Growing up in Europe as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian created ambiguous memories. On the one hand, the church had a strong sense of identity. Our members were dedicated believers, faithful to the tenants of the faith. Most of them had lived through World War II with stories to tell how God had protected them and preserved their lives. Many of them were warm-hearted saints eager to share their faith. On the other hand, most churches were no longer growing as in the postwar years. Evangelistic efforts, even when successful, seemed to yield only small results in comparison to the stories we heard from the mission fields. Still these reports spurred us on in our desire to reach the city where I grew up for Christ: Vienna in Austria.

Our small local church, a somber meeting hall with a seating capacity for about 120 people, was tucked away in the backyard of an old house on one of the main streets in the 7th district. Until recently you rarely saw Evangelical church buildings on a main street. As a non-recognized religious community in Austria, the Adventist Church until recently did not even bear the name “church” (Heinz 1993). To reach our meeting place you had to pass through a long deteriorating and foul-smelling passageway that led to an old theater that had been converted into a sanctuary. If you visited on any given Sabbath you would probably have counted between 70 and 80 adults in attendance,
many of them grey haired and long-term members. But it was a missionary church that had adopted a large city block as its territory. Its members had formed about a dozen teams of two, going door-to-door with a survey designed to find people interested in receiving a Bible as a gift, if they were willing to do a series of lessons.

My pastor had taken a special interest in me, a 17-year old student in his final high school year. We actually found several people willing to take us up on our offer. They seemed intrigued when we brought them their Bible, but less eager to actually study what they considered an ancient mysterious book with little relevance to their needs and wants. I do not remember that any of our Bible study contacts led to a long-lasting relationship with the church beyond a few personal visits in their homes. They were either too busy or just not interested enough to follow through on their promise to do the lessons.

My brother, however, came home with another story. He had been with the outreach leader of our church, an experienced soulwinner, who had led several of his coworkers to Christ. An unfailing example of diligence and integrity paired with a loving and persistent witness slowly thawed even the most resistant heart and eventually led to amazing results. In fact, several leaders of our church came from families won by this godly man. All of them participated in our door-to-door expeditions giving out Bible giftcards and following up with Bible lessons to those interested. After one of those Saturday afternoon outings my brother, Edwin, came home rather excited. They had bumped into a friendly group of Arabs in a smoke-filled apartment and had given them the gift Bible. Even though none of them spoke enough German to understand them, Arab hospitality prevented them from just sending them away. Instead they located a friend who spoke enough German to realize that the people at their door were Christians offering them a Bible. One of the men, a Muslim from the Middle East named Mohammed, accepted the offer with a big smile, wrote his name and address on the Bible card and gave them a date and time when they could come back to bring the Bible.

**Bible Studies with a Muslim**

My brother took his mission very seriously. There were heartfelt prayers in our home for the foreigners interested in the Bible. Austria has always served as an entry point for foreigners to the European continent. Mohammed was part of a group of Arabs who worked for the Kronezeitung, one of the daily
newspapers of Vienna, who hired foreigners that could produce permission-to-stay papers. You could often find them on busy intersections near public transportation stations. Mohammed’s interest in the Bible was probably as real as my own interest would have been in the Qur’an. Curious, yes, but interested enough to change religion—that was a long shot. As my brother left for his afternoon assignment with Karl, our outreach leader, we looked forward to their return to hear how it went.

Dealing with a Muslim was a new experience for my brother. This relationship gave us a chance to observe Muslims more closely. In Austria 80 percent of the population are nominal Roman Catholics. Thousands of them leave the church every year to avoid the mandatory church taxes. Our outreach methods had been developed through encounters with Roman Catholics and the occasional Jehovah’s Witness. But our methods had never been tested with Muslims. Yet for Karl everything seemed straightforward. If this man was honest, he said, the Holy Spirit would open his heart to the truth. And thus he and my brother went on their way.

