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RENEWAL NOTICES are enclosed for those whose subscriptions expire with the next number, since overseas mail delivery takes 4-8 weeks, to give you more time to renew before your subscription expires. Note the expiration date at the top of your address label.

A WORD ABOUT THIS ISSUE: Two authors whom you met in previous issues are back again. M. B. (see Vol I, No. 4, 1986) writes on the Abraham of the Qur'an from the standpoint of the cross-cultural communication of the gospel. Dr. David Shenk (see Vol II, No. 1, 1987) has some thought-provoking reflections on Church Growth theory in relation to mission to Muslims. His article is a condensed extract of a chapter entitled "The Muslim Ummah and the Growth of the Church" in Exploring Church Growth, edited by Wilbert R. Shenk, and published in 1983 by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (255 Jefferson SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49502 USA). We are only reprinting the part concerned with Church Growth theory. I wish to thank David and Eerdmans Publishing Company for permission to reprint this condensed extract. Ed.

## ABRAHAM IN THE QUR'AN: THE FIRST MUSLIM

by M. B.

Muslims would agree with the New Testament (Rom 4:11) that Abraham is "father of all who believe." An analysis of Abraham's faith in the Qur'an can help us communicate to those whose knowledge of Abraham is based on the Qur'an just what the New Testament means by "believe."

An Overview of the Qur'anic Presentation of Abraham

When we follow the Muslim chronology of the Qur'an, given in the official Egyptian text, we discover that there are two groups of traditions about Abraham (see Table in Watt 1970:206-213). The first group contains versions of stories from Genesis and the Talmud (the collection of Biblical interpretations made by Rabbinic Jews.) The second recounts completely new stories about Abraham which are unique to the Qur'an.

**Stage One:** The earliest mention of Abraham comes in Sura "Mary" (19:42-50/41ff). It is a version of a story from the Talmud about Abraham's rejection of his father's gods in favor of the Creator. Next comes the story of a visit to Abraham by some heavenly messengers with the promise of a son. This comes in Sura "Hood" (11:72-76/69-73). Thirdly, "The Rangers" (37:100-111/102-112) mentions Abraham's attempt to sacrifice his son. According to the chronology of the Egyptian text of the Qur'an, these were the 44th, the 52nd and the 56th Suras respectively in historical sequence of revelation.

**Stage Two:** A later group of suras gives stories about Abraham unique to the Qur'an. Sura "Abraham" (14:38-43/35-41) tells us that Abraham was at Mecca and established a sanctuary there for the worship of the Creator. "The House of Imran" (3:58-62/65-69) declares that Abraham was the first Muslim, and in the "The Cow" (2:120-123/126-129) we read a prayer of Abraham in which he blesses the Kaaba at Mecca, asks God to turn the Arabs to Him and earnestly desires an Arab prophet to arise to lead them in God's way. According to the Egyptian chronology, these were respectively the 72nd, the 89th and 87th suras in historical sequence of revelation.

**Why Two Stages?** The most likely explanation is that stories about Abraham were current in Arabia in Muhammad's time, relayed by Jewish tribes. This accounts for the stories from Genesis and the Talmud being introduced in the Qur'an. The unique stories can be explained by the controversy that arose between Muhammad and the Jews who rejected his message. It was in response to that rejection that the new stories develop connections between Abraham and Arabia, Mecca, the Kaaba, the Arabs, and the Arabian prophet himself. In other words, the later stories legitimize the call of Muhammad by anchoring Islam in history back before the Torah and the Prophets; they take Islam back to the first man who heard the call of God and obeyed. Islam becomes the original religion, and Abraham the first Muslim.

The First Cycle: Abraham Fights Idolatry

Now let us examine these Qur'anic stories in detail. The first one ("Mary" 19:42-50/41-50) tells how Abraham challenges the idol worship of his father. His father threatens to stone him. Abraham asks God to forgive his father.

This conversion of Abraham is retold seven times in the Qur'an, making it by far the most important tradition about Abraham to be recorded. In two recensions Abraham breaks the idols around him in the name of God. He asks the idolaters, "Do you serve what you hew, and God created you and what you make?" ("The Rangers" 37:94/95-6). He is promptly threatened with fire, but God delivers him.

This story can be found in the Talmud but not in the Bible (Tisdall 1905:74f). No doubt it is an attempt by the Rabbis to fill out the Genesis account where it is silent on Abraham's relationship with his father's religion.

