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Editorial

One theme connecting the articles in this issue of *Seedbed* is the development of our witness to Muslims. The aim in presenting this material is to contribute to our promotion of the message of Christ in our interaction with them.

Gary Corwin reminds us of basic truths about Islam, helping us to better understand the people we desire to reach. Marten de Vries describes a debating situation that flounders and fails to present clearly the Christian faith and how it differs from Islam. Other witnessing approaches are raised by Khalil Abd el Nour in his analysis of the degree to which the Christian worker might use the Qur'an. He examines two practices and their proponents; while noting their helpfulness, he sounds a warning that we would do well to heed.

A different suggestion for announcing and spreading the gospel comes in the study of women's networks by Rebecca Lewis. Through the examination of lessons from other societies, we are challenged to reconsider our strategy for reaching out to Muslim women. Have we so bought into an outward perception of the weakness of women and the futility of working with them that we have neglected to develop a positive, active approach to Muslim women?

How are you progressing in making an analysis of your present ministry situation? Are you able to debate, either with individuals or groups? And what do you emphasize in your discussions with them? What use, if any, do you make of the Qur'an in your witnessing? What are your plans for spreading the gospel through women's networks? I invite your ideas and comments about the subjects treated in this issue of *Seedbed*.

Parallel with my reading of these articles is my study of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. I am impressed again with the centrality of the cross and its powerful message. Although Paul could be seen as a founder of churches, he was very clear that Jesus Himself was the foundation. In our search for improvement in our presentation and proclamation of the gospel, our growing in understanding of Muslim thought and culture, our efforts to plant churches, our interaction with certain Muslims (men or women), we must put down the foundation which is Jesus Christ. 'For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ' (I Corinthians 3:11). May God enable each of us to build well on that foundation.

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Second Look: Ten Things Worth Knowing about Islam

By Gary Corwin

Editor's Note

This article was first published in the October 2004 issue of the Evangelical Missions Quarterly (EMQ) and is used with permission. While the content may not include much that is new for most of our readers, we hope that this summary will be useful – both as a review of some basic truths and as a succinct way of communicating those truths to others.

With the author's permission and for the purpose of consistency, slight stylistic changes have been made.

At a time when more talking heads are focused on Islam than ever before, there may be value for the mission community in keeping some basic truths clearly in mind:

1. *Islam is not one. It is as varied in its forms and styles as Christianity.* Whether one is looking at major formal divisions, the various schools of law/denominational traditions, degrees of mysticism, or folk religious tendencies, there is a remarkable similarity in the degree of diversity. It is no more possible to understand the breadth of Islam by grasping the nature of Al Qaeda terror strategies than it is possible to understand the breadth of Christianity by grasping the nature of Tuesday night bingo at St. Christopher's Catholic Church. While each provides insight into some underlying assumptions, neither is adequate as a microcosm reflecting the whole.

2. *Islam is not primarily private belief, but public observance and social structure.* Generally speaking, outward conformity is a much higher value than

freedom of religion or thought. The more seriously Qur'anic teaching is taken in a society, the stricter the social sanctions to encourage conformity will be.

3. *Islam is a political vision as much as a religious one. Their destiny, it is believed, is to rule everywhere.* The world is divided into two parts, *Dar es Salaam* and *Dar el Harb*, the land of peace where Islam rules and the land of war where the infidel rules. While many Muslims do not think in the more militant ways in which these terms may be understood, most would still believe that Allah will one day bring it about.

4. *Radical, violent Islam is neither a fringe movement nor the choice of the majority of Muslims, but it is the logical choice of those most devoted to core beliefs.* Unlike Christianity, in which those most zealously devoted to the Master's teaching are the most loving and least to be feared, those most zealously devoted to the teachings of the Qur'an and the Hadith are overwhelmingly the most violent and unmerciful.

5. *Islam is a civilization at least as much as it is a religion.* In its Golden Age (roughly the several centuries just prior to the Reformation), in fact, it was a world leader in areas like the development of mathematics, science and architecture. It was then, and is still today, an all-embracing philosophy and way of life, with a catalogue of explicit requirements for legal, economic and governmental relationships.

It is this that underlies C5 contextualization principles for introducing Muslims to the gospel of Christ. The basic argument is that Muslims who receive Christ as Saviour should not have to cease being Muslims (in terms of civilization and culture) in order to follow Christ. A major problem arises, however, because the lines between Islam as religion and as civilization are so blurred.

6. *Apart from martyrdom as it is understood in some Muslim contexts, there is no assurance of salvation.* No matter how hard one might work to please Allah by obeying his commands, there is never the confidence that one has been good enough or that one will ultimately be received into Paradise. The free forgiveness embodied in the message of the Christian gospel of grace, therefore, is a powerful and attractive alternative.

7. *There is today, in many parts of the Muslim world, a deep questioning of Islam.* This is seen in the newspapers, TV talk shows and opposing *fatwas* issued in regards to suicide bombings, etc. Muslims are asking themselves 'Is all the violence being perpetrated in the name of Islam a true reflection of our faith?' 'Can we adapt to modernity or not?' 'Is leadership in the Muslim world working or not?' There is truly an opening in the Muslim mind about these and other subjects.

8. *Islam, like Christianity, is little more than a thin veneer over animistic folk religion in many parts of the world.* While the scholars and teachers dwell in the

realm of the holy texts, the practitioners of both Islam and Christianity are much more concerned with issues of health, prosperity and personal welfare. It is the promise of power to ward off evil spirits and their ill deeds that drives the daily religious life of many Muslims and Christians.

9. *When a Muslim hears talk of the Trinity, or that Jesus is the Son of God, he thinks blasphemy (i.e. God + Mary procreated Jesus in the usual way).* While clearly a misunderstanding of the biblical story, this belief is almost universally held by Muslims, and remains a large stumbling block to a proper understanding of who Christ is.

10. *The latest suras of the Qur'an trump all that has preceded them, including earlier suras and the Bible.* Unlike biblical revelation, which is progressive and unfolding, revelation from a Qur'anic perspective is consecutive and superseding. The 'law of abrogation' makes clear that what has come more recently takes precedence and is the ultimate authority, even when it directly contradicts what has gone before (in either the Qur'an or the Bible). Hence the conflicting messages in the Qur'an, for example, on how 'people of the Book' (Christians and Jews) ought to be treated.

Much more could be said, but perhaps this brief survey can serve as a reminder of both the complexity and opportunities inherent in communicating the gospel to Muslims.

Underground Church Movements: The Surprising Role of Women's Networks

By Rebecca Lewis

Editor's Note

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Introduction

I have become increasingly convinced that a key to winning the Muslim world to Christ will be through strategically reaching Muslim women. As I've studied how God has used women in societies quite similar to the Muslim world, I've observed three characteristics of such societies:

1. the seclusion of women, especially from men;
2. an oppressive, hierarchical social structure that minimizes female leadership; and
3. persecution of believers and opposition to Christianity by the government.

One might expect that it would be counter-productive in such settings for large numbers of women to come to faith first, independently of the men. However, my studies so far suggest otherwise. If anything, God seems to use women to help create movements to Christ in *precisely* such societies. Still, working through women, as a specific strategy, has been largely overlooked in Muslim outreach. I hope this paper will encourage further discussion of this possibility.

To the Male First?

When my husband and I first went to Morocco at the beginning of the 1980s, the literature on Muslim evangelism was clear: seek to win male heads of households. While that works well when it can be accomplished, I began to notice some patterns during our seven years in North Africa. First, many who were being won to Christ were not male heads of households at all, but unmarried young men. Quite frequently, these men would revert to Islam when they got married. A few key men did continue in their faith and went on to become leaders among the few believers in the country. Curiously, these men often had believing mothers who had been won to Christ by women missionaries years earlier.

Later, as I studied the rise of the early church in the first few centuries, I noticed the same thing. Several key men, such as Constantine and Augustine, had believing, praying mothers who had tried to guide them into the faith. I became intrigued by the often unseen role of women in the spread of the gospel and the establishment of the church.

In this preliminary study, I will first look at how women impacted the rapid spread of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world. Next, I will show how women's movements have thrived under similarly trying circumstances (especially in Korea and China), con-

tributing to spectacular church growth. Finally, I will discuss why I believe similar patterns could lead to movements to Christ in the Muslim world.

Women and the Rise of Christianity

In his book *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries*, sociologist Rodney Stark sheds light on the role of women in the early spread of the Church. In the Greco-Roman world of Christ's day and for the first two centuries, men greatly outnumbered women. Citing population statistics done by J.C. Russell, Stark shows that there were 40% more men than women in Italy, Asia Minor (Turkey) and North Africa. This imbalance reflects regular recourse to the legal and culturally acceptable practice of female infanticide. In a letter written in the first year BC, a husband gives his pregnant wife these ominous instructions: 'If it is a boy, keep it; if a girl, discard it.'

