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PO Box 4006, Worthing, West Sussex BN13 1AP UK

Parables, Proverbs & Plots Tools for Muslim Evangelism by Abu Atallah

Introduction

Stories, parables and proverbs are an essential part of the tapestry of Arab culture. So, they should and can be a fundamental component of our evangelistic strategy in communicating the Gospel to Muslims.

Arabs devote considerable effort to using their language creatively and effectively. Leslie J. McLoughlin, an Arabic specialist, says,

Westerners are not everyday given, as Arabs are, to quoting poetry, ancient proverbs and extracts from holy books. Nor are they wont to exchange fulsome greetings Perhaps the greatest difference between the Arab approach to language and that of westerners is that most Arabs take pleasure in using language for its own sake. The Sahara, or samara (evening entertainment) may well take the form of talk alone, but talk of a kind forgotten in the west except in isolated communities such as Irish villages or Swiss mountain communities-talk not merely comical, tragic, historical/pastoral, etc. but talk ranging over poetry, story telling, anecdotes, jokes, word games, singing and acting. Colloquial Arabic, (Levantine), pp.2-3

The whole culture uses stories to teach children and communicate ideas. I still remember the stories my grandmother used to share with me, including 1001 Arabian Nights stories on TV and radio and especially the religious stories during Ramadan. We Arabs spend hours and hours sharing stories about family, friends, politics and religion. Culture and tradition are passed on via

stories and proverbs. To understand Arab culture you need to be part of their story world.

Muslim Imams utilize stories very well. They use many of the Hadith stories in the body of their sermons. Though they do not use everyday experiences, they do use stories of the Prophet and his companions' experiences. The Hadith, as tradition, is a form of storytelling about the prophet and the early believers. Muslims always like to read and listen to *Qisaas Al Anbia'a* (the stories of the prophets).

In Arab villages men gather nightly for what is called *haflat samar*. These gatherings preserve the intellectual life of the community by recitation of poems and the retelling of stories. When a village patriarch begins with *marrah ayyam al-Sultan* (once in the days of the Sultan), or *marrah ayyam al-Rum* (once in the days of the Byzantine), or *marrah zaman* (once upon a time), the whole village listens.

In *Women in the City of the Dead*, a book which I have found very helpful, the author, Helen Wilson, says, "when women meet in the evening, everyone seems to be talking at once but all ears are tuned in to the flow of conversation, listening for a sign that a tale is to be told. Customary modesty and demure attitudes get lost in the telling of tales. Bawdy, gaudy images spice each story as matter of course. Among themselves, behind closed shutters, women can say what they want."

Listen and Learn

In order to be effective storytellers, we first need to be story learners. We need to be students of the culture, to visit and sit with people and learn their

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stories. I have made it a point to write down cultural stories to use as illustrations to explain the Gospel Truth. As I sat with Arab people, listening and observing, I gradually came to understand something of the background of the traditions which govern their lives and the problems facing young people in a society which is opening for the first time to Western influence. The result was a revealing and intimate portrait of family life in a changing world. In our ministry to Arabs our priority is to listen. Only then can we understand where they are coming from, where they are at and what their area of need really is. It takes patience and skill to listen to that degree.

How can we learn the stories of culture? I will answer with a proverb. *He who lives with people 40 days either becomes one of them or departs from them.* We have to be immersed in the culture, to become part of it. Another proverb says, *Ask the experienced one and not the physician,* or *Ask the experienced person while not forgetting the physician.* Another says, *Knowledge is in the breast and not in written lines.* We need to absorb the culture in order to learn the lore and utilize it to explain the biblical message. You need to befriend a few people to the point that they will help you by sharing the stories and explaining them to you. Kenneth Bailey has illustrated this exact point in his books; *The Poet & Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes*. The videos, *God is love* (Allah Mahaba) and *The Prodigal Son* (Al-Ibn Al-Dhal) underline the same point.

Storytelling: The Use of Stories, Proverbs and Parables in Evangelism

T. W. Manson, in his book *The Sayings of Jesus*, defines parables this way:

A parable is a picture in words of some piece of human experience, actual or imagined. As such it is a work of art. Further, this picture portrays either an ethical type for our admiration or reprobation, or some principle of the rule of God in the world, or it does both things at once ... In actual working, then, every true parable is a call to a better life and a deeper trust in God, which things are but the Godward and manward sides of a true religion, the obverse and reverse of the one medal. p.80

This is a very helpful definition of what we are trying to accomplish by using parables, proverbs and stories. Essential to all storytelling is that the ordinary and extraordinary are interwoven into a rich tapestry which represents an alternative view of everyday life. Tales divert, warn, entertain and justify. Everyone has a story and is willing to tell it.

Stories, proverbs and parables can be used as tools in pre-evangelism, evangelism and discipleship. At this point I will concentrate only on evangelism. Stories and proverbs are one of the most essential and beneficial means and methods that I have used and seen used in evangelism in various Arab countries. Children love the stories that I share, as do adults. Most of the times that I visit my Muslim friends we get to talking in stories. I remember spending many hours just sharing stories.

People will always listen to wise stories and remarks. But you must earn your trust before people will listen to you.

You have got to use stories creatively. I use stories from everyday life, stories people can identify with. I avoid using names of people present, however, so as not to be accused of gossiping.

We must use illustrations which come out of the culture and everyday life of our Muslim friends. Egyptian stories, for example, are different from Lebanese stories. We need to be sensitive to the culture that informs the story. An urban setting is different from a village setting. Educated people are different from simple people. We need to find stories that are compatible with the culture we are in, and which are relative to our discussion. I have always kept track of the most helpful stories and written them down. I obtain the stories through listening and reading magazines, newspapers and books. If the stories are helpful but not from the same culture, I adapt them by changing the names and the cultural context.

I prepare beforehand the most frequently asked questions by Muslims. Then I prepare stories and proverbs and parables from the Scripture, everyday life and my own experience which relate to those questions. So, as I address the questions that people ask, I can share a story with them. As they listen to stories they are less prone to argue and debate the points of the story. As I go on with the relationship, people begin to understand the Gospel message. On one occasion when a relative of the family came to ask the same old questions, I did not have to answer him. His Muslim family answered his questions by using the same stories that I had used earlier with them. This is

what I mean that stories really help people understand more effectively.

