

The Importance of Robust Public Proclamation in Communicating the Gospel to Modern Day Muslims

While Western Christianity prefers the written word and dialogue as vehicles to communicate their beliefs to others, Islam has traditionally preferred the 'spoken word' and debate. One needs only look at the over 43,000 Muslim videos on 'Youtube', mostly targeting Christianity, to see just how important these have become. Yet, we don't teach how to do either in our Bible Schools and Seminaries. In London we are beginning to change that by introducing the need to proclaim the gospel both publicly and passionately, thru the spoken word and thru debates. Jay Smith will introduce this new model, and give examples of how it can best be used.

Jay Smith has been working with Muslims for over 30 years, the last 22 years have been in London, England. Most of his time is spent travelling to numerous countries to teach Christian/Muslim Apologetics and Polemics, much of which he has learned from weekly forays to the world famous Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, London. He has been invited to many university campuses to teach classes, participate on panels, help out numerous Christian Unions with training, and has also participated in over 80 dialogues and debates with Muslim polemicists. He is a visiting lecturer for Oakhill College in London, the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics, and at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford. He has also taught apologetics at various religious schools and seminaries, in the UK, the US, and in Ethiopia. Since 2001, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), as well as the Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM), have used him to teach Islamics in the US and Europe. Jay has a Master of Divinity and a Master of Theology degree in Islamics, and is currently finishing his PhD dissertation at the Melbourne School of Theology, Australia, under the supervision of Dr Peter Riddell and Dr Gordon Nickel.

Introduction:

Since the events of September 11, 2001 (and July 7th, 2005 in the UK), there is a dilemma in missionary circles concerning correct missiological methods to use with Muslims, especially with the more radical fringe groups whose violent acts have brought death and destruction to so many innocent people. Radical Muslims like these are new to the missiological task, forcing a re-evaluation of adequate responses to them.

I. Two Christian Responses to Islam

A. 'Irenic', traditional method of "inter-faith dialogue", Friendship evangelism, Dialogues, etc...

B. Confrontational approach is also needed, using Apologetics and Polemics....Why?

II. The Rise of Radical, Political Islam

A. In UK from 15% - +40% = Muslims want Islamic 'Shariah' law to be introduced
1. 20% of those polled supported the July 7, 2005 London Suicide bombers

B. In the World: Turkey = 31%, Morocco = 45%, Jordan = 55%, Pakistan = 65% (80-90 million people)

III. The Rise of Radical, Theological Islam

A. History of modern Radical Islam

1. Middle East:

- a. Hasan al Banna – 1906 - 1948 -> “Muslim Brotherhood”
- b. Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) In the Shade of the Qur’an, Milestones
- c. Ayman Zawahiri – “Islamic Jihad” (Osama bin Laden) 1970s – Present (Hezbollah, Hamas, Mujahideen, Hizb ul Tahrir.....)
- d. Yusef al Qaradawi – moderate, yet ‘out of the closet’
 - Suicide bombers, wife beating & Homosexuals
 - Public vs. Private face of Islam

2. Indian Sub-Continent:

- a. Abu Ala Mawdudi – Jamaat I Islami
- b. Muhammad Ilyas – Tablighi Jamaat

IV. Solutions for Radical Islam

A. Eradicate it: (Govt.) through repressive laws internally, or the ‘barrel of a gun’ externally

B. Ban it: or anyone confronting them (i.e. Geert Wilders and ‘Fitna’)

C. Redefine it: from within (Moderates): ‘Quilliam Project’: Ed Husain, Maajid Nawaz

1. ‘Islamic Reform’: Shaykh Hamza Yusuf (Zaytuna Institute) & Dr. Tariq Ramadan (Oxford University)

D. Ignore it: (Media, Church, & most Missiologists)

- 1.(Church) Recent, political problem, needing Pol. Solutions
- 2.(Govt.) do not give them a voice, push them underground (i.e. Anjem Choudary)

E. Join it: (Insider Movement) Find commonality with it, appease it, and change from within it

F. Confront it: (Confrontationalists) Use “tough love” practiced by Jesus, his disciples, & early church

V. New Testament Precedence

A. *Apologia* - 5 times in NT:

1. Acts 22:1; 25:16; 1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 7:11; 2 Tim 4:16
2. Twice Christians asked to defend gospel (Phil 1:7, 16; 1 Pet 3:15)

