

ful, for example, quoting Mark Beaumont's quote of the ninth century Christian theologian, Abu Ra'ita, 'It wasn't a case of God taking a son to himself, but rather that the eternal Word or Son took "flesh" to himself' (83).

In unpacking and explaining the Trinity in Chapter 5, Robert has some lovely turns of phrase like, 'Biblical monotheism is not about mathematics but uniqueness, incomparability and depth' (92). His discussion on the implications for the individual and community of Islamic 'Tawhid' (radical 'oneness') over and against the rich relational nature of a Triune God is perceptive and refreshing.

Chapter 8 (the final chapter) affirms the necessity of the Holy Spirit to open eyes, underlines the certain assurance that faith in Jesus the Messiah confers, and gives some signs of hope where new communities of BMBs are flourishing, e.g. the growing number of Iranian believers.

Any reservations? There is some repetition of themes and cross-referencing, which can be a little frustrating, but otherwise the writing is lucid and uplifting.

I recommend this book because it glorifies our Triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It reminded me of the Trinity's 'deep unity' that surpasses anything that sterile radical monotheism can offer the human condition – body and soul. We are reminded that 'truth' and not methodology is what presents Christ authentically to Muslims and that the message of Scripture fits with the world we experience (132).

Read this book for your soul alone and you will be blessed.

Reviewed by Keith Fraser-Smith

Muslims of the Arab world have been Keith's focus for more than 40 years. He has served in a variety of leadership roles with AWM in Media, the Middle East, Arabian Peninsula, Globalization and UK ministry and is now leading a local CPM team in the UK. Among his many interests is his pleasure in writing book reviews.

Christ Above All: Conversational Evangelism with People of Other Faiths

by Daniel Shayesteh

Sydney, Australia: Talesh Books, 2003 & 2010, 239 pages

Dr. Daniel Shayesteh (PhD in Philosophy) has written a refreshing and encouraging book that does a *great job* of explaining how to have effective conversations about truth, God and the Gospel, with men and women of all of the major faiths and ideologies

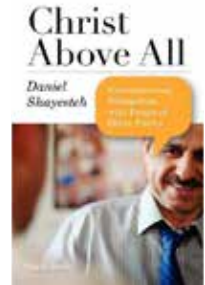
that are ‘out there’. Shayesteh’s own pilgrimage to faith in Christ from Islam,⁹ led him, an Iranian, to do his doctoral studies in philosophy (in Turkey), in which he studied the philosophies and worldviews of major world religions. He is very well equipped to speak with authority and confidence in declaring that Christ is truly *above all* other competing belief systems.

In this relatively short book, Shayesteh has done a masterful job of concisely summing up the core teachings of the world’s major ideologies (except Animism). He devotes a relatively short chapter to each in turn: Communism, Secular Humanism, the New Age, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Islam and Christianity. Shayesteh is refreshingly direct in expressing his conviction that we must seek to *convert* people from all other belief systems to the only true one—Christianity. His response to the arrival of so many immigrants from the major world religions into the West is very frank: ‘It is the conviction of this writer that western Christians... must convert these immigrants or be converted by them’ (vii). He has written this book because he has found that Christians are typically not up to the challenge of defending and explaining Christian truth to all peoples. Shayesteh is convinced that skilled use of natural reasoning can enable Christians to expose the weaknesses in all other worldviews, and convince people of the truth in Christ, so that they can be saved through him (ix). Listen to him express his strong confidence and conviction:

It is the contention of this writer that *the Christian faith is relevant to all of life and has every explanation for everything in all dimensions of life*. On the other hand, non-Christian religions and philosophies have deep problems in their explanations of life and reality. If we can point out what these problems are and present a biblical answer, it is possible that many will be enlightened....

It is imperative that we understand the problems with non-Christian worldviews and prepare ourselves to counter them with *attractive and irrefutable reasoning from the Bible* so that they can receive the message of Christ with their mind, heart and soul and in the understanding of it to rejoice in it. (vii, *emphasis added*)

One of the most interesting aspects of his argument is his apparent conviction that non-Christians have the *capacity* to understand the truth and to decide whether they will believe it or not: ‘God has ordained that through biblical understanding and reasoning we can be winners of souls for his kingdom’ (ix). Shayesteh is confident that if non-believers were shown the superiority of Christ in comparison to their own



9. Shayesteh tells the powerful story of his conversion in *The House I Left Behind: A Journey from Islam to Christ* (Talesh Books, 2012). I heard him tell his story to a conference for BMBS in September 2012. The story is very compelling and gives one more context to appreciate this particular book.

gods, they would surely give their hearts to Christ (x). Reading between the lines, I do not think that Shayesteh is discounting the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing people to Christ. Rather, he is stressing that the Holy Spirit can use reason and truth to open the eyes of people to the Gospel. He wants us to use our God given ability to explain Christian faith to non-believers in compelling ways.

