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AFRICA JOURNAL OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

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Pollution of the Mind

An AJET Editorial

In this rapidly changing continent environmental pollution has become an increasing problem. Much of this pollution has its origin in the West.

Thirty years ago the atmosphere around the cities of Kenya was clear. Even today the rich blue sky and puffy white clouds in the rural areas are breathtaking in comparison with the dull, overcast sky in the eastern United States. But Nairobi is no longer the "Green City in the Sun." A heavy pall hangs over the city. Hugging the earth in this capital city are thousands of vehicles, spewing out choking clouds of leaded emission. Streets are cluttered with plastic bags and containers which will not decompose. Human beings are clogging their lungs and contaminating the air with tobacco smoke.

All this pollution is the byproduct of unwise practices borrowed from the West. While Europe and North America are cutting back on their environmental disaster, developing nations of the world are accelerating in their pollution of the environment. While multi-million dollar law suits are being filed against tobacco companies in America by individuals and States for their crime of causing the deaths of millions of people and wasting billions of dollars in medical care because of tobacco, more and more people in Africa are lighting up their cigarettes in search of a good feeling.

As horrible as environmental pollution is, an even more harmful form of pollution is emanating from the West and few seem to be raising the alarm. Many throughout the world are fighting environmental pollution but few seem to be aware of the horrors of the pollution of the mind.

The Jews in the days of Jesus were greatly concerned about the ceremonial pollution which would make them unclean. The traditions of the Jews, such as washing of hands and cups and eating of clean food, were highly honoured by the Pharisees. Jesus became the target of criticism because of his failure to enforce ceremonial cleanness among his own disciples. Jesus replied to his critics, "Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'" (Mark 7:15). While we should all be concerned with external pollution, including our polluted environment, we should be even more concerned with moral pollution of the heart and mind.

Jesus went on to say, "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean,' For from within, *out of men's hearts*, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean'" (Mark 7:21,22).

Contemporary society is flawed *externally* with murders, fraud, corruption, evil talk, immorality, violent robberies and everything else which pollutes our culture. According to our Lord, these vices spring from the *heart* (*καρδια*). In biblical thought the *heart* is "the centre or source of the whole inner life with its thinking, feeling and volition." The *heart* refers to the "seat of physical, spiritual and mental life." The *heart* includes the thought life of the individual. Jesus declared that the primary problem with mankind and his culture is not the *external* environment but the *internal* heart of mankind, including his thought life, which creates the external pollution in our culture and environment.

Because "the *heart* is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer. 17:9), Jeremiah foretold of the coming Messiah who would "give you a *new heart*" (Jer. 36:26). Only through the new birth can the "heart of stone" be replaced with a *new heart*. But in the economy of God this inner part of the believer must be continually renewed. We know all too many professing Christians whose speech and conduct indicate a polluted heart and mind. Christians have a responsibility to feed their minds with thoughts which will not pollute the mind but which will edify and purify the mind.

"The good man brings *good things out of the good stored up in the heart*, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. *For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks*" (Lk. 6:45). Whatever one stores in the heart/mind will eventually spring forth in the vices familiar to us all.

As Christians we should all be concerned about the *pollution of the mind* which is invading Africa from the West. Our society is being infiltrated with moral pollution in movies, videos, TV and magazines which, when read and watched, can only pollute the mind. Christians in this great continent must begin to resist the moral pollution of TV, videos and movies. How can any Christian find entertainment in the violence, lust and greed which saturates our mass media? What responsibilities do we have in caring for our children who sit transfixed before the TV monster without any parental guidance or supervision? What should we do to clean up our moral environment? This is a moral challenge which Christians and churches must engage in. It is a matter of life or death.

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Prov. 4:23). What steps are you taking to guard your heart from moral pollution?

PROSPERITY TEACHING IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

Peter R. Young

The "Prosperity Gospel" is one of those aberrations of the Christian gospel born in the West and introduced into Africa by various peripatetic evangelists, including Reinhard Bonnke. Satan is indeed crafty. For the Bible does promise success, blessing and prosperity for those who trust and obey God. But Scripture must interpret Scripture. Theology cannot be based on proof texts isolated from the context.. Peter Young provides a helpful article in which he explores the teachings of the Prosperity Gospel, weighs it in the balance of Scripture and finds it wanting. This article is a clarion call for the church. We need to move away from a shallow and frequently distorted understanding of Scripture to a deeper grasp of biblical truth.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence and rise of prosperity teaching in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, has been viewed with considerable concern by the established churches especially because it is perceived that many of those that are attracted to the teaching are coming from the membership of these churches.¹ There is a feeling that this teaching is flawed, but there has not been a response to it as it occurs in this context.

This article aims to give a brief overview of the teaching and its claims before attempting a response to it. There will be some discussion of the appeal of the teaching in an African context as well as its lessons for the church.

Mr. Peter Young is currently a lecturer in Gindiri Theological College in Nigeria. He holds a BTh (Hons) from Ridley College of the University of Melbourne in Australia as well as an earlier pharmacy degree.

¹ This teaching is variously referred to as Prosperity Theology, the Prosperity Gospel, Health and Wealth Gospel. They are all more or less interchangeable, although some are more derogatory in their tone than others. For the purposes of this article, the term "prosperity teaching" is used.

AN OVERVIEW OF PROSPERITY TEACHING

Both ideologically and sociologically the historical roots of the prosperity teaching are to be found in the United States of America in the three decades since the mid-1960's. The prominent American teachers of prosperity include the seminal (for this field at least) Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Robert Tilton and John Osteen among others. These have in turn been influenced by the teachings of E.W. Kenyon, Norman Vincent Peale and Robert Schuller. The teaching also leans heavily on a outlook and hermeneutic of affluent and materialist middle-America.²

The teaching has been introduced to Africa largely through Reinhard Bonnke's Christ for all Nations crusade which has been active in various centres throughout Africa. This "crusade" (rather an unfortunate term given the inter-religious violence that accompanied its visit to Kano in 1992) has been appraised by Paul Gifford in 1987, demonstrating the campaign's advocacy of prosperity teaching and its American influence in this aspect of its teaching.³

This teaching has also been taken up by various indigenous preachers, including Archbishop Benson Idahosa of Benin City in Nigeria.⁴ Prosperity teaching is now a prominent feature of many of the neo-Pentecostal churches and large evangelistic rallies in Nigeria.

In giving a theological summary of the prosperity teaching there are difficulties, partly because it does not present itself as a written theology, but rather a rhetorical and experiential teaching in which the appeal is as much tied to the language used and the personality of the proponent as to the theological content. Another factor that makes the enterprise difficult is that there is considerable variation between the proponents of the teaching on some of its details. There are however certain common elements found in the teaching and it is on those that this paper shall concentrate.

i) Foundational Affirmations

The main element of the prosperity teaching is that all Christians have the right, and even the responsibility, to be prosperous in all areas of life. This

² R. Jackson, "Prosperity Theology and the Faith Movement", *Themelios* Vol.15, No.1 (1989), 16,17.

³ P. Gifford, "'Africa Shall be Saved'. An Appraisal of Reinhard Bonnke's Pan-African Crusade", *Journal of Religion in Africa* XVII, 1 (1987) 63-92.

⁴ B. Idahosa, *I Choose to Change: The Scriptural Way to Success and Prosperity* (Crowborough: Highland Books, 1987).

most notably includes the areas of financial prosperity and prosperity in the realm of physical health and well-being. Idahosa states this in the following way:

No one in God's family was ever destined to exist in sickness, fear, ignorance, poverty, loneliness or mediocrity. God's abundant goodness will be enjoyed and utilised by those who discipline themselves, become decisive, bold, adventurous, believing, daring, risking and determined.⁵

Similarly William F. Kumuyi of the Deeper Life Bible Church states:

It is God's perfect will that a believer should enjoy perfect health, spiritual and material blessings, victory, promotion, peace, joy and satisfaction throughout his sojourn on earth. There are thousands of promises in the word of God that should make a believer remain blessed all the days of his life.⁶

The corollary of this is that, for a Christian, to be in poverty or to be chronically ill is to be outside of God's will for his or her life, whether that be because of sin, ignorance or lack of sufficient faith. This teaching is obviously bound to give rise to serious pastoral and theological problems if it doesn't work and provide the prosperity it claims for the believer - because the fault is always with that believer and never with the theology.⁷

ii) Scriptural Basis

The authority for the teaching is sought from various proof texts, interpreted with the assumption that they all can stand alone as prescriptive statements without the need to refer to context or original intent.

One of the favourite texts of those propounding this teaching is 3 John 2 (KJV only!): "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." From this it is claimed that it is clear that it is the wish of God that all believers should prosper in every way, so that the argument is inconclusively proven.⁸

⁵ *Ibid*, 14.

⁶ W.F. Kumuyi, *Curses and Cures* (Lagos: Zoe, 1990) 9.

The Deeper Life movement seems to apply this teaching more to the area of health and healing, however.

⁷ D.T. Williams, "The Heresy of Prosperity Teaching: A Message for the Church in its Approach to Need", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 61 (Oct. 1987) 34.

⁸ Idahosa, 11.

This text is supported by others such as Psalm 1 (esp. v.3), the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28-30, Psalm 84:11, and many other isolated texts.

The basis for this is that the atonement effected by Christ not only includes deliverance from sin, but from poverty and sickness as well. The Scriptures quoted to support this are Isaiah 53:4-5; Mark 8:16-17; 2 Corinthians 8:9. So Idahosa can say,

We are saved? From what to what? Death to life! Sin to righteousness! Darkness to light! Poverty to prosperity! Fear to faith! Failure to success! And more and more!⁹

It is also argued that prosperity is an aspect of the atonement by referring to Galatians 3:13 and stating that the curse of the law is poverty, whether it be emotional, financial, physical or spiritual.¹⁰

Prosperity teaching also espouses a form of covenant theology. The covenant of God with Abraham, which includes a promise of material prosperity, is seen as a conditional one, dependent on obedience. Galatians 3:14a is then cited to show that God must also bestow this prosperity on the Christian.¹¹

This conditionality was of course made explicit through Moses and this element of the covenant was a prominent one (cf. Deut. 28-30). These covenantal promises of prosperity are a part of the believer's benefits on the basis of Hebrews 8:6-12 and the fact that Christ has fulfilled the old covenant (Matt. 5:17). Logic then leads to the statement: "...and you know that you are in Christ, stand before God as someone able to keep the covenant. The blessings of covenant keeping are therefore yours to claim."¹²

To maintain their position that material prosperity is the will of God for all here and now and to hold a belief in the perfection of Christ, there is, of course, a need to radically re-read the Biblical material on the poverty of the earthly Jesus. This is done and, as a result, we are told in an amazing piece of

⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁰ S. Matthews, *Money Matters* (Bradford: Harvestime, 1987) 57.

These arguments are also set out in A. Anderson, "The Prosperity Message in the Eschatology of Some New Charismatic Churches", *Missionalia* 15 No. 2 (Aug. 1987) 75-76.

¹¹ Anderson, 76.

¹² Matthews, 49.

exegesis that Jesus was one of the richest people that ever lived! The evidence cited for this is that he was able to pay his taxes, feed hungry crowds and support the ministry of the twelve by the exercise of faith. Furthermore, he wore the very best clothes that money could buy as is evidenced by the Roman soldiers gambling over his seamless garment at His crucifixion.¹³

iii) Faith and Positive Confession

Faith is the main condition given for receiving this abundance of material blessing, so it is important to understand what constitutes the substance of such faith. Teachers of the prosperity message stress that it is faith in God that he will keep his promises and act as he has said that he would that brings about a response from God to deliver prosperity in all areas of life. Not only will God act in response to this faith, but he is actually obliged to do so. Such considerations lead to prescriptive formulae as to how God will work (like Idahosa's seven steps to the fulfilment of God's promises).¹⁴ Since then human faith has the power to effect change and bring about this prosperity, it can be regarded as a force in itself without reference to its object. This force is wielded not by God, but by the human believer.¹⁵

This view of faith means that it is measurable by the material results it achieves and so easily leads to the possibility of grading Christians according to their material success. This, in turn, introduces the concept of a superior class of believers who can and do effect this prosperity in their lives.

Another feature of the teaching on faith by the proponents of prosperity teaching (and the whole of the "faith movement" for that matter) is their advocacy of what is called "positive confession."

Positive confession is a principle based on Mark 11:22-24, that is: what you say in faith is certain to come about. This leads to such popular slogans as "name it and claim it", "believe it and receive it" and "what you say is what you get." Idahosa quite openly states that this principle gives us power that is comparable to that of Jesus or God himself:

[referring to Mk. 11:13-14] "...if the tree died because Jesus spoke and cursed it for not bearing fruit, then we as Christians must also speak and expect mighty big results. God speaks and expects results. And we are

¹³ Matthews, 49,62.

¹⁴ Idahosa, 21-22.

¹⁵ K.L. Sarles, "A Theological Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143 (Oct.-Dec. 1986) 347-348.

made in the image and likeness of Him." [referring to Gen. 1:1-2] "It was not until God spoke that the things created began to fit into their respective places. Your visions and dreams of what you want to be will not materialise until you speak to them. Speak to your visions and dreams and bring them into fruition."¹⁶

To maintain this positive confession it is enjoined on the believer to act as though the benefit claimed has also been received even though the evidence may be entirely to the contrary. To do less is to display weakness of faith. The potential for disaster here, particularly in cases of serious illness, is obvious.

iv) Giving and Receiving

Prosperity, it is emphasised, is not simply for its own sake. We are blessed materially in order that we might give (usually to the work of evangelism). The Scriptures cited here include 2 Corinthians 9:8.¹⁷ This also works in reverse making the cycle of prosperity complete: the more you give away, the more you receive. This finds scriptural support in such passages as Luke 6:38, 2 Corinthians 9:6, Ecclesiastes 11:1, etc.

In this way then, giving is not seen as an end in itself, but also a potential avenue to the material enrichment of the giver. Some teachers are quite blatant in their advocacy of this as a motive for giving.¹⁸

v) The Scope of Prosperity Teaching

As has been stated, the prosperity promised touches all areas of life. After citing Psalm 84:11, Idahosa asks,

What do you visualise when you read the words 'good thing'? A good car, good health, good job, good wife, good children? The Bible reveals that God will withhold none of these things from them that walk uprightly.¹⁹

So also Matthews:

Bible prosperity is total prosperity. It includes money to meet our needs

¹⁶ Idahosa, 75,76.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 10, 65-72.

¹⁸ See examples of this cited by Jackson, 18; and in P. Gifford, "Prosperity: A New and Foreign Element in African Christianity", *Religion* 20 (1990) 375-378.

¹⁹ Idahosa, 33.

and help others, but also includes peace of mind, a successful marriage, good health, the favour of God and men, and long life. Bible prosperity is physical, mental, emotional, social, material and spiritual.²⁰

In this respect then prosperity teaching affirms a holistic world view, emphasising that Christianity is not simply concerned with the spiritual realm.

Prosperity teaching understands the promise of material blessings to extend not merely to provision, but to an abundance that approaches luxury. John 10:10 is interpreted to be a promise that the Christian will have not only provision, but abundant provision. It is seen as fitting that a child of the King should enjoy the luxury that such a position implies.²¹

vi) Poverty and Sickness

If material prosperity, which is their responsibility to claim, is the will of God for all of his people, then this necessarily means that poverty and sickness are not only evil in themselves, but those who exist in such situations are somehow in a state of sin. It is argued that the church has in the past been misled in affirming the value and dignity of poverty and suffering whereas in fact it can only lead to sin and tragedy.²²

Similarly there is no truth seen in the assertion that prosperity promotes sinfulness and sinful attitudes (Idahosa cites the examples of Abraham, David and rich Christians to illustrate this point).²³

In some variants of the teaching there is great emphasis on the activity of Satan and demons in the hindrance of prosperity, especially in the area of health. Hence the need to get rid of the demon before true prosperity can be experienced. Where this is perceived to be the case, the power to effect the change in the circumstances through the casting out of the evil spirit, according to the teaching, lies in the power of individual's faith.²⁴

A RESPONSE

In embarking on a response to this teaching it is important to acknowledge that not all of what prosperity teaches is to be denied. The gospel

²⁰ Matthews, 50.

²¹ Idahosa, 59-63.

²² Matthews, 57-58.

²³ Idahosa, 12.

²⁴ Kumuyi, 7, 28-30. See also Sarles, 336, 344-346, and Gifford (1990), 378.

does apply to and should effect every area of our lives and not just be restricted to the spiritual realm. God's material and physical care and provision for his people are very real aspects of his love toward us. God can and does provide prosperity on all levels for his people (all good things come from him) but this is always in the context of his sovereignty. God does love the affluent as well as those who are poor, and even relative affluence does bring responsibilities to share that affluence.

That being said, it is clear that there are many aspects of the teaching to which a response is needed.

i) The Use of Scripture

The general approach of prosperity teaching to Scripture and its interpretation has been to quote isolated proof texts and to treat them almost exclusively as propositional truths or promises. This, it is claimed, is in the interest of elucidating the plain meaning of the text. In practice the words of various verses are applied to the modern world without recourse to such considerations as literary or historical context, the nature of the text or the original intent of such writings.

Responding to this methodology, Fee makes this important point:

Let it be understood that the 'plain meaning' of the text is always the first rule, as well as the ultimate goal, of all valid interpretation. But 'plain meaning' has first of all to do with the author's original intent; it has to do with what would have been plain to those to whom the words were originally addressed. It does not have to do with how someone from a suburbanised white American culture of the late 20th century reads his own cultural setting back into the text through the frequently distorted prism of the early 17th century.²⁵

It is precisely this "suburbanised white American" reading of Scripture that is used not only in the prosperity preachers of the west, but in those that seek to apply it to the African context as well. Not only is it foreign to the African context as Gifford argues,²⁶ but it is fundamentally flawed as an approach in any context.

²⁵ G.D. Fee, "The 'Gospel' of Prosperity - an Alien Gospel," *Reformation Today* 82 (Nov.-Dec. 1984), 40.

²⁶ Gifford (1990), 373-388. A study of the cultural impact of importing this very culturally specific hermeneutic is one that would seem promising, but is beyond the scope of this article.

This is strikingly seen in the interpretation of 3 John 2, one of the foundational texts of the movement as mentioned above. This verse is a part of the conventional letter writing formula of the day and part of a personal note of good wishes from the author to Gaius. It cannot be seen as a propositional promise of God to all believers either in its original intention or in the way it is to be applied today.

