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A Man of Passionate Reflection

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Section 1

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

a man of

PASSIONATE REFLECTION
A BIOGRAPHY OF JERALD WHITEHOUSE

Judy Whitehouse

Roots

In May 1943, Ralph and Gladys (Clark) Whitehouse took their newborn, Jerald Wayne, from Shelton General Hospital, Mason County, Washington. They went home to the house that Ralph himself had built on Star Route 1. Big brother Stan had just passed his second birthday, and they now became a family of four.

The recent depression years made frugality an imperative. Then the attack on Pearl Harbor jolted the United States into war. A skilled woodsman, Ralph worked for Simpson Logging Company. Although they moved first to Monroe and then Chehalis, Washington, the needs of his family precluded his following his dream to return to Walla Walla College to become a pastor. He remained, however, a deep thinker, a voracious reader, and a life-long church elder. Being a perfectionist Ralph survived the high-risk logging profession for forty plus years.

Gladys stayed at home quietly and faithfully nurturing her boys. She instilled in them a powerful work ethic that may have begun in the strawberry patch, but the lessons learned went far beyond rural Washington State.
Jerald’s education both began and concluded in Seventh-day Adventist schools. While studying at Lewis County SDA Junior Academy he became a serious piano student and a classical musician under the tutelage of wheelchair-bound Opal Foster. He went to Auburn Adventist Academy to begin Grade 11 and in order to pay his fee he worked hard in the furniture-making industry and later on as a chemistry lab instructor. Although academic excellence remained a top priority, in his senior year he allowed himself the luxuries of a few extra-curricular activities—like choir and a special choral group as well as piano and clarinet study.

Jerald first met Judy Dietrich in his academy German class and then in chemistry lab and choir. In 1961 he started the theology course at Walla Walla College, but still focused on hard work, so he waited until after his junior year to propose to Judy. His exact words were: “Will you go with me where God leads us together?” She joyfully accepted, never imagining where God might actually take them!

In his senior year he took an academic overload, became President of the Theology Club, and wrote daily letters to Judy (who was in nurses’ training at the White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles). He also arranged an apartment for their new home near Walla Walla College after their wedding, planted a huge garden, and at the same time took a correspondence course in piano restoration and tuning. He just wanted to have a viable, moneymaking career to support his new wife even though the couple had already applied for foreign mission service.

The wedding came just one week after Jerald’s graduation in June of 1965. At the end of the summer the newlyweds relocated to Loma Linda, California on Campus Street. While Judy concluded her nursing studies Jerald enrolled in graduate school to earn a master’s degree in Health Education. Since both were full time students, each of their parents contributed $100 to their support. When the Whitehouses’ rent jumped from $50 to $55 a month, however, the ever-watchful Jerald promptly found cheaper, “more reasonable” quarters on Prospect Street.

Several of Jerald’s professors at Loma Linda University were recently returned missionaries including Drs. Harold Schull (Korea), Robert Dunn (China and Burma), Bill Dysinger (Cambodia and Africa), John Elich (anthropologist, South America), and Karl Fischer (both China and
Africa. Mission issues sometimes replaced the syllabus class content. Jerald enthusiastically joined in debates concerning the appropriateness of missionary-national relationships and much more.

In the middle of the academic year Dr. Dysinger called Jerald into his office. Dr. Mervyn Hardinge (also a professor in the Department of Tropical Medicine and Preventive Care) was on a sabbatical, visiting Adventist mission sites around the world. While at the Middle East Division office he learned of an immediate need for a pastor at Benghazi Adventist Hospital in Libya. They had just lost their pastor, and the full-services hospital was chronically short staffed. “Is there a student there,” Hardinge asked, “who would be qualified to pastor and also have some skills useful in the hospital?”

“Are you interested?” Dr. Dysinger inquired.

Jerald said yes, on the spot. He knew well enough that Judy would acquiesce.

Within weeks, Roy Williams from the General Conference Secretariat Department came to interview the Whitehouses. In rapid succession, after graduation, came the purchasing of some second-hand household goods to ship overseas and visits to their families in the Pacific Northwest. To complete preparations Judy wrote her Registered Nurse Board Exams, and Jerald got his private pilot’s license—in case of need. But most important was the fact that their dream of foreign mission service was to become a reality.

**Libya**

Jerald’s degree required a three-month field project, so he fulfilled that responsibility teaching at Heri Seventh-day Adventist Hospital, near Kigoma, on Lake Tanganyika. In that immediate post-independence era, East African nationalism was at full tide. In this, their first cross-cultural experience, Jerald and Judy felt like wide-eyed infants cast out into the world. Happily, wise and mentoring friends surrounded them. Jerald would always champion the support of young people and often said, “We need to build people more than institutions.”

Meanwhile the visas for Libya languished amid bureaucratic red tape. The Whitehouses waited and shivered in the guesthouse in Beirut until after Christmas. Bob and Mary Darnell (with fifteen years of experience in the Middle East Division) not only included Jerald and Judy in their holiday celebrations, but they also inducted them into the great imponderables of bringing the gospel to an almost total Muslim population.

When the visas arrived on Sunday, April 16, 1967, Jerald determined
to leave Beirut on the first available flight. Cliff Ludington, the Medical Director in Libya and his wife welcomed Jerald and Judy. They settled into life at the Benghazi Adventist Hospital, but sadly, the hospital was called “the American hospital” because of the preponderance of American professionals. It functioned in a bombed-out but renovated hotel near the city center while a new hospital building was being built—all by permission of the Libyan King Iddriss al Sonousi in his palace in Tobruk. Medical work was welcomed but proselytizing had been strictly forbidden.

Six weeks later the Six-day Arab-Israeli War broke out and the city became chaotic and inflamed with anti-Western sentiment. The apartment building that housed Jerald’s new church as well as some hospital nurses’ apartments were overrun and vandalized by rioters. Americans were ordered to evacuate. Upon returning after spending six weeks in Italy, Jerald was convinced that, being under a mandate from the King of Heaven, they should have stayed at their posts. They belonged with the people they had come to serve.

Jerald and Judy welcomed their first daughter, Jeralyn (December 8, 1967), just shortly before the new sixty bed hospital in Benghazi opened early in the new year (1968). Within that year, according to their philosophy of mission, Jerald went house hunting. In January 1969 they moved from the villa provided by the hospital (with only American neighbors) to rural Gwarsha where they lived among the simple, grass roots people of Libya. Although their Americanness seemed even more prominent and suspect, they felt that it was the right move. Their warm, generous neighbors, indeed, rejoiced with them when they brought home their second baby girl, Lavelle (April 7, 1969).

In addition to his pastoral responsibilities, Jerald was the Health Educator and Hospital Chaplain. Together with his colleague Nadie Kolta (from Egypt) he strategized to open health clubs around Benghazi.

Only a year and a half after the new hospital opened with great pageantry, however, a bloodless coup sent the old King into exile. Maamar Gdaffi set up a socialist state, and affairs spiraled downward. Jerald fought to maintain a Seventh-day Adventist presence in Libya, but in March 1970, it all came to an end. The day that the plane carrying the Whitehouses and the Koltas lifted off from Benghazi Interational Airport also marked the formal end of Adventist work in the country.

Tragic as their Libyan experience appeared to be at the time, unquestionably it set Jerald on a trajectory of caring deeply for Middle Eastern people. Naturally, he wondered what, if anything, he might have done differently. Had the mission been too much of an imposition of Western culture? How
might the gospel have been “customized” for the Libyan people? These were
the questions that would challenge him even until today.

Lebanon

When Jerald and Judy returned from furlough they hoped for another
full term in the Middle East. While awaiting their next assignment they
lived once more in the guesthouse in Beirut and Jerald worked with Pastor
Towfic Issa in his village of Zahle. With that godly man Jerald learned that
witnessing could be truly open, not contrived or stressed, and he came to
understand that God actually leads his witnesses to the seekers.

The Whitehouses moved next to the idyllic mountain village of Bekfaya,
the peach capital of Lebanon, where they were the only Americans in town.
There Judy gave birth to their third daughter, Yvette (May 14, 1972), and at
the same time, learned kitchen Arabic from her neighbors.

Jerald began to seriously study Arabic for his work as Health and
Temperance Secretary for the Eastern Mediterranean Field required him
to travel not just in Lebanon but also in Syria and Jordan. In 1973 he was
ordained to the gospel ministry with Bob Darnell preaching at that service.
Jerald had long admired Darnell’s quiet scholarship and deep spirituality.
Indeed, Darnell was a man far ahead of his time in his insights into conveying
the gospel to the Muslim world.

An American Interlude

In June 1973 the Whitehouses returned to Loma Linda where Jerald
enrolled in the doctoral program in Public Health with an emphasis on
preventive care. He had become convinced that health would be a redemptive
commonality with the Muslim populations, so to that end, he returned to
graduate study.

Without financial sponsorship, the family had to live austerely. One
Christmas Jeralyn wanted to take a nice gift to her teacher so her Mom gave
her a jar of almonds. In tears, she cried, “When are we going to stop being
poor?”

Jerald graduated in June of 1976 but prospects of returning to the Middle
East seemed remote so he went to work in the Department of Preventive
care in the Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Fontana. He even considered
studying medicine to increase his usefulness, but because of his advanced age
(thirty-three), he was refused admission by Loma Linda University’s School
of Medicine. Therefore, he took the eighteen-month degree to become a Physician’s Assistant.

He and Judy agreed that if they did not receive a call back to the Middle East by October 1, 1979, they would have to find a job in the States in order to survive financially. The road was getting rather bumpy but finally Jerald lined up a job in Milton-Freewater in Oregon, but licensure delayed the move.

Just in time an inquiry came from the General Conference: “Whitehouse, would you go to Sudan to head the new work just opening up there?” Thus a new trajectory was set. Jerald and Judy terminated their employment, attended the Institute of World Missions at Andrews University, and six weeks later hurried back to California to pack, visit family, and sell their house. They even ordered a Toyota Land Cruiser with Sudan specifications to be delivered in Africa. But weeks stretched into months of delay due to the real estate slump and their inability to sell their house.

Finally, with an apparent buyer lined up, Jerald left to attend the Interdenominational Frontier Mission Conference in Edinburgh (October 23, 1980) and to spend a month at the School of Tropical Medicine in Liverpool. Judy stayed behind to sign the escrow papers. Unfortunately the house did not sell. She encouraged Jerald to go on alone to Sudan. He reached Khartoum in December 1980 and stood by the banks of the Nile River as he prayed for the Good News to also reach the north of Sudan since the first church initiative would be in the Southern Regional capital of Juba and not in the (majority) Arab North.

Jerald’s departure began a six-month separation for the family during which time Judy’s father died and she had to face that loss alone. Neither she nor Jerald, however, were about to give up on the Sudan project. Finally, she leased the unsold house and flew to Nairobi with their three daughters in April 1981. Jerald met them there with the Land Cruiser. He looked deeply tanned, happy, and excited about the potential in Sudan. Together the reunited family drove (or winched as necessary) over the more than 800 miles of bush roads to their new home in Juba through gorgeous “Big Sky Country.”

The five Sudan years became the “core experience” for the whole family. Every prior experience and skill was formative, yet nothing could have prepared them for life in that big city built almost exclusively of mud and thatch huts. With the clinic overflowing with patients, the call for a permanent physician remained unfilled. To add to the stress the mission facilities had to be built and government relations (mostly far to the north
in Khartoum) demanded attention. In the fall of 1984 Jerald was able to negotiate an agreement allowing ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) to work nationwide, but facing all these enormous responsibilities, Jerald told God: “I can’t do it all! But I will treat whoever you place right in front of me.” Thankfully, his loyal clinic staff stood by his side and in the beginning it was his own three children who counted out pills!

Major changes were also occurring in the family. After the family furlough in the summer of 1983 Jeralyn remained in an academy in California. In August 1984, just a few weeks before Lavelle was to join Jeralyn at Weimar, premature twin girls were born at the government hospital in Sudan. When their mother did not survive, their father, Oresto Towe Mulukuat, asked that they be cared for at the clinic so nurses could teach bottle feeding. Generally motherless newborns did not survive in the subsistence economy where malnourishment for even children with breast-feeding mothers was endemic. On August 20, 1984, the father brought the nine-day-old gorgeous babies, each weighing only 4 2/3 pounds to the clinic so that their paternal grandma could be trained as their care giver. Knowing that the clinic could not sustain such vulnerable infants, Judy took them to their own house, and waited until Jerald came home from Khartoum. She knew him well and knew that his love for children was one of the things that made her love him even more.

Two daughters were studying in the United States, but two new ones had arrived. The adolescent world of the Whitehouse girls had been limited in some ways but also hugely expanded by the Sudan years. When their parents felt overwhelmed and discouraged, the girls often became the source of courage. Once they were settled at Weimar Academy the girls never once admitted to the keen homesickness they felt with the separation from their home, and even though Jerald had foreseen this sacrifice that comes with foreign mission service, it hit him as a hard reality when he watched it happen in his own family.

Meanwhile, Judy and Jerald had to keep the clinic going and nurture, among others, the Mulukuat daughters whom they had named Rebecca and Rakilly (the Sudanese name for Rachel). Jerald refused to accept as fact the first message from the American Embassy that said: “You will have to abandon your plan to take the children to the U.S.” In January 1986 he was right for the adoption was finalized and their U.S. citizenship was granted in August 1988.
Reverse Culture Shock

The Whitehouses took their final leave from Juba in September 1985. Rakilly and Rebecca were just thirteen months old. Jerald had been wearing too many hats during the Sudan years and was burnt out. Weimar Institute was a good place to rehabilitate so when Jerald was invited to become Director of the Outpatient Lifestyle Clinic he accepted. He later became the Chair of the Department of Health Ministry at Weimar College. Jerald’s ability to think outside the box helped him adjust from the vastness of the demands in Sudan (the largest country in Africa) to meet the demands of administration on the small Weimar College campus in the foothills of the Sierras. He managed to find common ground, however, with Weimar’s strong belief in outreach and even added an international flavor as his students started work among the Mung refugees in Sacramento.

In time Jerald’s health improved, but his chronic love for other cultures never left him. Therefore, he notified the General Conference in the spring of 1988 that he could consider another overseas assignment. His only stipulation was that the family be sent to a place that could support international telecommunication in order to strengthen the quality of the parenting he and Judy could have with their America-bound daughters.

First came a call to Niger, offering even more remoteness and isolation than the family had experiences in Sudan. Then, in February 1988, an invitation came directly from the Middle East Union to return to the Middle East as the Director of ADRA. This call resonated well with Jerald’s experience and language skills, to say nothing of his dreams.

Once more, he and Judy began the mental preparation to return overseas, and although they waited in excited suspense, the call was never passed on through the General Conference. The excitement quelled, disappointment and frustration ensued. But they were too busy to mope as they helped Jeralyn prepare for her wedding—a joyous occasion on June 5, 1988 when she became the bride of Robert Brossfield.

Bangladesh

Three days after the wedding, a formal request came from the Far Eastern Division (FED) headquartered in Singapore. “We need you as ADRA Director in Bangladesh. You need to arrive in Singapore not later than August 1.” Suddenly action escalated to a break-neck pace. Jerald quickly got help to build a garage to store their things—before he went to Haiti to do an ADRA evaluation as promised. Robert & Jeralyn headed to Andrews
to conclude their education. Lavelle, newly graduated from academy, elected to remain at Weimar College. Yvette decided to attend Far Eastern Academy in Singapore, while Jerald, Judy, and the twins went to Bangladesh. After landing at the Dhaka Airport, they made their tortuous way to the gated compound of the Bangladesh Adventist Union Mission.

Their flight just happened to be the very last flight before the airport closed. The Whitehouses had arrived in the sprawling, inundated capital just in time for the “Flood of the Century.” Public health issues were paramount, so immediately Jerald led his staff into the mayhem of dealing with the flood disaster. Although they had been without a director for some time, the workers immediately fell to the tasks of delivering potable water to flood victims and dealing with all the vast amount of human pain, hunger, and hopelessness that enveloped the country.

Bangladeshi floods come and go so eventually Jerald was able to move on to longer-term enterprises, such as well-drilling, sanitation management, and women’s projects. Because ADRA projects granted some dignity to the people, Jerald believed that these activities, in themselves, portrayed the gospel.

