

EVANGELISM AMONG MUSLIMS

F.S. Khair-Ullah

Dr. Khair-Ullah, Lahore, Pakistan, is Director of the Creative Writing Project of the Christian Publishing House of Lahore.

The intention of this paper is not to provide ready made answers to any of the problems discussed but to raise certain issues to stimulate thought and discussion. The paper also does not claim to present a well-thought-out strategy among the Muslims — an evangelist must keep his tactics in a fluid state and act according to the situation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I have leaned heavily on the rich experiences of many past and present writers who devoted the best of their lives as evangelists among the Muslims. I would strongly recommend all those who are interested in the subject to study their works diligently.

First, we must realize that Islam is not merely a religion; but a complete code of life. We who live in Pakistan know this very well and we become all the more conscious of it when we try to separate our religion and nationality. This fact may not be fully appreciated by others than the nationals themselves and therefore it needs to be stressed at some length.

In February, 1974, an Islamic Summit Conference of all the Muslim states was held in the historic city of Lahore — where in 1940 a resolution was passed by the Muslim League demanding a separate homeland for the Muslims of India where they would be free to practice their religion without hindrance. The aim of the Summit Conference was to stress the unity of all Muslim countries. It was a wonderful experience for one to have gone through. Radio, television, newspapers, and magazines all were harnessed to emphasize the Islamic spirit of the occasion. No sensitive heart could be unaware of the thrill of the religious fervor displayed by the common people. To watch the live televised transmission of the Jumma prayers from the Badshahi Mosque, was to feel the sense of brotherhood, the pride of belonging to a fellowship of all believers in One God from Algiers to Indonesia.

We as Pakistani Christians had a divided feeling. We could feel what our compatriots were feeling and yet we were not fully with them. It was only when the Lebanese delegation arrived and their foreign minister, who is a Christian, made a statement that some of us partly associated ourselves with what was going on. Our depressed spirits further recovered a bit on the arrival of the patriarch of Antioch along with a group of Arab Christians who threw their weight on the Muslim side on the question of Jerusalem. Our sense of inferiority in belonging to a "rootless minority" was to some extent overcome. This peculiar problem of the Christians was further limelighted by two letters that appeared one after another in *The Pakistan Times*, an English daily, on February 26. The first one was by Mrs. Khanna, a Christian lady, who has from time to time written articles and letters on the subject of problems of

Pakistani Christians. She advocated that we Pakistani Christians should fully associate ourselves with our countrymen and consider ourselves as Pakistanis first and Christians afterwards. She even went to the extent of blaming the "British-sent" missionaries for making us Christians foreigners in our own country. Mr. Joshua Fazal Din — a Christian leader and a former deputy minister in one of the former governments — in his rejoinder in the same paper (March 4) rightly stressed the fact that we are Christians first and Pakistani afterwards. He further paid tribute to the missionaries for the wonderful contribution they had made to the various languages and literature, and who had served our country by their humanitarian institutions at the grass roots. Mr. Fazal Din pointed out that Mrs. Khanna's confusion was due to her ignorance of the fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam. Christianity gives precedence to religion, while in Islam the state and religion tend to merge into one another. He went on to say, "It is because of this clear teaching of Christianity that over the ages many people have been leaving their homelands as pilgrims whenever they have felt that their own state was refusing to 'accept' them as full citizens 'in the name of Christ.'"

If this is how the Christian leaders feel, how much more must a Muslim feel on this question of religion and nationality. The Gospel is not preached in a vacuum — it is to be preached to men and women who have feelings and an intellect and a will. Unless we appreciate the social and cultural complex within which they exist, we cannot effectively communicate the Gospel to them. A Muslim is not simply an individual — he is a member of a close-knit society and within it a member of an even closer-knit family — an idea that the people from the West may not be able to imagine. A Muslim on hearing the call of our Lord is subjected to many conflicting loyalties — those of family, of society, and the state, besides the personal inner conflicts. How true what our Lord said regarding this matter: "Do not think I have come to bring peace on earth. I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother..., and a man's foes will be those of his own household."

This is the price that a follower of Christ has to pay, but can we help him to resolve some of his difficulties?