Women in Greco-Roman culture enjoyed low status. They were considered property and virtuous women were kept secluded from men other than their husbands. In part because women were scarce, girls were usually married before the onset of puberty. Plutarch tells us that the Romans '[gave] their girls in marriage when they were twelve years old or even younger'. Shockingly, these marriages were immediately consummated. The famous biographer deplored this practice, lamenting 'the hatred and fear of girls forced contrary to nature'.

Seclusion and poor treatment in society do not seem to have kept Greco-Roman women from becoming believers. Indeed, the early Christian church became significantly more female than the general population, reflecting the great attraction of the gospel message for women. Ancient historical sources 'simply swarm' with stories of women becoming believers. Among the upper classes especially, women were much more likely than men to follow Christ.

Luke 8:1-3 reflects this. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and many other upper-class women not only supported Jesus and the twelve out of their own personal resources, but they also travelled with them. In Acts 17:4, 12, a number of 'prominent women' are among the new believers in Thessalonica and Berea. Historians Henry Chadwick and Peter Brown have both noted that Christianity seemed to penetrate the upper classes through wives and concubines. These 'prominent women' first became believers, then influenced their husbands and sons.

Why did more women become believers than men?

The status and treatment of women was substantially better in the Christian community than in society at large. Christian teaching prohibited infanticide, forbade incest and condemned bisexuality, homosexuality and divorce. Moreover, girls were married at a higher age. According to one study, 48% were over 18 years of age. And as Chadwick notes, marital fidelity — which was normally required only of

wives — was expected of husbands as well (a fact that did not escape the attention of Galen, the famous Greek physician).

The church also looked after widows. Indeed, a letter written in 251 to Bishop Fabius of Antioch by Cornelius, bishop of Rome, reports that more than 1,500 widows and distressed persons were being cared for out of a church membership of around 30,000.

Not only were women a significant majority in the early church, they filled important leadership roles as well. In his epistle to the Romans (chapter 16), Paul greets 33 individuals by name, of whom 15 are women. Considering that Paul had never visited these believers, his knowledge of what so many of these women were doing is noteworthy.

In this study, I am not as concerned with the ‘official status’ of women in the church as I am with the roles they played in its rapid expansion. Again we turn to Scripture first. In the New Testament we find women ministering in important and varied ways. For example, women *extended hospitality* by opening their homes. Luke 10:38 tells us that Mary and Martha hosted Jesus and His disciples in their home. In Acts 12 (the story of Peter’s miraculous release from prison), many people have gathered to pray in the home of a woman — Mary, the mother of John Mark. Later, in Acts 16, Lydia persuades Paul and his travelling companions to stay in her home. In addition to hospitality, women *led prayer meetings* (a women’s group met with Lydia), *prophesied* (Phillip the evangelist had

four daughters with prophetic gifts) and *did evangelism* (the woman at the well). Scripture also lists women as apostles (Junias) and as travelling missionaries (Priscilla).

Women win people to Christ through marrying non-Christians

While not a ‘church planting strategy’ *per se* (nor a necessarily recommended practice), clearly one of the ways early believing women spread the church was by marrying non-Christian men. In 1 Peter 3:1-2, Peter gives explicit instructions to Christian women whose husbands are not believers and in 1 Corinthians 7:13-14, Paul declares that ‘an unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife.’

In the church, where women far outnumbered men, many Christian women had to marry non-believers if they were to marry at all. Records abound of Christian women marrying upper-class men who were not (yet) Christians. The results are striking. Most historical sources not only indicate that it was common for unbelieving spouses eventually to be converted, but reversion to paganism was rare.

Historian Peter Brown calls Christian women a ‘gateway’ into unbelieving families. These women, ‘the wives, servants and nurses of unbelievers’ (quoted in Stark, p. 114), kept the gospel moving into new circles of non-believers through personal interaction and private witness. Notice that marriage to non-Christian men was only one avenue of influence; servants, nurses and others also contributed to the expansion of the kingdom. As

we've seen, Greco-Roman culture generally oppressed women. Yet their low status only increased their interest in the gospel; and it certainly did not keep them from effectively spreading it throughout society. But is the same true of other, similar settings? We now turn to South Korea.

Case Study: Korea

Over the last century, the South Korean church has experienced explosive growth. From a tiny minority in 1900, the church has surged to over 30% of the population today, of whom 70% are women. This, despite the fact that Korean culture shared many features characteristic of the Greco-Roman world, features that also make it seem so difficult to reach the Muslim world today.

As Christianity was entering Korea in the late nineteenth century, strong Confucian values of hierarchy and obedience made life extremely difficult for women. In the first years of marriage, for example, women were scarcely allowed even to speak to their husbands. Women (especially upper-class women) were strictly secluded and, from the age of seven, were kept from associating with the opposite sex. Except for the elite who were indoctrinated into their Confucian role, women were neither educated nor allowed to own property or possess money.

Sons, because of their role in ancestor worship, were greatly desired. Female children, by contrast, were poorly treated. As one Korean woman lamented: 'There are two times of

regret in a woman's life: when she is born and when she is married.' In Korean culture, husbands were not supposed to show (or even have) affection for their wives. In fact, women often were never called by a name but merely referred to as 'so-and-so's daughter' or 'so-and-so's wife.' As a result, when women were baptized and given names for the first time, many of them would cry for joy.

Early Missionaries Recognized the Strategic Role of Women

Despite the narrowly circumscribed role of women in Korean society, from the earliest days we find that the missionaries affirmed the importance of converting women.

At the first meeting of the Council of Missions in 1893, they adopted policies for their missionary work. One of these was that 'the conversion of women and training of Christian girls should be a special aim, since mothers exercise so important an influence over future generations' (*Women in the Korean Church*, Mija Sa, 1995, p. 6).

These early pioneers acknowledged not only the mother's unique role in influencing the foundational world view and faith of her children, but also the long-term impact of that influence on the establishment of the church.

When the Methodists arrived in Korea in the 1880s, one of the first things they did was to establish schools for girls. They taught women and men to read and translated the Bible into Korean. All this brought dramatic changes to the lives of women, who

now became involved in evangelism and education outside the home.

Korean women — excluded as they were from the all-important rituals of ancestor worship — were surprised and grateful when they were encouraged to attend Christian worship gatherings. Initially, women met in separate prayer and Bible study groups. These groups fostered a level of supportive fellowship previously unknown among women. The women then began to teach their neighbours and evangelize them. Later, when they started meeting with the men, a heavy curtain separated the sexes, so men and women still could not see each other. Nevertheless, by participating in worship together, women gained a sense of unity and community with men never before possible.

The 'Bible Women' of Korea

Early in the history of the nascent Korean church, when Christians were a tiny minority, a significant movement was launched. 'The Bible Women of Korea' movement, as it was called, systematized the training efforts of Korean women. What is a 'Bible woman'? The Presbyterian bylaws of 1896 define her as 'a Christian woman employed in the distribution of Christian literature and biblical instruction.'

Women missionaries — Methodist and Presbyterian alike — specifically trained Korean women in their forties and fifties to be 'Bible women,' preferring widows who could travel as itinerant teachers. One such Bible woman was Dorcas Kim Kang. Appointed in 1900 at age 52, Dorcas was assigned a

195-mile circuit of 17 churches. In a single year, she walked 1,450 miles as she visited the churches under her care! Family responsibilities prevented Sam-Tok Chun, a married Bible woman, from assuming a Methodist-style itinerant ministry. Still, she faithfully taught the Bible to her daughters-in-law and neighbours. Sam-Tok, working with other Bible women, is credited with winning over 600 women to Christ. Although Bible women functioned as evangelists and as pastors of female congregations, not once in 100 years were they ever officially ordained as 'elders' or 'pastors.'

As in many oppressive contexts, life was difficult for these early women believers. Indeed, many were martyred before 1900, especially those who had taken a vow of celibacy as part of their Christian commitment. The church in Korea owes a great debt to these women.

Finally, I will mention the National Organization of Korean Presbyterian Women, founded in 1928 by the Presbyterian Church of Korea, which had a huge impact on society. Similarly, the YWCA also helped to lead women in active social change. Today, whereas ordained men remain the official leaders of the Korean church, one can scarcely exaggerate the importance of women in the rapid expansion of early Korean Christianity, especially at a time when women and men lived in completely separate worlds.

Case Study: China

In China, as in Korea, women were quite secluded, especially in the more

populous or upper class areas. Female foot binding, a widespread practice in China, made walking extremely painful for women and kept them from venturing far from home. How could these women be reached? Even if the few Chinese male converts had been much more numerous, men in China were not used to having personal relationships with their wives, much less with other women. If Chinese women were to be won, it would depend on the arrival of women missionaries from the outside.

And arrive they did. Outreach to women significantly increased after 1870 as growing numbers of single women missionaries went to China. Two main factors contributed to this influx. First, the hugely destructive Civil War in America deprived many women of their husbands (or potential husbands), creating a much larger available female missionary force. Second, the structures needed to harness this force — women's missionary training schools and women's mission boards — were created in the aftermath of the war.