Meanwhile, he kept urging his prime concern: how to make the gospel relevant to Muslim people, in *this* time and *this* place. Endless ideas swarmed through his mind as he realized that very few of his experiences in the Middle East applied in Bangladesh. Sadly, after eighty-two years of Adventist Mission in Bangladesh, the gospel had still had very little impact.

Then, nearly halfway through their four-year term Jerald was urged by the Union President to prepare a proposal that could implement his ideas on how to minister to the people. At a committee in Singapore he received an encouraging vote of confidence. Working after hours and on weekends, Jerald became involved in what would be known as CTM (Contextualized Ministry). In fact, the General Conference representative present in Singapore later remarked, “That was a ‘God Thing’ that happened that day in Singapore.” Nonetheless, it led the Whitehouses down a very difficult path.

**Regaining a Foothold Back Home**

In 1992 Jerald and Judy permanently returned to the United States, anxious to be near their two college student daughters, Lavelle and Yvette. The Far Eastern Division offered Jerald the opportunity to continue to work with CTM throughout the FED from his home in the United States. They encouraged him to write to those leading the ministry and travel and consult
with them on a regular basis. Therefore, the family bought a home near Walla Walla College, and the twins entered grade two.

To Jerald’s infinite disappointment, however, the plan for the CTM work throughout the FED collapsed. Unemployed once more, how could he support his large family? Besides, how could his international experience and expertise be utilized in the Walla Walla Valley?

Once again Providence intervened. ADRA International called from the General Conference Headquarters, saying: “We know you’ve just settled down where you are. But would you consider a six-month contract as our new Senior Health Advisor for ADRA? We’re convinced we want you for the long term. We could fly you home every couple of months until you see how we like the situation.”

Jerald accepted, with haste. He flew East on New Year’s Day, 1993. By August the entire family moved to Silver Spring, Maryland and for the first time, Rebecca and Rakilly had a chance to be in school with African-American children.

Jerald’s job included much travel to countries on every continent. In several unentered places, he negotiated with government officials, offering ADRA services. He wrote proposals and kept his finger on the pulse of Adventist Mission worldwide.

Two years later (1995) he was asked to direct the Islamic Study Center, one of five Centers under the General Conference department of Adventist Mission (Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Post-Modern) which was later renamed the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (GCAMR). Jerald’s mandate was to inspire models of gospel outreach among Ishmael’s descendents and to support and nurture the resulting believers. In June 2005, GCAMR was expanded and several families joined the center located in Cyprus. Jerald served as director of GCAMR for fifteen years. He traveled widely doing training, giving seminars, and empowering workers in a variety of approaches in many parts of the world. His was a creative response to new paradigms in cross cultural dialogue. This passion for mission, frontline experience, and a variety of vigorous strategies helped new work take root in a number of countries around the world. Jerald retired in June 2010.

Finally, two short stories that illustrate why mission has value even in the face of hardship and difficulties. Jerald and his friend and mentor Bob Darnell had the opportunity to return to Bangladesh on several occasions. When Jerald interviewed the new believers with the question: “What is different now?” the reply often came, “Oh, now I can sleep at night. I don’t fear the Day of Judgment. Now I have a Mediator.” Among Bob Darnell’s
Last words to Jerald (1996) were these: “Keep working, it is God’s work, His methods. It’s His.”

In September 2009 the Whitehouses were invited to the 30th anniversary celebration of ADRA’s work in Sudan. Jerald and Judy were guests in the very home in Juba that they had vacated twenty-four years earlier. War, suffering, and exile have ravished that land, but the Church has remained. ADRA today employs 538 workers in South Sudan and more than 200 in the North. Obviously, God’s Spirit has been working gloriously. And the leaders of both the Sudanese church and ADRA today are those very young people Jerald and Judy knew decades ago. As Jerald would say, “Behold the Kingdom of God is among you! Ilhamdillallah!”

Epilogue: A Survey of Jerald Whitehouse’s Mission Philosophy

You will learn to know yourself.

Inevitably, foreign mission service reveals one’s own prejudices and motives, to say nothing of ego problems. While at Weimar, the Whitehouses expressed their excitement about their recent experiences in Sudan to a visiting church administrator. He commented, “Well, all of that time in Sudan will look good on your resume.” Passion for mission made that remark intolerable, and Jerald and Judy both thought: “Is that what we worked for in Juba?” Our resume? Merely a resume? A much higher reward was from the faithful clinic worker who said as they were leaving Sudan, “You have taught us how to love.” God himself had done such a work, of teaching people to love, while the Whitehouses well knew their own limitations, struggles, and human weaknesses. But it was nonetheless a sincere compliment, perhaps the highest ever received.

Never mind who gets the credit.

One day, Jerald was shocked to read an article in the Adventist Review about new developments in the work in Sudan. He could find no reference to his own pioneer work in Juba. “I guess we weren’t there at all,” he told Judy. “It must all have been a dream.” At first indignant, he realized that this oversight was a good lesson. “We needed to understand why we invested our hearts, souls, and financial resources in Sudan.” Rewards much higher than recognition in a journal article remain.
The gospel is best heard through complete cultural identity.

The missionary should not just import a list of doctrines appropriate in one’s home culture. Rather, each missionary is sent to provide a fountain of hope. Jerald has believed, profoundly, that “our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy.” Jerald believes that if we fail here “we may find ourselves treading on men’s dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival” (John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision*, page 10).

Sometimes you can’t focus on the “Gospel of Vegetarianism.”

The Whitehouses knew from their MCH (Maternal Child Health) program that Sudanese children often did not get enough food—of any kind. Again, what then, if your mother-in-law lives with you and wants chicken? Reason and flexibility are always in order.

Special social questions will arise.

What is a converted polygamist, who might be either Muslim or Christian, to do with his “extra” wives? How should one counsel a husband having problems paying off the dowry? Is there a way to accommodate tribal customs? What, in fact, should an *Adventist* wedding look like? As the national churches around the world mature, God’s Spirit will HIMSELF direct the cultural applications of the gospel in those places.

Fear and ignorance will challenge you.

One must, for instance, deal with cultural practices that seem utterly contrary to common sense. For example, in South Sudan children suffer because their canine teeth are deemed “false” and the source of illness. Hence they are removed—often by barbarous means. Sometimes even from newborn infants. The results are horrific. Ignorance plays with people’s minds and makes them gullible. Fear of the spirits and witchcraft often prevail even among the newly baptized. Because Christians are called to serve those who are vulnerable to both demons and men, they must give a gospel of hope.

Be aware that the missionary never stands alone.

Missionaries take up their tasks by means of commitment, make ongoing choices, and are impacted by missionaries of a prior generation. Theirs is never, however, a solo effort. They are sustained by a strong support system that is marked by countless selfless acts of kindness, large and small,
by people who pray and send funds, by volunteer teachers who educate their children so that the parents can stay in the field. God uses all kinds of human hands, even in their brokenness, to honor him.

Above all there are the families who have endured long and sometimes final separations. Even as their parents declined in health, both Jerald and Judy could do nothing but admire their spirit of sacrifice. As the Whitehouses prepared to leave for Sudan (1979) Jerald’s frail mother wrote: “We’ve been thinking and crying, but we will go along with your decision. . . . We had been looking forward to your being closer and a bit of moral support for Dad, but we have been grateful that you have been closer these past few years. . . . So, much as we’d wanted you, you do what you think best.” On the occasion of Judy’s mother’s last Christmas (1978) when her cancer had returned, the Whitehouses were pondering a mission call. Judy faced the wrench of separation. Mom simply stated: “Now Judy! We believe in the resurrection. We’ll get together soon enough. You go!”

*Not all advice is necessarily valid.*

A seasoned missionary from the Middle East gave Jerald two pieces of advice early on. Both of them implied a “me-first” attitude that was utterly foreign to Jerald. In order to maintain his integrity Jerald broke both suggestions. That advice was to first of all, “Never apologize to a local person where you work because you will lose their respect.” Representing the Benghazi Adventist Hospital, Jerald once crossed the desert to supervise the setting up of a booth at the International Trade Fair in Tripoli. He observed that one of the Arab nurses was doing nothing, essentially filling an ornamental role amid the urgent and heavy construction work. Always focused on the job, Jerald roundly and publicly rebuked the man. Immediately, he knew he had overstepped his authority. He apologized. From that day forward he realized that one’s character is always measured by the way one treats one’s co-workers—even one’s enemies!

Second, Jerald was advised that “if you have a road accident, especially if someone is injured, run for your life.” During their time in Bekfaya, Lebanon, the Whitehouses realized that because they essentially “lived in a fish bowl,” for them transparency was a must. One night as they were driving out of the village someone stepped right into their path. Jerald slammed on the brakes. The brakes locked, the car went into a skid and knocked an elderly man down. Instantly, a crowd gathered. Quietly, Judy and the children walked home. With the help of bystanders, Jerald got the man into the car and took him to the hospital. After surgery for a broken femur, the patient received
several visits from Jerald. How could a missionary do otherwise or even think of leaving someone on the side of the street like road-kill? Jerald was far too conscious of his position as an emissary of heaven to consider such an alternative.

**Young people must be empowered to flourish within their own culture.**

One of Jerald’s own daughters concluded that “Dad has ‘fathered children’ all over this world!” and has helped young people realize that God speaks to all people through their culture.

**Consider the distance between existing Adventists and Muslim-majority communities.**

Jerald has ached for a bridge of congeniality that would connect Adventists and Muslim peoples. The coming of Adventism to a community must not be by attack, by demeaning, or outrage, or shaming. Rather the gospel must come by the methods exhibited in the Lord’s own ministry. One MBB (Muslim background believer) student told Jerald, “Thank you for teaching me to love my own people.”

**Examine your building priorities.**

Jerald’s dad always said: “Don’t use a bigger hammer. Get a better wrench.” Jerald learned to use appropriate tools, strategic to good workmanship in either the woods or the world during these end times. The strategic thinking Jerald learned in his doctoral studies—although intended for global health—applies to global ministry. His work has been about building the Kingdom of God, person by person, with tools culturally unique to the hearers. Institutions are only secondary.

**Jerald’s Sayings**

The authenticity of one’s alignment with a God of grace is exhibited by how gracious is one’s witness.

There is conflict between the institutions of Christendom and Islam. The conflict need not be between believers in the same Creator and Incarnational God.

The gospel has no closed countries. Doors may be closed to American foreign policy, but not to the gospel.
It is unethical to compare the best of Christianity with the worst of Islam.

Humans, we and they, have an argument need. It is a useless exercise. “No one ever converted to Christianity because they lost an argument” (Phillip Yancey).

The gospel is about refuting the devil’s accusations to undermine the character of God, and secondly about saving the lost. If (God forbid) one of us should look up from the lake of fire to see the face of God, it would be the kindest face (Thank you Jack Provonsha).

Mission witness is a two way street. Missionaries must have humility to learn the spiritual lessons in other’s heritage and worldview. Witnesses must reveal their deep spirituality to the recipient culture in practices perceived as godly in those cultures (such as dress, lifestyle, and integrity). In that kind of process missionaries themselves becomes enriched and changed in positive ways.

We, like the recipients of our witness, stand in need of the same indispensable grace.

To name the name of Jesus is to introduce a peace offering, slain, not a battle cry!

It’s important to know, in cosmic terms, who we are, who they are, and what we have to offer.

The kind of a God we worship will be reflected in the winsomeness or lack of it in our witness.

God has given the Qur’an as a bridge to the Bible for the peoples of the East. The Qur’an is not complete truth, but a bridge. This is much like Ellen White’s description of Jesus’ teaching—accessing people “by the pathway of their most familiar associations” (Ministry of Healing, page 23).

To call oneself a Christian in the non-Christian world is to say: (1) I am hedonistic like in the Hollywood movies, (2) I eat pork, (3) I don’t practice polygamy, but I practice serial polygamy, and (4) I’m part of the Western conspiracy to destroy Islam. To say “I am a believer, a follower of Jesus
Christ’ conveys a completely different message.

To minister in Jesus’ name is to do the work he did, relieving oppression, healing, and accepting broken people (ADRA).

“He knoweth the way that we take, and when He has tried us, we [his global people] shall come forth as gold!” (Job 23:12).

“And the earth will be filled with a knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14).
Introduction

Sharing the biblical portrait of Jesus Christ with Muslims has been a formidable challenge and the cause of much debate. One particular approach has created a lot of controversy that in the professional literature is called a C-5 movement (Travis 1998a:407-408). The Seventh-day Adventist Church has also been involved in this type of experiment and Jerald Whitehouse (from now on called Jerald) has been its initiator (personal communication, June 30, 1998) although he would hasten to say that he stood on the shoulders of his mentors who empowered him with a vision for such a ministry. In November of 1989 Jerald submitted a proposal to the far Eastern Division (FED) committee, asking for permission to start a new type of work among Muslims.

In 1998, after the contextualized ministry had been in existence for nearly ten years, I had the opportunity to evaluate this mission experiment for my PhD dissertation and came to a favorable conclusion (Lepke 2001). In it I called the experiment the “R-Movement” and the country “Islamex” out of obvious security concerns, and because of the same concerns my dissertation was never published.
In this work I offer a description of Jerald’s life up to 2000, for I believe it is very important for an understanding of the R-Movement and how the idea and concepts for it took shape. Jerald was the mastermind behind the experiment, and it was he who put to work the main concepts gained through his years of experience in Muslim relations and through the input of ideas and experiences that other people had shared with him. Without Jerald, such an experiment as the R-movement may never have been conducted in Islamex. Therefore, looking at his life is important in order to understand why Jerald was able to achieve this type of breakthrough. What follows is largely drawn from the contents from my dissertation (Lepke 2001:65-83), but I have removed some pseudonyms to give due respect to Jerald and some of his mentors.

**Aiming for the Mission Field**

Jerald was born into a rural lower middle-class, White, Protestant, Adventist working family. As the second of two sons of a father who had worked as a day laborer logging in the forests of Washington state, he grew up very simply in a moderately confined and parochial environment.

**Education**

Attending church schools throughout all of his formal education years, Jerald was socialized in a traditional Adventist environment that quite naturally led to his baptism at the age of ten. Even as a boy, although never leaving the area until college, he showed some interest in becoming a missionary, without really knowing what that meant.

Later, Jerald majored in theology at Walla Walla College, a Seventh-day Adventist college in the State of Washington. At that time his girlfriend, Judy, went to Loma Linda University, an Adventist university in California to study nursing, leading to a long distance relationship (and several visits by Jerald to California) for a year and a half, after which they finally got engaged. Jerald received his degree in 1965 and the couple was married shortly after his graduation. One of the things that helped bring Jerald and Judy together was their common vision for foreign mission service.

Jerald realized that being a pastor was not sufficient to qualify for a profession in international missions so he became interested in doing graduate work in health education. He was convinced about Ellen White’s admonitions regarding the cooperation between the gospel and health.
It was this same concern that had triggered his unusual second minor, zoology—besides biblical languages—that he used to accommodate the science prerequisites for the master’s degree in health education. So it was that Jerald went to Loma Linda for his graduate studies while Judy was finishing her nursing degree there.

**Spiritual Development**

Although Jerald grew up within the Adventist culture and religion with an early interest in mission work, his spiritual life was not always easy for he struggled to internalize his faith during his academy and college years.

“I was a theology major. But it wasn’t easy for me to be genuine and comfortable with religious things. And that is maybe the product of growing up in a home that did not talk a lot about personal things. There were the normal religious things. Dad read worship every morning and evening, that kind of thing. [There] was not any discussion about what it does in my life. So I had to learn that more as I was growing up later” (personal communication, June 30, 1998).

During Jerald’s time at Loma Linda University he not only acquired practical knowledge, but he also found people there who helped him in his spiritual development. One of those was Dr. Jack Provonsha, but the main direction for his spiritual life he gained from Dr. Graham Maxwell, both Seventh-day Adventist theologians and authors.

“I guess Maxwell probably had quite a significant influence on my personal and spiritual development at that point. His understanding of the Great Controversy and the issues in the Great Controversy and that the main issue being over God’s character and the government of God gave me a new window, not only in theology but also in my personal relationship with God” (personal communication, June 30, 1998).

It happened that the whole environment at the School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine was quite conducive to the mission interest of Jerald. All professors there had to have international mission experience, and Jerald even took a class in cultural anthropology that helped him throughout his international ministry.

