

FROM THE ARABIC LANGUAGE PRESS

An article attacking Christian media in the Arab world

[Here is another interesting article translated and sent to us by an Arab Christian brother who wishes to remain anonymous. A virulent diatribe against the Christian use of mass media to spread the gospel, it records the comments of five Muslim intellectuals, mostly from universities in Cairo.]

"CHRISTIANIZING BROADCASTS HAVE INVADED OUR HOMES." Dateline 11 January 1990, from the Cairo bureau of Al-Muslimoon, an Arabic-Islamic journal published in the United Kingdom.

Should you happen to be a radio fan, you must have had this experience. You scan the radio dial looking for interesting programs. Suddenly you hear a voice welcoming you in good classical Arabic. The speaker begins to talk to you in clear and attractive tones as if he were your friend. Soon afterward, you discover that this broadcast is nothing but a broadcast preaching Christianity!!

What is the truth about such Christianizing broadcasts and what are their goals? Do they constitute a danger to young Muslims, and what is the nature of this danger?

AL-MUSLIMOON has taken the initiative to deal with this subject. It is concerned about the dangers which these questionable broadcasts constitute as they address themselves to the sensitivities and inner feelings of our youth in a language which is acceptable by them.

How are we to face this challenge? What is the best way to confront this "Christianizing" informational war? Here is how a number of Muslim intellectuals answered these questions.

Dr. Atef al-Iraqi: "Modernize the Call (Da'wah)"

Dr. Atef al-Iraqi, professor of Islamic philosophy at the College of Arts, the University of Cairo, confirms the fact that "Christianizing" broadcasts are not merely transmitting in Arabic, but in other languages as well. They cover large areas of Asia and Africa including the Arab World.

These broadcasts are primarily aimed at Christians, especially those who follow the type of Christianity most common to Europe, i.e., Catholicism. Now if we consider a country such as Egypt, we would notice that 80% of its Christians follow the Orthodox and not the Catholic tradition. Only about 10% of the Egyptian Christians adhere to the Catholic or the Protestant and Armenian traditions. It is a well known fact that Catholics are followers of Pope John III [sic!] whose headquarters are at the Vatican. As for the Orthodox, they follow Pope Shenoudah, whereas Protestants and Armenians follow Father George Qanawati [sic - Anawati is a Catholic priest!].

(...) Even though these "Christianizing" broadcasts are primarily aimed at Christians, yet they constitute a fearful weapon which is being used against Muslims, with the aim of changing their allegiance to the Christian religion. This is especially true for those Muslims living under difficult conditions and lacking some basic necessities, such as food and medicine.

Dr. al-Iraqi adds: The real danger in my opinion resides within us, as we seem to have a wrong and closed understanding of the Islamic religion. This causes many people to be repelled by it. Just look at these Christianizing broadcasts! They present their programs in an attractive way using the most up-to-date broadcasting methods and potentials such as offering books and pamphlets to the listeners. In our case, we still maintain a close-minded understanding of religion.

If we really want to face these "Christianizing" broadcasts, Dr. al-Iraqi continues, we must resort to the same weapon which these broadcasts use. As is well known, iron can only be met by iron! The weapons used by these Christianizing broadcasts are weapons of addressing their audiences through speeches. We must use the same weapon - speeches - in order to make people come to Islam and not flee from it. (...) They resort to scientific methods in calling people to embrace Christianity. Therefore it is incumbent upon us to call people to Islam using the best methods such as they do, namely through the use of science.

Islam, in his opinion as well as in the opinion of foes, friends and neutral people, is a religion of clarity and simplicity. This is why I hope that the Imams of our mosques would tone down their harsh and severe Friday morning sermons. They need not fill people's minds with fear. After all, Islam is a religion as well as a guide for a life right here on earth. It should not be portrayed as a religion which simply instills fear; it is after all a religion which must be described in such a way that people are eager to embrace it.

Dr. Abdel-Jalil al-Shalabi: "Christian books as well"

The real danger of these attempts to Christianize Muslims, according to Dr. Abdel-Jalil al-Shalabi, the former secretary of the Academy of Islamic Research, is not simply confined to the multiplicity of Christian hymns and songs which are beamed by these broadcasts. The most serious danger is to be found in those Arabic books which are printed to look like the Quran. At the head of each chapter, we find the title bracketed within two frames in exactly the same way as the various headings of the Surahs of the Holy Quran. The chapters also begin with, "In the name of the merciful and compassionate God" [i.e., the opening words of all but one Surah of the Quran, and placed at the beginning of all Muslim books.]

There may even be a brief Quranic quotation and then begins "Christianizing" propaganda. In this fashion, it seeks to make the impression on the minds of the readers that the Quran approves the call to embrace Christianity. For example, at the beginning of a certain chapter, one would find: "The Messiah, son of Mary, is the apostle of Allah and a word which he cast on Mary and a spirit from him." After quoting this Quranic verse with chapter and verse, the

propaganda book adds that the Word of God is eternal. It also mentions that once upon a time there arose a controversy among Muslims regarding the eternality of the Word of God. Eventually, the victory was won by those who affirmed that the Word was eternal. (...)

