

SEEDBED

2005, Second Trimester

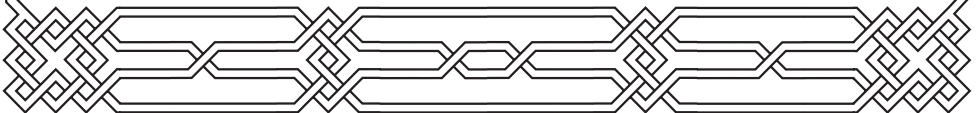
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EDITORIAL

The world is in turmoil these days as terrorism and suicide bombers bring death and destruction. News commentators interview politicians and police authorities in their search for explanations. As Christian workers in the Arab world, we look more closely at questions of theology and seek to understand the thinking and practices of the Muslim peoples we know. At the same time, we press forward in our efforts to share the Gospel with them. We hear amazing stories of God's work to reveal Christ in a variety of situations throughout the Arab world. We do not lose heart, but continue to make Him known and to disciple those Arab Muslims who are coming to faith in Christ.

This issue of *Seedbed* has a variety of articles to stimulate our thinking of how we evangelise and how we disciple. We are reminded also of the importance of prayer behind all our efforts. I look forward to your reactions and suggestions that are stirred up by our colleagues' articles. Have you any experience with the

question of coincidence that IL has raised from his teaching of students? Or can you add to Um Ithnain's guidelines for personal evangelism? What has been your involvement with transformational development as described by SM? What practical suggestions can you make for its implementation? How have you applied its principles to church planting issues? What advice do you have for discipling MBBs and encouraging their formation of a community?

Bear with us as we continue to work through the electronic publication of *Seedbed* — both for AWM colleagues and for other subscribers. If you have not yet contacted us to let us know if you would like the electronic version, please do so soon. We are trying to bring our records up to date as well as to develop a system of archives for past issues. If you would like any of the materials mentioned by our authors in this *Seedbed*, please get in touch with me.

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That's a Good Answer: Coincidence or God's Guidance?

by I.L.

Many Muslims believe that when a dream comes true, it is of God.

In folk Islamic practices, there are soothsayers who claim to know the future.

Christians often see the hand of God in their circumstances. Recently, a preacher described an incident from the tsunami disaster. There was a village where Christians were so unwelcome that celebrating Christmas was offensive. So to avoid provoking their neighbours, this group of Christians arranged a few days of Christmas celebrations on a nearby mountain. Apparently the village was wiped out by the tidal wave, but all the Christians survived.

A Muslim student explained that the 9/11 disaster in America was predicted in the Qur'an. He also claimed that the Qur'an was validated by the miracle of the words *man* and *woman* appearing an equal number of times.

All these examples have the common element of belief in the supernatural overruling of events. They also contain a strong element of Coincidence or Chance. A correct understanding of how Chance works in this world is important for Christian witness.

Let me begin by replying to the confident assurance that a recent modern event was predicted in the Qur'an.

Answer 1: *Produce the evidence.*

The first thing I did for the 9/11 question was to type the key words *9/11 Qur'an* into a search engine.¹ It turned out that this prediction was a hoax, and I found Muslim sources that said so.² I also checked at the website www.answering-islam.org. Evidently, someone had deliberately fabricated a story, using the wildest of proofs containing many inaccuracies that any Muslim should have been able to spot. This story was then circulated on the Web. Many Muslim sources that are against Muslims naively repeating falsehoods exposed this hoax.

So the first reply can be to challenge Muslims to produce the evidence, because many of these wild rumours have no basis in fact.

Answer 2: *So what!*

Coincidence is normal. Look at the example of the words *man* and *woman* appearing an equal number of times. Why should it be seen as remarkable for two of the words of the Qur'an to have the same frequency? If you do a word frequency table of any text, then some words, even related words, may well have the same frequency. Why choose these two words in particular, which just happened to have the same frequency, as proofs of divine authorship?

Perhaps this can be explained in an easier way. Paulos³ gives the example

of the initial letters of the months of the year, *JFMAMJJASOND*. There are several words in these twelve letters. This is not remarkable at all. It would only be remarkable if we predicted in advance that one specific word (e.g. *month*) would be in the letters *JFMAMJJASOND*. I can see the words *ma*, *am*, *as*, *son* and the name *Jason*. An even more interesting example is to take the initial letters of the planets, *MVEMJSUNP*. The word *sun* is in this sequence of letters. This is entirely coincidental.

Answer 3: *What does the Bible say?*

- ‘Would you like to read a whole chapter with me from the Old Testament which concerns Jesus?’ Thus I would invite the person to read with me the prophecy about Jesus from Isaiah 53, pointing out the many predictions found there.

Scripture Gift Mission used to have a booklet with the main passages of prediction and fulfilment printed out neatly. It is probably out of print, but you could do something similar. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* has a useful chapter.⁴ *All that the Prophets Have Spoken*⁵ also deals sensitively with the prophecies concerning Jesus.

The object, as always, is to introduce people to the Scriptures. Few Muslims seem to have heard about Isaiah, and reading with them some of the great chapters on who God is could be the start they need.

Of course, many Muslims will glibly play the ‘me, too’ game, and want to argue that Muhammad was

also foretold in the Bible, and that there are many predictions about him that also came true. That is another topic. Here in this article I want to focus on coincidence.

- Another comment might be: ‘Maybe God is speaking. Death is so final. Are you ready to meet God?’
- When talking about horoscopes: ‘Would you like to see what the Bible says about the purpose of the stars?’

This leads naturally into a study of Genesis 1 where the stars are created as lights for the night. The impressive display of stars is also a reminder of God’s infinite greatness. This means that the stars point to God.

Answer 4: *Why would God send that dream?*

Take the example of the dream in which a death is predicted, and the dream is attributed to God. I leave aside the question as to whether or not demons can influence dreams. Instead I ask, ‘Why would God want to tell someone that?’

It is clearly not so that the person who eventually dies can be warned. Usually someone else, who may know the person but not be in daily contact with him, has the dream. We could say, ‘Maybe God sent or allowed the dream so you can think seriously about death. We all die, and then comes the judgement. Are you ready to face God?’

So what is the biblical stance on Coincidence?

Firstly, we stand in awe of a sovereign God, who always achieves His purposes. He sustains this present world and is dynamically involved in it to make even the wrath of man serve Him. To God, everything is predictable and He actively controls everything. The lot is in God's hand. Nothing happens randomly to God. What appears random to humans is not random to God. Randomness is a concept that betrays the weakness of man: to us something can appear to be random, when from God's viewpoint of total knowledge, there is no such thing.

However, to avoid deism, or the mechanistic, clockwork universe, the Christian goes further. God did not just set the universe in motion and leave it to run down like a wound-up clock. God is an active participant in His creation. It is true that God did make the world to operate largely in terms of cause and effect, but God is also a free agent and human beings have a limited amount of freedom. Francis Schaeffer points out that the world is an open system with both God and man actively involved in it.⁶

In addition, God guides and protects His people and often works to deliver them. But the Bible also teaches that sometimes God does **not** deliver. Many heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 suffered agony and death. One of the many modern examples is the case of the famous

ten Boom sisters. Betsy died in the concentration camp while Corrie lived to a ripe old age.

So yes, in the tsunami there were remarkable deliverances. But some Christians also suffered enormously. Non-Christians can also tell tales of rescue while Christians can speak of disasters. I am not writing glibly: a very close Christian friend of my wife died in a suicide plane disaster. The point is that other non-Christians could mention how they suddenly were not able to catch that flight in which all perished, whereas Christians died in the disaster. So where are we?

