his abandonment of commitment to his father's joy and love displays the step he has himself taken away from the family. He speaks coldly of 'slaving' for his father. 'You never ...' is on his lips. 'This son of yours ...' is how he thinks of his brother now. As the parable concludes, is this second prodigal son about to slap his pleading father, turn on his heel and march away from the distraught parent? His words and actions are unthinkable, shameful.

Supremely in this story, as told by Jesus, 'shame' is featured in the father's willing embrace of it. He accepts the younger son's rejection of him and lets him go. He accepts the humiliation of having to plead with his elder son for the latter to join him in his celebrating. In the little words of verse 20, the incredible (for a Semitic culture) is disclosed. The father 'ran to his son'—down the street, through the village, showing his

undergarments! The old man runs to reach, accept and protect the lad who should by rights be disinherited and sent packing. In the Middle East, old men never run! They never have done! This old man embraces the shame and takes the initiative with his younger son, just as a little later he will embrace more shame and go p. 164 cap in hand to his elder son.⁵ Jesus is hinting that such is the larger story of God and mankind. God is full of honour and integrity, yet dishonoured and shamed by his earthly children. Heaven's answer is to come in the Son to be dishonoured, to embrace the shame, to be beaten to death.

KEYS FOR COMMUNICATING?

The Arab Muslim lives in a group-oriented context where vertical relationships are predominant. The cultural theme most valued is honour. Shame is to be avoided at all costs. Daily living becomes a question, largely, of navigating successfully through the uncharted water that lies between honour and shame.

Western cultures, being deeply committed to individualism, tend to cohere around concepts of law and guilt, rather than loyalty and shame. Westerners must abide within the law. They are not overly concerned with saving one another's face. A strictly Law-based, guilt-oriented expression of the gospel may be appropriate within western cultures, but it doesn't make the most sense for cultures that operate by different convictions.⁶

In the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah graphically expresses what 'sin' means, in terms of shame. Half the chapters in the prophecy contain the word itself. Others use words like dishonour, disgrace, blush, derision, hiss or phrases implying shame like 'lift up your skirts'.

The point of shame in Jeremiah's prophecy is that the Old Testament people of God have abandoned their loyalty to Yahweh, the God of their forefathers. They are engaging in every type of open sin including idolatry and yet they are denying that anything is really wrong because they are still offering sacrifices at the temple ([Jer. 7:4](#)). Jeremiah declares that Israel has become shameless:

You have the brazen look of a prostitute;
you refuse to blush with shame.
Have you not just called to me:
'My Father, my friend from my youth,
Will you always be angry?
Will your wrath continue for ever?'
This is how you talk,
but you do all the evil you can

⁵ For a full treatment of this parable from within a Middle Eastern perspective, see Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, (Concordia: St Louis, 1973). For other, similar, treatments of New Testament texts, see the same author's *Poet and Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to Parables in Luke*, (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1976).

⁶ Helen Merrell Lynd, in her book *On Shame and the Search for Identity*, (Harcourt, Brace & World: New York, 1958), produces an analysis of the 'guilt-axis' and 'shame-axis' approaches to identity. She summarizes her findings in a diagram (pp. 208f), edited and reproduced here (Figure 2 below).

One conclusion to be drawn from Lynd's work is that, within western society, some individuals tend to function more on a shame axis than on a guilt axis. Nevertheless, in the declaring of the gospel by Westerners, 'sin' is most usually equated with Law-breaking rather than self-exposure; and the cancelling of guilt rather than the melting away of shame is emphasized in invitations to 'convert'.

[\(Jer. 3:3-5\)](#).

For sure, the people are breaking the law, they are guilty of lawlessness. p. 165
Figure 2.

Guilt Axis

Shame Axis

Concerned with each separate act

Concerned with the over-all self

Involves transgression of specific code

Involves falling short, missing an ideal

Process of deleting wrong acts and substituting right ones for them

Involves a total response that includes insight

Involves competition, measurement on a scale

Involves acting in terms of the pervasive qualitative demands of oneself

Exposure of a specific demeanour

Exposure of the quick of the self

Feeling of wrongdoing in specific act

Feeling that may have loved the wrong person

Trust built on conception of no betrayal

Trust slowly eliminating fear of exposure

Emphasis on decision-making

Ability to live with multiple possibilities

Feeling of guilt toward someone who had denounced one for a certain reason

Feeling of shame toward someone whose trust one had not met

Emphasis on content of experience

Emphasis on quality of experience

Surmounting of guilt leads to righteousness

Transcending of shame may lead to sense of identity, freedom

But the thing that hurts the Lord most is that, in their lawlessness, they are expressing their prior rejection of him. They 'sin' by refusing to really relate to him as Father or friend. They spit in his face and dishonour him before all the nations. What's more, they are not ashamed of themselves!

One clear expression of repentance comes out in the book. It is that of 'Ephraim', and it occurs after the judgement of God has begun to fall on the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Some of the leaders of the people are already in exile and God detects the inklings of sorrow among them:

After I strayed
I repented;

after I came to understand,
I beat my breast.
I was ashamed and humiliated
because I bore the disgrace of my youth.

([Jer. 31:19](#))

Repentance is expressed in terms of the recognition of shame and disgrace. The people are waking up to what has really happened in their relationship to God. That is why, in this chapter, the grounds are laid for a new relationship in a new covenant. 'I will be their God, and they will be my people' (v. [33](#)) is how the Lord expresses it. The recovery is promised in terms of a renewal of kinship. [p. 166](#)

In sharing the gospel with Arabs and other Muslims who operate within honour/shame concepts, it will surely help if we learn to read our own faith from within those constructs.⁷ There is plenty of assistance for us in the Bible, as we have seen. Phil Parshall comments that repentance and tears come quickly to people who function on an honour/shame basis when they know that they have been apprehended in an act that embarrasses them.⁸ Can we convey to our Muslim friends that their disloyalty to God is known and is shameful? With regard to their answerability to the Lord of Heaven and earth, have they become people who do as they please because they have lost a sense of shame? The mechanical, outward ritual acts may be in place, but are they concerned about God's honour?

One western missionary describes a situation in which a young Christian from a Muslim background was being mercilessly punished for the 'shame' he had brought on his family by turning to Christ. A revelation was needed in order for the family to realize that the greater shame was theirs, in resisting God's work in the young man's life:

His father was impossible. He would not respond to any of our explanations, or even to our returning good for evil. Seeing that the pressure was getting too much for the boy and that he might soon go back to Islam, I asked God to send his father a vision.

God answered. That night a white shining figure appeared to the father and said, 'You have beaten your son and he did not recant. You had him bound in chains and he did not recant. If you touch your son again, you are going to die. He is showing you the way of salvation. Listen to him!'

The next day the father became a Christian!⁹

A legitimate apologetic for the difficult issue of Jesus' crucifixion could conceivably be expressed in terms of God's honour. Lordship and submission are scriptural concerns ([In. 5:22-26](#); [Philp. 2:9-11](#)) and explain why Jesus acted as he did, why the cross was a means of bringing glory to God, not a contradiction of it. To emphasize the vertical relationship between Jesus and his Father is as valid as emphasizing the horizontal relationship between Jesus and mankind. Western Christianity applauds the latter emphasis, concentrating on incarnation and the personal self-giving of Christ so that whoever believes in him might be born again ([In. 3:16](#)). Perhaps it is time to stop expecting the Muslim to see the love of God in the cross of Christ. It might be easier for him to glimpse there something of Christ's loyalty to his Father, something of the Father's glory in watching his Son obey him to the end, vindicating family honour.

