

WHY PRE-EVANGELISM?

by W. Evans

Pre-evangelism is that process by which people's hearts are prepared to receive and respond positively to the Gospel. It is the precursor, therefore, to evangelism, or the presenting of the Good News of salvation. There is obviously no clear demarcation line between the two. Some may consider the former to be an integral part of the latter, in which case it's merely a question of semantics.

Pre-evangelism is distinct from evangelism in work among Muslims. This is due to Islam's innate hostility to Christianity and the number of obstacles which stand in the way of a Muslim's understanding and acceptance of the Gospel message. The chief components to preparing hearts for a positive response are the removal of the particular barriers inherent to Islam and the awakening of a sense of spiritual need which cannot be met within Islam.

Removing Barriers

The following obstacles stand in the way of a Muslim responding positively to the Gospel:

1. The concept that Islam is the last and best religion and has superseded the other monotheistic religions, especially Christianity, is inculcated into the mind of every Muslim from infancy. Why then, should they even consider the claims of an inferior religion?
2. Islam permits no defection. The law of apostasy is a formidable deterrent to even giving thought to any other religion or system which might lead

one away from Islam. Added to this is the more immediate and temporal deterrent of social and economic ostracism likely to result from defection from Islam. The Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ must begin to appear as worth more than physical life and temporal well-being before a Muslim will seriously consider its message.

3. Muslims are also unfavorably disposed towards the Gospel because of Islamic misconceptions and misrepresentations of Christianity: the Christian Bible has been corrupted; all that is still valid in it has been included in the Qur'an; the Trinity is condemned as polytheism; the "Son of God" is construed to mean physical procreation; the divinity of Christ is blasphemy; the death of Christ is turned into a masterpiece of deception; Christianity is equated with western culture and its flagrant moral looseness.

Disarming the Muslim of all these objections and misunderstandings is an essential part of that great task of pre-evangelism.

Awakening Spiritual Need

The second essential component of pre-evangelism is awakening a sense of spiritual need. Islam effectively deadens the conscience of any sense of sin as defined in Christianity. "Sin" is relegated to the transgression of a relatively restrictive list of Muslim taboos, such as eating pork, drinking wine, and very especially associating something as an associate or equal with Allah. Attitudes and acts of moral significance are largely disregarded. Every Muslim I have talked to

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3. Assessing if we should seek to establish a deeper relationship, which could depend on spiritual interest, natural common interests and similar social class, ministry priorities as to target groups, families, work colleagues, times of special receptivity/need (bereavement, sickness ...)

Each Muslim we meet needs to have an opportunity to show spiritual interest. We need to be prepared by developing relative fluency in appropriate language phrases, and then by learning a few ways of throwing out bait, and of turning conversations to spiritual issues. A team should ensure each member is able to operate at this level. Everyone is called upon to be ready to give account of their faith. All of us can learn the basics, and so be ready to not only reply, but to create opportunities.

STAGE I-ESTABLISHING RELATIONSHIPS

This progresses through acquaintance, acceptance, freedom to speak openly, to trust.

On the team we discussed these four components of establishing a relationship. In particular we worked at how to show respect to a person without being defensive or overly acquiescent. It is possible at this stage to go so far in seeking relationship that disagreements and differences are glossed over. One possible approach to keep us on focus is to ask "why" questions, and to listen carefully to the reply. Questions such as "Why do you believe that?" "Why do you feel that way?"

STAGE II-SOWING

Goal: Clarifying the meaning of a being a Christian by highlighting a changed life through belief in Jesus.

0. Has the concept of a Christian been clarified?
1. I am a committed Christian, not a cultural one.
2. Do they know other Christians? (community, church)
3. Have they heard my testimony?
4. Do they know I have a relationship with God?
5. Have they heard testimonies of others?
6. Have they been challenged with the need for change of belief, the absoluteness of the Gospel?

The thrust of this stage is to move past the main objections to the Gospel to show a vital on-going relationship with God.