Once in China, these missionaries established girls' schools, visited women in their homes, taught them to read and trained them in practical handicrafts. They also rendered medical services. Because seclusion practices made it extremely difficult for male doctors to treat women, medically-trained female missionaries became the primary health-care providers for Chinese women.

As we have seen, women in China lived life beyond the reach of male

missionaries. And yet they generally found Christianity much more attractive than did the men. Their receptivity caused one early missionary to fear that winning so many women and children to Christ would 'feminize Christianity' in China. That women have turned to Christ in much larger numbers than men is undeniable. Over the last 50 years, China's Christian population, which has exploded to nearly 90 million (nearly 10% of the population), is over 70% female. Yet in terms of perceptions, Christianity is far from being a 'woman's religion'. Indeed, men are actively involved in highest levels of official leadership.

The separation of the sexes, which resulted in foreign women working among Chinese women and children, created a situation whose impact would be more far-reaching than these missionaries could ever have imagined. Because they were less threatening to the population at large (which was very suspicious of male foreigners), female foreign missionaries were able to carry on their work 'beneath the radar screen'. And because they were less likely to be persecuted and more likely to be allowed to settle, single women missionaries were often sent to the most difficult, anti-Christian or anti-foreigner areas. As a result, women were reached in these locales as well.

The 'Bible Women' of China

As in Korea, women in China were trained and employed as 'Bible women'. While the female foreign missionaries themselves never converted large numbers of Chinese women, their example

of independent female evangelism, coupled with their training of native Bible women (who were very well received and were effective evangelists), all proved invaluable. Since the Bible women were frequently only semi-literate — Chinese being a very difficult language to read — much of the Bible training was done orally. Amazingly, by 1917, Chinese women made up almost half of the available female harvest force in China. One survey counted 1,819 missionary wives and 1,818 single women missionaries, but 2,579 paid Chinese Bible women!

Challenges and Opportunities

As churches began to develop, an attempt was made to incorporate women into the general worship services. As in Korea, propriety dictated that women be kept separate from the men. In rural areas, where women were generally less secluded, they joined in the male church gatherings more readily. Unfortunately, baptism requirements often made church life difficult for women, as even minimal literacy was harder for them to achieve. Moreover, public confession of faith ran counter to cultural requirements for modesty, as 'proper women' did not speak in public.

Nevertheless, from the very beginning, women assumed many different informal leadership roles among the growing number of female believers. As one author writes,

They learned to be teachers, evangelists, leaders of religious ritual and counsellors in local congregations... Other volunteers offered their help in teaching Sunday Schools, organizing

prayer meetings, visiting the sick and providing comfort for women in need. Women's religious groups, therefore, became training grounds for women to develop their own leadership (Pui-Lan, 1992, p. 66).

Not surprisingly, younger single women and older women, having fewer household responsibilities, often took the lead.

One factor proved to be crucial both to the rapid multiplication of lay women leaders and also to their survival during times of persecution. Because women had never been accepted into the more formalized 'ordination' model of training and leadership organized for the men, women's leadership patterns within the church developed independently of Western patterns. As a result, many gifted female leaders, regardless of their age or social status, became evangelists and teachers among the women. The seminary and ordination process not only severely limited the number of male leaders, but the status it conferred made them easy targets when persecution came.

Chinese Women's Societies

Outside normal church structures, Chinese women did copy American models. They formed their own societies both to combat social evils and also to raise their own money for missions. Through these societies, Chinese Christian women exercised an influence disproportionate to their numbers and helped to expand the gospel into non-Christian Chinese society.

One such association is the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU),

which established chapters in China in the late 1800s. By 1916, over 40 WCTU chapters could be found in seven provinces. Like their American counterparts, WCTU members wore white ribbons as symbols of purity. They held public lectures and distributed literature to stir up public opinion against such evils as foot binding, polygamy, prostitution and the selling of daughters into slavery, as well as against the importation of opium, tobacco and alcohol.

Through other societies, Chinese Christian women promoted education, literacy, children's welfare and economic independence for women. And they led Bible distribution efforts around China, both in the early days and in times of persecution.

How Women's Networks Helped the Chinese Church Survive Persecution

After almost 100 years of Protestant Christianity in China, severe persecution of Chinese Christians broke out, first during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 and later under Communist rule. Chinese women believers had challenged cultural evils in China but radical students (many of whom had been educated in mission schools) would seek violent solutions to China's deeper systemic problems. Leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, which was founded in 1920, attacked the women's reform movements as Western and middle-class, replacing them with the equally Western revolutionary philosophy of Marx. The focus of the Communist agenda was on improving the lot of the male

peasant, not female reform issues. Nevertheless, many female Communist leaders had been influenced by the reform movements of the WCTU and the YWCA.

In the 1940s, Christians in China began to get a burden for taking the gospel 'back to Jerusalem'. In 1947, the first mission team of five young women and two young men set out for the western border of China, only to be turned back. That same year, the Communists took control. The Western missionaries were expelled and Chinese believers, including the Back to Jerusalem Evangelistic Band, were caught in the Communist push to obliterate the church. Many leaders were tortured; some were imprisoned for decades. While the most violent repression took place during the 'Cultural Revolution' of the 1960s, Chinese Christians essentially went underground from 1950 to 1980 to avoid persecution.

The male-dominated official church hierarchy provided an easy target for revolutionaries; however, the separation of women had enabled females to develop leadership skills, form their own networks, hold their own conferences and exert their own influence — a reality that proved invaluable when persecution was at its worst. These networks of women believers survived the closure and destruction of church buildings precisely because their interactions mostly took place in homes and were less structured. And where Bible women were predominately volunteers instead of full-time paid workers, the work fared even better.

Today, as in the past, the designated church leaders are men. This is true in both the government-controlled Three-Self Churches and in the house church movements (although it is not unusual for local house churches to be primarily women, led by unofficial women leaders). In the underground seminaries, however, half or more of the students are female.

By now it is not surprising to learn that many male and female leaders have had believing mothers or other older believing female relatives who led them toward Christ. One spectacular case is Lu Xiaomin, one of the most amazing women to influence Chinese Christianity. Won to Christ by an aunt, 'Sister Ruth' (as Lu is widely known) has now written over 900 Chinese hymns. Her songs have taken the underground house church movements and the official government-controlled churches by storm. Clearly, leading contributors to the rapid growth of the Chinese church continue to be women.

Greater Spiritual Interest among Women

Many estimate that almost 80% of Christians in China, whether in official or house churches, are women. Some attribute this imbalance to the greater interest of men in careers and of women in spiritual issues. To be sure, in China as in the Greco-Roman world, the gospel has brought women freedom and dignity. But there are other important factors. In Korea and China, as well as in the Muslim world, women have traditionally practiced a much

more animistic or folk version of the official religion. Women are the ones who deal with spiritual forces. Using amulets, appeasement or other means, they seek to gain control in a world in which they feel powerless over everything from sickness and pregnancy to their husband's fidelity.

Is it because women have such deep needs for hope and spiritual power that they are drawn to the God of Hope, who alone has genuine spiritual power to help them? Perhaps their felt needs make women more receptive to the gospel and more grateful for God's personal involvement in their lives.

Modern Case Study: Nepal?

It's worth mentioning in passing that in the last few decades, a phenomenon similar to what happened in Korea and China has been developing in Nepal. In an unpublished manuscript, John Wilson writes:

From the outset, women have played a significant role in the church in Nepal. This is interesting in view of the poor status of women in the traditional Hindu culture of Nepal.

Two of the oldest churches in Nepal were established by women and to this day, husband and wife serve the churches together (though the husband is designated as the official pastor). David McMillan is quoted as saying,

Today the church in Nepal seems to have at least as many men as women ... but when it comes to its origins, clearly women played the critical role. What I find striking is that this is completely counter to the culture of the country in which the role of

women is to breed, farm, feed their families and literally bow down to their husbands. Why was it women to whom God gave the vision and call to establish the gospel in Nepal?...Why have women played such a key role in the growth of the church in Nepal even though in church life all leadership is male and men and women sit on different sides of the building?...In family life, commerce, politics and every other walk of life, the gender distinction and the balance of power is completely different from our western culture — men have it all, women don't get 'a look in sideways'.

However, women found themselves in the same position in the Greco-Roman, Korean and Chinese cultures, that is, until the gospel was established.

What about the Muslim world?

This last generation has seen more mission outreach to Muslims than any before it. Yet working through networks of women as a strategy often has either been discouraged or simply overlooked. True, Muslim women *are* secluded and apparently *are* powerless and oppressed, both at home and in society. But did women in Korean and Chinese societies at the time the seeds of the gospel were first planted enjoy any more status or control than in the most oppressive of Muslim societies today? Were Korea and China initially any less hostile to Christianity? It is tempting to regard the Islamic world as a 'special case', where opposition to the gospel by authorities and families is exceptionally severe — until one reads the stories of what believers have suffered in these other places.

