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Da'wa according to the Holy Qur'an

Every Muslim has a policy, either conscious or unconscious, for dealing with non-Muslims, and specifically with those called people of the Book. But that behaviour usually takes the injunctions of the holy Qur'an into consideration in only a haphazard way. There are people who call themselves Muslims who feel that they are called upon merely to be polite in their dealings with Christians. They feel no burden to inform others about Islam. Others consider that they have no responsibility since Allah leads everyone according to His will. There are even those who think that all religions are equally valid, and no one should make a change in his faith. Perhaps more sadly, even the well-intentioned and well-guided sometimes fall back on the notion that there is nothing to be done but try to promote Islam as a beautiful faith in a positive light.

Much contemplation of the invitation to Islam in this book focuses on types of spiritual profiles, the various ways of approaching other people, establishing goals, identifying the areas of false belief, and examining ways and means of making changes in those beliefs. But in the final analysis, it is not what has been proven effective that is important, but what the holy Qur'an has revealed and commanded that we should do in relation to non-Muslims.

The holy Qur'an deals with this issue in many passages using many different expressions. This means that the issue must be an important one. Otherwise the holy Qur'an would not approach it so often in so many ways. It is not the purpose here to examine all of them, although that should certainly be done. It is rather the purpose of this chapter merely to examine those few passages that refer to the people of the Book by that name, pointing out how such people should be dealt with in terms of their acceptance or rejection of the message of Allah.

If we fail to do this, we are likely to fail in all of the investigation done so far. To ignore the council of the holy Qur'an in this matter cannot fail to lead us astray in the matter of meeting people with the message of Islam. What follows in this chapter is merely a beginning towards developing a Qur'anic philosophy of presenting Islam. It is high time this is done.

In the following study all of the passages of the Qur'an containing the expression "people of the Book"

that seem to refer to da'wa are examined. A number of passages are neglected that support the arguments, but seem to give no particular new information relevant to the particular issue at hand. Finally, those passages containing the expression "people of the Book" but focus on issues other than da'wa are obviously neglected as well.

1. The Roots of Da'wa

The first five points made by the holy Qur'an in relation to meeting people of the Book are fundamental and must be taken into consideration in every da'wa situation. We might want to call them the roots of da'wa. The ones that follow them are also basic, but more often relate to the specific problems of particular situations. These can be called the branches of da'wa, as they are generally speaking particular applications. All sixteen points should be memorized, practiced, and taken constantly into account while dealing with people of the Book.

1.1 Forgive and Overlook

Quite a number of the People of the Book wish they could turn you (people) back to infidelity after you have believed, from selfish envy, after the Truth has become manifest unto them: But forgive and overlook, till Allah accomplish his purpose; for Allah has power over all things. (Qur'an, Suratul-Baqara, 2: 109).

I once patiently explained the Biblical evidence for the oneness of Allah to a young Christian. He failed to accept it. Rather, he tried to make me believe in the Trinity. I met him on a later occasion, went through even more detailed arguments, with the same result. On a third occasion I met the same young man. He again rejected my arguments, and put heavy emotional pressure on me to accept Jesus (as) as God Almighty.

At that point I made a mistake. I asked him if Jesus (as) had been circumcised. At first he did not want to answer, so I asked him to open his Bible to Luke 2 and find out. He reluctantly admitted that Jesus (as) had been circumcised. I then asked him whether the piece that had been cut away had also been God or not. He looked at me reproachfully. I suppose I should be happy that he did not hit me. Much as I felt he had tried my patience, and much as my argument appeared reasonable and valid to me, still it was not productive.

The holy Qur'an, in its first passage telling us how to deal with the people of the Book, advises us to avoid problems of this sort. The ayat does not tell us to avoid proclaiming the truth. Before we are to exercise forgiveness and overlook the Christian attempt to turn us from the right way, we must be sure that the truth has become evident to them. This is the heart of the ayat. The truth must become evident to the Christian. My presentation of the truth, even from the Christian Scriptures, may well be evident to me.

But it may not immediately be evident to the Christian to whom I am speaking. Therefore, I must wait “until Allah accomplish his purpose.” During that waiting time I must continue to find ways of making truth evident to the Christian, while at the same time forgiving and overlooking his attempts to take me off the right path.

The attempt of the person of Christian background to take me off the right path may well be other than doctrinal. It may be something less obvious than the Trinity. The “selfish envy” that motivates such behaviour may well focus on behaviour. The argument may be implicit that, living in a non-Muslim country, I have the duty to conform for the sake of peace. Perhaps I should dress in a different way, or eat in a different way in order to avoid trouble.

I once came into conflict with the officials of a certain Western country where I was living because of the Islamic behaviour of my daughter in school. One of them informed me that if I wished to live in the country, I had to conform to the conditions ruling there. My appeal to the fact that the country had laws granting religious freedom was actually met with the argument that such freedom referred to the religious majority. The Qur’anic injunction in such cases is 1) to make the Islamic position as clear as possible, and 2) to be forgiving and overlook in insult until such time as “Allah accomplishes his purpose.

1.2 Expect Resistance

Even if you were to bring to the people of the Book all the Signs (together), they would not follow your Qibla; nor are you going to follow their Qibla; nor indeed will they follow each other's Qibla. If you after the knowledge has reached you, were you to follow their (vain) desires, then indeed you would be (clearly) in the wrong. (Qur'an, Suratul-Baqara, 2: 145).