Referring to Mark 10:29-30 Idahosa says that "Any man or woman who reads these verses without prejudice will establish in plain language that the Lord promised temporal wealth."²⁷ But simply reading the verses in isolation from their context doesn't tell the whole story. Idahosa conveniently forgets that this saying is set in the context of a discussion on the difficulty of the wealthy entering the Kingdom of God and neglects to comment on the promise of persecution that is a part of these verses. Jesus is not giving mathematical expression to the benefits of discipleship or talking about the ownership of property, but rather showing that in the family of believers there was to be the sharing of property etc. such that the disciples were compensated within that fellowship.

The other verses used (and especially those of the New Testament) can be shown to have been given similarly contextually and hermeneutically blinkered interpretations.²⁸

In its approach to the Old Testament we see that prosperity teaching not only uses the same hermeneutical principles, but seems to regard the content of the Old Testament as being much the same as that of the New Testament. There is no hint of the principle of interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New.²⁹

The Old Testament undoubtedly does teach that God would bless his people in the land as they were obedient and faithful to him. This theology (which can be seen most markedly in the book of Deuteronomy and much of the wisdom literature) is qualified by the gospel and is counter-balanced even within the Old Testament itself. The book of Job for example challenges this simple

²⁷ Idahosa, 108.

²⁸ See Fee, 40-41, and Sarles, 337-339.

²⁹ A.B. da Silva, "The 'Theology of Success' Movement: A Comment", *Themelios* 12 (1986) 91. This is not to deny that the Old Testament is important in understanding and throwing light on the gospel. The revelation of God is contained in both testaments, but the New Testament contains the full and final revelation and it must inform our reading of the Old Testament.

equation of righteousness equals material and physical success; unrighteousness equals suffering. The message of the book is not that God restored Job's fortunes at the end, but rather that his friends' rigid application of the wisdom formula cannot be held with a sovereign God. The questions of Habakkuk on the suffering of the righteous are all left unanswered in the prosperity teaching.

ii) Eschatology

Given the theological roots of prosperity teaching, it is perhaps surprising on one level that more attention is not given by these teachers to the second coming and related teachings. On reflection however it is rather less surprising when one considers the basic eschatological stance that underpins the teaching. What is meant by the underlying eschatological stance is the assumption, whether explicitly stated or not, that all the benefits of the Kingdom of God can be enjoyed by all believers here and now.

This assumption is expressed by Colin Urquart in his foreword to Idahosa's book when he says of Jesus' teaching, "He came to establish God's heavenly Kingdom here on earth - and surely nobody can believe that heaven will be a place of poverty?"³⁰

The tension that the New Testament teaches between the realised and the yet-to-be-realised aspects of the Kingdom is completely missing here; the emphasis solely rising on the former. Thus the *parousia* and the life of the world to come are robbed of their essential relevance and importance.

This emphasis on realised eschatology is especially evident in some of the teaching on healing and health. To teach that believers should not experience illness is to deny the reality of physical mortality. It ignores the fact that even the most wonderful of Jesus' healing miracles were temporary healings. For example, even Lazarus died after the events of John 11. It, in effect, claims that the believer who has enough faith already possesses an indestructible resurrection body.

These eschatological assumptions would seem to be in direct conflict with the teaching of the New Testament in general and the argument by Paul in I Corinthians in particular. (It would be fascinating to see how I Corinthians 4:8ff. would be dealt with by these teachers).

³⁰ C. Urquart in Idahosa, 7.

iii) The Nature of God

One of the more disturbing aspects of the theology of prosperity teaching is what it says about the nature of God. God is effectively reduced to an object to be manipulated. The promises of God are seen as binding him, so that, when the right procedures are followed, he is bound to produce the result desired. As has been mentioned, it must not be denied that God can and does give prosperity to some, but in this teaching there is no room for the freedom and sovereignty of God. Everything depends on the actions of the individual. In this way it is very anthropocentric, although it is claimed that all is for God's glory.

The problem referred to here can likewise be expressed with reference to prosperity teaching's view of faith. Faith perceived as human achievement (Pelagianism) always carries that danger of pride and the displacement of glory that rightly belongs to God. Faith in God, as demonstrated by the positive confession that one practices, is almost reduced to the level of an incarnation. To give almost sacral power to the words one utters and hence ascribe almost divine power to the individual human believer borders on idolatry.³¹

iv) Christology

The interpretation of the person of Jesus that is outlined above denies the reality of the incarnation and involves a watered down understanding of what he was doing in his earthly ministry. To view the miracles of Jesus as a limitless wealth-generating mechanism is not only to miss the whole point of the miracles in his message, but it means that Jesus never really shared our limitations and hence didn't really share our humanity either. The miracles were a sign of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God in the person of Jesus. (Where such miracles continue to occur they continue to be such signs). There is not any indication that they were intended or even interpreted by others as "God's way of looking after Jesus" - to do so gives deficient Christology.

It is by no means universally accepted that sickness and poverty are dealt with in the atonement, and, in fact, there are some major difficulties in claiming that they are. Chief among such difficulties is the fact that illness and material poverty are not moral categories and so cannot be seen as sinful in themselves. They, therefore, do not need atonement. It might rather be said that in the final consummation of the Kingdom of God these things will be finally done away with (they are an aspect of the general groaning of creation - Romans 8:22), but that in the meantime they are realities that people are to

³¹ The pastoral dangers in quantifying faith by material results have already been pointed out.

struggle with and against as a part of the fallen human condition.

v) The Problem of Pain and Poverty

While a full and comprehensive theodicy is beyond the scope of this article, the flaws in the answer provided by prosperity teaching must be addressed.

In the teaching of the prosperity preachers, pain and poverty are always directly attributable to some sin or defect in the spiritual life of the individual involved. As had been alluded to this is precisely the theology of the friends of Job, and the type of cause-and-effect-wisdom that the book of Job seeks to address. The answer that that book gives is that God is sovereign and may work according to some other unexplained and unexplainable economy. What Fee has termed the rules of conventional wisdom simply are not biblical, and he points out that they are refuted by Jesus himself in at least two instances (Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-4).³²

It must indeed be recognised that ignorance, sin and evil often can be the causes of pain and suffering. This not only occurs on an individual basis, but institutions and corporate bodies can, and often are, responsible. The Christian response to any pain and poverty must rather be rooted in the pain and poverty of Christ - the cross, and we are to act to alleviate these circumstances in love. This response to poverty and suffering is a long way removed from the motive of giving for the sake of receiving that pervades in prosperity teaching.

vi) The Nature of Success and the Value of Money

Prosperity teaching raises several issues to do with the nature of success and the value of money. The first question is this: Is success as envisaged by these teachers that to which we are called? There is an assumption inherent in the discussion that "success" is a good thing to which to aspire. Idahosa never really defines what he means by the success that is promised in the title of his book, but the context in which it is discussed indicates that he equates it with temporal wealth and a large and growing personal ministry.³³ While these may indeed be very pleasant things to have, it is questionable as to whether they are to be the goal of the Christian. Such an aspiration will necessarily lead to individualism and the loss of corporate vision of the purposes of God.³⁴

³² Fee, 41.

³³ Idahosa, 101-114.

³⁴ T. Mofokeng, "The Prosperity Message and Black Theology", *Missionalia* 15

Another issue raised by the teaching is the value that one should place on money. It is again an in-built assumption in the prosperity message that wealth is a positive attribute and something to be desired. Fee makes the point well that for the people of God, money has neutral value.³⁵ The concern for money and riches is one of the things from which Christ frees us (Matt. 6:32). Paul states this same truth when he states that he has known contentment in all circumstances (Phil. 4:10-13), and warns against striving after money (I Tim. 6:6-10).

THE APPEAL OF PROSPERITY TEACHING

Despite the claim that prosperity teaching would have no appeal to those in the poorer countries of the world,³⁶ it has made a significant impact not only in Nigeria and parts of West Africa, but also in Southern Africa. The cynic might suggest that it is plain greed that motivates the adherents of this teaching, and the appeal of a quick and easy way to riches may undoubtedly be a part of the attraction to some. The situation is somewhat more complex than just this however.

Gifford, in his paper on the teaching in Africa, has helpfully suggested three possible reasons for its appeal in this continent. He suggests that its appeal may lie in: i) The preacher's embodiment of the wealth that the followers aspire to; ii) Its conformity to the traditional African belief that wealth and success are natural signs of blessing by God or the ancestors; and iii) The fact that these teachers have invested heavily in spreading their message throughout the continent, particularly through the donation of their literature to financially hard-pressed theological institutions.³⁷

These are no doubt real factors in the teaching's appeal, to which more can be added. A factor that must not be disregarded in these considerations is the highly emotional nature of the presentation of the prosperity message. Meetings and rallies are very lively and emotionally engaging. Even the books on "prosperity teaching" use highly emotive language. The preachers of this teaching tend to be very attractive and charismatic figures as well. The appeal of the message then is intimately tied to the appeal of the medium in which it is presented. This is especially so when that medium is compared to the often

No. 2 (1987) 84-86.

³⁵ Fee, 42.

³⁶ G. Grogan, "Liberation and Prosperity Theologies", *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 9 (1991) 120. Also Fee, 43.

³⁷ Gifford (1990) 382-383.

unattractive (even boring) services offered in the traditional churches.

Another important factor in prosperity teaching's appeal lies in the fact that it gives answers to very real questions that arise in people's lives. The African holistic world-view demands that the problems of poverty and pain be squarely faced and not ignored or spiritualized in the way that Western theology has tended to deal with them. Prosperity theology provides such an answer and in this way has been (almost paradoxically) linked with liberation theology, which provides a rather different answer.³⁸ The prosperity solution to the problems of ever present suffering and poverty is particularly appealing because the individual is left in control over these elements, they are not left to any unpredictable and ambiguous action like that of a sovereign God.

These issues may be particularly pertinent in a Nigerian setting where national material prosperity once seemed to be within the realms of possibility whereas the situation now seems to be getting bleaker and bleaker. Prosperity teaching may therefore be seen as a possible solution, on an individual level, to this crisis and a viable way out of the otherwise seemingly inexorable downward economic spiral.

Prosperity teaching recognises and expects the reality of supernatural intervention in everyday situations, something which Africans have always been aware of, but to which the traditional churches, again under the influence of Western thinking, have been less open.

SOME POSSIBLE LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH

It is obvious from the above that there are some lessons and correctives that this teaching and its appeal can offer the established churches. Not only is there a need for the churches to address some of the issues raised, but the widespread appeal of prosperity teaching highlights deficiencies in the standard of teaching in the churches. It would seem that doubtful American theology is taking the place that should belong to good African Christian theology.

In too many African churches the liturgy, hymnody and style of worship seems to cling to dated and incomprehensible Western patterns and practices. These have a tradition of use in many of the mission-founded churches especially, and may prove painful to part with, but they mean little to a large section of congregations and compare unfavourably to the experience offered by the proponents of prosperity teaching. The churches need to rise to this challenge and be imaginative in adapting the services to meet the needs of their

³⁸ Grogan, 118-132; Gifford (1990), 380-381.

people. God is alive and very active in the Church in Africa and his people need to acknowledge and celebrate that fact. It is a sad indictment the mainline churches if people are having to move to the extremes of prosperity teaching to find a venue in which they can comfortably do so. There is no doubt that there is awareness of the activity of God throughout the churches but the shackles of the past too often hinder a proper response to that. It is tragic that Christians be drawn into questionable theology because they don't feel they can worship God meaningfully in places where theology is more solidly based.

At the level of the theological colleges and Bible schools, there is often an undiscerning acceptance of all materials donated to them, especially in the area of book donations. It must be recognised that not every book is edifying and some discernment must be exercised in this area. This is difficult where there are no other sources of literature available, but if future leaders of the church are trained using material that is flawed, the future teaching of the church will likewise be flawed.

There is a need for the church to preach a biblical message that does touch all areas of life, making the Scriptures relevant to the real needs of everyday life in modern Africa and showing that God does act in the world today. In particular, there must be practical and relevant teaching on the topics of wealth and poverty, pain and illness.

Above all there is a need for a sound grounding in biblical theology and the reading and teaching of Scripture in a way that brings out the whole of its message and rejects the proof-text approach to interpretation and theology.

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Theology: Since the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* publishes theological reflection based on the authority of Scripture, articles submitted to AJET should reflect an evangelical perspective.

Scholarship: Articles should reflect serious scholarship based on library or field research. Bibliographical references should preferably be no less than ten. The English composition should be accurate and readable, without the need of extensive editing.

Format: Articles should be type written, double spaced with bibliography at the end of the paper. End-notes should be properly given, following guidelines of scholarly publications.

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CHRIST AS RECONCILER IN PAULINE THEOLOGY AND IN CONTEMPORARY RWANDA

P. Bayinsana Ng. Eugene SJ

Broken relationships! How common and yet how appalling to find among Christians. Eugene Bayinsana discusses one of the most tragic examples of broken relationships in Africa, the genocide of hundreds of thousands of Christians in Rwanda by other Christians. How can this be? Yet many of our churches are splintered and divided with the same basic disease. Reconciliation with one another is mandated by God who has made reconciliation possible between man and God. Bayinsana examines the biblical teaching of reconciliation. God is the Reconciler par excellence. But when men and women are reconciled to God, this must be reflected in reconciliation with their fellow human beings. Practical suggestions are made for the tragic case of Rwanda which have many applications for all societies which experience broken relationships due to racism, tribalism and injustice.

INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation is a term that speaks to men today apart from the Christian Gospel because experiences of being unreconciled are particularly widespread or at least particularly widely noticed. But what do we mean by this term? Reconciliation properly denotes a change from enmity to friendship. With regard to the relationship between God and man, the use of this and related terms in the New Testament shows that reconciliation is primarily what God accomplishes as He exercises his grace towards sinful man through the death of Christ (2 Cor 5:19) where both the verb, "to reconcile," and the noun, "reconciliation," are used.¹ Theologically, reconciliation can be defined as "the activity whereby the disorders of existence are healed, its imbalances redressed, its alienation bridged over."² As such it stands at the centre of Christian faith. It

P. Bayinsana Ng. Eugene is a student in Hekima College in Nairobi, Kenya. Permission granted by *African Ecclesial Review* to publish this article.

¹ W.E. Vine, Merril F. Unger and William White, *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985) 5131.

² Allen O. Miller, *Reconciliation in Today's World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1969) 53.

is closely related to redemption, justification, peace and forgiveness. To reconcile is to reunite, to bring back with harmony. Reconciliation implies, therefore, that division, separation and rupture have taken place. Two realities, two persons, two peoples are at odds and do not relate as they should. Therefore discord, disunity, disharmony prevails. Oneness has been ruptured.

Reconciliation, in a secular sense, denotes a change in relations between individuals, groups, or nations and pertains to relations in the social or political sphere. It means a change from anger, hostility, or alienation to love, friendship or intimacy. Feelings may accompany that change, but they are not essential (Matt. 5:23; Cf. I Cor. 7:11).

GOD THE RECONCILER

In Pauline theology, reconciliation is described both horizontally (Gentiles and Jews are brought near as Christians) and vertically (both Gentile and Jewish Christians have been reconciled to God through Christ, who is our peace). When Paul applies this image to the Christ-event, he speaks always of God or Christ reconciling human beings, enemies or sinners to himself. The initiative is with God, who through Christ brings it about that human sinners are brought from a status of enmity to friendship (2 Cor. 5:18-19). "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation" (Rom. 5:10-11). In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19; Rom 11:15). For Paul, the subject of reconciling activity is always God who through Christ reconciles us to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18). Humanity stands in need of reconciliation with God. Paul describes the human condition prior to reconciliation as weak, ungodly, and sinful (Rom. 5:6-8; Eph. 2:12). But it was precisely when we were enemies that God reconciled us to himself (Rom. 5:10). God effected this reconciliation through the death of his Son upon the cross (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:19 and Col. 1:22). The immediate effect of reconciliation is peace with God (Rom. 5:1, Eph. 2:14) so that Christians can view themselves as a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

The restoration of a vertical relationship is always accompanied by a restoration of horizontal relationships. When people are reconciled to God they are also reconciled to one another. It seems that you cannot have one without the other. When sinners are reconciled to God, it is simply impossible that they should not be reconciled to God's other children. The consequence of reconciliation is a change so radical that it must be called a new creation. The scope of reconciliation, however, goes beyond God and individuals. The world is also affected by Christ's redemptive work (2 Cor. 5:19; Cf. 11:15).

God is faithful to his eternal plan even when man, under the impulse of the evil one, and carried away by his own pride, abuses the freedom intended to enable him to love and generously seek what is good, and refuses to obey his Lord and Father. God is faithful even when man, instead of responding with love to God's love, opposes him and treats him like a rival, separating himself and relying on his own power, with the resulting break of relationship with the one who created him. In spite of man's transgressions, God remains faithful in love. It is certainly true that the story of the Garden of Eden makes us think about the consequences of rejecting the Father, which becomes evident in man's inner disorder and in the breakdown of harmony between themselves. Refusal of God's fatherly love and of his loving gifts is always at the root of humanity's divisions. But we know that God, rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4) like the father in the parable, does not close his heart to any of his children. He waits for them, looks for them, goes to meet them at the place where the refusal of communion imprisons them in isolation and division. He calls them to gather about his table in the joy of the feast of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Reconciliation calls for conversion. For only conversion reverses the radical rupture that sin creates. Conversion means that my whole person changes. Yet I am so often at war with myself. This deep-rooted conflict was described with rare insight by St. Paul in his letter to the Christians of Rome.

My own actions bewildered me. What I do is not what I want to do; I do the every thing I hate.... It is not the good my will prefers but the evil my will disapproves that I find myself doing. In my inmost self I delight in God's law; but I see in my lower self another law at war with the law of my conscience, enslaving me to the law of sin which my lower self contains (Rom. 7:15-23).

The problem is that I cannot change myself. I can turn from God all by myself; but I cannot turn back to Him all by myself. St. Paul said: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself.... that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. For our sake He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

Without going into anymore detail, however, it is clear that for Paul humankind is estranged from God. God initiated the work of reconciliation through Jesus in the fullness of time and made us agents of that reconciliation. It is particularly important that Paul should stress this in a book like 2 Corinthians, which reflects a situation where reconciliation was the last thing on certain church members' minds. Paul in this passage is making several very

important points: God has initiated reconciliation; reconciliation is through Jesus Christ; we are agents of that reconciliation.

