

Seedbed

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Contents

Editorial	I
Insensitive, Provocative, Courageous... or What?	2
<i>by Colin Chapman</i>	
The Veil	5
<i>by Dr Elsie Maxwell</i>	
Shia Islam	11
<i>by Dr Andreas Maurer</i>	
The Use of the Word 'Allah' in the Arabic Bible.	14
<i>by Bob Cox</i>	
From Snail Mail to Email and Beyond.	18
<i>by CM</i>	
Using New Media to Make Disciples	22
<i>by JD</i>	
Book Review: 'The Clash of Civilizations'	24
<i>reviewed by Abe Wiebe</i>	
Book Review: 'Londonistan'	26
<i>reviewed by Dr Elsie Maxwell</i>	
Book Review: 'How Wide is my Valley'	28
<i>reviewed by John Haines</i>	

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EDITORIAL

Do you read your Bible with the news of the Muslim world as a backdrop? Yes, we have our moments of daily meditation focused on the Lord and on our personal relationship with Him when we seek to listen and to obey. But as we begin to intercede for others both far and near, we think of those events and conflicts in other places that are touching all our lives.

This edition of *Seedbed* includes articles that relate to some of these present-day issues. Cartoons or comments by political and religious leaders elicit reactions from Muslims who feel offended. How should we who love Christ and who love Muslims interpret these proceedings? What can we say to our Muslim friends and to our Christian ones? For those who live and serve among Muslims in non-Muslim countries, there are struggles to build bridges and yet remain true to the message of the Gospel. How do we define tolerance, respect and understanding without compromising the essentials of our faith in Christ? For those who live and serve in Muslim countries, how do we find ways to make the Gospel message heard – and even accepted – by individuals?

The first two articles, by Chapman and Maxwell, open up the discussion on the Pope's speech and the wearing of the veil in non-Muslim countries. These subjects are bringing reactions and comments both in the UK and in the wider world. Then we hear from Maurer as he gives us the historical background for the Shia group within Islam. This division is a

major factor in the present political problems within Iraq.

Cox, having written on the etymology of the word *Allah* in our last *Seedbed*, now explores its use in the Bible and among Arabic speakers; he seeks to correct false assumptions by non-Arabic speaking Christians. Our use of language is significant in communicating our message to the Arab peoples.

Media work is a major part of that communication process in our modern world. Both CM and JD describe for us the media processes followed over the years. They challenge us with suggestions for the future. We learn more about the correspondence work and about the Internet possibilities.

The first two books (*Clash of Civilisations* and *Londonistan*) reviewed in this issue of *Seedbed* take up our theme of present-day situations. The third book review is written in appreciation of the life of Abe Wiebe, a committed servant of the Lord. In spending his life in reaching out to Muslims, he is an example for us. For in the midst of thinking through all these great issues, what counts comes from our personal relationship with our Lord and with our Muslim friends and neighbours.

I look forward to receiving your articles about your ministries or about your insights into Islam. What is the Lord teaching you that would be of aid to other colleagues?

Donna Smith, Editor

Insensitive, Provocative, Courageous ... or W

Some Reflections on Pope Benedict's Lecture

by Colin Chapman

What can one say that hasn't already been said about the Pope's lecture and the furore that has followed it? Probably very little – which is why I will confine myself to seven questions:

1. **W** The title of the lecture was 'Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections'. The last sentence ends with the words 'the great task of the university', and the lecture presents a rationale not only for the existence of the university but also for the place of theology as an academic discipline within the university. With phrases like 'the reasonableness of faith', 'the right use of reason', and 'coherence within the universe of reason', he is arguing that theology has a legitimate place in a European university today, and mounts his defence in the face of what he no doubt sees as the two major challenges facing Christianity in Europe today: secularism and Islam.

2. **Did the Pope know what he was doing?** It's been reported that the lecture was entirely the Pope's own, and that it wasn't checked by any of his advisers in Islamic affairs. If they had seen it beforehand, they would no doubt have pointed out that most Muslim scholars believe that the Qur'anic verse 'There is no compulsion in religion' (2:256) comes from the later, Medinan period, not from the Mecca period, as the Pope said. They would no doubt have warned him that the quotation of the Emperor's words – without further

comment or explanation – could easily be misunderstood, and that he needed to distance himself from the Emperor's sentiments much more clearly. The Pope must have felt that he was on home ground – both because of the location of the lecture and the familiarity of the main subject. But by straying out of his own areas of expertise, he probably had little idea of how his words would be heard by many Muslims.

3. **W** **to Muslims?** Although he wasn't directly addressing Muslims, he must have had them in mind in what he was saying. The offending quotation from the Byzantine Christian Emperor comes near the beginning, and this is the final paragraph of the lecture: "Not to act reasonably (with logos) is contrary to the nature of God," said Manuel II, according to his Christian understanding of God, in response to his Persian interlocutor. It is to this great logos, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the university.' In these words the Pope is deliberately rejecting the language of 'the clash of civilisation', and inviting 'our partners' – which in the context probably means secular Europeans and Muslims – to dialogue on the basis of reason, and he's utterly confident that Christianity can hold its own in any reasonable dialogue of this kind.

4. **W**

about Islam? Most of the reports that we have heard suggest that he takes a fairly hard-line approach to Islam. Ruth Gledhill, writing in *The Times*, quotes a Roman Catholic who says that the Pope believes that Islam cannot be reformed as it is incompatible with democracy. She also quotes the President of a Catholic university in Italy who says that the Pope believes that the reform of Islam is impossible 'because it is against the nature of the Qur'an as it's understood by Muslims'. If this is where the Pope is starting from in this thinking about Islam, there's bound to be tension between his more negative approach to Islam and the more irenic approach that has been developed in official catholic documents since Vatican II.

5. **W**

such rage? One comment that I've read explains the rage in terms of 'the insecurity Muslims feel due to lack of intellectual knowledge and being left behind in every aspect of life'. It goes on to compare Muslims to 'a patient suffering from acute depression. He/she has no pride, feels unloved, has no job, has nothing. Any little remark can spark the anger and the patient become violent.' If there are elements of truth in this diagnosis, I suspect that it also expresses some of the arrogance that is so evident in the attitudes of many westerners towards Muslims and Islam. So instead of the condescending approach which says 'It's all their fault, it's entirely their problem', perhaps we in the West should wake up to the fact that centuries of western imperialism, the continuing Israeli-Palesti-

nian conflict, Afghanistan, Iraq, and more recently, the ridicule and scorn reflected in the Danish cartoon controversy – all of these things (things that we in the West have done to them) have helped to create what a *Guardian Weekly* editorial calls 'a global tinderbox'. As one who has lived for some years in the Middle East, I can only say that I understand perfectly the sense of humiliation that is felt so keenly by Muslims and why the West is accused so often of arrogance – the Arabic word being *istikbar*, which means literally 'making oneself big'.

