

Analysis of Al Injil “Eastern Reading”

General Comments by Seedbed Editor

The book, *Al Injil, Eastern Reading*, is an Arabic language commentary on the Gospel According to Luke, published in 1998 by Dar al-Jeel, Beirut. The book is designed to capture the interest and answer the questions of Muslim readers. It begins with several short introductory passages written by Muslim scholars. Then comes a general 3-page introduction by Mazhar Mal-louhi, head of the editorial committee, followed by a longer introduction to the commentary itself (pp. 13—37). The Gospel is then reproduced in the van Dyke version, printed in artistic font and format designed to attract the Arab reader. The commentary comprises the last half of the book (pp. 159—307). More than a year ago we promised an evaluation of this book and present our apologies for taking so long to put it together. Three esteemed brothers and colleagues, all native Arabic speakers, all of Muslim background, have examined the book and share their conclusions below. You will note that, while all have criticisms, one evaluator is much more negative than the other two. From my own somewhat cursory analysis of the book, I would agree more fully with the more positive evaluations. We hope that the editorial committee will correct some of the perceived deficiencies when the book is reprinted.

An Overview and evaluation by Abu Atallah

Presentation

Affirmation:

The book is a fresh new publication that conforms to the way Islamic books are printed and covered. The general presentation is a model for other books to follow. It is easier for Muslims to consider a book that looks Islamic or Arabic. They may, however, also take it mistakenly, thinking that it is from an Islamic point of view. Having an introduction by a Muslim scholar and making no mention of the authors, except a group of specialists, could make a Muslim think that Dr. Hashim wrote the book. This is clever, but is it deceptive? “*The Injil as it was inspired to Saint Luke*” is good phraseology. It uses the Islamic terminology for inspiration, a welcome departure from “*The Gospel of Luke*,” which implies that Luke wrote it on his own without inspiration.

The quotations from main Arab scholars are great, very well chosen quotations by well known scholars.

Critique:

— The title Eastern Reading does not make it clear whether the Gospel or the commentary is Eastern reading.

— I am not sure Dr. Hashim's one page was worth being included. His comments seem to be superficial, shallow and unclear. I am not sure what he meant by the statement that Luke is the

only Injil that speaks about the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. I also am not sure what he means by the Christian Jewish conflict.

General Introduction (pp 9—11)

— Showing the Middle Eastern background of Luke & Jesus, one born in Syria, the other in Palestine, does give the feeling that it is an eastern book rather than a Western one. p.9

— “*Jesus Christ, his peace be upon us*” is consistent with the Muslim’s “*Muhammad, peace be upon him*,” although this formula is strange to Muslims. p.9

— The comment that Palestine was occupied then as it is now is problematic because it infuses political issues into the text. It does, however, empathize with the Islamic perspective of Christianity as a western religion. P.9

— The following statement on page 9, which I have translated, summarizes why this commentary was written:

A great gap has been created between the message of Christ which he proclaimed for the Arab person/mind and the Western interpretation of that message, which made Christ a foreigner and his message a Western one. The adoption of Christianity by the West has created a powerful and devastating reaction in the Arabic person against Christianity. It made him forget that Jesus is the son of our tradition, son of our East, that his message is our message. Therefore we have spent time to write a commentary that is consistent with the origin of the message or according to the context in which it was revealed.

So this is what the author means by an Eastern Reading.

Introduction to the Commentary (pp 13—37)

I thought the introduction was superb. It addresses the major questions that Muslims ask. Explanations were given in a way that was very helpful and to which every Arab mind could relate. Using the Qur’an to show that God protects his word is problematic, though I understand why he used it. If we use the Qur’an to prove this, does that imply that the Qur’an is also the word of God? I would much rather emphasize that attacking the word of God as corrupt would be an attack on God’s ability to protect his word. This argument would communicate the same effect. Your position on this will obviously depend on your strategy of witness, i.e. whether or not you use the Qur’an and to what extent.

I am not sure why the author has used the Van Dyke Arabic translation instead of a contemporary one. There are some good new translations that are easier to read and understand by contemporary Muslims. I know that many Christians in the East oppose any new translation. Did he yield to their opinion? There is much terminology in the V.D. translation that would not be understood by Muslims. Also the Arabic font is difficult to read and not clear enough. I hope other editions will change that into a better font.

The terminology of Occupied Palestine on p. 13 suggests all kinds of political terminology to Muslims. Although talking about the Roman occupation, the

author described it as the West. This kind of polarization and contempt of the West by the East is not helpful. I understand that he wants to make the Injil relative to Arabs but to use terminology of the present to explain the past could prove to be harmful. It does not promote love for the whole world nor the fact that Christianity does not discriminate against either West or East. I am afraid that in his attempt to emphasize the East he has done what the West has done against the East for years. Fusing modern Middle Eastern politics to the scripture is dangerous.