The First Visit

The first visit actually went quite well. The gift of the Bible was accepted with delight. Edwin probably noted the enormous respect with which Mohammed treated the Bible. He held it as if he had just received a special treasure. Since he was the translator he tried to show the other men what they had received. The prepared introductory lesson turned into a question-and-answer session with the TV vying for and winning the attention for most of the men. Karl tried to explain some basic facts about the Bible. As he brought up some of the stories found in the Old Testament he noted that his listeners recognized quite a few names from their own holy book such as Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, etc. Still, the only one really interested in the Bible was Mohammed. The others seemed too tired to even listen to the conversation. So Mohammed suggested that they move the discussions to his own apartment next time. That address happened to be just a block away from our apartment making it easier for my brother to continue the adventure.

An Untimely Separation

But the geographical nearness obscured a spiritual distance that soon proved insurmountable. After a couple of visits it became clear that the Bible
studies in use were just not able to bridge the broadening gap between a world shaped by the Bible and one shaped by the Qur’an. Interestingly it was not Mohammed who gave up. He was always eager to debate a question and consider Karl’s statements about God and the Bible in the light of his own limited knowledge of the Qur’an. When the conversation turned to the person of Christ he made it clear to Karl and my brother that he considered Jesus a good prophet like the prophet Mohammed but no—not the Son of God. When Karl insisted on Christ’s divinity arguments went back and forth until Mohammed one day suggested that the Bible had been corrupted. For Karl, that was a sign that the man was not ready to listen to the Holy Spirit and there that there was no use in continuing the lessons. And so ended a promising beginning because of a disagreement over the nature of Christ.

**Lingering Questions**

What seemed so clear to Karl was confusing to me. Why did we have to start with the question of Christ’s deity in our Bible encounter with Muslims? Years later I learned that the first efforts to win Muslims to Christ and the Adventist message were as old as the history of the church in Europe (European Mission 1886; Pfeiffer 1996) but they had generally been about as successful as those of Karl and my brother’s attempt to give Bible studies to Muslims in Vienna. I was also shocked when I found that Adventists in Austria considered Muslims generally to be unreachable, as people who had hardened their heart against God.

But this was not the end of the story. For some reason my brother took such a liking to Mohammed that he introduced him to our whole family which started a friendship that is still intact today. Shortly after those few Bible studies Mohammed was the victim of an unfortunate car accident that left him shaken up, with a wrecked car, a big bill, and devoid of transportation for a while. To help him out, my brother invited him to rent a room from us. After getting a commitment from him that he would not smoke in the house, Mohammed soon moved in with us and thus gifted us with a unique opportunity to live close to a Muslim who soon became like an older brother to me.

**Getting Close to a Muslim Brother**

What all of us soon noticed was that Mohammed was not just a renter, but a part of the family, quizzing us about school, listening to our problems,
sharing his food with us, and, on occasion, he even cooked for us. He helped us with our chores and became the unofficial repair man for all sorts of things. He also taught us about family and told stories about his people. More importantly he became a genuine friend who teased my brother, got angry at bad behavior, and defended his credentials as a car mechanic after we bought a car that did not last for more than 100 miles. He taught me how to make yoghurt from scratch and I watched him bake delicious Baklava. And a few times I watched him really lose his temper over some issue dear to his heart, however insignificant it seemed to me.

I still smile when I remember our attempts to rid him of his smoking habit. While not smoking in the house had been one of the conditions for staying with us, Mohammed often smoked at his open window which meant that we non-smokers could easily tell when he was lighting up a cigarette. He was a heavy chain smoker who occasionally suffered bouts of coughing which started to concern us. So we pleaded with him to give up his dreadful habit—which he actually tried to do. What we did not anticipate was the violent migraine headache that he began to experience after the first day of quitting smoking cold turkey. As students of the 5-Day Plan to Stop Smoking program we had warned him about “those tough first five days.” Still we had no idea how to help him deal with his debilitating headache that left him moaning in agony. Eventually the cure was more than he could bear. So he went for help to his doctor who promptly told him to start smoking again. We could not believe that a medical doctor could do such a thing, but we had to admit defeat. Yet, this experience also bonded us closer to a person who was quickly becoming a true friend. It was this close relationship that later forced me to reflect on the complex human relationships I had experienced with Mohammed that contradicted all stereotypes of Muslims I had heard about in the church and later in Bible school. Declaring a quarter of the world population beyond the reach of the Holy Spirit because of their understanding of the nature of Christ was something that just did not seem to make sense.

