

Aziz Anderson, *New Adventures in Da'wah. Calling Christians to Islam in Today's World* (Australia: Halal Books, 2007)

In the preface Anderson claims to have spoken with hundreds of Christians and to have successfully persuaded some to revert.

### Chapter 1. Was it Easier 13 Centuries Ago?

Anderson describes the rapid expansion of the Islamic Empire within 100 years of Muhammad's death as involving "the greatest movement of Christians to Islam in all of history" (4). He denounces as untrue the common Christian understanding that new Muslims were forced to embrace Islam at the point of a sword, citing Latourette for support. He asks why Christian response to Islam today is so poor compared to that of Christians in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Anderson gives his testimony: born into a secular family; becoming a Christian at age 17; deciding to become a Muslim at age 45. He comments on how, during the intervening period, Muslim attempts to communicate Islam were poor. He believes he is in a position to give realistic advice on how to communicate Islam in a way Christians will find hard to refute.

### Chapter 2. Five Things to Avoid

Anderson wants his Muslim reader to build bridges of trust and respect when engaged in dialogue with a Christian. He advises:

#### 1. *Don't Attack the Bible*

Anderson has sympathy for Christian negativity to the oft-hailed champion of Islamic propagation, Ahmad Deedat. Anderson felt cheated after listening to Deedat:

He took great pleasure in explaining that the original Bible was long lost, leaving present day Christians with various corrupt and contradictory versions that cannot possibly be trusted.

But while Deedat caused his Muslim hearers to think Christians were stupid for respecting such a book, he misleadingly confused versions with translations, disregarding the fact that the original Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek. So Anderson maintains that Deedat "has brought much shame and embarrassment on the fair name of Islam in the Christian world" (15), with Deedat being viewed by Christians as either incredibly ignorant or, more usually, a knowing liar. The Muslim Digest in Deedat's own South Africa denounced him as a non-Muslim and the leader of the mosque in Deedat's hometown banded him from ever making any speeches or lectures.

Anderson claims on the basis of Al-Nisa 4:136 and Al-An'am 6:115 that the Qur'an teaches the Taurat, Zabur and Injil are still intact, citing in support also 3:84; 10:64; 18:27; 6:90; 4:56; 16:43; 21:7. Citing Al-Imran 3:93 and Al-Anbiya 21:7, Anderson comments,

...when we have a dispute with the people of the book, the Holy Qur'an seems to tell us to go and get the previous scripture and read it out to all present so the matter can be settled (18).

He recognizes that Christians have strong manuscript grounds for arguing "the Taurat, Zabur and Injil were not changed before, during or after the time of Muhammad" (19-20).

Anderson recognizes that Christians don't view their Bibles as the direct, literal word of Allah, the dictation of God, as Muslims do. He compares the Bible's view of inspiration with *hadith*, like the one in which Muhammad rebukes a lazy man for using his camel as a chair. He denies that the Qur'an disqualifies the Bible as Allah's word because it does not involve the same kind of inspiration.

Anderson recognizes it is hypocritical for Muslims to point out minor grammatical and spelling changes in the ancient Bible texts, given that this also applies to the Arabic text of the Qur'an, since all Muslim scholars acknowledge that the Qur'an was originally written in the Kufi script without the diacritical points, vocalization or literary productions. In neither case has the essential message changed.

Anderson identifies two reasons why many Muslims attack the Bible:

1. Their confusion on how to interpret some verses referring to the previous scripture (Al-Imran 3:78; Al-Nisa 4:46). These verses only refers to some people who spoke falsely *with their tongues* and doesn't say the written scripture itself was changed.
  - a. He contends that Christians, with a Trinitarian bias, have badly translated the text of the Bible into modern languages. Here he cites Matthew 2:2 claiming that *proskuneo* should not be translated as "worship" but as "pay homage", completely acceptable to Muslims. Anderson overlooks the immediately prior context which identifies Jesus as Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).
  - b. He corrects well meaning Muslims whom he has heard claim the Injil was originally written in Arabic. No, it was written in Greek, as confirmed by thousands of manuscripts.

## 2. *Avoid the Topic of Jihad*

Noting the poor memories of Westerners concerning the crusades and acts of terror perpetrated by modern day Jews in the West Bank and Gaza strip, he comments that, inconsistently, Christians "have a strange tendency to think only Muslim fanatics are capable of such bloodthirsty deeds" (28).

