

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 countries¹ 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

growth is apparently attainable by methods other than the development of the eight quality factors.

3. There is ONE rule, however, which applies without exception among the 1000 churches surveyed. Every church in which a certain "quality index" (65 of a possible 100) or more was reached for EACH of the eight quality characteristics, is a growing church.

He likens this last insight to a barrel with eight staves. You can only fill water up to the level of the shortest stave. You can make the others as tall as you want, but the water level will never go above the shortest.

Can we make a church grow? Schwarz avoids both the "hyper-spiritual" and the "hyper-technical" extremes. Citing 1 Corinthians 3:6 he suggests a middle ground which recognizes the planting and watering activity of humans, but that only God can actually give growth. Following this, ten action steps are suggested, which includes reference to a church profile analysis tool available from the publisher.

Although the book does not demonstrate that the eight principles can be extended to the Middle East, comparing them with my own research and the insights of others experienced in this region suggest that they are valid.

One key point should be noted. If we seek to bring change in a specific church regarding any of these eight principles, it should be to strengthen the weakest one. Like a good diet for a child or fertilizer for a field, growth does not result from an over-emphasis

on one nutrient, but a balanced mix of the essential elements.

This book, and other materials, including an instrument you can use to measure a church's "quality index" in these areas, are available in the US from:

ChurchSmart Resources

350 Randy Rd., Suite 5
Carol Stream, IL 60188
U.S.A.

Tel ++1-630-871-2598

Fax ++1-630-871-8708

E-mail: ChurchSmart@compuserve.com

Or check www.cundp.de/international
for other national distributors.

Footnote

1. USA, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, South Africa, Central African Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Greenland, Spain, UK, Ireland, Norway, Finland, Russia, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Denmark, Austria, Czech, Croatia, Slovakia, India, Malaysia, South Korea, and Australia.

Bible Pathway (*Tariq al-Kitab al-Muqaddas*), a new 607 page Arabic-language through-the-Bible commentary published by Bible Pathway, P.O. Box 20123, Murfreesboro TN 37129-0123. Reviewed by W. Evans

Tariq al-Kitab al-Muqaddas was translated in Egypt directly from the English *Bible Pathway* and completed with the excellent editorial assistance of Voice of the Truth Ministries in the United