In the North African context, contacts should not be immediately introduced to other Christians. The first danger is that seekers may learn too much and become informers. Secondly, meeting a lot of foreigners feeds the ulterior motives so often present in the initial interest in the Gospel. Thirdly, to apply the insights of Scoggins (2), we should be encouraging our friend to seek others of similar interests from within their existing relationships. We need from an early stage to encourage the spread of the Good News along the lines of natural relationships.

STAGE III-WATERING

There seems to be a big step from II to III, due to the gap between knowing and understanding in stage II and

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preparedness to actively and personally apply acknowledged truth. Opposition to truth may now be stronger. While there seems less that we can do ourselves, great initiative is needed at this stage. Activities such as the following might be appropriate:

1. Prepare and invite people to a short series of studies, for instance Genesis 1-3.
2. Provoke, question and challenge occultism.
3. Lend Christian novels, then discuss them.
4. Use the Marsh approach (what do you think of Jesus' miracles, prayer, life, speech, etc...) For the textbook see (3). For the autobiography in which this approach is described see (4) and for the booklets see (5).
5. Exploit festivals, Christian and Muslim, and birthdays.
6. Arrange a time when you can make a small presentation, beginning with the words, "I've been here a long time, but I've not shared what is important to me". For those of us who have been in the Arab world for several years this could be especially useful among contacts who seem to have "gone cold".

Stage III needs to incorporate the following:

- A. The Bible as our basis
 1. Do they have a part of it? Have they read it?
 2. Discussion on what has been read
 3. Attend organized events for Bible instruction designed for people at this stage
 4. Complete a Bible study series

B. An accurate picture of Jesus -- the story of His life, based on the Bible, use of the Jesus video

C. The Gospel message: core known and understood, use seekers' books

D. Key to responsiveness identified

1. What motivates them?
2. What disturbs them?
3. What is their aim in life?

The discussions on our team focused on the irreducible core of the Gospel message, and what supporting literature was available. Rodda's list of the Basic Christian Doctrines that are Necessary for Salvation (7) proved to be a helpful focus, coupled with McIlwain's insistence that the Gospel, the good news of salvation, is only good news, and should only be taught as such, to those who already know their sinful state and the impossibility of a solution unless God provides one (6, vol 1, p 59). A discussion of I Cor. 15:3-4, and Luke 2:11 also proved helpful.

STAGE IV REAPING

A. Has a personal decision been faced?

B. Has a personal decision been made?

Missionaries tend to think someone has become a believer up to two years before the individual would say the same thing. A team can profit from reviewing 'decisions' in the last few years, and discuss reasons why some have continued while others have not. By asking "whose responsibility?" a team can seek to identify areas of negligence and mistakes, repent of them if they were committed by themselves, and plan remedial action.

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The other danger is that seeking to work slowly and thoroughly we will never bring someone to the point of decision. When someone knows the Gospel, they need to be challenged to believe, to stop wanting to stay in both camps, and to accept Christ as Saviour. A few years ago, such a person was challenged with the question, "What is it that stops you? You're not convinced of the truth, or is it because it is costly to believe?" He admitted the problem was the consequences of belief, and in the next few weeks he did make a commitment to Christ.

CONCLUSIONS

"Be Ready" has become a guiding light to me in the last few years. Use of the Merza scale has helped me to become pro-active in witnessing. It has become a habit to try to discern where people are at, by listening, questioning and testing. This has enabled me to plan specific baits to put on my line and to sometimes actually go out fishing for people! Another consequence of thinking hard about the steps to belief was the setting of toolkit one (see previous article in SEEDBED XI, 2, pp. 2-8). In summary, we found the major advantages of such a framework to be:

- The weak points in one's readiness for action stand out;
- A greater level of readiness of all team members is achieved;
- Team members, even the timid ones, can acquire greater boldness;
- There is more effectiveness in the efforts that are made;
- There is much more of a pro-active

stance that seeks and plans opportunities;

- The scale is a stimulus to both prayer and action;
- The scale can act as a continued meaningful evaluation of the process of evangelism and what should be the next step in the process;
- Used prayerfully and intelligently, the scale can be a guide for spending maximum time and effort on the most promising people.

