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EDITORIAL

How do we live as Christians seeking to point our Muslim friends to Jesus Christ? The articles in this issue of *Seedbed* discuss that question through a variety of subjects and approaches.

Many of you have requested prayer for your opportunities to witness when commenting on the cartoon controversy and its worldwide implications. You will find two thought-provoking commentaries in the assessments written by John Piper and Marten de Vries. Perhaps you also have some insights about how to turn the reactions of Muslims into openings to speak of Christ. We would be glad to have your contributions for the next issue of *Seedbed*.

How much do the concepts of honour and shame bear on your understanding of Arab culture and provide ideas from Scripture to help your friends see their need of a Saviour? G. K. leads us to consider how a strong sense of shame could open the way for a desire to receive the One who bore our shame on the cross. Two other messages from John Piper remind us of the importance of the written word of God, even for those friends who prefer oral communication. Joy Loewen shares with us the lessons God has taught her through years of reaching out to Muslim

women. Let us know about your experiences when reading Bible passages to Muslims or praying with them.

How do we model our life with Christ before our national friends (both Christian and non-Christian)? Juan Carlos Parodi challenges us to improve our team relationships with our colleagues from Latin America. Some of his comments could also be applied to our adaptation to the cultures of our Arab world countries. And what about our lifestyles and our use of money? Don Little's interactive book study provokes us to think through how we model the Christian life before the less affluent – whether nationals or mission colleagues. How have you handled the questions that he raises?

A new book has come out to help women who serve in the Muslim world face various situations and stages of life and ministry. In her review, Linda Lundy recommends this book as providing women with practical suggestions related to all the stages of missionary life.

May you find something in this issue of *Seedbed* to encourage and stimulate your ongoing ministries.

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Being Mocked: The Essence of Christ's Work, not Muhammad's

by John Piper

February 8, 2006

Fresh Words Edition

What we saw this past week in the Islamic demonstrations over the Danish cartoons of Muhammad was another vivid depiction of the difference between Muhammad and Christ, and what it means to follow each. Not all Muslims approve the violence. But a deep lesson remains: The work of Muhammad is based on being honored and the work of Christ is based on being insulted. This produces two very different reactions to mockery.

If Christ had not been insulted, there would be no salvation. This was his saving work: to be insulted and die to rescue sinners from the wrath of God. Already in the Psalms the path of mockery was promised: "All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads" (Psalm 22:7). "He was despised and rejected by men . . . as one from whom men hide their faces . . . and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3).

When it actually happened it was worse than expected. "They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head. . . . And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spit on him" (Matthew 27:28-30). His response to all this was patient endurance. This was the work he came to do. "Like a lamb that is led to the

slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).

This was not true of Muhammad. And Muslims do not believe it is true of Jesus. Most Muslims have been taught that Jesus was not crucified. One Sunni Muslim writes, "Muslims believe that Allah saved the Messiah from the ignominy of crucifixion."¹ Another adds, "We honor [Jesus] more than you [Christians] do. . . . We refuse to believe that God would permit him to suffer death on the cross."² An essential Muslim impulse is to avoid the "ignominy" of the cross.

That's the most basic difference between Christ and Muhammad and between a Muslim and a follower of Christ. For Christ, enduring the mockery of the cross was the essence of his mission. And for a true follower of Christ enduring suffering patiently for the glory of Christ is the essence of obedience. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account" (Matthew 5:11). During his life on earth Jesus was called a bastard (John 8:41), a drunkard (Matthew 11:19), a blasphemer (Matthew 26:65), a devil (Matthew 10:25); and he promised his followers the same: "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household" (Matthew 10:25).

The caricature and mockery of Christ has continued to this day. Martin Scorsese portrayed Jesus in *The Last Temptation of Christ* as wracked with doubt and beset with sexual lust. Andres Serrano was funded by the National Endowment for the Arts to portray Jesus on a cross sunk in a bottle of urine. The *Da Vinci Code* portrays Jesus as a mere mortal who married and fathered children.

How should his followers respond? On the one hand, we are grieved and angered. On the other hand, we identify with Christ, and embrace his suffering, and rejoice in our afflictions, and say with the apostle Paul that vengeance belongs to the Lord, let us love our enemies and win them with the gospel. If Christ did his work by being insulted, we must do ours likewise.

When Muhammad was portrayed in twelve cartoons in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, the uproar across the Muslim world was intense and sometimes violent. Flags were burned, embassies were torched, and at least one Christian church was stoned. The

cartoonists went into hiding in fear for their lives, like Salman Rushdie before them. What does this mean?

It means that a religion with no insulted Savior will not endure insults to win the scoffers. It means that this religion is destined to bear the impossible load of upholding the honor of one who did not die and rise again to make that possible. It means that Jesus Christ is still the only hope of peace with God and peace with man. And it means that his followers must be willing to “share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10).

Footnotes

- 1 Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* (Nairobi: Usima Press, 1980), p. 141.
- 2 Quoted from *The Muslim World* in J. Dudley Woodberry, editor, *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989), p. 164.

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Muslims can say anything. Christians should rejoice in their Lord.

by Marten de Vries

Editor's note: Rev. Marten de Vries is a Reformed minister in Rotterdam and is regularly engaged in conversations with Muslims. This article first appeared in an abridged form in Dutch in the *Nederlands Dagblad* of Monday 13th February 2006 under the heading 'Cartoons kans voor gesprek met moslims' (Cartoons Offer an Opportunity for Conversation with Muslims).

Much has been said and written in the Christian press as a result of the controversial Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad. Many people have pointed out that Christians also are mocked and slandered. They are used to it; as followers of Jesus Christ, they react differently. They, in contrast to Muslims, do not feel *personally* hurt when their Saviour is scoffed at. They do suffer for this – just as they do when they are laughed at – but they do not curse in return. They may protest, but they do not threaten and they do not use physical violence; nor do they notify the police and call for prosecution. Instead, they ensure only that they are not suffering justifiable abuse for not behaving as Christians should (*see* 1 Peter 4 from verse 12 onwards).

Christians distance themselves from the cartoons because, in their love for Muslims, they do not seek to be strong by making the religion of others look ridiculous. A Christian may show a little humour, especially through a bit of self-mockery and putting things into perspective.¹ He or she may even use satire (*see* Isaiah 44 where people make a god for themselves out of a piece of

wood which serves as firewood for others). Or they may express bitter mockery as did Elijah on Mount Carmel when he suggested that Baal was deep in thought, busy or asleep. But these Bible passages cannot possibly be used as an excuse for deliberately presenting offensive questions or criticisms of Islam. They are, at best, for use only among Christians when baptised believers try to exchange the one true God for something which cannot be a god. Mocking is completely counter-productive when we desire to spread the 'sweet savour of Christ' among Muslims.

Ideal

Honesty forces us to say that our practice as Christians has not always lived up to the ideal.

What some Christians have done to each other has also often been contrary to scriptural principles. At one time Catholics condemned Protestants to be burned.