**Getting to the Mission Field**

Jerald and Judy are still amazed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church even accepted their application for mission service, considering their young
age and lack of experience. “Well, I’ve often said that if we had been in a position of responsibility, we ask ourselves, if we would have taken the risk on this young couple or not. And we probably would not have... We were as green as can be” (personal communication, June 30, 1998).

The call into the mission field came because of a great urgency in the Adventist Hospital in Benghazi, Libya. They needed a chaplain who could also do health education. Jerald was trained for exactly this combination. Also Judy’s nursing degree made them the ideal couple for the needs in Libya.

The airplane carrying them into mission service left on August 4, 1966. Before going to Libya, though, they spent three months in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, where Jerald did his clerkship in health education in a health education training program for Tanzanian pastors, after which their ministry in the Middle East officially began.

Libya (1967-1970)

The experience in Libya was the beginning of changing paradigms regarding Jerald’s outlook on reaching Muslims. That does not mean that reaching Muslims became his primary activity, but foundations were laid that enabled him to accept new ideas, to come up with new ideas, and to try them out.

Cultural Insights

One of the first things Jerald learned was the high value and emphasis that Muslims and peoples in Mediterranean cultures put on shame and honor. His associate, an Egyptian young man, wanted to marry another Egyptian young woman who worked as a nurse in the hospital. After the elaborate engagement, the head of the young man’s family from Egypt objected to the planned union because the woman was an orphan, without any family. In addition, her profession was seen in the Egyptian context as ranking next to that of a prostitute. Such a marriage could not bring honor to the family. The young man was threatened to be excluded from the family if he would go on with the wedding. At that time Jerald could only think in terms of how awful such an attitude was. So the couple proceeded with the wedding. As a result, all communication was cut off with the young man’s family and reconciliation never really took place. This was not even something that happened in a Muslim family for the head of the young man’s family was a high official in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in that region.
Meeting His Mentor

While Jerald and Judy waited in Lebanon in December 1966 for four and a half months for their visas so they could proceed to Libya, Jerald met Dr. Robert Darnell for the first time. Darnell was the man who became his main mentor regarding Muslim relations and who was then the field secretary of the Middle Eastern Division. Darnell had been sent to do doctoral studies in anthropology with an emphasis on Islam and was therefore the best educated authority in that field in the Adventist Church. The basic concepts and ideas that were utilized in the R-movement had their origin in Lebanon twenty years before the ministry started.

Later, while the Whitehouses were in Libya, Jerald was assigned to attend one of Darnell’s seminars in Beirut, where he was determined to gain as much knowledge and as many ideas as possible from Darnell.

That seminar was probably the turning point in really heading me in a direction as far as Islamic work and relating to Muslim peoples. . . . I was a young missionary and I had the concepts from my own graduate study of cross-cultural work, learning about people, getting inside the people's minds, understanding their culture from the inside as much as possible in order to establish relationships and have any impact in their lives. And so what Bob Darnell was saying fit in perfectly. It was just a carry on from the basic foundation that I had. That was really what gave me that direction and the impetus on Muslim work right from that time. (personal communication, June 30, 1998)

This does not mean that Jerald all of a sudden became a specialist with many ideas ready to put into practice. His understanding grew over time. Jerald picked up the idea of enabling Muslims to make the right decision in an end-time scenario from Darnell. The idea was to present the polarizing view from Seventh-day Adventist eschatology where apostate religio-political powers will form a block that will fight against the true people of God. Understanding these issues from a Muslim perspective in their full scope would be difficult. Nevertheless, Jerald and others felt that there may be an opportunity to help prepare Muslims for these final events so that they would be able to recognize the group that follows the truth and make an appropriate decision when that time comes.
Trying to Make an Impact

Jerald used that concept when, in 1969, the hospital in Libya was nationalized. Most of the expatriate workers had to leave Libya, leaving only Jerald and his Egyptian associate behind. Nevertheless, in a very short time he and Judy had to leave too, with the Adventist work in Libya being closed. Adventists are still not allowed in the country at the present time (2010).

The question for Jerald was: What could he accomplish in terms of preparing Muslim people for the coming of Christ with only a few months left in the country? He did not have all the understanding he had many years later, but it was at that point that he did his first contextualized outreach to Muslims. Jerald realized that many of the Libyan workers and their families had never been visited by an Adventist person before. Only two Seventh-day Adventist families had been engaged in establishing relationships with some of the Libyan workers besides Jerald and his family. Therefore Jerald tried to make up for this negligence as best as he could.

However, it should also be noted that the hospital had permission to exist only after signing an agreement not to proselytize for new believers. It would have been morally wrong to go against the agreement with King Iddris and to disregard that agreement would have threatened the very existence of the hospital by appearing to proselytize. In retrospect, the hospital workers certainly could have focused more on relationship building with the Libyan people. When the Whitehouses came to Benghazi the hospital had been in operation for ten years and there had been many relationships of various levels prior to Whitehouse's arrival. Part of the problem was that there was no defined strategy on how to work in a restrictive part of the world. For example, there was no plan for mingling with the Libyans except for work relationships. This was illustrated by the fact that hospital-provided housing was based on socio-economic status that excluded all but the wealthiest Libyans. Recognizing this disconnect with local people, Jerald found housing for his family outside of the city among the indigenous people, but only ten months prior to the hospital’s nationalization. The abrupt and bleak finality of the hospital's nationalization shocked the missionaries into recognizing the eternal implications for people they had worked with one on one. Notice Jerald's reaction to the situation:

So I decided that I would make sure that I visited every hospital worker, every Libyan that had worked in the Adventist Hospital, at least one time before I would leave. There were quite a few. It wasn't like that I could do that in a day or two. It took several weeks to do this. I prepared a little booklet
called “Your Friends the Adventists,” after the style that had been printed in English about that time, but in a Muslim way, from what I understood at that time, describing Adventists as a faithful people, as godly people, as having godly lifestyles, healthier lifestyles and so forth. I put it together in a way that would be appealing to the Muslims, and that we look forward to the end of time and the Day of Judgment. What I’ve been forced to think about was, what is the basic information that I would like them to know, so that when the issues become clear, they can make an informed choice between right and wrong? . . . It forced me to, sort of, filter out what is kind of peripheral and what is core? What do I think is most important that these people know, initially at this point? What is possible for them to understand? I mean, I may think that something is most important, but it may be too advanced for them to even grasp or understand, so this would be worthless also. So I was forced to do two things. First of all, I, sort of, asked what is most important in Adventism from our viewpoint and secondly, is it possible that Muslim people that I am going to give this to, could accept and grasp and understand and sort of plug in to their spiritual experience. I think that was a valuable exercise, because it forced me to begin to think in terms of a progression. Here is where the Muslim is, and here is the next step that I think the Muslim could understand and accept. So we prepared that little booklet, and my associate translated it into Arabic and we got it printed. (personal communication, June 30, 1998)

Jerald had had 200 copies already printed when he received notice that this material had to pass the government censor. Anticipating that it would not pass, he returned the booklets while keeping some copies for himself, realizing that they would not count them. After receiving the denial notice from the censor, he was at least able to share the few copies left with some of the hospital workers. He was able to visit all of them before he had to leave the country. This experience again molded his thinking and his direction. Finally, in March of 1970 Jerald and Judy left Libya for Lebanon.

**Lebanon (1970-1973)**

When it became clear to Jerald that the family had to leave Libya, the next question was where to go. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Middle East was preparing to do pioneering work in new villages in Lebanon. That was a very interesting concept for Jerald and was exactly what he wanted to do. So he requested to be assigned to that ministry.
Assignment Struggle

However, when he and Judy arrived in Lebanon, no one talked to them about doing pioneering work in new villages. The church was proposing different assignments for them. One was to become a pastor to an expatriate group in Kuwait, while another was to go to Iran. Jerald, on the other hand, had started to learn Arabic in Libya, and one of his main objectives was to achieve a conversational ability in that language. So the prospect of either ministering to expatriates or entering a different language environment in Iran was not very exciting for him. Jerald approached the division leadership of the church and questioned them about the idea of pioneering work in unentered areas in Lebanon. It turned out that the church was hesitant to put this young couple into an “impossible” situation, but Jerald successfully convinced them to let them at least try. So they worked for three years in Lebanon, living in a village up in the mountains where Jerald also learned Arabic.

Learning Arabic

Although Jerald’s interest to work among Muslims had been sparked by Darnell, the church ended up sending him to a Christian area in Lebanon where mainly Maronite Catholics and Eastern Orthodox people lived. The church did not think it safe enough to send him and Judy into a Muslim environment. However, they were happy with where they were sent and with being able to learn the language. Arabic, then, was not so much a means to study the Qur’an as it was a means to communicate the gospel with whomever he met. This was the main contribution he gained from his ministry in Lebanon. Working with Muslims was not the emphasis, but neither was it totally neglected.

We weren’t able to do too much with the Muslim interest, . . . but it was during that time that Bob Darnell set up what was called the team, T-E-A-M, that stood for Thrust for Evangelism Among Muslims. I would never use that name today, but that’s what they chose. They had about five people, [including] Ken Oster . . . . that they brought into the Union office there in Beirut. They set them up in the basement of the Union office with an area to work and with a commission to prepare materials and experiment with outreach and work with Muslims. So I interacted with that group, sort of informally on the side quite a bit. I would go and talk with them and I was aware of what they were doing, just that kept my interest alive. And eventually I did a little bit of work
with them in the area of health, like doing some of the health lectures and anti-smoking programs, the smoking cessation programs and so forth. (personal communication, June 30, 1998)

Out of the Mission Field

While doing health education work in Lebanon, Jerald realized that he needed more study in his field so he requested a return to the United States to pursue a doctorate in Public Health. He would not return to the mission field for seven years.

Doctoral Studies (1973-1977)

At the point when Jerald started his doctoral studies, the details of effectively relating to Muslims still had not been fully developed. “I knew that we needed to do something, that our initial relationships with a Muslim needed to be through felt needs, through understanding the Muslim mind, through an understanding of the Qur’an as much as possible, and through finding common beliefs and so forth, but it was still a bit hazy at that point” (personal communication, June 30, 1998).

Jerald knew the general direction he had to go, and therefore doing more graduate study in health science to use as an entry point seemed necessary for him. He had done many five-day stop smoking plans and he had even developed some follow-up health studies that could lead to spiritual discussions. Thus, he had tried some things to bridge health work with spiritual topics, but a full understanding of the various dynamics that needed to be considered was not worked out yet.

Most of his doctoral work was finished by 1976, and he received his degree in 1977 after which Jerald worked in a hospital in Fontana, California, close to Loma Linda.

Period of Transition (1977-1980)

The desire was certainly there for the family to return to the Middle East, but certain obstacles delayed this move and nearly jeopardized any further assignments to the mission field.
Setbacks

Several circumstances existed that had adverse effects toward a quick return to Muslim areas. First, after finishing the doctoral degree a call came from the church to become the dean of men at Middle East College in Beirut. Jerald did not feel that he was called to be a dean of men at a place that he felt would be an unsupportive environment for his ideas. Second, when another inquiry soon followed from Darnell who had become the president of the Middle East Union asking the family to go to Bahrain to establish Seventh-day Adventist work there, the timing did not seem right. Refusing this call was hard for Jerald, but family reasons prevented them from accepting it. In addition, he felt that he needed more training in acute medicine (as a physician’s assistant) to supplement his training in preventive medicine. After finishing that fifteen month program, Jerald and Judy were ready to move again into the Middle East, if a third obstacle had not happened.

Darnell was back in America by then. The Middle East Union was still withering through the difficult years there in Beirut. They were under a different Division by then and [Tom Smith (pseudonym)] who was the treasurer of the Middle East Union wrote back saying, they didn’t have any openings for us. We had refused two calls previous, and in fact I got a letter from Elder [Holmes (pseudonym)], the Division President, which was quite disconcerting actually, that basically said, we won’t even think of you coming back to the Middle East. You refused two calls, you disappointed your brethren out here, so forget it. That was the tone of the letter, about that strong. (personal communication, June 30, 1998)

Re-Orientation

This was somewhat discouraging for Jerald and Judy, and they turned their minds and actions to a different pursuit. Again the starting point was to put together a health and gospel ministry. Jerald wanted to do preventive medicine in a clinical setting. He thought that adding a spiritual framework would have a great potential for the Adventist Church in North America so he found an Adventist physician in Oregon who was willing to combine their work of preventive and acute medicine. Eventually a contract was drawn up, but Jerald could not sign it until he obtained his Oregon license as a physician’s assistant. Since the required examination would not be offered until three months later, the Whitehouses decided they should remain in California where they had a home and Judy had a job until things were
The Story of Jerald Whitehouse

finalized. The physician was willing to wait and Jerald and his family were ready to move to Oregon.

Back into the Mission Field

However, this waiting period was providential, according to Jerald, because one morning the phone rang. He was asked to go to Sudan to establish an outpatient clinic and become the director of the Adventist work there, which had not yet been organized. This time the couple was ready and it was clear to Jerald that he could not refuse this call. He quickly settled things with the physician in Oregon, and Jerald and his wife moved back into a majority Muslim country even though they lived in the southern region that was largely animistic and Christian. The family spent the next five years in Sudan.

Sudan (1980-1985)

Despite being occupied for the first year with just setting up the operation in Sudan—developing the health and church work, a strategy, and a plan—Jerald was not interested in simply setting up church institutions. How to establish relationships with Muslims was always on his mind. Although they had been sent into a Christian environment in the south of Sudan, he tried to find a way to balance the Seventh-day Adventist work so that it also included the Muslim north of the country. Jerald overcame conflicting predispositions held by the regional government in the south and the central government in the north, leading to a contract with the central government that legalized the Seventh-day Adventist operations throughout the country. This was possible only after a Seventh-day Adventist who worked for USAID in the capital city suggested that Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) should take over the work of the Catholic Relief Agency that had to leave the country.

Challenged by a Non-Strategy

These preliminary activities had taken a few years to develop. When the new staff arrived to work for ADRA, Jerald wanted to give a seminar to the new people to prepare them for work within Muslim areas. The Union President and Kenneth Oster, who had worked in Iran at that time, were invited to give presentations together with Jerald. The Union President was
given the topic of how ADRA work would fit into the Union's strategic plan for working with Muslims. The president had to admit that no plan had yet been set up. So the three presenters talked it over because such a presentation needed to be given. This was really Jerald's purpose in asking how ADRA fit into the strategy. The Union President wanted to know what Jerald thought was needed to set up some work for Muslims. Jerald made just one point that he had picked up earlier from Darnell, who had already suggested it in the 1960s. He suggested that a coordinating center for Muslim work in the Middle East be set up. Jerald was hoping that he could direct such a center, but nothing was established at that point. Later, however, the idea was picked up by the General Conference, but they wanted such a center to become a global center. This dream became a reality in 1988, but not with Jerald as its director. Jerald was happy to see it happen in 1988 but he was frustrated and discouraged by the obstacles that took so long to overcome. Jerald had ideas but had not had an opportunity to try them out yet.

Searching for Steps

In fact, during his years in Sudan, Jerald developed a step approach to Muslims whereby establishing good relationships would be the basis for spiritual discussions. Although the Middle East Union President was impressed by it, nothing materialized from this plan. Jerald later realized that he needed to have his later experience in Islamex where he was able to try out these new approaches to be better able to direct the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (GCAMR) that he was asked to direct from 1995 to 2009. As Jerald looks back on these developments he felt they were being designed by God.

Out of the Mission Field Again

Because of family considerations, Jerald and his family returned to the United States because two of their daughters were studying at the academy level back in the United States while their parents were still in Sudan. In Jerald’s eyes, God’s design does not always mean that everything goes smoothly. In fact, sometimes even church administrative actions can become a stumbling block for one’s faith and commitment.
Weimar, California (1986-1989)

Soon after returning from Sudan, Jerald began teaching health ministry at a self-supporting Adventist college at Weimar, California. The three years that he spent at Weimar served him and his family well for two reasons. First, it was good for the family, with his older girls attending an academy and with his adopted twin girls from Sudan having a good place to grow and develop. Second, it gave the whole family time to recuperate from the very exhausting five years in Sudan.

