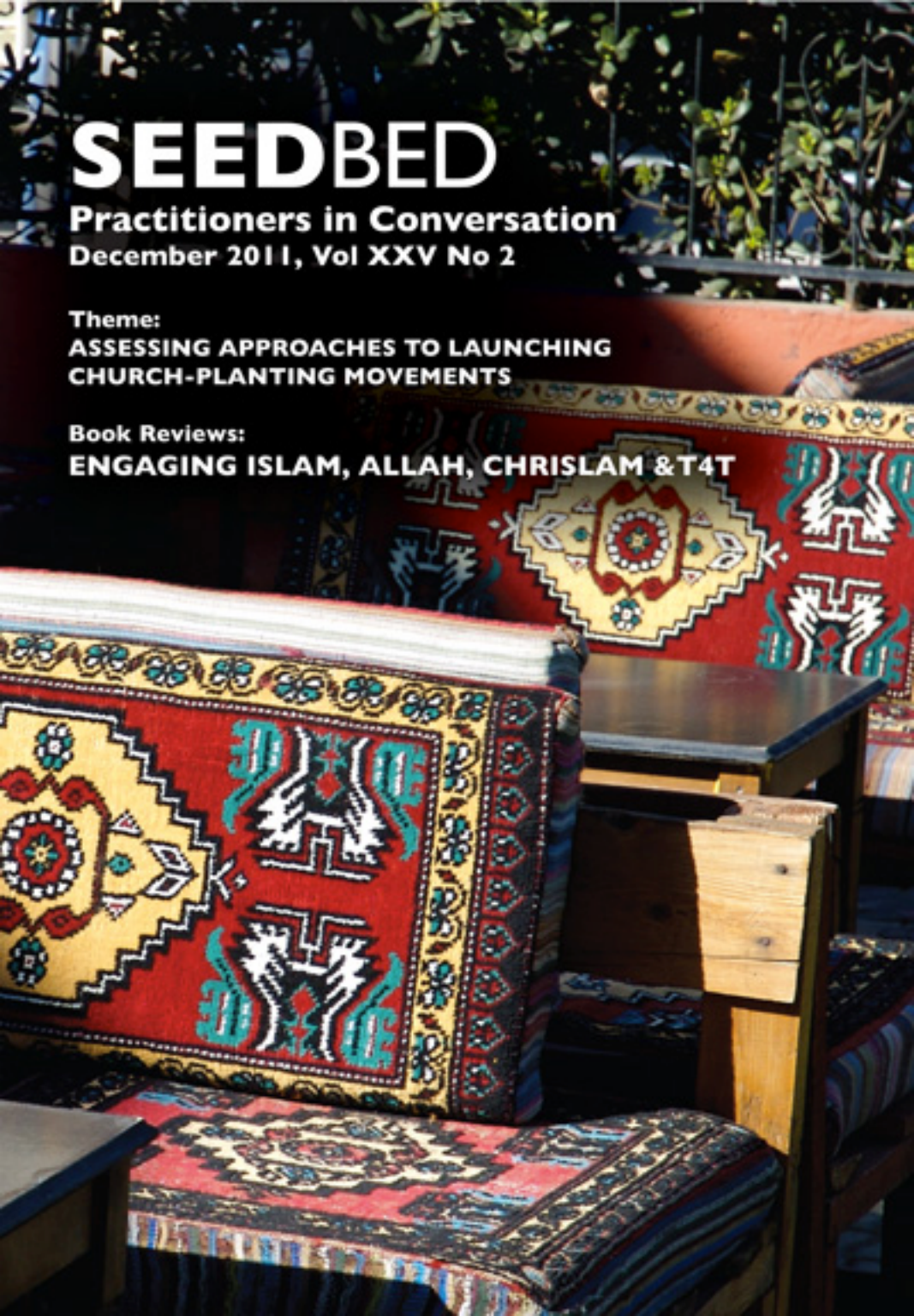


SEEDBED



Practitioners in Conversation

December 2011, Vol XXV No 2

Theme:

**ASSESSING APPROACHES TO LAUNCHING
CHURCH-PLANTING MOVEMENTS**

Book Reviews:

ENGAGING ISLAM, ALLAH, CHRISLAM & T4T

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Editor: Don Little

Associate Editor: L.D. Waterman

Copy Editors: Joy Curtis and Faith Knoll

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EDITORIAL

CPMs and the Initiative of the Spirit

This issue of SEEDBED presents a vigorous debate on whether we can, or should, learn principles and approaches from church planting movements (CPMs) happening in certain parts of the world, including in parts of the Muslim World, in order to employ them in other Muslim contexts. Several writers believe that with much prayer and apostolic intentionality, church planters can ‘prepare the way’ and invite God’s Spirit to birth CPMs of hundreds of churches in very resistant Muslim lands. They believe a valuable part of the church planter’s role is to correctly implement (with appropriate local modification) the CPM practices being used of God to begin movements in numerous regions of the world. Others, writing in this issue, believe that such expectation is unbiblical and that, in particular, one should not seek to reproduce the *Watson* model of CPMs. They argue that we should stick to approaches that they believe are better attested in the New Testament and throughout church history.

When I began ministry thirty-five years ago it was still a relatively new idea, *in North Africa*, that one should seek to *plant a church* rather than simply evangelize. In my generation, we strove to plant healthy churches that would *naturally* reproduce. Now church planting teams seek to catalyse church planting *movements*. All of these expectations share the same conviction that it is *the Spirit of God* who brings fruit in churches planted.

A central question explored here is: *should* we study what God is doing in certain fruitful ministries in order to extract principles and approaches to apply elsewhere in the hope of seeing similar fruit? In this issue, some argue that such an approach is not appropriate—God does not work in response to correct ‘technique’. Yet, others argue that these principles are consistent with biblical commands and examples, and in using them they are following the *initiative of the Spirit* who is himself launching CPMs in unprecedented ways in our generation.

There is a profound mystery of the Spirit in the ‘task’ of launching CPMs. How does the mystery of divine initiative interface with our human efforts in church planting? The reality of *God* working *through our* efforts is normal in our experience as Christians. When undertaken with the Spirit’s guidance, God’s transforming work is not at odds with our vigorous labours.

It is our prayer that this spirited, yet gracious, debate about CPMs will help you as you minister under the Holy Spirit’s guidance and anointing. No matter what we think of a CPM model, we all agree that we want *God* to build the house.

Don Little, Editor (I love hearing from you (secure): seedbed.editor@sent.com.)

N.B. Let me warmly welcome and thank L.D. Waterman who has joined SEEDBED as associate editor and has contributed significantly to this issue.

PART I: A VIGOROUS DISCUSSION OF WATSON'S CPM MODEL

Exponential Disciple-Making: A Fresh Approach to Church Planting Movements

by Steven Steinhaus

Steven Steinhaus (pseudonym) is a Pioneers field worker who has been serving with his family for 17 years among Muslims in Southeast Asia. He is also currently working on his D.Min.

A church planting work can be considered a movement when the churches in it are consistently multiplying to the fourth generation. That is, churches are planting churches that are planting churches that are planting churches.

Ultimately, Church Planting Movements (CPMs) are about discipleship. In CPMs, believers are not urged to ‘bring new people to church next Sunday’ but to plant more churches. Lay people lead Jesus-centred meetings in homes and other public places (not usually church buildings) and encourage those they are discipling to do the same. This approach mirrors that of the early church, imitating the pattern of 2 Timothy 2:2.

A true CPM is a *discipleship movement* built on leadership development. This is why CPM practitioners talk about ‘training the trainers,’ which simply means ‘discipling the disciple-makers’. Though this is done in a variety of ways, everyone I am aware of in CPMs today is very committed to solid, biblical discipleship.

Today there are at least 80 CPMs happening around the world. These can be found on every continent and, wonderfully, among many UPGs. Significantly, CPMs are also happening in conjunction with a wide variety of traditional churches as they release their members for lay ministry and equip them for harvest.

CPMs are real. Some people dispute the numbers and the results being reported. Nevertheless, the largest CPMs happening around the world today are being reported with ruthless evaluation and accountability. The largest CPM happening today (in India) has been independently verified by four organizations *not involved* in the movement. All four testify that the numbers reported are *less* than what is actually happening.

We have also this recent report from Fred Dimado, Director of Pioneers Africa—a brother many of us know, trust and love. Fred writes:

In March of 2011, I heard some news about CPM work in a nearby country in West Africa. The statistics were staggering and I thought some massaging of

figures was going on, even though I had no doubt about what the Lord could do. So we sent two of our key leaders to check things out on the ground. At least we had a learning posture and were open to gleaning some lessons that we could possibly embrace and apply in our church planting ministry.

After spending just a day out of the planned five days there, I got a call saying 'Brother, everything we heard is true! You need to be here to see what God is doing.' In 2003, the leadership of the NH Church had been exposed to the principles of CPM. Before then, the denomination had planted 75 churches. However, after CPM training and a focus on prayer and other CPM principles, they planted 75 churches in the first year of implementation and have since planted a little over 2,000 churches.

The CPM we observed has a strong prayer commitment, contagious faith and simple obedience to God's Word. The church there operates a prayer house in every district and there is a prayer schedule that runs five times in a day for five days in the week.

Since the CPM training hosted by the Pioneers Africa base in April 2011 for over 50 missionaries in the region, teams in Africa have been working toward CPMs with all they have got. The results they are already seeing are very encouraging. The Togo team scheduled a second generation CPM training¹ in the north of Togo even before the Accra CPM training had begun. Among the participants was a Pioneers missionary I will call 'L,' who has been with Pioneers for about two years. He and his wife serve a people group in northern Togo. After completing the CPM training, he went back to the church he had already planted and trained his converts and disciples. Afterward, twelve of these disciples went out looking for 'People of Peace.'² They have already identified thirteen 'People of Peace' in four different villages, and from this, thirteen Discovery Groups³ have begun.

Exponential Disciple-Making—A Fresh Approach to CPM

Ultimately, CPM is not about a 'model' but about 'process,' or more accurately, processes. These include:

1. A 'second generation' training is when someone who has been through the original training reproduces it by taking others through the training—a practical step that is encouraged for all attendees.

2. As described in Matthew 10:11-13 and Luke 10:5-10, a 'Person of Peace' is someone who welcomes God's messengers and opens the door for the Gospel to be presented to his/her household or network of close relationships.

3. A Discovery Group is a regular gathering of a group of focus people who do chronological Bible study from Genesis to Christ, leading toward faith in Him.

- Evangelizing families and groups
- Discipling these groups to become obedient disciples of Christ (not just converts)
- Training them to do these same things with other groups
- Seeing these groups become baptized believers
- Developing leaders who develop more leaders who do the same.

A CPM happens when these processes occur in contextually appropriate ways that reproduce Bible living, Jesus-loving disciples who transform their world. Broadly affirming varieties of CPM approaches does not exclude noting ‘best practices’ that can be used in these processes. For example, the practice of focusing on families or groups versus individuals is very significant. If evangelists and church planters around the world seriously implemented this one principle, the impact would be incredible. While all CPM practitioners agree to this ‘*oikos* principle,’ its implementation varies.

The remainder of this article will focus on a model of CPM that could be called Exponential Disciple-Making. I am greatly indebted to David Watson of New Generations for this term and also to Stan Parks, PhD. for the concepts elaborated in this article.

Key Questions in Evangelism and Discipleship

When we speak of CPM, it is helpful to consider:

- How did Jesus evangelize?
- How did Jesus make disciples?
- How did the early church operate?
- Have our own cultural presuppositions hindered our understanding?

Jesus did not simply ‘go out and evangelize.’ He focused on making disciples. This focus is quite different from what many modern Christians mean by ‘evangelism’ today: giving a short gospel presentation and hoping for an instantaneous personal decision with no necessary commitment to a church body or to long-term discipleship. Harold Netland correctly assesses modern evangelicalism when he notes, “There has been a tendency to understand the Great Commission primarily in terms of verbal communication of the message of the gospel (information transfer), and there has often been an accompanying reductionism which views the gospel simply as necessary information for “getting to heaven” ’ (Netland 2011, 1).

Timothy Tennent argues that common modern theological reductionism leads believers to fallaciously equate salvation with justification. This then creates a preoccupation with what is the absolute minimum an individual has to know or believe in order to be justified instead of considering what is necessary for people to become committed disciples in community.

In a similar vein, Timothy Tennent argues that

common modern theological reductionism leads believers to fallaciously equate salvation with justification. This then creates a preoccupation with what is the absolute minimum an individual has to know or believe in order to be justified *instead of* considering what is necessary for people to become committed disciples in community. Thus to 'be saved' (justified) is seemingly all that matters to many today. However, Tennent clarifies that 'biblically, the doctrine of salvation does include justification, but it also includes the doctrines of sanctification and our final glorification.' Tennent continues, 'True biblical salvation' is in three tenses: 'you *were* saved (justification), you *are being* saved (sanctification), and you *will be* saved (glorification)' (ibid, 376). Undoubtedly, this is why he elucidates the process of evangelism in a seemingly inverted order:

In my experience of working in India, I have found that discipleship often *precedes* conversion by many years. This seems counterintuitive in the West, because Christendom always assumed a larger Christian context making it easy to live as a Christian... However, in India, it often takes many years for someone to comprehend the gospel message and what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Lengthy periods of instruction and modelling often take place long before someone receives Christian baptism. This is closer to Jesus' model exemplified in the Gospels, whereby intensive instruction took place with His disciples for several years before they fully understood and accepted His lordship. (Ibid, 81. Italics his.)

The concept of *discipleship into conversion* is one of the principles often found in CPMs around the world today. A key idea is helping people learn a little and obey a little, that they may - like Jesus' disciples - come to faith over time as they hear the Word of Christ (Rom 10:17) and experience the power of His teaching by doing (John 7:17). To many in the West the concept of discipling into conversion seems not only counterintuitive but an oxymoron. Are we not first to convert then to disciple? While some may see this as simply semantics, I think this distinction actually helps put the emphasis back where Jesus put it.

Jesus' focus was not on evangelism but on disciple-making. Evangelism (literally 'good-news-ing') happens as people give their lives in discipleship to the King; it can never be divorced from Lordship.

In many CPMs today, the moment of salvation is the moment of baptism. This moment is a Lordship decision because, for many, deciding to follow Christ is inviting persecution. Seeing groups come to believe, repent and become disciples involves time for process. This is what Tennent was speaking about above. Yet this is contrary to what most missionaries hope for. David Hesselgrave gives us this warning:

Generally speaking, Western missionaries have assumed too much in asking for

decisions in non-Western cultures. This observation is in no way intended to place limits on the power of the Holy Spirit. But the number of people in these cultures who have responded in one way or another to a gospel invitation only to return to their former way of life is ample testimony that something is amiss...Strictly speaking, respondents can accept only that message which they understand... Many accept something other than salvation. (Hesselgrave 1991, 182)

Hesselgrave continues:

Premature 'decisions for Christ' may not be, in fact, the decision of the respondents to accept Christ at all, but rather a decision to please the evangelist. While it is true that the knowledge sufficient for an intelligent decision to accept Christ will always be something less than complete knowledge, it is also true that Christ himself urged those who would follow him to count the cost of discipleship. A postponed decision may sometimes be the only genuine 'decision', and in some contexts may greatly enhance the discipling of entire families or even larger homogenous cultural groupings. (Hesselgrave 1991, 186)

This is what we see in the New Testament: groups (often families) coming to Christ as they come to understand who He is over time: Andrew brought Peter, James brought John. While there are some examples of sudden, individual conversions in the gospels and Acts, it seems clear that these were not the norm. Rather, the normal way people came to Christ was in groups, as seen with Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-34) and about twenty-five other conversion stories in Acts.⁴ These groups made decisions together as they got information and had confirming experiences over time. Then the decision was made official through the ritual of baptism. Thus, while we may find exceptions to this pattern both in the Bible and in our own experience, I would propose that the best practice would be to *normally give time for process* instead of hoping for instantaneous, individual conversions. This should inform our goals and strategies for evangelism, especially among previously unevangelized peoples.

While we may find exceptions to this pattern both in the Bible and in our own experience, I would propose that the best practice would be to normally give time for process instead of hoping for instantaneous, individual conversions.

Upon conversion, groups that came into the Body most commonly met in houses. They were not brought into special church buildings or led by professional church leaders; these were organic meetings where 'everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church' (1 Cor. 14:26). There was a

4. In about thirty conversion stories in Acts, it appears that only three were clearly individual (Saul, Sergius Paulus and perhaps the Ethiopian eunuch).

plurality of elders and all the five-fold leadership⁵ was present, not dominated by a single office called ‘pastor.’ People came to Christ in groups and remained in their natural groups as they became disciples of Christ and lights to the world. Their lives were transformed, with radical sharing leading to societal impact (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37).

Overview of the CPM Training Model

Building on these insights, the CPM training offered to PI teams since August 2010 was designed to present an easily-reproducible, biblically-based approach to CP. This approach was modeled after ministries that have borne tremendous fruit in many UPG contexts around the world. It was not presented as a ‘silver bullet,’ a ‘recipe for success’ or ‘the only way to do church planting.’ Many other methods are also valid, biblical and blessed by God.

The heart of the CPM training that has been offered is 10 basic, easily-reproducible lessons. Everything about the model is designed to be reproducible. No high-tech equipment, professional trainers or lengthy theological training are needed for the training to be effective.

Three key ideas from CPM guided the process of assembling the training materials:

1. Everything must be based in the Bible.
2. Everything must be very simple and easily reproducible.
3. Biblical meanings must be able to be discovered without access to the original languages or other academic tools often unavailable in the majority world.

The materials intentionally handle in very simple, intuitive fashion the processes of:

1. Pursuing the intent of the biblical authors in their historical/cultural context
2. Considering the genre and place of the writing in salvation history and the canon of Scripture
3. Noting relevant differences between the historical context and the context of the current audience.

Those of us who put together these materials firmly believe that Spirit-led Christians throughout the ages and across the world can understand and apply the Scriptures without specialized knowledge of languages and history (2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12). We believe that some narrative passages in the Gospels and Acts are more than mere records of redemption history; they also illustrate useful principles consistent with the message of didactic passages. We believe God’s Spirit

5. Ephesians 4:11-12 states, ‘So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.’

can and does guide groups of His people to apply these principles effectively as they seek to obey Him in love.

Prayer is crucial in any endeavour expecting great things from God, and reproduction of intercessors is key to this approach to CP. Trainees are encouraged to increase the amount and depth of both personal and corporate prayer, as abundant and fervent prayer is a biblical practice generally present and preceding CPMs. Among prayer points are those such as the Apostle Paul requested: ‘Pray for us, that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honoured, just as it was with you’ (2 Thess. 3:1).

This approach does not try to evangelize everyone nor try to project a ‘secular’ persona for security reasons. Rather, it encourages ‘living out loud’ as a spiritual person, casting widely a net for those people in whom God is already doing something uniquely positive (‘a person of peace’). The goal is not trying to win individuals, but intentionally aiming to win families (the *oikos* or group of reference of a ‘person of peace’). Workers are encouraged not to aim for quick conversions, but rather to aim to make *disciples*, through a process of chronological Bible study (Discovery Groups).

The training uses a simple and concrete adult learning approach that stresses obedience to God’s Word rather than simply learning information and hoping for obedience. At every level, we are always asking, ‘If this is from God, what are you going to do about it?’

The goal is launching a simple, biblical house church model that can quickly reproduce in whatever context it is planted. We aim for independence from outside or foreign influence, through training local leadership. No programs or projects are begun unless local leadership is involved. Reproducing disciples, leaders, groups and churches is part of the ‘DNA’ of this approach.

The role of the cross-cultural worker is to *deculturate* the Gospel—presenting the Gospel without commentary, but with the question, ‘How will we obey what God has said?’ The role of followers *within* a culture is to *contextualize* the Gospel—presenting the Gospel and asking, ‘What must we change in our lives and culture in order to obey all the commands of Christ?’ Thus those saved from within a culture discern how to redeem local culture (a process not controlled by or dependent on outsiders).

In a number of ways, this approach to CP is counterintuitive. It runs counter to the methodology many church planters use—either as an intentional part of

The role of followers within a culture is to contextualize the Gospel – presenting the Gospel and asking, ‘What must we change in our lives and culture in order to obey all the commands of Christ?’

their strategy or because they are simply doing what seems to make sense. Among the counterintuitive elements are:

- Sharing only when and where people are ready to hear
- Viewing a new or inexperienced cultural insider as more effective than a highly trained, mature outsider
- Starting the gospel presentation with creation rather than Christ
- Conveying biblical truth through discovery rather than preaching or teaching
- Considering obedience (to small, incremental gains in biblical knowledge) as more important than rapid gains in knowledge of large amounts of doctrine
- Beginning a process of ‘discipleship’ (obeying what one knows of God’s truth) before conversion, rather than aiming to convert people and then make them into disciples
- Avoiding elements that tend to kill church planting movements, such as church buildings, paid clergy, and outside funding of local leaders
- Focusing training and coaching on ordinary Christians rather than professional or vocational Christians

Many of the counterintuitive aspects of this training occur because of a focus on making disciples (versus converts) in groups that multiply rapidly.

