

Book Review

Duane Miller, *I Will Give Them an Everlasting Name: Pastoral Care for Christ's Converts from Islam*

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Miller, Duane (2020). *I Will Give Them an Everlasting Name: Pastoral Care for Christ's Converts from Islam*. Regnum Books, Oxford, 98 pp., £8.00, ISBN: 978-1-913363-76-5.

Duane Miller is a pastor and a scholar. He is an Evangelical American Episcopalian minister with a BA and MA earned in America and a Ph.D from Edinburgh University examining conversion to Christianity from Islam. He is a fluent Arabic speaker who has taught in an Evangelical Arab theological seminary in Nazareth and currently serves on the staff of the Episcopal Cathedral in Madrid, Spain while also being an associate professor at the Protestant Faculty of Theology in the city.

Miller acknowledges that there are well-known problems for a convert from Islam, such as an inaccurate knowledge of Christian teachings or hostility from his or her Muslim family. Even so, Miller believes the greatest problem has to do with a sense of identity, which he describes as having three essential aspects: core (who am I to myself?), social (who am I to my group or groups?) and collective (what is my group's identity in relation to the wider world?).

To provide answers to these questions, Miller reflects in brief chapters on a range of issues that he believes should be explained both to converts and to those offering them pastoral support. *The Christian heritage of the pre-Islamic Arab communities* is valuable because it enables converts to answer for themselves and others the criticism that becoming a Christian means betraying their historic identity and culture. Explaining *how an individual should study and apply the Christian Scriptures (Observe, Interpret, Apply)* enables the convert to read them with an eye for their context and spiritual message rather than with the very different approach to the Qur'an they were taught as Muslims. *Converts should be given a basic summary of the Christian faith that replaces the basic Islamic confession* that there is one God and Muhammed is his prophet. Miller suggests using for this the Apostles and the Nicene Creeds. *Converts should also and immediately be taught how to pray*, both extemporaneously and using traditional forms (the latter point and critical view of much extemporary prayer somewhat reflecting his Anglican identity).

Another issue raised by Miller is the need to *make converts aware of various denominations* or traditions beside that of the person through whom they have come to Christ, since if they live where there are few churches, or must move to a new area, they may need to join a church from another tradition. Also, an awareness of different churches will teach them that there are primary and secondary truths. *Baptism should be treated seriously* as a turning point expressing a Christian commitment and as a public confession, preferably with family members present so that they have some understanding of their relative's genuine conversion. *Open profession of faith* should be taught as essential in the long term, because Islam aims to preserve the religious unity of an Islamic culture. An 'apostate' threatens that and undermines the claim that Islam is superior to all other beliefs. Execution is still sometimes employed – even in the form of murder by a relative or acquaintance – but if converts to Christianity can be silenced through fear it achieves the same goal of presenting Islam as incontrovertible in Islamic society.

Miller's Anglican commitment is also revealed in his next recommendation, which is to *use the liturgical calendar*. I must admit that I found this chapter the least convincing as a major strategy for converts. Miller follows this theme with what seems to me a far more relevant matter: *the need for the Christian church to communicate with the convert's family*. This, he reasons, may seem to make the convert vulnerable but in reality will not because the family is less likely to act against the convert if it knows that there is a community of people watching over the convert. It will also show respect for the importance of family in Islamic culture and empower the convert to share his or her faith rather than hide it. The next section emphasises the need to *teach converts how different from the Islamic portrayal of God is the Christian and biblical picture*. Converts tend to bring their Islamic assumptions to Christianity of a god who is impersonal and aloof. Miller does not discuss the debate about whether Christians and Muslims 'worship the same God'. He emphasises the different concepts of God in His relations with humanity but not the similar convictions regarding the Being of God as the one divine Creator. He next turns to the theme of *a covenant relationship with God*. Islam has at its heart the idea that God has made a covenant with Islamic society (the *Ummah*) mediated by Muhammed. To become a Christian is to repudiate this basic relationship in favour of the New Covenant with the People of God mediated by Christ. A fundamental reorientation is thus involved and must be taken profoundly and seriously. It is a passage from spiritual darkness to light.

Miller follows on with a *practical issue of difference – that in Islam money defines a relationship with a patron, rather than with work as in the West*. Converts often regard a Christian who has influenced them as a new patron and so make requests for help that seem very inappropriate to a westerner. Harm can be caused by the approach, as well as by its blunt rejection, so that Christians working with converts from Islam need care to avoid both the appearance of becoming a patron and the personal rejection of a convert because of what seems a rather unchristian concern to be given favour. Another practical issue follows: *the Church must be a genuine family of love*. Muslims take seriously that their religion creates a brotherhood. The Church often speaks highly of Christian relationships while living at a much lower level of friendship and mutual care, hence Muslim background converts may be deeply disturbed by their experience of Christian fellowship. Miller's final little chapter concerns *the value or otherwise of apologetics*. His experience is that most Muslim background converts are more moved by a good experience of Christians than by clever arguments. He recommends that evangelism should be quality-rich in love and kindness, but that Christians should also show they can think about matters Muslims find difficult about Christianity, such as what the Trinity means other than there being three gods.

This book is undoubtedly important because it deals with issues rarely covered in Christian literature and because it does so with a combination of simplicity and great learning. It could perhaps be restructured with clearer sections on matters of belief and practice. Miller's obvious love of liturgical ways will probably irritate more informally-inclined Christians. However, there is here another love of this writer with which all should be impressed – the love of sharing the Christian gospel with Muslims. Christians sharing Christ with their Muslim acquaintances is becoming a high priority as the world becomes a global village. Dr. Miller deserves our gratitude for leading the way for Christians wishing to build good evangelistic and discipling practices towards Muslims.