

# SEEDBED

*Practitioners in Conversation*

2008, Volume XXII

*First Trimester – No 1: The Identity of Christ's Pilgrims in the Muslim World*

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# SEEDBED

*Practitioners in Conversation*

**Editor:** Don Little

**Copy Editor:** Sandra Dick

*Seedbed* is a forum for the exchange of ideas.

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the editor or of Arab World Ministries.

Letters to the Editor are welcomed and the best will be published.

Please send all correspondence to [editor.seedbed@wornet.org](mailto:editor.seedbed@wornet.org)

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## EDITORIAL

### MISSIOLOGICAL MODELS AND THEIR POWER TO SHAPE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

### **From MBB to BMB**

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

### **A conversation in the making**

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

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

**Don Little, Editor**

[Editor.seedbed@wornet.org](mailto:Editor.seedbed@wornet.org)



## PART I:

# MAZHAR – A MAN OF SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE

## MY PRIMARY MENTOR IN THE ARAB WORLD FOR FORTY YEARS

*An interview with Greg Livingstone*

*God has chosen to use Mazhar Mallouhi in multiple and diverse ways as he has sought to walk in obedience to his Lord in the Arab world. Not least of these has been his friendship with Greg Livingstone, Founding Director of Frontiers, and formerly a leader in both AWM and OM, one much used by God to help raise up the current generation of workers among Muslims. The editor of Seedbed had the privilege of talking on the phone with Greg on March 20th, 2008, about the impact Mazhar had had on his life, and about his perspective on Chandler's portrayal of Mazhar. The following article is a slightly edited version of that twenty-minute conversation.*

Greg, it's great to talk to you about Mazhar Mallouhi and his impact on your life. In a blurb on one of the opening pages of Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road, by Paul-Gordon Chandler, you are quoted as saying that Mazhar has been your primary mentor in the Arab world for forty years. You said: 'This Syrian Muslim, my shepherd, has been more committed to seeing me demonstrate Christ among Muslims than anyone else.' Can you share with the readers of Seedbed some of the ways that Mazhar has mentored you?

Yes, I think the main thing is that he has been a guide through the culture of the Arab Muslim, which is, of course, very difficult for a Westerner who has not been raised there to comprehend. Mazhar certainly sensitized me to seek to understand what's below the surface. Without that understanding, I doubt we can ever get close enough to an Arab Muslim for him or her to take us or our message seriously.

Take, for example, the simple matter of good manners. I know one excellent worker, who has a PhD, but didn't have what Mazhar would consider good manners with Arabs. Too often, if an Arab came to see him at an inconvenient time, he would tell him to

come back later! So often we have blind spots as basic as that. Mazhar helped me understand how Westerners come across, and what blockages are there, which must be overcome.

*What else did you learn through Mazhar?*

Well, he certainly helped me understand the difference between finding faults with Islamic teaching versus accepting a Muslim where he's at in his pilgrimage. I had to learn not to react or be steered in the conversation when my Muslim friend gives the standard answers of what he's been taught. Mazhar demonstrated to me how to get behind the Muslim's mantras to where he really lives on a daily basis. Then to share something of our Lord's teachings, which would get to the Muslim's heart.

Mazhar guided me out of the *somebody-must-win-this-discussion* mode, towards coming alongside to search for God in the same direction, instead of being an opponent.

*That is so often hard for us Westerners to do. Any other lessons in this?*

Mazhar also taught me not to defend



Western civilization. In fact, to do the opposite; to be humble and apologize for the behaviour of people called Christians, who have not been turning the other cheek at all for fourteen centuries, but have been bashing the Arabs, striking *an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth*. We learned how important it is to point out that 90% of people called Christians, like 90% of Muslims, do not live out their faith. Until they can differentiate between a true follower of Jesus and a Western secularist, Muslims cannot 'hear' the Lord's claims.

Mazhar doesn't start with doctrine. He realizes it is not so much our *doctrine* that keeps Muslims from taking the claims of Christ seriously, it is HISTORY! We must mourn the history of fourteen hundred years of mutual offence. Because of history, becoming a Christian is a traitorous act for any Muslim. Very few will follow Christ and keep his commandments as Lord and Saviour until we find a way for them to fully keep the fifth commandment: to honour their father and mother. It must be possible for them to do that while also being 100% loyal to Jesus Christ, keeping his commandments as their final authority.

*What are some of the things about Mazhar and his example that challenge and inspire you the most?*

We try to get our co-workers to log thirty hours a week with Muslims. Mazhar probably logs sixty or seventy! He never stops meeting, befriending, sharing. He doesn't wait for opportunities; he *makes* opportunities. He continually perfects his stories and metaphors as he monitors what gets through, what awakens a Muslim to want to know more about Christ.

I've seen him, for example, in Morocco, face the anger of a Muslim who tells him

that the Injil is a bunch of rubbish. And in twenty minutes that same Muslim is begging him for a copy of it! Mazhar is saying, 'No, I won't give you a copy, because your hands are not clean. Unless you promise to read every word, I am not giving you one.' Then the man begs, 'I promise, I promise'. In wonder, I ask, how does Mazhar *do that*??

Also I'm inspired by the fact that he thinks Arab-world wide! Even though he is compassionate to an individual, fully 'there' with him, Mazhar has also raised huge amounts of money to put Muslim-sensitive books and Scriptures into every library in the Arab world! How many of us have that kind of vision?

*Mazhar is well known for his sense of humour, and his love of practical jokes. Are there any particular ones you want to tell us about?*

Well, I think, behind his jokes is a serious effort to help workers not take themselves too seriously. We are to take our mission seriously, but not think we are the thread on which the Muslims hang. We *must learn to laugh at ourselves and our foibles*.

One of my favourites of his practical jokes is when one of my co-workers was flying into Casablanca. Mazhar got one of the Moroccan believers, who worked at the airport, to pretend he was a policeman. As my friend got off the plane, Mazhar had his brother come up to him and say, 'Are you Gary\_\_\_? Come with me.' Gary just about went in his pants! He was desperately handing every scrap of indicting evidence back to a co-worker walking behind him. For at least twenty minutes Gary was envisioning the next year in a dark dungeon!

*Wow! (laughter) I hadn't heard that one.*

*Can we talk about Chandler's book, and his portrayal of Mazhar? When we met briefly in Malta in January, you told me to remember that*



*Mazhar and Chandler were not the same. Are there any particular parts of Chandler's portrayal of Mazhar that you do not find helpful or very accurate?*

Let me say that Reverend Chandler is a very good man, a man with a great heart for Muslims, but I fear that he is describing Mazhar more in the way that he wants Mazhar to be. Not with a bad motive, but maybe, in places, Paul-Gordon is really saying more about his own hopes and perspective than he is accurately describing Mazhar. Christine Mallouhi disagrees, but I still feel like he 'led the witness' (i.e. he interprets Mazhar to say what he himself wants to say), particularly in the doctrinal areas.

Mazhar is an agreeable person, so I suspect he was answering doctrinal questions as he felt Chandler wanted to hear. Mazhar adapts to his audience. He probably didn't realize the book would be portraying his doctrine all over the world. If he had, I think he would have spoken with more carefulness. Since he loves Paul-Gordon, he doesn't want to write a disavowal and hurt his friend. Mazhar is not a careful theologian by any means, but he certainly does believe in all the fundamentals of the faith, much more strongly than the book portrays.

*That leads to my next question. Some co-workers have found Chandler's portrayal of Mazhar's view of the Bible somewhat disturbing. He talks about his struggle with some of the Old Testament, and some of the stuff about the land of Israel. He also talks a lot about Jesus, and not so much about the church or the epistles of the New Testament. I wonder if you have any comments on that, on Mazhar's views, and Chandler's read on Mazhar's view of Scripture.*

Well, it is true that I would take my methodology from Mazhar more than I would take my theology. We must remind ourselves that Mazhar is a writer. He communicates best with liberal literary-oriented Muslims. He's an evangelist, not a theologian. Like Christians in all cultures, he picks and chooses the Scriptures that he feels show his Lord in the best light. You are aware that most Arab believers steer around some of the stuff in the Old Testament that highlights Israel and the promises to Israel, especially when they are interpreted to make the Arabs the bad guys.

I also think that, being a poet and writer, he likes the more Eastern communication of the Gospels. The Apostle Paul's direct teaching is less Mazhar's style. Still, I've never known him to see the Epistles as less than authentic communication from God. I've never known him to deny anything in Scripture. But, as evangelists tend to be, he tends to be a chameleon in conversations and emphasize what he thinks his audience will find most palatable.

*Thank you, that is quite helpful. In my opinion, one of the most important things about Chandler's book – and the strength of the book – is how he uses Mazhar to bring to light some of the crucial issues around the identity of a follower of Christ in the Muslim world. Both from what is in the book and from your own experience with him, how has Mazhar helped you understand and deal more effectively with this issue of identity?*

Mazhar helps BMBs<sup>1</sup> understand they can be loyal, obedient followers of Isa Al Masih without defecting over to a Western style of Christianity. He is really trying to keep them at home in their own culture, so

<sup>1</sup> In this interview the acronym BMB (Believer from a Muslim Background) is used rather than the more familiar MBB (Muslim Background Believer). Greg used MBB, but the editor, having listened to a number of BMB friends who suggested the change, is seeking to increase its usage.

that they can be a greater influence. He is trying to avoid the BMB becoming extracted from his people. Extraction is a problem of mission history we all must face.

Mazhar sees in the Eastern churches some models that might be more helpful for the BMB to pick up than the Western Protestant style of church. I think he is right in trying to help a BMB keep his identity as a member of the community, differentiating between the theological stance of Islam versus staying integrated in his community to influence. He is trying to help them be 100% obedient to Isa Al Masih as Lord and Saviour, but at the same time become the most respected person in their Muslim family.

What is honouring to the Lord is debatable. Apparently, the Apostle Paul's exhortations reflect that debate (e.g. whether one can eat meat that has been offered to idols). Community loyalty and contextualization is not a new problem.

*One thing I found in reading the book and in discussing it with other expatriate workers in the Arab world is that some feel the book is too critical of workers, almost implying that we try to extract BMBs out of their communities. Whereas I have never met a worker, in 25 years of working in and on behalf of the Arab world, who tries to extract them. It seems to me that Chandler is presenting this issue as if none of us ever wrestled with this problem before!*

It appears that Chandler is struggling with his own very narrow background. He explained to me in an email that he was not writing a biography, but trying to do a portrait of how a BMB should look and live. What distorts the truth is that Mazhar would not have done many of the things he does without huge help from Western co-workers, including myself, and his wife. You know, he's married to a Westerner who has helped keep him on track, to say the least. I

think the book definitely omits huge influences that have come on Mazhar from his brethren from the West. When I talked to him, he absolutely agreed with that statement. He feels very bad that the book tends to omit any contribution made by Westerners. But, Mazhar did have some tragic experiences in his earliest Christian life, more from Arab Christians than from Westerners. But earlier workers did think 'faithfulness' was to *come out from among the Muslims and be separate*. It took some time for Mazhar to return to living among Muslims as 'one of them'. But even in that step, he was coached by Western friends.

*Yes, the book refers to those early negative experiences and the unhelpful teaching he was given in the first years after his conversion. But that kind of teaching is not very common any more.*

No, we are talking about the 1960s.

*OK, just a couple more questions. Would you recommend this book for a new recruit who is headed for the Arab world but doesn't yet have any experience there?*

Well, I would, as I recommend any book, pointing out the author's bias, presuppositions and any possible inaccuracies – just as I would for my own writings! But, if the person is able to discern and take the best of it, without swallowing everything, I would recommend it.

I would hope that any of our co-workers would learn how to do that with anybody's book, not just this one. Chandler's book certainly does give many excellent thought-provoking ideas as to how a Muslim who has come to know the Lord can live out his life in his own community.

On the other hand, I think it would be good to point out that others cannot necessarily imitate Mazhar's style. Neither



the Heavenly Man in China, for example, nor Mazhar, can be imitated. Don't try to be a Mazhar. You can't do it! Such men come along seldom in a generation.

*I think the book is especially valuable for people who have been at it for awhile, for people who are living with and struggling with these issues, because Mazhar is a model of a BMB who has come a long way in learning how to live as a follower of Christ in a Muslim community.*

*Do you have any final comments as we wrap this up?*

The most thrilling thing is that I prayed that God would give me a faithful man in the Arab world. He led me and Mazhar to each

other. The first few years were not fun. They were not easy, because he had a lot to overcome, a lot of anger, a lot of misunderstanding. What I pass on to others is, 'Pray that you would meet such a person, and then pray for grace to hang in with him for thirty or forty years.'

*I was touched, reading in the book, of the time when Mazhar was struggling in Syria, and called you. You dropped everything, flew out and spent time with him. Your friendship is deep.*

And I think that is what every BMB is looking for in a co-worker.

*Amen. Thank you so much, Greg. This has been very helpful.*

## HOW MAZHAR'S GENIUS HAS MOST INFLUENCED ME

*by Phil Linton*

*Phil lived with his family in Morocco from 1984 until 1997 when he returned to the United States and became Minister of Missions at Ward Evangelical Presbyterian Church near Detroit.*

Mazhar Mallouhi, along with J. Christy Wilson and Wendell Evans, form the constellation that I have steered by as a Christian navigating in the Muslim world. Reading *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*, like being with Mazhar himself, was helpful – not because it lays out a comprehensive guide for ministry to Muslims, but rather because it presents a model of deeply sacrificial, Christ-like ministry with Muslims that yet again shakes me out of my complacency and lethargy. Reading the book, I could hear Mazhar's voice telling me, 'You can do this, Phil; don't settle for timid little witnessing forays; be a *real ambassador of Christ*.'

The book highlights several aspects of Mazhar's genius that have most influenced me:

**1. His courageous and lavish love for people.** This is a matter of honour and a matter of obedience to the Master.

Mazhar taught by example that when a brother is arrested, it would be shameful to let fear keep us from visiting. When people needed help, Mazhar was usually the first to act. His willingness to drive long distances, to go to a hospital in the middle of the night or to open his home and wallet for people in need often had dramatic effects – changing casual acquaintance, or even enmity, into deep and abiding friendship.

### **2. The importance of good books.**

Mazhar said that a good book could have a witness for Christ far broader in scope and longer in duration than any one individual. The good book he gave away might be a Bible, but it might also be something by C.S. Lewis (he always kept several copies of *Mere Christianity* on his shelves) or Dostoevsky. As influential as



Mazhar has been as a person, I believe that his legacy as an author and editor will be even greater.

**3. His insistence on learning about Muslims from Muslims themselves.**

Mazhar is far from being anti-intellectual (see *previous point*), but he had no tolerance for people who claimed to desire to build relationships with Muslims, but whose knowledge of Muslims and Islam came primarily from books. He used to tell me, 'Phil, the most powerful tool in building relationship with Arabs is the sentence, "Excuse me, could you help me?" It shows humility, gives respect and melts hearts. Put down your books, go outside, and start asking for help.'

**4. His love of children.** I have a video of him down on the floor being a donkey for my son to ride. (Mazhar insists he was being a *horse*, but I'm not convinced.) Mazhar (who is the greatest student of human nature I have ever known) used to say that he learned a great deal about people by watching their children. I believe many people who were waiting to judge Mazhar, finally were convinced that Christ lived in him by seeing a genuine deep love for children.

But there are two other aspects of his genius that are missing from the book.

**1. His readiness for conflict.** Readers who know Mazhar only from the book might conclude that he is an imperturbable Buddha-like figure, someone who calmly accepts any and all as fellow-travellers, seeing only the good in them. Mazhar in person is much more like Jesus, who did not shy away from speaking a challenge (or even an insult). Mazhar, like Jesus, is quick to say to someone like Nicodemus, 'You call yourself a teacher, and you talk like that?' You may disagree with Mazhar's call to wage peace on Islam, but you cannot dismiss him merely as someone who is willing to surrender in order to have peace. It should be obvious from his history that Mazhar is motivated by a desire to please Christ, rather than a desire to fit in. That he has found it so difficult to fit in is a source of shame and pain to many of us who have been his colleagues.

**2. His sense of humour.** Although I say I believe it, Mazhar *lives* life as if all things really do work together for good and the chief end of man is to love God and enjoy him forever. In Mazhar that confidence and joy express themselves in zany, outlandish jokes and pranks. I know no one who loves to laugh more than Mazhar. Even when the joke is on him, Mazhar is the one who laughs loudest and longest. His laughter and humility are people-magnets.



## FRIENDSHIPS FOCUSED ON JESUS

by Bill Christensen

*Bill Christensen and his family lived in Morocco from 1979 to 1991 where Bill was Director of the American Language Center and Arabic Language Institute of Fes for nine years (1982-1991). Bill, Mazhar and their families became close friends during the eight years that they were both living in Fes. Since leaving Morocco, Bill served on the staff of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship in Anaheim, and for three years as General Director of Vineyard Ministries International. Since 1997, he has been on the pastoral staff of Vineyard Church of Columbus, a large multicultural church with a weekend attendance of 7500, where he is currently Associate Pastor, overseeing International Community Relations and supervising several other pastoral ministries.*

The anchor of a good friendship is Jesus. It is common participation in Jesus that enables broken sinners to genuinely relate to and love one another. Effective witness is also anchored in Jesus in the proclamation and demonstration of his name, his excellencies, his life.

Mazhar Mallouhi is one of my best friends on earth. We couldn't be more different in culture and background. But to borrow Dietrich Bonhoeffer's language from *Life Together*, it is the Jesus in Mazhar that has strengthened and encouraged the Jesus in me for over twenty-five years. I love my friend for his devotion to our Lord and for his faithful love and friendship to me, my family and the friends that we have in common.

I have benefited from many godly gifted mentors. Mazhar is one of them. Through our friendship, I have learned to understand, appreciate and love Muslims. Observing Mazhar's way with Muslims has developed in me a greater boldness to wholeheartedly love my Muslim friends and confidently introduce Jesus as the true answer to their deepest longings.

I don't know if I could have grown as much in love for Jesus and my Muslims friends without Mazhar's gracious encouragement, loving challenges and faithful example of introducing Jesus in any context and at all times. He's the same man in a coffee shop in Fes or a mall in Detroit – wholeheartedly communicating Jesus in a way that makes sense to others. Mazhar's witness is thoroughly Christ-focused, at once devoid of cultural baggage that renders the gospel irrelevant, yet using culture to present Jesus comprehensibly.