6. **Are we allowed to raise the difficult questions?**

This is where George Carey makes some powerful points towards the end of his Beach Lecture at Newbold College. 'Allow me to ask an awkward question,' he says, 'which I believe was hovering in the background of the Pope's thesis and which many westerners are asking frequently these days: "Why is Islam associated with violence?"' He goes on to speak about 'the urgent need for reciprocity' and raises the issue of the Law of Apostasy and the problems it creates for Muslims who want to convert to another religion. After a period in which Christian leaders engaged in dialogue with Muslims have shied away from the concept of reciprocity, I for one am delighted to see that more are recognising that it could be an important principle in dialogue. Michael Nazir-Ali in his *Conviction and Conflict: Islam, Christianity and World Order* sees value in this approach, provided it's not translated into a simple tit-for-tat mentality. One good result of this controversy is that difficult questions of this kind are being brought to the surface in a very public way

and all kind of political correctness are being challenged. At the same time it may be worth remembering some words of Roger Hooker that arose out of his many years of experience with Hindus and Muslims as a CMS mission partner in India: 'I say what I can, not what I want'. Our typical western approach, which is usually in a hurry and thinks in terms of agendas and goals, isn't generally so good at building relationships and often wants to force the pace – sometimes even going for the jugular.

7. W The Pope has no doubt launched himself into a sharp learning curve in these areas sooner than he expected. Because of the way he used the quotation – without any repudiation of the harsh view it expressed – he has been forced to enter into face to face dialogue with Muslim leaders. In the lecture he was calling for the very calm, rational dialogue that is supposed to take place in the university. But he has stirred up a less than rational debate on the streets and in the media of the world. One can only hope that the Pope will be willing to listen to some of his own advisers in

this field who have been working patiently behind the scenes for many decades in very real dialogue with Muslims in different contexts, and that his unguarded remarks won't undo some of the excellent work they have done. Anglicans are engaged in highly significant dialogue with Muslims in different contexts – like the Anglican–al-Azhar dialogue. This furore has shown that we can't always dictate either the subject or the venue for dialogue. And in case we think that dialogue is just a fancy word for what theologians and church leaders do, it's nothing more than two people meeting face to face and talking together.

So was the Pope insensitive, provocative or courageous? Perhaps all of the above – which is all the more reason why Christians throughout the world can be involved in picking up the pieces – simply by talking to every Muslim that they know.

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The Veil

by Elsie Maxwell

Is the media targeting Muslims? Since the eleventh of September 2001 and even more so since the London bombing in July 2005, Muslims in Britain feel that they are the victims of a campaign against them personally and against their religion Islam. Why did Jack Straw, the leader of the House of Commons, raise the issue of wearing the veil? Why now? What is behind this? Some are saying it is a conspiracy to help Britain become more secular like France and not allow people of different faiths to distinguish themselves from others either by jewellery or clothing. (At this same time, there is also the case of a woman worker with British Airways who was asked not to wear a small silver cross.)

The issue of wearing a veil raises many questions. Shouldn't we be tolerant and sensitive to all people, to minorities, to religious groups? Shouldn't we let people wear whatever their culture considers to be right? Is the veil cultural or religious, or is it both? Or is it a statement about identity? Do Muslim women have to veil? Is it a command? Is the Qur'an the source of the command to veil?

1. Let us begin by examining the Arabic words which surround the topic:

- *Hijab* – from the verb *hajaba*

The meaning is *to cover, to conceal*. It can refer to curtains as well as to veils. (For most people, this is generally just a head covering, but for some it refers to

a full covering of the body.)

The word occurs seven times in the Qur'an. The sura references are: 7:46, 17:45, 19:17, 33:53, 38:32, 41:5 and 42:51. Several interesting definitions are found in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*¹. One explanation given by mystics points to the barrier of separation from God.

- *Niqab* – *face covering*
- *Jilbab* – *the garment that covers the body, with a hood covering the head and a veil, or niqab, over the face.*
- *Khimar* – *a garment that hides or conceals*. The word is from the verb *khamara*. In other verb forms, this can mean *to ferment*, but the second verb form means *to hide, cover, conceal*.
- *Burqa* – *a head-to-toe covering*. Generally, this is the garment worn in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- *Ghita* – another verb for *cover*.
- *Satara* – another verb meaning *to cover, to veil*. It is also used for curtains, as well as meaning *to shield, to protect*.

2. Here are the Qur'anic verses that establish the source or command concerning the wearing of a veil:

O Prophet! Tell
Thy wives and daughters,
And the believing women,
That they should cast
Their outer garments² over
Their persons (when abroad)
That is most convenient,

1. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Vol. III, p. 359-361.

2. *Jilbab* = cloak

That they should be known
(as such) and not molested...

Sura 33: 59
(Translation by Yousuf Ali)

Say to the believing men
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty: that will make
For greater purity for them:

...

And say to the believing women
That they should lower
Their gaze and guard
Their modesty: that they
Should not display their
Beauty and ornaments except
What (must ordinarily) appear
Thereof: that they should
Draw their veils³ over
Their bosoms and not display
Their beauty except
To their husbands, their fathers, their
sons . . .

Sura 24: 30-31
(Translation by Yousuf Ali)

These verses are understood in several different ways.

Conservatives read these verses as saying that Muslim males have the right to ask Muslim women to don a covering because women's bodies are sexually corrupting to those who see them. Thus, the veil shields men from viewing women's bodies.

- Al Tabarai (d. 923 CE) held that both sexes could show those parts of the body that were not pudendal, such as the face and hands.

- Al Baydawi (d. 1286 CE) ruled that the entire body of a free woman was pudendal, except during prayer, medical treatment or when bearing witness (she needs to show her identity clearly).⁴
- Al Khafaji (d. 1659 CE) decreed that even the face and hands were to be covered.

Modern Muslims have the following opinions:

- This Qur'anic legislation was revealed in Medina not Mecca, in the last six or seven years of the prophet's life.
- Other writers note that these words/verses were addressed to the Prophet's wives at the time of Zaynab's wedding and are not binding on all women.
- Fatima Mernissi⁵ quotes Ibn Sad⁶ and attributes the philosophy of the veil to 'Umar rather than to the prophet.⁷
- Mernissi also remarks that the Arabic words used in these verses have a very general meaning. *Jilbab* in the old dictionary *Lisan al-'Arab* is rather vague and designates numerous pieces of clothing, ranging from a simple chemise to a cloak or just a large piece of cloth worn by a woman. Another definition describes the veil as a piece of material used to cover the head and bosom; it can be sort of a cloak or a shawl.

The veil marked free women but slaves were not veiled or protected. Men from the pre-Islamic or *Jahilia* period could

3. *khumur* = the word *shawl* in this case

4. Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 94

5. Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, 180ff.

6. Ibn Sad, *Al-Tabaqat*, 176.

7. Mernissi, *Women and Islam*, 185-186..

abuse slaves but were not to abuse free women. If the free woman was not distinguished by her clothing, she could be subjected to abuse.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Egyptian Qasim Amin thought that these institutional restrictions on women such as sexual segregation, domestic seclusion and the face veil should change. Women should be able to have mobility outside their homes and receive an education. There was a call to not veil and in many countries women gave it up. These views were expressed by those who had a Western education. Later on, taking off the veil was seen as coming from a Western/secularist view of life, which was not fitting for Eastern Muslims.

Moreover Abu'l Ala al-Mawdudi wished to keep the former conservative views as this would avoid the evils of the secularisation of culture that had happened in the West. He wished the dress to cover the full body, hands and face. His efforts are seen as a drive for purity and non-secularisation.