The second Qur’anic principle is to expect resistance of the truth. The passage states first that all the evidence should be presented. But it goes on to stress that even after all of the evidence is presented, the Christian is likely to reject it. The wording of the Qur’an does not suggest that we are not to present the evidence. It does imply, however, that presenting the evidence is enough. It discharges us of our duty. We are not to use compulsion to getting the evidence across, whether that compulsion be physical or more insidious, such as the use of immoral means the likes of which are increasingly popular in marketing and missionizing. A dignified and clear presentation of the facts and reasons is enough.

An interesting psychological principle is developed here. It is popular in Western thought to emphasize the power of positive thinking. The Qur’an, on the contrary, notes the importance of negative thinking. We should expect a rejection of the message. Why is this? The Qur’an gives a good reason. If we expect the Christian to accept the message, and we repeatedly meet disappointment, we stand to become discouraged and in time actually be tempted to give up our own hold on truth and right guidance. If we expect rejection, we are completely protected from that danger.

There is an interesting implication here, one not stated in the sacred text. That is the danger that we

might feel that we are doing the guiding, through our implementation of positive thinking. The expectation of rejection lays the full burden of guidance on Allah, where it belongs, and thence the credit and responsibility. Being relieved of expectations, we are freed to focus on our own part, which is the clear and dignified expression of the message, unsullied by any ulterior motives on our part. In this way we see that the Qur'an is far superior to modern psychology. The Qur'an is not merely a reflection of the latest scientific discoveries, it is rather a correction of them.

The very next passage in the Qur'an gives an explanation of this behaviour. Why do people reject the clear evidence? The reason is that they know it already, but have taken on the habit of concealing the truth. When you present material in support of Islam from the Christian Scriptures, you will generally meet denial because they are accustomed to concealing the true meaning of the text.

The people of the Book know this as they know their own sons; but some of them conceal the truth which they themselves know. (Qur'an, Suratul-Baqara, 2: 146).

The process by which this is done is quite complex. The first means of concealing the truth is through biased establishing of the Biblical text. The second means is the biased translation of the Biblical text. The third means is the publication of the text in translation without the original parallel. The fourth means is through biased interpretation of the text, the biased selection of passages, and the purposeful neglect of scriptural witnesses to truth. All four of these means are in common use by both Christian scholars and clergy as well as lay people.

[1.3 Rely on Divine Guidance.](#)

Mankind was one single nation, and Allah sent Messengers with glad tidings and warnings; and with them He sent the Book in truth, to judge between people in matters wherein they differed; but the People of the Book after the clear Signs came to them, did not differ among themselves, except through selfish contumacy. Allah by His Grace guided the Believers to the Truth, concerning that wherein they differed. For Allah guides whom He will to a path that is straight. (Qur'an, Suratul-Baqara, 2:213).

This Qur'anic passage gives an enormous amount of information. First of all, it maintains the unity of the original revelation. That is, the Qur'an supports the diffusionist theory of W. Schmidt and Andrew Lang, the early 20th-century anthropologists who maintained that humankind was originally monotheist, and that all religious traditions are deviations from that original faith.

Secondly, the Qur'anic passage maintains that messengers or prophets came with both good news and warnings in order to maintain that original faith. In that context God sent the Book (that is, the pre-qur'anic revelation), which had the role of judging between people when they came into disagreement. That is, the revelation was to prevent the deviations from original monotheism.

Thirdly, despite the witness of the Book or revelation, the people of the Book deviated, not because the

Book was unclear, but through “selfish contumacy.”

The fourth clause gives God’s response to human deviation from original monotheism. The Qur’an calls this guidance. It is not certain whether this refers to the pre–Qur’anic Scriptures, since Scripture is also guidance, or whether this refers to the final revelation, the holy Qur’an, or to the Imamate, which is also guidance, or even to two or all of these factors. In any case, the Qur’an emphasizes that those who have deviated have access to guidance.

Finally, the last clause points out that God guides whom He will. Since the ayat has already stated that such guidance has already come to deviators, “whom He will” does not imply that God guides some people, that is, those few or many that He chooses to guide, but that the general grace of guidance granted to all, even to the deviators, is willed by God.

The implication for da’wa is the realization that guidance is divinely willed and granted even to deviators. We do not therefore have the right to deprive deviators of divine guidance, whether it be the truth revealed in their own Scriptures, the Qur’an, or through the Imamate. Guidance is the will of God and is open to all. It becomes inaccessible to deviators only by their own choice to ignore it.

This implication has two aspects in reference to the Muslim engaged in da’wa. The first is the realization that his hearer has the right, by divine decree, to access to the guidance contained in revelation. The person engaged in da’wa must not deprive him of it by concession, conciliation, apathy, or any other means. The second aspect is that the content of da’wa must be precisely that of revelation. The one doing da’wa does not have the right to give other than divine guidance. He does not have the right to give information that is not true, that is innovative or merely cultural in content.

1.4 Deal with Dispute by Submission to God.

The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will): Nor did the People of the Book dissent therefrom except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the Signs of Allah, Allah is swift in calling to account. (Qur’an 3: 19).

So if they dispute with thee, Say: "I have submitted my whole self to Allah and so have those who follow me." And say to the People of the Book and to those who are unlearned: "Do ye (also) submit yourselves?" If they do, they are in right guidance, but if they turn back, thy duty is to convey the Message; and in Allah's sight are (all) His servants. (Qur’an 3:20).

This passage is addressed to the holy Prophet (as). But its message refers to the person engaged in da’wa as well. The best form of da’wa is to follow the sunnah of the Prophet (as), and the sunnah of the Prophet (as) is contained in the instructions God has given him in the holy Qur’an.