On p.18 the subject of the oneness of God is wonderfully treated. Many times, in trying to explain the Trinity, we fail to emphasize the Christian and historic credo belief in the oneness of God.

Treatment of the term the Son of God is also excellent, with good examples from the Arabic culture and language, e.g. "son of Syria," "son of the road" (the beggar), or "son of the Nile" (an Egyptian). These are all examples of figurative usage of the word "son."

The treatment of the Word of God in pages 20,21 is excellent, specially the terminology of the word Raham (have mercy) which is the same root word for a woman's womb and bringing to life. Here is a translation of that paragraph.

The idea of creation and begetting has a close relation to the nature of God as a merciful one. Dr. Mohammed Shahroor in his book, *The Book and the Qur'an*, page 254, has used an idea similar to that used by Ibn

Alarabi when he wrote, "the rahman name of God is derived from Rahiem, which is the womb of the mother. This shows tenderness, mercy and compassion. The womb shows kinship and closeness of relationship. The Qur'an has added another meaning, that of the womb giving birth and, therefore, the name of Rahman came from it. We know for certain that God gives literal physical birth, but he also brings the non-existent to exist by his creative word.

It is helpful to understand the relationship. But if Christ is created, then He is not co-essential with God, or else the authors are saying that the idea of God having a son is not a strange phenomenon in Islam and Islamic theology.

The Commentary

Muslims usually describe Muhammad with the term *Peace and Prayer of Allah on him*, other prophets with *Peace be upon him* and the companions of the prophet, like Ali, with *may God be gracious unto him*. So the author seeks to use the same or similar terminology. The use of such terminology as *John, may God be gracious unto him*, and *Jesus (his peace on us)* is an Islamic and helpful way of giving the prophets the honor they deserve. The change of the Islamic form, *Peace be upon him*, (Jesus) to *his peace (Jesus) be upon us* is very delightfully done.

The way the commentary is written is very helpful to the Muslim mind. Even the titles of the passages are intriguing, as well as using the term *Al-Sahaba*, which is used in Islam of Mohammed's friends and followers from Mecca, for

the followers of Christ. Use of prophetic verses of the Old Testament quoted in Luke is woven very cleverly to show that Christ fulfils them.

The treatment of fasting on page 189 is insufficient. The authors failed to distinguish between fasting as *fardh* (essential deed for salvation), which many of the Muslims believe in, and Christian fasting. A fuller explanation of the role of fasting in both Christianity and Islam would have been helpful.

I really like the last part concerning Christ's death and resurrection. The commentary has dealt with many of the questions that Muslims ask about the crucifixion of Christ. It answers why Jesus had to die. It addresses the issue from the perspective of those who saw Jesus dead, friends and foes. The authors use the Qur'anic verse *peace be upon me the day I was born, the day I die and the day I rise from the dead.* (Miriam 33) This verse is much debated among Muslim theologians and I am not sure it is wise to use it here. To quote this without the other verse that says *they did not kill him (Jesus) nor did they crucify him* is not fair use of the Qur'anic materials and does not give the complete Islamic picture on the subject.

The section on p. 301, Was Christ a Liar or a Charlatan? in the commentary of Luke 24:25-27 is a good treatment on the message of Christ and what he has done and said. But Muslims will never say that Jesus is a liar, because he is a prophet. Instead they blame his followers for corrupting the truth. Even though the argument is

valid, it does not address the question Muslims are asking.

Conclusion

This is not a commentary in the traditional sense of a word study of the Greek. But it is written with Muslims in mind and is simple enough for the unsophisticated Muslim inquirer to understand. I find this commentary a good contribution to available literature in Arabic. Both vocabulary and content are very appropriate to advancing the Injil of Christ. It is a useful tool to help Muslims understand Christianity. If you choose not to use it please read it at least and learn from the different approaches that have been utilized. And I recommend that you share it with Muslim friends. I hope the next edition will make some improvements in the light of this evaluation.

Review and critique by Abu Fadi

Evangelism, evangelism, evangelism, evangelism! The fever of evangelism among Muslims! I know this is one of the most important commandments that Jesus gave His disciples at His ascension. But did He mean what some people are doing, or do their actions agree with the divine understanding that is written in Scripture, especially in the New Testament?

Recently a book was published which speaks about a commentary on the Gospel of Luke with a new Eastern reading. I was happy when I saw it. But when I read it slowly and critically I lost my joy. I had hoped that this book would be an instrument for many

Arabic-speaking Muslim brothers to come to the Lord. But unfortunately, I did not find in it the accomplishment of that purpose and goal. It's unfortunate that they spent so much energy, time, and money to produce this book in hopes that it could be used for evangelism. I have found problems in this book, whether theological, historical, unsubstantiated claims, and especially problems concerning meaning or usage of words which are used in Islam.