Unfortunately, some of the great reformers spoke in belittling terms of others. We may desire to distance ourselves just as much from the Crusades as from Augustine's misuse of state power in his struggle with the North African Christians who were followers of Donatism. Even today, in their condemnation of Muslims, some Christians prefer to let themselves be motivated by their own primitive

instincts rather than by the correcting principles of the Gospel.

On the other hand, we note that many Muslims are not only saddened by the current commotion, but they are also utterly ashamed of it. They are aware of insincerity in their own circles. Political anger and frustration is being packaged as religious offence. One Muslim mother wrote that all those Muslims who name their child 'Muhammad' and who do not go on to bring the child up 'in the fear of Allah', reveal just as little respect for their own prophet. Other Muslims point to the example of Muhammad himself when he used to ignore such insulting behaviour.

Dhimmis

It has already been pointed out that Muslims have been guilty of similar attacks on others. Sickening anti-Semitic satirical cartoons existed long before the Arabic European Liga of Diyab Abou Jahja published these recent ones as a reaction to the challenged issue of *Jyllands-Posten*.² Both inside and outside of the Middle East, drawings have been circulating in which Western political leaders are being dragged through the mud. Also, some Muslims are not diffident about ridiculing Christianity or discriminating against its followers.

What Christians have done or neglected to do may be embarrassing, but it is characteristic of Islam to see non-Muslims as *dhimmis*, second-class citizens, in those countries where Muslims are in control. Christians are by no means always persecuted except for when we are talking of Muslim back-

ground believers. Public ceremonies by Christians take place in Islamic countries, although officially they may be forbidden. In any case, missionary activity is punished and a falling away from Islam is seen as criminal behaviour and treated as such. These actions are in sharp contrast with the rights Muslims vehemently claim for themselves in the West.

Incest recommended?

The content and the symbols of the Christian religion are deliberately mis-treated. Muslim demonstrators showed great pleasure in trampling on the Danish flag with its cross! It is childish to say, 'This is allowed because they did it too'. In any case, such actions do not exemplify principles of respect.

Often, the Bible (the Old and New Testament) is the object of bitter abuse, while the Qur'an is put above any criticism. Now, of course, there are some Muslims, especially in the post-modern Western society, who think that open questions may be asked of the Qur'an. But biting criticism of their holy book would not be tolerated. Meanwhile, not only in some mosques, but also in busy shopping streets in the Netherlands, books are for sale in which terrible things about the Bible are printed. They will say it is not about the original Bible, which is now non-existent for them. However, this Bible is the Holy Scriptures for Christians today.

Here are some examples that Muslims give. They say that the Bible of the church is corrupt. Their proof is the inclusion of pornographic passages and the recommendation of incest and rape

found in the biblical histories. They add that the faith of Christians is ridiculous because of the incarnation where Jesus is God. So as a human being, God was hungry, ate, drank and went to the toilet! Notwithstanding, a Muslim will use Bible texts which are useful for him to confirm that Islam is right.

Muslims say anything they like about Christianity. Imagine the commotion there would be if somebody started criticizing the Qur'an in this manner! Actually, there are evangelists who work like this. But Muslims have been known to flare up in great indignation at the very idea of using selections from the Qur'an to underline Christian doctrine.

Offensive

Now we cannot deny Muslims the right to ask questions. When these are asked out of interest or lack of understanding, I am personally glad for them; they offer a chance to witness.

We must remember that the Gospel in itself is a stumbling block! The Bible says the very same thing and not without reason. God appeared in the flesh; Jesus humbled Himself to become one of us – with all that this entails. God's Son was born as a man, not only from the pure virgin Mary, but remember that there were also prostitutes further back in the family tree. A naked Jesus hung on the cross. Indeed, there was no beauty or majesty in His appearance that would lead us to desire Him. The incarnation gives rise to strong reactions, more emotional than the questions Christians may have over Muhammad's dealings with

women, for example.³ Of course these reactions may come because Muslims actually want to revere Jesus as one of Allah's prophets.

A Christian who does not understand how his confession of faith can go against the grain with other people has not really understood the Gospel himself.

Without shame

Nonetheless, the Incarnation is especially dear to us all. Muslims must learn that they cannot say just anything in any way and certainly not while talking with Christians. It might be a good idea if not only Christians in Pakistan would take to the streets to protest against provocative cartoons from Scandinavia but if at the same time in Dutch cities, Muslims would clean their shops of substandard anti-Christian publications.

I am not writing to Muslims here but to committed Christians. As Christians, you must fearlessly and boldly keep 'rejoicing in Christ' – yes, in the crucified Christ. Make clear that He is truly everything to you. By so doing, an opportunity opens up. The secularised Dutch have become immune to it, but Muslims are capable of feeling how much it hurts when somebody makes depreciative comments about what is actually holy to you. Under God's blessing, may this prove to be an opening to release the power of the message of the weak incarnate Christ!

Footnotes

1 I do not mean only as a reaction to insults from others, but in general. Moreover, the example of Isaiah 44 tells how, in certain circumstances, we could speak about non-Christians. Again,

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- this is not as a result of what other people may say about us.
2. *Jyllands Posten* is the name of the magazine that published the cartoons. Abou Jahja published anti-Semitic cartoons in reaction to this.
3. I am thinking of all his wives, including the girl Aicha and Zainab, who, in fact, was his daughter-in-law.

Sharing the Gospel in an Honour and Shame Society

by G.K.

Introduction:

Living in the Middle East for fifteen years has not made me immune to shock.

Most recently, I was astonished by the explosive reaction toward the Danish cartoons. Another such time was about three years ago when a Palestinian woman was interviewed on CNN. She had given birth to a baby boy and named him Saddam. As she stood holding her new son, she pointed to her oldest son and said, 'Inshallah, he [Saddam] will grow up to be a suicide bomber like his older brother aspires to be'.

It is at these times that I realize that I still embody the well-known Arab proverb which says, '*Ana fi wadi, wa enta fi wadi*' – which basically means that we are in two different worlds. So I ask myself, what are the barriers that separate our *wadis* and can we somehow cross over and walk together toward a relationship with God?

Shortly after watching that interview on CNN, I was introduced to a book entitled, *Honour and Shame* by Roland Muller. We read through it as a team and began to discuss the implications of sharing the Gospel in what Muller terms an 'Honour and Shame' culture.

What is an Honour and Shame culture?

For a thorough answer to this question, I would recommend *Honour and Shame* by Roland Muller, along with a number of articles that are listed in the refer-

ences. But for the purpose of this article, I quote Dr. Paul Hiebert:

In true shame oriented cultures, every person has a place and a duty in the society. One maintains self-respect, not by choosing what is good rather than what is evil, but by choosing what is expected of one. Personal desires are sunk in the collective expectation. Those who fail will often turn their aggression against themselves instead of using violence against others. By punishing themselves they maintain their self-respect before others, for shame cannot be relieved, as guilt can be, by confession and atonement. Shame is removed and honour restored only when a person does what the society expects of him or her in the situation, including committing suicide if necessary. When persons are shamed they lose their self-identity within the family and become disinherited from the clan.