Anderson recognizes Christians will not be convinced by Muslim attempts to explain *jihad* as everyday-type "struggle". Rather, Muslims should agree jihad wars have indeed taken place, but also gently point out that so too have Christian wars. Here Anderson also emphasizes militaristic texts from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 20-21; Psalm 18:34-50), though conspicuously failing to put this in the context of the biblical story-line and appreciate the historical progressiveness of biblical revelation.

Anderson argues that the Qur'anic concept of jihad concerns the right of Muslims to defend themselves (Al-Baqarah 2:190-191) and is akin to the right of the US to retaliate when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour. He also advises emphasizing Al-Baqarah 2:256: "Let there be no compulsion in religion". Indeed, he maintains that Al-Hajj 22:39-40 involves Allah granting permission to carry out jihad for the protection of churches, as well as synagogues and mosques.

He notes Christian views that September 11 represents a kind of jihad against the West. Muslims too should express their strong feelings about the injustice of killing innocent people, some of whom were even Muslims. But they should remind Christians that at that time "1.7 million innocent Iraqis had already suffered cruel and unjust

deaths as a result of the American-led trade embargo against Iraq" (36). Anderson lays the blame for this equally on Saddam and the US-led embargo. He states, "Allah is a God of justice, not only for Christians in New York, but also for Muslims in Baghdad" (37). The Muslim aim "is to encourage the Christian to recognize they have a cultural bias that colors how they view justice, God and religion" (38).

### 3. *The Treatment of Women*

Anderson observes that many Christians think women in the Muslim world are second-class citizens and that Muslims unwittingly help build this negative perception. In Australia he was sensitive to the critical way in which Australians would view the new Muslim immigrant who strolled home from the shopping centre, holding only an umbrella to shield himself from the sun, while his wife followed behind, struggling like a pack donkey, alone under the weight of groceries.

He also notes the Christian objection to Muhammad's multiple wives, though he charges Christians with having short memories, since Ibrahim, Ishaq, Yaqub and Dawud, like many other prophets, had multiple wives. Muhammad's wives were very modest in number compared with Solomon. Again it is striking that when Anderson counters using the Bible he uses Old Testament material without sensitivity to its place in biblical theology.

Anderson's response to Christian objections to polygamy in the Muslim world is to suggest that the high divorce rates in the West merely reflect a progressive form of polygamy. He speaks of a humble smile creeping across the faces of Christians when he says this, indicating that the "Christians" he is referring to seem to be very nominal indeed. For true Christians are just as critical of divorce as they are of polygamy.

Anderson notes the Christian objection concerning Muhammad's young wife, Aisha who was only seven when promised in marriage to Muhammad. He maintains it is mistaken to say he consummated the marriage when she was nine, as is often claimed, citing Karen Armstrong in support. It seems to be just more convenient for Anderson to side with Armstrong's opinion here than to really deal with solid evidence for or against the common objection - very unsatisfactory!

He notes the objection that the Qur'an prescribes an unequal distribution of inheritance, with a daughter only receiving half as much as a son (Al Nisa 4:11). But, he responds, this belongs to a time when the responsibility to provide for the family needs fell on the man, indicating a sister was actually being greatly honoured to be given a portion of the inheritance. So this law is wisdom, not sexist discrimination.

He also advises responding to Christian objections about women in Islam by asking, "Have you ever asked a Muslim woman how *she* feels?"

### 4. *The Gospel of Barnabas*

This old manuscript was discovered in Holland in 1709. Zealous Muslims have claimed it to be a more authentic and accurate account of Isa's teaching than the four gospels. It has been used by Muslims in trying to convince Christians to revert.

But this has proved to be one of Muslims' most humiliating mistakes. For the document was proven to be a fake, so that now Christians use it to discredit Muslims. He goes on at length to show why the Gospel of Barnabas is a fraud.

#### *5. Poor Communication*

Here Anderson warns against communicating in an arrogant, insensitive manner.

### **Chapter 3. Undoing Prejudice and Bridging the Gap**

Many Christians believe there is an impassable gap between Christianity and Islam. Anderson states his highly questionable belief that during the time of Muhammad and his companions no such gap existed.

Anderson casts his own spin on the Crusades. In his highly selective reading of the history he starts at 1095 when Pope Urban II called for the building of an army to liberate the holy places in the Middle East from the Muslims. He correctly observes that at that time the church in Europe was riddled with corruption and greed and largely ignorant of Islam. Ironically, too, Pope Urban II promised those who died in war automatic entrance into Heaven. For some the Crusades was an opportunity to get rich. Anyway, a poorly organized army set out for Jerusalem, sometimes attacking Jews and Christians along the way and with most of this pathetic army dying *en route*. In June 1098 they captured Antioch with a great slaughter and in 1099 took Jerusalem, killing many of the inhabitants.