One thing is different, to be sure. Unlike the pattern in the Muslim world, missionaries in both China and Korea were determined from the beginning to win women and train them to win others. Many single women missionaries poured into these fields, willing to dedicate their lives to raising up women leaders.

My research, preliminary as it is, leads me to believe that if we sent women by the scores into the Muslim world to win Muslim women to the Lord, we would see results similar to those in China and Korea. As in these other societies, foreign women in Muslim countries are seen as less threatening. Similarly, what women do or don't believe is considered of little consequence; their opinions are either belittled or overlooked.

I believe it is time for us, like the missionaries to Korea and China in former generations, to specifically strategize to create movements of women followers of Christ in the Muslim world. Women in the Islamic world are searching for spiritual power. They are more animistic in their beliefs. And they control the emerging world view of their children. Because sons serve as a mother's 'social security', Muslim women try to maintain close lifelong relationships with them. As a result, mothers exercise much power over their sons' lives and beliefs.

God has been giving Muslim women dreams and other revelations of Himself, just like He has Muslim men. Persecution will no doubt come, but it has rarely stamped out the growth of the gospel in a culture. If

God so mightily used networks of despised women to spread His kingdom throughout Rome, Korea and China, surely He can do it in the Muslim world.

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The Real Christians, That's Us!

By Marten de Vries

Editor's Note

The following article is the personal account of a meeting for dialogue between Christians and Muslims that the author attended in the Netherlands.

It is Friday night. An Islamic organisation in Rotterdam has arranged a lecture and they have invited a minister. He is a real PhD, one of those theologians who know all about the Christian faith and one you can quote. The title of his talk is: 'How do Christians handle social developments?'

And I'm late again. I was too busy making my garden ready for the spring. When I enter, I get the impression that I've come to the wrong place. There are only two Dutch men in the auditorium. As it turns out, they are the speaker and a long-time Christian attendee of such dialogues. But after a while, some twenty Muslims turn up. They include an old friend (a Moroccan religious teacher with whom I once had a public debate about a book that he had written on the Bible), a few academics and some students of Islamic theology.

The lecture starts well and I am impressed by the flow of beautiful words. The doctor of theology begins with a Scripture reading. This seems very good; any imam worth his salt would also start with a recitation from the Qur'an. Everyone present can read along in Mark 7 where Jesus declares all foods clean. Jesus does this in response to the reproach of the Jewish *ulamaa* (scholars) that his dis-

ciples didn't wash their hands before eating. The essence of His message is the importance of the inside of the person, not the outside.

The speaker who was invited to introduce the subject argues that some Christians become nervous when changes happen. They need structure in their life. But it was exactly in this matter that early Christians differed from their environment. They didn't need structure. Their faith wasn't based on rules. They broke away from a religious system and lived according to the gospel of deliverance. Jesus can be regarded as the leader of the Jewish liberation movement called Christianity. The instructions of Paul do not clash with it. They are meant to help shape a free and sincere life for God. These regulations are never absolute. It is clear from the Bible itself that rules exist to be changed: the Old Testament demands things that the New Testament does not.

I really enjoy what follows. The speaker continues to describe how things went wrong. The church became powerful, Christians dominated Europe and people were forcibly baptized. In the long run, one was expected to behave like a Christian, i.e. 'act nicely'. You were supposed to go to church twice on Sunday or you were regarded as a sinner. Christianity was corrupted and became a system. But thank God, today true Christians are seen to be a minority in the Netherlands, just like the Muslims. And that is

not all bad. Faith has become once again a matter of the heart. Now that no one is forced to go to church, Christian communities have become smaller but of greater value because their members consciously choose for the church in answer to God's love. I recognize the truth of his statements from what has happened in our congregation in Delfshaven. Every Sunday our church is full of young people who usually attend both services of their own free will. Even after a long service, they are in no hurry to go home.

So far I am able to say 'Amen!' He is giving the Muslims a chance to understand why Christians have a hard time seeing Islam with its rules and system of good works as an improvement. For 'The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17). We would hate to abandon that truth. In the integration process, it is not only useful for Dutch people to learn more about Islam, but also for Muslims to hear about Christian beliefs directly from true followers of Christ and not just from other Muslims.

But now there follows a curious shift. Okay, so the Christian theologian doesn't like rules. But for him, it is also wrong to say 'Salvation is found in no one else but Jesus Christ'.¹ He thinks that this means again imposing rules on others. 'For me, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life,'² he states. 'But if for you as Muslims something else is the "only way", well, who am I to tell you otherwise?'

What a shame!

'Where in the Holy Scriptures does it appear that you can handle the words of Jesus and His apostles like this?' I ask. The speaker admits that he can't readily answer my question. What happens when a Christian leader tells Muslims about his faith in this post-modern jargon: 'For me, it is like this'? Such a statement has no relation to what Islam really is or how Muslims think. It may even be fair to say that he forces a typical western philosophical concept of truth upon them. It certainly isn't the 'aroma of Christ' that is being spread.³ Following Christ becomes optional.

The response in the audience is predictable.

- A heavily veiled girl, who has already interrupted the speaker several times, says that in Islam there is no compulsion. No one is compelled to go to the mosque. According to Sura *Al-Baqara* ('The cow'): 'in religion there is no compulsion'.⁴ Personally I wonder if going to a mosque in Morocco can be compared to attending an old-fashioned Orthodox Reformed church in Holland. Or if someone who was born a Muslim is really free to dissociate himself publicly from all Islamic rules.
- The next reaction was: 'It's clear that there are contradictions in the Bible. Well, we already knew that. And you just confirmed it again. Well, there are no contradictions in the Qur'an.'
- The third person is the Muslim religious teacher. He says that he is pleased to hear this respectful speech

and the moderating explanation of John 14:6. He adds, 'It is indeed a very difficult statement by Jesus'. Then he notes that not only the disciples didn't understand it but also Christians today don't find it to be altogether clear. He goes on to say that as a Muslim, he understands what Jesus means. He means the same as Mohammed did when he proclaimed that there is but one God! At this point, I interrupt to say that I don't think it is very respectful when a Muslim claims to understand the Bible better than a Christian. Just imagine the reverse if I explain the meaning of a Qur'anic text to a Muslim! But my comment doesn't strike home. Instead they say, 'The real Christians, that's us, Muslims!'

What did he accomplish, this Christian compatriot of mine? Not what he meant to, I hope.

- He certainly didn't make it plausible that a crucified Jesus Christ offers rest of the soul to all people.⁵
- He never even questioned the absolute claims to the truth by Islam (which are presented without any

moderation whatsoever). Instead, he kindly requested permission to stick to his faith. And the Muslims don't have a problem with that. After all, in the Sura *Al-Kaafirun* ('The unbelievers') it says: 'You have your religion and I have mine'.⁶

- He has strengthened his Islamic audience in the conviction that it is only a matter of time until 'the people of the book' (i.e. Christians) 'will agree that only the Muslims serve God', in accordance with Sura *Al-Imraan* ('The people of Imraan').⁷

'In religion there is no compulsion'. What a statement! There is reason to fear that history may repeat itself. That the Netherlands, too, like Mecca long ago, will be Islamized without much coercion!

Footnotes

1 Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5.6

2 John 14:6

3 2 Corinthians 2:15

4 Qur'an 2:256

5 Matthew 11:28-30

6 Qur'an 109:6

7 Qur'an 3:64

The Gospel, the Qur'an and You

By Khalil Abd el Nour

Have you ever listened to a recitation of the Qur'an, been amazed at its beauty and majesty and wondered at its abiding grip on the hearts and minds of Muslims? Have you watched as those who love this book kiss its cover and touch it to their foreheads, carry it elevated above other books and never dare set it on the floor? Maybe you have felt yourself entranced by its poetry and absorbed by its fluidity.

Or maybe you fall on the other side of the Qur'anic divide. Perhaps you are one who finds no intrinsic beauty in the book and certainly nothing that would merit being called a miracle. Your emotions toward those who blindly adhere to its doctrines could be better described as pity. You wonder how this book could have grown to such a lofty level of influence in Islamic society and long for the day when the doctrines the Qur'an espouses will be displaced by the doctrines of grace.

Whatever our perspective on the Qur'an, we cannot deny that it is a book that commands the reverence and obedience of millions of Muslims. It is the single most pervasive and influential piece of literature in the Muslim world. Its proverbs and sayings are known to literate and illiterate alike. It commands a respect in Islamic society.

So it is only natural that those who wish to commend Christ to Muslims would look to the Qur'an in an attempt to discover elements there that buttress their understanding of the gospel. Surely there is a biblical precedent for

this. The apostle Paul felt at liberty to quote the Greek poets. He had no qualms about using lines from poetry and then radically interpreting them when making application to the gospel. Even John the Apostle utilized the Greek *logos* in order to present Christ. It was a concept that would have been familiar to some Jews of his time as Philo of Alexandria had incorporated it in his writings in some detail.¹ So, why should we not find in the Qur'an anything that would further our ends of making Christ known and then use it liberally? The argument makes sense.