These days the Western church desperately needs lovers of Christ and lovers of Muslims who will stay focused on what matters – Jesus – and not be deterred by crumbling East-West relations, all the while seeking clear context-relevant ways to present Jesus unapologetically to Muslims. I thank God for the influence my friend Mazhar has had on me to increase my love for Jesus and my Muslim friends. Furthermore, I thank God that *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road* provides a way for those who have not personally met Mazhar to learn from his life and witness.



## MAZHAR MALLOUHI AS I KNOW HIM

by Dale Martin

*Dale Martin spent 18 years working with AWM in Morocco (and Spain), where he became friends with Mazhar Mallouhi. He now works among Muslims in the US and directs the Summer Institute on Islam programme.*

On our second day in Morocco, I was walking up the steps to the language center when a short Arab man reached out his hand and greeted me with the words, 'Which mission are you working with?'

Having spent two years in France preparing to work in North Africa with all its briefings on security, I knew better than to answer that question directly. 'No, I'm not with the consulate', I replied. 'I'm here to start a business.'

One thing I learned about Mazhar in those first few minutes was that he is not easily deterred. He continued to question me about which mission organization I was with as I desperately tried to figure out who this little Arab man with that precocious smile was. He certainly took pleasure in creating an initial tension in a conversation so that he could enjoy getting a reaction and then diffusing the tension. His approach to people was anything but boring or ordinary.

Years later, after we had moved to another city, Mazhar and Christine came to visit us and the two of us went out for a drive in the car. Spotting a soldier in green fatigues hitch-hiking on the side of the road, he told me to pull over and pick him up. After the usual greetings were exchanged, Mazhar asked the soldier a question. 'There is something I'd like to know which I think you can help me with,' he began. 'You're an Army soldier; you know the character of soldiers. Tell me, how many soldiers do you think will get to heaven?'

The soldier laughed and thought for a moment before responding, 'Oh! I don't

know. Maybe fifty-five out of a hundred?'

Mazhar then said to him, 'In the Holy Book it says that people who lie, cheat, commit adultery and abuse their power cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Now think again. You know the life of soldiers. How many soldiers do you really think will get into heaven?'

The soldier thought for a moment and said, 'Maybe five, maybe only three.'

Mazhar then exclaimed, 'Now you are really getting close to the truth! Actually, all of us have sinned and done these things, so none of us can enter heaven as a result, except for the fact that Isa the Messiah died in our place to remove the shame of our sins. It's only because of what Isa the Messiah has done that any of us will get into heaven.'

The soldier leaned forward in his seat and told us, 'This is very interesting. I have never heard anything like this before.'

After talking with us for several more minutes, he told us that we had already passed by his destination a few miles back and that anywhere we wanted to leave him was fine. He asked us how he could get in touch with us again.

Over the years I have had the privilege of sitting with Mazhar at his café, as well as in other situations, and watch him interact with people. We have also been the recipient of each other's practical jokes through the years. Mazhar certainly has many qualities, like the ability to confront people with the truth in a way they can understand and appreciate because they can sense his love. However, of all the things I have appreciated and learned from Mazhar, the one thing I value most is that Mazhar is my friend.

## MAZHAR HAS HELPED ME SORT OUT WHO I AM

by Nabil

*Nabil's life has many parallels to that of Mazhar. He came to Christ as a young man in the Arabian Peninsula and eventually also married a Westerner. He has been involved in the publishing industry and now works with an NGO based in Europe. He came to know Mazhar several years ago when he edited some projects for him and he currently serves on the board of Mazhar's publishing company.*

For many years I questioned my personal identity, especially at the beginning of my faith journey as a Christian. I struggled to understand how someone can still be the same person after knowing Christ as he was before, even though he has gone through such radical changes. Particularly, I have struggled to maintain my identity both as an Arab and as a Christian, and to function in the way I was brought up, with my background, education, family values and, most importantly, my political views. My relationship with Mazhar helped me to understand where I stand and to see my faith from a different perspective, all of which has brought about a change in my approach to these identity crises.

Mazhar's approach has been to seek to walk on the dividing line between Christianity and Islam. His own testimony and life experiences have formed his views:

- His dramatic conversion
- His early experiences with Christians, both Arab and Western
- His search to find his own authentic expression of faith in Christ, while still

honouring and remaining true to all that is good in his own culture

Together, these moved him to a position where he retains and affirms as much of his Arab culture as he can and is as sympathetic as possible to his people, recognising the importance of their culture. Mazhar exemplifies a godly desire to be as close as possible to the Muslim people whom he loves. He consistently models this balanced approach to his identity and cultural heritage.

Mazhar illustrates his perspective with good examples of how we can believe in Christ without being insensitive, and in his novels he seeks to bridge the chasm of misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians. Building on the common Middle Eastern heritage that the Christian faith shares with Islam, he demonstrates the importance of removing Western cultural and religious trappings that Muslims erroneously associate with Christ, and encourages all to follow the Christ who first walked the Middle Eastern road. These values have had a great influence on me and have given me the assurance that I am, after all, still Nabil.

## PART 2: PILGRIMS OF CHRIST ON THE MUSLIM ROAD A VARIETY OF VIEWPOINTS

### REIMAGINING THE WAY OF CHRIST WITHIN DAR ISLAM

by Brad Gill

*Brad has been in ministry to Muslims since the 1980s, twelve years of which were in North Africa where he and his wife Beth worked closely with Mazhar and Christine. He now lives close to the Muslim concentration in Detroit and is involved in mission education and training as a representative of the U.S. Center for World Mission.*

The nasty borderland between Muslim and Christian worlds was bound to generate pilgrims who seem to transcend both. The extraordinary journey and ministry of Mazhar Mallouhi, portrayed in Paul-Gordon Chandler's *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*, is the story of such a pilgrim. He joins many other *irregulars* who have negotiated other cultural divides across the global mission movement, those precocious nationals whose lives seem to find another way through the morass of tangled misunderstandings. It always seems messy and downright disturbing, for the message of these pilgrims is often as prophetic as it is apostolic. These *irregulars* force us to pry open our missionary models and re-examine them, creating a haunting ambiguity which tempts us to simply tighten the lid back down on what we are used to. Mazhar's bold behaviour and sharp responses always seemed to challenge my way of interacting with Muslims. Looking back through the lens of Chandler's book, I can see that the force of this man's life always moved in the direction of mission *reformation* – of cultural readjustment of the

Christian presence among Muslims.

We really owe Paul-Gordon Chandler a note of thanks for going the distance with our friend's story. It is much more than a biography – more an exposition on a life and ministry. (At times one wonders where Mazhar's thoughts end and the author's begin, but Chandler's challenge is to not only exegete a man's life, but to exposit ministry principles just as Mazhar would do with any of us Western missionaries.) I hope this book represents only the first of a new genre that will

ground our missiological discussion in the reality of historical experience. We Westerners in Muslim domains have always had the tendency to drift towards abstraction and theoretical debate, as if we are going to discover some universal that we can apply to reaching all Muslims with the gospel. By taking a biographical approach, Chandler roots his discussion of principles in a particular soil, in particular historical and cultural conditions and in a particular life and personality. This frees us from our propensity for method and allows us to learn from one *modus vivendi* of ministry to Muslims in our present day.

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In the first part of the book, Chandler sketches Mazhar's biography as his text for the more expository chapters that follow. The push-and-pull of Mazhar's life moves through changing generations of Arab *zeitgeist* and across a wide range of Muslim settings. Depicting the different sides of this man was no small challenge, a man who seems to be a cosmopolitan, a tribal and/or a mystic all rolled into one. Even after a decade of ministry with Mazhar, my own understanding of his story remained piecemeal, anecdotal and incoherent, so Chandler's portrayal of the man has made me more appreciative of what has fuelled his *cultural instinct* in ministry to Muslims. At times when I was with him, Mazhar would seem reactionary about something I just could not grasp, either intellectually or emotionally. But this deeper look into his life reveals that these were instinctive reflexes built on earlier cultural dislocation and insult. Those who have been involved in ministering to Muslims know how torturous it can be for a Muslim to negotiate the religious force field between Islam and Christianity as he comes to Christ. It can colour his entire perspective and orientation in the future. Chandler has made sure we know from the outset just how Mazhar's experience has birthed a deep and culturally intuitive ministry to Muslims.

The author has chosen to call Mazhar a *pilgrim*, a *pilgrim of Allah*, a *pilgrim of Christ on the Muslim Road*, focusing our attention on a *core image* very familiar to both Muslim and Christian traditions. Chandler describes how Mazhar first saw Christ in the *irregular channel* of Mahatma Gandhi, and how Mazhar has drunk deeply from the writings of the missionary who knew Gandhi best, E.

Stanley Jones. It is Jones' book, *Christ on the Indian Road*, that frames Chandler's thinking on Mazhar's pilgrimage to Christ, a pilgrimage *naturally filled with paradox*, provocatively unconventional and very unorthodox. It's a *core image* that Mazhar has claimed for his own Christian identity amidst Muslims of the world. Pilgrims journey, often together, alongside each other, in helpful and supportive companionship. The image promotes a convivial attitude, a posture of sharing, reciprocity and partnership. It's a metaphor that pervades all the succeeding chapters as Chandler expounds on Mazhar's insightful way of *bridging* into Muslim lives with the love of Christ.

Chandler employs another core image, that of the guest, in articulating Mazhar's subtle negotiation of the poisoned Muslim-Christian divide. In the section 'Bridging Two Worlds', Chandler shows how Mazhar distils this vital metaphor from years of exile, confusion, misunderstanding, confrontation, resentment, hatred and abuse. The guest can bring a surprising 'Salaam on Islam', reflecting all the Arab value of hospitality, of honour and generosity, of respect and reciprocity. It guides his thoughts and guards his attitudes when confronting the religious predisposition of Muslims. 'Our openness to all we stand for,' he says, 'opens them to all we stand for' (p. 96). As a guest, Mazhar chooses to identify with the person of Christ but *relativizes* his relationship with Christianity. For him Christ and Christianity are not the same thing. 'Christ never intended to establish a new religion,' he says, 'but instead came to simply establish his life in and among us.' Chandler makes it clear

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companionship.

how uninterested Mazhar is in *engaging religion*. Religion more often seems to isolate and depersonalize others, violating the hospitable Spirit of Christ. He never wants to see people as just products of their religion, but persons on a pilgrimage to God. Chandler illustrates over a whole chapter just how Mazhar tactfully and respectfully evades the incessant religious comparisons of Islam and Christianity by finding common themes that surround the person of Christ.

One might get a bit uncomfortable with Mazhar's idea that a guest actually learns any truth from Muslims in this open and personal exchange. What happens with real theological

contradictions in all of this relational openness? Chandler makes it very clear that Mazhar has evolved toward a more generous view of Islam and that being a guest 'requires that we take a more positive view of Muhammad and all that he was attempting to do.' Mazhar seems able to mute the theological dissonance in his interaction with Muslims, often turning these points of tension

back on the Muslim for further spiritual quest and reflection. Chandler's long interview with Mazhar at the end of the book clarifies how this pilgrim on the Muslim Road has reconciled theological ambiguities and conflicts. When asked about the Trinity, he says, 'I don't understand it, but I live with my Master, with my Father, and God's Spirit, and that is the reality to me... having a "form" for this is not a necessity for me' (p. 177). For Mazhar it's the person of Christ that is attractive to Muslims, especially as he is seen through the love of Christians. While Mazhar is comfortable with using the Qur'an in his interaction with Muslims, he believes that

While Mazhar is comfortable with using the Qur'an in his interaction with Muslims, he believes that love is the bridge to truth, not Islam.

love is the bridge to truth, not Islam. Chandler illuminates how the Arab cultural instinct in Mazhar minimizes the need for logical resolution over against the consistent love of a fellow pilgrim who is discovering God through open and humble relationships.

Pilgrims on the Muslim road earlier or later must resolve their identity between these two religious worlds, and Chandler has synthesized Mazhar's perspective on cultural identity in the chapter, 'The Muslim Disciple of Christ'. Again, Mazhar's biography grounds us in the painful and almost crushing journey this can be for a disciple of Christ. His initial *radical discontinuity* from the Muslim world

has many typical earmarks of a Muslim coming to Christ as 'inwardly he was attempting to process the identity issue'. It's because of his early experience of conversion *into Christianity* and the succeeding years of restoration to Muslim culture that Mazhar takes issue with our understanding of religious boundaries. His sympathies are that any young Muslim coming to Christ doesn't need to

'unravel the intimate fibres of his being', that he or she is *in process*, moving 'not out of Islam but towards Christ'. Chandler is able to illustrate the numerous pathologies of identity faced in the conversion of a Muslim through the lens of Mazhar's story.

The author has also chosen to call this pilgrim an *insider*, meaning, I assume, that after negotiating the religious borderland, he now lives, moves and has his being in the Islamic world. This biography is a remarkable study on this idea of an insider among Muslims. Mazhar is no *pure* insider (anthropologically speaking). Over the whole book Chandler describes the



development of Mazhar's attitude and relation to Islam over a lifetime as a journey *from family, to foe, to friend*. Chandler has interviewed numerous friends and mentors in Mazhar's life, both Muslim and Christian, to render this assessment of *insider*. But, frankly, the term seems too static a term of identity when compared to a more dynamic life experience. One is impressed with the process, the *pilgrim's progress*, you might say, of negotiating social, religious and political realities on the border of Islam and Christianity. Many of us teared up a bit when news came that after four decades Mazhar had finally been able to go home to his family in Syria. This experience crowned years of 'homelessness' and a consistent desire to reconcile misunderstanding and ostracism. His life has all the characteristics of one who brokers the status of *Christian* within the Arab-Muslim world, and Chandler makes it very clear that it was the evolution of Mazhar's attitude that made the difference.

Chandler's study is, indeed, a helpful periscope on the semantic reach of this term *insider*. The concentric circles of family, ethnicity, country, Arab-Muslim society and Dar Islam could all be referenced in answering the question, 'Inside what?' Inside a religion, a religious denomination, a mosque, a cultural tradition, a tribal society, pan-Arab society, a family? Mazhar is a particular type of insider who has diligently, at great personal expense, crafted his place in Arab-Muslim society. He's a writer who circulates well in the cosmopolitan Middle East and North Africa, whose personal and professional concerns echo many of the aspirations of Arab nationalism from a prior century. His persona is a magnetic blend of

tribal and modern Arab virtues, a blend wonderfully received by the many Muslim friends Chandler quotes throughout the book. But through the years the stigma of *Christian* has made Mazhar automatically an outsider who has diligently sought to restore an original status. Chandler has had a tendency to conflate terms like Arab, *Muslim* and *Eastern*, but he has done a commendable job of grounding the sloppy term *insider* in this particular pilgrim's story.

Chandler shows how Mazhar's restoration as an insider came as Mazhar chose to associate himself as a 'Sufi' within

Dar Islam. Chandler has built the spiritual basis for Mazhar's choice throughout the book, from the impact of Gandhi's spirituality, through his discomfort with religious institutionalism, to his desire to recover a more Eastern spirituality in all of his projects as a writer. Mazhar feels comfortable as a mystic, but anyone who has known this man has to smile at any idea of him being a reclusive ascetic. This is one big and bold personality fitting into a broad spiritual stream within Islam. It gives him that unorthodox foothold within Dar Islam. The Sufi movements have always been heterodox and through the centuries, they have at times been persecuted as anathema to the law of Islam. The Sufis often are more sympathetic to Christ, more intent on personal union with God, than they are on legislating any religious code of conduct, so Mazhar's eccentric embrace of Christ, even his refusal to ascribe to the *shahada*, can tactfully reside inside Islamic heterodoxy. From page one, Chandler has very skilfully constructed a rationale for *insider* from the particular ingredients of this man's background, personality and vocation.

A journey  
from family,  
to foe, to  
friend.

The final section, 'New Directions for the Journey', makes clear that being an insider is not just for the personal, social or cultural equilibrium of the pilgrim of Christ. Its primary impulse in Mazhar's life is to bring Jesus to the Muslim in a more effective communication of the gospel.

Chandler makes explicit in these chapters Mazhar's concern to *Easternize* Jesus, the Bible and the Christian style of communication so that Muslims can feel that Jesus belongs inside their world. It's the *Western Jesus* that Mazhar believes to be the *great contradiction* that keeps Muslims from Christ. All

other theological contradictions between Islam and Christianity seem to pale by comparison to this tragic confusion of Christ's identity with the West. Chandler has been quite candid as to how Mazhar profiles the religious syncretism of Western Christianity. His broad generalizations of evangelical Christianity are uncomfortable and at times inappropriate, but one appreciates that Chandler is 'letting it roll' so that we might absorb the stigma Muslims assign to a Jesus shrouded in Western-Christian stereotypes.

Mazhar has staked the last decades of his ministry on correcting this apparent contradiction in the minds of Muslims, publishing a set of new biblical translations and commentaries more sympathetic to Muslim questions and reaction. His new titles *The Sufi Reading of the Gospel of John* or *An Eastern Reading of the Gospel of Luke* are clear declarations of his mission strategy. He employs a brazen translation strategy by carefully listening to the perspectives and questions of Sufi Muslim scholars and

It's the Western Jesus that Mazhar believes to be the great contradiction that keeps Muslims from Christ.

respected Muslim literati. Here again we witness the companionship and reciprocity of a *pilgrim-guest* whose posture within Muslim society generates new insights for correcting the distorted image of Christ. To hear a Sufi scholar say these texts are theologically 'a source of rich inspiration and enlightenment', or to hear another say that they help bring understanding to the term *Son of God*, makes one a cheerleader for this approach. Chandler recognizes that it can offend certain Christians who feel the threat of compromise. Admittedly, it tends to contextualize Jesus in Sufi clothes, favouring an ideal,

ephemeral, mystic Jesus whose beauty transcends all the dogmatic exchange. One could say this is only one possible synthesis of the gospel from Eastern, Arab and/or Muslim values. But behind the particular *result* of Mazhar's Sufi orientation to Christ, Chandler has illumined the creative *process* Mazhar has used to contextualize Jesus and the scriptures. Yes, the actual face of Christ could vary across the manifold levels of Muslim society, but Chandler has more importantly revealed Mazhar's intrepid partnering with Muslim friends to both dispel Westernizations and present a biblically *relevant* Middle Eastern Christ. This process provokes us to ask *just how often we come with the answers* before we understand the spiritual yearning of a Muslim heart. Chandler gives example after example of how false notions of Christ that stubbornly cloud a Muslim mind are addressed in Mazhar's publication of a more Easternized Christ.