(Hiebert 1985, 212)

Honour killings, suicide bombings, the burning of embassies, and everyday acts of lying and cheating are clearly seen as 'sins' and generally result in feelings of guilt in Western culture. But, if those acts are for the purpose of covering shame and maintaining honour, then they are deemed virtues in Eastern culture. So, if our definition of *sin* is so diametrically different and our understanding of salvation by confession and atonement does not relieve their felt need – shame – how can we communicate the Gospel?

The Bad and ‘Good News’ for Honour and Shame societies

We have all struggled to explain sin and tried to help our Muslim friends feel appropriate guilt for their sins. Yet, in an Honour and Shame society, people are not largely stricken with guilt. Let me give you an example. Recently, I sat with a student. He is 21 years old and in training to be a police officer. He told me that his mother died in a car accident five years ago. Then he went on and told me that he had been driving the car without a license. I was shocked and said, ‘Oh, you must feel terrible.’ He responded with, ‘Oh I was just a kid and besides “it was written”.’ No doubt this is what he was told at the time of the accident and this is what he has continued to tell himself whenever feelings of guilt have bubbled up inside him. So the question remains, how can we talk about sin with our Muslim friends?

Here’s the Bad News: We are in a position of shame before a holy God.

In Scripture, there are many metaphors that indicate our shame before God.

1. *Nakedness*: Gen. 3: 7-21; Deut. 28: 48; Isa.47: 3; Nah. 3: 5; 2 Cor. 5: 2, 3

2. *Defilement*: Leviticus; Lam. 1: 8; Isa.6: 5; 35: 8; 64: 6; Ez.39: 24; Mt.15: 11, 18

3. *Sickness*: Ex.15: 26; Lev. 26: 16; Ps. 103: 3; Jer. 16: 4; Lk. 7: 21

4. *Curses*: Gen. 3: 14, 17; Num. 23: 8; Deut. 28: 15, 45; Jos. 8: 34; Jer.17: 5

These are issues our friends can relate to. Obviously, in a Muslim

culture, modesty and purity are paramount. The very thought of approaching God (even in ritual prayer) naked or unclean is absurd. Likewise, everyone has suffered from sickness and is consumed with the fear of curses. They already attempt to deal with these problems with excessive modesty, ritual washings and works such as fasting in Ramadan and going on Hajj; but they don’t realize that these are indications of our shame before God. Our role is to help them see that these things were not part of God’s original plan for mankind but are instead a result of disobedience.

Deuteronomy 28: 15ff. gives a long list of warnings to those who dishonour God. It says they will suffer sickness, poverty, slavery, barrenness and every kind of curse. It is important to point out that these things affect all of us – from newborn babies to old men, good people and bad people alike. We are all in a position of shame and our nakedness, defilement and sickness constantly remind us that we are separated from a holy God.

Note: In the OT, shame often led to genuine repentance and restoration (2 Chr. 7: 14, Joel 2: 12, 13, 26, 27).

The Good News: God wants to restore us to a place of honour.

Since the time of Adam and Eve, mankind has dealt with shame in much the same way: covered it up. And if you can’t cover it up, then pass the blame. Yet ultimately, once shame is exposed, it must be dealt with or you face alienation.

God desires to remove our shame and restore us to a place of honour.

Some examples:

- Hannah prayed to the Lord to deliver her from the shame of her barrenness. When He answered that prayer, she prayed,

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour (1 Sam. 2: 8).

- Zephaniah was one of God's prophets who had the undesirable mandate to remind Judah of their shame before God. Yet, God also gave him a promise of restoration.

I will give them praise and honour in every land where they were put to shame. . . I will give you honour and praise among all the peoples of the earth (Zeph. 3: 19-20).

- Jesus foretold his death to his followers. He said,

The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me (Jn. 12: 25, 26).

More Good News: God sent Jesus and gave Him power over our afflictions.

Illustrations we can use:

1. He restored those who were outcast:

- The woman with the issue of blood (Mk. 5: 25-35).
- The woman at the well (Jn. 4: 28-42).
- Lepers (Lk. 17: 12-19).

2. He healed the sick:

- Blind Bartimaeus (Lk. 18: 35-43).

- Jairus's daughter (Lk. 8: 40 ff.).

3. He forgave sinners:

- The paralytic (Lk. 5: 17-26).
- The woman at Simon the Pharisee's home (Lk. 7: 36-50).
- Zacchaeus (Lk. 19: 1-10).

4. He freed people who were cursed and demon possessed:

- The Canaanite woman's daughter (Mt. 15: 21-28).
- The legion of demons cast out (Lk. 8: 26-39).

The Best News: Jesus bore our shame on the cross and lives to present us holy before God.

At this point, we need to give some of the OT background regarding the significance of blood sacrifice. Although our friends have a religious tradition of sacrifice, it has various and different meanings from that in the Bible.

1. After Adam and Eve disobeyed in the garden, God made the first blood sacrifice to make clothes to cover their nakedness (Gen. 3: 21).

2. When Abraham was willing to obey God and sacrifice his son, God provided a ram to take his place (Gen. 22: 1-14).

3. The people of Israel were told to put the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorframe so that the angel of death would not kill their firstborn (Ex. 12: 21-30).

4. Once the tabernacle was built, there were two blood sacrifices daily. This was to purify the place so that God could dwell among them (Ex. 29: 38-46).

These and other stories show that a blood sacrifice was required to deal

with the effects of man's shame. But we need to point out that these were temporary solutions and had to be repeated again and again.

5. God promised a suffering servant who would bring salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa. 49: 6).

- He foretold the physical pain that His servant would suffer (Isa. 50: 6-7).
- He foretold the scorn that His servant would suffer (Isa. 53: 3).
- His servant would suffer death for our afflictions and our shame (Isa. 53: 4-12).

6. Jesus was that suffering servant.

- It was His purpose for coming (Lk. 18: 31-33; Jn. 1: 29).
- Jesus felt our shame (Mt. 27: 46).
- The curtain in the temple was torn, opening the way to God. Life was restored to those who had died (Mt. 27: 50-54).
- After fulfilling all that the prophets had spoken, God raised Him up and gave Him glory (Lk. 24: 25, 44).
- In turn, He presents us holy before God (Jn. 17; Col 1: 21-22).
- With our shame removed, we can dwell with God forever (Rev. 21: 3, 4).

Conclusion

In the attempt to climb out of my *wadi* and overcome some of the barriers that hinder communication with my Muslim friends, I have encountered a number of seasoned guides. Some have

walked along with me and helped me to become a better storyteller and Arabist. Others, like Roland Muller and Bruce Thomas, have awakened me to a broader understanding of sin and salvation. The works of Kenneth Bailey have helped me to understand and retell the parables in the Gospel of Luke. I'd like to invite you to travel along with us and join us in becoming better communicators of the 'good news of great joy that will be for all the people' (Lk. 2: 10). 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news' (Rom. 10: 10).

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Missions, Orality, and the Bible

by John Piper

November 16, 2005

Thoughts on Pre-, Less-, and Post-Literate Cultures

There is significant discussion today about oral cultures and how they learn and how they should be evangelized and built up in faith. The discussion ranges from pre-literate to post-literate—from cultures that have never had their languages written down to Western groups that no longer read but only watch images and listen to iPods. Of course, awareness of orality is not new, since virtually all cultures before the modern period and its printing press learned orally. Everywhere the church has gone in the history of missions, its initial task has mainly been oral, even where missionaries prized literacy and sought to translate the Bible as part of their church planting.