The Qur’an points out that Christian deviation is not based on reason but “envy,” that is, on an emotional response. Disputation may sound reasoned, but it is best to bear in mind that the Christian argument is

always based on an emotional response, and is therefore itself susceptible to manipulation and political misuse. Therefore, it is best not to take the bait. If the discussion turns on a point of reason, the role of reason in Islam will lead the Muslim to focus on that issue in a reasoned way. The Christian will appeal to reason only in support of an already established emotional response. This is why disputation between Muslim and Christian is so often fruitless. It is not, as many Muslims so charitably think, because direct and reasoned discussion of principles goes against the grain when one is challenged to change one's position.

The Qur'an gives here the proper road to take when brought to an impasse through Christian appeal to emotions camouflaged by logical disputation. It also gives the reason why this is important. In discussion with Christians, the Muslim challenge generally inspires the Christian to make blasphemous statement, statements that actually call for punishment. In doing da'wa, one has to be careful not to cause more harm than good. In such a case, the Muslim should express his or her desire to submit to the will and teaching of God. That submission should be whole-hearted and so sincere that the Christian is impressed to follow suite. Before allowing the Christian to get to the place in his argument that becomes blasphemous and calls down punishment upon him, he should be led if possible to submit to God.

This means that the person doing da'wa should think first about both submitting to Allah him or herself, and about encouraging the Christian to do the same. There is basically nothing in the Christian psychology to prevent this. If the Christian hesitates, one can ask "Is there anything in your religion that prevents you from submitting to God?" The answer should be no. Then it is possible to open common ground by saying "Let us both agree then that we will wholly submit ourselves to God." It is difficult for the Christian to refuse, and this has not only created common ground, but has brought the Christian a long step towards Islam, which is merely submission to God. In further contact, if there is an area of dispute, a reminder of this common commitment can restore understanding.

There is another important factor in consciously going through this process. Muslims often approach those interested in Islam with a teacher mentality. Although it is true that if one's native language is Arabic, one will always have an advantage over others in that matter, it does not follow that one is thereby the definitive teacher of all others through time and infinity. One needs to relinquish arrogance if one expects to have a good reception, and the only way of relinquishing arrogance effectively is through personal submission to God.

The fourth rule is to say to Christians or others "Let us agree to submit ourselves entirely to God Almighty and to Him alone."

1.5 Define Submission to God.

Say: "O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than Allah." If then they turn back, say ye: "Bear witness that we (at least) are

Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will). "(Qur'an 3:64).

After establishing common ground by starting with the attitude of submission to God on the part of both sides, the next step can be taken. It is important to notice that this is the proper psychological order. First establish that we both submit ourselves wholly to God. Then, and only then, define submission.

The definition of submission in this passage includes three points. The first is the oneness of Allah. The realization of the oneness of Allah is predicated on the attitude of submission rather than on a rational, deductive demonstration of divine unity or even on a revealed proclamation. This is the import of the phrase "La ilaha illa Allah" which implies that there is none who deserves our worship or submission but the one Allah. The Christian should be led to understand that the submission to God, which he has already expressed, implies that there is only one God to whom he is submitting. But in many cases it will not be possible to present evidence other than an explanation of what Islam teaches. Pressure to cede the point is not effective. Proclamation of the truth with its evidence is all we can do.

The Qur'anic idea is very logical. It basically means that since we submit wholly to God, that God cannot exist in parts. Otherwise, our submission must also exist in parts. We should have to submit to one part of God with one aspect of our being or experience, and to another with another aspect of our being or experience. But this is clearly not our experience as we submit ourselves wholly to God. God is therefore one and indivisible.

The second point in the definition of submission to the one true God is that we do not associate partners with Him. It is one's personal submission that forms the basic argument for the oneness of God, rather than recourse to reason or revelation. Again, pressure is ineffective. Rather, we should concentrate on making it absolutely clear that we are so concerned about submitting to God alone, that we dare not concede the status of deity to anything or anyone appearing in created form. The distinction between Creator and created is absolute, and our submission to the Creator alone is an act of recognition of His sovereignty.

Insofar as Christians go, the point is that Jesus (as) is not God Almighty. With other people, it might be Krishna whom we cannot admit to be the deity. For both, the argument will arise that Jesus or Krishna are not associated to God, but are manifestations, incarnations, hypostases of the one God. The rational argument must concede that a manifestation, incarnation or hypostasis, being in the form of a creation, is in itself an association. It cannot but mitigate both the unicity of God and His uniqueness as Creator.

The third aspect of defining submission is the rejection of human religious authorities that have been set up by human means. The only acceptable authority is that set up by God Himself. People have direct access to God without the intermediary of ecclesiastical authority, church or priest. It should not be difficult to see that full submission to God conflicts with recognition of such authorities. It is quite clear and logical. That does not mean that it will be acceptable to all to whom it is presented.

The Qur'anic advice is a logical and psychological chain. It begins with submission to God. That

submission implies that the God to whom we are wholly submitted is one and not many, one and not existing in parts. It further implies that no other being can be conceived as God, but the one God to whom we are wholly submitted. Finally, the third implication is that submission to that one God excludes submission to humanly established religious authorities. Thus, once we have innocently led the Christian to submit himself wholly to God, something he will generally be ready to do so as not to be less than the Muslim, we have in one fell swoop undercut the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the atonement (the sacrifice of the god–man associated with God), and the doctrine of the Church. In other words, we have weakened all three major Christian heresies.

This approach is workable with Christians and secular people as well. At this point a decision may be made, either for or against Islam. However, in making a decision against Islam, the individual will fall back on his traditions, whether secular or religious. The following Qur’anic advice touches on those traditions.

The fifth rule is to define our submission by saying “We worship God alone, we associate no one or nothing with Him, and we set up no human authorities from among ourselves.”