Leila Ahmed, a professor of women's studies in the United States, sees the present drive to veil as being addressed to urban career women who are educated and working. The matter concerns the garments worn outside the home. The other issue involves the expression of religious identity in the presence of others. So in their eyes, the veil becomes a statement of who they are; it is not about their segregation. It is a 'badge of both morality

and also cultural authenticity, while performing new tasks in the public sphere.'⁸

3. The issue of the veil is connected to the issue of sexuality in Islam.

Firstly, it relates to how the woman is seen. Is she seen as a beautiful symbol to be protected or as a symbol of danger to protect others from? (This problem is not unknown in our present time; women are often portrayed in the media as sex symbols.)

Many women writers give a strong defence of Islam as teaching equality and mutuality of the sexes. They state that sexual morality or purity is not an issue of sexual identity nor does it come from the function of one's nature, male or female, but from one's behaviour. Some of them even attribute the source of these wrong views to Christian and Jewish ones, which they see as being very derogatory towards women. The Qur'an has no premise for the woman's body being corrupted or corrupting, nor does it make any pejorative claims about women or sex, as do Jews and Christians⁹. Barlas' opinion is that Christians attribute the cause of sin to women, while the Qur'anic account of the event in the garden between Adam and Eve does not present the story in that way. Jewish ideas of women as polluting led to them being barred from the temple during menstruation.

Yet Muslim patriarchies (male commentary writers and male authors of the Hadith) seem to have read into Islam many of these ideas: viewing sex as unclean, women as sexually corrupt, and

8. Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an*, 131.

9. Barlas, 'Believing Women' in Islam, 56, 138, 150.

men as having a hyperactive libido whose satisfaction necessitates polygamy and leads them to see women as passive receptacles for men.¹⁰ This view is still commonly expressed by many Muslims from whatever source they give.

The second set of verses (Sura 24:30-31) is about modesty for both men and women. The description of the covering is general and mentions only the bosom and the woman's beauty. Beauty is then taken to mean the hair and face. The gaze was seen by some commentators to mean the messenger of fornication. The veil protected men by covering and segregating the women.

Segregation is another aspect of the veil. Women are separated from all men except for family members. In the past when this was strictly observed, a women's world developed apart from the men's world. The women's world was the home, inside, while the men's world was the public domain, outside. So when women entered the men's world, they needed to be covered and not seen. In some countries, it is still not easy for women to work in the men's world. The new Islamic faith schools are teaching boys and girls separately and young girls are dressed as women even before the age of puberty.

4. W wearing the veil?

The major reason cited over and over is that it incites men to see the body of a woman and especially her hair. Thus the wearing of the *hijab* (the veil) is related to *zina* (illicit sexuality), which must be

controlled. This paradoxical view of woman as wife and mother, emphasizing the need to protect and preserve the purity of the family line and the identity of her children, is held along with the idea that if she is uncovered, she may incite trouble and cause *fitna* (chaos). The veil and segregation are the means to solve this problem. Some of my Arab women friends will jokingly say, 'Why not veil the men?'

The veil is also a symbol used by fundamentalists in their efforts to restore the practice of Islam as a more pious, pure faith where the people follow the patterns of Muhammad from the Hadith, rather than those of the Western world. It becomes a symbol or marker of this renewed identity: 'I am a Muslim. I may be British, Egyptian, Somali, Malaysian or American, but above all, I am a Muslim woman.' The percentage of such women is only about 2%, but interestingly, it is growing and is a feature of modern Muslim women in the West.

In discussions about the veil, I have not found writers speaking about how wearing it affects relationships with non-Muslims or causes difficulties in communication. They do not mention the problematic role of the unseen face when the person speaking is wearing a covering veil. It is clearly an acceptable fact that the face has a role in communication, identity and relationships. People desire to know someone face to face in an authentic relationship. Speaking on the phone or sending an email does not allow one to really know the person unless you have met previously. Speaking from behind a veil gives the impression that the woman

10. Sabbah, *A Woman in the Muslim Unconscious*.

can not really be known because she is not allowing you to see her. Face to face communication is preferable in order to really know a person and to fully understand their feelings and emotions, not just their words. Facial expressions such as smiling or not smiling while speaking are important in the communication. These are part of the message and can imply things not verbally said. A veil is clearly limiting and can give a false impression as the non-verbal parts of communication are missing.

In a few short interviews in the magazine *emel*, the muslim life style magazine,¹¹ several young Muslim women agreed that the *niqab* interfered or inhibited communication and as a result, they have chosen not to wear it. But one woman dentist considered it no different from her face mask while working on patients. However, nearly all these women objected to non-Muslims discussing the issue.

When I think of Christianity, I see our God who revealed himself to us by sending his Son in the likeness of man that we might behold him. The veil seems to speak to us of things hidden, things not yet known, but in the New Testament, Christ has opened the way by rending the veil so we may come directly into his presence. He wants us to know him, and we speak of seeing him face to face and knowing him and He us. The nature of

believers is openness, living in honesty and truth and not seeking to hide in any manner. Our honour is to walk openly without fear.

On the issue of modesty, we are encouraged to make it a characteristic of our manner of dress but there is no description of specific clothing. The matter of purity in 1 Peter 3 is not centred on the outward covering but rather on the inner being, the heart and the behaviour. The Islamic view often seems related to the externals and not to the inner cause of the problems and issues.

Of course, even before Islam, head coverings were worn by many people, and in many countries, a head scarf was part of a woman's apparel. Wearing a veil can be seen differently, however, from wearing a scarf, as a scarf does not cover the face. Today some Arab Christians are not comfortable unless they wear a scarf in public. Other Christians feel the need to wear a head covering for worship and prayer in public or even at home.

As we look at the discipleship of new MBBs, we see that along with prayer, Bible reading, church life, etc, they need to learn about the biblical roles of men and women. They will learn a new set of values to include the issues of purity and modesty, the joy of open communication and the possibility of pure relationships because God can keep them pure.

11. emel media ltd., *emel magazine* (London) Issue 26.

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Shia Islam

by Dr Andreas Maurer

Editor's note: At this time of conflict in Iraq, with daily news about the Shia and Sunni groups there, we include in this issue of *Seedbed* an outline drawn up by Dr Andreas Maurer to remind us of the views held by the Shia.

By literal definition, the Shia are known as *followers* – the followers of Ali, first cousin of Muhammad and the husband of his daughter Fatimah.

- The Shias maintain that Ali was the first legitimate Imam or Caliph, or successor to the Prophet and therefore reject Abu Bakr, Umar and Usman, the first three Caliphs of the Sunni Muslims.
- They are also called the *Imamiyachs* because they believe the Muslim religion consists in leaders of the faithful.
- The Sunni Muslims call them the *Rafizi*, or the *forsakers of the truth*.
- The Shias strenuously maintain that they are the orthodox Muslims and arrogate to themselves the title of *al-Muminun*, or the *True Believers*.
- Shia also believe that God made a special revelation to Fatimah, Ali's wife. (Sunni writers deny every word of these traditions.)

The spirit of division that appeared among the followers of Muhammad, even before his death, broke out with greater violence after it; and the rapid strides of his successors even to imperial power only afforded a wider sphere for ambition. The greatest and most radical difference between the Shias and Sunnis arises from the former maintaining the divine right of

Ali to succeed to the Caliphate on the death of the Prophet. Ali's claim rested on the nearness of his kinship to Muhammad, of whom he was a cousin, and on his having married Fatimah, the only offspring of the Prophet who survived him. They also assert that he was expressly declared his successor by the Prophet himself under direct guidance from God (Sura 2:118/124).

