

SEEDBED

Practitioners in Conversation



Spring 2024, Vol XXXV, No. 1

**Introducing the Prince of Peace
to a World at War**

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Introducing the Prince of Peace to a World at War

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Editorial



Editorial: Making Disciples of the Prince of Peace

By S.T. Antonio

S.T. Antonio (pseudonym), editor-in-chief of Seedbed, serves as a church planter and a theological catalyst with Pioneers for the Middle East alongside his wife. He is a graduate of Biola University and a perpetual member of its Torrey Honors College, and he holds MDiv and ThM degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Antonio is author of Insider Church: Ekklesia and the Insider Paradigm (2020, William Carey Publishers). He is an American with a Hispanic mother and an Asian wife.



“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.” Matthew 24:7–8

Can you plant churches in the middle of a war? The remarkable disciple-making movement of the first century occurred during the so-called “Peace of Rome” (*Pax Romana*). Fast-forward a couple millennia, and the growth of evangelical Christianity in the West happened similarly in an era of Western power and freedom (“*Pax Americana*”). Perhaps security, freedom, and peace are a more conducive environment for Jesus to effectively expand his kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Yet when Jesus forecast the nature of mission between his ascension and second coming, he did not paint a rosy picture of stability and peace. Wars and rumors of wars. Persecution and upheaval. Apostasy and increasing injustice. It is in *this* context that “this gospel will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:7–14).

Jesus' prescient descriptions appear eerily timed for 2024. The horrific war in Israel–Palestine—not to mention those raging in Ukraine, Sudan, Myanmar, Yemen, Syria, Central African Republic, Libya, the list goes on—jolts us afresh by senseless, dehumanizing evil, that same evil that grieved the heart of God into regretting his very act of creation (Gen. 6:5–6). It's as if we see Cain's murder of Abel recapitulated and freshly contextualized in country after country (1 John 3:12), the earth newly flooded with fresh blood crying out to God for justice in a growing chorus hastening the final judgment.

Into this world Jesus sends us, armed with nothing but a cross and the blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:24). Into this world we are sent to announce the reign of the risen Prince of Peace, set the captives free, and unleash the yeast of God's kingdom. Perhaps it is war and instability, then, not peace and freedom, which comprise the "normal" context for the Great Commission.

Accepting reality is one thing; adapting our practice is another. An environment of global hostility and upheaval creates numerous challenges for how we carry out our task, especially in least-reached communities. The role of trauma healing, decisions to stay or evacuate, the impact of geopolitics—these are just a sampling of the practical issues we wrestle with when laboring to make disciples amidst instability and conflict.

Yet a further complication arises if our "sending nations" are themselves participants in the global conflicts, possibly even waging or enabling war against the very people we are called to serve. Those of us who are Europeans or Americans may think of ourselves as autonomous individuals, but the collectivist societies in which we live and serve view us not as isolated units but as representatives of tribes and nations. For example, we who serve Muslims may unwittingly carry the baggage of a long history of Anglo Christians invading Muslim nations, from the Crusades to the Iraq wars. Even today, the United States' support for Israel's bombardment of Gaza comes with loud, unequivocal support from many American

evangelical churches and leaders. Whether we like it or not, such realities shape the aura that surrounds us as we seek to spread the aroma of Christ to our Muslim friends in the Middle East or elsewhere.

Is it possible to disentangle ourselves from such “noise” which conspires to drown out our message? How do we faithfully represent the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), rather than earthly princes, the kingdom of heaven rather than our earthly nation (Phil. 3:20–21)? How do we integrate “peacemaking” with “proclamation,” the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18) with the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), the renewal of the family (Eph. 5:22–6:4) with the sword of the kingdom (Matt. 10:34–39)?

In this issue, fellow practitioners teach us what they have learned about making disciples in times and places shaped by war and conflict, including the particular historic tensions between Christians and Muslims:

- A Taiwanese practitioner talks about how to think about the question, “should I leave or should I stay,” when serving in a conflict zone.
- An experienced leader in trauma healing shares insights which her ministry team learned from providing trauma care to Ukrainians in the midst of crisis.
- Two Ukrainian church planters outline a proposal for reaching Muslim UPGs in Russia’s North Caucasus region.
- An Australian worker offers her analysis of Mark Durie’s polemic-apologetic writings about Islam in light of Martin Accad’s spectrum of Christian-Muslim dialogue.
- A veteran Islamics scholar and evangelist offers his mature biblical and practical reflections on his previous writings on “peaceable witness among Muslims.”
- A practitioner in the U.S. shares lessons learned from a case study of using *A Muslim and Christian in Dialogue* to start multiple interfaith discussion groups in the Chicago area.
- A mature BMB leader from Sudan whose warring heart was transformed by Christ’s love shares his story and his advice for those journeying with BMBs through identity formation.

Supplementing these perspectives, we review books on peacemaking in the context of violence in Nigeria, reconciliation between Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians in Israel–Palestine, the untold story of American missionary–spies in World War II, ministry to refugees around the world, and navigating Christian–Muslim theological divides.

The *Seedbed* archives (now available as far back as 1996) are also worth mining on these topics, including issues devoted to theological and practical implications of the [Israeli–Palestinian conflict](#) (May 2011), as well as practical case studies and reflections on [ministry in volatile times and places](#) (Sept. 2016).

As a forum for practitioner conversation, Seedbed articles and reviews are not intended to represent the views of Pioneers nor of the Seedbed editorial team, but to stimulate constructive, crucial conversations among practitioners from various organizations on high-stakes issues in kingdom advance among least-reached communities. Please liberally share articles with peers and colleagues, invite others to sign up, and charitably debate these questions in an ethos of grace and iron-sharpening-iron. We are all co-laborers in God’s field and have much to learn from each other.

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever (Heb. 13:20–21).

Wars and rumors of wars, yes. But our risen Lord holds the keys of death and Hades, and with his church, he plunders the grave.

For his kingdom,

S.T. Antonio (for the whole editorial team)

Articles



Being a Messenger of Christ in a Time of War and Peace

By Jeanne Wu

Jeanne Wu was born and raised in Taiwan. She met her husband at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where she completed her PhD in Intercultural Studies. Together they have served in the Middle East for several years, and Jeanne occasionally writes articles and contributes to books on global missions. Before living in the Middle East, Jeanne was active in Chinese diaspora ministries in Germany and the United States, and refugee ministry in Chicago. She currently serves on the board of a Chinese Diaspora mission organization, the Lausanne Global Diaspora Network, and the Seedbed editorial team.



There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens...A time to plant and a time to uproot...a time for war and a time for peace. (Ecclesiastes 3:1,2, 8, NIV)

In the past several years, friends from Western countries have asked with genuine concern about my family and the situation in Taiwan due to recently increasing tensions between Taiwan and China. It didn't help when the Economist magazine featured Taiwan as their cover story in 2021, entitled, "The Most Dangerous Place on Earth¹". Born and raised in Taiwan, I am familiar with threats and rumors of war. Air-raid drills were routine when I was in elementary school. I still remember the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis during the first presidential election in Taiwan, bringing tensions with China to a historical high. Rumors of war were on

1 <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/05/01/the-most-dangerous-place-on-earth>.

every corner, the outcome being a large wave of emigration from Taiwan. A similar scenario repeated in 2023 before the 2024 presidential election in Taiwan but on a smaller scale. Although China claimed the election was a choice between “war and peace,” the candidate of the pro-sovereignty party won the presidency in 2024. Meanwhile, most of my friends and family in Taiwan live their daily lives as usual. After Russia invaded Ukraine, some Taiwanese started to sense there might be a possibility that China would invade Taiwan.

Last year before the election, my husband and I had a short visit to Taiwan. We connected with a Taiwanese-American pastor who came to Taiwan with his family about two decades ago and planted a vibrant church. He asked about our thoughts on the increasing China-Taiwan tension. We shared our views, then he told us he believed China would invade Taiwan, that it was just a matter of time. He continued, saying that if war broke out between China and Taiwan, he would choose to stay, though it would require leaving his sending organization, since they would require all of their members to leave. Most organizations have a policy of not forcing cross-cultural workers to stay, while reserving the right to pull them out in times of crisis. The pastor told us he would choose to stay because, if he left, it would be difficult to enter Taiwan again, and he believed there would be a lot of kingdom work after the invasion.

I was impressed by this missionary-pastor’s courage and commitment to God’s calling. Our conversation stimulated my thinking toward two missiological questions: (1) Should workers stay or leave in a conflict zone? (2) Is it worth it to send workers to volatile locations in a time of instability and conflict? I will reflect on these two questions in order.

To Leave or to Stay?

It is not a coincidence the Lord eventually called me to a war-torn country. Though not a courageous or adventurous person by nature, I have always paid attention to stories and news of wars. Years ago, after

my husband and I found an apartment and signed a contract in the difficult country where we served, we waited outside the country for our first residency visa. After the visa came, we were eager to return and get settled into our new home. On the day we were scheduled to fly back, the US embassy in that city announced the withdrawal of their staff due to high tensions and the possibility of military conflict. We suddenly had a tough decision: should we fly or not? After prayers and consulting with the local partnering pastor, we decided to return as planned. We are grateful the Lord opened the door for us to stay and serve for four more years there after that incident. However, our host country was a constant proxy of regional hostile entities, with the U.S. embassy in the city we lived in being a continual target of rocket attacks during the years we lived there. Eventually, almost all workers in our city had to leave due to a security crisis.

A Time to Stay

When making decisions on whether to leave or stay, a rule of thumb for most workers is to listen to the local people's advice. If our presence will endanger them, we should leave. But many times the situation is not so clear-cut. From an organization's standpoint, it is always hard to make the call—to allow the workers to stay or to pull them out in times of crisis. If the organization pulls the workers out too early, they lose opportunities for ministry, and the workers may feel they are not obeying their calling from the Lord. On the other hand, if the organization lets the workers stay (or enter), and bad things happen to the workers, the organization could possibly be blamed. I have heard stories of both scenarios, and in past years we also faced situations in which we had to make such decisions. For example, one senior leader of our organization told us that two years before civil war broke out in his host country, some organizations pulled their workers out due to the assassination of a field worker. However, most workers who were evacuated in what was supposed to be a temporary relocation to neighboring countries did not adjust well in the new countries and lost their sense of purpose

and meaning in their ministries. Many of these workers later left the field in discouragement. In this case, the senior leader believed their organizations pulled the workers out too early.

In another example from 2023, one year after the Ukraine–Russia war, the Gospel Coalition interviewed Ukrainian Christians and field workers and reported that many churches are growing, and that Ukrainian refugees have revived churches in neighboring countries². An American worker in Ukraine told the TGC journalist, “We know where he called us to, so that’s definitely where we want to be. We wouldn’t want to be anywhere else right now.”³

A third example comes from a Korean family, fellow workers and friends of ours, who shared with us their experience of making decisions on the edge of war. When ISIS emerged, invading and taking over a major city close to them in 2014, they had to make the decision to stay or leave. At that time their city had already been flooded with refugees from nearby cities, and ISIS was just miles away. Their local friends did not believe they would stay, though this worker family had previously told their friends that they would stay with them even if war broke out in their city. By God’s grace, ISIS could not take their city, and the military was able to defend that region. This Korean family chose to stay and their ministry grew tremendously. Before the war, there was no known believer in their field, but since the war, they planted local churches and witnessed a small movement among the people group they served.

Most stories so far may seem to support the option of letting missionaries stay in times of conflict. Yet I believe sometimes it takes as much faith to leave, as to stay, if not more. Perhaps a little humility, too. There are definitely times when missionaries should leave, which can

2 Zylstra (2023), “One Year Later, Christians in Ukraine Say, ‘We Wouldn’t Want to Be Anywhere Else’” (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/christians-ukraine/>).

3 Ibid.

also be God's will. As it is written in Ecclesiastes 3:1, "there is a time for everything."

A Time to Leave

In 1949, the Communist party took over mainland China after years of civil war against the National Party. At that time, the Chinese church already had influential leaders like Ming-Dao Wang, John Sung, and Watchman Nee. Between 1951-53, the Communist regime expelled all foreign missionaries and started to persecute the local churches, putting house church leaders in jail. It might have felt like the end of Chinese Christianity at that time. Probably no one would expect that in the early 1990s, after many house church leaders were released from prison, they would gradually start the house-church movement in mainland China.⁴ We cannot overlook the way many Korean missionaries and Chinese Christians in diaspora from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and North America contributed to the development of the urban house churches later; but overall, it was a sovereign work of God.

A similar story took place in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The monarchy was overthrown, and a Shi'a Islamic theocracy was established. The regime began enforcing Islamic law, and evangelism to Persian Muslims was forbidden. Though historical Christian minority groups could still practice their faith, Muslims who converted to the Christian faith could face the death penalty. Since then, foreign missionaries have not been allowed to enter, except for some Iranian believers in diaspora and recent workers from non-Western countries. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, through dreams and visions, media ministry (e.g., SAT-7 and social media), and diaspora ministry, now many reports identify Iranian house churches as the fastest growing church in the world.⁵

4 For more of a brief history of house churches in China, please see <https://www.chinasource.org/resource-library/articles/faith-going-public/>.

5 For more stories and testimonies in Iran, please see <https://www.elam.com>.

Revelation 3:8 is a frequently quoted scripture: “See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.” Undoubtedly, this verse is very encouraging in any kind of ministry, especially in missional contexts. But the previous verse indicates that “what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open” (a message previously communicated in Isaiah 22:22). Our Lord not only opens doors, he also shuts them. However, we sometimes tend to emphasize the “open-door” part and neglect the “shutting-door” part. When God clearly shuts the door, and it is time to leave, we should leave.

In both China and Iran, God built His church amid severe persecutions and trials for the local believers. For He said, “*I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it*” (Matt 16:18, emphasis added). God does not need us for His kingdom work. It is humbling to be reminded that we might not be that important. There may be a time God chooses to use us, but also a time he does not. The popular expression, “Let go, and let God,” may well apply to missionaries in the situation when they are forced to leave. A Singaporean preacher from my home church said it well: “There is a difference between boldness inspired by the Holy Spirit and pride from our flesh when facing oppositions.” In such times, it may take faith and humility to leave our work behind. Our response in such situations should be, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (Job 1:21). The question of staying vs. leaving, therefore, is a challenging and significant question for those called to serve in times of turmoil. Another question, however, wrestles with whether it is worth it to send or keep workers in places of high stakes and conflict.

Is it Worth It?

Before we ask the question of whether it is worth it send workers to high-risk places, we may need to answer a related question first: “What do we expect in our life as followers of Jesus?” Do we expect hardship or a comfortable life? An American mini-series “Band of Brothers,” which I have watched twice, tells stories of the Allies beginning with

the Normandy landings during World War II. I particularly like a quote from one episode when the soldiers report to their leader, "We are paratroopers, Lieutenant. We are supposed to be surrounded" (emphasis mine). It was this kind of right expectation that made these soldiers fearless, loyal, and strong. As messengers of God engaging the world on the frontlines, we also are "supposed to be surrounded" by enemies—not enemies of "flesh and blood," but spiritual adversaries (Eph 6:12). What prepares us for a right expectation is a sound theology of suffering. If we have false belief and unrealistic expectation such as "bad things will not happen to good Christians" or "as long as we are doing God's work, he will protect us from all evil," then when afflictions strike us, our faith in God might be shaken. We might even lose our faith. A comprehensive study of the theme of sufferings and persecutions in the Bible will be helpful and crucial.

Challenged by the Lord

Years ago, one of our leaders prayed for us on the night when we departed for our previous field: "Lord, we know that it will not be easy to win souls for you on this field.... We will go through many hardships and pains.... But it is all worth it because Jesus is worthy." I was deeply touched by the prayer of our leader, though I had no idea what was waiting in front of me at that moment. Little did I know what he prayed would come true in the following years.

It was nearly one year after arriving in the country. We bought every piece of furniture, including the kitchen cupboards and sink, and had just started to feel at home. Then a geopolitical crisis happened. Some high-profile military commanders of hostile entities, including a few local officers, were assassinated in our city by our passport country. We were grateful that we were outside of the country attending a conference at that moment, but suddenly people started to talk about the possibility of World War III. We were told by some we should consider postponing our return to our host country indefinitely. It was a stressful time for everyone who was in the region, but I was also worried and anxious about all our

belongings in our home. I did not want to lose the furniture we just bought, as well as my clothes and food, etc. I could not sleep at night.

One night, I was reminded by the Lord of a story I heard years ago when my husband and I were serving in a different country. The story was a testimony of a Middle Eastern Christian-background believer. He and his family fled their hometown when ISIS invaded, and they temporarily settled in a neighboring country. In that country, through the local Arab Christian church, he became a true follower of Jesus. In his testimony he said, "When I was in my hometown, I had everything—house, car, and job. But I did not know Jesus. Now I left my home and lost everything, but I know Jesus. If this is what it takes to know Jesus, it is worth it!" I felt the Lord was challenging me that night: "If this Middle Eastern brother believes it is worth it to lose everything to know Jesus, don't you think it is worth it to lose everything to serve his country and help people there know Jesus?"

Thankfully by God's grace, World War III did not happen that year. We were able to return to our home after one month. Since then, whenever we leave the country, we bring important documents and items with us in case we might not be able to return. Yet I have peace in my heart, even if one day we lose most of our belongings in our beloved host country.

The Biggest Loss

From an organization's viewpoint, if an organization allows a missionary to stay or to enter a high-risk area and they lose their lives as a result of being there, the organization might assume they have made a mistake. But it may or may not have been a mistake. Either way, this kind of thinking assumes that the worst thing that could ever happen to a missionary is death. But the Lord alone has the authority of our lives and ministries. He can use the life of a missionary as well as the death of a missionary. As our Lord says,

“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12:24–25)

I am not trying to trivialize or water down the pain, trauma, and grief of the loss of life. My husband and I personally experienced all of these when losing a fellow worker and dear friend on our field recently. The loss is real.

But after being involved in kingdom work for more than a decade, I believe the worst thing that could happen to a missionary is not the loss of their lives, but loss of their faith. After our brother in Christ, John Chau, was martyred in late 2018, the news of his death went viral with a flood of negative public criticism, including from those in Christian circles. Recently National Geographic even released a documentary, “The Mission,” based on his story. I am saddened to see in this documentary how his father blamed the sending agency, and the entire evangelical mission movement focused on unreached people groups, for their son’s death. I could not imagine the amount of pressure that John’s agency has endured. I met John’s parents when attending the same Chinese-American church many years ago, and I wrote an article to respond to the subsequent criticism against his mission.⁶ Then, about half a year after John Chau’s passing, another Christian-related front-page story bothered me even more. Famous Christian writer Joshua Harris announced he was not a Christian anymore. I could not help but comparing these two cases. One person never received fame, wealth, or any other “benefits” through his faith, but lost his life for his faith, while the other gained fame, wealth, and other benefits through his faith but ended up losing his faith in this life. Yet the former was considered

6 Jeanne Wu, “They Will Reign with Him for a Thousand Years”: Exploring the Missiology of Persecution,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (2020), <https://missionexus.org/they-will-reign-with-him-for-a-thousand-years-exploring-the-missiology-of-persecution/>.

foolish. Similarly, the documentary, “The Mission,” interviewed an ex-missionary and ex-Christian who lost his faith after many years on the mission field, giving him a platform to criticize John (who lost his life for faith) and to attack the evangelical mission movement—as if this man is “the wise one.” This blunt contrast might sound like a modern-day parable. The famous quote of Jim Elliot sums it up best: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Not in Vain

In his book, *The Messenger, the Message and the Community*, Roland Muller found that the one common quality of fruitful missionaries was that they all had a “cross experience.” This was an experience of personal suffering that brought “death to self” and forced these missionaries to “cast themselves onto God.” Our sufferings are not meaningless or a waste. In the letter of James, he encouraged us “consider it pure joy, my brothers, and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance” (1:2–3). This gives us purpose and meaning as we go through trials. He continued in 1:12, “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive *the crown of life* that the Lord has promised to those who love him” (emphasis added). In the Book of Revelation, John also mentioned “the crown of life” in the context of perseverance of sufferings (the second of only two occurrences of “crown of life” in the New Testament):

I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you *the crown of life*. (2:9–10, ESV, emphasis added)

Both James and John used the Greek word *stephanon*, which means crown, in the phrase “the crown of life” (*ton stephanon tes zoes*). It may be noteworthy that the name of the first martyr in the New Testament is Stephen, which also comes from this same Greek word, “crown.” Did John and James have Stephen in their minds when they wrote these verses? I do not know. But what I do know is that Stephen was indeed “faithful unto death,” and he surely received the crown of life.

I love the worship song, “Your Labor is Not in Vain,” whose lyrics could be touching for any field worker. When almost all foreign workers had to leave our field due to the aftermath of our friend’s martyrdom, I was heartbroken and devastated. But the Lord reminded me what the Lord did in China and Iran. “Your planting and reaping are never the same. But your labor is not in vain,” as go the song’s lyrics. Our friend’s sacrifice will not be in vain. It is indeed worth it because our Lord is worthy.

Concluding Words

We live in a time of conflicts and turmoil. The global pandemic seems to finally be over, but the increasing geopolitical conflicts such as the Taiwan-China tension, the Ukraine-Russia war, and the war between Israel and Gaza and related Middle East conflicts cast an even greater shadow over the world. Today, the world is facing the challenges of plague, wars, natural disasters, and its consequences. “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens ... A time to plant and a time to uproot ... a time for war and a time for peace” (Ecclesiastes 3:1,2, 8, NIV). Before we make the decision whether to pull out workers in a conflict zone, or ask the question whether we should go there or not, it is essential to have a sound theology of suffering, especially in times like this. In this way, we learn to listen to the Lord’s voice, discern when He shuts or opens the door, and trust in His timing and sovereignty.

The time is evil, and the Lord is near. *“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully*

to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Questions for Conversation

1. The author mentions that it requires faith to stay in a volatile location and that it requires faith to leave, if that is what the Lord is calling one to do. What factors are involved in determining if a worker should go or stay? How might one determine if the Lord has left a door open for ministry, or if he is shutting the door for a time?
2. The author mentions the need of a theology of suffering to have a correct expectation of what life will be like in a war-torn location. She mentions John 12:24-25; James chapter 1; and Revelation 2:9-10. What other scriptures come to mind for developing a personal theology of suffering?
3. What losses have you experienced that have shaped your personal theology of suffering? Have you grieved them in community and with the Lord? What losses did Jesus suffer for the kingdom? How can we find comfort from Jesus when grieving loss?

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Planting Seeds of Healing in Times of War: Insights from Trauma-Informed Crisis Communities

By Tricia Stringer

Tricia, her husband, and three children have lived in West Africa, South Asia, and the United Kingdom for the past 25 years as Scripture Resource Strategists. They now work for SRV Partners and live in Alpharetta, Georgia, where Tricia is the Director of Strategic Initiatives and leads SRV's trauma-healing ministry, Multiplying Hope.



Thirty Ukrainian pastors and church members sat in the hotel conference room in Poland. Some of them were happy to be there—happy to finally be out of the war zone their home had become. Others looked haggard and anxious, constantly looking at their phones for the next update on the war. Others looked guilty, as if they should be ashamed that they were sitting in a beautiful hotel instead of worrying that the next loud noise would destroy their home. My colleague and I stood before them, armed with our trauma-healing material, and backed by the prayers of our trauma-healing team and several churches. We knew that our Ukrainian brothers and sisters were hurting, and we knew that the pain was just beginning.