Practical Steps for Implementation

Following is an outline of some essential elements in an Exponential Disciple-Making approach to CPM. This is not a ‘recipe’ for CPM (as though following these steps will automatically cause a CPM to result), but basic elements needed to catalyze an Exponential Disciple-Making CPM.

I. Live in community in a way that builds respect, and reveals that you are a spiritual person.

While there may be room for short-term teams, overall evangelism takes place through incarnational presence—where the evangelist⁶ learns the culture and gains access to it by being a blessing in it. Visiting families in the neighborhood, helping out with community service projects, giving money to community events

6. From this point on, I will use the term ‘evangelist’ to refer to anyone—local or expat—who is seeking to win people to Christ. I do not mean that this person will necessarily be in professional, full-time ministry but simply that he/she intends to obey the commands of Christ and bring the gospel to the unreached.

and needs, praying for the sick, attending funerals, even just driving slowly while nodding and smiling can all help to establish oneself as a socially appropriate and spiritual person. All of these are ways in which God gives us community access and opportunity for power and love encounters—the kind of encounters that can lead us to the People of Peace God has been preparing.

2. Seek ‘People of Peace’ (Matthew 10:6).

Apparently each time Jesus sent out his disciples (whether twelve or seventy), he gave them similar instructions. (See Matt, 10:1-1-16; Mk 6:1-15; Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-16.) A centerpiece of these instructions was to look for ‘a worthy person’ (Luke 10:6) or a ‘person of peace,’ who would bring the evangelist into his household. D.A. Carson states that these passages were both ‘an explicit short-term itinerary and a *paradigm* of the longer mission stretching into the years ahead’ (Carson 1984, 242. *Italics mine*). No doubt this is why we can find aspects of this model in many Acts stories as well (eg. Cornelius, Lydia, and the Philippian jailer).

I recognize the many differences between the cultural context of first century Jews doing outreach in Palestine and twenty-first century Christians doing cross-cultural missions work today. Yet in light of Jesus’ multiple commands, examples in Acts and Carson’s description of it as ‘a paradigm,’ I consider it appropriate to consider applications of this approach for outreach in our contexts today. It is not the only method of outreach, but it is certainly one worth careful consideration.

3. Evangelize people together in their *oikos*.

The word *oikos* in the New Testament era denoted the household. The ancient household was far more than the nuclear family, often also including extended family, slaves, freedmen who had been enslaved, and others who associated with the household for mutual benefit (Hesselgrave, 485). In many parts of the world today, people are still living with extended family, maids, helpers, orphans and widows. Thus, talking about significant issues most often still takes place in the household, not alone on the streets or in other public places. When a Person of Peace brings the evangelist into his/her home, entering a family is often not only the appropriate cultural thing to do (as it honours the elders while sitting and chatting, taking unrushed time together), but it is also the safest. Evangelizing people on the street invites confusion, diminishes ability to make real decisions (as they don’t usually make decisions alone) and risks angering anti-Christian radicals. Once in the home, we have access to the family through the person of peace without arousing suspicion, while under the protection of the host family.

Some CPM practitioners speak of evangelizing the Person of Peace anywhere, and then asking him to introduce us to his *oikos*. But this is requesting an individualistic decision, and not giving time for the family to process the deep mysteries

of God over time together. Rad Zdero notes that the *oikos* practice outlined above was the standard practice of the early church. He writes, “They used the “house of peace” approach that Jesus modeled to train future leaders (Mark 3:14; Luke 10:1-11). They would find a contact person in a new area and impact that sphere of influence for God’s kingdom’ (Zdero 2011, 348). Zdero clarifies that a Person of Peace was not equivalent to an open person, but was a ‘contact person’ who would open his or her *oikos* to the evangelist.

Rad Zdero notes that the *oikos* practice outlined above was the standard practice of the early church.

David F. Hunt has written of his experiences using these principles in a burgeoning CPM in Africa: ‘Over and over the pattern of church establishment and even church replication in East Africa has been through the natural web of family relationships. Previously a pattern of extraction of an individual who showed interest in the gospel was followed, which often led to the isolation of that individual from the rest of the community, thus actually hindering the process of church planting. A focus on the family instead may move the process of evangelism ahead more slowly, but will result in a broader acceptance of the gospel later...’ (Hunt 2009, 121).

4. Disciple into conversion through chronological Bible studies using a Discovery Approach.

In an unreached context, evangelism is not best done quickly, aggressively or individually. Such approaches may be more useful in the West, however among the unreached, people need a context in which to understand the gospel. They need to see God’s story from the beginning, then over time to discover about the Fall and God’s remedy for it. To embrace Jesus as the atonement for their sins, people must first realize that sin is a serious problem, and that the way out was for Jesus to die on the cross as the fulfilment of the Old Testament sacrificial system. For those who lack these basic understandings, Jesus’ death on the cross is meaningless.

Some people object that such a long process of studying stories is unbiblical and a needless waste of time.⁷ However, as noted above, it took several years for Jesus to bring his disciples to a true understanding of the gospel, even though they were with him daily. Furthermore, Craig Ott points out that Jesus used a ‘discovery approach’ with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26) and that Paul used a ‘Bible study approach’ with the Bereans (Acts 17:11). Ott goes on to say ‘evangelism must also be understood as a process. Though regeneration occurs at a particular time, there is a process leading up to that point.... Focusing too narrowly on a single decision for Christ often leads to superficial conversions that are rooted in

7. In our model we use thirty stories beginning at Creation and ending at the new birth (John 3).

misunderstanding or are wrongly motivated' (Ott & Wilson 2011, 218).

Those using the CPM model described here meet the Person of Peace in his/her family at least weekly, studying the Bible in his/her home with the family over a period of months. The studies are inductive, not teacher-led. The evangelist only asks questions, allowing the group to discover God's truth themselves. After a time of sharing and prayer, the family is led in a very simple Bible study method that is easily remembered and reproducible:

1. Read the story.
2. Retell the story several times.
3. Ask what this story teaches us about God.
4. Ask what this story teaches us about mankind.
5. Ask what they believe God wants them to do in response to it individually.
6. Ask what they believe God wants them to do in response to it as a group.
7. Ask who they could pass this story on to.

Ideally, after a few times the family has learned these questions and is willing to meet without the evangelist present. The evangelist then continues to 'disciple' the Person of Peace (or other natural leader who arises from within the group) at a different time, getting together before each *oikos* meeting to give the next story, to ask how things are going, and to answer any leadership questions. Keeping the evangelist away from the group meetings helps prevent inadvertently transferring outside culture. Sometimes it is imperative in order to protect the group from hostility.

5. Encourage the group to pass on the stories immediately, and to begin other groups as new People of Peace are discovered.

This is what allows for reproduction. And it is what leads to true discipleship. If people won't act (obey the Word) or talk about it (witness) they aren't becoming disciples. But amazingly, even before conversion, unregenerate people *are* facilitating Discovery Groups. This is not mere theory; it is happening in several places in the world today. Ott notes, 'Storytelling approaches to evangelism and discipleship have the added advantage that new believers can easily continue to tell others the Bible stories they have learned, and as a result, the method is locally reproducible and can easily lead to multiplication' (Ott, 221). This is exactly what's happening: not simply story-telling but inductive studies of Bible stories in affinity groups.

6. As the group decides to follow Christ together, coach them into becoming a church by obeying the ordinances along with all the other commands of Christ.

The culmination of weeks or months of Bible study is the challenge to be born-again and receive baptism together. Sometimes this preparation stage requires additional Bible studies and time. The baptismal event is not done in secret, but with the evan-

gelist and the *oikos* present. It is often an emotional moment for it connotes serious moral and identity commitments (Rom 6:16-19; Gal 3:26-29). Following the baptism there is often opposition which necessitates increased follow-up.

In CPM models, baptism is expected to happen immediately at the time of initial profession and life commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord. Steve Smith in *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* (2011) argues passionately for immediate water baptism as the sign of publicly professing faith in Christ. He states that baptism is ‘the sign that you are sure, not mature, in your faith. It is the sign to the new believer and to others around him that he is sure he wants to follow Christ’ (S. Smith, 238).

Continuing in an inductive, discovery format, we encourage these study groups that have now become believer groups, to continue to study the Word by focusing on one of the Gospels. As they move along in the Word, they soon discover additional elements of worship that need to be incorporated into their fledgling church. Thus the end goal of our evangelistic efforts is planting churches that are biblically sound, culturally relevant, rapidly reproducing and able to keep on evangelizing the rest of their group. Ultimately this leads to community transformation.

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented some of the timeless principles behind CPM, and have given the basics of the model we use. These principles are biblical door-openers for potential church planting movements. We encourage use of these principles not only for practical reasons (as this approach is bearing fruit in many places) but also because they are a biblically sound way to do ministry. While God is using other models and will continue to do so, this is a model he is using powerfully today, especially among the unreached in the developing world. CPM is *not* a ‘silver bullet.’ Nothing replaces the hard work and suffering of missions. It is not easy. Discipleship involves much more than just getting people to profess faith, and seeking to catalyze a church planting movement is more involved than trying to plant a single church.

In presenting a CPM paradigm of ministry, we offer a way of ‘working smarter.’ Around the world, God is bringing rapid multiplication of churches among groups who have had little or no Christian witness. The Exponential Disciple-Making pattern of CPM is one way to open our lives and ministries to a powerful work of God’s Spirit in reaching the unreached. May Jesus alone get all the glory, as His church expands to the ends of the earth!

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A Response to 'Exponential Disciple-Making'

by Roland Muller

Roland Muller is a church-planting missionary with WEC International. He is the author of several books on church-planting and missionary service. His website is: <http://rmuller.com>

CPMs are real, and they are making an impact on the world, so they deserve our careful observation. In his article, *Exponential Disciple-Making: A Fresh Approach to Church Planting Movements*, Steinhaus gives us a good overview of church-planting basics, which he equates with CPMs, and seems to assume that CPMs should be the goal of every missionary.

He begins by emphasising that CPMs are all about discipleship. This is a concept that has been with us since biblical time, but it has gained a new life in the last two decades. Back in the 70s I was told that my main role as a new missionary was to train one or two nationals who would do the job of evangelism and discipleship that I only dreamed of doing. So this has been my model for the last 30 years. Prayerfully picking nationals and discipling and training them as the leaders of the new churches that we helped plant around them. This allowed us and our team to plant churches every few years with a new national leader, and it allowed those leaders to pick others to disciple and turn into leaders of new churches. After thirty years, we have seen some of these churches start other churches and ministries, but some did not, and a few even ceased to exist.

The problem with CPMs is that they are a work of God, not of man. Therefore, making CPM our exclusive goal and then reducing CPMs down to a set of steps or strategies can ultimately restrict what God is doing, or not doing. As I have travelled around the world, I have observed many teams trying to start CPMs using various strategies. Only a few succeed.

In my opinion, most CPM teachers, (Steinhaus included) seem to have four basic steps:

1. Choose and disciple new leaders
2. Develop a community around them that is easily reproducible
3. Empower the participants in that community
4. The leaders should choose and train new leaders to build new communities around.

Most of this is straight forward, and has always been a part of missionary teaching in some form or other. But there are three areas where people disagree: 1) the meaning of some of the terms 2) the speed this process should take, and 3) the makeup and role of the community.

1. Terms

What is really meant when words like discipleship, teaching, reproducible, community, and church are used? These conjure up different images in the minds of different people. For some, discipleship means meeting with someone once a week for a Bible study, for others it means daily face to face contact. For some teaching means dictating previously acquired knowledge, for others it means gently leading people as they discover the Bible for themselves. Reproducible is a difficult word. It is very hard for western missionaries to live a life that is reproducible by the nationals, let alone form community that embraces the communal aspects that the nationals appreciate. Steinhaus tries to help us understand some of these terms, but more needs to be done by those writing about CPMs.

2. Speed

The emphasis in CPM teaching is to move quickly. Therefore discipleship and teaching models are designed around quick development, rather than deep development. Most people who struggle with CPM teaching struggle with the speed that this is supposed to happen. In my observation of several CPMs, there is a time of rapid growth, and then a slowing of growth while teaching and structure catch up; then, hopefully a burst of growth again. Most CPM advocates are disappointed when the momentum slows because they feel they are failing in some way.

3. Makeup and Role of Community

There are huge questions about the communities or churches that form. Interestingly these look different in different CPMs. In my mind the key here is not

When I first read the eight points of counterintuitive elements in Steinhaus' article I was shocked. I was diligently taught these principles 30 years ago, and did not think them new or counterintuitive. They are simply cross-cultural church-planting basics that have been part of what has been taught within my own organization for many decades.

the structure, practice or form that the community takes, but rather that it is an acceptable form of community for the participants. While Steinhaus touches on a few issues, CPM advocates need to do much more research on this aspect before dogmatically teaching in this area. CPM advocates differ themselves here, some emphasising teaching, some emphasising finding 'people of peace'; some emphasising working within in family units or *oikos*. Here we westerners need to learn from

others, for it is our weakest area. I believe that community is actually the secret of CPMs but it is seldom studied and taught about in western circles.

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not think them new or counterintuitive. They are simply cross-cultural church-planting basics that have been part of what has been taught within my own organization for many decades.

On the other hand, Steinhaus is right. Our western theological schools have tended to turn out people who want to teach theology rather than evangelise and form community. Most western Christians have never been part of a close knit community of believers that functions like a true biblical community, caring for one another and always reaching out to others. Therefore western missionaries tend to be ‘community challenged’ and ‘theologically dominated.’ Most of Steinhaus’ article seems to be aimed at these people.

In the end, my biggest concern with all CPM teaching is that despite their efforts to not produce strategy, models and steps, they all end up doing so, claiming that this or that is the ‘key’ to getting a CPM started. I have no problem with most of what Steinhaus and others are promoting, I just wonder how many new workers embrace these teachings as the new ‘how to keys’ that must be applied.

I believe we can do everything right, and still not get a CPM. As I stated earlier, this is because CPMs are a work of God not man. In the end, missionary service and church planting should be all about following the Holy Spirit and the teaching of Scripture in every situation. It’s all about having a personal, deep, relationship with God and discipling others into a similar relationship with God where they learn to follow the Scriptures and the leading of the Holy Spirit in every situation. If we are true to the leading of God in our lives, then we will be successful, whether or not a CPM develops from our ministry.

The Drunken Swagger of CPM Methodology: A Response to Steinhaus' Exponential Disciple-Making

by Paul Mullins

Paul Mullins (pen name) and his wife Lisa have been serving among Muslims in East Asia with Pioneers for 10 years. Paul holds a Th.M. with an emphasis on New Testament and Cross-cultural Ministry and is a doctoral student in anthropology. He resides in his host country as a business man. Paul can be reached at paulwmullins@gmail.com.

Balance is difficult to attain. Martin Luther said that we are like a drunken man who has fallen off his horse and who remounts only to fall off the other side. We all come into something like Church Planting Movement training on different sides of the horse. For those who have been overly worried about security issues, for example, the exhortation to 'live out loud' has been very helpful. It is my conviction however that the core missiology, implicit pneumatology, and hermeneutic are in error and in danger of not only not getting us back on the horse but actually knocking us right into the gutter.

Removing Proclamation from Church Planting

The CPM training, according to Steven Steinhaus' article, advocates 'Conveying biblical truth through discovery rather than preaching or teaching.' Further, 'The evangelist only asks questions, allowing the group to discover God's truth themselves.' Steven says that it is 'helpful' to evaluate how Jesus and the early church did evangelism and discipleship and yet somehow preaching and teaching, which are clearly thematic in the gospels and Acts,¹ are discarded as a means to church planting. It is concerning that the phrase 'man of peace' or a few mentions of a 'household' coming to faith can be seen as so instructive while the thing that Jesus and the apostles got up every day to do can be discarded so easily.

Arguably, the closest thing to a church planting seminar in the Bible would be the Pastoral Epistles (perhaps better called the Church Planting Epistles). Timothy and Titus are to finish the work of establishing the church in their given areas. Titus' field of Crete is clearly cross-cultural (Titus 1:12). Surely we would expect to see here an exhortation for Titus and Timothy to avoid teaching and preaching and simply to facilitate studies with questions so that the re-

1. The words 'teaching' and 'preaching' occur around 140 times in the gospels and Acts not to mention the large sections from these books that are in fact recordings of teachings and sermons.

sulting group could rapidly reproduce. Instead we see Paul's exhortation 'Until I come, devote yourself to...preaching and to teaching' (1 Tim 3:16).

Steinhaus says that replacing teaching and preaching with a discovery process is 'counter-intuitive' but I feel that this has actually become very intuitive in much of missions. This teaching is not so much counterintuitive as it is counter-bible.

The CPM model advocates a simple obedience response to the Bible but in denying the role of proclamation in church planting it becomes self-defeating. You must actually give up an inductive reading of Scripture in order to remove proclamation from your arsenal as a church planter. Steinhaus says that replacing teaching and preaching with a discovery process is 'counter-intuitive' but I feel that this has actually become *very intuitive* in much of missions. This teaching is not so much counterintuitive as it is counter-bible.

I also find it ironic that the CPM model, meant to filter out Western contamination, is itself a Western import. In much of Asia teaching is highly valued and sought after and the idea of a flat learning environment where everyone is the teacher is quite foreign. In short, this core distinctive of the CPM model is neither biblical nor in most cases culturally appropriate.

Is Less from Me Really More from the Holy Spirit?

Deeper below the surface of the CPM method lurks a deficient view of the Holy Spirit's normative way of working to build his church. Notice how the CPM model is optimistic about the Holy Spirit's workings among seekers but only to the degree that missionaries stay quiet and out of His way. Methods are trusted over the gifts of the Spirit; non-believers trusted over equipped believers. However, should not trusting the Holy Spirit mean that we should trust the inspired accounts in the New Testament about what his normal means of church building are?

Ephesians 4 speaks of a plurality of gifts not a singularity of method for the building of the church. Being 'mature' in Christ means we are no longer like 'infants, tossed back and forth by the waves' of false teaching (vs. 14). Not all believers are equally trusted for guidance of a group. The passage is even less optimistic about non-believers when it says they are 'darkened in their understanding' and in the 'futility of their thinking' and the 'hardening of their hearts' (vs. 17-18). Trusting the insights of non-believers and immature believers over the proclamations of mature believers does not reflect biblical balance.

Is God glorified when we teach a group of church planters that they should all use the same method for building up the church regardless of their unique spiritual gifting? Romans 12:6-7 says, 'We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it...if it is serving, let him serve;

if it is teaching, let him teach...' I see no exhortation or hint in Scripture that I am to focus my attention on keeping the bar low when practicing my gifts (or to not practice them at all) so that new believers and seekers can feel that they can easily do what I do. People are edified by seeing Spirit-empowered people minister in ways that no human could ever do on their own, not by seeing things that any human could do even without the indwelling of the Spirit. The CPM methodology of Steinhaus is brilliantly reproducible but blatantly unbiblical.

There are a few in our mission who may be on the other side of the horse, trying to be the long term pastor of their churches, but in general I believe we are already too far on the side of timidity and cultural self-loathing. Potential cross-cultural contamination and Hollywood stereotypes of missionaries as neo-colonialists should not prevent us from proudly opening our mouths to proclaim the gospel. 'Now Lord embolden your servants to speak your word with great boldness' (Acts 4:29).

Exegeting While Intoxicated

When I attended the CPM training in the spring of 2011 we were introduced to an inductive study method called CPA (Copy, Paraphrase, Apply). We were told to fold a blank sheet of paper into four columns. The fourth column was added for CPM applications. After each of the 10 lessons were introduced a passage was given to each small group to copy onto the paper, paraphrase into their own words, and list applications in a 'I will...' format. In one lesson, for instance, we were told that God wants us to have a specific plan for our ministries and the passage given was Luke 14:28-32 about counting the cost before building a tower. After a few minutes of copying, paraphrasing and applying most of the participants had indeed gotten from the passage to the point of the CPM lesson. But notice the danger! We were instructed to take the passage literally out of its context and into our topic and to paraphrase without asking the basic interpretive question of the original author's intent. A passage about being prepared to give up all to become a disciple suddenly is teaching us that we are supposed to have a ministry plan.

It may be a good idea to have a ministry plan but this passage comes nowhere close to teaching this. I can normally be gracious when I agree with where people are going but not how they are getting there, but in this situation we must see that how we are getting there IS where we are going. Many hours of the training were spent practicing the CPA study method and we were asked to all commit to return to our fields and pass the CPM training on to other expat and national workers. How sadly ironic that we are on one side of the horse saying that we must not teach seekers because we are so concerned about cultural contamination and yet we are so unreflectively instructing western missionaries to go home from their

training and immediately gather national leaders to show them how to abandon teaching, context, and a basic interpretative process when using the Word of God. In this case the CPM training actually falls off both sides of the horse: phobically removing teaching as a supposed safeguard on the one side and unreflectively modelling an atrocious handling of God's Word to people who look to us for guidance on the other.