In Search of a New Assignment

After three years at Weimar they “got itchy feet again,” writing to the Middle East Union that they would be willing to go back to this area, even to Sudan. The Union voted that Jerald should become the Union ADRA director with a base in Cyprus. Jerald was eager to go to the Middle East again and also wanting to improve his Arabic and knowledge of the Middle East.

A Harsh Disappointment

Then something happened that became very hard for Jerald to deal with. He did not get the call. After waiting for three weeks he contacted the Middle East Union again and found out that the General Conference had not passed on the call. Jerald assumed that this was some kind of penalty because of disagreements and misunderstandings over personnel issues at the time when Jerald was in Sudan trying to find qualified people to work there. This situation made him very upset and a bit bitter.

Another reason for not getting the call might have been Jerald’s methodological outlook. From his time in Sudan on he had become convinced that a one-method-fits-all approach is very inadequate. A combination of contextualization and meeting the felt needs of people was what Jerald propagated. It may have been the lack of agreement on this concept by higher church officials that blocked his return to the Middle East. Jerald stated that “some brethren in the General Conference apparently felt that such an emphasis is unnecessary or peripheral to the mission of the church, and the call was blocked” (personal communication to former Director of the Islamic Study Center, October 8, 1989). Later Jerald was not too unhappy about the blocked call because after arriving in Islamex he was
able to interact with people and organizations outside the Adventist Church who were experimenting with contextual approaches for Muslims.

**A New Opportunity**

One Sabbath in May of 1988 during church service in Auburn, California Jerald met a high-ranking ADRA officer from the Far Eastern Division who had come to brief the pastor of that church who would become the new ADRA director in some other country. Jerald talked to this ADRA person and showed interest in working for ADRA again. They met again, and about a week later Jerald received a written call to become the ADRA director of Islamex. At first he had some reservations, because it was not an Arabic speaking country, but at least it got the family back into a Muslim area.

**Working to Establish the R-movement**

It was in Islamex that the R-movement was conceptualized and established. The following paragraphs will show that just arriving in Islamex alone was not going to bring to life such a project. I believe that in order to better understand the processes leading up to this new type of work a broader appreciation is needed for the developments that happened even before Jerald went to Islamex.

**Ideas Take Time**

It is important to remember that when Jerald and his family entered Islamex there was no plan to establish the R-movement. In the years leading up the move to Islamex and also during the first few years there, ideas were being developed. Not only were those ideas important, but also the circumstances in the lives of Jerald and his mentors came together to create a plan at the right time and at the right place. Mentioning some of these developments can help us to better understand what happened in Islamex.

**Mentors**

The two most prominent Adventists in the Muslim work who also functioned as idea resources for Jerald were Robert Darnell, who passed away in 1996, and Kenneth Oster. Darnell especially encouraged Jerald in the use
of the Qur’an as the most successful way to reach Muslims. Both Darnell’s and Oster’s work validated this method, but it was not widely appreciated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church administrators in general or by the Middle East Union in particular. Many felt that using “Satan’s book” would be a compromise.

Ken Oster had some first-hand experience in both the effectiveness of using the Qur’an and the negative reaction from church leaders. When Oster and others had been working on the T-E-A-M effort in the early 1970s the group had started a Sabbath School class for Muslim background people attending Middle East College. The Sabbath School class lessons that they had prepared specifically for Muslim people had resulted in good attendance from among the Muslim students at Middle East College. The class went on for only a few weeks and then it was ordered to be stopped by the division president (personal communication, June 30, 1998).

This is only one example of some of the obstacles faced by those who wanted to approach Muslims in a more appreciative and contextual way.

Organizational Ideas

Besides the ideas and experiences of these men, in Sudan Jerald had a growing conviction that Muslims needed to be approached in a different way than Christians. Some of his experiences in Sudan pushed him toward a certain way of work that probably became the most controversial aspect of the R-movement. He felt that a separate organizational structure that worked underground, but lightly connected to the official Seventh-day Adventist Church structure was probably best (Jerald, personal communication to former Director of the Islamic Study Center, October 8, 1989). This was a line of thinking that was new and had never been tried out by anyone before.

You see, the whole Sudan experience, we were down in there alone. We weren’t directly under the regular church, under the eyes and the nose of the regular church organization. We were so far away. We were an ADRA program. Sure we were under the Middle East Union and I cleared everything with the president and with the Middle East Union Committee. We had a strategic plan and regular reports under the Middle East Union, but still I had to basically come up with that and create that and set the directions and so forth. So, being and doing also ADRA work we kind of operated almost parallel with the church structure. Anyway, we cooperated with the church structure. We kind of ran our own track. So, I suppose, coming through that avenue, really, I was not intimidated by the idea of doing something a little apart or separate. (Jerald, personal communication, June 30, 1998)
A Phone Call from Steve

Another man had an impact on Jerald that encouraged him to experiment with a contextualized ministry in Islamex. In the 1960s, Steve (pseudonym), a native citizen of that country, was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He had been a Muslim before his baptism, but no longer worked for the Adventist Church. Instead he had been employed by World Vision, a non-denominational Christian NGO, and was already involved in a combination of development and contextual ministry to Muslims. Between 1985 and 1986 he attended the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California (Steve, personal communication to CTM Taskforce, April 19, 1990).

While Steve was doing his studies in the U.S., he phoned Jerald who was still teaching at Weimar College. His main purpose was to find out from Jerald if the Seventh-day Adventist Church was in a position to support contextualized ministries. Although Jerald was already very positive about contextualized work, he could not give Steve a positive answer. Jerald thought at that time that the church was not yet ready. He encouraged Steve to continue working on the approach, even with outside organizations, because this was in Jerald’s mind the only way to be effective with Muslims. After hanging up Jerald really did not think again about that phone call.

After Steve’s return to Islamex he started working under the guidance of another Christian organization and became very successful in planting more than 110 contextualized congregations with several thousand Muslim background believers between 1986 and 1989. In 1989 Steve began working again for the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Steve, April 19, 1990).

Islamex (1988-1992)

Relief

When Jerald arrived in Islamex as the new ADRA Director he immediately became involved in a major relief operation because of massive flooding in the country. While he was touring some of the disaster areas somebody on the street took a picture of Jerald and his guide, the Seventh-day Adventist Union president. They had the ADRA logo on their car so the man taking the picture knew who they were. He asked whether the passenger was Jerald. The president answered in the affirmative, and the man told Jerald that he would see him later. It turned out that this was Steve who had heard about Jerald’s arrival in Islamex.
Plans

Over the next year Jerald frequently met Steve and they discussed establishing a contextual Seventh-day Adventist ministry for Muslims. Jerald was, in the beginning, skeptical about the possibilities of implementing such a thing within the Adventist environment, but emphasized to Steve that when the time came, he would be ready to move ahead. Moreover, as the two talked about Steve’s previous experiences in contextual work Jerald added new ideas and possibilities to his plan on how to implement a contextual approach in the country.

The Other Man

It was also about that time that Jerald met Shahjahan (pseudonym), the only Seventh-day Adventist pastor with a Muslim background who later became the leader of the R-movement.

Permanent Return

After leaving Islamex, Jerald continued to work for ADRA International as a senior advisor for health work at the Seventh-day Adventist Church headquarters in Maryland. He also continued to have some contact with the R-movement.

GCAMR (1995-2009)

That contact intensified after he was asked to become the director of the Global Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations in 1995. One of his tasks was to look at the results of the R-movement in Islamex and to find ways to implement this kind of ministry in other Muslim areas of the world. As of 2010 several similar ministries have been established in other Muslim areas of the world.
Works Cited


Introduction

“Let’s kill this white man. He brings the infamy and rotten behavior of the white man with all the evils of the West! Let’s do to him what we did to that other missionary last month,” cried the sheikh in the local dialect. That is when I realized that Jerald was in big trouble. They were going to kill him before my very eyes. I didn’t have time to warn him. I was stuck and didn’t know what to do, but silently I prayed for a miraculous divine intervention. But let me start from the very beginning.

On an island in ocean waters where pirates abound lives a dedicated group of believers in Isa (Jesus). The Island has no police, no vehicles, no hospitals, and no crime. Oh, and by the way, there is no water either. All water is either harvested rain water or ferried by dugout canoes from the mainland bore holes. On the island itself, all the boreholes have only yielded salty water. Hence the 100,000 people on the island depend entirely on Mother Nature to provide water. Another interesting thing about the island is that no outsiders are allowed to stay there. Visitors can come and go as tourists, but cannot live there. Everyone knows everyone on the island and somehow they are all related to each other. The 100 percent Sunni Muslim populace takes pride in their religious heritage and guards it jealously.
A month before Jerald arrived, an American missionary masquerading as a relief and development consultant conducted a survey to determine how to help the island inhabitants. After being cautiously accepted he was relating quite well with the inhabitants until one day he was caught showing the Jesus film on his battery powered lap top. His lap top was confiscated and destroyed, his camera was thrown into the ocean, and then he was beheaded as an example of what would happen to any kaffir (foreigner) coming to spoil the island’s Islamic heritage.

This was all unknown to Jerald as he joined me on a trip to the island to visit the believers there. As soon as the island elders saw him, they asked us to go to one of the Madrasa classrooms. There they discussed how to behead this white man who had the audacity to come to the island. “The nerve of these Christians, don’t they ever learn? This one [Jerald] will die like a filthy pig; for all Americans eat pig, which we all know is haram [unclean food], and they are as filthy as pigs. Look at their language, alcohol, and immorality.” On and on they continued talking in the local dialect. I could only pray and hope for divine intervention.

That was when God instantly answered my prayer. One of the Ustadhs, the Masjid Secretary to the largest mosque on the island, spoke up.

“If this man is sent as a servant of Allah (SWT) to teach us and we murder him, we invite Allah’s wrath on ourselves and our children. Let’s do a proper evaluation before we make any hasty decisions. After all, didn’t Muhammad (ASA) work with non-Muslim believers so long as they worshipped the one true God?”

This made a lot of sense, so all agreed. Turning to me they asked who Jerald was. I boldly declared that Jerald was a servant of Allah with a message to declare to the island’s inhabitants.

To prove the verity of my claims, the wise old patriarch and sheikh of the island picked up an Arabic Qur’an. He thrust it at Jerald and asked me to tell him to share a thought from it. I obliged and told Jerald to share from the Qur’an. Since many understood English (but were speaking in the local dialect) I couldn’t alert Jerald that this sharing was a major test—probably the biggest test he had ever faced. It was a matter of life and death. If he passed the test he would live to tell the story, but if he failed the test he would be beheaded and I would have to convey the news of his death to his dear wife and family, so I kept praying.

Jerald nonchalantly picked up the tattered old Arabic Qur’an. He turned it from side to side. Then he started in English and I translated in the local dialect. The conversation went something like this.
“My fellow believers in Allah—the only one and true God, it is a privilege for me to share from this noble book—God’s word to mankind. But before doing so, I want to castigate you. How can you allow God’s book to be so tattered and ragged with the covers fallen off? Is that how you take care of God’s Book? Do you do the same with your property, let’s say your bank book, your passports, your identity cards, certificates, diplomas, or marriage certificates? If you take good care of your personal property, why not do even better for God’s sacred writings? You should be ashamed of yourselves!”

The people looked at one another in dismay. What was this man saying? He was actually right. I held my breath. What was Jerald doing? Was he insulting his hosts? Was that wisdom or folly? If he only knew that his life was hanging in the balance, but Jerald continued unconcerned with their reaction.

“Let’s turn to sura Al Baqara and ayah 24.” He opened the Qur’an and proceeded to read in perfect Arabic. Then he went on to read several more verses and expound on them. His message was to encourage all of us to be diligent in our faith. He made a clear distinction between being religious and being spiritual. One was a pattern of habit with a lifeless form practiced over time, while the other was a dynamic vibrant life of faith with eternal rewards.

The sheikhs looked around the group. Truly this was a servant of Allah sent to give a critical message to them. Their qur’anic recitations, 5 salats a day, fasting, alms, zakat and all were truly lifeless. Only a dynamic relationship with the living and only true God would be of any use to any of them.

After the homily, Jerald turned to me and asked me to ask them to react to what he had shared. Each one took turns to express appreciation to this stranger that had come to pass God’s tidings to them. They had taken God’s rebuke via his servant Jerald very well. They wanted him to pray for them that they would live up to the standards he had espoused and would live a true life of faith.

Jerald consented. He led them first in reciting Al Fath, the complete first book of the noble Qur’an in Arabic with Jerald taking the lead. He then prayed for them and the island. He particularly prayed that the young people growing up in this wicked generation would not be polluted by the evils espoused by the Western media.

The sheikhs asked if he could return again and speak in the mosque during the holy month of Ramadan? He would come as a guest of the island. Could they slaughter a bull for him to celebrate God’s goodness in sending his servant to warn them? Could he stay over for the night?

The questions came on and on, but unfortunately we had to decline most
of the requests since we needed to get back to the mainland before dark. There is no electricity in that place and the canoes and motor boats had no lights on them. We dared not cross the ocean to the mainland in the darkness in the shark infested waters.

Jerald survived. We made it out on time and arrived back to the coastal city in one piece. Only then did I share with Jerald what had transpired. In Jerald’s modest humility he only thanked the good Lord for continuing to be faithful to him. I learned my lesson, too: “Trust the Lord your God with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths” (Prov 3:5). God had just done that for Jerald, and I knew that God would do the same for me. This incident has always encouraged me when I am faced with the challenges of life, for our God is faithful and totally reliable.

Truly, Allah Aqbar! (God is great).

Postscript: As a result of that incident the work has grown on the island. The man who wanted to lynch Jerald is now the chairman of a group of believers on that island. There are now more than 250 people who believe in Isa. Jerald never had the time to return to see the fruit of his labor. But I have no doubt that in eternity he will meet many from the island and other places who will be in heaven due to his work. I honor Jerald for being used of the Lord to encourage and direct creative ministries in the field.
It was while greeting the members at the back of the sanctuary following the close of my Sabbath morning sermon in Auburn, California, that I first recall meeting Jerald Whitehouse and his family. While Jerald and Judy already had three daughters well on their way to being young adults, what stood out for me were the Sudanese twin infant girls they carried. One was delighted to meet a stranger while the other one seemed absolutely terrified of me. Jerald and Judy had recently returned from serving in southern Sudan.

After a few months of slipping each girl a piece of candy now and then, the relationship improved and we became friends. During those years it was our privilege to serve as Judy and Jerald’s pastor. Also, during that time, the ADRA Director from the old Far Eastern Division (now divided into the South Asia Pacific and North Asia Pacific Divisions) visited our church, recruiting me to serve as ADRA director for Sri Lanka. In our discussions, he mentioned he needed a director for Bangladesh as well and I mentioned that Jerald might be ready for another mission stint. Indeed, Jerald and Judy, along with their twins, arrived in Bangladesh just about the same time we arrived in Sri Lanka.
From those early days, Jerald, in his quiet and gentle manner, modeled walking with God. Jerald emphasized in both his life and teaching that there is no substitute for being serious about one’s walk with God—for one’s own life, but also if someone desires to have any hope of developing meaningful relationships with Muslims. It was Jerald who first shared with me that the very words “Muslim” and “Islam” in their context are all about submission to God.

Not long after our arrival in Sri Lanka, a Muslim man showed up in my office with an interesting request. He wanted to earn his commercial pilot’s license and wanted me to be his private tutor to get him through the ground school course. After some discussion and negotiations on what it would cost him, we agreed on a price. Over the next several months, we met in my office for a one-on-one ground school just for him. He studied hard, made excellent progress, and finally passed the exam.

Two weeks before our last class, he arrived carrying a brown paper-wrapped package. He mentioned that he had brought me a gift. I asked him if I could open it then or should I open it later? He said, “Please open it now.” I carefully opened the package to reveal a beautiful hardbound copy of the Qur’an. His next words were, “I’ve been with you over these many months and have noticed that you are serious about your walk with God. I’ve brought you this Qur’an today as my gift to you. I am certain that if you continue your walk with God as I see you are now, you will become a Muslim.” I sincerely thanked him for his most thoughtful gift and have treasured it to this day. And I suppose, in the most literal sense, I am indeed a Muslim, fully submitting my life to God each day.

It was not long before I had an opportunity to visit Jerald and Judy in Bangladesh. While there our conversations continued, as I had many questions. I wondered about how I should relate to Muslims when they wanted to discuss who Jesus was, what about Mohammed, and how should I relate to the Muslim name for God, Allah?

