

Introduction

There is nothing entertaining about this book. It is not a book to sit down with and enjoy, but to be used. It can be handled by individuals, pairs, or small groups, but to do so will require hard work and concentration. It will demand commitment. The material is somewhat easier to follow in a seminar context.

This is a series of studies providing material designed to make Muslim contacts with non-Muslim people more productive. Its purpose is to help Muslims avoid being influenced by subtle attacks on Islamic behaviour. It also points out pitfalls in religious discussions. Finally, it provides material for attaining a goal-oriented, effective means of actively doing da'wa, or inviting people to Islam.

These studies are not for the one who wallows in love and tolerance, maintaining that all religious traditions are equally valid and that all ways lead to God. It may well be that all ways lead to God, but then all will stand before Him to be rewarded or punished according to what they have done with the revelation of truth given to them. The philosophy behind this book is that there is a faith that is right and true, and all other faiths are deviations to a greater or lesser degree. Furthermore, all people have the obligation to find and follow that faith. Finally, all people have the obligation, once having found faith, to propagate it in appropriate ways.

Three sources make up the basis of these contemplations. The first is the theoretical framework of academic Comparative Religion, and Missiology. The second is the context of missions targeting Muslim populations. The third is the Qur'anic advice on how to meet the people of the Book.

The most important question of the reader will be how to use this material. First of all, this book presents a theory and philosophy. This means that the careless reader, looking for quick and brief advice, may be disappointed. In the long run, this will save time and energy. It is also more effective to gain a deeper understanding of what one wants to do, than merely to pick up a few tips without actually changing one's approach.

This study is based on the philosophy that the Bible can be used effectively in dealing with the people of the Book, for the very good reason that the Bible more consistently teaches Islam than it does

Christianity. Working with Jews is another matter, since Judaism, both in teaching and practice, is very close to Islam. It is of little use to point out to Jews that the Bible does not support the doctrine of the Trinity, for example. They do not believe in it anyway. Although there is a focus on Christian–Muslim relations, much of the material in this study can be applied especially to secularized people, who unconsciously maintain many Christian misconceptions, and even to people of other religious traditions.

The chapters of this study will describe the true faith to some extent, and point out ways in which other traditions have deviated from the right path. Finally, they will give several models of ways of propagating the faith, ways that are based on experience and research, on a realization of the contemporary challenges met by Muslims, especially as targets of Christian evangelization, and on some Qur’anic passages giving guidance in how to deal with the people of the Book. This study presents the theory and practice, but not all of the essentials. It is meant to be used in conjunction with the Qur’an, other Islamic literature, and insofar as people of the Book are concerned, the Bible and Islamic studies of the Bible.

This material is designed to be used by individuals, partners in doing da’wa (invitation to Islam), and small, informal groups established with the purpose of inviting people to Islam. The expertise can be best acquired through participation in seminars focusing on the material in a systematic way, and dealing with the questions of the participants as they come up. The greater focus is on what an ordinary person can do with very limited means. This is not to neglect the importance of the grand message or mass movements. Rather, it hopefully prepares the ground for things more effective. Great movements start with a few people with dedication and who grasp the opportunities.

A number of methods of da’wa are dealt with and evaluated. Some of them are simple, and require little preparation. Among these is distributing literature in various ways. Some, though important and needing great preparation, are barely mentioned, because they require great resources. Among these are medical, social, and educational work. So the main emphasis here is on what one or several dedicated individuals can do. This does not mean that the matters presented here are not of interest to those doing a more extended work. The matters discussed are actually vital for all Muslims.

The first chapter points out that different beliefs require different approaches, so that the style of presentation must change according to the content of the information. Examples are drawn from the three primary beliefs in which Christians and Muslims differ: the oneness of God, the prophethood of Muhammad, and the Imamate. Each doctrine because of its content requires its own kind of presentation.

It cannot be overemphasized that work should be done systematically. A written file should be maintained for each individual for whom da’wa is being made. The second chapter notes various spiritual types and ways of approach, changing the focus from differences in the content of information to differences in the kinds of people who receive it. A written evaluation of each individual’s spiritual typology should be made. This means that one must find opportunities to ask the individual what his beliefs and practices are. A second sheet should be taken to evaluate the ways of approach and plan

specifically in what situations they can be implemented.

The third chapter argues for setting goals of spiritual change. This should also be evaluated for each individual, based on the spiritual profile that has already been made. It is no use to spend time convincing people of what they already believe. On the other hand, unless a systematic plan is made, important goals will be forgotten.

The fourth chapter points out the differences between Islamic and Christian beliefs, while the fifth chapter points out the differences in practice. These chapters are valuable for refining the spiritual profile and the goals already made in chapters two and three. Chapter six provides similar material from the point of view of the secular challenges of the modern world as well as from non-Christian traditions.

Chapter seven gives a survey of the missionizing practices of Christians. It evaluates them, showing why most of them are inappropriate in Islam. However, some tips on da'wa can be gleaned from them. But for the most part, they are useful to know in order to avoid them. Chapter seven also proposes an Islamically based model for doing da'wa. It is not meant to be followed literally, but as a point of departure for developing a working and effective program that takes little time and money. It can be adapted to the needs of individuals, partners or couples, or small, informal groups.

Chapter eight is a study of the passages in the holy Qur'an that contain the expression "people of the Book" and give guidance on how to relate to them. This guidance is in sum an excellent rule of da'wa outlined in sixteen points. Anyone attempting da'wa should memorize this sixteen-point da'wa plan and keep it constantly in mind while dealing with the people of the Book.

Chapter nine is an appendix, giving general guidance to the use of the Bible and at the same time forming a bridge to the following parts, where the Biblical support for Islamic belief and practice is overwhelmingly copious. It points out some of the pitfalls in using the Bible.

These missiological essays were written not only to inspire commitment to inviting people to the right path, but to make people realize how important doing so actually is. It is a matter of survival.

Thomas McElwain

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