What's new is 1) the development of more self-conscious strategies of adapting to the kinds of oral traditions in various cultures, and 2) the more rigorous application of the biblical history of redemption as oral story, and 3) the intention and attempt to develop means of communicating biblical truth to so-called post-literate Westerners who spend little time reading.

None of these developments is in itself bad and may be very good. 1) Orality will always be a huge and precious and inevitable part of human life, even in the most literate cultures, and it is wise to make the best use of this reality for Christ and his kingdom. 2)

The Bible is history and interpretation—it is a story along with the inspired, authoritative explanation. It should be heralded in oral and written form for what it is. 3) Post-literate Westerners (and people who in every age have had difficulty with reading, or dislike for reading) should be both met where they are and encouraged and helped to advance in the benefits of Bible reading and meditation. So, it seems to me that these developments are expressions of love and common sense.

But I am not sure what convictions about the Bible lie beneath some of these developments. So I want to ask a few questions that I hope will help us make explicit the underlying assumptions about the function of the written word of God in these developments. My hope and expectation is that all who identify themselves as evangelicals will say a hearty *No* to question #1 below and a hearty *Yes* to the rest. Then let us do the mission with the wisest use of our voice and our Book.

1. Will we Westerners who have had the Bible in our languages for five centuries and who have access to Greek and Hebrew in which the Bible was verbally inspired keep this privileged position for ourselves?

2. Or will we humble ourselves and labor with all our might to help other peoples and cultures have the same access we have to a full and right understanding of the scriptures so that they do not have to depend on

cultural outsiders telling them what God's words say and what they mean and how they should be applied culturally and religiously and missiologically?

3. Will we tell pre-literate and less-literate peoples and cultures that all authoritative religious truth comes from God through a single inspired book, and that all oral communication about God and his ways, no matter where it happens anywhere in the world, depends for its final reliability on this book, the Bible?

4. Will we clarify for them that, although all other holy books may have some helpful religious insights, nevertheless they do not have any final authority from God, but only the Bible does?

5. Will we tell them that this Bible was first written in Greek and Hebrew, the languages that God used when centuries ago "men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21)?

6. Will we make sure they understand that if they remain only oral and do not someday raise up a generation who can read this book and study it in the original languages, they will remain

dependent on outsiders for the divine truth God has given only through the Book?

7. Will we joyfully concur that access to the words of God in the Bible in one's own language is a blessing greater than health and life, and that the golden rule gives us the privilege and duty to give other people and peoples the blessing that has come to us without our deserving it or planning it?

8. Will we labor for the long-term strength of the church among all unreached and less-reached peoples, by empowering them with the ability to read and study the Bible in the original languages, in the *desire* that the Lord may come very soon, but in the sober *possibility* that he may delay his return for centuries?

9. Will we labor to reverse the Western cultural trend away from reading, in the conviction that, when one moves away from reading, one moves away from a precious, God-given, edifying, stabilizing connection with God's written word?

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Minimizing the Bible?

by John Piper

September 28, 2005

Seeker-Driven Pastors and Radical Contextualization in Missions

I have been pondering a possible relationship between the minimizing of the Bible in so-called seeker-driven churches and in some of the radical forms of contextualization that have emerged in missions. Perhaps there isn't any connection. But I wonder. The common denominator that I am pondering is the loss of confidence that declaring what the Bible says in the power of the Holy Spirit can create and sustain the church of Christ.

This morning I just read John 2:11, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and *manifested his glory*. And his disciples *believed* in him." I bowed and prayed, "O Lord, this is how faith happens. People are given eyes to see your glory in your person and in your deeds. Please don't let me turn away from the ministry that puts all the emphasis on the 'gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God'" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Then I was reminded of another text in John which connected the revelation of Christ's glory to the written word of God. John 20:30-31, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The signs that reveal the

faith-awakening glory of Christ are not mainly new signs being done today, but the signs that are written in the gospels. These are written "so that you may believe." He "manifested his *glory*. And his disciples *believed* in him." That is the way faith comes. Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes "He will glorify me!" (John 16:14). Therefore we declare the fullness of the glorious Person and Work of Christ in history. That is how the church is created and sustained.

It seems to me that a growing number of pastors and missionaries have lost confidence in this truth. They have concluded that the gap between the glory of Christ and the felt needs of their neighbors, or between the glory of Christ and the religion of the nationals, is simply too great for the fullness of God's word to overcome. The upshot seems to be the minimization of the Word of God in its robust and glorious fullness.

This is on my front burner just now because in recent weeks I have received a steady stream of testimonies from aching saints who say in so many words, "Our pastor doesn't proclaim to us what the Bible says and means. The messages are not revelations of the glory of Christ. They are advice-talks with a religious twist." And then I have been reading about certain kinds of gospel contextualization in missions that seem to minimize the fullness of the biblical revelation which converts should share with others. So I have

been pondering whether there are connections.

I have no desire to naively equate the cultural conglomerate of Western Christianity with the true, spiritual body of Christ. I can appreciate avoiding the word “Christian” in a missions context where it signifies: degenerate, materialistic, immodest Western religion. And I realize that most of the ways we “do church” are culture specific rather than biblically mandated. But there are other questions that trouble me:

1) Are the essentials of biblical faith embraced by new converts to Christ, and do they make them known in love to others? For example, do they embrace and make known that the Bible is the only inspired and infallible written revelation of God, and that Christ is God and was crucified for sin and raised from the dead above all authority?

2) Are the former religious behaviors of converts to Christ, which they may retain, communicating regularly a falsehood about what the convert means and believes?

3) Are words being used by converts that mislead people rather than make the truth plain? Are missionaries and converts following Paul’s commitment

to candor: “But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2)?

I may be wrong about a Bible-minimizing connection between seeker-driven pastors and radically contextualizing missionaries, but it is hard not to see a loss of faith in the power of God’s Word when I hear that the Bible is not preached at home, and when I read from the frontiers: “We have little hope in our lifetime to believe for a major enough cultural, political and religious change to occur in our context such that Muslims would become open to entering Christianity on a wide scale.”

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit to come in power in our day for the sake of powerful displays of the glory of Christ in the declaration of the Word of God where those glories are revealed with infallible and converting authority.

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Lessons Gleaned in Evangelism among Muslim Women

by Joy Loewen

As I reflect on nearly thirty years of ministry among Muslim women, both in the East and the West, I am aware of having learned many lessons about communicating the Gospel. Five significant lessons stand out as turning points in my desire to communicate the Good News more effectively to Muslims.

Understanding the Importance of Being Set Apart

‘Oh, Lord, I can’t do that!’ I tried to explain to God as I knelt by my bed.

I was about forty years old when I clearly sensed the Holy Spirit suggesting that I remove my make-up and my jewellery except my wedding rings. It wasn’t that I was much into fashion but the modest make-up and jewellery I wore had been part of me for quite a few years. I looked very unfashionable in comparison to Muslim women at their parties all decked up with their expensive lustrous gold bracelets and necklaces purchased in the Middle East. Now they would think I was unattractive and they would be embarrassed to associate with plain me. So I presumed, but God was testing me. I was determined to pay any price to bring the Gospel to Muslim women, but, really, it was going too far to ask that of me.