Some people want to use such terminology to evangelize Muslims and relate the terms, facts, and truths to them. It's a good goal, but full of thorns. It could create many problems for evangelism. Let's notice some things which I would like to point out:

Inside the cover is written, "*All publication rights are reserved to the authors.*" In Arabic the word author means that they came up with something which was not written before. It seems to me that those who put the book together did not really come up with any writing because it speaks about the Gospel of Luke and its interpretation. Is it correct to say the people are the authors? Could we have used interpreters or presenters instead of authors? Also they used the phrase *qira' sharqia* which means a reading from the East. Is the reading that we have now a Western reading? They did not say anything about the translation of the Gospel of Luke into Arabic. They took the regular Van Dyke translation and did not indicate anywhere that it is a Western reading.

On page 8 we notice that a Muslim from the Sidi Mohammed University in Morocco wrote the introduction, so giving the impression of acceptance by Muslims. So they can use it for Muslims to read and to evangelize. I believe this is not ethical. And the writer of the introduction has stated many errors, such as the following:

— He says he has a special, authenticated copy of the Gospel of Luke. Does this mean there are other unauthenticated copies? He did not identify the source of the authentication or its meaning. Is this Islamic or Christian authentication? He did not say where the other manuscripts are which are not authenticated. Are they known in the market? Or are they only in the University of Sidi Mohammed?

— He also writes that the Gospel of Luke is the only one that treats the birth of Christ, as well as the crucifixion and resurrection. This shows his ignorance of the New Testament. Putting something like this in the book indicates that even those who put the book together agree with what he said. Why were they silent about what he said? Was it because they wanted to witness to Muslims? Or why?

— He also writes, "*In the beginning was the Word,*" using the feminine form of the verb instead of the masculine as in the Arabic translation. I believe this is a discrepancy that shows that the man does not understand that the reference is to Jesus, a person, rather than to a spoken or written word. The authors did not correct this mistake nor make any comment about it.

Those who published the book use different Muslim expressions. Supposedly it is an introduction by Christians to evangelize Muslims. I will show you some of these in the following paragraphs:

— First, the expression, '*Christ slamo-hu A'lina*' or 'Christ, His peace be upon us.' is an expression that is too simplified, weak, and a stupid way to refer to Christ the same way as Muslims use it. It is silly to use something like that. There is also the issue of presenting Christ as only a prophet according to the Islamic understanding of the expression, 'may peace be upon him'.

— The expression "Falesteen (Palestine), occupied in those days as it is today." This is purely a political statement and is not helpful for evangelism. It puts all kinds of barriers and problems into our relationships with others before we have even spoken to them, especially between Jews and those who speak Arabic, or those who have different political ideologies which may be in disagreement with Palestinian authorities. It is not suitable to infuse political opinions into this pure Christian book. Could we use another word instead of Palestine, such as the Holy Land, or the Cradle of Religions? Of course, we would have to explain what Palestine meant in the historical period of the time of Christ. Even using the phrase, "*it was occupied then the same as today*" is not correct. Are they trying to please political authorities in their country?

The publishers say in the introduction that the reason they wrote this book

was to combat the problem which the West has created by adopting Christianity and giving it a Western interpretation and understanding. This is oversimplified and almost foolish in my opinion. As well as Christianity the West has also adopted Zionism and Islam. The West has also used liberal theology, capitalism, and bad morals, all of which are non-religious, but rather political, ideologies which change from time to time according to political climate.

On page 9, the publishers use the phrase "*and we spent some time to restore the Gospel text.*" They supposedly meant, "We spent some time explaining the Gospel text, commenting on it or translating it." But they did not mention anything about reading the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

On page 10, they write, "*We have judged the other side. We have not left freedom for the person to defend themselves and, therefore, we have taken away freedom from the other person.*" Who, tell me, are they to whom we have not left the freedom to witness and to defend themselves? The publishers forget, or are made to forget, both history and present reality. Are there are no newspapers or Islamic radio broadcasts in their country, do they not have mosques in their countries? Do they need presidential authorization to build a mosque? Help us! Make us understand, please! (*Translator's note: The author meant Christians who were not given the right to defend themselves or give their point of view.*)

On page 15, they use the expression, "*Radha allahu 'anhu*" (May God accept him). This reflects the idea that they hoped that God would have mercy on him, but were not sure. This really does not reflect the Christian's understanding, the hope and assurance that we have in Christ Jesus when we have believed in Him—to be able to inherit the kingdom and be with Him in heaven. This also puts the disciples on the same level as Mohammed's followers, those who came with him from Mecca; even though there is a great difference between the two.

On page 16, they mention that the Book of Revelation is in the holy Gospel. This mistake may give the wrong impression to Muslims, making them think that the Book of Revelation is part of the Gospels. The difference between the Gospels and Revelation needs to be emphasized. They also use the Muslim expression "*Al-Qur'an al-kareem*," rather than saying "the Qur'an the book of the Muslims." Muslims always refer to the Bible as "the Book of the Nasara or the Christians," not the Holy Book.

