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Evidencing Islam with the Bible

This book is a guide to presenting Islam to people from a background in which the Bible has had a particular religious role. Little has been said about people from other traditions, although much is also applicable throughout the world. There are points of commonality between Islam and the other classical written traditions, and these can be used to advantage. There are practices in common as well as much evidence in favor of Islam in the classical texts of the many religions of the world. This final chapter examines some of the ways the Bible can be used by the Muslim engaged in da'wa, the invitation to Islam among those whose background is in a traditionally Christian country.

The Bible contains what Muslims refer to as the Tawrat, Zabur, and Injil, and is the holy book of Christianity. It is comprised of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The New Testament is made up of four gospels, the book of Acts, some letters, and the book of Revelation. Other early writings, both letters and gospels, exist, but were not included in the New Testament by the Church fathers who decided what should be accepted and what not. The Old Testament is made up of the Jewish canon: the books of Moses (as), the prophets and the writings. There is some disagreement about the inclusion of another group of writings called the Apocrypha. This whole collection may have been written over a period as great as 1600 years. It contains at least 68 distinct books, but altogether is called the Bible.

There are several similarities and contrasts between the Bible and the Qur'an. Both are books of divine revelation, both contain the true faith, and both are easily accessible. For the most part, they are also consistent with one another. However, the Bible is different in several ways. First of all, it is a collection from many writers, so that it cannot be evaluated as to its validity and genuineness as a whole. Each part has to be judged for itself. The habit of publishing these writings in one volume clouds the issue. It is as though the Qur'an, a collection of both weak and strong ahadith, and the Arabian Nights were published all in one volume.

That would not detract from the validity of the Qur'an, but it would present some problems. Those problems are the ones we meet in the Bible. Secondly, the Bible is uneven in transmission. Some of it is undoubtedly transmitted nearly perfectly, while other parts are clearly defective. Finally, the Bible as we have it in the best sources is written in Hebrew with some Aramaic portions, and Greek. The Qur'an is

consistently written in Arabic. All of these matters have to be taken into account in using the Bible.

There are two traditional ways by which Muslims use the Bible. The first is to point to textual criticism, the research done by Christian and liberal Jewish scholars showing the Bible to be defective. The conclusion is that the Bible is unreliable, and therefore Christianity is unreliable. This approach is sometimes effective in drawing some people to Islam. However, it has two weaknesses. Textual criticism itself as a method is questionable, and to appeal to it in the case of the Bible is to invite a similar approach on the part of Christians in reference to the holy Qur'an. The result is often name–calling rather than progress in finding truth.

The second traditional way by which Muslims make use of the Bible is to select passages that seem to support Islam, specifically in the matter of the oneness of Allah and the prophethood of Muhammad (as). It appears that a great deal could be done in this area that has not yet been done. Somewhat inconsistently, some people use both approaches at the same time.

Considering the unevenness of the Bible, Christians can and do draw from it support for their own positions. Most such support is based on clearly biased translations, and these are almost never published in parallel with the original. Every text that can be construed ambiguously is turned in translation towards the support of the Trinity, the atoning death of Jesus (as), and the authority of the Church. This makes it difficult for the Muslim to gain the expertise necessary to meet Christian arguments. Such texts have to be painstakingly evaluated in the original.

The facile answer that Muslims can give is that what appears to disagree with Islam is clearly a corruption of the text. For the most part, this will be true. In dialogue with non–Muslims, the Muslim must protect him or herself by maintaining that the Biblical text contains the truth, but is not itself the truth. However, as more and more research is done, we find that more and more of the Bible in fact supports Islam, and less and less is actually dubious.

Some Biblical sources for Islamic beliefs and practices have already been given in Chapter One. Parts Two and Three of this book give fairly comprehensive sources for most Islamic principles, sometimes in comprehensive detail. Given that Islam in all five schools of jurisprudence is based are the holy Qur'an and hadith literature as interpreted in various ways, the wealth of detail given in this book ought to suffice for most purposes.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the general principles of how the Bible can be used. The underlying presupposition is that Muslims, in appealing to textual criticism to undermine the Bible and consequently Christianity with it, and in appealing to a selection of texts to support the Prophet of Islam (as), are not taking advantage of the full potential. Even scholars who study the Bible generally follow a particular Islamic form of criticism. This criticism is based on the idea that the Bible is greatly corrupted and must be examined with scholarly care to re–establish the original references to Muhammad (as). Their efforts may or may not be fruitful. It is not my purpose to enter that subject. That focus, however,

has led to the neglect of a plethora of texts existing in the Bible as we have it in its present state, texts that clearly support Islam without any scholarly apparatus needed to make it apparent. Other texts become clear with a minimum of scholarly study, mainly pointing out biases in translation of the original Hebrew and Greek.

Muslims ought not to fear to use the Bible in defence of Islam. The argument of corruption only makes it easier to do so, since one can always fall back on that when confronted by Christians quoting a text that is difficult to manage. The misquoting of ambiguous Pauline texts is the whole basis of the Biblical justification of Christian doctrine. Since Paul never met Jesus (as) and was not one of the twelve apostles, one is always justified in rejecting his writings out of hand. In so doing one is immediately relieved of nearly all of the problematical material in the Christian Bible. I believe that Paul can be used effectively in the support of Islam, but for the most part that requires the depth of textual criticism and professional expertise that some Muslim scholars are already applying to the text.

It is easy to fall into confrontational debate with Christians by appealing to the Bible, especially in a proof–text manner. It is better to appeal to the Bible in an informal and relaxed circle with the Bible forming part of a liturgical introduction to the group event as described in Chapter Seven. Merely reading a series of texts that support Islam and allowing them to become the starting point for friendly discussion is better than a confrontational situation. I have sometimes found Christian missionaries so ready to disagree, that I have got them to disagree with their own arguments just because they came from me in a situation they considered confrontational.

Of course the Bible can be used at times to rid oneself of fruitless contacts, such as visiting Jehovah's Witnesses. It can be amusing to watch them leave after reading Daniel 6:10, where prayer in prostration is presented as worth risking one's life for. If you offer to teach them to pray, they inevitably remember another appointment.

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