RECONCILIATION BETWEEN MAN AND MAN

Thus far I have argued that reconciliation assumes that a rupture in relationship has taken place. I have argued that ultimately rupture has its origin in sin and is overcome by God's grace through Christ. Now I shall insist that reconciliation, the restoration of oneness among God's children, is impossible unless God's love lays hold of us, unless we open ourselves to God in love and lay hold of man in love.

"The two great commandments of the law" are really one. I cannot love God if I hate my neighbour, and I will not love my neighbour as I should unless I love God with all my mind and heart, with all my soul and strength. Disunity was not God's original design for us. In fact, in the historic account of the first three chapters of Genesis, the story of Adam and Eve reveals God's plan for human unity. In the first place, a remarkable oneness prevailed, an intimate harmony between man and God. When God made the first man, He gave him not simply a garden of delights, the birds of the air and a woman from his flesh. "More precious than all, God gave man God."³ From the first instant Adam came from the hand of God, from the moment Eve was fashioned from the flesh of Adam, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit lived within them. There was a striking unity, a fascinating harmony, within man himself, within Adam and Eve. In God's plan a unique oneness would link man with man. No war, only peace. Not hatred but love. God fashioned Adam and Eve in his own image. He gifted them with the power to know and the freedom to love.

But this design was defaced. This primitive unity did not endure. The disruptive element, the chaotic factor is sin. As Genesis presents it, sin divided man when Adam disobeyed God. Adam ruptured the bond that linked man and God. Sin destroyed man's harmony within himself (Gn. 3:7-10). The Scripture tells us that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him (Gn. 4:8).

To restore the unity that had been sundered by sin, the Son of God became man to recapture in some measure the divine dream of human harmony to put man at peace with God and with himself, with his fellow men, and with all creation. Christ came to reconcile us. Through his birth and death Christ destroyed the foundation of disunity. In Bethlehem and on Calvary Christ began the task of reconciliation. He linked man and God (Jn. 1:12). Christ made it possible for man to live at peace with himself (Rom. 7:24-25). He made it

³ Walter J. Burghardt, *Towards Reconciliation* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1974) 3.

possible for man to live at peace with his fellow men (Jn. 13:34). To realise this love, he gathered us into one body, his own body, with Himself as Head (Gal. 3:28). In Jesus' teaching, when the sinner accepts this offer of reconciliation from God, then the sinner must of necessity be reconciled with his/her brothers and sisters.

RECONCILIATION IN CONTEMPORARY RWANDA

The question now is, for whom was Paul's reconciliation intended? The distinctive contribution of Paul is that it was for Gentiles as well as Jews.⁴ In the first Epistle of John there is a very significant paragraph: "This is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another and not be like Cain, who was of the Evil one and murdered his brother." Cain and Abel are mankind; and their story is ours.

By any standards Rwanda was a country that was massively Christian. The official statistics, even though they have to be taken with a critical eye, prove that Rwanda in a sociological view was largely Christianised. According to the last census done in 1978, 66 per cent of the population said they were Christians, 58 percent being Catholics, 15.2 per cent Protestants, 6.3 per cent Adventists. So in general, Rwanda has more than 70 per cent Christian.

During the genocide, Christians in Rwanda killed one another in huge numbers. In the case of Rwanda, the year 1994 will be forever remembered as the year of genocide, when a million people were massacred. The wounds are deep. What makes a Christian nation perpetrate a genocide? Why was faith so fragile in Rwanda when it came to the test? Why did the message of the Gospel not reach the people who were baptised? "Within a few weeks and months the church in Rwanda appeared to have been annihilated and a century of evangelization seemingly nullified."⁵ For Rwandese, the experience of the genocide is deeply traumatic. Judgements about how well or how badly individuals behaved under such stress, about how well and how hardly the churches in general reacted, must be left to the Almighty God. The church leaders refused to condemn the massacres and headed a church which has never officially challenged the growing injustices of the government.

Most of the Christians would agree with the surviving church that attempts to destroy the church responded to two basic and related situations.

⁴ Michael Hurley, *Reconciliation in Religion and Society* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1974) 38.

⁵ Aylward Shorter, *Christianity and the African Imagination* (Nairobi, Kenya: St. Pauline Publications, 1996) 38.

One factor was the extremely close ties of important church leaders to the Habyarimana regime. For instance, "the President had installed a direct telephone line between his office and the office of Archbishop Vincent Nsengiyunva."⁶ The church went hand-in hand with the politics of the president. The church and the covenant had become too close, so close that the leaders could not criticise the corruption or give up their status and their gifts. This compromised their prophetic voice and undermined completely their moral authority.

Other factors are the deliberate intention of those organising the genocide to destroy any voice of critique or dissent and the churches finally had ethnic tensions of their own. Most of the leaders were Hutu, and it was difficult for Tutsi clergy to reach more senior positions.

Many attacks on the church compounds and religious workers were a result of the overall plan to eliminate Tutsi and moderate Hutu. Within all the churches of Rwanda, ethnic tensions often surfaced at the time of elections or nominations to senior ecclesiastical positions. Splits were glossed over but never healed. People were elected, not for their spiritual, administrative or leadership qualities, but along ethnic lines.⁷

It may indeed be the case that church leaders at times could reasonably have shown more courage. To be a credible voice of protest, the church leaders would have had to disengage themselves from close links to the ruling party and regime, which most of them were unable to do even after the genocide began. All this indicates that reconciliation in Rwanda will not be easy.

Reconciliation for Paul is not to be thought of as a cosmic miracle which merely changes the state of the universe outside of man. Paul has ensured that the moral transformation and the reconciliation of all things shall not be overlooked. He has shown that reconciliation is primarily concerned with the restoration of relationships. Therefore, one must insist that speculative interest is not enough to resolve a moral problem. Reconciliation in Rwanda will have to go step-by-step. It could take years. People must realise that they did wrong. They must repent and make amends to the relatives of those they killed. They must admit that they did wrong. They must change their way of living. Paul's point in I Corinthians 1:20 is clear. Reconciliation is not secured easily nor is it accomplished as a physical miracle which changes the state of the cosmos outside of man. "It does not work like, to use a Gnostic image, a magnet put up

⁶ Hugh McCullum, *The Angels Have Left Us. The Rwanda Tragedy and the Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994) 79.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.77.

in heaven and drawing those who are brought into its magnetic field irresistibly after it. The effect of Christ's death is the effect of a deed of love bringing its fruit in a human life which is touched by it."⁸

People in Rwanda have to begin to understand the depth of their trauma if reconciliation is to happen. Reconciliation, in order to be complete, necessarily requires liberation from sin, which is to be rejected in its deepest roots. Thus a close internal link unites conversion and reconciliation. It is impossible to split these two realities or to speak of the one and say nothing of the other. This is to recognise and to proclaim that there can be no union among people without an internal change in each individual. Personal conversion is the necessary path to harmony between individuals. In Matthew 5:24 we are told that when we are going to the temple to pray, if we have anything against our neighbour, then we must leave our gift before the altar and first be reconciled to our neighbour and only then return to offer our gift.

Consequently, another question concerns what reconciliation involves. Is Paul suggesting that the differences between Jews and Gentiles or Hutu and Tutsi (in the case of the Rwandese) are abolished in the one new humanity which is the Church? Does the author in fact envisage the church as a third entity which replaces both Jews or Gentiles, so that people are no longer Jews or Gentiles, Hutu or Tutsi, but simply Christians? "Markus Barth and William Rader have argued that the new people is not constituted by the Gentiles and Jews but by their common worship of the Father."⁹ The new people is not an individual man or woman, but instead the bride of Christ. The new creation therefore consists of Hutu and Tutsi worshipping together in Christ. Both remain Hutu and Tutsi but are reconciled to God and one another through Christ. Here I am really postulating that the reconciliation involves each group.

Reconciliation, however, has profound practical consequences. For Paul the community of the church is a community of people reconciled to one another. This can be seen, for example, in the images that Paul uses for the church community. It is pictured as a body, where each member has its own role to play (I Cor. 12:12); as a family and also as a building (Eph. 2:9f). Paul was convinced that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, that we are agents of that reconciliation and that we live in reconciled communities where people of all races, classes, tribes and countries must live in harmony. Therefore, in the case of Rwandese, the first thing needed is a new look at the Gospel in order to attain self understanding and self-identity in a church based

⁸ Robert Banks, *Reconciliation and Hope* (London: The Paternoster Press, 1994) 116.

⁹ Cf. Michael Hurley, *op cit*, p. 39.

on the Gospel of the cross. There are prophetic voices in Rwanda articulating this need, and Christian communities are waiting for the church to wake up and get effectively involved in their daily struggle against sin in a more meaningful way.

A social analysis, or an appropriate reading of the signs of the times, is not an intellectual pastime or luxury. Just as Jesus perceived the goodness of people, and challenged the structures of oppression in his day, so must we do likewise. The Christian communities must be involved in promoting education for peace and reconciliation. What is needed is that we create a new mentality for peace and reconciliation. The churches must become forums for discussion by the Christians of the people's realities and what Gospel responses are proper. As part of this education for peace and reconciliation, definite ways of handling difficult situations on the local level must be offered.

It is true that the possibility of being genuinely open to reconciliation on the vertical level is prepared for and facilitated by human choices and attitudes that actively seek reconciliation on the horizontal level. As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them (Lk. 6:31). On the other hand, loving others and showing practical concern for all in need is the outcome of a relationship with God. This is reinforced in the parable of the good Samaritan, where Jesus defines our neighbour as anyone who is in need, rather than simply one who is a compatriot.

Throughout Paul's theology, there is a strong emphasis on reconciliation, God's reconciliation of the world to himself, with the subsequent reconciliation of people to one another. The horizontal aspect of reconciliation flows out of the vertical, the human from the divine. Reconciliation really matters because it touches human lives and changes human hearts. Churches must work with patience and courage in the process of rebuilding trust and mutual acceptance, of moving from despair to hope, from misinformation to admitting the truth, from revenge and hatred toward forgiveness and reconciliation. Jesus' mission in life was to bring about that reconciliation through his ministry and to help it operate in practice through works of pastoral concern.

JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is the key word of Paul's Gospel. If, however, reconciliation is an interpretative key to Paul's theology and the chief theme or centre of his missionary and pastoral thought and practice, then to do it justice, one would have to consider all of Paul's theology. There is no contradiction in the relationship between justice and reconciliation in the context of a consideration of justice. In the case of Rwanda, the question which arises is how people can live with one another after what they did to one another? How

can one live with those who refuse even to recognise as wrong the crime that they have perpetrated? How can one live with those who continue to will the original wrong and refuse to accept forgiveness for what they still rejoice in? Finally, how can one live with those who cannot believe in forgiveness or who cannot accept it as they recognise the seriousness of what they have done? Therefore, must one not demand appropriate punishment for the so-called criminals? And if so, is this kind of demand compatible with Christian forgiveness and reconciliation? People in contemporary Rwanda insist on justice as necessary, but is it a sufficient condition for the growth of community?

Surely it is wrong to ignore the injustice committed against one group. One knows only too well in the context of Rwanda how talk about reconciliation sounds hollow unless basic issues of justice are addressed. It may not always be possible to waive this step. Some crimes may have to be punished, even in the context of a sincere willingness to forgive.

At least three reasons indicate that such punishments are necessary. First, a society needs to express formally through punishment of malefactors its recognition of crimes committed and its abhorrence of them. Second, only in punishing certain heinous crimes and restraining criminal elements is the wholeness of community restored. Third, punishment may be crucial to deterring other would-be criminals and so to maintaining proper order. In the case of Rwanda, where guilt has been so widespread, where two communities live so closely with one another, and where over several generations crimes have been committed by one group against the other, it will take fine political and moral judgement to balance the right to try and punish killers against the restraint that may enable the communities to live together again. In this case justice is being limited for the sake of other values such as order, peace, reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

Reconciliation is difficult. In Rwanda, some people cannot forgive and have turned away from the structured church to a faith that is no longer connected to the past. Others try to preach forgiveness and, even more difficult, to practice it. "I will try to ask God how to forgive" says a priest at the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Michel in Kigali.¹⁰ Now there has to be a new start, a new way to proclaim the Gospel. There is much to be done in the church. People have told me they will not enter churches in which people were killed. This makes me sad because many people have been killed in churches. The church as church, as well as individual Christians, need to be radically different

¹⁰ Hugh McCullum, *The Angels Have Left Us. The Rwanda Tragedy and the Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994) 70.

from the church which was paralysed because it was tied too closely to political powers to be prophetic. Ultimately, it is the people of God and especially their leaders inside Rwanda who must be healed and reconciled. The Bible does not know Hutu or Tutsi, neither should we. That is why we have to work to forgive as we have to work to see truth, win freedom, respect justice, establish peace, and grow in love. This is what the Scriptures refer to when they place the cross of Christ at the centre of God's gift of forgiveness.

If reconciliation involves the transformation of a relationship of enmity into friendship, then two crucial elements must cohere to effect a full reconciliation. First there must be clear recognition of offence, sin and injustice. In this context it is right to name injustice, protest against it, and call for its removal. Secondly, there must be an unconditional offer of forgiveness. Unconditional because it is central in Jesus' life. This is gratuitous and is clearly a matter of love. This is the kind of forgiveness God extends to us. We are asked to extend it to one another (Matt. 18:21-22). It is a wonderful gift, an expression of love which can remake the past that has gone wrong and create an even stronger relationship for the future. We must also note that forgiveness, repentance, penitence, mercy, and compassion are steps on the way to reconciliation and to peace. "Reconciliation too grows stronger where forgiveness is not only given but made known."¹¹ The challenge at this beginning of the third millennium for Rwandese is to by-pass the ethnic conflict and to redress the imbalance created by the past.

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¹¹ James O'Connell, "The Essence of Forgiveness," *Month CCLV* (September/October 1995) 354-358.

TOWARD A BIBLICAL POLITICAL SCIENCE American and Asian Lessons for Africa

John B. Carpenter

Nations throughout the continent are struggling to establish forms of government which will keep their peoples united and provide the freedoms and structure for personal and economic development. Does the Bible provide any instruction for the development of a political science for Africa and the world? John Carpenter considers some biblical principles and reflects on them in the light of his Asian and African experiences. He concludes that democracy is needed because of depraved human nature. But some of these "rights" may need to be curtailed temporarily in order to promote economic development.

INTRODUCTION

As Jesus made clear in his parable of the weeds (Mt. 13:24-30), the "sons of the kingdom" will co-exist with the "sons of the evil one" until the day of judgement. The point of the parable is that they should do so peacefully, without taking the judgement prematurely into their own hands. How they fulfill the implied imperative of this parable is the question which Christian political science seeks to answer.

To form the outline of such a science we must first survey the direct biblical statements about the state, then derive political conclusions from some of the theological revelations of Scripture and on that dual basis look seriously at the real world. For special comparison I would like to comment on the systems in my native United States, in Singapore and a general look at the developing world, drawing on my experiences in Ethiopia.

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

I have already touched on what I believe to be one of the most important passages of Scripture to the church's approach to society: the parable of the weeds. In just a few verses Jesus demolishes any ideas of a "Christian state"

John B. Carpenter received his Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary and his Th.M. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is currently a lecturer of Bible and Theology at the Evangelical Theological College in Addis Ababa. He formerly taught in Singapore.

before the judgement ("The Lord's Salvation Army" notwithstanding). I believe that Jesus, using this parable, does not allow "the sons of the kingdom" to imagine that by their efforts, whether by social action, political action, mass evangelism, or even revolution, the utopian kingdom of God can be realised in this era. To further emphasise this crucial point, Jesus told the parable of the growing seed (Mk. 4:26-29) in which he emphasised that the kingdom of God will expand we "know not how". The church can only proclaim the gospel of the kingdom; it cannot establish it.

These parables were told in the context of the expected soon coming of the kingdom of God on earth. That expectation was not frustrated but it was not fulfilled in the way that the Jews were assuming it would be. The Jews of Christ's time were expecting that God would send his Messiah, "the Son of Man" (Lk. 17:20f). They had assumed that the new David would come to liberate them from the humiliating oppression of the Romans. Instead, the kingdom came among them with a demand for their true submission to the God of love.

Christians today also misunderstand the kingdom; either they believe it can come in this era by their efforts (as do some Liberation theologians, reconstructionists, and even some charismatic "spiritual warfare" advocates) or else they believe the kingdom is entirely future and cannot be introduced in this present evil age in any way (as do many dispensationalists). Evangelicalism in Africa (and America) has been accused of using the future hope of the kingdom as an excuse to avoid working to improve the world now.

Theological convictions, as always, shape how the principles of these parables are applied to the real world. I follow George Ladd's thesis that the kingdom of God has been introduced with the ministry of Jesus, is even now expanding by the sovereign work of God on earth, and will be consummated with the return of Christ.

If God's Kingdom is the gift of life bestowed upon his people when he manifests his rule in eschatological glory, and if God's Kingdom is also God's rule invading history before the eschatological consummation, it follows that we expect God's rule in the present to bring a preliminary blessing to his people (Ladd: 1974, 72).

The Kingdom of God is both "now" and "not yet". The "now" tells us that we can develop a Christian political theory and we can be involved in the political institutions of our world, bringing some of the benefits of the kingdom to bear. The "not yet" warns us that there will be no utopia, no Marxist-like "new man" in this present evil age. The former is the prod to involvement while the latter is the jolt of reality.

There are, of course, other Scriptures that deal with the issues directly or indirectly relevant to church-state relations. One is the fact that the kingdom of God is in fact a *kingdom*. Much of the Old Testament is a story of God raising up and dealing with a monarchy. In fact, the legitimacy of the monarchical form of government is never directly challenged in the Bible (though the Israelites' motivation for desiring a kingship is condemned by the Lord through Samuel). Only when the king forgot that his authority came from God (as with Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4) or used his position of power to abuse his subjects (commonly railed against by the prophets) does the king come under God's condemnation. Some would interpret this as a support for authoritarian government; at least, it shows that government is necessary; anarchy is not a Christian ideal.