In a later version of this story in the Qur'an, Abraham explains his break with idolatry:

O my people, surely I am quit of that you associate. I have turned my face to Him who originated the heavens and the earth, a man of pure faith; I am not of the idolaters.' ("Cattle" 6:79/78-9)

God is defined as the Creator, not some local deity such as his father worshipped. These local deities can no longer be "associated" with the Creator of the whole world. The concept of association becomes a watchword in the Qur'an, a kind of marker of the Muslim faith. It defines what God is not (just as Christians have used negative words to fence off belief about God). When one sees the marker one turns neither to the left (to things which might be said to represent God) nor to the right (to people who might be held to reveal Him), but rather one keeps straight ahead, acknowledging God as unseen.

God's Call to Abraham in Genesis

I believe that Genesis 12:1-3 is an ideal commentary on the story just considered. How did Abraham come to acknowledge "the God" above the many gods of the idolaters around him. The Qur'an does not answer this question in the way that Genesis does. We are not told in the Qur'an that God spoke to Abraham at this stage in his life. Only later is there conversation between them. How appropriate then to introduce a Muslim to the personal revelation of God in Genesis 12:1-3. Here God gives Abraham a command to obey and a set of promises to believe. We can therefore begin to develop the notion of faith as it is expounded in the Bible. Faith in God is trust in His promises and obedience to His commands. Surely here is a rationale for Abraham's attack on his father's idols.

The Promise of a Son

The account in Genesis 18 of messengers arriving at Abraham's tent and promising him a son is found twice in the Qur'an. The earliest version comes in Sura "Hood" (11:72-76/69-73).

Our messengers came to Abraham with the good tidings. ... We gave her [Abraham's wife] the glad tidings of Isaac, and, after Isaac, of Jacob. She said 'Woe is me! Shall I bear being an old woman, and this my husband is an old man?' They said 'What, dost thou marvel at God's command.'

The context of Genesis 18 is missing. There, the Lord has already promised Abraham a son (12:2,7; 15:4,5; 17:19). The messengers come to repeat for the fourth time God's commitment to give Abraham a son in his old age. We are also told in Genesis that Abraham had a son by his wife's maid. We do not hear about Ishmael in the Qur'an, however, until we come to the sacrifice story. Again, we discover in Genesis that Abraham asks that Ishmael be accepted as the son of the promise (17:18). The Lord then makes a distinction between the two sons. Ishmael, the son born naturally, is blessed and will become the father of a great nation. It is Isaac, however, the "son of the promise" who was conceived supernaturally, who will be Abraham's heir and the bearer of God's everlasting covenant.

All of this Biblical context is important for the Muslim to grasp. We need to help him to see that God made His covenant with Isaac and his descendants, not Ishmael, and that this covenant is everlasting. We can try to point out that the prophets of Israel looked back to this covenant with Isaac, and forward to a new covenant established through the Messiah with all who follow Him (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb 8:7-13). Ultimately, God worked out His promise to Abraham through Jesus Christ to all, whatever the race, who are "sons of the promise" by faith in Jesus (Gal. 4:28-31). Gentiles, and this includes Muslims, can become Abraham's heirs only through faith in Christ.

The Call to Sacrifice His Son

The second Biblical story to be included in the Qur'an is a version of the sacrifice story of Genesis 22:1-19. In "The Rangers (37:100-111/102-112), Abraham says to his son:

'My son, I see in a dream that I shall sacrifice thee; consider, what thinkest thou?' He said, 'My father, do as thou art bidden; thou shalt find me, God willing, one of the steadfast.' ... We called unto him, 'Abraham, thou hast confirmed the vision. ... This is indeed the manifest trial.' And We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice. ... Then We gave him the good tidings of Isaac...

Again, the Genesis account gives essential data not found here. In Genesis 22:2 it is God who gives that awesome command "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and sacrifice him as a burnt

offering." The Qur'an can be taken to imply that it was Ishmael who was sacrificed, because Isaac's birth is only announced after the account of the sacrifice. This is the traditional Muslim view.