It was September of 2022, and the war in Ukraine had dragged on for months with no end in sight. Our ministry, Multiplying Hope, had been asked to run one of our trauma healing trainings with a group of Ukrainian refugees. Though we had worked with many survivors of trauma, we quickly realized that our normal healing-group structure would not meet the needs of people who had not only recently experienced trauma, but

also who would definitely experience it again. So, for the next four days, we walked alongside our Ukrainian brothers and sisters. We sat with them. We wept with them, and we just listened. Our Ukrainian friends learned how to listen to each other. They learned that what they were feeling was normal. They learned how to deeply engage with a Bible story and allow themselves to feel alongside the characters of the Bible. But perhaps most importantly, some of them formed a supportive community they would return to in the months ahead.

Over the past couple of years, as war and disaster have followed war and disaster, our trauma-healing ministry has faced new questions: What does it look like to walk alongside hurting people who are in the middle of war, and know that more hurt will come? How does walking alongside someone while war is still raging look different than more traditional trauma-healing paradigms that address the trauma *after* it happens?

The Ukrainian conflict is not unique. Among the least-reached communities among whom we often make disciples, war and conflict abound. It is imperative to address trauma in the communities to which we are called, bringing Jesus' light to every dark corner. While we do not have all the answers, our experiences may shed some light on best practices when supporting people in the midst of war. Our most significant learning was that people in ongoing crises need supportive communities. We will describe how we have structured these communities and discuss some of the best practices we use when facilitating such communities.

Creating Healing Communities in Crises

To begin with, it is important to establish that people in ongoing trauma do need trauma-informed coping skills. God created us so that our body, mind, emotions, and spirit can work together seamlessly. However, all of us have past experiences that create gaps in the way these parts of us work together, due both to the sin in our lives and the

simple fact that we live in a fallen world (Amy Butler and Megan Taylor, personal conversations with author, April 2020).¹ Trauma widens those already existing gaps between heart, soul, mind, and body to the point that our normal coping mechanisms are no longer sufficient. When we experience trauma or high stress, the logical and the emotional parts of our brain no longer communicate well with each other. While we will not explore the full details of the neuroscience of trauma in this article, we can say that trauma causes us to think and act in ways that seem irrational.² Over time, those thoughts and actions become ingrained in our lifestyle, working in similar ways to the way muscle memory works in our physical bodies. The longer we continue thinking and acting in these ways, the more difficult it is to reverse unhealthy patterns, even when we get to the place in our lives where we want to begin addressing our past trauma (Van Der Kolk 2015, 56–60).

Thus, trauma-informed coping skills can help people understand and endure on-going traumatic situations. In the September training, for example, we discovered that the Ukrainian pastors still found it helpful to learn basic information about trauma through Bible stories. During one of our activities, one of the pastors found himself sitting on the floor, acting out the story of Job. As he pretended to sit in ashes and scrape himself with pottery, the pastor found himself being offended when another actor, Job's "wife," told him to curse God and die. He found himself even more hurt when Job's "friends" accused him of causing his sorrow and pain by sinning. At that point in the activity, we stopped the action and asked each participant how their character felt. The pastor playing Job began weeping, and it took him a minute to answer. "This is exactly what some of my friends have said to me. They've told me that Ukraine's problems are caused by our pride." He felt hurt, embarrassed, ashamed,

1 GapRelief, <https://www.gaprelief.com/international>.

2 For further reading on this, see Van Der Kolk 2015, Oatley 1999, Siegel and Solomon 2003, Mar 2004, and Stephens 2010

and deeply betrayed by the people he had counted on to be with him in his hurt.

We asked the woman playing Job's wife how she felt. She said, "Those were my children too who died. I am so sad that I'm not thinking about the hurt I'm causing Job by what I'm saying." The man playing Job looked surprised. "I have never thought about that," he told her. "Different people respond to trauma differently. People don't always realize that when they are hurting, they hurt others too."

But while the pastors engaged with the story of Job, they could not act out or speak about the part in Job's story when Job's children died. That was too much. The subject hit too close to home. In response, we took that part out of the story. That part of the story remained unspoken, like the "elephant in the room" that no one wanted to touch. Telling personal narratives is key to identifying and working through our emotions in order to experience healing. However, as our Ukrainian brothers and sisters demonstrated, people living in war zones are not always able to talk about personal stories—or even to talk about stories that address experiences of violence and death that are too similar to their own. Forcing that kind of conversation too soon can cause a person to spiral into uncontrolled depression and shock.

This was one of our key findings over the past couple of years: there is an appropriate place and time to address past trauma. When someone experiences ongoing trauma, like war, it is not only inappropriate but also can be harmful to address that trauma while it is ongoing. It is a bit like being in a boat during a storm. The waves are crashing in, the boat is breaking up, and your body jumps into survival mode. Adrenaline sets in. You move at top speed to escape the boat, use something to float on, rescue everyone you can. The moment the boat breaks up is not the time for you to contemplate why you did not bring a life preserver, or to think about what you should have eaten for breakfast to give you more energy to move quickly in this moment. If you tried to think about those things, you would be distracted from the important work of staying alive.

Instead, you go into “survival mode.” You need to know other things, like how to survive in a storm on the open sea. In the same way, without being in a stable enough environment to feel safe, we cannot think clearly about past traumas or hurts. We need, instead, survival skills that allow us to experience our current trauma in a way that gets us to the other side of the current situation as unscathed as possible.

So, we should neither address trauma too soon nor wait too long before introducing trauma-informed tools to people in ongoing trauma. The key is to walk alongside each other from the very beginning, and to allow people in trauma to direct conversations and open up only when they are ready. In other words, the key is to build trauma-informed communities of support.

Renowned trauma counselor Judith Herman reminds us that “The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others” (Herman 2015, 133). If this is true, then ensuring that our brothers and sisters remain in control of their own story and their own experiences, *while keeping connected with them in community*, is key. Diane Langberg, trauma counselor, says that those living with ongoing trauma need community even before they tell their individual stories. In fact, “ongoing connection and community” is one of “three things [which] are vital in the midst of trauma” (2015, ch.10, para. 34). The other two things, faith and purpose (which I will address later in this article), come after community has been established. Therefore, recovery involves a community, but not just any community—it requires a community that develops cohesion, intimacy, and generosity of compassion (Herman 2015, 215–216). In our setting, these ongoing communities take the form of weekly or biweekly meetings, either in person or via Zoom when necessary. These communities have become important because they have created safe and healthy environments in which people can talk about their personal stories *when* they are ready.

Judith Herman says that when groups have foundations of trust and acceptance,

a complex mirroring process comes into play. As each participant extends herself to others, she becomes more capable of receiving the gifts that others have to offer. The tolerance, compassion, and love she grants to others begin to rebound upon herself [this] occurs most powerfully in the context of a group. (ibid)

Perhaps in healing communities, new neural pathways are being formed as safe interactions occur again and again. This is our goal: to provide contexts in which daily—sometimes hourly—safe interactions occur again and again. Like muscle memory that physical exercise builds, these safe interactions build an “emotional memory” that may remain even after the war subsides. If nothing else, these safe interactions provide a community to which people can run even after the war when difficult things happen. We have seen this in a trauma-healing group in North Africa. Small healing groups met for a few months and then subsided as their immediate crisis subsided. However, when a new crisis happened, the group immediately contacted each other because they trusted each other, sought help from each other, and re-formed to walk alongside each other in this new situation. It is our prayer that this will happen again and again.

It takes time to create trusting and trustworthy communities in which deep healing can take place. And it takes time for a crisis itself to come to a place where the community participants are no longer in physical danger or acute emotional distress and can experience healing. But in the meantime, these ongoing communities function as places of survival, providing trauma-informed survival skills. These survival skills include activities like listening to current personal stories about what is happening that week, teaching and reviewing grounding activities such as deep breathing, and embodied interaction with biblical narratives that can bring hope in seemingly hopeless situations.

The Structure of a Crisis Community

As more and more people in war zones have reached out to our team for trauma-healing training, we have changed the way we train for ongoing crisis in order to create a paradigm that better serves people in these crises. Understanding the differences between our traditional healing groups and our crisis groups may help illuminate how best to walk alongside people in ongoing crises such as war.

First, we must understand the difference between trauma and crisis. Trauma refers to the lasting impact of a crisis or highly-stressful event on our lives. A crisis refers to a specific event or time period. Crises cause sudden intense emotional upheaval.

A traditional healing group systematically and intentionally works through past traumas as a community. An ongoing community during times of crisis—a crisis group—is slightly different because its goal is to create a community that will trust each other enough to someday, in the future, work through these past traumas as a traditional healing group. In fact, in times of war, people may not be ready for even a crisis group immediately. In these cases, we have individual conversations where we listen to people, cry with them, and maybe share a few small healing activities about how trauma affects our lives. These conversations can build important foundations of trust so that someone feels comfortable reaching out for more support later. In addition, these conversations may also provide someone with some immediate relief or simple trauma-informed coping tools.

Once a person is ready to meet with others, a crisis group looks similar to a traditional healing group in that its goal is to meet together as regularly as possible. However, crises demand flexibility and slightly different expectations. “Outside” group facilitators from areas not affected by the war are more likely to be useful in crisis groups. Although our goal in trauma healing is for local healing groups to develop and grow without the need for outside help, in a crisis there may be no one from a community

with the stability needed to facilitate the group. In addition, meetings may not occur on the same day each week, they may be shortened or interrupted due to lack of internet or security concerns, and meeting structures may change due to the immediate needs of the group.

Although both our traditional healing groups and crisis groups follow a similar meeting structure, a crisis group is more likely to need to adjust that structure to meet the needs of the group. Ideally, each meeting typically follows a three-part structure of 1) looking back, 2) looking up, and 3) looking forward. In the “Looking Back” section of the meeting, the group emphasizes and builds healthy community. The participants talk about their week and spend time listening to each other’s stories. In a crisis group, we only talk about what is happening in our stories right now rather than in the past. “How was your week?” and “How are you today?” are common questions during this time. People need to share immediate needs and process how to get through each day. Listeners do not give advice, judge the person, or try to solve their problems. Instead, listeners give space for the storyteller to share what is happening in their heart without interrupting them or trying to teach them how to deal with the situation.³

In the “Looking Up” section of the meeting, the group builds faith, which is the second thing that Langberg says is vital in community. The group does this when they engage with Scripture, usually in the form of narrative. Individuals in trauma engage more easily with narrative because narrative effectively helps the brain make sense of difficult sensory input, such as what happens in times of crisis or war (Oatley 1999, 110-112).⁴ However, the biblical narratives we engage with need to be appropriate for the situation, as we learned with our Ukrainian friends. Perhaps, as in the Job story, we need to take out difficult-to-hear parts

3 There may be times when practical information, such as where to find food or clothing, needs to be given by the listener. We are addressing emotions and emotional pain in this article.

4 And other references in the bibliography such as Heffernan, Scheff, and Stephens, Silbert, and Hasson.

of the story in ways that do not change the overall message of the story, or perhaps the stories we choose need to be overtly filled with hope. Often shorter stories work better because people living in the midst of highly stressful situations typically have shorter attention spans.

In this section of the meeting, our team pairs each Bible story with a healing exercise that deepens the engagement with the Scriptural truths found in the story. These healing exercises often become the “survival skills” that participants use throughout the week when life becomes overwhelming. Healing exercises may include activities like deep breathing, grounding exercises, meditating on the Bible story itself, drawing, singing, or lamenting. Whatever the exercise, it is important that they are simple, easy-to-do activities.

In the past two years, crisis group participants have said that meditation on a Bible story, deep breathing, and lamenting are their favorite activities because they are able to replicate those activities anywhere and at any time. Based on our conversations, lament seems to be key to many people’s emotional survival. In our activities of lament, people share their feelings honestly with God. They tell God what is happening, how they feel about it, and what they know and believe—or want to believe—about God. Even if they are not ready to tell God they believe he is good, they have the opportunity to confess to God that they know he is good, and that although they do not believe it at the moment, they would like to believe it. The freedom of being honest with God has been significant as participants develop a healthy and intimate relationship with God. This relationship will ultimately lead to healing of trauma, and it is this relationship that we desire to protect and cultivate in times of crisis.

Finally, in the “Looking Forward” section of the meeting, groups address the third thing vital in the midst of trauma—building purpose. In this section, we practice telling the week’s Bible story to each other. Although we encourage group members to share the story during the week, in crisis groups that encouragement is more subtle. Just the practice of saying the story aloud during the meeting, or repeating it to

themselves during the week, can be helpful. Narratives heard, and then re-told, powerfully affect our brain's ability to heal.

Of course, many challenges exist when building and structuring communities that effectively walk alongside each other in the midst of war. Interpersonal conflicts abound. Real, logistical issues abound as well: the Internet shuts off, electricity is cut, or people go on the move. Outsiders often must facilitate or run meetings because those in the midst of trauma may not have capacity to schedule or organize meetings. Immediate issues of safety, hunger, and deep depression can keep a group from meeting effectively. The session structure we have just described often devolves into just praying and crying. These are all normal cycles in a group's life, and that is completely acceptable. It is more important for a group to experience the love and time commitment of each other and a facilitator than a set plan that ignores the immediate pain the group is experiencing.

Best Practices in Crisis Communities

As we have run crisis groups, some common themes have emerged as facilitators (who are often not experiencing war themselves) walk alongside hurting people in the midst of war. The following are a few of the "best practices" facilitators have developed in the groups we have been forming and sustaining.⁵

1. People need to know that God is good and that he did not start the war.

They need to know that God does not allow evil to go unpunished. Bible stories of hope and victory are helpful. Stories that show that God understands us and will conquer evil in the end are important. Jesus' resurrection and second coming remind group participants of truth.

5 These best practices were largely compiled by the Multiplying Hope Latin America Director, Janice Utterback, who is currently walking alongside Ukrainian groups of women.

Many of them have never paid attention before to the victory they see in these stories. We have seen group participants weep with hope when they hear and retell how—when Jesus comes again—all evil, including death itself, will be thrown into the lake of fire. We have seen group participants weep with thankfulness and comfort when they hear and retell that even though Jesus knew he was going to raise Lazarus from the dead, he wept when he saw everyone weeping—God himself cries with us. We may know that God is in control, but participants do not need to hear that in the midst of war—we have seen people become angrier when reminded that God has the power to stop violence. They need to know instead that God walks next to them in the midst of violence and pain.

2. Just as God weeps with people who are hurting, facilitators need to walk alongside and weep with our hurting friends.

We cannot fix or dismiss problems that we have no control over. The weeping and walking take time, and we must be patient. Remember Job's friends? They spent seven days just being present with Job, but then they messed it up when they tried to fix Job's problem, although they did not really understand it. As the friends' accusations continued, Job finally cried out, "If only someone would listen to me!" (Job 31:35 [NLT]) Job's cry echoes that of thousands who just want a place to lament and weep and friends to weep with them.

3. People need to know that God sees every person's journey and responds to each person individually.

Everyone walks through their journeys differently, and there is no right or wrong way to walk through their journey. When people see how someone else reacts differently in the same situation, they may be confused or worried that they are not acting in the same way. Facilitators need to know that their reactions are normal and acceptable, and they need to respond with grace. Facilitators also need to recognize that they

often have no idea what very basic and valid concerns people face every day. If the head of a household is not present, who makes the decisions they normally make? If someone's family member returns home safely, is it acceptable to celebrate when so many other people's family members have not come home? How is a mother or father supposed to feel when their son is conscripted into the army? These are emotions and situations many of us have never faced, and we cannot and should not impose our opinions on those facing these issues daily. Instead, we should employ simple tools that help groups normalize their emotions in group settings.⁶

4. People need to be seen as individuals, but they also need to know that they are not alone.

We have seen that people in war zones are extremely touched to know that people around the world are praying for them. They also need to know that people around the world understand the depth of their pain. One of the best ways for people to show that they understand the depth of pain is to call wars what they are: war. While we sometimes want to soften the blow and use less violent language when talking about war, it is not helpful to those experiencing war. When our friends in war-torn countries know that we are fully aware of the danger and crisis they face daily, they feel that we are truly walking alongside them.

5. People in trauma make bad decisions.

This is normal. The trauma and stress in a war, combined with family members away for long periods of time, can lead to bad decisions. These bad decisions often lead to crippling feelings of guilt that are often worse than anything else they have done. We are not the judge or the executor of justice. We are the listeners. We help people identify and name what is happening. War fatigue, loneliness, and fear are all real emotions that are difficult to live with.

6 For more information, please see Multiplying Hope's Healing Conversations training (www.multiplyinghope.org).

6. We need to remember that facilitators make mistakes.

It is important to have a basic level of training in trauma healing, but it is also important to remember that as we do our best, both the groups we facilitate and God have much grace for us when we read a room badly, or when we accidentally say the “wrong” thing. Training is important, but deep love and patience is more important. Basic training is necessary but fear alone should not keep us from walking alongside those who are hurting.

Conclusion

The Ukrainian group made it through that training in 2022, even though we were not sure how it would go. They listened to each other, they acted out Bible stories, and they cried together. Some of them are still meeting together. The fruit of that first training tells a story of hope, a hope founded in communities dedicated to walking alongside each other through sometimes unspeakable trauma. Churches and pastors have walked through God’s Word together. Soldiers have shared stories with each other on the front lines. Wives have cried together. Communities have lamented and prayed together. And Ukrainian church leaders are learning about trauma in a one-year course as they begin to pray through what it looks like to walk alongside hurting people in the years and decades to come.

We do not know what will happen next year. We still do not know how to perfectly walk alongside people in war. We only know that we are committed to walking alongside our hurting friends. However we choose to do it, to live in the present and walk alongside communities caught in the trauma of war is the precious responsibility of the entire church community. We cannot bring the healing ourselves, however. We cannot try to fix or heal at our own pace or in our own way. This is a journey of faith for us as well, as we trust that the Holy Spirit will bring healing, and we know that a trinitarian love and compassion embraces each meeting, each prayer together. And that is enough for now.

Questions for Conversation

1. What do you consider to be the greatest advantages of doing trauma healing in groups?
2. In addition to war, in what other kinds of crises could you use this approach?
3. What lessons did you learn that you can apply to your ministry as you walk alongside people suffering from trauma?

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Reaching the Muslims of Russia in the Wake of the Russia-Ukraine War: A Three-Pronged Proposal

By Andrey Kravstev and Pavlo Geraschenko

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After February 24, 2022, when Vladimir Putin announced the start of a military assault on Ukraine, dozens of Western mission organizations and their staff members, many of whom had worked in Russia for decades, were forced to leave. The Russian war in Ukraine has become a major turning point marking the most significant curtailment of mission opportunities since the dissolution of the USSR. These developments raise questions about the future of evangelical witness among Russia's unreached people groups in places like North Caucasus, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Buryatia, and other areas of that region.

The developments related to the ongoing war are not unlike other contexts globally in which anti-Western hostility has disrupted mission

efforts. China, Iran, Syria, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are examples of geopolitical conflict with Western powers that make the active presence of Western missionaries problematic, and at times impossible. What possible strategies could be productive for fulfilling the Great Commission in regions with shifting geopolitical climates, requiring a rethinking of how we engage in that task?

This article zeroes in on one missional context in which Western missionary activity is being impacted, the unreached Muslim people groups in the North Caucasus (NC) region of Russia. The reflections in this article are based on the experiences of two Ukrainian missionaries who served in the NC area since the early 2000's until the beginning of the full-scale invasion in 2022. The text was also complemented by a worker from Kazakhstan (Maqsat Toqtasyn) who spent two years in the Caucasus focusing on one of the ethnic groups there. The article falls into two parts; first, we share our thoughts on *why* these groups are so difficult to reach; and second, we will comment on the *who*, *how*, and *what* of the ongoing evangelical witness among the Caucasus Muslims today. In so doing, we hope to provide an illustration of a possible, faithful, and strategic response to continue the Great Commission among least-reached peoples whose access to the gospel is impacted by larger geopolitical conflicts.

Why is It so Hard to Reach the North Caucasus People Groups?

Even before the war broke out between Russia and Ukraine, the Muslim people groups of the North Caucasus lacked access to the gospel due to a wide variety of factors. The first and most obvious factor is *religious*. Muslims everywhere are hard to reach because Islam is a post-Christian, and in many ways, anti-Christian, belief system that was shaped in the process of intense historical confrontations with Christianity. Many of Islam's tenets directly oppose the essential teachings of the gospel. Muslims see their faith as the final revelation that

supersedes all “outdated” and “distorted” forms of religion, including Christianity. While most Muslims have only a basic knowledge of their own religious teachings, this arrogant view of the Christian faith is often the default position among even the least devout of them.

Thirty years ago, coming out of an atheistic past, an average person in the region was more open to a consideration of the gospel, but over the following decades their religious–ethnocultural identity has become stronger and more unequivocal. Mosques now can be found in the central squares of every town and village. Talented young people who received theological education in Islamic schools in near eastern countries have been actively promoting their faith, including its fundamentalist versions, among the younger generation in the Caucasus.

Secondly, the religious situation is complicated by the *ethnic* factor. Islam is one of the key components that defines the identities of small people groups against the dominant Russian society. Attempts to evangelize these groups are often taken as a threat, not only to their religion, but to their ethnic distinctiveness as well. In other words, religion, however nominal it may be, lies at the core of what helps these groups protect themselves from cultural assimilation. Many times the gospel is not even given a chance to be heard or considered because its messengers are seen as promoters of a Russian or Western religion that threatens these groups’ existence as distinct entities.

Closely related to the preceding is the *socio-cultural* factor. Collectivistic Islamic societies tend to be homogenous and oppressive. Whereas traditional Western models of evangelism and church planting focus on the conversion of individuals, in these cultures a typical person thinks in terms of families and clans. These units provide a support network to their members but expect full loyalty in return. Culturally, family honor vs. shame is one of the strongest motivators in individual decision making. As a result, converts to Christianity are usually seen as renegades with very few of them able to stay within their original social networks and be productive in those networks as evangelists.

Another relevant factor is *historical*. On a grassroots level, ethnic Russians and evangelical missionaries are generally perceived not only as representatives of another religion, but as historical enemies also. The brutal conquests and deportations by the Russian Empire in its different incarnations that dominated in the Caucasus for the last two centuries, are still alive in popular memory and come to the surface in unexpected situations. Missionaries of a Slavic origin—like the authors of this article—have not only to cross cultural barriers, but also to gradually gain trust among their Caucasus friends by demonstrating that they do not approve of the historical decisions of their predecessors. This is similar to what Western missionaries face in post-colonial environments; however, since the North Caucasus is still a de facto colony of Russia, the wounds are fresh.

If the above factors represent long-standing barriers to the gospel in the North Caucasus, the political situation in Russia today has even further complicated mission efforts among these unreached Muslims. The state-sponsored propaganda presents the current war as a clash with the “decadent West,” and large numbers of young men from the Caucasus people groups are fighting today in the ranks of the Russian military against Ukraine. Whatever comes from the West is seen as harmful, undermining Russia’s “traditional values.” This leads not only to the impossibility of the physical presence of foreign missionaries, but also makes public opinion hostile to everyone and everything “Western,” which in the opinion of many, includes evangelical Christianity.

In addition, the federal government’s approach to religion is preferential and instrumental, like that which is seen in numerous Muslim countries, except with a wider scope. The policy is to support the so-called “traditional religions” (which include Islam and Eastern Orthodoxy, but not evangelical Christianity) and to promote an “inter-religious peace” between them. In practice, it means encouraging one’s religion of birth and discouraging proselytism. To weaken the efforts of the diverse groups within Christianity or Islam who think that faith should be more than an ethnic marker, anti-missionary legislation has been

enacted. The 2016 Yarovaya Laws make almost any form of evangelism a potential crime which has had a restraining effect on Christian outreach, including that to Muslims.