“RENDERING TO CAESAR WHAT IS CAESAR’S”

To this the New Testament adds: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established" (Rom. 13:1). Christians, then, recognise a divinely sanctioned role for civil governments even when they are headed by otherwise wicked people. This text (Rom. 13:1-7) is often used by Christians as the *locus classicus* on church and state and it is usually done so in a way that emphasises the call for submission to the state. That emphasis is just; it is the emphasis of this particular text but it is mistaken for Christians to think that that is all the text implies or that it is all the Bible has to say on church and state. Even in the midst of Paul's call for submission to the state, the apostle seems to have a certain kind of state in mind. He writes, 'For rulers hold no terror for those who do right...' We know, though, that there have been many rulers (including a certain Nero who would in a few years of the writing of those words terrorise the Christian community who threaten those who do right. Of course, Paul knew that. He had already suffered persecution from local governments. The fact is that Paul is not laying down an absolute; he is not saying that Christians must always submit to everything that every government commands. I believe he is teaching a general principle that in the day to day affairs of life Christians ought to submit to government. Caesar does not have absolute authority. That belongs only to God.

Of course, we must not overlook Jesus' famous words, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Mt. 22:21). In their specific context this saying applies to paying taxes but I think it is evident (from the very nature in which Jesus phrased his response) that Jesus intended to lay down a much broader principle. What that principle is, that is, what exactly belongs to Caesar takes the whole of Scripture to find. However, it is evident here that

belongs to the state. There are parts of life that are to be rendered to God alone. Therefore, authoritarianism is excluded.

It is easy to see how for centuries nations dominated by Christianity have used the teachings of Scripture to justify "the divine right of kings" or, if I may coin the phrase, "the kingly right of divines" (i.e. Caesaro-Papism or Papal-Caesaroism). Only the conviction, at times stronger than others and stronger in the Western church than in the Eastern, that there was a realm that belonged only to God, distinct from Caesar's, tempered this authoritarianism. They showed that their understanding of biblical teaching was incomplete.

THE RULE OF LAW

What needed to be added to this recipe for authoritarianism were the doctrines of the Reformation: particularly the authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers and the differentiation between the institutional church and the kingdom of God. The authority of Scripture was decisive in theology because the centre of authority shifted from the church, with the people (the *pontifex maximus*) to the written Word of God. (Actually, in theory the Bible had always been the centre of authority but the church, represented by the popes and councils were accountable to no one and taught that their interpretation was authoritative.) With Scripture given to the laity, the concept of *lex rex* (whether they knew it or not) became prominent. God ruled over his people through his law, the Bible, and not through a priestly aristocracy. The priesthood of all believers and the conviction that the kingdom of God is, in fact, *of God* (and not of this world) went even further to reinforce this notion.

If the law of God could be the centre of authority over God's people, "the sons of the kingdom", it is not difficult to believe that the law could be king over even the kings. It is only a small step from the theological idea of the authority of Scripture to a political doctrine that all, whether peasant or monarch, must equally be ruled by objective law. The "rule of law" is an idea that finds affirmation and a parallel in Christian theology. *Lex rex* is part of the Christian political theory for this age. Constitutions and the idea that no one is above the law grow out of these concepts.

INALIENABLE RIGHTS

The Right to Life

One of the central affirmations about the nature of humanity in Christian theology is that we are made in the image of God (*imago Dei*). We are much more than the species that happened to get lucky at the evolutionary casino.

We are a little lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honour (Ps. 8:5). We have been so invested with worth by our maker that the second greatest command (like the first) is that we love one another; we are prohibited from killing each other (except in extreme circumstances) because of that image we bear (Gn. 9:6). Our right to live is inalienable; only those who purposely take it from others can have theirs taken from them.

Here I introduce the important concept of inalienable rights. I define these kinds of rights as qualities with which we are endowed by our Creator and only he can justly take from us (unless we are guilty of unjustly taking them from others). When I say "no one" I mean *no person!* This includes kings, army generals, prime ministers, or majorities. They cannot be cancelled by a Caesar's edict, a parliament's bill, or by a referendum. Of course, we should not think of rights as a claim upon God; we have none but we do have claims upon each other. Even the most insignificant person can make a claim upon the whole world that he has a right to live.

The Right of Faith

There are inalienable rights. Life is one of them. I believe faith is another. When God set our first parents in the garden of Eden, he gave them the freedom to choose whether they wanted to obey him or Satan. God could have, but did not, impose the correct choice on them. Even in mainstream Calvinism the original freedom of choice of our first parents is preserved in the covenant of works. Also God is omniscient, all-wise and all-loving. If anyone could justly force a decision of faith on another, it is the Lord. But he restrained himself. He restrained himself, not out of a lack of ability, because he is omnipotent. He could get any human being to do anything he wants and make it seem like a free choice in so doing. Yet he does not and even if he did, that is only his right. Jesus bids us but he does not impose himself upon us. True faith simply can not be imposed. Therefore it is a gross abuse of authority for any government, even if it were evangelical, to legislate faith.

Christians have a much harder time at allowing people the same freedom when they get into power. Augustine approved of state persecution against the Donatists. When Christianity became the state religion of the Roman empire, it wasn't long before Christians started persecuting pagans and Jews just as they had been persecuted. But if even God would not impose a decision of faith on Adam and Eve, how dare anyone take it into their hands to do so. No one, absolutely no one, has the right to tell another what faith they can and cannot believe. Not even having the true faith, which I believe evangelicals have, and which Muslims believe they have, gives people a right to impose it on others.

Faith should not, and cannot, be forced on or prohibited from another. This is why Christians should be guardians of everyone's freedom of religion -- not just their own. We don't support this right because we think all religions are the same. That is an insult to the other religions and a denial of the unique revelation of the gospel. But, as Jesus showed in the parable of the growing seed (Mk. 4:26ff), the kingdom of God grows as God mysteriously extends it. We cannot spread the kingdom by trying to harness political power. We can, though, respect the rights of others while all the time we pray that they use that right to choose, like Joshua, to serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15).

Therefore, I believe that the separation of church and state is right and best for both. However, that does not mean that Christians should withdraw from political participation; in fact, the Church should seek to influence government policy in a way that they believe is in the best interest of the whole nation. Christian communalism that pits the desires of the Church against the welfare of the nation or of broader humanity (e.g. the crusades) is fundamentally unchristian. It is a violation of our command to love and serve our neighbour. If a Christian enters politics, he does so to serve the whole nation and not a partisan for his fellow believers. The separation of church and state, a term coined by Thomas Jefferson, is a barrier that restricts the state from interfering with the freedom of religious organisations to practice peacefully and without hindrance. It does not merely keep religion from dominating the state but it prevents governments from favouring one religion or discriminating against any faith. This kind of separation of church and state can be defended by fervent Christians and can give them a framework in which they can work to bring Biblical principles to bear on national problems for the good of the whole nation.

As an application of this principle to the Singapore context, Christians should insist on the right to worship of such banned groups as the Jehovah's Witnesses, however much we may disagree with their theology. Christians, including missionaries, should not seek to use civil power as a tool to hinder the growth of groups with which they are competing.

The Right to Justice

Not only has our Creator endowed us with certain inalienable rights, chiefly life and faith, but he has commanded us to "do justice" (Micah 6:8). Justice, by definition, is the same for everyone regardless of whether they are rich or poor, powerful or weak, Chinese or Indian or Caucasian or African, Christian or not. Justice means getting what one deserves whether it be rewards or punishment; it should not be used as a code word for "socialism" or retribution as some are prone to do.

Unfortunately, there is a carnal tendency of Christians to exchange justice for "just us". This command is active, not just a passive suggestion that we not practice injustice ourselves. The prophets still cry out that we be bastions of justice; we must stand up for justice for everyone whether they share our faith or race or tribe or not. There is no room for tribalism among Christians.

During the crusades Christians killed Jews and Muslims because they believed that that was God's will. Most of us now would know better than practising those atrocities in the name of the God of justice but we may passively sit back and allow injustice to carry on without our raising an interested eye brow. In the South of the USA Christians for decades tolerated the heinous sin of racism because they were too blinded by their culture and numbed by their "narrow piety" to see inalienable rights and feel the cruel injustice inflicted on their neighbour. After all, that neighbour was a "nigger"; he's not one of us, so why should we care? We care because he is made in the image of God and because God, the judge of the whole earth, demands that we do right.

Inalienable rights, notably life and faith, and the active practice of justice must be what the Christian citizen demands of his government. If he settles for anything else, he is failing to be the salt in his nation.

Therefore, the government for this present evil age, truly built upon the whole Word of God would necessarily be a restricted government; one that knew that there are certain areas beyond its jurisdiction. I believe that that kind of government is only found, in the long term, in a democracy. Though Confucians hold out faith in a sagely gentleman ruler, the Christian doctrine of original sin tells us, even if interpreted liberally, that such gentlemen rulers will be few and far between. On the other hand, one can argue just as well that the masses who make up the electorate are just as depraved as the strong man at the top of many Asian governments. However, the genius of democracy is that even if the electorate is depraved, they do not have absolute authority as do dictators.

The Right to Economic Development

However, there is a complicating factor: poverty. A government may be just in theory, respecting the inalienable rights of its citizens, but if the economic development of the nation is such that people, though they are safe from unjust executions, die from famine or preventable diseases then their inalienable rights are being taken away just the same. Perhaps they are not losing their lives due to the conscious decisions of despots and their secret police, but they can scarcely enjoy the blessings of liberty if they are starving to death. Economic development plays an important role in the type of government that a country

should have.

TEMPORARY RESTRICTION OF DEMOCRACY

It is the theory of some, like Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew, that too much democracy at an early stage of economic development can hinder growth due to the undermining of the pro-business government's ability to organise the nation; too much power going to labour unions and the ability of socialists to appeal to the masses. Lee Kuan Yew maintains that governments should restrict some freedoms in the developing stage in order to allow businesses to grow; the government is to ensure that the increasing prosperity is fairly distributed (fairness being based on performance). Due to the phenomenal economic growth of Singapore and some of the other East Asian "economic tigers", Lee's ideas should be taken seriously. I see no reason why Christians cannot tolerate, for the time being, the curtailing of certain secondary rights, such as completely free elections, free expression, etc., in the interests of bringing the benefits of development to a poor nation. However, Christians can never support the violation of inalienable rights for any reason. To place development over justice is crass, but to stress democratisation and ignore what must be done for development is other-worldly and doomed to failure. In other words, inalienable rights must always be preserved but the degree of democracy which a nation should adopt may depend on the level of development it has attained and upon other cultural characteristics. Democracy, though, remains the goal in this age.

Therefore, the restriction of the rights of communists, the guidance of the media, the propagandising of capitalist economics and the strict punishment of anti-social behaviour, all done in part to make the island friendly to investors, was understandable when Singapore had an average per capita GDP of \$600, an enormous housing problem and was crime infested. As those problems dissipated and Singapore approached developed status, it should have moved to more democratisation as far as the cultural factors would allow.

While all change, as with evangelistic ministry, must be on a person to person level, to turn around a whole nation - yes, and a whole continent - will probably require a leader. Leadership committed to clean government and meritocracy, that understands economics, the dynamics of development and which can calm the troubled waters of tribal conflict - injecting some mellowness - is desperately needed in Africa. One African like Lee Kuan Yew, a man who knows the way the world works and how his own people think and is willing to take any means necessary (hopefully short of atrocities) to snatch the nation up by its bootstraps, could revolutionise all of Africa. Just as Singapore has become an economic dynamo in Southeast Asia, spurring development in the region, so too could an African nation become an African dynamo if the right

leadership arose and certain cultural changes were made. This government would probably be authoritarian. Our prayer for Africa should include a prayer for a "sage-king", a "gentleman-ruler."

"Lee Kuan Yew has repeatedly argued that Singapore's rapid, sustained, and stable economic development has been dependent upon his autocratic control, whereby individual rights and interests must be subordinated for the greater long term good of the national community" (Brown 1996: 209). Before the American or the Christian reacts against this as the crass triumphing over the spiritual, remember the children who will unnecessarily die today. One factor in Asian economic growth some point to is "good government" by which they mean a powerful, pro-business -- indeed business-like -- administration. Lee Kuan Yew said, "whether in periods of golden prosperity or in the depths of disorder, Asia has never valued the individual over society" (Choong 1994: 268). For Lee this is the Asian rationale for detaining communists without trial, putting suspected gangsters in "preventative detention," sometimes draconian punishments and bending the labour unions to the imperatives of economic competitiveness.

Cultural factors, too, complicate the ability of a nation to sustain democracy. Democracy depends on such practical demographic features as high literacy and relative prosperity as well as on such abstract civic virtues as moderation (except in the zeal to preserve justice), a feeling of national identity that over-rides tribalism (ethnocentrism) and regionalism, a willingness to serve the common good, and a willingness to compromise: all, in part, manifestations of Jesus' command to love our neighbour as ourselves. The church should more conscientiously seek to be an institution that nurtures those virtues since we are eager to move every society as close as possible to the ideal of the kingdom of God.

THE IDEAL OF DEMOCRACY

Can a non-democratic nation preserve inalienable rights and justice in the long term? The Confucianist would say "yes;" the "gentleman ruler" will take care of his people. But the Biblicist must say "no," not in the long term. Granted that for a few, brief shining moments there may be a real gentleman ruler here and there, but the Bible tells us that men are not generally so trustworthy. Here the Christian doctrine of sin makes its contribution to our formation of a Biblical political theory.

C.S. Lewis wrote, "I am a democrat because I believe in the Fall of Man. I think most people are democrats for the opposite reason" (Lewis 1943:192). In fact, when Lewis approvingly quoted Aristotle as saying that some men are born slaves he added, "But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters.

Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows." Lewis, here, turns the traditional enlightenment defence of democracy on its head. Democracy is not mandated by the dignity of humanity; it is necessary because of the depravity of humanity. Lewis finds another reason for the concept of human rights: to prevent sinful people from abusing one another, especially to prevent the strong from abusing the weak. "Legal and economic equality are absolutely necessary remedies for the Fall, and protection against cruelty" (Lewis 1943). It's not even that power corrupts, it's that people are already corrupt and putting them into a place of unaccountable power will give them the opportunity to show that corruption.

Thus, democracy is not plainly spelled out in Scripture but the principles are there just waiting to be assembled. We must be concerned with justice, the preservation of inalienable rights, and due to human depravity, we know that justice will only stand a long-term chance if there is a real accountability of those in power. Accountability over those in power may take many forms depending on who is in the position of offering the accountability. A developing nation may only be able to handle a limited circle of those offering accountability due to poor education or insufficient understanding of the dynamics of economic development. A democracy offers the widest participation of the interested population efficiently possible and, therefore, it offers the most accountability if the other civic institutions are operating properly to maintain republican virtues.

Democracy, then, is Christian. Preserving it, or seeking to develop a nation to the point of being able to achieve it, should be our concern. Therefore, we must also be seeking to nurture, as far as the present condition of a nation can tolerate, the secondary rights that are necessary for cultivating a true democracy: like the right of free speech, free press, right to assemble, the right to a fair trial, fair elections, etc. I do not believe these are inalienable rights because there may be rare circumstances when they may be curtailed. You can't yell "fire" in a crowded cinema; the press shouldn't be allowed to publicise military secrets just to sell more copies; no one should be able to threaten the development of a poor nation because they preach tribalism or communism. But on the whole, these rights are essential if a democracy is to be genuine. How can you make a legitimate decision at the polls if you do not have access to unbiased information or dissenting opinions are not allowed to express themselves? So where these rights are constantly suppressed or where people are afraid to exercise them for fear of being fired or humiliated - or worse - there the land is not fertile for true democracy. Where there is a famine of democracy, the harvest of justice will be dismal.

When I explained inalienable rights, I insisted that not even the majority has the right to do certain things. In the light of human depravity we could also

add that the mob can be just as cruel as the despot. Socrates was unjustly condemned by a democracy. Just as no monarch should be absolute, neither should any majority be absolute. The "mob" needs accountability too. The type of democracy that I believe most fully reflects all the Biblical data is a republic in which there is a vision of powers, checks and balances and institutions set up to ensure minority rights.

Charles Colson puts it this way:

The republican form of government best reflects the Judeo-Christian world view. It recognises human sinfulness and the need for checks and balances to power. It is based on the belief that law is objectively rooted and thus bending on the present, that tradition is to be respected, that citizenship demands civic responsibility and often, delayed gratification. And most important, a republic is consistent with the belief that government is God's ordained instrument, not simply a mouth piece for the masses. (Colson 1992:)

CONCLUSION

Africans should know what Americans will not tell them: a good, efficient government is more important, especially for the destitute, than free election. Yet, we strive for the best; we would have both, if we can.

Bread and butter politics is not enough for the Christians. Though longing for the life saving benefits of development to be extended to all, in the midst of that development we cry out like the prophets for justice to roll down like a never failing stream.

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THE MUSLIM FAITH AND THE CHRISTIAN CONTRAST

Lilly A. Takona

Evangelism is very difficult if the one evangelizing does not know the worldview of those whom he is evangelizing. Muslims are a growing power throughout Africa. They may be our neighbours or owners of the businesses in our community. Christians need to know what Muslims really believe. Lilly Takona discusses the various contrasts between the Muslim faith and Christian belief with great accuracy.

A little more than a century ago Africa was unreached with the Gospel of Christ. A century later, Africa has been referred to as the continent with the fastest growing church. The entire sub-Saharan Africa is now a field where opportunity invites the proclamation of the Word of God.

But what about the Muslims? These millions, where are they going? What is to be their future? What is to be their condition in the world beyond the grave?

Islam is a growing religious force which aims at establishing regulations and rules for every department of an individual's life, and seeks to conform the person to the will of Allah. Like Judaism's law, regulations and rules in Islam are beyond human ability to keep and observe perfectly

The Old Testament laws were fulfilled by Jesus in a flawless manner because he was the Son of God. The New Covenant and the plan of life established by God after Christ's death makes men the recipients of the Holy Spirit, and temples of the living God through faith (1 Cor. 3:16).

This relationship superseded the Old Testament mode of fellowship and communion, enabling the Christian to live a life pleasing to God because Christ becomes the Christian's life. These truths found in the Bible are foreign to Muslims and are abhorred because Mohammed promulgated the idea that he

Lillian A. Takona teaches Christian Religious Education at Testimony School in Eldoret, Kenya. She earned her M.A. at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary.

was the greatest of the prophets.¹ The message in the Quran is accepted by Muslims, even though it is little understood. The Quranic instructions are believed to be the very words of God.