⁷ See the helpful exegesis of this theme in Lowell L. Nobel, *Naked and Not Ashamed*, (Jackson Printing: Jackson, Michigan, 1975).

⁸ Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism*, (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, 1980), p. 78.

⁹ Source protected.

Evertt Huffard suggests that a ‘Christology of honour’ is as scriptural as any (western) emphasis on the ‘love of God’ being declared in [p. 167](#) Christ¹⁰ Of course such love is shown, but is it not significant that the synoptic gospels make little reference to it and Luke doesn’t even mention *agapê* (God’s special love for man) in his recounting of the missionary sermons of Acts? A concern for God’s glory, honour, blamelessness and unmerited generosity seems rather to be documented—themes which make profound sense in the kind of cultural settings we are considering in this book.

In the difficult situation cited above (admittedly from a West African, Muslim context), the authoritative vision from heaven convinced the human father that he should no longer oppose his son’s conversion to Christ. The vision-word from God was strong enough to nullify the traditional theological reservations which Muslims have about the crucifixion. Such present-tense experiences of God’s holiness are perhaps the best attestation to the possibility that in the original crucifixion event itself, a holy God was also strongly in charge.¹¹

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[p. 168](#)

The Servant Songs of Isaiah in Dialogue with Muslims

Bruce J. Nicholls

The author gave this paper at a seminar on Islam at the Gujranwala Theological Seminary, Pakistan.

The Editor

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I want to offer the thesis that to understand the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ from an Islamic perspective we need to start our discussion from the unity and greatness of God and with the prophet as the servant of the Lord who brings forth justice to the nations and shows compassion and mercy to the weak and to the transgressors of God’s commands. We need to focus on honour and shame rather than initially on love and guilt. The thesis is that the approach of the prophet in [Isaiah 40–66](#) and especially in the so-called ‘servant songs’ is one with which the sincere and searching

¹⁰ Evertt Huffard, ‘Culturally Relevant Themes about Christ’ in J. Dudley Woodberry, *op cit.*, p. 172.

¹¹ It is not my intention to minimize the difficulties of getting around traditional Muslim objections to the crucifixion. It is, however, to suggest that a shift away from intellectual argument towards a concern for the Muslim to be ‘shamed’ into allowing God to be God is valid. After all, Paul knew that it was ‘word’ and ‘power’ together that convinced many of his hearers ([I Thess. 1:5](#)) of the truth of his message. According to Luke, the story of Acts is really that of how Jesus *continued* from heaven, via his apostles on earth, to act and to teach—both aspects of proclamation going together ([Acts 1:1](#)).

Muslim can identify. I will argue that the servant songs are an effective starting point for this dialogue, and that they open the way to understanding Jesus Christ as the suffering servant of the Lord, the Messiah whom God has honoured and exalted as king and Lord. The uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ in terms of the trinity, the incarnation, the cross and resurrection which are stumbling blocks to both the Jew and the Muslim can be accepted as divine mysteries but only after we have first met the servant of the Lord in the context of our own human predicament and responded by faith. The theological dictum of Augustine and Anselm 'credo ut intelligum'—I believe that I may understand—is as appropriate for the Christian-Muslim dialogue as it was for the Christian-Graeco-Roman philosopher dialogue. For the articulation of this thesis I am grateful to the articles in the recent publication, *Muslim and Christian on the Emmaus Road* edited by J. Dudley Woodbeery (MARC, Monrovia, 1989) and especially for the chapters P. 169 by Evertt Huffard, Colin Chapman and Dudley Woodbeery. Pages quoted are from this compendium.

THE GOD OF HONOUR AND SHAME

In our Asian context whether Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim, the general practice of Christian evangelists, pastors and missionaries is to interpret the gospel to their hearers and readers from the perspective of the love of God manifest in the incarnation, cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and to appeal for a response in repentance, faith and love. This pattern is clearly seen in Raymond Lull, the first missionary to Muslims, who as a mystic and poet identified love as the distinct element of Christianity (p. 162). The modern missionary movement to Muslims beginning with Gairdner and Zwemer has continued to emphasize the same priority. However with Huffard, we ask the question, 'For whom is love the key, the speaker or the hearer?'

No evangelist would deny the centrality of the theme of love in the gospels especially as the one that dominates the thought of the Gospel according to John and the three epistles that bear his name. In sections of Romans and 1 Corinthians Paul makes the same point. However, we need to ask if there are other themes and approaches to the gospel that are equally valid and may in some cultural circumstances be more appropriate. From the Isaiah passage we will argue that justice for the nations is an equally valid interpretation of the gospel motif. It is not without significance that in the synoptic gospels neither *agape* nor *agapao* are given any prominence. Love in the synoptics is almost wholly limited to the Lord's interpretation of the Ten Commandments as to love God, to love your neighbour, and to love your enemy. In the Sermon on the Mount the noun *agape* is mentioned only twice. The emphasis is more on the power of God, his justice and his mercy to the weak and to those oppressed by sickness and disease and by demonic forces.

The story of the cross is in terms of honour and shame rather than love and guilt. Having said this we want to affirm the comprehensiveness of the gospel and that each theme is essential to the whole. This is beautifully illustrated in the parable of the two lost sons, one that strikes a response in many Muslim hearts.

While love is found in the Quran, it is a minor theme and limited to those whom Allah wills to love. There is no concept of God's universal love for all of mankind. Allah is merciful to those whom he accepts. He reveals his will through the prophets but not his divine attributes. God in himself is unknowable. The Muslim cannot say, 'God is love', for in a mathematical monotheism the being of God cannot be love, for love involves interpersonal relationships. Only in a trinitarian understanding of God is it possible to say, 'God is love', and to understand his covenant relationships with his people as one of unconditional love.

The gap between the traditional evangelical and the Muslim world-views and value systems is wider than is often realized. Evertt Huffard [p. 170](#) points out that, 'Evangelical theology is heavily influenced by a Western individualistic worldview that amplifies the values of freedom, equality and personal love. On the other hand, Islamic theology has its symbiotic relationship with a community deeply rooted in the group-orientated pre-Islamic Arab culture that champions the value of honour, authority and loyalty. The stress in evangelical circles on a "personal Saviour" disturbs the Muslim as an attempt to bring God down to the human level' (p. 166). Thus in a western cultural context relationships are horizontal; all are equal. It is common today for children to call their parents by their personal names. Social relationships are maintained by love and shared interests. Where love no longer exists, separation and divorce are common.

Huffard contrasts this with the Arab Muslim who 'lives within a group-orientated context where vertical relationships have priority. The group/vertical structure is maintained by loyalty to the family and respect for authority. Fathers want to be respected and honoured by their sons; people are treated on the basis of their status and age. The cultural theme most valued is honour and the greatest fear is shame' (p. 166).

This difference is dramatically symbolized in the two approaches to marriage. In western culture marriage is based on a personal and free choice where love is the criteria for marriage. In Arab and Eastern society generally, marriage is an honourable arrangement between families that mutually respect each other. Marriage begins in honour and grows in love. In Muslim society love is not the only consideration in the selection of a mate; Huffard adds, 'Thus a man may not marry the woman he loves but he learns to love the woman he marries' (p. 166). Relationships are vertical; honour, authority and loyalty and only then love. Thus in the Muslim social consciousness, it is appropriate to begin our discussion on the uniqueness and finality of Christ with the concept of honour without shame and end with concepts of love and obedience and not the reverse as is often our evangelical practice.