Finally, I believe the arc of Chandler's story presents a two-fold challenge to the person in ministry to Muslims. Both are a

response to the particular dynamics of Muslim-Christian encounter, to the mutual predisposition of two embattled and dogmatic monotheisms, and to the *religious mindedness* that so easily pervades their frontier. *First, there must be integrity to the message and the messenger.* From the inception of the book Chandler wants us to confront the powerful *soul force* of a Hindu Gandhi in the life of this lost and disgruntled Arab-Muslim. The incarnation of the different Arab values of hospitality, generosity and honour is not sufficient. Chandler wants us to hear Mazhar's plea for spiritual integrity. Chandler is not pushing us to imitate the bold life of this *excommunicated-but-now-restored-insider*. Rather he gives a prophetic call for what made all the difference in Mazhar's attraction to Christ: spiritual lives that walk their talk and display a spiritual *reality* amidst the all-too-stale religiosity of Muslim-Christian encounter. 'A rose,' he says, 'doesn't have to propagate its perfume.' The antidote to religious hypocrisy is a true Christ-likeness. Just as recent surveys seem to confirm, the love of Christians is the great attention-getter for Muslims. Mazhar saw this spiritual integrity in Gandhi and he insists on its priority to this day.

*The second challenge is to our propensity to apply an institutional model of church on these pilgrims of Christ prematurely.* It's clear in Chandler's interview with Mazhar that he doesn't like the way religion labels and separates people. It's that tendency of religion to demarcate boundaries, to insist on symbols of inclusion and exclusion so that church membership becomes more a

wall than a door for the Muslim seeking Christ. After fourteen centuries in which Muslims and Christians have each 'built a structure around God', Mazhar wants to deconstruct any traditional boundary that inhibits Jesus' access to the Muslim. Here is the heart of an evangelist who wants to broadcast the seed, to 'yeast' the Muslim world with the true nature of Christ. *The form of witness is his priority and calling, not the form of the church.*

If you will allow me to extrapolate a bit on Chandler, it seems that Mazhar is saying that *the idea of church must be a centring on the living Christ and not a hardening of institutional boundaries.* This explains his almost allergic reaction to anything *ecclesiastical*. Religious requirements can mistreat the sometimes delicate process of a Muslim coming to Christ. Religious institutionalization smacks of exclusion and must be minimized. Now, there's a tension here for the church planter. Some kind of appropriate structure is required to encourage and sustain young believers in this process. Mazhar suggests a

simple fellowship of people who are growing in their understanding of God meeting together to talk about Christ. As an Arab national he acts as the host in an atmosphere of *sacred hospitality*, allowing different ones to be at different places in their pilgrimage, but learning from one another in the Spirit of Christ. Its ethos is open, voluntary, sensitive to the individual and apparently socially and religiously heterogeneous. It appears to be a *pilgrimage structure* of travellers on the road to Christ. It also seems to fit more easily in the urban world of Cairo or Beirut than it does in the

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Muslims.

tight inclusiveness of a tribal world. And if it provides that *sense of belonging* and *at-homeness* for the Muslim seeker, can it expand, can it extend and can it nurture a movement? Might it not develop its own institutional character as it moves beyond a small and local nucleus? The church planter is left hanging, but his suspension must remain if this book means anything. Mazhar prioritizes those baby steps of the Muslim who sees Jesus clearly for the first time. He knows that earnest Muslim pilgrims of Christ need an open and culturally sensitive road in between the hardened religious systems of Islam and Christianity. He's telling us our ecclesiology should wrap itself around this critical reality.

If my enthusiasm for this book has not been manifest, let me simply say that it's a

blockbuster. Chandler has shown us the way to think empirically about the missiological issues that so often get caught up in abstract debate. Read it and let it push your thinking.

The image of pilgrim and of guest, the catalogue of stories, the anecdotes and the parables of life all make one feel the effectual power of Christ on the Muslim Road. It's a very bold narrative on a dangerous borderland, so one wonders how often we will see such exposure for our investigation.

But we need more books of this genre, ones rooted in the particulars of a Muslim context. Hats off to Chandler for launching us in the right direction and for Mazhar's vulnerability in letting his story be told.

## RESPONSE TO GILL FROM THE AUTHOR

*by Paul-Gordon Chandler*

Brad,

Thank you for your very thoughtful and well-written review of *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*. Your appraisal of the book is thorough and your comments and questions most astute. Clearly you have known Mazhar and caught the vitality of his unique journey with Christ. As you say, 'the evolution of Mazhar's attitude' is what has made the difference. At times I have found myself engaged in the full continuum of those attitudes, yet epiphanies of what freedom in Christ looks like emerge in a variety of colours through such fellow pilgrims.

You have generously translated what I have shared in the book into missiological terms and inferred the importance of Mazhar's essence as a follower of Christ. You caught his spirit in stating, 'love is the bridge to truth... the Arab cultural instinct in

Mazhar minimizes the need for logical resolution over against the consistent love of a fellow pilgrim who is discovering God through open and humble relationships'.<sup>2</sup> Christ walked among us, and does walk among us today along all roads of life, regardless of creed or culture and without the need to be labelled or confined to our religious terms and boundaries, or even worldviews for that matter. At times these delineations are helpful and at other times very harmful. I felt freedom in generalizing about evangelicals as I was raised as one and know that world well. But I do realize that the spectrum of belief and practice is extremely diverse and labels rarely accommodating. However, I am trying to dislodge boundaries a bit in all directions towards honest exploration.

I appreciated your insightful comment, 'It's that tendency of religion to demarcate boundaries, to insist on symbols of inclusion and exclusion so that church membership becomes more a wall than a door for the Muslim seeking Christ... The form of witness is (Mazhar's) priority and calling, not the form of the church.'<sup>3</sup> Mazhar's life gives us the opportunity to join a modern-day Middle Easterner in the practice of building on the common heritage the Christian faith shares with Islam. By removing Western cultural and religious trappings associated with Christ in the minds of Muslims, we are forced to re-examine the

We are forced to re-examine the core of our own beliefs, which in turn can deepen our faith journey.

core of our own beliefs, which in turn can deepen our faith journey.

Following Christ, who chose to walk the dusty roads of Palestine, should not be seen as a new model for mission, but rather an intimate, passionate calling from the heart of our Creator. God's Spirit works individually and creatively and knows no bounds. Although I have spent most of my life among Muslims, no one has stretched my own thinking and given me a glimpse of Christ more than Mazhar has done, who, in spite of – or maybe because of – his very earthy, human qualities, continually points me towards his Master.

## JESUS OUTSIDE OF THE BOX: A RESPONSE TO BRAD GILL'S REVIEW

by Leith Gray

*Leith Gray has lived and worked in West Asia since the late 1980s. He and his wife Andrea work in Bible translation and consultation and are involved in training local and cross-cultural workers to present the message of the Bible creatively and incarnationally in local contexts. They particularly enjoy partnering with colleagues from a Muslim background as they seek to make the message of the Bible clear and relevant to local people. Andrea and Leith have two young children.*

I am glad to be able to respond to Brad Gill's review of *Pilgrims of Christ*, since he, like me, knows Mazhar personally and is captivated by the person behind Chandler's literary portrait. I think Brad shows quite well in his review that the reality of Mazhar is too complicated to be captured by any book!

Brad's opening words jumped out at me, when he spoke of the *nasty borderlands* between Christianity and Islam. I began to reflect: Are these borderlands really so nasty? Or is their ugliness in the eye of the

beholder? It is a striking thing in the biblical account of Jesus that the borderlands are exactly where he chose to live and work. Yes, he chose to dwell in the boundary between pious and 'sinner', between Jew and Samaritan, between Jew and Gentile. Even more threatening, he chose to cross the boundary between clean and unclean, belief and unbelief, even life and death!

The challenge of the borders that Brad mentions is that for the most part they are entirely human constructions that are often



confused with divine truth. When we see the needless suffering Mazhar and other Arab brothers face as a result of the sanctification of human categories, we are forced to confront a problem – not just in our methods of outreach, but ultimately in our whole perspective on the message of Jesus. I agree with Brad that through the example of successful insider believers like Mazhar, we can see the inadequacy of our mental models. In fact, we can see in Mazhar's life story the failing in the traditional evangelistic model of proclaiming the message of Jesus to Arabs in a way that is often not liveable over the long term nor reproducible.

We often say that all that Muslims (or anyone else, for that matter) really need is Jesus, but in practice our methods betray that slogan. For once a Muslim starts to become really interested in the message of Jesus, he or she is directly or indirectly taught to abandon cultural practices that are totally compatible with the gospel, and to adopt in their place foreign cultural practices and boundary markers of minority Christians, practices that are merely human and not part of the gospel message. Gradually the person is alienated from his or her family and even rejected. Mazhar often tells anecdotes and stories of some of these failures and concludes with the moral: *the system is corrupt*.

Usually our response to this ugly reality is to try harder, look for better methods, or even blame the recipients of the message for their hard hearts. How often have we heard the words that fall like a guillotine, 'They just don't have the Holy Spirit'? These are simply cop-outs and mental escapes to let us avoid

the key point – the Scripture says that the message of Christ is the 'power of God for the salvation of those who believe', but for hundreds of years in the Muslim world, traditional *conflict-of-religions* approaches to evangelism have been, at best, powerless in transforming Muslim societies into the image of Christ, and at worst, destructive of Middle Eastern families, culture and civilization. Mazhar often tells the story in this regard about the monkey by the side of the river scooping up fish from the current and laying them on the river bank *in order to save them* from drowning.

How often  
have we heard  
the words that  
fall like a  
guillotine,  
'They just  
don't have the  
Holy Spirit'?

This failure in Western missions is not news to missiologists and many field practitioners. Their experiences and the facts on the ground have led them to look for another way of understanding the message of Jesus and how it should be proclaimed. Lamin Sanneh, in his 2008 book *Disciples of All Nations*, highlights

two early critics of the cultural transfer model of missions, Fr. Vincent Donovan and Roland Allen. Allen, a thinker writing in the 1920s, strongly criticized what he called the 'Western cultural captivity of the Gospel'. He saw that the baggage of the European civilizing mission essentially wrapped up the Jesus of the Bible in layers that were impenetrable by all but the most persistent seekers, and that kept the gospel from performing its true work as the transforming leaven of all societies and people groups.

Paul Hiebert wrote in 1994 about how we might define Christianity, the nature of conversion and the relationship between religions. He noted that contemporary mathematical theory shows us that there are several ways in which we can define a

set. He focuses on the distinction between *bounded* sets and *centred* sets. Westerners have operated for generations under the *bounded* set model, a model that assumes that Jesus started a new religion called Christianity, the only true religion in the world. It is a system that, as Brad says, 'demarcate(s) boundaries... insist(s) on symbols of inclusion and exclusion so that church membership becomes more a wall than a door... ' The bounded set model forces us to believe that truth only exists within that bounded set, meaning within the boundaries of Christianity – or even within a particular denomination! We are led to believe, therefore, that we have 100 per cent of the truth, and those outside our group have zero per cent of the truth! As Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, writes in the April edition of *Christianity Today*, such a view portrays God as a stingy God, parcelling out truth only to a few.

When we put things in those terms, we realize how untenable this position is. Those in the West who are part of the *emergent church* movement have reacted to this traditional stance, one they perceive as arrogant and derived from the influence of modernist thought on Christians. They observe that no one has 100 percent of the truth... apart from God! So at best, we can say that perhaps those within the boundaries of Christianity have 90 per cent of the truth, but it would be more modest and defensible to say we have 70 or 60 per cent of the truth. We still haven't arrived. What about those outside the boundaries? Do we dare to say that they have as little as 10 per cent of the truth? Isn't it more likely that they have something like 30 or 40 per cent or more?

Theologians have categorized knowledge into two general categories: general

revelation and special revelation. Our Muslim friends possess as much knowledge from general revelation as Christians do. In addition, they often have a large amount of knowledge based indirectly on special revelation: they believe in the one Creator God, his books, his prophets, the concept of sin, reward, and so on. Perhaps the 'brazen translation strategy [of] carefully listening to the perspectives and questions of Sufi Muslim scholars and respected Muslim literati' is not so brazen, but a natural and godly way to go about things.

When we operate under the old *bounded set* or *conflict of religions* paradigm, we are tempted to portray the other as evil, and ourselves on the side of virtue. Nobel laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn said that the experience of suffering in Soviet Gulags helped him see reality: the line between good and evil in the world does not fall between civilizations, nor between peoples, or even individuals... it falls down the centre of every human heart!

Let me move on to another major point that Brad Gill derives from Chandler's story, *the need for integrity in the message and the messenger*. In recent years, there has been concern among some prominent evangelicals about how evangelicals are viewed by people outside of the evangelical subculture. Kinnaman and Lyons, in their recently published book *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity... and Why it Matters* go into embarrassing detail in this regard.

Richard Mouw writes about the need for an 'open-handed gospel' when we encounter those of other faiths or no faith. Mouw notes how many evangelicals today feel that salvation is closely tied to 'doctrinal clarity', and he decries the 'stingy spirit' that refuses to recognize the good,



the true and the beautiful in others. My wife has often noted in a similar vein that evangelicals have moved from a doctrine of *justification by faith* to a position of *justification by doctrinal statement*. This focus on doctrine to the neglect of integrity of character often leads to the worst kinds of hypocrisy and posturing, with evangelism no more than a form of propaganda intended to win nominal allegiance.

Part of Mazhar's genius is his artistry in presenting the message of Christ in a way that maintains the dignity of those listening, rejecting 'all shameful and underhanded methods' (2 Corinthians 4:2, NLT). Mazhar has excelled at utilizing Jesus' very Eastern methods of presenting truth, allowing listeners the freedom to respond or to go their own way.

You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.'

One way we could describe this is that Mazhar downplays logic, preferring to speak by analogy. He prefers parabolic discourse to the direct and embarrassingly blunt styles promoted by some evangelists.

To return to the image of borderlands, perhaps what is most challenging about

Mazhar is that he lives, not by making brief forays from the safe centre to the dangerous periphery of Christendom and then back again; rather, he lives out the approach Vincent Donovan took when he said, 'do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you

are, as beautiful as that place might seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before.'

## YOU CAN JUDGE PARENTS BY THEIR CHILDREN

by *Abu Dawood*

*Abu Dawood, along with his wife and children, has lived and ministered among Gulf Arab Muslims for over fifteen years. He teaches at a higher education institution and serves on a team that seeks to befriend Muslims, minister to those seeking God, disciple believers, and, by God's grace, establish indigenous churches.*

In 1996, we first met Mazhar Mallouhi while serving on a multi-agency team in the Gulf. A few of our team members had previously known Mazhar in Egypt and had shared with us tales of his exploits, stories and love of practical jokes. Personally, I did not know what to expect of the man and I remember being quite nervous the first time we hosted him and Christine, his wife, for an evening meal.

During that first encounter, I remember Mazhar not saying too much and I wondered if the tales were deserved. That

is, until our daughter, who was two at the time, came and gave him a hug. The two began to play together and I saw Mazhar melt from being distant and reserved to laughing out loud and tickling our screaming toddler. Mazhar then smiled and said, 'You can judge the parents by the children,' and since then we have become good friends and colleagues who have worked together to fund several translation projects.

In *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*, Paul-Gordon Chandler summarizes the life and attitudes of Mazhar. I write attitudes



because the word *beliefs* implies a clear definition of something that in reality is much more fluid. If you ask Mazhar a clearly defined question about a particular tenet of faith, you'll likely get a story in response, which is often left to the listener to interpret. Even so, there is one clear consistency in Mazhar's life: devotion to his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, which the book clearly presents.

The first third of the book summarizes Mazhar's life, which began in Syria as a Bedouin sheep herder with fears of illiteracy and poverty, and progressed to become a prominent author with a vision for making the gospel message available in bookstores and libraries throughout the Arab world. The biography describes Mazhar's spiritual journey which started with his fascination at the Christ-like features displayed by Ghandi. His interest in the gospel grew through reading the Russian authors while serving in the army. Finally, as Mazhar read the Gospels, he was impacted by Jesus and, as he described it, decided to follow the Master, Jesus. This new life in Christ led to alienation from his family, moving to Beirut to join an Arab Christian community, attending seminary in the USA, and then returning to reside in various countries of the Arab world – always with a compassion for people and a love of Arab culture. Throughout the biography, the author focuses on Mazhar's struggles with identity, as a Syrian Muslim living among various Arab and Western Christian cultures.

It is on the issue of Muslim identity and the work of Christ in the Arab world that the author concentrates in the following section of the book, *Bridging Two Worlds*.

I have heard Mazhar say that he feels his mission is to save the Jesus of the Middle East from the Christian missionaries of the West.

Chandler begins to describe Mazhar's thoughts of Islam, Arab culture and Christian witness among the Arab people. Considering his struggles with identity, Mazhar is critical of the historical Western missionary efforts in the Arab world, which tended to focus more on unintentional westernization than on the essence of the gospel. Though the author doesn't mention

it, I have heard Mazhar say that he feels his mission is to save the Jesus of the Middle East from the Christian missionaries of the West. What the author does mention are some of Mazhar's biblical insights to the parables and teachings of Jesus that flow from being a cultural Arab. Many of these

insights and stories are helpful for those who minister among the Arab people.

It is Mazhar's use of story, parable and verse that first endeared him to me. When questioned about his views on Islam, he shares about the impossibility of fighting against darkness. He then goes on to share about the need for more candles in the darkness. Though somewhat cryptic, this exemplifies Mazhar's style of sharing truth and his passion to display genuine love and care. If someone attacks his belief in Jesus or claims that the Bible is hopelessly corrupted, Mazhar is quick to request the help of the aggressor to better understand. Mazhar knows that Arabs will not refuse a request for help and that a respectful response better enables the hearing of gospel truth. Thus, Mazhar shares with the aggressor that he is hopelessly devoted to the person of Jesus Christ and the beauty of the gospel. The request for help leads to

further discussions and opportunities to share the truth. A logical argument will not convince an Arab to believe if he has never comprehended the reality of Jesus. As Mazhar explains, the Arab Muslim is like a Bedouin who has driven his car to the city. All his life, he has been driving in the desert and when he comes to the city, the police immediately pull him over to the side of the road and claim he has driven through a red light. The response of the Bedouin is, 'What red light?' He has never seen a red light before and has no idea what it is. Similarly, Arab Muslims have no idea about the truth of Jesus Christ and we must help our neighbours see the light.