Two works which advocate a liberal use of the Qur'an in evangelism are *CAMEL* (an evangelistic methodology based on a few verses from Surra *Al Imraan*) and *Building Bridges* written by Fouad Elias Accad. Both pieces have much to commend them and I do not wish to dispute the fact that a multiplicity of approaches can be effective in evangelism. However, I would like to sound a warning that while the Qur'an can be a great friend in communicating the truth, it can also be an immense stumbling block. Those who use the Qur'an masterfully (and they are few) will reap the rewards while those who use it in ignorance may be shooting themselves in the foot!

Bridges²

Fouad Elias Accad is to be applauded for his eirenic [aiming or aimed at peace] approach to Muslims. He uses the Qur'an as a native Arabic speaker, a

man of religion and wisdom. His emphasis on the character of the Christian communicator as well as on the parts of the Qur'an that affirm a pro-Christian view is a welcome perspective in the world of Christian-Muslim relations. He also gives himself and others the prerogative of individual interpretation of the Qur'an. Accad points out that New Testament Christians understood Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah to apply to Jesus Christ. They did not seek the approval of the local rabbi in doing so. 'Understanding and personal application of such material is a common heritage of all humanity' (p. 16). He makes the astonishing claim that 60% of Muslims who are exposed to the gospel through the method he advocates come to a personal faith in Christ without being alienated from their Islamic community (p. 10)! Later in the book, this figure is put at 80% for all who finish studying the seven points that Accad outlines. Accad points out that Paul, rather than speaking in a derogatory fashion of the Athenians and their religion, commended them for being religious people. Although Paul was aware that Greek poets were said to be inspired by their sister goddesses (Muse), he did not hesitate to quote from Greek poetry (p. 23). Accad sounds a clear warning about the adverse effects of speaking negatively about Islam or the Qur'an.

The seven points that Accad enumerates are not dissimilar to other evangelistic approaches. None of them would be viewed as odd or suspicious in a plan for personal

evangelism. The author provides textual support for each point from the four prophetic books accepted by Islam (Torah [Pentateuch], *Zabour* [Psalms], *Injil* [Gospel] and Qur'an). These points follow:

1. God has a purpose for our lives.
2. Sin separates us from God.
3. We can't save ourselves.
4. The cross is the bridge to life.
5. God's provision is a person.
6. Making Him ours
7. What to expect when we accept

God's gift.

Additionally, the author espouses the view that the Qur'an does support the death of Christ upon the cross. He bases this view on Qur'anic references which uphold the teaching of the preceding holy books (e.g. Spider 29:46; Cow 2:136), several Qur'anic commentators and the conflicting views of others who hold the view that a substitute was put on the cross in place of Christ (pp. 138-140).

CAMEL³

The CAMEL method draws on the valuable experience of workers in Bangladesh and gives some worthwhile documentation and analysis of the church planting movement in that part of the world. CAMEL is an evangelistic method based on an acronym that stands for **C**hosen, **A**nnouncement, **M**iracles, **E**ternal Life — an outline of Sura *Al Imraan* 3:42-55. The evangelist is instructed to request that his Muslim counterpart read the passage with him. The story is a familiar one about the choice of Mary to give birth to Jesus, the angels vying

over which one will protect Mary, His virgin birth, His miracles and what appears to be a reference to His death in verse 55. In brief, it is a key Qur'anic passage dealing with Christ and is therefore of great importance to anyone working among Muslims.

The goal of the CAMEL presentation is *not* to lead a Muslim to salvation, but it is to begin to identify a 'man of peace' — someone whose heart is inclined to hear the gospel message and to act as a proponent of both the message and the evangelist. Furthermore, the presentation is intended to raise the listener's understanding of Christ from that of a mere prophet to saviour. Three facts are critical in accomplishing this task. First, Isa (Jesus) is holy. Second, Isa has power over death. Third, Isa knows the way to heaven and is the way. It is worth noting that the evangelist is instructed not to refer to Muhammad during the CAMEL presentation.

Paul and Contextualization: Some Necessary Background

The Scriptures are our guide. Much has been written in the area of contextualization and Paul's adaptation of his message to the culture of his intended audience. My comments on the subject will of necessity be cursory. The fact that Paul's method of contextualization stands as a model for advocates of extensive use of the Qur'an in witness bears further scrutiny. The most prominent example cited by such advocates is Paul's reference on Mars Hill to an 'unknown god' (Acts 17:23). Paul also quotes Greek

poets to further draw on the culture of his audience in verse 28: 'For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring"'.

A few points are worth noting. First, Paul was greatly distressed by this city filled with idols (Acts 17:16). His 'reasoning' with the inhabitants of the city led him to the synagogue as well as to the market. The local Epicurean and Stoic philosophers identified him as a babbler who was bringing news of foreign gods. It does not seem that Paul was so much trying to adapt his message to the Greek culture as he was proclaiming the gospel in ways that at least some of the local people recognized as foreign and different.

Secondly, Paul quoted from one altar in a city that is said to have acknowledged 30 to 40,000 gods! The background of this altar to an unknown god preceded Paul by over 600 years. Apparently a plague had overtaken the city and no sacrifice to any god arrested the plague. A local hero, Epimenedes, was called upon to devise a solution. He suggested that sheep be released on Mars Hill and wherever one lay down, there an altar should be erected to the unknown god. The solution was effective and the plague was stayed. Therefore, the altar to an unknown god remained until Paul's day.⁴ We can conjecture that Paul's use of this image evoked in the mind of the Athenians this story of the 'salvation' of their city.

Thirdly, Paul's proclamation of one God who is all-powerful and of the resurrection of the dead was in stark

contrast to the prevailing view among the Athenians. Paul did not shrink from declaring truth that was in total opposition to beliefs embedded in the surrounding culture. Included in Paul's proclamation was the existence of one God, creator of all, who does not reside in temples and is not served by human hands. After laying this groundwork, Paul proceeded to borrow from Greek poets by suggesting that we human beings are the very offspring of this one eternal and all-powerful God. It seems evident that Paul's quotation of Greek poets was used to buttress truth that was in conflict with the prevailing culture and world view. Paul was using the poetic passages to call Athenians to the truth of general revelation which they knew instinctively, although they had repressed that knowledge. Paul used the Greek poets, not to affirm the Athenians in their idolatry, but to challenge that idolatry by the truth of one eternal and all-powerful God.

In summary, Paul did make reference to the culture in which he ministered and we presume this aided him to gain credibility and access to his audience. However, his citations cannot be construed as an affirmation of the prevailing culture but as a challenge to that culture and its world view. Let us not forget that Paul was profoundly disturbed in his spirit by the state of false worship in Athens. His understanding of 'contextualization' was not that of a facile imitation of certain superficial beliefs. He understood the Greek worship to be inherently false, although not devoid of elements of

truth; and therefore he challenged it publicly, while privately resorting to any and every means to proclaim the truth of God.

So What Do I Do Now?

Solomon says 'Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes' (Proverbs 24:4-5). I am not suggesting that our Muslim friends are fools — not at all. What I am suggesting is that every situation has a proper answer and wisdom will know which answer to give. The Arabic proverb captures the idea: For every situation, a response and for every response, a situation.

So, should I use the Qur'an in witness? Yes. No. Paul's use of Greek poetry bears some similarity to our use of the Qur'an, but not entirely. We are comparing apples and oranges here, aren't we? The Qur'an, in Islamic society, is perceived as God's direct speech sent down from heaven through angelic mediation to the final prophet — Muhammad — forever superseding all other revelation. Citing the Qur'an in evangelism is probably significantly more poignant and striking than citing a Greek poet in Athens. It reminds me of the farmer who got tired of digging potatoes so he bought a few sticks of dynamite to get those spuds out of the ground. Of course, he ended up with a big hole and potato puree. Using the Qur'an as an evangelistic tool is like using a stick of dynamite to dig up potatoes. It may have effects that you didn't dream of.

Still, the Qur'an can be used legitimately. But like that stick of dynamite, it has to be handled with care and used knowledgeably.

Here are a few suggestions that can guide us in our use of the Qur'an in witness.

1. *Use the Qur'an with the end in view.* Put very simply, do not plan to use the Qur'an in discipleship. We've been given very specific instructions as to what discipleship entails. 'Teach them to observe all I have commanded you.' So, if the Spirit draws our Muslim acquaintance to Christ, we will need to recognize that the Qur'an will take a diminishing role in his life and faith, while the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments will take a predominant role. I suggest that as you progress through the stages of evangelism, your use of the Qur'an should decrease, not increase. If every phase of your evangelism draws equally on the Qur'an and the Bible, then how will you explain an about face when the Muslim believes in Christ and you resort 100% to the Bible as your discipleship material?

