

SEEDBED

Practitioners in Conversation
June 2015, Vol XXIX No 1

Theme:

**THE IDENTITIES OF BELIEVERS
FROM MUSLIM BACKGROUNDS**

Plus:

SIX BOOK REVIEWS



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Practitioners in Conversation

June 2015, Volume XXIX No 1

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SEEDBED

Practitioners in Conversation

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EDITORIAL

The Influence of our Different Contexts

This issue of SEEDBED looks at one of the more critical – and possibly one of the most contentious – aspects of ministry among Muslims: the *identity* of believers coming from Muslim backgrounds. It deals with such topics as: How do believers who were raised as Muslims come to understand their own identity in Christ? How does this change over time (from days of seeking, to the time surrounding their decision to ally themselves with Jesus, to later years of walking with Christ and growing in their faith)?

Of course, the answers to such questions necessarily look quite different across the globe, not only because each individual's story is unique, but also because of the contexts in which different believers live. A 2009 map from the Pew Research Forum (See the map at the end of the editorial) gives a glimpse of the world population of Muslims weighted according to country. As I looked at this map and thought about the distinct perspectives represented by the authors of this issue, I considered the diverse factors that are part of their stories.

For example, do the believers whose identities are being discussed speak the language of the Qur'an, or some variation of it, as their mother tongue? Or do they speak an entirely unrelated language and sound out Arabic letters for the purpose of reciting the Qur'an ritualistically? The linguistic differences alone complicate any discussion about the identity of believers from Muslim backgrounds.

Another significant contextual difference is the history of the church in each locality. Is there an established Christian church? If so, does it belong to their same cultural and linguistic group, to a similar one, or to a completely different people group? In some parts of the Muslim world, there are thriving Christian churches that pre-date Islam. In others there are thriving Christian churches that are relatively young, formed in the last century or two from movements to Christ in a nearby people group. In some places, Muslim communities exist as a sizeable minority, surrounded by people of another faith, or no faith. And in yet other contexts there is practically no Christian presence and little knowledge of other faiths besides Islam.

The articles in this volume of SEEDBED represent this diversity. You will read about a Muslim minority people group in China, house churches among Turkic peoples in Central Asia where the dominant Christian presence is Russian, and about individual (and often isolated) believers in one war-torn country where the population is virtually 100% Muslim. You will also hear a perspective from a South Asian house church movement that has been growing for a few decades, and a report of long-established Arab churches responding to the Syrian crisis.

The authors of the articles also represent diverse personal backgrounds. In this issue you will read articles both by expats ('alongsiders') and by believers from

Muslim backgrounds (one who speaks English and has gone back to his own people after years abroad, and one who does not speak English and has remained in his own people group and context).

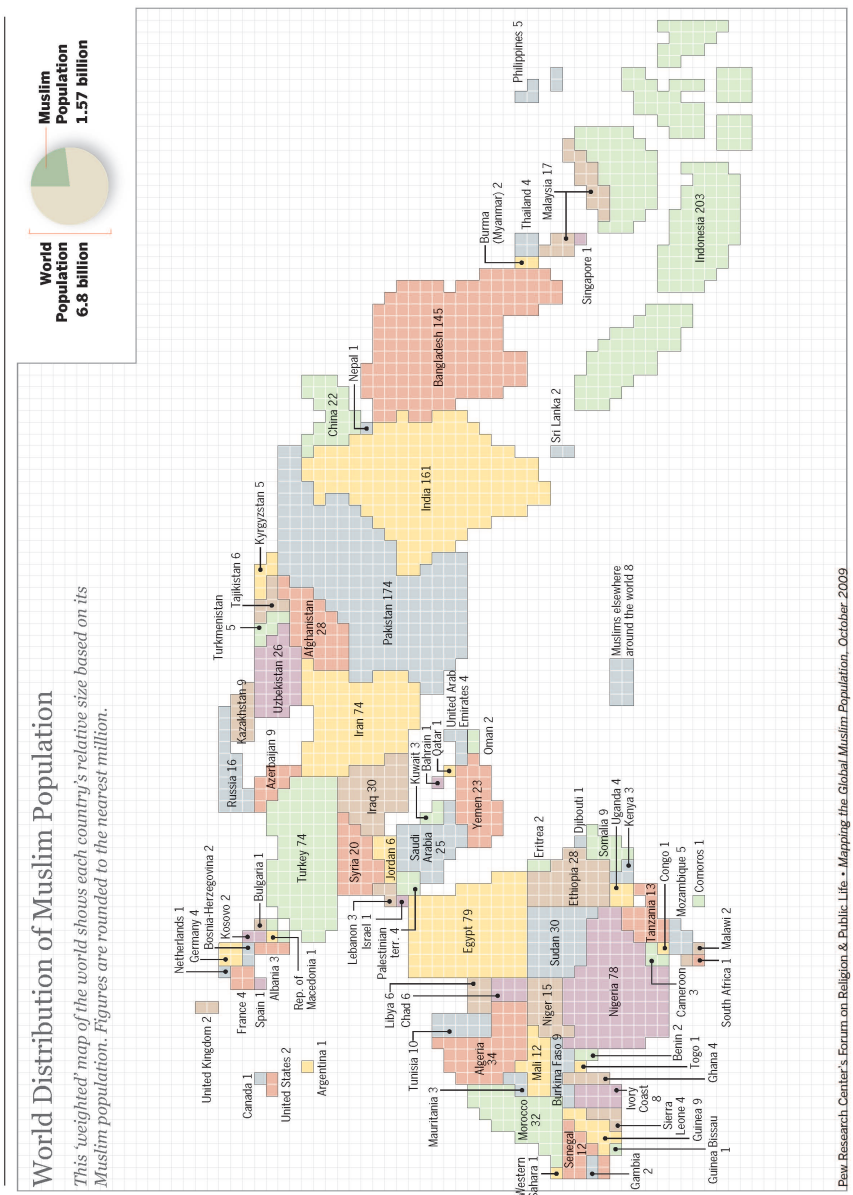
As such, the articles represent a multiplicity of perspectives on issues that have recently been the subject of much debate. The goal of this journal, as always, is to be a 'forum for the exchange of ideas.' It is my opinion that many of the specifics about identity issues for believers from Muslims backgrounds are most fruitfully discussed at the local level, between local believers and 'alongsiders' who speak the same languages and are wrestling together with what it means to follow Jesus in their particular context.

But hearing from one another across the breadth of our diverse cultural contexts also has great benefit. Perhaps a vastly different perspective from a context halfway across the globe will cause you to look at things in your own context from a different angle. Perhaps other ideas will be a catalyst for searching the Scriptures in the language you speak and in the original languages. Or perhaps a perspective here might provoke you to the kind of prayer spoken of in 1 John 5:14-16, where we are told that if we believe a brother or sister is in the wrong, then we 'should pray and God will give them life.' What a tremendous promise!

So if this issue provokes greater searching of the Scriptures and deeper thinking about the missiological issues pertinent to our role as Message-bearers, we will be glad. If the articles become a catalyst for learning to listen to one another more attentively and ask better questions of ourselves and others, we will consider it a success. And if this exchange of ideas provokes intentional and earnest prayer for one another, even better. We trust that God will answer those prayers by transforming us and giving each of us life. To God be the glory.

Melissa Kay, Associate Editor (seedbed@generalmail.net)

Melissa first traveled to the Muslim world in 1995 through a study abroad program to complete her theology degree. She completed a B.A in music and theology, and an M.A in Intercultural Studies from Wheaton College. Melissa then served among Muslims in South Asia from 1999-2008, followed by ministry as an academic researcher in Muslim-Christian relations in American and British university settings. Currently she spends much of her time facilitating musical worship and spiritual formation activities for practitioners at various gatherings around the globe, with a particular passion to help us corporately and individually focus our eyes on Jesus and reflect on God's Word. In her current involvement with Seedbed, she enjoys interacting with colleagues interested in contributing articles to help us collaborate, strengthen and encourage one another regarding issues pertinent to our task as Message-bearers.



This map is from: <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2009/10/weightedmap.pdf>

PART I: EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY FOR BELIEVERS IN FIVE CONTEXTS

So, Who Am I Now? How Alongsiders Can Help Believers Find Answers

by Trent Jones

Trent Jones (pseudonym), an American, has served as a leader of church planting teams among Muslims in two of the 'Stans' of Central Asia since 1993, along with his wife and five children.

I am going to start this article by describing our context, because so many issues of strategy in our work are determined by the context we are in. I am not prescribing our approach for other contexts, but I do believe it is appropriate for ours.

Our context

Our context is formerly Soviet Central Asia during the opening years after the fall of the USSR. In this country, 'Turkistan,' there is an ethnic Turkic majority, and a Russian minority. There is still a strong Russian language/culture influence from seventy years of Soviet rule. Most Turks¹ speak their mother tongue and Russian to varying degrees. They also have very positive feelings about the Soviet Union and good memories of the Soviet era, especially those who reached adulthood before 1991. The majority are acquainted at some level with Russian people, and all are acquainted at some level with Russian culture. Most men have travelled in Russia for military service, education or work. While being generally positive toward Russia and Russians, they do not respect certain characteristics of Russians, particularly in the areas of family and community relationships. They have no interest in what they perceive as the Russians' religion: Christianity.

These Turks for the most part have a very strong identity as Muslims. In their mind to be a Turk is to be a Muslim. Yet many do not give much thought to what it means to be a Muslim. In fact, the words which could be translated as 'Turk-ness' and 'Muslim-ness' are used interchangeably by most. For most Turks, one is considered a Turk and a Muslim. 'Is there a difference?' they think. Even if they never go to a mosque and never participate in anything Islamic, they are considered to be Muslim. They can be criminals, drug addicts, even communist party bosses, and still be considered Muslims.

If forced to define what a Muslim is, they will most certainly define it by religious behaviours, not by beliefs. During the Soviet period they were allowed to

¹ In this article the term 'Turk' is used instead of the name of this specific Central Asian ethnic group. It does not refer to Turks from Turkey.

practice their religion as Muslims, but only to a very limited extent and mostly in a benign fashion. Certainly those who wanted to advance within the government structures needed to embrace all things Soviet, which meant 'all things Russian' (at least in appearance), including an outward assent to atheism. So, during the later Soviet period, many Turks had a latent Muslim core with a more secular Soviet appearance. Since 1991, most Turks have been moving 'back to their Islamic roots,' signified by a great increase in almost all areas of Islamic practice. The government, however, is still quite cautious and controlling of anyone who seems to be having any kind of Islamic influence on others. As such there are very few people who have read the Qur'an in a language they can understand. And there are few, if any, public settings where Islamic topics can be freely discussed.

To Turks, 'Christianity' is the Russian religion. Jesus is 'the Russians' prophet.' They know Russians celebrate Jesus' birth around New Year, when the patriarch from Moscow is on TV wearing a long robe and swinging a censor with incense smouldering while worshippers put candles in front of icons of Jesus, Mary and other 'saints.' In their minds all Russians are 'Christians.' Russians are people who: 1) make the sign of the cross, 2) drink vodka at funerals, 3) leave home when they are 18 and do not care for or see their parents after that, and 4) wear immodest dress (women) and are loose morally.

Most of what Turks think about the Russians' religion carries over to what they think about all westerners. We are 'Christians' like the Russians. Though they have heard the words 'Orthodox' (in the Russian church sense) and 'Catholic,' most would not be able to explain the difference, except maybe that 'Catholic' has something to do with the 'Papa' in Rome.

Prior to 1991 this part of the Soviet Union was closed especially tight and evangelism to Turks in Central Asia was virtually non-existent. As far as we know there were perhaps five believers of Turkic background before 1991. However, there were small evangelical Russian churches in Soviet Turkistan during the Soviet period, primarily Baptist and Pentecostal. These were under the same kind of restrictions and pressures as Muslims.

All the Rules Change

With the breakup of the USSR, all the rules changed. Turkistan and all its neighbours became independent. The borders opened and for the first time in over seventy years outsiders could come and go freely. During the next eight years many came and began to minister in a variety of ways with relatively few restrictions. Some focused on direct gospel outreach to Turks while others on strengthening and partnering with the existing Russian evangelical church. As a result, hundreds, maybe thousands of Turks came to saving faith in Jesus during these first eight years.

When thinking about the issues related to identity formation, these new Turkic believers can be grouped into two basic categories: those who have come to faith and have grown primarily in the context of a Russian language and culture church, and those who have come to faith and have grown in their Turkic cultural context, with little or no contact with the Russian language and culture church. Each of these groups has quite distinct identity pilgrimages, and thus calls for different approaches from the 'alongside' expatriate worker.

Characteristics of Believers within the Russian Language & Cultural Context

These new Turkic believers in Russian language and culture churches can be best understood on a continuum. On one end are those who are Turkic ethnically, but whose heart language is Russian. They function primarily in a Russian cultural context. At the other end are Turks who speak very limited Russian, who function primarily or exclusively in a Turkic cultural context. There are also many spread across the middle of that spectrum. The further to the Russian end of the spectrum you go, the less important are their ties to a Turkic Muslim identity. The further to the Turkic end, the more important the tie.

And therein lies the rub. Those on the Turkic side value the faith they have found, like the treasure hidden in a field. But the only expression of that faith they have experienced is a Russian language and culture version. And while many of them can understand and appreciate it to some degree (depending on their level of Russian language and culture fluency), it does not feel like their own. So for them, coming to faith in Jesus is, to some extent, choosing to leave their own culture and people and adopt what feels like 'the Russian religion.'

This phenomenon is more pronounced because of two things. First, these evangelical Russian churches are evangelistic. They are praying for and sharing the gospel with everyone, including Turks. Second, almost all of these Russian believers, evangelists and churches are certain that their particular expression of church is 'the' biblical way for a Christian to practice one's faith. They do not understand the Turkic language and culture. In fact, most only do outreach in the Russian language. They are sure all Turks understand Russian. They have grown up 'knowing' that Russian culture is superior to the Central Asian Turkic culture. Thus these churches are glad, for the most part, for Turks to come to faith in Jesus, yet they assume these Turks will practice their faith in the same way Russians do.

This has led to all sorts of interesting situations. These new Turkic believers are being taught in their churches that 'we Christians do this and we do not do that.' As the more devout start doing these things they experience the wrath of their family and people. Others recognize that to do these things would result in

ostracism or rejection by their own people. Consequently, by not embracing these teachings, they risk ostracism or rejection from the church.

One believing Turkic father wanted to have a circumcision party for his young sons. This is something all Turks do. The Russian church leaders said, 'No, you cannot do that, you're a Christian now. Circumcision is for Muslims.' He countered, 'Circumcision is for Turks, I'm a Turk. How can I not circumcise my sons?' (Russians, believing and unbelieving, do not circumcise their sons.)

We went to a wedding put on by a believing Turkic mother for her believing daughter, who was marrying a believer. They had traditional Turkic music and danced as all Turks do at their weddings. But for the Russian pastor's wife who was sitting near the head table, dancing is anathema for any believer. She was deeply disturbed to see their church members dancing, and in mixed company, and left the wedding party early.

One village woman came to genuine faith in Jesus as a result of experiencing healing in Jesus' name. She lived far from the capital city where the Russian language church was located. Recognizing the vitality of her faith, they paid her transport money to come to the capital city a few days a week to participate in services and receive training. She spoke virtually no Russian, and there was very little translation. Those at the church gave her Russian 'city' clothes and told her to change into them anytime she came, as her village wardrobe was not appropriate. While there were a few Turks like her at the large fellowship, there was nothing geared to her people, nor permission given for them to find their own way. She was brought to our house by a young Turkish believer who is like a son to her. He had to bring her secretly because her church frowns on any member fellowshiping with those outside. We sat on the floor on brightly coloured stuffed quilts around a low table sipping tea. We sang, prayed, read God's Word, all in her Turkic language, and shared a meal together. She got up saying she felt she had been 'born again for the second time' that day. She experienced for the first time, albeit in a less than ideal way, that she could be a follower of Jesus and still be Turkic; her faith could be expressed in a way that felt much more like 'hers.' She was overwhelmed.

Another believer from a traditional village, Azim, was one of the first believers in his area in the early 1990s. A group of Turks from his area had come to faith through the witness of some faithful Russian-speaking brothers. One day some from this group were hosting a wedding party, which is a very important life cycle event for Turks. All relatives, friends, and neighbours were invited. At this event, they began to sing songs about their new faith, in the Russian language with Russian tunes. The responses of the Turks in attendance ranged from bewildered to furious. Within a couple of weeks the area mullahs enlisted the local thugs to strike back against these who had 'sold their faith' and converted to 'the Russian religion' As a result, two men were beaten very badly, including

Azim (the other man still barely functions mentally because of his wounds). Azim took his family to the capital city far away and ended up part of a Russian church there. The rest of the Turkic believers in that area went underground. Jesus promised we would be persecuted, but sadly the persecution here was primarily because of the Russian cultural expression of their faith.