2. The Branches of Da’wa

The basic principles of da’wa are given above. All five of them are essential to every da’wa situation. But they may be, in fact must be, applied in practice in ways appropriate to the particular situation. The “branches of da’wa” described below give directions in how to deal with the specific and varied kinds of situations that commonly arise. Amazingly, the situations described in terms of the people of the Book in the Qur’an over fourteen centuries ago are very much the same today.

2.1 Look to Abrahamic Revelation.

Ye People of the Book! Why dispute ye about Abraham, when the Law and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have ye no understanding?(Qur’an 3:65).

Rather than accept Islam on the basis of the five–point plan noted above, many individuals will raise arguments for not doing so. This passage in the Qur’an describes a particular situation. The message of Islam specifically attacks the deviations of Christians and Jews with the appeal to return to the purity of the Abrahamic faith. This is a very psychological approach, since it appeals to what is common, or claimed to be common, in both faiths. The goal of the Islamic proclamation was to unite Jews and Christians in such a way that neither should exist any longer as such, but should go forward united in the original monotheism, the faith of Abraham.

In answer to this, Jews appealed to the Law (the books of Moses a.s.) and the Christians to the Gospel, in their attempt to validate their deviation. Both attack the Qur’an in various ways, but the most insidious way they do so is to consider the Qur’an the book of Islam, as the Tawrat or Torah is the book of Jews

and the Gospel or New Testament is the book of Christians. In that way the three faiths are set up as opposing but having in some sense equal validity. Muslims often buy into this by accepting Judaism and Christianity as divinely revealed faiths which are merely superceded by the later revelation of Islam. This is not correct nor is it Qur'anic.

The real situation is that there is only one valid faith, original monotheism. At the time of their revelation, the messages of Moses and Jesus (a.s.) were expressions of that one, true, original faith. They later became Judaism and Christianity through deviation, at which point they ceased to be valid faiths. The Qur'an does not accept appeal to divine revelation on the part of deviators as a valid justification for their deviation. We are not to accept their claims that the Torah or the New Testament validates deviant traditions.

The message of Islam remains an appeal to give up deviation and to return to the faith of Abraham. It is not a message to accept the Qur'an as the book of Islam and out of courtesy allow that the Torah teaches Judaism and the New Testament Christianity. It is a logical implication that a single God without parts and without associates will reveal a single true faith. Alternatives are just not acceptable, politically correct as such an attitude may be in present society. To the extent that the Torah and the Gospel have been transmitted to us faithfully, they teach Islam.

The surface import of the Qur'anic passage is that the basics of true faith are to be found already in the revelation to Abraham, and appeal to later revelation in an attempt to overturn that faith in support of deviation from it is unacceptable. The Qur'an essentially rejects the two alternative religious philosophies. The first is that God has given revelation in stages, so that there are basic truths that were unknown at one time, and became known through revelation at later periods. The second is that faith has gone through a process of evolution, developing from a primitive form to a higher form.

So this passage in the Qur'an warns us to avoid two issues that opponents will raise. The first is the battle of the books, and the second is development in faith from primitive to higher. Both of these are diffused by maintaining the principle of universal original revelation of monotheism and the understanding that the proliferation of faiths is degeneration or deviation from it.

When we are faced with these issues, appeal to the Bible to support deviation, the correct answer is to say "Let us return to the faith of Abraham."

2.2 Watch out for Deceit.

It is the wish of a section of the People of the Book to lead you astray. But they shall lead astray (not you), but themselves, and they do not perceive!(Qur'an 3:69).

You People of the Book! Why do you reject the Signs of Allah, of which you are (yourselves) witnesses? (Qur'an 3:70).

You People of the Book! Why do you clothe Truth with falsehood, and conceal the Truth, while you have knowledge?(Qur'an 3:71).

A section of the People of the Book say: "Believe in the morning what is revealed to the Believers, but reject it at the end of the day; perchance they may (themselves) turn back;"(Qur'an 3:72).

Among the People of the Book are some who, if entrusted with a hoard of gold, will (readily) pay it back; others, who, if entrusted with a single silver coin, will not repay it unless you constantly stand demanding, because they say, "There is no call on us (to keep faith) with these ignorant (Pagans)." But they tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it. (Qur'an 3:75).

This passage gives a different excuse that people use for their rejection of Islam. The passage begins by noting the tendency of people who reject the faith to try to lead others astray. This is basically the appearance of deceit or dishonesty. The first point of dishonesty noted in ayat 70 is that of claiming to submit to God, and then refusing to accept the implications. The second mode of deceit is concealing the Truth, especially the fact that the Law and the Gospel, whatever they claim to be following, actually teach Islam.

The third mode of deceit is pretending to accept the message of Islam in the hope of being able thereby to influence Muslims. It is very common, especially in some quarters, to go along with what a person is saying, pretending to accept it, and later denying it. Many times Muslims think a person is close to Islam when he is merely being friendly. The final form of deceit is the idea that one need be honest only with someone who shares one's faith. The Qur'an does not accept such behaviour.

The Qur'an thus sets up these basic principles of honesty when dealing with the people of the Book. 1) The need to recognize and follow through consistently on the implications of what one has proposed. 2) The need to relate to Scriptures as an expression of divine truth rather than as a source of material to select what seems to support already accepted beliefs. 3) The need for sincerity in one's expressions of belief. 4) The need for treating all people with the same honesty, whether or not they share one's faith.

The principles of honesty needed in da'wa activity
1. Apply one's beliefs consistently in behaviour
2. Use Scripture to find truth rather than to support what one already believes
3. Express one's true beliefs honestly and accurately
4. Treat all people honestly without regard to differences in faith

2.3 Remember that God Sees and Knows.

Say: "O People of the Book! Why do you reject the Signs of Allah, when Allah is Himself witness

to all you do?"(Qur'an 3:98).