We can use this Qur'anic story to show several things to our Muslim friend. First of all, we need to point out that the command to sacrifice Isaac goes against God's promise to Abraham. It is this seeming denial of His word that is the real test for Abraham. This paradox is absent from the story in the Qur'an. The sharpness of human sacrifice can still be felt in the Qur'anic version, however, and we can use that dilemma of faith to show how much more difficult it was for Abraham to trust God in the Genesis story. A second issue has to do with the fact that Abraham's faith culminated in obedience to the word of God even when that word seemed to contradict all that God had said before. Finally, we can point to this event in the life of the father of the Hebrew nation as a prophetic foreshadowing of the sacrifice of the "Lamb of God."

#### The Second Cycle of Traditions

We have seen how, in the Qur'anic version of Abraham's sacrifice, Ishmael takes the place of Isaac. We will now discover that Isaac disappears from the scene altogether, and that Ishmael assumes his place in the narrative. Chronologically the next mention of Abraham comes in the Sura named "Abraham." Here we find him in Arabia at an ancient sanctuary in a valley where Mecca would later be built.

#### Abraham Establishes God's House at Mecca

In Sura "Abraham" (14:40/37) Abraham prays to God, "Our Lord, I have made some of my seed to dwell in a valley where is no sown land by Thy Holy House." In a later revelation, the Holy House is explained to be set apart by a word from God:

'... We appointed the House to be a place of visitation for the people, and a sanctuary. ... And We made covenant with Abraham and Ishmael: 'Purify My House for those that shall go about it and those that cleave to it, to those who bow and prostrate themselves.' ("The Cow" 2:117, 119/125)

Finally in "The Pilgrimage" (22:27) God commands Abraham to call for a pilgrimage to the house.

There are two issues that spring from these quotations. The first is that God makes His covenant with Abraham and Ishmael. Isaac has no part in this covenant, neither is there an elect people. The covenant has to do with a sanctuary, a holy place. Thus the promise of the land in Genesis is transformed into a commitment to a building. Why so? The answer probably lies in the fact that the Kaaba was already an ancient sanctuary in Muhammad's time. It may be too that Abraham was associated with this temple before Muhammad, but of this nobody can be sure. In any case, for Islam, the ancient house anchors Muhammad's novel call in antiquity. Although the Kaaba had

become a seat of idolatry in Muhammad's time, that was not its original purpose. Men had long distorted its purity, but Muhammad restored it to its true purpose that Abraham had planned for it.

The second issue is that in the Qur'anic account it is Abraham's seed that establishes Mecca. In "The Cow" (2:120/126), Abraham asks God, "My Lord, make this a land secure". In the context "the land" is the area around "the House", the Kaaba. So the building becomes the focal point of a "holy" land. The Qur'an does allude to Canaan as "holy" on two occasions. But that is in the context of Moses delivering Israel from Egypt. Significantly there is no record of God promising Canaan to Abraham, and no mention of Abraham living there.

Thus we discern a movement away from Biblical tradition and toward the development of a new tradition favorable to the claims of Muhammad. This new tradition displaces the Genesis tradition in terms of its importance for the Muslim. This becomes all the clearer in the prayer of Abraham which occurs in "The Cow" (2:120-3/126-9).

#### Abraham's True Descendants

In his prayer, Abraham makes this request: "Lord make us submissive to Thee, and of our seed a nation submissive to Thee." ("The Cow" 2:123/128). The word translated "submissive" is the word 'muslim,' used in the Qur'an to signify the relationship that should obtain between men and God. The phrase translated "a nation submissive" is 'umma muslima.' The word 'umma' signifies a distinct community or nation, in distinction from humanity as a whole. Here, then, Abraham is not speaking of Isaac and his descendants. He is not concerned with the Hebrew "nation." Rather, he is praying for Ishmael and his descendants, the inheritors of Mecca, the Arabs.

Abraham continues his prayer "Lord, do Thou send among them [i.e. the submissive nation] a Messenger, one of them, who shall recite to them Thy signs, and teach them the Book, and the Wisdom, and purify them." ("The Cow" 2:123/129) It could not be clearer. Abraham looks for the coming of Muhammad. The "seal of the Messengers" would be not a Jew from the seed of Isaac but an Arab from the seed of Ishmael.

#### Abraham Was Neither Jew Nor Christian, but rather a Muslim

The ultimate word on Abraham comes in "The House of Imran" (3:58-62/65-68).