‘Well, try it, my child, and just see what a difference it will make,’ I heard God saying.

By this time, I was sweating it out with God.

‘What will my husband think? What will others think? I will be a prude. I won’t look young and sexy anymore. Besides, there is nothing sinful with wearing make-up and jewellery...’

And so on, went the internal struggle.

Then submission flooded my soul. I got up, put away my make-up and jewellery and waited to see what would happen. That was about thirteen years ago and I can testify that that step of obedience was the turning point of effectiveness in my ministry among Muslim women. The biggest surprise came from the reaction of Muslim men. I now had more open doors to their wives. I discovered that a Muslim man sometimes is afraid a Western woman will corrupt his wife. We are often seen as ‘Hollywood’ seductresses, all out to lure and capture men. Suddenly, as if almost overnight, both Muslim men and women saw me as a ‘religious’ woman. Muslims feel safe among ‘religious’ women. Doors opened for me as never before. Presentations of the Gospel no longer came with mixed messages. I was amazed. Something very important had taken place which I couldn’t quite identify. Slowly I realized that in the eyes of *Muslims*, I was ‘set apart’ for religious purposes.

Understanding the Significance of Using Scriptures

I pondered a new missionary’s comments. He was describing ‘Scripture reading times’ with non-seeking Mus-

lims. I had grown up in a missionary home in an Islamic country and I had never witnessed this approach by any missionary. And in the ten years my husband and I were missionaries in an Islamic country, I had not heard of anyone simply reading Scriptures with non-seeking Muslims. I wondered if it really worked. Everyone I knew basically talked about Scripture with Muslims, but did they actually have them read it for themselves?

After thinking and praying about following that practice and asking the Lord for courage, I decided to plunge in and try it out. First, we tried it in our home when we had Muslims over for tea or dinner. We lined a bookshelf in the living room with Bibles in different languages. They were put in full sight of guests who often noticed them and made mention of them. We'd pull out the Bible in their language and let them look it over. Then we'd ask if they would like to hear a story Jesus told. Finding the portion, we'd ask them to read it out loud and tell us the story back. They often asked where they could get a Bible and then we'd give them one.

Once we felt comfortable and natural doing this in our home, I decided to put a small Bible in a cloth bag in my purse. Every time I'd visit in Muslim homes, I'd see if I could get them to read Scriptures. During conversations I'd bring my Bible out and ask if they would like to hear something on what we just talked about. Most of the time, the Scripture reading was gladly received. After about twenty years in Muslim ministry, another turning point

in becoming a more effective witness to Muslims had just taken place. I discovered that it is far more powerful using the Bible than simply sharing about it. Now our Muslim acquaintances equate us with the Bible. They know the Bible will usually come out during a visit. One day Aliya was in our home when she suddenly blurted out, 'Where's your Bible?' And Khalida, a strongly opposed Muslim PhD student, asked one night, 'Aren't you going to read the Bible with me?'

Understanding the Power of Praying with Muslim Women

'Please pray for me,' my Libyan friend begged. Her doctor had advised her not to get pregnant because she needed a liver transplant and now she was carrying a baby and desperate. This should be interesting, I mused. She is one of the most conservative women I've met. I let her know that I pray in the name of Jesus and I asked if that would be okay with her. After her agreement, I weakly prayed for a miracle. After all, I hadn't learned how to do this in church. Immediately she requested, 'Now pray a second time and put your hand on my stomach.' This woman is desperate, I concluded. I chided myself later for being so weak in faith and spiritual authority. A few months later, I was called to the hospital where Khadija was threatening to lose the baby. She wanted prayer again. Some time later, a beautiful healthy boy was delivered.

Khadija helped me to enter a turning point in understanding the power of prayer on the spot with Muslim

women. I had been in ministry about thirteen years and told many women I would pray for them, which I tried to do, faithfully keeping my word. It was quite a different matter to pray with them and to do it boldly and in the name of Jesus. In the beginning I felt embarrassed and hesitant, but to my joy and surprise, I discovered Muslim women are yearning to be prayed for. It never fails to amaze me to watch them sit quietly in wonder and awe, often wiping away tears. Seldom do I witness this in my own culture. The experience of the strongest presence of God usually comes when I pray with Muslim women.

Understanding the Teaching of Sin in Evangelism

‘Why don’t the women respond more to the red page depicting the cross in the *Wordless Book*?’ I lamented to my husband.

‘Perhaps,’ he replied, ‘it’s because they don’t understand the black page depicting sin well enough.’

Could it be? I did talk about sin but I really had always wanted women to understand the blood of Jesus shed on the cross.

It was my turn to share the Gospel on the women’s ward of the mission hospital in the Islamic nation where we were serving and I decided I would try to explain sin more clearly. My legs began to weaken and I got very nervous. As I stood before about seventy-five patients and relatives, something ominous was happening. I was shocked to find that there was no black page to explain sin. I asked

others to try to find it but they couldn’t either. An eeriness settled in. I put the book down in front of me for a few seconds and then went to pick it up and it was gone. No one had moved. So I looked for something black to use as an object lesson. As soon as I was done, my eyes saw the book lying where I had put it down. Still no black page. I was shaken as I returned home. I fell into a chair strangely exhausted, holding the book in my hand. As I opened it, the black page fell open and I heard inaudible demonic laughing. That day will never be forgotten because I learned a very important lesson. If we want women to understand and appreciate the value of the cross, they must hear a clear explanation about sin.

It has taken me a long time to learn how to explain sin to Muslim women. There is little comprehension about the holiness of God in Islam. Almost every sin of their own can be justified to be legitimate. Someone else’s sin is a different matter. I have found that if a Muslim woman does not get a clear understanding and conviction of her sin, and yet accepts Christ, she will most likely fall away with time. A turning point in seeing a Muslim woman begin to grasp an understanding of sin came when, after giving doctrinal explanations of sin which seemed to fall on deaf ears, I began to share stories of sin and shame in my own life. Initially I was reluctant to share such information, largely because I was afraid they would not want to associate with me, or might spread what I shared so that doors would even close to me as a result. I was amazed to realize that deep

down I really wanted to leave a good impression.

Hesitantly I began to share my own stories. Suddenly, Muslim women could relate to some of the things evidenced in my sinful nature or even a sinful stronghold where I had needed deliverance or mistakes I had made. The Good News was that I could move on to declaring a Saviour – His saving and transforming power, forgiveness and grace. Especially powerful has been the mention of my own sins of lying, cheating, jealousy, hatred, anger, desires for revenge, a family line of occultic involvement, hypocrisy and rebelliousness. I also share our family mistakes in raising our children. All too often, we leave the impression that we are good. Since they want to project the same image, the issue of sin, so important in understanding the cross, is left untouched or not understood. My Tunisian friend understood sin very clearly and came under conviction. Even though she has had her share of trials and testings and even been weakened by them momentarily, one thing she knows is that she has a Saviour who died for her sin. Now the cross looms large for her.