Say: "O you People of the Book! Why do you obstruct those who believe, from the Path of Allah, seeking to make it crooked, while you were yourselves witnesses (to Allah's Covenant)? But Allah is not unmindful of all that you do." (Qur'an 3:99).

The Qur'an gives us here the proper response when people reject Islam. The context of their rejection is that they have agreed with us to submit themselves wholly to God. Yet they have failed to follow through on the implications of submission to God, that is, that for reasons of consistency they must relinquish belief in the Trinity, the Atonement, and the Church.

Although we might feel some sympathy for the inability to make changes in belief, knowing how difficult this may be, still rejection of Islam demands a firm response. This passage gives one. We are to remind them that God is a witness to what they do. If they have made a covenant with us that we will both submit ourselves wholly to God alone, then God is a witness to that. He sees and knows how we follow through on that promise. If we balk at obedience the first time it runs against our preconceived ideas, it ought to make us stop and think about our sincerity in making the promise in the first place. The Qur'an gives us the proper words for this response.

2.4 Remember that God Judges.

O ye People of the Book! Believe in what We have (now) revealed, confirming what was (already) with you, before We change the face and fame of some (of you) beyond all recognition, and turn them hindwards, or curse them as We cursed the Sabbath breakers, for the decision of Allah must be carried out. (Qur'an 4:47).

This passage notes that the Qur'an confirms the Bible, what has already been sent. This does not mean that the Qur'an endorses everything in the Bible or that it confirms it to be without error. Many scholars have shown that the Bible has not been transmitted perfectly. But this passage notes that the Qur'an confirms the message of the earlier revelation.

This is a reference to the fact that there is one original and true revealed faith, that universal monotheism from which all religious traditions but the true one have deviated. The Qur'an is not an additional message, but a perfect expression of the original one that is still to be found, however imperfectly, in the earlier revelations even as they are transmitted to us. The Qur'an thus makes two points: firstly, people should believe the Qur'an; and secondly, that the Qur'an expresses the same unchanging original faith that was revealed earlier.

There is a reference here to the event described in Qur'an 2:65,66. Those who exceeded in the Sabbath were turned into despised apes. Tradition notes that this took place in Aqaba or Biblical Elath on the sea. The people tried to find ways of circumventing the command to observe the Sabbath by not catching and eating fish on that day. Ingenious ways of circumventing divine law resulted in them

becoming apes, without spiritual discernment. So people who make excuses for not carrying out God's commandment by the very process of doing so dull their minds and their capacity to understand truth. So there is an inevitable result of such action, besides the punishment of God for it.

If the reminder that God sees and knows does not work, then we may make the appeal stronger by reminding them that judgment inevitably falls on those who make excuses for not following the truth that God has been graciously pleased to grant them. There is no compulsion in Islam, and one must be careful in dealing with such issues. Advertising and marketing can be forms of compulsion. This we are given specific limits in the Qur'an as to what and how much pressure can be put on people. We are allowed to remind people that God sees and knows everything. If that has no effect, then we are allowed to remind them of judgment. It goes without saying that each person should first examine him or herself in these matters. Hypocrisy is a strong detriment to da'wa.

It is certain that all must one day acknowledge the Truth.

And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Judgement he will be a witness against them; (Qur'an 4: 159).

2.5 Warn against the Trinity.

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: So believe in Allah and His apostles. Say not "Trinity": desist: It will be better for you: For Allah is One God: Glory be to Him: (Far Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs. (Qur'an 4: 171).

There is a temptation to begin discussion with a non-Muslim on the matter of tawheed or the oneness of Allah. That is because this principle is the foundational doctrine of Islam on one hand, and one of the areas of most glaring error in other faiths on the other hand. Nevertheless, in this Qur'anic ordering of subjects to deal with as one meets the people of the Book, it comes only tenth. Experience shows that truly immediate approaches to this problem are not generally effective. Again, the Qur'an is most psychologically astute in its ordering of subjects.

This passage gives the basic points that need to be brought forward in discussion with people of the Book on this matter. Four basic issues are stated, two negative ones and two positive ones.

The first issue is to ask the people of the Book not to commit excesses, but to say only the truth about Allah. Committing excess refers not merely to the belief itself in the Trinity, but the pretension that such a doctrine is taught by the Christian Scriptures. The situation is not that there are two alternative beliefs that may be chosen equally one over the other. The Trinity is an unwarranted attempt to define God, which is to break the command in the Decalogue against making images of God.

The attitude of defining God is to set the human capacity for theological cogitation above God. It is the attitude of the idolater, who considers that he has the right to make an image through which to worship God. Intellectual and physical images have their sources in this excessive attitude. The oneness of God is not the product of a theological formulation, but the submission to the divine proclamation of oneness. It is based on the attitude of submission and the realization that the human mind is incapable of grasping God. The implication is that nothing should be said about God in excess, that is, no expression should be maintained as categorically true in reference to God except those actually found in the sources of revelation. For example, since the Christian sources of revelation do not contain the term Trinity, it is excess to call God a Trinity.

The second issue is the right understanding of Jesus (a.s.). Christians commit an excess in calling Jesus (a.s.) God the Son, the second person of the Trinity. The Qur'an corrects this by pointing out exactly what and who he is. The important points are 1) that he is the Messiah (a matter denied by the Jews at the time of Muhammad and later), 2) that he is the son of Mary (with the implication of the virgin birth, otherwise he would be called by the name of his father), 3) that he was a prophet or messenger sent from Allah, 4) that he is the word of God, that is, the divinely appointed expression of God's will, or the divine proof, on earth, 5) and that he was a spirit proceeding from God. Thus the role of Jesus being a special representative of God on earth is emphasized, although this is not to deny that role to others sent from God as well.