In a lay conference several years ago, sponsored by the division of Christian-Muslim Relations of the National Christian Council of Kenya (NCCCK), most participants expressed a state of being confused and having vague concepts of the Muslim doctrines. This requires further clarification and insight into Islamic beliefs. Until Islam is understood clearly, the spiritual needs of the Muslims will not be met. Furthermore, the witness of the Christian may not be pertinent and effective. As Muslim beliefs are explained, the uniqueness and superiority of the Christian faith become apparent and the weaknesses and vulnerability of Islam become evident.

MUSLIM DOCTRINE OF GOD: AND THE CHRISTIAN CONTRAST

The first clause of the Muslim creed reads: "There is no god but Allah."

The Trinitarian belief as found in the Bible is contradicted by the doctrine of the unity of God as explained in Muslim dogma. Several statements are often quoted in support of the Muslim protest against the doctrine of the Triune God. These include:

Lo! Allah pardoneth not that partners should be ascribed unto Him. He pardoneth all save that to whom He will. Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah hath wandered far astray.²

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah (himself) said: O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Lo! Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah hath forbidden Paradise. His abode is the Fire. For evil doers there will be no helpers. They surely disbelieve who says: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the one God. If they desist not from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve.³

Theological difficulties grow out of the Muslim concept of God. Allah is a transcendent, sovereign being, the absolute First Cause of everything, completely self-sufficient, unaffected by His surroundings and thus incapable of

¹ Quran: Suratul Al-Ahzab (*The Clans*) 40.

² Quran: Suratul An-Nisa (*Women*) 116.

³ Quran: Suratul Al-Ma'idah (*The Table Spread*) 73.

being altered by any being or agent. He is transcendent above all events in time and space. Allah's transcendence completely separates him from His creatures, making it impossible to know God or to have a personal relationship with Him.

Muslims do not understand that the doctrine of the unity of God is a central truth of biblical thought and Christian theology. Basic to all prophetic teaching of the Old Testament are the words of Moses: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, *the Lord is one*. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut. 6:4,5). Jesus quoted these words and declared, "This is the first and greatest commandment" (Matt. 22:38). Indeed, Moses' words in Deuteronomy 6:4,5 were not additions to the ten commandments but an exposition of the first commandment given by God on Mount Sinai and written in Exodus 20:3. "You shall have no other gods before me [or besides me]." The apostles in the New Testament echoed their firm belief in the unity of the one true and living God (I Tim. 1:17).

Belief in the Trinity of God developed from two facts in history: the apostles and early disciples had confronted the person of Jesus Christ whom they believed to be the Son of God, and they witnessed the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost and manifested in the early church. Yet these same Christians believed fully that God is one.

Through the person of Jesus Christ men were brought into God's fellowship. Thiessen in his *Lectures in Systematic Theology* quotes Boettner, saying,

If there were not trinity, there could be no incarnation, no objective redemption, and therefore no salvation, for there could be no one capable of acting as mediator between God and man.⁴

The birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ provided the perfect redemptive plan of God for man. Following His ascension, God gave the Holy Spirit to dwell within the believers, in order that He might guide them into all the truth, and disclose to them what is to come (Jn. 16:13).

The orthodox Christian church does not believe that there are three gods but that the only true and living God is One in his Being or essence and Three in Persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The one God is found

⁴ Thiessen, Henry Clarence. *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, revised by Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1960) 9.

equally and identically in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁵

Instead of arriving at his theology through the mind of Christ, as revealed in the Gospels and developed through the Epistles, Mohammed went back to natural theology, and his refusal to accept the deity of Christ blinded his mind and heart to the knowledge of the truth of the Trinity.⁶

MUSLIM DOCTRINE OF THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE CHRISTIAN CONTRAST

Muslims have a high regard for Jesus as one of the great prophets of Allah. However, they consider it blasphemous and repugnant to accept Him as the Son of God. Such acknowledgment would cut across the unity of God, the most fundamental doctrine of the Muslims.

The Quran repeatedly calls Jesus the "son of Mary."⁷ Mohammed spoke of him as Mary's "pure son."⁸ But he understood Jesus to be "son" only in a physical sense.⁹ His incarnation is completely foreign to both Mohammed and his followers.

Their dogma further repudiates the idea of God having a son in many emphatic statements and gives condemnation to those who adhere to such blasphemy:

And they (Christians) say: The Beneficent (Allah) has taken unto Himself

⁵ The so-called Athanasian Creed sums up the orthodox Christian view of the Trinity as best as human beings can verbalize the mystery of the God-head.

Following is an abbreviation of the Athanasian Creed:

"And the Catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.

For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit"
[Keeley ed. *The Lion Handbook of Christian Belief* (Herts, England: Lion Publishing, 1982)171.]

⁶ Zwemer, Samuel M. *The Moslem Doctrine of God* (New York: American Tract Society, 1905) 109.

⁷ Cf. Suratul An-Nisa (*Women*) 156; Suratul Al-Maryam (*Mary*) 34.

⁸ Quran: Suratul Al-Maryam (*Mary*) 19.

⁹ Jones, L. Bevan. *The People of the Mosque* (Calcutta: YMCA Pub. House) 267.

a son assuredly ye utter a disastrous thing. Whereby almost the heavens are torn, and the earth is split asunder and the mountains fall in ruins, that ye ascribe unto the Beneficent that he should choose a son.¹⁰

Muslims abhor the Christian doctrine of the "Sonship" of Christ, because in speaking of Jesus in this manner, it denounces the Quran. To associate a partner with God is an unpardonable sin.

The sonship of Christ makes clear that there is essential identity between the Father and the Son. According to the Scriptures, Jesus said:

Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. (Jn. 14:10).

In his paper presented at the International Congress on World Evangelization, held at Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, Saphir P. Athyal states:

The whole structure of Christianity and all its claims stands or falls with the validity of its belief in the person of Christ. If the Gospel records about him are not entirely true, and if Christ is not really what he claimed to be, then there is nothing left of Christianity.¹¹

It is in Christ that man meets God. "No one has ever seen God, but God, the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (Jn. 1:18).

Athyal continues:

.....if we carefully examine the claims of Christ, we see that obviously no man can make such claims unless he is really God or has a mad delusion about himself.¹²

Based on the Gospels the Christian belief never looks upon Christ as the son of God in a physical sense. This is the conception of Islam, with regard to the inconceivability of God having a son. The Quran has no sonship except in a physical sense.

¹⁰ Quran: Suratul Al-Miriam (*Mary*) 88-92.

¹¹ Athyal, "The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ," *The New Face of Evangelism*, edited by C. Rene Padillah (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1976) 63.

¹² *Ibid* p. 63.

Muslims and others misunderstand the “sonship” of Christ because they do not understand the Semitic (Jewish) understanding that lies behind the New Testament. “What underlies the conception of sonship in Scriptural speech is just ‘likeness’; whatever the father is that the son is also”.¹³ To speak of Jesus as the Son of God is to emphasise his *equality* with God, according to Semitic understanding. When speaking of the “only begotten Son” (Jn. 1:14; 3:16-18), the emphasis is on “the absolutely unique consubstantiality” with the Father. The Father and the Son are of the same “substance” or essence.

The Gospels clearly teach this. When Jesus mentioned to the Jews, “My Father is always at his work...,” the Jews picked up stones to kill him because “he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God” (Jn. 5:17-19). We can see in this incident that in the minds of the Jews, the Father-Son relationship stressed the equality of the Son with God the Father, not his subordination or origin in time.

According to the New Testament revelation, Jesus Christ is the Word who was “with God” and “was God” (Jn. 1:1). God the Father sent the Son (Jn. 3:16) who was conceived by the power of God the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:20).

Paul underlines this truth in Romans when he writes:

...regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 1:3-5).

Bernard Ramm, in his book entitled, *Special Revelation and the Word of God*, states:

The attitude, actions, and dispositions of Christ so mirrored the divine nature that to have seen such in Christ is to have seen the reflection of the divine.¹⁴

The greatest controversy in the dialogue between Christians and Muslims is that which arises from the Christian belief in the divinity of Christ. In

¹³ Warfield, Benjamin B. “Trinity” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. Edited by James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1939).

¹⁴ Ramm, Bernard. *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1961) 112.

the opinion of the Quran, it is "blasphemy and unbelief."¹⁵

A careful study of the Quran reveals that this Christian doctrine is contradicted in many verses. For example:

They indeed have disbelieved who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. Say: Who then can do aught against Allah, if He had willed to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother and everyone on earth? Allah's is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them. He createth what he will, and Allah is able to do all things.¹⁶

And when Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Didst thou say unto mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allah? He saith: Be glorified! It was not mine to utter that to which I had no right. If I used to say it, then thou knowest it. Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Thy mind. Lo! Thou, only Thou are the Knower of Things hidden.¹⁷

In the above quotations, it becomes obvious that Islam as taught in the Quran does not understand the Persons in the Trinity. Christian theology does not teach that God is Christ, rather Christ is God. Secondly, orthodox Christianity has never included Mary in the Trinity.

MUSLIM DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE AND THE CHRISTIAN CONTRAST

Chanted recitations of the Quran can be heard everywhere in Muslim lands. Miniatures of their sacred book are worn as charms to ward off evil and sickness. Often, promises of blessings are given to those who will memorise specific portions of the book, for the very words of the Quran are believed to have been uttered by God and inscribed from all eternity on a preserved tablet near the throne of Allah.¹⁸

These utterances were sent down in the "night of power," the sacred month of Ramadhan,¹⁹ and were later revealed to Mohammed on various

¹⁵ Al-Fadi, *The Christ in the Gospel and the Quran* (Beirut, Lebanon: Markaz Esh Shabiba Center for Young Adults, n.d.) 31.

¹⁶ Suratul Al-Ma'idah (*The Table Spread*) 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid* 116.

¹⁸ Quran: Suratul Al-Buruj (*The Mansions of the Stars*) 22.

¹⁹ Quran: Suratul Al-Qadr (*Power*) 1.

occasions. The Quran is the basic structure of the Islamic faith and is said to be "alive as the universe is alive."²⁰

The Quran speaks about four kinds of Scriptures given by God to humanity. The *Tawrat* (Pentateuch) given through Moses; the *Zabour* (The Psalms) through David; the *Injil* (Gospels) through Jesus; and the Quran through Mohammed.

An examination of the Quran reveals that Mohammed seems to have had respect for the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Gospels and to have felt that they were of divine origin. "He sent down the *Tawrat* and the *Injil* for the guidance of mankind."²¹ There are a number of passages in the Quran referring to the different biblical writers and claiming most of the pre-Islamic prophets from Adam to Jesus. "Lo! We inspired thee (Mohammed) as we inspired Noah and the prophets after him."²²

In the same Quran are references that imply various alterations and inclusions made in the Bible. As such they are corrupt and are not to be regarded on the same level as the Quran. Some of them (Jews and Christians) heard the word of God and then, after they had understood it, perverted it and knew they did so.²³

This corruption, for which the Jews and the Christians are charged, is explained by Jones, who quoted a Muslim commentary on the Quran. This commentary explains corruption to mean the interpretation or meaning given orally.²⁴

Much of this so-called perversion of the Scriptures centres around the prophecies regarding the Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting. Mohammed attempted to prove that he was the one of whom those Scriptures were written. But this was strongly denied by the Jews. Prophecies were made against the Jews because of their failure to accept Mohammed as the prophet of Islam.

The Jews and early Christians were suspected by the Muslims of altering the text of the *Tawrat* and the *Injil*. But in the opinion of eminent doctors

²⁰ Zafrulla-Khan, *Islam: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962) 86.

²¹ Quran: Suratul Ali-Imran (*The Family of Imran*) 71,72.

²² Quran: Suratul An-Nisa (*Women*) 163.

²³ Quran: Suratul Ali-Imran (*The Family of Imran*) 71,72.

²⁴ Jones, L. Bevan. *Christianity Explained to Muslims* (Calcutta: YMCA Publishing House, 1952) 9.

and theologians it was not possible to corrupt the text, because those Scriptures were generally known and widely circulated, having been handed down from generation to generation.²⁵

It is apparent that one of these sacred books must be false. The educated Muslim realises that he must accept the witness in the Quran to the Bible or deny the Quran itself. Strong prejudices and assertions are ingrained in the Muslim's thinking, opposing the inspiration of the Bible and the validity of Christian teachings.

MUSLIM DOCTRINE OF THE CROSS AND THE CHRISTIAN CONTRAST

Rarely is it possible to find a school of philosophers or scientists, or members of a political persuasion, constantly repeating that their leader was put to death by the government for being a threat to the laws and order of the land. Yet this is what Christians do. The subject of the cross of Christ is central to Christianity. The centrality of this theme may be illustrated by its position in the Christian confessional statement of faith.

The cross is the centrepiece of the Apostles Creed: "...suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified....." In the Pauline epistles, Paul refers repeatedly to the death of Christ. Included in his expressions are references to his blood (Rom. 3:25; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20), his cross (I Cor. 1:17, 18; Gal. 5:11; 6:12-14; Eph. 2:6; Phil. 2:8; Col. 1:20; 2:14), his death (Rom. 5:6ff.; 8:34; 14:9, 15; I Cor. 8:11; 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:15;), and his crucifixion (I Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Gal. 3:1).

Throughout the history of the church, the cross has been placed at the centre of that redemptive act of God by which he restores rebellious men to fellowship with himself. In his *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, Henry C. Thiessen writes:

.....Christianity is distinguished from all of them [other religions] by the importance it assigns to the death of its founder. Take away the death of Christ as interpreted by the Scriptures, and you reduce Christianity to the level of the ethnic religions. Though we would still have a higher system of ethics, were we to take away the cross of Christ, we would have no more salvation than these other religions. Take away the cross, and the heart of Christianity is gone. The subject of apostolic preaching was Christ and him crucified....²⁶

²⁵ *Ibid* (as quoted from the Mohomedan Commentary) 9.

²⁶ Thiessen, *op cit.* 230, 231.

Muslims debate the death of Jesus extensively. In Madinah, between the graves of Mohammed and Abu Bakr, there is a space reserved for Isa Ibn Maryiam (Jesus the son of Mary).²⁷ The Sunni Muslims²⁸ deny the crucifixion of Christ, claiming that he was taken to heaven alive. Someday he will return, be killed and occupy this grave space.

The Quran makes reference to the death of Christ in this manner:

And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger - They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and Lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain.²⁹

Muslims are at variance concerning the death of Christ and the interpretation of this *aya* (verse). A Pakistani, Mohammed Munir in his *Islam in History*, outlines four Islamic theories of the death of Christ.

- a. That Jesus did not die on the cross, and that he is alive in the fourth heaven from where he will descend on the earth before the Day of Resurrection, his appearance being one of the signs of the approaching Day. The relevant verses of the Quran including verse 158 (156 in some versions) of chapter IV are interpreted to mean that a phenomenon of Jesus' death on the cross was in the nature of an optical illusion and that in fact God lifted him up toward himself where he was still alive...³⁰
- b. That Jesus did not die on the cross, was taken off the cross and tended by his disciples and cured of his wounds after which he came over to Kasmir where he died a natural death, that the person who was promised to appear with the attributes of Jesus, the promised Messiah, and that was Mizra Ahamad Ghulam of Gadiani;
- c. That Jesus died on the cross but that he will rise from the grave before the Day of Resurrection;

²⁷ Bethman, Erich W. *Bridge to Islam: A Study of the Religious Forces of Islam and Christianity in the Near East* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Association, 1950) 70.

²⁸ Quran: Suratul An-Nisa (*Women*) 156.

²⁹ Quran: Suratul An-Nisa (*Women*) 156.

³⁰ Munir, *Islam in History* 187, 189.

- d. That Jesus died on the cross and that he will not at all appear, neither he in person nor anyone like him.

Of the four, the widely accepted view (with various modifications) is that he did not face death. The Jews wanted to kill him, and indeed thought they had killed him. God, however, saved him from the plot, took him up to heaven, and stamped his likeness on a treacherous Jew who was apprehended and crucified instead of Jesus.³¹

The phrase, "It appeared so unto them," is also translated "but they had only his likeness,"³² indicating that another person appeared as Jesus and was crucified. The Muslim thinks that for Jesus to have died such a death would have brought the curse of God upon him; such would have been impossible for a prophet of God.

Following his ascension to heaven, he was sent down again to comfort his mother and his disciples. And, he was taken up again to heaven where he is now.

Muslims of the Ahmadiyya sect oppose this belief. They accept, however, that the Quran denies the death of Jesus on the cross but not the act of being hanged there. Mohammed Ali claims that Jesus did not stay long enough on the cross to die. After falling into an unconscious state, the Jews removed him from the cross and laid him in the tomb after which he came out alive and showed himself to the disciples. He went to the ten lost tribes of Israel in Afghanistan and Pakistan (cf John 10:16). At the ripe old age of 120 years, Jesus died a natural death. His grave to this day is located in Cashmere.³³

Muslims holding this position support the common swoon theory among liberal theologians whereby Jesus did not die on the cross. He was taken down in a swoon and placed in the tomb by his disciples.

In his discussion of the nature of Christ's resurrection, Thiessen writes:

The theory that Jesus did not actually die, but that he merely fell into a swoon from which the cool air of the tomb and the spices revived him, is

³¹ "Women," *The Koran*, Translated from the Arabic by J.M. Rodwell (Dent, London: Everyman's Library, 1968).

³² Bethman, *op cit.* 70.

³³ Mohammed Ali, *The Holy Quran* (Lahore, Pakistan: The Ahmadiyya Anhaman Isha'at Islam, 1974) 582-3.

a gross perversion of the plain meaning of biblical terms. That Christ actually died, is evident from the fact that the centurion and the soldiers declared him to be dead (Mk. 15:45; Jn. 19:33); that the women came with the expectation of anointing a dead body (Mk. 16:1); that blood and water flowed from his opened side (Jn. 19:34); that his disciples assumed he was dead and his resurrection greatly surprised them (Matt. 28:17; Lk. 24:37ff); that he did not appear to his disciples on the third day in a weakened condition, but as a mighty conqueror of death; and that Christ himself declared that he was dead but is now alive forevermore (Rev. 1:18).³⁴

If Jesus did not then die, why did the Christians believe that he did? Mohammed Ali explains this by showing that the death of Jesus is central to Christian theology. He states:

Similarly, if the Christians do not believe in it [death of Jesus on the cross], then the doctrine of atonement becomes untenable and the entire fabric of Christianity crashes to pieces. So both these peoples [Jews and Christians] go on sticking to this absurd and unfounded belief in the face of all reason and all established fact of history.³⁵

The Bible explains the crucifixion of Christ in vivid terms while showing that his crucifixion was voluntary ("The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" Gal. 2:20). Jesus purposed to do the Father's will by meeting the demands of a Holy God for redeeming sinful man. By Jesus' death on the cross, a propitiation was provided as the perfect sacrifice for sin. Christ's atonement was sufficient for all (1 Tim. 2:6). It is sufficient for those who believe (Jn. 1:20).