B. Jesus’ Example

1. Friendly dialogue = Nicodemus (John 3:1-21)
2. Moderate Reproach = Rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16)

- a. Pharisees and Herodians (Mark 12:13)
- b. Dispute with Pharisee host at a dinner party (Lk 7:36-50)

- 3. Strong Confrontation = Money-changers (Mt 21:12-13; Lk 19:45)
 - a. Pharisees in Matthew 23:13-33

C. Paul's Example

- 1. Contextualized his message:
 - a. With the dispersed Jews (Acts 13:13-15)
 - b. Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31).
- 2. Reasoned with the Greeks using their traditions (Acts 17:1-2, 17)
- 3. Strong Confrontation, using apologetics & polemics, to *speak boldly, refute, debate, & argue* (Acts 13:46; 17:17; 18:28; 19:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:11; 10:5).
 - a. Ephesus, began “*arguing persuasively*” in the Jewish synagogue for three months (Acts 19:8)
 - b. Then continued in the lecture hall of Tyrannus for 2 years (Acts 19:9-10).
 - c. Rome, for another two years, he “*boldly tried to convince*” those who came to talk to him about Jesus (Acts 28:23-31).

VI. Confront only Co-religionists?

- A. Jesus = Woman at the well & Centurion.
- B. Paul = Gentiles living outside the Jewish community
- C. Philip when confronting the Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40).
- D. Should all missionaries go to co-religionists alone?

VII. No Models Today... Why?

- A. No Missiological Model – only Church planting & conversion
- B. No Schools – We teach responses from the Reformation, not apologetics/Polemics with Islam
- C. No Confrontation Missiology – All geared to 15% Arab world, not 85% Asian/African

Conclusion: ‘Sauls becoming Pauls’: We see results from both debates, and the material engendered by these debates by individuals who are ‘opinion leaders’, the ‘makers and shakers’ of their communities, the ‘Sauls who become Pauls’.

Many missionaries have been at the forefront of dialogue with Islam. Few have sought to confront its foundations polemically, perhaps out of fear, or perhaps due to our methodological restraints. We have tended to “sit on the sidelines” and watch from a distance the discussions and debates which have ensued within secular academic circles.

This is unfortunate since our training and experience has equipped us to enter into such a challenge, not only because we refuse to resort to violence, but because we, like the radical Muslims, start from a similar pre-suppositional framework, the efficacy of revelation as a source for all we believe and practice. Therefore, we can best debate the truth of these different claims to revelation. What’s more we have by far the best material to defeat their authority, and the only antidote, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The situation post 9/11 and 7/7 has brought into focus a need to re-assess whether there is room for some of us to return to the early church models of active and public engagement, using both apologetics and polemics, to confront the more radical elements of the Muslim community today, especially with regards to their theological and historical foundations, since it is to these foundations that they derive their authority in substantiating the actions they carry out.

I believe it is time for some of us to move away “from the sidelines” and look beyond our fear and restraints. We need to learn from those who have been at the forefront of this debate, and ascertain whether we can benefit from the materials and methods that have been employed in this approach to the Muslim community. Perhaps these, then, could be applied to a healthy ongoing public debate with our Muslim brothers and sisters who far too often see us as a threat to much of what they hold true and dear.

Both Muslims and Christians, when true to their faith, have a passionate commitment to truth, and both believe that ultimate truth can only be known through revelation. That is what Muslims hold dearest to their hearts—a passion for revealed truth. So do Christians! So we, both Muslim and Christian, enter the debate, not to destroy one another necessarily, but rather acknowledge that the intention of the debate is to destroy falsehood, and uphold the truth.

Jesus and Paul gave us an example of this kind of confrontation in the first century which I believe is just as applicable for those of us today in the twenty first century. Therefore, may we not then, like them, also choose to confront, and is there then not a place for apologetics and polemics?

Example: SEVEN AREAS OF DEBATE WHERE CHRISTIANS WIN

- 1) The Bible vs. The Qur’an
- 2) Women in the Bible vs. Women in the Qur’an
- 3) The Kingdom of God vs. The ‘Khilafa’ (Islamic state)
- 4) Yahweh of the Bible vs. Allah of the Qur’an
- 5) Yeshua in the Bible vs. ‘Issa’ in the Qur’an
- 6) Peace in the Bible vs. Violence in the Qur’an
- 7) The Relevancy of Christianity vs. The Irrelevancy of Islam