It is important to emphasize all of these Qur'anic points, rather than just the fact that he was a prophet and born of a virgin. Believers in the Trinity are already sensitive to the fact that Islam teaches that Jesus (a.s.) was a man and not God. Therefore every possible opportunity to note the true greatness that the Qur'an accords to Jesus (a.s.) should be taken.

The third issue is to ask Christians to stop referring to God as the Trinity. Again the Qur'an mentions a very simple and obvious thing, but one that is easily overlooked. In the light of the fact that the Christian Scriptures do not mention the Trinity and to do so is therefore excess, and in the light of the fact that Jesus (a.s.) is the Messiah, son of Mary, a prophet, the Word of God, and a Spirit proceeding from Him, people should therefore stop calling God a Trinity. It is appropriate to remind them to do so.

The final point to be made is to emphasize the foregoing by proclaiming the important points in reference to Allah. Again, this is a very effective psychological way of dealing with the issue. The first three points prepare the way for this one, making it clear and unequivocal. The first point to say about Allah is that He is one. The second thing is to break the intensity of the rationality through praise. This is absolutely necessary in order to reach the minds of the people of the Book. Thus, after saying that God is one, we should say subhan Allah, praise be to Allah.

This is in fact an acknowledgement of our status as creatures and His status as Creator. We need to put ourselves, both Muslims and Christians in our places as in the same category, creatures standing before our Creator. This prepares us for the third point, that the Creator is exalted above creation in essence.

Creatures reproduce. By contrast, the Creator does not. The realization of the oneness of God, and His status as deserving of praise because He is Creator of all things, prepares one for the realization that He does not reproduce. The realization that He does not reproduce can and should produce the awareness that to ascribe a son to Him is an excess. The fourth point reinforces the uniqueness of God, who has neither son nor daughter, by giving the explanation that He is sovereign over all things in heaven and earth. Therefore He can have no need to reproduce, and by extension can have neither need nor possibility to be described in terms of being or having a son.

1 Ask to avoid excess	1 Not to believe in the Trinity 2 Not to pretend Scripture teaches the Trinity
2 Describe the true nature of Jesus (a.s.)	1 The Messiah 2 The son of Mary 3 A Prophet 4 The Word of Allah 5 A Spirit proceeding from Allah
3 Ask to desist from calling God a Trinity	Do not say Trinity!
4 Give the major points on the oneness of God	1 Allah is one God 2 Acknowledge God as Creator through praise 3 God has no son 4 God is sovereign over all things

The matter of excess in religion is often reiterated in the holy Qur'an, and could form the basis of a study in its own right.

Say: "O People of the Book! Exceed not in your religion the bounds (of what is proper), trespassing beyond the truth, nor follow the vain desires of people who went wrong in times gone by, --who misled many, and strayed (themselves) from the even way. (Qur'an 5:80).

2.6 Take Advantage of What is Common Heritage.

This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time, --when ye give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues. If any one rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good). (Qur'an 5:6).

This passage of the Qur'an relating to the people of the Book emphasizes that there are common issues between them and Muslims. There is a popular interpretation of this passage that says to eat with a Jew

and sleep with a Christian. This is a false understanding of the revelation. In reality, neither Jews nor Christians eat in the proper way. Jews go beyond their Scriptures in prohibiting the eating of milk and meat together. Christians fail to follow the restrictions on diet altogether. What is of value here is to realize that the Scriptures of the Jews and Christians actually support Islamic diet as shown in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14, where the same species are prohibited and allowed as in Islamic law, with the exception of the camel, which is clearly given as a grace to the desert-dweller in the Qur'an.

The usefulness of this is to show to the Jew and Christian that Islam is teaching something that they lack in practice, but which they have in common with Islam through their Scriptures. Many will be surprised to see that their own Scriptures actually teach Islam, and this surprise will result in a favorable attitude towards Islam. This is only an illustration of the principle, since much of Islam, even in the smallest detail, is to be found expressed in the Scriptures of the people of the Book.

The second matter, that of marriage to people of the Book, is of a different character. Here the emphasis on what is common heritage is not in terms of revelation, but social contact. Many religious communities become enclosed upon themselves. Muslims also have the concept of the Ummah or the community of faith. However, it is a community that is open to social contact. It is crucial that Muslims be willing to be in close social contact with those of other faiths, in order to present Islam to them in the best possible light. This extends even to the point of marriage. Suspicion is often attached to people who revert to Islam to marry a Muslim, but this is a Qur'anic practice. Da'wa by marriage is a laudable act. It often results in new Muslims who are more attached to the faith than the original Muslim spouse. Of course, it also happens that true faith does not materialize. For this reason care should be taken to provide a good grounding in Islam before engaging in such marriage.

[2.7 Show how the Qur'an Explains the Bible Correctly.](#)

O People of the Book! There hath come to you our Apostle, revealing to you much that ye used to hide in the Book, and passing over much (that is now unnecessary). (Qur'an 5:16).

O People of the Book! Now hath come unto you, making (things) clear unto you, our Apostle, after the break in (the series of) our apostles, lest ye should say: "There came unto us no bringer of glad tidings and no warner (from evil)": But now hath come unto you a bringer of glad tidings and a warner (from evil). And Allah hath power over all things. (Qur'an 5:21).