The leading, or 'orthodox' sect of the Shias, the *Imamiyachs*, accept the following as the rightful Caliphs:

1. Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet
2. Al-Hasan, the son of Ali
3. Al-Husain, the second son of Ali
4. Ali, surnamed Zain ul-Abidin, the son of al-Husain
5. Muhammad al-Baqir, son of Zain ul-Abidin, the son of al-Husain
6. Jafar as-Sadiq, son of Muhammad al-Baqir
7. Musa al-Kazim, son of Jafar
8. Ar-Raza, son of Musa
9. Muhammad at-Taqi, son of ar-Raza
10. Ali an-Naqi, son of Muhammad at-Taqi
11. Al-Hasan al-Askari, son of Ali an-Naqi
12. Muhammad, son of al-Hasan al-Askari or the Imam al-Mahdi, who is supposed by the Shias to be still alive though he has withdrawn for a time. They say he will again appear in the last days as the Mahdi, or 'director' that the Prophet prophesied would appear before the Day of Judgment.

The contentions of the Shias regarding the succession have become endless, and of the proverbial 73 sects of Islam, not fewer than 32 are assigned to the Shias. According to the *Sharku 'l-Muwaqif*, there are as many as 73 sects of the Shias alone; the three principal ones are:

- *Ghulat*, or Zealots, the title generally given to those who, through their excessive zeal for the Imams, have raised them above the degree of human beings.
- *Zaidiyah*, those who separated after the appointment of Muhammad al-Baqir to the Caliphate and followed Zaid.
- *Imamiyah*, or those who acknowledged Jafar Sadiq as the rightful Imam to the exclusion of Ismail, and who appear to be what may be called the orthodox sect of the Shias.

Out of these three great divisions have grown innumerable sects, which would be tedious to define. All Shia religionists are more or less infected with mysticism. Many of the Shias have carried their veneration for Ali so far as to raise him to the position of a divine person, and most of the sects make their Imams partakers of the divine nature. These views have their foundation in the traditions already quoted, which assert the pre-existence of Muhammad and Ali, and they have undoubtedly been fostered by the Gnostic tendencies of all forms of Persian belief, especially Sufism.

The differences between the Shias and the Sunnis are very numerous, but the following are the principal points:

- The discussion as to the office of Imam.

- The Shias have a profound veneration for the Caliph Ali, and some of their sects regard him as an incarnation of divinity, whilst they all assert that next to the Prophet, Ali is the most perfect and excellent of men.
- They still possess *Mujtahids*, or enlightened doctors, whose opinion is final in matters of Muslim law and doctrine. The *Mujtahid* is the highest degree amongst Muslim doctors. The Sunnis say that in the present divided condition of Islam, it is impossible to appoint them, but the Shias still elect them in Persia, and the appointment is confirmed by the political authorities.
- They observe the ceremonies of the *Muharram* in commemoration of al-Hasan and al-Husain, whilst the Sunnis only observe the tenth day of the *Muharram* or the *Ashura*, being, they say, the day on which God created Adam.
- They include the *Majusi*, or fire worshippers, amongst the *Ahl ul-Kitab*, or people who have received an inspired record from God, whilst the Sunnis only acknowledge the Jews, Christians and Muslims as such.
- They admit the principle of religious compromise called *Taqiyah* (lit. *guarding oneself*) – a pious fraud, whereby the Shia Muslims believe they are justified in either smoothing down or denying the peculiarities of their religious belief in order to save themselves from persecution.
- There are also various minor differences in the liturgical ceremonies of the

Shias, which will be found in the account of the liturgical prayers.

- The differences between the civil law of the Shias and Sunnis have been carefully noted in Mr. N. B. E. Baillie's

introduction to his *Digest of the Imameea Code* (London, 1869).

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Thomas Patrick Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 1982.

The Use of the Word ‘Allah’ in the Arabic Bible

by Bob Cox

An American pastor recently asked me the following question: ‘Can we pray in the name of both Jesus and Allah (when Allah denies that Jesus came as God in the flesh)?’ My answer to him was that when I am praying in the Arabic language, I pray to Allah in the name of Jesus Christ (Yesu’u ul-Masih). The Arabic Bible affirms that Jesus is Allah in the flesh. The common assumption is that Allah is not the God of the Bible. I would like to make a cautious correction to this assumption by stating that Allah has always been the God of the Arabic Bible.

When I began learning Arabic in the early sixties, I was introduced to a Bible in the Moroccan dialect, which used *Allah* for the word *God*. As I progressed, I began using the Bible in literary Arabic known as the Bustani-Smith-Van Dyck version, which was completed in 1865 under the sponsorship of the American Presbyterian Mission in the Middle East. It uses the word *Allah* for *God*. This has been the favoured translation of evangelical Christians in the Arabic-speaking world for more than 140 years. In the last few years *Today’s Arabic Version* and *Kitab ul-Hayat* (*The Book of Life*, funded by Living Bible International) have been added to the list of translations consulted by Arabic-speaking evangelicals. These newest versions also use the word *Allah* for *God*.

I now know, after study, that translations of the Arabic Bible have a very long history. Among the early translations was *The Diatessaron of Tatian*, which was a sort

of harmony of the four gospels composed of fifty-five chapters with a single continuous account of the life, death and resurrection of our Lord. This was written in Greek about 172 AD. This version was very popular among Syriac-speaking Christians. Syrian bishops had an uphill battle getting Christians to use *The Gospel of the Separated Ones* (meaning the text in which the four Gospels were separated from one another rather than blended) in their churches. The only copies of the *Diatessaron* that have survived the centuries are in Armenian and in Arabic. The Arabic version does not seem to be translated from the Greek, but experts say that internal evidence indicates that the Arabic version reflects the style of *Old Syriac* (second century), which was a translation of Syriac which preceded the *Peshitta* (fourth century). In spite of its early origin, many think that it wasn’t translated into Arabic until the eleventh century.

From the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, there were an amazing number of translations of the New Testament (and in some cases, the entire Bible) in Arabic. Following is a list of surviving manuscripts in different museums, monasteries or libraries (the name of the institution indicates where the manuscript can be found, not who was responsible for writing it):

- *Vatican Arabic No. 13*
- *Sinai Arabic No. 151* (867 AD)
- *Vatican Arabic No. 95* (eighth/ninth century)

- *Vatican Arabic No. 71* (tenth century)
- *Vatican Arabic No. 18* (993 AD)

There is a manuscript attributed to Ibn Tayyib, a monk, pastor, scientist, physician, author and translator who died in 1045. As a medical doctor, he treated the Caliph of Baghdad. As a biblical scholar, he produced a full commentary on the four gospels with his own translation of the text. Then there is a manuscript called the *Coptic Vulgate* (1203 AD) which has the Scripture text in both Coptic and Arabic. This is now in the Vatican library as *Vatican Coptic No. 9*. The most comprehensive of all was the work of Hibet Allah Ibn Assal (1252) who collected twelve manuscripts of the Arabic New Testament from Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Syriac Orthodox churches and made the world's first critical edition of the gospels. The notes are copious and precise. A copy made by a monk called Ghabriel in about 1260 is now in the British Museum (No. 3382).