Years later, Azim came to visit us at our home, not far from his home village. I was not at home, so my wife welcomed him in the local fashion, seating him on the floor, and went to get something for him to eat until I arrived. When she came back with tea and snacks for him, he was crying. She did not understand but then he explained, 'You have shown me I can be a Christian and still be a Turk. How far I have drifted from my own people!' We, the expatriates, were struggling to live like these people. Our poor example was a wake-up call for him to see that he had left much of his people and culture behind unintentionally and unnecessarily.

Characteristics of Believers Living within Turkic Language and Cultural Contexts:

Those in the second category are those who have come into contact with the gospel primarily through Turkic believing friends and relatives. They tend to live further from the existing Russian language churches, and have fewer natural contacts with the cities where they are located. They tend to speak less, or no Russian, and live in more mono-cultural Turkic settings. Their faith has grown up more naturally Turkic, by default. But they still face the challenges of locals who hear them talk about Jesus and see them reading the New Testament, 'the Russians' book.'

In response to this situation we designed the first lesson in our 'first steps of new life' booklet for Turks to address the topic, 'first questions.' So many early believers were confused or struggled because they could not answer questions that they immediately faced from those close to them. In answer to the question, 'So, who am I now?' we teach that they are now cleansed of their sin and reconciled with God. In response to 'Have you converted to another religion?' we teach them that people in all religions are sinners who need a saviour. Those who choose his way of salvation from their sins are reconciled with God, walk in his way of righteousness and love. We even explain to them how they can respond to the common question, 'Isn't Jesus the Russians' prophet?'

We have found that most of the Turkic believers who are separate from the Russian church still face opposition from their family and community. But if they can forbear, hold their ground, refuse to fight back and continue to live out their faith in Turkic cultural ways, the opposition almost always lessens significantly as time goes by.

In response to their new faith, Turkic believers tend to experience their family and community go through the steps of surprise, anger, threats, distance, toleration,

then finally gradual acceptance, and sometimes attraction to the power of a transformed life or to the power of prayer. If they can hang on through the first three stages and stay in their culture they can usually at least become tolerated by their family and community. This process can take years.

The first time we experienced this phenomenon was during the mid-1990s when our neighbours across the street came to faith. Though we had been sharing with them they had not seemed too interested. Then when the young, new wife heard my wife quote Matthew 11:28: 'Come to me all who are weary,' she was quiet for a moment then asked thoughtfully, 'How do we *come* to him?' But because we were foreigners and Jesus is the Russians' prophet, she still did not think this was for her. Later however, she came to our house for a gathering where two Turkic believers were singing and sharing their testimonies. After two to three hours watching and listening she said enthusiastically, 'This is for Turkic people. I'm calling my husband.' She came to faith that night, as did a few others. Again, what seemed to make the most impact on them was that Turkic people were doing the sharing. Her husband came to faith a few months later.

This young husband and his wife, both from traditional Turkic families, had lived in the capital city for years and were primarily Russian speakers. They were re-learning how to speak Turkic by talking with us. When we suggested we could find them a Russian language Bible and introduce them to a local Russian language church where they could meet other believers for fellowship and growth, their response surprised us. They both said, 'If we start to read a Russian Bible and start going to the Russian church, our family will not stand for it. If we start fellowshiping with you and other Turks who follow Jesus, our family will not like it, but they cannot say it is not Turkic.' And that's what this couple did. What they said proved true; their family did not like their new faith, but they tolerated it. They managed to stay a part of their family and follow Jesus.

Another believer in our city expressed it this way: 'In the capital city, if a couple of Turkic people are seen entering the building where the Russian church meets, most Turks would say "So what?"' Somehow in the cosmopolitan capital city there is enough diversity and anonymity, that a Turkic person seen going to a known Russian church would not raise a stir. But this believer followed with the statement, 'In our city however, no one would say "So what?"' Again, what's raising the hackles of the Turkic community is not faith in Jesus per se, but Turkic people involved in the Russian expression of faith.

Distinction Between the Two Groups

To summarize, the distinction between these two groups is this: the first group are those Turks who have embraced the faith in its Russian form, and so the 'DNA' of their faith contains Russian linguistic-cultural expressions. If they want their faith to

have an impact on other Turks, the challenge for them is to learn to distinguish between what is the core truth their faith is based on, and what is the cultural expression of that faith. They must learn to let go of the non-essentials and ‘re-fit’ their faith to move back into their own culture.

The second group are those who have embraced the faith in its undeveloped Turkic form. For them, the challenge is a bit different. They do not have the Russian church’s ‘DNA’ but they are accused of adopting the Russians’ faith by unbelieving Turks as they are invited toward the faith of the existing Russian church. Their challenge is to discover how authentic Turkic faith can be lived out while resisting the pull into the existing Russian model. They are on a pilgrimage to find what has not yet been clearly modelled or articulated – a biblically-based faith relevant to their own people.

Our Role as ‘Alongsiders’

For Turkic believers the primary challenge is to come to a new identity as a Turk and a follower of Jesus without unnecessary Russian or western cultural baggage. Our role as expatriate ‘alongsiders’ is to show them, while honouring our Russian brothers, that they can follow Jesus as a Turk. Below I would like to articulate five ways that we can do this. We can do all five of these things with both types of groups of believers described above, but how we do so will differ, depending on their need.

I. Become part of their community (Incarnation)

We want to be able to say like Paul, ‘Follow me as I follow Christ’ (1 Cor. 11:1) to Turkic believers. Granted, we are far from the best examples for this first generation of Turkic believers of what it means to be a Turk who follows Jesus. But at this stage, we’re the best option they’ve got. In order to do this, we have to make the hard choice to ‘become all things to all men’ (1 Cor. 9:22). That means living in their neighbourhoods, speaking their language, wearing their clothes, dancing at their weddings, crying at their funerals and quoting their proverbs. This is an incredibly long and difficult process for an outsider: to learn to live, to speak, and to some extent think, like a Turk. It takes years. But without this we cannot be relevant examples for them. And what other examples do they have? They are all first generation believers. No Turks are ahead of them on the road of faith.

During the 1990s we saw new Turkic believers who were being discipled in ways not relevant to their culture. Some were following Jesus fairly passionately, but in a western-style way, with their backpacks, short pants and English language praise music. In this form, their new faith was not very welcome, or understood, in their home villages. Most of these have moved on to the west or disappeared. We know of only one or two that were discipled outside of their culture, remained relevant, and who are today making a difference in the Turkic church. It is almost impossible

to make relevant, multiplying disciples cross-culturally, unless we become one of them, to whatever degree possible.

Granted there is the option for expatriates to simply give new believers the Scriptures and trust them to find their own way under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is what is advocated in more recent discipleship-making movement literature. For example, Jerry Trousdale argues: 'Many of us are not conditioned to trust that the Word and the Spirit are really "enough" without trained professional Christians in every new community of faith. Trust that God's Word and the Holy Spirit are enough for people seeking to know and obey God' (Trousdale 183).

This sounds good and could work in an 'ideal' world where the new believers have an accurate, understandable translation of the Scriptures in their mother tongue and live in a cultural 'vacuum' that is not in contact with believers and churches from other peoples and cultures. In the 'Stans' of Central Asia, we haven't seen anything very close to the ideal situation. In many cases the first translation of the Scriptures made available was either very literary 'high' language, and not understandable to most Central Asians, or it was a translation into a Central Asian language that used many borrowed Russian terms (like the Russian name for Jesus, or the Russian word for baptism, etc.) Equally problematic is the exposure that these new believers have from Russian language and culture churches that are ready to enlist them as members, send them to seminary, pay them to do ministry—all in the Russian language. So the 'give them the Bible and let the Holy Spirit do the rest' approach has often been derailed.

We found ourselves in a situation where the first Muslim-background leader we were working alongside was coming under increasingly strong influence from a particular Russian church. While we were whispering in one ear 'look to the Scriptures and trust the Holy Spirit to show you God's way for your people,' the Russian church leaders were shouting in his other ear 'If you do not do everything our way (the Bible way) you're wrong!' Their influence eventually won out, and he left us, studied at their training school and received a salary to work at their church. We warned him that he'd lose all influence among his own people if he did so. After about two years, he came back to us in tears and said, 'Everything you told me would happen if I joined the Russian church has happened. I am so sorry I did that.' But the damage was already done. The extensive group of friends and relatives who had followed him into the faith had dispersed, unwilling to follow him into the Russian church, yet unable to continue in the Turkic fellowship he no longer approved of. He then went to another Russian church in town that was a bit more accommodating to his Turkic culture. Yet even from there he had little impact among his own people. A few years later he participated in a training we did for Turkic believers on what the Scriptures teach about church, trying to give them a biblical foundation to stand on against the tide of the existing Russian churches.

Unprompted, he stood up in front of the group of Turkic believers and pled with them, 'This is right! This is what fits our people. Do not make the same mistake I did and try joining up with the Russian church.' His influence among his own people began again when he moved to another town with his family, and began to do outreach in that town in ways relevant to Turks, apart from any visible contact with existing Russian language churches.

2. Model culturally-relevant faith for them

In the 'Stan' where we currently minister, we have found many Turkic believers who came to faith through Russian language churches and ministries who were not living out their faith in their own language and culture. They were expressing their faith in a language and culture which they only partially understood. Most of them were having almost no impact in sharing their faith with their own people. My wife met one woman who had never prayed in her mother tongue because she had never been with another Turkic-speaking believer. A year or so after arriving in this 'Stan,' we arranged a gathering for Turkic-speaking believers at our home. We sat on mats on the floor, read the word in Turkic, sang praise songs in Turkic words with Turkic melodies. In trying to encourage them to express their faith in culturally relevant ways, we found it's more effective to show them than to talk about doing it. When they participate in it, they love it. I had been trying to give one Turkic brother, the leader of a ministry, a vision to help me plan a gathering for Turkic believers from different groups, but he was not very enthusiastic. During the meeting mentioned above, after seeing it himself, he said, 'I get it. Let's plan that gathering for Turkic believers.'

A few months later about twenty-five Turkic believers gathered at a camp. For two whole days, everything we did was in Turkic. The meetings, the singing, the discussions over tea and the prayers. At the end I affirmed and exhorted them. I said, 'God made you Turkic. He loves Turkic language and Turkic music. You can worship him in Turkic ways! You can follow Jesus and still be Turkic!'

One day I was driving with the Turkic believer mentioned above. We were listening to some of the worship songs in more traditional Turkic tunes. He could not believe that I was tapping along and enjoying the music. The brothers he had been in contact with over the past few years had given him the impression that his people and culture were 'uncivilized' or 'second class.' That is the dominant Russian view. He told me of a time several years before that had been eye-opening for him. At a training event a teacher had said, 'God loves Muslims!' He practically fell out of his chair. 'Really, God loves us?' This was such a different tone than all the input he had had from the ministry he was involved with which was more like 'now that you're a Christian, take your stand against Muslims.' Everything Turkic was Muslim and therefore to be rejected. Instead, we aim to communicate to Turkic believers

that God loves their people, language and culture and that for the most part they do not need to be ashamed of it or give it up.

Another couple in their forties, from a village, had come to faith through their exposure to a Russian church near the capital city. They had been in the faith for about three years when he walked into my office one day saying he heard I taught in Turkic from the Bible. They came over to our house and we spent a couple of hours getting to know each other. They sat wide-eyed, wanting to hear more and more. Before they left they asked repeatedly if they could start meeting with us more often, as they had never met with believers who spoke their language and understood their culture.

3. Teach them from the Word

As we model for such believers what it might look like to follow Jesus in their culture, it is imperative that we go to God's Word with them, and help them to see that these efforts to express faith in culturally relevant ways are in line with the Scriptures. That way they can be certain they are always starting from the foundation of God's Word, not the foundation of a charismatic figure or a successful model. As well, they can then more confidently stand against those in other-culture churches who do not understand (and sometimes oppose) a Turkic expression of the Christian faith. How might we do this?

With a small group of believers we start with a set of questions about an issue (e.g., the particulars about how to baptize new believers). Then we go to the Word together and study the passages which address baptism. Then we discuss together, 'So then, what does Scripture say about when a new believer should be baptized? Or where? Or who should do the baptizing?' Often they came with certain ideas because of what they had seen and heard in existing churches. We try not to tell them what to do, but to always say, 'What does God's Word say about that?'

In more formal settings, we have had opportunities to train groups of Turkic believers about what a church is and how it should function. Again, most are coming to this kind of setting having had some exposure to how church is done in existing culturally-Russian fellowships and they assume that what they have seen is 'the Christian way' to do church. Without in any way degrading or opposing existing churches, we go through the relevant scriptures and help them distinguish explicit biblical teaching from allowable biblical practice. We have to remember they come out of an Islamic context where all the emphasis is on doing the required things in the right way. And all Muslims all over the world do the same required things, in the same right way (or so they assume). The Soviet mentality only confirms this 'only one right way to do things' approach. Understandably it takes a while for them to understand that a Turkic church could do things quite differently than a Russian church, and both of them be biblically-founded.

One Turkic believer told us about the first time she heard us teach that she, as a follower of Jesus, does not have to adopt Russian forms, but could remain in her culture. We gave examples of how she could express her faith in ways more relevant to her people. This included using terms that Turks understand instead of Russian terms, and dressing modestly like Turks dress, and praying while seated on the floor with hands outstretched, instead of standing with hands clasped, etc. She refers to this being a freeing time for her when a great burden was lifted from her shoulders. Again, she did not realize there was another option. The only expression of following Jesus she had seen before this was a largely Russian cultural model. The only method she knew of sharing her faith was a direct, western, cognitive approach that felt burdensome to her and had been fruitless among her people.

Another believer we know well was quite Turkic in culture, but most of his experience was in Russian-style churches. He understood the way his people thought, but was having little impact on them because he was practicing his faith in Russian cultural ways. For example, because he was not participating at all in the normal Muslim funerals and memorials, his village marked him as ‘not one of us.’ He had explained this was because of his Christian faith. ‘Then he saw us participating in Muslim funerals and memorials with unbelievers. When he asked us about it we looked at the Scriptures together. I asked him, ‘If Jesus lived in your village, what would he do? When someone died would he go participate with the community and comfort the grieving, or would he stay away?’ Immediately it was clear to him what Jesus would do. As a result he started going to these events, expressing care and looking for opportunities to pray with and for people. First his friends asked him, ‘I thought you could not do this as a Christian?’ Note they did not think he’d left his Christian faith. He had a clear and vocal witness.

4. Partner with them to develop culturally-relevant faith expressions

As mature leaders began to emerge in the Turkic church, we began to work more in partnership with them to develop relevant faith expressions. One local brother called me and asked if we could meet within the next day or two. He had been asked by some young believers to conduct a Turkic marriage ceremony. He knew he did not want to do a Muslim Turkic ceremony or a Russian Christian one. He was asking me to help him think through how to do a believing Turkic ceremony. In this case he was quite familiar with how a Turkic ceremony was usually conducted, but he was not sure about what the Scriptures had to say about wedding ceremonies. We have done this same kind of thing regarding what to do regarding funerals (*janoza*) and burials when a believer dies and how can they meaningfully participate in the traditional funerals and memorials for their Muslim relatives, friends and neighbours.

5. Encourage and affirm them

For most of these believers it is a bit scary and daunting to be forging new paths, either out of the existing Russian church or into the uncharted realms of the Turkic church. I have found we can play an important role in encouraging them that they are moving in the right direction. Or we can affirm that the steps they are taking are fully in accordance with God's Word, even if they are different from what another church does. We can affirm them as pioneers, the first generation of Turkic believers. They must find the way, building a relevant Turkic church on a solid biblical foundation.

Primary Issues to be Addressed in Helping them Learn to be Turkic Followers of Jesus.

In our context, we repeatedly come across some issues that are difficult for Turks to navigate as followers of Jesus. We have seen believers respond to these issues in different ways. Some make the error of refusing to participate in anything Turkic. This usually results in separation from their community and loss of impact on their community. Others err in the opposite direction, and in fear of being ostracized by their community they do everything the way they did as unbelievers. This compromises their faith, and while they manage to stay within their community, their faith is too weak and indistinct to make an impact. We are trying to help Turkic believers find that tightrope in the middle. How can they participate as much as possible in their community, and yet not compromise their new faith in Jesus? How can they live resolutely and humbly for Jesus in a way that is relevant and even attractive to their community? In the section below I've laid out four categories of issues we are currently helping this first generation church wrestle through.

1. Lifecycle events for believers.

What do believers do when they get married, or when they have a child, or when they circumcise their son, or when a believer dies? Turks have clear patterns of what to do when these life cycle events occur. Parts are Islamic, others have more subtle Muslim undertones. What does a Turkic believer do? These are uncharted waters.

Often the situation at these lifecycle events is not up to the believers. Their unbelieving parents and relatives are in charge of these events. Here the questions become 'how much can I participate in?' or 'where must I draw the line?' Say a believer dies, and his unbelieving uncles and aunts are running the proceedings in their own way. We may not agree with what they are doing. But they are the 'ranking' relatives, and what happens is their call, not ours. Or say the unbelieving grandparents insist on saying the Muslim call to prayer into the ear of the believers' infant son before giving him a name. They are going to do it whether you are there to witness it or not. What about when the unbelieving parents insist the bride and groom's marriage ceremony (*nikoh*) is done by the mullah? Is that acceptable?