Our first goal therefore is to show that God is one, that he reigns supreme in the universe and that in exercising his authority over all people he demands absolute loyalty. The Mosaic Ten Commandments ([Ex. 20](#)) work these principles out in detail and find a ready response in the Muslim heart. It is only in the New Testament that Jesus takes up the theme of Deuteronomy, 'Hear O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts' ([6:4-6](#)). It should be noticed that this interpretation of the justice of God in the Ten Commandments which is reemphasized by Jesus, directed to those who are already within the covenant, whether the first covenant or the new covenant, represents the experience of the insiders. To those who are outside the covenant, the emphasis is primarily on justice and mercy. As is to be expected, the Muslim interprets Jesus the blessed prophet of the Quran in terms of honour and shame. The cross is a [p. 171](#) shame which brings dishonour to Allah. It is therefore both impossible and unnecessary. The problem here is that the Muslim is unable to give content to his monotheistic understanding of the honour of God and he has an inadequate understanding of the cause of shame. The Christian understanding of the trinity is not a tri-theism nor is any analogy or illustration of it adequate; rather God has not only revealed himself in three different ways (this is the modalism of Christian heresy and of Hinduism) but in his being he exists in three different personal ways. God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptism is in the one name of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But little is to be gained in arguing this point with the Muslim. It can be accepted only when it is first experienced.

Similarly the relationship of shame and guilt can be understood only from inside the covenant relationship and experienced by the believer. As Christians we maintain that God's honour is upheld when God acts in ways consistent with his character as revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures. God reveals not only his will (as Allah does) but also his essential character (which Allah does not). He is the God who acts justly and with compassion and mercy. Our triune God is holy. He is love. Therefore the acts of the servant of the Lord, whether understood as the remnant of God's faithful people or the messianic prophet who is still to come, must maintain the honour of the Lord God. The prophet suffers dishonour, shame and even death in order to maintain the honour of God. God may maintain his honour by delivering his prophets from shame, for example, Noah, Lot, Moses (as the Quran gives testimony) or he may permit or will his prophets to be wrongly killed, for example, Abel, Zecharias (as the Quran also gives testimony). We would argue that only in suffering and even death can the honour of God be maintained.

In interpreting the Servant of the Lord as finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the cross becomes the supreme event in which the honour of God as just and holy is maintained and God as love and merciful is proclaimed. It is only in the evangelical emphasis on Christ's death as an atonement for sin that God's justice is propitiated and his honour maintained. The problem for the Muslim is that the Quran gives an inadequate understanding of the human predicament. To reduce Adam's sin to ignorance or human error does not do justice to the question of why the prophets of Allah wrongfully suffered, nor does it do justice to the enormity of human suffering in the present context of the Middle East and the recent Gulf war. Some thoughtful contemporary writers admit this. The questionings of the Egyptian Muhammed Kamal Hussain are well known on this point. Dudley Woodbeery's diagnosis of the human condition (pp. 149-160) is particularly informative and relevant. Thus we would argue that we can understand honour and shame only when we understand both the greatness of God's character and the depths of human degradation and sin. Only then can we understand the necessity of the cross. To the Jew and the Muslim the cross is a [p. 172](#) stumbling block, to the Greek it is foolishness but to those of us who are being saved it is the wisdom and power of God. We glory in the cross ([1 Cor. 1:18-2:5](#)). Samuel Zwemer rightly entitled his biblical study 'The Glory of the Cross'. The servant songs of Isaiah are a marvellous introduction to this theme as the frequent references to them in the New Testament show.

RATIONAL ABSTRACTION OR FELT NEEDS

Before turning to the Servant Songs themselves we may note a second issue in the difference in the perspective between our evangelical evangelists and traditional orthodox Muslims. Drawing heavily on Paul's letter to the Romans it is common for evangelicals to develop a systematic theological approach to the gospel in which the law is taught, people are made aware of their sin and guilt and only then is grace proclaimed. Colin Chapman draws our attention to the Bible selection publication entitled 'The Message of the Tawrat, the Zabur and the Injil' which was prepared for Muslim readers and published first by the Bible Society in Beirut. In it the first four studies of the ten are entitled as follows: 1. God is one and has created man to serve and love him, 2. God gave man his laws, 3. God warns man of the consequence of his failure to keep his laws, 4. God is merciful and loving and wants to forgive. The remaining six studies show how Jesus is God's answer to the people's needs. Section 8, for example, is 'God demonstrates his love for sinful men through the death of Jesus'. Like many others, I was impressed with this selection and was in part instrumental for it being republished by the Bible Society in Bangalore. But with Chapman we might rightly ask whether this is 'the only model of the

Gospel? ... is this model of the Gospel appropriate for Muslims?' (p. 139). The use of the four spiritual laws abstracted from all cultural contexts and widely used in Asia is another example of the same methodology. My point is that this approach is appropriate for the speaker and the insider to the Christian faith, but not necessarily for the outsider who comes to the gospel with a different, in this case an Islamic perspective.

An alternative approach is to begin with the Muslim's felt needs which are similar to those of all peoples and where the Muslim, like all of us, is most vulnerable. Folk Islam and Sufiism are more sensitive to the daily human predicament of people than is Islamic orthodoxy. I have watched Hindus and Muslims praying at the same shrine of a holy saint, sharing the same felt needs and making the same request to 'God'. Martin Goldsmith, a one-time missionary to Muslims in South-East Asia, made effective use of parables in his preaching in the market place. His adaptation of the parable of the Pharisee and the sinner ([Lk. 18:9-14](#)) is a good example of how parabolic preaching to those with an eastern mindset is quickly understood and readily acceptable. I have twice published this story in the [p. 173](#) *Evangelical Review of Theology*, once in 1983 and again in July 1991 (Vol 15, No. 2 p. 272-277). The parable effectively answers our Lord's question, 'Which man went to his home justified before God?'. The justice of God, forgiveness and restoration are themes that go to the heart of the Muslim's felt needs. Colin Chapman calls Kenneth E. Bailey's interpretation of the prodigal son in the context of its literary form and the peasant culture of the Middle East, 'New Testament scholarship at its very best' (p. 142). Bailey's approach is not to counter the rationalism of Islam with an evangelical rationalism but with the excitement of discovering the unexpected in the story in which the honour of the father is vindicated and the love of the father is unexpectedly demonstrated. Chapman questions the reprinting of Pfander's great work *The Balance of Truth*, first published in India in 1835 (p. 118). For many today it sounds uncomfortably culture bound. Chapman likens his rationalistic approach to the 'football player who not only decides where the game is to be played, but also moves the goal post to suit himself' (p. 118). In India I was part of the Bible Society team supported by WASAI who met a number of times to discern the felt needs of Muslims today and to select Scriptures that speak to these needs. These booklets have been found useful. It was Martin Luther who rightly said, 'If you preach the Gospel in all aspects with the exception of the issues that deal specifically with your time, you are not preaching the Gospel at all.'

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SERVANT SONGS IN PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL TODAY

[Isaiah 40-66](#) is set in the period towards the end of the Babylonian captivity (about 540 BC) when the return from exile was imminent. The new ruler Cyrus, was about to permit the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to Judea.