The final section of the book is presented in an interview format with Mazhar answering specific questions of the author, Paul-Gordon Chandler. The questions span Mazhar's view of theology, the church, Islam, the Qur'an and scripture. His answers are helpful in our ministries and provide advice on baptism, creeds and other Christian practices in the life of the Muslim believer.

Contextualization of the gospel has been a concern among missionaries since Acts 15. The author and some from the insider-movement have put forth Mazhar as the model for Christian witness and discipleship of Arab Muslim believers. On the contextualization C-scale, Mazhar labels himself as C5 – a follower of Jesus who remains in his indigenous culture and community and does not take on the label of *Christian*. As explained in the book, the label *Christian* in an Arab Muslim context

may imply Westerner, traitor, alcohol vendor and an immoral person like those displayed in Hollywood films. Therefore, Mazhar prefers other labels that better describe his identity as a cultural Arab Muslim who is devoted to Jesus.

Though I agree with these C5 labelling concerns, I do not see how C5 leads to the establishment of the indigenous church. The book discusses baptism, sacraments and other church-related issues without clearly describing the church in the Arab Muslim context. When questioned about the church, Mazhar describes a setting with friends gathered together in an Arab coffee shop discussing politics, literature and God. Though I agree with Mazhar that the Western church of today bears little resemblance to the community churches of Acts, I also feel the coffee-shop gathering does not sufficiently model the church. This is especially true in

regards to corporate prayer and praise, which are clearly described in the Early Church.

A second concern of mine relates to identity. The book describes Mazhar's spiritual journey and struggle with identity as a believer in Jesus. In the end, he found that he did not need to become a Western Christian in order to be a pilgrim of Christ. And it is among the Arab intellectuals and

people of the Middle East that Mazhar has been able to serve and live as an Arab Muslim who is known to follow Christ. With that being stated, I do not feel Mazhar is calling for Western missionaries to portray themselves as insider Arab Muslims, as the author seems to imply. Our skin does not tingle at the reading of the Qur'an as

In the end, he found that he did not need to become a Western Christian in order to be a pilgrim of Christ.

Mazhar's does and I do not feel it is possible for us to ever fully comprehend all the nuances of the Arabic language, family, society and religion. In fact, labelling ourselves as Muslims and quoting the Qur'an would likely be perceived as deceptive and insulting.

God has clearly gifted and called Mazhar to minister among the Arab people. Chandler's book captures a taste of Mazhar's enthusiasm for life, literature and

the Lord Jesus. It also describes Mazhar's passion for seeing the Bible distributed and accessible in all parts of the Arab world. Some have questioned his understanding of systematic theology but that misses the point of a man who is known for his generosity, hospitality and keen insight into the lives of those around him. I personally count Mazhar as one of my close friends and whole-heartedly recommend *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*.

## A MIDDLE EASTERN BMB RESPONDS TO CHANDLER'S BOOK

by Mostafa S.

*Soon after he became a Christian 28 years ago, Mostafa became active in outreach to Muslims in his Middle Eastern country, and he and his wife have provided shelter and discipleship training for countless Believers from Muslim Background (BMBs). He has suffered much for his faith and is a tireless evangelist and teacher, known and respected across the Arab world. At the request of his church leaders in the Middle East, he and his family moved to Europe some ten years ago, from where they minister locally and internationally in evangelism, discipleship and teaching.*

### I. Reviewing this book from a BMB perspective

I am honoured to be asked to share my thoughts about the book *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*. This book explores the very rich life of my brother in Christ, Mazhar Mallouhi, the Muslim who converted to Christ so many years ago now. Coming from a Muslim background myself, I can say that Mazhar was one of the signs on the road for me, as well as for many other converts, when I started my journey with Christ some twenty-eight years ago. At that time, the number of converts who were well known in the Arab world was very small, and the idea of changing one's faith from Islam to Christianity was nearly unheard of in our countries and among our communities in the Middle East.

Mazhar Mallouhi is one of those people who can establish and strengthen his relationships with others smoothly. He has

very strong charisma that helps him to be accepted and welcomed by people from other faiths. What made me very sad is that on the very day that I was going to spend the whole day with Mazhar and some other converts, the security police in my country arrested me and put me in prison for about eleven months. Thus, I have still not had the privilege of meeting Mazhar personally.

Nevertheless, I have read most of his books and have even published comments about his book *An Eastern Reading of the Gospel of Luke* (a special edition of the Gospel of Luke published through Mazhar's publishing company). In that review, I raised some questions about what the Muslim Moroccan professor wrote in his introduction to *An Eastern Reading*. In the introduction, he claimed that he owns an authentic or a genuine copy of the Gospel of Luke! Even stranger, at the end of his nice introduction, he

wrote 'In the Beginning was the Word' but he wrote it in its feminine way in Arabic (rather than the masculine way it is written in the Gospel of John). In that review I asked why Mazhar hadn't used this golden chance to explain his faith to his Muslim friend before he published the book. I still hope to meet with my brother Mazhar one day, God willing.

*Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road* covers a long period of time in Mazhar's life and ministry, and that makes it difficult for me to comment about many things, especially since in our countries religion is mixed with politics. As we used to say, 'Our policies change every five years depending on the direction of the wind.' That is why it does not feel fair for me to agree or disagree with what I read in this book.

Let me begin by sharing something about my values as a believer from a Muslim background, or BMB (I prefer this term to the term MBB because I no longer consider myself a Muslim):

- I am not a liberal Christian. I follow what the Bible says, but I also understand that the Bible was written using different languages over a long period of time.
- I am opposed to being *without roots*, and that helps me to connect easily to my culture, language and family, as well as to the existing Christian churches in my culture.
- I am very keen that we learn from each other, and encourage each other at the same time.
- I strongly agree that it is essential to have a clear identity in my life.
- I am not *against* Muslims, as they are my family and I love them as Jesus loves them. But I am strongly against Islam as a faith system.

## 2. Unhelpful and inaccurate 'facts' and interpretations in the book

In his book, Chandler talks about many things in our countries; some are good and insightful, and while some are neither accurate nor helpful. I must mention some statements in the book with which I strongly disagree, and I pray that God will help me to be clear and transparent as much as I can without offending anyone. As we all know, in life we see things from different angles, and this is the source of major disagreements between many Muslims and Christians, too. Chandler did his best to explore and introduce Mazhar's background but I can say that he misses some very significant aspects of what is a very different culture.

Chandler made many mistakes that I found disturbing and that caused me considerable concern. A number of times he either criticized or praised individuals because of something in their *cultural* lifestyle, to which he gave a *religious* meaning. For example, when talking about the Bishop of Galilee, he praised him because he could trace his family roots back to the time of Pentecost. Is that a cultural or a religious matter? What is the value of praising someone simply because he can trace his roots back two thousand years? Does that devalue other people who cannot trace such a long ancestry? If Mazhar were to trace his roots, I would not be surprised if he found his roots go back to one of the disciples of Christ, long before anyone from his family converted to Islam during the time of the second Khalif, Omar Ibn El-Khattab, who subdued the people of Egypt and Syria and forced them to convert unwillingly so as to save their lives and avoid paying the Islamic *Jezia* (Islamic tax). My mother used to say that her roots went back to the Prophet, but the significance of all such pride in one's ancestry collapsed dramatically when I

joined another family – the family of those who know Jesus Christ personally.

In the beginning of the fourth chapter, Chandler mentioned the Crusades. I do not really understand why we insist on falling into one of the most well-known traps that Muslims use against us! And why should we talk about the Crusades only from the Muslim point of view? Why must we confuse religion and politics as Muslims have the habit of doing? Why does Chandler mention what is happening in Iraq, Afghanistan and in Sudan? Are Christians responsible for such violence and suffering? Are Christians responsible for what is happening in Darfur in West Sudan? Are Christians responsible for suicide bombers in Iraq, Palestine and Israel? I do not think so. I strongly disagree with Chandler. These incidents of violence motivated by Islamic ideology cannot be blamed on Christians!

On page 74 Chandler criticizes Christians who go on prayer walks through Muslim countries trying to 'reclaim the land'. I want Chandler to tell me what the difference is, in his understanding, between such language coming from Christians, and that which comes from Muslims who claim Spain back as a Muslim land that is now under *infidel control*. I understand, and Muslims scholars agree, that the believer (Muslim) who talks about infidel ideas is not an infidel himself, but I would very much like it if Chandler would be careful in what he writes, so as not to support the other side. In any case, the expression 'reclaim the land', when used by evangelical Christians, has never caused any problem for me or for any other convert friends because we understand that it is meant in a spiritual and not a political sense. So, I want to reassure Chandler that his

concerns about the harm done by this 'militant' language are misplaced.

### 3. Issues of identity for BMBs

Mazhar talks on many occasions about the issues surrounding the change in identity as a Muslim comes to Christ, and I agree with him that we must keep our identity without compromising our new faith. We never read in the Bible anything about neglecting or ignoring our families. I've never seen anything that asks me to attack my family. In contrast, it is very clear that Islam is attacking the Christian faith all the way and we can see that clearly in all who convert to Islam. Islam has tried to annul or destroy everything about Christianity and Judaism, ever since the time just before Muhammad's death when he asked his followers to kick all Christians and Jews out of the Arabian Peninsula. Muhammad never thought about his own children's uncles who were originally Christians (Khadija the first wife of Muhammad was a Christian lady), and we never hear about them as part of his children's relatives. I ask you, Chandler, why did Muhammad change his own children's identity without consulting them?

In pages 101-102, Chandler recounts the story that Mazhar frequently tells about the monkey that is frantically pulling fish out of a pond in order to save them from drowning. Chandler says that Mazhar teaches that Christians do the same thing when they try to 'rescue' followers of Christ from Muslim backgrounds by taking them out of their Muslim environment. It is a funny story, but I cannot really understand the connection between the monkey and converts who decide to separate *themselves* from their communities.

He also refers to the Arabic proverb which says, 'Don't tell me who you are, tell

me who your friends are' (p. 102). I can say proudly that since I became a Christian, I have tons of very good and valuable Christian friends. I have no problem with my identity since I became a Christian. Do you know why? Because the one who personally gave me my new identity is the Holy Spirit himself. Can you imagine? Let me tell you how it actually works. When we choose Jesus, we try to keep our relationships with our families as much as we can, but God at the same time does something new and different. He replaces my human family with another family, a spiritual family. In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10, we hear this from the mouth of Jesus Christ himself.

Seeking to continue to live inside the Muslim family structure is commendable, but it also tends to weaken my new Christian identity. When I try to do that, I end up living as an alien; I am neither a Muslim nor a Christian. Trying to keep the old identity makes you lose both identities. I will need to compromise or sacrifice something very important. *Islam never provides a personal identity like the one Jesus Christ gives.* Islam provides a murky and nationalistic identity that does not bring about any good, even though we have searched for its value for years! This is the challenge of living as a Christian, to have one's own, *personal* identity in Christ, even if you live alone without being in a community or *Umma* (nation).

When the Tunisian Muslim convert scholar in North Africa (p. 117) says that there is no contradiction in being a follower of Christ *and* a Muslim scholar, I can say here that we are facing one of two possibilities. Either he has a lack of Christian

teaching and we need to help him to understand more accurately so that he can enjoy his life with his Saviour more, or we have to agree that he is living in a temporary period in which a new community of converts is being established that is living and increasing *underground* until the time comes when they will finally be able to share about their new faith openly in their communities. One cannot remain a *Muslim* scholar for long as a follower of Christ.

The Good News these days is that the number of converts is increasing hugely, and the number of workers is increasing, too – especially in our countries that have faced Islamic pressure and oppressions for fourteen centuries. When a Muslim receives

Jesus as personal Saviour now, he finds lots of new members in his new spiritual family. Mazhar Mallouhi was unfortunate in starting his personal journey with Christ early, before the new movement in the Middle East and other Arab countries had begun. That is why we really appreciate his personal

experience through the years, but he needs also to appreciate other people's experiences in light of the new situation in our part of the world.

#### **4. Where is this kind of dialogue leading?**

Islam has attacked Christianity through the centuries. Islam converted more than a thousand churches into mosques in the Islamic world in the beginning of the Muslim era. Islam took over the most holy place of the Jews and changed it into three very important mosques in Jerusalem. Who attacked whom? Is that a difficult question to answer?

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one Jesus Christ  
gives.

I very much like the idea of building on the dark side of the moon as he expresses it on page 87, but I do not agree with the idea of a *Christian West* and a *Muslim East*. The East is Christian too, and has been since the beginning of Christianity. Furthermore, we cannot build bridges from one side only. We need to build strong foundations on both sides first, and then we can meet in the middle like with any other kind of negotiations. I cannot build relationships with Muslims by building on Islamic foundations only, and then later try to introduce Jesus to them.

Finally, Chandler shares in his book about the many personal situations where Mazhar has succeeded in sharing with Muslim friends about Jesus (p. 96). That helps us to learn how to share our faith and how to pray, too. However, I was very

We cannot  
build bridges  
from one side  
only

seriously concerned about what he said about the ongoing friendly dialogue between Dr. Zaki Badawi, the Muslim British cleric, and Dr. Carey. We need to discuss this matter with honesty and frankness. Does that dialogue bring any Islamic agreement that the Christian faith is not corrupted? That the Holy Bible is not changed? That Jesus was crucified? Can they do that kind of dialogue in the Arab world, too? Do the frequent regular articles in the London Times lead to anything more than the request that has been raised by Dr. Rowan Williams, Dr. Carey's successor, that Shari'a Law be adopted for Muslims in Britain? Does that dialogue open the door for *British Muslims* who live in Britain to be free to change their faith and live in peace in Britain? Many questions need to be answered!



## PART 3: CONTEXTUALIZATION – TWO APPROACHES

### CASE STUDY OF A TEAM APPROACH TO CONTEXTUALIZED CHURCH PLANTING

by Abu Roo

*Abu Roo and his family recently began ministry in the ME following many years as pastor of evangelism in a large American church. Having found Christ as an adult, his life-long passion and central gifting is in evangelism. He is grateful to God for the privilege of seeing such encouraging fruit among some of the leaders of the Arab city in which he ministers. Abu Roo welcomes interaction about his ministry. He can be reached through the editor at [editor.seedbed@wornet.org](mailto:editor.seedbed@wornet.org).*

#### About our team

I am privileged to serve with a cross-agency team in the Middle East comprised of representatives from six different agencies. Though we hail from a variety of different church backgrounds (Mennonite, Baptist, non-denominational, etc.) and from multiple sending organizations, we are bound together by four specific commonalities:

1. **Spiritual.** We have all had our doctrine and spiritual fitness examined by our home churches and sending agencies.
2. **Relational.** We all get along with each other and allow no one to join our team without 100 per cent team approval.
3. **Vision.** We are all passionate about the truths of Jesus Christ coming to the Arab people.
4. **Strategy.** We are all unified in our efforts to reach the well-educated, affluent, influential, highly visible and highly practicing Muslim, using contextually sensitive and appropriate methodology.

We have been in place for a little over two years now as we have been working through the issues of establishing a legitimate business while forming the team. One reason I have been asked to write this article is that though we have been in operation for only a comparatively short period of time, our team has been blessed to have seen over fifteen individuals come to faith. These men and women have all experienced a transformed life, they love Jesus and the Bible and they still call themselves Muslims.

#### Our team's methodology

We are admittedly diverse in our individual beliefs with respect to the Prophet and his book. On one extreme we have those who view them as spiritual anathema; on the other extreme are those who would be willing to consider Muhammad as an actual prophet to the Arab people, albeit misunderstood and misrepresented by the *Dark Spirit of Islam*. (I will comment on this *Dark Spirit* later.) I fit somewhere in the middle, and assume the role of one who guides those with a stiff traditionalist view to move more to the

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middle so their message can be heard, while at the same time trying to keep those on the other extreme from crossing the line into syncretism. Despite our individual proclivities, we are unified on two key points of practice: 1) we do not disparage or elevate the Prophet or his book; 2) we do not require Muslims who come to faith to abandon their cultural form(s).

The point of this article and its case studies is to encourage those of us who know truth to proclaim that truth in culturally sensitive and non-offensive ways. This can be uncomfortable as it may require that we step outside of our natural cultural and religious prejudices in order to effectively communicate with someone who looks at things through a completely different set of lenses.

It saddens me to see workers who engage in confrontational rhetoric or who possess a combative attitude toward our Muslim cousins when proclaiming the truths of Christ. It is true that Islam asserts a multitude of abhorrent teachings, yet I have found few that are actually supported by the Qur'an. There are many proof-texted ayats used to argue fundamental Islamic points, but few are properly exegeted or accurately applied in context. Perhaps it is helpful to mention, at this point, that I believe in the authority of Scripture (not the Qur'an), the Deity of Christ, his bodily death and resurrection for the redemption of our sins, his imminent return, the Trinity, and every other fundamental doctrine of the historical Christian faith. I also fully understand the fundamental differences of the teachings of Islam and how they oppose the historical doctrines of Christianity. However, despite our differences, we have many bridges of commonality which can allow for ongoing civil discourse. Consider my friend H.

### H's story

H is as devout as any Muslim I have ever met. Conservative, traditional, an admitted Wahabist anchored deep in Islam, believing that anyone who leaves Islam should be executed for turning their back on God, tribe, family, heritage and culture and for taking on the hedonistic trappings of the West. Though he has not, and probably will not, come to faith, we have enjoyed hundreds of hours of friendly spiritual discussions. I recently helped him translate a book dealing with the West's views of Islam for a university project. When we came to two phrases in the book referencing *Messianic Jews* and *Jews for Jesus*, he was stumped and asked, 'What is this?'

I replied, 'H, you are aware that Jews do not believe in *Isa Messia*. They reject his virgin birth, his prophethood and that he is the Messiah.'

He said, 'Wait a minute . . . we (Muslims) believe in *Isa's* virgin birth, we believe he was the Word of God, the gift of God and the grace of God. We believe in his divine nature, that he is the greatest of all prophets, and that he is the Messiah who is alive today in Paradise waiting to come again to judge the world.' Then he paused and said, 'And you guys (Western Christians) support Israel, but you don't support us?!'

