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Book Review

McDowell, Bruce & Anees Zaka
*Muslims and Christians at the Table –
Promoting Biblical Understanding among
North American Muslims*
Philipsburg: PR Publishing, 1999.
(326 pages, paperback)

Why review a book for AJET that unmistakably targets North America in its title rather than Africa? Because this book provides a remarkably comprehensive presentation that is in many ways quite exceptional, and not at all irrelevant for our own African context. McDowell and Zaka combine solid biblical convictions with a wealth of experience and practical, reproducible ideas on how to reach out to Muslims. In the process the reader is equipped step-by-step in essential awareness and motivation, historical and cultural understanding, theological reflections about the concepts of revelation, salvation, Christology and faith, and through attention to the practical side of reaching Muslims (almost half the book!). In the end it seems rather unnecessary that the authors have limited the scope of their workbook to North America. Indeed the title may prove misleading in another respect as well; whereas the book is designed to assist believers in outreach to Muslims, it is certainly not suitable to be placed in the hands of Muslims!

The main method of reaching Muslims is given a detailed description in chapter 12: Meetings for Better Understanding. This particular approach may work better in a Western setting than in the heartlands of Africa. But there are still scores of other useful methods offered for testing. Probably the wealth of ideas presented in various lists throughout the book is its most outstanding feature: e.g. 24 Methods for Reaching Muslims (pp 173-186), 21 Principles of Conduct for Visiting a Mosque (pp 186-192), 36 Theological and Social Topics for Discussions and Meetings with Muslims (pp 221-222) and 19 Muslim Beliefs and Practices in the Light of Scripture

(pp 247-254). Unfortunately the authors have not taken the time to give outlines of at least a few of these listed topics, such as “Allah’s condescension” or “Human nature and sin” or “The mission of Yesua el-Masih.” Topics like these will be rather difficult to develop for any beginner in ministry to Muslims. Also it is the case that some excellent summaries occur in the earlier part of the book on theological differences and worldview contrasts between Christians and Muslims, but one does not find the same sensitive critical reflection under the section on Contextualized Discipleship (pp 247-254). It is rather naïve to expect a Muslim’s view about Holy Water from Mecca (*zamzam well*) to change merely by explaining Genesis 21:19; Isaiah 12:3 and John 4:13-14.

But apart from such minor reservations, this book makes fascinating, inspiring reading, offers much worthwhile practical assistance, and gives the “theological basis for Muslim Evangelism” more room than most other books on this crucial issue. Despite the title, it could serve well in assisting Christians in Africa as they seek to promote biblical understanding among their Muslim neighbours.

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