In addition, when done as a series of team exercises, I see the following benefits:

- The team has a regular focusing mechanism on our primary reason for being in the country. In the midst of many pressures to sidetrack, it can be a means of continually drawing people back to the cutting edge of what we are doing.
- Team unity is strengthened. Even if team members are dispersed during the week and rarely see each other, the scale can function as a reinforcement of the common focus.
- Team sharing can be deeper, as each gets involved in discussing and praying for the others' contacts.
- Problems of team unity can be kept in perspective as the team unites round the common purpose. This reflects my opinion that one of the best ways to stop squabbles among believers is to concentrate the efforts of all concerned on our common task and greater common sense of working together. Work is now needed, to develop a similar framework, with accompanying literature, to cover the various stages of discipleship and church planting.

POSTSCRIPT

When we discussed this scale on the team, we were all familiar with McIlwain's Chronological Approach (6,7) and my wife was writing and using materials suitable for such people, centering in particular on a thorough study of Genesis 1-3 (8). The Merza scale, and the Laying of Firm Foundations from the Old Testament, are two tools which work well together. The Merza scale is a framework for analysis, evaluation, discussion, prayer, planning which precedes Bible studies and continues until someone fully grasps the Gospel. The chronological approach is our preferred means of teaching the Scriptures. If a team is studying the scale and is not yet familiar with preparing people for the Gospel by teaching from the Old Testament, they could with profit take the time at this point to cover that lack.

One surprising effect of the scale has been to stimulate me to question the basic premise of the scale, which is that friendship is essential for presenting the Gospel. I know my questioning goes against nearly all we have learned on how to do friendship evangelism, and how that is the primary way forward in Muslim countries. But somehow we must spread out our nets wider if we are going to see more results. Friendship in our adopted culture demands a lot of time; therefore we can only be friends with a few. If these few are not responsive, what do we do?

Do we trust God that the friends He has given us are the ones He wants to save; therefore we should endlessly cultivate their friendship even if initial interest has long ago gone cold? Or do we leave

the door open to these people, but continually press on and throw out the bait to other fish?

Some years ago we were encouraged by a leader to have a 'turnover of friends'. But a friend by definition is not to be rejected or ignored. So what is the answer? The answer came through reading Donavan's book, CHRISTIANITY RE-DISCOVERED. (9) He explains how, when faced by a similar problem in black Africa, he adopted the approach that he was there to proclaim, explain, and persuade. His style was that he would enter into commitments with village groups to meet and discuss Biblical material on a regular basis for a year. Then people could make their choices. He was not committed to long-term friendships because there were other people to reach. The writer is a Catholic, but his approach at this point proved helpful. His book reminded me of that classical text, PRACTICAL APPROACH TO MUSLIMS, which most of us had read in pre-field preparation and in which we were encouraged to be proclaimers, and to keep sowing the seed, keep moving on (10).

In the light of I Thess. 2, the temporary nature of relationships formed does not mean that relationships must be shallow. There can and must be deep involvement with people. But both Paul and his colleagues were willing to limit the time of involvement and to move on.

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Cain's Twin Sister

by B.R.

I have been trying to **turn conversations with Muslims to spiritual matters** by telling various Bible stories. I pick a Bible story and read over it ahead of time to ensure I know how to tell the story in Arabic. I also think of two or three points I'd like to make with the story, so that I can continue the discussion and we can deal with various spiritual topics.

Recently I was with a Muslim friend who is quite devout and knows a lot about Islam. I asked him if he knew the story of Cain and Abel. He did, but I told it anyway.

When I finished my friend asked me, "Do you know why Cain and Abel had a dispute?"

"Because Cain was jealous of Abel," I answered. "God had accepted his sacrifice and not that of Cain."

My friend said, "No, I mean before that. There had to be a reason for the two to bring a sacrifice to God and have him judge which was acceptable."