Let us be perfectly clear here. While Christians may affirm certain concepts found in the Qur'an, its historic interpretation runs counter to the teaching of Christ and His apostles on essential points of sin and salvation. Personally, I cannot imagine a church arising out of Islamic society that reveres both the Qur'an and the Bible. Such a church, in my view, would be syncretistic and heretical. If you agree with that view, then you should make it clear to Muslims that your authority is the

Bible and that your faith and life are drawn from its teachings. The Arabs say 'stretch out your feet as far as your blanket goes.' That colourful saying can take on a variety of meanings. Here I'd like to suggest that you realize the Qur'an can only go with you so far. Ultimately, you want to build on the truths of the Bible.

2. *Use the Qur'an knowledgeably, not as a technique.* In other words, use it if you have a good general grasp of its message which includes understanding the Islamic *tafsiir* (commentary). Normally, this will require an extensive understanding of Arabic if you are dealing with an Arab audience. A few years ago, I witnessed an experienced foreign worker present a detailed research paper to a few hundred Muslim students in a very conservative Islamic university. The title of the presentation was 'The Death of Christ in Sunni *Tafsiir* Literature.' I was sceptical simply because I knew that the prevailing conviction among Muslims is that Jesus was not crucified. However, this scholar/worker presented his views in erudite Arabic and each point was thoroughly buttressed by extensive quotations from reputable Sunni *Mufasssiiriin* (commentators). The speaker also gave his own testimony of how the crucifixion had radically reoriented his life. I do not know if anyone was convinced that Jesus died on a cross that day, but I know that those students were given a huge dose of truth and walked away with a lot to think about.

On the other hand, I have talked to numerous workers (both foreign and

national) who find in the Qur'an methods by which they can proclaim the gospel. Even the CAMEL method claims to 'raise Christ from the level of a prophet to the level of saviour' by referencing verses from Sura *Al Imraan*. No one will deny that the understanding of Christ must be elevated — indeed, radically changed from the common Islamic perspective. However, is the Qur'an the proper source for such realignment? One could say, 'Yes, the Qur'an refers to Christ's miracles (even His creation), His raising of the dead, His virgin birth and certain hadith refer to Christ as sinless. Surely this is enough truth to lead us to our goal — communicating Christ as the eternal Word of God.' In fact, many use these concepts with some degree of success. Even some Muslim background believers have recounted how they were struck by the elevated view of Christ in the Qur'an.

Although our friend Fouad Accad gives himself the right of private interpretation of the Qur'an and other religious texts, I suggest that trying to sidestep the communal interpretation of the Qur'an will have negative side-effects. While Fouad Accad, as a native Arab speaker and elder, may do it successfully, the foreign worker with broken Arabic may find himself in a difficult predicament when he attempts to do the same. Muhammad Abduh (an Islamic reformer in Egypt in the early 1900s) identified two foundational elements of the Islamic faith. The first is *Tawhiid* (unity), which should not surprise anyone. The unic-ity of God cannot be violated in Islam.

The second foundational element is a Qur'anic quotation. It says 'No burden-bearer can bear the burden of another'. Essentially, this verse, in Islamic understanding, denies the ability of any being to bear my burden (or anyone else's) before God.

While individual Muslims will certainly vary in their understanding of these foundational Islamic teachings, there is no doubt that the Islamic community holds to them unswervingly. Any attempt to reinterpret them or cast them in a new light must at some point be referred to a reputable Islamic cleric who will, no doubt, set the record straight. So is it against the rules for me to quote a verse from the Qur'an which says Christ was a word from God, for example?⁵ No, but bear in mind that the Muslim community (*umma*) already has an understanding of this which is in opposition to yours. The understanding of the *logos* will not be derived from the Qur'an nor will the understanding of Jesus' atoning death nor a multitude of other truths that you hold dear. The Islamic interpretation is text plus *tafsiir* (explanation of the text) which resides in the community. You as a foreign worker will not succeed in reinventing the interpretation of the Islamic community. You will succeed in challenging Muslims to consider Christ as you:

- Become disturbed in your spirit as you see false doctrine and
- Begin to proclaim the truths of the Bible as a challenge to the prevailing world view and culture.

(These two steps could certainly be applied to our western cultures as well as our host culture, by the way.)

While this principle does call for some study of the Qur'an and a measure of Islamic understanding, I do not wish to say that only PhDs or fluent Arabic speakers should reference the Qur'an. Every evangelist should have a growing understanding of the Qur'an and its doctrines. Whether we reference the Qur'an in evangelism or not, we should be familiar with its teachings as they form the world view of the people among whom we are called to minister.

3. *Use the Bible more than you use the Qur'an.* One of the benefits of an extensive knowledge of the Qur'an is that it elevates you in the eyes of your audience and gives you a status of teacher. Roland Muller has identified the 'teacher-based' approach as the most effective approach he has seen in Muslim evangelism and discipleship.⁶ One fruitful foreign worker told me he did not hesitate to quote the Qur'an but he quoted the Bible at least three times as much. (Now there's a good challenge for you!) In this way, truth that is present in the Qur'an can reinforce gospel proclamation while clarity is preserved. Paul was clear in Athens that what he was proclaiming was a new and different approach to God. He used elements of the Athenian world view to draw in his hearers but in no way did he pretend to be presenting one more god to add to the pantheon. He was proclaiming one God over all, eternal and omnipotent.

4. *Reference the Qur'an for specific points.* It is not advisable to use the Qur'an to try to establish that Christ died to make atonement for our sins simply because the Qur'an does not portray that view at all. Qur'anic material can be used however to emphasize the gravity of sin and its dire consequences for the human race. For instance, it can be beneficial to ask Muslims why God told Adam and Eve after their transgression, to 'go down hence, both of you, one of you a foe unto the other' (Suras 20:123 and 2:36).⁷ There is a significant gap between the Islamic concept of sin and the biblical one. Qur'anic material can be used, not to *reinforce* Qur'anic understanding, but as a *stepping stone* to a biblical understanding. Isaiah 59:1-2 provides an excellent follow-on to this question: 'Your sin has made a separation between you and your God and your iniquities have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.' The resulting enmity between Adam and Eve after Adam's transgression lends credence to the alienating effect of sin. Also, the prevalence of evil in the world around us further elaborates the human race's alienation from one another and ultimately from God. Such communication of truth is not contrived but self-evident and may lead the Muslim to question how one can find a lasting solution to this problem.

So, isn't this exactly what is being done when others use the Qur'an to demonstrate Christ's divinity or His atoning death? I think not. First of all, there is no purposeful misrepresentation of Islamic understanding in the

above example. The enmity of Adam and Eve (and the continued alienation of the human race) is an accepted tenet of Islam. The question of why this enmity is present is answered satisfactorily, not in the Qur'an, but in the Bible. There is no claim that Islam is teaching a doctrine of original sin even though the implications are that, as a result of the transgression, sin began to permeate the human race forever consigning it to enmity and strife. The conclusion, however, is drawn from the Bible. Secondly, although Muslims do not hold to original sin, they have no qualms in confessing that all people sin (with the exception of the prophets, depending on the Muslim's view of prophetic infallibility). So these questions build on a common understanding in Islam in order to lead to a more focused biblical understanding. They underscore the human dilemma with sin in hope that the Muslim listener will sense the urgency of seeking a solution.

Other concepts that could be communicated by referencing the Qur'anic version of Adam and Eve's transgression are man's nobility prior to Adam's transgression, i.e. his knowledge and role in the universe (*see* Suras 20:116, 2:31 & 33-35), the inefficacy of repentance (*tauba*) as a means of atoning for sin (*see* Suras 20:121-122 and 2:37-38) and the essence of the temptation as the usurpation of God and obtaining god-like status (*see* Sura 20:120). Furthermore, the necessity and benefit of reading the earlier revelations (Torah, *Zabour* and *Injil*) is easily sustained by Qur'anic referencing. You object, 'But this is side-stepping the understanding

of the Islamic community!' In my view, this is more of a direct confrontation with inconsistencies in the faith and practice of Islam. The prevailing evidence of the Qur'an is so strong that it presents a quandary to the Muslim. If the preceding books are affirmed and preserved by the Qur'an, how could the reading and study of them be invalid or undesirable? Also, as an evangelist, you will not want to depend exclusively on Qur'anic referencing to establish the necessity of reading the Bible. Your sharing of truth from the Bible will underscore its implicit authority for you as a disciple of Christ.

5. *View the Qur'an as one avenue of communication among many.* I find that those who use the Qur'an most effectively use it in a way that could be described as 'off the cuff.' In other words, they make reference to it in passing to support some point they are making, which may also be supported by a variety of stories, parables, current events, etc. As a foreign worker, odds are that you will not be accepted as a Qur'anic scholar. (Did you think you would be?) Like you, I've had the experience at least a million times (only a slight exaggeration) of asking a question related to the Qur'an to stimulate thought and discussion, only to find that I am referred to the local Sheikh. Don't get bogged down in fruitless exegesis of the Qur'an. Use its concepts and ideas to frame and assist the message you want to present — Christ!