They also use the word *Zabour*, which is unknown terminology for Christians, who do not use it. A Muslim does not know what it means and how it relates to the Psalms. So they have to explain in parenthesis that the *Zabour* means also the Psalms of David, so that people know what it means. Using verses from Sura the Table, they indicate to the average reader that the Jews and the Christians are infidels. Using it is incorrect.

On page 17, instead of saying, "*Mohammed, peace be upon him*," they should say, "Mohammed, the Prophet of Islam." "*Peace upon him*" is giving him recognition as a prophet. Also the expression, '*he has raised him to heaven*' is not clear, and seems to support the Islamic interpretation that Jesus was not crucified, but that God lifted him up and put His appearance on someone else who was crucified.

On page 25, he talks about the Gospel of Barnabas without any apparent reason. I don't know why they mentioned it. Was it a response to an unasked question?

"*The Gospel according to Luke*": The translation here is not new, as they claim, but the Arabic font is not suitable, very difficult to read, the distance between the lines is very close and the accents are difficult to read. One could understand different meanings.

On page 200, the writers say, "*our Master Christ orders the prophet Yahia, peace be upon him*." They had supposedly explained the difference between Arabic, Greek, and Hebrew names. In which case they should have preferably used the Biblical names. At least they should have indicated the biblical name in parenthesis, e.g. (John the Baptist).

We should not use the Qur'an in any shape or form to interpret or explain the Gospel as is done on page 296. This gives the clear impression of recognition that the Qur'an is a divinely inspired book. As for example in the verse which is quoted, "*Peace be upon*

me, the day I was born and the day I die...".

Why did the publishers use *Sahaba*, which means the companions of Mohammed in Islam, for the disciples of Jesus, although the word for disciples in Arabic (*Talamiez*) is acceptable as far as Muslims are concerned.

These are just a few of my comments, which I consider show the weakness of this book for use in evangelism among Muslims, even though so much work, energy, and money were spent on it. What do you think? Do you agree with me?

Verbal Comments by Majed,
recorded by Editor

It is "a great book" which will appeal to many Muslim readers. I like the handwritten script used in the reproduction of the Gospel, although it would be easier to read if reduced somewhat in size. The design on the cover and title pages is "pure Islamic art" of the type which would appear in the most elite editions of the Qur'an.

The introduction, e.g. *Occupied Palestine*, gives one the impression of a political document, rather than a commentary on a historical event.

Certain expressions, made to resemble Islamic expressions, would be more readily understood and accepted if put in the Islamic format, e.g. *alihi salaam* rather than *salaamuhu alina* after *al-Messih* or *Allah Jallat Jallalahu* rather than *Allah al-Kareem*.

The quality of the Arabic is "substandard" with numerous grammatical and style errors which, however, would not be noticed by the average Arab reader. For example on p. 174 *zahara al-malak li Sidi Youssef*, should more correctly be ...*ala Sidi Youssef*.

There are no footnotes referencing the numerous citations found in the commentary. A serious reader would want to know the source of these. I also note a lack of consistency and sequence in writing styles, perhaps unavoidable in a multi-author commentary. More careful editing would have given the book a more professional presentation.

The Task of Effective Relationships

by S.B.

Our life and ministry involves us in many different types of **relationships**. Building relationships is a key part of our ministry. Unfortunately, these relationships are not always easy to understand due to cultural, spiritual, and personal differences that we face. This lack of understanding can lead to conflict and ineffectiveness in our ability to carry out the ministry we are called to.

Conflict between individuals happens quite frequently in the country where we live. It ranges from disagreements between kids on the street to our elderly maid who has decided to move out of her son's home because of the intense conflict with her daughter-in-law. All conflict can bring stress and hurt into our lives, but none more than that which occurs between believers. A conflict that I found myself in the middle of recently served to clarify what I had heard, and to a small degree confirmed through observation, about relationships in this country. It was probably like many other conflicts that have occurred throughout the history of the emerging church here. But one issue in particular was raised that caused me to think in a different light about my role as a foreigner working with national believers. Since this incident I have seen this dynamic played out in other personal relationships of mine and of other foreigners with nationals.

Case Study

I had been meeting together with a group of five Muslim-background believers for about a year and a half when two other believers were invited to join us. One of them, "Mohammed", had been involved for a number of years with a group in another city. He had been working in our city for about a year but had only joined us in our meetings two or three times because on the weekends he would travel to meet with the believers in his home city. Then he decided he wanted to focus on ministry and be committed to the body in our city.

The other brother, "Razeg", was originally from our city but three years previously had moved to another city to work. When he returned to our city and got to know me and two of the national believers, the group invited him to join us. Razeg and Mohammed lived in the same neighborhood, so I had introduced them to one another before they started to meet with the group. They had developed a good relationship.