We must remember that the gospel is reproducible because it is the gospel not because we make it is so through compromise and reduction. Must we really choose between biblical faithfulness and missionary success? I believe not.²

2. As an alternative to the CPM training I highly recommend the book *A Vision of the Possible: Pioneer Church Planting in Teams* by Daniel Sinclair. The author takes his experience of supervising over 300 teams in Muslim contexts and an honest reading of Scripture to give a more balanced approach to CPing and CPM. Cf. SEEDBED 2008, Vol XXII, No 1 for a review of Sinclair's book.

Response to Roland Muller and Paul Mullins

by Stephen Steinhaus

Good missiology is done in community. For that reason, I am grateful to Mullins and Muller who wrote thoughtful responses to my article. Such discussions are best had face to face, not in academic journals. My fear is that this issue may become politicized like the ‘C-scale’ wars in years past. I pray the battle lines have not already been drawn and that we will spend at least as much time with the lost as we do spilling ink that will not necessarily mean more souls saved or churches begun.

I will comment on just a few points. After a few more stiff drinks, I am ready to get back on my horse and swagger again. Too bad Mullins is not here to drink with me; we would likely get a lot more accomplished!

As Muller suggests, we must always remember that a CPM is a sovereign work of God. The fact is that X may be doing all the same things as Y and yet the latter sees no fruit while the former sees a CPM. This is indisputable yet went unstated in my initial article. Thank you for reminding us of this. For those who attend the CPM training we offer, this is our initial topic and a continued emphasis throughout the week.

Nevertheless, there are things that we as humans can do. This was the main thrust of my article: ‘What is the apostolic (or missionary) role in CPM?’ We do these things not to try to make something happen quickly, but to bring depth of discipleship. If people are discipled well to hear and obey the Word, they will also make disciples of others. David Watson is quick to point out that this approach is actually *not* a quick way to plant a church, but a slow one. However, once groups of people learn to hear and obey God’s word, things can take off quickly. Rapid multiplication can and does often occur. Surely the Lord is pleased with both quality and quantity; it does not have to be an either/or.

However, once groups of people learn to hear and obey God’s word, things can take off quickly. Rapid multiplication can and does often occur. Surely the Lord is pleased with both quality and quantity; it does not have to be an either/or.

Mullins has raised several points that he has misunderstood. I will attempt to treat some of his concerns. First, Mullins puts great stress on the importance of ‘proclamation.’ By this, it appears he actually means the teaching gift, and wondering how teaching occurs in a discovery-based CPM. To answer, proclamation is a huge part of CPM. It occurs in many ways, including preaching sermons, lectures in secular and public forums, and through good works matched with loving explanations of those good works. In CPM, we speak of ‘abundant gospel sowing’ as a key. So we proclaim via stories, parables, testimonies and other means. And we proclaim a lot!

Proclamation also occurs as exhortation when people interact over the Word in a DBS. People who are given gifts like exhortation, prophecy and teaching will naturally

say more and say it forthrightly. This happens spontaneously in DBSs much as it happened in the early church. See Colossians 3:16 and I Corinthians 14:26.

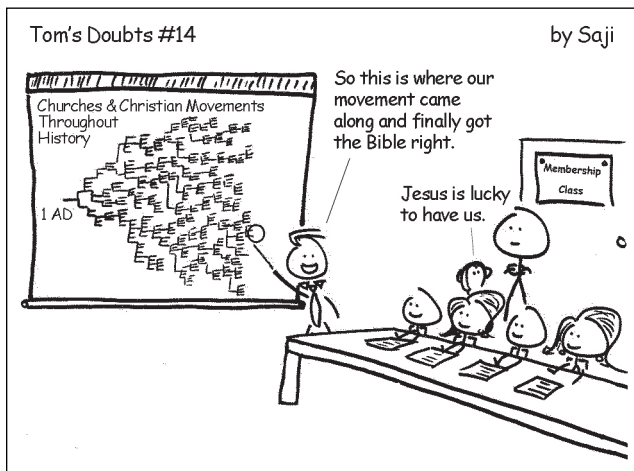
However, a problem in much of the Christian world is that preaching has been elevated as the pinnacle of Christian ministry. Thus, many Christian leaders have perfected the Aristotelian art of rhetoric (preaching) and are very skilled in it. They are therefore committed to it and tend to read this one-way communication back into the New Testament. But this was not really what was happening in the early church. Rather, much of the teaching and preaching described in the New Testament was interactive, where the Word was read and people discussed it, following the guidance and gifting of the Holy Spirit. (For more details, see Zdero in my reference list). Lecture-style preaching is fine, but a big problem is that it is not easily reproducible, especially among the uneducated in the developing world. In fact, in other journal articles, many have lamented the problem of poor discipleship in the developing world and accused the West of creating a Christianity that is ‘a mile wide and an inch deep.’ This CPM model was developed more out of concern for deep discipleship than out of a concern for rapidity.

In the commonly understood pattern of ‘preaching,’ the preacher tries to do everything for people: read the Word, explain it to them and make suggested applications for them. And while he does these, much of the congregation falls asleep. But in Discovery model CPMs, everyone is active, as the process is much more engaging and exciting. Moreover, we ensure that people understand the message, by having them retell it and discuss it. If they do not understand, we take the time to discuss it more, or even discuss the same passage in the following meeting. After they discuss it and know it well enough to discuss it with others, they are called to obedience: each person is asked how they will obey. This creates do-ers of the Word (Jam 1:22) and serious disciples who really focus on the Word (Jam 3:1), rather than praising (or criticizing) the rhetorical skills of a preacher.

So as churches emerge, people with the spiritual gift of teaching will naturally do a lot more of the talking and answering the questions in the DBS. Their answers will be deeper and more edifying than people lacking the gift. Also, in every healthy CPM (which is what everyone is striving for) there is also a concerted attempt to give just-in-time training for generational leaders of the movement. Thus group (church) leaders receive more training in specific areas of need as they are invited out to special seminars or trainings. As the movement grows, the trainers and speakers at these events will mostly be insiders from within the CPM who have the gift of teaching (though healthy CPMs also invite others in to speak to their leaders for cross-pollination).

Thus I would say that there is in fact a validation of *all* the gifts in CPM, as

opposed to what Mullins suggests. It is ironic that Mullins suggests that the gifts are not allowed to be present in CPMs. In fact, the presence of all the gifts might be the main thing that many find so threatening about CPMs. Lay people—appropriately gifted and called—can lead everything. The Word is studied in such simple ways that everyone can apply for himself and so applications are made in line with a person's calling and gifting (instead of needing someone to tell everyone the 'right way' to interpret). The Holy Spirit is given free reign and the DNA of obedience is set so people get used to lifestyles of simply 'hearing and obeying.' Everyone in a congregation is sharing what they are learning; everyone is giving, testifying and being a witness. Thus as outsiders see the power of God and His manifest presence, they are attracted and the Church grows.



"Tom's Doubts #14" by Saji George (Sept. 2, 2011). Used by permission.

I appreciate Mullins' concern for sound exegesis and not taking verses out of context. The point of the four-column approach is that the *third* column is an application specifically related to the main point of the text, whereas the fourth column asks the further question, 'Is there any (secondary) principle we can draw from this passage, related to CPM?' If there were no third column, I would join in Mullins' criticism. But after the primary application of a text has been made, I do not consider it 'atrocious' to ask, 'Is there anything this text might tell us about the subject we're currently discussing?'

I began my original article stating that I believe God is doing a new thing in our day. For those inclined to share the concerns of Mr. Mullins, I would suggest applying the wise counsel of Gamaliel: 'Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourself fighting against

God' (Acts 5:38-39). I appeal to Mr. Mullins and all other readers: please consider what I am saying and do not reject it out of hand. Get a personal look at a CPM if you can. I believe you will find that your fears are unwarranted and you will rejoice with me in what God is doing for, as Muller points out, 'CPMs are real, and they are making an impact on the world, so they deserve our careful observation.' CPMs are a work of God and *he* is on the move!

Soli deo Gloria!

A Vote Against Watson's Approach to Launching Church Planting Movements

by Neil Daley

Neil (pseudonym) is living and working in the Arab world, seeking to make disciples and plant churches among Muslims. He can be contacted at neildaley7@gmail.com.

It is disturbing to me that David L. Watson's CPM approach is becoming increasingly popular. More and more church planters are being trained in this approach to helping launch CPMs. I recently watched the six-hour CPM seminar that Watson posted on the internet. Watson opens the seminar by claiming to have discovered a biblical pattern that has remained hidden for centuries. Watson said, *'Over the next few months of studying, a pattern began to emerge from God's words. Basically, the 'How To' has been there for millennia and, for whatever reason, we haven't been seeing it. But, for whatever reason, God allowed me to see the pattern that He taught in His Word.'* As I listened to reports of tens of thousands of new churches forming and the many new techniques superseding many time-honoured principles, I found myself asking the question: Is God really behind this unprecedented **rapid** development of churches, or can it be accounted for in other ways?

Watson admits his statement above is meant to make people want to learn more, *'That's a tickler folks, because I'm not going to tell you what it is. It's a 40-hour conference. You'll pick up the flavour of it as we go through this seminar today.'* After picking up the flavour of it, I narrowed down my concerns to what is presented below. I must say, before I begin, that I respect Watson for his long service as a church planter, his bravery in dangerous contexts, his work ethic, and his zeal to 'push the envelope' to its limits. My main concern is that he seems to have 'pushed the envelope' well-beyond biblical and sensible limits.

Watson says 'The teacher is the Word of God.'

Watson states, *'The centre of this whole process is John 6:45, 'Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me (Jesus).' Who comes to Christ? The one who listens to the Father and learns from Him. Where has the Father spoken? The Father has spoken in His Word. Most sermons have one verse and 25 minutes of opinion. How is that listening to the Father?' For Watson, the centre of the whole process is the hearing of the Word. No argument there. Romans 10:17 says, 'Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.'* Watson is correct in wanting his disciples to hear as much of the Word as possible and as little 'opinion' as possible. However, he seriously overstates his case when he says that 'most sermons are one verse and 25 minutes

1. David L. Watson 'CPM Awareness Video' (www.cpmtr.org) All Watson quotes are from this video source and are italicized. There is no way of indicating page numbers since my quotations are from transcriptions of the video.

of opinion.' When Watson makes this critical assertion, he lumps 'most' bible teachers into this scenario. I guess we've all heard those sermons, but I think most of us would say they were not preached in our pulpits! Watson uses this generalization of the problem with 'most sermons' to justify his *radical* solution. He warns us before he tells us that it will be the toughest of the principles for us to accept in his CPM method. Watson states, *'This principle is the toughest of all: Let the lost facilitate the discovery bible studies. I'm not talking about lost people teaching Bible. Remember, all we're doing is reading the Word, restating the Word of God, and letting the Word of God teach them. The teacher is the Word of God.'* This is an important distinctive of the Watson method: *'The teacher is the Word of God.'* Watson remedies the problem he has noticed in 'most sermons' by replacing Bible teachers with 'lost' facilitators who lead his 'discovery bible studies.' He continues, *'The facilitator just gets them going: 'Let's look at this passage... Now, write it down... How would you say it in your own words? How are we going to do this? If this is from God, what have we got to do?''*

Watson also justifies this radical solution by insisting that it is the only fitting way for his groups to 'discover' truth for themselves. Watson says, *'It's about discovery, not preaching or teaching. A little teaching is always going to be there, but that's not where we start. We start with the idea that God has given us His word, the Bible. Then God is doing the teaching, the group is doing the listening, and God draws those who listen to Christ. And He transforms them.'* Watson believes that 'most' bible teachers cannot facilitate a discovery process without giving into the temptation to express their own opinions.

Watson is okay to have his groups 'hear without a preacher.' The centre of his CPM process is to have his groups 'come to Jesus' without the direct involvement of bible teachers.

So, on the basis of two broad generalizations, he feels justified to *'Let the lost facilitate the discovery bible studies'* in the place of preachers and teachers. It is interesting that Romans 10:17 (mentioned above) is preceded by Romans 10:14 which says, 'How shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a

preacher.' Watson is okay to have his groups 'hear without a preacher.' The centre of his CPM process is to have his groups *'come to Jesus'* without the direct involvement of bible teachers. Watson puts a lot of confidence in this idea: *'The teacher is the Word of God.'*

Watson wants bible teachers to 'stay out' of his groups.

Watson aims to establish trust early between his groups and the Scriptures themselves, not between his groups and bible teachers. This is admirable. Every bible teacher should aim for this...eventually. Why is Watson so intent on establishing this trust as early as possible? Watson says, *'It helps the groups realize it is not about me, it's about them and their relationship to God. Because if I lead the bible study that then goes*

to church, who does it take to lead a bible study and take it to church? The outsider. But if I discover the leader inside and equip them from day one to lead and start the church, who do they think can start a church? People just like them. You see how different that makes reproducibility? The job of the outsider is to coach lost facilitators, and they do it with their group, and you stay out of it. Watson is very clear on this point. He wants all bible teachers, all mature believers, to ‘*stay out*’ of his groups. Not only do these outside teachers preach mostly ‘*opinion*,’ Watson argues that they also usually promote their denomination. He says, ‘*Make disciples of Jesus, not of denominations. Stop thinking about brandedness, theology, doctrine, and start thinking about the kingdom and tell them the kingdom of God is near.*’ Watson sees a real danger of his groups being infected by the trappings of denominationalism and cultural bias. So Watson puts a lot of confidence in the Word of God being the only teacher and he urges ‘outside’ teachers to ‘stay out.’ Therefore, he puts a lot of confidence in his ‘discovery bible studies.’

Watson indirectly teaches all the groups.

While Watson asserts that ‘*The teacher is the Word of God*’ to keep ‘outside’ teachers out of his groups, he indirectly teaches all the groups himself! Isn’t it the same thing when he indirectly teaches groups of unbelievers through facilitators who run his discovery bible studies? Aren’t those discovery bible studies carefully designed by Watson to move his teaching program along? Isn’t he carefully ordering the passages that are being studied by the groups? Watson says, ‘*When people find the treasure that they’ve always been looking for, then they sell everything they have to possess it. In our method, we try to plant these treasures around so the people can discover them.*’ Watson ‘*plants these treasures around*’ by careful design in his discovery bible studies.

There is nothing wrong with having a teaching program and carefully ordering passages for the disciples to discover important truths. Every good bible teacher should do this to some degree to fit the discerned needs of the disciple. But how can Watson say he is not co-leading every discovery bible study at some level? For Watson, it is acceptable for an outsider to exert indirect influence into the groups, but not acceptable to exert direct influence by actually being there in the group meetings. When he says, ‘*The teacher is the Word of God*,’ it is easy for us to get the impression that the groups start in Genesis and move chronologically to Revelation using Watson’s ‘three column’ method. But there is much more teaching than that. These group members need an experienced guide to navigate these 66 books. Watson is that guide, but he claims he is not teaching the groups...directly.

Watson assumes the Word of God cannot be ‘mishandled.’

When Watson says, ‘*The teacher is the Word of God*,’ and ‘*Let the lost facilitate the discovery bible studies*’ he appears to be making the assumption that the

Word of God cannot be mishandled. For Watson, anytime the Word is quoted, it is as if Jesus himself is standing there teaching. There is a lot of truth in

Minimally, the Word of truth must be 'rightly divided' between milk and solid food for Watson's new groups. Only mature believers have that experience and discernment. Yet Watson insists that 'the teacher is the word of God' in order to justify telling bible teachers to 'stay out' of his groups.

that. But, if the Word cannot be mishandled, then why would Paul warn Timothy, 'Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth?' The phrases 'accurately handling' (NASB) and 'correctly handling' (NIV) imply that the Word of Truth can be handled inaccurately and incorrectly. Why would the Holy Spirit allow the pure Word to be mishandled? I am not sure why, but we see it happening often. Even Satan accurately quotes the Scripture in order to deceive people. Each of Satan's three temptations Jesus faced in Matthew

4 involved a clever mishandling of Scripture. Cults have mishandled the plain text of the Bible for centuries. Matthew Henry comments on Paul's warning to Timothy, 'It requires great wisdom, study, and care, to divide this word of truth rightly; Timothy must study in order to do this well.' Minimally, the Word of truth must be 'rightly divided' between milk and solid food for Watson's new groups. Only mature believers have that experience and discernment. Yet Watson insists that '*the teacher is the word of God*' in order to justify telling bible teachers to '*stay out*' of his groups.

Watson urges coaches to 'leave' facilitators after two years.

Watson says, '*My job is not to go and convince people about God, it is to go and find people that God is already working with. My job is to find that 'family of peace' that God has been quietly working with for generations. Or maybe they are in a crisis moment. And when I find that family, I stay with them, which means I build relationship with them and pour my life into them. It becomes their responsibility to reach their community, not mine. I equip them to reach their community.*' Watson says he builds relationship with '*them*' and pours his life into '*them*,' but actually he does this only with the leader of that 'family of peace.' According to Watson, when the church planter finds his 'family of peace' and begins leading them in the discovery bible studies, the church planter then discerns who the group leader is and equips that leader to lead the discovery bible studies himself. Watson says, '*If I start a discovery bible study, I'm only going to lead it a maximum of three times. By time number four, I've already identified who the inside leader is, so I coach them to lead it.*' The church planter, now 'coach,' equips this facilitator to lead the group. Watson refers to coaches as the '*outside leaders*' and facilitators as '*inside leaders.*' The '*outside leader*' at this point has no

contact with the facilitator's group. Watson teaches, *'The role of outside leaders is to model, equip, watch, and leave. You have to model it. They have to see you do it. You've got to equip it until they reach the same capacity as me in their ability to do things. Then monitor it, to make sure it has replicated properly, making sure no aberration has gotten into it.'*

This 'equipping' phase is the heart of Watson's discipleship process. When asked about how long this equipping phase lasts, Watson says, *'You model until adequate leadership is in place, which is a subjective thing. I'm looking at their obedience, are they producing new leaders, I'm looking at their heart, there's a lot of things you look at before you leave. Sometimes the watch period begins with a near-watch and transitions into a far-watch. I may step back in to do some more mentoring and training, but I'm trying to back out. Typical rule of thumb is two years.'* Once the church planter is satisfied that the leader (facilitator) is facilitating 'adequately,' the church planter leaves the facilitator. Watson says, *'Then at the right time, just like Jesus did, He said, 'It is better that I leave.' I promise you, in church planting, it's better that you leave. Because as long as you hang around, you will always be an impediment, a barrier to the growth of the church, and to its multiplication.'* By saying this, Watson asserts that Jesus would have been an 'impediment' and 'barrier' to the development of His twelve disciples if He had not left them.

Watson misunderstands why Jesus left His Twelve.

Watson says, *'Then at the right time, just like Jesus did, He said, 'It is better that I leave.' I promise you, in church planting, it's better that you leave.'* John's Gospel quotes Jesus telling his disciples on the night He was betrayed, 'It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you.' Watson believes Jesus was leaving the Twelve so that He wouldn't be an impediment to their development as leaders.

But Jesus did not just leave, he died! These words, 'It is to your advantage that I go away,' were meant to console the disciples, not graduate them. Even after three years, Jesus told His disciples, 'I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.' After three years, Jesus was still not finished teaching the Twelve! Jesus was not becoming an 'impediment', he was about to model the ultimate love: 'Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.' It was Jesus' main reason for leaving. Is this Watson's main reason for leaving? Jesus told them, 'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.' And Jesus returned to them after the resurrection in power and glory and great joy for the disciples! Then, at that time, Jesus commissioned them to 'make disciples.' Why did Jesus wait until then to instruct them to 'make disciples?' The disciples experienced the power of resurrection and the immortality of the risen Christ firsthand, and even saw Jesus ascend to heaven with their own eyes!

Similarly, when the Apostle Paul bid farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, it was after three years of being with them continually. Paul is quoted by Luke

in Acts 20 saying, 'Night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one of you with tears.' And Paul's departure was not because he was an 'impediment' to them, it was because he was 'bound in the Spirit' on his way to Jerusalem to face 'bonds and afflictions' that would eventually lead to his martyrdom in Rome. Even Peter did not feel he was an impediment in his ongoing teaching role with his churches when he wrote, 'I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.' It is difficult to see how Watson's model of leaving is biblical.

Watson creates barriers between mature believers and the groups.