Some years ago, I read that the Christians in Algeria had suffered very little in the civil war. But when I counted the deaths I knew of as a percentage of the Christian population, this was similar to the death rate for the whole country. Coincidental deliverance of a few is not necessarily evidence for the general protection of God on His people. Non-Christians also marvel at coincidental deliverance. So what is special about Christians?

Coincidence in the world

My point here is the confirmed view of mathematics; it is highly unlikely to change due to new theories or new discoveries.⁷

1. Coincidence is normal.

Since human beings are engaged in so many activities and lines of thought, sooner or later, two or more significant events will happen together. It is often difficult to distinguish between coinci-

dence and some real association. A large part of the work of science involves the struggle to maintain this distinction and to untangle what is coincidence and what is real cause and effect.

When two or more significant events happen close together, there might be a valid reason, but the most likely explanation is one of a simple coincidence. Unfortunately, most people do not understand this and feel it must be the wrong conclusion. This feeling is discussed in point 3 below.

2. Runs of coincidence are normal.

Paulos (1988:44) provides a computer printout of a random sequence of *O* and *P*, each with a probability of 0.5, which is the equivalent of tossing a perfect coin, in this case over 300 times. What is obvious from such a printout is that runs of three or more *P*'s, or three or more *O*'s, are very common. They are caused just by the nature of randomness in the created world. Therefore, we should be extremely hesitant to read any other explanation into a run of coincidences.

3. Humans are hard-wired / created to notice coincidence.

People notice what is unusual. Sometimes the noticing happens at the subconscious level. Driving would not be possible without the subconscious ability to observe changes in the peripheral vision – that wider area which we are not focusing on. There is a growing body of evidence that people are able to perceive and sense

things at the subconscious level. Subconscious perception could account for a significant part of coincidental thinking and dreaming.⁸

4. Vague dreams, ideas or thoughts are likely to come true.

The more vague the dream, idea or thought is, the greater the number of possibilities for it to come true. We know this from horoscopes, which tend to be so general that they apply to anyone.

5. Dreaming of a significant disaster is a relatively common event.

Sooner or later, for someone, such a dream will come true.

6. Humans have a tendency to remember right predictions and to forget the false ones.

Therefore, people give undue importance to coincidence.

The Christian and coincidence

1. Not everyone who has a sign will turn to Christ.

In the time of Christ, people who saw and experienced miracles did not necessarily follow Jesus. Only one of the ten healed lepers returned to Jesus. Many saw miracles and were hardened, even attributing the power to Satan. Although we are grateful for those who have turned to Christ after a miracle, we need not give undue importance to these signs.

*2. We should be very slow and cautious
when interpreting Coincidence.*

Christians often look to a chain of circumstances as indications that God is guiding. I fully believe that God, who is actively involved in relating to each believer, does control all circumstances. Trust in the loving sovereignty of God is part of the core of our faith. I know that coincidence is normal, and that God is in control. I also know well the human tendency to twist matters, to jump to conclusions or to resist submitting to God. This means that I am reluctant to use circumstances alone as an indication of God's guidance. In the books on guidance I have read, this question of coincidence has been largely ignored. While coincidence is ultimately from God, coincidence may, or may not be, a form of guidance of God. We cannot decide how to interpret events based on the events alone. Our reaction to circumstances should be growth in humility as we actively seek God and submit our thinking to Him who knows and overrules all.

At times I have thought that God was guiding through a seemingly miraculous sequence of unusual events. Later I found out that I was wrong. I need to learn to be very suspicious of my own interpretation of circumstances.

3. Attitude to false predictions

We need to remember that God commanded His people never to listen to anybody making a single wrong prediction. A true prophet sent from God would never make a mistake (Deut. 13:18). In the Old Testament, the commands encouraged people to think carefully before making a prophecy and speaking in God's name. One false prediction was enough for sanctions to be imposed.

We know that one of the reasons some false prophets seem to succeed is that they make many predictions and highlight the occasional one that was right. Before they make a correct prediction, they probably make many false predictions. Since those making wrong predictions would have been killed, right predictions, but not coming from God, would have been rare. Execution of false prophets sent out a strong message against listening to them. In our day, we should know enough about the role of coincidence to make us distrust those who claim to tell the future. We also have strong warnings in Scripture not to listen to false prophets, even if what they say should come true.

Let us therefore not give too much importance to Coincidence, but learn how to turn the conversation to more profitable and truthful directions.

Footnotes

- 1 I used the programme *Copernic*, available free from www.copernic.com, with the advantage of using several search engines simultaneously. It presents a list of possible sites which is saved in a list of searches. I can then delete the irrelevant, go online and get the pages, with or without images. These pages are automatically saved and can be viewed offline within Internet Explorer.
- 2 See for instance http://rationalthinking.humanists.net/fastest_growing_religion.htm, *The story of 'accelerated conversion' and some afterthoughts* by Syed Kamran Mirza, who also attacks other hoaxes such as supposed conversions of famous people to Islam. Also look at *Twisting the Qur'an to Justify the WTC tragedy (what does the Qur'an say about 9/11?)* in <http://freepublic.com/focus/f-news/981270/posts>.
- 3 Paulos JA. *Innumeracy: mathematical illiteracy and its consequences*. UK: Penguin, 1988. See also other books that explain mathematical fun, such as *Why do buses always come in threes? The hidden mathematics of everyday life*, by R Eastaway and J Wyndham, Robson books, UK, 1998.
- 4 McDowell J. *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. English and Arabic.
- 5 *All that the Prophets Have Spoken*. See www.goodseed.com.
- 6 Schaeffer FA. *How should we then live?* Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1980. See chapters 7 & 8.
- 7 I am well aware of the debate concerning the use of psychology within the church. Whereas a lot of psychology used in counselling is pseudoscience – it has been rejected or has yet to be verified and it has multiple theories and opinions – these statements of mathematics are undisputed and well-tested statements of reality.
- 8 Phillips J 2004. "Mindsight" could explain sixth sense.' *New Scientist*, 4 February, 2004.

Transformational Development — Christian Response to the Issues of Global Poverty

by S. M.

Editor's Note: *We preface this article with a brief interview with its author.*

Editor: **How did your interest in transformational development begin?**

S.M.: *After I became a Christian, I saw God touching every part of my life. My home country was going through an economic crisis that affected my family as well as the general population. God in His mercy blessed me by providing work with an NGO. This was a positive testimony to my Muslim friends for they saw God's provision for me. Then I had an opportunity to bless others because of this financial resource. But I did not become wealthy nor did I see this as part of the prosperity Gospel theory.*

Editor: **What was the nature of the work?**

S.M.: *This NGO carried out projects in agriculture, education, training and assistance to the government through an advisory role. My eyes were opened to see how effectively people's lives could be touched through relationships and our witness to God's love and care.*

Editor: **How did you gain more training in this important subject?**

S.M.: *God led me to the UK where I could study more about how development operates. My secular studies taught me why things work or do not work in economic development. They also showed me that without God, development work is limited in its effectiveness. So then I spent the next*

few years researching the Christian perspective on development. This has brought me to an understanding of transformational development. The following article summarizes some of the important things I have been learning.