Somehow all these stereotypes assumed that conversion for a Muslim was like changing an opinion or a brand of newspaper. But it was not as easy as that. Mohammed’s roots in the Muslim community were generations deep. What impressed me over and over again was his strong loyalty to his community. Even though he did not keep all the tenets of his religion and we rarely saw him going to a Mosque (there were not as many as there are now in Vienna), there was a fierce sense of community with Muslims around the world and especially with his country of origin. He knew the stories
of the Qur’an, lived in the realm of the principles of Islam, and could get passionate about defending “his” people. Thus I began to understand that our typical stereotypes were riddled with half-truths about Muslims just as Mohammed displayed all the stereotypes about Christians he had absorbed from his own community. Our intimate contact allowed us to revise some of our prejudices and see in each other a genuine human being trying to live a life of integrity. Later when I started to study theology I often wondered how to reach Muslims, especially those who seemed to be locked behind state borders that effectively shut out Christian missionaries.

**Reaching Resistant Communities**

My plight eventually drove me into missiology where the question of how to reach the resistant has always been a central concern. One core idea that helped me initially to see the larger picture was McGavran's (1959) concept of responsive or resistant groups and his insistence on winning the winnable while they are winnable (McGavran 1970:256). This did not mean that “if receptivity is low, the Church should withdraw mission” but rather it should “occupy fields of low receptivity lightly” (229, 230). Since receptivity was usually defined in terms of churches growing rapidly among a particular people group (Wagner 1987) Austria and Muslims invariably ended up on the resistant end of the so-called resistance-receptivity axis (Dayton 1980; Wagner 1987; Baumgartner 1990; Dayton and Fraser 1990; Woodberry 1998). But what did this insight mean in terms of mission strategy? If a people group was recognized as “resistant” what could be done strategically to get through the walls of that resistance?

This question eventually led to the concept of contextualization which recognizes that people like to respond to the gospel without crossing cultural barriers. In Austria this meant a new search for culturally sensitive ways to approach my contemporaries. One helpful author proved to be Viggo Søgaard (1993), a mission strategist with a background in communication theory who emphasized a receptor-oriented approach that distinguishes both cognitive and affective factors in evangelism strategy. While cognitive factors can often be easily dealt with by providing more information, affective communication requires identification with the receptor in an incarnational way (Kraft 1991).

This quest eventually led me back to an analysis of Jesus’ own example and instructions to his earliest missionaries which often dealt with resistant populations. More specifically I was fascinated by the implications found in
Christ’s own instructions to his disciples in Luke 10 that is known among missionaries as the Person of Peace concept.

**Looking for the Person of Peace**

In Luke 10, Jesus sends out the seventy to prepare for his own arrival in a new area.

After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. Then He said to them, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. “Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. “Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. “But whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ “And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. “And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. “Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. “And heal the sick there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’” (Luke 10:1-9 NKJ)

In this passage Jesus is instructing the disciples how to approach communities that do not know him personally by using the gateway of the Person of Peace. These communities may seem closed, but Jesus assures us that they are part of the ripening harvest. In view of the harvest before them Christ demanded urgency and focus. Did Jesus also imply that receptivity is a temporary phenomenon, a fact that has also been noted by missiologists and sociologists alike (McGavran and Wagner 1990; Stark 1996)? If you miss the window of harvest time you may lose the harvest and face hunger. I observed the devastating consequences of the missed harvest time in 1993 as I was traveling as an evangelist in Moldova, the former satellite state of the USSR. As we were approaching our destination I noticed the stench of miles of rotting harvest fields caused by a severe shortage of fuel for the tractors. Left in the fields the harvest was wasting away.