Before meeting with the group Mohammed had had a cordial but not a close relationship with "Said" who was the most mature believer and the unofficial leader of the group meeting in my home. He was also the one with whom I had the closest relationship. Mohammed and Said had gotten to know each other through summer Bible schools and through occasional

visits that Said had made to Mohammed's city to meet with the believers there. Shortly after Mohammed had started meeting with the group, while I was sitting with him and Said in a cafe, he told Said that he had heard from other brothers that Said thinks he is better than everyone else and they resent his prideful attitude. Taken back by this, Said asked who had said this. Mohammed wouldn't give names. Said felt that if others had problems with him they needed to come to him and work it out. He decided to go around to all of the guys in the group and ask them if they felt this way about him. All of them denied it, leaving Said to conclude that Mohammed was lying. A couple of days later I was sitting with Razeg in a café, and he began to share with me how Mohammed had made some accusations about Said. Razeg, not having known either Mohammed or Said for a very long time, wasn't sure if the accusations were true but tended to believe Mohammed. I stopped him from sharing Mohammed's accusations and decided it was time we all get together to work this out. So, the next day all four of us met and began to work through some of the problems.

In the course of our discussions, Mohammed made a very interesting comment. He said that when a national has a close friendship, he doesn't want anyone else to get too close to that friend for fear that he will lose his friendship. He is threatened by others trying to build relationships with his friend and sees it as a competition to be won or lost. So, in order to keep others

from getting too close to his friend he tries to build himself up and tear others down.

This was the first time I had heard this dynamic expressed by a national. And both Said and Razeg nodded their heads, indicating by their look of realization and expressions that they agreed with Mohammed's perception, but had not been consciously aware of it until that point.

Analysis

As I walked away from that situation, still somewhat unresolved, I began to evaluate other relationships in light of Mohammed's comment. Later Said and I had a long discussion about it and specifically how it affects the national believers. I saw more clearly

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how important relationships are and that they are for the personal benefit of those involved. Having a relationship with a foreigner brings both opportunity and status. Within the church, apart from the possible material and status benefits, it is perceived that it may also lead to being chosen as the leader\teacher, a very prestigious position in this culture. Therefore, the foreigner becomes the center of the group's relationship focus. This had happened to me even though I had made strong attempts to have national-national relationships be the central focus.

Each one tries to be as close as possible to the foreigner, oftentimes

at the expense of relationships with national brothers. Over the past four years I have repeatedly seen this lead to others making accusations against the perceived "favored" one in the group. These are always made indirectly through a third party, like Mohammed had done concerning Said. The goal seems inevitably to be to influence the foreigner. This dynamic seems to be rooted deeply in the culture, as I have witnessed it on numerous occasions with my unbelieving friends as well.

In the task of church planting this dynamic needs to be very seriously considered. **Is this what has caused the splitting up of so many groups?** I have learned that many other foreigners have experienced this dynamic and haven't really been aware of the elements at play behind what is happening. One who has been working very closely with nationals for 15 years began sharing with me some things he was just now learning about his relationships with them. I realized that he was describing exactly the dynamic that Mohammed had described to me.

A number of factors contribute to this situation. The foundational problem would obviously lie in **unbiblical attitudes.** Scripture has a lot to say about attitudes and actions such as jealousy, pride, tearing others down, unforgiveness, lack of love and trust. Our teaching and prayer needs to center on these issues very early on with a goal to see biblical patterns develop in relationships.

Other **social factors** come from the relationship dynamics that nationals are raised with. Acceptance before God and others comes through doing the right things; by works and not grace. Much effort is made to be seen as honorable and significant in the eyes of others. Many times nationals have sung their praises of themselves to me and put down those around them. The powerful forces of shame and honor are the basis of this cultural dynamic. Relationships with, and acceptance by, a foreigner who has status in the culture gives the individual significance in the eyes of others. It is important, therefore, to have the foreigner's approval. A means for accomplishing this in the church is making oneself look good by conforming to "Christian" standards in the eyes of the foreigner and tearing others down by showing how they aren't conforming to those standards.

Along with this is the element of **trust, or lack of it,** between individuals. From infancy children are appeased by lies. We have often witnessed parents lying to their children to make them stop crying or causing a fuss. This lays a foundation of mistrust and also downplays the wrong of lying in order to obtain a justifiable end. Therefore deception and lying are viewed as justifiable to build oneself up in the eyes of the foreigner and tear others down.

Economic issues enter in as well. A large percentage of the churches here is made up of young single men and women, many of whom are unem-

played. Relationship with a foreigner provides a possible opportunity for employment and/or financial and material benefits. In a society with high unemployment and little hope for a good job, it is understandable that this is a strong factor.

Solutions

Are there **practical steps** we can take early on in our relationships with national believers to alleviate the problem of the negative relationship dynamic with the foreigner? Although I am still wrestling through this whole issue, I have some thoughts that may help stimulate our thinking and allow us together to find some solutions.