Following this stunningly positive and confident preface, Shayesteh goes on in his first chapter to argue that all people need to have *intelligent reasons* for everything they believe and for choosing whom they follow. He reminds us that biblical Christianity is the only world faith that continually calls its adherents to examine their own beliefs deeply and be sure that they know and are obeying the truth. Listen to Shayesteh explain this:

If people discover that their philosophy or their god is against freedom, unity and peace, they will be challenged and motivated to search for the truth. Eventually they will believe in Christ.

We can be confident that there are clear and rational reasons for our faith in Christ and we make sure we are equipped to defend it against all other beliefs and religions.... We need to challenge the followers of all beliefs and philosophies that have rejected reason and believe in the randomness of evolution or in dictatorship. They need to understand that intellectual honesty and integrity stands against all philosophies that make no distinction between right and wrong.

We Christians are better able than the followers of other beliefs to answer questions of life because our faith offers certainty to people's hearts and through reason is proved true and superior to other faiths or philosophies. (15)

Following his two opening chapters, Shayesteh spends more than a third of the book presenting and engaging with nine belief systems (listed above). In each chapter he concisely presents the core of the belief system, and then has a lengthier section in which he poses a series of questions of the belief systems and explains why the answers that each belief system gives to these questions are unsatisfactory. In his discussion of Islam, he focuses much attention on the Islamic reality/teaching that Allah inspires Sin. He charges Islam with teaching that Allah has evil purposes in creation. Listen to him explain this perspective:

Though Muslims believe in the uniqueness, purity and holiness of Allah, the statements in the Qur'an about the inspiration of sin in humankind and Satan by Allah prove the opposite.

Why does Allah blame people for their rebellion, if he himself has desired and created them to be rebellious (a sinner)? Why would a god, if he is merciful, treat the righteous in the same manner as the unrighteous? If the mercy of Allah does not protect a righteous Muslim from the horror of hell, *what else may be concluded but that Allah's mercy is tyranny?* (89, 90 emphasis added)

I found that the third and forth sections of the book offer much help for us as we engage Muslims in conversations about truth and the Gospel. In part three, Shayesteh proposes that there are *three key questions* that can and must be asked of every belief system: (1) What is sin and where does it come from? (2) What is human destiny? (3) Is the true God just? He devotes a chapter to each of these questions in turn in chapters 12 – 14.

In the fourth part, he presents examples/models of evangelistic conversations with a communist, a New Ager and a Muslim (chaps 15-17). Chapter 17, 'Dialoguing with a Muslim' is full of great insight. This chapter alone makes the book worth buying and reading. Shayesteh structures the chapter with a question or a comment from a Muslim, followed by Shayesteh's analysis and explanation of the meaning of the Muslim's comment, and then his reply to the comment. He begins the dialogue (which at 42 pages in length is his longest chapter) with a 'hypothetical' invitation from a Muslim (an Imam) for Shayesteh to become a Muslim. Both his explanations of the Muslim's words, and his own responses, offer considerable insight into how Muslims think and misunderstand Christian doctrines and Scripture. Here is just one example of the way he explains Muslim thinking:

Ali is confusing himself... His lack of knowledge has caused him to be trapped in the misinformation Muslim scholars have spread everywhere in order to dissuade their followers from reading the Bible or listening to Christians. I asked him to focus on the first step and respond to my questions, but he has refused to do so. He may do this again and again, but I will not give up and need to remind and encourage him to continually focus on the main issues... You need to pray always and ask God for the guidance of God and for his special touch. (18-2)

Shayesteh concludes his book with a fascinating presentation of the Trinity as vital for salvation. This chapter, 'No Salvation without the Trinity', confronts head on the Muslim objection to the Trinity and suggests that it is only the God of the Bible who can provide both salvation and satisfactory answers to all questions of significance. The understanding of God taught by all other belief systems utterly fails to satisfy or save any sinner.

Even though Shayesteh has been a believer in Christ for several decades, his book brims with the strong and excited confidence in God's awesome truth that is more typical of new believers. He is *profoundly* convinced that Christ is the only possible answer that satisfies humanity's greatest needs and longings. If, as you live among and talk to Muslims repeatedly and have become discouraged that you get nowhere in conversations with them, I warmly encourage you to read *Christ Above All*. God may use it to renew your enthusiasm for the gospel and the excitement and privilege we have in talking to people about Christ.

Reviewed by Don Little