Kenneth Cragg raises this question, "Is it possible to familiarize the Muslim with the truth that to become a Christian is not merely a shift of communities, that it does not rob Muslim society, as such, of a potential servant and the local community, as such, of a loving son? How can we demonstrate that to become a Christian is to remain responsible in some sense for 'Muslim' citizenship?"

Cragg has raised this question in regard to that of baptism. He earlier stated, "In the first place Muslim society is not individualistic but communal. Therefore, is the individual the appropriate unit of baptism? Perhaps forms of the new allegiance might be more meaningfully fulfilled in community. Official baptism may have in Muslim eyes an appearance of treason, because of strong communal and national ties to Islam. In the New Testament days and in the modern West, baptism does not mean a rejection of particular citizenship. In the modern East it seems to mean that. The Muslim in the Arab world thinks of the Christian Church as a separate *millet* perhaps with different language, cer-

tainly with a different 'ethos' and different cohesion. What is a renunciation of sin looks to one's kin as denunciation of all that makes one 'belong.'

The problem for which Cragg is seeking a solution is that of the new convert finding himself being cut off from his old society and of his not being accepted in the local Christian church. He writes a little further, "The newer churches of Western planting, especially in the Arab world" (and I would include Pakistan in this too although for other reasons!) are not spontaneously hospitable to the Muslim seeker. His good faith may be doubted, his presence mistrusted and his interest questioned."

J.T. Addison gives reasons why the work among the Muslims of India was neglected. One reason he gives is that very few are adequately equipped for such work. "The chief reason, of course, is that since Muslims...are...a peculiarly exclusive and unresponsive minority, it has always been easy to turn from them to more readily exploited opportunities. And of such opportunities India has long had many to offer, with its mass movements, for many years past, among the depressed classes and the lower castes. It is only natural that the attention of most missions should have been chiefly absorbed in meeting the demands of those who have been eager to accept Christianity rather than in laboring to change the hearts of those who despise and reject it. But, however plain the reasons may be, the more difficult case has suffered in consequence. Few missionaries have been set apart for this special task; there is a deplorable lack of Indian evangelists capable of dealing with Muslims effectively; and there is extremely little Christian literature."

What was true in 1942 in pre-partition India is even more true in Pakistan in 1974. Among the nationals, except for the Rev. Aslam Khan, himself a Muslim convert, of St. Andrew's Brotherhood, Lahore, I cannot recall any minister whose work is exclusively among the Muslims.

Some of the earlier missionaries succeeded because they made themselves one with the people. They mastered their language, they learned their way of living and adopted their dress, and identified themselves with them completely. You have only to read the thrilling account of Dr. Pennell's experiences as he moved about in Pathan dress, even mistaken by the British and not allowed to travel in a railway compartment reserved for "Europeans only." If you wish to reach the heart of the people, you have to be one with them to win their trust and confidence. If we are the agents of "reconciliation" can less be expected from us than what our Lord did for us by being born among us and living as one of us?

To get to the heart of a Muslim, there are at least four barriers to be crossed — or he has to cross some of these barriers to arrive at a point where he can accept the discipleship of our Lord.

There is the barrier of *culture and nationality*, and then the *intellectual* and the *emotional* barrier, and finally the barrier of "will" which must be surrendered before Christ can come into our hearts.

I think the best way to learn something of the strategy required to break down these barriers is to study some of the methods successfully employed in the past. It is obvious that they would vary from place to place and from time to time. We should not rely too much on these skills

for it is, after all, the Spirit that bloweth where it listeth, but still our Lord told his disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Fishing is a game of skill and patience and we too must acquire these two qualities.

The first of the evangelical missionaries who had a special burden for the Muslims was Henry Martyn (1781-1812). His initial effort was to make the New Testament available to Muslims in their languages, so he set out to make translations in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic. Combined with this he used the older method of street preaching. It was during one of these street sermons that an influential Muslim, a keeper of the jewels of the court of Oudh, Sheikh Salih, while standing on the fringe of that group, heard Henry Martyn preach in his language. Curiosity led him to seek the place of this Englishman. He was able to persuade Sabat, who was assisting Martyn with the translation, to make him the calligrapher. As he copied out the Gospel in a fair hand for lithoprinting he was converted and was baptized in 1810 by the Rev. David Brown, taking the name of Abdul Masih ("the slave of Christ"). Bishop Heber ordained him as the first native priest of the Anglican church. "He understood the implication of the Gospel and years before medical missions were known in India (indeed any organized missions, since Martyn and his successors were East India Company chaplains), Abdul Masih established a dispensary for which he qualified himself and on which he spent his own personal resources. It was his pioneer example that stimulated English medical ministry in the sub-continent."