People of the Book! Why do you dispute concerning Abraham? The Torah was not sent down, neither the Gospel, but after him. What, have you no reason? ... No: Abraham in truth was not a Jew, neither a Christian; but he was a Muslim and one pure of faith; certainly he was never of the Idolaters. Surely the people standing closest to Abraham are those who followed him, and this Prophet, and those who believe; and God is the protector of the believers.

Muhammad had discovered Jews and Christians in Arabia who disputed his claim to prophethood. The new traditions had already been revealed and had undoubtedly thrown Jewish and Christian Arabs into turmoil. (There is a hadith to the effect that this revelation came as a result of a dispute with Jews and Christians.)

Strictly speaking, of course, Abraham was not a Jew but rather the father of the Jews (and, according to the New Testament, "of all who believe"). But that is not what the passage is about. Notice that "idolater" is the key word in the argument; Abraham was not an idolater. It would seem to be implied that Jews and Christians are. Abraham did not "associate" gods with "the God". It is the fault of Jews and Christians that they do.

It is far from clear in the Qur'an in what way the Jews as a whole are idolaters. The story of the golden calf is related several times; it is perhaps this incident which is seen as branding all Jews with the same infidelity. But there is another aspect to the idolatry idea. Those who fail to acknowledge Muhammad's call are automatically considered idolaters. It is assumed that a man who rejects the Prophet's call to submission must harbor false views of God.

Abraham: the "Father of All Who Believe" (Romans 4:11)

First of all we have to acknowledge that this second cycle of traditions is not capable of being a bridge for the gospel. However I have found that one young man accepted the authenticity of Genesis by a careful comparison of the Bible and the Qur'an. This led him to expect that the rest of the Biblical revelation would be truthful.

Secondly, we can accept the "submission" of Abraham and his rejection of idolatry. We can build on this by referring to Paul's presentation of Abraham as a man whose faith involved "unwavering trust in God" (Rom. 4:20). Submitting to God (described in the New Testament in terms of discipleship) is part of faith in God. But we can go on to show that Abraham also trusted God as a person; trust is not mere assent to doctrine. There are two sides to trust/faith according to Romans 4: a) there is a passive acceptance of the will of God; and b) an active commitment to the will of God. Submission admirably expresses the first but we can point out that the second is absolutely essential to true faith. In other words, faith is an active self-giving to God. It is this double attitude of submission and trust that underlies Romans 4:3, 22 and Genesis 15:6. "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Thirdly and finally, we can proceed to describe all that faith involves for the believer in Christ (Epistle to the Romans). He or she receives a righteousness from God apart from law (3:21, 22), is counted righteous as a free gift of God's grace (3:24, 26), and through the atoning death of Christ (3:25), is now at peace with God (5:1), and receives the Holy Spirit of God who enables one to live by faith (8:1-17).

This presentation of the gospel arises out of the context of Abraham's faith and fits perfectly into a consideration of what is involved in faith for any believer. Abraham is the "father of all who believe," those who God counts as righteous as a result of their commitment to Him.

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<sup>1</sup>The names of the Suras are from Arberry's translation (1964). All quotations are from Arberry's translation, whose verse numbering is given, followed by that of the Egyptian text and the translations based on it.

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**CHURCH GROWTH THEORY AND THE MUSLIM WORLD**

by David W. Shenk

[The following is a condensed extract from a chapter, entitled "The Muslim Umma and the Growth of the Church," from the book Exploring Church Growth, edited by Wilbert R. Shenk, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983. It is published by permission of author and publisher.]

Surely we should rejoice when people experience grace in Christ. Nevertheless, we need to ask to what extent church growth models fit into the communication and experience of redemptive grace. At the Pattaya Consultation on World Evangelization (1980), the miniconsultation on reaching Muslims identified five commitments of contemporary church growth missiology: a belief that churches ought to grow; a commitment to working with people groups; concentrating resources primarily on receptive peoples; contextualizing the gospel; and careful planning for evangelism. I will comment on each of these rubrics from the perspective of a Kingdom missiology.

A Belief That Churches Ought To Grow

All Christian evangelists rejoice when churches grow. In relationship to Islam, however, church growth has been very slow. In fact for

many centuries Christian communities in Islamized societies have experienced considerable attrition and assimilation. That is reverse church growth.