All the above were done before the printing press was invented. Since 1591 there have been about twenty translations of the Bible in Arabic done by Catholics, Protestants, Maronites and Orthodox. (These translations were probably not made with the Arabic-speaking Muslim in mind but for the Christian minorities in the Middle East.) Of interest to Bible scholars may be the fact that one manuscript from the ninth century, containing the four gospels (*Vatican Arabic No. 13*) did use the word *eloheem* in some places for *Allah* in translating the Greek word *Theos*. As you know, *Elohim* is a Hebrew word used in the Old Testament and is the

plural of *Eloah*. I can only speculate why they didn't continue using *Elohim*. Perhaps they opted for a singular word because the Muslims accuse the Christians of worshipping three gods. As far as I know, all other translations of the Bible, including English, use a singular word to translate the word *God*.

Of course, I personally have not been able to consult all the above-mentioned manuscripts and printed Bibles. In the Arabic version of the article from the *Theological Review* mentioned above, there is a comparative study of several manuscripts on Romans 1:4: 'and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord'. Among these are *Vatican No. 13* and *Sinai Arabic No. 151*, both from the ninth century. Both use the word *Allah* for the word *God* in this verse. All the printed versions that I have been able to consult also use *Allah*. I think that it is safe to say that the translators of the Arabic Bible have always used *Allah* for the word *God* with the exception of the manuscript *Vatican No. 13*, which used *Elohim* in some places.

I give you all this background just to prove that Arabic Bible translators have been locked into the use of the word *Allah* in Bible translation for the last 1200 years. This was done on the basis of choices made by early translators and is just like the use of *God* in the English Bible, which was the choice (good or bad) of translators since Wycliffe (or perhaps even before him).

Now, here is the reason I react to those saying we shouldn't use the word

Allah in the Bible. Our mission office in the USA gets mail from people who have been influenced by American polemicists who say that you shouldn't use the word *Allah* to describe the God of the Bible. They want to know what they can do to help get the word *Allah* out of the Arabic Bible. My reaction is as follows: who are we as non-Arabic speaking people to dictate to Arab Christians that they should not use the word *Allah*? People who don't know one word of Arabic don't even have the courtesy to ask the Arabic-speaking Christians what they think about it.

What would you think if South Korean Christians told us that we should not use the word *God* in English anymore? Let us suppose that several South Korean Christians wrote books about false cults originating in America. In these books, they argue convincingly that god, as defined by these cults, is not the same as the God of the Bible. They encourage us English-speaking Christians to get rid of the word *God* because it associates us with a false religion which has a false concept of deity. Let's suppose also that they took up large collections of money to make a new translation of the Bible in order to eliminate that word and that they did not even consult with Christians of England and North America about this. If such a translation of the Bible came out, I can only imagine how the lovers of the King James Version, NASB or NIV would react.

I do concede that there is a polarization in North America. Many people

think that the word *God* describes the Christian's God and the word *Allah* describes the Muslim's god. A few years ago I was invited to speak to a mission class at a well known Bible College. I was shocked to hear the professor say that *Allah* was unknowable, but *God* was knowable, and that *Allah* was not a god of love, but that *God* is love. I had gone to the class thinking that *Allah* was the Arabic word for deity and *God* was the English equivalent. After some reflection, it dawned on me that the professor was using a different definition from mine. To him, *Allah* meant the Muslim's god and the word *God* meant the Christian's god.

I think that American Black Muslims feel that way because when they convert to Islam, they often take Arabic names like Abdullah (which means servant of God) and they refer to Allah as their deity. In light of this, I admit that it is wiser to use the word *God* in English when talking about the God of the Bible. However, when I speak Arabic (with people from Egypt, Syria, Morocco etc.), I always refer to God as *Allah*.

I guess it boils down to how you interpret the word *Allah*. If you interpret this word in the context of the Old and New Testaments (which the Arabic Bible does), then you are describing the God of the Bible. If you describe Allah in the way the Qur'an presents him, then you are not describing the God of the Bible.

References

Information about manuscripts and translations of the Arabic Bible is taken from an article entitled "The Arabic Versions of the Bible, Reflections on their History and Significance", by Kenneth E. Bailey and Harvey Staal that appeared in the *Reformed Review* (Vol. 36), 1982, pages 3-111. I also have the same article in Arabic (slightly expanded version) from the *Theological Review*, Near East School of Theology,

Beirut, Lebanon, pages 142-155 (date not shown on the copy in my possession).

Information about the Syriac versions of the Bible (*The Diatessaron, Old Syriac, Peshitta*) is taken from *Quiknotes, The Origin of the Bible*, by Philip W. Comfort, Ph.D., Tyndale House Publishers, 2000, page 59.

From Snail-Mail to Email and Beyond

by CM

I came to work at the Media Centre in Marseille in early 1992 and joined the Bible Correspondence Course (BCC – now Response) section. Immediately, I found myself thrown into the task of correcting courses in Arabic and very soon afterwards, into that of responding to the questions correspondents would send with their lessons – everything ranging from a brief note to a lengthy personal letter.

Before I began the work, I had thought that the most important aspect of it would be to answer difficult questions from correspondents about Islam and Christianity. But I soon realised that its real value was that it provided a channel through which people could study the Bible. That channel was simply a friendship by correspondence for those who wanted it. These friendships could last a long time. Occasionally we would receive letters from students whose records with us went back twenty years. There were others who stayed in contact for three to five years. Sadly, of course, there were many who wrote only once.

‘One God, One W ’

I saw that many students were happy to study the Bible teaching as presented in the *One God, One Way* course without raising serious objections. This course consists of ten lessons: The Creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah 53, Jesus, Last things: heaven and hell. Although the format and the questions are very simple,

the content is substantial. It is an excellent introduction for the Muslim who is interested in knowing about the gospel. It has the great advantage of building on the Old Testament and on stories that are familiar to the Muslim from the Qur'an, even if the details are sometimes different. The concepts of sin and the need for a sacrifice to atone for sin are carefully introduced. This paves the way for the student to understand that Christ's death on the cross was part of God's plan from the beginning.

Students' letters

We would always seek to encourage the students, perhaps just by adding a few words of congratulation to their course. There was also a whole range of questions to respond to. These fell into several categories:

Practical. Students would often ask for help with visas, coming to the West, finding a wife... Knowing the difficulties of the economic situation in North Africa, we could sympathise, but we had to say politely that we could not help. There were also more heart-rending requests, particularly when people had medical needs for themselves or other family members. A generous older lady at the Media Centre purchased drugs on several occasions, which we then sent to the correspondents concerned.

Personal. Some would write about difficult family situations. I couldn't help smiling when one young man shared his problem: he would be talking to a girl and

his face would become red! The most difficult letters of this kind were those from young people who had become interested in the gospel and then faced severe family opposition, perhaps even being thrown out of their home.

When on HMA, I often asked people to pray that the mindset of the parents' might change and that they would allow their children to make their own choices in the area of religion.

Intellectual – yes, what I thought I would be doing. There were these kinds of questions too. The most common ones by far were about the 'corruption of the Bible' and Jesus as the 'Son of God', often quoting the well-known verses in Sura 112: '*Allah...lam yalid wa lam youlad...*' (Allah... did not give birth and He was not born.) Correspondents also often asked about the Trinity – do Christians believe in three gods? Jesus as God, Son of God, Son of Man – how can he be all three? The Cross – did Jesus really die? How come there are four gospels and not just one? How do Christians pray? How do Christians fast? What do we think of Muhammad?