Interwoven in this section of the book of Isaiah are four servant songs that have the common theme of the servant of the Lord. There is uncertainty over the length of each song and no agreement as to whether they had a separate existence or were part of Isaiah from the beginning. I prefer to see them as distinguishable but an inseparable part of the original corpus of [40-66](#). Taking this broader view we identify the songs as [42:1-9](#), [49:1-7](#), [50:2-9](#), [52:13-53:12](#). The theme of the one sovereign God who acts through his servant is by no means limited to the songs as will be indicated in this discussion. We may summarize their significance as follows:

1. The Servant whom God the Lord has chosen and filled with his spirit is portrayed as ‘the man for others’ whose progressive suffering rises to a crescendo in chapter [53](#).
2. God’s honour as the Creator King and Redeemer is vindicated through the suffering of his servant whom God raises and lifts up and exalts above all others.
3. The identity of the servant oscillates between Israel the faithful remnant, the prophet and even [p. 174](#) the pagan Cyrus and the coming anointed one, the Messiah whom the New Testament writers identify as the Lord Jesus Christ. Fulfilment in the present age and the age to come form a single perspective in the plan of God. It may be compared to an observer standing on a Himalayan hill station and viewing first the immediate valley and foothills and then the distant Himalayan peaks whose distance is foreshortened by the merging of the hills and valleys in between.
4. The perspectives of the servant songs find an initial commonality with the perspective of an Islamic worldview; in the theme of righteous suffering a bridge of understanding to communicate the passion and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes possible.
5. The songs are climaxed by the Glory of the Servant of the Lord who will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted ([52:13](#)); he will be given a portion with the great and divide the spoils with the strong ([53:12](#)). This vision can be fulfilled only in one, the Lord Jesus Christ risen from the dead and ascended into heaven.

SIGNIFICANT THEMES IN THE SERVANT SONGS

Space forbids more than a summary of the themes of [Isaiah 40–66](#) with special reference to the servant songs that are significant for our discussion.

1. There is no God but God. The Lord says, ‘To whom will you compare God?’ ([40:18, 25](#)). ‘Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth’ ([40:28](#)). ‘I am the Lord; this is my name! I will not give my honour to another or my praise to idols’ ([42:8](#)). In the spirit of the first two commandments of the Decalogue, the prophet warns against idolatry and ridicules the maker of idols who bows down and worships what he has made and cooks his food on the remaining wood that bums in the fire ([44:6–23](#)). ‘The Lord says, Israel’s King and Redeemer, the Lord God Almighty; I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no God’ ([44:6](#)). The Bible shares with the Quran its abhorrence of idolatry and the sin of *shirk*.
2. God the Creator is great. The Lord says, ‘He who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to his people, and life to those who walk on it. I the Lord have called you in righteousness’ ([42:5](#)). The Lord calls his servant to lift up his eyes and look to the heavens and asks ‘Who created all these? He who created the stars calls them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing’ ([40:26](#)). In the second song the Lord pronounces woe to those who quarrel with their maker and asks, ‘Does the clay say to the potter, “What are you making?” ’
3. God is righteous in all his acts. The first song begins, ‘Here is my [p. 175](#) servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my spirit on him and he will bring forth justice to the nation’ ([42:1](#)). ‘He will open the eyes of the blind, free the captives from prison and release from the dungeons those who live in darkness’ ([42:7](#)). Bringing forth justice on earth is the central motif of these songs. The honour of God is upheld for he always acts in accord with his character. He cannot overlook evil or act capriciously. He acts justly because he is just. Jesus

Christ, too, was just in all his work, in his rebuke of religious hypocrisy and in his obedience to death on the cross.

4. God acts with compassion and mercy. The first song emphasizes that the Lord protects the weak and has mercy on the broken hearted. 'A bruised reed will he not break and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out' ([42:3](#)). He gives food to the poor and water to the thirsty. He makes rivers flow out of the barren heights ([41:17-20](#)). He cares for his people as a shepherd does for the sheep. 'He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart' ([40:11](#)). He says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please' ([44:28](#)). Thus the Lord says, 'Do not fear; I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God, I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand' ([41:10](#)). The Lord's compassion is directed to all, even the enemies of his people, and especially to the poor and oppressed. Jesus Christ was 'a man for others'. His life and death show him to be the true and final servant of the Lord.
5. God judges and redeems. God pours out his anger on Israel who are blind and deaf ([42:18-25](#)). Yet he is Israel's only Saviour. 'ear not for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine' ([43:1](#)). In the first song, the Lord declares his covenant relationship with Israel and calls them to be a witness to the nations. He says, 'I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and light for the Gentiles' ([42:6](#)). He redeems his people in times of trouble. 'When you pass through the waters I will be with you ... When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned ... for I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel your Saviour' ([43:2f](#)). He promises to restore their land and to give them back their inheritance ([49:8](#)), a theme that has been central to the Palestinian conflict between the sons of Jacob and the sons of Ishmael and is at the heart of the present-day Middle East conflict. The Lord who blots out the people's transgressions and remembers their sins no more ([43:25](#)) is the Christ of the Epistle to the Hebrews.
6. God speaks through his Word. God's word is more than a knowledge of God's will; it is his self-revelation. It is the eternal Word. This is emphasized in the second song ([49:1-6](#)). The Servant says, 'He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his p. 176 hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver' ([49:2](#)). In the third song he says, 'The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, he wakens my ear to listen like one being taught' ([50:4](#)). The knowledge of God is direct, for the servant of the Lord not only speaks the word, but also lives out the word. This eternal word is God and is incarnate in the Logos becoming flesh ([Jn. 1:1, 14](#)).
7. The servant of the Lord is the mediator of a new covenant. 'He who vindicates me is near', says the servant ([50:8](#)). As a mediator the servant is blameless but he is also vulnerable. He suffers, but through his mediation he maintains the honour of God. He is stricken and smitten of God. The Lord says, 'He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed' ([53:5](#)). Little needs to be added to the significance of the fourth song ([52:13-53:12](#)). The New Testament writers point to the remarkable fulfilment of this song in the passion and cross of Christ. He is the mediator of the new covenant. In the cross, Christ in a voluntary act accepted the shame of this humiliating death. The honour of God's righteousness was justified and his name praised. God can blot out the sins of the transgressor only because Christ died for our sins. A just God could do no other.

8. The servant of the Lord brings glory to God. The fourth song begins, 'See my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted' ([52:13](#)). The song ends, 'Therefore I will give him a portion among the great and he will divide the spoils among the strong because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors' ([53:12](#)). In the resurrection God has given him the name that is above every name and at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' ([Philp. 2:10f](#)). The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead silences all objections to the incarnation and the cross. Christ is alive and he reigns forever. The final chapters of Isaiah ([54-66](#)) are a crescendo of praise to the triumph of God's servant king whose coming kingdom on earth is one of judgement and hope.

CONCLUSION

[Isaiah 40-66](#) is the moving announcement and enactment of God's establishing his kingly reign over the affairs of mankind through his suffering servant, who is none other than the King himself. This is Good News indeed. God redeems at great price his covenanted people, he restores the land, rebuilds Jerusalem and brings forth justice among the nations. In the fulness of time the Lord promises, 'Behold I create new [P. 177](#) heavens and a new earth' ([65:17](#)), to which Peter adds, 'the home of righteousness' ([2 Pet. 3:13](#)). God will answer before his people call and 'The wolf and the lamb will feed together and the lion will eat straw like the ox' ([65:24f](#)). In the person of Jesus Christ the kingdom came ([Mk. 1:14f](#)), the church as the sign of the kingdom is being built ([Mt. 16:18](#)), the powers and authorities of darkness were exposed and defeated by the cross ([Col. 2:15](#)) and on the Final Day all will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory ([Mt. 24:30](#)).