2. Believers' participation in lifecycle events for unbelievers.

Your next door neighbour dies and they are having the traditional Muslim funeral. As a Turkic follower of Jesus how much do you participate? For the next three days men gather in the morning and sit on benches in front of the neighbour's home. Every time a new person comes someone recites a passage from the Qur'an, then the oldest person says a prayer (*duo*) (sometimes for the deceased). What does a Turkic follower of Jesus do? How can he be part of the community, express genuine respect and care for the family, and yet not compromise his faith?

3. Believers' participation in Muslim community events.

So what does a believer do during the Eid marking the end of Ramadan? Do they ignore the holidays and the celebration? Do they not let their children participate in the 'trick or treating' and general festivities that are going on in the community? While all the neighbours are going house to house visiting and congratulating one another, do they participate, or do they close their gate and sit inside? Do they or do they not go visit their relatives on the days set aside for that? What about when a relative comes back from the Hajj and everyone is going over to visit them? Do they ignore it, or go to visit? If they go, do they drink the *zam-zam* water brought from Mecca? If women are having a social gathering and a Muslim teacher shows up and starts teaching, should a believer stand up and leave, or sit quietly until it is over? Or should she challenge the teacher? What if the Muslim teacher starts doing a spiritist ritual with chanting, or inviting everyone to take a sip of the soup that has just been 'blessed'?

4. Believers' family relationships and gender roles.

How does a believing Turkic husband relate to his wife, and vice-versa? How does a father relate to his children? How does a believing daughter-in-law relate to her unbelieving mother-in-law, who has almost absolute authority over her in this culture? Where should a believing son who gets married live when his unbelieving parents expect him to stay in their home and care for them? Must a married believing woman cover her head? Should believing teenage daughters be allowed to relate at all to teenage boys?

Conclusion

When we left the US for Central Asia in 1993, we didn't have a template showing us the ways to help the first generation of Turkic believers to discover and live out their new identity. These are the things we've found necessary and helpful as we've tried to 'keep in step with the Spirit' as Jesus builds his church in Central Asia. So much of what it means for a Central Asian Turk to follow Jesus is still to be articulated.

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Hui Christians' new Identity in Christ

by Luke Ma with Johanna White

Luke (pseudonym) was born in China into a nominally Muslim family in the Hui ethnic minority people group. Following his parents, he migrated to a western country in middle school and after several years of interaction with people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, he renounced Islam and became a keen atheist. During his university years he enjoyed debating with Christians until eventually God took over his life. Luke lost the debate, but found saving faith. After a few years of secular work, Luke entered seminary where he met and married Johanna (pseudonym). With help from several missionaries, and from the Lord, Johanna persuaded Luke to return to his own people as a missionary.

Introduction

‘Hui’ has a complex meaning which encompasses everything about a person. From our perspective, the word encompasses two distinct aspects of a person’s identity: their ethnic and cultural identity (people group) and their religious identity. Many Hui, however, would not see any sense in this distinction. Like many Muslim people, and people of various backgrounds, there is no clear line between religion, culture and ethnicity in the minds of Hui, nor should there be. But if we want to talk about the self-identification of Hui followers of Jesus, we need to think about such distinctions and have categories to describe them. Likewise, these believers, as they grow in their faith, start to make such distinctions, whether consciously or unconsciously:

‘I’m a Muslim follower of Jesus.’

‘I’m a Hui, but I do not believe in Islam anymore. Now I believe in Jesus.’

‘I’m a Christian. I also belong to the Hui ethnic minority in China.’

‘Among us Muslims, there are a few like me who are Christians.’

The Hui People: Unity in diversity

It is extremely difficult to generalise, because Hui are defined by diversity. They are spread over large areas of the country, although more concentrated in certain places. In different places they have undergone different levels of secularisation and integration with the Han culture. They also have different historical roots and different stories about where the Hui came from. Also influencing diversity are the four main sects of Islam in China,² how much religious education they have

² These four main sects of Islam include: *Gedimu* 格底目, *Yehewani* 伊赫瓦尼, *Salafiya* 赛莱菲耶/三抬 and *Sufi* 苏菲派. *Gedimu* is the oldest form of Islam practiced in China, the followers of *Gedimu* trace their ancestry to the earliest Muslims who came

received, and whether they are interested in religion. The Hui vary regionally as well as individually in how much being Hui is associated with religion or culture. In northeast China it is more about a cultural identity. In the northwest there is more identification with the religion of Islam. All we can really say about what unifies them is that Hui Muslims generally do not eat pork and verbally profess belief in Islam.

The Hui Christians: Diversity continues

When their pre-faith lives have been characterised by such diversity, it is no surprise that Hui believers' opinions, practices and habits are also widely varied. But it does seem like we have a little more of a chance to generalise about Hui believers compared with the broader Hui community.

By and large, those Hui who have come to the Lord through missionaries tend to be educated, secularised, urban Hui. They had non-Muslim Han³ desk-mates in school, received Communist (atheistic) education, and only ever wore traditional head coverings for special religious festivals.

This may be what initially made them more open to new ideas like the gospel. Or it may be simply because these are the Hui who had opportunities to meet missionaries and hear the gospel. Another possibility is that there are many Hui believers in small towns with conservative Islamic upbringing, but that neither I nor the people in my networks have been able to make contact with very many of them. So as missionaries gain access to more areas, as we learn more, and as the gospel penetrates more areas including the countryside, the less educated and the more

to China. However, due to *Gedimu's* long history, many of this sect's religious practices are intermingled with Chinese traditions. *Yehewani* only came to China at the end of the 19th century. Inspired by Wahhabism in the Middle East, followers of the *Yehewani* sect believe they possess a purer form of Islam and see it as their duty to cleanse Chinese Islam from its cultural trappings. However, even this is not enough for the fundamentalist *Salafiya* sect, who came to China even more recently than *Yehewani*. *Salafiya* often consider themselves the only true followers of Islam and seek to return to the way Islam was practiced in Muhammad's time, both in doctrine and practice. As a result, they're strongly evangelistic and seek to convert both non-Muslims and Muslims from other sects. Finally, there is the mystical *Sufi* Islam, where religious practices can differ radically from the other 3 sects. Often *Sufi* religious practices take on forms similar to those of Buddhism and Taoism, because their emphasis is not on doctrine but spiritual ecstasy and oneness with Allah.

³ The Han (汉) are the majority people group in China, making up about 90% of the Chinese population. They tend to be atheist or Buddhist.

devout Muslim communities, these generalisations about Hui believers' identities may shift.

Believers are also influenced by the Islamic sect they came from. Most I've met are from the more mystical, less orthodox streams of Islam including Sufism. They enjoy the experience of closeness with God and the heartfelt assurance of salvation that Jesus brings. Here we see that they have brought with them some aspects of their Islam – the focus on experience and feelings rather than orthodoxy – yet joyfully abandoned other aspects like reliance on one's own actions to achieve salvation.

Common characteristics of the Hui Christian

We are different!

If you ask a Hui what it means to be Hui, they will say things like, 'We are not Han.' 'We do not eat pork.' 'We do not celebrate Spring Festival.' 'We are Muslims.'

Do you see a pattern? Apart from Islam, the Hui find it hard to think of anything special about their people group. Everything else is what they are 'not.' How do they choose which things to mention they are 'not?' Notice they are not comparing themselves to Europeans or Africans, nor to other Muslim people like the Uighur in China, nor to other religious groups in their neighbourhoods like Buddhists, but to the Han Chinese people. It has been said that if the Han disappeared from the earth, the Hui would no longer know who they are.

Titles of books on the Hui often reflect this comparative way of defining the Hui. Think of *Between Mecca and Beijing* by Maris Boyd Gillette and *Familiar Strangers* by Jonathan Lipman.

Hui define themselves by their differences from Han, so it is natural for Hui believers to define themselves by how they differ from Han believers. Think back to the kinds of Hui who tend to become believers. Living in large Chinese cities alongside Han friends and workmates, these Hui have spent their whole lives explaining that they are different:

'Actually, I'd love to have lunch with you, but would you mind going to a halal restaurant?'...

'No, I'm not planning anything special for Spring Festival, because my family is Hui.' ...

'I need a day off work to attend a religious event with my family. No, you haven't forgotten to check the calendar. It's not on your calendar. It's a Muslim festival.'

Defining themselves by their differences doesn't change when they start to follow Jesus. What does change is the *degree* of difference between them and their Han friends. The gap gets smaller. When they were Muslims and their Han friends

were atheists, they had a fundamental worldview clash. Now, being in a community of Christians, it becomes more of a vague feeling of not quite fitting in, of not being fully understood, and of having only a few customs and habits to cling to which help them explain this difference.

Pork is the main issue

In my experience, most Hui who follow Jesus worship with Han Christians in Han churches. They sing the same songs and use the same Bible translation as the Han (HHB 和合本). The one thing they tend to do differently is avoid eating pork. Some Hui are even happy to eat together with Han Christians in a Han restaurant and simply not choose the pork foods. Some, I think a minority, in order to not stand out, start to eat pork with their Han brothers and sisters. These people do so begrudgingly, and keep it secret from their families. Some churches, including the one I regularly attend, care for their Hui members by no longer cooking pork for group meals. Unfortunately though, this situation is rare, and the Hui in most churches are expected to be the ones who accommodate themselves to the majority.

Hui believers know food is not and should not be the major issue. When they encounter Jesus' teaching on inner versus outer cleanliness in Matthew 15:11 and 23:24-26 it resonates with what they know deep down to be true but have never been able to articulate. They all know supposedly devout Muslims who provide proof that Jesus' words to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:26 are true also of Muslims, 'In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.' They know that what goes into their mouths is far less important to God than what comes out of their mouths. They know that a truly righteous person is known not by what he eats, but by what he says and does. 'For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him' (Matthew 12:34b-35a).

Still, many Hui believers continue to avoid pork because they are simply not accustomed to the taste, because they want to be seen as good in front of their families, to be a witness to others and to signal to the Han that they are somewhat different. Even though some will eat pork out of convenience when no one they know is watching, they still do not want to be pressured to do so, and it makes them feel cared for when they are offered pork-free food. Peter's vision in Acts 10: 9-17 and Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 have proven very helpful to both Hui believers wrestling with what they should eat, and Han believers learning to love their Hui brothers and sisters.

A good friend of mine, Sister Li, is from an eastern province where the Hui are quite integrated with the Han. She comes from a Hui family who raised pigs for a living. After believing, she received a burden to share with other Hui and actually stopped eating pork. Sister Li was noticeably offended when another Hui made judgemental comments about the Hui from her area because they eat pork.

What they call themselves

So what do these brothers and sisters of ours call themselves? Firstly, they all still call themselves Hui. None of them now call themselves Han, and if someone accuses them of becoming Han, they argue against it. They do not start celebrating Han festivals they did not celebrate before. They do not say 'I have no *minzu*' (民族, ethnicity) either.⁴ There is no concept of a Chinese person who has no *minzu*. You cannot simply be Chinese. You have to be Han Chinese, or Hui, or Uighur. You can change *minzu* but you cannot be without a *minzu*. Hui believers all still self-identify as Hui, but they vary in how much they still identify as Muslims and whether they differentiate between these religious and ethnic classifications.

Most accept the titles of both Hui and Christian. When it comes up in conversation, most will identify themselves either 'Hui' or 'Christian,' and if asked, will also claim the other title. But putting the two words together as 'Hui Christian' somehow sounds a little strange.

The most common expression used by Hui believers to describe their faith is '*Jidutu* 基督徒,' which is simply the word for 'Christian' used by the Han church. 'Follower of Jesus 跟随耶稣/尔撒的人' is quite rare, and 'Muslim follower of Jesus 跟随耶稣/尔撒的穆斯林' is very rare. What is more common is a change in the vocabulary used by an individual, depending on who he is speaking with. Sometimes this may be a deliberate choice of words based on relationship factors. More often than not it is not something a Hui believer has thought a lot about, and even if they have strong opinions, old habits die hard. For example, Sister Wu from my hometown proudly says 'I'm Hui, but I do not believe in Islam' and 'I believe the Bible' but when speaking with me, a fellow Hui Christian she still refers to herself and to me as 'we Muslims 我们穆斯林.'

In the cities at least there is awareness that Christian vocabulary can change without necessarily changing what or who it represents. Even different cultures that share a language (such as the Han and the Hui) can use different names for God and Jesus, use different place names, and use different words for common concepts such

⁴ In China, there are fifty-six officially recognized *minzu*. All Chinese citizens have their *minzu* on their ID cards. The majority of Chinese people, about 90%, are classified as Han. Hui is one of the fifty-six recognised minorities, as is Uighur (another group of predominantly Muslim people in China). The concept of *minzu* is so deeply ingrained in the Chinese identity that it is difficult to understand how foreigners (such as my wife Johanna) could not belong to one. Johanna has a nationality (as shown on her passport) a home country (where she visits her parents) a country of origin (where her ancestors came from), a racial (genetic) identity and a religious affiliation (protestant Christian), but none of these adequately encapsulates the sense of ethnic and cultural identity of a Chinese *minzu*.

as grace, thanks and the church. For the Hui, the name of Jesus is defining. Some prefer *Yesu* (耶稣, the name Han Chinese use) and others prefer *Ersa* (尔撒 a Chinese transliteration from the Arabic name in the Qur'an). A couple of years ago I witnessed heated arguments among brothers about which name was the right one. In at least one area of China, the Hui community of believers has divided along these lines. The word they use to describe the division (*'pai 派'*) is the same word used for Christian denominations and Muslim sects.⁵

Recently there is increasing interchange between Hui and Han spiritual vocabulary. This year, a sister posted on WeChat (Chinese Twitter) 'Christmas is the birthday of *Yesu/Ersa*' (圣诞节是耶稣/尔撒的生日). Another shared a link to the song 'In Christ Alone,' giving it the two titles 'Only *Ersa*/Only *Yesu*' (唯有尔撒/唯有耶稣).

Relationship with the Han Churches

For some Hui believers, opportunities for corporate worship are only available in Han churches. For others, there is a Hui-led group especially for Hui, or at least organised with Hui people in mind. As far as I know, where Hui churches exist, they tend to be founded by Han churches, or missionaries associated with Han churches. No matter which kind of gathering they are part of, the relationship between Hui and Han believers is troublesome, full of misunderstandings, and absolutely crucial to the Hui.

Hui believers, while maintaining their identity as Hui, have a distinct sense that they have left Islam, and to some extent, that they have left a part of their Hui-ness behind. They used to define themselves as 'not Han but Hui, because I'm Muslim.' Now they are 'not Han, but not truly Hui either, because I'm not Muslim.'

Before they were believers, the Hui compared themselves to the Han for their identity. Now they are Christians, they look to the Han as much, if not even more, to tell them who they are. The Han are the majority people group in China, and the majority of the church in China. For smaller groups like the Hui, Han Christians are the closest thing they know to the universal church. To be accepted by them is to be accepted by 'the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.'

Most Hui believers do not get the chance to experiment with contextualised worship styles. Most are individuals in Han churches. They use Han spiritual vocabulary, read the preferred Han Bible translation (HHB, 和合本) and most of their friends are Han Christians. But they still feel in a subtle way they are different from the others in their church. They can grow and do well in a Han church but

⁵ Some Hui believers have started referring those who use *Ersa* as *Ersa Pai* 尔撒派, and those who use *Yesu* as *Yesu Pai* 耶稣派

they have an itch. It is an itch for empathy. They long for empathy that can only come from another misunderstood minority.

When Hui believers are numerous enough or vocal enough to be noticed by the Han in their church, it most often gives rise to clashes, not empathy. The Hui complain they are not understood. The Han complain the Hui are choosy, particular and weird. Most Han think of Hui as ‘that other funny group’ and do not try to understand them. Because the Han are in the majority they behave like any majority people group would. However, the Hui understand the Han quite well. They have been comparing themselves to the Han majority their whole lives. I have a relationship with members of a Hui church in northeast China who started experimenting with Arabic chanting and other Muslim worship forms. The local Han church suspected this Hui church was a new kind of pseudo-Christian cult. Such cults are illegal in China, so this was a potentially dangerous situation for the Hui church. The solution? The Hui paid protection money to the Han church, who then welcomed them as a subset of their existing group.

Individual Hui believers in Han churches often think they became Christians by accident, by a freak of nature, and that this miracle cannot be repeated for other Hui. Perhaps they have borrowed this fatalism from Islam. Maybe they are discouraged at the small numbers of Hui believers and Satan has made it worse by whispering lies to them. A couple of years ago, my wife heard such lies from Satan, ‘Maybe God saved your Hui husband, but he won’t save other Hui. You may as well give up trying.’ She is not Hui, but what helped her was the same that helped many Hui to overcome this discouragement. It is not until their own eyes see a sizable community of Hui worshippers they truly realise Hui can and do come to Christ.