Transformational development is about putting God in the centre of work with issues such as poverty, unemployment, social and political injustice, environmental problems and most of all, spiritual blindness. No programme can transform the life of the community in the way that God can!

Use of the term *Transformational Development*

The word *development* implies the process of positive change. In the secular world, development is a traditional term for work to reduce poverty. However, in many people's thinking, the predominance of material well-being suggested that a wealthy *developed* world had *got it* in comparison to the poor *underdeveloped* world. Consequently, an often patronising and *we know it all* behaviour ruled in the development sphere. That, in turn, caused a massive loss of resources tied to the programmes that were based on a modern understanding of development economics. The lending of funds was tied to

conditions that often hurt rather than helped the recipient countries.

The linking of development primarily with economic growth is a mistake that is recognised more widely now among development practitioners around the world. Human life is not only about material well-being. Deprivation of political and civil freedoms, social injustice and spiritual repression contribute equally to the state of poverty we come across all too often. However, due to the sensitivity of involvement with such issues, they are often left out of the development equation. The avoidance of tackling the needs for social and spiritual transformation weakened the tools of poverty alleviation.

In order to address this weakness, the phrase *holistic ministry* was introduced. It was directed towards showing a concern for the whole person — physical, social, emotional and spiritual. Christian organisations increasingly used the term *holistic*, applying it to the ministry that treated all these dimensions. But then the term began to be used also by the secular development agencies and therefore could no longer serve as a definition of the distinctive nature of a Christian approach.

Spiritual well-being is an essential part of the welfare of individuals, communities and nations. Our Christian identity and faith shape our view of the development process. The faith-based (Christian) development perspective has come to be known as *Transformational Development*.

Bryant Myers gave this definition:

Transformational development is the process that helps people to discover their true identity as children of God and to recover their true vocation as faithful and productive stewards of gifts from God for the well-being of all. Transformational development is seeking positive change in the whole of human life materially, socially, and spiritually.¹

Our challenge is to employ the gifts of the communities for the glory of God and for the sake of all human beings. According to Musopole, we want to see *a transformed person who transforms his or her environment*.

Principles of Transformational Development

1. Transformational development is rooted in biblical foundations.

It recognises that true transformation in the life of a person or a community will never be reached unless they renounce their sins and turn to Christ.

For a Christian development practitioner this will mean that along with practical assistance, people need to hear the good news of the Gospel and be given a chance to respond. To do this in a sensitive and appropriate way in the context of a Muslim location will add yet another challenge.

2. Transformational development has a very distinct view of the nature of poverty.

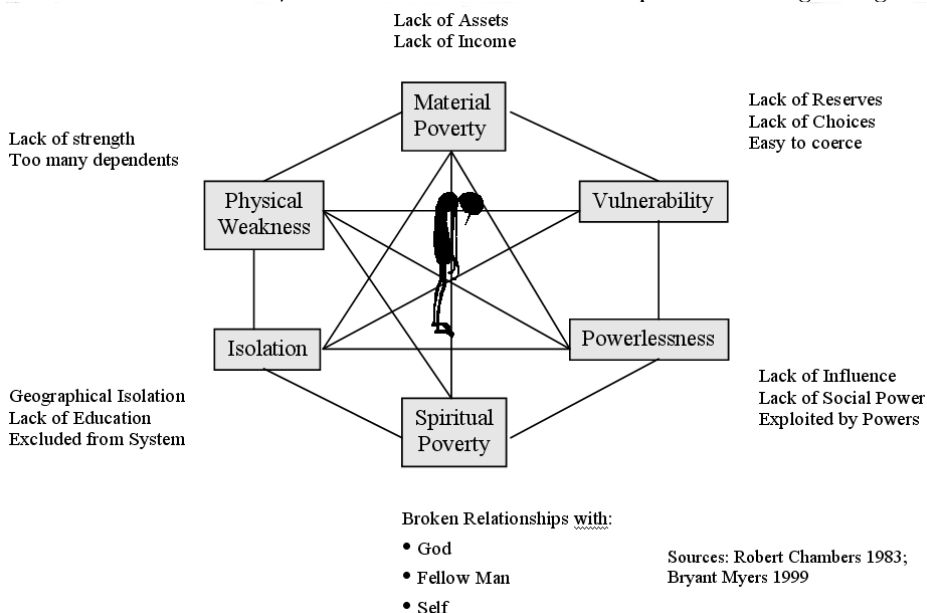
Poverty is an extremely complex issue and no explanation of it is complete without spiritual, social and material dimensions. The understanding of

what causes poverty is very important because this will define one's response to it.

One of the best ways to describe the nature of poverty is to use the *Chamber's/Myers Poverty Trap* with its six interconnected and interactive elements. (See figure below.)

The poor are locked in the cluster of disadvantages like material poverty, physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability, powerlessness and spiritual poverty. The poor have few assets. Their housing and sanitation are inadequate. They have little or no land, livestock or wealth. They encounter physical weakness caused by poor health and malnutrition. Many in their households are women, the very young and the very old. The poor lack access to services and information. They often live in

remote areas – far from main roads, water lines and even electricity. They do not have the right of entry to markets, capital, credit and information. The assets of the poor are bought at far below market value because of distress sales. They have no savings to cover emergencies or stand against disasters. They lack choices and options and are vulnerable to cultural demands like dowries or feast days. These social requirements create a permanent demand for moneylenders, whose high rates ensure ongoing poverty. Natural or manmade disasters push them to do things they might not wish to do, such as sell land or livestock. The poor are vulnerable to bargaining when it comes to being paid for their labour. The power to withhold work without reason is a powerful bargaining tool.



The poor lack both the ability and the knowledge to influence the life around them and the social systems where they live. Often local police, politicians and landowners use deception, blackmail and violence to rob the poor who, in turn, have no possibility for justice, 'since they do not know the law, cannot afford legal help and fear to offend the patrons on whom they depend'.²

And most importantly, the poor suffer from spiritual poverty — broken and dysfunctional relationships with God, each other, the community and creation. They may suffer from spiritual oppression — fear of spirits, demons and ancestors. They may lack hope and be unable to believe that change is possible. All of these elements are interconnected and reinforce each other. A problem in one area means problems in another, resulting in greater and greater poverty.³

It is vital to understand sin and what it does to our relationships with God and with one another to even begin to comprehend, let alone address, the problems of someone who is caught in such a trap and needs to find the way out. The good news is that the way out leading to transformation is already provided through Jesus Christ. The challenge is that often it is not just a problem of one individual or even a community; it also extends to the national level.

The operating principles for Tearfund declare:

Therefore, reconciliation with God through submission to Jesus Christ is the greatest need of the poor, as with all people. We are therefore committed to the proclamation of the Gospel.⁴

3. Transformational development depends on prayer.

Everyone has equal access to prayer and to the throne of God; He will answer and enable us to act on behalf of those who are oppressed.

Tim Chester quotes CB Samuel as saying:

Prayer is the ordinary person's instrument. In their transformation, the poor have one instrument that no force on earth can deny them: the instrument of prayer. They naturally qualify because 'a broken and a contrite heart God will not despise' (Ps. 51:17).⁵

4. Transformational development involves the Church.

The experience of workers in development suggests that the local church is the best way to ensure that all the dimensions of transformational development are integrated and applied. By the grace of God, the church will remain in the community for much longer than the best of TD practitioners. Therefore, it is extremely important to help the church to see its own way of leading their community towards a fully integrated transformation.