As we spent hours in conversation during that visit and many other visits over the years, Jerald helped me consider ways to look at things that I might not have initially seen. Often individuals move into almost immediate conflict over the question of who Jesus was. Jerald encouraged me to look at how Jesus related to those who wanted to know who he was. It became clear that Jesus often avoided giving a direct answer. Studying the situations where he “avoided answering the question,” I came to understand that Jesus wanted to give individuals an opportunity to learn more before he shared too many details, so they would be better able to accept him for who he truly was.
Later in my work, I came to understand more about the name Allah when it was my privilege to work with Middle Eastern Christians who insisted that Allah was simply the name of God in the Arabic Bible, so it would be impossible NOT to understand that Allah is God. Several Indonesian friends from the country with more Muslims than any other country in our world shared that in their language Allah is the name for God and they too understand Allah as the God of the Bible.

Jerald also challenged my thinking on how to relate to the prophet Mohammed, urging me to ask the right questions. What I learned from these conversations sent me down the road of attempting to identify truth, wherever it may be found, as a basis for dialogue. Clearly the Bible is a key part of God’s revelation to the human family, but it is also clear that he has revealed himself through other means, including individuals who have lived since the times in which the Bible was written. Instead of trying to judge the prophet Mohammed, I have found it more useful to identify biblical truths I could also find in the Qur'an and allow those truths to be the basis of conversation and dialogue with my Muslim friends. This approach moves us from the argumentative stage to a point where dialogue and agreement are a possibility, and centering the friendship and discussion on what God has revealed to the human family.

It was also during extended discussions with Jerald that I came to understand how too many Muslims see Christians as those who worship more than one God, worship idols, demonstrate offensive moral values, and use forbidden things such as alcohol and pork, and are into gambling. In many conversations since that time with dozens of Muslims, I have come to understand how important it is to identify myself, not as a Christian with all the baggage that seems to come along with that term, but to a more appropriate identity as an Adventist believer. This term has sparked numerous conversations that have opened opportunities for dialogue where I was able to explain who Adventist believers are and some of the teachings we hold in common with Muslims. It has often been my experience that a Muslim will exclaim that I am a better Muslim than he is.

Some, at times, raise questions about the dangers of syncretism in trying to understand and even reconcile differences between Muslims and others. This has not generally turned out to be an issue even while staying faithful to biblical teaching. While some may raise concerns about going “light” on the identity of Jesus, the comment we hear over and over is, “Now I have assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ my Savior and Lord.” This change, this new understanding is a result of learning how to communicate
with Muslims and as a result, through Jesus Christ, lives are forever changed and life starts anew.

Jerald was instrumental in establishing a variety of approaches to reach into the hearts of Muslims. He did not give up when something did not work out, but kept on going. In one early approach, the leader did not work out well and he had to start over again, but start over he did. He stayed the course in seeking a variety of ways to lead Muslims into a deeper walk and submission to God. Jerald has been an inspiration to many. I have often said that Jerald has been one from whom I have learned a lot over more than twenty years of friendship and discussions. Even in his lighter-hearted moments when he has quipped, “Mike has been a very slow learner,” I’ve appreciated Jerald’s patience in taking time with me and hundreds of others in helping us seek ways to better interact with our Muslim friends.
Section 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

a man of

PASSIONATE REFLECTION
Since God has used Jerald Whitehouse in a significant way in the current movement of Muslims to faith in Christ, I would like to offer an overview of that movement. First, I shall look briefly at why it is the fullness of time for Muslims, then how God is working through current events.

**Why It Is the Fullness of Time**

“When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son … to redeem them that were under the law” (Gal 4:4-5).

A herald of the fullness of time for Christ’s coming was the tragedy of Herod’s killing of the children below the age of two—what the Church calls “the slaughter of the innocents.” In an analogous way we might say the slaughter of the innocents on September 11, 2001, was a herald of the fullness of time for Christ’s coming to the Muslim world—an event my wife and I first saw in a miniature picture on our computer a block from the Taliban recruiting center in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Four of the factors involved in the fullness of time for our Lord’s coming in the first century were: (1) the schoolhouse of Judaism which provided the
knowledge of God and his will; (2) the global political/military dominance of Rome which made travel around the Mediterranean world possible; (3) the global culture of Hellenism which provided the common language of Greek and the Scriptures that were thus accessible through the Septuagint; and (4) disillusionment with the Greco-Roman religions.

Similar factors are involved in the fullness of time for our Lord’s coming to the Muslim world in the twenty-first century through his Body the Church. First, Islam, although an A.D. religion, borrowed heavily from Judaism in its view of God and his will and understood God to be the One God that the Jews worship (Qur’an 29:46). Second, with the political/military dominance of the United States, travel throughout much of the world is possible. Third, globalization and the media have led to increased communication. Fourth, Muslims have become disillusioned with the type of Islam that has come to the fore.

The reactions of Judaism to the first-century globalization of Rome and Hellenic culture was diverse but included the Pharisees’ return to the Torah with its Law. Some Pharisees like Nicodemus were peaceful; others like Saul on the road to Damascus were militant. Some like the Zealots were terrorists. These diverse reactions created both obstacles and receptivity to the original proclamation of the gospel and the expansion of the Church. Yet the Church spread rapidly.

Muslims today have had similar diverse reactions to the globalization of American and Western culture. These have included the Islamists’ return to the Qur’an with its resultant law, which borrowed heavily from rabbinic law. Some Islamists are peaceful, others militant. These diverse reactions are creating both obstacles and receptivity to the proclamation of the gospel and the expansion of the Church. But, as we shall see, the Church is expanding as never before in the Muslim World.

**The Hand of God in Current Events**

Avery Willis Jr. has noted how the hand of God worked through the glove of circumstances in Indonesia in the late 1960s to draw thousands of Indonesians to faith in Christ (Willis 1977). A different mix of circumstances can be identified through which God is working in the Muslim world today. This is not to say that God causes the tragedies associated with many of these circumstances but that he works within them to draw people to himself.
The Rise of Militant Political Islam

God’s hand working through political transitions became evident in Indonesia in the turmoil following an abortive Communist coup attempt in 1965. Muslims then began to massacre Communists or suspected Communists while Christians continued their ministry of care for the needy. When the government mandated that all must choose one of five officially recognized religions, many chose Christianity partly in reaction to Muslim atrocities. Over 2 million are reported to have chosen Christianity in the late 1960s.

The Iranian revolution led by the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979 led to the imposition of a Shi’ite form of Islamic law (Shari’a) on the population, resulting in the closing of the United Bible Societies office. However, more Bibles were sold despite the new restrictions, and more Muslims came to Christian churches for instruction than ever before. Then a pattern became evident. Years of secularization under the Shah had led to the loss of traditional values—family, moral, and religious. The reactions involved a return to Islam; but when a strict form was imposed on the population, they reacted. When friendly Christians were present many Muslims became more receptive to the gospel. Then persecution followed. A number of prominent Christian leaders were killed.

A similar pattern was discerned in Pakistan when Zia al-Haq came to power in a military coup. He tried to introduce a Sunni form of Shari’a. The result was an even greater increase in the sale of Bibles than in Iran plus an increased enrollment in Bible correspondence courses. For an analysis of that process see Larson 1998. The civilian government of Nawas Sharif also tried to Islamize the government with a resultant disillusionment with Islam among many Muslims.

The pattern was even more pronounced in Afghanistan where civil war between ethnic Mujahideen groups led to Taliban control of 90 percent of the country. The enforcement of the strictest from of Sunni Islamic law led to a great reaction among many Afghan Muslims and a greater interest in the gospel.

In Sudan the northern Arab Muslims have tried to Islamize the non-Arab south. This has led to repeated civil wars since 1955 up until a recent fragile peace accord. Although this has not led to massive conversions from Islam, it has been a factor in the large numbers of southerners adopting Christianity rather than Islam.

Events since 9/11 have, for the most part, exacerbated the tensions within Islam and between Muslims and non-Muslims. The result has been greater
opposition to the gospel by some Muslims and greater disillusionment with Islam by others and a consequent greater openness to Christian faith.

**Natural Catastrophes and Poverty**

Occasions for the Church to express mercy have been provided by the expansion of the Sahara Desert and by periodic flooding in Bangladesh. In the former countries cups of cold water were given in Christ's name; in the latter cups were bailed out in his name.

Although church growth in Bangladesh was helped by the 1971 civil war with West Pakistan, disastrous floods have given non-governmental relief and development agencies (NGOs) opportunities to serve through self-help ministries like fish and vegetable farming. Where ministries to human need have been part of a holistic concern for people, the growth of believers of Muslim background (BMBs) has been seen.

The tribal strife in the Sahel with the breakdown of irrigation systems has led to the expansion of the Sahara Desert. Christian NGOs have sought to provide nutrition and wells; while Muslim agencies have tended to serve only Muslims or those who would convert. As elsewhere, Christian NGOs that have consciously engaged in holistic ministries have seen modest church growth among Muslims in some places where there were no known converts before.

**Migrations**

Migrations of people can be a result of refugees fleeing civil strife, urbanization, or immigrants seeking a better way of life. With some fifty conflicts raging at all times in the 1990s, there were many refugees. Iranians fleeing the Khomeini revolution were more receptive to the gospel whether in Turkey, Spain, or the United States. Afghan refugees from the civil war in their homeland came to Pakistan, Europe, and North America where there was greater freedom. Numbers of these have come to faith in Christ.

A study of Muslim conversions to Christ in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon showed that a majority of the individuals had recently moved to the city (Matheny 1981). They were open to new ideas and needed friends and help. Previously they had their support systems, and there was an inertia to change while relatives were watching to see that they did not dishonor the clan. When they arrived in the city they needed help and friends, did not have the extended family watching them, and were open to new ideas—hence the
The Fullness of Time for Muslims

The gospel. If they did not turn to Christ, after a time they became secularized or, what the study did not show, disillusioned with modernity. Then many turned to Islamic fundamentalism by choice. Much of the Muslim world is rapidly becoming urbanized—hence the potential for greater evangelism.

Other Muslims like the Algerians and Moroccans migrated to European countries like France for a better way of life. The 1.5 generation, born in North Africa but raised in France, has often felt like people without a country. Groups such as L'Ami, led by 1.5 generation immigrant BMBs and French believers, have made them feel welcome and demonstrated how Christ can break down ethnic barriers, and many have accepted the Christ.

A Need for Healing and Blessing

Perhaps two-thirds of Muslims are involved in popular Muslim piety (sometimes called folk Islam)—a blending of the formal Islam of the Qur’an and Orthodox tradition with pre-Islamic animistic beliefs and practices. These range from traditional African tribal religion to Javanese mysticism. People in popular Islam are primarily concerned with existential problems like healing for their children, guidance for decisions, and protection from a world that is perceived to be dominated by evil spirits and forces. They would feel the need of a savior from fear more than a savior from sin. Previously non-Pentecostal evangelicals were ill prepared to deal with these issues. Increasingly as evangelicals too have been open to being channels of God’s power for healing or of his grace to carry believers through suffering, they have found Muslims receptive. A majority of Muslims who accept Christ as Lord previously practiced forms of popular piety rather than the more Orthodox/Orthoprax forms. In Southeast Asia, church planters are finding that Muslims and BMBs want deep inner healing of their emotions from such feelings as anger, and this is leading to the growth of the church.

Ethnic and Cultural Resurgence

The Bengalis of East Pakistan in 1971 rebelled against the dominance of the ethnic groups of West Pakistan and created Bangladesh. They also rejected Christianity as Western and rejected the Bengali Bible which used more Hindu terms than Muslim terms and even used different names for Bible characters than Muslims used for the same people. When the New Testament was translated using Muslim-friendly Bengali terms and was labeled the *Injil Sharif* (their name for it), it became the best-selling book
in the country. What attracted Muslims to Christ was learning that the *Injil Sharif* identified him as the mediator between God and humans, but it was easier for them to follow him when they learned that they could use the forms of worship with which they were familiar. Aside from references to Muhammad and Mecca the religious vocabulary of the Qur’an and the five required forms of worship have all been used by Jews and/or Christians before the start of Islam (see Woodberry 1989:282-312). Thousands of Muslims began to follow Christ staying within the Muslim community but meeting together regularly for Bible study, worship, and prayer.

For a variety of reasons other BMBs in a different, African context joined the existing churches and did not want to use the same forms for worship that they had used as Muslims. The North Africa Mission (now Arab World Ministries) used to pray for a national church in each North African country by the year 2000, but there was little response. One ethnic group, the Kabyle Berbers, felt suppressed by the Arab Muslim majority, and their traditions indicated that they were once Christians. These influences have made it easier for thousands of them to follow Christ in the last fifteen years.

In another country nearby with no known Christians a few years ago and two ethnic groups fighting each other on the streets, I was privileged to worship secretly with new believers from both groups. An old man confessed that he had never imagined that he would eat and worship with members of the other ethnic group, or for that matter with Americans, but we were one because of Christ. Ethnic, cultural, and religious tensions have increased since 9/11, but Christ is still the one who has broken down the dividing wall.

As we note how the hand of God is drawing Muslims to himself, the challenge for us is to see how our hands can cooperate with his.

**Works Cited**


In contrast to the common Muslim conception that asserts both a sharp disconnect between previous revelations and the Qurʾān as well as that such revelations are corrupt in their present form, a thorough study of all of the verses in the Qurʾān referencing any of the previous revelations (the Tawrāt, Zabūr, Injīl or the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel respectively) demonstrates the following: first, there is a coherent conceptual web describing a close interconnected relationship between the Qurʾān and those previous revelations; second, the qurʾānic view of such revelations is one of praise, support, and integration; and third, the web displays cycles of relationship and interdependence that suggest a working epistemology of all the revealed books, an epistemology that could have important implications for interfaith dialogue.

The overall flow of the Master’s thesis that this opening paragraph comes from has five chapters and two associated figures illustrating the concepts of the research.\textsuperscript{1} For this much shorter work I will simply offer a few

\textsuperscript{1}This is from my MA thesis. If you would like the complete thesis in electronic format contact bryancgallant@gmail.com
introductory comments and the concluding chapter with a few associated endnotes. I will also include the two figures for reference.

**Reasons for This Study**

In the current world in which we live, the role of interfaith dialogue and cooperation is taking a more central role as we attempt to coalesce a peaceful relationship between peoples, countries, and religions. Religion and faith seem to be at the very core of many of our conflicts and deepest emotions. This means that there needs to be a more positive interaction between Jews, Christians, and Muslims than has been seen in the past—even though they all claim to worship the same God! Unfortunately, dialogue like that is immediately hampered by truth claims, doctrinal challenges, historic scars, and even attacks on the very veracity of each other’s scriptures. All of these complicated realities minimize any tangible possibility for meaningful and positive interaction.

The full thesis, of which this is only a shortened summary for the *Festschrift* project, had a very tight scope for its study. It was written from the perspective of Islamic logic and not necessarily for a Christian readership, in the sense that it was attempting to answer Christian questions. This essay is also written from within an Islamic worldview of thought so that the conclusions would be more readily accepted within the Islamic world. This needs to be kept in mind when Christians read the document. It also must be noted that this essay is only a summary of the full work. Most of the documentation and facts referenced here are dealt with in greater detail in the larger work.

From the Qur’anic perspective, God has sent his revelations (some of them named directly, others not) throughout time and to many different peoples. These messages, of which the Qur’an is also, one, have all proclaimed the same overall words and Divine message and are given to humanity for guidance and preparation for the Day of Judgment. If it can be shown that from the Qur’anic point of view the revelations are all considered Divinely inspired and protected by God (such that the forms in which we have them now still retain their essential salvific value), there would be the possibility of calling all of the People of the Book(s)\(^2\) to a quality of faith and lived out reality based on those revelations in order

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\(^2\)This phrase is very common and in Arabic is: *ahl al-kitāb*. In this particular sentence, however, I am attempting to group all people of all the revelations into one group—which may be problematic for some.
to live in peace and cooperation instead of animosity, betrayal, and war. Such is the grand hope that this study is undertaken with and written in such a way as to be just one voice towards creating such a possible outcome.

