

## AS SEEN FROM MANY ANGLES

by Shirley W. Madany, 1995

One of the best-known propagators of the Muslim faith has not wasted any time getting "online." An alert Christian businessman discovered the subject "Islam" on his America Online service, and made a computer printout for us. We would share the various items, and then contrast them with some translations from Arabic-language magazines.

Foremost was an article by Ahmed Deedat of South Africa entitled: CHRIST IN ISLAM. This Muslim cleric has made a name for himself with his well-publicized public debates with any Christian leader willing to take him on. His confidence overflows in the myriads of tracts, brochures, cassettes and videos which have circled the globe from the ISLAMIC PROPAGATION CENTRE INTERNATIONAL in Durban, South Africa. Now he is readily available to individual Americans who might be curious to know more about Islam. He considers himself to be a top authority on the contents of our Holy Bible as well as his Holy Quran.

The theme of his piece is to be found in an opening statement; reportedly a comment made by one of the Christians who was debating with him. "It can be said from this discussion that there is, at present, somewhat more accommodation on the Islamic side for the founder of Christianity than there is on the Christian side for the founder of Islam." In a first conversation with a Muslim this is often the charge--that we don't respect their leader as much as they respect Jesus. No hint of their attitude towards the followers of Christ. That is a totally different matter it would appear.

There follow detailed quotes from the Quran about the holy prophet Jesus. Christians would do well to remember that the Jesus of the Quran is not the historical Jesus whom we look to as our Lord and Savior, the eternal Son of God. Ahmed Deedat is determined to prove through the quotation of many verses from the Quran that the Quranic Christ was the true one and that the words of Scripture have been corrupted. There is so much misinformation evident within his arguments.

Reading this particular piece with its measure of flattery you would hardly believe that this same amiable sounding gentleman could be the author of "Crucifixion of Cruci-Fiction?" I have that eighty-eight page diatribe in my files, and as I glance at it again I find it very unpleasant reading. He scoffs at any notion that Jesus could have been crucified.

Another group of Muslims availing themselves of computer outreach was The Institute of Islamic Information and Education in Chicago. They have submitted items on subjects like: Human Rights in Islam, as well as giving the goals and work of their organization. To quote them: "The Institute of Islamic Information and Education (III&E) is dedicated to the cause of Islam in North America through striving to elevate the image of Islam and Muslims by providing the correct information about Islamic beliefs, history and civilization from the authentic sources."

In this packet of information on Islam there was a nine-page study of food groups, toothpastes, and soaps which were "halal" or (kosher) for them to use. The salient problem being the use of "swine" in any way shape or form--be it in the fat ingredient in biscuits, the coagulant in gelatin

or the fat used in toothpaste. Cosmetics, disinfectants and chewing gum were given their rating also. For the devout believer this would be a helpful tool. As we quote again: "This is Islam, please don't make things convenient to your liking but follow the path of Islam. Allah loves those who follow the path of righteousness."

One has to admire such resourcefulness. Here is an opportunity for Christians--just waiting to happen. Let us have a Christian "online" also!

Now let us consider Islam as it is written about by other than clerics; by moderate non-radical Muslims finding outlet in Arabic-language magazines. It is as if one was looking at Islam through a prism. I am referring to some translations of recent articles written by moderate Arab intellectuals.

A businessman living in exile (Europe) strikes a theme of hopelessness. He pleads for an end to all types of "guided" or organized ways of living. With the bankruptcy of socialism why doesn't the Arab world opt for an open society! He knows that those in control don't want to hear such words.

This businessman expressed himself thus: "We feel defeated in most Arab countries. Despair is creeping slowly, added to the fact that we suffer from humiliation brought upon us by oppressive authorities. We are liable to be arrested at any time and to suffer torture. No alternative is found except to migrate to God's wide world seeking honor, freedom and a means of earning a decent living." And where does one turn to find a "free" country to which to flee?

There is plenty of cause for this mood of despair. The Saudi troops have just threatened their neighbor Yemen, with an old quarrel over border lines. The Gulf War has left thousands of disrupted lives in neighboring Iraq. The great originator of radicalism -- Iran -- has not ceased to send out its emissaries so that unrest still brews in southern Lebanon. News coming out of Egypt makes one fear for their future. And the savage civil war in Algeria is scarcely reported because of the threat to any foreigner who dares to surface too prominently. Newsmen and cameras are not welcome. So the news barely reaches our ears. Efforts to arrive at peace between Israelis and Palestinians are continually being affected by the cowardly blows of terrorists who have no qualms about claiming responsibility for their deeds.

No wonder then that another contributor writes just as eloquently about "A Dying Culture." Just as we write about ourselves and complain that nowadays there is no "Christian Mind." So, too, this Muslim says: "What all Arabs must face--both governments and people--is the cold and brutal fact: our culture is dying."

Listen to his description of culture:

"If the greatness of a culture is to be measured by its ability to produce and to interact with foreign cultures, we may say that today Arab culture is not to be envied at all. Nothing is being produced! Very little interaction is taking place with foreign cultures. It is as if we tendered our resignation from our cultural activities while motivated by a hatred

of foreigners as we repeat the cliché that we are actually resisting foreign cultural invasion."

After saying that, he goes into more detail to explain why he said it. He notes how few books are printed in the Arab world and the dearth of creative writing. He thinks the Arab has entered a "cocoon" while repeating the slogans of the past. The schools and universities have failed because of the disappearance of language study and of world literature. "If we were to measure cultural activities by the amount of translations which are accomplished, we may say that translation of foreign works has stopped or is on its way to being halted."

He asks these questions: "What does our young generation know of the literary and cultural activities which are going on in France, Germany, England, Italy, the United States, India and Japan? What do we know about the present state of such disciplines as psychology, sociology, philosophy and economics in the USA for example?"

He notes that there are several Arab countries which no longer import foreign books because they cannot pay for them in hard currencies. And that: "Other countries treat writers and books at their borders as if the former were smugglers and the latter something like opium or hashish."

We have to smile at that last sentence because having been in the business of shipping books into the Arab world for over thirty years, we have observed only too sadly how true this is. In fact, we made our own classification and drew up two lists - the "open" countries and the "closed" ones and we were simply referring to which ones would accept and deliver books which came legitimately through the mail. Books have indeed become a "hot" item, fit to be smuggled across borders!

One could go on to quote more but this selection happens to be dealing with one basic problem. The words come best when they say them: "Our defeats reach their highest levels when we blame the Zionist aggressor or the oppressive power of the imperialists without realizing even for one moment that the trouble is within us."

Comments like these will never be found on America Online but if you do happen to stumble onto Islamic material during your computer explorations be sure to seek out a Christian view of Islam in order to arrive at a proper balance. Don't be like the "reverend" who was quoted by Ahmed Deedat as agreeing weakly that when he heard the words of the Quran regarding Jesus, he thought they were identical to the Bible, and hence there was no difference!