In his book, *The Cross of the Messiah*, David Brown writes:

The Messiah believed that his death would establish and guarantee a new covenant between God and his disciples, creating for man the possibility of a new relationship to God of trust and obedience. More than this, he believed that by his life and death he was winning victory over Satan and the powers of evil which would bring freedom and new life to those who followed him.³⁶

Provision has been made for the most bigoted Muslim, but he must

³⁴ Thiessen, *op cit.* 244.

³⁵ Mohammed, *The Religion of Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: The Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islam, 1936) 585.

³⁶ Brown, *The Cross of the Messiah* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) 55.

appropriate the blood of Christ for his sinful nature as the only atonement for his soul's salvation.

MUSLIM DOCTRINE OF SIN AND THE CHRISTIAN CONTRAST

Allah forbids sin but has not provided the way of victory over it. Sin is not thought of in regard to the nature of man but is associated with the breaking of rituals. Muslims divide sin into two categories, 'greater sin' and 'lesser sins.' Observation of the ritual prayers, confession of the *shahadah*, and other similar traditions help one to attain righteousness.³⁷

However, the Bible presents sin as that basic nature found in every human being which makes man naturally rebellious and filled with animosity toward divinity. The atonement for man's sin was accomplished by the death of the perfect sacrifice, Jesus, the Son of God. The blood of Christ has a cleansing quality for all who will believe and accept this substitute and sacrifice.

The work of Christ on the cross was essential for man's salvation. God can not pardon sin merely on the grounds of the sinners' repentance. For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer in the Old Testament only provided ceremonial cleansing, something much more was needed. "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death" (Heb. 9:14).

In his unpublished manuscript, *The Quran: A Bridge to Christian Faith*, Fuad Accad, a Protestant minister in Lebanon, writes:

Unfortunately the Muslim has no idea, not even the slightest, about what all these important acts of a loving God should mean to him and to his eternal salvation. He reads his Quran over and over, marvelling at this heroic act of surrender on the part of Abraham, the father of the faith, without giving much attention to the part God played in it. Moreover, they celebrate this event every year, with great pomp, at '*Eid Al Adha*' (Feast of the Sacrifice) -- killing hundreds of thousands of sheep throughout the world but especially at Arafat in Mecca; for this feast falls on the tenth day of the pilgrimage, when hundreds of thousands of

³⁷ Quran: Suratul Al-Hud (*The Tribe of 'Aed'*) 114.

pilgrims are there.³⁸

The despondency and bankruptcy in Islam is woefully illustrated by Jones who quotes a correspondent from Lahore in *The Light*,

I am a girl of twenty, and from the age of twelve I have done every sin that you can think of. In fact I have tasted of every leaf of the tree of life. Alas! there is nothing left from me but hell when I die. I ask you sincerely, what am I to do to be saved? I have put this question to a priest. He told me to repent, but the truth is I cannot repent, as what I have done I have enjoyed doing, though it was a sin. Now will you advise me what I am to do so as to be saved from hell?³⁹

The response from the editor stated:

Turn a new leaf. Lead a righteous life henceforward. This alone can wash off past sins. This is the only true atonement. Sins are washed off, the Quran assures us by good deeds and these alone.⁴⁰

To Islam, salvation is attained by works alone. As such, each man shall be judged according to his deeds. What a tragic need for the throngs of Muslims who remain captive to the hopelessness of Islam.

The Bible holds that sin is universal in the human race. It traces the historical, continuous retrogression of the human race from an original God-consciousness to the point where it could be said, "there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside" (Rom. 3:10-12). The universal presence of death, which came as the result of sin, further proves the prevalence of sin in every human being.

CONCLUSION

Since God is the key Person in man's relationship with eternity, and all men are sinners, man is really without hope before his Judge. Yet, God has provided a means of salvation, which is contained in the gospel which Christ commissioned the church to preach.

The basis of salvation is faith -- the committal of the whole personality to an object of faith who is capable of satisfying the just demands of God. That

³⁸ Accad, Fuad. *The Quran: A Bridge to Christian Faith* (Unpublished Manuscript, n.d.) 7.

³⁹ Jones, *People of the Mosque*, p. 264.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 165.

object is the person of Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ is completely removed from the realm of works, so that, while condemnation moves on the principle of works, salvation proceeds on the principle of grace. The faith principle, with the person of Jesus Christ as its object, is a concept exclusive to the gospel and salvation is by no other way.

If salvation is through faith in Christ exclusively, and the truth is contained only in the gospel, the communication of the gospel becomes a topic of primary importance. How should the gospel be presented to Muslims so that they may believe in Him?

An examination of Paul's letter to the Romans (see Rom. 10) with allied passages, and a brief notice of Paul's personal ministry, indicates that God ordains human messengers to proclaim the Good News. God has, apparently, confined himself to that method of communication.

Mohammed Amir Alam in his book, *Islam and Christianity*, writes: "Islam states that to man only man can be a guide, an example. No angels and never God himself have been, will be or can be fit models for humanity."⁴¹

Paul stoutly defends both the dignity and necessity of human agents, and seems never to have considered the possibility of any other means of sending the news abroad. Muslims, like any other group of the unevangelised, are under hopeless condemnation as sinners. Terms such as "death," "judgement," "eternal destruction," "punishment," and "vengeance," are commonly used in the Bible to designate the penalty of sin. This price can only be removed through the acceptance of the work of Christ on the cross by faith.

⁴¹ Alam, Mohammed Amir. *Islam and Christianity* (Calcutta: Oriental Printers and Publishers Ltd., 1923) 125.

STRATEGIES FOR MUSLIM EVANGELIZATION

Lilly A. Takona

Muslims are the largest and fastest growing segment of non-Christians in the world today. David Barrett estimates that in the year 1900 there were 200,000,000 Muslims in the world, constituting 12% of the world's population. By 1996 Muslims numbered 1,126,995,000 or 19% of the world's population. By the year AD 2025 he estimates Muslims will constitute 24% of the world's population. Muslim evangelism must therefore become a priority in the Christian church. Much has been written about evangelistic strategies in order to be more effective in evangelizing the Muslims. Lilly Takona suggests various approaches that are helpful in making Muslim evangelism more effective.

Don McCurry made the following plea in the 1979 North America Conference of Muslim Evangelization:

We need the vision of a harvest among Muslims and the nerve to obey Christ in evangelising and discipling them. God is asking us to lay our long-standing prejudices and our centuries' old neglect, and make disciples of these hurting friends for whom Christ died. It is time to claim promises long lying dormant concerning the sons of Ishmael.¹

ADDRESSING FELT NEEDS

In order to reach a target people with the gospel of the redeeming Lord, an understanding of their religious beliefs, societal structures, world view, and present attitude toward the gospel must be cultivated. Further, any strategy for evangelism should focus on reaching a people within the context of their needs rather than on the basis of preconceived methodologies.

Although there is no one strategy for evangelization that could be

Lillian A. Takona teaches Christian Religious Education at Testimony School in Eldoret, Kenya. She earned her M.A. at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary.

¹ McCurry, Don. M. "Why are Muslims so Militant?", *Muslim World Pulse* Vol. 9, No. 2 (August 1980) 5.

regarded as universally adaptable for every cultural group, a number of strategies that could be used by the African church in Muslim evangelization should be considered.

Edward R. Dayton and David A. Frazer have rightly written:

Evangelization always takes place in the context of need. When we study the ministry of Christ, we are impressed at the way in which he always responded to the needs of people: He healed the blind, the lame, and the lepers; blessed the children, fed the hungry, instructed those who sought truth, forgave the guilty, accepted the outcasts, and reassured the fearful. He was sensitive to the deep needs of people, and broke the social taboos and conventions of his day if they prevented him from helping those in need.²

Human needs are as complex and varied as human beings. Abraham H. Maslow has presented a model of man's needs in terms of a hierarchy of priority.³ In his scheme, the basic needs are physiological. When they are satisfied, safety needs become primary, followed in order by needs for belonging and love, needs for esteem, and for self-actualisation.

Felt needs prompt people either to desire change of their environment (including the social norms, economic status, and others), or seek means to satisfy those needs. In this context, without felt needs, motivation toward change is minimal.

The gospel does not only affect the heart of sinners, thus bringing salvation. It should also free man from need drives so that he can become all that God intended him to be ("The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...." Ps. 23:1).

Decision Making Process

The object of communicating the gospel to Muslims is to move them toward a decision, the decision to accept Christ as the source and giver of salvation. Since making a decision means choosing between two or more alternatives, Muslim evangelization is more than evangelism. It requires, also, an understanding of decision processes.

² Dayton and Frazer, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980) 63.

³ Aiken, Jr. *General Psychology* (San Francisco: Chandler Pub. Co., 1969) 115,116.

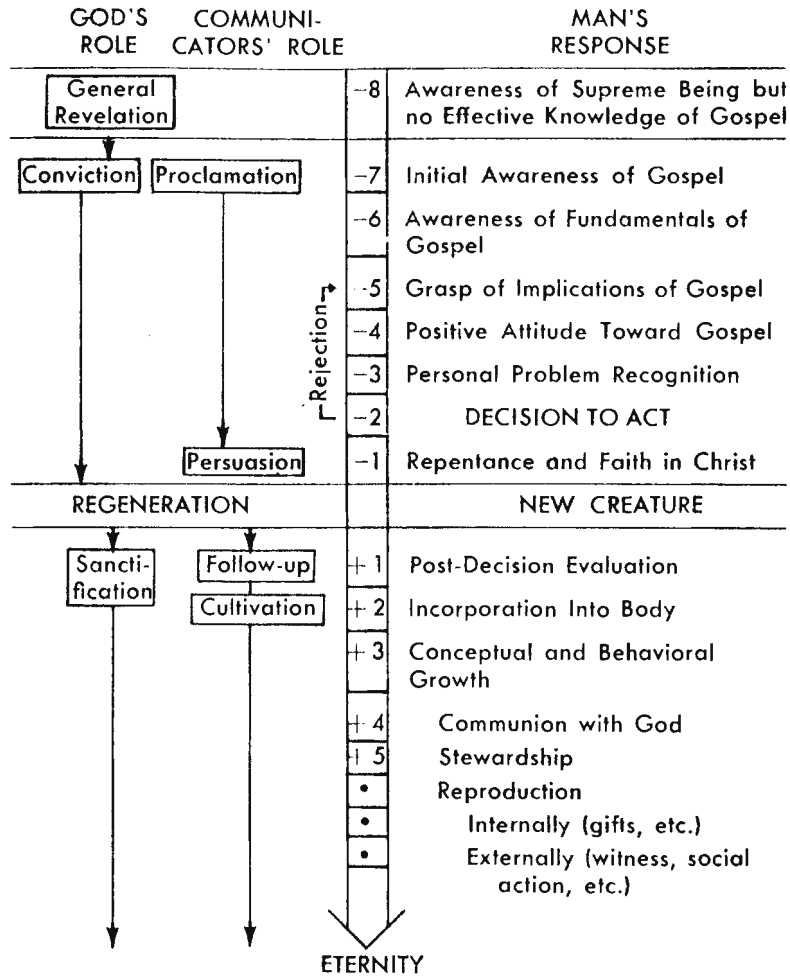


Figure 1. The Spiritual Decision Process. ⁴

⁴ Engel, James and Wilbert Norton, *What's Gone Wrong with the Harvest?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975) 45.

James E. Engel, formerly Professor at Wheaton College Graduate School and a fluent spokesman in marketing and audience behaviour, has suggested a model of spiritual decision processes which purports to be universal. The model suggests that everyone falls somewhere along a continuum in terms of their relationship to Christ. According to Engel's model, Muslims could be placed between -8 and -2. Muslims place the belief in the existence of One Supreme Being as central to man's life. God to them, as to the Christian, is immortal, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. He has not only created all things, but has continuously sustained and maintained them. The Quran speaks of God in this way:

God - there is no God but He, the Living, the Everlasting, Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep; to him being all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by His leave?.... He knows what lies before them and what is after them, and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He wills. His throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious.⁵

Christians have often debated the question: do Muslims have an effective knowledge or understanding of God? And, do Muslims have only an awareness of God? To respond with a "Yes" to either question may seem legitimate, but only on the surface. Muslims "know" God but only within the Islamic context. He is transcendent but not personal; merciful more than holy; He is vengeful and not a chastiser; He is capricious and less concerned.

Caution is useful when interpreting what Muslims mean when they claim to know God. Only in Jesus Christ is there a possibility of an accurate knowledge of God--a direct encounter of man with deity. Under his title, "Research Needed on Adoption Models," Joe M. Bohlem defines awareness as follows: "...is a state at which the individual knows of the existence of an idea or practice, but lacks details concerning its intrinsic nature and use."⁶

And, are Muslims aware of God? "Yes" if they can trace any events in which divinity encounters history; acknowledge man's limitation and ascribe omnipotence to a Living Being who cannot be manipulated by man or his environment; ascribe the existence of things to a Being who is orderly and capable of maintaining His handiwork. Muslims can verify their acceptance of

⁵ Quran: Suratul Al-Baggara (*The Cow*) 256.

⁶ Bohlem, "Research Needed on Adoption Models," *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, edited by Wilbur Schramm, et al., (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971) 804.

these statements.

Based on such verification, the author concludes that Muslims are not left ignorant of the existence of God. However, Muslims have no effective knowledge of the gospel. Their scriptures contain distortions of the content of the Christian message - Christ is seen as only man. Any association of his person with divinity is considered a *shirk* (or in the terms of Paul's epistles, *anathema* or a curse).

Some Muslims have an initial awareness of the true content of the gospel - that man is a sinner and that sin is present in the life of every individual from birth; that God never overlooks sin; that the gospel is God's answer to remedy prevalent conditions; Jesus Christ gave his life for the cause of man's redemption; that Christ will return to earth and establish a kingdom whose participants shall be characterised by an upright behaviour and conduct; that God is pleased when man "seeks after God's own heart."

Other Muslims are, to one degree or another, aware of the fundamentals of the Christian gospel; that it is important that man acknowledge his corrupt nature, that God sacrificed his only Son, that man ought to respond to the call of God to accept the sacrifice made on the cross, that man ought to repent and "put his house in order" in preparation to meet his God. Others have acquired a positive attitude toward the Christian gospel and Christian institutions, including the church and mass evangelism in the market areas, and not destroying or carelessly disposing of Christian literature.

Most Muslims by-pass stages (-7) through (-4) of the Engel's model and find themselves on the Personal Problem Recognition stage in the continuum. The problems recognised in this stage are those discussed by Abraham H. Maslow (felt needs). Those who arrive at (-3) are faced with a decision-making crisis. Usually, when personal problem recognition is accompanied by sufficient knowledge of the gospel and some amount of spiritual awareness, "The individual is open to a challenge to turn his life over to Christ. Prior to that time, there is neither sufficient understanding nor need to permit a valid response to such a challenge."⁷

Professor James F. Engel observes that Jesus' view of mission strategies involved receptivity. The latter illustrates this by use of the Parable of Soils (Luke 8:5-15). Engel writes:

⁷ Engel and Norton, *How Can I Get Them to Listen?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1977) 33.

Much of the reason for non-receptivity of some soil is that the worries and riches and pleasures of this life choke out the seed of God's Word Christ is saying that filters are closed and there is no real response to anything said because of the absence of *felt needs*. The existence of felt needs implies the existence of an open filter.⁸

In another context, Engel summarises stage (-3) when he says that problem recognition occurs only when there is sufficient recognition of the gap between life as it now is and what it might be.⁹ A competent salesman would usually identify the prospective consumers' needs in order to persuade them to buy his products. The consumers may be only dimly aware of their problem or symptom. By identifying the existing condition, he creates an awareness of the need among the prospective consumers.

By supplying sufficient amounts of information, the salesman helps them to visualise satisfaction upon their consumption of the product. People are usually receptive to products or ideas when they are accompanied by sufficient information and when they appear to be dynamic enough to satisfy their needs.

Observable in Engel's model of spiritual decision processes are the three logical sequences of the procedures for the Great Commission. These are proclamation, persuasion, and follow-up/cultivation. To proclaim is to supply information.

In theories of communication, *information* is often defined as any content that is sufficient in reducing uncertainty or the number of alternative possibilities in a situation.¹⁰ Lasting decisions are usually made on the basis of the amount of information available. The larger the amount of available information, the higher the chances become of making better decisions.

To give a continuous supply of accurate gospel content to Muslims is to provide them with a basis for their decision. The Apostle Paul used this philosophy in his theology of mission. "How then shall they call upon him whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher" (Rom. 19:14)?

A continuous proclamation of the gospel among Muslims is certain to bring a clarification of the Christian doctrines. It is the field that is properly

⁸ *Ibid*, 28.

⁹ *Ibid*, 33.

¹⁰ Schramm, ed. "Nature of Communication Between Humans," *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, 13.

prepared that is most likely to bring forth a better harvest when good seeds are sown.

Application to the African Context

Although Engel's model purports to be universal, it needs to be developed to become more adaptable in a cross-cultural communication of the gospel to Muslims. Africa's people are numerous and diverse. Muslims have cultures of their own with distinct cultural variables, including: attitudes, social organisations, roles and role expectations, patterns of thought and non-verbal expressions.

Pattern of Decision Making: Unlike the West, which is also the cradle of Engel's model, Africans are a very homogenous people. Their cultures revolve around the family, village, clan and tribe. Many African groups, including the Maasai, are oriented toward communal loyalty and dependence on initial decisions made by recognised persons in the community for the entire village or clan.

However, with the present situation in Africa, whereby plurality in society is becoming more acceptable, research ought to be undertaken to discover how Muslim communities make decisions. Secondly, research ought to determine how their process of making everyday decisions could be systematised or generalised into Engel's model.

Credibility of the Messenger: The model needs to include the stage in which the target Muslims establish a positive consonance with the Christian communicator. All the evidence in the Bible organised perfectly and delivered well will not persuade a Muslim to arrive at the decision-making stage of the Engel's model unless he associates it with the credibility of the Christian communicator.