A cozy response to the decline of the church in Nubia or Libya, for example, suggests that the Christians in those countries were decadent even before the Muslim conquests. Yet this is hardly true. Nubian Christianity was explicitly vigorous; the creative impact of the gospel along the Upper Nile valley contributed to an artistic and intellectual dynamism which reached far beyond the borders of Nubia. Similarly Libyan Christianity experimented with contextualization of Christian life and theology so daringly that they sometimes gained the criticisms of their more traditionally inclined brethren in Egypt and elsewhere. On the eve of the Muslim conquests, Persian missionaries were proclaiming the gospel in China, the Egyptian evangelists were preaching to African people groups far south of their imperial borders. These are not marks of decadent Christianity. (Kealy & Shenk 1975:168-330)

Nevertheless, many of the formerly Christianized societies of northern Africa and the Middle East are now mostly Islamized. The churches are minority communities circumscribed by the dhimmi system. In some countries the ancient churches are no more; over the centuries they have been slowly smothered into extinction. The twentieth century has not substantially reversed this trend.

During my years as an educationalist in a Muslim country, the church tried to grow. There was a fairly explicit hunger for the gospel. There were many Nicodemuses. Several times we seemed on the verge of people group movements. But these inclinations, which gave us great joy, were disconcerting to the society as a whole. With graciousness, tact, and firmness the authorities felt constrained to shackle the church. Later, a law was passed prohibiting the propagation of any religion except Islam.

Nevertheless, the life and worship of the Christian congregations was affirmed. There was seldom any attempt to keep Christians from fellowshiping and praying together. Growth, however, was seriously problematical. Muslim friends often said, "Every person born in this society has the blood of Islam flowing in his veins." Everyone traced his genealogy, at least mythically, to the Quraish; all were kinsmen to the Prophet, and that fact was the foundation stone of nationhood.

Krikor Greg Haleblan, a Syrian Christian, writes, "One of the first principles most worthy of consideration is the Muslim's love for unity or oneness" (1979:79). The mosque is a supreme sign of unity in the Muslim community. All the architectural symbols flow together, and the whole is oriented toward Mecca. Dress styles and housing patterns reveal the same affirmation of unity. How, then, can a growing church be accommodated within the unity framework? How can the umma accept growth pluralism, when the umma itself is the reciprocity of ultimate truth?

Although we do rejoice when churches grow, is church growth the only authentic measure of effective and faithful witness? Does effective witness and ministry always lead to church growth? Does ministry in a no growth situation suggest that the witness is not in any sense redemptive? In response to those questions, I propose several observations.

a) We need patience. Let me illustrate from a non-Muslim situation. In 1853 the first Christian missionaries (CMS) arrived in Kenya. Within weeks the first missionary graves were planted on the outskirts of Mombasa, the port town of Kenya. The ministry and witness continued for thirty years with incredible suffering and dedication. The consequence: only seven baptized communicant members. Today, however, nearly 10,000,000 or 70% of the Kenyan people are professing Christian. Yet those who planted and ministered faithfully saw almost no fruit whatsoever.

In relationship to Islam we also need the gift of patience. In some societies, a decade or two is sufficient. In some Muslim societies we probably need a patience which endures a century or more.

b) A fixation on church growth often distorts the authenticity of our witness and service. At Muslim congresses anger is frequently expressed against forms of Christian philanthropy which are a hook for church growth. Obviously we rejoice when congregations of believers emerge through our ministries. Nevertheless, the emergence of congregations is not the reason why we serve. We serve because God is love.

Several years ago I was heading up philanthropic Christian ministries in a Muslim society which was undergoing radical social change. Most humanitarian agencies quit. We stayed. Many times I was asked, "Why?" My response was, "Because in the Messiah, God has revealed his love. We also, as disciples of the Messiah, want to share God's love with you." That witness was acceptable, and I believe effective. We didn't experience much church growth, but the witness in deed and word spoke deeply.

We must constantly interpret why we minister. Otherwise our acts of mercy seem to be sinister ploys to gain converts. Deeds of service and ministry must be performed in the name of Christ. Christians are not humanists. It is God's love which constrains us, and this we must say. Ministries of service are not an addendum to the gospel, or techniques for evangelism. We don't do them so that we can gain entry into countries which would otherwise be closed to the gospel. Indeed not! We minister because of Jesus.

c) How large does a church need to become before its redemptive presence is felt throughout a society? Paul Hiebert's description of bounded, fuzzy, and open sets is helpful; it opens the question of the meaning of a Christ orientation (1981). As an Anabaptist, I am committed to the bounded set, an explicitly committed, visible, covenant community. Nevertheless, I also believe that the redemptive

power of the community of faith is not proportionate to its size. Jesus does become present where two or three meet in his name. And the gates of hell do not prevail against the ministry of that faith community, whatever its size.