It is evident to me that a lot of the problem stems from the foreigner's ability to provide **material benefits**. The foreigner is often seen as a means for getting out of the quagmire of unemployment and hopelessness in which the national finds himself. So it is crucial that we set guidelines early on that will diminish this element in our relationships. This is probably the biggest area which many of us on the field have struggled with. When we have so much in comparison with many of those we are ministering to, it is difficult not to respond to requests for financial aid. But, this is the area I personally feel is most crucial for us to respond to properly and biblically if we are to see a strong independent national church.

I believe we need first to develop **biblical guidelines for our financial giving**. It is important for us to observe and follow the NT churches' example

of how they used their finances. It appears that in the early church they gave in two situations. The first was to those who were poor and without the means to work (Rom 15:26). This would also include what we would label relief work in the case of natural disaster (Acts 11:27-30). Note in 2 Thess. 3:10-13 that those who could work but chose not to were reprimanded, not offered financial help. Secondly, they also gave to the work of the ministry that the apostles and evangelists undertook (Phil. 4:15,16). In these instances churches helped those in need within their own fellowship, other churches which were in need, and the work of the ministry. I find no record of the apostles giving to meet financial needs in the churches they had planted.

Defining poverty is not always easy. I would define it as referring to those who are without the basic necessities of life like food, clothing, and shelter (James 2:15-16). Currently I don't work with any believers who fall into this category. Some may not have much, but they do have what is necessary to live. More commonly I find there are those who don't have work and are still living off of their families. In such cases I think we should **assist them in finding employment** rather than giving money directly to them. This can be done in a number of ways. We have given responsibility to one or two people in our city who are focused primarily on helping nationals start small businesses. These business ventures are well thought through, have strong accountability, and are

structured as small bank loans that are manageable to be paid back. These projects are designed to help local believers provide for themselves and are developed outside of the context of the local church and its ministry. Since God has commanded us to work, we feel that the issue of financial need can best be handled in this way. Giving money can damage people. Helping them to be employed to meet their own need and the needs of others and the church can only build them up.

A good article to read in relation to giving financially to nationals is *Should We Stop Sending Money* by Robertson McQuilken. He deals more in depth with the lack of biblical support for and the practical experiences of the dangers of foreign funds supporting the work of national believers and the national church.

Another principle that seems consistent in the NT church was that regular gifts were given by the church and with a known purpose (ex.—to help the poor—Rom 15:26, to assist a ministry—Phil 4:15-16). It is good to **develop the practice of giving as a group** to help others, no giving being done under the table. This helps us develop trust and unity as a group. If everyone is aware of the need and as a group have decided to help, we are encouraging unity and a spirit of family. Having the group involved in knowing about and meeting the need may also limit those who try to take advantage of the foreigner. In this way no one is receiving money or special benefits without the others' knowledge. Usually

when a national believer comes to me requesting money I tell him that it is the responsibility of the church to meet the needs of its members. Therefore, the financial request needs to be discussed, not with me the foreigner, but with the body of believers as a whole. If the person requesting the financial aid isn't seriously in need he usually won't go to the other believers. If he is serious it is beneficial that the national believers make the decision as to how he is to be helped. In most cases when I have taken this approach, either the person has not pursued the matter or he has been helped by the other believers.

From the very beginning it is important to encourage the national believers to be involved as a group in meeting one another's needs, rather than letting them expect just the foreigner to give. **It must be taught and applied that the church is responsible to care for the needs of its members.** The biblical principle of giving is very important. I think we rob our national brothers of blessing and their responsibility if we as foreigners meet their material and financial needs. They, as well as we, are responsible to give according to their ability and beyond their ability (1Cor. 8:3). In applying this principle we give value to the national church and help them to become independent. The more we can help national believers responsibly care for one another, the more they will learn to depend on one another. Practicing these biblical guidelines may help eliminate some of the elements that cause nationals to draw

close to us rather than to their national brothers.

I do not advocate not giving anything to nationals, but think it is important to give in the right ways. We must **avoid giving in ways that will cause dependence** and which will subvert the responsibility and blessing of national believers. Giving through an organization or person who is loaning money for small business ventures is one way we can give responsibly. I also believe that we have a responsibility to help those who are truly in need, as described in Jam. 2:15-17 and explained earlier. On some occasions we have helped impoverished people outside of the local church context with an urgent medical expense, food, or clothing. It is important to consider each situation in terms of dependency and the responsibility of the local Body.