6. *Understand that the Qur'an informs and shapes Islamic culture. The message of*

the Bible will influence that culture in a different direction. It is simplistic to view our evangelism as a message that is relegated to religion alone with little or no effect on other areas of culture. The foundational aspect of any culture is how that culture views God. Islamic culture has a very clearly defined understanding of God and how He interacts with human beings. A wide spectrum of values, beliefs and behaviours derive from that understanding of God in all areas of the culture: ethical, legal, familial, etc. The Islamic view of God and the Qur'an have definite bearing on honesty, gender relations, family, work, the poor, role of government, individual rights — and the list goes on. The idea that the gospel can somehow be injected into a culture and leave that culture as it was, except for the presence of some individual believers, is a gross misunderstanding of mission. The gospel not only transforms hearts, it redeems areas of culture. The silversmiths of Ephesus understood that the gospel threatened their very means of earning a living. As evangelists, our concern is not merely soul-transformation. We are also eager to see the values of the culture transformed in the light of the truth of Christ. This realization is a built-in caution against over emphasis on the Qur'an. There is no such thing as an implication-free use of the Qur'an. If we seriously affirm the Qur'an, we must be prepared to live with its culture, world view, values and doctrines. If we are not prepared to live with those things, then we need to take stock of our words so that they do

not communicate a greater affinity with the Qur'an than we are actually willing to live with.

Having said that, we also must bear in mind that our own proclamation of the gospel is not *supracultural*. As Leslie Newbigin has pointed out, 'all expressions of the gospel are culturally embodied'.⁸ The biblical revelation was given in particular cultures. Our own expression of the gospel is deeply rooted in our culture. By the same token, we expect the assimilation of the gospel in Islamic societies to produce a more fully orb'd understanding of the gospel globally. So the point is not that the gospel will judge and condemn all that is understood as Islamic culture, but rather that it will refine it, ennoble it and doubtless, reform it. If the bride of Christ will be composed of all peoples, languages and cultures, then that bride is necessarily incomplete until the Islamic cultures of the world make their entry. We await that day with eagerness and look forward to the great richness that will be brought into the Kingdom of God as a result.

7. *True respect for the Muslim and his holy book may mean refraining from referencing it in certain settings. By the same token, use of the Qur'an may indicate a lack of respect for it.* I have a profound respect for Islam. I believe it is essentially reasonable. It can provide an order and discipline to life. It is global in its mission, holistic in its exigencies and therefore engages the will of its adherents. It demands complete obedience. It is simple enough to draw in the masses and yet profound enough to excite the contemplation of sages. Islam

claims to be the religion of *fitra* (innate human nature) and this may be true. Man, left to grope on his own and search for God could well come up with a system very similar to Islam. My profound respect for this world religion makes me doubly careful to examine it on its own terms. Islam is a religion that gives guidance and promises reward to those who follow it. In essence, Islam is man's submission to Allah through the system of works Allah has prescribed. As such, it is a system of self-righteousness as opposed to 'alien righteousness' which is ours in Christ — a righteousness which is not innate, not natural to us — the righteousness of God himself in Christ.

If my use of the Qur'an misrepresents that essence of Islam, then I must face the fact that I am, in effect, misusing the Qur'an. While the two religions hold much truth in common, the essence of the one faith is in opposition to the other. Need I say that in Christ, God has completed the work man could not hope to accomplish and therefore, the ensuing good works are a result of God's gracious salvation expressed as an act of love and worship to an all-worthy, saving God?

Does not this principle negate all use of the Qur'an in witness? I think not. The Qur'an does express certain truths and raise useful questions which we can reference profitably. However, the bottom line is still 'For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit' (1 Peter 3:18).

That truth is not found in the Qur'an, with all due respect.

Conclusion

The discussion of the extent of use of the Qur'an in Christian witness is one aspect of the broader question of contextualization.⁹ In the last two centuries, mission activists have been accused of running rough-shod over cultures while collaborating with oppressive political and social regimes. The fear of our day is that we will inadvertently conspire to the same ends. As a result of 9/11, two Gulf wars, the war in Afghanistan, Islamic militancy and the ongoing tensions in Israel and Palestine, the situation seems ripe for Christian missions to move along in the protective wake of western political, military and economic supremacy. Despite the fact that mission in a bygone era occasionally moved along in the wake of colonialism, advances of Christ's kingdom still came as a result. Those advances became the foundation we build on today even though we continue to live with certain deleterious effects of those early days.

Fearing the same harmful effects, proponents of a more eirenic approach to Islam and the spread of the gospel among Muslims have arisen. Indeed, that call is urgently needed in our day. Those who advocate this eirenic approach have much to say to us and we will do well to listen. Frankly, however, there is no single approach that can claim ascendancy to the point that all other approaches are disqualified. God's ways are mysterious and He

works through militants as well as missionaries to accomplish His purposes.

May I dare suggest that the real need of the hour is not a détente in rhetoric (though that might help) or even a dropping of arms among the militants (though I would vote for it). When the angel announced Christ's birth, the statement was so startling that we still gasp and grasp to fathom how it could possibly be true — 'Good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people...glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.' Sin's violent abuse was to be forever laid to rest. That happened in time and space on a cross as a holy God of peace and love subjected Himself to the worst of man's violent rejection. Though that cross is a stumbling block for many, it is the only message of peace we have to offer — the only one. And it is for all people — militants and militant haters, settlers and stone-throwers, missionaries and Muslims.

Footnotes

- 1 'The Word of God [*logos theou*] is above all the world; and it is the oldest and most original [*genitatos*] of what has been made.' (Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.175)
- 2 Fouad Elias Accad, *Building Bridges*, Navpress: Colorado Springs, 1997.
- 3 Comments based on an electronic copy of

the booklet without any publishing or copyright information.

- 4 Don Richardson, 'Finding the Eye-Opener', *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne, Pasadena, 1981, pp. 424-25.
- 5 David Shenk suggests when the *kalima-tullah* subject comes up, ask your Muslim friend what it means. Answers may vary and he may not even know. Reply 'Good! Did you know that the Bible also calls Jesus the Word of God?' Then take him to John 1 to explain what it says. In this way the Qur'an is referenced without reading the gospel into it (*comment provided by Sam Schlorff*).
- 6 Roland Muller, *Tools for Muslim Evangelism*, Belleville, Ontario, Canada, 2000, pp. 34-39.
- 7 General Qur'anic *tafsiir* points out that alienation and strife is the natural state of this world.
- 8 Leslie Newbiggin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, Grand Rapids, 1989, p. 191.
- 9 Those who advocate a more highly contextualized model of the Muslim background church will likely also push for more extensive use of the Qur'an in evangelism. They see a continuing role for the Qur'an in the new believer's life and faith, encouraging him to remain in the mosque and continue to refer to himself as a 'Muslim' without qualifying what is meant by that term. This author disagrees with that position as it leads to a syncretistic faith and confusion concerning Christ's message and mission. It has the added disadvantage of being open to the charge of deception in an environment that is already explosive both politically and religiously.

Book Review: Camel Training Manual

Reviewed by Dale Martin

Camel Training Manual, Kevin Greeson, WIGTake Resources, Bangalore, India, 2004. 145 pages. {www.lanforceinc.org}

In the forward to this book, it makes the claim that there are 250,000 Muslims who have come to faith in Christ as a result of following the methods it describes. Moreover, Mr. Greeson states that more than 7000 Muslims are coming to faith in Christ each month in one country of South Asia alone as a result of the application of these principles.

The *Camel Training Manual* is, in fact, an integration of multiple approaches woven together rather than a single method. The *Man of Peace* approach, house church multiplication theory, Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God* approach, David Garrison's *Church Planting Movement* approach, contextualization and using the Qur'an as a bridge to the Bible all find a home in its pages. Whereas past decades saw the successive arrivals of various missing keys in how to go about Muslim evangelism, this book has put them all together onto one handy key ring.

The author reveals his goal on page 2 of the introduction when he says, 'The goal of the Camel Training seminar is nothing short of training you to be a facilitator of a massive church planting movement among Muslims in your community.' No one can accuse him of aiming low. The *Camel Training Manual* is illustrated from Kevin's years

of experience in a country of South Asia where he has been working for nearly twenty years.

Most experienced workers will react with some scepticism whenever a method is proposed for reaching Muslims. However, this 'method' is relational and incorporates insights and wisdom from a number of significant sources. The main strength of what Greeson proposes is the integration of approaches which have been tried and widely implemented throughout a number of fields. The role of the missionary corresponds to what Dick Scoggins has been teaching for years.

Another strength of this book is that it takes a bold and courageous line of action rather than an overly cautious or timid one. Yet it does not attack Islam and is not objectionable to the Muslim. It is based upon taking our Christian witness to Muslims in the mosque rather than waiting around for them to come to us. It knows what it is looking for — Muslims who are already open to the gospel — and presents elements of the gospel to them in a clear way from the Qur'an, working in dependence upon and in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. If God is not drawing Muslims to Himself, this method does not work.