Even though this paper is written from the perspective that assumes and accepts the Muslim understanding of the Qur’ān and the role that the Prophet Muhammad plays in revelatory history from a qur’ānic worldview, it is not saying that I am claiming inspiration for the Qur’ān, nor saying that I believe it is inspired or that Muhammad is a prophet by the biblical definition. I am saying that the paper is written from within the Muslim framework and logic, therefore the conclusions cannot be readily dismissed based upon someone’s view of the Qur’ān. This is a critical point and the whole thesis as well as this shortened version must be read with that in mind. This may mean that some of the logic will only make sense for someone who has already accepted the role of the Qur’ān in their life (or at least can appreciate its affect on people).

Neither this article nor the larger work answer the issues of whether or not the Qur’ān is inspired or what role it is to play in the lives of the believers (whether Muslim or non-Muslim). I assume from the beginning that the reader already comes with those decisions in mind and reads accordingly. Whether or not this study will draw the reader deeper in their understanding and appreciation of the Qur’ān remains to be seen, but that is not part of the scope of this study.

In addition these pages will not endeavor to answer the issue as to whether or not the revelations named and dealt with within the Qur’ān (i.e., the Tawrāt, Zabūr, and Injīl) are the same revelations that we have today (i.e., the Jewish Tanakh, or the Bible, whether Protestant or Catholic). That is outside the scope of this particular research as well. However, some of the conclusions from this study will shed light on a few serious principles with which to consider those issues within the grand scheme of the qur’ānic teachings regarding those revelations.3

**Foundational Methodology**

The field of qur’ānic studies is by no means new to either Muslims or non-Muslims, and spans many centuries of scholarly interaction with the text. However when one turns to thematic studies in English the field

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3All qur’ānic verses quoted in English are from Ali 2001.
is relatively new and representatively small (Abdel Haleem 1999:vii).\textsuperscript{4} Within that fairly limited field of the last century one name and one particular methodology rises above and acts as the foundation for following works. The name is Toshihiko Izutsu and his methodological framework is called the semantic field.\textsuperscript{5}

Recognizing that it is often said that any translation is in some sense a betrayal, the mere statement of letting the Qur’ān speak for itself within another language constraint seems ridiculous at best and even criminal at worst. However, Izutsu has pioneered a way that seeks to go underneath the translations and build a coherent grouping of words that run together and create an actual worldview of meaning, which he calls the “semantic Weltanschauung” (1998:34).

In order to do this one must have a particular attitude as well as a specific method. The necessary attitude is:

\begin{quote}
We should try to read the Book without any preconception. We must, in other words, try not to read into it thoughts that have been developed and elaborated by the Muslim thinkers of the post-Koranic ages in their effort to understand and interpret their Sacred Book, each according to his particular position. We must try to grasp the structure of the Koranic world conception in its original form, that is, as it was read and understood by the Prophet’s contemporaries and his immediate followers. Strictly speaking, this must always remain an unattainable ideal, and yet at least we should do our best to approach this ideal even a step nearer. (Izutsu 1998:74)
\end{quote}

In order to approach that seemingly unattainable ideal, he uses semantic fields. A semantic field, offering my own simple definition, is a connected collection of all the words that are related to one another within a particular worldview. This is formed by taking a word or concept and going beyond its basic meaning to find its relational meaning according to the other words that it is repeatedly associated with. That in turn builds more relationships with other terms that create an overall coherent understanding of how that one word is relationally defined as opposed to a mere context-less definition (for a more detailed discussion see Izutsu 1998:18-24). In view of this, each


\textsuperscript{5}The focus in describing Izutsu’s work will be to identify the process and explain its usefulness to our study, and not to express all the intricacies and reasons for the semantic field as they relate to other linguistic studies. If someone wants to read more of that history, Madigan 2001 offers some of that history and the footnotes lead to the rest as needed. While Izutsu seems to be the first to apply and explain this method for the study of the Qur’an, others have used it since.
word is part of a larger relational set that ends up forming a conceptual framework for meaning and action. Within these fields and relationships there arises certain “poles” of words that act as opposites. Those pole words are then called focus words. Izutsu summarizes pole words as a “complicated system of oppositions that are formed, each one of them, by two poles that stand facing each other . . . In short, from the semantical point of view, the Koranic Weltanschauung is capable of being represented as a system built on the principle of conceptual opposition” (1998:74).

Before leaving this rich subject of methodology there is one more important point in favor of a thematic, Qur’ān only kind of study. It is the principle of exegesis outlined by Ibn Taymiya (d. 728/1328) in his Introductory Treatise on the Principles of Tafsīr, translated by J. McAuliffe in Renard’s Windows on the House of Islam. Ibn Taymiya writes, “If someone asks, ‘What is the best method of interpretation?’ the answer is that the soundest method is that whereby the Qur’ān is interpreted through the Qur’ān. For what is summarily expressed in one place is expatiated upon in another. What is abridged in one place is elaborated upon in another” (Renard 1998:36). Therefore, the practice of letting the Qur’ān “speak” for itself as I am currently outlining is exactly what Ibn Taymiya is advocating as his first point of correct exegesis. Of course, he goes on to mention the role of the Sunna of the Prophet, the Companions, the Followers, and personal opinion (ra’y) as well. But, the first and best way is using the Qur’ān to define itself. In this, Ibn Taymiya was echoing a basic principle of tafsīr, namely, that first and foremost, the Qur’ān’s own self-understanding and exegesis is of utmost importance.⁶

Traditional Qur’ān commentaries agreed but combined this with the Prophet’s tafsīr (in hadith), that of the companions, and others. With that principle in place, and the preceding discussion as a foundation, I now turn to an explanation of my personal methodology, keeping in mind that even though I am extolling the virtue of the Qur’ān’s own self-commentary, I myself am doing the arranging and jumping into the commentarial fray.

With those preliminary comments in place we now move from the foundation to the resulting conclusions in an effort to keep this work to the appropriate size.

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The Qur’anic Worldview

The overall effect of this study creates a coherent Weltanschauung of the Qur‘ān in relation to the previous revelations. I will briefly summarize the steps taken in order to arrive at these conclusions; then, I will enunciate a clear statement regarding the previous revelations in light of the study and the conceptual web; finally, I will elaborate on a few of the most obvious implications of this study in regards to interfaith dialogue.

We began with the foundational methodology of the study based on the works of T. Izutsu, F. Rahman, and D. Madigan. Even more than the methodology their works also offered reasons for the need to do studies like this. Using the methodological tools of semantic fields (with some adjustment) the study has established a substantial core of references in which to create the chorus of verses needed to hear what the Qur‘ān says. This type of study is in contrast to the frequent “atomistic” approaches to the text and offers the broadest survey in order to grasp a coherent picture.\(^7\)

It should be noted that this study did not directly deal with issues of timing of certain verses since there was no recognizable change in the qur‘ānic understanding of the revelations throughout the conceptual web. Chapter three (missing in this shorter version) described the concentric circles of relationship that make up this qur‘ānic worldview.

Beginning with God as the Divine Center for all guidance and revelation, the circles progressed outward through general signs of guidance on to the named revelations given to various prophets through the ages. From those named revelations the next circle included all of the terms and functions that those revelations played in drawing humanity back to God. The fourth circle identified a few correlated words that could be studied in greater detail in the future, but were noteworthy in this study as well, as they reveal certain activities connected with the believer’s response to revelation.\(^8\)

Finally, at both a point of beginning for each person’s choice to respond to revelation (as the thread pulling him back to God), and even the eschatological endpoint describing their choice; the fifth circle collected the various words associated with either belief in the books or spurning them. All of that discussion was followed by a graphic representation of the full web.

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\(^7\)This specific wording is from Rahman 1982:2-4 where the concept is further explained and enlarged upon.

\(^8\)Some of these words (explained more in the full thesis) include: *mithaq* and *’ahd* (covenant, which Dr. Darnell wrote about in his dissertation noted in the resources), and *as-sabt* (the Sabbath).
In chapter four the web begins to display its true intricacy and coherence. In answer to the three questions embedded in this quest regarding the Qur’ānic view of the previous revelations, it deals with origin and purpose; questions of hierarchy and uniqueness; a discussion of the charge of distortion; the presentation of the cycle of validation and prophecy within the revelations themselves; and finally, a short consideration of the hermeneutical cycle suggesting a connecting epistemological role for all of the revelations (see next page).

Throughout the study, based upon consistent Qur’ānic evidence and analysis, I have shown that the revelations (all of them from the Qur’ānic worldview) stand as integral parts of God’s guidance given to humanity to call them back to himself. This worldview includes the revelations having their beginning in God, protection by God, and the same words of praise and function being attributed to them within the Divine plan. Not only
are they considered a part of God’s historic activity in the world, but true believers (both defined within the time of the revelation of the Qur’ān and those of faith throughout time) are those who believe in all of the revelations and therefore obey. Not only is the aspect of belief in the revelations intact in the great lists of the faithful, but as one considers the internal descriptions of the roles that the revelations play in the life of the believer, two additional cycles come to light. The first one connects all of the revelations into a tight bidirectional process of validating and prophesying. The next cycle establishes the role of the revelations being studied together in order to lead the believer into the clearest understanding of God’s guidance.

Given the whole picture of the conceptual web, the overwhelming message is that people of faith will believe in all of the revelations and use them to determine direction for their lives in response to the guidance that God
has given them within those revelations. Warnings are given to those who only accept a part of the message; promises are given by God to protect his words. Therefore, any view that claims that certain revelations are corrupted (thereby limiting study to one revelation) would necessarily invalidate the whole coherence of the Qur’anic worldview as well as God’s own promises of protection, thereby bringing into question the validity of all of the revelations including the Qur’ān. In light of this study, then, I agree with other authors (Ayoub 1998; Saeed 2006; Saeed 2002) quoted previously in the larger work and represented in the Works Cited section that the current Islamic view of the corruption of previous scriptures needs to be seriously reassessed.

Implications for Further Study

This research has direct implications for further study in at least three tightly interrelated areas. I shall list them here as individual subjects, although the discussion of them blurs the lines of distinction. The first area that this study sheds light on is in regards to the discussion (often a polemic one) about the role of the Bible for Muslims, which immediately raises other issues of revelation and theology. The second area is about the historic rise of the theory of *tahrīf* and why it has become the de-facto view of so many Muslims today. The third area involves the ongoing need for interfaith dialogue and the role that the revelations play in such interchanges. After a short discussion about these complicated subjects I will offer some final words of hope in light of this study.

Although this thesis from the outset was not focused on determining whether or not one can assume that the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel mentioned in the Qur’ān are the very books that exist today,9 based on this study and the integrity of the conceptual web, a few questions are raised that impact this discourse directly. First of all, if those books which were “in their hands,” having a tangible presence, sent by God, protected by God, and used to validate the message of the Qur’ān at that time; are no longer the ones “in their hands” now; then in light of the web, there are serious implications. Since the same promises for protection of God’s words are attributed to the

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9 Some have considered that to be the case. Sidney H. Griffith shares in the entry, “Gospel,” in the Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān, the following: “There is some evidence that the term Gospel was also sometimes used in the early Islamic period to indicate the whole New Testament, in the same way that the name Torah was used not only for the Pentateuch, but for all the books of the Jewish scriptures.” He goes on to say some early Muslim writers who quoted from scriptures include, Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) and al-Ya‘qubi (d. 292/905) (McAuliffe 2001: s.v. Gospel).
Qur’ān, any assumption of corruption on the other books calls into question God’s protective ability and promise for all of the books. In addition to the aspect of protection, it also brings into question the timelessness of the message of the Qur’ān (or any revelation) within Islamic theology. Given the role of the Qur’ān, specifically within Muslim thinking (though it would apply to all revelations as I have already shown), the two interrelated cycles of validation and hermeneutics existing within the qur’ānic worldview would invariably be broken as well. In other words, if the Qur’ān cannot be validated by the previous revelations then the very call of Muhammad as prophet is challenged since his proof was in bringing the same message that the previous prophets and revelations did. Within the hermeneutic cycle, the timelessness is also challenged by asking the question: Would God send believers knowingly to a book that is going to be corrupted (which was not corrupted then) or lost, thereby breaking both his promise and his guidance? The mere mention of such potential possibilities is unacceptable within the overall qur’ānic worldview and therefore needs serious thought in connection with this issue. Unfortunately, the prevalence of these views in the polemic discussions through the centuries have offered much more heat than light, and it is hoped that a study like this will establish some foundational logic to begin a more fruitful dialogue.

The same needs to be said in the area of textual criticism of the Bible, which is often pounced upon by polemicists as a major source of quotes and variant views (by either side). From the qur’ānic perspective, the ultimate cause for belief in any revelation leads back to God, not to human evidence of protection or even to perceptions of error! Although current scientific views may not always seem to fit the understood picture of faith, faith is not the handmaiden of science. God may speak in scientific ways so that humanity can appreciate his message, but he is not limited by created beings’ scientific constructs of understanding. God and faith are larger than that. The understanding of revelation as God’s giving of guidance to humanity needs to be understood appropriately as well within this paradox. Add to that reality the fact that academic opinions do not in and of themselves constitute objective truth and often change with incredible rapidity in light of eternity;\textsuperscript{10} one needs to constantly reassess the various textual critics and their opinions at any given time in the light of faith and God’s power to protect his words. In having said this, however, perceptions of revelation

\textsuperscript{10}Harald Motzki has said that beginning with something that is universally accepted “is surely not a very secure starting point: unanimity on a scholarly issue is a temporary phenomenon” (Motzki 2001:1-34).
and inspiration may need to be adjusted in order to find some common ground.\(^ {11} \)

**What about *Tahrif* and the Charge of Corruption?**

Regarding the issue of *tahrīf*, more study is needed to ascertain the exact rise of the arguments and motivation in light of how it cannot be sustained within a purely Qur’ānic worldview or even within some of the early *tafsīr* authors. Taken into account what Ayoub (1984) and Saeed (2006 and 2002) have said, I feel confident that this work will add to the serious need for scholars to reassess this issue and find a more coherent view between the Qur’ān and the other revelations.\(^ {12} \) My initial research seems to point to the historic literary interaction between Ibn Hazm (456/1064) and Ibn Nagrella (448/1056) as being the seminal example of many of the *tahrīf* arguments coming to the forefront in Islam (and repeated for centuries thereafter).

D. Powers investigates this further in his interesting article, “Reading/Misreading One Another’s Scriptures: Ibn Hazm’s Refutation of Ibn Nagrella al-Yahūdī.” Without going too deeply into this subject, let me share a few of his conclusions as they directly impact the point of what is being presented in this study.

First of all, he found that “both Ibn Hazm and Ibn Nagrella are religious polemicists, not disinterested scholars, and even a cursory examination of their arguments reveals the application of a double standard; what is acceptable within one’s own religious tradition is not acceptable within another.” Then, the deeper he studied their interaction, he shares “the more familiar I have become with their respective arguments, the less convinced I am that either one actually sat down and read the other’s scripture.” (Powers & Brinner 1986:116-117) In other words, they merely were parroting the previous attacks offered to them from writers within the opposing tradition or from outside. At no point was there a sincere effort to find mutual direction from the books that God has given!\(^ {13} \)

Powers’ cogent conclusion resounds yet another note to the chorus of

\(^{11}\) Zebiri shares the following comment in the entry “Polemic,” from the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* that fits with what I have been saying: “Contemporary Muslim polemic tends to draw more on sources external to the Qur’ān, in particular higher biblical criticism which can be used to demonstrate that the Bible is not “revealed” in the sense that Muslims generally understand revelation, i.e. the verbatim word of God (q.v.) preserved without any alterations.” McAuliffe 2001: s.v. Polemic).

\(^{12}\) These two authors are noted along with an enlarged study of Nickel’s excellent study that I shared in chapter four of the larger work.

\(^{13}\) For a useful handbook on the various views of Muslims and Christians and the role of polemics see Zebiri 1997:258.
voices affirming the need for a more coherent view of the Qur'ān and the reading of other revelations:

Our examination of the interchange between Ibn Hazm and Ibn Nagrella provides us with an example of one way to read a sacred text, namely, with the intent of undermining the claim of the Hebrew Bible or the Qur'ān to be a scripture. It is to be hoped, however, that today, when increasing numbers of Jews and Muslims have access to the other's scripture, either in the original language or in translation, and when the need for mutual understanding is so great, that the adherents of these two major religions will begin to read one another's sacred text from a non-polemical perspective. (Powers & Brinner 1986:118)

In light of the conceptual web of the Qur'ān, as seen within this study, the person of faith would be bound to do exactly that.

