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The principal focus of this number is urbanization in the Arab World in relation to the evangelization of Muslims. The lead article by Harvie Conn, Professor of Missions at Westminster Theological Seminary (P.O. Box 27009, Philadelphia, PA 19118, USA), was sent to a number of mission and national church leaders in the Middle East and North Africa who were invited to respond. Only four replied in writing; their replies are reproduced below (a fifth reply, several annotations on the returned article, could not be reproduced). I wish to thank Harvie for expanding what he wrote for a publication of the Urban Missions Program of Westminster Seminary into an article for SEEDBED, and I want to thank those who kindly took the time to respond: their remarks have been most valuable. If any reader has anything further to add, we will be happy to print his or her letter or article in the next issue. Ed.

URBANIZATION, ISLAM AND THE ARAB WORLD

by Harvie M. Conn

The urban lifestyle is not new to Islam. Ira Lapidus, in his book, Middle Eastern Cities reminds us that Islamic civilization has always been predominantly an urban civilization (1969:v). He continues, "For Muslims, cities often possess a special sanctity and are regarded as the sole places in which a full and truly Muslim life may be lived" (p. 47). V. F. Costello repeats the thesis. "It has been argued that Islam has a preference of urban over rural societies, a preference rooted in doctrinal and historical conditions. Islam was born in the seventh century A.D. in the urban and commercial environment of the Hedjaz in west-central Arabia, and it has been argued that its religious goals and rituals are more easily achieved in an urban context" (1977:6-7).

The Middle East can claim to have the world's longest history of continuous urban development. And Islam plays a rich part in that urban history. The early Muslims looked on nomads and villagers as merely second-class recruits to Islam, and that attitude has been held ever since. The city, writes an American sociologist, was not on the fringe of the Islamic system; "it was the system" (Palen 1981:393).

The Current Picture

From the early sixteenth century, urban decline hit the Middle East and North Africa, but from the 1920s the picture has shifted again. The Muslim world once again is returning to urban prominence. In Libya between 1954 and 1966 the proportion of the total population living in settlements with more than 20,000 people rose from 18% to 25%. Fifty percent of the population of Kuwait by the 1950s lived in cities of 100,000 or more. Amman, Jordan in 1966 was over ten times larger than in the 1930s. "Most of the countries [of the Middle East] now have more than one-third of the population living in towns, making the Middle East more physically urbanized than most of Tropical Africa, or of East, Southeast and South Asia" (Costello, 1977:33).

In the period between 1950 and 1970, urban growth in Northern Africa surpassed that of North America and all of

Europe. The percentage increase of urban population growth in Northern Africa reached 51.6% (19.1% rural). In North America it was only 17.6%, in western Europe 18.7%; Northern Europe was 9.8% (Davis 1972 [Vol. 2]:200). By 1970, 2.5% of the world's urban population increase was tabulated for northern Africa, the highest of Africa's five regional districts, and thirteenth in the world's total of twenty-two regions.

A breakdown of rural and urban populations in representative countries would look like the following:

<u>Country</u> (All populations in thousands.)		<u>Total</u>	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
Mauritania	1950	712	697	15
	1960	970	948	22
	1970	1,161	1,133	28
Morocco	1950	8,959	6,887	2,072
	1960	11,640	8,253	3,387
	1970	15,519	10,035	5,484
Libya	1950	999	787	212
	1960	1,349	1,017	332
	1970	1,850	1,329	521
Egypt	1950	20,461	13,946	6,515
	1960	26,085	16,221	9,864
	1970	33,283	18,739	14,544
Tunisia	1950	3,555	2,467	1,088
	1960	4,157	2,618	1,539
	1970	4,882	2,764	2,118
Saudi Arabia	1950	5,250	4,750	500
	1960	6,200	5,200	1,000
	1970	7,357	5,500	1,857

(Figures from: Davis 1969 [Vol. 1]:57-58, 73).