Sometimes God gives to one person the gift of winning many souls — "those who turn many to righteousness shall shine like the stars for ever and ever." One of these stars was Pfander (1803-1865). In 1820 he was at Basle Missionary college. He was a brilliant linguist and the college decided that he should translate the Scriptures in the Asiatic languages; for this purpose he went to Armenia in 1825. Here he realized that preaching the Gospel among the Muslims could not be done in the same way as it is done in the West. The Muslims possessed a Holy Book which they regarded as heaven-sent and they considered the Christian Scriptures as abrogated. So he set himself to study the Quran and the Hadith. His study convinced him that millions of Muslims who believe on Allah and the Quran and the Prophet of Arabia could be easily won for Christ, the Lord of the Universe, if only they were guided aright. He further realized that the Christians of that area had been dominated by Muslims and their theology, and many had embraced Islam. Pfander wanted to win back these lost sheep and to show to the Muslims the right path, so he wrote his famous book *The Balance of Truth* (Mizan-ul-Haq) in 1829. In 1835 he came to India and learnt Urdu and completed his *Mizan-ul-Haq*. Pfander carried on his bazaar preaching and public debates.

In 1845 one of the government servants wrote a reply to *The Balance of Truth*. Then followed a series of books by Muslim scholars refuting Christianity. Pfander made an appeal to his European friends to send him the latest theological books which would help him to reply to the Muslim scholars. The interesting background is that it was the Roman Catholic bishop and his priests who used to supply to the Muslim scholars books by Strauss, Feuerbach, and others, so that the Protestants be

put to shame. They also supplied them the books of the early heresiarchs like Marcion, the Ebionites, Arius, and others.

The enemy's favorite weapon is to divide the ranks of God's people and thereby neutralize and make of no effect God's "Good News." Even today this is happening in Pakistan. One of the separated groups of the church by attacking another group in its magazine, supplies enough material to the Muslims to accuse us of changing the Scriptures. Every attempt to make a new translation meets with this objection from this body, encouraging various Muslim groups to attack the Christians.

"Pfander possessed three requisites for public controversy — absolute command of the subject; absolute command of the language-idiom, the thought-idiom and the manner-idiom of the people with whom he spoke; and absolute command of himself."

One of the most memorable public controversies was held at Agra. Pfander was assisted by the Rev. Thomas Valpy French, later bishop of Lahore. "Both sides claimed the victory of course, but two of the ablest of the Sheikhs on the Muslim side afterwards came out for Christ — names ever memorable in Muslim-missionary annals, Imad-ud-din and Safdar Ali."

Maulvi Imad-ud-din wrote many books on Islam. He was a learned person and used his knowledge most profitably in the service of his Lord. Unfortunately, most of his books are now out of print. He was the first of the nationals who produced a great deal of literature for the Muslims. He was very fortunate that his patron was Bishop French, himself a keen worker among the Muslims and participant in public debates. It was Bishop French's idea to have a divinity college in Lahore, primarily for the converts from Islam, so that they could be given full training and go and work among the Muslims. The old method of public debate may be out, but the debate continues in a different form. Sometimes it still takes place in the correspondence columns of a newspaper. Recently a lively controversy took place in *The Pakistan Times* over the Gospel of Barnabas. Dr. Jan Slomp of the Christian Study Centre, Rawalpindi, took up the cudgels on behalf of the Christians. But the fight was neither equal nor just. Jan Slomp's rejoinder was never given in full, and his replies were allowed to be scrutinized by his adversary before they were printed so that a counter-reply appeared almost immediately after his letter, thereby giving the impression that the Muslims had an answer ready with no loss of time.