What makes the Person of Peace concept helpful is that it reminds us that in seemingly closed fields we are dependent on the Lord of the Harvest to reveal his timing. This sense of dependency is further underlined by Christ in Luke 10 when he asks his disciples not to be weighed down with extra provisions or equipment but to approach their mission by trusting in God’s power and providence. While they were not to greet anyone along the road,
he directed them to accept the hospitality of a Person of Peace, the firstfruit of the harvest often capable of leading the missionaries to further fruit.

What does a Person of Peace look like? While there is no one passage that gives us a systematic explanation of what Persons of Peace look like we do find some instructive incidents in the New Testament that allow us to draw some important conclusions. I have selected five passages to analyze the concept more closely: Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman in John 4; the story of the demoniac in Mark 5; the story of Cornelius in Acts 10; the conversion of Lydia, the purple dealer from Thyatira, in Acts 16; and the account of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16. Each story has some very unique aspects, all of them reflect some striking commonalities, and all of them are instructive for our purposes.

The Samaritan Woman (John 4)

The story of the Samaritan woman describes the encounter of Jesus with a woman caught in the web of confusing relationships and part of a people group despised by the disciples. Their prejudice had no room for Samaritans in God’s economy of grace. But Christ deliberately moved beyond cultural barriers to reveal himself to this woman who had stolen away from her home in the heat of the day to haul water from Jacob’s well. What makes her a Person of Peace is her responsiveness to Christ and her remarkable ability to summon her town to share in her discovery of the Messiah. Her eagerness to share Christ is in marked contrast to the disciples’ struggle to understand the significance of this encounter. Their deep-seated hatred towards Samaritans is vividly illustrated in the angry request of James and John in response to a Samaritan refusal to receive Jesus: “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” (Luke 9:54). This attitude is not unlike the prevailing stereotype among some Christians who see Muslims at best as an ignorant group of closed-minded intolerants or worse as murder-breathing terrorists which should be eliminated. Both attitudes reveal a spirit totally foreign to and rebuked by Christ who “did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them (Luke 9:56). In contrast to the disciples’ bigotry the woman reveals a longing for the Messiah and a remarkable ability to draw those in her own network of influence to Christ. John must have sensed that this incident was a strategic learning moment for the disciples that documented Christ’s desire to break down seemingly insurmountable barriers to the so-called resistant who live beyond the walls of our own prejudices.
The Demoniac (Mark 5)

The demoniac may at first sight not qualify as a Person of Peace. Here is a person known to be the terror of the region in total bondage to dark forces that imbue him with supernatural strength and keep people far away from him. He lived in a prison seemingly inaccessible to missionaries. Moreover, the encounter with him seemed to result in a defeat for any further possibility for Christ to reach out to a population of Gentiles who, afraid of his presence and power, “plead with Him to depart from their region” (Mark 5:15, 17). Yet, there is a strange paradox in the story. A man possessed by a “legion” of unclean spirits unable to control his own speech seemed unable to stay away from Jesus and ends up worshipping him (5:6, 7). Jesus reads the deep needs of this man’s soul and sees beyond the inhumane façade. His heart is touched by the man’s need for deliverance from demonic oppression which he grants without hesitation. The former demonized man is transformed into a Person of Peace eager to be with Jesus who, when denied this privilege, becomes the Lord’s untiring ambassador spreading the good news of God’s mercy in the very region that has refused entrance to Christ. The result of this insider’s witness in the region of the Decapolis does not become evident until Jesus returns to the region two chapters later which brings him face to face with thousands influenced by this testimony (Mark 7:31-37; 8:1-10).