According to Watson, once the church planter finds his facilitator, he becomes the coach of that facilitator and leaves the group. The rest of the group never sees the church planter again. Watson says, *'When I say 'leave' I don't mean walk away from relationships, I mean you walk away from leading. The job of the outsider is to coach lost facilitators, and they do it with their group, and you stay out of it.'* Watson urges coaches to 'stay out' of the groups. He says, *'Hanging around will always be an impediment, a barrier to the growth of the church.'*

But, Watson said earlier that he 'pours his life into' the 'family of peace' he finds. Watson seems to contradict himself. Does the church planter 'hang around' and 'pour his life into the group?' Or, does he leave the group so he won't be an 'impediment and barrier to the growth' of the group? If he leaves the group, the coach has no direct contact with group members, at all, and knows only what his facilitator tells him about the group. That would seem to be a 'barrier' also! If that is what the coach does, then, from then on, there is a permanent barrier between the mature believer and the unbelieving group members. As we will see, Watson puts a lot of confidence in this separation. He is confident because he believes *'the teacher is the Word of God'* and the Word cannot be mishandled.

At this point, the facilitator leads the group using the discovery bible studies. Then, at some point in these studies, the facilitator is prompted to ask the group members if they know people they can facilitate. Watson says, *'And these babies, barely able to walk, say they know six people that they can facilitate. Before some leaders are baptized, they are already forming other groups. This tells me we have a healthy line of church planting happening there.'* At this point, the facilitator begins equipping that group member to facilitate his own group. Once the coaching phase begins, that new group never again sees their facilitator's coach who must leave the group.

With the forming of this latest group, the original church planter now has two

'barriers' between him and the newest group members! He has two levels of accountability between them. By Watson's own admission, you now could have baby Christians coaching facilitators. In fact, you could have unbelievers coaching facilitators. Because mature believers are not allowed in the groups due to the risk of cultural and denominational contamination, it is conceivable that you have the blind leading the blind, except for Watson's discovery bible studies. How crucial are these discovery bible studies? Watson doesn't see a problem. He says, *'If you look at what these facilitators are doing, they are becoming the leaders that will become the pastors of these groups. The facilitators of the groups grow into the role of pastor.'* But, with the potential of multiple levels of accountability between the church planter and his facilitators, isn't there a good chance the discipleship process will be compromised? Is God really behind this unprecedented rapid development of groups, or is something else?

By Watson's own admission, you now could have baby Christians coaching facilitators. In fact, you could have unbelievers coaching facilitators.

Watson puts a lot of confidence in 'group process.'

He says, 'Group process is absolutely essential to church planting.' Watson believes that group discipleship is far superior to one-on-one discipleship. He's convinced that groups have a God-given ability to be self-correcting. Watson said, *'It's a self-correcting system. The group will hold accountable the honesty to the Word of God. It's amazing! Heresies in history have never been started by lost people, only by Christian leaders.'* He goes on to say, *'If we study in small groups, then we remember better, hold each other accountable to it, and it's going to go into the future. If you're not engaged in group process in the Word of God, then you're missing the trait God built into us, that groups remember forever.'*

There is much to agree with here. Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) use 'group process' by making loans to groups of entrepreneurs who are held accountable by their group to repay the loans. I'm also a strong advocate of small groups in the discipleship process, especially groups under the oversight of church leadership. But, are all groupings of people value-added in the discipleship process? Are groups always a safe place for a disciple to grow in faith? Do group members always grow in their ability to think critically in groups?

Watson's groups may be susceptible to 'groupthink.'

Normally I do not put a lot of confidence in clinical psychology, but sixty years ago researchers found that the effectiveness of 'group process' can succumb to a phenomenon called 'groupthink' under certain circumstances. In a 1991 article, Paul Hart describes this psychological phenomenon.

It was not until the research of Irving Janis appeared that anyone really considered that a highly cohesive group could impair the group's ability to generate quality

decisions. Tightly-knit groups may appear to make decisions better because they can come to a consensus quickly and at a low energy cost; however, over time this process of decision making may decrease the members' ability to think critically. It is, therefore, considered by many to be important to combat the effects of groupthink. According to Irving Janis, decision making groups are not necessarily destined to groupthink. He devised seven ways of preventing groupthink:

1. Leaders should assign each member the role of 'critical evaluator'. This allows each member to freely air objections and doubts.
2. Higher-ups should not express an opinion when assigning a task to a group.
3. The organization should set up several independent groups, working on the same problem.
4. All effective alternatives should be examined.
5. Each member should discuss the group's ideas with trusted people outside of the group.
6. The group should invite outside experts into meetings. Group members should be allowed to discuss with and question the outside experts.
7. At least one group member should be assigned the role of Devil's advocate. This should be a different person for each meeting.²

Are Watson's groups susceptible to 'groupthink?' Notice how important it is that group members can 'freely air objections and doubts.' Does Watson encourage group members to do this when studying the Word? Notice how 'higher-ups' should not express their opinions before the group decides. Is Watson encouraging his higher-ups to do this? Notice how 'all effective alternatives should be examined.' Is there any place for examining alternatives in Watson's method? Notice the important role of trusted 'outside experts.' Does Watson encourage his groups to seek out these trusted outside experts?

One could argue here that Watson's groups are not decision-making groups, which would mean these preventive principles do not apply. But, decision-making is a big part of being a disciple. Individuals in the group will make decisions whether to agree or disagree with the teaching presented. They will make decisions on how to apply those teachings they agree with. There will be decisions to let outside experts give input that could change their thinking, and decisions to reject the group's opinion. There will also be decisions to disobey a leader's command or to resist pressure from leaders pushing for commitments before they are ready. Do the Watson groups have the mechanisms in place to escape 'groupthink?' Are Watson group members at risk of losing their ability to think critically over time?

2. Paul Hart (June 1991). 'Irving L. Janis' Victims of Groupthink'. *Political Psychology*. 2 12: 247-278.

Watson puts strong emphasis on obedience.

Watson correctly cites the Great Commission text to support the importance of obedience in a disciple's life: "Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you." However, Watson seems to incorrectly apply it to justify pressing his group members for commitments as early as possible. Watson says, *'We start telling in the first facilitating, 'OK now you guys have heard this lesson, I want you to think of 2-3 people you can tell this same story to before we meet again.' That's every week. And when they come back to the next meeting, we say, 'Who did you tell this to last week? And we get them to report about: How did it go? What did they learn? How did you feel about it?' So from the very beginning, we set the expectation that you're to tell your friends and neighbours what you're learning out of this process.'* No pressure here, right? I can understand this being appropriate for more mature believers who respond well to these types of challenges. But Watson does this with unbelievers and new believers.

Watson continues, *'It's amazing how much more faithful the children have been in sharing with their friends than the adults have been. Children don't have the inhibitions that we have.'* Yes, and children don't have the resources to resist authority even when they wished they could. Even adults have difficulty resisting authority in some circumstances. The way the groups tend to form, they already have relationship with their facilitator, making it more difficult to refuse them, even if they want to. Watson states, *'Our job as leaders is not only to ask them who they can share with, but also to expect them to share it and build a group expectation so the group helps encourage them to do it.'* This statement appears to be sound advice, but it lacks boundaries. Watson seems to assume that obedience mandates that he ask them as soon as possible, so it is built into his discovery bible studies.

Watson continues, *'It's amazing how much more faithful the children have been in sharing with their friends than the adults have been. Children don't have the inhibitions that we have.'* Yes, and children don't have the resources to resist authority even when they wished they could. Even adults have difficulty resisting authority in some circumstances.

This obedience thing is a very difficult subject. The epistle to the Hebrews reads, 'Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.' Does Watson insist on this obedience too early in the disciple-making process? Yet, Watson seems to contradict this early emphasis on obedience when he says, *'Evangelism is the relationship that leads a person from not knowing Christ to falling in love with Christ and giving their life to Him in obedience.'* On the one hand, Watson seems to agree that love of Christ comes first, then obedience to Him. But on the other hand, he seems to teach the opposite to his groups.

Watson makes obedience a condition for love.

Watson says, *‘The bible says it’s not about knowledge, it’s about obedience. Read John 14 again. ‘If you love me, you will obey what I say.’ And Jesus says it seven times. Obedience is the definition of love. God spells love, o-b-e-y. It’s not about saying you love someone. It’s about doing it. The words don’t mean anything if the actions don’t support it.’* Jesus made two seemingly contradictory statements about obedience just verses apart in John 14. Jesus said in verse 15, ‘If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.’ Then Jesus said in verse 21, ‘He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.’ Then Jesus said in verse 23, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.’ For Jesus, was it ‘love Me’ first or was it ‘obey Me’ first? Which came first? Which is the condition for the other? I find it interesting that only the first and third statements have the conditional ‘if.’ The second statement may or may not be conditional. Watson interprets the second statement as conditional. Indeed, a case can be made from other texts that obedience comes first. It is an ongoing debate in the Church. Nevertheless, as a result, Watson teaches that you should get the disciples obeying first in order for Jesus to ‘disclose’ Himself to them. Watson says, *‘Early on, it feels a little legalistic that you hear the Word and do it, and are holding each other accountable to do it.’*

Watson seems to lean toward the view that love follows obedience, not the other way around. If it is the other way around, then the discipleship process should emphasize love first. But that would prolong the discipleship process and bog down the rapid development of groups. Perhaps that’s why Jesus spent so long teaching his disciples before He commanded them to ‘make disciples.’ Watson says, *‘How many of you have discipleship materials that focus on obedience, or do they focus on doctrine, theology, sociology, or program? We don’t stress about learning a lot, we stress doing what you learn. How do you teach obedience? By being obedient. If the people don’t see it reflected in our lives, then the teaching has no value. The group develops a pattern of mutual accountability to obedience and they begin to do the functions of church. And they begin to have the nature of church because they’re obeying the Word, not because we taught them the doctrine.’* Watson does not hold back in vilifying discipleship materials focused on ‘doctrine and theology.’ For him, these words are like Trojan Horses carrying all manner of destructive denominationalism and cultural bias. Is anyone else concerned by Watson’s vilification of ‘doctrine and theology?’ Is it possible that Watson’s **rapid** development of groups comes, in part, from this unbalanced emphasis on obedience?

Watson ‘cuts-off’ disobedient trainees

Are the members of Watson’s groups free to disagree and disobey? When Watson asks group members who they can share with, are these group members free to resist giving names? When Watson coaches his facilitators, are these trainees free to resist making commitments? Watson warns his coaches, *‘You have to cut off the unfruitful ones who suck up your time. So we have this unbreakable rule: If I teach you, you must teach others, or I will stop teaching you. No exceptions. The moment I discover that you’re not teaching, the relationship is ended. You’ve got to focus on the right people. Here’s my response to them: I’m not going to continue teaching you. Come back in six months, and if you can make the commitment and sign the covenant, to teach others as I teach you, I will let you rejoin me in six months. I can only invest in people who are going to invest in other people.’*

This is intense! I can understand this level of discipline and accountability with more mature believers who invite it and respond well to it. But it doesn’t seem appropriate with new believers and the unbelieving facilitators who lead his groups. Perhaps Watson is more lenient for his less mature trainees, but it seems like this toughness is what he is modelling for his coaches!

What’s more, this obedience emphasis can be a slippery slope in the hands of baby Christians and unbelieving facilitators who are already prone to manipulate those under their leadership. It’s human nature to be tempted toward that, especially in a context where obedience is over-emphasized. And, in the Watson model, there is the possibility that these lost facilitators could manipulate group members behind a ‘barrier’ of secrecy since teachers and mature believers are forbidden from the groups.

Watson’s groups may be susceptible to the ‘perils of obedience’

The famous ‘Milgram Obedience Experiment’ revealed a disturbing phenomenon that may have some relevance here. Let us look at this experiment and its implications:

Milgram summarized the experiment in his 1974 article, ‘The Perils of Obedience’, writing: The legal and philosophic aspects of obedience are of enormous importance, but they say very little about how most people behave in concrete situations. I set up a simple experiment at Yale University to test how much pain an ordinary citizen would inflict on another person simply because he was ordered to by an experimental scientist. Stark authority was pitted against the subjects’ [participants’] strongest moral imperatives against hurting others, and, with the subjects’ [participants’] ears ringing with the screams of the victims, authority won more often than not. (In Milgram’s first set of experiments, 65 percent (26 of 40) of experiment participants administered the experiment’s final massive 450-volt shock, though many were very uncomfort-

able doing so.) The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority constitutes the chief finding of the study and the fact most urgently demanding explanation.

Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.³

According to the research, ‘relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority’ when that authority figure asks them to do something that violates their conscience.

Is it possible that unhealthy dynamics are in play between Watson’s coaches and their facilitators, or between the facilitators and their individual members?

Is it possible that unhealthy dynamics are in play between Watson’s coaches and their facilitators, or between the facilitators and their individual members?

Please don’t misunderstand me. I am not implying in the least that physically ‘destructive’ deeds might be happening. Not at all! I only want to make the point that ordinary people can naturally feel strong pulls toward obeying authority even when their conscience urges against it.

Sometimes, well-meaning leaders, even godly ones, can use God’s commands inappropriately, especially when it can seem to achieve important mission objectives. Do the Watson groups have the mechanisms in place to escape Milgram’s ‘perils of obedience?’

Watson urges groups to ‘make disciples’ too early

Watson’s discovery bible studies are designed to urge new group members to begin making disciples within weeks of starting the studies. Watson said, *‘And these babies, barely able to walk, say they know six people that they can facilitate.’* This marks the beginning of disciple-making for Watson’s groups. Watson reassures us that these facilitators have a limited role, *‘Let the lost facilitate the discovery bible studies. Not teach, only facilitate.’*

But, there is no clear distinction between facilitating and teaching in Watson’s groups. To facilitate is to lead. To lead is to teach at some level, even if you co-teach with the discovery bible studies. Is it possible for a disciple to begin too early in making his own disciples? Interesting that Jesus personally taught his twelve disciples for three years before instructing them to make disciples. Interesting that

3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milgram_experiment

Jesus at age 12 was noted by Luke as ‘sitting in the midst of the teachers (in the temple), both listening to them and asking questions, and all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.’ And yet it wasn’t until He was 30 years old that He began leading a group in His teaching ministry. And it wasn’t until three years later that he instructed his disciples to ‘make disciples.’ It seems significant.

It was not considered disciple-making when Jesus sent out the Twelve (or the Seventy-Two) to do proclamation of the kingdom in advance of Jesus coming to those places. There was no disciple-making expected of them at that time, even with any ‘person of peace’ they found. None of the disciples were instructed to lead people or teach people prior to the death and resurrection of Christ.

No one argues that the disciples were probably debriefing their families and friends to some degree during those three years. No one argues that disciples are urged to ‘Be ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.’ But Watson goes beyond debriefing with friends and family by advocating for full disciple-making at the same time one is being disciplined. To do that has the ring of being efficient and productive and even fruitful, but I do not see any concrete examples of it in the Bible. Why would Watson think that Jesus was not modelling discipleship for us with His Twelve? Why would the Twelve need more time to develop their spirituality before leading than Watson’s disciples need today? Is God really behind this unprecedented **rapid** development of groups, or is something else?

Watson fast-tracks spiritual development

Everyone agrees that character-development cannot be fast-tracked. Spiritual development is a naturally slow process. Even the creation advocates slow and evidences it by the child development process which cannot be fast-tracked. When child development is happening too slowly, it is clear to everyone that something is wrong. The reverse is true also. When child development is happening too quickly, it is clear that something is wrong or out of balance. Why would spiritual development be any faster than child development?

The apostles saw the connection between spiritual development and child development. Peter says, ‘As newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word (I Per 2:2).’ Paul’s epistles say, ‘I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it (1 Cor. 3:2).’ ‘For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant’ (Heb. 5:12-13).

Watson feeds his babes with the milk of the Word, but he insists on feeding them with his ‘formula milk’, rather than mother’s milk. Watson puts a lot of confidence in his formula milk which is his ‘discovery bible studies.’ He strongly recommends that all his new groups use these same studies in order to maintain the essential DNA of the method. They are his teaching curriculum. Watson insists on the formula milk because he is convinced that ‘most’ mothers’ milk is tainted by their addictions to denominationalism and cultural bias.

Watson believes mature believing bible teachers have no place in the groups because they *‘will always be an impediment, a barrier, to the growth of the church.’* Mature believing teachers of the Word are like parents. Watson’s CPM method seems analogous to having a mother ‘equip’ her 2-year old daughter to bottle feed the mother’s two-month-old baby girl with formula milk. This daughter is also somehow equipped to burp the baby, change the baby, bathe the baby, cuddle the baby,

Watson’s CPM method seems analogous to having a mother ‘equip’ her 2-year old daughter to bottle feed the mother’s two-month-old baby girl with formula milk. This daughter is also somehow equipped to burp the baby, change the baby, bathe the baby, cuddle the baby, and give the baby the sleep she needs.

and give the baby the sleep she needs. In the analogy, the mother merely checks in from time to time and debriefs the daughter on the baby’s development without the mother ever actually seeing the baby herself. Watson’s facilitators are like children performing tasks that parents are responsible to perform. Imagine if Watson were in charge of public edu-

cation for children. He would have adult teachers equipping their grade-school age children to equip their public school courses to other children who would equip other children to equip other children! Soon, all adult teachers would have no contact with any of the children in the education process. And the children would be so busy coaching and mentoring other children, they would have no time to have a full education and full life experience. Watson would redefine ‘education’ in a big way! Is God behind this unprecedented **rapid** development of churches, or is something else?

Conclusion: Watson’s method should be rejected entirely.

Watson prefaces everything he presents in his training with this statement: *‘The ‘How To’ has been there for millennia and, for whatever reason, we haven’t been seeing it. But, for whatever reason, God allowed me to see the pattern.’* Then later Watson states, *‘Jesus told his disciples that they would do greater things than He did. Did you ever wonder about that statement? Talk about audacious! The Creator of the world told them that. It happens through these principles I am talking about.’*

Should we be eager to accept these new principles that are nowhere explicitly

modelled in the Scriptures? Should we be ready to jettison time-tested principles in the hope of duplicating something that has not been fully vetted? Again, my main concern is that Watson, in his zeal, seems to have ‘pushed the envelope’ well-beyond biblical and sensible limits. He has pieced together a clever confluence of unbiblical discipleship practices and unhealthy group dynamics to achieve the unprecedented growth of groups that church planters have previously only dreamed of. Unfortunately, this ingenious synergy of practices and dynamics needs no divine help to proliferate.

Watson likens his method to a clock. He said, *‘Some places the growth is only an incremental increase because they only take bits and pieces of our method and apply it. Our method is like a clock with many integral pieces, so what happens when you pull one piece out of a clock? It doesn’t work.’* Ironically, this clock analogy fits well in describing this method that gives the Watson groups their unprecedented growth. If one of these pieces were missing, it certainly would slow down the replication dramatically.

For example, if mature believing bible teachers were allowed to be present in the groups, it would slow down replication dramatically. If mechanisms were put in place for the groups to escape ‘groupthink,’ it would slow it down further. If the strong emphasis on obedience were tempered with a stronger emphasis on the love and grace of God, it would slow it down even further. And if Watson were to resist pressing his group members for commitments and resist urging them to make disciples as early as possible, then it would slow it down even further...to a crawl.

Without these pieces, Watson’s method is nothing new! With these pieces, his method is a risky mix of unbiblical, loosely biblical, and biblical discipleship practices that the unsuspecting will likely swallow whole! Because of these things, Watson’s method should be rejected *entirely*.

A Response to Neil Daley

by J. Ted Esler

Esler served among European Muslims before working in mobilization leadership. He is part of a church planting network in the US and is executive vice president for Pioneers USA.

I agree with Daley that Watson's characterization of CPM strategy as a 'new rediscovery' is flawed. In the modern missionary era, similar strategies are behind the 'three self' churches championed by Venn and Anderson in China and Sierra Leone (Thomas 1995:68; Moreau et al. 2000:483). Nevius taught similar material in Korea (Nevius and Hunt 1899) as did Roland Allen (Allen 1960, 1962). McGavran focused on the multiplication of churches and was influenced by Pickett's book about movements in India (Pickett 1933). None of these approaches are identical to Watson's training but there is significant overlap.

On Leaders

Daley insists that trained Bible teachers (mature disciples) lead and teach. His critique is a bit mixed as he also claims that Watson's approach 'indirectly teaches all the groups' by selecting the particular texts and leaders that the discovery Bible groups are to study. His real issue, though, is the lack of trained teachers within the Bible study groups.

Daley insists throughout his critique that teaching by mature believers is a prerequisite for biblical understanding. He is correct if one assumes the sort of theological training common in the West. Yet one cannot deny that CPMs are occurring among people groups that have limited numbers of highly trained believers. Implicit in Daley's view is the assumption that the Word of God, by itself, is not powerful or that God is not able to use it in the life of a nonbeliever without a human guide. This is a difficult position to argue from the Bible.

The intent of Watson's position is not to keep Bible teachers out of groups (although this is the inevitable outcome and hence it must be taught as a method). Rather, the intention is to keep the focus on God's Word, studied in an indigenous, reproducible context without the movement-killing requirement of the missionary's presence (or other 'qualified' teacher).