Christianity is divided into about twenty thousand sects, all of which maintain that their teachings are based on the Book. Most of them have many things in common, and many differ from others in their emphasis of some particular, often seemingly insignificant, point of doctrine or practice. This is due to many things, not least of which is the fact that so much of Christianity is based on heathen sources rather than the Book.

But this passage in the Qur'an points out two relevant things about Christian use of the Bible. The first of

these is that the prophet Muhammad (a.s.) has come to reveal many things that Christians have tended to overlook in the Bible message. The second of these is that the prophet Muhammad (a.s.) has come to point out that some of the matters in the Bible to which certain sects are attached are local or temporary measures relevant to the application of the true faith to a particular time and place. They are therefore not to be taken and practiced today.

Everyone who uses the Bible agrees on these two things in principle. Everyone agrees that the Bible contains the basics of faith, and everyone agrees that it contains practices that are not to be applied today. What they disagree on is what these principles and practices are. Muhammad (a.s.) provides an authoritative, prophetic solution to this dilemma. Islam, not an ecumenical movement or interfaith dialogue, is the answer to Christian sectarianism.

When practicing Christians point to the Bible in defense of heresy, the proper answer is that Christians disagree in their interpretation and understanding of the Bible on that point, therefore the Qur'an was given to clarify matters. When secular Christians point out that Biblical faith cannot be determined, because Christians themselves disagree on the interpretation of the Bible, this is an opportunity for the Muslim to point out that the Qur'an clarifies the issues of disagreement.

2.8 Use Islamophobia to Good Advantage.

Say: "O People of the Book! Do you disapprove of us for no other reason than that we believe in Allah, and the revelation that hath come to us and that which came before (us), and (perhaps) that most of you are rebellious and disobedient?" (Qur'an 5:62).

One of the most important issues in the meeting between Islam and the people of the Book is Islamophobia, or the accusations of non-Muslims that Islam is backward, fostering ignorance, injustice, economic chaos, oppression of women and other evils. Generally Muslims try to meet such accusations in one or both of two ways. The first is defensiveness. They try to give evidence that the accusations are untrue. The other method is programmes presenting Islam as peaceful, conciliatory, and rational.

Of course both methods rely on accurate material, but they have two weaknesses. One is that they are selective, and this undermines their effectiveness. The second is that they accept the parameters of the accusers. Finally, these ways of working are distracting, taking the attention away from the real basic issues.

The Qur'an provides another way. That way is to counter accusation with accusation. It is to note the hypocrisy of the accusation. Of course that hypocrisy is evident in the fact that the Christian world is largely responsible for much of the violence and injustice that takes place and has taken place in recent centuries. Without claiming that Islamic societies are perfect, one can take note that neither Christian societies nor the secular societies based on them have ever maintained anything approaching justice.

Yet this is not the Qur'anic answer to accusation either. The real reason for Islamophobia lies in four

factors. The first is that Muslims believe in one God. The second is that they believe in the Qur'an. The third is that they believe in the former revelation, a fact that remains a threat to the people of the Book. The fourth is that the people of the Book, in their deviation from the Book, are rebellious and disobedient. If the people of the Book were obedient to their own Scriptures, they would have little reason to fear Islam.

The best way to deal with anti-Islamic expressions is to focus on these four factors. The first two are the frightening aspects of Islam. Submission to Allah implies that Muslims cannot be manipulated or controlled by other powers. Adherence to the Qur'an implies that Islamic law limits their loyalty to humanly devised laws that favour the oppression of the weak by the powerful. The latter two factors relate to Christian failure on these two points. They neither adhere to the legal prescriptions of their own Book, nor do they submit to God, but rather are rebellious and disobedient. The simple proof of that is the fact that insofar as is possible to discern, not a single Christian sect maintains even the literal obligations of the Decalogue, to say nothing of the rest of the Book.

These four issues have to be dealt with before Muslims are obligated to examine the accusations of Islamophobic people. Only when they recognize the Muslim's right and obligation towards Allah and the Qur'an, and conversely the obligation of the people of the Book towards God and the Bible, is it possible to deal with any accusations fruitfully. When the matter is brought up, one can politely say that one is ready to deal with those issues as soon as these matters are clarified.

2.9 Maintain the Consistency between the Books of Revelation.

Say: "O People of the Book! You have no ground to stand upon unless you stand fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord." It is the revelation that comes to you from your Lord that increases in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. But sorrow not over (these) people without Faith. (Qur'an 5:71).

And do not dispute with the people of the Book except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): But say, "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our Allah and your Allah is One; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)." (Qur'an 29:46).

The Qur'anic advice here is most interesting. Qur'an 5:71 makes three points. The first point is to challenge the people of the Book to stand on the consistent revelation of the Bible and the Qur'an. Whenever an argument is brought forward, merely insist that it is invalid unless the whole body of Scripture is brought to bear on it consistently. Accept no arguments that are not based on the Qur'an as well as the Bible. This will force the people of the Book to take the Qur'an into consideration, or break off dialogue. Their desire to lead people away from Islam will generally force them to continue.

The second point is that their investigation of the Qur'an in this context will generally increase their

obstinate rebellion against God and their blasphemy. One must expect this to be the result in most cases. The third point is that we should not let this state of affairs cause us sorrow or mental stress. We should merely accept it as reality.

The passage in Qur'an 29:46 reiterates the usefulness of emphasizing the consistency between the Bible and the Qur'an. We should not let Christians convince us that they have a different God than we, nor a different revelation. That would only grant them some grounds of validity. All difference is based on distortion, and it is unacceptable. Rather, one must emphasize that the God of the Christians is the same as the God of all humankind, who is one and unique, the Creator and therefore the sovereign of all. Adherence to the false doctrine of the Trinity does not relieve them of their responsibility to their Creator. We are all under one God.