My mother also memorized many proverbs and had one for every occasion. The best book of proverbs in Arabic that I have seen is called *The Folk Proverbs*, by Ahmad Tymour Basha, published by Ahram Centre for Publishing and Translation in Egypt. The book contains 3,188 proverbs. The book *Kalilah Wa Dimnah*, which contains stories of animals that teach moral and ethical standards, is also very helpful.

I have used proverbs to bring humor and laughter to the discussion while stories fleshed it out with depth and reality. Proverbs help me as an ice breaker or an opener to discussions, or to alleviate and lighten the intensity of the conversation. I have also used them to illuminate and provide examples of the subject we were discussing. So often quoting proverbs makes spiritual truth come alive. It illustrates in a minute what may not be clear after ten minutes of logical presentation.

We are finding now in the twentieth century that stories and parables are great for preaching. Jesus used them 2000 years ago. Christ's parables were and are still very relevant to Middle Eastern culture. I have also seen people use the whole Scripture as one story from Genesis to Revelation. The story of the Bible is very interesting for people to listen to.

We have also used stories in video form. The two videos that I have used most are *God is Love* (Allah Mahaba) and *The Prodigal Son* (Al-Ibn Al-Dhal). They are based on the parables in the Gospel according to Luke and they mean a lot to people. I ask beforehand if I can

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bring a video with me for all of us to watch, We have dinner (9 pm) and then watch the video. After watching, they ask questions about it. It is very helpful for them to hear stories from their own context or an Egyptian popular story telling about honour, generosity and sacrifice. It makes the task of communicating the Gospel much easier.

I also use object lessons [non-religious—otherwise I may end in the Folk Islam trap of superstitions concerning certain objects] to explain issues. As I was drinking Arab coffee, for instance, I thought of the coffee cup as an illustration. The outside of the cup is clean and lovely looking but the inside is blackened with coffee grounds. So I used it to illustrate that we have to clean the inside because what is inside is what defiles the body. So we need more than ceremonial washing, more than doing the right stuff, We need internal cleansing. We need to be constantly learning and searching for ideas, stories, and proverbs to illuminate our message.

Telling Your Own Story

Begin by learning how to share your own story of faith in a way that the people who are listening can understand what you mean. We also need to learn to share stories from our life experience. As I got to know people better, I found that they were not primarily interested in the corruption of the Scripture or even the Trinity but in how I lived my daily Christian life.

Books

Dubai Tales, by Muhammad Al Murr, (translated by Peter Clark), Forest

Books, London, Boston, 1991; also from the same author *The Wink of the Mona Lisa and Other Stories from the Gulf*, translated by Jack Briggs, London House, 1994.

Mother without A Mask, by Patricia Holton, London House Motivate Publishing, 1991.

Women in the City of the Dead, by Helen Wilson, Hurst & Company, London, 1992

The Folk Proverbs, by Ahmad Tymour Basha, published by Ahram Centre for Publishing and Translation in Egypt, 1986. The book contains 3,188 proverbs.

Also stories by Naguib Mahfouz, the 1988 Noble Prize winner, like *Children of Gebelawi (Awlad Haritna) El-Harifish Miramar, Midaq Alley and Al-Qushtum*. Most of these are in English.

Follow-Up of Media Contacts as a Tool of Evangelism by J.A.

A Vital Link in the Chain

One of the beautiful aspects of evangelism is that it involves a number of encounters. No one person's witness or no single exposure to the truth is solely responsible for you coming to faith. Rather you and I can point to many different experiences, which are like links in a chain. Under the orchestration of the Holy Spirit, God uses each link to draw us to Christ.

The follow-up of Bible correspondence course (BCC) students in North Africa illustrates this principle. Media ministries perform a valuable role in attracting people to the gospel, allowing them to gain a basic understanding of spiritual truth away from the eyes of a hostile environment. Through radio and now Sat-7, a seed of interest is sown. Personal Bible study through a BCC introduces the student to the Bible and gives a first chance to read a gospel account of the life of Christ. Some are attracted and continue, showing spiritual interest. Others drop out or filter everything through their Islamic perspective.

But media alone can take them only so far. At a certain point there needs to be **direct personal contact** to continue the process. Without this, students will often discontinue correspondence and become frustrated. Although Jesus is attractive, they don't see how to follow him in an Islamic society; they don't know of any other Christians and have no way of initiating contact with one if

they did. Others drop out as their many questions aren't easily dealt with through correspondence. Time delays and postal interference also take their toll.

This is where **personal follow-up** is so crucial. In-country workers or visiting contactors from the media center have the important task of meeting and befriending the student. The relationship initiated and can develop in any number of ways according to the student's needs, spiritual understanding and true intentions. The goal is not only to win the student to Christ, but to get him or her launched into a new pattern of life. Students need to be able to feed themselves spiritually and be integrated into a body of believers. Great wisdom and care are necessary in the step of introducing them to another national believer.

Here's a very positive example. Mohamed, a young fellow from an isolated village at the foot of the Atlas Mountains professed Christ through radio and correspondence. His name was passed on to a worker who makes regular trips in that area. He wrote to Mohamed as a friend of the media center with which he'd been corresponding, set up an appointment and visited him. After hearing a very clear testimony of faith, he decided on the spot to take Mohamed to meet another believer he knew in a neighboring village. Then these two Moroccans visited another BCC student in the area! None of the three had ever met another Moroccan Christian before.

Of course, not everything is so rosy. Many correspondents are needy and jobless, seeing little hope of improving

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their situation. Western workers, sometimes missing the cultural cues, can be fooled and wind up investing in someone who has a totally different agenda-to go abroad or to pass on information to the police. One student professed allegiance to Christ after a number of weeks in Bible study, then said that he'd originally made contact as an informant for the police!