What Can be Done Today?

Of course, the current developments in Russia have not caught God by surprise; he has not stopped his work among the Caucasus peoples. What we see, and have seen happening over the last few years, is a progressing movement of motivated workers from other parts of Russia who are coming to live among the North Caucasus Muslims. These are young men and women who caught the passion of sharing the good news with Muslims. This seems to be one of the ways in which the Lord is answering purposeful prayers about the NC peoples, thanks to the tireless efforts of the leaders of the North Caucasus Regional Partnership. The question is: "What next steps should be taken as our response to God's move?" We will provide brief reflections in terms of who we should send, how we can do so, and what should be our focus.

Who: Empowering Believers in and near Russia to Reach NC Muslims

The first, and most important, suggestion we want to make is the need to bolster a new generation of workers from Russia and neighboring countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and other countries that are political allies with Russia). The global church can no longer afford the luxury of ignoring these local believers in this task. In particular, the focus should be on what we might call "regional mobilization." In our context this is similar to what is referred to as recruiting near-culture peoples, in that the potential workers all share a post-Soviet heritage. But in another way, it can be distinctly different since many of these workers are from Christian backgrounds, thus not "near" at all.

In this type of context, it is important to recognize both dimensions of "nearness" and "distance" the new workers will face in ministry. Those

mobilizing must not assume that because of certain similarities, such as shared Russian language or Soviet education, the worker will easily and naturally overcome the remaining cultural differences. Specifically targeted training for new workers is vital. Workers with experience in the context, both Western and regional, can be great assets for this since they already understand the complexities of post-Soviet cultures.

Western workers can empower new regional workers by being advocates for them with their own and other international sending organizations. In this context, the word “empower” means more than inspire or mobilize; it means enabling new regional workers for the task in every respect; from support raising, training, and even crisis counseling when those needs arise. Like any other new sending base, the workers coming from post-Soviet countries often have little to no support structures upholding them.

In most cases, these young people are not encouraged or supported by their home churches, which is of itself is another—*ecclesiological*—factor affecting mission in Russia. Due to its turbulent history, the evangelical church in Russia has not yet developed its own full-blown mission sending structures. Their sending will have to be either quite different, and or in partnership with the wider church.

This does not mean that Russian churches have no missionary vision. All of them are doing work to reach their own “Jerusalem and Judea.” For a small community within the nominal Orthodox context this work already looks overwhelming, so the need of reaching “Samaria,” let alone “the ends of the earth,” is far from a burning passion. As we know, the Western Protestant church also did not care much about “the conversion of the heathen” until parachurch mission agencies were established (Winter 1999). At the same time, individuals from different corners of this large country have come to the awareness of the existence of unreached people groups close to them and feel called by God to do something about it. It is this small but vital part of the evangelical community that needs to be noticed, encouraged, and strengthened.

We believe the task can be best accomplished through international mission partnerships in which foreign churches and parachurch organizations come alongside local field teams. Veteran workers are well positioned to assist in these connections as mediators since they often know both sides. They can vouch for the character of the new worker, and in turn they can help a new regional worker understand some of the administrative issues of dealing with a Western agency. We know of a few such partnerships successfully working now in the region. While independent from one another, they travel parallel pathways. Here are some of the strategies of mobilization and empowerment they employ through their local field teams:

1. raising awareness of the NC peoples in Russian churches through video, online, or printed materials, mobilizing their own supporters for intentional prayer, and even helping raise specifically designated donations
2. mobilizing potential workers through church-based seminars and opening their teams to facilitate short-term mission trips by regional Christians
3. helping new workers relocate to the NC from other regions of Russia/Central Asia for long-term work (travel funds, furniture, family adjustment, integrating into the missionary community, etc.)
4. translation of relevant materials on missiology, intercultural communication, Muslim evangelism, church-planting, etc.
5. conducting an informal missionary training education on the ground for new regional workers
6. advocating within their agency for other training possibilities, such as seminars by experienced Western missionaries in neutral countries like Georgia or Turkey
7. helping the workers with ministry projects in evangelism, church planting, acts of mercy, etc. and, when necessary, in their urgent family and personal needs (sickness, transportation, living conditions, etc.)

8. assisting tentmaker missionaries to start business projects that would make them self-sustainable
9. helping the workers to create video, audio, and printed materials related to their projects, including materials in local languages

We realize that when it comes to the financial aspect, Western organizations are likely to expect Russian churches to take this responsibility on their own shoulders. But we are convinced that such expectations are unrealistic, at least in the short term, in view of the reasons mentioned earlier. At the same time, speaking of “support,” we do not mean Western agencies paying salaries to workers with no time limit in view. Some field teams and especially field team coordinators might need the financial support, yet overall, the hope is that Western workers would give the local workers the proverbial fishing rod rather than the fish. Self-reliance remains the ultimate goal, but unless given a helping hand now, this movement will not blossom in the foreseeable future. A way workers can help with this is teaching regional workers how to communicate effectively with supporters, both at home and in the west. We can help them think through different possible bivocational support strategies such as business as mission.

Workers, and former ones, can be a key link in international partnerships that connect Western and Russian ideas, people, and resources. Partnership implies that each party fulfills a role the other party cannot do. Western workers cannot now work in Russia, but local and nearby believers can do so. Russian Christians cannot support the work on their own, but Western churches can help. Whenever there is open communication, mutual trust, respectful coordination, a proper means for accountability, and a reliable way to transfer funds across borders, much can be accomplished together. All these functions work best when there is a knowledgeable mediator helping both sides understand the other.

How: Relational Evangelism through Community Involvement

In a situation when mass evangelism is neither legal nor effective, relational evangelism seems the best available alternative. To be successful, a missionary first must develop a certain level of moral authority and the right to speak about spiritual matters. One way to achieve this is to demonstrate that his or her social involvement brings value to the community.

The range of possible ideas for this in the North Caucasus is quite similar to what workers see elsewhere. Workers are practically unlimited and restricted only by lack of imagination or required resources. Some examples from the field include opening youth creative centers, offering ESL classes, producing videos/literature about local history or culture, developing ethnic music, creating rehabilitation facilities for drug addicts, developing social tourism, launching teenage sport clubs, working with autistic kids, providing services and/or creating jobs through business projects, etc.

One significant difference is that workers from nearby post-Soviet countries do not have the same “foreign star” appeal that Western workers do, especially when dealing with youth. This means the programs themselves need to be attractive, rather than relying on the novelty of Westerners. At the same time, the post-Soviet worker starts with a better understanding of the local context, which can help them design programs that are more appropriate and sustainable.

Interaction across religious communities was not uncommon in Soviet times, thus it does not seem unusual now. The difference is that today we can intentionally use this cross-religious interaction to create neutral spaces where Christian and Muslim friends can safely relate based on their common interests and felt needs. Connecting to someone as a physical rehab specialist, an English teacher, or a landscape designer is not perceived as a threat and can open up potential opportunities

for deeper conversations. It also makes evangelism less visible to the authorities and therefore provides workers with additional protection. In the case of business projects, it can also make them and their ministries self-sustainable.

Given the slow but steady urbanization trend, city evangelism offers more promise and can be prioritized by local teams. The people in cities tend to be more individualistic, secularized, and less subdued by peer pressure. Among urban youth, especially in large cities with multi-ethnic populations, Russian is often the trade language which weakens the influence of clans, traditional values, and religion. At the same time, about half of the NC Muslims still reside in villages which suggests that village evangelism should also take a key place in missionary planning.

What: Sharing the Gospel vs. Advancing Existent Forms of Christianity

In our estimation, one of the key reasons why multiple attempts to evangelize NC Muslims have brought little fruit is that there have been very few attempts to find appropriate models of contextualization in this region. Missionaries usually expect Muslims to convert to a particular version of the Christian faith. Unfortunately, as in other places with historic Christian communities, to local Muslims the word “Christian” has nothing to do with one’s relationship with Christ; it is a socio-cultural term that simply describes a culture—in our case, either Westerners or Russians. For a Muslim, to “become a Christian” means to stop being who they are—a Chechen, or Kabardin, or Karachay—and become a Russian person instead. Does the gospel require one to deny who they are, and break with their own family and people? These are God-given identities that must be reexamined in light of the gospel, but not renounced.

An approach that could be considered fruitful, albeit in a long-term perspective, may be described as a “third way.” This means that in a context where only two competing religious alternatives can be imagined, the missionary works hard to present a viable third option: to

be reconciled to God through Jesus' sacrifice and become his disciple. A person of any religious or cultural background (which is the same in our context) can become Jesus' follower on the condition of faith and obedience. For this, one has neither to renounce their identity acquired at birth nor their former faith in the Almighty God they "worship as unknown" (Acts 17:23). We envision new believers staying embedded in their birth community in every way possible but living vibrant lives as disciples of Christ.

The message of following Christ regardless of community of birth is reinforced when teams include workers from both Christian and Muslim backgrounds who demonstrate genuine unity, friendship, and respect in their everyday lives, families, and communities. As we have strived to model this, on multiple occasions local Muslims have asked us about our convictions because they noticed that our practice of faith was different from that of both cultural Muslims and "Christians." We hope to be seen as peculiar "followers of Jesus" marked by integrity, sincere love, and sacrificial concern for the people around us, and we believe this has a strong potential to raise interest and create room for spiritual discussions.

Correspondingly, sharing the gospel with this approach is different from preaching Christian theology. Instead, we want to introduce the listeners to the historical Jesus of the four gospels rather than the dogmatic Jesus of the Church and the councils. Focusing on the nature of the Trinity or Jesus's divinity triggers deeply entrenched apologetical clichés picked up in mosques or YouTube videos, which almost always means an end to meaningful conversation about important matters. On the other hand, very few Muslims have any real knowledge of Jesus as revealed in the gospel stories: loving, forgiving, healing, and proclaiming with authority the good news of the kingdom of God. Theology can serve as an important instrument in a later stage of discipleship, but one rarely reaches that stage, partly because it becomes a hindrance in earlier stages of evangelism.

Let us be clear, we are not promoting any particular model on the disputed C1-C6 spectrum (Travis 1998). The point is to offer Muslims an opportunity to truly understand the gospel and acquire a personal relationship with God through the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation. This can be done only through a longer process of clearing away the layers of historical stereotypes and animosities, which, in turn, requires building a relationship of friendship and trust. Our task in the Caucasus is not to advance any denominational interests, but rather to encourage the birth of genuinely local faith communities. As to the issue of how the converts identify themselves, that will eventually be resolved by the converts themselves in negotiation with their surrounding societies.

We expect these communities to be diverse, sometimes meeting for decades in private homes or rented public spaces. In some face-to-face rural contexts, where nothing like formal “church planting” is now possible, we can prepare the soil by focusing on individual discipleship over many years of those who come to faith. The Caucasus is a diverse place, and even among the same people group, different approaches can be effective depending on urban or village context, target groups’ ages, needs, interests, religious adherence, etc. This is a time and resource-consuming work that requires long-term commitments. But are there any real alternatives? Expecting them to become Russian Baptists, Korean Presbyterians, or North American Pentecostals is naïve and unrealistic. More than that, it is unbiblical. The apostolic decision “not to make it difficult for the Gentiles to turn to God” by dismantling unnecessary barriers still stands true (Acts 15:19).

Concluding Thoughts

In places impacted by war and geopolitical conflict, global mission among unreached people groups faces additional barriers which problematize conventional mission approaches. The unreached Muslims of the North Caucasus represent one such context, and these reflections offer examples of how the frontier mission community needs to rethink

and adapt its approach to fulfill its task amidst new obstacles in a changing global landscape. In the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, frontier workers and organizations called to serve the North Caucasus should adapt their efforts toward mobilizing and equipping local believers from Russian and post-Soviet countries for the work, integrating community service with relational evangelism, and creating a “third way” of following the biblical Jesus, distinct from the existing “Muslim” and “Christian” ways of life and culture.

David Bosch famously commented that mission “is not so much a case of the church being expanded, but of the church being born anew in each new context and culture” (Bosch 2011, 465, emphasis original). The North Caucasus gospel movement has barely been ignited; yet while NC Muslims have come to faith and some have even become pastors over the last decades, this has usually taken place in Russian churches or those planted by Western missionaries. We should prayerfully look forward to, and work for, the birth of the NC gospel movement, and it is for this worthy cause that God called us to partner with Himself and with one another. While it may not seem feasible now, our Lord is known for doing impossible things—to which missionary history bears ample evidence.

Questions for Conversation

1. What do you think of the authors’ proposal to reach the North Caucasus peoples? Which aspects of their proposal might be most relevant in your context?
2. Should sending nations with geopolitical baggage shift their focus away from sending cross-cultural workers and focus on mobilizing near-culture workers from more “neutral” nations?
3. How does the contextualization of believers’ identity play out in your context? What do you think of the authors’ proposal for “a third way” between the two religious alternatives?

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Mark Durie's "Polemic-Apologetic" Discourse on Islamist Violence and Its Role in Christian-Muslim Interaction

By Julie B. Ma

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In a conversation about whether Islam promotes violence, someone mentioned Mark Durie—the Australian pastor and Islamicist—and all eyes fixed on me. I was the only Australian in a room full of Christian pastors, missionaries, and seminary professors from around the world. Do I agree with Durie? Surely, we must know each other, right? Wrong. All I had was a vague recollection of a newspaper article or two that had made me feel uncomfortable. I knew I needed to find out more. Also in that room was Dr. Martin Accad from the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Lebanon. Accad's life experience and his views on Islam's relationship to Christianity differ markedly from Durie's. This essay is the result of my using tools I learned from Dr. Accad to help me get to know and engage with Dr. Durie.

The Task

This essay seeks to engage with Rev. Dr. Mark Durie's views on violence in Islam with respect to their helpfulness in Christian-Muslim dialogue. Dialogue is defined according to Martin Accad's SEKAP scale, which I describe later. I write from the perspective of a Christian evangelist

reaching out to Muslims who claim their religion promotes peace. The debate over whether Islam encourages violence, with which Durie began engaging in September 2001, has become even more urgent since the Israeli-Hamas war which broke out in October 2023 and the sometimes-violent demonstrations that have sprung up around the world, including in Australia.

The topic will be addressed in several steps. First, I describe Durie's setting: the multicultural, secular society of Australia, whose policymakers promote a progressive ideology of religious diversity which embraces moderate Islam. This necessitates mentioning the varieties of Islam that fall into this moderate category. Second, I outline a spectrum of Christian-Muslim dialogue, using Accad's SEKAP scale. Third, employing the vocabulary of the SEKAP scale, I analyze Mark Durie's approach, including the contribution of Durie's own identity and experience to its formation.

Finally, I offer some thoughts on engaging with Durie's work as we minister among Muslims. I speak as an evangelist whose views differ from Durie's at points, but who wishes to promote unity in the body of Christ and honest conversation among disciples of Jesus, when our Muslim neighbors are watching as well as when they are not.

The Setting

In order to understand Durie's work and his approach to Islam, it is important to understand the Australian context where he lives and serves. Australia is a secular nation insofar as it allows "the free exercise of any religion" (Commonwealth Consolidated Acts n.d.). Australia does not have a state religion as the United Kingdom does, nor does it insist on removing religion from the public sphere, as does French *laïcité*. The kind of secularism found in Australia may be described as religious pluralism (Barker 2015).

Muslims make up a mere 3.2% of Australia's population, numbering only 813,400 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2022). Australia's Muslim

population is small compared to the 43.9% of Australians who claim a Christian affiliation, but Islam is increasing while Christianity is in decline.

The Australian census does not collect data on varieties of Islam, but the Christian organization Prayercast suggests that “most Australian Muslims are Sunni, though there are small communities of Shias, Sufis, and Ahmadiyya” (Prayercast n.d.). Migration statistics may provide further clues. Most of the 126,000 Muslim immigrants to arrive since 2016 were born in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and Bangladesh (ABS 2021). Earlier waves of migration occurred from the Middle East, especially Turkey, after World War II and from Lebanon during the civil war between 1975–90 (Prayercast n.d.). These facts align with suppositions that Australia’s Muslim population includes individuals with intimate experience of extremism (such as some Afghans) as well as moderate Muslims for whom extremist views are foreign (for example many Turks).

A working definition of moderate Islam is necessary. Although notoriously difficult to define, if we focus on our topic of violence, moderate Muslims are those who are not Islamists or violent extremists. Moderate Islam overlaps with liberal, progressive, and secular Islam. Liberal or progressive Islam means “approaching the Qur’an as a source of broad ethical principles,” making it compatible with other faiths and even humanism (Brown 2017, 430). Secular Islam follows Egypt’s ‘Abd al-Raziq (and Atatürk’s secular Islamic state of Turkey) in asserting that Islam can be practiced fully and authentically under any kind of government (ibid, 343). Moderate Muslims also include those who have simply never thought deeply about their ideology, particularly many Muslim women.

Approaches to Christian-Muslim Dialogue

Christian-Muslim dialogue is a surprisingly new phenomenon. According to historian Hugh Goddard, it was initially met with suspicion and division when it became a concern of the World Council of Churches

in 1971. Dialogue differs from the interreligious disputations and debates of earlier centuries by fostering “greater philosophical sophistication” and “greater willingness to listen as well as assert” (Goddard 2000, 177).

Martin Accad (2012) has developed a helpful diagram for understanding dialogue. His five-point SEKAP Spectrum of Christian-Muslim Interaction encompasses a range of engagements from syncretism (S) to polemic (P). In between sit three categories which Accad classifies as true dialogue: existential (E), apologetic (A), and in the center, kerygmatic (K). He explains the kerygmatic approach in detail as the most Christ-centered option, embracing the best elements and avoiding the pitfalls of the other four (37–39). Accad’s presentation of a range of dialogical positions naturally meets suspicion from parties at either end. His response is not to refute critics but to slow them down enough to allow deep consideration. This is one reason he chose the enigmatic biblical Greek name *kerygmatic* for his central position (Accad, personal communication, February 2023).

Mark Durie’s Approach to Islam

Who is Mark Durie?

Mark Durie is an Australian academic with 20 years’ experience as a linguist, followed by another 20 years as an Anglican pastor, having a keen interest in Islamic studies throughout his career. For about nine of his 20 years in church ministry, his pastorate included dozens of believers from Muslim backgrounds. Apart from his current teaching role at Melbourne School of Theology and academic works on Islamic doctrines (2010) and texts (2018) as they interact with Christianity, he writes and speaks publicly on platforms ranging from mainstream newspapers to Christian magazines, church events, and political forums.

His writing is prolific, hard-hitting, and academically rigorous. In person, Durie demonstrates a pastor’s heart who cares deeply for the oppressed and marginalized, especially those within the church. This

essay focuses on Durie's public rhetoric about Islamist violence which is freely available online.

Violence as Example

Under the headline, "Muslim violence a fact, not prejudice," Durie writes that "Islam itself—not just poverty or social exclusion—provide[s] ideological fuel for extremism and violence" (Durie 2011). His view echoes Samuel Huntington's belief in a 'Muslim propensity to violence' due to the historic origins of doctrines of *jihad* and warfare seen in the life of the Prophet Muhammad and early formation of Islam (Huntington 1996, 258, cited in Meral 2018, 4).

Durie's direct critics include Susanna Latham (2011) who says his writing "will help to perpetuate human rights abuses against Muslim Australians." This echoes the sentiment of Ziya Meral, who studied conflicts in Egypt and Nigeria and believes "the use of discriminatory and often outright Islamophobic discourse by Copts ... in Egypt ... can fuel hatred in the country" (Meral 2018, as paraphrased by Deller 2019).

After hearing Durie and his critics, I became compelled to ask why he makes such inflammatory remarks and how he gets away with it as a pastor of believers from Muslim backgrounds.

Reasons for Durie's Approach

Durie's approach grows from his own experience in Aceh, Indonesia and Melbourne, Australia, as well as his beliefs about his audience. His target audience comprises English-speaking Westerners, especially Christians and those in leadership positions. Muslims who are poorly informed about traditional Islamic doctrines and their Western sympathizers form a secondary audience. His concern for Muslim-Christian relations began during his linguistic research in Aceh in the 1970s and heightened after September 11, 2001 (Durie 2019). In Aceh, he lived as a Christian among Muslims. He studied Islam and experienced tensions

in the Muslim treatment of Christians in the Acehnese community. On September 11, 2001, Durie “watched the towers burning and knew immediately the one ideology in the world that could do that” was Islam (Durie 2019). He felt a weight of responsibility to warn the West of the threat of Islamism.

Durie wants Westerners to reject Islamic secularist propaganda, especially the myth that “Islam means peace.” He argues it more accurately means “surrender” in a warfare sense (Durie 2015; 2019). As the post-9/11 world finds itself “in a sort of permanent war between the West and radical Islam” (Brown 2017, 335), Durie believes truthful information helps the victims on both sides.

Durie’s convictions about Islam were further formed through his experience as pastor to over one hundred Iranian Christ-followers from Muslim backgrounds in Melbourne, along with extensive reading about revolutions in Islamist regimes and movements of Muslim people coming to Jesus. Through these experiences, Durie has observed that when some Muslims see that their faith leads to abuses under sharia law and reduced human flourishing for all, some leave Islam and come to Jesus. He speaks extensively about written biographies of Muhammad, saying, “Muslims are leaving Islam now because they are reading these texts for the first time ... on the internet” and “You don’t need to put labels on Muhammad. You just let his story be known” (Durie 2019).

Fitting Durie into Accad’s Scale

Where, if anywhere, does Durie’s attitude fit on Accad’s SEKAP scale? Or, in the words of one of his confused readers, “Are we to read Mark Durie’s article ... as olive branch or flaming sword?” (Winn 2011)

Durie’s purpose is decidedly not syncretistic or existential. He does not relativize differences between religions (cf. Accad 2012, 32), nor make promoting tolerance and peaceful coexistence his primary aim (c.f. Accad 2012, 35).

Would a “polemic” view be more fitting? Accad describes the polemic approach as one in which “Islam is viewed as an evil and a thorn in the flesh of Christianity,” (2012, 34) and “[t]he chief reason ... to engage Islam is often to demonstrate to Muslims that Islam is false and deceitful” (ibid). Durie has written on deceit in Islam (2010, 56–69; 2022, 111–112), and his work on discontinuity between the Qur’an and the Bible (2018; 2021a) could be taken to imply that Islam is false.

According to Accad, polemicists justify their approach by “pointing out that many Muslims are being won to Christianity” (2012, 34). While neither advocating for nor justifying his approach this way, Durie is sometimes heard speaking of Muslims leaving Islam when they learn of Islam’s failings. His approach to pastoring Christ-followers from Muslim backgrounds also might seem polemical to some. Disagreeing with a range of contextual approaches including (but not limited to) Insider Movements (cf. Travis 2015), Durie advocates explicitly renouncing Islam, not because “proclaiming Muslims will go to hell if they do not reject Islam” (Accad 2012, 34), but because that is the only path to spiritual freedom (Durie 2022, 3–6, 9).

Yet Durie also exemplifies a biblically-informed, apologetic attitude. He does his best to present his answers (*apologia*) “with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15 [NIV]). He tries to avoid the “relentless repetition” of “sterile arguments” which Accad names as the main problem with apologetic approaches through the centuries (2012, 36). Whether analyzing the Qur’an (Durie 2018), dialoguing with a Muslim apologist (MuslimByChoice 2012), or pastoring refugees from Muslim backgrounds (Durie 2021c), he demonstrates careful listening. By this, I refer to both his demeanor in speaking engagements and his accurate summarizing of his opponents’ views. He is humble and considerate in his responses while being clear about how he disagrees, backing up his arguments with evidence from “listening to” Muslim texts. This profound willingness to listen is the main reason I am reluctant to designate Durie as a polemicist (cf. Accad 2012, 29).