2.10 Engage in Jihad.

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. (Qur'an 9:29).

What is the valid way of fighting in any given situation is open to discussion. Nevertheless, all should understand clearly that the goal of Islam is to oppose injustice throughout the world and establish a society in which the highest possible level of justice for all people can be maintained. It is the teaching of Islam that the implementation of Islamic law is the only way to achieve that. Therefore, the goal of Muslims must be the establishment of a society in which Islamic law is recognized.

There are three internal impediments to this. The first is ignorant and violent reactionary movements caused by colonialism and post-colonial policy. This type of supposed Islam fans the flames of fear, hatred, and opposition. It forms the other side of the vice that anti-Islamic powers use to oppress the peoples of the world. The second internal impediment is modernism. This is the attempt to adapt Islam to the colonial situation. At the present time it affects many Muslims, but has begun to appear passé. The third impediment is the adaptation of Muslims to the requirements of globalization. The type of government, economy, society, and culture that is becoming increasingly common to the whole world contains some aspects that are in conflict with Islamic principles. One of the most glaring of these is interest-based economy. Another can be called exploitative democracy, a system ostensibly for the whole population, but in reality the rule of the most powerful lobbies.

Islamic jihad must overcome both internal and external impediments, and when it fails to do so, it eventually merely supports the continuance of anti-Islamic tendencies. The goal of jihad must be the implementation of Islamic law in such a way that there is real justice for all people, not just for people who somehow tie into a lobby. Jihad is the struggle firstly to establish a purely Islamic state, that is, a society in which Islamic law is fully implemented in public policy, social policy, and economy. Secondly

jihad is to extend that state globally. The point is not to foster the rule of Muslims over non-Muslims, but to foster justice for all.

It is not the goal of Islamic jihad to create a pluralistic society in which all ways of life are considered equally valid. Such a philosophy is in practice merely a cover for exploitation. The concept of freedom has become in practice a vehicle for freedom to exploit. Those who do not accept justice as expressed in Islamic law, which is essentially the same as Biblical law, must eventually submit to a situation in which their exploitative activities are limited. The system of jizya was instituted for that purpose. Muslims must work respectfully, peacefully, single-mindedly and effectively towards that goal, but never going beyond the behaviour sanctioned by the Imamate.

2.11 Maintain the Grace of Allah Instead of Sacrificial Atonement for Sin.

That the People of the Book may know that they have no power whatever over the Grace of Allah, that (His) Grace is (entirely) in His hand, to bestow it on whomsoever He Wills. For Allah is the Lord of Grace abounding. (Qur'an 57:29).

There is a misconception among Christians about the grace of God. In its traditional form, grace in Christianity is seen through two vehicles: the sacrifice of Jesus (a.s.) on the cross and the dispensing of grace through the Church. Some evangelical forms of Christianity have largely dispensed with the latter, because of the post-medieval influence of Islam on Europe and Christianity.

Whatever the depths of meaning there may be in this Qur'anic passage, it does deny the Christian monopole on divine grace. Evangelical Christians will emphasize that God forgives by grace alone to those who believe in the sacrifice of Christ. The Islamic answer to that is that Muslims believe in forgiveness by divine grace alone. No sacrifice, human or otherwise, can add to the infinite grace of God. To maintain such a doctrine is to imply that divine grace is insufficient, a thought that is completely unacceptable.

This factor is presented last in the Qur'an. It is the factor among all Christian heresies that is least often questioned by Christians. The question of ecclesiastical authority is the major reason behind sectarian splitting, although some detail of practice is often taken as an excuse. The doctrine of the Trinity is completely rejected by some sects, and highly questioned by others. But the doctrine of the atonement finds strong support. This strong adherence to a basically heathen idea, the myth of the dying and resurrecting god, is inexplicable except with the understanding that Christianity is basically a heathen faith.

The Qur'anic answer to this problem is to proclaim that Allah has the right to forgive. The Christian doctrine is based on the presupposition that God is powerless to forgive without an atoning death. The most direct way of combating this is to note the sovereignty of God and His intrinsic right to forgive. As

human beings we do not have the right to question the divine right of forgiveness.

The disarming Christian argument is that justice demands a sacrifice. As reasonable as this may appear to Christians, the argument is false. The demands of justice, no matter how reasonable they may seem to the human mind or emotions, do not override the divine prerogative.

It is a matter of survival. We do not live in a world where all religious traditions are equally valid, all of which foster love and tolerance of one another. Such rubbish is a camouflage for exploitation. We live in a world where ideas support policies, and policies affect lives and livelihoods. The idea the one can make wrongs right by crucifying an innocent man in the Middle East leads to the committing of atrocities. It contributes to the death of thousands. The Christian doctrine of atonement, no matter how it is covered with emotional appeal, hides within its core the very human desire for revenge. It is no use to call this the demands of justice. It is raw revenge, and nothing more. Its heathen, pagan character does not change.

This is why Christians have to be told outright that they have no power over the grace of God. They live in a world of illusion, created by a false, heathen faith. The Christian belief in their monopole on grace will not end with the death of so many thousands of Muslims in the Middle East. It will eventually result in calling down upon themselves and the secular society they have created the response of God Himself. Then all will know that God has grace for whomsoever He will.

Image:

The principles of honesty needed in da'wa activity
1. Apply one's beliefs consistently in behaviour
2. Use Scripture to find truth rather than to support what one already believes
3. Express one's true beliefs honestly and accurately
4. Treat all people honestly without regard to differences in faith

1 Ask to avoid excess	1 Not to believe in the Trinity 2 Not to pretend Scripture teaches the Trinity
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