Before moving on I want to share briefly some things I have used in responding to financial requests. I have found it very helpful to **be up front with nationals** and let them know the struggles we have in giving to them. I have tried to explain to them that I don't like to give money because it may destroy our relationship and our relationship is too important. I have also told some brothers that I desire that they learn to depend on God and not me for support. I have also shared that Muslims believe that the only reason a Muslim becomes a disciple of Jesus is because he receives money or some other material benefit, and I want them to be able to tell their Muslim friends that they follow Jesus without

such. With the national body of believers we have also encouraged them to minister within their means as the Lord provides and not compare themselves to those who may have more resources and can have a larger ministry. All of these explanations have been well received by my friends, and it has cut down on many asking me for money.

One other element that is important for developing godly relationships is **modeling trust and unconditional love** in our relationships. Many times I hear statements of mistrust and doubt from believers about other believers. It is easy to begin to fall into the trap of doubting others and questioning the hearts of people. I appreciate guys like Barnabas who, when in the beginning the disciples doubted Paul, came to his side and stood with him (Acts 9:26-27). And, when Paul didn't want John on the second journey, Barnabas stood up for him and gave him a second chance (Acts 15:37-39). If we truly trust God we can trust others as well. God is able to compensate for the times we may trust someone and make a mistake. We are bound to get hurt sometimes, but if we are going to see trust built up among our national brothers we need to model it ourselves.

Gossip and criticism of others is a deadly sin in destroying relationships between people. We need to be careful how we talk about other people to believers. I appreciate this country's societal principle that you don't talk about someone when that person isn't present. We need to purposely strive to

build up others and overlook faults. It is easy to focus on weaknesses but if we take the time to **focus on the good in people** I believe attitudes can change. Helping our national brothers to do this can only strengthen their relationships. An exercise to try might be to ask them to write down something they appreciate about another brother with whom they don't have a strong relationship and give it to that brother to encourage him. Also, develop the habit that if you have criticism about someone the first person you say something to is the person with whom you have the criticism. The group needs to work together on this as well. It is important that believers not only avoid tearing others down but that they also refuse to listen to that sort of talk from others.

Because they grow up in a society where lying is acceptable and acceptance by others is conditional, we see many believers here with problems of insecurity. Our **relationships** need to be **characterized by truth and unconditional love and acceptance**. Only as our national brothers feel unconditionally accepted and loved by God and other believers, and as they learn to deal with one another in truth, can there be the security in their lives that will free them up to not have to compete for the acceptance of the foreigner.

The **meeting place** also seems to have a great significance in effecting this dynamic of trying to be close to the foreigner. As many others have suggested, I think it is wise for us to begin in a national home or move the church

out of the foreigner's home as soon as possible. I am finding that this forces nationals to take the initiative as well as bonding them together. The believers here do not yet have a home to meet in apart from a foreigner's residence. But we decided together that during the warm and dry months it is better for them to meet outside on their own with no foreigners present. This limits the contact with the foreigner and if the group is going to continue to meet together it will strengthen the relationships between the believers. As the group has matured we have also removed ourselves from the meeting time even when the group meets in our homes.

Two of the believers in our city have a friend who is very seriously considering following Jesus. We are encouraging them even now to think about how they will continue to minister to these guys outside of the context of foreigners when they become believers. Our goal is to equip them to minister and allow God to use them in their context to see the church built up.

**Agree together as foreigners
and nationals that no one will
benefit from the foreigner in any
way other than spiritual help**

Another thing we are currently doing in our situation is to agree together as foreigners and nationals that no one will benefit from the foreigner in any way other than spiritual help. For example the foreigner will provide resources like books and tapes, or provide teaching and training, or be a resource to funnel names of BCC

students or other seekers to national believers. The foreigner is teaching and training one or two of the national leaders who in turn will teach and train the others. This obviously limits the contact that the foreigner has with the whole group of national believers. Although this seems to be a more effective model the potential problem we see and have experienced to some extent is that other nationals are aware that the national leaders have contact with the foreigners. Their conclusions sometimes are that the leaders are receiving material benefits which they themselves aren't receiving. Especially for new believers coming into the group this can create the same problems we have discussed earlier with jealousy.

Conclusion

The main experience that we have had in our ministry context is working with young single, mostly unemployed, men and women. Most of what I have discussed in this paper comes out of that context. As we pray and minister we are asking God to give us families. I believe as we see more **families** come to Christ **who may be more secure with jobs and some level of financial stability** this dynamic that we observe now may become less and less powerful. I would be interested in talking with those who may have more experience with Christian families and see if some of what is being discussed here is

felt more or less strongly as it is with young single men and women. Also, one strategy which we are trying to implement more in N. Africa is to **focus our ministry in existing social structures where relationships between nationals are already strong**. As we see that happen more in the future we may also see less tension in our relationships.

The purpose of this paper was to help us look at our relationships with nationals and learn to relate to them in ways that will help the church to be established more securely. We need to be aware of some of the cultural patterns in the relationships we are building. As many of us have already discovered there are not always easy answers to some of the struggles we face. There are pros and cons to each model that we develop in our ministry and situations we find ourselves in can vary greatly from one to another. I'm hopeful that as we dialogue and share experiences we will be able to walk in greater wisdom and determine how to minister more effectively to our national brothers and sisters. Love covers a multitude of sins! May we continually seek the Lord's guidance and not allow our own desires and fleshly wisdom to keep us from being used for His glory. I welcome your input and wisdom as we seek to see his church established throughout the Arab world.