Daley states that, 'Cults have mishandled the plain text of the Bible for centuries,' suggesting that only mature believers can be Bible teachers. The Western church, saturated with training resources, seminaries, and institutes of theological education, is perhaps the world's most significant source of heresy. It does not logically follow that heresy is absent when teachers are abundant.

The purpose of the discovery Bible groups is to teach people how to study the

Scriptures *themselves*. This inevitably helps with reproduction but more importantly it aids the discipleship process. Further, the purpose of a discovery Bible study is for people to study *Scripture*. It is not to cover systematic theology, the Protestant Reformation, or other such topics. It is ‘To tell the old, old story of Jesus and His love.’ The Word of God is quite capable of being understood by people, particularly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

On Leaving

Daley’s has concerns about the length of the equipping phase. Is there a formula for how long one stays? If Watson says that the time can and should be short, what is the justification that it must be long? Watson takes the position that the church planter continues as a facilitator, even after he/she has left. This seems consistent with Paul’s approach. Daley himself quotes Watson saying that two years is the ‘rule of thumb’ and seems to be flexible—why then does Daley have an issue over two versus three years? Daley also quotes Watson himself in stating that while one leaves, one does not abandon but continues to be involved.

Once again Daley misrepresents the intent of Watson’s approach. The intent is that, as soon as possible, the group develops its own leadership without dependence on outsiders, not simply to oust them for expediency’s sake.

On Group Process

In the absence of any biblical argument against group Bible study, Daley turns to psychology. This is not problematic except for the fact that Daley concludes his article with a charge that Watson is being ‘unbiblical’ while using two different psychological experiments to make his case.

Daley’s contention that ‘groupthink’ may dominate Watson’s groups would be better made with evidence that this is happening. However, since this is not the

Daley’s contention that ‘groupthink’ may dominate Watson’s groups would be better made with evidence that this is happening. However, since this is not the case, it is only conjecture. Janis’ ideas to combat groupthink that Daley cites are excellent suggestions and do not run counter to Watson’s training.

case, it is only conjecture. Janis’ ideas to combat groupthink that Daley cites are excellent suggestions and do not run counter to Watson’s training. Some are explicitly taught, such as encouraging people to air objections and doubts. Further, a ‘teacher-centric’ model may have a greater tendency toward group-

think. A leader seeks conformity to their views. Learning to study the Scriptures for oneself encourages critical thinking skills to develop.

On Obedience

Most would agree with Daley that the relationship between obedience and love is a tough subject. It is a ‘chicken versus egg’ issue—which comes first? The core of his critique references the teaching of doctrine versus the teaching of obedience. Watson, according to Daley, favours the latter, making it a condition for love. I am not convinced that this is Watson’s conclusion. In any case, it is a more theologically balanced position to assume that one cannot exist without the other.

I do not like Watson’s insistence that only ‘implementers’ be allowed to get further training. Missiology requires some degree of academic freedom. If we simply ‘cut off’ those who do not follow along we lose the healthy spirit of debate. I agree wholeheartedly with Daley in this criticism of Watson.

At the same time, I personally spent too much time on unresponsive people while church planting some years ago. There is something healthy and encouraging about Jesus’ command to move on when people reject the Gospel (Luke 10:10-11). Jesus purposefully winnowed his following, making difficult to accept proclamations of truth that turned some people away (John 6:38-66).

Daley’s second foray into the application of psychology is poorly argued. He asks if ‘unhealthy dynamics are in play between Watson’s coaches and their facilitators, or between the facilitators and their individual members?’ The Milgram experiment he cites would apply to any group—not just a discovery Bible study group—including groups with teachers. In fact, Milgram highlighted the role of authoritarian figures in creating destructive dynamics. Discovery Bible study groups are peer groups without strong authoritarian leaders. Daley’s preferred model, in which a recognized authority is the teacher, may be more susceptible to Milgram’s observed ‘perils of obedience’ than Watson’s approach.

Fast Tracking Discipleship

CPM strategies emphasize discipleship and growth is an outcome. Obedience-based discipleship is not a fast track method. Transferring knowledge is quicker and easier than seeing truth applied in people’s lives.

Summary

We have created an image of the rugged missionary scholar, standing before a crowded room, exegesis the Word of God in power and truth, and bringing the gospel to the hurting, lost masses. When somebody suggests that these Bible scholars are the problem rather than the solution, it challenges this image.

The teacher-centric model that Daley defends dominates the Western church. We must give up on the idea that Christians must be led by a priesthood. Daley is

uncomfortable with Watson's reliance on the Holy Spirit to lead people adequately. This leaves me with a question for Daley: what role, if any, does the Holy Spirit play in the teacher-centric model you suggest?

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A Second Response to Neil Daley

by L.D. Waterman

Waterman (pseudonym) pastored for ten years in the US before moving to work among Muslims in Southeast Asia, where he has served for the past eighteen years.. He serves as an Area Leader with Pioneers.

In some of the hardest places on earth, hundreds of thousands of people are coming to saving faith in Christ and tens of thousands of churches are being planted. Moreover, this is happening rapidly. According to Neil Daley, the method yielding this fruit should be rejected entirely; there must be some human scheme at work to bring so many to salvation. He repeats four times the question: 'Is God really behind this unprecedented rapid development of groups, or is something else?' The answer, I believe, is 'Yes, it appears to be significantly of God.'

Daley draws data for his critique entirely from a six-hour video that David Watson himself described as 'a tickler,' stating that real understanding of the model would require attending 'a 40-hour conference.' While I appreciate some of the concerns raised in Daley's article, his attack appears to be misguided.

First, Daley is concerned that Watson 'feels justified to "*Let the lost facilitate the discovery bible studies.*"' This is a concern worth exploring. Some appropriate follow-up questions would be, 'Is it contrary to God's will to have unbelievers interacting with the Bible?' and 'Is there evidence that Discovery Bible Groups (DBGs) are yielding cults or movements with aberrant faith and/or practice?' Daley doesn't ask these questions, but seems to hint at answering 'yes.' I would suggest, in response, that having unbelievers study the Bible is a good thing, particularly when that study process is bringing significant numbers to a biblically informed saving faith.

Part of the problem with Daley's approach is that it contradicts Watson's own explanation of the model. Daley quotes Watson's description of how a DBS works 'Let the lost facilitate the discovery bible studies. Not teach, only facilitate.' He then claims (with no evidence cited) that what actually happens is just the opposite of what Watson says, 'there is no clear distinction between facilitating and teaching in Watson's groups.' In other words, Daley claims that Watson does not understand what is happening in a DBS, but Daley can tell us how these groups *actually* work. What Daley warns his audience away from is not the model as Watson teaches it, but rather an incorrect extrapolation of some of the 'tickler.' There actually *is* a clear distinction between teaching and facilitating, and maintaining that distinction is a vital key to the success of a DBS.

Daley adds the accusation that 'Watson assumes the Word of God cannot be "mishandled."' Watson did not say this and I am confident he does not believe

this. I have personally heard him speak about the issue of mishandling of God's Word: how it happens and how it can be minimized. In the context of a DBS, correction can happen via questions from other group members, questions from the facilitator, or through the input of an outside mentor who meets regularly with the facilitator. As Watson points out, the greatest heresies have not been launched by groups studying the Bible together with a facilitator asking simple questions. They have usually been started by gifted teachers, whose teaching others simply follow.

A second major concern of Daley's is that of the outsider stepping out of direct interaction with a group after a short period. This is also a point worthy of consideration. However, in his zeal to paint the model in a negative light, he misses two important factors. One is the nature of apostolic ministry, which is at root an itinerant ministry. He mentions Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus as if it were the norm, when in fact that appears to be the longest period Paul remained in one place, with his time in many locations being much shorter (in line with the calling described in Romans 15:20). The goal of apostolic ministry is to begin a healthy process that is able to continue with local leadership after the apostolic departure. Ongoing interaction and teaching are a part of the CPM process as envisioned by Watson, a part of the model that Daley did not catch because of his brief exposure to the model. Thus, his conclusion, 'It is difficult to see how Watson's model of leaving is biblical', is based at least partly on an inadequate grasp of the model he is critiquing.

A third major concern of Daley's is the rapid development of groups. In contrast, the Spirit of God inspired Luke, as the writer of Acts, to be very excited about rapid gospel advance and the salvation of large numbers of people. Luke wrote, for example, in Acts 6:7, 'The number of disciples in Jerusalem *increased rapidly*, and a *large number* of priests became obedient to the faith' (emphasis added).

A third major concern of Daley's is the rapid development of groups. In contrast, the Spirit of God inspired Luke, as the writer of Acts, to be very excited about rapid gospel advance and the salvation of large numbers of people.

The Apostle Paul, after having ministered directly for only two weeks in Thessalonica, sent the Thessalonians this prayer request for his ministry: 'pray for us that the message of the Lord may *spread rapidly* and be

honored, just as it was with you' (emphasis added). For Daley, however, rapid gospel advance constitutes a sign that something must be wrong.

In a related fourth concern, Daley objects to the model's emphasis on calling people to obey God's Word. He seems to feel that calls for obedience to Scripture should be presented only to the spiritually mature. He writes: 'I can understand this being appropriate for more mature believers who respond well to these types of challenges. But Watson does this with unbelievers and new believers.' By con-

trast, the Apostle Paul proclaimed to pagan Athenians that God ‘calls all people everywhere to repent’ (Act 17:30). God deserves the obedience of *all* people, and it is biblically appropriate to encourage and assist people to obey however much they understand of God’s truth.

Daley invests a full page presenting his concern that ‘Watson’s groups may be susceptible to the “perils of obedience.”’ However, he does not cite any evidence that this is a problem. He draws on secular psychology to show that obedience can sometimes be a bad thing. He closes that page of concern with the question: ‘Do the Watson groups have the mechanisms in place to escape Milgram’s “perils of obedience”?’ The answer is a two-fold ‘Yes.’ First, the group members have personal choice of application from God’s Word as the source of each person’s obedience (a factor not found in Milgram’s experiment). The groups have, secondly, an outside mentor interacting weekly with the content and direction of the group’s progress. While Daley is very concerned about hypothetical ‘perils’ of unbelievers and new believers obeying what they discover in the Bible, I would prefer to join Watson in being much *more* concerned about the very real perils of *dis*obedience to God’s Word.

Another concern cited by Daley is the danger of people studying God’s Word in groups, without instruction from outside experts. He raises these leading questions: ‘But, are all groupings of people value-added in the discipleship process? Are groups always a safe place for a disciple to grow in faith?’ He then suggests this potential problem: ‘Watson’s groups may be susceptible to “groupthink.”’ Daley offers no evidence that ‘groupthink’ actually is happening or has happened anywhere in any of the hundreds of thousands of DBSs bringing people to faith around the world. The secular category of groupthink is interesting but not a good fit for a discussion of groups coming to faith in Christ. It’s doubtful that in the group faith decisions described in Scripture (for example Pentecost [Acts 2], household of Cornelius [Acts 10], household of the Philippian jailer [Act 16]), someone was ‘assigned the role of Devil’s advocate’ and there was an expectation that ‘The group should invite outside experts into meetings.’ Ironically, I believe that the DBS model is actually better positioned than the teacher model preferred by Daley to apply many of the ways of preventing groupthink (for example: ‘Higher-ups should not express an opinion when assigning a task to a group’). While I appreciate brother Daley’s concern for sound doctrine, the method he is critiquing has already demonstrated great effectiveness in:

- Bringing unbelievers and new believers to consistently study and apply God’s Word
- Calling people to obey what they sense God telling them to do, based on what they find in His Word

- Bringing many people to grow rapidly as disciples of Jesus
- Yielding rapid multiplication of groups.

God demonstrably uses a wide variety of methods to bring individuals, families and groups to saving and mature faith in himself. I would encourage all workers to explore, learn and apply any method that they believe is most likely to bring forth fruit pleasing to the Father.

Reply to J. Ted Esler and L.D. Waterman

by Neil Daley

I commend my two responders for critiquing, graciously and concisely, the concerns that I raised in the article. I acknowledge the depth of thought that went into each of their replies and I appreciate the robust dialogue. One of their shared complaints was that I had based my critique on an incomplete understanding of David L. Watson's model. I had used the six-hour web seminar instead of the 40-hour training. I used the six-hour seminar because it is pure Watson, on his home turf, elucidating what I believe is the distinctive that guarantees the rapid proliferation of groups. I had found it curious that he achieves these same dramatic results wherever he is the church planter. Waterman commented, 'For Daley, rapid gospel advance constitutes a sign that something must be wrong.' I agree that it is certainly a sign, a sign that the rapid advance is either a move of God or a move of man.

Another of their shared complaints was the lack of evidence to support my suspicion that the groups might be producing disciples of questionable faith. Waterman asked, 'Is there evidence that Discovery Bible Groups (DBGs) are yielding cults or movements with aberrant faith and/or practice?' First, I would ask: How can any mature believer really know what is happening in the groups since the 'insiders' are purposely sequestered from the 'outsiders,' resulting in the 'barriers of secrecy'? For Watson, the risk of denominational contamination is too high for any mature believer to spend any significant time in the DBGs. Second, I would ask: Is it 'aberrant faith' (or 'aberrant practice') for someone to base his or her beliefs and their ministry priorities on a set of principles that is just outside biblical and sensible limits? To help make a point, I will call this 'set of principles' the New Normal. This New Normal is what DBG members and coaches appear to be steeped in from early on.

The New Normal is a risky mix of unbiblical, loosely biblical and biblical principles and influences that are both explicit and subtle. The explicit principles that are unbiblical are: 'There are no mature believers, only maturing ones,' 'The teacher is the Word of God,' 'Groups are self-correcting by God's design,' 'Everything must be very simple and easily reproducible,' 'If I teach you, you must teach others, or I will stop teaching you' and 'Stop thinking about theology and doctrine and start thinking about the kingdom.'

The explicit principles that are unbiblical are: 'There are no mature believers, only maturing ones.' and 'The teacher is the Word of God.' and 'Groups are self-correcting by God's design.' and 'Everything must be very simple and easily reproducible.' and 'If I teach you, you must teach others, or I will stop teaching you.' and 'Stop thinking about theology and doctrine and start thinking about the kingdom.'

leaders is not only to ask them who they can share with, but also to expect them to share it and build a group expectation so the group helps encourage them to do it.' And this principle, 'My job is not to go and convince people about God, it is to go and find people that God is already working with.' The explicit principles that are loosely biblical are: 'God spells love O-B-E-Y' and 'The job of the outsider is to coach lost facilitators, and they do it with their group, and you stay out of it.'

In addition, the New Normal exposes its disciples to more subtle unbiblical influences like pacing and front-loading. Pacing is the influence where the disciples are moved along from one commitment level to the next, gradually but consistently as the DBS prompts, like the conveyor pacing on assembly lines at car factories. If you have ever seen those car assembly lines, they are designed for guaranteed production. Any slow workers are compelled by their fellow line-mates to keep up the pace. In the case of Watson's disciples, there is risk that their heart and mind fall behind the pace and never catch up to match their own behaviour, which is out-pacing them. Front-loading is the influence where certain biblical truths are presented earlier than others in an order that can subtly bias a disciple toward a particular bent. It can condition disciples to see subsequently learned biblical truths through filters of bias. In the New Normal, front-loading leads to an over-emphasis on obedience or an under-emphasis on teachers, for example. Without the presence of a mature believer in the life of a seeker or new disciple, the subtle influences of pacing and frontloading can adversely affect their perception of what is normal Christian experience.

Compounding this, Watson has taken crucial multi-step processes and telescoped them down into risky concurrent processes for the sake of expedience. For example, the Old Normal patiently gave seekers ample time to discover biblical truth without pressure to commit. Then, after commitment to Christ, the Old Normal patiently gave new believers ample time with mature believers and other new believers to grow in their 'faith and practice' without pressure to reproduce. Then, after growing in their 'faith and practice,' the Old Normal patiently gave disciples ample time to mature into reproducing teaching roles without pressure. However, the New Normal runs these three processes concurrently! For example, at every level in the DBS series this same question is posed to all group members: 'If this is from God, what are you going to do about it?' This question begs the question: How does any seeker know it is from God until they hear the whole message of God? Yet, to hear the whole message of God takes more time than the New Normal feels is expedient. For Watson, expedience trumps limits, both biblical and sensible limits. Again, is it 'aberrant faith' or 'aberrant practice' for someone to base their beliefs and their ministry priorities on something that is just outside of biblical and sensible limits? I believe a reasonable case can be made that this is 'aberrant faith and practice'.

Another complaint of my two responders was my claim that Watson's model of 'leaving' was unbiblical. Waterman cites Second Thessalonians 3:1 as a biblical example of a 'rapid gospel advance' that occurred even though the Apostle Paul left the believers after having ministered directly for only 'three Sabbaths' (Acts 17:2). Ironically, I Thessalonians 2:7-11 seems to indicate that Paul and his team stayed much longer and that Paul even likened his ministry to parenting! Here is the passage:

'But we proved to be gentle among you, *as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children*. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labour and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you *as a father would his own children*' (italics mine).

It can be argued that there could have been a significant gap in time between Acts 17:4 and 17:5 because the 'three Sabbaths' could have referred only to Paul's time teaching in the synagogue there. Without exception, the biblical accounts of 'rapid gospel advance' are connected with dynamic apostolic teaching and are better described as viral rather than programmatically prompted.

Waterman contends that the model of 'leaving' is reasonable due to the 'itinerant' nature of apostolic ministry. However, I would argue that transportation constraints and severe persecution drove that. Esler contends, 'The intent is that, as soon as possible, the group develops its own leadership without dependence on outsiders, not simply to oust them for expediency's sake.' The question is: How 'soon' is reasonable? The weakness with trying to make the outsider/insider viewpoint a biblical one is that the Apostle Paul did not have that viewpoint. Again, in I Thessalonians 2:17-18 and 3:5-6 Paul debunks any notion of programmatic 'leaving' by outsiders when he writes,

'But we, brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan thwarted us.'

Then Paul writes,

'For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labour should be in vain. But now that Timothy has come to us from you... (he) has brought us good news of your faith and love...'

Paul sent Timothy to find out about the new believers' faith because he feared that 'the tempter might have tempted' them. This confirms that even the Apostle Paul's groups might not have been as 'self-correcting' as Watson insists. The Apostle Paul was deeply concerned that the same 'tempter' that tempted Jesus in Matthew 4 was working his deceptive schemes against these new believers! And this answers Esler's question, 'What role, if any, does the Holy Spirit play in the teacher-centric model you suggest?' In Paul's teacher-centric model, Paul himself was very protective like a parent, and it seems that the Holy Spirit worked through that relationship. And notice that Paul's close relationship was with all the believers, not just the leaders. Paul, the outsider, was very much engaged with insiders at every level, he and Silas and Timothy. There was a 'rapid gospel advance' because these three mature believers taught and spent time, and wanted to spend much more time, with all the believers there. There is no question we need to do a better job at preparing outsiders to effectively minister to insiders, but deliberately sequestering insiders from outsiders seems desperate and risky.

Waterman argues, 'The goal of apostolic ministry is to begin a healthy process that is able to continue with local leadership.' I would agree with the statement, but the expression 'healthy process' has a very different meaning under the New Normal than it would under the Old Normal. Also, it is inconceivable to me that the facilitators of the second, third, and fourth generations of Watson groups could

Waterman argues, 'The goal of apostolic ministry is to begin a healthy process that is able to continue with local leadership.' I would agree with the statement, but the expression 'healthy process' has a very different meaning under the New Normal than it would under the Old Normal. Also, it is inconceivable to me that the facilitators of the second, third, and fourth generations of Watson groups could somehow begin that 'healthy process' in just two years since they are only two-year-old believers themselves!

somehow begin that 'healthy process' in just two years since they are only two-year-old believers themselves! The whole concept of telescoping processes and isolating new believers presumes too much trust in the Holy Spirit's protection and too much trust in the DBS curriculum. Babies need parents until they 'have their

senses trained to discern good and evil' (Hebrews 5:14). In difficult places where those mature believers do not already exist, time must be invested to develop them first, whether individually or in groups. How likely is it that the Holy Spirit will move at different paces in different ways in different people? A cookie-cutter DBS is not dynamic enough to facilitate this like a mature teacher can. Any free exploration of the Bible in the group is only as broad and as deep as the DBS curriculum allows because there is no mature teacher there to accommodate a discussion outside its strict program. And when I say 'mature teacher,' I mean it in the best possible way as God intended.

Using DBSs as part of the New Normal is like replacing parents with parenting manuals. Imagine if the believers in Thessalonica had opted for Paul's epistle over Paul himself!