Rene Padilla has said:

Sustainable Christian development requires sustainable Christian communities. In other words, projects may lead to sustainable development without a local church, but they

cannot sustain development that is distinctly Christian without a local community of believers.⁶

Transformational Development Strategies

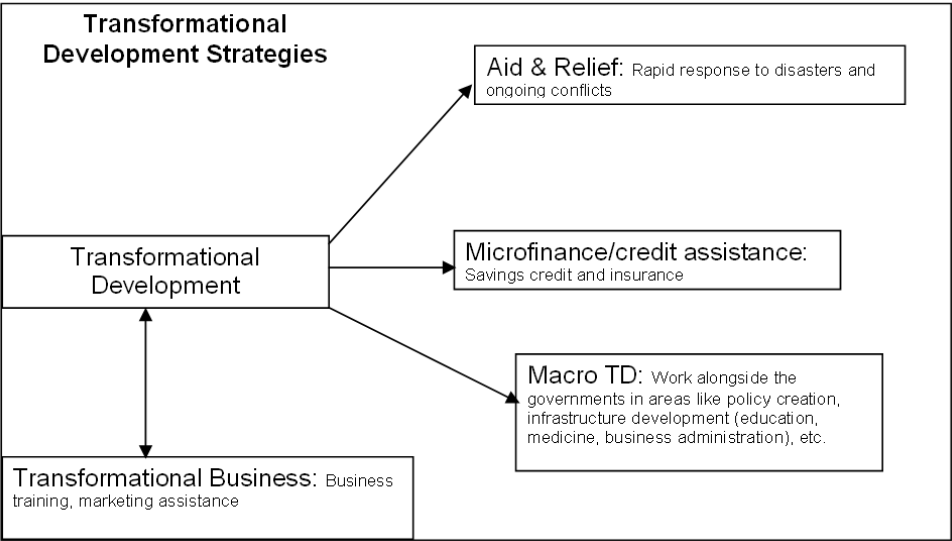
Transformational development can be split into several general strategies. (See author's diagram below.)

There are different ways of categorising TD strategies. Each person, community and nation requires a specifically tailored approach. They hold one thing in common — there are no quick and easy answers.

The story of the Good Samaritan makes it obvious that God called us to respond with an unconditional mercy to those in critical need. *Aid and relief* efforts are the kind of response we can provide in the context of disasters and conflicts. They are immediate and temporary and expect nothing in return. However, relief and aid by

themselves can only provide a *quick fix*, which is not sustainable. If handled wrongly and exaggerated, they give local people the feeling of hopelessness and promote constant dependency. Therefore, in the long term, aid and relief have to be complemented by other TD strategies.

The victim in the Good Samaritan story, once past the crisis stage, might require help to restore his stolen belongings and his livelihood. In many communities of today, there are families who survive all too long at the subsistence level of existence. There are also people who have lost their livelihoods due to the choices they made — such as changing their religion and/or lifestyle. Again, a long-term balanced approach is required in these cases. Schemes like *microfinance – microcredit* are proving to be successful in helping people regain



their dignity, self-reliance and their ability to support others.

Looking at a wider implication from the same story, certain needs can be identified within the community. One such requirement would be to ensure a secure infrastructure, such as roads. Moreover, marginalised people, such as robbers, require help to return to a respectable way of life. Social changes would have to be made in the society to improve the relations between different social classes like Levites, priests and Samaritans. A just distribution of society's resources would have to be encouraged. These kinds of changes call for long-term committed work alongside local governmental and non-governmental organisations. This is transformational development at *macro-level*.

Another major element of the TD strategies is *Transformational Business*. It is so significant that it actually can stand on its own. Businesses are distinct from development and mission agencies because they are profit-making entities. No doubt, the main goal of Christian business is the growth of the kingdom of God. This goal is linked to those of mission agencies. However, it is important to see the difference between the non-profit or charitable legal structures and the profitable ones. The nature of a business venture requires flexibility and rapid response to market

changes. Decisions have to be made quickly, while changes within mission structures require time. Sometimes tough choices have to be made in businesses (like laying off some workers if the business is not making enough profit). Such a decision could be difficult within the loving missionary context.

So why use business enterprises in our development strategies? One answer is that many communities are not at the stage of aid and relief; microfinance might not be the best strategy in a certain context. Business, as well as microfinance, helps to develop self-reliance. It also can help local churches to continue to exist in the local environment without constant donor money. And surely, it helps the mission agency not to be obliged to supply funds constantly. Business can provide a valid identity both to local believers and to missionaries. However, running successful businesses requires the desire to acquire extensive knowledge, entrepreneurial skills and ongoing support.

In conclusion, transformational development is an amazing blessing as well as an incredible responsibility to a body of believers. There are no quick solutions to the problems to be faced. An open-minded approach, a desire to learn and understand, along with a complete reliance on God must precede any initiative.

Footnotes

- 1 Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor. Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Orbis Books Publishing, 1999).
- 2 Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (London: Longman Group. Christian Children's Fund. 1996).
- 3 Bryant L. Myers, *Walking With The Poor. Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Orbis Books Publishing, 1999).
- 4 Tearfund Operating Principles, May 1999.
- 5 Tim Chester, *What Makes Christian Development Christian?* Work paper presented at Global Connections Relief and Development Forum, 2002.
- 6 Ibid.

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9. Tearfund discussion paper, 'Paths out of Poverty', July 2002.

The Why, When, Where, How and What of Evangelism (Part 2)

By Um Ithnayn

What are the major challenges in telling others about Christ? What should we be telling people? This two-part article is based on the Evangelism seminar given at the East Area Women's Conference (November 2004) that explored various aspects of evangelism:

- **Why:** A joy shared is a joy doubled.
- **When:** Live a life of witness.
- **Where:** Homes and Hangouts.
- **How:** Prepare in Prayer.
- **What:** Prepare Ministry Tools.

Part One stated that half the battle of evangelism is spending time with our Arab Muslim friends. It is easy to fill our lives with many good things; but to increase our evangelistic ministry, we need to proactively maximize the time spent with Arab Muslims. The other half of the battle is opening up spiritual conversations once we are sitting with our friends. How do we turn the conversation to spiritual things? This second half of the article focuses on our prayerful preparation for evangelism and then describes a few practical ideas for creating opportunities for spiritual conversations.

How to Begin: Prepare through Prayer

Our evangelistic ministry is an outgrowth of our own reconciled relationship to God. We are called, commanded and compelled to draw others into the joyful security found in

God through Christ. Since evangelism is secondary, we must start with the foundation: our own relationship with the Lord. As our relationship with God deepens, we are better able to sense His leading. Obeying Him in our ministries brings us still closer to Him.

Since this is the Lord's ministry, we must seek His direction. Prayerful preparation includes praying for our friends and the people we have yet to meet, as well as asking how He wants us to prepare for spiritual conversations. At the East Area Women's Conference, R.Y. led a seminar in which she listed ten steps to effective intercession.¹ Among them was the need to acknowledge that we can't pray effectively without the Holy Spirit's enabling and leading. We need to wait before the Lord and listen for His direction concerning how He wants us to pray. She also suggested we pray with a Bible nearby so that God can readily give direction from His Word. In this case, His answer would concern evangelistic goals for our friends.

For example, as I pray for a friend, God brings to mind her specific deep needs. He shows me *how to pray* and *how to prepare* to share spiritual truth with her. Does He want me to offer to pray with Fatma concerning a particular felt need? Should I prepare to share a verse that would speak to her

situation? As the Lord lays ministry ideas on my heart, I pray that He will prepare her heart to be receptive to what He is leading me to attempt.