Durie's Response to the SEKAP Scale

During my research for this paper, I met Dr. Durie in person and showed him the SEKAP scale for the first time. Dr. Durie immediately recognized and was attracted to *kerygmatic* as meaning “proclamation,” but its central position caused him to pause. He wants to counterbalance syncretism, yet he is reluctant to identify with the seemingly pejorative polemic label. Neither does apologetic fit him, because his main aim is not to persuade Muslims, nor defend himself in the sense of *apologia* in Luke 12:11 and 21:14. This rejection of an apologist role is a clue to why Durie's Christian-Muslim interactions are so hard to place on the scale. In Durie's words, “I'm not doing this. I'm talking to Christians” (Durie, personal communication, April 2023).

It does not fit neatly, because Durie is not doing or teaching Christian-Muslim dialogue. While Durie believes access to Muslim texts persuades some Muslims to leave Islam (Durie 2019) and he once participated in a public dialogue with a Muslim apologist (MuslimByChoice 2012), this is not his focus. His intended audience is Christians and Westerners, and his purpose is to equip, support, and defend Christians, their human rights, and especially their freedom of religion (Durie 2021a).

Durie is not an apologist per Accad's definition (2012, 36–37), in that he does not “engage with Muslims solely for the purpose of evangelism” but rather to “refute the validity of Islam” for his Christian audience.

The Problem of Audience

Durie feels a “weight of responsibility” to his two-part intended audience: the Christian West. The church, his Christian audience, includes church and parachurch leaders, laity, and believers from Muslim backgrounds. Where national values are based on Christian values, the church overlaps with the second part of Durie's audience, Western policymakers, or the state.

Factual statements based on rigorous scholarship like Durie's play a vital role in government policymaking, especially in such subjects as Islamist violence where controversy and misinformation abound. Likewise, Christian leaders should base decisions on truth.

Accad, in his kerygmatic approach, prefers existential dialogue in public, apologetically addressing controversy sensitively in private (2012, 43). Yet Durie says relegating apologetics to private spaces means the public never hear the hard truths about abuses of women under sharia, for example, and are denied opportunities to act (Durie, personal communication, April 2023).

It seems impossible to arbitrate between Accad's and Durie's approaches without limiting the audience. Durie is well aware of detractors who suppose his rhetoric stokes anti-Muslim sentiment but places them outside his target audience. The problem is that globalization and the internet make limiting one's audience impossible.

Two groups for which Durie's approach has potential negative effects are Arab Christians and moderate Muslims. Some Arab Christians, of which Martin Accad is one, take offense at Durie's negative characterization of them as *dhimmi*. Accad views *dhimmi* as a "mixed blessing," a historically valid and reasonable system of giving social status to non-Muslims in the past (personal communication, February 2023). Durie (2022, 25, 93–106) sees the *dhimma* pact as oppressive, dehumanizing, and a current threat to Western civilization (2021b; 2022, 101–102). When Durie labels a conversation partner as a *dhimmi* Christian, he alienates them, even though his intentions are to lovingly guide them to freedom in Christ.

Moderate Muslims are another group alienated and threatened by Durie's rhetoric. For example, Susanna Latham (2011), an Anglo Australian married to a Muslim man, thinks Durie has "a lack of close personal relationships with Australian Muslims and no understanding that Islam in the way [he uses] it is essentially a meaningless term." Durie's truth-ori-

ented approach resembles thought patterns of Salafis and is at odds with liberal interpretations of Islam. Durie gives only brief and dismissive mentions to the fact they interpret their scriptures differently (2021a). For example, *jihad* can be interpreted as holy war or “to strive to improve oneself” (Dib 2015). He says, “theological pronouncement about Islam’s peacefulness” by Westerners like Latham “invites mockery” (Durie 2015). Additionally, he devalues liberal interpretations because they are recent and do not appear in the approximately 80 classic Muslim texts he studied in depth (Durie 2019).

Moving Forward: Reducing Threats and Building Bridges

As a Christian evangelist, I desire a presence and witness among both Muslims and non-Muslims, which necessitates building bridges of acceptance. The most basic way to build bridges is our mode of communication. Careful listening, humility, gentleness, and the heart of a pastor are unmistakable in Durie’s speech, whether recorded or in person, and provide a model for honest conversation. Unfortunately, however, these Christlike qualities are masked in much of Durie’s writing.

We must also consider our various audiences. Durie excels at educating Christians about Islam in its most historical, textually-based, fundamental sense, and exemplifies connecting the gospel to a select subtype of Muslims. The bridges he builds seem effective for those who are already disillusioned with Islam and seeking an alternative. With other groups, however, Durie seems to be building walls, not bridges. He talks past moderate Muslims, undervalues the contributions of Arab Christians, and aggravates non-Muslims who are trying to suppress their sneaking suspicion that Islam is not really a religion of peace. Yet his commitment to truth is admirable, despite his neglect of the “truth” of moderate Islam. Such evidence-based reporting of facts is essential in state-level policymaking, and Durie’s emphasis on Islamist violence counterbalances the emphases of moderates.

Engaging with voices like Durie's has become even more relevant since the Israel-Hamas war broke out. Worldwide, onlookers are faced with the dilemma of whom to support and whom to condemn. Durie is firmly in the pro-Israel camp but urges "compassion for all sides" (Durie 2023a, pt. 8). He is doing his best to answer our hard questions about this messy situation and help us stop hating the Palestinians who live among us, whether in Australia or anywhere else.

Readers who have a bad taste in their mouths about Durie's writings might find a tiny hint of sweetness emerging in his October 2023 blog series "A Q&A Primer on Hamas" (Durie 2023a) and the radio interview he did to promote the series (Durie 2023b). Even though his clear aim is to mobilize support for Israel's campaign against Hamas, he also calls repeatedly for compassion and help for Palestinian civilians, many of whom identify as Muslims. He expresses deep sympathy and makes statements such as: "The Palestinians' situation is appalling. As human beings they deserve much, much better than being used as human shields for the Muslim Umma's proxies in a long fight to the death with Israel" (Durie 2023a, pt. 8).

Throughout the blog series, and especially in his radio interview (Durie 2023b), he delineates sharply between "Palestinian civilians" and their "leadership" past and present, of which Hamas is a present iteration. Hamas, he says, is a "genocidal" radical Islamist movement with "the destruction of Israel" as "a core goal" (Durie 2023a, pt. 1). Hamas is "deliberately sacrificing its own people" calculating that civilian casualties on the Palestinian side will boost support for Hamas and hatred for Israel (Durie 2023a, pt. 3). Palestinian civilians, on the other hand, are not the enemy. They are victims of the terrorists ruling over them who need liberation and love.

Ideally, I would like to see Dr. Durie further develop his conception of "truth and love" beyond a tagline. I would also appreciate greater interaction with modern Islamic texts in his study of Islamic doctrine. Perhaps these are unreasonable expectations since Dr. Durie is only

one man with limited capacity. So a more realistic request I would like to make is that he partners together with younger scholars to engage with and balance out his work, in a spirit of charitable, curious expectation of what new insights might emerge. As we do so, I suggest three helpful attitudes for younger scholars engaging with and building on Durie's work: taking moderate Islam seriously; respecting, rather than hating Islam; and aiming for a kerygmatic approach.

Meanwhile, I hope to encourage younger scholars to engage with Durie and balance out his work. As we do so, I suggest three helpful attitudes: taking moderate Islam seriously; respecting, rather than hating Islam; and aiming for a kerygmatic approach.

Taking Moderate Islam Seriously

While technically true, Durie's assessment of Islam as causing violence might fit into what Accad calls "brash generalizations about Islam" (Accad 2017). Violent Islamist ideology may be "mainstream" and "not aberrant" in certain Islamic nation states (Durie 2021a), but not necessarily in all of them, as Durie's generalizations imply. Moreover, it is the moderate, secular, and liberal Muslims, not the violent ideologues, who are given voice in Australia. These moderate voices exist alongside increasingly outspoken radical voices in the pro-Palestinian movements happening in late 2023, when Durie published his responses to the Israel-Hamas war.

For Palestinians to be liberated, he says, not only must Hamas be defeated but also Islamist ideology itself. Otherwise, another terrorist group will rise to replace Hamas (Durie 2023a, pt. 8). When moderate Muslims and non-Muslim supporters of the Palestinian cause learn the truth about Islam as he sees it, Durie hopes they will not only extend more care to the Palestinian people but also abandon any affiliation they have with the religion of Islam. Caring for Palestinian people, as Durie sees it, means taking the same action necessary to defend Israel—that is to wrest them from the grip of not only Hamas but Islamism as well. He does not see moderate or secular Islam as a solution to anything.

Perhaps Durie's background in linguistic scholarship precludes him from taking Islamic secularism seriously. The Arabic term *'alimi* is widely used in the Middle East to refer to a government that separates religion from state affairs, that is, a secular government. Yet Brown (2017, 297) insists that the "most natural" Arabic for "secular" is *la-dini*, devoid of faith. Perhaps, just as Durie cannot accept linguistic links between Islam and peace (Durie 2015), an Islamic faith that is "devoid of faith" sounds like nonsense to him.

Then again, Durie's attitude toward moderate Islam may have less to do with linguistics and more to do with the evangelical lens through which he views the world. Evangelicals reject liberal Christian beliefs on the grounds that they differ from the Bible. Similarly, Durie appears to reject liberal Muslim beliefs on the grounds that they differ from the Qur'an.

Nevertheless, moderate and secular Muslims exist, and we should not expect them to behave like Islamists; neither can we expect distressing information about Islam to motivate all of them to abandon their faith community. By taking seriously the variety of textual interpretations within Islam, Christian scholars of Islam could help people tell the difference. We have words for Christian liberals that help evangelicals adjust the expectations we place on their beliefs and behavior. Could we, or a gifted linguist like Durie, find ways to describe moderate Muslims that would help us all to stop fearing them?

Respecting, Not Demonizing Islam

Accad and Durie agree on the need for respectful discussion of difficult topics. In Accad's kerygmatic approach, "No topic is taboo, since a respectful exchange is prepared and assumed" (Accad 2012, 43). Likewise, Durie believes "Tolerance is strengthened when people are able to debate ideological issues freely" (Durie 2011).

However, Accad says, "The message that the media and leadership—political and religious—set forth is one that either demonizes or idealizes

Islam” neither of which respects Muslims, nor the truth of what Islam is (2012, 2). Durie is accused of “demonization” (Latham 2011), but he asserts that “criticism—or even hatred—of a religion should not be conflated with the hatred of people who hold those beliefs” (Durie 2011). Although this parallels the Christian notion of loving sinners but hating sin, Accad is right to call it “disturbing, for it is a very short step from the demonization of Islam and Muslims altogether” (2012, 2).

A more helpful approach may be to shape our view of Islam with the desired outcome of our presence among Muslims in mind (cf. Accad 2012, 2). This must by no means lead us to deny the existence of Islamist violence, but rather to broaden our knowledge base, seek to understand what attracts people to the faith, and treat the whole person, including their beliefs which we do not share, with respect.

Using a Communal Kerygmatic Approach

As mentioned, expecting any one person to employ every approach on the SEKAP scale is unrealistic. As a group, however, Christians can and do cover the range of approaches. The key is for Christians to see each other as a diverse community with complementary gifts, not as adversaries (1 Cor. 12:4–30) and to let Muslims glimpse our love for one another despite our differences (John 13:34–35). As an evangelist, I can focus on showing love and speaking of Jesus without feeling pressure to answer every question myself. Durie, on the other hand, while perhaps not loved by Muslims, may be one of the “religious and scholarly leaders ... willing to share uncompromisingly” which Accad (2012, 43) deems so essential to Christian-Muslim interactions.

I cannot censor the voices of Christians who make people uncomfortable, nor do I wish to. What I can do is invite people to engage with the diverse views they encounter and humbly walk with people as they wrestle to discern truth. On occasions when Durie’s views enter the conversation, I can take on the metaphorical role of “good cop” while Durie’s straight talk on Islam, whether intentionally or not, may

position him similar to a “bad cop.” This analogy is not intended to communicate that Durie’s posture is abusive or aggressively negative toward Muslims. Rather, what might be considered as two contrasting approaches—“straight talk” on Islamic violence vs. an irenic “kerygmatic” approach—can both contribute constructively in helping Muslims come to understand truth and freedom. There can occasionally be friction and even visible conflict, but both the good and bad “cops” are members of the same metaphorical police force working in different ways for the same ultimate goal.

Conclusion

Mark Durie’s discourse on Islamist violence has an important, if unpleasant, role as part of a wider community in Christian-Muslim interaction. Durie has intentionally presented himself as a truth-telling counterbalance against the misinformation he sees as contributing to naïve syncretism and existential dialogue.

He makes frequent yet brief calls for “truth and love” but is limited in his application of both. The truth he proclaims applies only to the classical forms of Islam he has studied and experienced, disregarding many facts about moderate Muslims. He tangibly loves Christians yet does little to expound in his public writing how he envisions demonstrating that love to people outside the family of Christ. He seems to prefer to leave the task of actively loving Muslims to evangelists like me.

These qualities make him an excellent source of information about Islamist violence and a handy foil for those who advocate for more irenic approaches to engaging Muslims. However, Durie’s discourse on Islam can still contribute toward the ultimate goal of “kerygmatic” proclamation. Whether or not he intends it, the role of “bad cop” in Christian-Muslim dialogue is an constructive function of his discourse for which he is particularly suited.

Editorial Note: This is an updated (June 8, 2024) version of the article which contains corrections and clarifications from the author to better reflect her intention and Mark Durie's views.

Questions for Conversation

1. Do you agree with Julie's conclusion that Mark Durie's discourse "has an important, if unpleasant, role" in Christian-Muslim interaction? Why or why not?
2. In what ways does your context affect your approach to Muslim-Christian interaction and dialogue?
3. How would you describe your own approach to Muslim-Christian interaction? How does it compare to Durie's? Where would you place your approach on Accad's SEKAP scale?

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“Peaceable Witness”: An Author-Practitioner’s Reflections after Twenty-Five Years

By Gordon Nickel

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Since the dawn of Islam up to today, the teachings of the New Testament on peacemaking have been a scandal and a challenge for Muslims and Christians alike. Such teachings raise questions regarding what the Messiah teaches about our response to violence and what Christ-honoring witness looks like. For those of us seeking to make disciples among Muslims, what are the implications of the radical teachings of Jesus and Paul about peace for gospel ministry? Twenty-five years ago, I authored a book titled *Peaceable Witness among Muslims* to find out. Now I would like to reflect on that book with a question in mind, “How did that work out for you, in thought and practice?”

“Peaceable Witness” Still Relevant Today

I wrote *Peaceable Witness* (1999) between a six-year experience of mission work among Muslims in Germany and Pakistan, and a similar

stint in India alongside doctoral studies in Muslim commentary on the Quran. In Pakistan, my wife Gwennyth and I engaged in gospel witness to a particular tribal group in a major city. After writing *Peaceable Witness*, we worked alongside and mentored national Indian evangelists in witness among Muslims, using the Urdu we had learned in Pakistan.

In between these two periods, I authored *Peaceable Witness* for a potential readership in my own denomination—an historic peace-church known as the Mennonite Brethren—and also for interested readers on the ‘two sides’ of our particular identity, the Anabaptists and the evangelicals. At that point, no one in my denomination had written substantially on gospel witness among Muslims, and only a few in the larger Anabaptist world had done so.

As I read the book today, I see many truths that I still would affirm with the same or even greater emphasis, if not with the same words or tone. After an introductory chapter, I wrote chapters two through seven largely on themes that I understood I shared with most evangelical workers among Muslims. It truly seemed that most of us, from many church backgrounds, were on the same page in the 80s and 90s. Witness collections such as *The Gospel and Islam* (McCurry 1979) and *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road* (Woodberry 1989)—sources I referenced extensively in my book. My chapters made a case for the centrality of bearing witness to Christ, making disciples, and gathering believers into nurturing fellowships. I addressed the question of conversion head on from a biblical perspective, knowing the objections coming out of the Western guilt complex (Sanneh 1995, 393–400). I emphasized the necessity of a confident New Testament Christology in meaningful friendly conversation with Muslims. And I provided encouragement for living “lives of love” among these friends, no matter what challenges our contexts may bring. My chapters included all the best practices (then current among missionaries) related to building good relationships, making a positive confession of Christ, adapting to local culture, relying on the power of prayer, the gospel, the Holy Spirit, and the attractiveness of Jesus, and much more.

The chapters in which I made my own particular case for “peaceable witness” among Muslims are chapters eight and nine (accessible [online here](#)). Briefly, I argued that what the Bible calls “the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15) deserves a method of delivery that matches the message. I invite you to read these two chapters in order to better understand my comments below.

I recounted a number of stories of peaceable witness from current ministry experience as well as from the history of Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. I focused on the *hijra* as a moment in the Islamic story when a decision determined the approach to violence and contrasted it with Jesus’ Gethsemane decision to obey the will of the Father to go to the cross. Following Jesus’ example of peace, I argued, would mean a bold declaration of the truth about Jesus without any kind of imposition, coercion, manipulation, or inducement. In the life of a witness, I wrote, following the example of Jesus faithfully could lead to suffering and even martyrdom.

Reading those ‘peace’ chapters closely now after a sizable time gap, I again agree with many of the affirmations I made then. The theology and especially Christology of peaceable witness that I drew from the New Testament still seems to be solid. I made prominent use of Kenneth Cragg’s *Jesus and the Muslim* (1985) and *Muhammad and the Christian* (1984), and I do not regret doing so. I do not think I have seen better writing on these themes in the interim. I also drew much encouragement from David Shenk, a fellow evangelical Anabaptist, whose *Journeys of the Muslim Nation and the Christian Church* (2003) remains foundational.

A Missing Plank of “Peaceable Witness”?

But selection of Scripture for making one’s case, and thematic writings with a thesis, can leave out content that eventually speaks up for inclusion. It is quite natural for writers to marshal material to back up their arguments, and I certainly gathered supporting expressions from

many directions for these chapters. What happens, though, when deeper academic study and further ministry experience suggest important gaps? And what if dichotomies assumed or created in one context turn out to be false in another?

The teachings of Jesus and Paul on peace and peaceful gospel-witness are firm (e.g., Matt. 5:9; Rom. 12:18). At the same time and in the same pages, Jesus has some scathingly harsh words for the Pharisees and teachers of the Jewish Law (e.g., Matt. 23:13–36). Can the Lord's vigorous interaction with religious leaders be in contradiction with peaceable ministry? Either it cannot, or I need to change my concept of peaceable ministry. I do not believe they can contradict, even if their integration does not readily appear to my eyes. It is Jesus' teaching and behavior I want to emulate and advocate, not a self-constructed approach that cites only the words and actions that I choose for my case.

Paul also struggled mightily to convince his fellow Jews that "the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead," and that the Messiah is Jesus. In the Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica, Paul devoted three Sabbath days to "reason with," "explain," and "prove" these truths (Acts 17:2–3). Can we imagine that in three full days of intense interaction over the earth-shaking claims of the gospel there were only smiles and calm voices? The verb used for "reasoning with" in Acts 17:2 has perhaps not been fully appreciated in the context of engagement with Muslims. The meaning of *dialogesthai* here is not to have a breezy conversation. We actually lose a proper sense of the range of gospel engagement with Muslims when we take "dialog" to mean only the efforts of certain Western pluralistic interfaith groups.

I remember when I first learned from Christian friends in India, some of them converts from Islam, that their discussions with Muslims would continue all night, and even for days. Quite honestly, my first thought was that I did not think I would be able to do that—I like my sleep too much. The possible second thought, however, is where I might deceive myself and perhaps try to deceive others. I may begin to find reasons not only

for why I would not choose to engage Muslims at length like my Indian friends, but also for why no one *should* do that—in other words, why it is wrong! Personal weakness might then become ministry approach, and in the meantime, I may start trying to signal virtue. Such is the deceitfulness of the human heart.

My Indian friends tell me that after several days of close “dialog” in the Pauline sense, their Muslim interlocutors sometimes acknowledge the truth of the gospel and submit to Jesus. Again, my first response may be skepticism. But why should that be? “Some of the Jews were persuaded” in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4). What we may be missing, however, are the similarities between the Jews who did not want to acknowledge that Jesus is the Messiah and rose from the dead, and the Muslims who do not want to acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God and died for the sins of the world. In both cases the resistance is to the true identity of Jesus.

The Reality of Islam

My doctoral studies in the Islamic interpretive tradition, and in particular the earliest Muslim commentaries on the Quran—subsequent to writing *Peaceable Witness*—repeatedly suggested a hard reality. I learned that resistance to the deity and lordship of Jesus, alongside an ascription of moral authority to Muhammad as well as something quite like deity if not deity itself, was part of Islam right from the start. For me, the symbol for this is the message of the inscriptions in the Dome of the Rock, posted in 691 AD and still accessible today.¹ This resistance to the divine glory of Jesus on the one hand, and conscious ascription of divine glory to Muhammad, is something that I believe has been shared by many Muslims throughout Islamic history and up to the present day.

If readers feel I am going too far here, perhaps we can agree on a less controversial observation about Islam. Islam is a response to

1 See for example, “[The Arabic Islamic Inscriptions On The Dome Of The Rock In Jerusalem, 72 AH / 692 CE](https://islamic-awareness.org/72-AH-692-CE/),” islamic-awareness.org.

Judaism and Christianity—the major faiths in the Middle East in the seventh century—that rejected their major beliefs and practices while repurposing pieces from them to compose a new religion. Consider the first half of the second sura, which scholars uninterested in Christian ministry freely call polemic against the Jews. The first 80 verses of Sura 3 are commonly described by Muslim exegetes as recitations against the Jesus confessions of a group of Arabian Christians. This is how the Muslim scripture opens! Interested readers can check the notes I wrote alongside the text of these suras in *The Quran with Christian Commentary* (2020). I found that the Islamic interpretive tradition accentuates—not ameliorates—any indications of polemic in the Quranic text. And other Muslim genres simply launch into polemic immediately, using whatever they like from Muslim tradition and even from Western biblical criticism!²

This is a topic that deserves greater discussion in another time and place. My point here is simply that when we come into significant interaction with Muslims, many Muslims begin not with a clean slate about the truths we will confess about Jesus, but rather with more than a millennium of encouragement to strongly reject those truths. From among these, many Muslims are happy or willing to authentically dispute the truth with gospel messengers, and some will be honest enough to—like Paul’s Bereans—examine the Scriptures to see whether their message is true (Acts 17:11).

Whether you agree with these thoughts or disagree—feel free!—please do not misunderstand. I am by no means writing about all Muslims at all times in all places. But if these thoughts are relevant for a substantial number of Muslims, then intense Pauline ‘three day’-style dialog should not automatically be declared out of bounds.

2 For more information, see my *The Gentle Answer to the Muslim Accusation of Biblical Falsification* (2015).

Seeking the Peace of Muslims

For many Muslims, making a case for the New Testament Jesus needs more than polite conversation about our respective beliefs and practices. The description of peaceable witness in my book characterized arguing and debating with Muslims as out of step with the “gentleness and respect” of 1 Peter 3:15, and that was wrong. Yes, some debating behaviors are certainly out of step with peace, but why assume that all must be so? What about with Muslims who do not see debate as harsh, who do not think making a strong argument disrespectful but rather enjoy it, who will be left unmoved by the simple confession of a Christian but are ready to struggle with a Christian for the truth? In this case, what would seeking the peace of the Muslim mean? Would it be peaceable to decline to continue the encounter on the principle that it might not appear gentle? Or would peace mean making a strong case for gospel truth—for example, that Jesus did indeed die on the cross—while relying on the Holy Spirit for control of personal emotions and expressions as well as of the larger spiritual environment of the encounter? I am now inclined to make room in peaceable witness for such efforts.