Understanding the Attraction of Heaven in Evangelism

Mom and Dad had just died. Their deaths were awesome because they were ready and anticipating going to be with Jesus in heaven. My many Muslim friends came to me to give their heart-felt condolences, which they are so gifted at doing. Some prepared wonderful meals to honour

me. How precious these women have become! They go far beyond sending a sympathy card or having flowers delivered. They will cry and sit with you. But one thing they cannot do is give hope to the bereaved. The very mention of death terrifies the average woman. Tala had created a beautiful homemade sympathy card for me but she left a blank where the word *death* was to be written. She could not utter the fearful word. Because my heart was so full of fresh emotions after the deaths of my mother and father, words came tumbling out. As I spoke words about our beautiful heaven, I watched them in amazement. Their reactions seemed to say, ‘Tell me more’. And so I did.

The words in Revelation 21:3-4 and 22:3-5 about heaven capture their hearts without fail. This has proven to be one of the best ways to get a spiritual conversation going. For example, Aswad’s full-term baby boy was born dead and her grief was beyond bearing. She didn’t have a Bible in her language. But I had her read verses on heaven from Revelation and she couldn’t stop reading.

Then she responded, ‘We believe when a baby dies, he will bring us fruit in hell.’

I couldn’t believe it. She had already destined herself to hell and was at least comforting herself that her baby would come and bring her fruit. I explained that Jesus could take both her and her baby to heaven.

She wanted so badly to believe that but dejectedly repeated, ‘Well, we believe....’

More than ever, I was determined from that point on to keep talking about heaven. Many Muslim women convey their involvement in praying or fasting for the departed soul of their loved one to reach heaven. There seems to be an underlying belief among many that their prayers or sacrificial fasting will bring about a safe arrival and perhaps even influence God as well as hopefully gaining them merit from engaging in this religious work. I like to use a powerful verse from 1 Peter to affirm that the crucified and risen Jesus is the One who can safely bring us to heaven, the longing of every Muslim woman's heart.

Christ also suffered when he died for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners that he might bring us safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was

raised to life in the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18 NLT).

In conclusion, I discovered that putting into action what I learned about my calling, Scripture, prayer, sin and heaven were significant turning points in my becoming a more effective witness for Jesus among Muslim women. Some of these lessons, though learned earlier, were fleshed out once again when Manal, my North African sister, surrendered her life to Jesus, was baptized and moved in with us for in-depth discipling and to be in a safe haven where she could receive a lot of loving care. Her most apparent spiritual growth seemed to take off when I shared about my own journey in dealing with sin and finding God's deliverance and grace.

Improving Intercultural Awareness for Team Life

by Juan Carlos Parodi

To date, we probably have been quite satisfied with the ways in which we in AWM handle our international teams. Because the majority of our members are from Western cultures, our emphasis has been on orientating people from other cultures to our Western-style mission. It is time for us to look at ways in which our largely Western mission might adapt to people from other cultures.

Some of you might say, 'But most of our workers live in cross-cultural settings! They should know better!' We should not assume that living in a cross-cultural setting makes you a person sensitive to cross-cultural differences in a team. I have lived in multi-cultural settings, worked with people from North America, Europe and Asia, lived in the Arab world as well as in three different Latin American countries and learned six languages – and I still believe that we need to learn more about being part of a cross-cultural team. Most Western international agencies continue to fail in making non-Westerners feel welcomed into their family.

Unfortunately, in the past, some Latin Americans (including myself) have felt rejected, offended or ignored by Westerners in our own company. I am not saying that it was intentional, but I strongly believe that it was because of a lack of mutual cultural understanding. Intercultural communications include, besides language fluency, the awareness of other compo-

nents of communication such as the meaning of relationships, the notion of time, formality, hierarchy and non-verbal communications that people bring with them.

Speaking the language is only one part of the process in establishing a relationship with any other culture. In Latin America, for example, it is a priority to establish a personal relationship with others in order to gain trust. There is an enormous emphasis on strong handshakes, closeness, touch and a sincere smile. The Latin Americans will always stop what they are doing and greet you with genuine pleasure. If they have known you for some time, they will ask after your health and family. The place of a woman in the family is so important that you are always expected to ask after the wife and, in some cases, after the mother of the person you are greeting if you have met these relatives before. Showing interest in the family of the other person is a sign of respect and *sincere friendship* because family is what Latin Americans value the most.

With the development of globalisation, researchers are also considering the factor of the *individualism-collectivism* context as it exists in different cultures. Some authors explain that the term *individualistic* describes cultures in which the 'I' identity has precedence over the 'we' identity. In other words, individualistic societies, such as in North America, focus on individual achievement, whereas col-

lectivist societies emphasize the importance of belonging to a group. Latin American countries are considered to be collectivist societies where the group to which Latin American people give all their loyalty is their family. This strong sense of family loyalty goes beyond the family circle and shows itself in organizational life as well. And it will definitely be an expectation of team life for our Latin American members.

Despite the friendliness that a Latin American person might show to other people, it should not be taken as a sign of openness toward an immediate trusting relationship on their part. Latin American people are rather private about their personal lives and do not open up to a person who does not belong to their trusted social circle. Research in cross-cultural communication has found that members of individualistic societies are less influenced by group membership. Consequently, they are able to express more open and precise communication than individuals from collectivist cultures. While a North American can talk about a recent divorce or other personal matter to others outside the family circle, a Latin American would never reveal such matters to anyone besides close family and friends. Latin Americans are open with people they consider as their friends. And in a cross-cultural team setting, they would expect friendship from the rest of the team. This is all related to trust. If members of the team do not show sincere friendship, then the Latin

American might end up not trusting the team or team members.

So, if you have not established a friendly relationship with the Latin American person, you run the risk of having your requests ignored for the simple reason of priority. If you are not a well-known person to them, they will probably give priority to someone else whom they know well. Authors call this behaviour *personalism*. The following quote illustrates what this means. Latin Americans are 'people who seem to produce work for others primarily because of a personal relationship with them.'¹ It is important to point out that once you develop a friendship, you can count on the person's loyalty because you will be treated as someone they care about; it will be very unusual for them to let you down.

There is also a strong sense of identity among all Latin Americans. The legacy of past cultures has passed on many traditions that have been zealously kept by the descendants of these cultures, making it difficult for modernisation and globalisation to easily envelop these cultures. However, they are still open to globalization and to new international matters, as long as they can keep their sense of belonging and loyalty to their Latin heritage. That is why you see Latin Americans bonding together in close communities. Conflict might occur in a team if several of them attach themselves to their small group and put a wall between themselves and others. Such a difficulty could be avoided by a 'welcoming team' with a strong sense of belonging: not 'them' and 'us' but 'we'.

I would like to point out what Osland wrote in 1999 in an article on Latin American culture.² She explained how to express empathy and respect toward others. Such appreciation is given when you take time to understand where the Latin American team member comes from and what value this person has. This has to do with affirming the concept of dignity. Unfortunately, Western cultures do not take the time and the effort to appreciate people's backgrounds and cultures. Latin Americans see Western missionaries as 'task-oriented' machines that ignore them and are just concerned about their performance, competency and ability to learn the language. The result may be that Latin Americans feel used and abused. They need individualized attention and recognition of being part of the team. In the Latin culture, trust is built upon friendship, not on performance.