Since the Messiah is called Word of God in the Quran, he must therefore also be eternal and co-equal with God [i.e. according to these books]. Of course, such reasoning is obviously wrong. Actually, what the Quran really means when it says that the Messiah is a word from God, is simply that he was created by divine fiat. It does not mean at all that he is the Son of God, nor that he is divine.

Dr. al-Shalabi adds: These books are spreading among the Muslims of South Africa, India, East Asia and the isles of the Philippines. They lead Muslims astray as they induce them to doubt their doctrine.

Dr. Ahmad Shalabi: "Christianizing activities ... an octopus"

We turn now to Dr. Ahmad Shalabi, professor of Islamic history and civilization at the College of Sciences, the University of Cairo.

Throughout Islamic history, there were several attempts to "Christianize" and to engage in anti-Islamic propaganda. When Western colonialism came to the Islamic world, the efforts were doubled. But thanks to the various liberation movements, Western imperialism has come to an end. Now, the anti-Islamic propaganda has been left in the hands of the "Christianizing" organizations. These choose their fields of activity in those Islamic areas where resistance does not happen to be strong or decisive. We may point to such areas as southern Sudan, Indonesia and certain other countries.

Regardless of the fact that these "Christianizing" efforts may become widespread, they will eventually weaken as they face Islamic forces which will succeed in lessening their influence and in stopping their advance. Unfortunately however, these missionary organizations still find wide areas for their activities such as in those regions of poverty and educational backwardness. There, they rely on schools and hospitals to spread their thoughts. They open schools where they offer free education. Students come and find nothing but "Christianizing" teachings. As they are weak, they cannot offer resistance. As for the missionary hospitals, their doors are open to receive the sick. It is a well known fact that sick people have very low resistance. Since they have no choice when seeking medical help, they attend Christian hospitals and receive Christian instruction. Eventually, they may even believe what they have been told. Dr. Ahmad Shalabi adds: We plead with Muslims everywhere to be on guard against this perfidious and difficult octopus.

Dr. Inshirah al-Shal: "Use the best audio-visual potentials"

Dr. Inshirah al-Shal [first name indicates a lady], professor of radio and television at the College of communications, the University of Cairo, says: We must distinguish between religious broadcasts and "Christianizing" broadcasts. Religious broadcasts offer religious programs, whether Jewish, Christian or Islamic, to adherents of these heavenly religions.

Take for example the Station of the Holy Quran [station in Mecca broadcasting on both medium and short wave]. It is a religious broadcast which is aimed at Muslims in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. Also, the Christian radio of the Netherlands which is beamed at Christians in that country or throughout Europe. [The implication is that these are merely religious and do not aim at conversion!]

On the other hand, let us have a look at those "Christianizing" stations; they proselytize. They engage in crusading activities ["Crusade" is a loaded word]. Their goal is to bring Muslims who are within the reach of their signals into the Christian religion.

As we take a look at the Christian broadcasting stations which reach us, whether they are using radio or television, it is incumbent upon us to mention certain facts which constitute a great danger to us. It is obvious that their source of income is definitely Christian. The Church is the one which plays the role of gathering the funds. Quite often, the source is the Vatican, which is the stronghold of Christianity within the whole world.

When we come to the transmission sites, one happens to be in Africa and the other in Europe. The one is in Ethiopia [sic - the RVOG ceased in the 70s after the Marxist coup!] and the other in Cyprus or some other region close to the Arab world. These places afford the best place for the transmissions to reach us. Some people claim that the "Christianizing" stations are located in America. I find this very difficult to believe. "Christianizing" broadcasts and telecasts reach us clearly throughout the day. They could not originate in America and perform so well, the distances are too great. Of course, it is not inconceivable that America would engage in this questionable activity; but I must insist that if it is involved, it must rely on strong and powerful relay stations in the Middle East which enable it to reach us with clear signals. [Note the confusion.]

Dr. al-Shal adds: One need not minimize the danger of these radio stations. They invade our very homes and they fight us in our own houses. We know that many of our poor citizens especially in southern Sudan [sic] have been influenced by them and have embraced Christianity. [Note the disinformation: the people in southern Sudan were animists, and never Muslims.]

But what is more troubling is the fact that these media use the most up-to-date broadcasting and televising methods. They offer their programs in a quiet and diplomatic way using good and clear Arabic. This exerts a great influence upon the soul of the listener. He becomes totally absorbed by them, having lost his reasoning and volitional powers. "Christianizing" stations do attempt to Christianize Muslims. This is a very serious act; we must face it by using all the means which are available to us. It would have been morally acceptable had these "Christianizing" stations concentrated their efforts and beamed their signals in the direction of those societies which are devoid of any faith in the heavenly religions. This would have been a legitimate work which no one would ever oppose. But to seek to "Christianize" Muslims is in fact a totally immoral and despicable act no matter which standard we may use to appraise its nature.

