

Dealing with Deedat's Legacy

By David Foster

Ahmed Deedat, the world-renowned Muslim debater, is still alive. He has authored many tracts, booklets and books. Deedat's primary strategy has been to attack Christianity as a way of promoting Islam. He furthered his vision by founding the Islamic Propagation Centre International (IPCI), which, in its heyday, was the world's largest centre for propagating Islam.

Deedat's legacy lives on, although this momentum was abruptly curtailed by two events. In 1994, Deedat was struck dumb and remains immobile to this day. A few years later, the IPCI, which operated from a massive building, dubbed the 'Bin Laden' centre, suffered a colossal legal defeat in the provincial high court. After eight years of court proceedings, involving accusations of financial mismanagement and bitter infighting between IPCI trustees, the judge finally demanded that Deedat resign as Director of the Centre. Not only so, both Deedat and his son — the heir-apparent — were dismissed from the Board of Trustees. Somehow, the IPCI survived this shake-up and continues to disseminate Deedat's materials worldwide.

It is not uncommon for Christians, when sharing their faith with Muslims, to be given literature or videotapes by Ahmed Deedat. What should we do when this happens? Ought we to familiarise ourselves with the arguments in Deedat's books and equip ourselves to share answers? Should we give out printed rebuttals, such as John

Gilchrist's excellent replies to virtually all Deedat has written (available on www.answering-islam.org)? The answer is 'Sometimes yes, sometimes no'.

Scripture tells us plainly that church leaders are responsible to refute false teachers (Titus 1:9; Acts 18:28; cf. Proverbs 26:4&5). But notice that Proverbs 26:4&5 form a couplet. The first part says, 'Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.' The second half seems to say the opposite, 'Answer a fool according to his folly...' The point is this — just as there is no absolute formula for answering a fool, there is no predetermined set of answers that must always be given to Muslim enquirers. Sometimes we ought to give an answer; at other times, it may be wiser not to. Jesus sometimes answered his antagonists' questions; sometimes he did not. In Paul's epistles we see at least three instances which require careful discernment in order to properly obey seemingly opposite instructions — sometimes to argue and sometimes not to argue (Titus 2:15-3:11; 1 Tim. 5:20-6:6; 2 Tim. 2:23-3:16).

Let me share a personal experience illustrating the wisdom of refraining from arguing. I went to Mr. Khan's home having prearranged the visit by phone. As soon as I sat down, I noticed he was prepared with a handful of Deedat's booklets on the coffee table. The Christmas season had finished just a couple weeks earlier so I was able to strike up a conversation about Christ's

birth. Before the discussion could really get under way, he pulled out one of Deedat's books and showed it to me. I was puzzled because the title did not relate to our discussion. There was no particular burning issue Khan wanted resolved. He simply had an impression of Deedat as 'the' authority on comparative religion and thought that no one could stand up to him. Pulling out this book was more a symbolic gesture than anything. If Khan had had a particular question that needed to be resolved, I might have told him we could revisit that question later. It seemed, however, that his intention was to discourage or distract me from focusing on the heart of this Bible story.

Khan's plan did not work. Instead, it gave me an opportunity to explain in five minutes why I did not want to discuss Mr. Deedat or his arguments. I told Khan that each and every one of Deedat's booklets has been refuted. I explained how Deedat's persistent efforts to undermine Christianity had culminated in an all-out attack on the Bible—the publication of *Combat Kit*. As with previous books, this one, too, had been answered, without any retraction or response from Deedat. However, this time he had gone too far. No longer willing to remain silent to attacks on the Christian faith, a diverse group of Christian leaders in Durban published a strong public rebuke of Deedat's mockery of the Holy Bible and warned him of impending judgment. This did not bring an apology but a counterattack.

The story might not have had much impact on Khan if it had ended there, without the climax. Only a few months after being warned, Deedat was crippled and struck dumb! After hearing this, Khan himself was struck dumb when it came to mentioning the name Deedat. Through the remainder of that evening, Khan did not dare to bring up any of Deedat's literature or his arguments (nor on any of my subsequent visits). I was able to carry on positively explaining the meaning of Jesus' miraculous birth, particularly the meaning of the name. Khan took some steps towards understanding that the name Jesus, Isa, means 'the Lord saves'.

We read in Proverbs 29:1, 'Whoever stubbornly refuses to accept criticism will suddenly be broken beyond repair.' When this kind of judgment befalls a man, as has clearly happened in Deedat's case, it is not difficult to help Muslims recognise the downfall for what it really is. I believe it is right to refute the arguments of false teachers, but who can argue against the obvious judgment of God when it falls on the life of an arrogant man like Deedat? (Compare Acts 13:9-12.)

Postscript

Since Deedat was stricken, a couple of church leaders and I have made three extended visits in his home. We have had significant 'discussions' with him. He communicates letter-by-letter using the blink of an eye. Tragically, he has shown no sign of a change of heart. He refuses to admit that what has happened to him implies God's judgment or any blame on his part.