In matters of faith, trust is everything. I have strong concerns about the impact this New Normal is having on church planting work. This method seems to be rapidly becoming the primary approach to launching CPMs, and could soon become the legacy that is passed on to millions worldwide who are grasping for genuine Christian experience. When the dissenters of Christianity falsely credit the spread of Christianity to human schemes, I fear we may be handing them 'Exhibit A.' If it were just a matter of taking this CPM training and exposing our church planters to this method, then that might be a good thing. Unfortunately, this method purposes the aggressive recruitment of trainees to train others in what strives to be a rapid proliferation of his CPM ideology. If unhindered by its critics, this proliferation can become the primary focus of any organization it touches. It is part of the DNA of the method. Watson is pressing us into service! That being said, I do join Waterman in his closing remark: 'I would encourage all workers to explore, learn and apply any method that they believe is most likely to bring forth fruit pleasing to the Father.'

PART 2: A NORTH AFRICAN'S PERSPECTIVE ON PLANTING CHURCHES IN THE MUSLIM WORLD (A MINI-SERIES)

Part 1: The Church in the House: Understanding, Opportunities & Challenges

by Abdellah Larage

Raised in a Muslim family and won to Christ through the ministry of a church planting team in his city in the late '80s, Abdellah has since been planting house churches in Morocco for about 15 years. He has agreed to write a several part series for SEEDBED in which he shares his vision for church planting and some of the things he has learned planting churches in his country.

In this opening article, he describes the nature of a church in a home, the strengths it offers and some of the challenges that such a church model encounters in his Muslim nation.

Understanding and Counting the Cost

Do you want to plant house churches? I was once teaching a group of young adults about planting house churches. I started by asking them who wanted to plant churches. Initially, all of them said they wanted to do it. However, after they heard the heaviness of the cost, all of them said that they no longer wanted to be involved in a church planting ministry. If anyone wants to plant churches and does not know the nature of the work and what is expected of him, he will be discouraged and unable to continue.

What do I mean by counting the cost? Briefly, this is what the planting process demands of the church planter. A church planter begins with prayer. Then he will start evangelising, while continuing to pray. When some start to accept Jesus, he will disciple them and continue evangelising and praying. With ongoing prayer, evangelism and discipleship, he will then need to start a regular meeting of the house church. After that, while continuing to pray, evangelise, disciple and lead the house church, he will need to begin to train leaders. While he is doing all of this, he also must do proper preparation for preaching and teaching and leading worship. In addition, because all the others are new believers, he does counselling and other pastoral care ministries. A church planter soon realizes that he has to do many things at the same time: pray, evangelise, disciples, train, counsel, give pastoral care, preach, lead worship and so on.

Since the situation in the Arab world does not allow church meetings in public places, it is normal that all the different meetings take place in homes. For many years, the weekly program in our house included: church meetings, Bible study meetings, prayer meetings, counselling sessions, and meeting for seekers. In addition, since my wife was doing social work, she was teaching sewing and painting

in our home three times a week. In addition, every two or three months we ran a weekend conference in our home for new believers or leaders.

Having meetings like this takes a lot of energy, particularly since Arab culture is a culture of hospitality. My wife worked hard preparing food and cleaning. In our culture it is not enough just to offer sandwiches for food, we have to prepare a meal. If it is not lunch or dinnertime, we have to offer something to eat along with coffee and tea. Many times my wife cooked for 40 - 60 people when we hosted conferences in our home. Even though the apartment was not small, it was not designed for 60 people!

Another cultural reality is that people can come and visit without calling ahead to say they are coming. We often had unexpected visitors—believers and non-believers. You cannot ask them when they will leave because that would imply they are not welcome, and they might stay for up to one week. I remember one of our relatives, married with a daughter, visiting us for three months. She then went home for three months and then visited us again for another three months! It was very strange. Once I began to feel as if we had no home of our own—so many meetings, appointments, my office at home—it was very difficult for us for a time.

The House Church, Hospitality and Arab Culture

The house church model can work everywhere in the world. Yet, since we are talking about the Arab world in this article, it is good to see that this model is closer to the culture and the nature of the Arab world in which relationships are very

important, in which the sense of family is very strong and has deep roots. People like to live a highly relational life. They often visit each other; hospitality is highly valued; they spend lot of time together as families; they like to eat together. Most times when they meet, they eat together. When a visitor comes to a family, the culture dictates that he can stay as long as he wants. This is true for everyone, not just for relatives. The Arab world culture is very open to relationships. It is very easy to build relationships and to be invited to homes. Therefore, the Arab world is good soil in which to plant house churches.

What is a House Church?

We want to see house churches planted. This model is found in the early church in the Book of Acts, and in other New Testament documents, though it is not the only model that God has used. In history, the house church model has been very suc-

cessful and has more recently made good contributions in China, the former Soviet Union and in Muslim countries.

The church is a group of people who believe in the same Name, the name of Jesus Christ. They have this common belief. The church is a group of believers because God wants his followers to be together. Jesus told Peter that he will build his church and when the apostle Paul was encouraging men to love their wives, he said as Jesus loved the church and died for it, so Jesus died to build a church. Clearly, the church is God's plan and will.

If we want to define the house church in a very simple way, it is the church that meets in the house. There is no difference in the basic concept of church, between the house church and the sanctuary church. It is the model that is different.

House Churches in the Bible

The cultures seen in the Bible are cultures of hospitality. From the book of Genesis, where we see Abraham inviting the three passersby to stop for a meal, to 2 Kings where we see the Shunemite woman providing hospitality for Elisha, and on into the New Testament, hospitality is seen throughout the Scriptures. The heart of hospitality welcomes everybody: not only the prophets, but also the people of God. Most importantly, when the families knew someone was God's servant, he was more than welcome. This is still the culture in Arab countries where there are Christians from a Christian background. It is very easy for a church leader to go to houses and have a meeting with a family.

Jesus was born in the Middle East. So it was natural that Jesus liked to visit houses and had meetings in the houses of so many people. Jesus himself told many people that he was going to come to their house for dinner. Many of the parables of Jesus were given when he was in houses. He ate in the house of Zacchaeus who was saved because Jesus invited himself into his house. Jesus loved to be in houses with people to eat and talk. On many occasions he was in open places with thousands, but in a house, the atmosphere was more private and intimate.

The culture of hospitality in Bible times was very strong. Because of this culture, Jesus could sleep in different houses. He did not have a house during the years of his public ministry. He was always going from one place to another. To find a place where he could sleep was not a problem. The same was true for the apostles, who when they were visiting different places to share the message of the word, found it was very easy for them to be invited into the house of someone.

According to 1 Timothy 3:2, an overseer should be hospitable. To be hospitable is not to bring people to your house for the goal of preaching to them or teaching them or praying with them. Hospitality is not a means to an end. It is not a tool to be used

to evangelize. Hospitality is a biblical value in which you welcome people in, have fun together, prepare a meal, eat together and spend intimate time with each other.

It is easy to find examples of house churches in the New Testament since from the beginning the church met in houses. In the mission trip that Jesus sent the disciples on, he sent them to visit houses. In Matthew 10:13 we read: 'If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you.' This mission trip was a mission to the families in their houses. The disciples could enter a house, share the message, pray for the sick, stay with the family and teach them about God's kingdom.

One of the best examples of the house church in the New Testament is in Acts 10. When Peter he arrived at Cornelius' house, he found not just Cornelius but his household. Acts 10:24 reads: 'And the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.' Cornelius was a man seeking God's face. He saw that Peter's coming to him was an opportunity to invite others so they could also hear the news. While Peter was talking to them, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. God used Cornelius to host a church in his house. The church is the family of God and Cornelius invited the members of his family to the meeting.

The house is the setting for planting churches in the New Testament. Jesus sent the disciples to houses; the Word of God was shared in houses; people were filled with the Holy Spirit in houses. The Word was shared also in synagogues and public areas, and people were filled with the Holy Spirit in these places, but the focus is on house churches. When Jesus asked his disciples to wait until they received the Holy Spirit, they were waiting in a house, and from that house, they started their ministry. Paul wrote to Philemon, sending his love to him and to 'the church in your house' (Philemon 2). This is the case with other people in the New Testament, where the house is the primary location of the church. People came together to meet as a church in the home of someone who was part of the church.

The house church is not, as some believe, the consequence of there being only a few believers in the early years of the Church. When the disciples were waiting for the Holy Spirit to come, there were 120 in the gathering. After they were filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter preached the word of God and three thousand accepted Jesus. It was a very good opportunity to start a sanctuary church but the disciples did not do that. The growing number of followers of Jesus did not affect the practice of having the church meet in homes.

It would have been easier for the disciples to start a sanctuary church. Their Jewish background would incline them to think this way since they were used to going to the temple and synagogues. Jesus himself visited synagogues many

times, but when he invested time in the life of the disciples, he did not do so in the temple or in synagogues.

The model of the house church was something new; it was not an imitation of the model of the temple or synagogue. One of the differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament is that in the OT, the temple was a holy place where God dwelt, but now *we* are the temple of God and together we are the Body of Christ.

House Churches around the world today

Now, around the world, many people are thinking seriously about going back to house churches. In China, because of persecution, the sanctuary churches are under the authority of the government while the house churches are outside of the control of the authorities.

In Korea, there is no persecution but they teach about house churches. Therefore, they came up with a model in between the house church and the sanctuary church. They kept the big building where the church meets on Sundays. At the same time, they created the house groups. It is a good model that strikes a balance between the two different models. However, we cannot call these house groups 'house churches' because they are not allowed to baptize new believers, celebrate the Lord's Supper, or collect tithes. Still, even if these house groups are not house *churches*, they provide an environment very similar to the house church. In the New Testament there were no 'house groups', only 'house churches'.

The model of the house church was something new; it was not an imitation of the model of the temple or synagogue.

Why has the house church model become primarily the model of the persecuted church? There are many reasons why the house church is not the most popular model around the world. Unfortunately, a sobering reality is that the *sanctuary church throughout history has far too often persecuted the house church*. What is more, government authorities throughout the centuries have wanted to control the church, and it is much easier to control the sanctuary church.

The house church is most often found where there is persecution, like China and the Muslim world. This is because given the conditions in this part of the world and the situation of believers from a Muslim background, the house church is a good model and the best choice.

The positive features of the house church

I. Family life and relationships

The church is the family of God. There are two main things that make a group

of people a family: family relationships and family life. The church is a family regardless of the model and the house church is the best environment for family life within the church.

Not all human relationships make a family. The bonds of family relationships are much deeper and more powerful than other relationships. The church is the Body of Christ, formed from those who have a personal relationship with Jesus. Since the believers in Christ have one heavenly father, they are brothers and sisters. As we have one heavenly Father, we have one Saviour. In John 15:5, Jesus said, 'I am the vine, you are the branches.' All believers are branches in the vine, which is Jesus Christ. By him and through him we are connected to each other. 'Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.' (Eph. 2:19)

Family relationships without true family life create a distant and unconnected family. House churches provide a positive environment for a church family. It is much easier for believers meeting in house churches to follow the biblical admonitions to take care of each other, to encourage, help and serve each other. One of the features of family life is that they eat the Lord's Supper together. In the New Testament the Lord's Supper was a real meal in which the believers ate and drank together. It was not simply a religious service as it is today in most churches around the world. The Lord's Supper was a real meal and it is very easy for house churches to practice the Lord's Supper around the table as the believers eat together. In this environment, as a meal is shared, family life thrives and the roots of the family deepen.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:33-34: 'So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.' Churches today use this Scripture passage during their observance of the Lord's Supper, but Paul was referring to a real meal and not just a small piece of bread and a little sip of wine. When Jesus sent the disciples on their mission he told them in Luke 10: 8: 'When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you.' The mission is not only preaching the Word of God; it is also about building and living family life: eating together and living with others. This also helps to build a bridge, since in this way it becomes easier to share the Word with them. Eating with people is a good way to share the good news of Jesus.

The disciples in the early church ate together regularly. 'Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts' (Acts 2:46). Eating together is not just for the sake of eating, but is the normal life of a family: sharing homes and food

with joy and happiness. The message of Christ is a message of joy. We live it; we do not just preach or teach it.

As the church eats together they share the spiritual life. They live what is written in 1 Corinthians 14:26-28:

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop.

It is difficult to put this passage into practice in the sanctuary church. However, in a house church it is far easier for each member to share. At the same time, it is difficult in house churches when someone does not share. One of the things we did many times in our house church was that instead of one person preaching, every member shared for two minutes. This way all the church members could share as a body and a family and we heard what was on each person's heart.

A house church is also a good environment for discovering spiritual gifts because there are always many opportunities for each member to participate in leading. This way each believer feels a responsibility regarding the other members of the house church. It is not normal to have members who just come to attend; everyone participates. Because of our Arabic culture, when we meet in our house churches we spend a lot of time together. When people arrive, the first thing we do is to exchange news: how was our week and other things. Then we start our worship and the other parts of the meeting, and finish by having tea and eating something together. This way we spend up to four hours together.

One of the powerful features of a house church is that because we meet in the house of one of the families, each believer gets to know this family in their home. Relationships become very deep; every believer gets to know the real life of others in the church. This is what makes communication easier and gives a greater possibility of helping each other. If someone does not come to a meeting, everyone notices that. Sometimes during the house church meeting one of the members will call the absent person so everyone can hear his news and why he did not come.

2. It is easy to multiply house churches

'So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith' (Acts 6:7).

A house church can experience fast growth because of its nature. The majority of people like to enter into relationships, friendships and fellowship. This is what helps the house church to experience an increase in the number of members. When a house becomes too small for the increasing number of members, they divide the church into two house churches and this way we see the multiplication of house churches. This growth in God's kingdom is to be a normal, natural and spontaneous life.

The house church is the model of the early church in Acts and because our Arab culture is so similar to the culture of the early church in Acts, it is a good model for us. The early church began in the Middle East and for this reason it is a better model for the church throughout the Arab World. This does not mean we should apply the same model everywhere. It would be a mistake to try to do that or to copy it. In the Arab world the house church model is needed. The sanctuary model is not as good a fit for Arab culture, and this is one reason why the sanctuary church is growing so slowly in this part of the world.

3. House churches can survive persecution more effectively

Persecution is expected in the Muslim Arab world. The matter of fact acceptance of persecution seen in Philippians 1:29 is understandable for those living in the Muslim world: 'For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.' Because of the nature of the Arab Muslim world, the followers of Jesus in these countries can expect to be persecuted.

The house church is a model that survives during times of persecution. Persecution cannot stop the church. This is what we see and experience today. In many different parts of the world where persecution is taking place, house churches still exist and are growing. This is because the number of members in house churches is small and because there is no big church building. There are some house churches that do not meet every week in the same house. If there are three families, each week they meet in a different house so as to avoid problems with authorities. Another example of the resilience of house churches during times of persecution is the church in China. Even though the authorities are doing their best to stop it, the house churches are growing more and more. As much as there is persecution, just as much is there growth in house churches.

Challenges in Planting Churches in One's Home

1. Requires that the church planter have multiple gifts

This ministry is unique in that it combines a number of ministries and gifts even when it is done by one person e.g. prayer, evangelism, discipleship etc. A preacher may only preach, a teacher may only teach, but to plant a house church, multiple

gifts and ministries are necessary. The church we want to plant is a body in which we practise, encourage and discover the gifts.

2. Witchcraft and demonic possession

Since the church is a dangerous attack against the powers of darkness, a body that can storm the gates of hell, I believe that planting house churches is the ministry most attacked by the enemy. I have seen and heard many testimonies from different missionaries about enemy attacks in their lives. Over the years we have found occult objects in our home that people had brought with them and put somewhere in the house. Once, when a leader from another country stayed with us for two weeks, he went to the bathroom and felt heaviness in his spirit. He fell to the floor and was hardly able to get out of the bathroom. He told me there must be some occult object in the bathroom, so I went in and sure enough, I found something. Another time I went outside and found our doorstep covered with blood.

One missionary shared with me that someone had killed a small cat in front of the door of their home and put blood there. Once I was teaching about prayer in another country and when we finished the evening meeting I went to the home where I was staying. At four in the morning I felt an attack from the enemy. I started to pray and at eight in the morning we discovered that someone had killed a small animal in front of the door and put blood there.

Many times when a new believer comes to a meeting, or when someone just wants to attend our church meeting to see how we live our Christian lives, our meeting is disturbed by demonic manifestations. Many times when we start praying or worshipping, someone starts to scream. In homes it can be very difficult to pray for demon-possessed people. It creates problems with the neighbours and if the neighbours know that we are Christians, they will complain. Even if they do not know, they will knock at the door to find out what is happening because they may think there is a problem and they want to help.

Many times when a new believer comes to a meeting, or when someone just wants to attend our church meeting to see how we live our Christian lives, our meeting is disturbed by demonic manifestations.

3. Challenges from authorities

If it is not easy for a Muslim to accept Jesus. However, the reaction of the authorities makes can make it even more difficult for house churches. For example, Moroccan prohibits any group from meeting without official permission from the authorities. Any meeting of five or more people (non-family) is illegal unless they have received permission to meet. Because converting from Islam to the Christian faith is illegal in Morocco (as it is in most of the Muslim world), if we were to ask for official permission to meet, we would not receive it. Simply put, there is no way

that believers can meet in their homes with official permission. In March 2009 the police entered a house and arrested all the believers. They were taken to the police station for twelve hours of interrogation.

In December 2009 the police entered a meeting in another house and deported the missionaries and interrogated the Moroccans. When I began to write this article in 2010, more than one hundred foreign followers of Jesus had just been expelled by the authorities in Morocco.

4. Challenges from the family

A major challenge for the house church is that because this is a family's home, the house church meeting depends on the presence of the family. If the family is not at home because they are travelling or for some other reason, the house church meeting can easily be cancelled. So during the summer months when families take holidays, the meetings of the house church often stop.

In many house churches, there is primarily one family who hosts the church. In addition, because of the Arabic culture, relatives can visit the family anytime without any prior warning. So in such a situation, because the relatives are most often not believers and do not know this family are Christians, the meeting of the house church is cancelled.

5. Challenges from visitors in the home

Since the house church meets at the home of one the families, it is very natural that a new believer who joins a house church and enters the home of this host family gets to know everyone in the house. He learns a lot about the family and becomes a member of the family. Yet, this very positive reality can create many problems because there are many people who declare their faith in Jesus just because they want to know what is going on in the house church. Then, once they know all about the church, they try to make problems for the church.

In Egypt, one of the leaders received in his house a brother from a Muslim background after his family expelled him when he became a Christian. Within a week, this professed believer stole a large amount of money. Another missionary welcomed a new brother into his home and, trusting him, gave him the keys to his house when he went out with his family. They returned to find that this 'brother' had stolen all the electronics in the house. He even wrote a letter, telling the missionary that if he went to the police, he would report him to the police.

One day, a young woman confessed faith in Christ. We welcomed her into our house and she started to attend the house church. Soon after, two high school sisters in our house church were confronted by Islamic fundamentalists at their school. He said that he knew they were Christians. The two sisters ran away and

came to me. Eventually we discovered that the new ‘sister’ was from a fundamentalist group. She had pretended to be Christian just to infiltrate for the fundamentalists. So we confronted her, and even though she denied any relationship with this group, the same week God led me to encounter her with the group. I went up to say hi to her but did not say anything more. We continued to welcome her to our meetings and one day she eventually truly accepted Jesus.

In March 2010, someone who said that he was Christian was welcomed by a Christian family into their home. He stole some pictures and put them on Facebook, saying they were Christians. He asked everyone who received the link to pass it on to others. He wrote that they were trying to change the religion of Muslims and that they needed to be stopped. They also put the pictures of many other believers including me, my wife and, our daughter on Facebook. These are just a few of the many stories of ways a house church can be in danger at any time.

6. Challenges within the house church

One of the difficulties the house church faces is the lack of good teaching. It is not that all house churches do not have good teaching, but the majority suffer from the lack of it. What happens when there is not a good teacher in the house church is that every member has his own opinion on many subjects, and everyone wants to teach. This happens because the leader of the house church normally has very little Bible teaching and sometimes no training at all.

One day, because the authorities were persecuting Christians, one of the members of a house church asked permission to share something and then said that the house church should stop meeting because God does not want any of his followers to be in prison. Thank God that the house church did not stop meeting. This man was the only one who stopped attending the meetings.

One time a Mauritanian brother shared with him that he had a vision for the growth of the house church. He said God put it in his heart to marry twelve women and have many children and in this way he would help in multiplying the number of believers.

On a number of occasions we sent a few Moroccans with a Mauritanian brother to visit and encourage the church in Mauritania. One time a Mauritanian brother shared with him that he had a vision for the growth of the house church. He said God put it in his heart to marry twelve women and have many children and in this way he would help in multiplying the number of believers. This illustrates the sad reality of poor teaching.

One day I met with some believers from Algeria. I asked them if they had any program of teaching and they said that they do not need any program. They pray and God teaches them and does miracles. This is very dangerous thinking. The lack

of good teaching becomes more dangerous when it is based on spiritual experiences without a biblical basis.

A pastor from Jordan, whom I met, was teaching that demons could not speak in tongues. I asked him why he thought this and he said that one day when he was praying with someone who was possessed by demons, he asked the demon if he could pray in tongues and the demon said no. Therefore, this pastor began to teach that demons could not pray in tongues. The question here is not if demons can speak in tongues or not, the issue is that this pastor built his teaching on what the demon said, not on the Bible—and demons have been known to lie from time to time.