Some might say that typical Muslims don't really believe like H because Islamic traditions argue against the divine nature of Christ and claim Muhammad to be the greatest of all prophets. This is true, but these are *traditions* taught and sustained by the *Dark Spirit*, not what is actually in their book.

### Lowering the two fists

The first lesson we emphasize to new members on our team is that every Muslim has two invisible fists raised in defence of Islam in the face of every Western Christian he meets. The first fist says, 'Don't attack my

prophet'; the second says 'Don't attack my book.' If you don't manage to lower these fists, you will never be heard. This means one must refer to Muhammad with the respect the culture demands. To refer to him (or even *I* for that matter) without adding the *peace be upon his name* is insulting. It telegraphs to your cousin-friend a disregard for his beliefs and culture, and keeps that first fist in your face. I am aware of all of the arguments against Christians elevating the position of Muhammad. I am neither advocating that nor suggesting we engage in deceit. I am simply saying we should be willing to respect the Prophet and our cousins enough to engage in culturally appropriate methods of address. I would do the same while speaking with a friend about a ruler from his country. Using terms such as *his highness*, or *his majesty* is culturally and socially appropriate even though my personal opinion may be that the person in question is neither *high* nor *majestic*.

The second fist is poised in defence of the Qur'an. Again, we can take a hostile position against the book, or we can look for truths to build a bridge to the redemptive message we want to proclaim to our cousin-friends. I once had a friend declare that there were no redemptive truths in the Qur'an. He then went on to comment about what a bizarre book it was because it had adapted stories such as Noah who had an extra son not mentioned in the Bible. I don't know whether Noah had an extra son or not; I don't really care. What I *do* care about is that I can respectfully study and discuss the story of Noah in the Bible and the Qur'an together with my cousin-friend, pointing out from *his own book* how God (*Allah*) provided a way of salvation via the Ark, which the son in question refused. The

son said he would climb a high mountain to save himself (works) but drowned in the process. When Noah cries out to God on behalf of this son, God rebukes him for praying for someone who was not of his family (of faith). The story may not be biblical, but it is a powerful illustration of the biblical truth of salvation by grace which is received by faith, not works.

### K's story

K was one of our first significant individuals to come to faith. In truth, he had received Christ privately several years before we met him through a miraculous healing. However, without anyone to guide him otherwise, he gravitated toward a local church which did not effectively receive him. Not only was he distrusted by Arab Christians, but as an uninitiated, he found their form of worship, their hymns, their method of prayer and other practices strange and uncomfortable. After being shunned by family, discouraged in communal worship and frustrated in his attempts to share his faith, he stumbled upon our team. We shared how he could still love Jesus, remain in his community and be used

Without anyone to guide him otherwise, he gravitated toward a local church which did not effectively receive him.

of God to bring others to faith without taking on the trappings of Western Christianity. We began to disciple him, concentrating on truths from Scripture instead of our Western church traditions. Before long he was coming to *Holy Book studies* (see Appendix for an explanation) with non-believers in tow who were all seeking to know about this *new thing* (reminiscent of Acts 17). One was K's cousin with whom K had attempted to share Christ many times previously in the

traditional Western way by suggesting he reject Islam and embrace Christianity. After really *hearing* what was being said about Jesus without the Prophet, his book or his Islamic methods of worship being threatened, K's cousin remarked, 'Is this what you've been trying to tell me all this time?' He, too, accepted Christ as Saviour and has become a growing believer.

K is now a graduate student in the US who has been proactively helping our team and others share Christ with Muslims more effectively. He has been a key speaker at Focus Group Consultations in the US, the last of which had over 240 attendees. His dream is to return to his country after graduation to open a medical school staffed by believers. As a side note, K once travelled through my home city in the US while on the way to his university on the West Coast. Stopping at a local mosque, he was able to lead six individuals to Christ. How? Because he approached them as a Muslim, spoke to them as a Muslim and expounded truths they could understand in a Muslim context.

#### **W's story**

W came seeking information about Christianity because he had become disillusioned with Islam. After several meetings, he embraced Christ but was motivated to gravitate to Western forms of worship. We did not impede him; in fact we actively assist the group who has reached out to him in the more traditional extractionist mode. However, as we had warned, he has become ostracized and ineffective in being able to reach family and friends. Two friends of his, A and F, who are devout Muslims interested in the claims of

Christ, have been faithful to participate in Bible studies and discussions with this other group for over a year. However, they admittedly have not stepped into faith because 'they do not want to become a Western Christian like W'.

#### **N's story**

N was a devout Muslim from a very conservative background. When we suggested that we could study the Holy Books (Torah, Psalms, Gospel and Qur'an) together without him having fear of us trying to convert him, he was delighted (see the Appendix re: Holy Book Studies). It was not long before the Spirit of God, combined with the Word of God, brought light into his world. Today, he is a growing follower of Christ and a key believer who is instrumental in helping us develop effective ways of sharing biblical truths with other Muslims. His family is aware of his faith in Christ, but since he has not rejected Islam for Western Christianity, he remains accepted, although with a certain degree of ambivalence.

Recently, after watching *The Passion of Christ* over a dozen times alone, his family came in to watch it with him. It took them several hours to view the movie together, because every few minutes they would ask N a question requiring him to pause the DVD to render an explanation. This would never have happened had he announced to them, 'Today I have become a Christian,' which would have been interpreted as an all-out rejection of Islam, his family and culture. As I sit here writing this, I just returned from a party at N's home where his family embraced us all with honour, respect and appreciation for the contribution we have made to N's life.

After several meetings, he embraced Christ but was motivated to gravitate to Western forms of worship.

### O's story

O is a well-read and highly intellectual individual who is sincere in his pursuit of God. Coming from a traditionally conservative family, he memorized the Qur'an and most of the Hadiths at an early age and was very set in his traditional Islamic understandings. After a few meetings and Holy Book studies he came in one day only to violently throw his Qur'an down on the table exclaiming, 'I have been lied to all of my life!' Today, O is an active and growing believer who boldly shares with other Muslims, ably deflecting their traditional perverted arguments, using not only intellectual, but spiritual truth. Again, because he has remained Muslim, he can passionately discuss truths with other Muslims in ways that we as Westerners cannot.

### The Dark Spirit of Islam

I have referred on a number of occasions to what I choose to call *the Dark Spirit of Islam*. By that, I am suggesting the Enemy has successfully managed to keep a people group who are, for the most part, very sincere in following the God of Abraham from knowing the love and sacrifice that same God has made for them. My first experience conducting a Holy Book study (see Appendix) with four devout 'cousins', (one had memorized the entire Qur'an by the age of twelve, one was a militant extremist, another was a Wahabist and the fourth was an Islamic Studies professor at a local university) revealed to me that they knew *only* what they had been told to believe. When we began to read from their book and I began to ask simple questions designed only to stimulate conversation, I was amazed to see them make fifteen phone calls in the space of three hours to have someone else tell them what a particular word or ayat meant. In essence, I quickly discovered that these men, so deeply steeped in their

religion, were unable to read black ink on white paper to render a simple interpretation.

*We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (Eph. 6:12).

When we realize the battle is with the *Dark Spirit*, and not with a people or even their prophet, then it frees us to share without fear or concern of rejection. I never argue or debate a theological or doctrinal point with a cousin-friend. I do, however, put truth on the table and challenge them to determine for themselves, either through intellectual honesty or spiritual revelation, what they should accept.

Teaching Muslims to read and understand for themselves is another key to defeating the Dark Spirit. I once conducted a Bible study with a group of our believers and seekers where I taught them to read the Sermon on the Mount asking, 'Who, what, when, where, why and what does it mean for me today?' It proved to be absolutely revelatory and life-changing for them!

### Our community of believers

We now have a small, but determined group of believers who meet together weekly for prayer, worship and Bible study. We don't call it a *church*; we refer to it as a *community*. After all, isn't that what the church is supposed to be? Since we don't want to contaminate this young group with Western culture or traditions, we have them studying the book of Acts together so they can discover for themselves how the early believers came together. They are figuring out for themselves what it means to minister to one another, to share their faith, to partake of the Lord's Supper, to be baptized, and many other aspects of becoming followers of Christ while living in the

context of their world. Have they all *arrived* yet? No, but neither have I. But they are moving forward steadily and are making a bigger impact in the world around them

than ten times the number of us Western workers. For that, we thank the Lord and continue to pray for an ever-increasing harvest!

## APPENDIX

### WHAT WE MEAN BY HOLY BOOK STUDIES AND SIGNS

As indicated previously, our team employs the use of the Qur'an as an entryway into the truth of Scripture. Muslims are commanded to pay close attention to God's signs and are warned of serious consequences for rejecting or disregarding them. The Qur'an states:

*This is the path of thy Lord, a straight path. We have detailed the Signs for those who receive admonition (6:126).*

*But those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance – they are companions of the Fire, to dwell therein (forever) (7:36 – see also 7:9, 40).*

What is a sign? A sign, or guide, is a physical or external representation of an internal or spiritual truth. The most important level of truth lies beyond the natural terms in which the message is actually expressed. There are over fifty signs, guides or mercies specifically mentioned in the Qur'an, many of which have a direct correlation with our own biblical signs (miracles).

With a little study and effort, it becomes easy to engage sincere Muslims in spiritual discussions by referencing what is in their book, not to *proof text* or to *trip them up* (like they try to do with us), but to genuinely share truth which has been hidden from them by the *Dark Spirit*. When we render respect and interest in what Muslims believe instead of a combative or defensive spirit, we then earn the right to be heard. We never have concerns about placing the

Qur'an side by side with the Bible. We know, and believe, that the Word of God is far more powerful! This frees us from ever having to debate, prove or argue. When the light of Scripture illuminates understanding of their own book, Muslims become receptive to our message of redemption and God's love.

Signs can be many different things:

#### Creation

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allah Sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; – (*Here indeed are Signs for a people that are wise* (2:164).

#### Adam & Eve

O ye Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness, – that is the best. *Such are among the Signs of Allah, that they may receive admonition! (7:26).*

#### The Ark of the Covenant

And (further) their Prophet said to them: 'A Sign of his authority is that there shall come to you the Ark of the covenant, with (an assurance) therein of security from your Lord, and the relics left by the family of Moses and the family of Aaron, carried by angels. *In this is a symbol (sign) for you if ye indeed have faith' (2:248).*

### David Slaying Goliath

By Allah's will they routed them; and David slew Goliath; and Allah gave him power and wisdom and taught him whatever (else) He willed. And did not Allah Check one set of people by means of another; the earth would indeed be full of mischief: But Allah is full of bounty to all the worlds. *These are the Signs of Allah: we rehearse them to thee in truth: verily Thou art one of the messengers* (2:251,252).

### Prophets

They (also) said: 'Allah took our promise not to believe in a messenger unless He showed us a sacrifice consumed by Fire (From heaven).' Say: 'There came to you messengers before me, with clear Signs and even with what ye ask for: why then did ye slay them, if ye speak the truth?' (3:183).

Those messengers We endowed with gifts, some above others: To one of them Allah spoke; others He raised to degrees (of honor); to *Jesus the son of Mary* We gave clear (Signs), and strengthened him with the holy spirit... (2:253).

### The Books that 'Came Before'

Then if they reject thee, so were rejected messengers before thee, who came with Clear Signs, Books of dark prophecies, and the Book of Enlightenment (3:184).

### Jesus

He said: 'So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, "that is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him (Jesus) as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us": It is a matter (so) decreed' (19:21).

## THE BORN-AGAIN IDENTITY:

### A RESPONSE TO THE TEAM CASE STUDY

by Bassim and Nuria Aziz

Bassim was born in the Middle East and lived there for most of his life. Eighteen years ago, God laid on his heart a call to share the love of Christ with Muslims. When he met his European wife, Nuria, twelve years ago she was already sharing the Gospel with her Muslim friends. They are now involved together in media ministry and personal discipleship. Bassim is also engaged in mentoring and training national believers.

While commending the efforts of fellow workers to understand and identify with the culture in which we are ministering, there are several areas that invite comment in the descriptive methodology and introspective studies cited above. The following is a brief response to some of the issues raised by our brother Abu Roo.

### A Question of Semantics?

The first methodological premise of Abu Roo and his team, that of not disparaging or elevating the central tenets of the philosophy with which we are engaging, is no doubt a good starting point for all effective evangelistic effort. We preach Christ, as the apostle Paul did on Mars Hill, with reference

to culturally appropriate symbols and in a spirit of gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). However, care must be taken that we do not confuse our listener with our choice of terminology and language. A closer reading of Paul's sermon in Acts 17 reveals that, whereas the apostle was quite comfortable in referring to the cultural forms of his time, he was crystal clear in his language in matters pertaining to salvation.

Some (mainly Western) missionaries claim that they can use Islamic language and re-define it. For instance, the term *Muslim* is taken in the broadest sense as signifying someone in submission. This linguistic approach completely disregards the cultural



and religious context of the word. From the point of view of communication theory, the speaker is not the only influence to be taken into account when considering the definition of a given term; the listener's understanding of that term also plays a key role in the communication process. The cultural context of the word *Muslim* is very rigid because of the definition given in the Qur'an and because of the *shahada*. A linguistic corpus search on the collocation of the word *Muslim* would suggest a conclusively Islamic context. Similarly, research in the area of translation theory would imply that concepts have cultural prototype or core meaning.<sup>4</sup> To the vast majority of Arabic speakers, the concept of a Muslim who believes in Isa is ambivalent and confusing. Don't all Muslims believe that Isa existed and that he was an honourable prophet? The overwhelming received meaning of the term *Muslim* in the Arab world is someone who affirms and lives by the *shahada*.

Many who suggest that a Christian can continue to call him or herself a Muslim after conversion would also propose that they are free to say the creed, since they can in all conscience assert that Muhammad was a 'prophet' to the Arab world. However, this once again necessitates arresting the term *rasul* from its semantic context since the type of prophet that Muhammad is considered to be in the Muslim world is defined by Muslims in their book.

One practical way for Christian workers to avoid being associated with Western imperialism or other such negative labels

when sharing the gospel with Muslims is for more Arab Christians to assume roles of responsibility in team ministry. A recent encounter in North Africa reinforced to us the importance of the witness of the international Arab Christian community. A young man from a privileged Islamic background had been discussing many deep questions with a Western missionary in a friendly setting for several months. He was then introduced to an Arabic-speaking Christian who could converse freely with him in a high form of Arabic about matters of faith. Later on, he spoke with an Arab believer from a Muslim background and finally with a fellow national. An Arabo-centric team will help greatly to dispel the myth that Christianity is a Western construct.

Still on a pragmatic note, we have made friends with dozens of believers from a Muslim background, from all over the Muslim and Arab Muslim world over a period of fifteen to twenty years. Some have

"How can I identify with darkness, when Jesus has taken me out of darkness into his marvellous light?"

maintained a good rapport with their family and community of origin. Others have suffered imprisonment, kidnapping, threats and exclusion for their faith but are going on in their walk with God. Not a single one of them wished to be identified as a Muslim, either in a qualified or unqualified way, after becoming a Christian. Nor

did they continue at any point to practise the Five Pillars. One brother, who is highly effective in ministry to Muslims and is regularly intimidated by the secret police for his faith, said, 'How can I identify with darkness, when Jesus has taken me out of darkness into his marvellous light?' These 'family members' are fruitful in their witness

4 Eugene Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. Leiden: Brill, 1969

and have seen many other Muslims embrace the gospel as a result of their testimony. There is, in fact, every encouragement to trust in the Holy Spirit to provide the words needed for a new convert from Islam when they are challenged (Matt. 10:19-20).

### The Truth Test

A central argument put forward in the case studies cited by Abu Roo seems to focus on the attitude he prescribes towards the Bible and the Qur'an. To take elements of truth from the Qur'an, such as the creation of the world and of mankind, the uniqueness of Christ or the Final Judgment as a springboard for discussion is a commendable approach. To argue that the Qur'an upholds the divinity of Christ is irreconcilable with certain verses in the Qur'an. Sura 5:17 and 72 are verses which explicitly denounce all who say that 'Allah is Christ' as blasphemers. Sura 5:116 is an alleged dialogue between Christ and God in which Christ denies any claim to deity.

In the case study of H, the author advocates extracting soteriological truth from the account of Noah's son's rejection of the flood warnings in the Qur'an in Sura 11:42-43. This account conflicts with the biblical account which tells us that God commanded Noah to take his whole family into the ark (Gen. 7:1) and that Noah did all that God commanded him to do (Gen. 7:5). The author of the case study states that he does not care whether Noah had an extra son or not but that he can happily use the account of Noah's son and his supposed refusal to listen to his father's warning in the Qur'an to support the doctrine of salvation by faith and not by works. We can observe several difficulties with this approach to truth. The first is that the precision and accuracy of biblical narrative and the way in which the Bible differs from the Qur'an

matter enormously both to us and to our Muslim friends. A deep understanding of the more difficult passages of Scripture never fails to make a good impression on the Muslims with whom we share our faith. We are called upon to guard the truth and to handle the Word of God correctly (2 Tim. 1:14; 2:15) not least because every word of Scripture proves true and is there for a reason (Prov. 30:5; 2 Tim. 3:16). Would the author have the same approach when referring to the account of the denial of the crucifixion in the Qur'an? This methodology can lead down a path of inconsistency and confusion and does nothing to challenge the assumption that the Bible has been changed and is not trustworthy. Incidentally, debate is sometimes necessary in our dialogue with Muslims – much depends on the spirit in which that debate is conducted (2 Cor. 10:5).

Secondly, we cannot in all conscience appear to give parity of credence to the Qur'an and the Bible, as on many points the two books are mutually exclusive. For example, the book of Hebrews and the final verses in the Bible make clear the fact that God's revelation reached completion in the Person of Christ (Heb. 1:1-2; Rev. 22:18-19). In accordance with this biblical truth, we do not believe in any claims to messianic revelation outside of the Scriptures. The fact that someone may have responded positively to a particular hermeneutical approach is not adequate justification for adopting that same methodology. To illustrate our point, the story is told of an uneducated man who was asked to speak extempore on the parable of the ten minas in Luke 19. The man was unaware of the meaning of the word *austere* and confused it with the word *oyster*. He went on to give a sermon about Christ who, like an oyster man, went down to the depths and came back clutching a pearl with bleeding hands because he suffered for our

sakes. The story goes that twelve men were converted as the man spoke. When John Wesley was asked his opinion of the sermon, he simply expressed his delight to learn that souls had been saved. Nevertheless, Wesley did not condone that same man's approach to preaching God's Word simply because the Holy Spirit had graciously used him to touch hearts!