Good team life for Latin Americans and Westerners could be advanced by planning for multicultural understanding. The Western colleagues need to be aware of the Latin culture and traditions. Here are some practical suggestions:

- Talk about issues of diversity in your teams and ask for examples from different group members.
- Avoid ethnic slurs, jokes and stereotypes.
- Use resources and illustrations that represent Latin Americans.
- Take into consideration the variety of parenting and child rearing approaches. Parenting styles and

forms of discipline vary from culture to culture.

- Determine participants' reading abilities and language skills before using written materials. Avoid mimicking language, dialect or gestures of another culture. Never correct a Latin American in front of everyone!
- Be aware of special family needs. For example, some men do not want their wives to attend team meetings alone – so encourage family team gatherings.
- Be sensitive to people with special needs for special equipment and materials. Also, be sensitive to the need or desire to bring children to meetings.
- Bring in resource people who represent different cultures and viewpoints.
- Use colleagues' own experiences in exercises and activities.
- Be inclusive and be careful not to focus only on your Western team members.
- Be aware that the Latin social orientation is collective with a group identity and interdependence; it is cooperative rather than competitive and it has an emphasis on interpersonal relations. A Latin American team member will definitely 'die' in an individualistic team setting.
- Be aware of differences in living standards between Westerners and Latin Americans. I recommend that AWM families adopt Latin American team members spiritually and emotionally. I remember when I lived in Jordan, my team leader and his family made me feel that I was part

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of their family. We should not feel guilty if we have higher living standards than others in our team, but we also should be sensitive to their needs and be generous as well.

- Remember that the concept of time for a Latin American is focused more on the 'present time/now' perspective.

When I lived in Jordan, my worst culture shock came through living with three Europeans. I fitted into the Arab culture right away because I loved passing time with people and talking and listening to them. My European roommates were in the house doing homework for several hours. I felt lonely since they didn't want to come along with me to meet Arabs. I was focused on learning Arabic through my

Arab friends; they were focused on learning Arabic through their study notes. This was an example of *Time and Task oriented* versus *Relational oriented*.

In conclusion, I would like to encourage Western colleagues to be extra compassionate, extra patient, extra loving. In other words, exercise the gifts of the Spirit when you interact with your Latin American colleagues. Wear their shoes and understand how much they have sacrificed to be able to minister to Arabs.

Footnotes

1. O. Osland. 'Organizational Implications of Latin American Culture: Lessons for the Expatriate Manager.' *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 8, 219-235 (1999)
2. Ibid.

Affluence in AWM—Is Bonk Right?

by Don Little

Editor's note: This is more than a book review as the author goes on to discuss the ideas in the book in relation to the ministry of AWM workers in the Arab world.

In his 1991 book, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem*, Jonathan Bonk presents a hard-hitting analysis and critique of the almost overwhelming negative and usually destructive impact that Western missionary affluence has on the poor among whom most such missionaries minister.¹ In the first three chapters, which make up Part I, Bonk argues that the *sense of entitlement* with which Western missionaries regard their personal material and economic advantage goes back to the beginnings of the modern missionary era. In fact, it is so deeply embedded that it is at the core – often unconsciously – of missionary thinking, strategy and policy. In Part II (Chapters 4- 6), Bonk lays out some of the often unforeseen, yet profoundly negative consequences of this growing Western missionary affluence. He describes some of the primary damage that this affluence does to relationships and communication, and describes how it often causes massive failure in ministry. In his concluding chapter, Bonk makes some helpful suggestions as to how individual missionaries and Western mission agencies can find their way ‘out of the mire of personal affluence’.²

The destructive impact of our relative affluence as Western missionaries was brought home to me recently as I

struggled to know how to respond to a friend and former disciple who wrote an email to me from North Africa, asking for financial assistance in his current desperate situation. My unwillingness to help this friend, whom I have not seen for about five years, elicited an angry and resentful response in which my friend called into question my integrity as a disciple of Christ.

As I read Bonk's penetrating analysis and at times almost scathing critique³, my responses ranged from conviction of my own sinful behaviour, to outrage at the ‘ridiculous’ exaggerations that Bonk seemed tempted to make.⁴ Bonk strikes close to home and writes as a missionary insider familiar with the temptations and challenges of missionary affluence. Indeed, as many of my colleagues will affirm, dealing with the psychological stress of being *relatively well off* and ministering among people who are often so much poorer in material possessions than we are, was for me one of the abiding stresses and challenges of living in North Africa. Added to the stress of feeling uncomfortably wealthy while living in North Africa was the stress of coming home for furlough visits to Canada and feeling distinctly poor by comparison to our friends and supporters. Questions of affluence and poverty and missionary lifestyle have continued to trouble me ever since I spent two years sleeping on a bedroll on the floor with OM in India while surviving on less

than \$100 a month in order to live at the level of the people among whom we ministered.

My own solution while living in North Africa was to seek to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in being as generous in giving to those who asked for help as I possibly could, given my modest degree of *comparative* affluence. A number of times, we secretly gave away significant amounts of money to help friends pay their rent, or pay off debts, or pay for medical bills, etc. At times, this generosity was quite costly to us, restricting our family holidays and preventing us from buying more possessions and typical 'middle class' accretions. However, our generosity gave us credibility.

A few MBB friends explained that they did not mind seeing people with more money than they had. They acknowledged that life was like that. It hurt them *only* when those same people preached about generosity but were not willing to part with *a lot* of their abundance in order to help meet the needs of the needy around them. Living and ministering in North Africa was a constant personal challenge to live up to Christ's discipleship demands in terms of one's possessions. There was no question but that one's attitude towards one's affluence, and resultant actions, had a strong correlation to ministry fruitfulness.

What about those of us serving as church-planting tent-makers in AWM in general? Are we living at a level of affluence that interferes with our capacity to minister to those around us who are poor? This question is

impossible to answer in a general way. There are such huge variations in relative lifestyles among our tent-makers and among the cities in which they live. Those who live in some of the Arabian Peninsula countries live quite well from the income that their local occupations provide. Nevertheless, they are considerably poorer than most of the local people among whom they are seeking to minister. Indeed, the major spiritual stronghold in those regions appears to be materialism, rather than Islam. The lifestyle challenges of our workers in such areas are considerably different from those of us who live in poorer Middle Eastern and North African countries.

On one hand, our generation of workers in North Africa is saved from some of the typical excesses of missionary affluence simply by the fact of being tent-makers. Our lifestyle choices are often matched to reflect others in our professions. We are not seen, in general, as missionaries, but as Westerners living and working in North Africa. The era of compounds and missionaries living much above their neighbours has long been outdated in North Africa – if for no other reason than that the governments in the region do not welcome missionaries. In this sense, Bonk's criticisms of missionary affluence do not generally apply to us.