An author who acknowledges faults in an earlier presentation must not pretend that a new presentation is faultless, and I want to be careful not to appear to do so here. This is simply how my “peaceable witness” approach worked out in thought and practice. And I wish every Christian minister out there in the Apostolate to Islam, striving to bear witness to Jesus among Muslims in appropriate ways, God’s richest blessings!

Questions for Conversation

1. Would you engage in a three-day vigorous dialogue seeking to persuade someone about the truthfulness of the gospel? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever advocated for a particular ministry practice which you later changed your mind on? If so, how did you begin to think otherwise?

3. The author presented his ideas based on both biblical and Islamic sources. What is your view of the biblical and Islamic sources which he discusses?

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Using *A Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue* for Interfaith Discussion Groups with Muslims

By Mike Urton (with contributions by Kevin Schiltz and Roy Oksnevad)

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Fear over doctrinal conflicts are among the issues that can hinder Christians from sharing their faith with Muslims. Discussions over deeply-held core beliefs can lead to heated arguments that end relationships. This potential conflict causes many to avoid these conversations altogether and leave the discussions only to scholars and debates between apologists.

This dilemma begs the question of a constructive way to have these conversations. A way that allows Christians to be faithful witnesses while learning what their Muslim neighbor thinks and believes, without descending into argument. A way that helps to build friendships and community between Muslims and Christians, all the while giving Christians ample opportunity to introduce their Muslim friends to Christ.

In the Chicago area, we have been using the classic resource [*A Muslim and A Christian in Dialogue*](#), by Badru Kateregga and David Shenk, to create three discussion groups between Muslims and Christians. This

book was written to create dialogue in both Muslim-majority and diaspora contexts; any situation where Muslims and Christians can have friendly conversations. Its aim is not just a mutual exchange of ideas, but for both sides to honestly hear each other's witness. It may challenge some Christians to hear the witness of Muslims, but this is an important part of the method. The authors wrote in the preface that

witness in dialogue is vital We have not minced words. We have spoken with candor. We have each attempted to be as faithful as possible to the respective witness to which we believe God has called us (Kateregga and Shenk 2011, 18–19).

In this article we discuss how these groups in Chicago were started, lessons we learned from conducting the groups, and suggestions for how to start groups.

History and Description

Over the course of the pandemic, I (Mike) and a couple of men from my local church had a Zoom English Café with some Turkish men from a nearby cultural center. In June of 2021, as the pandemic began to wind down, we discussed a return to in-person meetings. I approached our Turkish friends about having a book discussion on *A Muslim and A Christian in Dialogue*. The Turkish men in the group were enthusiastic about the idea, and so our monthly English Café became a book discussion group.

At our first meeting, we introduced the book showing that it was arranged in two sections, the Muslim witness and the Christian witness. Each of these sections listed core doctrines such as "There is no God but Allah," "Satan and Evil," and "The Seal of the Prophets" for the Muslim witness; and "The Lord God is One," "Sin and Evil," and "Jesus the Messiah" for the Christian witness. Also, we laid ground rules for the discussion as those advocated in the preface, including, "Don't interpret

my faith for me!” (Kateregga and Shenk 2011, 19). This rule helped in creating an honest and mutually respectful group. We agreed that we would have a rotation between the Muslim and Christian witness sections by discussing a Muslim doctrine one month and a Christian one the next.

This group has consistently met since that time, and while we have experienced ups and downs in attendance of both Muslims and Christians, a core group of committed participants has emerged. Having a meal together before the discussion helped us to build trust and create genuine friendships. This was evidenced by a time when some new Muslim young men joined our group. One of the older Muslim men, speaking of the Christians, told the newcomers, “They are our brothers. You can ask them anything.” These factors gave the group stability and created an environment where the core doctrines of our respective faiths could be discussed, understood, and challenged.

As an example, when the topic was “The Lord God is One” from the Christian witness, a Muslim participant stated, “I didn’t know that you Christians believed in only one God. In my village in Turkey, I was told that Christians believed in three gods.” This was in the same session when we talked about God being Triune. Our Muslim friend said this after we unpacked that God is one in being and three in person, all the while emphasizing that the love shared between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit points not only to God’s love for his creation, but also to His self-sufficiency.¹

In another example, while discussing the chapter “Adam and Hauwa” under the Muslim witness, it was noted that the author wrote,

It is the sincere Muslim witness that the first phase of life on earth did not begin in sin and rebellion against the Creator. Although Adam and Hauwa (Eve) were sent

1 For further explanation see [*How Does the Trinity Impact BMB Discipleship?*](#) – Part 2 by Malik Ibrahim

from the Heavenly Garden down to earth after Satan's temptation, they realized their sin and repented. They sought forgiveness from God. They were given the necessary guidance. (Kateregga and Shenk 2011, 43)

Our Muslim friends understood this event as a mistake that Adam and Eve committed but was forgiven after they repented. The Christians pushed back that the result of Adam and Eve's disobedience was the world of suffering and death that we have today. Thus, what they did was certainly not a minor sin or mistake.

When the topic was "The Word of God" from the Christian witness, some of the Muslims in the group were applying their understanding of Qur'anic revelation to the Bible. One of the Muslim men who had been in the group from the beginning spoke up, "You guys are trying to understand this as Muslims. In Christianity, the revelation is Jesus."

A noteworthy discovery happened in our session on "The Seal of the Prophets," when we talked about Muhammad. A Christian mentioned some of the stories about Muhammad from his earliest biographer, Ibn Ishaq, such as light emanating from his mother's body when she was pregnant with him that allowed her to see "the castles of Bushra in Syria" (Guillaume 2004, 69). One of the Muslims shared that the historicity of such stories was secondary to whether it produced faith in Allah and his messenger. This emphasized the difference that many Muslims approach Islam through the lens of faith, whereas Christians approach the Bible as living history.

For the chapter on "Worship and Fellowship," we discussed baptism, Sunday worship, and the eucharist, which was met with a surprising amount of interest from our Muslim friends. They were so interested that we had to use two sessions to complete the discussion. Their interest in these Christian practices most likely stems from the emphasis that Islam places on religious duties, such as the five pillars of Islam—the heart of their faith. In explaining these practices, we were afforded the

opportunity to share how each practice testifies to the completed work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

The group has not always kept the schedule of discussing a chapter every month. During special holidays, like Eid Al-Adha (the feast of the sacrifice) or Christmas, the group taught about the meaning of the holiday. At Easter, we showed the Jesus film in Turkish at our friends' request. Holidays have proved to be wonderful times to share from Scripture the true meaning of the celebrations and how each points to Christ.

We have also taken unscheduled breaks during personal or national tragedies to support each other. When a Christian in the group had a sudden death in the family, the Muslims attended the funeral to show their support. The next discussion was on Christian funerals. When the recent earthquakes happened in Turkey, the Christians spent time listening to what was on the hearts of their Muslim friends, and praying for them in the name of Jesus.

As we write this article, the group does not show any signs of slowing down and has even added a few new people. It has also spawned another, larger group, which began meeting in the fall of 2022 and rotates meeting at a local church and a Turkish cultural center in a different part of the city. Recently, a third discussion group for Muslim and Christian women started.

Lessons Learned

In conducting these discussion groups for over a year and a half, we have learned from both our successes and mistakes. The following is a list of the most significant lessons learned:

- Include people from local churches in the surrounding area and train them well. In our discussion groups, we have done a decent job of including Christians but not always the best job of training them for the task. Training is key because it assists people in overcoming their hesitations and equips them in answering difficult questions.

- Seek out partners in the Muslim community where you are engaging in order to help with the planning. This makes the Muslims equal partners in the discussion and creates ownership. They are the primary recruiters and organizers for their own community. The mutuality in our groups is one of the reasons we have had longevity.
- The Muslim community that you are engaging must have interfaith dialogue as a value. Not all have this value. We have approached at least one other mosque about these discussions, and they said no. Also, the book discussion seems to work better with those who have a university education or higher. Coupled with this is a good command of English, although *A Muslim and A Christian in Dialogue* is translated into other [languages](#).
- The format of the book makes dialogue simple, especially since it requires little preparation. However, as with any book, it is not perfect, and there are some issues in the Christian witness sections with which some may disagree. An example for us was the statement, “Christians and Muslims worship the same God” (Kateregga and Shenk 2011, 34). We find this statement to be too simplistic, and when we’ve explained that to our Muslim friends, they have agreed with us. Yet we find ourselves largely in agreement with Dr. Shenk, and the differences allowed us the opportunity to explain why we disagree. At the outset of the group, we stated that even though these are learned authors, we will not agree with everything they say, since they are fallible. The Muslims have likewise found a few issues where they disagree with Dr. Kateregga.
- A disappointment that our Muslim friends expressed with the book was the brief treatment of “The Prophets in History” from the Christian witness. Since the prophets are so central to Islamic belief, they were hoping for a more comprehensive explanation of the missions of the major prophets in the Bible. As a result, the group decided to do a few supplemental sessions on the prophets at the conclusion of the book discussion.
- Although the goal is distinctly not teaching, a short presentation may be necessary for certain topics. Many of our Muslim friends have

never read the Bible. Thus, when the subject was “The Word of God” from the Christian witness, we taught how the Bible was structured and how it all pointed to Jesus.

- Read from Scripture regularly in the discussion. Dr. Shenk does an excellent job using biblical references, but sometimes more is needed to flesh out the discussion. An example is when Muslims puzzle over why Muhammad is not prophesied in the Bible. Here is where Hebrews 1:1–2 can be introduced to show that the prophets culminate in God’s Son. We made a sheet of all relevant Scriptures for the discussion sessions in both English and in Turkish. We also included QR codes which link to the Scripture passages on the sheets, in case participants would like an electronic version. Online Bible translations may be found [here](#).
- Hospitality is a key component to the success of our groups. It can be easy to think of this as just as an add-on or something polite to do to get to the discussion. Yet times of enjoying a meal together and talking about each other’s lives have created a deep trust in the first group. The second group elected to forgo the meal, but there were always snacks and refreshments present, which we enjoyed before the discussion starts.
- Commitment to the group over the long haul is key. Our Muslim friends have told us that they do not really know what Christians believe. Most of what we share with them is new; it is the first time they have heard it. Thus, patience and commitment over a long period of time is needed as our Muslim friends discover the truths of the Gospel for the first time and begin to understand.

Suggestions for Getting Started

If you are interested in starting a group using this book, here are a few suggestions:

- Gather a group of like-minded believers in your area to begin praying about reaching out to a local Muslim community to start a discussion

group. A good place to begin recruiting is among those in your congregation who have had cross-cultural ministry experience, such as returned or furloughing missionaries or those who have been on a short-term mission.²

- Choose a curriculum like [Journey to Jesus: Building Christ Centered Friendships with Muslims](#) to train Christians. Make this a prerequisite to join the discussion groups.
- Locate a Muslim community in your area and reach out to them. If you are unaware of any mosques or community centers, then visit salatomatic.com to find one near you. Meet with the community leaders and present the idea of starting a book discussion. If they are amenable to the idea, then schedule a date for a first meeting where you introduce the book and set the ground rules for discussion. You can set up a regular schedule to meet or set a time at the end of each meeting when you will meet again.

Conclusion

We are very grateful for the friendships that we have formed in these discussion groups and have seen firsthand how the groups foster peace between Muslim and Christian communities. Yet, we resonate with what the authors wrote in the preface, “Hundreds of millions of Muslims and Christians are each other’s neighbors. The faithful in both communities believe they have been called by God to be witnesses, yet they seldom hear each other’s witness” (Katerega and Shenk 2011, 18).

Indeed, it is our desire that our Muslim friends hear our clear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ and embrace him as Lord and Savior, so that we cannot only call them friends but also brothers who share our relationship with the Prince of Peace.

2 See my (Mike’s) previous article for Seedbed on this topic, “Reaching UPGs in the United States through Church-Missionary Partnerships: A Proposal” (Oct 2021).

Questions for Conversation

1. What is most surprising to you about this case study?
2. What aspects of this case study might be applicable in your context?
3. What are the obstacles to forming discussion groups with seekers in your context? What fruitful practices have emerged in your experience?

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Continuity, Discontinuity, and Islam: Guidance from a BMB Leader for Mentors of BMBs

By Bishop Dr. Yassir Eric, *Communio Messianica*

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Editorial Note: *This article originated in a presentation and Q&A session by Bishop Dr. Yassir Eric in “BMB Perspectives on Theology, Identity, and Community,” a course facilitated by the [Lilias Trotter Center](#) and the [Hikma Partnership](#).*

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who are actively involved in discipling our community, my brothers and sisters, believers who come from a Muslim background (BMBs). As followers of Christ who opened our eyes “to turn them from darkness to light” (Acts 26:18), we belong to one body and are bound together by the love of God into a true unity through Jesus Christ, not uniformity.

Jesus, with his blood, “purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9).

Although there are many resources available to learn how to disciple and mentor BMBs, in this article, I will share my personal experience and provide some best practices to help BMBs find their identity in Christ the Messiah and the relationship between their Christian faith and their Islamic heritage. My life has been transformed by the power of Jesus Christ; this is what shaped me and gave me insight.

Some of my most cherished qualities and values I did not learn in church, but from my Muslim family in Northern Sudan.

My Journey with Christ

Initially, I came into the world in Northern Sudan into a large, devout Muslim family. Although I grew up in a Muslim home, some core principles, and virtues I cherish till now in my life, I did not learn in a church environment but through my Muslim family, whom I deeply love and miss so much, especially my devout Muslim grandfather, fervently committed to the Islamic belief and faith. He taught me the values of hospitality, showing respect to others, and fostering a deep sense of connection with the family. These principles remain close to my heart, and I am doing whatever it takes to pass these values on to my children. A cherished memory is of my grandfather’s generous street feasts during the month of Ramadan. He would extend an invitation to anyone on the street to join the evening meal if they were unable to reach their homes in time for the breaking of the fast. This act reflected his immense generosity and hospitality, which still motivates me to this day.

When I was only eight, my father took me to a Qur’an school without explaining why, where, or how long I would be there. At the Quran school, I cried myself to sleep every night, missing my family, my mother, and my community. I was in a small village in the middle of the desert of Northern Sudan and had no idea what would happen to me there. I thought my

father would come back soon. But days turned into weeks, weeks turned into months, and two years later, my father finally came to take me home. While at the Quran school, I had no chance to live my childhood, as it was buried in the sand of the desert.

The time at the Quran school shaped my identity. There, I learned that my existence was only meaningful within the Islamic Ummah, and that I no longer solely belonged to my immediate family but to the larger Islamic community “the Umma” and had dedicated my life to serving it. I grew up loving Islam and ready to do anything to protect and support my Islamic Ummah.

The Ummah is a term used in Islamic culture to refer to the global community of Muslims. It encompasses people of different races, nationalities, and cultures that share the same faith. The word Ummah is derived from the Arabic word “umm,” which means “mother.” In Islamic belief, the Ummah is significant in the life of any Muslim. It is considered a source of care, love, and support, much like a mother. Muslims believe that protecting, preserving, and supporting the Ummah is a crucial duty, and it is one’s responsibility to do so. With the Ummah, a person can thrive and succeed in life.

The second lesson I learned at Qur’an School was that one’s life has no value without belief in God. As a Muslim, I have never doubted the existence of God. This is why I find it much more fulfilling to talk to my Muslim friends than to try to convince the godless, self-centered people in the west who believe God must explain himself to them in order to believe in him! The notion of a sovereign God that creates the universe is not something I learned in church; I had this conviction even when I was still a Muslim. At the Qur’an School, I was taught to have reverence for God and that life loses its meaning if God is not a part of it. This shaped my life and identity.

After attending Qur’anic school, I underwent some changes, both positive and negative. My status in the family improved, and my grandfather

started to ask me to sit beside him. Despite still being a child, I began to behave more like an adult. I stopped greeting women and started adopting some fanatical beliefs. My loyalty was exclusively to the Muslim Ummah, and I started to be against anything outside of it, including Jews and Christians. I developed a strong hatred and never felt inclined towards Christianity, nor did I ever try to build any bridges with them.

One day, a Christian from Southern Sudan sat next to me at school. His name was Zakaria. I hated him because he was a Christian from Southern Sudan. I suggested to my friends, "We need to kill him because he's an infidel." For two years, we prayed daily for the elimination of Zakaria. That night—in sha'a-llah—our dreams were to be fulfilled.

We were ready: together with my friends, I sat in a tree and looked down at the path below us, which was only dimly lit by the moonlight. The light of a torch flickered in the distance, getting closer and closer. Soon it was only a few meters away from us. My heart was racing. We quickly reached for our rifles, to the barrels of which we had previously attached bayonets. Just before Zakaria walked right under our tree with his torch, I gave the signal. Together with a friend, I jumped down from the branch and landed with my jumping boots directly on Zakaria's back, who slumped to the ground from the force of our bodies.

Now the others also jumped down from the tree. One tied Zakaria's hands with a rope, another pressed his hands over his mouth. Zakaria jerked his head up. All I could see of his dark face was the white of his eyes, wide open in fear and pain. First, we took our weapon butts and struck his body. Then we turned the weapons round and stabbed his back, legs and arms with the knife blades on the barrel of the guns. Zakaria's screams became weaker and weaker until he stopped screaming altogether. I could feel his body twitching beneath me, becoming weaker and weaker. As if in a frenzy, I continued to beat and stab him.

"Come on, stop it, he's already dead!" shouted my friend Mustafa, who had been pressing his hands over Zakaria's mouth the whole time.

Only now did I stop, straighten up and nod to the others. Once again, I looked down at Zakaria, who was lying lifeless on the forest floor. We walked quickly back to our camp. Above us, the sky was already turning pink. Dawn was breaking and it was time for morning prayers: "Allahu akbar," I murmured, as a feeling of pride welled up inside me. We washed ourselves and did the morning prayer. Zakaria never came back to school. That day I thought I did something good to please Allah.

One day, my uncle, who was a devout Muslim, converted to Christianity. As a result, our family rejected him. I loved him dearly and wanted to help bring him back to Islam. I began to question who Jesus Christ really was and turned to the Qur'an for answers. As I read about Jesus in the Qur'an, I found myself falling in love with Jesus. However, this did not cause me to renounce my faith in Islam and become a Christian.

During a visit to my cousin who was critically ill in a hospital, I encountered two Egyptian Coptic Christians in the intensive care unit. They requested to pray for my cousin, which surprised me, as I wasn't aware of Christians praying or believing in God. Despite my reluctance, I allowed them to pray as I didn't want to offend them. However, I made it clear that I didn't want to see them again. In the Middle East, it's not acceptable to be impolite to guests, which is why I couldn't refuse their request.

They prayed a prayer that deeply touched me. Their words were full of love, and they spoke to God as if they had a personal relationship with Him. I was amazed that these people, who were not of my faith, could converse with God in such a way that I couldn't. As soon as they finished their prayer with an "Amen," my cousin opened his eyes after being in a coma for four weeks, and life returned to him.

This night, Jesus opened my eyes to see Him through the actions of two Christians who risked coming and praying. One of them also shared the gospel with me, the first Christian who spoke to me about Jesus. I asked Jesus to come into my life and change me if He was truly the one this person was speaking about. I surrendered my life to Christ not

because I was convinced that Christianity or Islam was right or wrong, the Bible was not corrupted, or the Trinity was real; I still had many questions and doubts at that time. Rather, I gave my life to Christ because He touched my heart.

Soon after that, I told my father, "I became a Christian." Unfortunately, my family disowned me because of my decision. Looking back, I regret the way I spoke to my father during that time. If I could go back, I would handle things differently. I realize now that I got into a conflict with my family too quickly before they had a chance to see the positive changes that had taken place in my life.

The rejection I faced from my family had a profound impact on the way I interacted with them and even thought about them. This was mainly due to one of the Christians who told me, "There is no fellowship between darkness and light." He made it clear that my family represented the darkness, and as a follower of Christ, I represented the light. I was sincere in my decision to follow Jesus, and I felt the need to sever all ties with my past. However, in hindsight, I don't believe this is what Jesus would have wanted me to do. Unfortunately, my decision to leave my family led them to disowning me.

Many years after I had to leave Sudan, I went back to Egypt for the first time after many years. While attending a conference, one evening I met a Sudanese pastor who approached me after I finished my lecture. He asked me where I came from, and as I was telling him my story, he began to cry. I asked him why he was crying, and he replied, "Do you remember me?" I was confused as I didn't think we had ever met before. He then revealed his name to be Zakaria, and the memories of the last time I saw him, on that dark night when I almost killed him, came rushing back. The moment he said his name, I could see the injuries that I had caused him. I felt an overwhelming sense of shame and wished to disappear. It was a moment that I could not handle.

I thought Zakaria would remind me of the pain I had caused him in the past. But instead, he surprised me with something that I never thought

was possible. He said, “Yassir, because you hated me so much, I have been praying for you.” With a broken arm, he took out his Bible and showed me that he had been praying for me for many years. It was then that I realized why God loved and dealt with someone like me—because of the prayer and love of a person like Zakaria. That night in Cairo, God confronted me with the truth that I hope all believers should know. We never sought Jesus; HE was the one who was always seeking us. I am grateful for the church in the Middle East, who despite rejection and persecution, are being light and salt to this world. On that night, the Lord taught me a valuable lesson: to hate those who hate you is easy and human, but to love those who hate you, you need someone whose name is Jesus Christ.

BMBs’ Identity in Christ

There are a few things you can do to help people like me, who come from a Muslim background, to grow into a healthy identity as followers of Christ within their own communities. These reflections are based on my own personal experiences, mistakes, and discipleship.

Firstly, it’s important to give new believers from Muslim backgrounds time to be shaped by God through the power of the Holy Spirit so that they can become more like Christ. I don’t know of any father who would reject their child when they become better people, exhibiting love, care, and respect. However, to be transformed into the image of Christ, this process requires time and prayer. It’s not something that can be achieved solely through a program, method, or strategy.

Secondly, once BMBs have had time to grow, help them to tell their story and walk with Jesus Christ. Teach them to find the correct vocabulary for sharing their new faith with their community. Imagine that I am a new believer who has just left my former faith. I want to be a part of you and the Christian church, and I sincerely want you to accept me. What would I do? I will start telling you terrible things about Islam to

convince you that I am genuine so that you will accept and admit me into your club. This ruptures my relationship with my community, sometimes beyond repair. Instead, you can help us find a different narrative and wording to communicate what Jesus Christ did in our lives, to give us the confidence that Jesus Christ touched our hearts and changed our lives. It would help if you also reminded us repeatedly that we are on a journey of change. Jesus is the one who works in our lives and causes us to be transformed into HIS image.

BMBs struggle with being stereotyped and not trusted by CBBs. Many Christians in the Middle East simply don't believe that a Muslim can become a follower of Christ. Moreover, some Muslims have said that they have become Christians when they have not. However, the pressure that a BMB feels to constantly prove his faith to the church can cause BMBs to break all the bridges and ties that relate to their community and societies. Instead, we need to give those new believers time to be changed by Jesus Christ.

My family's rejection was not based on a theological debate or arguments but because of the way that I miscommunicated what had happened to me. The irony is that my father and family rejected and persecuted me because they loved me and didn't want to lose me. According to them, and according to what I told them, I became an infidel and will go to hell. Because of their love for me, they wanted to prevent me from that.

