

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

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.

Rev Colin Chapman served in Beirut and Cairo and is currently Principal of Crowther Hall, the CMS training College at Selly Oak, Birmingham, England. **p. 106**

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, almsgiving, 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.