"At the beginning of history you had to marry your sister," he explained. "Eve gave birth to twins. First, she gave birth to Cain and his sister, and later she gave birth to Abel and his sister. It was forbidden to marry someone who came out of the womb at the same time as you. Thus, Cain had to marry Abel's twin sister and Abel had to marry Cain's twin sister. However, Cain's sister was more beautiful than Abel's, so Cain wanted to marry his twin sister and not Abel's. Abel, rightfully, opposed this. So, they brought sacrifices to God who would show who was right by accepting one

sacrifice and not the other. He accepted Abel's and not Cain's."

Although this account is not in the Qur'an, it is well-known, at least by the Muslims I know. The story and its interpretation emphasize obedience to religious purity laws, something Muslims love to focus on, and not faith. How Satan has twisted an account that points to Christ to turn Muslims' minds to their own works and hide the gospel!

We need to restore the story to its true meaning. "Well, that's not how the story is in the Bible," I explained to my Muslim friend. "The reason God accepted the sacrifice of Abel was that he brought it by faith, and Cain did not." I went on to talk about sin and the need to approach God by sacrifice. Some argue that Abel's sacrifice was acceptable because he brought a blood sacrifice and Cain knowingly disobeyed God's command to be approached only via a blood sacrifice. This interpretation doesn't seem to be supported from Genesis, however.

Perhaps a better transition might be to explain the reason for bringing the sacrifice, that it was an offering of the first fruits of their labors. The Lord wants us to offer the first of what we have to him. It all comes from him and belongs to him, and he deserves the first and the best back. Even what remains with us is to be used for God's glory and not just however we please. Thus, the occasion for the offering was not a dispute about wives, but rather an honoring of the Lord by bringing the first fruits. (The first fruits requirement is written in the law of Moses and the explanation about the wives isn't even written in the Qur'an. This might take the edge off

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contradicting our Muslim friend and push him towards at least considering our view.)

Although the Genesis account of Cain and Abel doesn't specify why God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's, the book of Hebrews gives us a clue. "*By **faith** Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain*" (Heb. 11:4). Cain was a tiller of the soil and Abel a shepherd, and both brought the first fruits of their labors to the Lord, grain in one case and meat in the other. This would have been in at least outward obedience to the command to sacrifice their first fruits. The difference must have been rather in the heart of the offerer, rather than in the nature of the offering. God accepted Abel's sacrifice, since it was brought in faith, but Cain's sacrifice did not please God because it was not brought in faith.

The difference between Cain and Abel was in the **heart**. One had faith and the other didn't. We could then talk about the importance of the heart, rather than just the outward appearances of righteousness. This could lead also to a discussion of what our hearts are really like, how we are sinners. From this, we could explain why we must approach God by faith.

Abel's faith was a **saving faith**. Hebrews 11:4 says that by faith Abel offered his sacrifice, "*through which he received approval as righteous.*" From the very beginning, righteousness was not acquired by works and religious performances, as Muslims teach, but rather by faith. A sinner, by definition, is not righteous and so cannot be in the presence of the holy God and so cannot draw near to God. Hebrews 11:6

confirms this: "*without faith it is impossible to please God. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*"

Faith is not such a wonderful intrinsic quality that God is prompted, when he sees it, to say, "because you have such a wonderful thing in your life I'm going to count you as righteous." This would just be a different version of salvation by works, based on some quality or characteristic in the sinner. This would be no different than the Islamic teaching that God will forgive me because I have repentance from my sins and faith in the mercy of God in my heart.

Faith leads someone who is not righteous to be **declared righteous** on the basis of the object of his faith. Abraham "**believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness**" (Gen. 15:6 and Rom. 4:3). When a person has faith in the Messiah and trusts in him as the only means of being accepted by God, then the perfectly righteous life of the Messiah is counted and considered to be that of the sinner. It is this faith that Abel had and that Cain did not.

Neither Abel nor Abraham had as clear a picture of the work of Christ as we have today. Neither the Genesis nor the Hebrews passage pretends that Abel had a conscious, thought-out reflection on the doctrines of substitutionary atonement and the imputed righteousness of Christ. The Hebrews passage doesn't even say that Abel had faith in Jesus. Yet, that faith is there, although in a very preliminary form. How is that?