Abdellah will continue this series in the next issue of Seedbed. Future topics will include reaching the youth and passing on the vision for church planting among new believers and emerging house church leaders.

PART 3: BOOK REVIEWS

Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication

by Craig Ott and Gene Wilson

Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. 449 pages. ISBN: 978-0801035807

Global Church Planting will make an excellent text for courses on church planting, and a solid stimulus to fresh thought for anyone already involved in church planting. The book lives up to its title, giving a solid overview of church planting principles and practices from around the world. Although workers in non-Western contexts might feel the discussion occasionally leans toward the influence of models popular in North America, the book manages to integrate well some of the best thinking on cross-cultural church planting among the unreached with practices relevant among Westerners as well.

The scope of the book is well described by its subtitle: 'Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication.' Actually, the book goes beyond 'best practices' to give a thorough overview of a great many topics, including some current practices that might not be considered 'best.' The authors do a good job, though, of presenting a variety of views and approaches well, yet summarizing with clear statements their own preferences and conclusions. A biblical foundation is solidly laid throughout the book, with only a few instances of lapsing into appeal to authority: stating an opinion, then citing another author, with no mention of biblical basis.

At many points, the authors stress principles that are useful for all church planters by way of reminder, such as 'If multiplication is the goal, then the watchword in virtually everything the church planter does is *reproducibility*' (p. 81).

The book features some very helpful charts, such as 'Three Types of Church Planters' (Pastoral church planter, Catalytic church planter and Apostolic church planter [p. 91]). Reflecting on the descriptions of these types can be a helpful exercise not only for those making plans for future ministry, but also for those evaluating current and existing practices—by oneself, one's teammates, or other groups. On page 114, we find 'Simple Prototypes for Initial Kingdom Community,' comparing and contrasting three models: 'House church,' 'Voluntary gathered congregations' and 'Cell-celebration church.'

Some very useful material is found in the 'Launching' chapter of the book, with substantial sections such as 'Evangelize Holistically by Addressing Felt and Real Needs,' 'Baptize and Teach Obedience to Jesus,' 'Disciple New Believers and Train Them to Do the Same,' and 'Discipleship and Multiplication.' Each section

presents a solid biblical foundation as well as insights gleaned from other writers, presenting a radically simple and practical approach for laying a strong foundation in discipleship. This is summed up on page 237 with a useful full-page sidebar entitled ‘Discipleship and the Apostolic Church-Planting Team Strategy.’

Included along with thirteen concrete steps for research in the initial phases of CP, the authors include a very helpful list of ‘Twenty Questions to Understand a Ministry Focus People’ (p. 206). Other important topics well-covered include tentmaking, partnership and short-terms, plus a sensitive handling of the issue of the new believer’s identity in Islamic and similar contexts.

The writers give an overview of developmental models of church planting from other writers, such as David Hesselgrave’s ‘Pauline Cycle,’ Robert Logan and others’ ‘Church-Planting Life Cycle,’ and Tom Steffen’s ‘Church Planter Phase-Out.’ They then comment: ‘The developmental model that we propose focuses on the goal of church reproduction and multiplication in the context of pioneer cross-cultural church planting.’ They affirm aspects of each of the other models, then conclude ‘But in contrast to them, we describe church planting in various cultural settings, with various forms of the church (such as house churches), and where resources are usually more limited. We also develop the model with the goal of a lay-driven church reproduction that is less dependent on vocational church planters or pastors’ (p. 156-157).

A section entitled ‘Avoiding Sequential Thinking’ opens with the statement, ‘David Garrison and other advocates of church multiplication have warned against an overly sequential approach to church planting.’ More precisely, Garrison described sequentialism as ‘the third deadly sin,’ and an obstacle likely to prevent a Church Planting Movement.¹ Ott and Wilson’s mildly worded caution against an *overly* sequential approach reflects their willingness to propose a somewhat sequential model while still cautioning against a too-sequential approach.

On one other point (mentioned twice) the authors approvingly cite, but quietly modify, David Garrison’s counsel. What Garrison described as ‘ten universal elements at work in every church planting movement,’ Ott and Wilson list as ‘Garrison’s Ten *Common* Elements of Church Planting Movements (pages 72, 171, italics added). The reader is left uncertain whether this constitutes an intentional moderating of Garrison’s absolute description or a Freudian slip in quotation.

1. *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World*. Midlothian, VA: WIG-Take Resources, 2004. Pages 243-245

Global Church Planting is not a light read. Those looking for a basic introduction to church planting would want to look elsewhere. But for most Seedbed readers, this would be a good ‘refresher’ course in current ideas and church planting practices that God is using around the globe to establish his church.

Reviewed by L. D. Waterman

Waterman (pseudonym) pastored for ten years in the US before moving to work among Muslims in Southeast Asia, where he has served for the past eighteen years.. He serves as an Area Leader with Pioneers and, with this issue, has begun to assist SEEDBED as associate editor.

T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution

by Steve Smith and Ying Kai

India:WIGTake Resources, 2011 (also available in Kindle format)

In the year 2000, Ying Kai and his wife Grace were deeply burdened by the task before them and spent much time seeking the Lord’s guidance and direction. They were moving to a new country, notorious for its oppressive government, with the task of engaging 20 million people with the gospel. Just ten years later there were 1.7 million baptized believers and over 150,000 new churches. God did an amazing work in calling so many lost into the kingdom through a strategy known as Training for Trainers (T4T).

For those of us who have laboured for years among an Unreached People Group (UPG) and seen annual results (baptisms) measurable with just our fingers (and maybe our toes too if we’re lucky), it’s hard to even fathom what God has done through Ying and Grace. Other movements implementing T4T have also been birthed and continue to grow. While T4T has greatly aided some missionaries, others question its usefulness after trying its 6-10 lessons with little visible fruit. In this book, Steve Smith and Ying Kai break down T4T and demonstrate how it is the process of T4T that is crucial and not merely the 6-10 lessons. The authors reveal that T4T is a simple, life-on-life, biblical, obedience-based discipleship program.

In the opening chapters, Steve and Ying share how they were both driven to their knees in desperation because of the task before them: initiating a Church planting movement (CPM) among a UPG. As a result, their ministries were characterized by an unwavering focus on the end-vision of seeing millions engaged and not on what either man could do, liked to do, or was gifted at doing. By keeping their focus on the end vision, Ying and Steve were driven to Scripture and to prayer. The fact that the authors present a plethora of strategies and practices related to T4T, should not

be misunderstood to imply that T4T is a man-centred approach:

In the old days of sailing ships, when no wind was blowing, ships went nowhere. One thing sailors did in times of calm was to take every square inch of sailcloth and hang it from as many yardarms as possible. *They could not make the wind blow, but they could be ready for the wind when it did blow...* John 3 describes the Spirit of God as a wind. We cannot make Him blow; He blows where He wills. We cannot create movements, only the Spirit of God can. But we *can* align ourselves, raising the sails of kingdom-oriented ministry, so that when the Spirit does blow, we are ready to move forward. T4T is a process that raises the types of ministry sails that can move with the blowing of God's Spirit. [And] the Spirit of God is blowing throughout our world! (73-74).

Another key conviction is a belief that God is at work among every UPG before a missionary ever arrives, so there is a harvest ready to be harvested. Jesus' disciples were chided for failing to see the harvest before them in John 4, and according to the authors we too need to have a harvest strategy and mentality to 'see' those who God has called to start movements (just like he used the women at the well in John 4 to open an entire village to the gospel).

Another key principle gleaned from training thousands of people was that '*the Holy Spirit chooses the person, not us*,' so it's our job to train (biblically, disciple) as many believers as possible. God often chooses to work through the most unlikely people: poor people, ex-cons, illiterate people, adolescents, or even the elderly. Ying recounts how God often uses the least likely person to start a movement. For us to find and empower those unlikely movement starters we must train everyone that is willing and then invest more heavily in those who obey God's word by sharing with others.

In addition to training everyone, Ying and Steve also champion the idea of sharing the gospel with everyone and establishing this in the DNA of all new believers. A missionary who was living among a 'resistant' people group who began seeing rapid growth communicated this principle best when he said, '100% of those I do not share [the gospel] with do not respond' (207). The authors challenge us whenever possible to sift for spiritual openness with the gospel and not some other method, since after all the gospel is the 'power of God' according to Romans 1.16.

Many readers may agree with the previous principles of training all open believers and sharing the gospel with lost persons, but struggle with how to make that a reality in one's ministry location and context. This is where Steve and Ying's book really shines. Because the book is based on real movements in our day and age and not on mere theory, the authors give numerous examples of how to start trainings in a variety of settings and how to share the gospel.

For starting trainings, the key component is the importance of powerful vision casting that stirs up the heart of the listener. Clear, appropriate, repetitive vision casting is often the missing component which God uses to birth a movement. When someone comes to faith, it's important to right away cast vision to them about how God wants to use them. They have been saved by God for a purpose, and God wants to begin using them immediately.

One final paradigm shift proposed by the authors relates to how we grow in our faith. Many churches operate out of a knowledge-based paradigm that correlates spiritual maturity with biblical and theological knowledge. By examining Ephesians 4 (and other passages) the authors show that Scripture teaches something different. In Ephesians 4:11 leaders are given to the church. In verse 12 they equip God's people (to know Christ, serve, etc.). And, also in verse 12, God's people serve or do the work of ministry. In verses 12-13, the result is that they and the body mature through this process. The biblical progression of maturity is NOT 'believe - mature - serve', but RATHER, 'believe - serve - mature' (80).

The biblical progression of maturity is NOT 'believe – mature – serve', but RATHER, 'believe – serve – mature.'

Once again, most missionaries will not disagree with obedience-based discipleship in theory, but many will struggle to actually implement obedience-based discipleship since it is foreign to our own experience as westerners. In section two, the authors devote five chapters to explaining how to facilitate the T4T process. A T4T meeting is broken into 3 parts of equal length (30-40 minutes per part). The first third of the meeting is focused on looking back at the week or two that have just passed, and it consists of 4 elements: pastoral care, worship, accountability, and vision casting. The second third of the meeting is focused on looking up to God, so a passage of Scripture is read and studied inductively with some simple questions like 'what does **say**?', 'what do I need to **obey**?', and 'who is someone that I can **share** this with?' (nicely packaged with the acronym, **SOS**). The final third of the T4T meeting is focused on looking forward to the coming week(s) and consists of two activities: practicing the lesson just studied so the disciple is confident and qualified to disciple others and making goals for the week which will be used in the accountability section of the next meeting. The authors stress that it is the most important parts of the training process that are easily left out.

The third and final part of the book explains how the T4T process fits within the larger framework of CPM and troubleshoots some of the common roadblocks or points where movements often get stuck, like baptism. I will mention just one provocative idea from this section, which relates to evangelism. The authors warn

CPM practitioners not to use more than one way of sharing the gospel. They suggest choosing only one method with proven results in one's context or in a similar context to one's UPG. Then, everyone who comes to faith can be trained to share the same gospel presentation. According to the authors, most documented CPMs have just one simple way to share the gospel, whereas having multiple approaches rarely gets beyond first or second generation growth.

In our team we have been implementing T4T contextualized for a Muslim UPG for the past year and half. We have trained hundreds of Christians how to simply and sensitively share their faith in Jesus Christ. Just as we expected, based on Ying's experience, only about 10-20% of those we have trained have shared with others. However, in the last 6 months hundreds of Muslims have heard the gospel for the first time, scores of Muslim's have expressed interest in the gospel, many have made professions of faith, and 6 have been baptized. These MBBs are being discipled using the T4T process and we are to the point where they are beginning to share with their 'okios' (network of family and friends). We are still far from seeing a movement, but we have been greatly aided by the T4T process. Before we started implementing T4T we lacked boldness, trained only a few nationals, rarely got to the gospel but spent lots of time investing in relationships, and saw even less fruit. T4T has really sharpened us and helped us to keep our eyes focused on a God sized vision! Thanks to T4T, we are consistently putting aside 'good' CP activities as we press on towards God's *best* and the *highest value* activities.

The T4T process is currently being implemented among hundreds of UPGs and as a result scores of CPMs have been birthed by God's Spirit. The book is very optimistic about how God's Spirit wants to use us, His Body, to birth movements for God's glory, but this could perhaps be the greatest point of concern as well. Some readers may find it a stretch to believe that there is a harvest ready to be harvested among all peoples. Aren't there some UPGs that are blinded by our enemy to the point that we must till the soil and sow seeds for a generation or more before the harvest is ready? What about godly men and women who have laboured for a lifetime and seen almost no fruit?

Another point of concern is that some of the Kingdom kernels presented in chapter 4 seem to be taken a bit out of context and might not withstand rigorous exegesis. Occasionally it feels as if there is a good missiological principle or church planting strategy that the authors felt they needed to prove from Scripture thus making it a 'biblical principle' or 'biblical strategy'. I am not convinced that all of the Kingdom parables can be applied to a CPM strategy in the 21st century, but I will leave it to the reader to decide for himself which points warrant the label of 'biblical' and which do not.

In summary, Steve and Ying have done the missions community a great service in writing this book with its countless practical insights drawn from several of the most explosive CPMs in recent history. Anyone who teaches or implements missions or church planting should read this book. Veteran workers will undoubtedly be sharpened by the focus on vision casting and the practical vignettes sprinkled throughout its pages. Newer personnel, struggling to find a clear strategy and wondering how to make national partners, will likely find this book to be a trusty guide. Only our great God can accomplish a church planting movement, but insofar as he chooses to work through his bride to accomplish that purpose, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* helps us get our sails up and correctly positioned so that we are ready for when God's Spirit blows.

Reviewed by Matt Blake

Matt (pseudonym) and his family have lived and worked with Muslims in Indonesia since 2006.

Engaging Islam

by Georges Houssney

Port Angeles, WA: Treeline Publishing, 2010, 208 pages

ISBN-100983048509

Georges' heart for Muslims shines through on every page of this compelling book. It is not surprising to find so much wisdom packed into such a small and readable book, given that it is written by someone with so much experience sharing Christ with Muslims and training others to do the same. The richness of Georges' diverse experience, and his years spent training people how to engage with Muslims all shine through beautifully here.

Last year I took a dozen students through a four month course entitled 'Engaging the World of Islam.' It was a struggle to choose what texts to have as required reading. Now that I have read *Engaging Islam*, it is a natural choice as one of the core texts for this course the next time I teach it.

In my own accumulated experience of 30 years spent living in the Arab world, leading in ministry to Muslims, mentoring and teaching colleagues across the Arab world and now also teaching college students, I resonate with everything that Georges shares in his book and find it to be right on. I was particularly struck by two things that come through so well in this book: (1) Georges' love for God and for Muslims and his desire to see them come to know and love Christ, and (2) his holy boldness to witness fearlessly as the Apostle Paul modelled so well for us.

For years I have felt that one of the big weaknesses in the ‘tent-making’ model of church-planting, which I practiced and still strongly advocate, is that the part of Paul’s model that we overlook and seem to ignore, is that Paul preached with stunning boldness—and paid the consequences—in persecution, suffering and in fruit! Georges is an exemplary 21st century model of an Apostle to Islam after the pattern given to us by the great church-planting apostle Paul himself.

I cannot think of a book that I can recommend more highly to everyone, from beginners through to seasoned practitioners. It will inform and transform your understanding of Muslims and compel you to get involved and love Muslims for Christ’s sake.

Reviewed by Don Little

A Muslim’s Mind: What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Islamic Traditions

By Edward J. Hoskins

Colorado Springs: Dawson Media, 2011, 173 pages

The subtitle of the book is quite accurate. Every Christian who wants to understand Muslims *from the inside* would do well to read this book. Dr. Ed Hoskins suggests that relying only on the Qur’an to understand Muslims is like playing cards with only half a deck. In this succinct, easy-to-read book, that is based on *years* of study of the Islamic Traditions (Hadith), Hoskins shows us how much we have been missing without the other half of the deck!

This semester, for the first time in my life, I am reading through, along with my Houghton students, a large percentage of the Hadith and am finding them to be *disturbingly* helpful in giving me insight into the way Muslims think. As an aside, if you would like a copy of a concise 95-page document that gathers significant Hadith from all 93 Books in Bukari’s authoritative collection, and adds some helpful questions about each one, send me an email and ask for it.

Hoskins’ goal is to give serious Christians tools to use in building rapport with Muslims. ‘My desire is that after reading this book, you will understand Muslims better and see how easy it is to speak truth to them, starting with their own words and ideas’ (p. 22). He points out how much the Islamic traditions (the Hadith, for example) influence and shape the thinking of Muslims, most of whom desire to perfectly follow them in every aspect of their lives. In just the first few readings of the Hadiths that I have done this semester, it is fascinating to discover the kinds of things that have interested Muslims as they sought to make Muhammad a model

for how to live their lives.

However, in this book Hoskins does not present the kinds of topics that *Muslims* would most value, and that fill up the bulk of the Hadith collections. Instead, he deals with seven topics that *Christians* would be most intrigued by, even though, according to Hoskins, only three percent of all Hadiths deal with such topics. Hoskins gives the Hadith perspective on Muhammad, women, Jews, Jesus and Christians, Shariah Law and Jihad. In doing so, he shows how valuable the Hadith can be as a way of building bridges to Muslims that naturally lead to conversations about deep truth.

Hoskins writes with a deep compassion and empathy for Muslims that is infectious. He appeals to Christians to understand Muslims better so as to have more compassion and love for them. He treats potentially inflammatory topics with grace and humility, desiring not to offend Muslim by being too explicit when discussing Hadiths that may embarrass more moderate Muslims.

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My only real serious critique of the book is on this point. Hoskins *so much* wants to avoid painting too dark a picture of Islam that he does not always seem to present a balanced picture of the significant harshness, vulgarity and violence that permeate the Hadith. I doubt if many Muslims would be offended by his treatment of the Hadith in this book. This is a good thing, but, for anyone desiring to accurately understand the source documents of Islam, such a delicate approach can be quite unsatisfactory—he does not present a complete and balanced picture of what the Hadith are primarily about.

At the same time, however, *Hoskins does show that the violence of radical Islam is largely based on the Hadiths* and on Muslims' sincere attempts to imitate the life and teachings of Mohammed as taught in the Islamic Traditions. He demonstrates, gently but convincingly, that radical Muslims have not 'hijacked' Islam, but rather, Islamists have been *radicalized* precisely because they are using these pre-medieval documents: the Qur'an, and especially the Hadith, as their guide for thought and action in the 21st century.

Though thorough scholarship stands behind this concise analysis, Hoskins writes simply and directly and shows clearly the profound influence that the Traditions have on the ordinary 'Muslim Mind'. I am using *A Muslim's Mind* in my course this semester, since it is the first contemporary book by an evangelical, that I am aware of, that deals with the Hadith in a knowledgeable way based on serious

study of the entire Hadith corpus.

This is a book that I will use and be recommending widely. It is a quick and surprisingly easy read, given the sometimes intractable nature of its subject. I would encourage everyone who has Muslim friends and/or who are seeking to engage Muslims for Christ's sake, to get and read this insightful and inspiring little study. I expect that you will be putting several key lessons to use immediately.

Reviewed by Don Little

Allah: A Christian Response

By Miroslav Volf

HarperOne, HarperCollins Publishers, 2011

Miroslav Volf's book, *Allah. A Christian Response*, is an irenic response to the open letter from thirty-eight Islamic leaders and scholars² reacting to Pope Benedict's Regensburg address³ as well as the Common Word response⁴ from 138 Islamic scholars, clerics, and intellectuals who represented a wide array of Islamic schools of thought and denominations. Volf's goal is to formulate, for both Christians and Muslims, a political theology that can serve as the basis for peaceful cooperation in the shared political spaces of a globalized world. Volf's political theology is based upon the premise of demonstrating 'sufficient similarity' between the Christian and Muslim understandings of the oneness of God.

Volf asserts that the entire process of building bridges between the two communities will fail if it turns out that each community worships a different God. He therefore, spends a great deal of time exploring how a proper understanding of the Trinity does not in any way contradict the Muslim belief in *Tawhid*. Quoting from Nicholas of Cusa (A.D. 1401-1464) and others in church history, he demonstrates that Christians have always affirmed a belief in One God who consists of one undivided, eternal divine essence. After reviewing various passages in the Qur'an relating to perceived Christian beliefs about a trinity he summarizes that 'Christians deny what Muslims deny' and that 'Christians affirm what Muslims affirm' (p. 143).

2. Open letter to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, October 13, 2006 <http://ammanmessage.com/media/openLetter/english.pdf>

3. Pope Benedict's Regensburg Address www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html

4. 'A Common Word Between Us and You,' in Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammed, and Yarrington eds., *A Common Word*, 30-50.