BCC Follow-Up and Church Planting

Over the past years this method of evangelism has been widely used, especially in Morocco. It has surely borne much fruit as anywhere from 50-70% of those professing Christ today have come to faith through BCC study and follow-up. At the same time it is important to evaluate this strategy in the context of the overall goal of seeing the establishment of strong, self-supporting, nationally-led churches. How successful has it been?

From my experience in Morocco, the results are mixed. A small number of house fellowships have sprung up in the major cities primarily as a result of BCC follow-up. Most have the following characteristics:

1) The church is made up predominantly of single males. Radio and BCC ministries target the youth, with the bulk of students aged 16-25. Between 80-90% of them are single males; very few are married. There are more and more girls enrolling in BCC study though few complete more than 2 or 3 courses at which point they might be ready for follow-up. The issue isn't lack of openness but rather their limited freedom under the watchful eye of their father or older brother.

2) It's a literate church. Because BCC course work demands literacy, non-readers, which make up more than 60% of the population, aren't able to benefit. This is naturally reflected in the church makeup.

3) Its members are predominately from lower income backgrounds and have job needs. BCC attracts many who are students with their future still before them as well as some who are out of school and unemployed. Many get involved in BCC in the first place hoping that it might somehow lead to a job situation. With only a few already well-established in a good paying job, this contributes to an inherent instability in the group, as job concerns will force some to move on.

4) Dependency on missionary homes for meetings. BCC doesn't usually attract married men or heads of households. Nor does it attract those who are generally able to lead their families to Christ. Because most singles live at home under their Muslim parents, there is a general lack of meeting places.

5) Deep, committed relationships among its members don't come naturally. Because Moroccans generally don't make a lot of close friends, their natural source of security comes from within the family circle and one other 'bosom buddy'. While BCC often fosters the linking of pairs or 3's together in a strong relationship, the sense of corporate identity as a new family takes time to build.

From the above points, one might conclude that BCC follow-up should be discarded as largely ineffective in the planting of strong churches. Certainly, if taken as a strategy all by itself, it's not going to do the job. Rather, it's a tool that must be used with other forms

of outreach, especially those which target heads of households. BCC follow-up is turning out tomorrow's leaders. We mustn't forget today's.

I will conclude with a very positive development. Historically, BCC follow-up has been a missionary thing which nationals didn't want to get involved in. The feeling was to let the missionaries do the sifting and let older nationals take over later when the new convert showed they were for real. The past few years have seen a big change in this. All over the country Moroccans who came to Christ through BCC (and naturally believe in it) are now doing follow-up themselves, writing the letters, making the contact and getting involved in the evangelism and discipleship process from the start. Let's pray that God will multiply their efforts in reaching their generation for Christ!

The Day of Bad Luck by BR

We walked into our Moroccan neighbor's house and greeted each of the family members. After taking off our shoes, we sat down on the couches that lined the walls, I with the father, Miloud, and my wife, Pat, with the oldest daughter, Drissia.

We were far enough apart that we couldn't hear each other's conversation, but we were each talking about the same thing. A neighbor was very sick in the hospital. I was speaking with Miloud in Arabic, and Pat was speaking with Drissia in French.

"Farid is very sick," said Miloud. "He can't even talk. I just came from visiting him. He can only make signs with his hand."

"May God heal him," I said. "What does he have, and when did he get sick?"

"Three days ago he was at work, and suddenly he fell over. They took him to the hospital, but he can't talk," Miloud replied.

"The poor thing," I said. "What did the doctors say was the name of the sickness?"

"I don't know," answered Miloud.

"Sometimes older men have heart attacks, and sometimes they have something which occurs in the brain," I said. "A blood vessel is blocked and injures part of the brain, because there is a lack of blood. Depending on what part of the brain it injures, the person's body is affected. Some people can't talk afterwards. Often, they can't move one side of the body." I drew a little diagram of the body and how different spots in the brain affect different body functions.

"That's exactly what happened with Farid. He can't talk, and he can't move the right side of his body. He can only make signs with his left hand," said Miloud.

"That must be it then," I said. "Tell me his family name and his room number. I am a pastor, and I will go visit him. In our religion the pastor goes to visit someone sick and sits with him and prays for him."

"Okay. We do the same sort of thing," replied Miloud.

This was a seemingly normal conversation. Pat's conversation with Drissia was quite different. As we compared notes, it became obvious that two world views were at work.

"Our neighbor Farid is in the hospital and is very sick. He can't even talk," Drissia said to Pat.

"What happened to him?" asked Pat.

"Evil spirits have caused this," she replied.

"Really?" said Pat. "How do you know it is evil spirits and not some sickness?"

"Because he can't even talk," replied Drissia. "Also, it happened to him on the day of bad luck. It happened last Friday, the 13th."

"What can be done for him?" asked Pat.

"Well," said Drissia, "not much in the hospital. Evil spirits don't respond well in hospitals. They like it there and they often gather together so that they are very strong. You can't do much against them. If he was at home, then we could do something. Farid's boss made a mistake by taking him to the hospital. He should have brought him home. This sort of thing happens all the time

in Morocco. We would call the *fqih* (a private Koranic teacher and sometimes a healer). He would read the Koran."

"Is there a *fqih* here in this neighborhood?" asked Pat.

"No. But there's one in a city about 3 hours away," said Drissia.

The next day Miloud was going to the hospital, and I asked if I could go with him. He agreed and we ended up in a waiting room with several other Moroccan men waiting to visit Farid. I was sitting next to Farid's oldest son, who is in his early twenties.

"Did you know that I am a *fqih* with the Christians?" I asked him.

Although I had never talked with him before, he said, "Yes. You are a pastor."

"When someone is sick or possessed with evil spirits, we Christians visit him and read the Bible and pray for him," I said. "Of all the prophets, there is one who was well-known for healing sicknesses and casting out evil spirits. That was *Sidna Isa*. (2) He raised the dead, healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, and cast out evil spirits."

"And of all the prophets, there is only one who is still alive-*Sidna Isa*. All the other prophets are dead, but he is alive in heaven. (3) For this reason, his name is powerful. He is still powerful to heal and deliver from evil spirits. There is a verse in the gospel which says: 'With power and authority he commands the unclean spirits and they come out.' His name is powerful, not because of magic, but because he is alive. All the other prophets are dead, but he is living."