Mosque Attendance

You have probably read about the beauty of believers from Muslim backgrounds worshipping Jesus in mosques, and bringing light to their communities in doing so. We agree this is a wonderful idea, but so far we do not see it happening among the Hui. If Hui followers of Jesus go to mosques, it is only for annual festivals, when they want to be part of their family celebrations, or because they were dragged along. I have not met a single Hui who continues to attend the mosque regularly after having truly understood and believed the gospel. I suspect it is because believers do not get spiritually fed in mosques and they lose any motivation to go. Just as it is very common to lie to parents in order to get out of the house to attend church, it is equally common to lie to avoid attending the mosque. Hui who have believed the gospel but not yet revealed it to their family tend to pretend they are too busy, or simply no longer interested in attending mosque. Even the Hui I know who have become missionaries to other Hui and who embrace Insider Movement ideas do not go to mosques themselves.

How Do they Tell their Families?

Often they do not. It depends who evangelised them. If the gospel they received was minimally contextualised, they may go straight home and tell their families in insensitive ways. This gets them yelled at, confined to the house, or occasionally beaten. They might receive threats of disownment, cutting off material resources and threats to tell the rest of the family. The family may invite an Imam to come over to ‘re-educate’ them. If none of this works, parents may resort to speeding up arranged marriages in the hope of bringing their child back into Islam.

If they were evangelised contextually, Hui believers can use contextualised methods to soften the blow. Generally, this generates less persecution. Sister Dong married a Han believer against her family’s wishes. The family threatened her and threw away her clothes. Later she learned to share contextually. After this, one time she mistreated the Hui Bible (*Tian Jing*, 天经) by placing it on the floor and her mother criticised her for it, telling her that it was not the right way to treat a holy book.

Compared with what believers from a Muslim background experience in some other countries, the persecution suffered by Hui believers is relatively mild. There are cases of real persecution, but usually it is more the internal feeling of being a traitor, and the fear of persecution. Loyalty is an important moral value in China, and feelings of betrayal are common. The fear of being a traitor hangs over a Hui long before they accept Christ. They are not only asking ‘Do I want Christ to be my saviour?’ but also, ‘Is Christ worth more than my family?’ Such fear inhibits conversion and stunts growth. Biblical teaching on dealing with fears and sharing their faith in culturally sensitive ways can be helpful. But what really helps them break through this fear is seeing other Hui believers worshipping together, fearlessly living as Christians and sharing the gospel with other Hui.

Clothing and Rituals

The majority of Hui Christians come from backgrounds that never really wore head coverings regularly. Of those who did, they generally stop covering their heads after conversion. However, they might still cover when they go home or for family festivals, weddings etc. They do tend to maintain modest clothing in accordance with their previous habits (which vary by location). Likewise, the men generally cease to wear the white hat, but may choose to wear it on special family occasions. In other words, Hui Christians do not despise the old clothing, but just do not attribute as much importance to it anymore.

Some like to wash ceremonially before attending church services. This is not so much for the ritual, but because they want to give God their best. Since most people here do not bathe or change clothes daily, their ceremonial washing is simply rearranging their schedule so their bath day falls on a Sunday.

Willingness to Share with other Hui

Often they are first drawn to the gospel because it is not Hui. Christianity provides an escape, especially for women, from the absent father, domestic violence, anger, bickering, controlling grandparents, or the hypocrisy of their Hui experience. As they begin to walk with Jesus, some Hui loathe to do anything resembling Hui culture or Islamic rituals. Later, they develop a more balanced view of their past, and some receive a burden for their own people.

Perception of Hui Christians amongst Hui Muslims

The wider Hui community is in denial that there could be Hui who do not believe in Islam. They do not know any Hui who are Christians. They think it might be possible, but very unlikely. Occasionally you read or hear a Hui's account of meeting a Hui Christian, and it is full of shock and awe. They deny that it could be the Holy Spirit working. Instead they criticise the believer for being from a non-devout Muslim family, or blame intermarriage, going to a big city, being from a heretical sect, or even blame themselves for not providing good religious education. Families all pitch in together to bring a stray member back to Islam, but are very careful not to let the news get out. Perhaps this family effort and secrecy partially explains why Hui do not admit to ever having met a non-Muslim Hui. Undoubtedly, the widely-dispersed and apparently small numbers of Hui believers is another reason the majority of Hui do not know they exist.

On rare occasions, when a large number of Hui have become Christians, there have been violent clashes. But again, these are not widely known. This means it is hard to comment on how Hui believers are perceived by other Hui.

Thoughts about the Potential of Syncretism

The Hui believers I have met vary in how 'Hui' they are, along a sort of spectrum. Their degree of 'Hui-ness' is dependent not only on what they were like before they encountered the gospel, but also on who shared the gospel with them and with whom they now worship.

Towards the not-so-Hui end of the spectrum, there are some with distinctly Korean faith practices, some who are indistinguishable from Han Chinese believers, and I even met one Hui man who practices his faith as a member of the Church of England, complete with sung scripture, incense, robes and clerical collar!

In my experience, most Hui believers have lifestyles and worship practices that are more or less at this end of the spectrum. We could say that, apart from eating pork, many Hui have contextualised their practices to the non-Hui around them, rather than others contextualising to the Hui. This is not to say that missionaries are not trying to contextualise. Some Hui prefer non-Hui ways and reject attempts at contextualisation beyond simple diet changes. Others have adopted a few distinctly

Hui practices, but mostly live and worship the way the Han do. As with everything else about the Hui, there is wide variation.

Towards the other end of the spectrum, however, there exist markedly syncretistic Muslim followers of Jesus. They supposedly profess belief in Jesus, but continue to attend a mosque weekly and watch Qur'anic chanting on TV at home. Apparently whole families have believed, but they do not worship in gatherings outside their families so it is hard to gauge whether they truly believe, and whether these families actually meet together to worship Jesus regularly.

When I asked the head of such a household about this, his answers perplexed me. The chanting, he says, is to fill the air with beautiful sounds. He doesn't understand Arabic, but it makes him feel spiritual. He chose to listen to the Arabic Qur'an rather than the Arabic Bible, and to Arabic rather than Chinese, his mother tongue. He did not seem to be able to tell me why. At that time, the Hui contextualised version of the Chinese Bible (*Tian Jing*, 天经) was not yet available in audio form, so I could not suggest it as an option.

When it was time for Friday prayers this head of the household and his son left me to attend the mosque. When I asked, he said it would be 'inconvenient' to be seen not attending the mosque when he belongs to such a tight-knit community. While waiting at his house for him to return, I chatted with his neighbour who was pottering around in his garden. He was also a Muslim, but wasn't attending the mosque that day because he was 'busy.'

Meeting families like these makes me think that the extreme contextualisation methods used by the evangelist who reached out to this village can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, I praise the Lord that Jesus' name is known by people who can still live and be accepted in their communities, and who will happily host evangelists to continue visiting their homes and reaching out to their neighbours. On the other hand, it concerns me to think that these families are not aware of the universal church, the body of Christ, are not receiving regular feeding on God's Word and are not actively engaging their own communities for Jesus. If I am wrong, and they *are* aware they belong to two faith communities, attending church on Sundays and mosque on Fridays as it were, I wonder about them creating confusion for their children.

Conclusion

If there is one thing we have learned about the Hui, it is that they are defined by difference and diversity. The implication of this for ministry is that we should never assume, but always listen. We should listen enough that we know what questions to ask, then listen some more. We will find patterns in the answers, but then we will meet someone who does not fit the pattern. There are tools being developed for evangelising and discipling the Hui which are invaluable, but no one size will ever fit

all. Even as the Hui themselves develop tools, they differ from other Hui. Fostering unity becomes a big issue.

To listen and not assume is simple to say, but hard to do. For ordinary Christians trying to join God in cross-cultural mission, struggling with language, perceiving the unspoken cultural cues, not knowing which tool to pull out of the toolbox today, it can make the task seem insurmountable. But in the Hui church's story there is encouragement for Christ's struggling servants: the Hui are being saved!

Even though Han are evangelising their neighbours without consideration for cultural differences, Hui are being saved. Even though Koreans are attracting Hui to church with Korean pop culture, Hui are being saved. Even though Europeans struggle to acquire Chinese language, Hui are being saved. Even though there is persecution in one family and syncretism in another, Hui are being saved. Praise God!

Believers' Identity: Snapshots from an Islamic Republic

by Eileen Perry

For eleven years, Eileen Perry (pseudonym) served with her husband and three children in an especially volatile part of Mid-Asia. While there she worked in a variety of educational projects for women and children. They currently are in transition to Europe to work amongst refugees from the same people group.

A Shared Journey

The issue of the identification of new Christian believers in Muslim countries perplexes many. Expatriates and believers alike often struggle with how best to define their faith and spiritual journeys. Local believers have issues of security and community rejection to wrestle through. As Christian outsiders our debates are about how to introduce or identify ourselves. We hope that our introduction will lead to more discussions and opportunities to share. However, both of us connect on this question as we seek God's wisdom in this important area of identity.

It seems like I have been in countless conversations or training sessions discussing the issue of how we should identify ourselves as believers in a Muslim country. My head has swum with possibilities and I have tried them all. People we would meet each day, like many other Muslims around the world, love to know your religion even before asking your name. I have tried many variations of how to introduce my faith perspective. I would say, 'I'm a person of the book,' or 'I'm a follower of Jesus,' or 'I love God and his ways.' At the end of each experiment they always summed me up and said, 'Oh so you are a Christian.' I am sure my blond hair and blue eyes did not help my efforts to try these different ways of explaining my faith. However, since I wrestled with this question so much, I struggled to discern how I could effectively teach those with whom God had entrusted me how to explain their new faith to others. In the beginning I felt I had to encourage them to declare their new-found faith and talk about their change to Christianity. But in recent years I have chosen a different route—to leave it to the Holy Spirit to guide and direct them in this area. I felt led to not mention the term 'Christian' but rather to simply express the teachings of Christ. I saw the Holy Spirit's faithfulness in action as they learned how and when to describe their beliefs to family and strangers alike. I learned much as I watched my local brothers and sisters. And each one did it a bit differently.

Male Identities

Early in our time in Mid-Asia we met a local brother who opened our eyes to the complexity of living out one's faith in a hostile environment. Initially he appeared

very devout, always walking around with his prayer beads whenever in public. It came as a surprise to find out that he followed Christ. The beads acted as a cover to throw others off from the reality of his faith. Many times locals that worked for faith-based NGOs would also carry prayer beads to make others believe that they followed Islam. Those few in their trusted circles knew otherwise.

Another brother answered questions with questions when asked about his beliefs. He openly expressed his respect for Jesus and his teachings in very public venues but never openly shared with Muslims that he was a Christian. When asked directly, he would ask in return, 'When you say Christian what does that mean to you?' Then he used their definition to determine his well-thought-out response. Even his own family did not know for sure what he was. However, amongst local, trusted, believers he openly talked of his faith and helped others to grow and wrestle with theological issues.

Other brothers take a quiet stand by not attending the local mosque. They do not proclaim their new-found faith, but simply stop attending the neighbourhood site of worship, even though they periodically receive much pressure by doing so. In addition, they discontinue their daily prayer rituals (*namaṣ*) or do not partake in traditional fasting during Ramadan. Families encounter persecution when their neighbours see this. These men often lead their families to faith and openly share with their immediate family if they trust their wife or if they have a living situation with relatives that they trust.

Female Identities

Widows share their faith boldly and more freely than married women or female teenagers. Due to the absence of the male authority in their family they often have greater freedom with their family members and the general public. I observed some openly claim to be Christian in a mixed group within their families. However, married women who came to faith apart from their husbands will share with some women about their faith, confess openly to being Christians with foreigners and then hide it from their husbands out of fear. Teenage women confess to other believers about their faith but if their family does not also believe, they often do not share with their families about their beliefs. If they develop the courage to do so, they normally share only with the other females in the family.

How People Identify Themselves in Different Ways

In this Islamic republic it appears that the majority of believers express their faith in different ways in various settings. On the whole, the communities, out of caution, do not publicly proclaim their faith. Most choose to not follow the outward signs of Islam like practicing *namaṣ/salat* and fasting. Many secular Muslims also abstain from these practices, so believers hide behind these assumptions. People share in various ways in their family unit depending on their gender and status in the family.

The husbands and widows more freely and openly identify themselves as Christians and encourage their family members to follow them. The teenagers and married women more cautiously share their faith with other members, if at all. Most believers, when established in a trusted fellowship, introduce themselves as Christians. Additionally, they will share with foreigners that they believe in Jesus, love Jesus or are Christians.

Case Studies

One of my students, Masuda,⁶ whispered in my ear one day that we share the same faith. In the same breath she asked me not to say anything about it in the class since several of her relatives also attended. Over the months God moved in the heart of her niece who began to respond positively to Jesus' pursuit of her. Masuda, though still nervous about identifying herself, moved past this fear and began praying for and with her niece. Masuda and I often met after class to pray and share verses. Soon she began to invite her niece too. Her niece more boldly declared that she had become a Christian and continued to use that term with me and another expat she met with and with her aunt. Her aunt, on the other hand, more quietly declared her beliefs and often referred to other believers from Muslim background as *Imandar*, or those of the same faith.

Suela, an illiterate cleaning lady, came to faith through the witness of a local believer as well as through miracles and dreams. It was the latter that finally drew her to Jesus. She never called herself a Christian in my presence but claimed, 'I believe in Jesus, look at all he did for me.' She would often say that she believed but did not feel comfortable putting a title on that belief.

Aisha, another illiterate cleaning lady, more boldly proclaimed that she was a Christian with other local women. One woman from her small fellowship was put into prison by her husband. When the husband questioned her, she said, 'Yes I'm a Christian, what will you do about it? Go ahead and tell the police.' She showed great boldness around others yet did not share about her faith openly with her husband.

Laila, an older divorced/abandoned woman quickly declared her new found faith to her relatives after watching the *Jesus Film*. However, they teased her about becoming a Christian. After a few months of this she retracted and has not since declared any faith. Off and on she asked questions about Jesus and Christianity but it appears that the experience she had with her relatives silenced her and created a tension and concern about pursuing more. Her daughter, on the other hand, boldly shared her interest in Jesus yet has not come to the place of accepting a title for her beliefs.

⁶ All names in this section are pseudonyms.

Ahmed openly shares about his Christian faith. He has a brain tumour and due to this terminal condition he more willingly takes risks with his faith and how he shares it. He loves to talk about his faith with strangers, other believers, and foreigners, but he shows caution with his wife's relatives.

Conclusion

How Mid-Asian believers identify themselves is a huge issue—one that I think we as outsiders do not fully comprehend. We intellectually fathom the risks and study the various potential terms to use. Emotionally, most of us have never experienced first-hand the real threat to our lives and the abandonment of family due to how we identify ourselves. Fortunately we serve a God with many titles who exhibits creativity beyond our imagination. His graciousness abounds in so many areas, including this one. May we extend that same grace to our new brothers and sisters as well as each other as we wrestle with this issue and seek God's guidance for each situation we face. In whatever way God leads them, may their personal choice of identity draw us into deeper worship as we and our brothers and sisters share about our sweet relationship with the Lord.

Reflections on Who I Am as a Follower of Jesus

by Isaac Turner

Isaac Turner (pseudonym) is an American who began his service among Muslims in South Asia in the mid-1970s where he and his wife (European) raised their children. After serving as a professor of Intercultural Studies from 1996-2002, he returned to South Asia where he and his wife currently enjoy ministering alongside their children and grandchildren. He holds a DMiss from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois, USA, and regularly trains and mentors Christians from all backgrounds in outreach and church planting.

Note: Recently I interviewed Abdul Rahman (pseudonym) a South Asian friend and brother regarding how he identifies himself in his family and community. He grew up in a Muslim family and decided to follow Jesus as a young adult. Abdul Rahman came to faith thirty-two years ago and has been greatly used by God since then in bringing others from a Muslim background to the path of Isa. Over the course of decades, we have enjoyed fellowship, ministered side-by-side and shared innumerable conversations regarding his own journey and identity. What follows has been fairly freely written in the first-person format, as if he himself wrote it in English. This seemed more readable than a word-for-word translation of an interview. As such, I have attempted to accurately represent his words and views, even in cases where I myself might have a different opinion, and as an ‘alongsider’ (a foreigner from a Christian background coming alongside local believers) would necessarily have a different identity from his. In all of our discussions we continue to be iron sharpening iron, as we learn from one another and grow together.

Abdul Rahman’s Journey

My first personal contact with Christianity happened as a young man when I went to visit a relative in the capital. The bottom floor of their home had been rented by a Christian organization to house a Bible correspondence school. Throughout my life, I had been warned against Christianity by my local Imam and others, who said that Christians were immoral, ate pork, drank alcohol and worshipped three gods. However, on one of my many visits to my relative, I was offered a Bible at a very low price by the office staff, and out of curiosity I decided to buy it.

I went straight from my relative to a nearby mosque to pray and placed the Bible by my side. Others in the mosque immediately began telling me I needed to get rid of that terrible book as it was corrupted and would lead me astray. But that only increased my desire to see what was in it so I went straight home from the mosque and started to read.