Women's Ministries Section (Book Reviews)

Invest Your Heart: A Call for Women to Evangelize Muslims, by Julia Colgate, published by Frontiers, Mesa, Arizona, 1997, 83 pages. Reviewed by Donna Smith

This book looks at attitudes as well as methods in reaching out to Muslim women. The author encourages us to invest our lives in genuine, compassionate relationships with Muslim women. Her suggestions come from her own experiences of 7 years among an unreached Muslim people group in Southeast Asia.

The following titles of the four sections of the book give a feel for the author's heart and vision: *Enjoy Muslim Women As You Build Loving Relationships*; *Tell the Truth to Muslim Women*; *Trust Jesus to Love Your Muslim Friends*; and *Continue to Love Muslim Women As They Make Spiritual Decisions*. Each section concludes with thought-provoking application questions for personal use or team discussions.

Julia Colgate observed patterns in her ministry to Muslim women and patterns of their response. Her system of evaluation is given in detail in the Appendix. Her chart is a helpful debriefing tool to show the felt-needs of the women of her people group and which methods seemed to touch their hearts. She comments on the value of this chart, "It not only showed me my methodologies but my preferences, my true areas of giftedness, my weaknesses and my failures." Such an evaluation helped her to adjust and to see that her priority was not

simply to win women to Christ but to nurture them to maturity in Christ.

I particularly recommend this book for its prayerful, loving approach to ministry among Muslim women. As workers among these women we can benefit from the challenging questions and perceptive analysis of ministry.

Lifting the Veil: A Handbook for Building Bridges Across the Cultural Chasm, by Trudie Crawford, published by Apples of Gold, 1997, 33 pages. For additional copies, write: Lifting the Veil, P.O. Box 49757, Colorado Springs, CO 80949, USA. Reviewed by Donna Smith

Trudie Crawford has given us a gold mine of suggestions for ministry to Muslim women. She has written her little book out of a love for Muslim women and a concern for witness to them by believing women. A central part of the book points to the importance of storytelling to communicate truth. To this is added the suggestion that such a message can carry great influence when it is sung. She concludes her section on sharing the Gospel through stories and parables by giving examples of the overwhelming difference that prayer makes.

Although this book is limited to one woman's personal experiences, it stimulates us to build our own bridges to our Muslim women friends. Her concluding challenge is to use hospitality and feast times (both Muslim and Christian) to share truth. Our part is to be "changed, prepared, available and obedient" so that Muslim women will come into God's Kingdom.

Book Review

Called From Islam to Christ: Why Muslims become Christians, by Jean Marie Gaudeul, Monarch Books, Crowborough, 1999, ISBN 1-85424-427-2. Reviewed by Elsie Maxwell

A very encouraging read and challenging book. *Called From Islam to Christ* is a collection of testimonies of Muslims from various countries and backgrounds who have been called to Christ over the last hundred years, some of whom are still alive and living among us. The author's definition of a call is a rather ambiguous one. He states that God calls and guides everyone, but not all perceive his call. He also acknowledges that some feel a definite call to Islam. But the purpose of this book is clearly to show how a real 'call' has led some Muslims to leave Islam and embrace Christianity.

Gaudeul relates their stories, showing the prime element which drew them to the Gospel, e.g. the attractiveness of Jesus, the things they observed Christians doing (praying, worshipping, the sacraments), a thirst for truth, a hunger for community, for forgiveness, or a search for God himself. The author wants the reader to appreciate the unique way God calls many of our Muslim friends and that they do respond and come to Him. He briefly addresses the issue that many believe the genuine conversion of Muslims to

Christ is not possible. Use of the Scriptures figured prominently in the conversion of many. The struggles of the convert for acceptance into the Christian community are mentioned, as is the issue of persecution. Some of the testimonies are of martyrs.

J.P Gaudeul is a White Father who has worked in Africa but presently teaches in Paris. Do not be put off the book by the author's Catholic faith. He writes openly and very honestly about the position of the Catholic Church in relation to Islam. He admits that it does not always present Christ as it should, even giving wrong impressions of the truth. Yet people have been attracted to come and ask about Christ at Catholic Churches as well as at other churches.

The bibliography is amazingly inclusive: 87 books and articles about converts are listed and 78 on the topic of conversion. The book summarizes many stories which previously only appeared in the French language. It will encourage you in praying and witnessing to Muslim friends. You will be more sensitive about how your daily actions and words can be far more effective than you may have previously considered and make you more mindful of how you are being seen by your Muslim neighbours. I personally found it a good and valuable read.