The Centurion (Acts 10)

The story of Cornelius is the breakthrough to the Gentiles in the book of Acts (Wagner 1995a:68). The story spills over into Acts chapter 11 as Peter defends his acceptance of Cornelius and his friends into the community of faith. This is also the longest story in Acts (77 verses). Remarkably it also helps us understand another dynamic of the Person of Peace concept: finding the Person of Peace is not only a human activity but involves God’s intervention on the side of the group needing to hear the good news, but also on the side of the missionary. First, on the side of Cornelius, a centurion in the Roman army living in the Mediterranean city of Caesarea. He is a God-fearing man known for his generosity to the poor and his devotion to prayer. Second, on the side of Peter, the apostle, who seems hesitant to follow God’s promptings. What strikes the reader of the story is the portrayal of God who pays attention to the sincere prayers and acts of mercy of Cornelius, calls him by name in a vision to guide him to a specific address in Joppa, thirty miles south of Caesarea where Peter is staying in the house of a tanner. At the same time God leaves nothing to chance and instructs Peter by vision
to respond favorably to Cornelius’ request for guidance. When Peter finally arrives he finds a large group of people ready to hear and respond to his message.

The story comes on the heels of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, God’s chosen missionary to the Gentiles. So it is interesting to see that God chose Peter to spearhead this breakthrough to the Gentiles. Why Peter? As one of the original twelve apostles, Peter’s recognition “that God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34) is a key insight for the early church. Peter’s experience of staying in Cornelius’ home connects well with Christ’s instruction to accept the hospitality of a man of peace in Luke 10:8. Seeing God’s initiative in pouring “the gift of the Holy Spirit” “out on the Gentiles” (10:45), Peter accepts that manifestation as a signal that it is alright to baptize the Gentile believers and incorporate them into the church, a move that anticipates Paul’s missionary practice even before there is a well-developed theology of righteousness by faith. Nevertheless, Peter’s testimony before those who were at first incensed at his actions eventually leads them to also accept God’s leadings (Acts 11:1-18). The amount of detail in the story of God’s deliberate timing and providential moving leaves no doubt that God has accepted uncircumcised Gentiles as worthy of that message of “peace through Jesus Christ.”

Lydia (Acts 16)

If the story of Cornelius marks the beginning of the church’s mission to the Gentile world, the story of Lydia takes Paul and his companions a step further. Luke insists that Paul’s move to the European continent was providentially guided by the Holy Spirit. After traveling through Phrygia and Galatia the text simply states, “they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6) or to go into Bithynia (Acts 16:7). Instead they end up in Troas where Paul receives a vision pleading with him to come to Macedonia. The leading city of the region is Philippi. It apparently had no Jewish synagogue, a circumstance which forces Paul to search for another entrance for the gospel to this community. On Sabbath he finds that opening in a group of women gathered for prayer at the river. Among them is Lydia, a God-fearing woman described as “a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira” (16:14) who is so responsive to Paul’s message that she and her household are soon baptized (15).

Her description as an international merchant indicates another characteristic of a Person of Peace: access to a network beyond her household that provides an entrance for the gospel. Lydia had access to the social elite
and the wealthy that would have had use for her merchandise: luxury items such as purple dye and perfumes (Gill 1994:114, 115). As a woman of means she probably had a staff of servants who would have easily followed her example and interest in Jesus Christ leading to what missiologists commonly call a people movement to Christ (McGavran 1955:1972). After she invites Paul and his companions to stay in her house it becomes the new center for the expansion of the gospel in that city (Acts 16:15).

The Jailer of Philippi (Acts 16)

The story of the start of the church in Philippi does not end with Lydia, however. Soon after the encouraging start of the church in the city a demonic spirit who controls a fortune-telling girl begins to draw attention to the presence of Paul and his team in the city: “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). Only a power encounter with the spirit eventually brings this unwelcomed advertisement to an end. But the confrontation leads to a serious backlash against the missionaries who are arrested, stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into jail. The story introduces us to the jailer who is not yet a second Person of Peace, but who is possibly a retired Roman soldier living in this Roman colony. The city magistrates charge him solemnly to keep the prisoners “securely” which he promptly does by putting them into the “inner prison” and putting their feet “in the stocks” (16:24).