I was surprised by what I found. It did not have the terrible things I had expected to find. In fact, I was quite attracted to the message, though some things

were hard to understand. I continued going back to the correspondence school office to ask questions and learn more, and gradually I came to believe it was true. Hebrews 2:14-15 really spoke to me: through Isa's death, he was able to destroy the one who has the power of death, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. That was what happened to me. *Isa* delivered me from the fear of death that had been my constant companion and gave me the assurance that I was saved and would spend eternity in his presence. Having come to faith, the question I then faced was, what do I do next? I came from a business family and often helped out in our family store. But I had a lot of freedom. Christian friends recommended that I join a team of young people who went around the country selling Christian books. The idea appealed to me and I joined them.

With my business background and experience talking with people and selling things, I was a good book salesman. However, because we sold only Christian books it immediately turned many people away. The more religious people would tell their friends not to buy our books or to talk with us since we were Christians. The word 'Christian' was said by them more as a term of disgust and revilement than as a neutral name of a religion.

There was a further difficulty with my name. Since we sold Christian books, the public assumed we were part of the very tiny Christian community in the country, which consists of believers whose ancestors were either Hindus or tribal animists and whose expressions of Christianity look idolatrous to the Muslim majority. Muslims in our country tolerate Christians selling their own books, even if they have little interest in buying or reading them. But someone with a Muslim name selling Christian books was *not* to be tolerated. Hearing my name provoked endless questions and frequently ended in heated words, threats or worse, but unfortunately the questions provoked were not about Jesus. In order to prevent such unwanted reactions, I was told I must change my name and was given the name Richard. And so, for that year on the book-selling team I became a Christian named Richard.

As I reflect on my time selling books, I see now how little impact I had on those I interacted with. Because I was viewed as a Christian, most were not really interested in what I had to say or the books I sold. Yes, some bought books out of curiosity, but not many really considered the Christian message. They were absolutely convinced they had a later, uncorrupted and improved version of the same basic religious system we followed. From their perspective, I was the one who was out of date and deceived. I was the one who should be learning from them and their most recent revelation, the Qur'an, because since they perceived me to be part of the Christian minority they assumed I didn't know anything about the Qur'an. So, even though I had studied it and grown up with it as they had, I was no longer in a position to discuss or make any comments about the Qur'an or Muhammad, since that was their book and prophet and my questioning would be taken very negatively.

After one year selling books, I left the book team to spend a second year with another small team that included foreigners. We lived full-time in a larger district town and made visits most days of the week out to smaller bazaars in the countryside. On the same day each week we would visit the same bazaar and thus were able to build up regular interactions with local people who knew when we would be there. We rented simple one-room shops and sat on the floor with prominently displayed copies of the *Injil* and various study books comprising a Bible correspondence course.

It was usually one foreigner and one local believer from a Muslim background like myself who visited each bazaar together. We wore the white clothing of religious men. The foreigner's presence usually created lots of interest. When asked who we were, we explained that we were there because, though they themselves had heard of the *Taurot*, *Jabbar* and the *Injil*, they had never seen them or read them. We had come to give them the opportunity to do so. In this way, we had a very different identity from the team I had been on earlier where we were simply Christians selling Christian books.

With our different identity, I was also able to go back to my real name. And when people asked us what religion we followed, I would say I was an *Isayi*, one who is a follower of *Isa*. That would cause most people to stop for a few seconds to consider and then respond by asking, 'Oh, you mean Christian?' So, in a way, I had a different identity than before and could use my real name. However, it was not so very different and seemed to lead to about the same place. People were just not very interested in what we had to say.

The one exception to this were the poor people looking for financial opportunities. Since Christians are believed by most Muslims to be rich and willing to use their money to buy converts, the biggest response we had was from the poor. Some came right out and asked, 'If I become a Christian, what will you give me?' Others, however, were better at keeping their motives hidden, but were waiting and hoping that eventually the money would begin to flow.

I do not say that all those who came with bad motives went untouched by the gospel. Some did come to see the real worth of the gospel message and received it. But they were in the minority. In general, those who responded to us were from the lower social strata and had little influence on others. They faced the constant scepticism of others who looked on their becoming Christians as simply a means of gaining financial support.

But most significantly, those who came to faith were also looked on as Christians and traitors to Islam. And as such they came under significant persecution. In some cases, this led to the person turning back to Islam, at least outwardly. Where this did not happen, it still greatly hampered any attempt to share

their faith with others. They were hesitant to share and others were unwilling to listen.

After a year on the second team, I moved to another larger city and did the one thing I knew how to do – business. I opened a store there and became a shopkeeper again. God has given me a natural gift of relating to people and making friends. So, through my shop I made lots of friends and decided I wanted to use that to share the gospel. I began to invite some friends over to my house to read the Bible together. And, by the way, it was during this time that I got married to a girl from a Christian background. The official registration of the wedding was done in the Islamic way and on the official document my wife is registered as a Christian and I as Muslim.

Understanding what Islam truly teaches

From those days to the present, almost thirty years have passed. I have learned many things in that time and have seen God work in the lives of many people. Again, my own identity has changed over those years. That change in identity has come, in large part, through my own study of Islam.

It is strange but true that, while I grew up a Muslim, it has been only after becoming a follower of Christ that I have come to understand what is in the Qur'an. Like over 99% of the Muslims in my country, I had only read the Qur'an in Arabic and had no idea what it said beyond what my Imam told me. It has been very surprising because I discovered that many of the things I was taught by my Imams were not true.

The Qur'an does not say the earlier books such as the *Taurat* or *Injil* have been changed or abrogated. In fact, it says just the opposite. God has kept them from being changed and the Qur'an confirms rather than abrogates them. Similarly, I was always told that the prophets were sinless, but when I read the Qur'an, I saw that the prophets, including Muhammad, implored God for forgiveness for their sins. The one exception to that was *Isa*, who is said to be holy in the Qur'an. I had also been told the Qur'an teaches that Muhammad would intercede for his disciples on the last day, but when I read the Qur'an, I saw that no intercession would be accepted by God on the last day and Muhammad would not be able to intercede.

In addition, I did not find the things I had been told I would find in the Qur'an. I also found many things there that I had no idea existed; no Imam had ever told me about them. For example, the honour and respect shown to *Isa* was a big surprise to me. Not only is *Isa* called holy, but he is also called the Messiah and the word of God. He was strengthened by the holy spirit⁷ and his birth to the Virgin

⁷ Editor's comment: It is noteworthy that Abdul Rahman is looking directly at the Qur'anic text instead of at common Muslim interpretation. A lengthy discussion about the differences between Muslim hermeneutic of the Qur'an and Protestant Christian hermeneutic of the Bible is beyond

Mary was miraculous. He performed many miracles while on earth, something the Qur'an clearly denies about Muhammad. He also is called a mercy from God and it is said that he was taken up to heaven alive, where he still is today.

In short, I have discovered that while there are some difficult and harmful passages in the Qur'an dealing with *jihad* and warfare and the place of women and marriage, there is also a very large amount of good and helpful material that can be used very effectively in the initial stages of witnessing to people. Using such material helps people see that what they have been told in so many areas by the religious authorities is not what the Qur'an actually teaches. This is a very important first step in any person's pilgrimage to faith. They begin to see that they need to investigate for themselves what the different books say and not simply take the word of their Imams. I encourage them to purchase a Qur'an in their own mother tongue and read it for themselves, something very few would otherwise ever think of doing.

Having come to a better understanding of what the Qur'an says has also led to a change in my own identity. Since I am no longer a part of a Christian team, it has been years since anyone has asked me what my religion is. People hear my name, return my *salaam*, or listen to my speech and the Islamic religious vocabulary that I use and assume I am a Muslim. And if anyone would ask me, that is what I would say. I am a Muslim, or submitter to God, as per Romans 12:1. That gives me some significant opportunities, since I can talk about the Qur'an and Muhammad without immediately inviting a wall of hostility and prejudice. In fact, as a religious person, that is an obvious topic for conversation.

In my conversations, I can interact with people who have no preconceived idea of who I am and what I believe. I use that to help them see the errors in their own belief. Thus, the idea that they will keep the *sharia* (Islamic law) and be saved through it is fairly easily shown to be impossible. There are many examples in the Qur'an and Hadith that we cannot keep the law and it therefore condemns us. Then, we talk about the almost universal hope that Muhammad will intercede for them. According to the Qur'an, he is only a warner and bearer of good news, not a saviour or intercessor.

Through such discussions, I find out who is seeking and open. With those who are not, we simply go on to other subjects apart from religion. But those who are open come to realize that much of their religious understanding comes from the Islamic religious hierarchy. Rather than showing Muslims what the Qur'an actually

the scope of this article or this volume of , but this is a good example of how the issue plays itself out in one case study. While Islam generally teaches that the Holy Spirit is the same thing as the angel Gabriel, Abdul Rahman is intentionally preferring and advocating a literal reading of Surah 2:87 which the Yusuf Ali Qur'an renders as 'We gave Jesus the son of Mary Clear (Signs) and strengthened him with the holy spirit.'

says, imams in our country use their teaching to maintain their position of power. And as seekers read the Qur'an for themselves and discover that it says that neither obedience to the Islamic law nor the intercession of Muhammad is going to save them, they become open to hearing of another means that God has opened to find peace with God. That peace is made possible by *Isa*.

This is a message that is hinted at in the Qur'an (where *Isa* stands out as unique – honoured in this world and the next), but is clearly taught in the books given by the earlier prophets and most clearly in the *Injil*. In talking to those who are open, we go on to examine in the earlier books what God says about salvation through grace made available in Christ. People who follow and accept this line of thinking do not see themselves as rejecting the Qur'an or Muhammad. Rather, they reject what the religious hierarchy has falsely taught in order to maintain their own control over religion and the financial benefits it brings.

When such honest seekers come to faith in Jesus as their Saviour, I then help them gradually see that the Qur'an and Muhammad, while teaching some good and helpful things, also have faults, limitations and things we cannot accept. They come to see that Muhammad was a fallible human being like any other child of Adam and the book he recited, like any other human book, is a mixture of truth and error. I can use books like a biography of Muhammad translated by the *Islamic Foundation* into our language to tell some of the stories about Muhammad that the local Imams never tell, and people come to understand on their own that they should not blindly follow Muhammad's example in everything.

My main goal in relating to interested people is that they come to know the truth of salvation by God's grace through faith in *Isa*. However, I also want them to continue to maintain their identity as Muslims. To do otherwise is to cut themselves off from the wider community and puts them in a small religious ghetto that is ostracized and despised.

Maintaining a 'Muslim' identity

In the past, when anyone came to faith in Christ, they were rejected by their own community and often given shelter and work by the Christian mission. That is done less today as many are helped to take on an *Isai* identity and retain much of their old Islamic cultural forms. But even being *Isai* still means they are known as Christians and face substantial, if reduced, walls of prejudice and persecution. Once placed in a position outside the Muslim community, it is very difficult for anyone to cross that huge barrier and win people from the other side.

By maintaining their Muslim social identity followers of *Isa* remain in their communities and share with others the way they have been witnessed to. Such sharing raises questions and suspicions. But believers can defend themselves from

accusations because they are not simply rejecting the Qur'an and Muhammad, but looking at what those sources really teach.

I encourage those who come to faith in *Isa* to begin meeting together each week in small house fellowships, just like the gathering we host each week in our home now and that we have regularly enjoyed in other believers' homes through the years. In such meetings, they would pray for one another, read and teach from the Bible and do what is usually done in Christian fellowship meetings.

Depending on their situation and previous practice, I also encourage people not to cut themselves off from their own community and society. If that happens, their voice is no longer heard and considered and they will struggle greatly just to continue on in faith themselves.

This is an area where there are no hard and fast rules. I encourage people who come to faith not to necessarily make any big announcement of the fact, but to see that their life changes and to gradually take opportunity to share with people as they have been shared with. I sometimes illustrate what I mean by comparing the believer to a pregnant woman. In our culture, a woman does not go around and announce that she is expecting a child. She doesn't have to. It gradually becomes obvious to everyone. In the same way, if the believer in *Isa* is genuine, he will not have to announce his new faith, but his life and words will gradually make it obvious.

Of course, the believers' faith in *Isa* does become obvious to everyone over time, just like a pregnancy, and when this happens the believers must be ready for the persecution that comes to any who follow *Isa*. It is a life-long struggle to remain within a suspicious community while talking about Jesus. Many believers from Muslim backgrounds in our country who identify themselves as *Isayi* or Christian have merged into the Christian society and cut off contact to such a degree that after the initial painful ostracism from their families they experience little ongoing persecution.

I experienced this in my own life. When I took a more Christian identity, I went through the very painful trial of being ostracized and rejected by my own family and community. It was very difficult. But then when I took on the Christian name of Richard, I found that while the overt persecution lessened, I was also simply dismissed by the Muslim community as someone who didn't know anything worth sharing with them. Now that I use my given name, I am not easily dismissed, and the persecution that comes has more to do with my allegiance to Jesus.

An example of what I'm saying comes to mind: Over the course of six months last year, the largest house-fellowship in our city withstood an intense onslaught of community opposition – from barring the use of neighbourhood wells, taunting and spitting into the meeting rooms, to death-threats, rape attempts, violent attacks, and surrounding believers' homes for hours with armed men. The neighbourhood's

fundamentalist minority was attempting to expel them from the community for their allegiance to Jesus, and it would have been easiest to give in by leaving their homes and moving to where a small Christian community already lives. But this house-church stood their ground, insisting to their neighbours that as followers of Jesus they were more truly ‘submitted to God’ than their oppressors, and eventually the neighbourhood opinion moved against the fundamentalist fringe. Though difficult, this group of believers has chosen to remain in their Muslim neighbourhood and weather the inevitable persecution.

It is a delicate balance, and each individual believer’s situation is different, but in this we can also follow examples in Jesus’ life. In answering suspicious critics who wanted to brand him, he was notoriously evasive. He was shrewd when answering Pharisees (e.g. Mark 11:28-33). It seems that Jesus saw a time and place for revealing his identity and provoking opposition, and at other times avoiding it. Even when asked ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus didn’t always give a ‘straight’ complete answer but focused on the next thing that particular individual needed to hear (e.g. Luke 18:18).

Conclusion

I will close with something that has helped me to come to my present identity and position. After finishing my two years with the Christian teams I began to consider the position of some of the very unorthodox Sufi Muslims in our society. Many of them never say formal prayers, they drink alcohol and smoke hashish, and believe in reincarnation and their own divinity. They are much further from orthodox Islam than the person who calls himself an *Isayi*. Yet, while the *Isayi* is ostracized, the Sufi is accepted as a part of the Muslim community. Why? Because they *refuse* to be ostracized. They retain the outward trappings of Islam – clothing, beard and prayer hat – as well as the Arabic religious terminology. They insist they are *the real* Muslims.

If we want to be salt and light in a society that would all too happily call us irrelevant and place us to one side, then we need to follow something of these Sufis’ example. I believe we can sometimes bring glory to Christ and fruit into His Kingdom through tactfully remaining within our community. No matter one’s social identity, everyone who talks boldly about Jesus will face hostility. The question is whether we easily allow the hostility to expel us or, as the Lord leads, tactfully refuse to be rejected and ostracized.

The Impact of the Local Church Showing Compassion: Lessons from the Syrian Crisis

By Rupen Das

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Abstract

The church in the Middle East has been under increasing pressure from radical elements in society. Yet the Syrian crisis is bringing a profound change in some of the churches as they see this as a strategic opportunity to move from the margins of society to becoming vital members of the community. The unexpected result of the humanitarian assistance that they have been providing is that thousands of Muslim are expressing an interest in Christ. The church, which has seldom been seen by Western missionaries as a partner in frontier missions in the Arab world, is suddenly a key component. This paper shares lessons on local churches balancing providing humanitarian aid with its core identity as a church.

In his book *A Wind in the House of Islam*, David Garrison documents the move of the Holy Spirit through thirteen centuries of history of the Muslim world. It would seem that the Syrian crisis is in the process of adding a new chapter. This chapter, however, is being written through the local church, an institution many missiologists involved with the Middle East have felt would never be able to reach out to Muslims because of its insular and sometimes hostile attitude towards them. As well, since many church rituals, customs and social requirements make the non-believer feel unwelcome, local churches are seldom seen as viable partners in frontier missions.⁸

⁸ On John Travis' C1-C6 Spectrum, it was always felt that the local church, situated in C1 to C3 on the spectrum, was so socially alien to Muslims that it would not be a likely channel for reaching them. Using the example of the emergence of the Gentile Church out of its Jewish cultural heritage, it was felt that if only Christ and the Word of God, apart from the cultural trappings of Christianity, were introduced into Muslim communities, not only would the Gospel penetrate deeper into the community and the emerging believing community become more stable, but that new forms of worshipping communities would emerge because of the transformative nature of the Gospel and the Word of God. While the events in Syria and Lebanon do not fit into the C-Spectrum,

The Church in Historical Context

In the post-Constantine Arab world, as Islam gained power and redefined the social and political landscape, the Church has often been on the defensive in trying to survive and preserve the faith. Bishop Kenneth Cragg, veteran missionary and scholar, tells the amusing story of Robert Curzon, the English traveller, diplomat and author, on a mission for British museums looking for ancient manuscripts. While in a monastery in the mountains of Lebanon in 1849, Curzon describes a meal with the monks in the candlelit refectory. 'I have been quietly dining in a monastery when shouts have been heard and shots have been fired against the stout bulwarks of the outer walls ... which had but little effect in altering the monotonous cadence in which one of the brotherhood read a homily of St. Chrysostom from the pulpit ... in the refectory' (Cragg 204). While there was violence and gunfire outside the high walls of the monastery, it did not affect the life of the monks inside the walls as they continued to live and worship as if nothing had happened. The massive walls kept out the world and its violence to preserve the faith and the faithful.

