

EDITORIAL

The Agony And The Ecstasy Of Discipling

This morning friends in the States re-connected me with an older Moroccan gentleman (I'll call him 'Larry') whom I spent a number of years seeking to encourage and disciple 15 years ago. Today I learned that Larry has recently come to the States and is in a serious domestic crisis. They thought that it might help him if I were to talk with him. I had looked at my relationship with Larry as one of my discipling failures. That dear brother could not, would not (?), come out of his isolation and join with the brothers and sisters in our city for regular fellowship and teaching. Admittedly, Larry was of a different generation and from a very different background, but until today I had looked back on that relationship as having ended in failure.

Today I learned that now, some 15 years later, Larry speaks very highly of me and expresses a deep love and respect for me. He says how much he appreciated my stopping by his humble apartment to visit him and eat meals with him. Larry comes from a well-educated upper class family and the tragic loss of his young wife in a car accident devastated him (when he was himself quite young). God used this tragedy through a long and tortured pilgrimage, to eventually lead him to Christ. He held such potential to be a contributing leader, teacher and father within the church! After a few years, I eventually gave up on Larry and gradually stopped visiting him. Now, so many years later, we are reconnecting. *Such is the strange and often confusing reality of discipling believers from Muslim backgrounds (BMBs).*

From the outset of our time in Morocco God led me into relationships with young believers. I sought to walk with them and help them grow into the maturity and wholeness that I knew God wanted for them. Some of these men grew and matured, and some are among the leaders of the church in Morocco today. Others struggled and battled, and eventually drifted out of fellowship. It was my experience with the intense struggle and enormous challenge of discipling men like 'Larry' that drove me to research BMB discipling.

This issue of *Seedbed* is devoted to the always important, often hard, and sometimes joyous and wondrous calling that we have as we walk alongside our brothers and sisters helping them in their journey. It is my hope and prayer that as you read these articles you will be encouraged to greater faith. You will laugh and cry, but also be called forward into renewed fervour to continue to help disciple our precious brothers and sisters, who are walking by faith in obedience to their Lord and ours in often very tough circumstances.

Don Little, Editor editor.seedbed@wornet.org or editor.seedbed@a2bmail.net



Hi Don,

While waiting for our visa to a neighbouring country we have been reading Seedbed. We love the practical focus you are giving it. The last issue stirred me up about the Sharif, so I hope this is in time for the next issue.

At risk of sounding like a cheerleader, I'm responding to the two articles in the Vol. II – 2008 Seedbed about Arabic Bible translations. From my learner-of-Arabic perspective I want to stir up the crowd for the Sharif Bible translation and help even newer Arabic learners to choose a practical Arabic Bible.

Based on the chosen wording of key passages establishing the divine nature of Christ, Basheer Abdulfadi ranks the Sharif LAST of four translations (Smith van Dyck, New Arabic Version/Book of Life, Today's Arabic Version and the Sharif) in terms of the reliability of the translation in translating key terms. Tim and Sharon Warner evaluate Bible translations based on comprehension and translation philosophy, concluding that the Sharif TOPS all translations in terms of communicativeness. One may be left wondering, is the Sharif the worst or the best choice?

All translations have their place, but for my purpose, the question is to what degree does a translation bring the word near the non-native Arabic speaker, so that we can use it in ministry among Muslim peoples? (Deut. 30:14)

At Kelsey my 4th semester class read Acts in the Sharif instead of the Van Dyck. Our Jordanian Christian teacher said the language would benefit us more, and it did. Continued reading in the Sharif has helped my wife and I to share truth with Muslim people, while advancing our Arabic reading to the point where we can now slowly read more in Arabic generally. Additionally, the Sharif helps you to speak and understand Muslim expressions (AlQuds "Jerusalem", alMawla "Lord", yahya "John"). Without knowing these you waste time explaining (or being explained to!) Christian terms and names.

The Warner's have demonstrated that for educated Yemenis, the Sharif is the most intelligible. Can anyone prove that any Arabic Bible (unless written in a local Arabic dialect!) is more intelligible than the Sharif for all but the most educated Muslim – especially for a person reading the Bible for the first time?

If you question the ability of any Arabic population group to understand Modern Standard Arabic, I commend to you this 2008 article (a shorter PDF version of a 996 page book written to help Christian radio broadcasters assess the Arabic needed to actually communicate with listeners). Scholar Jos Strengholt concludes that with the exception of some (not even all!) university graduates, even *simplified* Modern Standard Arabic is not *intelligible* to the general Arabic reader or listener unfamiliar with the context. (See <http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/Gospel%20in%20the%20Air%20chapter3.pdf>)

This is the situation of the majority of Muslims reading the Bible for the first time. I would agree from my experience in Jordan, the Arab country said



to have the *highest* level of literacy.

If Arabs struggle with Arabic, should not we the foreign missionary choose the simplest translation as the word we choose to bear? But wait, people say the Sharif clouds the witness to the deity of Christ? Should we cast it aside?

As the author Abdulfadi says, we should be aware of key Sharif verses such as *isa huwa mawlana* (Acts 2:36) and *anta ibni, analyawm tawajtuka ibnan li* (Psalm 2:7) relating to the divinity of Christ. He questions the Sharif's use of *sayyid* and *mawla* (lord and master) in translation of the Greek, kurios. Others may prefer different wordings, but as the Warners demonstrate, the Sharif is a far clearer translation and more accessible to the non-literary population of Islam.

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I've noticed that in church Jordanian Christian hymns interchangeably use *mawlana* and *sayyidna* for "our Lord." In Arabic, the words for lord, king, owner, ruler and master are perhaps more fluidly applied to both God and men (and women!) than perhaps Lord in English. So I will not debate the author's conclusions, but merely note that while some may believe *rabb* the best choice for Lord in Bible translation, we learn at Kelsey that housewife in Arabic is "rabbit ilbayt" (lord of the home).

Doug

Doug and his family just completed three years in language study and await a visa for service in the lands of the Nile.