Comparisons and Characteristics

1. As with so many other parts of the world, urban population is often crowded into one large city (the "primate city"). Tehran boasted a 1956 population of 1,512,000 compared to the next largest city in Iran, Tabriz with 390,000. In Egypt, Cairo with 3,346,000, and Alexandria with 1,513,000 far outstrip the third largest

city, Ismailiya (276,000). North Africa shows the same pattern, with Casablanca, Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli outclassing all the other towns in their respective countries. In fact, in 1950 the Middle East, with a little over three percent of the world's population, contained four of the world's forty-nine cities with a population of one million or more.

2. Though the Middle East has its megacities, on the whole the cities are small by western standards. By and large they lack large and heavy industries. The population as a whole is still mostly rural.

3. Like other third world cities, a great deal of urban growth is due to migration into the cities. But a number come not from rural villages but from the smaller, traditional towns. This produces slower growth in small and medium-sized towns and relatively high rates of growth in the largest cities.

As in other cities, there is little indication of a melting pot phenomenon. Migrants tend to concentrate in the city according to their home regions. A survey of Tripoli in 1971 showed that families from the Misurata area and from other regions were living in groups. In cities like Cairo and Isfahan, migrants tend to live on the side of the city nearest their place of origin. Migrants may also cluster not only by residence but also by occupation. So, in Tripoli, those from the Jebel village of Takbal invariably become bakers just as at one time most of Cairo's porters came from Musha village.

4. Migrants tend to keep their ties with the rural and small town areas they come from originally. This seems especially pronounced in the Middle East. Unlike other city centers, many urban dwellers "exhibit characteristics and behaviour patterns that reflect their rural or village background. ... Migrants do not simply pick up urban ways; they also, in effect, ruralize the cities. Many city dwellers are still tied to rural customs and culture, and migrants shape the city as much as the city shapes them" (Palen 1981:397).

5. In other urban centers affected by the west and by modernization, secularism is said to erode aspects of traditional beliefs. But contemporary scholarship seems to indicate no similar erosion process in the Muslim city.

One noted scholar sees no essential difference between Middle Eastern villagers and city dwellers in "the religious aspect of life. . . . Few systematic differences in religious behaviour between village and city have been clearly demonstrated" (Lapidus 1969:140). V. F. Costello argues that "changes in religious habits frequently accompany a move to the city" but these changes may not be due so much to the city as to twentieth century governments and their mixed attitudes to religion (Costello 1977:105).

Questions for Urban Evangelization of Muslims

1. In A.D. 500 the stronghold of Christianity was in the urban centers of North Africa. But 1,000 years later, argues Dr. Ray Bakke, the growth of Islam had virtually eradicated any Christian presence in those cities. The focus of Christianity then shifted from urban North Africa to rural Europe. And for one thousand years there was no real gain in the numerical strength of Christianity. "There was simply a swapping of urban real estate for rural real estate" (Bakke 1982:119).

How did the church fail in the urban context of North Africa? Bakke suggests the following: (1) They refused to give the tribal people the Scriptures in their own language, except in Egypt; (2) They failed to indigenize their ministries. The bishops and leaders of the church were all appointed from Rome. Africans had little control over their own urban churches; (3) They refused to deal with the race issue; (4) They refused to develop new approaches for the new urban realities; (5) The church developed a desert, escapist, monastic life for their church rather than an urban lifestyle and theology; (6) Schisms in the church, with increased attention spent on defensive apologetics. The churches thus lost their evangelistic cutting edge. (Ibid.)

Are we in danger of copying some of these same mistakes in the twentieth century? We were not ready to deal with urban Islam in the seventh century. Are we more ready now?

2. Costello argues that Muslim cities today show little signs of the anonymity and alienation often said to be characteristic of urban life (1977:103). Are there other felt needs to which the gospel may respond? How should the church respond to the problems of "overurbanization" in the Middle East -- to poverty, overcrowding, affluence? Can

these problems also become "gospel doors"?

3. Will we find it more difficult to evangelize cities in the Middle East? Does Islam's supposed preference for urban over rural societies offer resistance to the gospel as strong in the city as in the village and town? Even more so?