Abel's and Abraham's faith was in the **promises of God**. Hebrews 11:13 testifies: "*These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it*

and greeted it from afar" What was the first promise to fallen Adam and Eve? That there would come someone descended from Eve whom Satan would seek to harm, and succeed in harming, but who would in the end triumph over Satan. "*I [God] will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman [Eve], and between your offspring and her offspring; he [the promised offspring of the woman] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel*" (Gen.3:15).

Adam and Eve would have recounted this promise to Cain, Abel, Seth, and to their other sons and daughters. Thus Abel, and later Abraham, by having faith in the promises of God, had **faith in the coming of Christ and in his work**, although they did not know the details as to how that would work out. Nevertheless, their faith is the same saving faith that we have today. The object of their faith is the same as ours, the work of Christ. It is only by such faith that anyone of any race or religion can be accepted as righteous before God.

Cf. The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, H.A.R. Gibbs and J.H. Kramers, page 115 for the origin of the story in Qur'anic exegesis.

BOOK REVIEWS

UNDERSTANDING ARABS

by Margaret K. Nydell

Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press Inc, 1987, 64pp

The author helpfully explains in the preface that the book is written for western "non-specialists who want or need to have a clearer understanding of the thought patterns, social relationships, and ways of life of modern Arabs." As well as being a primer on Arab character and behavior, it is an excellent quick reference book for checking up on our behaviour in the Arab world.

A fourteen page introduction outlines patterns of change which influence Arab thinking and behavior today. Nydell deals particularly with westernization and fundamentalism.

The body of the book deals with matters essential to understanding of and effective interaction with Arabs. Pithy summaries of key points in each of the ten chapters give a quick overview of the material dealt with, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

Beliefs and Values — "All Arabs share basic beliefs and values which cross national or social class boundaries. ... Their beliefs are influenced by Islam even if they are not Moslems, child-rearing practices are nearly identical, and the family structure is essentially the same." This chapter closes with helpful summary lists of values, religious attitudes, and self-perceptions.

Friends and Strangers — "Among Arabs also, a friend is someone whose company they enjoy. However, equally important to the relationship is the duty of a friend

to give help and do favors to the best of his ability."

Emotion and Logic — "Arabs consciously reserve the right to look at the world in a subjective way. ... Arabs are more likely to allow subjective perceptions to direct their actions. ... honor is more important than facts ... people are more important than rules."

Getting Personal — "For Arabs the space which is comfortable for ordinary social conversation is approximately the same as that which Westerners reserve for intimate conversation."

Men and Women — "Arab men and women are careful about appearances when they meet. ... The public display of intimacy between men and women is strictly forbidden by the Arab social code ... even between husband and wife ..."

Social Formalities and Etiquette --- "Generosity to guests is essential for a good reputation. ... Your personal image and status will be affected by people's perceptions of your hospitality." The chapter closes with a list of generally accepted rules of etiquette.

The Social Structure — "Foreign residents of Arab countries automatically accrue most of the status and privileges of the upper class. ... No upper-class person engages in manual labor in front of other people. ... Upper-class Arabs are careful about their dress and appearance whenever they are in public because the way a person dresses indicates his wealth and social standing. ... When you plan social events, do not mix people from different social classes."

The Role of the Family — "Family loyalty and obligations take precedence over loyalty to friends or the demands of a job. ... The reputation of any member of a family group reflects on all of the other members. ... There is no real basis for a close relation-

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community and the place of tale-telling in their lives. The stories themselves serve to inspire creativity in communicating spiritual truth to women of the Arab world. When a Tunisian woman says, "ahkee" (tell me) to her foreign guest, why not go prepared with a story that leads to the discussion of spiritual truth? This book serves as a resource for creating or recounting such tales.

Reviewed by Donna Smith

Blame Men, Not Allah, Islamic Feminists Say

By Seth Mydans, The New York Times

Are Muslim men allowed to beat their wives? Are men and women equal before Allah?