We cannot fully fathom the redemptive implications of the power of Jesus' presence. Recently a Muslim government official told a mission executive, "Your community is the only group who have ever left an eternal impact on my country." What did he mean? Massive multilateral aid agencies have had a high profile in that country. Yet a minuscule cluster of believers ministering in the name of Christ are especially appreciated because of their transforming quality. Is this what Jesus meant when he referred to his disciples as salt and light?

The presence, life, prayer, ministry, witness, and invitation of the redeemed cluster who meet in Jesus' name is vitally needed, even in situations where the church does not grow numerically. Muslim societies need to see and experience the church. It is the authentic sign of the presence of the Kingdom. The church is the only community which perceives salvation in the One born in Bethlehem, who loved ultimately, and whose open arms on the cross speak of the redemptive vulnerability of God. That witness is desperately needed everywhere. If the church is indeed the body of Christ, then the most important event in the life history of a society is the advent of His incarnational presence in that society in the church. Could it be that from God's perspective, the presence of the church in a society is more significant than the growth of the church?

I am completely confident that the Holy Spirit does want the church to grow. Yet some societies have developed formidable anti-growth propensities. In those situations it seems the Holy Spirit is especially concerned about maintaining an authentic presence and witness. It seems to me, therefore, utterly disastrous when Christians ministering and witnessing in an apparently sterile no-growth situation decide to terminate their presence. The darkness cannot overcome the light, but what happens when the small light which is present emigrates?

#### A Commitment To Working With People Groups

The church has normally been committed to affirming the right of people to worship and express their Christian faith in their own idiom and culture. Even from the early centuries of the Christian era, missionaries have translated the Bible into the languages of the peoples they evangelized. In relationship to Islam, probably one of the greatest attractions the church presents is the affirmation of the right of people to read the Bible in their own mother tongue. This is in contrast to Muslim missionaries who teach people Arabic, because "God's final revelation to mankind is the Arabic Qur'an."

Nevertheless, an emphasis on people groups is not a panacea for world evangelism, and in some situations it might be counter-productive.

Let me illustrate. I grew up in a missionary home in Tanzania. My parents were the first evangelists to a particular people group (15,000 people). They learned the language, and spent hours translating the Gospel of Matthew into that language. Yet many of those Scripture portions remained unused. They were never used, because the great movement into the church in that particular people group took place at the moment when those people caught the vision of the new universal community, which could link their tiny ethnic group to a world wide fellowship. It was the quest for universality, not locality, which was the trigger for church growth. Consequently, it was the Swahili Bible, written in the national language, which united all societies together in East Africa which sold, and the Scripture portions which seemed to reinforce ethnicity were seldom used.

In many emerging nations in Africa, the church is the principal glue which holds the nation together, because it is a transcultural community. In some countries government leaders explicitly lock to the church to help maintain transethnic commitments. In that context, western missiologists need to be very cautious. Overemphasizing ethnic identity is perceived by many emerging nations as being treasonable. The church is affirmed as the community which helps bring unity, not as the exacerbator of ethnic identities. So in Muslim societies also, the church must minister as a unifier, not a divider of the people. Symbols of universality will be just as important as affirmations of indigeneity.

Another dimension is that the values of homogeneous people groups are often so tightly woven in the social and cultural fabric that it is exceedingly difficult for an alternate commitment to break through. Consequently, some of the most responsive peoples to the gospel are those who have broken out of the trappings of ethnicity. These are the upwardly mobile people, those who travel, seek education or participate in outward expansion. It is the modern emphasis on individualism which is prying people loose from traditional loyalties and opening them to the possibilities of involvement and commitment to other forms of community. For these modern individualists, the church often provides a welcome home; it is a primary fellowship which is genuinely universal, and it affirms the integrity of personhood.

A people group orientation sometimes overlooks the broad commonalities which link all Muslims together. A fixation on local culture may obscure the amazingly consistent world view of Muslims. The people group emphasis tempts us to sidestep the universal theological nature of the encounter and witness.