4. Recent migrants to third world cities often show signs of culture shock in moving from the town to the city or from the village to the city. This kind of culture shock has proved to be an open door opportunity for the gospel among recent urban migrants. Will the supposed uniqueness of the Muslim compatibility with the city minimize this opportunity? Should church and missionary focus their urban evangelism on newly arrived migrants rather than older, more settled in migrants? Is this a unique "hidden people" within Islam with greater potential for church growth?

5. What kind of city offers the greatest potential for evangelistic fruit in the Middle East? The megacities where social change and openness seems often to be more characteristic? or the smaller cities more typical of the Middle East?

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FOUR RESPONSES TO CONN'S ARTICLE

I - Response of A. W. (North Africa).

The author is quite right in drawing our attention to the "urban" factor in the Arab World. Unfortunately his information in most cases is more than fifteen years out of date. The trend noted is correct, but the numbers cited are too old to arrest attention, eg. Cairo is a megacity today of 12-14 million, Casablanca has 4 million and Algiers at least 3 million people. I agree that the urban centres are the Islamic strongholds where religious leaders and educated middle class congregate. The cities, however, are also the centres of social and political foment.

Reaching the urban dwellers with the Gospel has no "one best way". Making the Scriptures available is obvious. Providing genuine friendship is another. I believe what needs to be done is a combination of "living Christianity that is visible", eg. obvious piety, and reaching in depth into lives and families of decision makers. We must witness to Muslims at our social level. Nationals certainly would be better situated to carry this witness on than foreigners.

Let us not forget that Islamic cultural monopoly is very strong. Some of Conn's comments or questions appear irrelevant to life in the Arab World. Certainly Christians must be present in the city. If possible we must discover some felt need and meet it. At the same time never forget that the state, police and religious systems are there to stamp out any emergence of growing "cross-cultural" Christianity. They will seek to restrict you to some dismal corner where you cannot harm the status quo.

The real issue lies, I believe, at the level of preparation for power encounter and a God-given strategy to achieve it. The other key lies in in-depth discipling of believers. Mildly held convictions will have but minimal impact.

II - Response of D. A. (Middle East).

I would agree that there is a clinging to their rural locality roots by most urban Arabs. It is the place of origin and their family status there that give them a sense

of identity and worth in the more anonymous society of the cities. But in Middle Eastern cities at the eastern end of the Mediterranean there does seem to be a greater breaking down of the rural life-style, especially among the younger people. Many migrants to the cities do pick up what are considered to be the "sophisticated" urban ways. This is probably not so noticeable among the very poor, but certainly is the case among those who further their education.

1. Therefore, a very definite point of contact in urban evangelism is this sense of change and rootlessness that does characterize many urban young people. They need security and direction and this is a good starting point. I certainly agree that we are in danger of making the mistake of not developing new approaches for the new urban realities. Evangelism in the Middle East is sadly lacking in Media presentations, drama, video and literature in Arabic that speak to the problems of coping with life in the pressures of urban life.

2. The signs of alienation may not be as evident in Muslim cities because of the "family-centered" unit of society but there is alienation in thought and attitudes often with a resultant resentment of restrictions and the pressure of submitting to "family". In the area of counselling and helping young people adjust and deal with the pressures of "freedom" there is much scope for wise Christian witness. The expatriate's role in all these matters should be to work with and through a national church (where it is found) to enable it to be seen as a centre of social and spiritual concern and stability. In some large cities local churches are conducting clinics and social welfare schemes to help where poverty and overcrowding are creating particular problems.

The matter of affluence is one which is not being addressed in any determined way as far as I am aware and the whole question of "materialism" in the Islamic society is one which calls for a careful examination and literature to combat it and point to the true spiritual kingdom.

3 & 4. I am not convinced that Muslims (perhaps as against the supposed preference of Islam) find urban dwelling more in keeping with their culture than rural life. Certainly they are gregarious, family and clan orientated, but many do not like the pressures of big cities or the "corrupting"

influences of the West that are found there. The strength of Islamic resistance to the Gospel in large cities has much to do with fear of the community-orientated society. But this can also be offset by the sense of being "alone in a crowd" which grips many Muslim people. Long term, consistent loving friendship is an effective key and here again, where a national church exists, we need to work and pray that this love and neighbourliness will be released through its members. Loneliness is a very real thing in any city for people of any religion and perhaps as new families move into urban areas they are more open to love -- but it must be long-term caring love that gives the right later on to share the source of that love, Jesus Christ.