I then took out my New Testament in Moroccan Arabic and read him Luke 4:31-36 and Mark 1:32-34. I offered to

pray for his father. He didn't say much, although he seemed appreciative of the words I'd said. Although Miloud heard this conversation, he didn't react much.

Later we all went in to see Farid. He was lying down, unconscious, with all sorts of tubes in him. The son left, leaving myself, Miloud, and two other men with Farid. Miloud muttered a number of phrases I couldn't understand, opened a package he had been carrying and took out a bottle with Arabic writing on it. He poured out some of the liquid into a plastic container and took cotton he had brought and with the help of the other two men started to rub this liquid all over Farid's body.

I read what the bottle said: "Oil of the seed of blessing-for treatment and healing." Finally the son peeked his head in the door to see if they were done. (Maybe he was keeping a look out so that no nurses would know they were spreading oil all over his body. I don't think there was anything medically dangerous about what they did, but I doubt that the nurses would have approved).

As we were all leaving, the son said to me, "Do you want to stay more?" I wasn't sure what he wanted, but maybe this was the opportunity to pray for Farid.

"Come with me," I said to him. We stood next to Farid's bed, and I put my hand on his shoulder and prayed in Jesus' name for his healing, whether from sickness or evil spirits or both. We then went back to the waiting room.

We sat there a while. Every so often one of the men would say things like:

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"Everything is from God." "Healing comes from God." "Everything is submitted to God." "May God bring healing." These words were intended to be a comfort rather than a dry fatalism, comfort in the sovereignty of God, trying to encourage the son and themselves to submit to God's control.

Although I don't know how these phrases are received by the ones suffering, whether as a real comfort or simply as trite words that do little to heal, I couldn't disagree with them. God is the one who is in control. His will, not ours, is ultimate and healing comes only from him. But there was no mention of God's love, comfort, closeness, or care.

For all the supposed submission to God's will, the conversation showed that, far from a resigned submission to the will of God, the people were desperately trying to manipulate God and the spiritual world to change the situation.

The men started to discuss what had transpired. They had already called in three *fqihs* from the area. Two had come to the hospital and read the Koran over Farid. One of them said that even though Farid couldn't talk, he uttered two words: "Allah, Allah."

"Really?" I asked. Miloud said he didn't know for sure. Apparently the *fqih* was alone with Farid and later told the people that he had uttered these two words. Did the *fqih* just say that in order to encourage them and appear worthy of his fee? This *fqih* also said that they needed a *fqih* who knew not only how to read and say all the proper phrases in Arabic, but also someone who knew how to translate them into French. These evil spirits were French spirits;

they didn't understand Arabic. For that reason they apparently didn't respond to his treatment.

The second *fqih* told the people that the evil spirits were no longer in Farid.

"So, the spirits are gone, then?" I asked.

"Well, that's what he said," said Miloud. All the men agreed that if the spirits were really gone, then Farid would be able to talk and open his eyes. Since he wasn't, then the spirits must still be there.

The third *fqih* didn't come to the hospital but to the house. He wrote out three things that needed to be done in order for the spirits to leave. First, Farid's body needed to be anointed with a mixture of oil and water once a day for three days in a row. Second, the family needed to take generous servings of couscous to the local mosque to be eaten by the believers. Third, the family was to buy a chicken without any mixture of colors in the feathers. The chicken was to be slaughtered, the intestines put in a clean envelope and carried out to the forest. The rest of the chicken was to be cooked and taken to the mosque on Friday to be eaten by the believers.

Tuesday had been either the second or third anointing of Farid's body with oil. Two days later he died. Cause of death: stroke.

During that intervening time I tried to develop a Christian response to some of these things and to discuss this with Muslims I met. Everyone had heard about Farid's illness. Although most people wouldn't bring up with me the fact that they thought it was evil spirits, I always said to them, "People say that

evil spirits did this to him.” When they saw that I was not just a Western materialist, then they were freer to talk about their own world view.

Pat and I visited Aziza, who speaks French more than Arabic. “Did You hear about Farid’s being sick?” we asked her.

“Oh, yes,” she said. “He lives right above my parents. This thing happens sometimes in Morocco. The person can’t talk. On one side he can’t move. I don’t know how you say this in French.”

I thought she was talking about how to say that the person can’t move. “You mean paralyzed?” I asked.

“Yes, he’s paralyzed,” she said. However, that wasn’t what she wanted to say.

“People say that he was attacked by evil spirits,” I said.

“Yes! That’s what we say. That’s what I mean,” she replied.

“How do you know it’s evil spirits?” I asked.

“He doesn’t talk,” she said. “Plus, the *fqih* opens the Koran above the sick person and reads it. This enables the *fqih* to see what’s in the sick person, and he can tell if there are evil spirits.”

“There are evil spirits (4) everywhere,” she continued. “For this reason you must say *bismilleh* (in the name of God) every time you take a step or walk, especially if you walk in a puddle, since the spirits like to be near water. Saying *bismilleh* protects us.”

At this point I repeated the same basic points concerning Jesus which I had shared earlier with the oldest son. I concluded by saying, “for this reason,

those who trust in him don’t have to be afraid of evil spirits or say *bismilleh* at every step. Jesus protects us from the spirits.”

I am concerned to speak to people where they are. I don’t know if Farid had been attacked by evil spirits, (4) but everyone else thought he had. To speak only about the medical aspects of sickness and say that God can heal completely misses where the people are living: in fear and bondage to spirits, some real and some imagined. I need to communicate to them that Jesus Christ has had victory over evil spirits, that he protects those who believe in him, and that he is able to deliver from evil spirits as well as heal physical illnesses.

I also need to be careful as to how I approach the topic of Jesus’ being able to heal. I could just announce that Jesus, the Son of God, has power in himself to heal. But at this point I would lose my audience. They would argue that God does not have a Son and that all the prophets could do nothing on their own, but were mere men acting with the power of God.

