

Money & Measurements: Monetary units = dinar, dirham, fiis. Units of distance = mīl (mile), qawsayn (two bow's lengths), šibra (width of a hand).

Miscellaneous: Jesus is the "way" = es-sirāt (27:4); also the "divider" = furqān, instead of a "sword" (12:23). The direction of prayer = qibla (4:39-42). Jesus speaks of "wrapping turbans (amā'im) in layers" instead of "lengthening phylacteries" (24:16). Godfearer = hanīf (9:2). The feeding of the 5000 = sending down a "spread table" = mā'ida (13:8-10, cf. Qur'an 5:112-115). The traveler = 'ibn es-sabīl (18:20). Jesus speaks of "biting of hands" = ya'addu 'ala yadayhi, instead of "gnashing of teeth" (25:46). The "important matters of the law" = 'arkan ed-dīn (24:25).

FEEDBACK ON THE RABITA

Whither Rabita by an "Interested Observer," and Several Observations by the Editor

The article on Rabita ["The Rabita - Fifteen Years Old in 1987"] in the First quarter 1987 [II/1] issue of SEEDBED is most encouraging. One rejoices in what the Rabita has done in the last fifteen years. It is most heartening to see the responsibility of the organizing and planning of the Rabita in the hands of North African Christians.

One of the problems mentioned in the article faced by the organizers stems from the fine North African custom of hospitality. One does not invite people and then ask them to pay when they arrive. Asking a guest for remuneration for hospitality given would be a shame. This, by the way would be true in any Western home in the U.S. or Canada or Europe. One would never ask a guest to pay.

However, I wonder if the parallel with Rabita is wholly applicable. The custom of hospitality has its limitations according to circumstance. The Rabita is a large conference gathering. What would be a parallel situation in North Africa? Do cultural or religious conference organizers pay for all guests that come? Would not someone visiting a cultural gathering in a large city be expected to find lodging and meals in a hotel when he comes to the conference? Or would the organizers suggest some low cost lodging in the area?

This also raises the question of the strategy of the Rabita organizers as regards funding for its continued ministry. The article pointed somewhat critically to certain missions that did not contribute to the Rabita what might have been expected in view of their purpose of seeing a developed leadership in North Africa. There may be something of a misinterpretation here. Perhaps the missions in question face the same problem as the Rabita leadership - funding. In any case what will be the strategy of the Rabita committee for the

future? To continue to expect the Missions to fund Rabita, or to seek an alternative that would somehow place more of the responsibility of the financial burden on North African Christians in Europe?

Is it wrong to expect the participants of Rabita to pay or bear part of the expenses of a conference of which they are the sole benefactors? Or will Western Christians continue to foot the bill because of a North African cultural sentiment concerning hospitality? As the article pointed out, there are several who attend the Rabita that are able to contribute. If it is wrong to invite someone to come to Rabita and then ask him to pay, is it wrong to first inform those invited of the real costs involved in their coming? Could a letter of appeal be sent to the 200 names on the Rabita mailing list? Could some of the small gathering groups of North African Christians in Europe be challenged to rise to the occasion? Even if only a portion of expenses were met this way, would it not be a beginning of shouldering responsibility for the North African Church in Europe?

This is undoubtedly a difficult issue to face. Yet the Rabita leadership may be in an unprecedented position to bring the North African church to new heights of growth through increased responsibility. We are living in a day where countless new nations have sprung up and gained independence. All North African countries are now independent and carry on the responsibility of its own affairs. Should not North African Christians be setting an example by manifesting their ability to bear the responsibility of its own affairs? This is not an issue of easy solution, yet it is well known that North Africans are very resourceful people. It may be that in a few years we will see the North Africans taking the initiative for their financial obligations as well as the leadership roles which they have shown themselves so adept at as manifested by the rise and growth of Rabita.

Interested Observer

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Thank you for your response. I am glad to see your positive interest in the Rabita and I acknowledge that you make some valid points. As for the questions you raise, after further correspondence with a source, I have several additional remarks by way of clarification.

First of all, your question as to whether the Arab custom of hospitality is really relevant to the Rabita conferences. In North Africa, you ask, would the organizers of comparable events pay for all who attend? If the answer is no, as you suspect, then why cannot guests at Rabita conferences also be expected to pay? I must confess that I have also asked myself that question. After investigating the matter further, however, I have come to realize that we are dealing with subtle perceptual and attitudinal differences of a cultural nature. We Westerners tend to view the Rabita as essentially an organization, an impersonal entity, from which hospitality cannot therefore be expected. And then, in our experience hospitality very definitely has its limits; it is even optional in some circumstances!