Only when the believer confesses his sins, puts his trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord and is born from above by the Spirit of God, will the windows of heaven open and he be filled with the love of God. As a new believer he discovers that God is just and God is love and 'we love him because he first loved us' ([1 Jn. 4:19](#)).

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Theological Principles for Evangelizing Muslims

Chawkat Georges Moucarray

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As the messenger of the gospel, Jesus Christ was the Evangelist par excellence. His example should hold our attention ahead of that of Paul or Peter. Moreover, we have four gospels dealing with Jesus while we only have the book of Acts for his two famous apostles.

Jesus' mission was essentially to the Jewish people. Judaism at the time was shot through with very varied threads (asceticism, nationalism, legalism and so on). This form of Judaism had some characteristics that we find in contemporary Islam: extreme monotheism, political messianism, Holy Scriptures codified by a secular tradition, the centrality of the Law, etc. This similarity makes the example of Jesus that much more relevant for all who seek to proclaim the gospel to Muslims. The gospels of Matthew and Mark, which appear to have been written by Semitic authors for Semitic readers, merit closer attention than the other two.

The following principles bring out some lessons that we can draw from evangelism as practised by Jesus. Of course this is not an exhaustive list. The relative importance of any of these principles may vary according to the situation and the people concerned.

1. THE REVELATION OF GOD AS FATHER IS AT THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

From start to finish of his earthly ministry, Jesus affirms that God is a Father. He is a Father to all men, but especially to Jesus' disciples and in a unique way to Jesus himself.

The two characteristics of the fatherhood of God that stand out the most are on the one hand authority and on the other goodness. If the authority of God seems obvious, his goodness as shown by Jesus is not so self-evident.

Jesus demonstrated the goodness of God in many ways: he *served* men, notably by healing their diseases; he showed his love for his disciples by *giving* his life for them (cf. [Jn. 13:1](#); [15:13](#)); he offered men [p. 179](#) *forgiveness* for their sins, the greatest service he rendered them, by the gift of his life.

Jesus used human fatherhood to speak about divine fatherhood, notably in several of his parables. This analogy is valid, however, only up to a certain point, because of the sin which characterizes human nature (cf. [7:11](#)). In Arab culture, for example, goodness is more a maternal than a paternal quality. Moreover we can see the Quran's vehement opposition to the concept of Jesus as Son of God, notably on the grounds of the connotations of human sonship that this raises.

2. THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE OF THE LAW IS TO LAY BARE THE HEART OF MAN

In the Sermon on the Mount in particular, Jesus gives the Law a spiritual interpretation which is designed to expose man's sin. Jesus adopts the same attitude towards human traditions associated with the Law, for example the rules relating to purity (cf. [Mk. 7:1-23](#)).

Without ever questioning the value of God's Law (cf. [Mt. 5:17](#)), Jesus constantly denounces a superficial understanding and outward obedience to this Law. The dangers of legalism are many: hypocrisy, pride, activism, ritualism, a desire to justify oneself before God, among others. If the Law is good yet legalism exists, it must be the one who practises the Law who is evil!

Thus man cannot secure his own salvation, by obedience to the Law, by his own efforts to please God. It is precisely in order to help him to become aware of this inability that the

Law was given. Without understanding this, he will never be able to grasp the message of the gospel.

3. THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL IS INSEPARABLE FROM ITS OUTWORKING

Mark's gospel often shows us Jesus in action, but all the gospels recount numerous miracles performed by Jesus (cf. [Jn. 20:30](#)). In other words, Jesus was not content to preach the gospel; he accompanied his preaching with deeds illustrating the gospel (cf. [Mt. 11:5](#)).

It is John's gospel that most clearly establishes the relationship between Jesus' words and deeds. The latter are referred to as 'signs' whose meaning is made clear by Jesus' words. He says that he is the light of the world before he gives the man blind from birth back his sight ([Jn. 9](#)). He feeds the crowd before declaring that he is the bread of life ([Jn. 6](#)). He states that he is the resurrection and the life before bringing his friend Lazarus back to life ([Jn. 11](#)).

In the synoptic gospels, the miracles of Jesus are rarely preceded or followed by any commentary. Thus, deeds don't necessarily need words to explain them; they speak for themselves. Conversely, preaching doesn't always need deeds to confirm it; the power of the Spirit is sufficient. However, seen as a whole, Jesus' mission consisted in proclaiming the gospel and in putting it into practice in order to demonstrate its truth. p. 180

4. DIALOGUE IS THE PREFERRED MEANS OF EVANGELISM

All the gospels show Jesus in dialogue with his contemporaries. This is obvious in his personal encounters with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, Simon the Pharisee and others, but it is also true of his discourses. In the rare discourses recorded for us by the gospels, Jesus' teaching is related to his listeners' religion, to their experiences as human beings or to their individual interests. He responds to their preoccupations and takes their objections into account, even if it is in a way that may be disconcerting at times.

5. PARABOLIC LANGUAGE IS PARTICULARLY SUITABLE FOR EXPRESSING CERTAIN TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL

In the synoptic gospels in particular, Jesus often has recourse to parables to proclaim the gospel. His disciples were struck by this and asked why. Jesus' reply was one of his most disconcerting (cf. [Mt. 13:10-17](#)). In his frequent use of parables Jesus has two goals which are apparently (but only apparently) contradictory: to make the gospel easier to grasp for those who are open to it and more difficult for those who have decided not to accept it. To the first group, the gospel in fact becomes clearer when it is compared to the events of everyday life. By contrast, the second group will always find additional reasons to reject it in such comparisons.

In John's gospel, Jesus explains his use of parables by the fact that the Holy Spirit has not yet come down on the disciples to give them the ability to understand certain truths (cf. [Jn. 16:12, 25, 29](#)). Chronologically, we are in the post-Pentecost era, but aren't those who don't believe in Jesus Christ in the same situation as prior to the day of Pentecost? This is why parabolic discourse is particularly appropriate to evangelism.

6. THE DEATH AND DIVINITY OF CHRIST WHICH ARE AT THE CENTRE OF THE GOSPEL ARE IMPLICIT IN EVANGELISM

Jesus' divinity and the necessity of his death for the salvation of men are among the truths which are at the heart of the gospel. But they are also truths which are no easier for today's Muslims to accept than they once were for Jesus' own disciples.

It is surprising to see that Jesus started to speak to his disciples about his death only quite late, when they had already discovered that he really was the Messiah (cf. [Mt. 16:13-23](#)). In spite of their discovery, or because of it, his disciples struggled greatly with this idea. Jesus returned to this subject only twice, and his disciples still had the same difficulty imagining that their master could be nailed to a cross.

In the same way, Jesus' disciples probably didn't have a very precise idea about his divinity. The title 'Son of God' that they used for him on several occasions was a messianic title and it quite possibly had no other significance for them. Moreover Jesus was as discreet about his divinity as about his being the Messiah.

However, Jesus acted and spoke in a way that made his contemporaries think. Neither Moses nor Abraham [p. 181](#) dared to do as Jesus did. This roundabout fashion of revealing who he was shows Jesus' humility, but it also demonstrates his teaching methods, since he didn't want a head-on confrontation with the passionate monotheism of his fellow Jews. Even his enemies managed to understand that Jesus implicitly claimed divine status, which motivated the sentence they passed against him.

7. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST TESTIFIES TO HIS DIVINITY AND TO HIS SUPERIORITY OVER ALL THE PROPHETS

With the crucifixion of Jesus, all the hopes and dreams of his disciples collapse in ruins. They are in complete confusion until they discover that, contrary to all expectations, his tomb is empty. Their encounter with the risen Christ fills them with joy but, more especially, it gives them a new understanding of the Scriptures. Thus, the reality of the living Christ on one hand and the testimony of the Scriptures on the other combine to reveal the mystery of Christ to the disciples. From now on, and especially from the day of Pentecost onwards, all the events of Jesus' life, as well as his death, make sense in the light of this event, unprecedented in history: his resurrection. He is the promised Messiah who fulfils the hope of Israel, and the eternal Only Son sent by God to bring man back from death to life.

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How a Maulvi Found Peace

K.M. Usman

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It has been my privilege to know and work with K.M. Usman. He belonged to the Malkana agricultural community who live in villages around Agra and towards Delhi. They number more than 1 million people. They were originally Hindu Rajputs of the warrior community that converted to Islam during the Moghul period, some under political pressure and others through the witness of the Sufi saints. Many others were forced out of Hinduism by the Brahmins who feared their collaboration with the Muslim rulers. Because their religion was a mixture of Hinduism and Islam they were neglected by the orthodox leaders of both communities.

In the 1920s the fundamentalist Hindu Arya Samaj claimed to have converted 100,000 Malkanas back to the Hindu fold, but indifference and negligence soon alienated them further from both communities. K.M. Usman's story is the report of his interview with Power for Living in 1973 at the Haggai Institute for Advanced Leadership Training held in Singapore.

As noted, Usman studied Islam and Arabic from the age of 7. In 1939 he graduated from the Muslim University of Aligarh. He was the first graduate and first Maulvi from his community. After his conversion to Christ in 1950 he immediately began witnessing among his own community and within two years more than 50 people had accepted Christ and were baptized. During the early 1960s Usman saw another 100 Malkanas come to Christ and be baptized. Then opposition increased and even the local church, through fear, attacked him. Various groups have sought to take up the work among this community but with little success. It seems that the moment of Christ's 'kairos' for this large community was lost—a story too often repeated in the Muslim world. We bow in shame and confess our sin of omission.

The Editor

At Agra, India, stands the world famous Taj Mahal, one of the seven wonders of the world. It was built by the fifth emperor of the Moghul dynasty as a tomb and a memorial for his wife, who died giving birth to her 14th child.

Agra is also the place of my birth—and my rebirth. The former event is unimportant, but the heavenly host rejoiced at the second. My [p. 183](#) Master affirms this in [Luke 15:7](#). That I should meet him in Agra, India has to be a miracle.

I was born to exceptionally devout Muslim parents in a community of a million Malkana residents. Malkanas mostly practise a mixture of Hinduism and Islam. They have some outward traditions of both religions but few convictions of either.

My father was concerned about the religious, educational, and social uplift of his community; and it looked to him for guidance. He decided that I should become a Muslim priest—a maulvi. So, from the ages of 7 to 17, I studied Islam and its theology along with my secular subjects.

Eventually, I became the first university graduate and the first maulvi of our community. Yet the more I studied Islam and the Koran, the more I became confused, frustrated and restless.

One verse in the Koran says, 'Cursed be of Allah those who tell lies.' I was conscious that I had told lies. I was very much afraid that God was going to condemn me, and that no power on earth would be able to save me from God's wrath. I would find myself in the blazing fire of hell with furious snakes and poisonous scorpions clinging to me and biting my body.

Another terror was that two angels were sitting on my shoulders constantly writing down all my good and evil deeds. I knew that the angel on my left shoulder would reach

Allah right after my death with the record of my evil deeds. Even if my evil deeds should be as small as a particle of sand, Allah would still send me to hell.

I felt that I was already living in hell, and there was no way out. There is no grace and no forgiveness of sins in Islam. Since Allah is the great and just judge, he will weigh the good and evil deeds, and the guilty one will have to suffer accordingly. It was such a horrifying scene for me that I lived in constant fear.

Nevertheless, I became the head of the Islamia School and the Muslim priest at Firozabad, a city near Agra. I married and had a family.

Once, in purchasing books for the school library, I picked up a secondhand Bible. Out of curiosity I started reading it, but soon put it aside, thinking it was very much like the Koran.

A week later, however, I began to read Matthew's gospel. My attention was gripped by the words of Jesus, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' ([Mt. 11:28](#)). Jesus, one of the four major prophets of God according to Islam, was calling me. No man on earth could save me from the fire of hell, but here was a chosen Messenger of God offering me the rest of soul which I needed so badly.

He further said to me. 'Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God.'

'Yes I do, my Lord,'

'Believe also in me' ([Jn. 14:1](#)).

'Yes, I will,' was my response to him. I was so much overpowered that I forgot I was reading a Book. I felt someone was speaking to me, saying, 'Usman, do you need peace?'

'Yes, my Lord and my God.'

'Now, peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you' ([Jn. 14:27](#)). p. 184 O, the peace of God's chosen Prophet! What a wonderful gift, and a free gift to me, and that peace was what I needed most!

I became free from all my fears, horrors, and restlessness. I became a new person— with no fear of hell and no fear of any recording angel.

But what was I to think of Islam, my lifelong faith? Muhammad, the founder of Islam many centuries previously, had angrily denounced a couple who opposed him. He had prayed in these words, recorded in the Koran:

'Perished be the two hands of Abu Lahab, and he will perish. His wealth and what he has earned shall avail him not. Soon shall he enter into the blazing fire, and his wife too, who goes about slandering. Around her neck shall be a halter of twisted palm fibre.'

With this I compared the agony and suffering of Jesus Christ while hanging on the cross. The crown of thorns was thrust on his head, the nails were put through his hands and feet, and scorners spat in his face. His enemies inflicted the severest possible pain and suffering on him. Yet Jesus prayed in these words: 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

What a great contrast in these two prayers! I realized it revealed a great contrast in the two personalities. Muhammad's prayer was merely a human reaction, while Jesus' prayer was a divine reaction. It seemed to me impossible for a human being to pray as Jesus Christ did under such agonizing conditions. He must have been God!

I decided to leave my work in order to live a solitary religious life as a Christian ascetic. I made the necessary arrangements for my farm and asked my wife to use its income for her own and the family's needs. I would live alone in a small thatched hut about a mile away.

However, the Rev Donald E. Rugh, a missionary from America, convinced me that a Christian should live with others in the fellowship of the church. He promised to give me Christian teaching. I have since had theological training and been ordained into the ministry.

The head of the institution from which I had passed my high school examination, a staunch Muslim, came to see me after my conversion. 'I know why you have become a Christian,' he told me. 'As a Muslim you had to pray five times a day. Now you spend just an hour a week in the church.'

'But at that time I felt off-duty from God after I'd prayed five times a day,' I answered. 'A Christian is never off-duty from God; he is under his appointment and living in his fellowship all the 24 hours.'

He asked me, 'Have you ever seen God?'

My reply was, that, in fact, I was not at all interested in seeing God's hands, his face, or even his whole body. I had seen his open and bleeding heart, full of love and compassion for me; and that was enough.

My wife, who had been a faithful, quiet, gentle companion, was reluctant to accept Christ and be baptized. I continued to pray and present Christ to her as best I knew how, however.