At the Media Centre, we had a helpful stock of standard replies to these questions. Our aim was to provide a simple, brief and reasoned answer at the right level for the correspondent. I always asked the students to whom I sent these answers to come back to me if they had any questions or comments. But they hardly ever did! How good it would have been to have some feedback and so to be able to improve our responses! I attach as an appendix the answer we used to send about the 'corruption of the Bible'.

Personal follow-up

In handling all these questions, we needed to keep in mind the long-term aim of the response work. This is to keep in touch with students so that they will keep on studying the Bible. After *One God, One Way*, they can go on to *Luke, Acts* and other courses. At the same time, we are praying that the Lord will work in their hearts and that they will desire to know Him for themselves. Then, at the right moment, we can offer them the chance of meeting a friend face to face who will be able to explain to them the truths that they have been studying.

I was able to make a few follow-up visits myself in order to meet students who were corresponding with us. I also passed on details of many others who had shown a genuine interest. They were then contacted by workers on the ground. I personally know of a few who are walking well with the Lord today. Of course, it's my prayer that there might be many others I don't know about!

Snail-mail declines but email grows

I look back on it as a privilege to have been able to serve the Lord at the Media Centre from 1992 to 2001. We saw some significant changes. In particular, the heyday of postal correspondence (and probably also of radio listening) began to come to an end. The first blow that we experienced was to lose the majority of the students who corresponded with us from Algeria. As the civil war developed between the government and the fundamentalists, the postal service deteriorated dramatically and it became almost impossible to main-

tain a worthwhile exchange of correspondence. Then, from the mid-1990s came the rise of satellite TV, email and the Internet. We can only guess how much pen and paper communication has suffered as a result! Our statistics show a significant and steady decline in letters. However, as postal correspondence has decreased, email correspondence has increased.

For the last five years, I have been helping to reply to Arabic emails as a member of the Internet Response Network, giving half a day or so a week to this work. It has been interesting to see the contrast with postal letters. One of the first surprises was the dropping of the traditional Arabic greeting! In letters, there would always be a sentence, or even sometimes a paragraph, of greeting, often in a poetic style. In emails, this has come down to a word or two, and sometimes not even that! Email messages also tend to be brief – not more than a few lines at first. Many correspondents must be writing from Internet cafes and so do not have the time and privacy that the letter writer enjoys.

Nevertheless, I have been encouraged to see that it is still possible to develop worthwhile exchanges that can lead to the offer of a face to face visit. Three correspondents who have now been contacted come quickly to mind: A in the UK, son of a Yemeni father and a Russian mother; K in Libya, who must have had his own computer at home (he

would sometimes reply within minutes of my sending a message!) and M in Yemen. So the Internet is certainly opening many new opportunities for us.

Future challenges

A particular challenge is to provide the combination of personal interaction and opportunity to study that a former generation had through correspondence and BCC. While we rejoice at good numbers of people emailing our websites, particularly www.maarif.org, we also want to encourage them to study. The BCC courses on www.risalat-ul-injil and the quizzes and activities on www.shabiba.net are a positive start in this direction. We need to develop these further.

Personal interaction now includes participation in chat rooms and at least one member of the company is already involved in this. As the technology races ahead, we are also looking at offering material suitable for the mobile phone. It goes without saying that we need the Lord's direction in all this. We must continue to present the gospel message in ways that are appropriate and relevant to the audience. We must look to Him to work in their hearts. We must give ourselves to the task of helping those who respond – by providing teaching and encouragement for them and by linking them with those who can help them face to face. We trust that some of them will be truly saved and added to the church.

Appendix: 'Has the Bible been Changed?'

The following is a brief summary of one of the 'standard answers' that we have in our files.

First, we emphasise the power of God to preserve His word – a concept the Muslim should have no difficulty in accepting. How could man, the creature formed from the dust, change the Creator's word? (I remember Dr Mennis Abdennour giving the parallel of a human father who had left important instructions for his children: would he permit someone else to enter his house and change them?)

Secondly, we quote some appropriate verses from the Bible, for example:

Psalm 119:89 – *Your word, O Lord, is eternal. It stands firm in the heavens.* These are the words of the prophet David in the Psalms (*Zabour*).

Luke 21:33 – *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.* These were Jesus' words about his own teaching. These statements, from those who Muslims agree were prophets, carry their own weight and force.

Thirdly, we recall the love of Jews and Christians for God's word, and how many Christians died in the persecutions of the Roman Empire in order to preserve the Bible. There is also the stern warning at the end of the Bible against making any changes to God's word (Revelation 22:18-19).

Fourthly, we mention some of the ancient manuscripts on which the New Testament text is based, with complete copies available from the fourth century and smaller sections from early in the second (and possibly, even earlier still).

We conclude with an encouragement to the correspondent to read the Bible for himself. After all, who can judge a book without having read it?

Note: Although we do not reason from the Qur'an in order to defend the reliability of the biblical text, we do echo some Qur'anic phrases here and there in the article. God is *watching over His word (yuhaimin)*. The gospel is *light and guidance (huda wa nour)*. The Christians and Jews are *the people of the book (ahl ul kitab)*. (See for example Sura 5:44-48.)

Using New Media to Make Disciples

by JD

Sitting in a university lecture, a young student from the Arab world reads her research paper out to the class. The lecturer shows some reserve when he discovers that her primary source of information is a free encyclopaedia on the Internet, open for any surfer to review and adapt. The student's methods reflect the new style of interactive learning developing across the Arab world. Converging media are permeating society and shaping perceptions in many regions. This global forum leads us to ask just how significant digital technology will prove to be in reaching the current generation of Muslims of the Arab world with the Gospel. Should we be investing resources in using channels such as the Internet and mobile phone to communicate our message? This brief article examines some of the pros and cons of new technology from a missiological perspective and moves towards an advocacy of using new media for evangelism and discipleship in the Arab world.

By all means

A major reservation often aired is that contemporary media channels are the domain of the elite and privileged in Arab society. It is thought that to concentrate media efforts on Internet broadcasting would severely restrict our audience. This may have been the case five or ten years ago, but the advent of converging media and, in particular, the introduction of the mobile phone, is

changing the face of communications in the Arab world. A recent article in *The Gulf Times* states that mobile phone use in the Arab world surged by 70% in 2005. The fastest growing markets are in Yemen and Sudan. North Africa (excluding Egypt) has the second highest penetration with a growth rate of 86%.¹

Increased access to new media is having a significant impact on ministry. In the last twelve months, websites have generated over 4000 electronic mail responses to our AWM Media centres from all over the world, including countries as difficult to reach as Mauritania, Saudi Arabia and Libya. It is clear that we cannot ignore such widespread opportunities. In the eighteenth century, pioneer missionary William Carey saw the invention of the mariner's compass as a divine providence to enable men and women to travel as never before with the Gospel². Can we see the creation of the Internet, in spite of all its abuses, as an act of providence? Carey pointed out in his *Enquiry* that the fact that slave-traders and unethical merchants had used navigational tools to exploit others should spur Christians on to show compassion and use all appropriate means to make disciples of all nations³.

