

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 The concept that Islam is the last and best religion and has superseded the other monotheistic religions, especially Christianity, is inculcated into the mind of every Muslim from infancy.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

will admit, on being pressed, to being a sinner, even by the standard of Islam. But tradition holds out the comforting, although vague, hope that Muhammad will intercede on the judgment day for all Muslims and preserve them from eternal damnation. There is, therefore, little sense of spiritual need in the average Muslim's heart. Somehow, everything will come out all right in the end!

Removing the innate hostilities and creating the sense of need must be, in the final analysis, the work of God. We rejoice in the increasing number of documented cases where the work of pre-evangelism has been done by direct, divine intervention in the form of dreams and visions, etc. That factor, however, in no way absolves us of the need to find the most effective ways we can cooperate as God's fellow-laborers in this great task. His declared intention is that the chief means of reaching the world is through His people bearing witness to the ends of the earth.

The next article, "Steps to Conversion", gives some suggestions of how to effectively remove barriers. I have found two approaches helpful. The first is to ask non-confrontive questions designed to cause my Muslim friend to begin to challenge his religious status quo and to think through the inherent inconsistencies and negative implications of that which he has merely accepted passively all his life. The second is to lead my friend through a serious study of Genesis 1-3, with the following emphases:

a. The perfection of God's original creation, as contrasted with the world we live in today (1:31)

- b. The spiritual nature conferred by the "breath of God" (2:7), setting us apart from the rest of creation
- c. The death of this spiritual life by turning from obedience to God to acting on Satan's proposal (warning of 2:17 and confirmation of 3:19)
- d. The futility of Adam and Eve's attempt to compensate for their disobedience by their own efforts (3:7-10)
- e. God's initiative and action which alone could cover their sin (3:21)
- f. The negative heritage passed on from Adam to future generations (5:1-3), note "the likeness of God" in v.1, contrasted with "his own likeness" in v. 3. By the time Adam procreated "in his own likeness", the fall had taken place and he could pass on to his descendants an active and physical life. He passed on only a latent spiritual potential, which was separated from its source, needing to be re-born through a means that only God could provide.

Again and again I have found this simple study an effective preparative for moving on into the New Testament revelation of God's provision for restoring our broken relationship with Himself. The above explanation is obviously very sketchy. A fuller guide for the study can be obtained by request from Seedbed.