In North African society, however, perceptions and attitudes about hospitality are quite different. North African culture is intensely personal; it values the personal relationship. I do not believe that a small fellowship such as the Rabita [150 is hardly a "large conference"] would be viewed as the impersonal entity you think it is. It is certainly NOT the large institution type, most of which are government-related. If you want a parallel, it would probably be more like a Sufi brotherhood, very personal. An invitation to the Rabita conference would therefore be viewed as being from the persons doing the inviting, rather than from an organization. Have we not moreover taught the national Christians that the Church of Christ is like a family? In any case, North African society places far fewer limitations on hospitality than we do in the West; if anything, hospitality is viewed as an obligation, not an option.

It would seem, then, that the Arab custom of hospitality is very much relevant to the Rabita conferences. I am told that in North Africa, and I am speaking here of Muslim gatherings, to expect guests at such an event to fend for themselves would be unthinkable. "These types of gatherings are done on a local level where everyone [i.e. local people] brings what he can and outsiders are lodged with those living there. As for a hotel being suggested, emphatically NO - even low-cost ones! Hotels are for tourists!"

You raise several further questions about the funding strategy of the Rabita Committee: Could not conference participants pay at least part of their expenses? Could they not be informed of the real costs? Could not a letter be sent to North African Christians and church groups inviting them to contribute? All valid questions. Upon inquiry, I found that most of these have been done. The cost of the conference has both been mentioned in letters to the mailing list and announced at the conference itself, even though many on the Committee did not feel comfortable with this. As for North African churches in Europe shouldering some of the expenses, there are none to appeal to. North African Christians in Europe have generally integrated into European churches; in any case, the Rabita Committee has not felt that its role is to found churches.

I also found that almost all North Africans in attendance do pay something; "they are expected to pay what they can. ... Some give a lot, others little. Very few give nothing." Those on the Committee are expected to contribute, but they do not personally have the means to pick up the tab for an entire conference (now about 70.000,00 FF). In any case, the contributions of missions and Western Christians make up only a part of the total. In fact, I found that missionaries are often the ones who benefit from paying less than the full amount, and they often bring contacts who cannot pay!

In Europe, one problem the Rabita faces is that North African Christians are very dispersed. Another is the lack of appropriate facilities. The ideal would be to have their own facilities where they could organize conferences on the North African model. Expenses could then be kept within reach of those who come. Lacking this, the

Committee has tried without success to find an evangelical campground it could rent. They have been obliged to use a conference center--at 120 francs per day per person! Whence their appeal for help.

I hope that these remarks help to answer and clarify the questions you raise. In any case, let us continue to pray for the Rabita and its Committee. Pray also that God will help us all--National Christians and missionaries--understand one another better.

The Editor

BOOK REVIEWS

Michael Nazir-Ali. Islam: A Christian Perspective. The Paternoster Press (Paternoster House, 3 Mount Radford Crescent, Exeter UK EX2 4JW, England; available from FFM, 205 Yonge St. Rm 25, Toronto, ON, M5B 1N2, Canada), 1983. £4.80. Reviewer: E. A. M.

According to the author, this book is not intended to be yet another introduction to Islam, but rather more of an appreciation from a Christian with a Muslim background who lives in a Muslim context.

The first chapter covers the background and origins of Islam, and the second its development. These two chapters give a good overview of the political aspects of Islam, the Law and lawyers, theology, and mysticism. They convey a great deal of information in an easy readable manner, and teach without using a highly technical approach.

The third chapter, on the growth of Muslim culture, is surprisingly short in view of the high profile the author seems to give culture. Very little detail is given on the literature of the modern period; poetry alone is mentioned. The next chapters are full of information about the background of the revival movements, Muslim thought changes, and the rise of fundamentalism. The changes in Pakistan are prominent since the author is from that country.

The final chapter is on Christian presence. After a brief historical overview, the author gives his personal viewpoint on a number of issues. He expresses a concern that the relationship of the national church and national believers to foreign Christians continue to improve. He encourages a clearer understanding of acculturation (going native) which is more than using native clothing or identifying with the poor, but includes as well a deep appreciation for indigenous ways, culture, music, literature, skills, arts, etc. He judges the homogeneous unit principle to be unbiblical. Here again, his remarks pertain particularly to Pakistan. I think the book has the right kind of appreciation for Islam as a culture.