5. While the Christian presence in the Middle East is relatively so small and while the response of the church world-wide to the opportunities in the Muslim heart-lands is still slow we must:

- a. pray the Lord of the harvest to thrust out labourers
- b. pray for spiritual awakening in the national churches
- c. concentrate on centres of population where national expatriate Christians can work together to reach out in loving service and proclamation.

Until the church of the area and the church world-wide rises to the present opportunities in the Muslim world and catches the vision and challenge of making disciples throughout the Middle East and North Africa the great "potential for evangelistic fruit in the Middle East" will remain simply that.

III - Response of C. C. (England and the Middle East).

1. The statistics (pages 18 - 20) need to be brought up to date.
2. I would suggest that there needs to be some definition of the area being considered, and some recognition of the differences between different countries in the region. The opening paragraph speaks about "Middle Eastern Cities", and reference is made elsewhere to Cairo, Amman and Isfahan.

The analysis of the failure of the church in North Africa, however, hardly applies to Egypt, and applies mainly to the countries we now know as Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. I sense that missions are beginning to realize that they cannot think about Muslim Evangelism in Egypt in the same terms in which they have thought of it in North Africa.

3. "Will we find it more difficult to evangelize cities in the Middle East?". In documents of this kind there is always the danger that we think and speak as if evangelism in the Middle East depends on us (i.e. on western missionaries). Seen from the viewpoint of the 12 million Christians all over the Middle East, some kinds of strategy papers sound as if they have been written in a missiological ivory tower in the West. I am all for hard thinking about mission strategies! But, I fear that our plans may have little content until and unless the indigenous Christians of these countries -- many of whom live in the teeming cities of the Middle East -- are drawn into the discussion.

IV - Response of W. E. (North Africa):

I agree with Dr. Coon in most aspects of his analysis of the present situation in North Africa. There is certainly one strong "primate city" in each one of the countries. The question, however, his statement number two under "Comparisons and Characteristics", i.e., that most cities other than the one primate city are small by Western standards. In Morocco, I am sure that there are at least half a dozen cities having more than 100,000 people. And three of these have over 500,000. They would not seem small according to Western standards. His statements concerning migration, concerning grouping according to origin or occupation, and concerning the maintenance of world ties are very much on target.

I would like to make several comments on his questions, suggestions concerning application of this analysis in regard to evangelism in the Middle East today. First, I disagree with the quotation from Dr. Ray Bakke suggesting that some of the reasons for the failure of the church

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IV - Response of W. E. (North Africa):

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I would like to make several comments on his questions, and suggestions concerning application of this analysis in regard to evangelism in the Middle East today. First, I disagree with the quotation from Dr. Ray Bakke suggesting that some of the reasons for the failure of the church in North Africa were that "they refused to develop new approaches for the new urban realities" and that "the

church developed a desert, escapist, monastic life for their church rather than an urban lifestyle and theology".

In an important study of the problem of the disappearance of church in North Africa, L. R. Holme states that:

The churches of North Africa...fell because they were the churches of a party and not of a people; they appealed to the civilized Romans alone and not to the Barbarian Moors. Circumstances forced them to assume a hostile and uncompromising attitude towards the form of Christianity adopted by the Moors, and their life was bound up with that of the Roman domination in the province." (Holme 1898:253)

The "Moors" in this quote refer obviously to the Berber tribes of North Africa. Those tribes at that period, as today, were primarily mountainous rural people, not concentrated in urban centers. The urban centers of that period were primarily Roman cities, the cities in fact where the Christian Church flourished. The Church certainly failed in developing new approaches to effectively reach and retain the loyalty of the Berber people. But this failure was not a failure to develop new urban strategies.