In the gospel of John chapter 4, Nicodemus approached Jesus and acknowledged that the things He did could only be done by someone who came from God. Luke also described the gospel and the good news to Theophilus in Acts 1:1 as all that Jesus began "to do and to teach." We must follow His example by doing what He did and then teaching others. We should strive to reflect Christ in our lives and be the hope of glory that our community needs. This takes time, but we should remain committed to finding the right words to communicate our experiences and remain connected to our community, as Jesus began "to do and

to teach.” This is the example we need to follow: to do and follow what Jesus Christ did and then to teach. People must see the reality of Christ in us, “the hope of glory.” All these things need time. Please help us find the narrative and the wording to communicate what Jesus Christ did in our lives. Please help us to remain within our community, because our community means a lot to us and needs us.

Continuity or Discontinuity between Islam and Christianity?

Navigating a healthy identity in Christ as BMBs is just part of a more extensive journey of relating our faith in Christ to our Muslim heritage. To help BMBs grow toward maturity, we should understand Islam and how it relates to faith in Christ. Our discipleship courses should not be Islam courses—we should avoid that. However, keeping some Islamic issues in the back of our minds can help us walk with BMBs as they sort through their Muslim background in the light of Christ.

It is essential to distinguish between Islam and Muslims. Muslims are people, and we should build bridges to understand them better. Islam is more than just a religion; it has a socio-political system, a socio-educational system, a judiciary system, and even a military system. Additionally, Islam is a culture. Sometimes, it is not easy to distinguish between what is culture and what is religion. In the Middle East, some issues are expected of everybody. We might even say that CBBs in the Middle East are Christian by religion but Muslim by culture.

In the Western culture, the individual is the core, and their life is usually represented as a big circle. This circle consists of various aspects of life, such as faith, family, friends, work, and other things that make up an individual’s life. However, for Muslims and BMBs, their faith or religion is the big circle that encompasses all aspects of their life. They sort everything inside this big circle of religion and faith. For instance, if a Muslim is offered food that is not permissible by Islamic law, they might

decline by saying, “I cannot eat it because I am a Muslim.” Similarly, there are specific job roles that they can or cannot perform due to their faith. Religion is not just a part of their life; it is the foundation of their life, and everything else falls under it.

In discipling relationships with Muslims who have converted to Christianity, Westerners need to understand that their Western understanding of God and theology may not be applicable. They need to learn to see the world and their faith from the perspective of the Muslim converts. It is hard to label some things as either Islam, religion, or culture, and there is no one version of Islam or type of Muslim. Discipling Sufi Muslims is different from discipling Ahmadiyya Muslims, or those from the Muslim Brotherhood, or British Muslims of Bangladeshi origin. Hence, there is no single ultimate or best system or approach for discipling all Muslim converts. However, we can learn from experiences and methods and be open to learning and contextualizing.

The Three Layers of the Islamic “Atmosphere”

For me, Islamic culture, or any culture, is like the earth’s atmosphere. An atmosphere has different layers, and Islamic culture can be divided into three: Good, Neutral and Destructive.

Layer 1: The Good (Positive)

In Islamic culture, there are several positive values, including hospitality, respect for elders, and a strong emphasis on family. As believers in Christ, individuals from a Muslim background should continue to uphold and embody these values. Additionally, expressing and demonstrating one’s faith and acknowledging its crucial role in one’s life is a valuable trait that should be retained as a disciple of Jesus.

During my time in a Qur’anic school, I learned two essential things: fellowship, also known as the Ummah, and belief in God. These two principles are critical when dealing with a Muslim-born believer. BMBs are

fundamentalists in a positive sense, meaning to have a strong affection for the family, communities, and the devotion to God they were raised with. That is why it is so painful for them to leave their homes, families, and communities.

What I missed most when I left Islam and first joined the Christian church is community, the fellowship (Ummah). The Ummah concept is in total alignment with the word of God. Biblical faith is not Western individualism—that does not help us to live together. For BMBs, the most fundamental thing that we need is a sense of belonging, a sense of identity. This could only be lived collectively for BMBs. If we turn to the Bible in the Book of Acts, they had everything in common. This church in the Book of Acts is the church of the BMBs—everything in common, accountable to each other. This I learned at the Qur'an School.

These are examples of good things from Islamic culture, things BMBs should keep when they follow Jesus.

Layer 2: The Neutral

Secondly, in every culture, there are some things which are neutral. Whether you do it or not, it does not harm you, and it does not bring any confusion: food, color, and all those things. I don't think as BMBs we need to spend much time in changing these neutral things when we follow Jesus.

Layer 3: The Destructive

The third aspect of culture is crucial and deserves more time to be fleshed out. These are those elements of Muslim culture which can be destructive. These need to be filtered through the Word of God with care and wisdom.

Revelation and the Qur'an

Some people have asserted that the Qur'an is a revelation from God. I would not say there is a revelation in the Qur'an from God. All I can say is

that God is putting his fingerprints all over and showing himself through many things, including in Islam.

Ida Glaser—who I appreciate very much—said that Islam can be related to Moses because of the law.¹ This is partly correct, because the Shari’a has a Jewish background. However, the problem with making this connection is that Shari’a is missing a major component—Allah does not make a covenant with his people. In the OT law, God makes a covenant first with his people to be with them and walk with them, and then he gave them the Law. Also, the purpose of Shari’a is different from the purpose of the OT law. The OT law’s purpose was to show human beings’ sinfulness, but in and of itself the Law would never solve their problems. But in Islam, the purpose of the Shari’a is to sanctify, and through the obedience of the law people come to God.

These differences between the Bible and the Shari’a show that these similarities are not divine revelation—only divine fingerprints at best. Not every truth is revelation, but every revelation is truth. This distinction helps me when I deal with the issues of Islam. There are some good things, and I will not spend a lot of time trying to challenge those portions of Islam, but I cannot claim they are revelation.

Ethics and Sin

One of the challenges that I see in the discipling of BMBs is the idea of sin and ethics. In the ideas we inherited from Islam, sin is not something that is defined as a personal offense against God as it is in the Bible. In Islam, you differentiate between big sins, small sins, gray sins, large sins, which allows you to excuse certain sins as insignificant. The Bible, however, is very clear about sin, and so you cannot continue in Islam’s understanding of sin.

1 Ida Glaser, *Thinking Biblically about Islam: Genesis, Transfiguration, Transformation* (Langham Global Library, 2016).

Good Works

This whole issue of good works is tricky for BMBs and needs to be addressed biblically. The New Testament teaches that God created us to do good works in Christ. But then we have salvation by grace through faith and its tension with the book of James, a very typical tension that we have as BMBs. BMBs need to have their previous understanding of works replaced by a solid theology that reconciles grace and works in a good balance.

Sometimes the normal evangelical way of talking about this does not help. When a BMB comes to church and hears, “You are saved once and forever,” this is emphasizing his previous negative picture of Christianity. Before I met Jesus, Muslims used to tell me that Christians could do anything and get away with it. And honestly, it seems like some Christians are living their faith in this way, which is a serious matter. But ultimately, BMBs need to replace their previous understanding with a biblical understanding of grace and good works.

Who is God?

One of the biggest areas of discontinuity between Islam and Christianity is who God is. The similarities in the concept of God for Christians and Muslims are like two people looking at a forest from far away, where all the trees look similar. If a Muslim looks towards God, and I look towards God—both of us from far away—we both say we are looking into a forest with trees. But the closer we get, we realize there are tall trees, small trees, yellow trees; therefore our concepts of God are different upon closer inspection.

For me, the difference is not about terminology and philology. When I read my Bible, it says in Genesis 1:1, “*Fil badi khalaaq **Allah** issamawat wa al-ard.*” (“*In the beginning **God** created the heavens and the Earth.*”) As an Arabic speaker, I continue to use the word “Allah.” As a Christian, however, I need to fill the concept of God with new content, because

now I have “entered the forest,” so to speak. I not only say, “praise be to Allah”—which I said as a Muslim and continue to say—but I bring it further: “Praise be to Allah, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us in his mercy” (1 Pet. 1:3). I fill the word Allah with adjectives and realities of the Trinity from 1 Peter 1.

Another discontinuity is in our relationship to God. At the Qur’anic school, I learned to fear God. God was never a positive person to whom I would run to or relate to. What I needed to understand is that I am a child of God, and he is my father. I am no longer a slave, and I should not behave like it. We need continuity in that area.

Likewise, I’ve taken the concepts of God’s mercy and grace and redefined them in my new understanding of him. In Islam, *rahmat Allah* (God’s mercy) means that God is merciful and therefore gives me health, or something else that I desire. But as a follower of Christ, I have come to know that *rahmat Allah* is in the relationship with him, when he gives us second birth to believe in Jesus, to be born again. We are passive, not active. You and I don’t do anything for it. We are born through it.

God’s grace (*na’mah*) is also misconstrued in Islam. In Arabic, we call food, *na’mah*, which is why you should not throw it on the street. But *na’mah*, in the biblical sense, is the receiving of what we cannot deserve, do not deserve, and cannot earn, period. This is a redefinition of grace.

In my relationship with God, I had to discover, first, that God is my father. In Islam, I never could call Allah father. Secondly, God makes an unconditional covenant with me out of his divine initiative, as he did with Abraham, Noah, and in the New Covenant through Jesus Christ. This is going to replace Islamic predestination and many other Islamic ideas. So, if I could summarize the difference between the concept of Allah in Islam and in the Bible (even if we use the same word), the fundamental difference is the relationship. All these aspects without a relationship are nothing. All the attributes of God, if we don’t tie them to our relationship, don’t make any sense.

We need to fill our understanding of Allah with this biblical content, without picking a fight that Muslims believe in a different God than we do. The more we define it and fill it with biblical truth, the more people will realize it. We don't always have to say what we are against, but we always say what we are for. Make it positive.

And through that, God will form Muslims and us as BMBs. As I said in the beginning, when I became a follower of Christ, I had no idea if the Bible was really the truth. I had many questions. I had never read it. The whole issue of the Trinity, Christian morals, and other doctrinal concepts was not something I was convinced of cognitively. It was a journey, and this journey could be long or short, but it's a journey. That's why all these terminologies need to be filled again for BMBs.

Superiority

There is another area of discontinuity with our Muslim background, an idol that needs to be addressed for BMBs, and that is superiority. When I was a Muslim, they used to tell us, "*kuntum khayra ummatin ukh'rījat lilnnāsi*" ("you are the best people raised for mankind", Surat Al-Imran 3:110). We feel superior. The Qur'an tells us that we are the best Ummah. Mark Durie addresses this aspect of superiority in his book, *Liberty to the Captives*. It is a very important aspect, a big idol that needs to be replaced. As BMBs, we have many problems because of this superiority, which is why our churches are dividing. Anyone working among Arabic-speaking BMBs or Farsi-speaking BMBs knows what I'm talking about. This is something we brought with us from our Muslim background that needs to be replaced through the holiness of Christ. Without Christ, we are nobody; we are superior to nobody. We need to understand that every man and every woman is created in the image of God.

Women

The last idol I share that needs to be corrected is the whole understanding about women. As a child, I was taught that women have a lack of understanding and faith. A woman can never be a believer or a

person of faith like a man. Then you come to the Bible, and right at the beginning, God says, "He created man and woman in His image." One of the most pressing issues whenever I am with BMBs is the gender issue—it's a big issue of concern. Recently, I was with a large group of Iranian BMBs to speak about this issue, and one of the brothers stood and said, "Do you mean that my wife is equal like me?" I said, "Well, exactly, I mean that. She is even better than you." Then there was some discussion there. These are part of the issues we cannot tolerate and need total discontinuity with our Muslim background.

Let me conclude with this. When you tell someone like me to continue with some things in my Muslim background and to discontinue other things, the way that you reason it with me is very important. I'll give you an example. You can come and say to me, "You need to read your Bible." Why? "Because you need to have a quiet time, so that you will grow spiritually, etc." Then I will try. The day that I fail to do my quiet time, I feel guilty because I did not keep my commitment or word. But there is another way that you can help me in a better way. You should tell me, "Read your Bible, because Jesus read the Bible." You should tell me, "Pray, because Jesus prayed." Even if I'm not in a good mood or don't feel like doing it, I will pray because of the *sunna* of Jesus—he prayed. When I cannot love people, I must stick to the *sunna* of Jesus. It's not an option.

Sometimes we present aspects of Christianity like, "You really could do it. You don't have to." No, we *must*. Jesus prayed. And if I follow him, I need to pray. You can call this legalistic or whatever name you like. But this path will help someone like me, and other BMBs, much better than coming in with the Western idea of democracy—"if you feel like it." Say to me, "Jesus did it, and it is written in the Bible," and this should be the way you present it. If you say to me, "Tell the truth, because Jesus is the truth. Love your enemies, because Jesus did that," this will be a totally different motivation for me to follow things, than if you say to me, "As English and Europeans, our yes is yes, and our no is no." I don't want to be English or European. I want to follow Jesus.

I believe through the leading of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we can redeem many terminologies. Of course, Islam obtained many truthful ideas—whether intentionally or unintentionally. I don't want to call them biblical ideas, but they are ideas that have a biblical touch.

If you think about the five pillars of Islam, including the Shahada, they are very important for me as a Christian. I could redeem that. When you disciple a BMB like me, and you teach me how to respond when somebody asks what I believe, I should not start with my testimony. I should start with the Apostles' Creed. This is my Shahada. I just recite that. That way we redeem the concept of the Shahada.

We need to redeem the concept of prayer. In Islam, salat refers only to the five daily prayers prayed towards Mecca. You need to redeem that, to ask, "What does that mean?" and to tell me what it means to fill it biblically. I believe there is a lot of room for that.

We can redeem the concept of "abd" (slave). In the Old Testament, the abd (slave) comes to his master and says, "I would like to live with you freely." I tell BMBs, "I am *Abdullah* (slave of God), and I came to God, and I said to him, 'I have the freedom, but I don't want it. Guide me, direct me.'" With Islamic terminologies, Christians should not spend time trying to "civilize" us and say, "As a Christian, don't use this word. You need to speak this way. Don't say 'Allah,' say 'Rab.' Don't say, 'Salaam alaykum,' say 'salam lakum.'" In all these Christian things, Christians would like for us to be conformed to a club or their idea of Christianity. We should avoid that. Worship is about bringing all aspects of our lives to God. Whole-life discipleship of BMBs is very important.

We should not buy into the idea of insider or outsider either, Muslim communities, or non-Muslim. No, not theologically, just biblically. We always should be insiders, culturally. Otherwise, we will not help. Theologically, we cannot be insiders in many things pertaining to Islam or the Qur'an. There is also a difference between an insider applying the Islamic terminology "as is" and an insider who seeks to redeem an aspect

of it. I'm not saying that Islam has everything we need, but there is a large portion of things we could talk about and redeem and fill with a new aspect of things.

It's always good to share helpful things that could assist us in discipleship. But the minute we turn everything to an ideology, to a concept, we will get stuck. That's why I think working with Muslims, sharing the gospel with them, needs time. If you don't have time, don't even try it. Evangelicals preach three points, a summary, and a main point. I don't know where they get this from. We BMBs think in a picture. I need you to draw a picture with dimensions for me. This is why we are culturally very close to the Coptic Church and to the Oriental churches, because you see, even in the liturgy, there is time.

The person who led me to Christ started with the things that I believe in—in God and the things we had in common. First, I had to know that he was believing in God, so that he would be qualified in my eyes as someone worth listening to. As a Muslim, I used to believe we are the best Ummah, we have the best religion, so you really need to give me something better than what I know. And this is exactly what that Christian brother did. He started on common ground, speaking about the way to God and put the miracle that happened into perspective for me—the healing of my relative. I don't think we can make a method out of all this. But we should always start with where people are and not where we are. Secondly, we should always start with what they know, not what we know, and then guide them from there.

People sometimes ask questions about Muhammad. Please don't allow us BMBs to communicate in a way that our Muslim friends will hate us because we are nasty about Muhammad. I don't support any kind of polemic against Muhammad—polemic does not get us anywhere. Once, I was asked at the airport in an Islamic country if I believe that Muhammad is a Prophet and if I convert Muslims to Christianity. For the first question I told them, "I say that Muhammad is a prophet because my Muslim friends say so. I respect Muhammad as a prophet because he matters

to my friends.” And because I deeply love and value my Muslim friends, I’m not going to be polemical against Muhammad, but I am a follower of Christ.” So instead of speaking more about Muhammad, I need to speak more about what I believe in and speak about it in a positive sense. We should always avoid trying to teach Muslims Islam. This is not our job, and we should not try to educate a Muslim about Muhammad. We need to listen to what *they* say about Muhammad. We can say, “Tell me, what do you think about it?” And always answer questions by asking a question. Never give a straightforward answer for that.

Closing Remarks

I want to encourage you, no matter where you are in your journey. Working with Muslims can be difficult, and working with Muslim-Back-ground Believers (BMBs) can be even more challenging. However, I assure you that your efforts are not in vain. Your prayers are not in vain, and the difficulties you face in learning the language and culture are not in vain. I can say with 100% certainty that in heaven, we will sit with our BMB brothers and sisters and rejoice that the Lord used our weaknesses to glorify Himself. So please, don’t give up. We need you. Our people need you. The Muslim world needs you. Please keep praying. In the month of Ramadan, I pray every morning for my mother because I know she is fasting and seeking God. And the Lord promises that those who seek Him will find Him. It’s important to distinguish between Islam as a theology and Muslims as people. Muslims are our family, friends, and neighbors; Christ deeply loves them. He shed His blood for them. I don’t know your story, but I thank you for trying to understand us as BMBs and engage with our people. Your work will impact the lives of those around you and those whom the Lord has entrusted to you. So please, never give up. Keep pushing forward, and know your labor is of great value.

Questions for Conversation

1. To what extent does Bishop Yassir's story help you better understand the experience and needs of the Muslims and Muslim-background believers that you know?
2. What do you think about Bishop Yassir's claims that the Ummah and other Islamic concepts can be redeemed in Christ? In your context, how would you guide new believers to wisely discern the good, neutral, and harmful elements in their cultural and religious environment?
3. What strikes you most from Bishop Yassir's counsel for discipling new BMBs? How does it compare to other advice you have received? What ideas and questions does it stimulate for you in your context?

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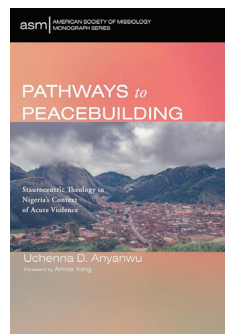
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Book Reviews



Pathways to Peacebuilding: Staurocentric Theology in Nigeria's Context of Acute Violence

By Uchenna D. Anyanwu. Pickwick Publications, 2022. 485 pages.



Reviewed by Eric Coblentz

Eric Coblentz served along with his wife, Briana, and four children in both Haiti and Indonesia for nearly a decade fulfilling multiple roles including, an orphanage director, university professor, and researcher. He now serves as research fellow for the International Institute for Religious Freedom¹ and promotes religious freedom for all people from an academic perspective. He now resides in Orlando, Florida along with his wife and four children.



This is not just another book on peace. It is a substantial work of contextual theology. It will leave you devastated by the horrific violence among our Nigerian brothers and sisters. With its robust and well-thought-out theology, it will leave you wanting to make peace, the Jesus way. Dr. Uchenna D. Anyanwu's work—a prophetic voice to the global church—is focused on the context of Africa but has deep implications for the Western church where allegiance is increasingly aligned with political views rather than the way of Jesus. Likewise, this work has even further implications for the global church as our world becomes increasingly polarized.

1 For more detailed information on religious freedom and what we do at IIRF go to: <https://iirf.global>.

The US Commission on Interreligious Freedom claims that 46 countries around the world maintain at least one type of anti-conversion law. Moreover, globally there are 73 anti-conversion laws on the books in those countries (USCIRF 2023). The degree to which people groups are unreached is directly tied to the difficulty of living as a Christian in these areas. Therefore, impacting Unreached People Groups (UPGs) is directly connected to the level at which we wrestle with the persecution, violence, and hate we find in these countries, as well as the appropriate Christian response to such violence.

Dr. Anyanwu, who is from Nigeria, is a scholar-practitioner who has served cross-culturally for 15 years in a variety of contexts in West and North Africa and therefore holds the credibility to speak to both academic and practical concerns. This massive work is a major theological contribution which at times reads very academic but is ultimately birthed out of and speaks to urgent, practical concerns. It seeks to answer the question, “how can Jesus’ followers pattern their response to violence after the model of Jesus?” The book is written for academics and practitioners working in African contexts who are facing extreme violence, but broadly speaking it is written for anyone striving to find pathways of peace among violent aggressors.

Summary of Content and Evaluation

This work is written in response to the acute violence of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria towards Christians and the Christian response to such evil acts. Staurocentric, a key term in the book, comes from the Greek word *σταυρος* (*stauros*) meaning “cross.” Therefore, staurocentric pathways follow the example of Jesus’ death on the cross leading to his—and our—triumph over death, evil, sin, and violence. His argument is that peacebuilding contextual theology should be grounded on the mystery of the cross, what he calls:

a theologico-theoretical framework that the church in Nigeria should espouse in order to position herself

to extend hands, heads, hearts, and homes of *staurocentric* practices, whose appropriation must be undertaken through constructive and critical integration of the God-given African peacebuilding concepts autochthonous to Africa's mosaic cultural contexts. (28)

Theologically, he makes the argument by methodically walking through Scripture's voice on the themes of obedience and suffering. Methodologically, the book employs a sophisticated approach, utilizing ethnographic in-depth interviews with leaders, theologians, and seminary students.

Anyanwu starts his argument by working through the historical context of violence in Nigeria and the socio-political factors that led to it. This chapter is particularly important for those who may not know the history of Africa and the British colonialization in Nigeria. Before the British colonialists came to Nigeria, the ethno-linguistic groups existed side by side as their own individual peoples. The "forced" and "unnatural" relationship only came about when the nation-state's lines were drawn by colonizers.

Furthermore, Anyanwu wants to challenge the ways in which Westernization of local communities means the loss of African traditionalism that spurs on peacemaking. Instead, he advocates for a more contextualized peacemaking theology, drawing from a rich tapestry of the ethno-linguistic backgrounds of Nigeria in dialogue with the way of the cross. While Anywanwu does criticize what Western missionaries have done in Africa, he also acknowledges that "a critique of Western missionaries' failures to have done contextual theology does not imply that their labors were in vain" (129).

After working through his contextual theology, Anyanwu begins to frame his approach to peacebuilding by using the term "carrefour" to represent interconnected aspects of contextual peacebuilding. The first "carrefour" is Muslim artisans of peace working alongside local Christians to form networks of peacebuilders. While the violent examples

of hatred towards “the other” in Nigeria paint a grim portrait of hope for future peacebuilding, there are some Muslim clerics in northern Nigeria who are working towards peace. Imam Muhammad Ashafa, for example, subscribes to a more inclusive and open-minded approach to his Islamic faith, collaborating with Pastor James Wuye to build peace in local communities. Co-authors of *The Pastor and the Imam: Responding to Conflict* (1999), they have both suffered greatly to create patterns of peace in the region.

The second “carrefour” is African traditions such as ubuntu. The African philosophy of ubuntu says,

I know that with the passing on of every person something of me also passes on, and that with the birth of a person is also in a sense my birth, that I am because you are, that otherness is a condition of selfhood. I also know that celebrating and esteeming otherness is, in fact, a celebration of the self. (187)

Recapturing African traditional values that have, in some cases, been left out of the Christian fellowship due to colonialism, can instead be an avenue for peacebuilding.

