

EDITORIAL

MINISTERING TO MUSLIMS IN AN ARABIC CONTEXT

In this issue of **Seedbed**, we focus on the themes of the scriptures in Arabic, learning Arabic and ministering in Arabic. Though many of us who live in the Arab world usually function in Arabic in our relationships with those around us, few of us have sufficient fluency in Arabic to be able to assess the translations we use. We also face significant challenges in ministering in Arabic, and in learning Arabic and continuing to improve our fluency. This issue will help us with in all three areas.

In Part 1, three articles examine the primary translations of the Scriptures into Arabic that are available today. Abdulfadi assesses how well four translations render key passages that point to and teach the divinity of Christ. The Warners assess how well native Arabic-speakers *understand* selected passages in the different translations of the Arabic scriptures. Part 1 concludes with Drapper's initial assessment of *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*, which was published in June and has already become quite controversial.

Part 2 contains a number of articles related both to foreigners learning to speak and minister in Arabic and to the value of ministering in Arabic. Together, I believe that they will provide insight and much practical help for everyone living and working in the Arab world.

In Part 3, Martin shares some helpful insights into how we can explain to Muslims the nature of the Christian life – one that is lived by faith through grace. Then we have the second in our series in which Tahira shares helpful insights into how a few Sunni women think and feel about being Muslims. Finally, in Part 4, are three book reviews. The first two provide much practical help in our ministries, and the third encourages us to reflect afresh on our understanding of the Gospel and of our future with God.

Your response to any **Seedbed** article is always welcome, and I will publish the best ones in order to encourage our conversation together. The only letter received in response to the last issue of **Seedbed** is quite critical of its generally positive treatment of *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road* and voices concerns that many have felt about Chandler's book that were *not addressed* in the last issue of **Seedbed**.

On behalf of all who read and benefit from **Seedbed**, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to Sandra Dick who has served as **Seedbed** copy and layout editor for more than five years. Her other increasing responsibilities have meant that this will be her last issue of **Seedbed**.

Don Little, Editor
editor.seedbed@wornet.org

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

September 4, 2008

Dear Don,

I am a minister to and among Muslims, serving with the Assemblies of God in the US. This past July I read the book, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road* by Paul-Gordon Chandler, as well as the *Seedbed* articles (2008, Vol. 22, No 1) concerning this book and Mazhar Mallouhi's life. It is an understatement to say that I was shocked by Chandler and Mallouhi as well as very disappointed with *Seedbed's* treatment of the book.

You are aware of this as I sent you my 5-page book review (http://answering-islam.org/Reviews/chandler_mallouhi.html). I also sent it to Greg Livingstone, Phil Linton, Brad Gill (all of whom wrote in the last issue) and others. I know all three of these men and also met Mallouhi several years ago when he was visiting the local area. Everything that I was told about him was positive, and that heightened my surprise at the book's content. To read various statements made by both Chandler and Mallouhi that smack of compromise, syncretism, relativism and universalism was disturbing enough; to then read the positive reviews in *Seedbed* that appeared to sidestep these issues or qualify them was too much to allow anyone who cares about the inspiration of the Bible to remain silent.

I also have a compelling personal reason to speak out as I am a research assistant for Greg Livingstone, Mazhar's lifelong friend. It is because of both my working and personal relationship with Greg that I bought the book, read it completely, took extensive notes, wrote my review and now this letter. As members of the same body, we have a responsibility to hold one another accountable and I feel that this responsibility has been forsaken for the sake of individual friendships and past positive experiences with Mallouhi.

Since some feel that I am being too exacting of Mallouhi, I quote him:

When I hear the Psalms read, for example in church, and when it says 'The God of Israel,' I find this a stumbling block for me, because this presents a tribal God (p. 181).

I cannot reconcile God ordering massacres in the Old Testament (p. 181).

We are part of several groups of Muslim mystics, Sufis; sometimes we meet in our home, other times in theirs. But we walk together this spiritual journey toward God (p. 193).

I have met many Muslims who I believe are farther spiritually than me, and a million miles closer to God, loving God and devoted to God with complete sincerity (p. 193).

‘If people do not have the revelation of God in Christ, this of course does not mean that they do not know God,’ says Mazhar (p. 91).

‘I believe Gandhi loved Christ but could not afford to be publicly associated with “Christianity” –being a Hindu by allegiance, but a Christ follower by affinity. And I fully expect to see Gandhi when we are privileged to enter God’s presence in eternity’ (p. 123).

Mallouhi: ‘It is very hard for me to picture God, whom I love, and whom I know loves humanity, his creation, sending anyone to an eternal hell. God is just. And if he treats evil with evil then what difference is there between him and us’ (p. 198).

I am deeply concerned ***about the spiritual harm that these clearly anti-biblical statements can result in***, whether through (or in) gospel workers, former Muslims or Muslims close to the Kingdom. Mallouhi has a responsibility, first and foremost to God, to genuinely repent and to prove that repentance by doing whatever he can to publicly recant and disavow these beliefs. I suggest that he write another book addressing his anti-biblical statements, in which he ***clearly shows that his beliefs are in line with biblical orthodoxy***. I further urge him to ***include an apology for the confusion and compromise that this has caused*** and has the potential to continue to cause.

If I made these statements ***and held to them***, I would be dismissed as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and no evangelical organization would accept me – much less allow me to remain within it. If, in our

attempts to be relevant and fruitful in ministry to Muslims, we can dismiss and/or ignore blatant heresy (and not demand actions worthy of repentance – see Matthew 3:8), we become like the proverbial frog in a pot of boiling water, being boiled to death while sensing no danger. C.S. Lewis, ‘one of Mazhar’s favourite Western writers’ (p. 146), said:

As Christians we are tempted to make unnecessary concessions to those outside the faith. We give in too much. Now, I don’t mean that we should run the risk of making a nuisance of ourselves by witnessing at improper times, but there comes a time when we must show that we disagree. We must show our Christian colours, if we are to be true to Jesus Christ. We cannot remain silent or concede everything away.*

While confrontation can be perceived as not having the other person’s or party’s best interest at heart, it really is my desire that Mallouhi and Chandler be all that God wants them to be. And this can only happen as they live and ‘teach what is in accord with sound doctrine’ (Titus 2:1).

May all of us ‘in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ’ (Eph. 4:15).

Sincerely,

Adam Simnowitz

P.S. I have been in contact with Mazhar Mallouhi, Greg Livingstone, Phil Linton and Brad Gill.

*(http://www.cbn.com/special/Narnia/articles/ans_LewisLastInterviewA.aspx)