Sometime later, my wife fell from the roof and broke her back. She [p. 185](#) became very weak, and when X-rayed, was found to have tuberculosis. This was a great shock to me, for tuberculosis was considered incurable at that time.

Each day I rode my bicycle eight miles to visit her in the hospital, taking one of our five children with me. On one visit I put my hands on her chest and began to talk to my Master in a very informal way.

'Why has this calamity fallen upon our family?' I asked him. 'Please speak to me so clearly that I will be able to understand.'

After a pause I continued, 'Yes, I can live without my wife, but what about our five small children? What would they do without their mother? But if you think they will be alright, please tell me now, so I may be free from my anxiety and live in peace.'

I do not know how long I continued in prayer. My wife finally suggested that I go home before it got dark.

The next day the doctor attending my wife took another X-ray of her chest. He examined it carefully, then, one after another, he took five X-rays and consulted his colleagues.

Finally, he came to me, exclaiming, 'Good news! Your wife has been healed. She is perfectly alright.'

After coming home from the hospital, my wife told, 'Since God has given me a new birth, we ought to consecrate the rest of our lives to his service.' She confessed Jesus Christ as personal Saviour and Lord and was baptized.

The people of my village still had great respect for me, fortunately, so I could speak with them. I was sharing my Christian experience with a group of about 50 people one day when we heard a deafening noise—the crying of women and the clash of bamboo sticks.

A fierce fight had erupted between two rival factions in the village. Some of the combatants were using long iron-tipped sticks, and others were using spears. So many people were getting badly injured that I ran between the two groups to stop the fighting.

A stick struck my nose. It began to bleed furiously, and my white clothes turned red with blood. In horror the rivals stopped their fighting and ran to help me. The leaders of both groups went to get a doctor. Later they took me to a hospital for treatment.

The two groups reconciled their differences and have since been living in harmony. Now the whole village is at peace.

What a lesson that was for me! If a few drops of blood from a sinful man can pacify a few thousand, how much more can the blood of Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, be effective for the whole world. [p. 186](#)

The Stories of Farhana and Mr and Mrs Yaqoob

by a CMS Missionary

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FARHANA

Farhana came from a comfortably off family; she is now a woman in her late 50s. She was sent to a convent school as a little girl and was taught from the Bible. When she was married and had daughters of her own she sent them to a convent school too. Her daughters were not taught from the Bible because by this time the government had declared that no Muslim child should be taught the Bible even in Christian schools, but she used to go along and meet the nuns. One particular sister, Sister Ruth, would spend a long time talking to her and answering her questions. Sister Ruth sent her along to a missionary couple who lived near Farhana's house and Farhana used to attend the Bible studies that they would run.

Vision of Jesus

One night she had a vision of Jesus. She wasn't able to describe it but she said there was light, beautiful light, and it meant that she knew it was Jesus telling her that what she was hearing was the truth. She was baptized after receiving further teaching.

Farhana decided to tell her husband what she had done. She knew it would shock him because it is a very disgraceful thing for a Muslim to change from Islam to another faith. People regard it as a deep betrayal and a sin that some see as worthy of death. Farhana was a very strongminded woman and her husband was a very kind and gentle man, but at the same time she was concerned that he could possibly divorce her. She told him and he said to her that he was very upset, very angry and thought it was a very bad thing that she had done but that he knew that he couldn't change what was in her mind and in her heart and if she had to be a Christian, well, 'so be it'. But she was not to bring shame and disrepute to the family name. He said to her that she was not allowed to go out to meetings and to church and that she had to continue to be a good wife to him. She always had to be at home when he was at home and this effectively cut her off from having fellowship with other Christians. [p. 187](#) It meant that she had to rely on people going to visit her for fellowship.

Son angry

One of her sons was so angry with her for her decision that he deliberately started taking drugs in order to scare her, to shock her into giving up her faith. He had already tried burning her Bible but she bought another one. He took an overdose of drugs one day and ended up in hospital and was very sick but even that didn't shake her resolution to be a Christian. Farhana was baptized in the sea about ten years ago and, in spite of difficulties, she has carried on with her Christian faith. Her family at large have not rejected her—in fact they regard her as very impulsive and perhaps immature and think that perhaps one day she will just drift away from the Christian faith.

MR AND MRS YAQOOB

Mr Yaqoob left the country of his birth and went to live in another because of problems and tensions in his family. He set up a small watchmaking business and during the day he was kept busy but in the evenings he would feel desperately lonely because he had no friends or relatives in that country and he would just sit alone in his one-roomed rented place. During those lonely evenings, he wished for a wife and a son.

One evening the thought came to him that he should pray in the name of Jesus for a wife and a son. Years before, Mr Yaqoob had had a Christian friend who tried to persuade him to read the Bible. Mr Yaqoob had always refused. However, Muslims do believe that Jesus was a great prophet who can still work miracles today. He knew that he was asking for a miracle because in this country a man cannot choose a wife himself; the marriage arrangements are always made by the two families concerned. Mr Yaqoob had no one who could do this for him.

Prayer in Jesus' Name

So, in desperation he prayed in the name of Jesus for a wife and a son. God answered that prayer and not long afterwards he met some people, a marriage was arranged and, in a year's time he had a son, Ibrahim. Mr Yaqoob was so grateful to Jesus for answering this prayer of his that he thought he had better find out more about Jesus. Christians used to go to his shop sometimes and sit and talk with him and he gradually became free enough to ask some questions about their faith. Six years later he decided to get a Bible and read it for himself. He did this in secret without telling anyone, not even his wife whom he loved greatly. Gradually he came to the conclusion that what the gospels were saying was true and he wanted to become a Christian.

One evening he went home to his wife with his Bible and sat down and said that he wanted to talk to her seriously. He said that he wanted them both to become baptized the next day in case they died as Muslims. He was convinced that the Christian faith was true and he did not want to die and be buried without having been baptized. His wife hadn't heard any of this before. [p. 188](#) She hadn't known how her husband was thinking and feeling, she had not known that he had prayed in the name of Jesus for a wife and child. She listened to what her husband was saying and later explained it this way: 'It was a miracle: the Holy Spirit came and taught me things I could never have understood in years of thinking or hearing about them.' She wanted to be a Christian too. They both knew that their friends and relatives would very likely cut all communication with them and that they would be despised but they went to a Christian minister and were baptized, not the same day but after some basic teaching. They regularly attended their church's praise and fellowship services and sometimes one or other would have a prophecy to share with the others.

Assurance in death

In August 1989 Mr Yaqoob became very ill; he lost weight, had a terrible cough and became thinner and weaker. At the end of the following January it was found he had lung cancer and little time left to live. Shortly before he died he had a dream or a picture from God of Jesus and three angels coming to him and speaking to him and explaining that he would be with them and that he was not to be afraid. He was not to be concerned that he had been trusting in something untrue but be assured that what he believed was true. He was so delighted with this assurance from God that he tried to contact another friend who was a former Muslim to tell him to carry on believing and trusting and spreading the seed

of the Word of God. He wasn't actually able to meet that friend before he died but his wife was able to pass on the message to him.