I agree with his intimation in point two in this section that there is a need for greater research to find the felt needs in urban centers in the Arab-Muslim world of today to which the Gospel may respond. I would not agree, however, that the problems of anonymity and alienation are not among those felt needs. It is true, to some degree, that the maintenance of strong ties with rural roots and, in most cases, some degree of integration into a homogeneous group in the city may minimize the effect of anonymity and alienation. My experience is, however, that frustration and dissatisfaction with traditional Muslim forms and restrictions causes a high degree of alienation in many of the younger generation North Africans.

Finally, I would like to comment on his question of what kind of city offers the greatest potential for evangelistic fruit in the Middle East. It appears to me that this would largely depend on the level of resistance to, or acceptance of, the Gospel. High resistance will mean more success in the megacities where the convert can more easily escape his immediate family and homogeneous surroundings and be lost in the megalopolis crowd. A more highly receptive attitude

to the Gospel would mean greater success in smaller cities and towns where there is a much greater likelihood of a people's movement beginning.

As an appendix, I would add that one of the greatest obstacles to effective evangelism in North Africa today, whether in the megacities or the smaller cities and towns, is effective penetration of the social and cultural barriers by Western evangelists. Most of the megacities will have their modern area where Westerners can circulate relatively inconspicuously. Outside of those areas of the larger cities, however, expatriates are very noticeable. It is difficult for them to establish relationships conducive to sharing the Gospel without becoming so high-profile that action is taken by Muslim authorities to silence the witness.

As long as that climate of opposition remains, I find it more fruitful to bring an interested seeker outside his immediate family and home surroundings to a part of the city where he is not known, or to a neighboring town or city if he is from a relatively small place. This permits him to get a grounding in the Gospel without his contact with the expatriate arousing the kind of opposition which would force him to break off the contact.

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CONCLUDING REMARKS

by the Editor

I shall attempt to sum up and tie together this exchange of views by some concluding remarks and observations.

There is no doubt but that the Arab world countries are among the most urbanized in the world. Even though the statistics and some of the information in the lead article may need updating, the trends noted are there and the

issues are basically the same. Middle Eastern cities are bigger than ever. No longer can the Middle Eastern city be considered small in comparison to the West. The erosion of ties with rural origins is becoming a factor today, and rootlessness and social alienation are seen especially among the young, the second generation of migrants to the city.

One question that bears further comment concerns the supposed preference of Islam for urban society. A recent book by sociologist Ernest Gellner, which I have started to read, may help us here. Gellner distinguishes two social traditions in Islam (Gellner 1981:35ff). The one, which he calls the central tradition, does indeed have a special affinity for urban society. This is the tradition of orthodox Islam which is rooted in the Law, the Shariah, and the scholarly class who apply it.

Alongside the central tradition however there is another tradition which, while it does not seem to be exclusively rural (esp. today with the growth of urbanization), has nevertheless had strong rural ties. This tradition has a different approach to social organization (called "segmentary" by sociologists); its roots are in the tribe and the strong, charismatic leader, the marabout or saint. According to Gellner, Islamic society has tended to oscillate between these two traditions. Thus, while the special affinity of Islam for urban society would seem to be confirmed, it is evidently not the whole story. To adequately meet the urban challenge in the Middle East, we will therefore need to take both traditions into account.

One respondent took exception to two of the reasons given for the extinction of the church in North Africa, especially the argument that the church failed to develop new approaches to meet the new urban realities. It strikes me that Gellner's distinction between the two social traditions is relevant to this question. The dominant Catholic church, Latin in culture and implicated in Roman colonialism, was basically urban (the "central tradition"), while Donatism, the preferred church of the non-latinized Berbers who opposed the Roman colonial system, was essentially rural. It is surely more than coincidental that to this day, the Berber areas are the main centers of segmentary society (and of opposition to the "central tradition").

It is clear then that more was involved than a failure to develop new urban approaches. If the above analysis is correct, it boils down to a refusal to break out of the colonial structure and accept other cultural traditions as valid expressions of the church (see Schoen 1979:4-7, 11, 15). All this has important implications for the mission and the church today.

