

## BOOK REVIEWS

***A Passion For The Impossible: The Life of Liliat Trotter*** by Miriam Huffman Rockness, 1999, 299 pp, Harold Shaw Publishers, Box 567, Wheaton Il., 60189, USA. Reviewed by Joyce Wiebe

The person who emerges from the pages of this well-written biography is one formed by beauty and suffering as well as the inherited qualities of strong ancestry and the influence of the social circumstances of her time. Liliat Trotter was born into a high class, well to do family who sought to nurture in her all of the traits of strong values, high ideals, mental discipline and inborn talent imbedded in her character. Through it all she became a highly sensitive instrument uniquely suited for God's work in the particular place (Algeria) and generation (1853—1928) in which she lived.

This book was particularly interesting to me on a number of scores... how she dealt with the calling of Mission over against a life of Art (she could likely have become a famous painter if she had pursued that career); how she faced the hurdles of language, culture, religion and just plain everyday living in her chosen land of service; how she put vision into practice in the expansion of outposts of evangelization across Algeria; the place of prayer and spiritual warfare in the battle against Folk Islam and occult practices; her solution in facing stress and attacks of the Enemy; how she confronted Islam; her methods for reaching children and women (far ahead of her time in some instances as she developed story-telling

techniques especially geared to them, devised methods to reach entire families and made available times of retreat and refreshment for the women folk); her use of colorful literature (hundreds of tracts and booklets which she herself wrote and illustrated); her relationships with fellow workers as the Band grew (the few male and younger people in particular) and the opening up of doors for short term workers (!); her heart for nurturing young believers by every means possible (including short Bible schools held in safe places); her contribution to the mission to Muslims across organizational and geographical lines (which saw her attending inter-mission meetings in Egypt and Europe, and contributing from her own vast experience and vision)—and many more.

No doubt the secret of it all can be summed up in the phrase '*a passion for the impossible*', which, in turn, implies an ever growing faith and daily deliberate dependence upon the Strong God whom she experienced throughout her life as her Bulwark and Guide.

She was, indeed, a leader. A leader in vision of what she believed God's purpose was for Algeria and in the method to accomplish it. Her positive view of the setbacks as well as the advances in the work; her acceptance of the seasons of 'helplessness' as well as of 'power' in various situations which confronted her over the years; her untiring work and travels; her zeal for expansion, reaching out farther and farther into the untouched villages and

towns were all a challenge and demonstration to those around her of her passion and faith. And many were they who followed in her train.

It is regrettable that a couple of consistent errors were not caught by the editors — namely the spelling of the word *zaouia* (meaning ‘fraternity of Sufis’) which was inaccurately written *zaouria* throughout the book. Also, the North Africa Mission was rendered North African Mission whenever it was mentioned in the text. Possibly these errors would not bother anyone but an old NAM missionary who had served for many years in North Africa! Throughout the book I found myself comparing the ‘thens’ and the ‘nows’ — not much difference in many cases as far as circumstances and obstacles are concerned. Islam is still a formidable foe. Maybe what is needed ‘now’ is a Lilius Trotter, inexhaustible and indiscourageable, full of vision and faith with a deep knowledge of God — a woman (or man) of God with a *Passion for the Impossible!*

My heart was challenged for what God can do in the Muslim world. And I think yours will be also as you read the story of one who chose to follow God and His eternal purposes above all else in life.

***Natural Church Development: A practical guide to a new approach***, by Schwarz, Christian A., 1998. 3d ed. Moggerhanger, UK: British Church Growth Association. ISBN: 0-948704-36-5. Reviewed by David Greenlee

Christian Schwarz’s book is the most refreshing church growth work I have read in recent years. Based on a study of more than 1000 churches in thirty-one countries<sup>1</sup> he offers no prescriptive methods or cookbook approaches. Instead, he seeks underlying principles involving both the quality of the life of the church as well as the size of the church, which can be supported through sound research and tally with sound theology.

**Eight “quality factors” were identified which showed the greatest correlation with numerical growth:**

1. Empowering leadership
2. Gift-oriented ministry
3. Passionate spirituality
4. Functional structures
5. Inspiring worship services
6. Holistic small groups
7. Need-oriented evangelism
8. Loving relationships

To clarify, point 2 refers to service according to God-given spiritual gifts. Point 5 refers to the experience of participants, not outsiders or “seekers.”

**Three theses, he argues, are established by this study:**

1. The differences between growing and declining churches in all eight quality areas are highly significant. Thus, growing churches have, on average, a measurably higher quality.
2. There are, however, exceptions to this rule; churches which grow numerically, but have a below-average quality index. Quantitative