

SWEET FIRSTFRUITS, W.M., 1893, 140 pp., Revised English Edition, 1993, The Good Way, PO Box 66, 8486 Rikon, Switzerland. reviewer: W. Evans

A number of years ago I read this small book distributed by the Karmelmission in Arabic. I was favorably impressed with both the style of the book and the cogency of the answers given to many of the stock objections to Christianity which I had encountered in the Muslim world. I began using the book as a stock tool for giving to any who were open-minded enough to consider rational propositions.

The book was first published in 1893. It is the story of a group of Syrian Muslim sheiks and scholars who converted to Christianity through study of the Bible and comparing it with the Qur'an. The story begins with a letter sent from a Christian to a Muslim friend, urging him to heed the Qur'anic injunction to read and obey the Bible. The friend puts the case before a group of his friends, Muslim sheiks and scholars. They agree that the subject of the letter should be given due consideration and set a time for a subsequent meeting for such. Before this meeting takes place, three of the Muslims discover a common faith in the Christ of the Bible. The rest of the book deals with a series of conversations and debates designed to bring the increasing number of converts back to Islām and during which those who had turned to Christ answered the arguments put forward by their Muslim compatriots.

The blind fanaticism displayed by some of the Muslims evokes the rising tide of opposition to Christianity in the Muslim world of today and the tactics employed by such extremists. The issue of tension between the religious freedom granted by the government and the Sharia of Islam also comes into play.

The confrontations resulted in the martyrdom of one of the group of converts and the deportation of the rest to a neighboring country. Their subsequent pardon and return to Syria as overt Christians enjoying freedom and the respect of both Christians and Muslims seems a bit utopian but brings the book to a happy ending.

Since 1993 the Karmelmission has also had *Sweet Firstfruits* available in English. Because the book is so little known, I fear that it is not being used to its full potential, in either Arabic or English. I strongly recommend all those working among Muslims to read it and then use it as appropriate in their ministry.

DID YOU KNOW...?

DRUID REVIVAL!? = Druids are undergoing a revival in Great Britain. Upwards of 5000 regularly participate in religious ceremonies, and 40,000 turn out for the "big events." Historian Ronald Hutton attributes the increase to druidism's fit with trendy green "new age" spirituality, and to the fact that it does not saddle adherents with a moral code.

ARABS ON A TREADMILL = Arab economies are going no place fast. East Asia pulls in 58 percent of global foreign investment, while the Arab Middle East attracts just 3 percent. The World Bank estimates that the Arab world and Iran will have to create 47 million new

jobs by 2010 just to keep pace with the population. PULSE 17/11/95, quoting from the New York Times.

AN ISLAMIC ECONOMIC BLOC consisting of the six central Asian republics together with Pakistan, Turkey and Iran has been created, known as the *Economic Cooperation Organization*. I.S.I.C. 2,3/96, P.4.

APOSTASY = "According to the School of Malik [that school of jurisprudence which is dominant in African Islam, including all the countries of North Africa and much of Upper Egypt], '... the person who leaves Islam to follow another way, but conceals his *kuf'r* and continues to manifest Islamic belief... should be executed after his guilt has been established. He should not be asked to repent because the repentance of such persons cannot be trusted.'" *The Punishment of the Apostate*, p 28.

WATER RESOURCES = Among all the Middle East's countries, only Lebanon has a water surplus... Agriculture slurps up 80 percent of the area's scarce supplies. Still, there are signs of hope. Israel has doubled its crop yields using half the water. PULSE 2/2/96

UNREACHED = According to missions researcher David Barrett, of the world's 5.8 billion people, 1.9 billion are Christians (of all kinds) and 1.1 billion are Muslims... He estimates that 1.1 billion people remain unevangelized. PULSE 2/2/96

KINGS AND RULERS = With no formal means of succession, worried citizens are beginning to wonder what will happen once the aging autocrats who rule them in Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Oman, Morocco, Bahrain, the UAE and Iraq pass from the scene. The *Wall Street Journal* is warning of "grave repercussions in the region," and a possible "bloodbath" in Syria. PULSE 2/2/96

RICHES FOR WHOM? = While the house of Saud continues its lavish lifestyle, the rest of the country feels the pinch of belt tightening brought on by stagnant oil prices, bungled economic management, and a population explosion that is spreading the rulers' largess ever thinner... Per capita gross domestic in 1982 was \$12,000. Today it's \$7,000. State employees (44 percent of the work force) have not seen a raise in a decade. PULSE 5/1/96

ANTI-CHRISTIAN? = The United Nations has banned Christian organizations from flying Bibles into Sudan, according to Peter Hammond of Frontline Fellowship, Cape Town, South Africa. ... One Sudanese pastor is quoted as saying, "*It's not that the UN is against religion. They're just against Christianity.*" PULSE 5/1/96

ARABIC LANGUAGE = "Muslims have 5 significant beliefs about the Arabic language. It is:

- (a) *the vehicle of true religion,*
- (b) *the original language of all mankind,*
- (c) *the language given to Adam, who wrote it on clay,*
- (d) *the language of the people in Paradise,*
- (e) *the correct language for prayer to God, since it is His language."*