While it would be easy to be critical of such an insular attitude in the church, the reality was of a Church trying to be faithful to Christ in the midst of chaos, turbulence and changing times. The Lebanon, Greater Syria, and Palestine of Curzon's time were embroiled in violence and communal strife as the Ottoman Empire began its death spiral and western powers, with arrogance and deceit, carved up the region for their own national strategic interests. Bishop Cragg describes the times as being a volatile mix of '...liturgies and weapons, traditions and encounters, partisans and aliens, devotions and shouts, walls under siege' (Cragg 205). Nothing seems to have changed and it would seem as if he was describing the Middle East of today.

The experience of the early Protestant missions in the region was very different than that of the historical Churches, partly because the evangelistic nature of their work forced them to engage with the local context. The first American Protestant missionaries arrived in Lebanon in the early 1820s with a desire to reach the Muslim world, but soon discovered that the laws of the Ottoman Empire made it extremely difficult for a Muslim to convert because of a possible death penalty for the convert (Badr 213). Since the majority of those who joined churches established by Protestant missionaries were from the historical churches and not from the Muslim community, questions were raised about the focus of the mission. After a number of

since the local church is at the center of a move of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel seems to be moving through families and clans as new believers maintain their cultural identity even as they participate in the life of the church.

trips to the region, Rufus Anderson, the senior secretary of the Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Boston wrote that the historical churches in the Near East ‘... need to be reminded of things, which, amid ages of political revolution and degradation, they have forgotten. They need to see – as Muslims also need to see – “living exemplification of the gospel” with all its benevolent influences on society, culture and the nation’ (Badr 224). He saw the need for the gospel in the historical churches as much as in the Muslim community, and therefore the mission was justified. However, the question being debated at that time was the focus of missions, whether it was ‘civilization or Christianization.’ Anderson was against the ‘civilizing mission’ of overseas missions, which often resulted in the imposition of Western cultural and religious patterns. He favoured an approach that focused on the message of the gospel alone (Fleischmann 271). Yet Protestant and Catholic missions established schools, colleges, and hospitals as part of their mandate, which were to have a profound impact on society.

The challenge for the Church throughout history has been finding a balance between ensuring the survival of the faith community and engaging with the world around them in meaningful ways. Jürgen Moltmann, the German theologian at the University of Tübingen, describes the struggle between *identity* and *relevance* that the Church in every generation and in every country faces. The struggle is for the church to constantly define and protect its identity, which is often defined by its history, in the midst of competing and changing values in the surrounding cultures and threats from the political context. Unfortunately, this causes the church to be inward-looking and thereby lose its relevance. However, the process of remaining true to what it means to be a people of God and followers of Christ, while engaging with the community and finding ways to be relevant, will change the church (Moltmann 3).

The Church in the Present Crisis

The tension between survival, faithfulness and relevance is still very much at the core of how churches in Syria and Lebanon are engaging with the Syrian crisis. Because of the existential threats that Christians and churches feel, many of the historical churches through their denominational relief departments provide assistance to their members who have been displaced or are in need. Some of the Protestant Churches, on the other hand, have seen this moment in history as a strategic God-given opportunity to move from the margins of society (being considered latecomers in the social and religious landscape), by becoming places of compassion and having an influence with the gospel within the larger social context.

As the present Syrian crisis unfolded and spilled into Lebanon over the past four years, the Lebanese Society for Educational and Social Development (LSESD, also known as the Lebanese Baptist Society) decided to respond to the unfolding

humanitarian crisis. As a church-based agency it worked to empower local churches across denominations inside Syria and Lebanon to reach beyond their comfort zones and social boundaries and help those in need with food aid, water, emergency supplies, access to health care and education, and programs for children.

This is a story of reconciliation that has not yet been told. Because Syria had occupied Lebanon for twenty years, every Lebanese family watched the destruction of their country and has stories of their homes being destroyed and family members imprisoned, tortured and killed. The decision by a handful of Lebanese pastors to reach out to Syrian refugees in Lebanon was a personal demonstration of forgiveness that they modelled for their congregations. This went against the grain of Lebanese society and to date most of these pastors face opposition for their actions from family, neighbours and others in the community. In one church, 85% of the congregation left the church because the pastor decided to help the refugees. Inside Syria, where Protestant churches over the centuries had become very insular, many among them decided to make their churches places of compassion for people of any faith to find help.

What happened as a result is remarkable. Not only did hundreds from all faiths turn up to access the supplies and services that were being provided, but many people asked for prayer, attended church services and Bible studies, and sent their children to Sunday School. The request for Christian literature was more than what was available. Other churches and mission agencies are reporting similar responses. There were no conditions imposed to receive assistance, and there was no manipulation.

There are a number of factors, especially within the Muslim community, which probably contributed to this openness. In his survey, David Garrison points out that during times of conflict and violence Muslim are very open to the world outside their community. It would seem that the barriers within Muslim communities that have kept people from relating to outsiders come down. For many of the Muslim refugees, their contact with Christians had been so limited that they sometimes had warped perceptions. A comment heard at times was, 'I never knew that Christians can be kind'. Many Muslims also saw the conflict in Syria as an intra-Islamic conflict and were sickened by it.

Other factors which contributed to this openness include the fact that because local evangelical churches did not have elaborate rituals which newcomers had to learn, the barriers for participation were minimized. These churches allowed them to keep their symbols of identity such as the hijab, beards, etc.—symbols that had no idolatrous connotations or in any way indicated demonic allegiances. Also, there were no foreigners involved. The implementation and the face of these ministries of compassion was Arab, Syrian and Lebanese. These churches provided extensive pastoral care through prayer, home visitation, help in finding employment and help

getting children into schools. Finally, and most importantly, local churches provided them with community when their communities had been destroyed.

Lessons about the Role of the Church

Over the past sixty years the local church has been mostly marginalized in matters related to evangelism, missions, church planting, or ministries of compassion such as relief and development. As a result, specialized agencies have evolved to handle these efforts. As the political and social events unfolded in the region, there was an urgent need to rethink the understanding of ‘church’ in order to respond effectively. The local church, as it had evolved over time, presented significant barriers in moving beyond its walls to engage with those outside its community. There was a need to interpret and define a place and a role for the local church within the larger context of society. Through this process, LSESD and its partner churches are beginning to understand how local churches can become places of compassion within the community.

1. The local church is an institution in the community.

Evangelicals often focus on the church as a spiritual body that is concerned primarily with the afterlife. There is no doubt that the church, the Body of Christ, is a link between the physical and spiritual realities. What is not properly understood is the fact that a local church is an institution in the community. John Inge, Bishop of Worcester (UK), writes about a Christian theology of place. Places and communities are integrally linked, which together build the identity of the other. A local church is part of the community and together with other institutions in the community helps create the community’s identity. The church exists in a specific physical and social place for a purpose. If this holds true, then the local church has obligations, as do other institutions, to the community in which it exists.

The local church as an institution in the community naturally has visibility, history, credibility and relationships. As a part of the community, it is a natural and logical place from which a relief project can be implemented, as long as there is no conditionality or manipulation using the aid that is provided. The local church needs to move from its understanding of being an exclusive club with rigorous entry requirements to being a place where compassion is expressed and experienced by anyone in need.

2. A local church needs to be a church and not an NGO or a social service organization.

Many Christian NGOs and donors that seek to work with and through local churches unintentionally turn these churches into social service organizations through their operating and management practices, requirements and restrictions. A local church is a worshipping community, with preaching, teaching, discipling, counselling, praying, and assisting those in need, ‘for building up the body of Christ,

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (Eph. 4: 12-13). Through all of these activities the local church is to be salt and light in the community.

Well-intentioned donors, because of historic precedence, require that churches receiving their funding refrain from evangelizing, proselytizing or any other spiritual activity during the period when aid is being provided. This is based on an international humanitarian standard called 'the Red Cross Code of Conduct.' They feel it would be manipulative because of the power dynamics involved between those providing the aid and the beneficiaries.

The reality is that power dynamics are a part of every human relationship; eliminating them is neither realistic nor possible. However, they can be managed and their impact minimized. The fundamental issue in managing the power dynamic is that there should be no conditionality to the aid being provided or manipulation by those providing the aid. While the local church should not morph into a social service agency, it cannot forget that helping those in need is one of its functions among all the others.

3. The local church needs to minister to those outside its community

Describing the structure of tribal and sectarian societies in the Arab world, Ibn Khaldun, the 14th century North African Arab historian and father of sociology wrote, 'Only tribes held together by group feelings can live in the desert...' (Gellner x) as the group ensured the survival and well-being of the individual. Tribes were very insular, they safeguarded their wealth, and took pride in their heritage and identity. Compassion was only shown towards those who belonged to the tribe. Blessings and benefits were only for those who were part of the tribe. The tribal god was for their blessing and protection only and not to be shared with anyone else. This tribal mentality continues to define the religious landscape of the Middle East today. Each religious groups tries to take care of its own. Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf described such attitudes within the church as *exclusion* and *embrace* (also the name of his book).

The inherent question is, who is the local church excluding and whom should it be embracing? The impact of reaching beyond one's communal and social boundaries cannot be diminished. A frequent comment from many Muslim families receiving food aid from churches for the first time was, 'But do you know we are Muslims?' The impact of showing compassion to the outsider, one who does not belong, is an absolutely radical statement by the local church.

4. The local church needs to partner with others within the community and beyond while retaining its identity as a church.

Local churches have specific roles and functions within a community and are afraid of losing their distinctives if they were to start addressing social needs. Providing assistance to those in need can be intimidating because of the wide range of needs people have. The local church needs to be a place of compassion that can connect those with specific needs with other agencies and organizations that have the expertise and resources to help. Many churches will network with other churches, but find it difficult to network with service providers and helping institutions in the community who share similar values.

5. Local churches need support in designing and reporting on aid received.

One of the major complaints of donors against the work of local churches is that churches don't understand or appreciate the requirements of donors, and cannot write proper proposals or provide reports or accountability as required. Most local churches neither have the culture nor the capacity to provide what donors need, in the format that they need it. One of the most significant lessons learned through the Syrian crisis is that churches need support to be able to do this.

LSESD assumed this role and worked closely with churches in developing proposals and ensuring proper reporting and accountability. This freed the churches to do what churches do best: meet the needs of people. LSESD developed simple systems to gather data from churches and to ensure proper accountability, while it assumed the role of program manager and interfaced with donors.

Underlying these lessons is the reality of the Micah Declaration's statement of purpose. 'Our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ' (Micah Network 1).

The Local Church Proclaims Christ in Showing Compassion

The highlight of the emerging role of the local church in its mission to Muslims and Muslim communities is that the Good News is not only to be verbally preached but needs to be lived out by the people of God. As they demonstrate the reality of the Kingdom of God through their lives they are able to witness to others who this God is. Ultimately it is God who converts and gives life, in His way and in His timing.

Martin Accad's SEKAP spectrum identifies a continuum of how Christian-Muslim interaction takes place. At one extreme is the syncretism, which seeks to reconcile the differences between Christianity and Islam; at the other is the polemic, which 'adopts warlike strategies in relating to the other religion, where one seeks to destroy and uproot the tenets of another in order to replace them with one's own' (Accad 13). The kerygmatic approach that Accad advocates is a positive

proclamation of the Good News. He writes, ‘...the nature of *kerygma*: God’s gracious and positive invitation of humanity into relationship with himself through Jesus’ (Accad 38).

The local church, by becoming a place of compassion, is able to proclaim in word and deed God’s gracious invitation to His Kingdom through Christ. It ensures that the church’s interaction with Muslims is not just verbal and intellectual. It moves beyond the apologetic and the polemic, and integrates life and theology into a wholeness, which our experience in Syria and Lebanon shows that Muslims understand.

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PART 2: BOOK REVIEWS

Connecting with Muslims: A Guide to Communicating Effectively

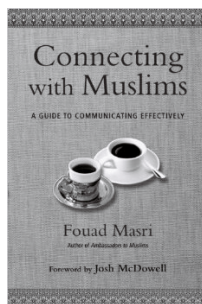
by Fouad Masri

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014

'You don't need a PhD in Islam to share your faith with a Muslim. You just need the heart of an ambassador. Discover how' (back cover).

In his forward to this book, Josh McDowell points out that the track record for Christians relating to Muslims has not been stellar. He notes, however, that there are Christians who are involved in effectively sharing God's love. This 190-page book, divided into two parts: *Practical Ways to Connect with Muslims* and *Always be Prepared to Give an Answer*, helps us learn how. The eight appendices are helpful additional resources.

In the introduction, Fouad lays down compelling reasons for writing this book. He believes Christians fail to share the Good News with Muslims effectively largely because of ignorance. He also notes the challenge of a largely unfinished task in the West. He refers to a *Christianity Today* report 'that 42.5 percent of Muslims in North America do not personally know any Christian.' He asks, 'Who will welcome Muslims? Who will invite them into their homes for coffee or a meal?' Fouad also challenges three myths Christians have about Muslims: that they hate us, they are not interested in Jesus or Christianity, and that God doesn't care about Muslims and Islam. His message to the church is: get involved and relate.



Fouad shares about growing up in Beirut. His grandfather brought the gospel message back to Lebanon from America, but due to tragic events Fouad grew up hating Jews and Muslims. In his turmoil he read about Jesus washing the disciples' feet and even the feet of Judas. He understood Jesus' message in his head and submitted his will and life to him. It wasn't until tragedy struck a friend that his head knowledge of the love of Jesus moved to his heart. He prayed, '...The more hate there is in Lebanon, the more I want to be a soldier of love. The more war there is in Lebanon, the more I want to be a soldier of peace.'

I love the author's many 'on the way' testimonies of how he was able to fearlessly share the gospel or give a New Testament to Muslims while travelling. The

way he introduces spiritual topics looks quite easy and natural. (Of course he has several advantages over most of us in that he is a native Arabic speaker and will naturally be able to move the conversation with an Arab Muslim along faster than a non-Arabic speaker!) Not only do these stories make for a fascinating read, they are useful options for engaging with our own Muslim friends and neighbours.

Each chapter has some great ‘Action Points.’ For example, in the first chapter, ‘Our Role in the Great Commission,’ he writes, ‘Invite a Muslim friend to dinner or coffee to your home, or visit a Muslim in his or her home. Make an effort to meet Muslims’ (34).

Fouad encourages us to learn from Jesus’ witnessing style in John 4 as Jesus took the initiative and guided the conversation with the Samaritan woman. He stresses the need to move a conversation with Muslims from a felt need or something trivial to the spiritual. There are pitfalls in friendship evangelism if the messenger is not intentional about sharing spiritually. He has a point in that many Christians are ‘being nice’ to refugees and losing sight of spiritual goals.

Fouad stresses the cultural importance of gift-giving and hospitality in relating to Muslims. He also encourages utilising varied witnessing styles, including asking questions, sharing Bible verses, using our personal testimony, and telling stories from our own experience or from proverbs and parables. He is keen to use the Word of God as his authority. In fact, he often gives a New Testament to the Muslim he is talking to or quotes a Scripture verse he has memorized.

At the end of the practical section, he mentions that ‘Muslims appreciate commitment.’ In other words, we need not be afraid about voicing our faith and convictions. Another interesting comment that doesn’t appear in other witnessing books is ‘Relax, don’t panic.’ He points out that, as in swimming, we have to surrender our body to the buoyancy of the water. We too must surrender and trust God to help us in each situation with Muslims.

Examples given in the book are mostly short-term introductory type evangelistic opportunities. He does not deal with the unique aspects of witnessing to Muslim women, children, or youth. Nor does he address the challenges of dealing with messy situations or what needs to happen after giving someone a New Testament.

I highly recommend this book especially for Christians beginning a ministry to Muslims in the West. He lays down great principles, leads by example, and has faith that God will do something when we are faithful to share the Good News. In *Connecting with Muslims* Fouad Masri delivers on informing, challenging and equipping the Christian reader.

Reviewed by Ed Loewen

Ed is a practitioner with Pioneers 'In Canada Missions.' Visit his ministry blog 'Reaching Muslim Men in Context' at: www.edloewen.blogspot.com. Also, Ed's wife and long-time ministry partner has an excellent ministry blog as well. Visit: www.joyloewen.blogspot.com.