The third “carrefour,” and the penultimate concept for the Christian response to acute violence, is the “*staurocentric* pathway.” Put plainly, this is the way of the cross which entails dying to the propensity to hold your own sense of security while at the same time entrusting your life and being to Jesus and awaiting the resurrection (210). If followers of Jesus want to obtain victory over violence in this world, then we have to walk the path that Jesus walked. This path includes radical forgiveness, radical humility even to the point of death, and then a radical reversal of the meaning of the cross. The cross, which was meant to publicly shame and abuse an individual and their family, was redeemed by God as a symbol of forgiveness, sacrifice, and humility, which ultimately leads to resurrection, exaltation, and restoration of the *imago Dei*. In an intriguing and creative

manner, Anyanwu then walks the reader through the stories of historical followers of Jesus who have lived the staurocentric life over the centuries and antithetically how Christians have grossly misinterpreted the way of the cross, namely during the crusades. It is the way of the cross to give up oneself in order that others may enter into peace with God.

One challenging concept that some practitioners may struggle with is Anyanwu's explanation of evangelism in spaces of peacebuilding and peacemaking. He admits that both Christianity and Islam are missionary religions in that they both see it as their duty to woo and win non-followers to their faith. However, he says that his position is that "the matter of conversion lies beyond the act of humans. Conversion—a heart-felt conviction and decision to forsake a faith (and follow another) ... can only be an act of God, not humans" (217). He further says that everyone must have the right to exercise and bear witness to their respective faiths to others. We must trust God that he will bring people into his kingdom through our witness of Jesus rather than attempting to force them into his kingdom.

Practitioner's Angle

Considering my own context in Southeast Asia where violence towards Christians exists, I found Dr. Anyanwu's work to be both stimulating and helpful. I wish that I would have read this book before moving away from Indonesia, but I hope the readers of this review will take it seriously and consider new ways of bringing the gospel to UPGs where many of our brothers and sisters are facing violence.

In 2017, a friend and I sat across from an indigenous family who had been living among a UPG on one of the bigger islands in Southeast Asia for over nine years. They had just fled that city after receiving texts claiming that a radical group was sending young people, about the age of their own children, to surveil them, and now this group was threatening them with extreme violence if they did not leave. As we sat on the floor with like-minded friends doing similar work, I felt something different than I had expected to feel. I felt angry, frustrated, confused, and

deeply saddened by what this family had experienced. I sat there and just listened. I cried with them and could almost feel the pain they were experiencing as they attempted to unload the burden of betrayal.

But as I sought to listen and experience their pain, something unexpected happened. As they wiped away tears, I heard them say, "We couldn't imagine our own children being asked to do what these teenagers were asked to do We forgive them." They lost everything and they wanted to forgive them? It was at that moment I felt something else, intermingled with all those other feelings I mentioned. I felt love. They wanted to follow the way of Jesus, and in so doing they took the power of evil and disarmed it. They took it one step further, again accepting the inevitable tears, saying, "We hope to see them again someday so that we can tell them." This family went on to move to another UPG to sacrificially follow the way of Christ.

With over 240 million people, Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world. It is also filled with cultural and religious diversity. Conflict is inevitable in such a large, diverse country, but there are indigenous values in all cultures that bear an image of God. Anyanwu's challenge is to find the carrefour of indigenous concepts that come from religio-cultural contexts and place them at the intersection of the *staurocentric* lifestyle. Sociologist Bernard Adeney-Risakotta says that while most Indonesians highly value Western ideals like rationality, science, and modern education, they believe these values are limited. These ideals cannot teach *ikhlas* (committed to giving of yourself in service to others), *pasrah* (submitted to the will of God), *tanpa pamrih* (without self-interest), *mengalah* (allowing yourself to be defeated knowing that you are stronger than the other), *gotong royong* (working together for the good of all), or *rukun* (living in harmony with others) (Adeney-Risakotta 2019, 88). According to Anyanwu, followers of Jesus should translate values such as these through a *staurocentric* lens to find pathways to peacebuilding. This does not guarantee an ideal outcome in an "a+b = c" equation. It may lead to death. But it is a Christian response to the violence that gives us hope for future change.

This is not a passive fatalistic kind of posture; rather it is a call for followers of Jesus to give themselves to love and serve others, including those who perpetrate violence. Uchenna Anyanwu offers three practical steps to live a cross-centered life. This includes the way we talk about people from our pulpits, restorative and public declaration of forgiveness, and loving and blessing Muslim communities. One practical way practitioners can take a first step in living this out is to ask yourself the following questions:

- How can I hospitably talk about my neighbor in my teaching?
- How can I publicly and restoratively forgive those who are committing violence towards me?
- How can I bless the violent communities around me to show the restorative love of Jesus?

I strongly recommend this book for those who are serving among people who are facing violence. While nobody should expect this book to be a handbook for relieving violence, it certainly will help us think about how we can be better vessels of God's peace on earth. We must not forget that Jesus is not only "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Everlasting Father"; he is also "the Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). While this work may not be as helpful for someone serving in contexts that do not face much violence, it still has the potential to help one think about how to live the *staurocentric* life in a contextual, peacebuilding way. Finally, this book is another reason to keep working towards including voices from all over the world to help each other find creative ways to bring the kingdom of God to difficult places.

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8. Peacebuilding Carrefour Reference List

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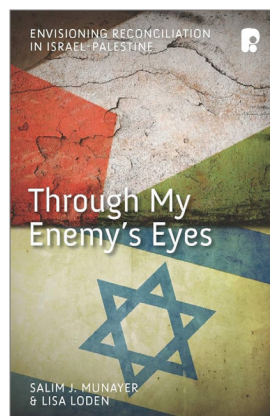
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Through My Enemy's Eyes: Envisioning Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine

By Salim J. Munayer and Lisa Loden.
Pasternoster, 2013.

Reviewed by S.T. Antonio

S.T. Antonio (pseudonym), editor-in-chief of Seedbed, serves as a church planter and theological catalyst with Pioneers for the Middle East alongside his wife. He is a graduate of Biola University and a perpetual member of its Torrey Honors College, and he holds MDiv and ThM degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Antonio is author of Insider Church: Eklesia and the Insider Paradigm (2020, William Carey Publishers). He is an American with a Hispanic mother and an Asian wife.



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The Israel-Gaza war has set the world on fire. The overwhelming violence and devastation on and subsequent to the October 7 Hamas attack has detonated an atomic bomb of hatred, terror, and bloodshed in the Holy Land, with radioactive fallout impacting all Jews, Muslims, and the watching world.

How should apostolic workers, whether serving in Israel-Palestine, in the greater Middle East, among Muslims, or anywhere in the world, think, talk, and pray about the unfolding war? Amidst conflicting narratives, algorithmically-filtered videos and news, and diverse theologies and cultures, it can be challenging to get a handle on reality, let alone discern the mind of Christ in the eye of this tornado of a conflict.

A decade before the Hamas attack, a Palestinian Christian and an Israeli Messianic Jew co-wrote a book which may illumine the current crisis and how Christ followers ought navigate it. [Dr. Salim Munayer](#), former academic dean of Bethlehem Bible College and current professor at several institutions, is a regional coordinator of the WEA's Peace and Reconciliation Network. He founded [Musalaha](#) (Arabic for "reconciliation"), a ministry aiming to bridge divides between Israelis and Palestinians inside and outside the church. [Lisa Loden](#) is a Messianic Jewish believer who emigrated to Israel in 1974, where she cofounded a Messianic Jewish congregation. She serves as co-chair of the Lausanne Initiative for Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine and co-founder of "In His Image—Women for Change," a group of 9 Israeli and Palestinian women serving in different ministries in Israel-Palestine.

In this remarkable collaborative project, Munayer and Loden, from the well of their personal friendship and partnership, share jewels of knowledge and incisive wisdom on the roots of the conflict and a vision for how the church in the Holy Land—and the broader body of Christ—should move forward.

Summary & Evaluation

Through My Enemy's Eyes focuses on reconciliation, not of Israel and Palestine generally, but of Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians specifically. Much light is shed, however, on the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its theological implications. The book is very helpfully structured around four key issues, each which naturally leads to the next: history, identity, biblical interpretation, and theology.

The genius behind the book, however, is the way the chapters alternate—in each of the above categories—between a Palestinian Christian and an Israeli Messianic Jewish perspective in turn (though both vetted each other's chapters). This provides a kind of stereo experience for the reader, offering a well-rounded and reliable picture of many of the central issues dividing these two believing communities.

The first section begins naturally with history, as the root of the conflict often boils down to conflicting historical narratives. After an exceedingly fair and refreshingly balanced summary of the key facts about the historical origins of the conflict (ch.1), the authors delve into the divergent histories found in Israeli and Palestinian historiography. In one of the most important insights of the book, the authors show how these contrasting historical narratives construct Israeli and Palestinian identities in a way that entrenches the two sides, with each excluding and marginalizing the other (ch.2-3).

This naturally leads to next topic of identity, fleshed out through informative chapters on the wonderfully complex identities of Palestinian Christians (ch.4) and Israeli Messianic Jews (ch.5). Much helpful context and nuance is provided for both, which is critical in a day where many are ignorant of even a basic understanding of who our brothers and sisters in Christ actually are. Each community comprises a minority within Israel-Palestine, and significantly, each see themselves as a community with theological significance and connection to their land. Palestinian Christians identify as heirs of the multi-ethnic church at Pentecost and the millennia-long custodians—in service to the global church—of the holy sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth. Israeli Messianic Jews view themselves as those who have returned both to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as well as to the land of their forefathers, in fulfillment of God's eschatological promises to his covenant people.

Underlying their identities are the diverse ways each community reads Scripture, the focus of the next two chapters. The most helpful theme of these chapters is the impact of each community's social context and concerns on biblical interpretation. The Arab Christian experience, the Islamic milieu, diverse responses to Zionism, and denominational diversity all shape Palestinian Christian hermeneutics (ch.6). Israeli Messianic Jewish interpretation is likewise shaped by their minority status within Judaism, the history of Christian anti-Semitism, and fundamentalist religious and secular Zionism (ch.7). Neither community reads Scripture monolithically, and the book's focus on this diversity is sometimes encyclopedic and lacking in synthetic analysis. However, the

authors highlight some unifying elements as well, such as the remarkably ecumenical Palestinian [Kairos Document](#), and the common Messianic Jewish desire to recover the Jewish heritage of Scripture as the promised eschatological remnant of Jews who return to their God and their land.

These different biblical perspectives prepare the reader for a chapter summarizing the theological differences between Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews (ch.8), which while redundant at times, helps flesh out further some important sticking points. Several of the differences boil down to a fundamental divide over the new-covenant relevance of old covenant promises to Israel regarding the land and their national “chosenness.” Also, of note is the difference in emphasis (or lack thereof) on a biblical theology of justice for Christ’s church. The chapter powerfully highlights, and explicitly emphasizes, the way that each community’s theology is thoroughly shaped by their social and ethnic concerns, neglects the concerns of the other community, and results in a theology which is often experienced by the other as marginalizing or rejecting its legitimacy and theological significance as a people.

After clearly describing, not solving, these seemingly irreconcilable theological perspectives, the authors conclude the book by outlining a “theology of reconciliation” (ch.9). Readers hoping for a tidy resolution of all the tensions of history, identity, hermeneutics, and theology in the book will be disappointed. What the reader receives, however, is a biblical and practical theology of reconciliation for Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians as members of the one people of God, whose barriers have been broken down at the cross in Christ (Eph. 2:14–17), and who are called to the imperative of seeking justice and reconciliation in face-to-face, vulnerable, and forgiving community. While most of the book alternates between different perspectives, this final chapter offers a unified, prophetic voice, not of armchair theologians but of two battle-scarred reconciler-practitioners—calling Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, and the rest of the global church, to the hard, essential work of reconciliation and justice.

Personal Reflections & Implications

Before moving to the Middle East, I studied at a seminary in a majority-Jewish town. To make ends meet, I coached 6th-grade Jewish boys in basketball, and my wife tutored a Jewish teen. Meanwhile, my seminary studies taught me the profound role Israel plays in God's redemptive plan, the Jewish background of Jesus and the apostles, and the missional importance of Jews coming to know their Messiah. Our hearts longed for Jews to come into the kingdom, and we rejoiced when several of our friends entered into Jewish ministry both inside and outside of Israel.

Simultaneously, God was also knitting in my heart his love for Arab peoples. My own calling and love for Arabs began soon after our own national trauma on September 11, 2001. As our nation was preparing for legitimate military retaliation, I remember a conviction settling in my heart that the ultimate Christian response to Islamic terrorism is not through the sword. It is through the cross, for our ultimate battle is not against flesh and blood (Eph 6:12). Jesus teaches us to overcome evil with good—to pray for, serve, and love Arab peoples that they might be transformed into children of the light. To that end, we began a journey of “becoming like Arabs to the Arabs that we might win Arabs” to Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20).

Our first Arab church in the Middle East—where we learned to speak, fellowship, and worship in Arabic—was led by Christians of Palestinian heritage. It was these precious believers who served, welcomed, and mentored us, in language, culture, and ministry in the Arab Middle East. As we began to incarnationally identify with our Arab friends, we learned to grieve at the generational loss and trauma of our Palestinian brothers and sisters.

Since the October 7 war erupted, we have faced multiple waves of grief at the tens of thousands of Palestinian and Jewish children, women, men, and elderly who have lost lives, limbs, and innocence in the brutal, senseless violence in Israel-Palestine. Our grief has been compounded

by insensitive and inhumane policies and statements—including by those in my American evangelical circles—which have tended to acknowledge only one part of the evil and tragedy and coldly dismiss, justify, or even dehumanize the other.

Though published long before the current war, *Through My Enemy's Eyes* proved to be a refreshing contrast. It gives permission to grieve the loss on all sides, to acknowledge the legitimacy of seemingly irreconcilable narratives and identities, and to remember that we have brothers and sisters in Christ on both sides of this war. As opposed to some Christian voices which quickly rushed to military solutions that sought to overcome evil with evil, *Through My Enemy's Eyes* encouraged my heart with its thoughtful, biblical, and costly focus on the way of Jesus and its implications for reconciling Jews and Palestinians in the body of Christ.

The book excels at sympathetically describing differences, and less so in bridging those into a coherent story that integrates the valid concerns of both sides. Subtle suggestions are sprinkled throughout, and the theology of reconciliation is a critical starting point. However, these deserve greater fleshing out, both in practical terms, and in terms of implications for all the issues discussed previously (history, identity, and theology). With that said, creative new frameworks cannot emerge in toxic, polarized environments, and thus the book provides the necessary groundwork to clear layers of ignorance and create safe spaces within which the global church can write a shared story together. To that end, I believe this book remains urgently relevant today, with at least three implications for the work of the gospel in Israel-Palestine, in the Middle East more broadly, and I would argue, among Muslims anywhere.

First, we must submit all national and cultural narratives and identities—Israeli, Palestinian, American, or other—to critical evaluation and correction in light of the narrative of the gospel. While it is possible to authentically follow Jesus as an Israeli, as a Palestinian—and yes, even as an American—we must be sensitive to the ways in which our cultural and national narratives, and therefore our own identities, are prone to

exclude and marginalize other communities. Whether we are engaging with our own cultural narrative or that of the people group we are serving, we must find ways in our discipleship to critically reevaluate every history and heritage in light of the gospel, which creates the new story and new people within which all nations and cultures find a home.¹

Second, for those seeking to make sense of the dizzying array of biblical and theological questions surrounding Israel, eschatology, and justice, we must allow diverse cultural and theological perspectives to push us back to the Scriptures with fresh eyes in search of new treasures we may be missing. It is important both for us and for those we are discipling to read Scripture in dialogue with believers from other cultural contexts, which helps illumine our blind spots, expand our understanding, and enrich our practice.

Finally, the way forward for real reconciliation is the hard work of friendship, listening, understanding, forgiveness, and justice. The current Gaza war has produced fresh wounds that require healing and reconciliation, not only between Israeli Messianic Jews and Palestinian Christians, but between Western Christians and Muslims. We may have little control over the broader decisions made by nation-states and political groups. However, by our words and actions, we can bear witness to a different kingdom and a different story, one which acknowledges that all nations have sinned are invited to be reconciled to God and to one another through the suffering & resurrected body of Jesus, thereby becoming his ambassadors of reconciliation to the world.

In the wake of the current crisis, *Through My Enemy's Eyes* is needed now more than ever, not as a comprehensive solution, but as a catalyst for kingdom imagination, a reset button for how we think, pray, and speak about Israel-Palestine.

But more than just read it, we need to live it.

1 Andrew Walls' "indigenizing" and "pilgrim" principles remain one of the best frameworks for making sense of the way diverse cultures are both affirmed and transformed in the people of God (1996, 7-9).

From the Editors: *Want to discuss Through My Enemy's Eyes with others? Join our first ever Seedbed Book Symposium this July. Stay tuned for a future email with details on this special Seedbed event. Purchase your copy and [start reading today](#).*

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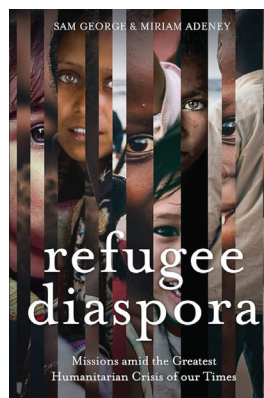
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Refugee Diaspora: Missions Amid the Greatest Humanitarian Crisis of the World

By Sam George and Miriam Adeney.
William Carey Library. 2018. 208 pages.

Reviewed by Eileen Perry

Eileen Perry (pseudonym) served with her husband and children for 11 years in a creative-access country. Due to their children's needs, the family moved to Europe to work with refugees nine years ago. Now she enjoys the freedom of being able to share with, learn from, and partner in the spiritual arena more openly. She primarily serves in the area of leader development and multiplication through training initiatives and long-term mentoring.



Until refugees reach their final destination, ministry among them often feels like a revolving door. As transitory as it may be, the gateway cities where they are “stuck” for several years (with limited access to the job market) have proven strategic for frontier church planting. One factor is the exorbitant amount of time available to be in the Word or exploring spiritual change. Refugees who come to faith can become pastors and ministry leaders influencing the emerging church among their people group internationally and back in their home countries. People arrive vulnerable and desperate for basic needs, and they can experience the love of Christ through the international body of believers. Journeying with refugees requires a holistic approach addressing the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of these vulnerable people who chose to risk all (for a variety of reasons) and leave their known communities. God

meets them in this vulnerable place away from their cultures, families, and the “group think.” However, ministry to refugees in their destination country looks different than ministry to the same people in their home countries.

Sam George and Miriam Adeney do an excellent job in their book of providing a broad and thorough perspective of ministry to refugees. Each chapter is written from a different angle by refugee writers, both males and females, and multicultural workers. The book is divided into three sections: Regions, Responses, and Reflections. This book could be used as a guide for those who are seeking to serve amidst the global refugee community or as a training manual for churches. This review highlights the contributors’ practical advice and observations which appear to be consistent across the regions. For those serving in countries from which refugees are leaving, this resource could serve as inspiration to connect with trained leaders in diaspora who have had the freedom to study more deeply without the burden of security fears. This resource could also be an encouragement to overseas church planters regarding how God is using the refugee journey to bring many to himself. It may also be helpful for workers in more volatile countries to explore options for possible refugee work in the future should they suddenly need to leave but desire to continue to steward their years of language and culture skills.

Part 1: “Regions”

Most chapters highlight similar effective ministry philosophies to best connect with refugees. After initial urgent humanitarian needs are met like clothing, food, and housing, the development needs of refugees (i.e., “survival resources”) must be addressed. Ministries and churches identified language instruction as a primary need, which creates opportunity for relationship building and church partnership. Some churches have a program where church members adopt refugee families for a set period of time to help create community during their transition (125-126). As refugees often come from community-based

cultures, these relationships are essential to their transition, assisting them in the integration process into their host culture. It also opens their hearts as they see Christ's love in action. Acts of service should not be underestimated, as so many refugees in Europe talk about the contrast they experienced between their own religion and the people in their host country being willing to serve them through menial tasks.

Several of the authors note the refreshment and revitalization that refugees bring to a church: "Christians receive a fresh experience of their faith ... receiving much more spiritually from refugees in return for their material gifts and practice of hospitality" (76). Many times, refugees help Westerners see Scripture from a new angle. The experience and worldview of the refugees, which are often closer to the original cultural context, can add a depth and breadth to their understanding of the Bible.

As refugees adjust to their new cultures, there are a variety of ways for refugees to begin to pursue sustainability. Wu shares about her experience and observations in Jordan. She saw some groups set up microbusinesses for refugees to produce and sell handmade items and food products, commending this model for how it allows them to sustain themselves and "cultivate life skills" (83). However, she warns that many times she saw a repeated pattern of well-intentioned foreigners wanting to assist a program and providing support, which can lead to the local pastor struggling with the increase in available funds due to a lack of experience with financial management and oversight (89). She suggests partnering with honorable accountability. It is important to teach the emerging refugee leaders how to have mutual transparency on a team. I have observed two church leadership teams with a foreign partnership model this beautifully. The foreigners serve as advisors and mentors, yet the refugee leaders also share in the decision-making process. This creates a system of financial transparency and a learner's posture.

Two contributors discuss how refugees, after their transition and resettlement, might engage in ministry. Some refugees, after coming to faith and being discipled, return to their home countries to minister and

start new churches (101). In our context, the refugees we work with have a vision to return to their countries as workers but have chosen to be very public online with biblical content, and thus they realize they will be at risk if they return. Thus, an alternative option for them is to enter into ministry here in Europe. Krua challenges the church to view the refugees as peers and close the financial gap or to find support solutions for the refugees to become full-time ministry workers:

The missionary funding model makes it difficult for refugees and immigrants—who don't have the financial support networks of white evangelical Christians—to participate functionally in ministry to refugees. Such institutional systems need to be totally overhauled and replaced with more just and inclusive structures. (140)

In Europe, many of the mature refugees are now at the stage of desiring to enter full-time ministry. I would contend that our role as Westerners at this point is to mentor and encourage them in fundraising and every other aspect of the process. This approach contrasts with the strategy we would have in the refugees' home country. However, it allows the refugee to focus on the ministries God has placed on their hearts and to reach their own people better than many Westerners could.

Part 2: "Responses"

Across all regions, workers identified that trauma care is essential for the overall well-being of the refugee who has fled war and abuse. We often hear refugees complain they cannot concentrate on language learning because of all the stress and trauma of their pasts. Some are constantly at the hospital for the physical manifestation of this stress. In the last few years, God has touched many lives through several ministries which created trainings in basic trauma care, combined with applicable scriptural stories. A ministry in Germany, highlighted in one of the chapters, is training their partner churches in how to provide trauma

counseling (160), and addressing issues like racial reconciliation and forgiveness (182).

It is common to see cross-cultural workers experience burnout or compassion fatigue. Dr. Melki warns, "If we confuse compassion and care, we begin to believe compassion requires personal attention to all aspects of life for those we serve, rather than targeted intervention in moments of greatest need. Then we expect deep engagement with hundreds of people and become frustrated at the unsustainable nature of such an expectation" (192). It is important for refugee ministry workers prior to arrival to develop their theology of suffering and to have a clear understanding that they are not the refugees' saviors but rather advocates who are seeking to help them stand on their own two feet.