### **The Born-again Identity**

Another core question that seems to surface in the case studies quoted in our friend Abu Roo's article is one of identity. O is described as someone who has 'remained Muslim' and is involved in passionate discussion with other Muslims about what he believes. On the other hand, when with his Christian friends, he is able to throw his Qur'an down on the table and allude to the fact that he has been lied to all his life. This raises the question of exactly what kind of Muslim O considers himself to be. Would his Muslim friends accept the behaviour described above and his allusion to the Qur'an? For them, it would constitute blasphemy. How is O able to develop a consistent and holistic identity in Christ according to 2 Corinthians 5:17? Isn't he in danger rather of developing a dual identity and of misleading his community about what he really believes?

According to the account of K, he was recently able to lead six individuals to Christ in a mosque because 'he approached them as a Muslim and spoke to them as a Muslim'.

We would like to know what understanding these men had of their relationship to Christ. Moreover, how do these new 'Muslims' relate to the worldwide Church, the suffering Church of the Arab world or their local Arabic-speaking Christian community if one exists? Comparisons made with Messianic Judaism are spurious since Messianic Jews share with Christians the common progressive revelation of Scripture and, as Gary Corwin points out, find their primary identity in the church.<sup>5</sup> In his gracious appeal to advocates of the Insider Movement, Gary states that there is evidence to suggest that radical contextualization for new believers results in either backsliding or a counter-reaction so that converts take refuge in highly traditional forms of church and cease to relate to their Muslim peers. Furthermore,

Surely, they should rather be commended for their faith and honoured for their commitment to bear the Saviour's name.

such a highly contextualized stance would seem to invalidate the countless 'cloud of witnesses' across the world who, through the centuries, have paid the ultimate sacrifice for refusing to deny their identity as Christians. Surely, they should rather be commended for their faith and honoured for their commitment to bear the Saviour's name.

### **Calmness and Confidence**

To conclude, we would like to return to Abu Roo's affirmation of his belief in the authority of Scripture and in the historical Christian faith. If we have confidence in God and in his Word, we will not be bound by one particular methodology in order to see the Arab

5 Gary Corwin, 'The Jerusalem Council Applied: A Humble Appeal to C5/insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocates to Consider Ten Questions'. In *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Jan 01, 2007, Volume 24:1, pp. 5-20

Muslim world turn to Christ. As John Piper advocates,<sup>6</sup> let us promote confidence in the gospel and in the sovereign work of God's Holy Spirit. Let us allow God to build his Church in the way he chooses, for we know that then the gates of hell will not

prevail against it.

To quote a well-known Western cultural icon:

*This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou cans't not be false to any man.<sup>7</sup>*

## A SUNNI WOMAN'S HEART

### PART I – THE VALUE OF HONOUR

*by Tahira*

*The author, a Westerner, has lived in the Middle East with her family for nearly twenty years, residing in a variety of neighbourhoods and engaging in a variety of ministries. She has a Doctorate in Inter-Cultural Studies.*

Perhaps I simply wasn't listening hard enough. After many years of living in the Muslim world, I was still unable to guess with confidence what was happening in the hearts of my Muslim friends. Often I felt that my lack of insight into their inner world hampered my witness. While many books about Islam explain the intellectual issues with which Muslim scholars wrestle, or the rituals and legal structure which determine the behaviour of observant Muslims, little systematic study has been done of the affective side of Islam, the part that touches the emotions and triggers intuitive reactions. I wanted to know how my conventional Sunni friends felt, what their desires, fears, attitudes and prejudices were. I hoped for more insight into the intuitive, gut reactions they so skilfully covered with warm but superficial conversations.

Recognizing my need to understand better, God provided me with an opportunity to attend regularly for several months a ladies' home Qur'an study in my

city. There I was able to take notes on the lessons and to observe Islam as my Sunni friends experience it. With time the women relaxed and became more authentic in spite of the presence of a non-Muslim among them. By the time the study wrapped up, I had over 150 pages of single-spaced notes. The workers with whom I shared them found them illuminating.

I chose to focus on the role of the affective in mission for my D. Min. dissertation. As I investigated the topic from the vantage points of psychology and theology, I began to understand just how crucial heart issues are in almost every aspect of mission: appreciation of culture, relationship-building, communication, deeds of mercy, development, apologetics, discernment, discipling and teaching. I learned that most people only make major decisions when their hearts compel them, and cannot honestly consider truths that their hearts refuse to accept. I began to long even more for insight into the dominant

6 John Piper, 'Minimizing the Bible?': Seeker-driven Pastors and Radical Contextualization in Missions'. In *Mission Frontiers*, January-February 2006

7 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene III, lines 78-80.

affective patterns among my neighbours.

For my research, I conducted a detailed affective analysis of my Qur'an study notes, searching for clues about such things as the emotional culture of the group, their understanding of God's heart, their values, attitudes, ideals, prejudices, motivations, felt needs and desires. I considered how Muslim beliefs, behaviours and relationships impact, and are impacted by, frequently expressed emotions. Whenever possible I counted words or obvious tendencies in order to reduce the subjectivity of my analysis. The results were fascinating and complex. As I attempted to summarize what I had learned, seven landmark emotional/cultural patterns stood out in these women who taught me about Islam and about themselves:

- the value of honour
- a need to belong
- an obsession with correct behaviour
- a desire to be approved by God, tied to an ambivalence toward his nearness
- a longing for affirmation in their identity as women
- a need for logical consistency, rightness and meaning in religion, and
- a sense of vulnerability and need for security.

This is the first in a series of articles about these seven strongly felt qualities and their ramifications for mission. In addition to my own experience and study, my reflections have been reviewed by a reference committee consisting of long-term witnesses to Sunni women from Muslim, indigenous Christian, and Western backgrounds. The committee contributed much to what follows, although they were not always in full agreement. My discussion

The results  
were  
fascinating  
and complex.

of each of the seven emotional/cultural patterns is organized according to the following categories:

- *Barriers*: tendencies which undermine relationships, trust and fruitful discussion between Sunni women and disciples of Jesus, and which keep them from becoming disciples themselves.
- *Bridges*: points in common between followers of Jesus and women like my friends. A wise worker might find these bridges a useful tool for relationship-building, establishing credibility, eroding prejudices and finding common ground strong enough to support mutual learning, constructive discussion of differences and witness to Jesus.
- *Fault Lines*: points of tension within the Sunni individual or community. They represent both possible points of entry and potential sore spots.
- *Worthy of Observation*: these sections note behaviours and attitudes which may be signs of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people from this subculture.
- *Missional Strategies*: practical suggestions for workers seeking to be servants of the gospel. They do not by any means comprise a comprehensive plan, but are intended as an invitation to further reflection, discussion and experimentation.

### **The Value of Honour**

It has long been recognized that Middle Easterners cherish honour as one of their greatest prizes, and writers in the field are increasingly reflecting on how an appreciation of this strongly felt cultural value could enhance our communication of

the Good News in the region. What follows are some observations, based on my research, about the Muslim sense of honour and our responses to it.

### Barriers

Muslims see themselves as custodians of God's honour. In the minds of the women I studied, dishonouring or questioning the religion of Islam is synonymous with dishonouring or questioning God. They have a strongly felt conviction that they are responsible to defend that honour. They reject central Christian teachings, such as the incarnation, the cross, the Trinity and inspiration (in contrast to *tanzil*) as being beneath God's dignity. They do not like to think that religious heroes sin or fail as this in turn brings dishonour to God. In the minds of people of this subculture, Jews and Christians are notorious for dishonouring God: it is intrinsic to their nature. The alleged corruption of the Torah and the *Injil* provides 'undisputed' evidence. In addition, the rejection by Jews and Christians of Muhammad proves their disdain for the Almighty. This habitual defensiveness in such a noble cause prejudices Muslims to block their ears to and fight the gospel message even before they have understood it. Non-Muslims are discredited before they open their mouths.

In an honour-shame society, Muslim pride in Islam leads Muslims to see any questioning of Islam as an attack, not only

In an honour-shame society, Muslim pride in Islam leads Muslims to see any questioning of Islam as an attack, not only against God, but against them personally.

against God, but against them personally. It is difficult to critique Islam without offending the honour of Muslims. Past or present injustices perpetrated by Muslims or Islamic rulers are usually vigorously denied or defended, although some Muslims admit the wrong but distance it from Islam. Muslims are very protective of their honour, and will

sometimes deny or excuse problems within the Muslim community when talking with outsiders. The women I studied see Muslims as normative human beings, and all others as perversions of what humanity is meant to be. Anything apparently noble about a non-Muslim must be explained away as insincere, anomalous, inferior or a vestige of latent Islam in human nature. It is difficult to convince people that they need to change when they are not

open to honest critique and when they consider all others religiously deformed or inferior.

While Muslims theoretically accept that true honour comes from God alone, in practice most look for honour from their community and equate the approval of religious people with God's approval. To fail or desert as a Muslim is to bring shame upon oneself and one's family and community.<sup>8</sup> People are not favourably inclined to options they consider too costly.

The great need for honour in oriental society sits well with the Islamic elimination of original sin or the notion that all have sinned. The importance and profundity of sin is minimized and the need for a Saviour is

8 Bruce Nicholls, 'The Role of Shame and Guilt in a Theology of Cross-Cultural Mission' (*Evangelical Review of Theology* 25, no. 3 July 2001, 231).

dismissed. Human pride harmonizes nicely with the belief that one can accrue enough merit to earn an entrance into heaven. The emphasis on honour in society also discourages confession of failure or need at either the personal or communal levels. Muslims, coated with this alloy of a prized cultural value and Islamic theology, become particularly gospel-resistant.

### **Bridges**

Like Muslims, followers of Jesus believe that God is very great and should be worshipped with reverence and awe. He is magnanimous and should receive heartfelt thanks from us in all the circumstances of life. We agree that faith without works is dead and dishonouring to the One who rules all things. Submission is a sign that we have understood God's majesty. Both communities can say with conviction that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Together we affirm that true worship involves one's intentions as well as one's behaviour. By making Muslims aware of our commitment to honour God, we discredit some of the prejudices against us and against our message. We may also open the door to honest questions about how our beliefs and practices contribute or detract from God's honour.

Christians in Muslim societies share many cultural values of honour with their majority neighbours, and among these are some with a strong biblical basis such as gracious speech, showing honour to others and practicing hospitality. Muslims who see in us these virtues are more likely to hear our words as coming from people worthy of respect.

We share with Muslims some of the same honour-related issues of spirituality. One is the recognition, in theory at least,

that God's opinion of us is the final measure of our honour or shame. We face the same temptation to look to other people to affirm our worth. People of both communities long to be honoured by God, and we hope that he will vindicate and reward us in heaven. Talking about our spiritual experiences in terms of honour may make us and our message easier to relate to.

### **Fault Lines**

Sometimes it appears to the non-Muslim that Muslims believe God is incapable of guarding his own honour and needs their protection. Muslims sometimes intimidate or coerce others into hypocritical submission or cowardly silence. One explanation for this forcefulness is that Muslims consider internal rejection of the wrong belief and actions of others to be the least form of godliness, whereas taking action is the greatest. However, the threatening vehemence employed by some Muslims calls into question the image Muslims want to present as tolerant, peaceable and kind to Christian neighbours. Mutual respect and co-existence, for which many Muslims long, do not easily harmonize with the view that non-Muslims are perversions of human nature. Discussing these matters with calm humility may reduce antagonism and lead to fruitful discussion of the how of honouring God and the nature and extent of human freedom.

There is a widely-recognized tension between the cultural value of honour in society and the grave dangers of spiritual pride. The Muslims among whom I live know that their society is image-oriented and superficial, but they also know that simple living and radical honesty come with a very high social price tag.

Unlike Shi'ism, Sunni Islam does not have a well-developed theology of suffering



and humiliation, but tends to be triumphalistic. Muhammad is portrayed as receiving from God earthly vindication for every slight. This results in two significant tensions. First, Sunnis who suffer over a long period have little theological recourse for comfort other than 'the will of God.' They may be more willing than most Muslims to hear about the comfort of the suffering Christ. Second, there is a tendency to deny or minimize the extent of the sufferings of prophets. This line of thinking, that God would never allow a prophet to be humiliated, is a standard retort to the preaching of the cross. However, a Sunni, when pushed, will acknowledge that Muhammad passed through times where God allowed him to suffer humiliation, and that the Jews killed many of the prophets, including John the Baptist. By pointing out the suffering of the prophets accepted within Sunni Islam, one may be able to reduce resistance to Muslim acceptance of the historicity and significance of the cross and the teachings of Jesus about responding graciously to humiliation.

### **Worthy of Observation**

Many local people feel themselves caught in the trap of constantly having to guard personal, familial or denominational honour by living up to a vast and sometimes contradictory array of expectations. A greater willingness for soul-searching honesty may be found among those who are disillusioned by the futility or superficiality of the expectations game and those who resent the constant manipulation. This is especially true of people who criticize their own tendency to seek human honour, and not merely the vanity of others.

The sincere desire to honour God and to be honoured by him could well be a sign of the preparatory work of God in the

heart of an individual or group. Such people are prone to recognize and feel a kinship to the sincere desire to glorify God in a follower of Jesus.

Honour is a highly valued commodity. It makes sense, then, for workers to be alert to an individual's or group's preconceived notions of what makes people honourable or dishonourable. Things that seem trivial to Christians may weigh heavily in the judgment of Muslims. One's credibility could be demolished by a sip of wine, a phone call during *iftar* or an interest-earning bank account. The goal is not to submit blindly to cultural expectations, but to act with realistic anticipation of the perceptions and emotional responses of the people among whom one is ministering, to minimize unnecessary misunderstanding, and to maximize opportunities to give glory to the Triune God.

### **Missional Strategies**

We can affirm with our words and our lives the importance of honouring God as the One who has no equal, as Creator, Sustainer, King and Judge. In light of the Muslim custom, Christians may wish to consider using more honorifics when referring to God. There are certainly plenty of biblical expressions of praise to God, and some of those used by Muslims are in full agreement with the Scriptures. The church might also explore biblically consistent ways of public worship which convey our reverence of God more clearly to Muslims without forfeiting the intimacy of addressing God as Father. Followers of Jesus can model and describe a profound level of submission to God's majesty at an intensely personal level. We can convey in our worship, attitudes and daily living that we live for God's glory. This becomes even

more powerful when the motives are love, gratitude and delight in God.

It is important to express our honour of God in ways that make sense to Muslims. A friend suggests, for example, that before using analogies from creation to describe God, one should assure the listener that one is not likening God to anything – never! – but only seeking to aid the understanding.

Workers should be careful to keep wholeheartedly the biblical injunctions about showing honour and the related virtues of humility, gracious speech, hospitality and magnanimity. Slander and attempts to humiliate Muslims have been prevalent but counterproductive in the history of interactions between Christians and Muslims. The Danish cartoon uproar should alert us to the intense sensitivity Muslims feel when Islam is (or even appears to be) mocked. Both Eastern and Western Christians need encouragement and guidance in overcoming their prejudices toward Muslims and respecting them without denying the profound differences that separate us. There is a need for sensitivity training for those of a Christian background to understand the religious and emotional import for Muslims of special Islamic times, places and rituals.

Respect breeds respect. On the one hand, respect for others makes it more likely that we will win their respect. Especially in one-on-one relationships, even the most ignorant should be treated as people whose views are worthy of a fair hearing. Muslims will consider anyone who accuses Muslims

of backwardness for their attempts to honour God through Islam to be arrogant and rebellious. On the other hand, if we wish to be respected by Muslims, we must show self-respect. Muslims have greater respect for Christians who are not afraid to stand up for what they believe than for those who try too hard to agree with them. Confidence in proclaiming one's faith forces questions to the surface and makes the Christian a credible person and not a chameleon.

It makes sense to describe Christ's work in terms of salvation from shame. The worker should be familiar with the biblical

Respect for others makes it more likely that we will win their respect.

accounts of God rescuing people from shame, whether that shame resulted from their own choices (Gomer, Zaccheaus, the adulteress of John 8 and Mary Magdalene) or from the unfair scorn of society

(the Exodus, Mary mother of Jesus, the blind man in John 9 and Jesus). Rather than attempting to stir up guilt to convince Muslims of their need for a Saviour, it may be more appropriate to follow Nathan's example and appeal to a sense of shame when addressing the issue of sin.<sup>9</sup>

Sensitivity should be shown to seekers and new believers who are dealing with the social shame their faith has brought upon themselves and their families. They have been told all their lives that only the weak and foolish leave Islam. A distinction should be made between subjective shame as a result of one's own feelings and the opinions of society, and objective shame before Omniscient God.<sup>10</sup> At all times it is

<sup>9</sup> Nicholls, 239.

<sup>10</sup> David Hesselgrave says, 'Insofar as biblical elenctics might involve shame, the shame must be that shame which Adam and Eve experienced – shame before a holy God' ('Missionary Elenctics and Guilt and Shame,' *Missiology* 11, no. 4 October 1983, 480).

wholesome to remind oneself and others that the ultimate shame or honour will not be disclosed until the Day of Accounting, when all secrets will be exposed and some will be invited to share the honour of Jesus forever, while those who reject him will suffer eternal shame.

A theology formed around the concept of honour is slowly beginning to develop, but it is still in the gestation period and will only mature with time and focused attention.<sup>11</sup> I will not attempt to outline such a theology here, except to mention a few ways in which a Christian theology of honour might serve to show the honourableness of foundational Christian beliefs. The Muslim tendency to minimize the sin problem might be addressed by drawing attention to the dangers of spiritual pride and the tendency of humans to seek their own glory, not God's. If sin is defined in terms of failure to appreciate adequately God's majesty, its ugly and stubborn nature becomes more apparent. A theology of honour would bring out some episodes of strength in the life of Jesus about which Western Christians seem almost embarrassed at times: Jesus' cleansing of the temple and his vociferous denunciations of the Jewish leaders.<sup>12</sup> Such passages would

help to counter the popular image of Jesus as weak and defeatist. The cross in a theology of honour would serve to exalt God's magnanimity, and, because of the resurrection, demonstrate both Jesus' total commitment to God's honour and God's desire to honour Jesus in a way that he did not honour any of the other prophets.<sup>13</sup> Despite protests of Muslims I know that they deny the crucifixion in reverence for Jesus, I have often felt that the real issue is that a risen Christ would seem more worthy of admiration than a dead Muhammad, and at all costs Muhammad must be exalted above Jesus. A theology of honour would challenge Muslims to take Jesus' prophetic words about his own death and resurrection seriously if they would revere him as prophet. Musk recommends shaming Muslims who deny the crucifixion into allowing God to be God.<sup>14</sup> God's wrath at the Jews might be used as a warning to Muslims who likewise reject Jesus' deity, ethical teachings and atonement and thereby dishonour God.