It is recognized that the mere thought of connecting the Bible to the Qur'ān through a common epistemological stance, seems to conjure up immediate impossibilities based upon centuries of interaction, polemic, theology, wars, and so forth. However, it may not be as farfetched in the current era, where people of faith and heart are searching for the common message and hope needed to walk forward peacefully.  

**Applying the Web to Interfaith Discussions**

First of all, if one accepts both a timelessness and a timeliness for the various revelations (reading scripture with reference to the historic context—which is being acknowledged more and more by Muslim thinkers recently in regards to the Qur'ān)—the gap may not actually be as intractable as some believe; even in regards to the more challenging issues related to Jesus and Muhammad. Authors such as Ayoub and Rahman discuss issues of Christology in a way that would warm many a Christian heart as a great beginning for further conversation. One such quote from Rahman says it this way:

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14One such book (among many) is by John Dudley Woodberry, Osman Zumrut, and Mustafa Koçlu entitled Muslim and Christian Reflections on Peace: Divine and Human Dimensions published in Lanham, MD by the University Press of America in 2005 (see page 157).


The Qur’ān would most probably have no objections to the Logos having become flesh if the Logos were not simply identified with God and the identification were understood less literally. For the Qur’ān, the Word of God is never identified simply with God. Jesus, again, is the “Spirit of God” in a special sense for the Qur’ān, although God had breathed His spirit into Adam as well (Q 15:29; 38:72). It was on the basis of some such expectations from the self-proclaimed monotheism of Christians – and, of course, Jews – that the Qur’ān issued its invitation: “O People of the Book! Let us come together upon a formula which is common between us – that we shall not serve anyone but God, that we shall associate none with Him” (Q 3:64). This invitation, probably issued at a time when Muhammad thought not all was yet lost among the three self-proclaimed monotheistic communities, must have appeared specious to Christians. It has remained unheeded. But I believe something can still be worked by way of positive cooperation, provided the Muslims hearken more to the Qur’ān than to the historic formulations of Islam and provided that recent pioneering efforts continue to yield a Christian doctrine more compatible with universal monotheism and egalitarianism. (Rahman 1989:170)

Note that Rahman identifies the need to anchor the discussion in the Qur’ān and not Islamic doctrines and the same assumption for Christianity taking them away from creeds and back to a more holistic view of God (i.e., from the Bible).

Another challenging area is in regards to prophecies pointing to Muhammad and his role in history. The apparent denial of these by Jews and Christians and the ensuing challenge for Muslims to find them clearly marked within scripture is one of the major reasons for the charge of the previous revelations being corrupted. Yet, if it could be shown that there have been biblical perceptions and prophecies allowing for the legitimacy of both the line of Ishmael and Muhammad’s coming this would necessarily remove that obstacle as well.17 In the spirit of cooperation and appreciation (as opposed to polemic conflict) much more study is needed in this area.

In closing, the single, most important need for true interfaith dialogue based upon a core epistemology like the one described in this study is that it will challenge the debilitating pre-judgments of exclusivity to truth that is claimed by both Muslim and Christians alike (Zebiri 1997:175). By creating a potential modern epistemology for people of faith (Muslim and non-

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17Regarding the legitimacy of the line of Ishmael, see Maalouf 2003:367; regarding a prophetic understanding of Muhammad see Dickie 2006:140. Both of these books are from the perspective of Christians reassessing various parts of Scripture to allow for a more inclusive reading of Muslims and Muhammad. They are also written within the theme of witness and mission. But, the fact remains that “new” understandings of the Bible are opening more Christians up to a more positive view of Islam. For a comprehensive summary of Christian voices regarding the Qur’an, see Ford 1993:142-164.
Muslim) which includes a non-atomistic reading of all of the revelations, and acknowledges God’s guidance throughout time; exclusivism could be replaced by both individual humility and human community seeking God’s heart and guidance in the challenging days ahead of forging a peaceful coexistence. As the attention is lifted from human statements of truth towards God’s words of truth delivered throughout time to various prophets it invariably lifts our eyes from our systems to the God of all truth. This kind of cooperation needs to be seriously considered, especially at this time in earth’s history, as Douglas Pratt remarks:

Arguably, so many of the clashes, confusions, and violent hotspots that exist today—where, for example, “Western Judeo-Christian” interfaces with “Islamic” cultures and societies (and here we only need to think of Iraq, or Afghanistan, or the Balkans)—are born from the legacy of unexamined conflicting religious ideologies and unresolved mutual misunderstanding and confused thinking. This is where the theological dimension of interreligious dialogue, particularly between Christian and Muslim, but also in respect to Jewish-Muslim engagement, must not be set aside. It needs instead urgent advance. (2005:222)

In light of such a statement, I believe the conceptual web offers an excellent beginning point to do that even though much more research is needed from all sides.18

Yet, I also realize that more than research may be needed. This is not pluralism or inclusivism, though some will definitely say that in a derogatory sense. It is actually something higher. It is choosing to use all the books claimed by the monotheistic religions to create a coherent and timely worldview of timeless values coming from the God of Abraham to be used as guidance for a world so desperately needing direction right now. Ultimately, that may need a special group of people willing to go outside of the historic labels. The Qur’an may be alluding to them in al- Ankabūt 29:46-47:

18Recent scholarship by Walid Saleh regarding the writings of Al-Biqā‘ī (885/1480) display the very possibility of such an epistemology within the Islamic history of tafsir. Consider the following quote from his forthcoming article entitled: “Sublime in Its Style, Exquisite in Its Tenderness: The Hebrew Bible Quotations in al-Biqai’s Qur’an Commentary,” in a Festschrift for Joel Kramer, ed. Tzvi Langermann. Saleh writes, “Al-Biqā‘ī deployed the Bible not only for polemical or apologetic purposes, the two uses to which the Muslims customarily put the Bible, but primarily as scripture to elucidate scripture. His underlying assumption was that the Bible has something to teach the Muslims.” Saleh has also written another article (under review by Speculum) called “A Muslim Hebraist: Al-Biqai’s Bible Treatise and His Defence of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qur’an,” that further presents the reasons for such an epistemology. Both of these works in particular and the ensuing research that will follow from studying al-Biqā‘ī’s works and reasons add further impetus to the understanding of the Conceptual Web that I have put forth in this study.
And dispute ye not with the People of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury): but say, "We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)."

And thus (it is) that We have sent down the Book to thee. So the People of the Book believe therein, as also do some of these (pagan Arabs): and none but Unbelievers reject our signs.

Given the implications of this study the Conceptual Web describes a possible epistemology based upon all of the revealed scriptures of God.

Interestingly enough, when Prophet Muhammad was escaping to Medina (1/622), in what became the beginning of the Islamic calendar, he and his companion Abu Bakr were saved through a number of miracles, one of which being the spider’s web covering the mouth of the cave. It may very well be that in these days it will be another web that gives guidance and protection for those choosing to walk the way of faith: using all of the revelations within the conceptual web as was just described from the chapter of the Spider!

Works Cited


Festschrift: Jerald Whitehouse


The New Testament bears witness to the process of contextualization. The writings are themselves “models of doing context-oriented” ministry and theology, and they present “stories of contextualization” (Flemming 2005:15) in which the gospel is tailored for different people groups and cultures. Central to this account is the story of Christianity’s reaching the Gentile world, initiated by the “praxis of the Spirit” (Anderson 1997:117). In his threefold repetition of the conversion of Cornelius’ household, Luke identifies the frame and movements of Holy Spirit praxis, suggesting patterns for faith sharing across cultural and religious boundaries today.

**Holy Spirit Praxis: A Frame for Contextualization**

The face of Christianity is again changing. Some observe the center of gravity shifting to the south and east—even the “demise of Western Christianity” (Tennent 2007:8). For others, the West is simply presenting a complex new paradigm for mission (Bosch 1991:349). Certainly, the truths of the gospel are being revisited and retold through other concerns and worldviews. Andrew Walls demonstrates that such major transitions have
characterized the history of Christianity, that the spread of Christianity has been serial rather than progressive, and its resilience is “linked to the process of cross-cultural transmission” (Walls 1996:22), its translatability. He argues that this transmission often came just in time to save the faith for the world.

The first major transition of Christianity, from being solely Jewish to being Jewish and Gentile, was initiated by the “praxis of the Spirit” (Anderson 1997:117). The Holy Spirit’s activity is the foundation of the church’s missionary nature, and must be integral to bringing Christian faith into the majority populations and territories of not only primal but also the world religions, including Islam. The Spirit’s activity suggests a frame for participation, which could be called *Holy Spirit praxis*. To understand the implications for recipient cultures and people, as well as for established Christianity, this paper will first identify and define models of contextualization—giving particular attention to the presuppositions and structure of the praxis model; second, examine the story of Cornelius as a biblical case study for the frames and movements of *Holy Spirit praxis*, before finally assessing the model’s faithfulness to the mission and theological constants of the New Testament.

### Models and Definitions

Attempts to understand and communicate the Christian faith must take into account Scripture, the interpretations that develop around it, as well as present human experiences—all products of cultural contexts. Contextualization is not something that is done with some theology, and not for others. The reality is that Scripture, which was written within a variety of contexts, is always interpreted within another, and delivered to another recipient context (Hesselgrave 1991:107-113). And, each context is complex.

Dean Gilliland compares seven models (Gilliland 1989:313-317) while Stephen Bevans proposes six, as a way to think about this “interaction of the gospel message and culture” (Bevans 2002:ix). Gilliland commends all those he compares (anthropological, translation, praxis, adaptation, synthetic, semiotic, and critical) for their “commitment to relevance and a focus on real situations in which people live,” but believes “the assumptions and methodology” of some “make them unacceptable” for evangelicals (Gilliland

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1Hesselgrave uses “a three-culture model of missionary communication:” the Bible culture, the missionary culture, and the respondent culture. For illustrations of this, see Nida 1952.
Bevans suggests that his models (translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and countercultural) are inclusive, with no one working “to the exclusion of one or more of the others,” while some “function more adequately within certain sets of circumstances” (Bevans 2002:139). For a summary of these models, see figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>The unchanging Scripture message(^1) is adapted using context as the vehicle for “a dynamic-equivalence translation” (Bevans 2002:37, 39; Kraft 1979:296).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropological</td>
<td>God’s revelation and grace is found as “seeds of the word” in each context, with Scripture serving as a map and scrutinizer (Bevans 2002:54, 56, 57; Gilliland 1989:315).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praxis</td>
<td>God’s presence and revelation is seen in activity—a process, a way of living (Bevans 2002:74, 75; Gilliland 1989:315) with human solutions, a danger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>It is assumed that cultures share “one philosophical framework” and “the historical foci of systematic theology” can be adapted to fit each one (Gilliland 1989:315).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthetic</td>
<td>A synthesis of models in dialogue with the four elements: message of Scripture, Christian tradition, culture, and social change (Bevans 2002:89, 90, 93, 102; Gilliland 1989:316).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semiotic</td>
<td>Truth is revealed through reading the “signs” of culture—best done by an outsider, thus a contradiction of contextualization (Gilliland 1989:316, 317).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental</td>
<td>God is revealed in the authentic, converted, faithful, subjective experience of sought personal and communal understanding(^2) (Bevans 2002:103, 105, 108, 116).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical</td>
<td>Takes both culture and Scripture seriously, with exegesis of the former and fresh study of the latter, to determine a new response (Gilliland 1989:317).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countercultural</td>
<td>While the context is taken very seriously, the gospel needs to challenge, encounter, engage, contrast with, and purify context (Bevans 2002:117-120; Cronshaw 2006:7, 8).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Contextualization models: summary of Gilliland’s and Bevans’ descriptions.

The praxis model is characterized by ‘reflective action’ (Bevans 2002:70)—typical of the prophets and consistent with the admonition to do and not merely hear the word of God’s desire (Jas 1:22). The central insight of

\(^1\)Gilliland raises concerns over the premise of “supracultural elements” (1989:314).
\(^2\)Bevans notes that an important presupposition of this model is that the human mind “operates in identical ways in all cultures and in all periods of history” (2002:105).
this model is that “theology finds its fulfillment not in mere ‘right thinking’ (orth-doxy), but in ‘right acting’ (ortho-praxy)” (Bevans 2002:70). Although Gilliland’s definition is essentially the same, his assessment of this model is not as positive, for he perceives its agenda to come “almost exclusively, from the socio-political context” (Gilliland 1989:315).

While the term praxis is not merely an alternative to practice but is a technical term, and while this model is sometimes referred to as the “liberation model” (Bevans 2002:72), because of the focus of liberation theologians, it does not necessarily suggest revolutionary liberation nor “justification for violence” (Gilliland 1989:315) although it always addresses underlying structures. Its key presuppositions are: (1) “the highest level of knowing is intelligent and responsible doing” (Bevans 2002:73); (2) God’s revelation includes his presence in history and in everyday life; (3) “theology must . . . produce change” (Gilliland 1989:315); and (4) “we best know God by acting in partnership with God” or, as the El Salvadorian theologian Jon Sobrino said: “to know the truth is to do the truth, to know Jesus is to follow Jesus” (Bevans 2002:75).

The Basic Movement of the Praxis Model

Figure 2. Praxis model—a circular movement.
While the movement of the praxis model is circular, committed action is the first and foundational response in this model as portrayed in figure 2. The second step is theory development through reflection upon the actions taken and a re-reading of Scripture; and the third step is more action, but this time “refined, more rooted in the Bible, and . . . contextual reality” (Bevans 2002:76).

When the “praxis of the Spirit” (Anderson 1997:117) is identified as integral to this circular three-fold movement of praxis theology, deeply entrenched theological convictions are challenged and a revised frame for mission and ministry introduced. The conversion of Cornelius and his household illustrates Holy Spirit praxis, providing challenging insights perhaps integral to cultivating saving faith among major people groups.

A Comprehensive Case-Study

To demonstrate that mission makes the church and that “the impulse of the Spirit” was its heart (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:11), Luke selects and orders the story in his second book to show a movement in three societal spheres: Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and the “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). 4 The inclusion of the Gentiles grows from this mission statement of Jesus.

Following the martyrdom of Stephen the Hellenistic Jewish believers were scattered, resulting in the conversion of Samaritans—conversions that would have scandalized the Jerusalem Hebraic Jewish believers, for whom “Christianity was entirely Jewish” (Walls 1996:16). It is not surprising that the news of Samaritans accepting “the word of God” (Acts 8:14) got Peter out to the towns in Samaria and down to Lydda and Joppa to investigate what was happening. And there, he also received the call from Caesarea that would entirely redefine the messianic movement. While Samaritans could be described as half-Jews and the experience of the Ethiopian could be explained as “a rare exception” (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:24), the conversion of Cornelius and his whole Gentile household and their reception into the community of believers in Jesus, was a redefinition of the religion and identity of the early Jewish believers.

Told three times (in Acts 10, 11, and 15), this story of the conversion of Cornelius is clearly of great significance to Luke’s intent. There are five

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4Unless indicated all Bible references are taken from the New International Version (NIV).
distinct parts to the story:

First, Cornelius a centurion in Caesarea, a “devout and God-fearing” Italian who “gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly” (10:2), had a vision in which he was told to send for Peter. After describing his experience, Cornelius sent two servants and a soldier to call for Peter. Meanwhile, in the second scene, Peter was being challenged to act in a manner entirely foreign to his concept of mission. As those sent by Cornelius approached Joppa, and while praying, Peter received a vision of “something like a large sheet” filled with “unclean” creatures (10:11, 14). When instructed to eat, Peter reacted for he had “never eaten anything impure or unclean” (10:14). He was told to “not call anything pure that God has made clean” (10:15). Hearing this repeated “three times” (10:16), when the call of the visitors was heard at the door, Peter heard the call of the Spirit to “not hesitate to go with them” (10:20). Going to the door, and learning their story, Peter did what was later to shock the Jerusalem community, he “invited the men into the house to be his guests” (10:23). The next day he set out with them, arriving at the home of Cornelius a day later (10:23, 24).