What to Tell Them

Collecting and creating ministry tools

Always be ready to give an answer... for the hope that you have (1 Pet. 3:15). We must have an attitude that is eager to make the most of any impromptu opportunities to share Truth. However, *being ready* can also mean we actively prepare ourselves for these opportunities. The Spirit leads us in our careful, detailed preparation just as much as He guides us in the spontaneous opportunities to share. We seek God's direction on the choice of topics, what to say concerning them and even how to create the opportunities to share what He is leading us to say. How does God want me to explain a particular truth to Khadija and Muna? What do they need explained in more detail in order to better understand what I sense God leading me to say? These prepared evangelistic statements are our ministry tools in evangelism.

Evangelism is not merely repeating the essential truths of the Gospel until they are understood. We must prepare apologetic answers to Islamic objections and barriers. The path to Christ is a progression, and so evangelism can touch upon discipleship issues as well. Answers to common questions, our current devotional reading or even what we are learning

about Islam can inspire a topic for a ministry tool. We investigate how others have addressed the various topics; sometimes we reshape what they have written to fit our own ministry situation.

What should we prepare?

Whatever you are reading or studying, *prepare* it so you can share it. During your devotions, spend a moment thinking about how your friend would react to the Bible passage. I carry my devotional/prayer notebook in my purse so I can pull it out and share with my friends what God has been teaching me.

Prayerfully prepared answers allow us to make the most of every opportunity (Eph 5:16). One common question often asked is 'Are you a Christian?'. If we merely answer 'Yes', our opportunity is lost. Instead, we can be ready with 'salty' responses, interjected with a bit of truth. Preparation helps put the Arabic vocabulary and lines of thought at the tip of our tongue; thus, these ready responses will more easily come out in conversation with our friends. I have an extremely poor memory, so I write down ministry tools and carry them in my handbag. Just before a visit, I glance over my notes to remind myself of the main points and the essential vocabulary words.

Writing your own ministry tools

Usually we are given only short opportunities to introduce a spiritual topic; therefore, short responses or statements are more practical. The

following is a simple format for creating ministry tools:

- **Choose a topic** to address in the ministry tool. If possible, think of an opening question or comment that could lead into the desired spiritual comments.
- **Research a scriptural response** by reading through appropriate Bible passages that speak to the topic. Pick one or two passages on which to base the prepared statement. It is also helpful to research ways that others have addressed the topic by checking books on apologetics, *Min-Tools*,² the PALM CD or various evangelistic websites geared for outreach to Muslims.
- **Write a response** of one or two paragraphs on the topic.
- **Rewrite the ministry tool in Arabic.** After deciding what to say, work through it again, according to your Arabic abilities and in light of the way things are communicated in Arabic. Write down any vocabulary words needed.

If your ministry is in Arabic, please do not skip the rewriting phase. I find that I often cannot say things in Arabic in exactly the same way I would say them in English. When I rework the ministry tool in Arabic, I may realize that my friends need more explanation of a Christian term that I have used, or that my whole line of reasoning is too complicated and *western* for my friends to grasp easily. Sometimes I need to break down a topic into several smaller items, rather than tackling a huge theological topic all at

once. I am not suggesting developing mini-theological treatises on every evangelistic topic under the sun. This format merely helps prepare what God is leading us to share, in order to make the most of every opportunity.

Finally, I suggest you write up your ministry tool in a format that is easy to glance over in order to refresh your memory. I keep my ministry tools in English, adding vocabulary notes. Others write their ministry tools completely in Arabic. Maybe all you need is a few main points to refresh your memory. *Appendix A* contains a list of possible ministry tool topics to get you started writing your ministry tools. *Appendix B* is a sample ministry tool in which I have answered a question I am often asked: Why don't you become a Muslim?

How to Bring Up Spiritual Topics of Conversation: Some Practical Suggestions

In general, it is easier to talk about spiritual things with our Arab Muslim friends than it is in secular western contexts. Our friends believe that God exists and they respect and fear Him. In the Gulf, it is politically correct to be religious and so various Islamic topics are a normal part of their conversation. Even in this religiously charged environment, we often still need to create opportunities to talk about spiritual things or draw the conversation to Christian truth. What are some practical ways to bring the conversation to a topic we have prepared?

Ask for help with Arabic

Most of us carry on our evangelistic ministry in the Arabic language. To Muslims, Arabic is *the* language of spiritual matters, as well as the language of the heart. Non-native Arabic speakers struggle to become proficient in this *very difficult* language, but happily, God can use this weakness for His glory. God can use our lack of proficiency in Arabic to turn the conversation to spiritual things. As non-native Arabic speakers, we can create opportunities to share when we ask for language help on a spiritual topic or Scripture passage.

What's your news? What are your thoughts?

To move the conversation from surface pleasantries to deeper issues, I have begun following our local greeting شو اخبارك (What's your news?) with شو افكارك (What are your thoughts?). 'What's your news?' has a standard response, 'alHamdulillah', and rarely goes beyond that. In asking them about their thoughts, I can creatively open up a conversation about their real heart issues.

Of course, the question usually is turned back on me. What have I been thinking about lately? I can share about what I read in my Quiet Time that morning, or even something that I have been preparing specifically to share with them. My friend does not have to know that I have been thinking about this thing just in order to share it with her. It is, in fact,

something that I have been thinking about lately, and so I am answering her reciprocal question honestly.

Props & salty knick-knacks

Sometimes it is easier to bring the conversation around to a spiritual topic if I can bring some kind of prop to use as an illustration. The *Visualized Bible* booklets, children's Bible storybooks and Sunday school materials are props that I have used. As women and mothers, we may find this easier with our large handbags and our association with children. I have a natural opening to engage with the children when the hostess leaves to get the food. Once I have my Bible story props out and get started telling the story to the children, there is often an opportunity to share the Bible story with the adults as well.

One obvious item, although certainly not a mere prop, is the Arabic New Testament. It is important to show respect for the Bible, but we also want to keep it at hand and available to use when we are visiting friends. I carry a copy in a protective sleeve in my bag so it does not get tattered. I even choose my handbag based on its ability to carry my favorite version of the New Testament. Although it is cumbersome to carry a full Arabic Bible, several Arabic versions are available on computer. This allows me to print out specific passages from the Old Testament to take on visits. The Van Dyke version of the Bible is now available for Palm Pilots and Pocket PCs³ as well. It is harder to

offer our friends this Bible in its electronic form, but at least it is readily available to read with them at a moment's notice.

For times when my friends visit me, I strive to fill our sitting room with items that I call *salty knick-knacks*. Scripture wall hangings, holiday decorations or other items serve as visual aids and reminders of spiritual truths or Bible stories. Recently I added a pearling scale to my collection. My intention is to use the scale to talk about my friends' belief that they must balance their good deeds with their bad deeds. During the Christmas period, the star and the angel at the top of the tree lead to the two Christmas stories in Matthew and Luke. Here in the Gulf, I fill a *mandoo*s, a Gulf-style 'treasure chest', with (fake) gold, frankincense and myrrh to illustrate the story of the Maji. Let us purposefully choose *salty knick-knacks* and think through how to use them in

order to open up spiritual conversations with our friends.