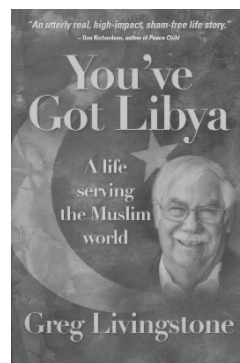
You've Got Libya – A Life Serving the Muslim World by Greg Livingstone (his autobiography) Monarch Books, 2014

The book begins with twenty-nine endorsements by international mission leaders which prepare the reader for 'the whirlwind' that follows, which is Sally Livingstone's description of her husband. Greg tracks his frenetic life from his inauspicious birth to the present day with a relentless frankness which is refreshing, challenging and often very humorous.

Scene 1 is Greg's traumatic early years. Several foster parents and 'other arrangements' negotiated by his showbiz mum leave him with a deep fear of abandonment and a desire to be accepted and to belong; to be somebody. In this topsy-turvy world he eventually ends up in a loving Christian family and comes to faith in Christ at the age of sixteen.

Scene 2 is his years of early Christian discipleship. He attends Wheaton College and in 1959 becomes a member of George Verwer's Muslim world prayer group at Moody Bible Institute. Attracted by George's radical approach to Christian discipleship and evangelism, Greg attributes his call to apostolic ministry to Muslims from this date. Christian 'persons of influence' pepper this period of his life and instil in him the 2 Timothy 2:2 spiritual reproduction principle.

Scene 3 opens with his engagement and marriage to Sally and his inclusion on George Verwer's recently-birthing Operation Mobilization leadership team. One of his first responsibilities is to charter a plane for \$27,000 to fly 113 people to Paris for a summer OM European campaign. He gave the charter agent \$15 and then had to recruit the people! Next he had to transport a team from the UK to India in OM vehicles renowned for their unreliability. Predictably, unexpected incidents occur. This is followed by a three-year stint in Europe during which time the OM 'Operation University Team' was birthed. Greg describes himself as a 'sheepdog' at this time. A period of leadership in the OM European office in Brussels confirms that he is neither an evangelist nor a linguist, but his very strong mobilizing gifting has become blatantly obvious.



In Scene 4 he finally gets to the Arab world where he meets Mazhar Mallouhi, a Syrian believer from a Muslim background, with whom he has since had a lifelong friendship. He gets 'fired' from his role in Lebanon, and after establishing OM Canada, a stint as chaplain on the OM ship *Logos* and a three-year pastorate in Aspen, Colorado he is appointed in 1977 as the US Director for the North Africa Mission (later to be called Arab World Ministries). Things begin 'to roar' and, overwhelmed by the number of new candidates and Greg's vision of doing church planting in a more flexible way through self-mobilizing teams, he and NAM part amicably. On May 28, 1983 *Frontiers* is born.

Scene 5 is *Frontiers* and Greg goes into some depth regarding the early history including the six non-negotiables: Muslim focus, church planting, teams, field-governed, coaching, and grace orientation. We gain insights into the challenges of founding and sustaining a new mission. In 2000 he steps down from being the International Director and describes their subsequent experiences in Malaysia and the UK where he continues being a 'sheepdog for God.'

Greg weaves into the narrative definitions of leadership, comments on missionary kids (he and Sally have three boys), missional insights, his weaknesses, the challenges of team life, his vulnerabilities, thoughts on internationalization, his illnesses, his fears of failure and abandonment, his obsessions, his studies and writing, and his care for Sally in her times of depression. Throughout his life God's sovereign grace upholds him and his passion for Jesus sustains him.

As Bill Bell (the Director of North Africa Mission, USA, from 1969 to 1976) would probably say, 'This is tribal story-telling at its best.' This is a book of encouragement reminding the reader that God can use 'damaged' people, a term Greg uses to describe himself, to glorify God. He does not glorify missions but speaks of suffering for the sake of the gospel. He speaks of finishing well and the hope of eternal belonging in glory, welcomed by Jesus and by those whose lives he's touched.

An index would have helped and for the non-North American readership a glossary of unfamiliar words and terms would be useful. The Epilogue snapshot of Greg's itinerant life would have been enhanced by the actual dates of his sojourns.

The generation of leaders that Greg represents are exceptional people. They are connectors and 'super conductors' of God's missionary heart. I personally experienced this when Greg invited me to be a 'coach' to one of the *Frontiers* teams in the Arab world. He wanted the team to appreciate the role of media in church planting. It was a 'roller coaster,' week-long, ministry-packed itinerary.

These apostolic leaders were called to establish new missions in response to the cultural sea change of the 1960s and the boomer generation. Throughout my NAM/AWM ministry I was blessed by many men and women whom Greg had

mobilized. These pioneer visionaries made mission history and we need to read about them and learn from them because in every generation there are new opportunities to obey the Great Commission.

I leave our heavenly Father with the last word: ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations’ (Jeremiah 5:1).

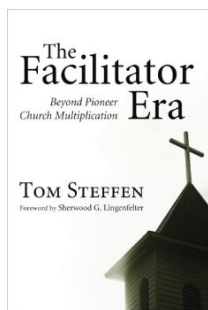
Reviewed by Keith Fraser-Smith

Muslims of the Arab world have been Keith's focus for more than 40 years. He has served in a variety of leadership roles with AWM in Media, the Middle East, Arabian Peninsula, Globalization and UK ministry and he recently retired after leading a local CPM team in the UK. Among his many interests is his pleasure in writing book reviews.

The Facilitator Era, Beyond Pioneer Church Multiplication

by Tom Steffen

Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011



This book is a review of the changing nature of the missionary enterprise. It captures the current missiological environment as understood and taught by missiology departments in most North American seminaries. Tom Steffen, a professor at Biola, has written a short story that is similar to Lencioni’s “business parable” approach. In the story, two veteran missionaries return from the Philippines and seek deeper understanding of church planting. They meet and discuss missiology with a professor who leads them through a historical overview of missiological writing.

He categorizes the books into the following: urban church planting, house churches, North American church planting, the missional church, multiethnic church planting, Muslim-focused church planting, training and books that focus on individual congregations. I found it interesting that Church Planting Movement (CPM) ideas that have rocked the missions world in the past five years are largely absent from his list as their own category. Rather, they are part of a ‘catch all’ category that contains both his own book (*Passing the Baton*, 1997) and Garrison’s *Church Planting Movements* (2004). These two titles seem fairly distinct in their approach. Overall, however, it is one of the best summaries of church planting material I have seen.

The discussion then turns to eras and epochs of mission, suggesting that the fourth era is upon us. This era introduces the role of the non-western church and how the missionary enterprise must change to fully embrace partnership between

missionaries and indigenous church leaders. For Steffen, pioneer church planting is giving way to facilitative church multipliers (he uses the acronym FCMs to describe this role). The contrast between these two roles, the pioneer and the facilitator, is well known among most missionaries. Steffen combines the facilitative role with an emphasis on church multiplication. He writes that the facilitator role is best suited for our era because of the number of reached cultures that can be motivated to go to the reached. He also sees a role for social transformation alongside more proclamational or gospel-oriented efforts.

Steffen seeks to bring both pioneers and facilitators together, which is a bit confusing at times since his main emphasis is to highlight their differences (see page 61 for an example of this). A chart on page 66 compares the two approaches. The majority of attributes are the same between the two. Facilitators do not learn language, are typically short-term, do not engage with non-believers, do not model the ministry directly and fulfill vision (rather than cast vision). He also notes what he called 'power transfer' as a difference. Pioneers transfer power because they initially lead; facilitators transfer knowledge but this is a different type of power transfer.

Steffen dedicates an entire chapter to megachurches and Rick Warren's PEACE plan in particular. I found this chapter a bit anachronistic: since the book was written massive changes in Warren's approach to mission have made a good part of Steffen's case questionable. However, the short-term movement that Steffen describes is undeniable and is a potent reality in the North American mission scene. Steffen does not, in my view, adequately address the failures of short-term mission activity (*i.e.*, the lack of long-term mobilization, the lack of actual on-the-ground ministry effectiveness and the failure of short-term mission exposure to create long-term change in the lives of participants).

The follow-up topic to megachurch involvement is the funding of mission. Steffen highlights the changing attitudes in the North American church toward how missionary activity should be funded into the future. He lists a number of books that are critical of the support-raising model and reviews their main arguments, noting along the way that business-as-mission and tentmaking may be alternate models.

The final chapter of the narrative (before the case studies) is about orality and Bible storying. This is a brief overview of the strategies being used in this arena. This chapter is a departure from the main theme of facilitative ministry. The next section of the book is a series of case studies highlighting the major themes that Steffen has introduced. A study guide follows this section. The case studies work toward unifying the overview of what a facilitative church planter does.

There is a final, helpful chapter that seeks to fuse pioneer church planting with the facilitative model. Utilizing his own approach from the book, *Passing the Baton*, he seeks to show that the facilitator can also be a pioneer of a sort.

This book has a lot to offer in synthesizing some major models of missionary activity. I particularly appreciated the categorization of massive amounts of church planting material.

Its weakness is that it lacks a sufficient critique of ‘hurry up’ models of church planting based on a short-term approach. I don’t believe it follows that short-term mission and facilitative work go hand-in-hand. In many people groups the size and scope of the effort dictates that, regardless of the model, long-term slogging for years should be expected. There are also some ‘stretches of the imagination’ that Steffen takes here that are a bit much for me. For example, as we look at the current missionary era (what the book calls the ‘4th Era’) I see no way that Rick Warren can be considered its primary persona (the hero of the next generation of mission is most certainly the unknown indigenous worker).

All things considered this is possibly better understood as a high level review of contemporary missions thinking in North America. It does miss out on some themes (for example, contextualization) but it’s a solid review of the literature. Speaking from within an organization with many ‘pioneering’ missionaries I sense that the move toward facilitation is a necessary and helpful step toward partnering with the two-thirds world church.

Reviewed by Ted Esler

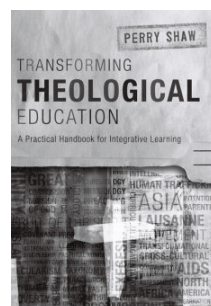
Dr. Ted Esler recently became President and CEO of Missio Nexus after more than fifteen years in executive leadership with Pioneers USA and Canada.

Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning

by Perry Shaw

Carlisle, UK: Langham Global Library, 2014. ISBN: 978-1-78368-957-6

In just over 270 pages, Perry Shaw’s *Transforming Theological Education* (Langham Global Library) is a ‘must read’ for anyone committed to training and equipping Christians for the church’s mission in the world today. Those who have known Perry’s ministry as an educationalist, theologian, teacher and ‘missionary-reformer’ of theological education have been looking forward to this volume for some time. In it he brings together a lifetime of experience in institutional theological education and particularly the story of the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary’s (ABTS) journey in 2007 from a traditional fragmented model of theological education to an



increasingly missional-ecclesial, multi-dimensional and integrative approach to training Christian ministers and leaders today.

What is so helpful in this book is that almost everything presented has been ‘field tested’ at ABTS. Perhaps deliberately to ground the book in a real context, Perry’s preface enables us to see exactly what such an integrative and multi-dimensional model actually looks like. Having visited ABTS and met some of its recent graduates from North Africa, I can confirm that ‘the proof of the pudding’ *really is* ‘in the eating.’

So, what are the ingredients of Perry’s ‘pudding’? There are two parts to Perry’s book. Part 1 addresses the philosophical and educational principles of integrative learning and how these are worked out in institutions. At the heart of this is a call to work with a whole faculty in re-forming (or redesigning) the school towards a missional mandate of ‘preparing and equipping men and women to guide the church to have a more effective impact on the surrounding society.’ Part 2 takes these same issues and seeks to provide theological educators with a ‘toolbox’ containing the practical skills to help this missional-ecclesial approach actually work in practice.

The first few chapters of Part 1 set the horizon of his missional-ecclesial vision of theological education through a process of ‘backward design’ – that is, starting with the end goal of the theological education process and working back. He asks fundamental questions such as, ‘What are the characteristics of an ideal church for accomplishing God’s missional mandate?’ and ‘What is the ideal profile of a graduate who will serve in and through this church?’ Whilst some of these characteristics will be universal many others are contextually-driven. By envisioning the ‘ideal’ church, graduate and the particular challenges of the context, the design of training is more likely to equip, support, evaluate and encourage students for effective ministry.

In chapter three he argues for a high level of reciprocal student evaluation of self and of faculty. Then in chapter four he outlines the shape of multidimensional learning. He calls us to move away from theological education characterized merely by cognitive mastery, the disconnected ‘four silos’ of biblical theology, systematics, church history and practical theology, towards a more holistic model with the intentional promotion of *affective*, *behavioural* and *cognitive* learning. He is not alone in the prognosis that the most influential, widely exported and ‘successful’ models of theological education are shaped in a western, white and predominantly male world. Not surprisingly he argues that this model is largely unfit for purpose, not just in the majority world but also increasingly in the west. As he puts it, in most traditional evangelical models, ‘While condemning secular rationalism, there is a tacit affirmation of the basic tenets of rationalism through the almost exclusive focus on the cognitive domain.’

Chapters five to seven further expand this basic thesis by exposing the ‘hidden’

and the 'null' curricula. The 'hidden' curriculum is everything that is not stated in the explicit syllabi that is handed out to students at the beginning of term... all that is 'caught rather than taught' in the teaching and learning process. He identifies seven possible negative aspects of a school's 'hidden' curriculum that students 'catch' and which might limit the school's ability to fulfil its missional-ecclesial calling. They are: 1) the idea that schooling *is* education, 2) an academic approach to ministry, 3) a knowledge-centred hierarchy, 4) the idea that leaders have *all* the control, 5) that there is a 'one-size' that 'fits all' in theological education, 6) that ministry is about competition not cooperation and 7) the prevalence of the 'null' curriculum.

This final concept is the significance of what is *not* taught in many traditional models of theological education. Given the fact that no school can teach everything, Perry argues that much can be discerned from what is left out in many schools. Citing extensive studies in the west and through a recent 'Global Survey on Theological Education'⁹, Shaw suggests that what is missing is spiritual formation, interpersonal and counselling skills as well as cross-cultural communication and practical skills related to ministry and mission.

This is further supported in chapter six by a deeper evaluation of the dangers of fragmentation in the curriculum and then in chapter seven an exploration of what he considers the non-negotiable aspects of training outside the classroom. Citing Linda Cannell's comprehensive history of western theological education and its journey to the current globalized model in *Theological Education Matters* (2006), Perry identifies the roots of fragmentation in the western embrace of the Greek philosophical approach. He points to the influence of Thomas Aquinas's application of Aristotelian philosophy to theological reflection and the subsequent systematizing of categories in theology. He then describes how through the Enlightenment and the success of the 'scientific method' an epistemology which limits 'knowing' to merely 'rational reflection' has fragmented so many of our current models of theological education.

What Perry does, whilst in no way being anti-rational or anti-academic, is bring to bear extensive research about the importance of emotional and social intelligence to the teaching and learning process in theological education. It is not just the re-dressing of the balance from a focus on a student's intellectual capacity to more influential factors like emotional stability, social skills, positive attitudes and self-motivation. Rather, he suggests that our evaluation of quality theological education must shift away from criteria formulated within the parameters of the academic community towards those defined by the 'end goal' of the process, namely, equipping and liberating students for effective involvement in God's mission and the transformation of their contexts. He offers numerous practical tools to help the

⁹ See <http://www.globethics.net/web/gtl/research/global-survey>.

reader engage in such an evaluation.

One of the more obvious tools he outlines in chapter seven is the adoption of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), over and above the American Carnegie credit-counting system. Whilst the latter is more widely used around the world, Perry argues that it has multiple shortcomings especially at the level of the 'hidden curriculum.' It grants credits almost exclusively to the classroom-centred component of the curriculum, which communicates that what is most important is what happens in class... that is the *teaching* and *not* the formative *learning* that goes on outside the class. The ECTS on the other hand focuses on hours of learning rather than hours in the classroom and affirms the substantive formative value of non-classroom based elements. Once again Perry puts plenty of flesh on the bones of this concept. He discusses the use and essential value of mentoring, small groups, community worship, theological reflection (on *all* aspects of life!) and independent learning contracts.

The final chapter of Part 1 examines the concept of 'deep learning.' Expanding on his central thesis that education is about learning – not teaching, Perry goes on to explore learning that lasts and that impacts life. He writes, 'the real learning is not what is remembered at the end of a course, but what is remembered five or ten years after taking the course, and even more what shapes in the long term the character and actions of the learner' (129).

In case the first part of the book raises the question, 'I'm convinced of the need for change, but how am I *actually* going to achieve what Perry is suggesting?' Part 2 provides very practical tools to have a go! I came away genuinely encouraged to do exactly that. As Perry writes, even if just a few of these steps are taken, the implications for furthering the global mission of God are massive.

So what are some of these practical tools? Chapters nine and ten outline helpful steps for designing courses and lesson plans for multidimensional learning. That is the nuts and bolts of a 'learning-centred' and 'learning-focused' approach; approaching the lessons with purpose, clear learning objectives and with an appreciation for the psychology of teaching and learning.