#### *Building Bridges of Trust*

Anderson believes that 7<sup>th</sup> century Christians did not have a strong prejudice against Islam and that a gap between Islam and Christianity did not exist within the mind of Muhammad. Anderson has an idealistic view of Muslim-Christian relations in the early Islamic period that just simply will not stand up to solid historical analysis.

Anderson's claim that Muhammad did not think there was a gap between Islam and Christianity strains incredulity, since, though I lay no claim to being a scholar in Islamics, the Qur'an is full of criticism of Jews and Christians, with lots of dire warnings. At any rate, on highly spurious historical grounds, Anderson advises Muslims to help Christians understand the harmony between the Qur'an and the Bible. I have just summarized Mark Durie's book *Revelation? Guidance for the Perplexed* (see my website under "Reviews"), which on any view, highlights massive points of difference between these books. Anderson's claims here are absurd and betray his own ignorance! Anderson provides a classic example of what Durie is arguing against, the view "that Allah is God and God is Allah" (55).

Anderson comments, "Many Christians are surprised to learn that Arab Christians had used the word 'Allah' for centuries before the time of Muhammad" (56). So they should be since there appears to be no hard evidence that they did. At least, Anderson provides none. Again, Anderson shows himself to be poor in his handling of both history, whether biblical or extra-biblical.

A long discussion, based on flawed etymology (Anderson is also quite out of touch with linguistic theory), about using various names for "God" ensues, in which he really pushes the envelope when he concludes that "it does seem more biblical for a Christian to pray to Allah rather than to God" (58).

Anderson cites Al-Alaq 96:1-5 recounting how Muhammad became a prophet. Moving outside the Qur'an he then maintains that after Muhammad had told his wife Khadijah of his experience, she went to the house of Waraqah bin Naufal, the son of Muhammad's uncle. Waraqah bin Naufal, a Christian priest, upon hearing this, explained with great joy that Muhammad was going to be a prophet similar to Musa. Anderson uses this story as evidence that Christians and Muslims were friends. He adds to this the time when Muhammad and his followers, experiencing severe persecution, found refuge among Christians in Abyssinia. Anderson maintains that the Qur'an, along with the Injil, teaches that there were always good and bad Christians, and laments the way in which the Muslim world, because of corrupt men like Pope Urban II, views all Christians as corrupt and depraved.

Anderson claims Muslims have just as much right to the Taurat, Zabur and Injil as Christians. A long repetitive section follows stressing Muslims' need not to reject them and arguing Muhammad didn't (this includes comments on the controversial Yunus 10:94).

#### **A Test is Coming**

Anderson suggests to Muslims that sometimes they have allowed traditions to take precedence over Qur'anic revelation. Just as Muhammad himself, having been born into an era of *jahiliyyah*, was tested upon receiving Qur'anic revelation so, Anderson suggests, 21<sup>st</sup> century Muslims are being tested today.

#### **Chapter 4: Bent Motorcycles and Islam**

Anderson begins with the example of a friend who bought a shiny new motorcycle which was slightly bent after an accident. He comments, "The motorcycle must be in original condition if it is to be attractive to the general public. The same is true of Islam" (79). Hence the need to distinguish between true Islam and human innovations.

Anderson recalls a Muslim wife who found comfort in reading the Injil, while remaining a devout Muslim. Yet her outraged husband beat her, threatened her and insisted she stop reading it. He got a witch doctor to put a spell on his wife to stop her reading the Injil. Anderson suggests this is bent Islam: a "kind of wounded Islam that values the traditions of men more highly than the word of Allah" (79).

#### *Building Mosques with Money from Unbelievers*

A Christian working temporarily in S.E. Asia had given a monthly donation for the building of a mosque on his street. When it was completed he was told, on the basis of Al-Tawbah 9:18 (only Muslims can visit and pay for mosques), that he was not permitted to enter the mosque. The local Muslims were behaving hypocritically.

#### *Palestine - Should We Push the Jews into the Sea?*

Anderson expresses his extreme sympathy for the Palestinians and sees them as the victims of unjust treatment by the Jews. He has been to Palestine and personally visited the refugees and has sent monthly donations for their welfare for many years. But he does not believe that the Jews should be expelled from Palestine or that this is what the Qur'an would require. Here he cites Al-Araf 7:137 and Al-Mai'dah 5:22-23.

### *Greeting Unbelievers*

Anderson observes that in some Muslim countries it is forbidden to give the Muslim greeting *As'Salaamu'alaikum* to a non-Muslim. He cites Al-Furqan 25:63 and suggests this too is bent Islam.