This would take the focus off the point I am trying to make in this very close-to-home area of evil spirits. By stressing that only Jesus is alive and that all the other prophets are dead, I want them to see that Jesus is greater than Mohammed. There’s something about Jesus that is special and unique. As they reflect on this and have other conversations with me later, I hope that the Holy Spirit will move them to be attracted by Jesus and to wonder in a similar way as the disciples: “Who, then, is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41). As they know more about

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Christ and his life, they will be more prepared for the question: "Who do men say that I am? ... Who do you say that I am?" and for the Biblical answer: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt. 16:13, 15,16).

I spoke with another couple about Farid's situation. The wife was convinced that it wasn't good to leave him in the hospital. "They should take him home, and then we could give him the medicine of the Arabs."

"What's that?" I asked.

"We put sulfur on his body," she replied. I related to this couple what the different *fqihs* had said.

"Do you Christians believe there are evil spirits?" the husband asked.

"Yes," I said. "We believe there are evil spirits. But to cast them out, we don't have to put oil all over someone's body or bring the intestines of a chicken out to the forest or bring couscous to the mosque. God is all powerful. If he wants to heal the person he will. We pray and ask God to do that. God doesn't need oil or a chicken or couscous. He's not hungry. What does he want with the intestines of a chicken? Why does he need them?"

The husband, although he certainly believed in evil spirits, didn't have much confidence in the *fqihs*. "Yes," he replied. "That one is a liar who said to do all those things with the chicken. He doesn't know what to do, but he's afraid people will find out, so he says to do all these things, and people do them."

"God isn't like a machine," I continued, "where we just push a button and he does what we want. Push 'heal' and he heals. Rather, he does His will, not our

will. If he were just a machine and we pushed his button, we would be the gods and he would be the person."

I added another angle: "We Christians try to help people when they are sick or when they have problems with demons. But we don't do it for money. Think of how much money these people spend on the *fqih*. They're desperate and will do anything. They call one *fqih*, and he comes and says something. They pay him, but nothing happens. Then they call another and pay him and nothing happens. Then another."

"In Morocco, when someone is really sick, the people say, 'Oh, you must take him to the *fqih* way over in Marrakech,' " explained the husband. "When you go there, and that doesn't work, they say, 'Take him to the *fqih* in Fez. He'll know.' They spend a lot of money."

"Look, why would you take a sick person to see a *fqih* all the way to Marrakech or to this city or that city?" I asked. "God is almighty and powerful. He's everywhere. Does God live in Marrakech? Does God live in Fez? No, he's everywhere."

"The words you say are very good," said the husband. "But people don't want to hear them."

I went on to explain how we Christians help people and pray for them, but not to get money. We shouldn't make money from people's problems. I read Luke 4:31-36 and continued with the explanation I had used previously.

When I heard of Farid's death, I went to the family's apartment, as is the custom among Moroccans, to convey my condolences. Men came and went all

evening. The women came and went in another apartment.

As we men sat mostly in silence, one would say things like: "Everything comes from God." "Death is inevitable. It happens to all of us." "Everything is submitted to God." "May God have mercy on him." "It was written."

I prayed for a chance to speak at a later time about these events. I wondered what the three sons thought. Did anyone see the contradictions between "everything is from God" and taking the chicken's intestines to the forest? How much do they fear being attacked by evil spirits? Does their stated attitude "It is written" really reflect their inner feelings or does it just cover up a fear of the dark side of the spiritual world?

What does the oldest son think of me, a Christian, having come to visit his father and pray for him and now to come and convey my condolences? Does he think, 'The Muslim *fqih*s couldn't do anything. The Christian *fqih* couldn't do anything either. There's no difference.' This had seemed like such a good occasion for the Lord to show his glory and show that Christ is more powerful than Islam, but nothing like that happened. How would the Lord use this situation and me in it for his glory and for the advancement of the gospel?

As I left the house, I paused by the son with whom I had spoken in the hospital. "Some day if you would like to talk about these things or would like someone to listen to you, I'm available," I said to him. "These moments are very difficult. When my grandfather died, I was very angry, against God, against the world, against everything. If ever

you want to ask any questions, whatever they are, I'd be happy to listen to you."

He seemed appreciative. I'm praying for opportunities to minister the love and gospel of Christ to this family.

Endnotes

1. It is difficult to translate the word "pastor" into Moroccan Arabic. The Moroccans don't have a history of a Christian minority living among them, as do some countries in the Middle East, so some Christian terms are unknown. I try to use Islamic terms that help convey what I am. I asked a number of Moroccans who know me for some suggestions. Most used the word *fqih*. An orthodox *fqih* is probably quite close to what a pastor is. He is especially known for knowing and teaching the Koran. He brings "God's word" at births, circumcisions, weddings, and funerals. He visits the sick. He prays. However, some *fqih*s are also involved in magic and using Koranic words in magical ways. Thus, when I mention that I'm a *fqih*, I clarify that I don't do magic, that God forbids that.

2. *Sidna Isa* is the term that Moroccans use to refer to Jesus. Although most Christian Arabs refer to him as *Yesoua*, most Moroccans have no idea what this word means. Even when I use just the Koranic term *messih*, people are often still confused. Whenever I use the term *Sidna Isa* (our lord Jesus with a small "I"), people understand right away that I'm talking about Jesus. Although some Christians object to the use of this term, communication is more important at the beginning stage than exact historic precision that leaves people confused.

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3. The prophets Elijah and Enoch (whom Muslims also call prophets) are also alive, having been taken up directly into heaven without experiencing death. I want to contrast a dead Mohammed with a living Jesus. Muslims don't think much about Elijah or Enoch (whom they call *Idriss*), but they all believe that Jesus is alive in heaven and will come back on the last day to rule. One Muslim-background believer in Christ likes to push Muslims to think by asking why was Jesus the one who had a miraculous birth and not Mohammed? Why did Jesus do all these healing miracles and not Mohammed? Why is Jesus alive and Mohammed dead? Why it is Jesus who is coming back to rule and not Mohammed?