A great deal of anti-Christian material is being produced in the country. It is the duty of Christians to see that suitable answers are available for those who are honestly interested in the truth. Bishop Lefroy long ago realized that an evangelist among the Muslims needed to possess these qualities: "He must have a complete mastery of the Quran in Arabic and must have a thorough knowledge of the commentaries, enriched by an acquaintance with theological classics of Islam. But training will be of little use unless he displays in argument entire fairness and complete good temper and patience. To these must be added a large-hearted sympathy that will prompt him to lead his opponent on from truth he already knows to Christ, the TRUTH. And never for an instant must he lose hope."

Public debate and controversy may break down the intellectual barrier, but this alone rarely wins a person's heart. Lefroy realized this: "Most of the older controversial literature on the Christian side," he commented, "is ... very *hard* indeed, as though intended rather to confute the enemy than to win the disguised friend. Similarly, much of our preaching seems to me rather as though we were hoping to convert men by throwing brickbats at them, in the form of truth."

The first great error that the Christians made was to wage the Crusades — the effects of which are felt even to this day in Muslim-Christian relationships. Even around the 1530s Erasmus wrote, "The best way and most effectual to overcome and win Turks would be if they shall perceive that thing which Christ taught and expressed in His life to shine in us ... in my mind it were best before we should try with them in battle to attack them with epistles and some little books."

In the twentieth century we have moved much further than the strategy of conflict. The idea of dialogue is another way of saying that we together should seek to find the truth. If we want others to know about our faith, it is as much our duty to study honestly *their* faith as well. Most of the writers of the present century advise us to avoid the attitude of antagonism — an attitude that has been bedeviling our relationships down the centuries since the Crusades. We must be honest in recognizing the best that is in Islam. David Brown in his book *The Way of the Prophet*, (1962) writes:

"Thus to decry Muhammad for his failings is to forget his heroism and essential truth of his prophetic message: to concentrate on Qur'anic contradictions and errors is to miss its teaching about God's activity in nature, or the duties of mankind: to attack Islam because of what it failed to do is to forget the Ages of Splendour and the contributions which Islam has made to the culture of Western Europe. Thus the desire to refute and to destroy all too easily blinds the Christian to those evidences of God's mercy which he may be able to discern within Islam... But... this is a wrong way to witness because it confirms the Muslim in his Islam, and therefore, in his prejudice against Christ and his Cross. The natural reaction of any man when his beliefs are attacked is to maintain them the more resolutely and even to discover better reasons for doing so.... The results of missionary preaching during the past century and half demonstrate with tragic clearness how unproductive such method really is."

Of late there has been recognition among Muslims of how honestly Christian scholars have studied Islam. Here is the view of Dr. Sadeg Razazadeh Shafaq, Head of the Department of Philosophy, Tehran University, Iran. He was addressing the International Islamic Colloquium held in Lahore in 1958. It was given under the title "Christianity and Islam," in the section on Islam's attitude towards and relations with other faiths. "As I have already indicated in one of the sessions of the Continuing Committee of the Muslim-Christian Co-operation, the universities of both faiths should create special institutions studying Islam and Christianity under modern light. Such institutions will help gradually to do away with the traditional misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and misinterpretations. In this respect, Christendom is already far ahead of the Islamic world, for many centers of study of comparative religion have been set to work in Europe and America, with good results."

Here is another view of a younger man, Muhammad Daud Rahbar, taken from his review of Cragg's book, *The Call of the Minaret*, "With justification he (Cragg) deplores the ignorance among the Muslims about what Christianity is and means (pp.246-247). How impatient the Christian scholar could feel when a Muslim scholar talks polemically without knowledge of the elements of Christianity, just as a similar ignorance about Islam on the part of Christians vexes the Muslim. But the position is one of unbalance. Christians have studied Islam with more depth than might have been expected from any non-Muslim community. Muslims often remark that such study is perverted and wrongly motivated. But at least it is a study and it is "motivated." Do we not have among Muslims, as a kind of counterpart, a "motivated" ignorance of Christianity?"

"Can any Muslim scholar in the whole Islamic world claim with conviction that he knows more about Christianity than the average Christian Islamicist in a Western University knows about Islam? Do not we Muslims rather talk about Christianity from ignorance than from adequate knowledge?"

