

EDITORIAL

MISSIOLOGICAL MODELS AND THEIR POWER TO SHAPE

Taking on the editorial direction of *Seedbed* during these tumultuous times in which Islam is increasingly the focus of world concern is a unique privilege and an immense challenge. Earlier *Seedbed* editors – Sam Schlorff (founding and longest-serving editor), Wendall Evans, Abe Wiebe and Donna Smith – are among my mentors in life and ministry, and each one has brought substantial strengths to the task. Attempting to stand on the shoulders of giants is daunting!

This volume of *Seedbed* is devoted to the topic of contextualizing ministry among Muslims in the Arab world. Most of the articles are devoted to exploring the significant personal and missiological influence of the life and ministry of Mazhar Mallouhi, a well-known Middle Eastern follower of Christ from a Muslim background.

In October, I learned that a book had been written about his life. Having known the Mallouhis in Morocco, I immediately bought and read it. I was deeply moved by his life and profoundly challenged by Chandler's portrayal of Mazhar's love of and creative engagement with Muslims for Christ's sake. Published last autumn (2007), *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path Between Two Faiths*, by Paul-Gordon Chandler, is a *missiological biography* that presents Mazhar as an example of a positive way for a follower of Christ from a Muslim background to live a life of witness in the Arab world. Not only is it a 'must read', as described by Greg Livingstone, but I believe it is also a 'must discuss' book. For that reason, it forms the core of this *Seedbed* volume.

Chandler has given us a very readable book that also gives a 'missiological model' for us to examine – not as an abstract construct, but as one that is embodied in the story of one man and his partner in life and ministry, Christine. In reading *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*, one quickly gets caught up in the engaging true story of Mazhar and his pilgrimage in learning how to live as a fruitful and faithful lover of Christ among his own Muslim people.

This *Seedbed* discussion of Mazhar and *Pilgrims of Christ* is presented in two parts. In the first part, we see something of the tremendously positive impact that Mazhar has had on five men who know and have worked with him. In the second part, we have three excellent, and very different, reviews and responses to the book itself. Mazhar has long been a controversial figure, and it is not surprising that this book about him also stirs up controversy. I have chosen, however, to devote so much time to Mazhar, and to Chandler's portrayal of him, because:

1. the book deals profoundly with the issue of the personal and cultural identity of believers from Muslim backgrounds (BMBs) in their own communities
2. I believe that reading, talking and praying about this book with our friends and colleagues may well lead us all to much deeper insight into some core issues that drive the urge to pursue *higher* levels of contextualization.

Chandler presents Mazhar as a model to stimulate our thinking about how we minister to our brothers and sisters coming out of Islam. My goal is not that we should



agree or disagree with his model (after all, we don't agree or disagree with a person's life, we merely love and respect him or her), but that this discussion of Mazhar and the book about him, will take us deeper into the world in which we serve – the world which Mazhar himself loves and serves so sacrificially.

Part 3 contains two examples of workers who are seeking to share Christ in ways that are sensitive to the beliefs and worldviews of Muslims. The first article, a case study, reports on efforts being made by some workers in the Middle East who are seeing encouraging fruit. Their bold and innovative approach is then critiqued gently and clearly by a couple who are intimately familiar with the Middle Eastern context. Part 3 is rounded out by the first instalment of a series in which Tahira explores how some Sunni women *feel* about their faith and their lives as Muslims. Much of what we learn from books on Islam is about the religion and its doctrine; this series will take us far beyond simply understanding their religious beliefs and give us much needed help in understanding the values and emotions of Muslim women.

I encourage you to look at the collection of book reviews in Part 4, where you will find reviews of books by Sinclair (on church planting), Musk (on Islamic and Christian fundamentalism), Jenkins (on the shape of the religious future of Europe), Jabbour (on the need for Western Christians to rethink how they see Muslims) and Sookhdeo (on Jihad). Two other reviews (Barna and Gibbs & Bolger) may seem out of place in *Seedbed*, but as we seek to understand new approaches to contextualization in the Muslim world, it is helpful to

compare it with the attempts being made in the *emerging church* to contextualize church to the increasingly postmodern societies in the West.

From MBB to BMB

Many friends who are now disciples of Christ from Muslim families and communities do not like the widely used acronym MBB (Muslims background believers) since it seems to put more emphasis on their former identity as Muslims than on their new identity in Christ. They suggest that BMB (believers from Muslim backgrounds) more helpfully stresses their new identity as believers. In an attempt to encourage more English speakers to use the acronym BMB, *Seedbed* will use BMB instead of MBB whenever possible.

A conversation in the making

In the coming months I intend to adapt *Seedbed* more to the Web so as to offer enhanced access for the many readers who increasingly learn through the Internet and web-hosted relational networks. In addition, *Seedbed* volumes will be devoted to specific themes as we seek to bring together diverse perspectives on vital topics and develop increasingly fruitful conversations together.

The new strapline for *Seedbed* is *Practitioners in Conversation*, a phrase that expresses my desire that *Seedbed* promote conversation and an exchange of ideas and experiences. Letters to the Editor will be published as part of our ongoing conversations, so whether you like what you read, or find it upsetting, please write and say so!

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