Conclusion

Half the battle of evangelism is spending time with our Arab Muslim friends. We want to live lives of witness, meeting people in homes and at our hangouts. The other half of the battle is opening up spiritual conversations once we are with them. We must bathe the evangelism process in prayer, by praying for our friends and asking God how He wants to use us in their lives. Being ready (1 Pet. 3:15) means preparing for our evangelistic ministry. By prayerfully preparing our own ministry tools, we can be ready with *salty* answers to common questions and objections. Our concisely prepared statements can more effectively interject spiritual truth into conversations with our friends. May God bless and guide our efforts to proclaim His glory and salvation among Arab Muslims.

Appendix A: Possible Ministry Tool Topics

This is not an exhaustive list but just something to get you started.

1. Reasons Muslims become Christians:⁴

- A sure salvation
- The person of Jesus
- The Bible
- God's love
- Relationship with God
- Seeing others endure persecution

2. Answering common questions & objections:

- Are you a Muslim/Christian?
- Why don't you become a Muslim?
- Jesus was not crucified.
- The Bible is corrupted.
- Jesus is not a god/the Son of God.

3. Seasonal Sharing:

- Ramadan - Fasting
- Christmas
- Eid al-Adha
- Hajj - being 'born again'
- Easter - the Eid al-Adha of the Injiil

4. What God has been teaching you recently.

- Prepare a ministry tool based on what God is showing you in your devotions, Sunday School preparations or in a religious book you are reading.
- Prepare how you could answer: What are your thoughts?

5. Prepare a shame/honour-focused Bible story or Gospel presentation.

Appendix B: Sample Ministry Tool

Below is a sample ministry tool, written as I would say it in Arabic. This makes it a bit difficult to read, but I want to highlight how rewriting the tool changes what and how things are said. Although I did not end up directly quoting any of the supporting verses, my response is based on concepts found in: Isaiah 57:12, 64:6; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 3:20-26; Hebrews 9:22 and Genesis 22:13-14.

A response to: Why don't you become a Muslim? My answer: There is no hope in Islam.

There is no hope in Islam. In Islam you must balance *توازن* the bad deeds *بالسيئات* with the good deeds *بالحسنيات* and this is impossible. Nobody is 100% perfect. Everyone sins and everyone deserves the fire. Even if God multiplies a Muslim's good deeds *حسنات المسلم* a thousand times, it will never be enough *بالمرة ما يكفي*.

The honour of God and the value of God are without limits; thus the weight *ثقل* of my bad deeds *سيئات* is infinite. Because God's value is great, the weight of my sins is great. No one can balance their sin and their bad deeds, not even the best Muslim in the world. A sin that we see as something small becomes something big when the person sins against God, the Supreme One *المتعالى* the Incomparable One *البديع*. So in Islam

there is no hope that we can escape the fire.

God is *irRahman irRahiim* (merciful and compassionate). He knows no one can balance *يتوازن* their sins, so He has provided a way for us *دبر طريق حقنا*. He is the one who balances our bad deeds when we trust in the redeeming sacrifice (*fidya*) He provided for us. This *fidya* washes us from our shame. It gives the good deeds, and more, to balance our bad deeds and our shame. I trust in this *fidya* so I have assurance that I will go to heaven when I die. I have hope that I do not see in Islam. This is why I am not a Muslim.

Footnotes

- 1 Taken from the Intercession Seminar PowerPoint, found on the East Area Women's Conference Compendium CD. Um Salat based this seminar on the book: *Intercession, Thrilling and Fulfilling* by Joy Dawson.
- 2 MinTools is an AWM user-interfaced database of topical responses and evangelistic stories. It can be found on the *Spiritual Arabic 2* CD.
- 3 For the Palm Pilot Arabic Bible visit: <http://unbound.biola.edu/unibible/>. A beta version for the Pocket PC can be downloaded from www.olivetree12.com/beta/arabic.
- 4 This list of reasons Muslims become Christians was taken from a lecture that was based on the article: 'Why I Chose Jesus', by Dudley Woodbury and Russell G. Shubin at <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/2001/01/muslim.htm>.

‘What If’... A Reflection on Prayer

by Gary Corwin

The following article was first published in the April 2004 issue of the Evangelical Missions Quarterly (EMQ) and is used with permission. As prayer is the one resource most essential to the achievement of our task, it seems a timely reminder.

Wade Byrum is a forty-something businessman and a fellow elder at our church. A short time ago he led our session in a devotional that I will not soon forget.

After some initial self-humbling remarks, he stated his purpose: ‘This is personal, it’s pointing at my heart. It’s exposing my heart. My hope is that I will spur you, and that you will also spur me, on to love and good deeds – most specifically, on to a deeper prayer life.’

He went on to identify personally with Augustine in the weaknesses reflected in his *Confessions*. He next pointed us to Epaphras in Colossians 4:12-13, who was ‘always wrestling in prayer’ on behalf of others.

Wade then read a powerful series of ‘what if’ statements about prayer, a portion of which I now share with you. Some of these I have adapted for a missions community context.

- What if prayer was like touching the fingertips of God just enough for His bounty to flow down from His open hands?
- What if I really believed that apart from accessing the Lord’s treasures through prayer, I only had trinkets to hand out?
- What if I really believed that He who spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, will also along

with Him graciously give us all things?

- What if I do not have, because I do not ask?
- What if I really believed Satan and his demons were brutally attacking God’s people one by one and that praying in the Spirit was the need of the hour?
- What if I really believed prayer is more necessary for me than it was for Jesus when He walked this earth?
- What if I really believed that I, and the sheep in my care would experience God’s favour as never before if I was consumed with being with Him in prayer?
- What if I really believed Satan would come after me as never before if I was consumed with being with God in prayer?
- What if I really believed Hell was a place of eternal torment and that God moves in the hearts of men, women, boys and girls as I cry out to Him?
- What if my prayer life matched my prayer theology?
- What if I was willing to be like Jacob — to not let go of God until He blessed me and this ministry — even if it meant being taken to the mat and getting up with a painful limp or a broken nose?

- What if I was really devoted to prayer, expectant in prayer and thankful in prayer?
- What if I really lived like Jesus did on this earth, and I just had to be with the Father?
- What if I was more concerned about the work of prayer and less about talk regarding prayer?
- What if I simply lost track of time in prayer?
- What if missionaries and mission leaders were known as those who loved to pray? What if someone said about us – ‘I don’t know all they do, but I do know that they pray for us’?
- What if we gathered, and there was confession of personal and corporate sin that brought supernatural healing?
- What if I was willing to risk brokenness, and confessed my sin, my frailties and my unbelief before God with you?
- What if I really believed that during a prayer gathering we could find ourselves with our hearts and our bodies prostrate before the God who is a consuming fire?
- What if a conversation took place between two mission supporters and

one said, ‘What is the matter with those people? They are all sweaty and look worn out.’ What if the second person said, ‘Oh, those are the mission leaders and I’m sure they’ve been wrestling in prayer again’?

- What if we experienced fasting and praying together in such a way that we longed for Jesus more than we long for physical food?

Missionary friends, we are called to pray. We are called to meet with the Lord individually, with family, in small groups, as agencies and corporately with God’s people. Each of these contexts is meant to feed the others.

Wade concluded his remarks: ‘I am not here to condemn (not even myself). I’m not here to try and motivate by guilt. I am here to share the gulf that exists between my beliefs and my practice and to seek the Lord’s and your help.’