### *Wars Between Muslims*

He acknowledges that Muslims have sometimes given Christians the wrong impression that they are a war-like people. The Iran-Iraq war and inter-factional fighting in Afghanistan encourage this view. He cites Al-Nisa 4:93-94 to show the Qur'an forbids Muslims killing Muslims. This too is bent Islam.

## **Chapter 5. Harmonizing the Holy Books**

Anderson advises Muslims not to be embarrassed about reading the Bible with Christians. He compares statements concerning the creation of earth (Al-Sajdah 32:4; Exodus 20:11); the creation of man (Sad 38:71; Genesis 2:7); the fall into sin (Al-A'raf 7:22; Genesis 3:6-7); Musa and the Parting of the Red Sea (Ta Ha 20:77; Exodus 14:27-29); Dawud and Goliath (Al-Baqarah 2:251; 1 Samuel 17:50); the Virgin Birth of Isa (Al-Anbiyaa 21:91; Matthew 1:18); Isa is considered holy (Maryam 19:19; 1 Peter 2:22); Isa taught that there is only one God (Al-Mai'dah 5:117; Matthew 4:10); Isa is Allah's Mercy to Mankind (Maryam 19:21; Jude 1:21 - has completely misread this verse!); Isa is illustrious in this life and the next (Al-Imran 3:45; Philipians 2:9).

Citing Al-Nisa 4:171, Anderson devotes a more extended discussion to the question, *Does Allah have a son?* Anderson admits the Injil does state that Isa is the "Son of God". Anderson's way of dealing with this is as follows. When the Qur'an denies sonship it is dealing with genetics. When the Injil describes Isa as God's Son this is a title of honour, relationship.

Again showing lamentable handling of history, this time biblical history, Anderson "reconstructs" the early church as follows:

About fifteen years after Isa (pbuh) was taken up, large numbers of Greco-Roman pagans began to hear about Isa (pbuh) and became Christians. Eventually, these Greco-Roman Christians far out-numbered the Jewish followers of Isa (pbuh), however their concept of the Divine was very unlike the monotheistic ideas held by the Jews. The Greco-Romans had for centuries believed in many gods... In fact, 'Son of God' was also a title used by the Greco-Roman pagans but its meaning was very different to the Jewish title mentioned in the Injil... It seems many of the new Greco-Roman Christian's still had this false concept lurking in the back of their minds as they read the Kitab Injil. Consequently, when they read the words, 'Son of God' they forgot it was a Jewish (monotheistic) title and mistakenly assumed it had some kind of genetic meaning like their old pagan title. This was the beginnings of trinitarian speculation (104).

Anderson goes on to state his belief that Muhammad was not passionately opposed to the Injil, nor the Jewish title "Son of God", but rather the Greco-Roman interpretation. Anderson cites Acts 2:22 as showing that Jesus' disciple Peter viewed Jesus as but a man. He contends that the Taurat, Zabur, Injil and Quran "all unmistakeably teach that there is only one God and we are to worship him only", as encouraged by Isa (Mark 12:29). He takes Jesus self-favoured title "Son of Man" as confirmatory that Isa was but a man. But he acknowledges Isa is surrounded by mystery and there are "things written about him in the holy books and the hadith that are not written about any other prophet" (107).



Citing Al-Nisa 4:107 and Revelation 19:3 he notes that Isa is called Allah's Word. He claims that he has never met a Christian or a Muslim who could answer this question with absolute certainty. I'm not sure what he means here as Christian scholars have no difficulty in explaining this - it is notable that Anderson avoids any discussion of John 1:1ff at this point! This is such an obvious cross-reference (written by the same author, the apostle John) that it is hard to understand why it is not brought into this discussion.

### *Death of Isa or Substitution*

Anderson parts company with standard Islamic positions on this matter. He imagines that Christians would say they don't accept the Qur'an because it denies the death and resurrection of Jesus. He recognizes that it is central to the Christian religion that Isa is God's sacrifice for the sins of all mankind; that becoming a Christian involves applying the sacrifice of Isa to his own sin and thus finding God's forgiveness and salvation. Christians also believe Isa's death was planned by Allah and predicted by earlier prophets.

Anderson is troubled by the common Islamic view that Isa was not killed, but at the last moment was substituted with another person and so escaped. Anderson insists, against the view of most Christians, but of most Muslims as well, that the Qur'an does teach that Jesus died. He challenges the assumption that Allah would never allow a holy prophet to experience so terrible a death. To him this is bent Islam, citing Al-Imran 3:183 to show that suffering was in fact a common experience for all the prophets. In this connection he notes that even Muhammad suffered by being poisoned, almost dying on one occasion and that he suffered defeat at the Battle of Uhud, where he himself was wounded in the face and lost two front teeth.