#### Resources Should Be Concentrated On Receptive Peoples

A third tendency among church growth missiologists is to encourage the concentration of financial and personnel resources on receptive peoples. Frequently this emphasis skews resources away from Islamized peoples. The General Secretary of the Kenya National Council once told me that mission agency heads frequently came to ask him

where the unevangelized areas of Kenya were. He would show them a map. One third of the country was almost untouched by the gospel. These were Islamized peoples. Weeks later he would learn that instead of going to these peoples, the new agencies would always settle in the evangelized areas, often in communities which were already 95% churched. During my six years Kenya, not one new agency decided to concentrate resources in the Islamized areas of the country, even though Kenya's secular government would have provided the most ideal circumstances for quiet evangelization.

The issue is further exacerbated by the difficulty in raising funds for ministry among Muslims. It is also disturbing that much of the new impetus for concentrating resources on ministries among Muslims is undergirded with notions that we are on the verge of a "breakthrough." Certainly we give thanks for any indications of openness to the gospel among Muslims. Nevertheless, for multitudes of faithful Christian evangelists ministering among Muslims, there probably never will be a breakthrough in church growth terms. Consequently, the resource flow will be siphoned into Muslim communities which are only marginally Islamized.

There is, of course, the Biblical command to shake the dust from our feet and go elsewhere when a people reject the gospel. Nevertheless, most Muslims have never explicitly rejected the gospel. Their apparent resistance is usually related to the fact that they have never understood its message. Apparently resistant people are not necessarily people who have rejected. In fact I have seldom interacted with any other people who seem as open to hearing the gospel as Muslims. True, the misperceptions run deep, the theological issues are profound, and community pressures are tremendous. But it takes time and patience, the kind of patience which does not fit the categories of cost effectiveness analysis.

#### The Gospel And The Church Needs To Be Contextualized

It is imperative for the gospel to break out of the cultural reciprocity of the missionary so that it may become truly incarnate within the culture of those who are receiving the message. In this, Islam and the gospel are very different. Cultural indigeneity is a far greater concern for Christianity than it is for Muslims. On the African continent this fact is dramatically obvious. The Muslim intelligentsia across the continent are calling for the purification of Islam, which in their terms means the incipient denigration of African traditional culture in favour of the Islamic Sharia. Within the Christian community the opposite message is heard. Everywhere Africans speak of the need to Africanize Christianity, to contextualize the gospel in African forms. This is one of the dramatic differences between the incarnational gospel of Jesus, and the Islamic perception of revelation as tanzil (sent down).

Let us not assume that through contextualization Muslims will be painlessly attracted to Christ. The theological issues cannot be surmounted by cultural niceties. Christians should also be aware

that Muslims have a deep aversion for all forms of hypocrisy. Contextualization must not be perceived as an attempt to camouflage the reality of the gospel or of the development of a redeemed community.

Efforts to contextualize should not negate the need for universal identity. At one time I worked in a situation where a small Christian congregation developed in a Muslim society. We encouraged contextualization, and one suggestion was to have our weekly worship on Friday. This was rejected, however, for two reasons: a) the community wanted identity with the universal Christian community which worships on Sunday. b) It would look as though the Christians were trying to usurp a Muslim practice. Later these concerns ameliorated, and today that community does worship on Friday. But at the time, Sunday worship was preferred.

Symbols are the communicators of belief. A particular symbol might seem neutral and adaptable by Christians, whereas the reality which the symbol communicates in the Muslim context may be antithetical to Christian commitment. For example, we suggested to this group of new Christians that we bow in the Muslim fashion for prayer. They told us, however, that bowing is not appropriate to the gospel. Muslims bow towards Mecca, but in Christ there is no geographical orientation. Christ is in fact risen, and therefore Christians should stand to worship looking into the face of the risen Christ. Bowing is a sign of slavery to God, whereas the redeemed are His children. Sons and daughters stand in the presence of their Father. In that situation, standing became the Christian posture for prayer.

In all attempts at contextualization, the missionary must be sensitive to the local fellowship. An African churchman once said that although meat and beer would be more appropriate symbols of the eucharist from an African perspective than the traditional wine and bread, it is nevertheless necessary to use the wine and bread because in that way the church is reminded through these non-indigenous symbols that it is part of a world wide fellowship. In much the same manner, a cluster of Christians from a Muslim background were rather horrified when a missionary suggested using camel's milk in the eucharist. Otherness and universality are dimensions of Christian symbolism which are just as important as the symbols of incarnational contextualization. The Kingdom of God is new!