Time Required: In addition, any strategy using Engel's model ought to be one willing to allow a considerable amount of time given to proclamation. Evangelism does not only mean persuading unbelievers to accept the Gospel but it also means preparing the field for sowing the seed. The Christian communicator may never see the seed germinating and growing to maturity.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL

Farmers specialising in horticulture know that having advanced farm machinery does not guarantee a plentiful harvest. Tools and techniques are of vital importance. However, other factors have to be brought into consideration,

including the type of soil, amount of rain per annum, weather variation, pests, fencing, and the experience of the farmer himself.

Tea plantations, for example, require a considerable amount of rainfall, a cooler climate, a higher elevation, and a well-drained volcanic soil. Rice plants do well at low altitudes, warmer temperatures and in marshy fields with dark loam soils. Any farmer whose goals are to have a bumper crop harvest must provide for his crop a situation within the specifications required by the very character of his crop. Yields of any given crop are largely determined by the nature of the field on which the seed is sown. In more appropriate terms, the content (soil type and climatic conditions) has a bearing on the ultimate size, quality and quantity of the harvest.

This same concept is transferable to Muslim evangelization. Adherents of Islam have, down through history, shown resistance toward God's eternal truths as presented by both the living and the written Word of God. Anthropologist Allen R. Tippet has rightly stated:

The greatest methodological issue by the Christian mission in this day is how to carry the Great Commission in a multi-cultural world, with a gospel that is both truly Christian in context and culturally significant in form.¹¹

Use of the Quran

Muslims do not, necessarily, resist the Gospel because they think it false or that it has been devoid of God's *Kalima* (message) to man; rather they perceive it as a threat to their culture, including the solidarity of *ummah*. The Willowbank report on Gospel and Culture, prepared by the Theology and Education Group of Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, states:

The.....problem is that the Gospel is often presented to people in alien cultural forms. The missionaries are resented and their message rejected because their work is seen not as an attempt to evangelise but as an attempt to impose their own customs and way of life.¹²

¹¹ Tippet, Alan R. "Contextualization of the Gospel in Fiji: A Case Study from Oceania," *Gospel and Culture*, John Stott and Robert Coote, editors (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1979) 393.

¹² Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, "The Willowbank Report - Gospel and Culture," (Wheaton, Illinois: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978) 13.

The Gospel is a life-changing force. However, it does not necessarily have to be a foreign element within the culture of their Christian communicator. The gospel must be recognisable to Muslims within their cultural matrix. There is need to recognise the distinctive features of Islam which provide a unique opportunity for effective Christian witness. Donald McCurry remarks:

It is widely known that many Muslims have come to Christ by first being pointed to Him by the Quran. True, they later encounter Him in the New Testament and from then on the Quran no longer remains a reference book for them. But the point is, I should not feel shy about using the Quran as a beginning point for introducing the subject of Jesus. And Paul has given us endorsement of this approach by his use of Greek literature in his Mars Hill sermon.¹³

Jesus, in his ministry in Palestine, used the method that leads men from the known to the unknown. In confronting the Pharisees who accused the disciples for having transgressed traditions, Jesus used the very Scriptures that the Pharisees read and had become acquainted with (Matt. 12:2-8); when casting merchants out of the temple (Matt. 21:14); when giving an answer to a lawyer who stood up to test him (Lk. 10:15ff); when in dialogue with the woman at the well (Jn. 4:5ff).

Quoting Geoffrey Parrinder, Parshall explains that "Jesus is always spoken of in the Quran with reverence, there is no breath of criticism for he is the Christ of God."¹⁴ The gospel needs to be related much more thoroughly to the Islamic context. The Christian communicator should not assume what the Latins call *tabula rasa* (blank slate), and ignore the realities of the Muslim religious knowledge. Time has come that the gospel presentation has to cease assuming the form of an exotic transplant from the Christian context. Proclaiming God's love means also to do it with that love which respects the dignity and spiritual treasures of Muslims.

The Logos Approach

The Christian communicator seeking to reach Muslims, to be an effective instrument of the gospel, has to have the courage to cast off the "idols" of his tribe and identify himself with the Muslim culture. A personal friend of the Author recently said, "you must become a Muslim to win Muslims to Christ." This

¹³ McCurry, Don M. "A Cross-Cultural Model of Muslim Evangelization," *Missiology*, Vol.4, No. 3 (1976), 280.

¹⁴ Parshall, Phil. *New Paths in Muslim Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981) 137.

may sound like a cliché. However, the Author is convinced that personal identification is key to persuasion.

To reach man, God did not mail a shelf of videotapes and slide presentations to the world. He appointed people with attitudes, personalities and feelings. God's sending enterprise climaxed with the sending of His only Son - "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son..." (Heb. 1:1, 2).

The Gospels witness that "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). Christ came and lived like man. He became a Palestinian Jew who spoke Aramaic; who largely conformed to the customs of his day; who identified himself with the misery of this world. This act shows how God freely chose the human situation. The writer of Hebrews observed:

Therefore, He had to be made like his brethren in all things that he might become a merciful and faithful high Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:17).

Alizondo, too, observed:

The tremendous mystery of the incarnation is that God freely chose the limitation of man. Jesus was not just any man, nor was he a universal man; he was a Jew limited by the customs and conditions of his economic, social and religious situations.¹⁵

The *Logos Approach* to Muslim evangelization requires two kinds of identifications. First, that the Christian communicator identify with the Muslim culture and, secondly, that he or she identify with the truth in the Word of God. Christ, though he took flesh, did not sacrifice His divinity on the altar of Judaism. He remained as ".....one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

The New Testament presents a double identification of the person of Jesus Christ.

1. ".....God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Though incarnated into a specific culture; dwelling in a

¹⁵ Elizondo, *Christianity and Culture* (Huntington, India: Our Sunday Visitor, 1975) 83.

specific land that had a specific history, keeping largely with the traditions and customs of Judaism, Christ did not divest Himself of divinity and the responsibility placed upon him as God's *khalif* (representative). He remained truly God. To meet Christ was to meet God. "I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:30). "He who hates me hates the Father also" (Jn. 15:23). "...I am not alone because the Father is with me" (Jn. 16:34).

As the Son identified Himself with the Father so the Father identified Himself with the Son at the transfiguration, when He said, "...this is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; hear him" (Matt. 17:5).

2. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21). God's supreme example of communication was in Jesus Christ. He lived out His life in human form. In God's eyes, evangelism is seen as not a task of isolation. It demands presence, an active presence.

The New Testament refers to the body of believers as being the "the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). In many parts of this continent of Africa, salt is used as a preserving element. Food such as fish and other meats are salted to remain longer without decaying.

Believers are said to be elements in society who function as salt in preserving its good cultural values from further decay. Notice here that salt does not change meat into salt, rather, it keeps it from decaying.

Christians should become salt among Muslims, encouraging them in their zeal for truth, promoting concern for their neighbours and giving charity to the poor, showing justice and fairness in their transactions. "Do not think that I came to abolish the law or the prophets, I did not come to abolish, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17).

As salt of the earth, believers in Christ have that responsibility to add taste to human life while showing that life receives meaning and purpose when Christ is given the central position in daily activities. As shall be discussed below under Context-Evangelism Approach, Muslims, especially African Muslims, are a very homogenous group that is often more aware of the need of society than their own individual needs. Goldsmith's testimony gives a vivid illustration of this character.

....This was true of my Malay policeman friend in Singapore. He became convinced of the truths of the claims of Christ, but he had little sense of

personal needs. However, he was deeply conscious of the needs of his Malay people as a race and felt that the Christian faith could be the one power that could change his people's national characteristics and attitudes. Through the saving work of Jesus Christ there could be an attitude toward work, marriage, honesty, etc.....¹⁶

Paul did not only speak of *Logos Evangelism*, but also articulated it in seeking to communicate the gospel across cultural and racial barriers. He wrote:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without the Law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I maybe all means save some (I Cor. 6:19-23).

As the Christian communicator takes Christ to the Muslims he hopes that his message will be received. In the *Logos Approach* he must be careful that the message is not compromised to the point where it becomes only a shallow, meaningless mass of words. One warning must be issued at this point: the communicator must always keep before him the centrality of the message of Christ, not the over-involvement with social or cultural accommodations merely because there is pressure exerted by the method toward such considerations.

The *Logos Approach* calls the Christian communicator to learn the language of the people, to adapt himself and his message to their particular needs and backgrounds. This is not to say that the "offence" of the Cross is disguised or made to take a lesser place in the ministry. He must seek to borrow what is in the Muslim culture and infuse it with new meaning. He must seek to find opportunities to let the gospel infiltrate the Muslim society, taking on the language forms that will enable them to understand and embrace the gospel without alienating them from their high respect of consistency and dedication to divinity.

The Context-Evangelism Approach

How can the Gospel be brought to a people with any hope of salvation,

¹⁶ Goldsmith, "Community and Controversy," *Missiology*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (January 1976) 320.

when history shows that they have continuously shown resistance? As we ponder over the possible approaches in the evangelism of the Muslims, we reason that God can enable Muslims or any people, to reach points of acceptance of the gospel through their own societal structures. With such a realisation, we then suggest a Context-Evangelism Approach (C-E Approach) in which the initial effort to persuade is focused on key decision makers within a given group of people. Africans, be they traditionalists, Christians or Muslims, have a profound sense of community. They are a people, *umma*, *olosh* 'bo, one village, a tribe.

On this continent, community workers have learned that in order to ensure a successful innovation, the new thing must be introduced through the existing structure of society. Most often, the innovation is channelled through recognised leaders. For example, the introduction of vaccination to the Tiv tribe in Nigeria which refused to be vaccinated on the grounds that the head of the family had performed the appropriate *akombo* rites, took this form:

The British administrator wisely dealt with the man (head of family group) as well as his senior, the head of the kindred. When the family head was persuaded that European vaccination was advisable, he told his people, and they came easily of their own accord, without the need of persuasion.¹⁷

Are principles of social changes applicable to religious changes? Yes, if smoother patterns of conversion to Christ are attainable. Muslims have to be approached by way of recognised community leaders. And who are they? Are they the *Mu'lahs*? The *Maalims*? The Chiefs? Fathers who are also husbands? Who?

This is a difficult question in that it involves an investigation into what constitutes a community. Is it not the tribe? No, that is too big. It is not even the clan. To recognise a community, a few questions have to be asked. These include questions as: If this Muslim is a part of a vital action taking place, either performing that action himself, or having it done to him, whom does this action affect in the same vital way as it affects him? If this Muslim finds himself in a judicial situation, who is affected by it? Or, if this Muslim makes a decision to become a Christian, who would be affected by his conversion? Will it be his tribe? Hardly. His clan? No.

The C-E (Context-Evangelism) approach should identify a given

¹⁷ Mead, Margaret. ed. *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change* (New York: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1955) 117.

community, its decision makers, and its values. Approaching head leaders is the initial step and contact with the defined community. To approach head leaders is to approach the symbol of unity in a community. To approach isolated individuals is to make them outcasts of the community. These will always remain outcasts of their community until such a time that a majority or all the community is converted. The C-E approach calls for an initial response for Muslims as a community.

Too often, the conversion of most individual Muslims has resulted in the departure from their own culture and community. J. Merle Davis points out:

Conversion tends to isolate a person from his social unit, destroy his source of support, render him a ward of the mission and deprive him of those normal human relationships and obligation through the exercise of which his one Christian experience may best be strengthened. It also deprives the group to which the new convert belongs of the daily witness of his Christian faith.¹⁸

An approach as C-E is more likely to open wider avenues for proclamation when the Christian communicator develops a positive rapport with decision makers. In so doing, the C-E approach leads the communicator to find a real community among Muslims, providing him with an opportunity to let Muslims hear an explanation of the gospel within the context of a crowd without making them become self-conscious.

The communicator is able to teach them as a unit, to dialogue with them as a group for they have similarities of feeling and reactions. A community such as this has its own distinct personality. Most often, such a community acts as a unit, accepting or rejecting an innovation. Innovations among Africans, and especially those that affect religious beliefs, do not usually take place in one individual at a time. Groups adopt changes as groups, or they do not adopt them at all.

The C-E approach, however, is convinced that decisions for or against Christ must be made by persons as individuals. Each individual soul stands before God as guilty. As such, this approach promotes mass responsiveness as opposed to mass conversion in which a large number of individuals hastily profess Christianity. The mentality of the C-E approach is to cultivate an appetite and an initial acceptance of the gospel. This concept has clearly been

¹⁸ Davis, J. Merle. *New Buildings on Old Foundations: A Handbook on Stabilizing the Younger Churches in their Environments* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1947) 38.

expressed by Bruce Fleming when he writes:

.....The effectiveness of evangelism depends upon our ability to design and apply methods of evangelism that will integrate and utilise the social web of relationships of people as natural "bridges of God" between individuals, families, tribes and communities. Such relationships serve most effectively as channels for the flow of dynamics in evangelism and gospel expansion.¹⁹

To a strong homogenous group of people as the Muslims, the C-E approach would, certainly, be much more effective than methods of approaching them on a one to one pattern. The Gospel must be presented to social units, via decision makers, rather than to one individual. New Christian "Muslim" families are more likely to survive the pressures and sufferings of persecution and to expand the church than scattered individuals. The twenty-first century African church must seek to develop Bible based and relevant approaches to evangelism while taking the New testament directives to reach every soul as absolute.

CONCLUSION

If we catch the vision of a great harvest among the Muslims, how then should we approach the task? This article has argued that it is imperative that we address the felt needs of the peoples we evangelize. To avoid having individual converts who are thrown out of their families, we should prayerfully approach the decision making individuals so that Muslims are won to Christ in families and groups. The messenger of the gospel must identify with the Muslims as the eternal Logos did in order to gain credibility as a Christian witness. Efforts should be made to contextualize the gospel by using the Quran as a bridge in communication. Time will be required to do all of this and the evangelist may never see the seed germinating which has been patiently sown over the years. But with much focused prayer we may say by faith that the Muslims will also be won to Christ.

¹⁹ Fleming, Bruce. *Contextualization of Theology* (Pasadena, California: William Carrey Library, 1980) 69-70.

OBSERVATIONS ALONG THE ROAD OF MUSLIM EVANGELISM

Anonymous Author

Textbook learning of evangelism is inadequate. There is nothing like experience to teach one how to witness effectively. This is especially true of Muslim evangelism. The anonymous author of this article has spent nine years in East Africa, much of that time devoted to personal evangelism of Muslims. He has engaged in "friendship evangelism," making friends of Muslims and through that friendship seeking opportunities to evangelize. Out of this intensive and personal experience this anonymous author offers practical suggestions for sharing one's faith with Muslims and leading them to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

A group of eighteen people sat around our living room, participating in a Christian worship service for Muslims. About half were Christian workers and converted Muslims, the rest were interested in how Christians worship. Our Muslim friends enjoyed sharing prayer requests, singing Christian songs, and reading the Bible together. The opportunity to have this service comes after several years of trial and error as my wife and I work to reach an unreached Muslim people group.

The strategies we use are specifically aimed at reaching the people group we work with. But the principles have a wide application to those who are evangelizing Muslims in Africa. We are still on the road in our church planting journey but we have learned some valuable lessons along the way. This article seeks to share some of these lessons and comment on the previous articles.

THE NEED TO FOCUS OUR EFFORTS ON ONE GROUP

One of the first things my wife and I learned about reaching Muslims was the need to focus on a specific group. When we first started our goal was to reach the "Muslims of East Africa". But we soon discovered that was impossible.

Anonymous Author is a church planter among a Muslim unreached people group. He also trains church leaders in Muslim outreach. He holds a Master of Theology from Dallas Theological Seminary.

Muslims are a greatly diverse group. There are Muslims living in Africa from different tribes, languages, countries, theological beliefs, and cultures. In fact, in each one of these groups there are many divisions and sub-groups. For example, the *Muslim* Indians living in East Africa have at least 60 separate religious and cultural groups.¹

Because we didn't have a focus at the beginning of our ministry we had Muslim contacts that were Somali, Indian, Arab, and from several local tribes. Although this was exciting it was also frustrating since we could not communicate in their languages or become deeply involved in each of their communities. Once we narrowed our focus to a single group we became accepted in their community and established deep relationships, resulting in many opportunities to share the gospel.

This does not mean we should not witness to whoever God brings across our path. But for the person who works with Muslims full time it is vital to narrow his or her aim in order to be effective.

It is important not to assume all Muslims are alike. Takona is right when she says we need to understand the beliefs, needs and culture of a target people. The characteristics of a people group dictates the strategies used to reach them. Are they literate or illiterate? Do they understand Arabic? Are they committed Muslims by choice or simply Muslims by birth? Answering questions such as these have helped us know what will be effective in evangelism.

There are also differences in the way Muslims practice their religion inside each people group. Only one of our Muslim friends faithfully goes to prayers five times a day, the rest don't. Some are studying to learn more about Islam, others couldn't care less about it. We need to get to know the needs of each individual Muslim in order to evangelize them effectively.

MISSTEPS ALONG THE ROAD

Takona brings up an important point when she talks about meeting felt needs. We tried several strategies that were not effective before we found some key heart needs.

Comparing the Teachings of Islam with Christianity

Strategies such as using the Quran as a bridge to the gospel is not effective with the people we work with since they cannot understand Arabic and

¹ Cynthia Salvadori, *Through Open Doors* (Nairobi: Kenway Pub., 1989).

many can not read at all. Comparing Christianity and Islam also has not worked, as they do not know much about the official teachings of their own religion. We tried to compare Jesus and Mohammed, the Bible and the Quran, God and Allah. But it went nowhere. They could not explain why they believed what they did. We knew more about the official teachings of Islam than they did. If we pressed them on a point they said, "Go ask the Imam, he will explain it to you".

We saw another danger in trying to compare Islam and Christianity. In order to show them the superiority of Christianity, we found ourselves teaching them about Islam. Instead of our friends turning to Christ it made some of them go deeper into Islam. If someone wants to discuss the Quran and the Bible we are all for it. But we do not want to teach them Islam. We want to tell them about Jesus.

Again, every group is different. Some groups, such as Arabs, will know more about Islam and want to debate religious ideas. We were involved in a weekly debate with leaders of a mosque for six months. The debates started between some Christians and Muslims on the street outside the mosque and became very popular. Large crowds gathered every week to hear the discussion. The leaders of the mosque were unhappy with their followers being exposed to this "false teaching" and moved the discussions into the mosque. After six months the debates ended with the feeling nothing was being accomplished. A few months later we discovered one of the leaders of the mosque had become a Christian and two others were in secret Bible study. God uses many ways to draw people to Him. We need to pray for wisdom in our use of strategies.