On the other hand, so much of what he says has an ongoing relevance to our ministry of discipling and church planting in the poorer countries of the Arab world. For example, we are actively seeking to recruit new mem-

bers into our teams from the new sending countries. There is no doubt that the majority of these co-workers will be coming with economic backgrounds vastly different from those of us who come from affluent Western countries. We are discussing how to mesh such people into our team. There will be very significant challenges in doing so. Again, tent-making will be a leveller in that in several countries, AWM members will be living entirely on their in-country incomes through their professional placements. This will mean that economic disparity will be related to professional rather than national background. Nevertheless, Bonk's concern about the normal inequalities between Western and non-Western missionaries must be carefully heeded. His quotation from a Japanese missionary in Thailand is a sobering rebuke and a warning to treat these issues with utmost care and seriousness:

The gap between us was immense in all areas of life. We tried not to compare ourselves with the 'first class', and tried our best, but how could we avoid this comparison? We were living right among them day after day! Once my family was virtually broke... for one week. I finally went to seek 'help' (of 'first-aid-kit' kind) at the office of the 'first class'. I was given a sermon – a good sermon – there. As I came out of that office, feeling like a third class passenger sneaking out of a first class cabin, I met a fellow Western missionary with whom I had studied at the same seminary in the United States, as he drove up in his Volkswagen loaded with items of shopping. He had only been in Thailand a few

weeks. Our most 'irritating' problem was our most esteemed Western missionaries!⁵

Moving beyond this issue, the central concern about the negative impact of our Western missionary relative influence has to do with the relationships that we build with the members of the national churches that we are seeking to encourage and strengthen. Bonk cites numerous cases of the work of missionaries being almost totally undermined because of their easy affluence and their often crass insensitivity to the impact that that affluence has on national workers who must subsist at a much lower lifestyle. Bonk makes several statements that are often chillingly true, and apply even to our ministry in AWM. It is worth taking the time to quote them:

1. Wealthy missionaries cannot identify with the life situations of the poor which their message is intended to address. Inability to relate the good news to the actual circumstances of the people except in theory raises serious questions as to the validity of the good news itself.

2. There does not seem to be a correspondence between what wealthy missionaries preach and what they themselves practice... Western missionary claims of personal sacrifice and privation – however genuine in the context of their pecuniary potential in their own society – can only be greeted with incredulity by the great majority of the world's peoples, many of whom would be rich by local standards if they could but trade places with the missionary for a year, a week, or even a day.

3. The gospel of plenty, preached so eloquently and persuasively in the

silent language of missionary lifestyle, frequently overrides or distorts people's understanding of the Christian gospel.... It is only recently that Western missionaries have discovered, to their chagrin, that the movement of which they are a part has been credited with being one of the greatest secularizing agencies of the past two centuries.⁶

Numerous times during our sojourn in North Africa, relations between missionaries and disciples were strained because of issues arising out of our relative affluence and perceived lack of generosity. Some seasoned co-workers, having struggled with needy brothers and sisters asking for help, and seeing monetary issues cause division in local fellowships, gave it out as a general principle that one should be very cautious about ever giving money to people who ask for help. Others, fortunately, took a different approach and gave away so much, so often, that they themselves were virtually reduced to poverty. I was close enough to the pulse of the hearts of my North African friends to know which missionaries they loved and respected the most!

These issues will not go away and there are no easy solutions. However, once again Bonk comes to our aid in suggesting that we must always work to ensure that our mission work is grounded in three central truths arising out of the very nature of the Gospel. Since we minister incarnationally, we must live among the people we serve and strive to live as close to them in lifestyle and attitude towards affluence as possible, as we call them to emulate everything about us as fellow

disciples. They cannot copy what they do not see. Secondly, we are called to model a lifestyle of sacrifice as we bear the cross of Christ in our daily lives. Finally, we are called to minister in weakness, not in strength. It will be as we seek to know the Holy Spirit's empowerment to live out the reality of these central Gospel truths that we will find our way to lifestyles that are free of the love of Mammon, lives which can truly reflect the call of Christ among those we are called to love and serve.⁷ May we in AWM continue to find grace to be radical disciples in the wide variety of contexts into which we are called to *live lives of witness*.⁸

Footnotes

1 Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

2 Ibid., p. xx. This summary of the book is partly an adaptation of Bonk's own summary in his introduction, p. xx, and partly my own summary of the book's contents.

3 For example: 'The narrow path of discipleship has never been popular among those whose numerous and bulky possessions make passage through the narrow gate and negotiation of the narrow way impossible. It has always been easier for a poor man than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven – in spite of the fact that the rich man with his M.Div. and his Kittel's is well prepared and splendidly equipped to speculate and articulate on eternal verities.' Ibid., p. 112.

4 For example: 'To borrow Trevor Verry's apt metaphor, "[the Western missionary] cannot help but carry something of [the West's] atmosphere with him, like the smell of stale cigarettes clinging to the clothes of a non-smoker who has been in a room full of people smoking"', p. 114.

5 Ibid., p. 55. Quoted by Bonk from *Missionary Service in Asia Today. A Report on a Consultation*

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Held by the Asia Methodist Advisory Committee,
February 18-23, 1971, p. 132.

6 Ibid., pp 61, 64, 66 & 68.

7 Ibid., pp. 115-122.

8 This slogan currently appears on most of the
publicity produced by AWM in the USA. May
we truly learn to live up to that high calling.

Book Review: Through Her Eyes: Perspectives on Life from Christian Women Serving in the Muslim World

Reviewed by Linda Lundy

Through Her Eyes: Perspectives on Life from Christian Women Serving in the Muslim World, Marti Smith, Authentic Media, Waynesboro, GA, USA, 2005.

Marti Smith has compiled a useful book that covers the different aspects of missionary life encountered by women when serving in the Muslim world. She not only draws from her own life as missionary wife and mother, but also includes a variety of experiences from other women.

Smith reminds us that since today's mission force consists of up to two-thirds women, how women cope overseas is extremely important. She covers topics such as adjustment to the culture, perseverance and handling loneliness. In her comprehensive treatment of her subject, she suggests survival tips for new workers and discusses questions of learning the language while caring for children, managing the pressures of life and dealing with sickness.

Her aim is to look at the experiences of both single and married women (those with children as well as those without children). She tells how different women have been enabled to remain on the field while going through many adjustments as they faced various challenges. Their responses include both what worked for them and what did not work.

Other questions raised by women workers and treated in this book are:

Where and how should we live? Do we live in a predominantly Western area or in the midst of those whom we are trying to reach? What are the pros and cons? What will work for my family? What would God have me do? How will my role change when I have a child? What school should my child attend? Should I homeschool?

Women on the field often find their role changing over the years. It is important to support and encourage them to anticipate what some of these changes might entail. When women readers see how someone who is there on the field has dealt with a certain situation in her own life, they can better face similar changes and problems. These tangible examples of real life experiences make this book a useful tool, both for the orientation process and for ongoing service.

Each section is followed by a series of thought-provoking questions for the reader to ask herself or to use in discussion sessions with women colleagues. These questions are very helpful to any woman preparing for missionary work or continuing service in the Muslim world. I know they would have been helpful to me before I went to the field as well as throughout my ministry. I recommend this book as one of the best I have read for providing practical help for missionary women.

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