As light changes to darkness so the prisoners’ heartfelt prayers and songs transform their bloodstained prison walls into a cathedral of hope. What Satan and his forces through their harassment intended as the end of the missionaries’ ministry in Philippi Paul and Silas saw as a victory for God. Peter Wagner says,

Praise in itself is one of the most powerful weapons of spiritual warfare we have at our disposition. The Bible says that God inhabits the praises of His people (Ps 22:3). The devil cannot long resist praises to God. . . . The forces of darkness . . . could not maintain their ground in the face of praise and worship. (1995b:80)

God responds by sending an earthquake which not only breaks the chains of the prisoners but also transforms the fear-filled world of the jailer who in response to the invitation of salvation to Christ submits his life to the One he has just met. What makes the jailer a Person of Peace? It is his openness to God and his ability to move his whole household to faith in Christ which
in all probability would include his servants along with his relatives.

**Characteristics of Persons of Peace**

These five stories stand as examples for a long line of people who have served as entry points to communities not yet reached by the gospel throughout the history of Christian mission. What do they reveal to us about their possible role in approaching Muslims? Let’s take a look at some of the elements common to all the stories.

**Receptivity in Adverse Contexts**

The stories of the five persons of peace take place in a mission-frontier situation. Samaria in the mind of a Jew and in the minds of the disciples was hated enemy territory. Yet the eager response of the inhabitants of Sychar taught the disciples that Samaria was part of Christ’s concern for the nations (Acts 1:8). The healing of the demoniac takes place among pig-herding Gentiles. Cornelius is a Roman military officer stationed in Caesarea, the important city built by Herod the Great on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea sixty miles northwest of Jerusalem and the seat of the Roman procurator. Philippi, the site of the last two stories was a Roman colony situated on the *Via Egnatia*, a major road leading from Rome to the Eastern provinces. As a colony that enjoyed the privilege of self-government, Philippi was the home of discharged Roman soldiers who were given fertile land to farm and settle in the city (Strabo 1924:3:363). In other words, the main characters in these stories remind us that God is at work even in the most difficult contexts of the global mission frontier.

**Response to the Encounter with God’s Message**

In addition, each story helps us understand that God’s activity is person and context specific and is designed to increase the likelihood of a positive response. The Samaritan woman had to be approached first in ways that disarmed her cultural taboos and her desire to keep her private life out of site. Yet once Jesus gently makes himself vulnerable as a thirsty foreigner depending on her hospitality, he uses her interest in living water to reveal to her God’s mercy despite the meanders of her own life of shame. Eventually her hunch that the gentle foreigner whom she first sees as a prophet and then recognizes as the Promised One turns into the good news that she cannot
keep for herself. When the disciples are stunned to see Jesus in quiet joy watching the woman run away, he uses the harvest metaphor in John 4 to explain to the disciples what was happening in front of their eyes: a whole town was quickly becoming ripe for the Kingdom of God, something that totally eluded them.

The narratives of Cornelius and Lydia make it clear that finding a Person of Peace is often a major challenge for missionaries and requires an obedient heart that is attentive to God’s guidance. In the case of Peter some scripture-twisting was necessary to make it clear to him that he was to go beyond the boundaries of good Jewish behavior and accept the invitation of a Gentile. I wonder how Paul and Silas knew that the closing doors to Asia and Bithynia were indeed God’s hand guiding them through Phrygia and Galatia and finally Mysia to the borders of Macedonia. But somehow, God, talking to them in specific ways, seemed to have been “normal.” In the end God lifted the veil by confirming the direction of his call through vision. Possibly the most difficult aspect of the story taking place in Philippi is the fact that the jailor emerged as a Person of Peace only after the missionaries suffer adversity, injustice, and incredible suffering. For those who have worked in Muslim countries stories of God’s guidance through dreams and visions are common (Dybdahl 1993).