4. The Arabic word here is *jinn*. "Evil spirits" isn't the precise translation. In the Muslim world view *jinn* are spiritual beings which are different from angels and demons. All angels are good, and all demons are bad. Some *jinn* are believers (Muslims), and some are not. Thus, some do good, and some do evil. In common practice, people want to protect themselves from attack by the *jinn*. Thus, "evil spirits" conveys the popular sentiment.

Farid could have been possessed. The physical manifestation was a stroke. The medical world is equipped only to deal with physical illness. Yet, even the clear medical determination of a stroke says nothing about the spiritual dynamics behind it. Job had real live boils all over his body. We know from Holy Scripture that these physical boils had a spiritual cause.

Bridging the Gap by Georges Houssney

[The following article is reprinted from *Reach Out to the Muslim World*, a publication of Horizons International, Vol. 8, Nos. 2&3, 1996. It challenges us concentrate on a simple presentation on Jesus, the only true bridge to God, depending on the convicting power of the Bible as applied by the Holy Spirit, rather than dependence on use of supposed theological or cultural bridges between Islam and Christianity. Editor's note]

Bridging Concept

A bridge is a link that connects two opposite sides of a gap. In applying it figuratively to Muslim evangelization the word **bridge** refers to an approach or method by which a person communicates his faith. Common beliefs are considered bridges which can be used to span the gap between Christians and Muslims. An often used phrase is "building bridges through friendship." Behind this concept is a presupposition that a Christian worker must begin with the familiar before introducing the unfamiliar. This is interpreted to mean we must begin with a Muslim's beliefs and culture because that is "where he is." Therefore, the Quran is used extensively in this bridging process.

This article is an invitation to rethink our concept of building bridges in Muslim evangelization. The concept of **bridge** must be redefined, for it must not be thought of as a link between two different religions. Rather, it should be viewed as the **right path** to safety. The Muslim who is living in darkness can cross it to find the great light of God. There is only one bridge, Jesus, who

reconciles man with God and brings the prodigal home.

False Bridges

It is an indisputable fact that Muslims, unlike atheists and people of other world religions, do believe in God as creator. They acknowledge many facts about Christ, revelation, Jewish prophets, heaven, hell and much more. Hypothetically, these are bridges we can and should build on. Yet, in reality I find that lingering in these "gray area" has serious dangers. We run the risk of a mental syncretism between the two belief systems. It has been my experience and practice that changing a deeply-rooted belief is best done not by directly confronting it but by presenting a completely new and fresh alternative, because the goal is transformation rather than modification. For example, rather than beginning with the Islamic concept of Jesus as only a prophet and building on that to bring them to an understanding that he is God, I would simply share from scripture the supremacy of Jesus and let them come face to face with his glory. As they find themselves attracted to his divine character, the need to debate with them disappears.

If Islamic beliefs were legitimate **bridges**, why is it that Muslims remain the most difficult to reach? Although the bridge building approach has been used for decades, relatively few Muslims have responded by coming to Christ through this method. Could it be that the very bridges that seemingly span the gap actually widen it? Or perhaps these are no more than false bridges which deceive the traveler by distracting him

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from the only bridge that leads the lost to safety!

No matter how similar to Christianity Islamic teaching may appear to be on the surface, the discrepancies are great. It is a temptation to remain in the comfort zone, acknowledging the positive aspects of Islamic teachings. But our ultimate purpose must be to go beyond that "gray area" to communicate the gospel of love, hope and salvation. We must call Muslims to come to Jesus, the only bridge between God and man. The gap is only bridgeable as Muslims understand that they are sinners and need the Savior. Before a Muslim can grasp the implications of the death of Jesus and his victory over darkness and sin, he must realize his lostness and catch a glimpse of the hope of eternal life.

How will Muslims be convinced that Jesus is the only bridge? They need a road map and signposts along the way. At every junction, Muslims have to make the choice whether they want to linger in the familiar, their own religious beliefs and practices, or whether they will take the "narrow" way that leads to life.

The Road Map

The Word of God is the most powerful tool for leading people to God. It is the road map to knowing God and understanding his plan for our lives. No ministry is ever fruitful without a strong emphasis on scripture. I have seen and heard more stories of people coming to the Lord through the Bible than through any other means. When people see the light through God's Word, they are more likely to value the Bible for

the rest of their lives. I am surprised at the many "tools" of evangelism that exist. On principle some people do not give a Bible or a portion of it because they are convinced it is not "the right approach." However, the Bible is all that God gave us, and although other tools are helpful, it is the most effective and the only book that carries with it "deep conviction." God's Word, which to some extent has lost its value in the "Christian culture," has incredible impact on the first time reader. You know what I mean if you have not been brought up with the Bible read to you in church, in Sunday School and at home.

Muslims are already disposed towards revering God's Word. It is immaterial what Muslims think about the authenticity of the Bible. Arguments about how it was collected and the evidence of the authentic manuscripts can never ever match the power of the Word when a Muslim begins to read it. I will never forget the Saudi passenger who sat beside me on a flight from New York to Jordan. For a couple of hours he argued with me as to why the Bible could not be trusted. I ignored his arguments completely and began to read passages from the gospels. His eyes literally bulged when I put the Arabic New Testament in his hands. He began to read the passage I pointed to and went on to the ensuing chapters. Since my debater had forgotten me, I took advantage of his new distraction and enjoyed a long nap. When I woke up he was still reading and was ready to discuss.

Equally unforgettable is a recent incident with Shiite Muslims in south Lebanon who wanted me to debate their imam. As I entered the home of

the organizer of the debate to agree on the terms of the debate, I began to read selections from the Bible, including the Psalms. He and the dozen others in his living room were so awed that they "shut up" and listened. We need to believe in the Word of God as the greatest and most effective tool for evangelism and beyond. Otherwise we will be looking for all kinds of other tools which are inferior no matter how well they are written or how beautifully illustrated. No human being has ever been able to match the power of God's Word, which speaks for itself:

For the Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

After the sinner comes to Christ, the Word of God becomes the most useful tool for:

...teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (1 Timothy 3:16,17)

If we do not express the value of God's Word to our listeners, we cannot expect them to value the Bible. And without the Bible they cannot find the bridge from death to life.