A friend recommends appealing to God's honour frequently in discussions with Sunni women. To defend the integrity of the *Injil*, she expresses her total confidence in God's ability to preserve his

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- 11 For an excellent start on a theology of honour, see Roland Muller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (n.p.: Xlibris, 2000), 100-107, and G. K., 'Sharing the Gospel in an Honour and Shame Society', *Seedbed XX*, no. 1 (2006): 8-11. Three members of the reference committee expressed reservations about a theology of honour. Two thought this too much a concession to culture, and that just living according to the Bible is enough. I am not sure that we can live according to the Bible without considering in a disciplined way what it says. A third asked, 'Isn't the honour just another way of saying pride?' She quotes Paul, 'If I would be pleasing to men, I would not be pleasing to God.' (Gal 1:10)
- 12 I am indebted to a long-term Egyptian worker for this suggestion.
- 13 The common notion among Muslims that God snatched Jesus up from earth puts him on a par with Elijah and Enoch.
- 14 Bill A. Musk, *Touching the Soul of Islam: Sharing the Gospel in Muslim Cultures* (Crowborough: MARC, 1995), 231, note 65.

word, as well as her dismay that a Muslim should utter slander against God's revelation. When Muslims present a harsh and distant view of God, she demands, 'Do you really think so little of God to imagine him like that? You think of *yourself* as being more loving than that!'

### **Conclusion**

Jesus made a habit of addressing unspoken

feelings and expectations about honour. He knew that a person's attitudes and practices regarding the giving and receiving of honour reveal something of his or her spiritual state. Being alert to our Muslim friends' sensitivity toward issues of honour can help us to discern more clearly what Jesus is longing to say to their hearts.

## PART 4: BOOK REVIEWS

### ***A Vision of the Possible: Pioneer Church Planting in Teams***

Daniel Sinclair, (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2005), 294 pages.

Available from [www.authenticbooks.com](http://www.authenticbooks.com) & [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) and such sources

Daniel Sinclair (pseudonym) served in the Middle East and then as field director for our sister agency founded by Greg Livingstone, overseeing hundreds of field workers across the Muslim world. This book is a practical manual on how to work in teams in order to plant churches. He tries to extend the principles beyond Muslims, to other unreached peoples, but his own experience and all of his examples are from the Muslim world context. The whole book bears the imprint of someone intimately experienced with the nuts and bolts of church planting *among Muslims*.

Dan covers a lot of ground and writes directly and engagingly. He treats most of the complex challenges that church planters face in the Muslim world. In addition to providing much practical advice on how to actually plant churches, he also explores key biblical principles and offers some helpful definitions and understandings of church planting in the New Testament.

I want to highlight three topics that I believe are particularly valuable for us in our ministries.

#### **1. The need for apostolic gifting**

Dan's opening chapter is devoted to exploring the question of apostleship (and he also has a ten-page study of apostleship in the New Testament as an appendix). He argues that the work of church planting is the essential apostolic ministry, and that the primary call of the apostles in the New Testament was to proclaim the gospel and

plant churches. He states emphatically that:

'Church planting' is newly in vogue in the church today, so we might be fooled into thinking it's a new concept. But in fact it is as old and as central as the Great Commission itself. It is exactly what all the apostolic teams of the New Testament did. They preached the gospel and then formed and matured *communities of faith*... Thus 'church planting among unreached people groups' would be a fair description of the New Testament concept of apostolic ministry (pp. viii & 4).

Though he strongly advocates the need for people with a wide variety of gifts on a church planting team, he suggests that unless there is at least *someone with apostolic gifting*, the team will not see a church planted. In situations of prolonged unfruitfulness in a team, he suggests that the team either needs to get a new team leader with apostolic gifting, or the team should split up and join other teams where there are some with apostolic gifting. He also offers some helpful and plausible definitions of what the apostolic gift entails, and how it operates.

#### **2. How to lead a church planting team that plants churches**

Dan has two very helpful chapters (10 & 11) that should be read by all team leaders and team members in any team seeking to plant churches. His discussion of what the team leader needs to do, and how to avoid getting bogged down in non-essential tasks, is very insightful. He is clearly speaking out of his

own struggles in being an effective team leader and his years of oversight of dozens of leaders of church planting teams. This is not merely about leading a team effectively, but about how to lead a team so that the team plants churches.

There is much discussion among our leadership at the moment about our church planting strategies. Some argue that we should see ourselves as church planting facilitators; others think that we should take the back seat to nationals and just help them plant churches. Dan's eleventh chapter 'The Role of the Church Planters in Church Planting' provides a good shot in the arm. It is a biblically based discussion of how the church planters ought to be involved in raising up leaders and mentoring the members of the first group of believers. Though not everyone will agree with him, I believe that much of what he says needs to be heard afresh.

### 3. Establishing the first group of elders

In his last chapter, Dan demonstrates biblically sound understanding of how to go about seeing a solid group of emerging leaders take on the leadership of the fledgling little church of believers from a Muslim background (BMBs). There is much wisdom here and everyone involved in the church planting process would do well to read and ponder his counsel.

In addition to these topics, Dan also addresses a number of other vital topics, including phases in church plants, learning the local language, tentmaking roles and identity, evangelism and discipleship (in which he has a short balanced discussion of issues that are driving many to C5 levels of contextualization, pp. 147-9), and church planting movements (a perceptive critique). So much of what he writes is uncomplicated

wisdom gained from hard experience. *This is the kind of helpful advice that so many of us wish we had had when we first started to try to plant churches.*

### Conclusion: Assessing A Vision for the Possible

Are there any weaknesses in the book? At times I felt that I was reading more of a manual for church planting for members of our sister company, than for *everyone* engaged in the task, since the assumptions about how teams operate and how team leadership functions are so typical of our sister agency. Also, at times some of his attempts to provide biblical support for his approach seemed a bit simplistic, or stretching the original meaning of the text. But then again, Dan was trying to keep the book to a reasonable size and keep it practical.

These reservations aside, *I highly recommend this book.* This is a very useful handbook on actually getting on with the task of church planting written by someone who is clearly speaking from experience. It is an easy read and has quite a few links to helpful web-based resources. Yet, it is so much more than a how-to book, because Dan repeatedly stresses that we must rely on the Holy Spirit and minister in biblically appropriate ways in order to be assured of the anointing of the Spirit on our ministry. He constantly stresses that it is always the Spirit who does the work through us.

This is a book that every church planting team should read and discuss together, and it should also be read as part of orientation for new workers. If, through reading this book, we could learn even a quarter of what Dan is trying to teach us, I expect that the fruitfulness of our church planting ministries would measurably improve.

**reviewed by Don Little**

## ***The Certainty Trap: Can Christians and Muslims afford the luxury of fundamentalism?***

Bill Musk (William Carey Library, Pasadena, California USA, 2008).

Both casual and close readings of Bill's book impress one with the degree of knowledge and research that has gone into it. He has extensive knowledge of both the Bible and the Qur'an, including their histories, theories of transmission and canonization. In these, he not only finds differences, as can be expected, but also similarities – in particular, a simplistic and emphatic interpretation of the texts by some proponents of each faith.

Bill's basic thesis is that radical elements in Islam and Christianity arise from a certainty of belief based on a literalistic reading of their scriptures. As opposed to a *literal* reading that recognises literary forms and the cultural and historical context of religious texts, *literalism* assumes a simple face-value reading that sounds faithful to scripture. It is easily commended to each faith's adherents by an appearance of authority that comes from a certainty that is easily understood and assimilated. This approach Bill characterises as a *hermeneutic (interpretation) of certainty*, which tends to stigmatise those who are of a less-confident mind about complete understanding of scripture.

In Islam, Bill shows how an authoritarian reading of the more aggressive and violent texts has created the radical ideology that motivates Islamist terrorists. This hermeneutic of certainty convinces mainstream Muslims of the Islamist cause

and increasingly of their methods. That view can also be used to persecute Muslims holding differing views and to silence discussion of the issue.

While discussion in the West is freer, literalist views of the Bible have dominated much evangelical thinking and influenced politics, especially in America. In particular, end-time projections raise the danger of self-fulfilling prophecies, especially when politics are shaped by them. The current clash is not of civilizations but is between literalist ideologies derived from both Islam and Christianity, creating a *hermeneutic of suspicion* of each other's scripture.

While fundamentalist groups claim stricter adherence to the text than those who use textual criticism to validate its teaching, Bill claims the reverse is true – that literalism produces a certainty based on a limited, even faulty, understanding of the text's message. Bill quotes Muslim thought, both current and historic, claiming the need for contextual criticism of the Qur'an. This involves assessing Muhammad's personal history to which the Qur'an responds and the oral renderings that eventually made up the written account. He also questions the abrogation of texts that conflict – should the later Medinan text prevail or the earlier Meccan and 'purer' text be more authoritative? Bill compares similar cases of abrogation in the Bible: dropping of Old Testament civil and ceremonial law, Jesus' claim that no animals

Bill's basic thesis is that radical elements in Islam and Christianity arise from a certainty of belief based on a literalistic reading of their scriptures.



are unclean and, more controversially, Paul's claim that Christ is the end of the Law.

The volume and depth of material that Bill includes provides convincing support for the relationship between literalistic reading and extremist behaviour. However, one wonders if a prior chicken-and-egg question should be asked. Is it not more likely that violence frequently co-opts convenient proof texts, rather than that the texts themselves induce violence? A superficial reading of a text is a handy justification for reacting to threats – real or perceived. Surely a lessening of suspicion on both sides would ease tensions more readily than textual criticism, important as it is in the long run. For the Christian, a practical application of the love of Christ should override fear of Islamist rhetoric.

The old adage 'you haven't read a book once 'til you've read it twice' applies well to

*The Certainty Trap*. Some of the book is heavy going even for the initiated, and may well serve leaders the best, but the less technical material in the preface and opening and closing chapters is accessible to most non-specialists. Furthermore, the material does try to do justice to both Islam and Christianity and should be amenable to inquiring minds of both faiths. But most importantly, Bill's book raises the important question of whether refusing to be honest about our doubts is in fact dishonest to scripture. After all, recognition and resolution of doubts contribute to growth and understanding. Bill asserts his own clear Christian faith, but honestly grapples with the dilemma of that certainty against confusing and controversial texts. His recipe for avoiding the certainty trap is greater humility in our human understanding of scriptures.

#### **reviewed by Bryan Norford**

*Bryan Norford, now retired, has an M. Div. from Regent College in Canada. He and his wife Ann have pastored Canadian churches of two denominations, and he continues to write, teach and preach regularly. They have had close association with Muslim families in the past. They recently served a season as managers at Winchelsea in Worthing.*

### **God's Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis**

Philip Jenkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, May 2007), 352 pages

The future of Muslims in Europe is something that is hotly debated, not only in Europe, but also across the world, and not only among secularists or Muslims themselves, but also among Christians. In my work, I find that many Christians agree with the sentiment, if not with the actually wording, of the Egyptian-born Jewish writer, Bat Ye'or, who envisions in her book *Eurabia: the Euro-Arab Axis* that Europe is emerging

into Eurabia: a Muslim-dominated subcontinent, in which the remaining Christians might enjoy some kind of second-class status.

I meet many Christians who believe that Europe is in danger due to the growing presence of Muslims. In her article 'OIC: Eliminating Eliminating "defamation" of Islam', Elizabeth Kendal, principal researcher and writer of the World Evangelical Alliance's

Religious Liberty Commission, speaks of 'the Muslim colonisation of Europe'<sup>15</sup>.

Those who do not believe in some kind of conspiracy theory, or who do not want to sound the alarmist bells just because millions of Muslims have become hard-working, law-abiding citizens across Europe, take Philip Jenkins as one of their allies. Although he is not blind to the facts, that:

- Europe is acquiring much greater ethnic and cultural diversity;
- Muslims have become a permanent part of the European landscape;
- European Christianity is sick (in chapter 2 he demonstrates the weakness of European Christianity);
- Europe today faces a serious danger from violent extremism rooted in radical Islamism (as he points out in chapter 8, entitled 'Ultras'); nevertheless, he believes that 'the vision of a predominantly Muslim Europe nearby on the historical horizon demands serious qualification.'<sup>16</sup>

Throughout his book he argues against the alarmists who believe that European Christianity is dead and that Islam will take over. First of all, he points out (in chapter 3) that there is still life in European Christianity as seen in (among other things) :

- the several hundred million 'cultural Christians'
- the widespread presence of religious-oriented institutions
- the establishment of new religious orders and
- the popularity of pilgrimages.

Secondly, in chapter 4, he puts the spotlight on the sizable number of Christian migrants now living in Europe, 'who represent a bracing, and often startling, new presence within the continent's religious life'.

Thirdly, in chapters 5 to 9, he points out that in the struggle for the establishment of Islam in Europe, there are not only extremist forces, but also reformists, who explore the implications for how Islam needs to change as it adapts to life in Western society.

Undeniably, the public voices of Europe's Muslim communities are often shrill, and some leaders assuredly are extremist, militant, and in some cases, actively subversive. In many countries too, Muslim populations seem deeply alienated from mainstream society, and some ordinary Muslims appear willing to follow the extremists. Yet the religious situation is much more complex than it might appear. While radicals and militant (sic) flourish, their opponents are numerous and significant, and so are the historical forces working against extremism.<sup>17</sup>

The growing presence of Islam in Europe has led and leads to debates and controversies in Europe over assimilation, integration and multiculturalism. Jenkins deals with some of these in chapter 10 and points out that 'while European states have been trying to accommodate and include the new presence of Islam, they have unwittingly revived a series of issues that affect Christianity as well, demanding a rewriting of the rules of engagement between church and state.'<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/reports/articles.htm?id=1725>

<sup>16</sup> Page 14

<sup>17</sup> Page 147

<sup>18</sup> Page 258

The presence of Muslims in Europe has consequences for Christians, as Jenkins points out in the last chapters of the book. It raises questions for Christians about the relationship between Islam and Christianity. Some see the presence of Muslims at our doorstep as a great way to evangelize those who used to be in closed or limited-access countries; others wonder whether the two religions are sisters separated at birth and raised in different family settings.

Jenkins points out that 'Muslims and Christians share common perceptions and can cooperate to combat proposals over abortion and contraception', something which I have found to be true in my present ministry in Amsterdam.

In a climate where there is a lot of doom thinking regarding the future of the Church in Europe and the growing presence of Muslims, I find Jenkins' book refreshing and balanced. It is well documented (it has thirty-seven pages of notes with references to books, websites etc). Of course, when he speaks of the Church, we have to remind ourselves that as a Roman Catholic he might use different criteria for defining committed Christians than evangelicals do. But, we should be careful not to write off Roman Catholic Christians too quickly. On Easter Sunday this year, Pope Benedict XVI baptized Italian journalist and author, Magdi Cristiano Allam, a former Muslim, who recounted that on his road to conversion, the challenge that Pope Benedict XVI offered to Islam in his September 2006 address at Regensburg was 'undoubtedly the most extraordinary and important encounter in my decision to convert'. It is significant that the Pope baptized a former Muslim in such a public way on Easter

It raises questions for Christians about the relationship between Islam and Christianity.

Sunday. In his article of 26 March 2008, 'The mustard seed in global strategy', Spengler comments on this baptism. Although I think he overstates his case when he writes that 'the Pope alone among the leaders of the Christian world, challenges Islam as a religion', I agree that by baptizing a former Muslim in such a public way, he wanted to make a clear statement. And he may not be the only Roman Catholic to do so.

As Spengler writes:

The Pope also has in reserve the European youth movement 'Communione e Liberazione', which he has nurtured for decades. Forty-thousand (sic) members turned out in 2005 when the then Cardinal Ratzinger addressed a memorial service in Milan for the movement's founder. European Christianity may be reduced to a few coals glowing in the ashes, but it is not dead, only marginalized. If the Catholic youth of Europe are offered a great task – to evangelize the Muslims whose restlessness threatens to push Europe into social chaos – many of them may heed the call.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, not everyone who calls himself a Christian is a born-again disciple of Jesus Christ. But that is also true of Muslims. Not everyone born, or whose parents were born, in a Muslim country and who now lives in Europe is a committed, religious Muslim. As someone pointed out, there are many *MINOs* in Europe (Muslims in Name Only).

Europe as a continent is facing several challenges; several of them – particularly the development of Islam, the future of the Church and how they each deal with secularization – are clearly discussed in Jenkins' book. *Those of us with a heart for Muslims in Europe need to read this book.* It will help to keep us from joining the growing

number of alarmists; but, at the same time, without becoming naïve, it will help us to trust that God, who sent his Son to die for the lost of this world, is not only the Lord of history, but also of the future.

In the immediate future, Christians and Muslims will increasingly have the

opportunity to rub shoulders, and in doing so, it is my prayer that our Muslim friends will be attracted to the Jesus they see in us. The first fruits are there; the harvest is about to come.

*reviewed by Bert de Ruiter*

## ***The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross***

Dr. Nabeel T. Jabbour (Navpress, 2008).

Nabeel Jabbour, of Syrian/Lebanese Christian descent, ministered and studied in Egypt before settling in Colorado, USA. He has his doctorate in Islamics and teaches and lectures widely, working with the Navigators. Check his website ([www.nabeeljabbour.com](http://www.nabeeljabbour.com)) for more information.

The description on the back cover of his book gives an apt introduction:

'A war is raging for the minds and souls of Muslims today,' writes Nabeel Jabbour. 'The eternal welfare of 1.4 billion people is at stake. They are being pulled in two directions-fanaticism on the one hand and moderation and open-mindedness on the other... ' In this book, Dr. Jabbour aims to help Western Christians go beyond mere tolerance to a passion for Muslims. He explains how that can be done in ways that are sensitive to Islamic culture, and he presents suggestions on how to build vital relationships with Muslims.