Volf lists six claims about God that both Christians and Muslims can affirm (p. 110):

1. There is only one God, the one and only divine being.
2. God created everything that is not God.
3. God is radically different from everything that is not God.
4. God is good.
5. God commands that we love God with our whole being.
6. God commands that we love our neighbours as ourselves.

While many of us will affirm that the above assertions are generally true for both Muslims and Christians they represent overlapping and not identical understandings. To this Volf claims that the understandings need not be identical, just 'sufficiently similar.' A wider theological comparison of the descriptions found in the two books leads many of us to conclude that the concepts of Allah described in the Qur'an and God described in the Bible are conflicting and more dissimilar than similar.⁵ Within Volf's more narrow framework of comparison, these six points can be found to be generally in agreement. The question arises whether it is misleading for honest and candid dialogue to take place when what is contradictory has been excluded from the comparison. Certainly Volf's more limited comparison can be a valid starting point that can later lead to wider discussions. Volf does succeed in establishing an initial basis for cooperation while intentionally leaving other discussions for the future. The other question is whether this is sufficient to accomplish Volf's purpose in establishing a political theology that both Muslims and Christians can agree upon and use to foster greater cooperation in shared political spaces. Volf does not appear to be naïve in his discussion and throughout the book he raises a number of issues that Muslims will find challenging.

I suspect many Christians will find Volf's assertion that Muslims and Christians worship the same God to be one of the most challenging in the book.

I suspect many Christians will find Volf's assertion that Muslims and Christians worship the same God to be one of the most challenging in the book. When comparing aspects such as revelation, incarnation, atonement, immanence, and whether God is knowable there is substantial theological disagreement between the two concepts described in the Qur'an and the Bible. Despite this problem of description, Muslims have always affirmed belief in the One, True, Creator God

5. See for example Christine Schirrmacher's book, *The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings*, WEA, Bonn, 2008. On page 23 she states, 'At first glance, Islam and Christianity seem to have several points in common when it comes to God, the Creator, the last Judgment, eternal life, and eternal death.... But to emphasize only these similarities would reflect only a superficial understanding of both religions.'

of the Jews and Christians. Muslims refer to the same object as Christians but have a description and understanding that we find inconsistent and contradictory with the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, while Muslims refer to the same object, Volf himself points out the issue of whether they are worshipping the same God with a proper understanding and in a proper way (p. 113).⁶ The general criteria given for establishing that we worship the same God can only work if nothing else can be intended. For instance, if Ngai Mumbi could also be understood to be the One, True, Creator God who exists apart from his creation, then the criteria for establishing the same object of reference may be found insufficient and may need to be described in more detail.

Also problematic is Volf's assertion that someone can keep the Ramadan fast, perform the 5 ritual prayers, believe that Mohammed was a kind of prophet (in the same way Martin Luther King Jr. was) and still be 100 percent Christian (p. 199).⁷ The inside flap of the book jacket reads 'A person can be both a practicing Muslim and 100 percent Christian without denying core convictions of belief and practice.'⁸ In his section on the rules for blending religions (pp. 196-200) one has the impression that Volf is pushing the boundaries in the attempt to challenge Christians to see that many Islamic concepts and practices could be incorporated into Christianity without conflict. However, some of the examples he presents would necessitate a reinterpretation by Muslims of the Surah passages he cites in support. Perhaps Volf is pressing us to conclude that Islam and Christianity are not as entirely different as most Christians typically think. His conclusion to this section is, 'The most pressing problem among religions today is not the blurring of boundaries by mixing and matching; it's the propensity to engage others with disrespect, hostility, and violence'(p. 200).

Perhaps one of the weak links in Volf's argument is his claim that Christians and Muslims can only find peace if we affirm a common God (pp. 8-9). Our own history is littered with cases of Christians fighting other Christians despite a belief in a common God. Huntington's book, *Clash of Civilizations*, also cites numerous

6. On page 33 Volf also states, 'Do Muslims and Christians have exactly the same beliefs about the one God they worship? Clearly, the answer is no... Muslim and Christian beliefs about God significantly diverge at points.'

7. He goes on to say, 'In holding many Muslim convictions and engaging in many Muslim practices, you can still be 100 percent Christian' (p. 199).

8. Volf mentioned in his lecture at Gordon-Conwell that the publisher was responsible for writing this quote and that this may be somewhat misleading.

cases of Muslims fighting other Muslims.⁹ If Muslims as well as Christians exhibit such a propensity to engage in armed conflicts among themselves, how does a belief in a common God reassure us that the partial overlap between our Christian and Muslim views of God's oneness would lead to peace, greater cooperation, and human flourishing? Another related question would be whether peace is impossible between people of different faiths who do not believe in a common God. Political peace between nations who have different ideologies is often very tenuous as those of us who lived through the Cold War can testify. If Islamic nations were able to accept other national entities as equally valid, long-term peace would be possible. If they remain true to the Islamic ideal that all nations should be ultimately united under Islam in one *Ummah*, then long-term peace is unlikely. This may be one reason why Volf appears so keen to demonstrate to Islamic leaders that they have misunderstood the Trinitarian view of God's oneness.

The view that I find to be the least convincing is Volf's assertion that a belief in a common God can lead to peaceful cooperation and pluralism within the same political space. The treatment of minority religious populations in Islamic countries would tend to demonstrate otherwise. Passages in the Qur'an prescribing harsh treatment for the *Dhimmi* people of the book and those outside the community would somehow need to be reinterpreted, ignored, or abandoned. In addition, there is the fact that the political system is part of the Qur'an's revelation to the community in Medina. In the Islamic view, man-made democracies are illegitimate in light of Allah's revelation of a political system and divine laws revealed in Islam by Mohammed. To live permanently in a pluralistic democracy under man-made laws is unthinkable to most Muslims even today. While finding a basis for peaceful cooperation among nations is necessary and perhaps achievable, living within the same nation peacefully together appears naïve in light of Islam's track record and theology, particularly once Muslims become a majority.

A number of reviewers have raised the issue of whether Volf's irenic engagement compromises the priority and necessity of evangelism. To this, Volf would reply that dialogue with Islamic leaders is pre-evangelism and that it establishes a relationship that can lead to dialogues on other topics such as salvation. Volf intentionally leaves a discussion of salvation for 'other books that can be written in the future.'¹⁰ Criticism of Volf for excluding this discussion is somewhat shortsighted if we recognize the need for simultaneous engagement at many levels of

9. Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, p. 257. Huntington reported that in half of the locations around the world in 1993 where inter-civilization wars were being conducted Muslims were fighting other Muslims.

10. Lecture at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, November 3, 2011.

Islamic society. There is a place for media which seeks to influence the Arab on the street, a place for scholars to increase mutual understanding, and a place for us to evangelize the Muslims with whom we have daily contact. All of these need to be happening. Thus, I am encouraged that someone as capable as Miroslav Volf has taken seriously the need to engage Islamic leaders and scholars.

While some Christian readers will feel that Volf has pushed the envelope in several areas, he also identifies significant challenges for Muslims to consider. He challenges them to stand against compulsion in religion in majority Muslim countries (p. 261). Volf calls Muslims and Christians 'to rebel against religion as a marker of identity and weapon in worldly struggles' (pp. 253 and 254). He also challenges them to consider a new standard of love of God and love of neighbour that goes beyond the limited view based upon the few and very conditional verses found within the pages of the Qur'an (pp. 173-176). At times Volf appears to have a lower standard for Qur'anic verses than he does for his interpretation of the Scriptures—reading into them with generosity. Many will find he is generous to a fault in his attempt to compare what the Qur'an states about these topics. Nevertheless, Volf's challenges to Muslims in these areas are nothing less than calls for revolution, reformation, and a reinterpretation of the Qur'an for living peaceably with others in the modern world.

Many of those who are pessimistic about Islam's political agenda and the historical inability of Muslims to live peaceably with others in the same nation will find Volf's goal laudable but unlikely.¹¹ Is this realistic in our time? A number of things would have to happen to make this possible: Moderate Islamic scholars would have to be able to influence the masses and compete with extremist organizations for public opinion, passages in the Qur'an would need new interpretations, Muslim individuals would need to have their freedom of thought and speech protected, the rights of minority communities would need better protection, discrimination against minority Christian populations would need to stop, a theology of politics and pluralism would need to be elucidated, and Muslim parents would need to teach their children that Christians, Jews, and others have rights and worth equal to their own.

Perhaps the best question, however, is whether the goal of irenic engagement is worthy of every effort we can expend. The world can certainly not afford for us not to make every possible attempt. I suppose that Christianity becoming the state religion of Rome in 313 AD did not appear possible at the time. I imagine that it was more than unlikely that European peasants would have been able to topple the powerful elites who ruled them ushering in an age of rule by the people.

11. As I was writing this, Muslims in France firebombed the Paris office French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* as it was about to go to print with a special issue featuring the prophet Mohammed.

Men walking on the moon within ten years seemed to be a far-fetched goal in the early 1960s. The fall of the Soviet Union and the Iron Curtain probably appeared unlikely even as late as the Fall of 1988. Volf's irenic response to the Muslim Common Word initiative and his model of engagement are a commendable example for us to follow at every level of society. It is at many points challenging and thought-provoking for Christians as well as for Muslims. This is healthy and necessary if genuine dialogue and better mutual understanding are to be achieved. Rather than assume that this will never happen, perhaps we should receive Volf's book as an invitation for all of us working with Muslims to continue engaging them in vigorous theological dialogue as well as in other ways. We should do all of this trusting and hoping that this may very well be God's time for the Muslim world. This could happen just as suddenly as the toppling of governments across North Africa. Who is to say that a Reformation of Islam is not possible as well?

Reviewed by Paul Martindale.

Paul Martindale is an Islamic ministry consultant to churches and the Director of the Summer Institute on Islam with Pioneers. He teaches at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary where he is Adjunct Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies and Cross-Cultural ministries and the Director of the Master of Arts in World Missions and Evangelism degree program.

Chrislam: How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel

Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton & Bill Nikides, eds.
i2 Ministries Publications, 2011, 344 pages, \$25

When doves love they quarrel; when wolves hate, they flatter. (Martin Luther)

Who has not heard the thunder rumbling on the missions-to-Muslims fronts? Well, latch down for the storm. Choose your climate zone but *Chrislam* is written to burst like a tropical hurricane or a cold arctic tempest over Evangelical quarters in North America, who are, according to Jay Smith 'funding the inside movements out of ignorance' (295).

The title *Chrislam* is alarming. It is meant to be. It is designed to be the grand *slam* on the most mercurial missiological movement known in our post-Lausanne era, called the 'Inside Movement' (IM) in this text. Nor does the subtitle, 'How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel' leave room for an interrogative debate. This is a multi-authored verdict from the keyboard of the most troubled

judges in the ‘historical camp’: their book is their collective verdict.

I need not encourage you to get *Chrislam*: you will certainly buy it. When you do, have your pen and ruler ready, as I did. Ink will flow as you read this in the airport terminal or waiting patiently in a medical lounge—as I did. Do not take it on holidays with you: it is too stormy.

While *Chrislam* is not a ‘Whose Who’ of the debate, it has succeeded in bringing many strong voices to the Evangelical jury, including many quotes from other authors. There are many other voices I missed, but in a Christian world that now recognises more than 500 Evangelical emerging experts on Islam, listening to some 50 leaders in this anthology is, frankly, impressive. Nor again was this book about the moderates bridging the middle; for good measure that may yet come.

The tone and the introductory material marshalled by the three editors is very strong drink: Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton and Bill Nikides. Lingel, who is both the i2 Ministries director and a global apologist, contributes two chapters in the book critiquing the Muslim-friendly Bible translations. West African missionary and i2 Ministries curriculum writer Jeff Morton focused three further chapters on the ‘dubious missiology’ of IM, while Presbyterian minister and i2 Ministries Asian researcher Bill Nikides contributed three additional chapters, chiefly on IM questionable theological underpinnings. This book is truly an i2 Ministries production.

Following their introductory ‘missiological storm warning’, Nikides, Morton & Lingel first hold court by presenting three chapters filled with a systematized anthology of prominent IM theological, missiological and translation citations and quotes. This is noble and a helpful abridged anthology. Their desire is to ‘be fair and honest with their views’ (2). As a reader, you will need to decide if the IM proponents have been quoted adequately in this text or if they could have wished to summarize the editor’s questions in a more favourable light. But fair is fair: the quotes are all selected from published IM-writings. We do well to anticipate their rejoinders.

According to *Chrislam*’s authors, what IMers are doing is, mildly put, extreme missiology; strongly put, syncretism and heresy. The authors do not argue with new believers living as temporary insiders. What horrifies them is the IM theology of keeping new believers inside the very forms of the religion of Islam. You will read the authors’ assault on (1) what they see as IM ‘mantra’ Bible verses used to justify ‘remaining in’ Islam, (2) what they see as the naïve re-packaging of fourteen-century old anti-Christian Islam into a Jesus-friendly *proto-evangelium*, (3) what they see as disdain for unity within the Body of Christ, which is rich in the Spirit’s wisdom of Christian history, and finally, (4) the temerity of replacing eternal titles of God as Father and Son with Muslim-sensitive alternatives.

There is much in this book with which teachable IMers must agonise. That not all concerned detractors will speak to them this undiplomatically will become evident to them over time. They will need much grace to hear most of the author's strong pent-up critique and 'prove from the whole of Scripture' questions of what they may have assumed to be the Spirit's brilliant blessings on their creative, never-look-back, IM missiology. That *Chrislam* can register so many biblical critiques, so many theological alarm bells, so many 'why is this not heretical' questions, is ample evidence that the IM can no longer dismiss this storm breaking over their fleet—and, truth be known, if these accusations are not answered satisfactorily, it may well cause a lot of generous churches to cease sending their funds to them.

It is too late to close the barn door after the horses have bolted, but after reading the book, I could have wished the editors had opted for a better arrangement of the material. Section 5 struck me as their best, since it had me listening to the heart of passionate voices of believers from Muslim backgrounds (sorry, Elijah Abraham, but I like this title) as well as their non-Westernised narrative material. Section 5 should have been first, followed by the closing section 6 authored by Jay Smith, David Cook, and the great late Samuel Zwemer. I would recommend you first read 5 and 6, and then only return to the Intro and 1-4. You will greatly appreciate David Abernathy's gracious chapter in section 4 entitled 'Jesus the Eternal Son of God'.

According to *Chrislam*'s authors, what IMers are doing is, mildly put, extreme missiology; strongly put, syncretism and heresy.

You will join me in congratulating the editors for their excellent selected bibliography, which lists major biographical works and websites and blogs for both advocates of the IM and their detractors, the 'Historical Perspective.'

Will this new i2 Ministries text inspire their IM brothers to willingly admit their errors? Or again, might *Chrislam* cause the regrettable hardening of the arteries in both camps? Will it be cheered by 'historical' colleagues, who agree with the book's authors, as the definitive rebuttal of the IM theology, missiology and the translation issues? Will it join fear-mongering texts on our shelves, suffering from a too damning tone? Or will God allow it to become one of several tools that lead to a profound missiological audit on both sides?

My prayers go for the last option. As I shared with my IM colleagues following the Bridging the Divide consultation in Houghton College (June, 2011): 'The Holy Spirit may well be telling us *all* to take a giant step backwards from the brim of a potential missiological disaster.'

Unmistakably, the honeymoon is over. For two decades, the spokespeople for

the creative IM movements have crowed like proud roosters over alleged numerical breakthroughs among Muslims. They do well now to hear this text's theological roar from historical orthodox thinkers and accept that this is one missiological storm from which they would be wise not to duck and hide.

Reviewed by Benjamin Hegeman

Benjamin is a colleague and friend of the editor. He teaches part-time at Houghton College in the Islamic Studies concentration and also spends part of each year in Benin, West Africa, where he serves with SIM as the Academic Dean of the Baatonou Language Bible College.

Speaking of Jesus: The Art of Non-Evangelism

by Carl Medearis

Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2011, 192 pages

Carl sums up his thesis succinctly when he writes that, '*Christianity*,' is not about joining a religion but following a person [Jesus]' (p.181). The pivotal Scripture text for his thinking is 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, especially Paul's words recorded in verse two, 'For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.'

This book is not specifically about Christian-Muslim relations but about how every follower of Jesus should conduct themselves towards their fellow human beings when it comes to being communicators of the Good News, Jesus. Carl's objective is to challenge the obsession with theological and doctrinal 'correctness' before sharing Jesus, especially within the Conservative Evangelical church tradition in the USA. He claims that such missiological methodology results in a negative, sterile 'us and them' attitude. Though not averse to using the word 'sinner' and 'sinners,' Carl's emphasis is on Jesus' own propensity for ministering to those on the margins of society. He writes that we should stop playing the 'our religion can beat up your religion' game (p.103). Instead, 'I just talk about Jesus' (p. 47).

This short review will leave others theologically better qualified to comment on this approach. My comments are restricted to the few references to Islam and Muslims. In this respect, Chapter 9 is the most important. Carl questions the value of speaking '*Christianese*' (p. 119). The first candidate for comment is the word '*Christian*' that he says is not anti-biblical but is not helpful in many contexts (p. 121). This is particularly true in the Muslim context with its long history from the crusades to current Western military intervention in the Muslim world.

Many are already using the term, 'a true follower of Jesus'. Some substitute Isa for Jesus but I have some reservations about this as the person of Isa in the Qur'an does not have the same characteristics as the Jesus of the Gospels. The second candidate is the word '*church*' and again he unpacks the meaning preferring to focus on the Greek word '*ekklesia*' that means an 'assembly of called-out ones' (p. 122). For Carl, being '*ekklesia*' is a 'growing, dynamic, life-giving organism rather than a structured institution with hierarchies' (p. 122). However, the challenge even within Church Planting Movements (CPMs) is that rapid growth brings with it a degree of 'structure' even if it is only in the implementation of training. As 'naming' is a creation ordinance so relational 'structure' between the Creator and the creature (and between the created) is an inevitable aspect of 'this age'. We cannot ignore the 'collective' and assume that we can have organism without organizational structure.

His third candidate is '*the Bible*' for which he does not give an alternative, although several times elsewhere he describes his approach as sharing and using 'the stories of Jesus' (p. 137). Fourthly, for the word '*evangelism*' he substitutes the term 'making disciples' and finally, '*missionary*'. Carl was once asked bluntly in Beirut whether he was a missionary, a question many of us are asked by Muslims. Christians, he writes, may express it like this, 'Now you say we're not *Christians*, you say we don't *convert* people, we're not *missionaries*, we don't go to *church*, and we don't *evangelize*' (p. 129). Carl replies to the 'missionary question', 'We are people trying to follow Jesus' (p. 129).

Elsewhere in the book Carl underlines this by reporting a street 'vox pop' survey he did asking people to comment on their reactions to two words, '*Christianity*' and '*Jesus of Nazareth*'. All those interviewed were negative towards the first while all were positive towards the second (pp. 175-6).

There is no doubt that those of us who befriend and engage with Muslims need regularly to review the religious language we use.

Carl's writing exudes the characteristics and qualities of a storyteller, the distinguishing marks of Jesus gossipers. He looks behind and within the questions to discover the heart intentions of the speaker and then responds with his own questions. The aroma of Arab coffee-shop banter seeps into the text. There is much to learn from his experiences and wisdom.

Disciple-making for Carl is a process of walking together with the kind of people who are not like us. The final chapter is controversially entitled, 'Gays, Liberals and Muslims', and features 'Poor Richard's' which is a little coffee shop/restaurant/used bookstore in downtown Colorado Springs. The owner, Richard Skorman, is a 'liberal' whom Carl befriends in a profound way. In an

interview with Carl, Richard says, 'It's the religion of Christianity that I don't like—not Jesus' (p. 162).

The chapter ends with an observation by a friend called Sameer, who calls himself a Muslim who follows Jesus. He comments that the house called *Christianity* needs to be renamed the *house of Jesus* and that when Muslims become inquisitive we have to 'grab them' and open the door and say, 'Look! It's Jesus.' Sameer adds, 'And Jesus will invite them in because Jesus loves people. He is not the guy in the way. He is the way' (p. 177).

This book will infuriate some readers for its 'simplicity' but it gets under the skin. Just remember that Carl admits that he is not a theologian and forgive him for what he sometimes omits and for what he sometimes commits.

Reviewed by Keith Fraser-Smith

Muslims of the Arab-world have been Keith Fraser-Smith's focus for more than 40 years. He lived and worked in the Middle East for 13 years, part of the time overseeing AWM's ministry in the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula. He was also director of AWM's media department for 8 years in France. Then, following five years in a UK pastorate, he spent 7 years in global mobilization which involved building strategic alliances with national agencies that wanted to place missionaries in the Arab world. In 2010 he was appointed ministry coordinator in the UK and is currently the interim-leader of a new area while transitioning to the leadership of a local CPM team of which one strategic element is to mobilize local churches and Christians in a city network. Among his many interests is his pleasure in writing book reviews.