The Signpost

Without the evangelist, no evangelism takes place. The road map in itself is often not enough to lead the lost to where they need to be. The evangelist opens the road map, explains it and points the way to the bridge. The evangelist is therefore a signpost to guide the traveler. This is clearly stated in Romans 10:13-15:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'

This passage clearly puts the responsibility on the Christian worker who is sent to preach the good news of the gospel. Jesus gave us the marching order to go to the world, to preach, teach, and make disciples. There is no substitute on the earth for the evangelist. The role of the evangelist has been overlooked in favor of more impressive means of communication: literature, radio, TV, videos, and mass campaigns. I cannot emphasize this point enough. We are God's ambassadors:

We are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. (11 Corinthians 5:20)

God often uses a number of people in the life of a lost person to bring him to a saving knowledge of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 3:5,6, Paul explains:

What is Apollos, and what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe - as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow ... For we are God's fellow workers, you are God's field, God's building.

As Christian workers, we are signposts who lead people to the only bridge, Jesus. Someone appropriately said that "we are the only gospel that some people may ever read." God has chosen us to be his spokespeople. We bear the

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major responsibility to spread the Word and to point people to Jesus, who is the only true bridge between God and man.

The Bridge

The Bible tells us that there is *one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (I Timothy 2:5)*

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is not other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 3:12)

If we use all kinds of methods, theories and approaches as bridges, we undermine the fact that Jesus is the only true bridge. If we present Jesus as the only bridge, our message will be simply announcing the good news that God loves Muslims, that they can have a personal relationship with him, that their sins can be forgiven, that they can have eternal life through Jesus, and that they can become children of God and join his international family of believers. As new believers, they need to know that the truth will set them free from their insecurities and fears and that Jesus will give them all he promised, including joy, peace and eternal life.

Conclusion

The great gap is not between Islam and Christianity but rather between God and man. Islamic ideas which seem similar to Christian beliefs are far from being reliable bridges in communicating the gospel to Muslims. Embedded in these beliefs are deceptions which hinder Muslims from seeing the truth.

Bridging advocates are motivated by a desire not to offend their Muslim friends. They are convinced that a Christian should have a generous attitude towards Muslims, acknowledging

the truths they stand for. If we remove the offensive aspects of the gospel, such as the cross and the deity of Christ, we have not helped our Muslim friends to hear the truth. And it is truth about Jesus which leads them to their Savior.

It is possible to use common beliefs as starting points. We cannot and should not ignore the Muslim's recognition of God's existence, his acknowledgment of Jesus and many other biblical facts. If the two sides of the bridge are made to look like nothing more than a choice between two religious systems, the Muslim has no real motivation to cross to the other side. To cross the bridge the Muslim needs to be convinced that he will find what he has always been looking for. On the other side he will find refuge and salvation. We must attract Muslims to the truth in Christ rather than modify their belief systems by making them understand our own.

As messengers of the Good News our approach should be to share it simply as news of God's love and his plan for the salvation of the world. Our message needs to be fresh and attractive.

We must call Muslims to come to Jesus, the only bridge between God and man. Before a Muslim can grasp the implications of the death of Jesus and his victory over darkness and sin, he must realize his own lostness and catch a glimpse of the hope of eternal life. The great gap is only bridgeable by the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin. It is *not by might nor by power by but my Spirit*, says the Lord. (Zechariah 4:6)

We are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. (II Corinthians 5:20)

What About the Children?

The Spring 1977 Issue of SIMNOW contains a sobering report entitled *Children of the World*. Although ministries oriented specifically to children are extremely vulnerable in Muslim lands, should not the following statistics from that report have some effect on our evangelism strategies?

There are as many as 100 million street children in the world today. (*United Nations Children's Fund, Crisis*, p. 24)

The words *child* and *children* are mentioned 1,957 times in the Bible (Authorized Version).

One-third of the world's population (1.8 billion people) is under 15 years of age.

Eighty-five percent of those who convert to Christianity do so between 4 and 14 years of age. This global age segment is commonly referred to as the *4/14 window*, a people group in its own right that is most receptive to Christ's message of salvation.

In WAR alone, over the past decade 2m children have been killed; 4-5m have been disabled; 12m have been left homeless, more than 1m have been orphaned or separated from their parents; 10m have been psychologically traumatized. (UNICEF)

Fifteen million children under the age of five die every year worldwide, two-thirds from readily preventable diseases. (UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*, 1996, p.45)

BIRTHS are projected to level off worldwide by the year 2000, except for sub-Saharan Africa, where the continuing increase in population will result in the annual number of births reaching

35 million by 2025. (UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children*, 1996, p.56)

One million children enter child prostitution every year. Worldwide, an estimated 10 million children are victims of today's sex industry. (UNICEF)

"More than 200 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 in the developing world are working," the UN says. Seventy five percent work six days a week or more, and 50 percent work at least nine hours a day. (*The Associated Press*, Dec. 12, 1966)

Approximately 2 million girls suffer female genital mutilation every year, most in Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sudan. UN Children's Fund, *The progress of Nations*

Gleanings

The bi-monthly bulletin of the *Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity* (ISIC) is one of the best publications I know for keeping abreast of, and reporting on, activities of present-day Islamic movements.

The April-May 1977 issue concentrates especially on treatment of Christian minorities in several Muslim-majority countries. Excerpts of this report follow:

Egypt In December 1996 the Egyptian Army bulldozed a Christian complex outside Cairo, the first time that Christian property has been destroyed by the army rather than by Islamic extremists. In January the army returned and destroyed hundreds of yards of stone wall around the property.

In February nine Christians were shot dead in a church in Upper Egypt. Subsequent, but related, deaths brought the total to 15. Never before in Egypt's modern history have Islamic militants stormed a church.

Pakistan In February some 30,000 Pakistani Muslims attacked the Christian-majority village of Shanti Nagar. Sixteen churches, several other Christian buildings and many hundreds of Christian homes were burnt. This was by far the most serious of attacks on Christians in Pakistan since the nation gained its independence fifty years ago.