To help our Muslim brother to cross the intellectual barrier, we must supply him with the best possible literature on the subject. Unfortunately, there is an utter lack of new and up-to-date literature for this purpose in our language. Even our apologetic literature is old material rehashed. We need scholars who would keep in touch with all that is being written by Muslims about Islam. There are movements within Islam which are questioning some of the old orthodox dogmas and practices, on which traditional Islam has been built. In their struggle we should be able to help them to find the truth. The scholars should also keep track of all that is being written about Christianity by Muslims and to give suitable reply where it is needed. Muslim scholars have not been sitting idle, they have been building up a great offensive and defensive bulwark in their books to forestall any Christian incursions into Islam. It is our duty to provide both the Muslim and the Christian with material which would help him to see the truth, and make up his own mind. Anyone reading the cleverly written article in the Urdu Encyclopaedia of Islam on Injil (Gospels) would need to know the correct Christian point of view to avoid falling victim to a scholarly misrepresentation of truth. There is a spate of anti-Christian literature produced by the Ahmadiyas and the Jam'at-i-Islami and it is our responsibility to provide correct guidance to the people. It is not only the "apologetic" literature that is needed. People are hungry for devotional material (compare some of the Sufi and other Muslim devotional material) and the material connected with the life of Jesus Christ, for whom they have great admiration. And even though the Muslims do not believe that Jesus Christ was crucified, some of them cannot resist being attracted by the beauty of the whole situation.

A young Pakistani Muslim poet, Hassan Bakht, published his collection of Urdu poems under the title *Har Shakh-i-gul Salib* ("Every Branch of the Flower — a Cross"). Most of the poems are woven around the idea of the cross as a symbol of suffering and sacrifice. Let me translate one of the typical verses, "Bakht, have you felt the power of the Cross? It spreads out its arms inviting you to an embrace."

Christian reading rooms and bookshops have played an important part in winning people to Christ. My own father was converted by a series of visits to a reading room set up by Mr. Hughes, an Islamic scholar, and Dr. Jukes in Peshawar. My father had bought a few books and taken them home, but was not allowed to study them. If it had not been for Said Shah, the national attendant of the bookshop who discovered my father's difficulty and invited him to his house for a meal and provided opportunity to read to his heart's content, he would never have come to follow Jesus.

A wonderful piece of work in teaching the pure Word of God to people is being carried on by the Bible Correspondence School in Pakistan. Thousands of Muslims are taking these courses. In spite of opposition from various quarters, the work is progressing wonderfully. May we be able to devise ways of following up those whom the Word of God has touched and who wish to take the next step.

We should praise God that in an Islamic country like Pakistan the doors are still open to preach the Gospel. Only recently, the Central Minister of Religious Affairs and Information, while addressing a group of Christians claimed, "The minorities in Pakistan were enjoying the same religious rights and privileges which could be favorably compared with any country. There was full freedom of propagation of any faith in Pakistan. What we only want is that the sentiments of the followers of other religions must be respected."

Are we fully using these opportunities? Are we also prepared for such a time when our expatriate friends will have to leave the country? Eric W. Bethmann, in an excellent book, *Bridge to Islam*, says, "It might happen that some countries will close their doors completely to all foreigners. That would be regrettable. Yet it does not matter by whom Christ is proclaimed, whether by foreigners or nationals of the country. The witness of the latter will be more valuable and eventually the work will be done by them. These national workers often become more effective by the withdrawal of the foreign political influence, because horrible accusations that they are fifth columnists, tools in the hands of a foreign power, traitors to their own country, cannot be hurled against them any more. If they now proclaim the message of Christ, then they witness for Christ and for him alone."

But has the national church been prepared for this work? I think this is the weakest part of our program. The Greeks who wanted to see Jesus came to Philip, because he apparently had a Greek name. Will our Pakistani brothers come to us to inquire about Jesus? Unhappily the Pakistani church is not prepared for it. There are so many factions and there is such disunity among us that our witness among our Muslim brothers is a cause of offense. We display no love among ourselves, fight tooth and nail, run to the non-Christian courts, and drag the name of our Lord into the dust — "Let not those who hope in thee be put to shame through me, O Lord God of hosts; let not those who seek thee be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel" (Psa. 69:6).