In the West, it is sometimes considered politically incorrect to share the gospel with others. One contributor shared beautifully how they respectfully keep the gospel at the core of their ministry in their outreach centers, called "The Meeting Place" (TMP): "TMP does not espouse aggressive or manipulative methods. Rather, the gospel is shared "with integrity" and "within the context of relationship and with no conditionality" (166-175). In addition to sharing the gospel with compassion, all the TMP staff have experience in the countries and cultures represented by their refugee participants, seeing many have come to faith through their outreaches and partnerships with local churches. They also note a common issue we all see and wrestle with in Europe, that some asylum seekers use baptism certificates and coming to faith as a strategic move for the acceptance of their cases. To deter this, many churches created rigorous six-month long baptism preparation classes to assess if the individual was serious about their faith (170). Due to the extremely transitory nature of the refugees in non-destination countries, one may want to move faster in sharing about Jesus. A common practice in other settings is a methodical, chronological approach culminating with Jesus. When I first transitioned to working with refugees, a seasoned worker exhorted me to always share about Jesus, whatever the lesson might be.

At first, I shirked at her advice, thinking that I could slowly build towards that, but in time I came to see the wisdom in what she told me to do and now make sure to always bring the lessons back to Jesus.

The threats are real for Muslims who embrace Jesus as their savior. With so many receiving asylum in Europe for their faith, there is a tension in discerning how to journey with them amidst the dangers. The theological foundations are broad for a policy to encourage Christians to remain in their countries whenever possible. Carter highlights scriptural examples that we can look to in these situations. To flee persecution can certainly be a valid, biblical response to danger (Acts 9:23–25). But it can be equally valid to endure persecution with joy, counting it a privilege (Acts 5:41; 2 Tim 3:10–13; Jas 1:2), or to resist unjust treatment by claiming citizenship rights (Acts 22:25–29) (201). Carter suggests an alternative to encouraging people to relocate to a far-off region, which is to find an in-country (or nearby) location for the one at risk and to partner with others to support this transition and settlement process (203–206). This could be done in partnership with other ministries to create unity and to show the body of Christ in action.

When I first began serving with refugees, I was surprised at how many had smartphones. I often work with illiterate women, and while they may not know how to read and write, they certainly know how to use their phones to some extent. Many ministries observed this situation and created multiple teaching apps, Bible study materials, and audio Bibles in the refugees' target languages. Sam George highlights the humanitarian ways that tech has also helped. The Red Cross created a "Find the Face" initiative to help with lost refugees. He also highlights organizations that teach coding skills for refugees so they have more access to employment opportunities (220). All these initiatives assist the refugees in their transition process.

The following quote encompasses refugee ministry. It could become the vision statement and source of inspiration for churches and individuals who are led to step out in this strategic ministry:

The true meaning of biblical hospitality is at the heart of welcoming strangers. The journey of weaving a love of strangers into the very tapestry of daily life will not happen overnight. Learning the art of biblical hospitality is a lifelong discipleship matter. It takes a great deal of intentionality, a growing awareness of changes in our immediate surroundings and in the world, and a continual development of intercultural skills. But most of all it requires a longing to reflect God's heart for the marginalized in our world as we navigate the difficult terrain of Christian hospitality in an inhospitable world. (235)

Part 3: "Reflections"

The final section of the book wraps up the first two sections with the biblical, theological and missiological support for ministering to refugees. It includes a substantive, wonderful study on the biblical basis for refugee ministry and the scriptural examples for how we can serve in this capacity. It was only once I started to serve amidst refugees that I truly began to appreciate that Jesus himself was a refugee fleeing with his family for his life as a young child (Matt. 2:13-15). This shared experience with God himself gives those who serve refugees and the refugees themselves such a connection and validation for this much needed ministry.

Recommendation

This book is an easy read. Although several contributors are from academic backgrounds, they kept the material accessible for all educational levels. For one who is curious about refugee ministry, its strategy, and its impact, it is a thorough overview. I would not recommend this book for a seasoned refugee worker, as the principles are not novel; it is more like, "Ministry to Refugees 101." For those serving in closed countries, it could be a resource to consider on how

to increasingly integrate strong refugee believers into their ministries, because they likely are already engaged in ministry. God is sending refugees to open countries, and they are not only reaching fellow refugees; they are bringing new life to dying churches and reaching many people in their host country.

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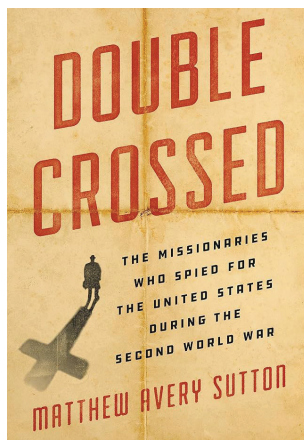
Refugee Highway Partnership

Global Diaspora Network

Double Crossed: The Missionaries Who Spied for the United States during the Second World War

By Matthew Avery Sutton. Basic Books of Hachette Book Group, New York, 2019. 350 pages.

Reviewed by William “Bill” in the Arabian Gulf



Bill has served in the Middle East for forty years, mostly as a tentmaker in the Arabian Gulf. Besides his day job, his family befriends Gulf locals, sharing Christ, reaching out through intentional hospitality, building up local believers, and encouraging expatriate churches to reach out to locals.



Can a missionary serve his God and country as a spy? *Double Crossed* is a well-researched book telling a story seldom told. After a brief introduction to the beginning of America’s first civilian, overseas intelligence organization shortly before World War II, the book follows the experiences of four men involved in the organization’s development in Germany, North Africa, the Middle East, and China.

After teasing the tensions between serving God as a missionary and a spy, the book looks at the pre-war period from the perspective of Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR). Preparing for war, he recruited William “Wild Bill” Donovan, a devoted Catholic, lawyer, and Republican politician, to gather information overseas for what came to

be known as the Office of Special Services (OSS), America's first overseas civilian intelligence organization and precursor to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Both men saw America's struggle for democracy as a struggle for freedom for Christianity and so appealed to Christians to support the war. Donovan considered Christian religious workers as assets in his overseas endeavors (whether resident overseas or networked with Christians worldwide) and kept this information a closely guarded secret. The book shows how the OSS developed through four men.

The first example is Stewart Herman, Jr., a theology student in Strasburg, who became the pastor of an American church in Berlin. Later he translated for the US embassy with diplomatic cover until Americans had to leave Germany. His knowledge of Germany and network of German confessing church pastors proved invaluable when he joined the OSS and worked from London for central Europe, which included Germany. After the war, he worked for the new World Council of Churches in Geneva, traveled throughout Europe, reconciled German church leaders, and reported to the OSS.

In the second example, William Eddy distinguished himself in military intelligence during World War I in France. His grandparents founded the American University of Beirut (AUB) and his father was a missionary there. Eddy taught literature at the American University of Cairo and later became president of a Christian university in the US. As World War II approached, he volunteered for naval intelligence and was sent to Cairo as a naval attaché to gather information and network with local leaders using his Arabic and knowledge of the culture and the Qur'an. He was then sent to Morocco to prepare the way for the allied invasion of North Africa by developing a network of locals prepared to kill and sabotage. One of the OSS's most effective leaders, Eddy was later appointed over the entire Mediterranean and then the US ambassador in Saudi Arabia. From the North African perspective, he was loyally serving their best interests—freedom from expansive totalitarian powers.

The third person is John Birch, the son of a missionary and born in India, who was a fundamentalist Baptist missionary. He served briefly in India and then in China, where he planted churches among the Chinese while Japan was invading China. After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor brought the US into the war, his financial support lines were cut off. He became a tentmaker by volunteering for the US Army Air Force, calling in air attacks, rescuing downed pilots, gathering information on Japanese troop movements, and helping Chinese and American officials share intelligence, all while continuing his missionary work. Helping the Americans fight the Japanese was not a problem from the Chinese viewpoint.

The fourth personality is Stephen Penrose, Jr. His father, Penrose, Sr., was a home missionary to American Indians, then a pastor, and finally the president of Whitman College. Penrose, Jr. taught science and math at AUB, got his PhD in philosophy, and then moved to New York to supervise the Near East College Association, the support group for the AUB, and mission schools in the Eastern Mediterranean. After Pearl Harbor, he inquired about serving his country, and was hired by the OSS. Having recruited and sent out missionaries, Penrose, Jr. now did the same for the OSS. Mission executives asked him for government help for missionaries traveling overseas. He helped them and in return confidentially selected missionaries to provide information and sometimes more. Later, Penrose, Jr. moved to Cairo to oversee OSS operations in the Middle East (and eventually in Greece and the Balkans), along with supervision of others previously at AUB. In the last part of the war, he oversaw Europe and the Middle East.

After the war, President Truman disbanded FDR's controversial OSS. He moved the operational parts under Penrose, Jr. in the military and the analytical parts under Eddy in the State Department. America continued thinking of itself as a "city on a hill," standing against atheistic communism and seeking to spread Christianity and freedom throughout the world. Isolationism was out and a more expansive foreign policy was in.

As communism became a more clear “enemy” of the Christian West, the need for a foreign intelligence service emerged. The author points out the dangers of the optimism of the liberal ecumenists, Eddy and probably also Penrose, Jr., who helped form the CIA without any limits to its independence. He speculates that if Birch was involved, his keen awareness of man’s sinfulness would have resulted in checks and balances. The author says this in the context of the abuses of the CIA in Latin America and elsewhere, sometimes working against democratically-elected leaders.

In the 1970s, a growing controversy emerged over the CIA’s use of clergy and missionaries. Christians who objected spoke out; those who accepted it did not. After the war, ecumenists tended to work in humanitarian charities, while evangelicals were the ones who worked as missionaries, put at risk by the CIA. Oregon senator Mark Hatfield, an evangelical, spoke out strongly against this CIA tactic, and when the CIA Director and the President did not take action, he brought the campaign to Congress and the public.

When George H. W. Bush (later president) became CIA Director in 1976, his first action, to defuse the controversy, was instituting a policy which satisfied Senator Hatfield, but had enough loopholes to allow the CIA to quietly continue doing what it wanted. The author notes that the world today differs from the World War II era, and it should no longer be necessary to use missionaries as spies.

Evaluation and Practitioner’s Angle

Some may find the book slow-moving, but those interested in history will find it fascinating. It is not a Christian book by and for evangelicals, but history for a general audience. The author does explain the various Protestant groups as well as the faith and doubts of the four men who are profiled. The author identifies more with the three mainline liberal Christian examples who sought to build the kingdom of God on earth, than with Birch, the fundamentalist Baptist who believed in Christ’s

imminent return and the need to urgently preach the gospel. The author considers Birch an extremist, although the core of his beliefs are historic Christian teachings (79, 80, 192, 193).

Who is a missionary? Is it a tentmaker who works in another profession, a vocational missionary, or just an active Christian? Only one of the four men was a missionary; three were in the US when they volunteered to serve their country as war loomed. In my opinion, none of them “double crossed” those among whom were living among. Instead, they helped by opposing tyranny through serving the USA. Shouldn’t we seek the welfare of the people we live among?

What is a spy? Is sharing information spying? International spying requires skills that few have. Historically, missionaries were among the few Americans who knew distant parts of the world and their people. Mixing missionary work and spying increases the missionary risk of danger, but the risk is there regardless. Who else speaks the local language and travels into remote areas besides spies and missionaries? When are risks worth taking? Spying and tentmaking have similarities: both have a job as a cover for other work. If one can wear two hats, can one wear three hats in times of crisis (sharing the gospel, employment, and spying) for the common good?

Locals are often suspicious of foreign identity and actions. In the poorer Arab countries, locals wonder why a Westerner is resident among them and what is his source of income. Locals question any business which cannot support an employee’s lifestyle. They may understand the foreigner as an employee of a non-governmental organization (NGO) who is there to do good and have external funding.

In contrast, the Arabian Gulf employs many foreigners, so tentmakers in real jobs are normal. As an example, one Gulf tentmaker wanted to start a ministry for local children, and wisely, first approached local community leaders. They didn’t understand why he wanted to do this. What was his motivation and hidden agenda? He said that God told him to come and care for locals. This explanation made sense to them,

so they agreed. This illustrates how we should be open about being believers in Christ, attracting to us those who are open, rather than hiding it and then springing the unexpected on them. In a religious society, we should leave our Western secularism behind and exemplify our faith's impact on daily life by praying for people and highlighting what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Perhaps being considered a missionary is safer than being considered a spy. Militiamen in Lebanon once apprehended an American because he spoke Arabic. What expatriates speak the local language? They believed he was a spy or military. After talking with him, they realized he was harmless, only a missionary, so they let him go. Most of us flee from being thought a missionary, but sometimes it can help!

However, is deception always sinful? In *The Ethics of Smuggling*, Brother Andrew discussed biblical teaching about deceiving opponents of God's work by hiding the truth without lying. One scriptural example is when God tells Samuel to anoint David. Samuel fears Saul, and so God tells him to say he is going there to make a sacrifice, a deception without lying (1 Samuel 16:1–3).

Perhaps we might also connect this to the "just war" doctrine, which applies to the World War II setting of *Double Crossed*. This doctrine is defined as a government-directed force that is biblically authorized and even required. The author shows little awareness of these Christian teachings until late in the book when he refers to a Dutch churchman who was the first head of the World Council of Churches and an OSS informant. The clergyman "embraced Niebuhr's Christian realist philosophy, recognizing that states must sometimes use force to secure peace" (289).

What can we learn from this book? It is hard to say. We know that real change only comes through believing the good news. Even so, we seek to bless and protect in this world. We look to the Lord for his direction and seek to glorify Christ in everything we do. We may find ourselves serving in unexpected ways "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

But our days are different than those detailed in *Double Crossed*. Besides ease of travel and proliferation of information, many others besides missionaries are now available for spying.

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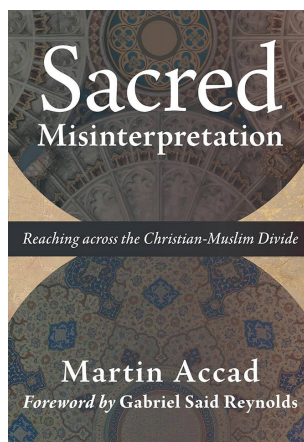
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Sacred Misinterpretation: Reaching across the Christian-Muslim Divide

By Martin Accad. Eerdmans
Publishing, 2019. 366 pages.

Reviewed by Gene Daniels

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This book feels like Martin Accad's magnum opus. It is the result of many years of scholarship and ministry among Muslims in his home country of Lebanon. The author has a family heritage of an irenic approach to Muslims in his home country of Lebanon; he is the grandson of Pastor Fouad Accad, the author of a groundbreaking book from 1997, *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam*. As for his scholarship, the author draws on several years of research into Christian-Muslim interaction during the eighth to fourteenth centuries. Accad is also an associate Professor at Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, a former director of the Institute of Middle East Studies, and the founder and director of Action Research Associates in Beirut, Lebanon.

The theme of the book is how Christians can engage in gospel proclamation to Muslims with a sensitive and honest approach to both of our sacred books. Accad states that he intended the book for

two audiences. The first is seminary professors who might use it as a textbook, and the second being anyone who is serious about engaging Muslims respectfully. The author practices that same attitude as a writer, noting that he deliberately wrote so that a Muslim could read the book without being offended, although I would point out that few Muslims would agree with most of the conclusions he draws.

Summary

I don't think I can improve on the summary put forth in the foreword by Gabriel Said Reynolds:

At the heart of *Sacred Misinterpretation* is Accad's conviction that the goal of interreligious dialogue is not consensus. Certain doctrinal differences between Islam and Christianity are rooted in the sacred texts of each tradition themselves and therefore cannot (and should not) be done away with. Yet there are also false understandings of the other that are rooted only in misrepresentations that appeared in the works of polemicists through the centuries. (xix)

At the core of this mutual misinterpretation are two very different ways of approaching our respective texts. Christians want to interpret the Qur'an in the way we have been interpreting the Bible for the past several centuries, via the literary hermeneutical method. But Accad points out that this method was "developed in the primarily individualistic cultures of the West" (41), and is regarded with a great deal of suspicion by the world's Muslims. Furthermore, this approach only reinforces their doubts about the reliability of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures.

On the other hand, Muslim scholars follow a very different exegesis, based on a view of divine revelation called *tanzil*, that is, Allah's "dictation" of the text. This posits that the Qur'an is an exact, literal representation of a divine original. Furthermore, the widely recognized lens for inter-

pretation is Islamic tradition, making any study of the Qur'an as a literary text illegitimate from an orthodox Muslim perspective. This approach is rooted in an immense corpus of *tafsir*, interpretation or exegesis, handed down through the centuries.

It's not hard to see the dramatic difference between normative Christian and Muslim methods of exegeting their own scriptures. Yet scholars, evangelists, and laymen from both sides have long applied their own methods to the other's texts. This sacred misinterpretation has caused a vast misunderstanding between the two communities which continues to negatively impact Christian witness to this day.

Accad's main practical thesis is for something he has identified as "kerygmatic interaction" with Muslims, that is interreligious dialogue which is focused on proclamation (*kerygma*) of the good news of Jesus Christ. To set this apart as a distinct model, Accad places this approach on a spectrum of approaches to the Qur'an and then summarizes the contrasts. On page nine he summarizes, "The biblical kerygmatic approach to Christian-Muslim interaction is thus devoid of *polemical* aggressiveness, *apologetic* defensiveness, *existential* adaptiveness, or *syncretistic* elusiveness..." (emphasis original).

Accad goes on to say,

A kerygmatic perception of Muslims says that even though Muslims have as their foremost concern to please God, they lack the ability to enjoy that deep and personal relationship with him, which according to the Gospels is possible only for those who respond to Christ's invitation to approach God as Father through a brotherly sonship with himself. (14)

He furthers this,

The practice of the kerygmatic approach to Christian-Muslim interaction knows few boundaries. Every

occasion is suitable to bear witness respectfully to Christ's good news. A Christ follower using this approach will happily make use of the Qur'an and other elements of the Islamic tradition as a bridge to do so. (15)

After laying a theoretical framework in the first few chapters, Accad quickly moves on specific issues to which he applies his kerygmatic approach. He explores controversial topics that are highly relevant to Christian-Muslim interaction such as; "God in Christian-Muslim dialogue" (chapter 4), "Who is Jesus according to Muslims" (chapter 5), "*Tahrif* and the Corruption of Scripture" (chapter 7), and "Muhammad as *Paraclete*" (chapter 9).

As an example of the depth to which Accad dives into these topics, he devotes two full chapters (6 & 7) to exploring how Muslims have viewed the Bible, using the eleventh century as a major dividing line. Prior to that time, Muslim attitudes toward the Bible were more diverse than most Christians recognize, and more importantly it was mostly positive. Case in point, prior to that time, the infamous accusation that Jews and Christians had altered their scriptures was understood as that they altered the interpretation of Scripture, not the text itself.

However, beginning with qur'anic interpreter Ibn Hazm in the eleventh century (994-1064), Muslim views began to take an uncompromising and harsh tone. Accad astutely recognizes that this dark turn was likely connected to the socio-political events of that time. Hazm was from Muslim Spain (Andalusia), and personally witnessed the downfall of the last caliph of Cordova and the beginning of the *Reconquista* of the peninsula that had been under Muslim rule for 800 years. The author also notes that Hazm's writings probably struck a deep chord across the whole Muslim world since this same century marked the beginning of the Crusades.

Despite the depth of historical research and theological analysis, Accad ends each of these dense chapters with very practical material. For instance, in this same chapter he writes,

It is easy to get drawn into a defensive, or even offensive, position in reaction to the Muslim accusation of *tahrif*. But followers of Jesus have to resist this temptation and take the time patiently to explain to Muslims the history of the New Testament text, particularly the text of the Gospels. (259)

This practical bend to an otherwise scholarly volume is a good segue to an evaluation of Accad's work.

Evaluation

Sacred Misinterpretation is no light bedtime reading. Besides weighing in at 366 pages, it covers a difficult topic thoroughly and exhaustively. However, Accad's writing style is clear and he helpfully explains all Arabic terms. Therefore, it should not be difficult for anyone comfortable reading college-level texts. Also, the book has several features that increase the material's accessibility. One, the table of contents is surprisingly detailed which makes the content feel searchable, and allows a reader to focus on finding things of specific interest. Two, the chapters that cover specific topics of Christian-Muslim dialogue (3-9) each have sections to make them more user-friendly. These chapters each end with a summary of historic dialogue on that topic, keys for building bridges, ways to use "deadlocks as assets," as well as suggestions for further reading and research. As one who is not a specialist in this field, I found these features most helpful.

I felt strong agreement with the author's approach, probably because the book gives solid historical and theological reasons to follow the irenic style of witness which comes natural to me. For workers who take more polemical or apologetic approaches to Muslims, I'm not sure Accad will convince them to adopt his kerygmatic approach, but it might challenge them to modify their current ones a bit.

However, despite these many positives, the depth at which Accad explores these topics may limit its appeal. Other than academics, a reader will have to have a great deal of curiosity to invest the time necessary to even skim the entire book.

The Practitioner's Angle

The majority of Muslims whom I have engaged with the gospel were in Central Asia, and few of them spoke Arabic or had any significant theological training. But even in that context, there were times I could have used some of the information in *Sacred Misinterpretation*. For example, from time to time I would meet imams, who were usually all too happy to engage me with standard anti-Christian Muslim apologetics. This book's practical insights would have been of help. Also, in recent years the ministry of research and training has taken me to the heartlands of Islam. In that context, Accad's well-researched thoughts would have been helpful when I've interacted with Muslims and with fellow workers who tend toward the polemical side of the spectrum.

For the church planter who does not regularly witness to Muslims with significant theological training, it seems to me there are three main takeaways from Accad's work. One, his historical work is proof that intense theological conflict is not intrinsic to Christian-Islamic interaction. In the past, some well-known Islamic scholars took positions much closer to classic Christian ones than we typically see today. Thus, we understand that at least some of the seemingly intractable theological divides are a reflection of the current zeitgeist in international relations and not rooted in the texts themselves. This changes the assumptions and presuppositions we bring to the table and can lower the level of antagonism we expect and project into theological discussions.

Two, workers will find it helpful to understand Accad's "kerygmatic" approach that is staying focused on proclamation (kerygma) of the good news. Field practitioners in Muslim contexts can feel like they are surrounded by hostile locals; thus, aggressive defensiveness or syncretistic adaptation both have subliminal allure. The many examples of a

“kerygmatic” approach contained in the book urge us to the higher calling of making all our words and deeds point toward the finished work of Christ.

And third, many workers, like myself, go to the field without formal training in Islamic studies. While this is not normally a hindrance, at certain moments this lack can feel acutely painful. I was once invited to share a meal with a new Muslim friend, only to find myself in a room full of Islamic missionaries looking for a Christian to convert. I survived, but would have done a much better job of pointing to Christ if I had read something like *Sacred Misinterpretation* beforehand. For many workers, reading Accad’s work will be like an insurance policy—you don’t think about it often, but are sure glad you have it when you need it.

Recommendation

I have no trouble giving a strong recommendation for Seedbed readers to consider taking the time to explore *Sacred Misinterpretation*; but with a couple of caveats beyond that it is specifically for those working with Muslims. One, the closer a worker is to the heartlands of Islam where Arabic is a native language, the more useful the book will likely be. Such workers are engaging people who are more likely to have been influenced by the depth of theology Accad draws on. Seventy-five percent of Muslims worldwide do not speak Arabic, and they are much less likely to be familiar with the contours of Accad’s discussions. Two, workers in the rest of the Muslim world will be greatly helped by Accad’s insights if they engage with Muslims who have significant theological training. And three, this book is appropriate for the scholar-practitioner who, like myself, simply desires a deeper understanding of the people to whom they have been called.

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