Dr. al-Shal continues: I call upon those engaged in research in the communications field within the academic circles to prepare studies about these questionable and dangerous radio stations. We must know exactly: who stands behind them, what are their methods, goals and program contents in order to formulate the best ways of combating them. This must be accomplished on the theoretical level. But as far as the practical level is concerned, I suggest that we review our religious programs currently offered over radio and television. Unfortunately, most of them are produced in a rather "rigid" way, and totally incompatible with the nature of the age we live in.

In order that a communications mission may reach its hearers and make an impact upon them, it must contain the following ingredients: a good broadcaster, an equally good content as well as a good production. Of course, we do have some successful religious programs in Egypt such as the program of Sheikh al-Sha'rawi, and "Science and Faith" of Dr. Mustapha Mahmoud. There are other programs with good contents. However, the time of their airing or the manner of their production makes them unsuitable. Take for example, the program dealing with "The Beautiful Names of Allah," and "A Talk of the Spirit." They are telecast just before the conclusion of the television transmissions. Those in charge of programming claim that since these are successful programs, people will stay up late to watch them regardless of how late the hour may be. What an illogical claim!

Dr. Muhammad Amara: "An Imperialist Invasion"

The Islamic intellectual, Dr. Muhammad Amara, mentions several facts concerning the "Christianizing" radio stations.

If these radio stations which spread non-Islamic religions were merely explaining their faith and appealing to others to accept it, and were funded by non-Islamic religious societies, we would have no reason to criticize them. Freedom of religion, the right to appeal on behalf of Christianizing organization and to inform other about the Christian faith is a natural right for those adhering to any religion. It is a right which must be guaranteed by the laws, traditions and covenants of the various states.

When we call for freedom for the Islamic missions and Muslim missionaries, we must equally accept and protect the freedom of others to propagate their own religions as long as they do not engage in activities which demean other faiths. This is a general principle to be respected by all those who would spread their religions.

But what is actually happening, as far as the attempts for Christianizing are concerned, has nothing to do with what we have been saying above. Islam is well aware of the fact that the Western missionary effort is part and parcel of an imperialistic invasion of our Eastern countries. Even our Eastern churches have suffered from the attempts to Westernize them. The West would like to transfer the loyalties of the Eastern churches and their membership to the West. There was a time when the hostility which was manifested by our Eastern churches toward Western traditions was more intense than the one exhibited by some Muslims toward the same. Since Eastern Christians are more liable to be seduced by Western Christianity, they easily come under

the influence of organizations and churches in the West which maintain strong relations with imperialistic circles. It is such groups which set up broadcasting stations and means of communication which possess a great potential for influencing people.

Therefore, these "Christianizing" efforts may not be regarded as mere attempts to propagate a specific religion. Rather, they are one facet of a multi-faceted effort of that cultural invasion aimed at controlling the minds and the hearts in our Eastern countries and especially us Muslims. It is actually an attempt to dominate and exercise cultural and economic hegemony over the Muslim nations.

After all, we are well aware of the attempts to Christianize Africa which took place during the colonial era. A minority had the opportunity to establish control over all aspects of life in the colonies in economics, language, culture and politics. Thus, "Christianizing" did not consist in a religious activity whereby the human conscience was placed before certain choices which it may accept or reject. On the contrary, it functioned as one aspect of modern colonialism whose total goal was to exert complete hegemony over African nations and to strengthen their ties to Western culture.

In spite of the difficult conditions through which we are passing, it is our responsibility to stand together and manifest our solidarity as we face this danger which is threatening our Islamic world. We notice that many of its sons and daughters who have been hit by difficult circumstances such as famine and bad economies, are falling prey to the anti-Islamic thought parading itself under a religious mask. We have heard some very disturbing news regarding small children who are being snatched from their parents due to hunger in Somalia and Bangladesh and who are being sent to the West through those "Christianizing" organizations where they would eventually embrace their religion and receive their education. Then, they are returned to their homelands having become skilled specialists such as doctors and engineers. Back home, they begin to exert their influence among their families and with their milieu, armed with Western thought patterns and with a non-Islamic religion. They accomplish their destructive work in areas dominated by poverty.

Those who are truly aware of these "Christianizing" movements in such lands as Indonesia, or those informed of the role played by the Vatican and the Pope in Africa, must realize that the Catholic church has adopted the slogan: Africa Christian by the year 2000! Those who are truly informed about these dangers must begin to act and stand behind those Islamic organizations which advocate and support "calling" [Da'wah - Islamic word for missions] and development. It should be adequate for us to just remember the story of the South in the Sudan where various missionary organizations are trying to create another Israel and thus build a dam which would stand against the Arabization and Islamization of the heart of Africa. This is but one aspect of this imperialistic menace.

We conclude therefore, that these efforts of the Christian missionaries are not really aimed at converting people to Christianity. Rather, their activities represent one aspect of a multi-faceted campaign launched by an aggressive Western imperialism to dominate