Our preaching will be of no effect until there is a real repentance and revival in the church. Only then we can go out and proclaim Christ as our Lord, and witness to him through our life, through our love and concern for our Muslim brothers.

The intellectual, the social, the emotional barriers may be overcome, but unless by the grace of God we touch another heart with love, it may never really come to know the much greater and wonderful love of God for him. A recent convert who was struggling with the social and intellectual barriers, while still a Muslim wrote these words, "It is stimulating to think that cases of conversion through sheer *reasoning* between dogmas of two religions are very rare, perhaps non-existent. In cases of conversion where prosperity, social status, security, vengeance against native society, emotional experimentation and the like, are not the motives, the change of faith is motivated perhaps infinitely more frequently by love for charming virtues, of a magnetic person, or love for a group of lovable associates, than by cold religious arithmetic."

It was this loving friendship of some people that won Dr. Muhammad Daud Rahbar finally to Christ. I think the message for the twentieth-century evangelist among the Muslims is perhaps best given in these words:

"In place of a frontal attack launched on the intellectual level, the best of modern missionaries to Islam pursue a mode of approach which was seldom neglected by their predecessors but which was never quite trusted to bear full fruit — the method of intimate personal fellowship, of loving service, of sympathetic testimony, and of united prayer. Believing that the essence of conversion is direct experience of the saving power of Christ, they seek to lead the Muslim to that experience by helping him to sense his deepest needs, by appealing to what he has already known of God in his inner life, and by sharing with him what Christ has done for them. In counting upon Christ himself, and not theories about him, to exert the drawing power, they are aided by the fact that 'the character of Christ does attract the Mohammedan and is doing so more and more.... The most hopeful note in the Islamic world today is the, to many, irresistible attraction of the Person of Jesus Christ.' To make the Muslim feel that attraction through deepening friendship, through a guided study of the New Testament, through leisurely conference, and through that prayer together which confesses God's Spirit alone can convert — this is the primary aim on which all else depends."

EVANGELIZATION AMONG MUSLIMS STRATEGY GROUP REPORT

Chairman: Dennis Clark
Secretary: Phil Parshall

Preamble:

In a packed room with over 75 nationals and missionaries in attendance, the great and crucial issues of Muslim evangelism were discussed. The input of Christian ministers from countries as geographically diverse as Indonesia and Morocco added significantly to the cross-pollination of views regarding the various methodological options open to the servant of Jesus Christ. An informed Christian leader challenged the group by stating that "never in recent history have so many Muslims been coming to Christ." Yet the reality of the over 600 million adherents of Islam yet to be evangelized left a sobering impression on the gathered participants.

Methodology:

A number of traditional means of Muslim evangelism were suggested such as visitation, films, radio, institutional outreach, studied ministry, open air meetings, literary programs, reading rooms, and tract distribution. However, several more creative postulations evolved as the delegates interacted with each other. In various areas indigenous drama and musical programs have been successfully presented as a means of communicating the Gospel. Particularly, it was felt, Christmas and Easter provide ready-made opportunities for this form of sharing Christ.

Recently a healing campaign took place in a major city of the Islamic world. Over 20,000 people stood in rapt attention in a littered brick field to hear the message of a visiting evangelist. The response was so great that on the fourth night the police moved in and arrested the five members of the preaching-healing team. All were declared persona non grata and expelled from the country. Perhaps such a ministry on a discreet church-related basis could be used of the Lord as have the similar great campaigns of Latin America.

Correspondence schools such as those found in Lebanon and Bangladesh continue to prove useful in seed sowing. It was agreed that more emphasis must be placed on follow-up through rallies and camps in order to obtain maximum results from these efforts.

Several experiments are under way with the use of "Fraternalities of New Believers" as a type of halfway house for the purpose of winning and disciplining Muslims. A culturally attractive form of worship is adopted with the view of minimizing societal dislocation for the inferior.

The use of cross-cultural national missionaries from within the area now under review was a proposal accepted by all present. In the past teams of Indonesians have visited several Asian countries, the most notable of which was Pakistan. Their ministry was well received. It is hoped that in the near future a team of Asian or Middle East converted Muslims can minister on a much broader basis.