Mrs Yaqoob's Family

Mr Yaqoob had no other family members in that country so there was no trouble from his family when he became a Christian but his wife's family were angry with them for making this decision. Mrs Yaqoob could meet with her sister only when her brother-in-law was out of the house. (He is a Muslim *maulvi*, a *mullah*.) Sometimes her mother would come and stay with them and her mother even felt free enough to listen to some of the gospel stories. When Mr Yaqoob died there was no support from the family as there usually is at the time of death. None of Mrs Yaqoob's family and none of their Muslim friends came to console them. She has received no financial support from the family as would usually be the case for a widow with a 17 year old son who has not yet finished his apprenticeship. In spite of the separation from family and all the ensuing social disadvantages, and in spite of financial insecurity, Mrs Yaqoob and her son, Ibrahim, carry on believing and trusting in God. She is full of praise to God that her husband died at home without pain and having had that assurance from the Lord Jesus, that he was shortly to be with him and that it was all true. **p. 189**

Book Reviews

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY: AN INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

by Wayne Grudem

(Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994 Hb 1264 pp. ISBN 0 310 28670 0)

(Reviewed by David Parker)

Wayne Grudem, from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has contributed a large (1,150 pages of text) and comprehensive volume to the current wave of evangelical systematic theologies. It is presented as a manual of theology, written for students and lay readers, and is characterized by exhaustive attention to detail, extensive listing of biblical texts (not just the references) and arguments in support of the doctrines discussed; there are also numerous footnotes and explanatory sections documenting the author's opinions.

Grudem follows the pattern of Reformed theology quite closely for his main outline, but does not hesitate to go his own way where he feels the necessity. For example, he adopts believer's baptism and a 'modified congregational form of government'. He also provides explanations that are intended to resolve traditional difficulties, like election and freewill, or certain questions relating to the second coming and the charismatic movement. He often refers to or even incorporates summarized sections of his own previous publications, so his positions on such issues as NT prophecy and feminism which have become quite well known are re-presented here. The dedication of the book to his parents, a Baptist pastor, Westminster Seminary professors and John Wimber suggest some of the diverse directions his thinking takes.

Grudem's style is a mixture of rigorous, logical argument and practical guidance on the application of theology to daily personal and church life. Sometimes the former is highly rationalistic and the latter is so specific and detailed that it seems out of place in such a volume and could well have been edited out to provide more room for substantial material. A great deal of material is packed into the volume, but it is generally quite accessible through the indexes and appropriate highlighting; however, additional sub-headings would have made it much more readable.

In the interests of practicality and relevance, Grudem also includes [p. 190](#) several innovative features, such as detailed cross-referencing to other theology books, listing of the full text of major creeds and confessions in the appendix, and the addition of appropriate hymns, Scripture memory verses and personal application questions at the end of each chapter.

However, the most important feature of the book is Grudem's approach to the nature of theology which governs his presentation and method. As the subtitle suggests, he restricts himself (in this volume at least) to a definition of systematic theology which states that it is 'any study that answers the question, "What does the whole Bible teach us today?" about any given topic'. Thus for him, systematic theology 'involves collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic'.

He follows this synthesizing method consistently throughout, arranging the material according to the topics and subtopics of traditional Reformed theology. He commences each section with a definition of the topic which is usually introduced confessionally, almost like a catechism, as an accepted statement of the doctrine without any background or explanation. He then proceeds to give the biblical and other supporting evidence for the doctrine, together with any further explanation of his view and refutation of opposing cases that he considers necessary. Hence he deliberately excludes as far as possible philosophic, historical and apologetic issues as a matter of policy.

Related to this is another striking feature of this work—the author's policy of restricting discussion and references to evangelical theology. He explains that 'I do not think that a true system of theology can be constructed from within what we may call the "liberal" theological tradition' (defined as those who deny 'the absolute truthfulness of the Bible' or those who do not take 'the words of the Bible to be God's very words'.) This explains his synthetic approach to the text of the Bible as a source of theology.

However, there are both strengths and weaknesses in this method. In practice it reduces the complexity of dealing with many different doctrinal positions, and it does give the opportunity to react at some depth with those within the evangelical family which it is supposed will be of most interest to readers. However, there is little discussion of what constitutes 'evangelical', which makes the author's position seem altogether too arbitrary and reductionist.

But more seriously, defining systematic theology in this way makes for a mechanistic approach to the discipline, which does little to provide the broader understanding of the relation of theological ideas to each other and to other areas of life that is so necessary for a mature approach to Christian thinking and living in today's complex world. Hence it is likely to be less than helpful in developing the reader's ability to reflect on new situations and issues as they arise.

Even the definitions sometimes raise problems that the author has to work hard to overcome later. For example, he defines the church as [p. 191](#) 'the community of all true believers for all time', the invisible church as 'the church as God sees it' and the visible church as 'the church as Christians on earth see it'. But when discussing the marks of the true church, there is no allowance for the church as an institution in society at large which

has a social mandate; furthermore, there are no clear parameters as to how purity of doctrine can be determined, apart from following the rather mechanical system of hermeneutics exemplified in this volume. Similarly, in discussing the roles of men and women, Grudem rejects unisex clothing on biblical grounds; he concedes, however, that head coverings ([1 Cor. 11:2-16](#)) may not be definitive of gender roles in any given society, but he offers no understanding of how cultural values interrelate with this particular theological judgement, or any other for that matter.

Another difficulty with this approach is evident by the many times the author finds it necessary to plead agnosticism concerning problems that he cannot answer. The typical procedure is to leave the issue up in the air by stating it cannot be solved due to lack of biblical data and state that 'it does not seem profitable for us to spend any more time speculating on this question'. Acknowledging difficulties may seem to exhibit the virtue of honesty, but when this measure is used frequently, it is not only frustrating for the reader but it suggests some defect with the hermeneutical and theological principles being employed. It is somewhat strange that on several other occasions where the biblical material is equally uncertain or ambiguous the author seems quite confident in deducting conclusions about what God's intentions are, or what was in the minds of the writers of Scripture.

We can applaud the author's concern for greater doctrinal unity and understanding within the evangelical church, and his confidence that ordinary people can respond far more ably to theological teaching than many professionals might think. We can also appreciate his desire to present a theology that is based upon biblical truth. But we may question whether the type of 'biblical theology' presented in this volume is good enough as an introduction for people who are just beginning their quest for deeper understanding. A far less rationalistic method is needed and one that builds up a theological system from first principles, thus providing a means of integrating theological insights with other elements of one's world view and avoids imposing a pre-determined interpretative scheme on the biblical data.

THE WESTMINSTER GUIDE TO THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

by William M. Ramsay

(Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994 Hb 564 pp. ISBN 0 664 22061
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(Reviewed by David Parker)

William Ramsay, retired Professor of Religion from Bethel College, Mackenzie Tennessee, has expanded a previous publication, *The Layman's Guide to the New Testament*, providing for both Christian and Jewish readers a large but readable introduction to the Bible which covers p. 192 each of the books, including brief treatment of the Apocrypha. Background and introductory issues are also included, sometimes in separate chapters and other times as special sections within the chapters with the biblical book to which they relate.

While a great deal of material has been included (with some charts but without indices, maps or illustrations), the author has managed to keep the book's purposes in focus and has also maintained a creative balance between technical issues, the substantive content of the biblical books and the theological and practical significance of the Bible's message. His style is a mixture of survey, outlining, exposition and application, with ample quotation of the biblical text and other illustrative material where appropriate.

Adopting what might be called a middle-of-the-road stance to scholarly issues, Ramsay frequently draws attention to alternative opinions. But more importantly, he consistently

emphasizes the importance of the Bible as the source and guide for faith. Thus he provides an handbook that is at the same time intellectually satisfying, a reliable introduction to contemporary thought and faithful to evangelical purposes of the Bible, even if in some of the illustrative material, his North American context is rather prominent.