Finally, a word needs to be said about where the existing Christian community of the Middle East fits into the picture. Noting that they are not mentioned in the lead article, one respondent warns that unless they are a full partner to the discussion, any plans to reach Middle Eastern cities will have little content. I agree, although I do not see that they have been excluded here. The subject is simply too vast to cover everything in one brief article. For example, there would need to be a discussion of the sensitive issue of the problem created by the linguistic and social barriers which exist between them and the majority community. However the Christians may view them, they are clearly a significant hindrance to cross-cultural evangelism. This subject is important enough for an article by itself.

To conclude, although this exchange of views may not go far enough to satisfy many of us, it is hoped that it will serve as a catalyst to stimulate further reflection and research, and hopefully spark other articles on particular aspects of the subject.

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TOMATO PLANTS AND CHURCH PLANTING

by Karen Hock

When our ten year old son asked me if he could plant the seeds from some of the season's last tomatoes towards the end of October, I reluctantly agreed. While realizing the pleasure he would have from the experiment, I was fully aware that growing tomatoes in the winter, in a 9th floor apartment, would not be easy and would have been ridiculed by an experienced gardener from the outset. The seeds were sown and even I got caught up in his joy when a week or so later he found they were sprouting. Plenty of late fall sunshine in the mild climate we enjoy on the southern coast of France made the young plants thrive and our son was faithful in watering them. When frost threatened, we had to begin carrying the various pots from the balcony, where they spent the day, into the house for the night.

As the weeks wore on, watering, and caring for the tomato plants became more and more of a chore and burden which fell mostly on me. But many blossoms had begun to set on the eleven sturdy plants and the hope of harvest and tomato salads on our table in winter kept me faithful. I was becoming concerned however. Hadn't last summer's plants produced ripe tomatoes about six weeks after blossoming? Perhaps the winter sun was too weak. We seemed to have only blossoms and no fruit! Finally I discovered two tiny tomatoes and with renewed courage I staked, watered and fertilized, while thinking about all the work that had gone into just two tiny fruit that a strong wind or driving rain might yet keep from ripening.

It was then that God began to use those tomato plants as a vivid object lesson to teach me valuable lessons for my spiritual growth and ministry. For several years I had worked in a team to bring the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ to Muslims in our city. We had done much sowing with literature through door-to-door work and now, having established friendships, we were able to make visits in many homes and read the Word of God with women. It is very satisfying to scatter the "grain" of God's word widely and think about all that good seed being sown in hearts.

But, through departures and sickness, the team had been reduced to two -- only two people to visit more than forty

families. It is less satisfying emotionally to tend a few spindly, young plants, which as yet have no fruit setting on -- to water daily (by prayer) with little visible progress, to weed, prop up, shield from too much sun, wind or rain. To pour all your time and energies into just a few people, seeking to water the Seed with other passages from the Word, to bring a slowly dawning light. God caused me to see that it is a work of faith and perserverance, and that some may wither and die, or succomb to attacks of insects (false cults), blight and perhaps to a lack of water (when we fail to do our part).

But, if the sowing is comparatively easy, how necessary is the caring which follows. Paul said that he who plants and he who waters are EQUAL and will each receive his reward. Sowing usually takes place in the spring. The farmer must work all summer, harvest normally coming after several months of faithful labor in view of the fruit to be harvested. The Holy Spirit brought to my mind the passage from Psalm 126: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." What a precious promise for us who labor in difficult places. However, between the "going forth and weeping, bearing precious seed" and the "coming again rejoicing, bringing sheaves" are several hard months of cultivating, watering, weeding, watching, nurturing and protecting the sprouts and then the fruit, until it is finally ripe and can be picked.

Some time later when the tomato plants on our balcony had encouraged us with the setting on of many more tiny green tomatoes, and had even survived a hot, scorching wind from a warehouse fire just across the street, we sat down at a meal to enjoy the first of "our" tomatoes. As I thanked God for the miracle of these first "fruits", I thought of one woman to whom I had taken the Gospel; after three years of regular visits, she had received the Lord Jesus as her Savior, had been baptised and was now herself beginning to sow the Good Seed around her. "Lord", I prayed, "help me not to become weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."