These provocative questions form the titles of two pamphlets issued by a Muslim feminist group in Kuala Lumpur, and they are at the center of a debate in Malaysia over putting a new domestic violence law into effect.

"For 14 centuries the Koran has been interpreted almost exclusively by men," said Amina Wadud, an American Islamic scholar who joined the women's group, Sisters in Islam, while teaching here.

"It is only in the past two decades that women have begun to say, 'let's look at this text and come up with our own conclusions,' " she said, "and voila, some of them are not the same as what the men came up with."

A multiracial nation whose official religion is Islam, Malaysia is seeking to define itself as a liberal role model in the Islamic world, offering wide latitude for its Chinese and indigenous minorities and their religions.

On the bustling streets of Kuala Lumpur with its glass-fronted skyscrapers, the mosques and discos stand side by side and women in Muslim headscarves chat easily with women in jeans or miniskirts. But some rules set apart the Muslim majority, and it is primarily the women who are affected.

Though its legal system is secular, Malaysia's Muslims are required to take family issues to Islamic courts,

where women generally have fewer rights in questions of divorce, child custody and alimony. Women also have little recourse in cases of rape or domestic abuse.

"They tell the woman: 'Go home. Everything will be taken care of. Everything will work out,' " said Zuriah Aljeffri, an artist who is a leading member of the women's group, "and she will get beaten again."

Since the passage last year of a national law against domestic violence, Muslim clerics have argued that the law does not apply to their courts, which vary in stringency among the 13 state jurisdictions.

"We know there is a problem," Hamid Othman, the minister for religious affairs in the office of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, conceded recently. "We just need time to study how to implement it." Sisters in Islam has taken the lead in lobbying for universal enforcement of the law, arguing, in its pamphlet on domestic violence. "It is not Islam that oppresses women, but human beings with all their weaknesses who have failed to understand Allah's intentions," they say.

Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim recently added his voice to theirs, saying that under the jurisdiction of Islamic courts, "women are tortured, abused, tormented and abandoned without alimony."

"Islam is built on the foundation of justice for all," he said. "When the implementation of these laws is associated with men's prejudice against women, then we are in for a lot of trouble."

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In this fast-modernizing nation, where women play a growing role in the economy and society, feminism and strict Islamic observance are increasingly at loggerheads.

"We find no contradiction in our desire to be strong, independent, modern women and to be good Muslims as well," Zainah Anwar, a member of the women's group, said at a conference on women and Islam last month.

But not everyone agrees. Over the past decade, fundamentalism has gained momentum among some of Malaysia's Muslims.

In a recent example of the fundamentalist trend, the state of Selangor issued restrictions on video-game parlors and Karaoke bars to combat "moral degradation." The state of Kelantan barred women in government service from wearing lipstick.

Kelantan has been in the forefront of this trend since the Malaysia Islamic Party, an influential opposition party, gained political control in the state six years ago and began to create its own more stringent model of an Islamic state.

Its chief minister, Nik Aziz Nik Mat, has outlawed gambling, restricted the sale of liquor, required special permits for carnival rides, dances and beauty pageants, banned unisex barber shops and instituted separate men's and women's lines at supermarket checkout counters.

"Enough is enough," said Norani Othman, a sociologist who is a member of Sisters in Islam. "Let's start learning from the West."

Though they reject what they call the extremism of some Western feminists, Sisters in Islam has become an insistent voice here, holding seminars, conferences and small demonstrations and publishing two heavily annotated books of interpretations of the Koran.

"Oh, yes, we are quite serious about our Islamic law," Ms. Aljeffri said.

Ms. Othman added, "We have to be careful to identify what is the cultural heritage of the Muslim societies of the Middle East and what is Islam itself."

Given Malaysia's relatively open society, both with regard to non-Muslim religions and to the status of women, she said her group is well placed to take a leading role in an international Islamic women's movement.

"I do feel that here in Malaysia we have slightly more space to do this because we have a less patriarchal system," she said. "We are the most developed Muslim economy right now, and so we see ourselves by accident as historically placed to play this role."

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