Strategic youth

Another premise for employing modern media to proclaim the Gospel and teach new believers is that there is a predom-

1. 'Mobile phone use by Arabs up 70% in '05', *The Gulf Times*, 30 July 2006.

2. Daniel Webber, *William Carey and the Missionary Vision*, (Banner of Truth, 2005) 88.

3. *Ibid*, 108.

inance of young people in the Arab world. The proportion of people under 25 is as high as 65% in some areas. This is a generation that is 'extremely eager to plug into the world'⁴. A review of the emails and letters received at our AWM Media centres reflects this trend towards a younger audience. The Scriptures provide us with plenty of examples of people whom God used greatly while they were still young. Joseph was only seventeen when he was sold into slavery, yet he went on to become the acting head of Potiphar's household. Josiah was nineteen when he began to organise the restoration of true worship and David was regarded as just a boy, but he was the only one brave enough to challenge Goliath and defend God's Name. Below is an extract from a recent email sent to our Arabic website for youth, www.shabiba.net. The girl who wrote it is fourteen years old.

I want to tell you I have dedicated my life to Christ as a personal Saviour. I have many questions I wish you could answer, but please do not disregard me because of my age. Please answer me.

If we are to be like David who 'served God's purpose in his own generation'⁵, we need to engage with new technologies to communicate our message.

New media as the public square

Perhaps one of the greatest reservations expressed about new technologies is that they can impede relationships and meaningful communication. Yet, the context of new media in the Middle East has been

described as 'an expanding public sphere with unprecedented opportunities for participation, a widening, more diverse public ... and spaces for new interpretations and new interpreters'⁶. The pull towards digital convergence of audio-visual media has created an area in cyberspace of decentralized interactive communication. In other words, through interactive channels such as email, mobile media and Internet chat rooms, everyone can have their say. There is a rapidly widening open door for public debate and exchange. Not only should we be explaining God's word in a clear, theologically accurate and relevant way in this new public square, but we also have opportunity to engage people in dialogue and personally interact with them. Ultimately, our aim is to lead them into a relationship with Christ and with other believers. It is already possible to link correspondents with someone in their own area so that they can do interactive online Bible study together. The mobile phone is an easy and relatively safe way to put people in touch, and sending out media materials can contribute to meeting the diverse needs of those who write to us.

So, how significant will new media be in reaching the Arab world with the Gospel? Of course none of us can foresee the future, but the opportunity to be seen and heard is already there. Let us believe God to use us to touch today's connected generation of the Arab world with the grace and truth of Jesus Christ.

4. S. Kanafani. 'Trendy Arab youth TV "with an edge" hits airwaves', *The Daily Star* online, <http://www3.start.com/arab/entertainment/zentv.html>.

5. Acts 13:36.

6. J.W.Anderson, 'Technology, Media, and the Next Generation in the Middle East'. Paper delivered at the Middle East Institute, Columbia university, 28 September 1999.

Book Review: 'The Clash of Civilizations'

reviewed by Abe Wiebe

The Clash of Civilizations, Samuel P. Huntington, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1997, 352 pages.

It has been argued by some western authorities that the West does not have a problem with Islam. It is all a matter of certain Islamist extremists. However, an examination of fourteen centuries of history would prove them wrong. Bernard Lewis states that ever since the Muslim invasion of Spain, Europe has been under threat from Islam. Twice in the past, 1529 and 1683, Islam placed the survival of the West in doubt. Today the confrontation between Islam and the West has evolved into becoming a *Clash of Civilizations* that could rapidly develop into global war.

This is the thesis of Huntington's evaluation of the current realities of world politics, which the likes of Henry Kissinger see as the most important book on the subject since the end of the Cold War. Although Huntington wrote ten years ago, much of what he states is still valid. Global cultural conflict, he says, is being reinforced by religion in the form of some six to eight civilizations. Whereas since 1500 the West established its superiority by the dominance of organized violence, this is being challenged today by inter-civilization clashes of religion and culture. Particularly is this true in the West's confrontation with Islam. Much is being made today of Islamic fundamentalism as it vies for a central role in the international scene. Having repudiated European-American values, Islam is now seeking to return

to Islamist ideas, practices and institutions. In addition, the Islamic civilization, bolstered by a surge of growth in the number of youth, is rending its opponents apart in the name of the superiority of their cultures. Huntington suggests that this has now become a tribal conflict on a global scale. Surely as we watch developments in Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia, we would have to concur. A mere glance at the Sudan would show us the gravity of such a trend.

One would have to observe that Islamic resurgence has given Muslims renewed confidence in the worth of their civilization as compared to that of the West. The collapse of communism in the 1980s removed a common enemy and left each other as a major adversary. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Arab and Jewish battleground. Huntington says that this originated as a result of the establishment of the Jewish homeland. Yet, anyone knowledgeable of biblical history would realize that the Arab-Jewish confrontation finds its roots in the book of Genesis and the story of Isaac and Ishmael. Perhaps the most pungent summary of the whole situation is framed by Huntington on page 217 where he says:

The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem also lies in the Western civilization where its people are convinced of the universality of their culture and who still believe that their

superior, if declining power, imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world.

Elsewhere Huntington makes much of *fault line conflicts*. These, he maintains, are communal conflicts between states or groups from different civilizations where people struggle for control over other groups and their territories. Huntington sees these fault line struggles as highly dangerous since they so easily can become limited or major wars. A look at today's world shows that most fault line conflicts are between Muslims and others. This draws Islam into war at various levels. Since Islam began as a religion of the sword, *jihad* and *fitna* (civil strife), antagonists easily developed on multiple fronts. At the same time, it made the two-nation (secular and religious) theory unacceptable in the past and more so today. Where Islam comes up short is its lack of a major core state that could lead the way. Perhaps

the emergence of Iran as a nuclear power will fill that lack.

In the emerging turmoil of civilizational conflict, it is obvious that there is a serious threat to world peace. The world cries out for a new world order if barbarism is not to prevail as at the demise of the Roman Empire. This, according to Huntington, means that the West needs to confront its own internal process of decay and Islam needs to admit that coexistence with other civilizations is an imperative. Short of that, we may rapidly find ourselves on the road to wars the like of which we have yet to experience.

Let me sincerely recommend the reading of this book to all students of the present world order. No, Huntington is not infallible, but for me at least, this Harvard professor has given us the best analysis to appear in recent years.

Book Review: 'Londonistan'

reviewed by Elsie Maxwell

***Londonistan: How Britain is creating a Terror State within*, Melanie Phillips, Gibson Square, London, 2006. (ISBN 1903933765).**

In *Londonistan*, Melanie Phillips attempts to explain the present situation and also give some background to the events which led to it: How could British-born young men bomb London? Why is there a surge in radicalism? Is it sudden? Is the war in Iraq the primary cause? If the USA and Britain changed their foreign policy about war, would peace come?

The book examines the policies of the British Establishment of the past few years. The issue of granting human rights according to the EU agreement led to some people known in other countries as radical leaders being granted asylum in Britain. Melanie Phillips claims these people set up their own groups (such as Hazb Tahrir) in the UK.