He considers Al-Nisa 4:112 and contends it is a mistaken assumption to think the subject of this verse was Isa, rather, he maintains, it is the Jews. He says this verse as denying the proud Jewish boast that they killed Isa, stating, "This verse is not dealing with whether or not Isa (pbuh) was killed, but rather with **who** killed him" (112). He cites Al-Imran 3:55 and claims the proper translation should read not "I [Allah] will take you [Isa] and raise you to Myself" but "surely I will cause you to die and raise you to Myself". He maintains that the Arabic phrase in the text is *inni mutawaffeekat*, which means "to kill - to cause to die". So, Anderson argues, the Qur'an does actually teach that Isa was killed, albeit indirectly, by Allah.

While Anderson declares his respect for Islamic scholars, teachers and traditions he states that if they contradict the word of Allah he has no choice but to believe Allah, rather than men.

Anderson claims that though it seems unusual today, "it is undeniable that in the early days of Islam, not all, but a significant part of the *ummah* believed in the death and resurrection of Isa" (117). He finds evidence of this in the hadith. Here he cites accounts in Tabari's and Razi's commentaries where "we read that some Muslims believed Isa (pbuh) died for three hours before his resurrection, and others for seven hours", with Ibn Kathir adding that other Muslims believed he died for three days, was resurrected and then raised to Heaven - a depiction in harmony with the Injil.

## Chapter 6: The 'Use By' Date of Isa (pbuh)

Anderson claims that he had a vision of Isa leading him from the Christian garden, through the Christian gate, into the Islam garden. He recognizes that in the present age Allah has called Muslims to follow Muhammad, but claims Isa still has a role to play, citing Al-Imran 3:55 as showing that Muslims, not Christians, are called to follow Isa.

Anderson considers the story of the clay bird in Al-Imran 3:49. In the light of this he says that while Christians prefer to think of Isa as "Saviour", he himself prefers to think of him as "Life Giver", and suggests this is a good bridge to use, as a way of experiencing Allah's gift of life through Isa.

Anderson speaks of his personal experience of receiving from Allah *new life* through Isa, and through Muhammad the corresponding *life style* - Islamic practice. In addition to being profoundly moved by the beauty he saw in Islam, the protection and honour Muslim men gave to the women in their families, the tremendous reverence for Allah, the incredible self-sacrifice of believers, the beauty, balance and harmony of Muslim art and architecture, the tremendous solidarity in the global Muslim community, he was particularly impacted by the person of Muhammad. He found that he constantly thought about him and his incredible life.

When he "reverted" his Christian wife, now a happy and devout Muslim, found this all extremely disturbing. He says he crossed the bridge to Islam when he realized that the Qur'an teaches Muslims to read and obey the previous revelation and when he saw that following Isa was still a valid option for Muslims today. He then felt free to say the *shahada*. He recognizes that some Muslims might think that anyone who becomes a Muslim must leave Isa behind, along with the other early prophets. He considers that this view might be based on Al-Saffat 37:6, which might be taken to mean that Isa was sent exclusively to the Jews. But Al-Anbiya 21:91 speaks of him being "a Sign for all people".

Anderson incorporates the testimonies of three reverts. In many ways they are similar to testimonies people might give upon becoming Christians - a warning to distinguish between truth and experience, no matter how emotionally rich the latter might be.

Next, he adds a note on protecting the *ummah*. He refers to the example of a Muslim friend named Ali who, having become convinced Isa was killed as Allah's sacrifice for sin, was vulnerable to the pressure of some zealous Christians to convert to Christianity. Anderson was determined to do his utmost to protect the *ummah* and keep Ali in the family of Islam. He was able to persuade him that followers of Muhammad are not excluded from following Isa, and so he rejected Christianity, a decision that was a great joy to him and a tremendous relief to his family.

## Chapter 7: Don't Make Them Pay Too Much

Anderson begins with a parable in which he basically asks Muslims to act like officials who work in Immigration Control centres on the border of Islamia and who obey the King of Islamia's decree not to make it too difficult for people of the Northern Country (Christians) to immigrate to Islamia. He notes, however, that contrary to this decree the officials did make it very difficult.



He finishes by exhorting Muslims not to preach a bent Islam but to emulate the same loving attitude as Muhammad, give Isa the respect and honour accorded him in the Qur'an, and place Allah's scriptures above the traditions of men.