Presenting the Gospel Without Building a Foundation for Understanding

One of our early mistakes was to assume Muslims knew who Jesus was. We have found most Muslims have never heard the real story of Jesus. One day we were visiting at the home of Muslim friends. They presented us with a gift of a beautiful cross. We were shocked and asked them why they wanted to give us this gift. We had always heard that Muslims hated the cross. They thought we were offended by the gift. We assured them it was lovely but we wondered what made them want to give a cross to us. "Well, it's part of your religion isn't it?", they asked. We said it was and asked them if they knew what it meant to Christians. They had no idea. This led to a long discussion on the meaning of the cross.

We have also discovered that a traditional five minute presentation of the gospel only brings confusion and hardens them to the truth. This is because

words such as "sin", "saved", and "savior" all have different meanings in Islam. Takona has pointed out some of the main differences in her article on the Muslim faith and Christian contrast. For example, Muslims have heard that Christians believe God had physical relations with Mary and she gave birth to Jesus. When we say Jesus is God's Son, they think we mean he is God's physical son and not eternal. We must clearly define what we mean when we talk to Muslims about God.

The first time we ate in a Muslim home one of the young women there asked my wife, "Are you saved?" We were surprised that they would be openly interested in what Christians believe but we have since learned that this is a common question Muslims have. Instead of answering directly, my wife ask the woman, "What do you mean by 'saved'?" She told us it meant going to church, reading the Bible, not drinking alcohol, and not going to discos. In other words doing good deeds like the Muslims. My wife surprised her by saying that she was not saved like that. My wife was then able to clearly share what she believed about Jesus in simple terms. When she was done the woman said, "That sounds very good, but I'm a Muslim. Why don't Christians share this with us?" Experiences like these have taught us to take time to build a foundation of understanding before sharing the gospel.

STEPPING INTO THE SPIRIT WORLD OF FOLK ISLAM

A major turning point in our ministry came when we understood the role animism and the spirit world played in the lives of most ordinary Muslims. We had been frustrated by the seeming indifference our Muslim friends had to the orthodox teachings of Islam. Not only did they not know much about Islam, but it didn't seem to make much difference in their lives. We wondered: Where do these people find meaning in their religion? What are their heart needs? Slowly we began to see they lived in fear of the spirit world. Islam is meaningful to them as a way to deal with these spiritual forces.

Opened Eyes

Unusual experiences first opened our eyes to this world. For example, a teenage Muslim boy who was involved in Bible study with us, became sick. We took him to the hospital but he just got worse. Finally his mother took him out of the hospital late at night and insisted on going to see the "holy woman". We left them at their house about 1 a.m. with the young man seriously ill. That morning at 7 a.m. the young man showed up at our door perfectly well. We asked him what happened and he explained the "holy woman" had done some rituals to cast out an evil spirit that was affecting him. He asked us if we believed in evil

spirits and we said we did. We then were able to share the power of Jesus over spirits and Satan with him.

About the same time we read Bill Musk's book, *The Unseen Face of Islam*, which gives an excellent overview of the lives of ordinary Muslims.² It was like he was describing our people group.

Suddenly we began to understand the meaning of many of the things we had observed. The incense burning in the house was not just to make the house smell nice but to chase away the Jinn. The verses from the Quran over the windows and doors were not just decoration but to prevent Jinn from entering the house. The necklaces and bracelets they wore contained charms from the Quran.

We also began to understand the reaction of our Muslim friends towards us. When we first began visiting their homes, we complimented them on their clothes or decorations. We were surprised to have them instantly offer these items to us as gifts. This response was a mystery to us until we realized they were afraid we might have the "evil eye" which is the power of jealousy to cause destruction and even death. It would be better to give us what we wanted than to risk a curse we might put on them because we were jealous.

This is not a side of Islam that is apparent at first. Phil Parshall in his book, *Bridges to Islam*, writes:

Perhaps this revelation about animism within Islam will come as a shock to the reader. We have been taught to think of Muslims as homogeneous and Islam as monolithic. The image of Muslims lined up in the mosque for prayer five times a day has been etched deeply into our minds by the media. There has been little understanding of what occurs in the privacy of a Muslim home or within the confines of a *pir's* [a Muslim spiritual guide] annual meeting.³

It takes time for Muslims to trust you enough to explain what is really going on in their lives. We had noticed that our Muslim friends put black smudge marks on a newborn babies head. At first they wouldn't tell us why and said it was just a tradition. But as we developed a deeper relationship they told us it was to keep the Jinn away. If a Jinn would see the baby it would notice the mark and leave the baby alone thinking it was too dirty to touch.

² Bill Musk, *The Unseen Face of Islam* (Evangelical Missionary Alliance, MARC, 1992).

³ Phil Parshall, *Bridges to Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985) 16.

Folk Islam

The mixing of the orthodox beliefs and practices of Islam with traditional belief and practices of the local people is called Folk Islam or popular Islam. The need for Folk Islam results from the fact that Allah is not a personal God. He is Master not Father and ultimately unknowable. But ordinary Muslims want to experience God. Phil Parshall puts it this way:

Islam, as a theological system, is rigid and unyielding.... However, as millions of Muslims move beyond cold, dead orthodoxy, we see them desiring that felt needs be met. Their hearts cry out for fulfillment in a love relationship to a more personal God.⁴

The problems Muslims have with orthodox Islam are increased when they can not understand Arabic. Our Muslim friends can not read the Quran, do not understand what they say in prayer, and can not understand the official Islamic pronouncements blessing their marriage. Once we were watching a video of a marriage ceremony and the Islamic blessing was being given. We asked if anyone in the room could understand one word of what was being said. No one could. One young man told us, "They could be calling us dogs and we wouldn't know". Therefore, many practices in Islam hold little meaning for them.

Folk Islam also fills the need of a way to deal with the spirit world. Our Muslim friends live in a world controlled by spirits. They live in fear of these forces, but orthodox Islam does not help them. So they change the meaning of beliefs and practices in orthodox Islam and give them different meanings. The creed, "There is no God but Allah, Muhammad is his messenger", becomes a protection against evil spirits instead of a statement of faith. The Quran becomes a book of blessings and cursing instead of a guide to life.

The great majority of Muslims are involved with Folk Islam.⁵ This would be especially true of Africa so far away from the centre of Islam.

The Reality in Islam

The first reaction of our people group to almost any situation is to find the answer in Folk Islam. If woman gets a boil on her finger, she immediately assumes it is the result of the evil eye. One of our Muslim friends has said of the spiritual power in popular Islam, "This is the only part of Islam that is real. I don't believe any of the rest."

⁴ *Ibid.* 17-18.

⁵ *Ibid.* 16.

The spirit world is the one thing that unites the otherwise divisive groups of Islam. *Dhikr* is a ceremony of emotional frenzy that leaves the participants in a trance like state. Many *dhikr* ceremonies focus on the occult. We became aware of *dhikr* when one was held by our neighbors in the apartment below us. The chanting and dancing shook the building. The amazing thing to us was the variety of Muslims that came to this ceremony. Muslims from different religious sects, races, tribes, and social standings that would normally have nothing to do with each other came together for this event.

In order to reach our Muslims friends, we have to understand the spirit world that lies behind the veneer of orthodox Islam. Only then will we address their felt needs. As Bill Musk observes; "With which 'Islam' is Christian witness familiar? Which 'Islam' is known, or maybe even knowable, by most contemporary missionaries to Muslims? Is it Quranic, institutionalised, orthodox and official Islam? Or is it everyday, everyman, non-publicised, local, and popular Islam?" He goes on to say that knowing and understanding official, orthodox Islam is important and needed to witness to Muslims practicing that kind of Islam. But it is equally important to get to know the world of popular Islam.⁶

The Search for Power

A major issue in the lives of our Muslim friends is who has spiritual power. This is illustrated by the experience of a couple we know. A divorced man about to marry for the second time was cursed by his first wife. The groom became sick and was taken by his family to a person with more spiritual power than the one who cursed him. A blessing was pronounced and the man was healed. If the man had not become well, the next step would have been to go to an even stronger spiritual power.

It is in the area of Folk Islam that we have the best and most numerous opportunities to share the gospel. We have the power of Jesus to set these people free from their fear of the spirits. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8b). This is what we are telling our Muslim friends.

FINDING THE STRAIGHT PATH

After several years of ministry we have found some key principles that are proving very effective.

⁶ Musk, *op cit.*, 203-204.

1. Develop Relationships

Our highest priority is developing personal relationships. Muslims rarely come to Christ through street preaching or crusades. They come to Christ like most of us did - through the personal witness of people that lived and explained the life of Jesus. Nothing can substitute for spending time with Muslims and letting them see your godly lifestyle. Many Muslims associate Christianity with the godless lifestyle they see in TV and movies. This perception can only be changed by Muslims getting to know us and seeing we are different.

I was recently on a trip with two Muslim men. Tasneem I had known for several years but found him very resistant to Christianity. Salim was his friend whom I had never met before. Salim turned to me and said, "Tasneem tells me you are a holy man". It was startling because Tasneem had never been receptive to our witness but he saw something in our lifestyle that was different. God is working in his heart.

Time is a key element. We had a co-worker who had a passion to see our Muslim friends believe in Jesus. She started telling them Bible stories and sharing about Jesus the first week she was with them. But she became frustrated by their lack of response. We encouraged her to continue to spend time just getting to know them. She immersed herself in their culture and after a few months began to have amazing opportunities to witness. It was the Muslims who often asked her to tell them about Jesus. It took time for them to come to trust her and establish a relationship where they wanted to know about her faith.

Islam controls a person's whole life, so deciding to become a Christian is a frightening decision. They need to trust the messenger before they trust the message. When I teach on Islam at the Bible School I give my students the assignment of talking to Muslims. I ask them to go slowly at first and get to know the person before presenting the gospel. Those that spend the time developing a relationship first have excellent witnessing opportunities. Those that begin with the gospel usually come back and tell me that Muslims are impossible to evangelize.

We have used a variety of ways to develop friendships with our people group including: eating meals together, watching videos together, picnics, cooking classes, fishing, outings, special meals, birthday parties, Christmas and Easter parties, and much more. We have made it a point to be with our Muslim friends during major events in their lives. We participate in weddings, help take care of them when they are sick, and go to some of their religious ceremonies. At the same time we do not compromise our testimony for Jesus. The results of

this effort is we are well accepted in the community even though we are known as Christian teachers.

A final thought on developing relationships is that it costs us some of our freedom. Takona says the Christian trying to reach the Muslim must "have the courage to cast off the 'idols' of his tribe and identify himself with the Muslim culture." This is the price we pay to reach the Muslim. We have had to dress differently, give up eating pork, change our sleep patterns, and live in a difficult place in order to be effective in our witness. Is it too high a price to pay to save the lives of people God loves?

2. Remember the Goal

There is a saying: "Keep the main thing the main thing." In this case the main thing is Muslims trusting Jesus as savior. Our ultimate goal is to see groups of Muslims from our people worshipping Jesus together. Everything we do must be focused on that goal. It is not enough to make good friends and enjoy spending time together. We must share the truth about Jesus. Whether we are having a party or studying the Bible with our Muslim friends, the goal is to share Christ. That does not mean you have to force the gospel into every conversation but it does mean you intentionally seek opportunities to witness in every situation.

3. Work in Family Groups

Our ministry revolves around several key families. God has given us the vision of seeing whole families trust in Jesus at the same time. With this in mind we look for opportunities to share the gospel with families as a whole and not just one on one. As much as possible, we do not work with individuals. If a young person comes to our house, we ask to meet his or her parents before we continue to work with that person.

In our community there were several teenage children that desperately wanted to come to our house to read our Christian books and watch our Christian videos but their father forbade it. Sometimes they would sneak over to our place without telling their parents. We told them they had to get permission from their parents and did not begin to work with them. For two years we prayed God would open up this family as a whole to our witness. God answered our prayers in an amazing way.

One day the parents were forced to come to our house in order to contact an important visitor we had with us. The next week the father invited me on an overnight trip with him and we had a great time. A few weeks later they came back to our house for a party where we shared the gospel - the first time

they had willingly visited our house. At that time I asked him for permission to have his children come to our house for an all night party the next week. He was impressed by our willingness to respect his role as leader of his family. He said, "My children can come to your house any time they want. They don't need to ask my permission. I now see that you are good people." His children have been some of our most frequent visitors.

Takona has an excellent section on working with community leaders in her article on Muslim evangelism. In our people group the husbands and fathers are the leaders and the family is the main unit that will be influenced by an individual's decision to trust Christ. We believe that if a whole family would turn to Christ they would be able to stay in their community and be a witness to their own people.

4. Understand Folk Islam

I have already explained the importance of this area in our ministry. Dealing with the world of spirits and the occult has led us to two important conclusions.

First is the need for an accurate understanding of what the Bible teaches about angels, evil spirits, and Satan. Our Muslim friends have all kinds of superstitions and fears about the Jinn that are lies from Satan. They are right to fear the real power of Satan in their lives apart from Christ, but they are further bound by fear based on Satanic lies and deception. Their belief that the Jinn control the ocean and not God is just one example of a deception (Psalm 24:1-2; 95:5). We must have a biblical understanding of the spirit world or we will be caught up in the same fears our Muslim friends have and lose our witness to them of God's power.

We have been told that a spirit haunts our area. Some of our Muslim friends openly admit to being possessed by a spirit by their own choice. If we did not biblically understand our protection from demons and Satan and God's absolute control over them, we would never be in this ministry. Those who wish to set Muslims free must also be convinced of this.

Second is the need to emphasize the power of Christ over Satan in our witness to Muslims. We need to live a life that practically demonstrates Christ's defeat of Satanic power, "having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15). We must boldly take the gospel to those bound by Satan.

We can not fear the spiritual power that ordinary Muslims seek if we want to proclaim the superiority of Jesus. One Christian missionary told us she would never go to our area as she was afraid she would be harmed by the spirits there. Do we believe that "greater is the one who is in you than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4)? As Musk asks, "Does the missionary for Christ have any stronger antidote for evil spirits in the home than the local incense burner? What of exorcism and healing? Do Christ's ambassadors have any expertise, on behalf of their King, in these ministries?"⁷

When we were offered occultic cures to have children we told our Muslim friends we trusted God to do His will. It is a testimony to His power that we now have children. When our Muslim friends express concern that our children are not protected by charms from the evil eye and the Jinn, we tell them about the much greater power of Christ in our lives. When our Muslim friends are sick, we are ready to pray for healing. When they want freedom from the power of spirits, we offer them the power of Jesus.

5. Tell Stories

Storytelling is a powerful way to present the gospel. The story of Jesus and other Bible stories are completely unknown by many Muslims. One of the things our Muslim friends enjoy the most is watching the Jesus film even though they have seen it several times before. We have also found it effective to read and discuss a Bible story and then watch a video of that story if one is available.

When we begin to share with Muslims, it has been most effective when we start with subjects they know and then move into new areas. Instead of starting with the death of Jesus we might start with creation. This gives the Muslims an understanding of why it was necessary for Jesus to die. Their view is that sin is simply a mistake that must be corrected by good works. Therefore the death of Christ seems unnecessary to them. When we explain the seriousness of sin through the fall of man and God's severe punishments as a result of sin, it opens their eyes to how God really views their own sin. New Tribes Mission has put out a series of books that explains and guides Christian evangelists through the process of telling the gospel story in a chronological way.⁸

We have been sharing the gospel with Mr. Baraka for a long time. In the beginning we started with the story of Jesus' death and resurrection but it made little impression on him. For one thing, he could hardly understand the story

⁷ Musk, *op cit.*, 204.

⁸ Trevor McIlwain, *Building on Firm Foundations* (New Tribes Mission, 1987).

since he did not know all that led up to it. More recently we have gone back to the beginning and spent several months studying Genesis. After telling the story several times of Adam and Eve's sin and the consequences, he finally understood the seriousness of sin. "You mean God gave all those terrible punishments for just that little mistake of eating the fruit?", he said. Then we discussed the great number of times people have disobeyed God since then, including us today. Mr. Baraka was distressed. "What can we do?", he cried. He is now ready to receive Christ.

6. Pray

The power of prayer is very evident in our ministry. When we spend time in prayer before visiting with Muslims we almost always have a clear opportunity to share the gospel. If we do not pray before the visit, it usually turns out to be just another social occasion. Someone has said: "Prayer is not preparation for the battle, it is the battle."

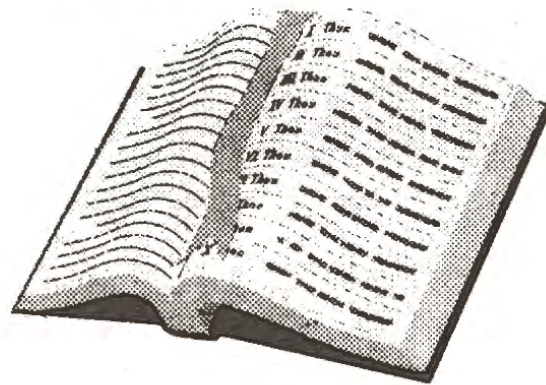
One Muslim couple who were close friends of ours were preparing to go on *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). We have found that many times Muslims come back from *hajj* hardened to the gospel. We mobilized a large group of people to pray for them while they were in Mecca. We also fasted and prayed that God would keep them from Satanic deception and open their eyes to Himself even in Mecca. When they returned we asked them how it went. They said it was terrible. Nothing went right. Their prayers for healing were not answered, the Arabs they had admired were rude and abusive, and the whole journey was a disaster. They are disillusioned with Islam and want to continue to study the Bible with us. This is the power of prayer.

CONCLUDING STEPS

Recently a man from our people group was talking with a co-worker. The subject turned to religion and he brought out the *Jesus* video he had just bought from a local store. "Can our family watch it and you explain it to us?", he asked. God is at work among the Muslims. Opportunities like this abound for those who are willing to invest the time to develop the relationships that show a godly lifestyle. The question we were asked by the woman the first time we ate with a Muslim family still haunts us: "Why don't Christians share what they believe with us?" It is a challenge for all of us who say we are following the footsteps of Jesus.

[Note: Names and details of stories in this article have been changed in order to preserve anonymity.]

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