Indonesia Indonesian Christians have suffered the destruction of over 200 churches since 1992, fifty of them in 1996. Already this year 5 churches have been destroyed and another pastor killed.

The lot of ex-Muslim Christians in Muslim countries is even more difficult

than that of recognized Christian minorities. Evangelism should, therefore, always be coupled with prayer for the suffering Christians who are its expected fruits.

Other Tidbits from the Muslim World In the last year about 40 Muslims, including village leaders, have become Christians in Niger. ISIC, April/May 1997

The number of Iranian Christians worldwide is thought to have grown more than tenfold in the 18 years since Iran's Islamic revolution. ISIC, 4/5 1997

Although South Africa is only 2% Muslim, it is a prime target of Islamic leaders. 'We are going to turn it into a Muslim state,' claimed one. ISIC, 4/5 1997

"Women's faces are a source of corruption for men who are not related to them." Statement from the Taleban Attorney-General's office, justifying why Afghan windows should be painted over to prevent unveiled women being seen from outside. TIME, March 31, 1997

And in the Western World Church of England clergyman Rev. John Papworth, under severe criticism for his reluctance to condemn poor people who steal from big stores, responded, "I am called a crank. May I remind you, a crank is a device used by engineers to create revolutions."

Book Reviews

Bayn al-Aql wal-Iman (Arabic translation of *Our Reasonable Faith*), by Herman Bavinck, 4 vols., Maadi, Egypt: International Publications Ltd., PO Box 74, Maadi, Egypt 11431, 1995. Price: LE2.50 (\$0.74) each for Vols. 1 & 3, and LE3.50 (\$1.03) each for Vols. 2 & 4. All four: LE12.00 (\$3.65). Reviewed by Joseph Sikaly, translated by S. Vishanoff.

This is a substantial work of theology. It was written in Dutch, translated into English under the title *Our Reasonable Faith*, and then translated from English into Arabic and published in four attractive paperback volumes of moderate size. It studies theological issues beginning with revelation and the nature of God and man, going on to a rather full discussion of Christ in his two natures and the Holy Spirit. Its theological stand is evangelical. It does not enter into controversy in defense of the truth, and its thought is not greatly influenced by theories and opinions whether old or new.

In the first volume, the work studies God's revelation of Himself (general and special revelation, as to extent and content). God is the highest good of mankind, and this good includes both man's understanding of the good and his actual enjoyment of it. When the author treats man's ability to appreciate art and the marvels of creation, he enters profoundly into the human soul, sounding its depths and reaching to its far regions. Yet he always builds on a firm theological foundation, taking texts of the Bible as the basis of each truth he expounds.

The second volume treats the nature of God the Father, the first person of the Trinity. I wish that this section provided direct answers to many of the questions raised by our friends in the Arab Muslim world, but the book was not written for them. It takes an inclusive view, with a wide horizon, and so does not engage in controversy. Despite this limitation, it does answer the questions of many readers, and of all who ask themselves questions such as "Where in the Bible is the proof of the Trinity?" They will find, for example, that even Christ's conception shows that God is One in Three Persons.

In the second part of the third volume, one is struck by the analysis of the divine and human natures of Christ. The Person of Christ is not a mere idea or image formed through imagination: He is a real person who revealed himself at a specific time and appeared as a specific human being, Jesus Christ. By this sound teaching, the author has struck a decisive blow in the issue of the two natures of Christ. It reminds one of the Apostle Paul, who before his repentance knew Christ only on a human level. But Paul's knowledge of Christ was transformed at the time of his conversion, faith, and rebirth, and so it will be for the sons of our Arab people who read this book, if they seek the truth; in these texts, which fit together so solidly, they may find the light they need to know Christ according to the Spirit. It is only natural that without this light so many people should find it hard to reconcile the prophethood of Christ with his suffering and death on the cross, and so it has been for generations.

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Reading on, we come to the section on the Holy Spirit. In previous ages the Holy Spirit came on scattered individuals for a limited time. When He was poured out on the entire Church, this was accompanied by mighty miracles. The author explains the miracles in the light of what Luke wrote in the second chapter of Acts, saying that the phenomenon was a miracle of speech, not of hearing. It was a unique event, yet Paul placed it below love. The author soars to the greatest heights of thought and expression when he describes the summit of Christ's work, when He humbled himself and came to this world, then was lifted up from us.

The book closes with a chapter on eternal life. Materialism appeals to modern man using delusions of happiness. But thanks be to God! By the coming of Christ, He has revealed the true answer to the question of eternal life: death is nothing more than the end of our earthly life, and eternal life is already present in those who believe.

Bavinck's book is an excellent resource for students of theology, whether they are engaged in formal studies or simply want to navigate the wide seas of Biblical theology. It is one of the most profound studies available in Arabic. It may be true that it does not provide a response to recent theories and heresies, because it was written before them. But it has the great advantage of not being influenced by old speculations and errors, and it does not give uncritical acceptance to views which are not committed to the revelation of God's truth as it is presented to us in the Bible from beginning to end.

When God Calls, by Miss Irene Dew, Gateway Publishing, 1996, 118 pages. Reviewed by W. Evans

This is an autobiography of a remarkable woman who was deemed as too frail and sickly to go to the mission field. She went on to spend forty five years as a missionary in Morocco, most of that time in Rabat, and much of it working alone.

The book is a collection of word sketches from Miss Dew's recollection of her life and ministry. Although following a general chronological sequence, there is considerable moving back and forth through the years, as recounting one incident triggered another memory. There are several chapters, in fact, which fill in events and details of previous chapters as memories seemed to come flooding over the author.

Miss Dew's commitment to God's call, her perseverance in pioneer ministry, her sensitivity to God's leading, and her faith shining through deep consciousness of her own weakness will refresh and challenge the reader. Her story is one of missionary work in a bygone generation and in a context unlikely to be reproduced today.

Unfortunately, the literary quality of the book is greatly diminished by numerous orthographic and punctuation errors which could easily have been corrected. It appears that the handwritten manuscript must have been read by an electronic scanner which misinterpreted multiple characters and that this was never proofread.