I suspect the same kind of gulf is very real to many of us. What if we acknowledged it and we really learned to ask, seek and knock (Matt. 7:7-8) until the gulf went away? What might that mean to the progress of the Gospel in our generation?

Let's Make Disciples

By Khalil Abd el Nour

Editor: *The following article is about a book in Arabic for the discipleship of Middle Eastern believers from a Muslim background. I asked the author to give us his reasons for preparing this material and his objectives for its use. His insights and experience may prove helpful to others who are working on similar ministry tools. His book is available through AWM Media publications.*

Let's Make Disciples is my effort to provide suitable material for the discipleship of believers from an Islamic background. At first glance, it may seem no different from any other Christian discipleship book written by and for Middle Eastern Christians. In actual fact, the book grew out of my experience in discipling new believers from a Muslim background and I wrote it uniquely with them in mind.

Intended Audience

I developed this material keeping in mind the new believer who is firmly in the faith but without a solid grounding in the content of the faith. He or she may have bounced from church to church (as is the case where I live) or foreign worker to foreign worker, but not acquired a systematic approach to Scripture. Since the book is for a literate person, I have never used it with anyone who has less than a secondary school education. I believe the content could be used with illiterates, but it would have to be recast by a responsible communicator in order to fit the needs of non-readers.

Since the book *Let's Make Disciples* was published and distributed in Egypt, it was necessary to employ common Christian terms without any

Islamic language. I decided to take all Bible quotations from the Van Dyck-Al Bustani version because that one is prevalent in Egypt. However, I tried to avoid over-used Christian expressions and to define those that may not be clear. I believe the translation *Kitab al Hayat* can also be used profitably.

Content

I have written from a historical theological perspective in order to provide a structure through which to understand God's revelation. This framework is the covenant theme found in the covenants of the Old Testament (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David) that are fulfilled and culminated in the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ. I emphasize the perspective that God works with His people through history and through the connectedness of the biblical revelation, including its continued application to our contemporary situation. In the first half of the book, I examine the Old Testament and seek to lay a foundation for understanding Christ and the Gospel. My first three chapters look closely at Genesis 1-3 in order to establish a proper understanding of who man is (created in the image of God), his role in the universe, his relationship to the rest of the

created order – to the environment, the animal world and other human beings, especially in the marriage relationship. (If you were under the tutelage of Wendell Evans, you will note his influence here.) I further study the covenants in successive chapters, adding one on Joseph (portrayed as a unique character who preserved God's covenant with the fathers) and another on Isaiah's suffering servant (as an Old Testament portrayal of the life and work of Christ). In the last half of the book, I concentrate on Christ's teaching through the Sermon on the Mount (four chapters), the Upper Room Discourse of John 13-17 (five chapters) and Peter's restoration in John 21 (one chapter).

Why do I feel that the historical perspective is important in discipling new believers from Islamic background? Precisely because the historical perspective is missing in their former faith. The Qur'an relates stories, but not history – and certainly not the history of God's redemption of a people. Furthermore, the skills of biblical interpretation take on a new urgency if believers understand that God is revealing Himself through the history of the Scriptures. New believers need to learn interpretive methods that are second nature to many of us. Some of them are: interpret in context, interpret the Old Testament in light of the New, seek for the intent of the author rather than look for meaning in

contemporary events and see Christ as the central theme of the Scriptures.

In addition to this historical perspective, each lesson has an associated topic. I have chosen topics that help new believers grapple with some of the difficult issues of our faith. They include: original sin, faith, three primary growth areas for all new disciples (mind, will and emotions), holiness, providence, the believer's relation to the law, repentance, principles of interpretation, Jesus' sonship, the divine and human nature of Christ, spiritual disciplines, the Lord's Supper, the Holy Spirit, assurance of salvation, personal worship and persecution. I do not treat these subjects exhaustively, but I try to provide a biblical framework for them.

Use of the Book

The Bible study section is in a question-and-answer format with model answers provided at the end of each chapter. The disciple has the opportunity to think carefully about the questions and write out his own answer in the space provided before consulting the model answers. At the outset, I state that no book can make disciples but rather that disciples make disciples. Ideally a leader can easily use the content with his/her small group. The leader need not even distribute the book to those in the discipleship group but can use the questions in his/her individual preparation for the study while leaving only the Bible as the text for the small group session. This reinforces the

value of turning to the Bible to answer our questions.

However, a small group will not be an option in many situations in the Muslim world. Isolated believers can benefit from the book and study through it on their own. This is why model answers to the questions are provided. Each chapter has about three memory verses. If the individual works conscientiously, he should be able to complete a lesson easily in a week's time (about half an hour each day). There are 21 lessons so six months should be more than adequate to cover the contents of the book.

A Final Comment on Discipleship

In closing, I want to make a few disclaimers. In no way do I see this book as the final word on the discipleship of Muslim background believers. In fact, now that I have used it myself in a small group, there is much I wish to change or adapt. I see the book as a collective starting point and I anticipate that it will be rewritten and edited in order to become a more

suitable tool for discipleship. I hope that others will build on this subject of discipleship by writing on it more extensively. After all, *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* is the 'stuff' of our call. If you use the book, please send me your comments and suggestions. You may influence the next edition!

Secondly, discipleship is done in community. Believers learn from each other. If the book can be used to assist the church to gather Christ's sheep and help them pour over God's Word, then its intent will have been realized.

Finally, may the Lord, the Spirit, lead His body to teach the whole counsel of God in lands and among a people that have often received only the crumbs of Christ's teaching. There will be no church unless there are disciples. If there are disciples (true ones), there will be a church. If there is a church (a true one), disciples will be reproduced, which means there is hope.

Book Review: Searching for the indigenous church: a missionary pilgrimage

Reviewed by John A.

Searching for the indigenous church: a missionary pilgrimage, Gene Daniels (pseudonym) William Carey Library, 2005, paperback, 213 pages. <http://www.netramp.us/wcl/customer/product.php?productid=495>.

The news of the widespread uproar in Muslim lands because of the recent alleged desecration of the Qur'an at Guantanamo Bay reminded me of how different the Muslim mindset is from our own. Christian commentators in the West have been surprised at the depth of anger and we are as well. After all, we certainly would not have reacted that way if we were in their shoes. But of course, that's because we're not.

Searching for the Indigenous Church is the story of a Christian worker's pilgrimage in church planting ministry in an unnamed part of Muslim Central Asia. As an American with previous ministry experience in the USA, he comes to recognize through hard experiences that in his unawareness he brought to the field a great deal of cultural baggage.

In his forward to the book, Dr. Thomas Hale comments:

...No matter how much we have read about the need to remove our culturally tinted glasses and see things from the perspective of another culture, most of us have great difficulty doing so. The main reason for this is

that we don't even recognize we are wearing such glasses.

Using the image of pilgrimage and Christian workers as pilgrims, Gene Daniels walks us through key moments in his quest to establish an indigenous church. Early on, he notes:

If we do get there, it will seem strange to us as foreign missionaries. Its fabric, if truly indigenous, is cut from a cloth of a different color, woven to patterns we do not like or understand.

The author doesn't give us many details about how he carried out his ministry there, but we assume that he attempted to start some groups, primarily made up of young singles. Monetary help was also given, including the financing of a rented facility for worship. He experienced some initial success. However, one day after a service, feeling quite happy about the situation, he was jolted by the brutal honesty of a key church member who said:

Do you really think that this is our church? Do you see anything here that is ours? Everything is imported from your world; this order, this structure is not my culture.... I used to want this to be our church, but now I'm too tired to keep trying. Missionaries brought so much of their culture mixed with the gospel that it will never grow here.