**Influence**

In all five cases it is important to note that the persons of peace become reference points for God’s message in their communities. They are known in their communities and once they have experienced God’s forgiving grace they lead their communities toward Christ. Even though the Samaritan woman and the demoniac start out with a bad reputation, the transformation of their lives became the catalyst for people movements towards Christ in Sychar and in the Decapolis. What is interesting is that in each case the people in the Person of Peace’s network seem to identify deeply with the core issues touched on by Jesus in his encounter. For the woman, it was the lingering uncertainty over the issue of worship which at its heart is an issue of acceptance by God. In the case of the demoniac, the breaking of the bondage to demonic powers resonated with the people in the region. Even though they were not subject to the same degree of bondage as the demoniac they recognized in his deliverance God’s compassion for them. By the time Jesus returned to the Decapolis people throughout the region were eager to embrace the Savior. Just compare the people “begging” Jesus to leave the
region with the “begging” in Mark 7 to heal and the feeding of the 4,000 taking place in the Decapolis (Mark 8). What made the difference? It was the presence of a Person of Peace who had experienced God’s power.

The influence of the gospel has often manifested itself as it travels along the social network bridges of people who testify to the power and reality of God’s love. The role of the Person of Peace is often to provide the first link to their circle of relatives, friends, acquaintances, and neighbors. This circle of influence is often termed “house” or household (Greek: oikos). Michael Green underlines that the oikos, “consisting of blood relatives, slaves, clients and friends, was one of the bastions of Graeco-Roman society. Christian missionaries made a deliberate point of gaining whatever households they could as lighthouses, so to speak, from which the Gospel could illuminate the surrounding darkness (1970:210). Cornelius called together “his relatives and close friends” (Acts 16:24) to listen to the messenger designated and called to their house by an angel. Together they listened, responded, and received the Holy Spirit and finally baptism. In Lydia’s and the jailer’s case the Bible simply indicates that their encounter with the message of salvation resulted in the baptism of them and their household (Acts 16:15, 31-34). These reports indicate that persons of peace are people who in group-oriented communities have an unusual influence to move others towards Christ.

Summary

The concept of the person of peace has become immensely popular among church planters and for good reason. Many websites and blogs referencing the concept trace their heritage to Dr. Thom Wolf, the former Baptist pastor of the Church on the Brady in Los Angeles with a PhD from Andrews University (2010) and to his long-term partner and mission strategist, Carol Davis, who describe Persons of Peace as persons with three characteristics:

1. They are receptive persons. Not all receptive persons are persons of peace. But persons of peace have opened their heart to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and responded to the light they have received.

2. They have a reputation. People know them. Their reputation is not always a good one. The woman at the well came out at noon to avoid others. Her reputation was tainted. The demoniac was a known terror. Cornelius was a man of good repute.
3. They are persons of influence. When they respond to the Gospel, others in their social network take note of their experience and are moved by their testimony. (Wolf n.d.)

These characteristics summarize well a concept that is not unfamiliar to Adventists even though we never have formalized it into an evangelistic strategy. Think for instance of Joseph Bates finding David Hewitt, “the most honest man in town” who became the first Sabbath keeper in Battle Creek (Schwarz 1979:79-80). What would happen if we were to approach the Muslim world with a similar attitude, looking for Persons of Peace sovereignly prepared by God to be led further into the truth of God? For many Adventists it is still difficult to attribute to their Muslim brothers and sisters a longing for God’s mercy and truth. It is my hope that the biblical stories of Persons of Peace may serve as a reminder that the God who reads the heart of people in every nation is the God not only of those who live in open societies but also the God of those who long for him in the obscurity of closed societies.

Works Cited