For the theologian, cross-cultural minister (missionary), pastor or church planter with little educational training, chapter eleven walks us through the difference between a traditional and a non-traditional instructional method. In contrast to the professorial lecture approach he explores the steps to designing dialogue, whole class and small group discussion, brainstorming, debates, forums or panel discussions, interviews and much more. In almost twenty years of education, I have come across no one better able to communicate the importance of instructional strategy over and above merely teaching technique.

Then in chapters twelve and thirteen he walks us through the art and science

of designing questions and case studies that engage the cognitive, affective and behavioural domains of learning and growth. You may never have considered that this would be worthy of two whole chapters, but I defy you to come away from this without being changed by it. He then goes on to look at learning styles and cultural context in chapter fourteen. As someone committed to supporting in-context theological education and advocating a much greater awareness of the cross-cultural issues involved in the teaching and designing of theological education, this chapter was full of applicable wisdom.

He continues in chapter fifteen with yet more practical steps to improving the design of grading and assessment, convincingly exposing problems in issuing grades in theological education and presents a series of alternative, more dialogical and reflective forms of assessment. Finally, in chapter sixteen he ends with a call to raise the bar and strive for excellence in teaching, defined using B.T. Washington's words as 'doing a common thing in an uncommon way.' This excellence involves developing a hospitable relationship with students, demonstrating competence, a clarity of communication, creativity, enthusiasm, a well-ordered learning environment, the appropriate use of praise and criticism as well as developing high expectations, and, crucially, a capacity for self-evaluation and continuous growth in the student and teacher.

Although it will be crystal clear that I think this is a rather impressive book (British understatement!) I have two warnings. Firstly, because of the influence of his educational background and impressive survey of contemporary educational theory, you get the impression that Perry is suggesting that our motivation for bringing transformation to the traditional model of theological education should be based on catching up with the last fifty years of educational research. He does of course make the case for transformation as a theological imperative from the Bible, but I was left wanting more discussion of this rather than endless citations from contemporary educational research. If Paul Sanders is right that 'the problem with much theological education is that it is neither theological nor educational'¹⁰ then some readers may be frustrated with the lack of theological exploration of this missional-ecclesial vision of theological education.

Secondly, Perry at a number of points admits to being intentionally provocative (and negative) about the status quo in traditional schooling models of theological education. Although he admits that traditional schools have introduced some of the holistic and multi-dimensional reforms that he is advocating, by his hypercritical approach, he may lose a significant number of readers among the exact constituency (traditional theological educators) that he is seeking to transform.

¹⁰ See <http://theologicaleducation.org/2010/09/29/trends-in-global-theological-education-dr-paul-sanders/>

In a field reputed to be the one of the slowest to accept institutional change, many have laboured but given up disillusioned. Both the influential Edward Farley (1983) and more recently Robert Banks (1999) ended their quest to see a re-envisioning of this field depressed at the lack of change. As a teacher and PhD student wholeheartedly committed to seeing the BMB church equipped and trained in-context and for the context of the Muslim world, I am grateful to God for lifting Perry from his own disillusionment and subsequent breakdown in 2006 and enabling him to complete this journey of curricular and institutional change with ABTS.

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Banks, Robert. 1999. *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Reviewed by Pat Brittenden

Pat Brittenden grew up as a 'third culture kid' in Algeria. With a background in education in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, he then worked in cross-cultural church planting and development work in North Africa. After further theological study, he now researches, writes, trains and advises on the design of Christian discipling and theological education in Muslim-majority contexts.

Peace Catalysts: Resolving Conflict in Our Families, Organizations and Communities

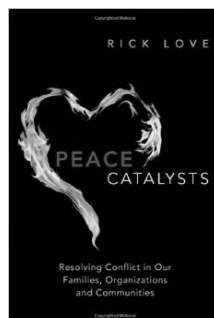
by Rick Love

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014, 207 pages.

ISBN: 978-0-8308-3668-0

Synopsis from the Back Cover of the book

Rick Love, founder and president of Peace Catalyst International, shares the principles that have guided his peacemaking efforts around the world. He provides a biblical framework for how the God of peace seeks the common good of any who have been at odds with others. As ambassadors of reconciliation, we can practice peacemaking at every level - in our homes and workplaces, from domestic disagreements to international disputes.



Rick begins his book with a foundational framework for what is involved in being a peace catalyst – at the levels of belief, core values and behaviour. His biblical apologetic is vital to the rest of the book as he calls the reader to a ‘lifestyle of peacemaking.’ The remaining chapters focus on integrating the peacemaking lifestyle to personal life, family, team, organisations and wider social issues.

Personal Assessment

The author advocates being a peacemaker in a world of conflict and divide. While Rick provides numerous tools and models to help us navigate our way through experiences of conflict, he offers much more than a toolbox of ‘how to’ tips (though the toolbox is valuable). Rick goes to great lengths to provide an apologetic and biblical call to being a peace catalyst as an integrated way of life. I was personally challenged and inspired by the holistic focus on peacemaking in mind-set and practice.

The six spheres of influence in peacemaking range from the personal to the international. While many readers may feel their own sphere of influence at the level of personal, family or organisation, others within the body will operate within the wider spheres of peacemaking (social, urban, national and international).

The chapter addressing Muslim-Christian relations is likely the least relevant to the worker community. The chapter is important for a wider evangelical audience with limited encounter with Muslims. However, the worker community in our context is undoubtedly beyond needing the exhortation to love and relate positively to the Muslim community.

Rick ably supports the big picture apologetic with readily-usable tools, including analysing one’s preferred style of responding to conflict. He provides practical guidelines for analysing conflict and guiding mediation while exploring a number of biblical examples of conflict (Jerusalem Council - Acts 15; the relational tension between Paul & Barnabas; the ambition of Peter & James, etc.). In addition, the personal examples woven throughout the book attest to the fact that the material is far from theoretical. Rick has journeyed the path of peacemaking in a variety of contexts over the years. I was particularly moved by his vulnerable sharing of conflict within his own family.

A number of audiences can benefit from Love’s input. Firstly, the book is highly relevant to cross-cultural workers. Some elements will be familiar from other sources, but Rick weaves the material together with a fresh approach. I found myself resonating time and time again with examples of how to approach a conflict situation and mediate peace.

The wider evangelical audience will also benefit. The chapter on social peacemaking goes beyond the worker context and addresses the challenges of how the evangelical community relates to Muslim and LGBT communities.

The chapter on peacemaking vs gospelling may ruffle a few feathers, but is worth a careful read. Rick challenges the evangelical reader to avoid pursuing peacemaking exclusively as a means of evangelising. As such, he no longer considers himself a ‘traditional’ evangelical. I found myself desiring to know more of what it means for Rick to no longer be ‘traditional,’ but the book does not develop that theme to any great degree.

Overall, *Peace Catalysts* is an inspiring and very helpful book on how to be ministers of peace on behalf of a God of peace and his gospel of peace. Peace is the persistent theme throughout. I have been moved by the basic call and the content of the book. I suspect other readers will be as well.

Reviewed by Abu Banat

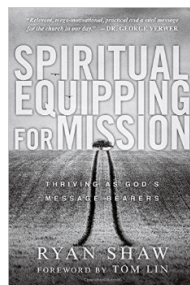
Abu Banat is a regional leader for Pioneers. He serves with a regional team of leaders to provide oversight, direction and personal support for more than 350 workers throughout North Africa & the Middle East.

Spiritual Equipping for Mission

by Ryan Shaw

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. 208 pages
ISBN 978-0-8308-3672-7 (print); ISBN 978-0-8308-9658-5 (digital)

This is a book about the spirituality of a disciple with a specific view toward those focused on the Great Commission. Shaw is attempting to answer the question, ‘What are the essential spiritual keys necessary for fruitful life as a disciple?’ The book begins with a chapter that establishes Shaw’s priority of cross-cultural ministry aimed at unreached people groups. This lofty aspiration requires a spirituality that is infused with the Spirit. The next ten chapters are organized around each spiritual principle necessary to make this happen.



Throughout the book Shaw uses the phrase ‘message bearer’ instead of missionary. This not only contemporizes the book but also infuses meaning into the task of a Great Commission worker.

The first principle is to be ‘Saturated with the Powerful Presence of God.’ The author contrasts serving through competence (or ‘in the flesh’) against serving in and through the Spirit. Shaw uses a number of passages to highlight the need for ministry to flow from a Spirit-filled lifestyle. These include highlights from Moses’ life, Jacob’s life and Jesus’ example. He also reinforces his points with examples from the mission field. A short section on calling points out not so much the need

for a vocational calling but rather emphasizes the calling of God on the Christian's life to be a committed disciple. Abiding in Christ is highlighted as a major contributor to being saturated with the presence of God.

The next principle is embracing humility. Pride is the downfall of message bearers. Jesus is our primary example of humility and Shaw ties this to meekness ('power under control'). Being involved in powerful ministry does not shield one from our human nature. We must deny self, surrender our rights and find our identity in Christ.

A sincere hunger and thirst for God is another spiritual key. The chapter starts with a warning that strategy can sometimes replace a spiritual reliance on God. As representatives of the Kingdom, we must make pursuit of God a high priority.

The fourth principle is being clothed in God's Word. Shaw points to the biblical examples of Ezra and Jesus. He emphasizes listening to God's Word but also applying it, studying it and being taught by it.

Discernment is the next attribute Shaw highlights. An example of Shaw's spiritual journey highlights an emphasis on how God works to reveal his specific will to us, not only His general will. For those called to minister as message-bearers this is foundational for knowing our calling. The author lists a number of ways that God speaks to us and suggests that we become spiritually aware of them, expecting God to speak to us.

A lifestyle of prayer is defined by Shaw as both intercessory and communion prayer. Intercessory prayer is that which seeks to impact others and a message bearer's work. Communion prayer is a focus on God and who He is. It is about abiding and being in Christ. Shaw looks at each of these two areas in some depth, providing both the theory and practical application of a prayerful approach to life and ministry.

Chapter 7 moves away from a common spiritual discipline and asks the reader to cooperate with God's 'twofold purpose.' This is the way in which God works not only *through us* but also *in us*. Shaw points out that the meaning of the gospel in the New Testament era was integrated into the lives of the people. This is an important perspective for those involved in ministry to be reminded of in the midst of a busy schedule with pressure to perform.

Another key is 'understanding the times and seasons of God.' The author draws from the Issachar example of the Old Testament and suggests that we should be engaged in understanding our world in a way that provides insight into what God is doing. The author notes that ministry has seasons in which God moves in different ways and understanding these seasons helps us to make sense of His work.

The ninth spiritual key is perseverance and steadfastness. Shaw contrasts the constantly changing environment in which we live with the need for longevity.

Emotional stability despite hardship makes longevity possible. Depression, which seems to be commonplace according to the author, is a challenge to message bearers. There are many reasons for depression to occur in ministry.

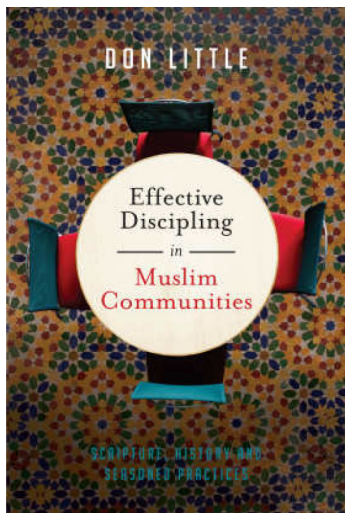
The final key is to pursue a focused life. Pleasing God and cultivating true vision are two important aspects of this according to Shaw. One exercise he suggests is that the reader cultivates a life-purpose statement that he also defines, providing his own as an example. He denotes some categories of service to be considered as well as areas of life to include in the cultivation of this life statement.

Typically I am not a fan of 'books of lists' because they fail to draw a central narrative. This work does not suffer from this because Shaw intersperses missionary stories and anecdotes throughout. These help the reader to see how the spiritual keys have been applied and observed in this own life. They make the text more compelling as you get to know the author and how God has worked in his life.

Each chapter can be read 'on its own' as a devotional unto itself. I think this is how most readers will approach the book. I would recommend this book to any workers who is preparing for ministry and thinking through what it means for them spiritually as well as for a seasoned 'message bearer' who perhaps feels that their spiritual life is being challenged.

Reviewed by Ted Esler

Dr. Ted Esler recently became President and CEO of Missio Nexus after more than fifteen years in executive leadership with Pioneers USA and Canada.



Muslims who come to Christ face momentous spiritual, psychological and social obstacles that drive many to abandon their faith. Often conversion and discipleship are framed by individualistic Western models that do not acknowledge the communal cultural forces that constrain and shape new believers. Effective discipleship requires a more relational, holistic process of Christian identity development and spiritual formation in community.

In this comprehensive resource, missiologist Don Little engages the toughest theoretical and practical challenges involved in discipling believers from Muslim backgrounds. He draws on New Testament principles, historical practices and interviews with seasoned disciplers ministering in a dozen countries across the Muslim world. Addressed here are key challenges that believers from Muslim backgrounds face, from suffering and persecution to spiritual warfare and oppression. Also included are implications for the role of disciplers in church planting among Muslims.

"Seventy-five disciplers were interviewed for this book. These mentors have walked the road of discipleship with more than three thousand Muslim-background Arabs. This is substantial data. Yet contemporary information and strategy are only part of the research. Whole chapters bubble with Paul's and Luke's understandings of discipleship. Other chapters trace discipleship through church history and throughout the Western and Muslim worlds today. Although no fan of 'insider movements,' the author champions humble adaptation and relevant contextual communication. In particular, he wrestles with issues like the construction of identity, persecution, demonic realities, handling money and roles for expatriates. Workers in the Muslim world will find this book a stimulating dialogue partner and will learn a lot." —**Miriam Adeney**, associate professor of global and urban ministries, Seattle Pacific University, author of *Kingdom Without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity*

"A well-written, comprehensive and scholarly work. It is very much worth reading. I will recommend it to my students."

—**Nabeel T. Jabbour**, author of *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross*

IVP Academic

Length: 350 pages

Size: 6 x 9 inches

Format: paperback

Published: July 2015

ISBN-10: 0-8308-2470-7

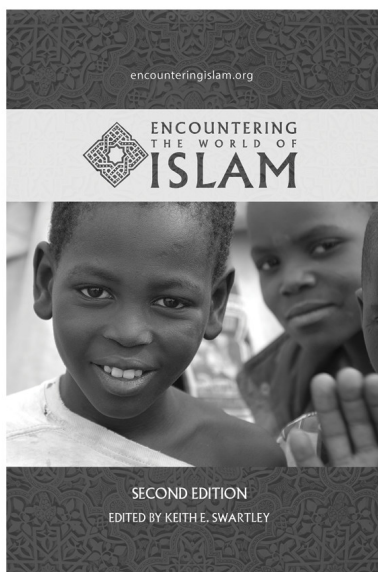
ISBN-13: 978-0-8308-2470-0

"Don Little, from tons of 'hands on' experience and wide interviewing among workers with Muslims in many countries, in *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities* has provided us with a severely needed though demanding practical guide that is destined to upgrade the discipling of Muslims toward becoming reproducers and a joy to God's heart."

—**Greg Livingstone**, founder of Frontiers

DON LITTLE, (DMin, Gordon Conwell) serves as Missiologist for Pioneers. He is also the cofounder and Director of The Lilius Trotter Center, which was launched in 2014 to enable thoughtful Christian Engagement with Muslims. He also teaches the Christian study of Islam at Houghton College and to practitioners living and working among Muslims around the world.

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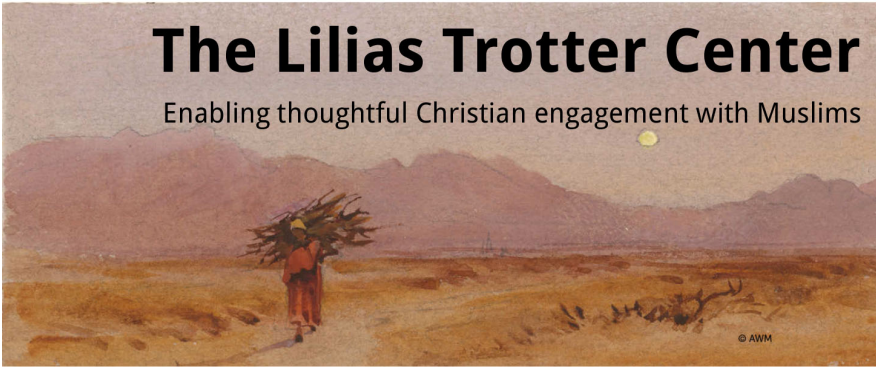
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Years later, Azim came to visit us at our home, not far from his home village. I was not at home, so my wife welcomed him in the local fashion, seating him on the floor, and went to get something for him to eat until I arrived. When she came back with tea and snacks for him, he was crying. She did not understand but then he explained, 'You have shown me I can be a Christian and still be a Turk. How far I have drifted from my own people!' We, the expatriates, were struggling to live like these people. Our poor example was a wake-up call for him to see that he had left much of his people and culture behind unintentionally and unnecessarily.

— Trent Jones, page 10

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