This event, along with other experiences, brought the author to a

significant paradigm shift. He realized that he *knew absolutely nothing about the indigenous church... and did not even know where to look*. He then introduces us to various *signposts along the way*, things that he had not considered before. They were:

- Church as community vs. church as a meeting.
- Really listening to emerging national leaders vs. getting on with our ministry and bringing nationals on board with what we are doing.
- A united believing community vs. individual churches, which tend to separate believers from one another.
- Staying on indefinitely in a ministry location vs. the pilgrim mentality of moving on at the appropriate time.

He leads us through these issues by recounting his interactions with local leaders, thus allowing us to hear first-hand their national perspectives. Some comments are quite sharp and cause us to bristle. For example, he quotes one trusted national leader:

Missionaries are often difficult to work with. They don't treat us with very much respect. Sometimes they ask our opinion, but they don't really want to know what we think. They actually just want us to agree with their ideas and plans. And it is the same for all of us.

These remarks rang true for me as I remembered almost the same thing happening some years ago when a Moroccan leader blurted out a similar frustration to me.

I highly recommend this book. Its 200+ pages are printed with double

spacing and can be read fairly easily in one sitting. But more importantly, the author raises a number of issues that I believe we need to grapple with and discuss with fellow colleagues (including nationals). Daniels is not aiming to tell us in black and white 'this is how we should be doing it'. Rather, by raising issues, he lets us draw our own conclusions and struggle a bit to compare his experience to ours. Though the situation in Central Asia is different from the one in the Arab world, I was struck by the many similarities to the contexts where we work.

The author is a good storyteller, and I appreciated his use of imagery found in Central Asia. Besides the pilgrimage motif, he introduces us to caravansaries (frontier outposts), fire towers and poplar trees (as something truly indigenous there).

Daniels concludes:

It may be that some of my fellow pilgrims were disturbed by my stories. I certainly hope so — they disturb me. Some may think I was too hard on the missionaries in my stories. Maybe so, but most probably I was not hard enough. Remember, I am one of them.

Yes, in telling his story, he has sometimes been quite severe in judging himself and missionaries in general. But I believe he has put his finger on several blind spots that we all tend to have. And it's good to get our feathers ruffled from time to time!

Author's Note: *If you would like a copy of the fairly detailed notes I have taken on the main points that Daniels brings out in his book, please write to the Editor.*

Book Review: Walking with the Poor

Reviewed by Donna Smith

Walking with the Poor. Principles and Practices of Transformational Development, Bryant L. Myers. (Orbis Books and World Vision, 1999, 6th printing, 2003). 279 pages.

The terms *transformational development* and *holistic ministry* have come to the forefront in mission discussions in recent years. I felt the time had come for me to better understand this topic that has been of passionate concern to some of my colleagues. In reply to my request about where to begin, one friend suggested that I read *Walking with the Poor*, where Bryant Myers comprehensively treats the subject.

Not only does Myers thoroughly examine the questions of poverty and the poor, and transformational development, but he also brings in a biblical assessment of the situation with reflections on who we are and what we are to be and do. The reader comes away with more than a solid grasp of good practices of development, and also a vision for a Christian understanding of both the problems and the processes of change that honour God and affirm the role of the church. Practitioners will find essential principles to apply to their practices and to affect their own formation, giving them attitudes and spirituality that will make them truly holistic. And always there is an emphasis on the community itself and its involvement in change.

The final section is entitled 'Christian Witness and Transformational Development'. Believers who are concerned with their witness to others while providing practical aid for the poor and suffering will find this section most helpful. There are comments on why we must witness; our goals; Gospel as life, deed, word and sign; the importance of the Bible and its use in transformational development; and the focus and evaluation of Christian witness – including changing worldview. This division concludes with useful appendices taken from other sources: 'Scripture Search Texts for Biblical Reflection', 'Biblical References on Transformation for Reflection and Liturgy' and 'Standards and Indicators for Christian Witness'.

Myers is careful to acknowledge the work of others in transformational development as he explains the thought processes leading to his present conclusions. Throughout the book, he provides clear diagrams to illustrate the subject matter of the text. At the end, he has included notes on each section to show his thinking. A full bibliography and detailed index provide further tools for the serious student.

Little did I know the influence that this stimulating and thought-provoking book would have on me. With highlighter in hand, I found myself able to read only a few pages at a time

because there were so many key thoughts to mark and mull over. Here are a few gems:

- Transformation must be about restoring relationships — just and right relationships with God, with self, with community, with the ‘other’ and with the environment (*p.36*).
- Our point of departure for a Christian understanding of poverty is to remember that the poor are people with names, people to whom God has given gifts and people with whom and among whom He has been working before we even know they are there (*p. 58*).
- The non-poor suffer from an over-inflated view of who they are when they play god in the lives of the poor. They also have forgotten their true vocation when they use their gifts not to serve but to control and oppress (*p. 110*).
- People, not money or programmes, transform their worlds (*p. 116*).
- In some cases, things actually got worse because the community had become dependent on external resources and now suffered from diminished capacity (*p.128*).
- The Gospel message is an inseparable mix of life, deed, word and sign (*p.134*).
- The first step is to treat people as if we believe they are made in the image of God and are as worthy of respect as anyone. How we treat and listen to the poor can be the beginning of recovering identity (*p 234*).
- Changing worldview means more than changing behaviour. It is even

more than changing beliefs or values. Changing a worldview means changing a people’s entire story so that the community adopts a new story. This can be only done by a people, not by individuals. While changing the worldview of a people must be a goal of discipleship, it is the work of the Holy Spirit of God (*pp. 236-237*).

Yes, the author is dealing mainly with questions of development and relief. But his principles also bear great significance for church planting and other related ministries to people. His analysis strikes home as I apply the principles to my experiences in North Africa. How I wish that I had more fully fathomed these truths forty years ago! What a difference that knowledge would have made in my own attitudes and actions. And the principles do not apply just to those working in non-western countries. A local British pastor maintains that this book is revolutionizing his present approach to reaching his community for Christ.

Paul Hiebert writes in the foreword, *This book is a masterpiece of integration and application in thinking about Christian ministry* (*p. xv*). I agree wholeheartedly with him and with his additional comment:

A truly holistic approach to mission rooted in biblical truth is as essential in planting vital churches that remain Christ-centred over the generations as it is in Christian ministries of compassion (*p. xvi*).

Do we want to see vibrant, lasting national churches where we serve?

Then we must take to heart the warnings and suggestions that emerge from this outstanding commentary on valid ministry.

We deplore the fragile churches and weak Christians that we see around us. But have we critically examined the views and practices of the 'non-poor', the Christian workers who have allowed their worldview to influence the way they minister to the 'poor' (materially or spiritually)? We must see our 'identity' in biblical terms of who we are and what we do. As Myers remarks in his introduction:

The poor and the non-poor need God's redemptive help to recover

their true identity as children of God made in God's image and their true vocation as productive stewards, given gifts by God to contribute to the well-being of all (p. xviii).

I offer this brief review as coming from one who is untrained in transformational development, but very enthusiastic about its importance. This book, although not a light read, has profoundly affected my views on ministry to others. I recommend it highly with the challenge to consider how to apply these truths to your attitudes and actions in serving Christ, whether in development or in church planting.