In the need to find a representative body or spokesman for the Muslim people, the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was selected as the Muslim voice to the media and to the government. The author cites many occasions when she thinks the MCB is joined to other radical voices at the same time as it describes to the media the position of Islam as totally peaceful. She is also alarmed that an alliance of socialism and the Respect Party (George Galloway) along with the Stop the War Coalition (Andrew Murray) is gaining ground. Furthermore the visits of Al-Qaradawi from Egypt and his favourable reception by Ken Livingstone

are discussed. Her section on the Jewish/Palestinian problem seems biased and reveals the difficulty for her, as she is a Jew. In her conclusion, Phillips seems to be pushing for the regulation of Muslim religious authorities.

Londonistan is not a comfortable read; it is not easy to sort out the clear facts and issues from the new style of hype jargon. Since Melanie Phillips, a journalist, currently writes for the *Daily Mail*, many would dismiss her book as just another newspaper propaganda stunt, a fanatical piece of work without foundation. One person has even commented that it is Zionist and without any trustworthy sources. Others would find it a bit frightening and would be alarmed that the government might be concealing information or not saying what might be done about the breakdown of multiculturalism.

Readers are faced with the question of how to keep up on all the articles and books like this one as well as the web sites about these matters. Some find reading this material irrelevant in the light of bigger and more important missiological or theological topics. But it is helpful if someone can read or scan this sort of information and provide useful summaries.

I recently attended a meeting of CRIB (Christian Response to Islam in Britain) in London which included a book review of *Londonistan* followed by discussion. Some of the questions raised were as follows:

1. Is Islam being seen clearly? Are there many faces of Islam, and do we need to

look carefully at the face of violence, even though we realise it is held by only a few? What are the causes of violence? Can the church have a role in this area?

2. Do Christians or the Church need to have a clear voice about the above matters? Who should speak for us? Is there a public role or is there only personal involvement which is limited to one-to-one interaction? The participants at the meeting also suggested that those who are able to be well informed on current affairs could help the rest of us who are unable to give time to this matter.
3. What about the need for learning more about conflict resolution? Can Christians help people find forgiveness, peace and resolution for their anger, pain and difficulties? We talked about how to find peace and how to turn these painful events into opportunities to speak of the Prince of Peace.
4. The issue of war, including both a just war and pacifism, as well as how the Bible views war, was another topic which came up in response to the concern of many Christians about the war in Iraq. A little attention was given to the subject of being able to handle the question of a *holy war*. When it is mentioned in the Bible, is it like *jihad* or not?

Book Review: 'How Wide is my Valley, Abe W

reviewed by John Haines

***How Wide is my Valley, Abe W*
published 2006.**

Introduction

In mid-July 2006, my wife and I flew to Toronto, Canada to spend time with our son John and his wife. At the end of our short visit, we spent two evenings with Abe and Joyce Wiebe, colleagues from our earliest days in Casablanca. Joyce, returning to Morocco after home leave in the USA, travelled on the boat with us in 1964. Shortly after her return, she and Abe were married at the French Reformed Church in Casablanca. During our visit to Toronto, we procured and immediately began to read the book that I am now reviewing, *How Wide is my Valley*.

Some of the qualities of Abe's life especially stood out in that visit – such as his ability to relate to others in spite of his self-avowed introversion. Abe's rich and varied experiences emerged often during our conversations. Now we have an account of his exceptional life recorded in this book.

Much of what we read in the early chapters of the book left my wife and me smiling, reminiscing and rejoicing over lessons learned from mutual friends and even mutual mentors in some cases. (Abe himself was one of my own mentors.) Further on, as we read details of his life and work, we discovered unfamiliar ground. Though Abe spent a great deal of his career in administration, he seemed *always*

to find Muslims to relate to and Muslim Background Believers to encourage.

I particularly noticed in the final chapter how he was dealing with retirement and its meaning. Granted, his work ethic is unique. A colleague once said, when asking Abe why he didn't take the rest of the day off, that Abe replied: *I can't*. He was driven to work hard, not only by his past training, but also by his relationship to Jesus Christ and his determination to get the job done.

Overall value of the book

This book gives a very personal glimpse of one missionary's life. Yet it goes far beyond that. In it we have ministry highlights as well as personal experiences and reflections on them. One such example is Abe's involvement through the long and difficult period of dealing with possible mergers of Arab World Ministries with other missions.

The author also includes three of the many messages he gave on different occasions over the years. These sermons are important because they were a blessing to those who heard them. They help many of us to see the issues of ministry and spiritual relations in his story in the light of Scripture. His countless illustrations from scenes of ministry help to impress biblical truth on the reader.

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impact on his world?

I observed certain strong points, several of which are unique to Abe. They are:

- Early Christian examples and training
- A capacity for work in early life
- A love of history, which 'lured' him into work with Muslims in North Africa and beyond
- An exposure to other cultures from his Mennonite background (early fluency in both German and English)
- An early conversion and growth in a Christian environment, as well as training in two Christian Bible colleges. I came to know him for the first time at his second college. I never dreamed then how long that relation would last and how far it would lead. Since then, our paths have crossed quite often to the benefit of both my wife and me.
- A love for people from all walks of life. This comes out, for example, in chapters 6 and 7, which tell of his experience in Algeria. We find that, while Abe wasn't a social gadfly or natural extrovert, God prepared him in the skill of relating to people and helping them; at the same time, he greatly appreciated what their friendship also meant to him. The Wiebes' home has always been open, with both Abe and Joyce ready to hear the burdens and fears of others. Many of us have found good counsel or a sympathetic, listening ear when visiting them.
- It includes not only the messages mentioned, but also samples of his poetry. (I wish he had put in my favourite of his, about Muslim zeal and spiritual need: 'Sun sets on eastern rim, where men kneel to pray'. It is one of the most moving defences of missions I have ever read.)
- The book unintentionally proves to be a most useful survey of the history of ministry in an important part of the Muslim world. Furthermore, a great number of our early spiritual forefathers came from this region.
- Abe's wide interests make personal discovery of this brother in Christ a challenge to all who read his story. We learn of his love for sports (fostered by early radio reporting of Dodger games) and for history. He tells of his advanced studies and his improvement in language skills – both Arabic and French. He keeps up on current events. We see him also as an excellent husband and father.
- Abe Wiebe's scholarship is indicated by his success at university and by the many articles he has written throughout his career.
- We are impressed with his honesty, both with regard to himself, and in his relations with others.
- Under an outward seriousness, he hides a real sense of humour. He enjoys – and tells – a good joke. One personal example is that he encouraged me in doodling cartoons during council meetings.

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unique?

- It comes from a man of widely varied experiences in several lands and cultures.

Conclusion

Is this, then, just an 'in-house book', only of interest to missionaries in the Muslim world and others who have known Abe Wiebe? My emphatic reply is 'No'! Personally I am disappointed that this book, which merits wider recognition, had to be self-published. I think of the many missionaries and Christian workers I have met around the world who would be inspired by such a story. It is for this reason that I would encourage wide dissemination of this autobiography.

I would like to close with a recommendation from my wife, Margy.

I finished Abe's book and really appreciated it. It was special to have a long friendship with the author. He includes a good balance of success and disappointments while showing the earthen vessel that God has used. God was looking for a man to stand in the gap and He certainly found that man in Abe! We pray that the book will challenge many to invest their lives in the Muslim world.

Margy and I would like to encourage those who read this review to buy an extra copy of the book and pass it on.