Across the nation of Canada, Christians display an assortment of responses to the Muslims on their doorstep. Some express fear, distrust or anger with statements like 'We are losing our rights; Muslims are taking over.' On the other hand, many Christians want to be good neighbours to Muslims but don't know where to begin with sharing the

love of Jesus. They are asking questions like 'Can I talk about Jesus with my Muslim colleague?' or 'Can I pray with my Muslim friend?' This book can help Western Christians find answers to such questions.

Nabeel begins by describing one of the most stunning sculptures he has ever seen.

'This piece of art had two interrelated scenes back to back, separated by a door. On one side was a Native American man in a fierce snowstorm, knocking at the door of a log cabin and pleading for refuge and warmth. On the other side of the door was a warm room with a terrified mother holding a shotgun while the woman's frightened three-year-old daughter clung to her dress. The terrified mother was refusing to open the door.' Fear kept her from a compassionate response.

By now you will have caught the gist of Nabeel's message – that it has to do with our attitudes towards Muslims. In the first half of the book he helps us understand his friend Ahmad – a Muslim international student studying at an American college. Ahmad's struggles are described in three sections: the Message, the Messenger and the Receiver. He begins the first section with 'My paradigm or lens through which I look at reality is not primarily that of guilt and righteousness like yours, but that of

shame and honor, clean and unclean, fear and power.'

In the Messenger section he states that 'fanatics, on both sides, have hijacked Islam and Christianity.'

Lastly, Ahmad asks, 'If I converted to Christianity... are you able to provide for me a completely new support system?' Nabeel introduces Ahmad's sister and father as well to help us understand current events and responses in the Muslim world.

In the second part of the book, Nabeel tackles the issue of understanding what our message is and how to contextualize it. Then he goes on to challenge us to *live among them*. *He urges us to move beyond ethnocentricity in order to be a blessing*. Nabeel describes three ways in which God's people around the world deal with this: some go into a holy huddle (isolate themselves), others become worldly (compromise), and then there are those who are 'in the world but not of the world'. The last group is the 'good yeast permeating their society with grace and truth'.

He takes us back to the story of Joseph and says that 'Instead of being fair, he cared for his family and made the Pharaoh richer at the expense of the masses.' He is highly critical of Joseph's way of handling the Egyptians during the years of famine that 'reduced the people to servitude'. The result of becoming so isolated from the mainstream of society is that 'There are no books in the Old Testament that cover this period'. But it was during the Exile and the period that followed that the Jews made the greatest impact on the nations. In Jeremiah 29, the prophet encourages the exiles to settle down, mix with society and bless Babylon. For example, Daniel and his friends did not compromise and yet did not marginalize themselves from society. The application for Christians in the West and for those living in the harsher religious

climate of Muslim countries is obvious.

In one of the chapters, Nabeel talks about 'What is Church?' In the light of Ephesians 2:11-20, he illustrates how the Jews (shown by squares) and Gentiles (shown by circles) come together in a circle i.e. the church. As an application for today connected to ministry to Muslims, he illustrates how Christians (squares) and believers from Muslim background (circles) come together. 'These squares with circular hearts have no ulterior motives to transform the circles into squares or to make the hidden church surface and become the obvious church.' The hidden church concept applies particularly to Muslim majority nations. If I am a square peg, I want to be one with a circular heart and effectively come alongside new brothers and sisters from Muslim backgrounds.

This book comes highly recommended by well-known Christian leaders and writers. I agree with their assessment that this is a *must read* for Christians in the West. Nabeel cleverly creates composite Muslim characters to communicate the core message of this book. As usual, I got fresh insights into the worldviews of many in the 10/40 window by his use of examples highlighting Eastern values.

Yet, for the practitioner, this is not new material. You will nod your head in agreement chapter after chapter. Nabeel keeps your attention and it doesn't take long to absorb the book's 251 pages. Most of the chapters are followed by excellent questions for reflection and discussion.

He offers to email you an Addendum once you've finished reading the book. Here's where the reading gets heavier. Since the prerequisite to receiving the Addendum is to finish the book, I will not review the Addendum. At the time of writing, I'm still

digesting the additional 133 pages! From what I've seen so far, the Addendum will challenge some of my presuppositions about the Kingdom of God in the Muslim world. I recommend this book to other practitioners because of Nabeel's Eastern perspective.

**reviewed by Ed Loewen**

*Ed directs AWM Canada's outreach to Muslims and, along with his wife, he has been involved in ministry to Muslims for his entire adult life – first in Pakistan and then in Canada.*

### ***Global Jihad: the Future in the Face of Militant Islam***

Patrick Sookhdeo (Isaac Publishing, 2007), 669 pages.

Available through [www.barnabasfund.org](http://www.barnabasfund.org).

This is a thorough analysis of the subject of war in Islamic literature and history as exemplified by the 1133 items listed in the 'References and Notes' section. In the early chapters, there are many useful insights in Sookhdeo's reflections on the Qur'anic texts. The implementation of the early 'Islamic' community's perception of jihad is fascinating. Muhammad's Medinan period both legitimized and gave the impetus to empire building that wove militant jihad into the fabric of Islamic doctrine, practice and psyche.

Sookhdeo follows these themes with a chapter on peace in Islam, quoting several proponents of non-violent interpretations of jihad.

Returning to militant expressions of Islam down the ages, the chapters on the modern period, especially the chapter entitled 'The Motivation of Terrorists and Suicide Bombers', are comprehensive and helpful in understanding the current spate of violence.

Sookhdeo ends the book with some approaches to militant jihad, quoting a number of Muslims who are opposed to violence, and his own *proposed responses to*

*Islamic terrorism* (his own words). He proposes that any hope for a peaceful future can only be found from within the Islamic community as it reforms itself. There has to be a dialogue among moderates and the Muslim masses and that alone will be able to concertedly rein in the extremists.

Essentially, the author agrees that war-fighting is a central part of the classical understanding of jihad and that the future,<sup>20</sup> quoting an Islamic scholar, will, 'require intensive and ongoing intellectual, political, and educational activities, in order to fight the extremist and terrorist Islamic Salafi thought.'<sup>21</sup>

This is a weighty read but worth the effort, even if the outlook is somewhat gloomy.

Other books that I would recommend on the subject are Peter Riddell & Peter Cotterell's book, *Islam in Conflict* (IVP) and Thomas Friedman's *Longitudes and Attitudes – Exploring the world after September 11* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux).

**reviewed by Keith Fraser-Smith**

<sup>20</sup> Page 430

<sup>21</sup> Page 478

## ***Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary***

George Barna. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2005), 140 pages.  
Available through [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) & other online stores

George Barna is a pollster with a well-established reputation for doing contract work for the US government and major corporations – looking at future trends in order to help them determine the nature of policies and business plans in a world where personalised consumerism is increasingly shaping the West. Following his successful work as a consultant, he has spent the last few years looking at what the church of tomorrow will look like in the US.

Based on his polling data, Barna projects that by 2025, only 35 per cent of American Christians will attend what we would call a local church (compared to 70 percent in 2000), while the rest will seek other ways to serve and worship God, using alternative, like-minded groups or through technology and the arts. Many of these, whom he calls *Revolutionaries*, care very little about the organised structure known as the local church, which has often rejected them. They prefer to use their passion for Christ to establish God's *Kingdom*. They are driven by a strong desire to come back to the New Testament roots of the Christian faith and serve as it was intended in the early days. They have created their own communities, using all kinds of media, to bring fellowship into their lives. They are lovers of this world who seek to transform it into what God wants it to be.

The book is not a personal testimony, but a brief summary of research done for

the benefit of the local church and for those who feel that the American church is unhealthy. At the same time, Barna says both that he himself does not want to miss the boat – this *revolution* – and that he wants to invite others to join in this massive and unavoidable change that is happening in the Church. By pulling together the outcomes of his interviews and by taking a fresh look at what the Bible says on the topic, he presents a portrait of the beliefs and passions of these Revolutionaries who are living their Christian lives largely apart from any local church.

Overall, this might be *bad news* for the local church, and Barna will likely get a fair amount of criticism for his conclusions. On the other hand, I did not see any alarmist statements or hidden agendas in his book. Having read quite a few books on postmodernism and related topics, I feel that *Revolution* is probably the most level-headed that I have read on the topic, because the core of the book simply presents the results of his research and is not a polemic. He wants to see local churches ready to face the coming changes, because they are simply unavoidable. While he realizes that many might disagree, he does not want churchgoers to be taken by surprise.

My only concern with the book is that it is sometimes hard to distinguish between the results of his research and his theological beliefs, especially when he describes the early church's understanding of service to Christ.



While I am unable to discuss how the trends discussed in this book relate to churches in the Arab world (mainly due to my own lack of experience in the region), there is no doubt that these trends will affect AWM as a Western organisation. We rely on local churches to send us workers and to fund our activities. We also have a core belief that the local church is a critical entity in the propagation of the gospel. If Barna is accurate in his predictions, by 2025 we will have access through local churches to only 35 per cent of the Christian population in the US, which is the major source of both our funding and workers.

If we want to survive as an organisation as these trends take hold, we will need to seriously review our core belief in the local

It is sometimes hard to distinguish between the results of his research and his theological beliefs

church and see what the reshaped Church will look like, in order to attract the *unchurched* American Revolutionaries. We will need to look at ways to accommodate these Revolutionaries and offer them organizational structures they can be comfortable with. It is likely that issues like justice, the environment and poverty will be high on their agendas, along with a great desire to worship God in a holistic way. Being highly flexible in their understanding of what church looks like, they may bring new ways of gathering seekers and BMBs together that are quite different from the typical models currently used in the Arab world. In the same way that this will be a challenge for the American church, it will also be a challenge for AWM. I just hope that we will not miss the boat...

#### **reviewed by Yannick Bherer**

*Yannick, a French-Canadian, has served AWM in IT services in Worthing for the last four years. He is very interested in a Christian postmodern worldview, both intellectually and personally, as it significantly shapes his faith journey.*

### **Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Communities in Postmodern Cultures**

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 345 pages.

In this volume of *Seedbed* we read of Paul-Gordon Chandler's suggestion that there are good models to be taken from the characteristics of *emerging churches* in the West that can be adapted into appropriate approaches to Muslims in the *East*. In anticipation of this *Seedbed*, and in order to get a better grasp on what 'emerging churches' are all about, I purchased and read *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian*

*Communities in Postmodern Cultures*, which is billed as 'The best book yet on the emerging church' (back cover). I am including this review in *Seedbed* in order to help readers understand more about the nature of the churches that are emerging in *missional response* to the postmodern cultural realities that are increasingly shaping Western societies. In addition, a look at emerging churches in

the USA and in the UK will provide helpful context to understand why Chandler and Mazhar are drawn to them for models in the Arab world.

Gibbs (American) and Bolger's (British) treatment of emerging churches is based on extensive research conducted over five years. Collecting information on about 200 churches that met their initial criteria, they narrowed down their research and made site visits to interview the leaders of roughly fifty churches in the USA and the same number in the UK. Their book begins with a quick look at postmodern culture (chapter 1) and then describes emerging churches (chapter 2). Here is a helpful description of *emerging churches* that they heard from one leader:

*The emerging church is a quest for a more integrated and whole life of faith. There is a bit of theological questioning going on, focusing more on kingdom theology, the inner life, friendship/community, justice, earth keeping, inclusivity, and inspirational leadership. In addition the arts are in a renaissance, as are the spiritual disciplines. Overall, it is a quest for a holistic spirituality* (p. 42).

Gibbs and Bolger believe that their research shows that emerging churches are characterized by three core practices:

1. identifying with the life of Jesus
2. transforming secular space
3. living in community (pp. 43-4).

From this threefold core, six other characteristics flow:

4. welcoming the stranger
5. serving generously
6. participating in worship experiences as producers and not mere spectators
7. using their creativity

8. leading as a body
9. participating in spiritual activities drawing on both ancient and modern practices (p. 45).

Gibbs and Bolger devote a chapter to each of these nine characteristics (chapters 3-11). An insightful appendix consists of ninety pages in which fifty leaders of emerging churches share their own testimonies of their pilgrimage of thinking and faith into new ways of being church.

So, what is one to make of the *emerging churches* described by Gibbs and Bolger? There are a number of characteristics of emerging churches that are very positive. They are seeking to radically identify with the people in the culture emerging around them in order to present Christ in an attractive way. The questions their leaders are asking are very similar to the questions that we are asking as we seek to engage our Muslim friends and neighbours. They are seeking to exhibit radical obedience to Christ in order to connect in transparent and authentic ways with postmoderns. There is little that does not appear to be attractive to all Christians in the list of nine core characteristics above. There also seems to be much that could be relevant to the shape that our witness and community life takes in the Arab world, especially in the practices numbered 1, 3, 4 and 5 (see *previous paragraph*).

A few years ago, when I heard Brian MacLaren (one of the main spokesmen for the emerging churches, and author of many books, including *Generous Orthodoxy*) speak on how to do evangelism in a postmodern culture, much of what he said resonated with my experience in sharing Christ's love with Muslims. MacLaren spoke eloquently of the need to draw alongside people and love them to Christ over a long period of time,

only sharing truths with people as they were ready to hear them. He spoke of not expecting people to understand *anything about* the gospel, and of the need to patiently bridge the huge gap in worldview. There is truly much in the emerging churches that is attractive and deeply challenging. Gibbs and Bolger were very impressed with the social and cultural practices of the churches they researched: 'Virtually all these communities support women at all levels of ministry, prioritize the urban over the suburban, speak out politically for justice, serve the poor, and practice fair trade' (p. 11).

And yet, as I read through Gibbs and Bolger's glowing account of these churches, I found myself increasingly frustrated and saddened by what was being described. The typical *emerging church* described in the book is very small and appears to be struggling (15 to 50 members) with people coming and going, and a core membership of often less than a dozen. They focus so much on 'incarnating Christ' that the proclamation of the gospel is often little emphasized. They focus most of their energy on trying to live like Jesus, and they almost try to make *Jesus* into a postmodern. They focus on the Kingdom, but reinterpret it in ways that seem, at times, to be far removed from the New Testament vision of the kingdom of God. They exhibit an insistent imbalance in interpreting Jesus in the Gospels in ways that seem to entirely dismiss the teaching of the Apostle Paul and the rest of the New Testament. As in so many new movements

that claim to go back to the New Testament and follow Christ, the *pride* that they have in their rejection of 'modern' ways of doing church is, sadly, much in evidence. Much of the time, the things they are rejecting in their former church experience, sound like exaggerated caricatures, rather than recognizable characteristics of evangelical churches. So much of what is described is a reaction against expressions of church that they have found wanting and rejected. The multiple imbalances and the sense of superiority so common in movements built in reaction to other Christians are a serious concern in the movement of *emerging churches* described in this book.

Gibbs and Bolger, in writing their book, sought to let the voices of those they interviewed speak more loudly than their own voices. This made for a rather uneven and disjointed text. It is clear that the authors like what they found, but I found that their hesitancy in evaluating and critiquing the movement weakened the book. I came away from the book with a sense of frustration at the authors' shallow, or unexamined, perspective on the phenomenon they describe. They are rightly charitable in their assessment of the movement, but I wish they had engaged a little more in weighing the validity of so many of the seemingly off-the-wall statements and claims that they quote. I would only recommend this book for those who are seeking an in-depth portrait of the current state of the movement of *emerging churches*. Other

They focus on the Kingdom, but reinterpret it in ways that seem, at times, to be far removed from the New Testament vision of the kingdom of God.

books will need to be read if one wants help in discerning the value and biblical faithfulness of some of the main players in this growing movement.

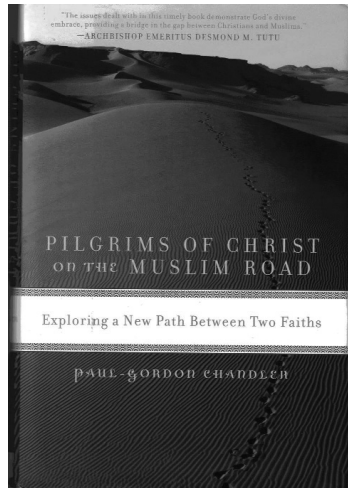
Those criticisms aside, there is much that is positive and challenging in the emerging church movement, as it is described in this book. The fact that postmodern culture rejects Christianity and is not at all interested in the message that they associate with the modern church motivates these leaders to creative response. For Christ and the gospel to get a hearing again in the West, radical rethinking of the shape of the church and of the packaging of the gospel message may well need to be attempted before the church will be seen as attractive by postmoderns.

I believe that these movements of churches struggling to engage their diverse contexts in fresh ways have much to teach those of us who are seeking to do the same thing in Muslim contexts

It is this same desire to have Christ seen as relevant to a group of people who despise Christianity that motivates our efforts towards contextualization in the Muslim world. In spite of its *serious flaws*, I believe that these movements of churches struggling to engage their diverse contexts in fresh ways have much to teach those of us who are seeking to do the same thing in Muslim contexts, which are so often hostile to Christians and Christianity, but attracted by Christ himself. May we all be drawn by the Spirit of God into radical faith and radical love for those who are wandering and lost without knowing the loving God that sent his son to demonstrate his love for humanity, whether Muslims or postmoderns.

***reviewed by Don Little***

## Contextualizing in the Arab world



People approach the challenge of seeing Christ and the Church made at home in the world's cultures in various ways – and this continues to be a source of much discussion and debate. Those of us living as Christ's ambassadors among Muslims of the Arab world find that these issues never go away, nor do they ever become simple. Just when we think we have finally got things figured out, something comes along to challenge our position and make us wonder if we have been too quick to come to our conclusions. Chandler's book, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*, is one of these disturbing challenges.

Persecution and seemingly never-ending pressure against all who name the name of Christ cause us all to ask deep questions about how to live in Muslim communities, whether we be foreigners seeking to understand and love our Muslim neighbours, or Christ's followers with a Middle Eastern heritage. This issue of *Seedbed* raises old issues once again, but by fleshing them out through the example of one person's attempt to be a faithful Christ-follower in the Arab world, it casts fresh light on these age-old issues.

Many of us, as evangelicals, tend to prefer clear-cut beliefs. Yet, Christ did not call us to a life of comfortable answers, but to take up the cross and follow him. May this Arab pilgrim's costly example stir us to keep on picking up our cross and obeying the One who was despised and rejected by his own people, yet nevertheless, remained faithful to the One who had called him.