This is nothing if not biblical. Greeson also advances a contextualized presentation for Muslims but the underlying approach and forms of worship in the resulting churches is

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minimally contextualized and he states that this became a minor issue over the years.

Overall, I feel that this 'method' is based upon an excellent integration of biblical principles and techniques which many of us have been using for a number of years in parts of North Africa. I suppose the only new element for me personally is the use

of the selected verses from the Qur'an with which he begins his approach to the Muslim. I look forward to trying this out. For those who remain sceptical about this approach, there is another book which is even more radical and optimistic. It is that 21-volume library of ministry accounts that we call the New Testament.

Book Review: The Last Trumpet

Reviewed by Abe Wiebe

The Last Trumpet: A Comparative Study in Christian-Islamic Eschatology, Samuel Shadid, PhD, Xulon Press, 2005, 305 pages, ISBN 1-597810-32-0.

Samuel Shadid, a Middle Easterner, is director of Islamic Studies at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and executive director of Good News for the Crescent World. He has written over 45 books in English and Arabic.

As indicated by the subtitle of this book, *A Comparative Study in Christian-Islamic Eschatology*, Shadid focuses on end-time events — from both the Christian and the Islamic standpoint. Shadid's treatment of the subject is masterful. Most of us have a general knowledge of Qur'anic teaching as related to the grave, heaven, hell and the surrounding stages of future events, but this author takes the whole matter much further. Right from the start, he plunges into the eschatological perspectives emanating from differing world views and shows how these are related to their primary sources, the Qur'an, the Hadith and the Bible. Shadid's knowledge of the various Hadith collections is extensive. Thus, drawing on this wide array of material, topics like, 'The Hour', 'The Anti-Christ', 'The Mahdi', 'The Resurrection and the Day of Judgement' are examined carefully and in depth. What is helpful is his presentation of both the Sunni and Shia side of each question while then bringing in the biblical

position for comparison. The whole is done in an easy and readable style.

One is immediately struck by the wide dependence of both the Qur'an and the Hadith on Zoroastrian, Christian apocryphal and Jewish sources. Muhammad may have been illiterate but there is abundant proof that many of his comments and 'revelations' were influenced by what he heard from others such as Salman al-Farisi. In fact, his favourite wife, Aisha, complained about Muhammad's long evenings with Salman. Perhaps the question needs to be asked, 'Did the Prophet really say all these things or are they in fact inclusions and additions by subsequent Muslim authorities during Islam's early development?' For example, according to a hadith of Muhammad, the Mahdi, who is the expected deliverer and saviour of the Shi-ites, who will return from his occultation (concealment) at the end of time, received this name because he will be guided to a mountain in Syria from which he will recover the original Torah. He will then restore the Ark of the Covenant from Antioch (p. 117). When he comes, he will fill the earth with goodness, justice and equity. This personage of the Mahdi definitely has a messianic aura about him. Was this included to off-set the Christian hope of Christ's return to establish righteousness?

In the section about the resurrection (p. 170), we learn that according to Islamic teaching, two angels, Munkar and Nakir, interrogate the deceased

while still in the grave. Apparently no one is exempt from this trial of the grave, even the Prophet. Since the first question in the grave relates to whether or not the person believed in Muhammad as Allah's messenger, what kind of question could the angel ask him? Moreover, why, as he attested, was he afraid of this interrogation? The answer must be that no one is sure of God's decision regarding his eternal fate since God's actions are unpredictable.

With respect to heaven and hell and future rewards, Shadid shows again and again that much of Islamic teaching has links with Zoroastrian and Christian doctrine. So is Islam really a pure revelation uniquely taken from the 'Heavenly Tablet' or is it in fact a reflection of societal opinions commonly accessible in the Hejaz and Mesopotamia during the seventh and eighth centuries? Shadid's study clearly points in the latter direction.

In his conclusion, the author points out that Islam is a reward-based eschatology, where man's eternal destiny is determined by human effort. The individual never knows whether he has made the grade since saving grace is absent from Islam. This makes the

trial of the final judgement of momentous importance. Great hope is laid on good deeds and the hoped-for intercession of the Prophet despite numerous declarations that believers can be sure of Paradise. Actually, only martyrs for the cause are guaranteed a place in the 'Gardens of Delight'. Fear fills the Muslim's heart in anticipation of the ultimate trial. Just reading of the seven levels of hell can show us why; they defy imagination. If Muslims truly believe that such a destiny might befall them, why then do they not make every effort to avoid it? We might ask ourselves the same question: if we truly see hellfire as a possibility, as stated in Scripture, would it not follow that we would seriously take measures to avoid it — not merely by doing good deeds but by holding to our faith in Christ's finished work, not merely by doing good works?

Unfortunately, though well written, the book contains several small errors in spelling which could easily be corrected with careful editing. Nevertheless, in my opinion, it remains the most complete presentation of Islamic eschatology in current literature.

Book Review: *Light Force*

Reviewed by Joyce Wiebe

Light Force, Brother Andrew with Al Janssen, Fleming & Revel, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004.

Can one man make a difference? Convinced that the instrument for peace in the Middle East is Christ's light shining out through His church, Brother Andrew has made regular visits to that war-torn region — first Lebanon, then Israel/Palestine. What has he discovered in these lands? The book *Light Force* tells the story.

Always, Brother Andrew asks himself the question, 'What is the solution to the problem in the Middle East?' His conclusion, that peace will never come through political or warring means, but only through the light of Jesus shining out through His church, has made him God's messenger to incite that truth in the hearts of believers.

He made many trips over a number of years, visiting numerous church groups and even going boldly into enemy territory to explain his Peace Plan. Guided by the Holy Spirit, he was given many open doors to begin this slow and laborious work. Often he questioned if he was doing any good or not, but the burden remained and he did what he could. In his mind, the primary conflict for the next hundred years will be Islam, and the outcome will decide what this world will look like for the next thousand years (p. 117).

His aim has been, first of all, to encourage believers on both sides of the conflict wherever he finds them, to

understand and love their brothers and sisters from the other side even as Jesus taught. Then he has sought to strengthen churches, no matter how weak and few in number they may be, and, if possible, to have face-to-face talks with leaders of the opposition.

For Christians to flee the conflict will leave the church decimated, its light dimmed and its influence weakened. A vibrant church, the living body of Christ, has to be present in the midst of strife. People in whom Christ dwells provide hope in the midst of conflict. But if they lose hope, how can they be light? And if they flee, only darkness will be left behind. Even in the midst of bombs and suffering which seek to destroy their society, their life, their work, they must begin immediately to rebuild as if they do not expect it to be destroyed again. They must believe that even if attacks are repeated God will give them the grace to begin again and again and again.

What about the church in Lebanon? After more than twenty years of Brother Andrew's twice-yearly trips into the country, it seems that the church is barely surviving, even after the peace process. Certainly there are a number of God's faithful servants who persevere and who are His instruments during the conflict. There are evangelistic meetings where some come to Christ. Yes, God's presence still remains in Lebanon, but is the church all it should be? And what has been Brother Andrew's contribution to

it all? One thing he is sure of, if the church disappears, then Christianity will fade away just as effectively as any Muslim fundamentalists may hope to accomplish by their actions. Then where will be the hope for the region? Perhaps Christians couldn't end the warfare, but certainly they could be a light in the darkness.

When Brother Andrew first turned his attention to the Israeli/Palestinian question, he determined to find out the condition of the church there to see if he could help. One man in particular became his mentor in that regard — Bishara Awad. Bishara had suffered much as a youth but later on became the Principal of Hope School. Some years later, he founded Bethlehem Bible College. Through mutual encouragement and prayer, the two men agreed to make a difference in this war-torn land. In the course of the following years, Brother Andrew made many trips to Palestine. He visited Palestinian terrorist group leaders, including Yasser Arafat. He always gave these men Bibles and listened to their dreams; at the same time, he explained to them that Christ, the

Prince of Peace, is the only way of true peace. He met with Christian Palestinians and church leaders and encouraged them. He helped in the reconciliation process begun by Salim Munayer in which Palestinian believers and Messianic Jews learned to understand, appreciate and accept one another as brothers in Christ. Most of all, he served as an example to churches in Gaza and the West Bank by going into enemy territory with a hand stretched out to help in the name of Jesus.

His heart of compassion for people everywhere, as well as the message of Jesus he bore, was a living example of what he believed God wanted to do across the region. Stories are told of miraculous encounters, quiet works of the Spirit, the almost imperceptible coming to life of a disappearing church. Through it all, the stubborn faith of a 'foolish Dutchman', as he calls himself, hangs on to God's promises and pledges to do his best to bring peace to this troubled part of the world. The question remains for the reader: What about me? What can I do in the face of the challenge and need?