#### The Church Should Plan Carefully For Evangelism

Much of my life I have lived among peoples who were the targets of western missionary enterprise, and have listened to their feelings. On the whole I have sensed great appreciation for missionary work borne of the love of God, but great resentment against those strategies which see people as objects to be manipulated into the church. The concern for plan is right. The manipulative plan is wrong. Furthermore, we must always recognize that in Christ means and ends converge. The means to the Kingdom, and the Kingdom itself are the same. Jesus is both the Way and the Life.

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It is especially important that parachurch agencies develop sensitivity to the local church. The church is already present in most Muslim countries. These Christians understand the local culture better than the expatriate ever can. Insensitive strategies can cause enormous harm. I know, for example, of several incidents where Scripture portions were posted into a country to every address in a phone book, causing tremendous embarrassment to the local church.

Our terminology should be more reflective of Biblical sensitivities. Much of the evangelism and planning terminology used in American church growth publications is extremely offensive. Would it not be good to plan, speak, and write as people of the Light, assuming that those among whom we plan to minister, have listened in on the plan, and they are at peace with our intentions?

Recently an evangelical mission was in conversation with a Muslim governmental department concerning beginning a new ministry. The mission executive asked to clarify the commitment of the mission, but the response of the Muslim officials was, "We know you completely and we trust you. That is why we welcome you!" That is the kind of open mission planning which is precious!

The overall assumptions of church growth theory seem to be anchored on the premise that correct missiology will produce church growth. However, is it not true that from a Kingdom perspective, faithfulness, not success, is the criterion of authentic mission? The cross precedes the resurrection. Mission is most authentically expressed through the suffering redemptive love of the people of God.

#### Concluding Observation

I shall summarize the concerns of this paper by sharing the story of a particular ministry among Muslims which I have observed with great interest. Several years ago an independent African Church, which was never begun through foreign missionary initiative, developed a concern for ministry among Muslims. They asked a foreign mission agency to join in a partnership ministry. The agency and the Church jointly appointed a Canadian family for this mission among Muslims. An African family was also appointed by the African Church.

For a year the team visited Muslim villages. They met leadership. They developed a strong trust relationship with decision makers. They visited a Muslim mystical community (Sufi Tariq) several times. They felt that the tariq represented a form of Islamic community which was readily adaptable to a Christian presence. So they moved into one of the largest Muslim communities in the region, and began developing a Christian community on the tariq model.

The houses were built on the same style, with roundels for the core cluster of households, and special houses for eating and for meetings. A multi-ethnic group of Christians formed the core community. The pastor ministered in a manner somewhat parallel to the sheikh in the tariq. Teaching and worship experiences were performed on mats,

with participants sitting cross-legged on the floor. All community events were punctuated with prayer; frequently Muslims and Christians prayed together, for even jointly sponsored events needed the affirmation received through prayer. The faith community ministered creatively to community needs, especially those of widows and orphans.

All meals were eaten in communal fashion, and the diet was completely dependent on locally acquired foods. Village people were always welcome for meals. That community blended into the local cultural horizon amazingly. For some of the Bible studies, as many as thirty people have been present. Muslims will come to this center for worship, who would never enter a church. Bible study courses have been used which draw from some portions of the Qur'an as contact points for the Biblical witness.

When a riot broke out in the community, over a hundred houses were burned adjacent to the Christian community. Many people were killed. As the neighbors fled into the bush, they tossed their belongings across the fence into the Christian community. Although there was considerable looting, nothing was touched or harmed in the Christian community. It seemed to be an authentic sign of peace in the midst of the turmoil. Later the leaders of the factions involved in the conflagration came and asked the Christian community to give leadership to reconciliation and the reconstruction of the village.

This is a marvelous example of Christian presence, prayer, ministry, witness, and invitation among Muslims. Although contextualized, it is distinctly Christian; although suffering, it lives and ministers in the joy of the resurrection. This small community is graciously affecting the atmosphere in the whole region. It is a precious sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God, a witness to the gracious creation by God of a redeemed peoplehood.

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