The third part is the narration of Cornelius’ conversion while, on another level, Peter and his whole community were also “being transformed” (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:24). After an awkward reception, Peter found Cornelius and his household of Gentiles waiting eagerly “to listen to everything the Lord” had “commanded” him to tell them (10:33). Acknowledging the Spirit’s activity in bringing them together, Peter began by telling them “the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (10:36). While still speaking of Jesus’ death and resurrection (10:39-43), to the astonishment of the Jewish believers present (10:45), the Holy Spirit descended upon all listeners (10:44). Responding to his own query (10:47), Peter “ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” and then acceded to their request that he stay for some days (10:48).

The fourth scene in this dramatic story is played out in Jerusalem. Even though Cornelius was an upright God-fearer (indicated by his devotion, prayers, and alms giving), Peter clearly had some difficult questions to answer for he had stepped well outside the frames of acceptable Jewish behavior. Luke records that Peter “explained everything to them precisely as it had happened” (11:4), not failing to provide in full detail the vision he had received, the encouragement of the Spirit “to have no hesitation about going with” the Gentiles (11:12), and the instruction of the angel to Cornelius to send for him (11:13). Peter provided the additional information that this angel had told Cornelius that he would bring “a message through which” he
and his household “will be saved” (11:14). Also, as the Holy Spirit came upon this Gentile household in the same way as upon Jews on Pentecost (11:15), the apostle recalled that he remembered Jesus’ promise of being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (11:16). Peter's explanation persuaded the critics that “God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life” (11:18).

The surprising activity of the Spirit in this Gentile context was reshaping and redefining the mission, theology, and identity of the Jerusalem community. But the fifth and final part to this story is found in the theological “watershed” (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:28) of the Jerusalem council. Following Peter’s reiteration of his experience in the home of Cornelius, demonstrating that Gentiles as well as Jews are saved “through the grace of our Lord Jesus” (15:11), and reports by Barnabas and Paul of “the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them” (15:12), James spoke. Quoting the prophetic words of Amos (15:15-18; cf. Amos 9:11, 12), he found biblical anticipation for what was happening. God’s activity in mission was redefining their community for, as James noted, God has taken “from the Gentiles a people for himself” (15:14). His use of the term laos as well as purity language draws attention to the Gentiles, as well as Jews, as “God’s specially chosen people” (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:29), and the stage was set for the Spirit’s future activity, as well as tensions over identity in an inclusive messianic movement redefined by Holy Spirit praxis for God’s eschatological mission.

The implications for the Jewish Christians were huge. They could hardly have foreseen Christianity as a movement inclusive of the Gentile Roman-Hellenistic world. But through the Holy Spirit, God was present in their lives. His mission was theirs and he was known through cooperative and obedient action consistent with his activities, as well as affirmed by biblical and prophetic antecedents.

**Holy Spirit Praxis**

Jesus said that he would build his church (Matt 16:18) and commissioned his Jewish disciples to “make disciples of all nations,” including Gentiles (Matt 28:19); and this is what he was doing by his Spirit in the household of Cornelius. Luke presents this story as central to the Spirit's initiative to redefine and translate the movement started by Jesus within the Jewish context to include the Roman-Hellenistic Gentile world. This story extends the three-step process of the praxis model, suggesting Holy Spirit praxis as a frame that is cognizant of the activities of the Spirit, biblical antecedents,
and the obedient response of believers. Figure 3 provides a comparison of the praxis model with *Holy Spirit praxis*, as well as a delineation of the movement described by Luke’s five-part drama. Again the movement is circular, with the activity of the Holy Spirit and the faithful obedient response of believers having major implications for the identity and mission of the whole movement of God.

The action of the Spirit is foundational to this transitional but inclusive frame:

1.1: The Spirit’s activities are not only local and particular, but are eschatological and defining for he brings God’s desired future. This was true of God’s visit to Cornelius.

Figure 3. Comparing the praxis model with Holy Spirit praxis.

2.1: The seemingly unpredictable initiatives of God challenge the worldviews and even theological frames of the believers, but their prayerful, obedient, and committed response achieves God’s purposes as seen in Peter’s
response.

3.1: Peter’s response is one of action-reflection, inviting Gentiles into his home as guests, traveling with them, and entering the home of Cornelius; all the time processing what was happening in the light of God’s direct revelations, his recollection of the words of Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

What happened next in this process was critical for the future of Christianity:

4.1: Believers in Jerusalem aggressively confronted Peter, but were persuaded by his careful analysis of the Spirit’s activities and his response in light of the words of Jesus. Although they could hardly have imagined it, their radical change of heart or conversion was critical for their ongoing identity as the people of God, and, although painful, their further obedient action as a mission movement also to Gentiles. Mission makes the church and they, perhaps unwittingly, had chosen a path of redefinition for themselves and cooperation with God’s future.

Luke’s narrative then moves to a case study of this redefined movement, a church of both Jews and Gentiles in Antioch where they were first called “Christians” (11:26). Antioch became the home church for the Gentile mission (13:1-4), resulting in further tensions with Jewish believers in Jerusalem, that resulted in the Jerusalem council.

5:1: Cornelius’ conversion story was again reiterated at the council in Jerusalem. It was now obvious that the future shape of this eschatological movement was at stake. In spite of Jesus’ statement of mission (Acts 1:4-8) the Jerusalem church and leaders had perhaps envisioned a national movement. But on the basis of the activity of the Spirit, the committed reflective action of those in the context of active mission, the response of the recipients of grace, the reflection of the church, and now the identification of biblical anticipation by the movement, the mission and faith community were redefined, providing the basis for the explosive transmission of faith into the Gentile Greco-Roman world.

While this model of Holy Spirit praxis is predicated upon the activity of the Spirit, “the work of God must be read and interpreted along with the Word of God” (Anderson 2006:119). Both authorities, the Scriptures and the Spirit, define the model. Ray Anderson writes, “As nearly as I can see, for every case in which eschatological preference was exercised by the Spirit in the New Testament church, there was a biblical antecedent for what appeared to be revolutionary and new” (Anderson 1997:124).
Evaluating Holy Spirit Praxis

The purpose of contextualization is to share the story of Jesus faithfully, to engage all people, cultures, and nations as disciples in community with God. Jon Paulien describes contextualization as “the healthy restatement of genuine Christian faith in a fresh cultural context” (Paulien 2005:218). By the Spirit’s activity in this process, he creates and recreates the church. Notice what is involved in Holy Spirit praxis:

It cultivates “contextualization in three dimensions” (Kraft 1999:1), our relationship with God and others, knowledge about God, and experience of God’s “power and authority” (Kraft 1999:9). This holistic focus is consistent with Jesus’ mission instructions to the seventy-two disciples (Luke 10:1-23): living and eating in the homes of the recipients (relationships), healing (power), and while healing, sharing God’s eschatological perspectives (knowledge). Charles Kraft believes these three dimensions protect from “dual allegiance Christianity” (Kraft 1999:10).

It provides for the process of “critical contextualization” (Hiebert 1987:109) which is dependent upon thorough dialogue between those sharing the gospel and the recipients through (1) the exegesis of the culture, (2) a serious examination of the biblical message to be contextualized, (3) a critical response to areas of convergence and dissonance, and then allowing (4) the community of believers involved to cultivate new contextualized practices and theology. Steps 3:1 to 5:1 (figure 3) of Holy Spirit praxis provide for this process, while protecting those doing the contextualizing from the blind spots of their cultures.

It acknowledges God, his will, and the gospel of Jesus’ death and resurrection as supracultural. While such reality can only be understood through culture and must “be contextualized anew each time it is applied to a different culture” with “new horizons for theological development” emerging (Gilliland 1989:225), the process of Holy Spirit praxis engages the recipients of the gospel, those sharing faith within that context, and the wider community of faith in understanding God, his will, and the gospel in the new cultural context. In this process the eschatological will and anticipation of God is understood in the light of prior understandings, biblical antecedents, and the historic provision of salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection.

It safeguards from unhealthy syncretism. Syncretism is the “blending of one idea, practice, or attitude with another” (Moreau 2000:924). It is “the replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements” (Moreau 2000:924). This can result from under-contextualization or over-contextualization (Hesselgrave
Under-contextualization may arise from a “rejection of contextualization” (Hiebert 1985:184, 185) or an “unhealthy reluctance to give up” one’s own syncretistic forms of faith and doctrine (Paulien 2005:224), while over-contextualization, which could be “uncritical contextualization” (Hiebert 1994:85), allows the recipient culture to overpower the claims of the gospel (Paulien 2005:224). While some syncretism is unavoidable, (Paulien 2005:4, 13; Bauer 2005.1:22) the frame of *Holy Spirit praxis* engages in “double exegesis” (Paulien 2005:229), which includes (1) the exegesis of Scripture through a group process, with a wide variety of people, at steps 3.1, 4.1, and 5.1, and (2) the exegesis of culture (Paulien 2005:233), again evident at steps 3.1, 4.1, and 5.1, but also through the Spirit’s analysis in Peter’s experience, at step 2.1. This process avoids the excesses of syncretism and cultivates what could be called “healthy contextualization” (Paulien 2005:225). See figure 4 for this new continuum.

Figure 4. Continuum of contextualization and syncretism (Paulien 2005:225).

It allows for God’s sovereignty and surprises. Reflecting on how God related to Abraham, Judah, Isaiah, and Esther, Paulien observes that “no matter how familiar we may be with Scripture, we cannot totally predict how God will act in any given circumstance” (Paulien 2005:243). Joshua Massey says, “His ways are not our orthodoxy” (2004:296). The Jewish believers in Jerusalem never thought that God would ask them to relate differently to Gentiles—it needed the activity of the Spirit, their committed and obedient response, and biblical antecedents to convince them.

It affirms the theological constants of Christian mission. It engages those sharing faith, their faith community, and the wider movement in asking the persistent and necessary questions about the relationships of Christology, salvation, eschatology, ecclesiology, anthropology, and culture in each context (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:37). Each of these was central to the five parts of the story of Cornelius.

However, this frame of *Holy Spirit praxis* also presents some challenges. It did for the leaders and church in Jerusalem and it does for us today. The five part drama of the conversion of Cornelius’ Gentile household, and the
ongoing repercussions and debates provide the backdrop to Luke’s narrative. These and the decisions of the Jerusalem council reshaped the identity of future Christianity, therefore suggesting that this frame of *Holy Spirit praxis* is more than an isolated case study. Although uncomfortable, due consideration should be given to the following suggestions:

1. It is “glocal” (Roberts 2007:14). The specific instructions of the Spirit in a local situation, for example in the home of a Gentile, had global implications for unreached people groups and for church.

2. It redefines the church. This was a painful process for the Hebraic Jewish believers and leaders in Jerusalem. While, as leaders in Jerusalem, Peter and James contributed significantly to the debates of the council and gave their assent to the decisions, it is evident they vacillated in the application. The “certain men” who continued to stir up dissention in Antioch over the grace of God being extended to Gentiles were clearly associates of James (Gal 2:12; Oosterwal 1989:21). The church is “created and recreated through the praxis of the Spirit,” liberating it from “its tendency to institutionalize the Word” (Anderson 1997:128).

3. It is prophetic. As well as communicating the gospel in ways that make “sense to people within their local cultural context,” Darrell Whiteman argues that “good contextualization offends.” This is not due to cultural offense, but when the gospel is shared and the church organized “along appropriate cultural patterns . . . people will more likely be confronted with the offense of the gospel, exposing their own sinfulness and the tendency toward evil, oppressive structures and behavior patterns within their culture” (Whiteman 1997:2-3). Such contextualized expressions are prophetic, expanding the ways in which the gospel is understood and the kingdom of God experienced (Whiteman 1997:4).

4. It confronts prejudice. Whether Cornelius and his Gentile household, Peter and the “circumcised believers” who accompanied him (Acts 10:45), the other “apostles . . . throughout Judea,” or the critical “circumcised believers” in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1, 2), their captivity to culture and unrecognized prejudices were exposed. All were confronted with the “offense of the Gospel” (Whiteman 1997:3) that the grace and salvation of God was for all, whether Jew or Gentile.

5. It suggests that mission shapes the message and movement. In that structures, status, and behavioral patterns reflect cultures, Paul was uncompromising in applying the revelations of the Spirit’s will to the life and community of the established believers and leaders. He openly confronted ambivalence or vacillation, for such represented “a different gospel” (Gal
1:6), or “no gospel at all” (Gal 1:7) when compared to that received “by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12). Not only was *Holy Spirit praxis* for the purpose of taking the gospel across the cultural divide to Gentiles, it also reshaped the message of the gospel for the Jewish believers and recreated their movement of faith. The Spirit’s activities across cultural, religious, and generational boundaries today are not only for the purpose of reaching the multitudes of world religions and secular cultures with the gospel, but also the Spirit’s activities are designed to reshape the message of God’s eschatological movement.

The Jerusalem church and apostolic leaders struggled over this aspect of *Holy Spirit praxis*. The implications for their church were enormous. History suggests that rarely have God’s people been prepared to accept his redefinitions. Statements of faith, prescribed structures, and cultural traditions are allowed to pre-empt the redefinitions God desires. But Anderson writes, “It is not precedent that permits the church to move with the freedom of the Spirit, but a biblical antecedent” (Anderson 1997:127).

**Conclusion**

*Holy Spirit praxis* is a radical model for it challenges those of the institutional church who “cling to historical precedent” (Anderson 1997:125). It forces them to acknowledge that the mission activity and power of the Spirit must always define God’s people, and redefine their eschatological identity. Being bound to historical precedent may in fact blind the church to God’s eschatological plans and preferences, producing stagnation in institutionalization.

Furthermore, in that the presence and activity of the Spirit is the pledge of the eschatological fulfillment of God’s promises in “anticipation of the return of Christ” (Anderson 1997:120), his actions suggest what God desires to be reality at the end, not just in the first century. We can therefore expect that “the Spirit will more and more prepare the church to be the church that Christ desires to see when he returns, not the one he left in the first century” (Anderson 1997:122).

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Introduction

It is a joy and a privilege for me to submit this chapter in honor of the pioneering mission work of Jerald Whitehouse. From the moment we first met I have been intrigued by his creativity and felt the conviction that he was led by God. That conviction was grounded on two things; the witness of his own life and walk with God, and the testimony of the Scriptures that I had been studying long before we met. When read in its context, the Bible offers many statements and examples that show God’s approval for methods of mission that may go against the grain of our comfortable practices. Broad reading and the clear texts of the Bible (Paulien 2004:83-85) suggest that God is more open and creative than we are. If that is the case, we should not be quick to condemn that which is different or uncomfortable.

God’s ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts (Isa 55:8-9).¹ We must keep this reality in mind as we seek to avoid the dangers

¹"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your
of religious syncretism. While syncretism is a grave danger to mission (see Owens 2007:74-80) its equal and opposite danger is the tendency to bind up outreach work in ways that limit God’s freedom of action in the name of doctrinal and lifestyle purity. The Bible is full of examples where God acted in ways that orthodox believers would not have expected or allowed. To use the words of Joshua Massey, “His ways are not our orthodoxy” (2004a:296). I will list some OT examples in canonical order, and then do the same with the New Testament.

The Unpredictable God in the Old Testament

In Genesis 22:2 God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, creating a major test of Abraham’s faithfulness. If I were God, I wouldn’t have done that. After all, according to Jeremiah 32:35, sacrificing one’s son or daughter is taken for granted to be a detestable and sinful act.

If I were God I would have chosen Joseph rather than Judah to father the line of the Messiah. Not only did Judah sleep with his daughter-in-law Tamar, but that action produced a son who would be an ancestor of the Messiah (Gen 38:13-30; cf. Matt 1:3). The messianic line also includes Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho, and Bathsheba, the adulterous wife of Uriah (Matt 1:5-6). God is more tolerant and forgiving than we are, and does not avoid guilt by association.

One of the many challenges of 2 Samuel is the way God related to David’s family. In one text (2 Sam 12:8) it is implied that polygamy was God’s will for David. Rebuking David for seducing Bathsheba, God says, “I gave2 your master’s [Sauls] wives into your arms.3 We would not expect to hear God asserting that he “gave” David more than one wife. After all, the grand

ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:6-9 ESV). The specific context here is that God’s compassion and his willingness to pardon extends to people we would not expect. He reaches out in compassion to those who are “wicked” and “unrighteous.” How much more will he be willing to pardon and include those who follow him with all their hearts, even though their knowledge of him is limited?

2The term translated “gave” here has the strong and active meaning of “handed over” (see Keil and Delitzsch 1973:389-390).

32 Sam 12:7-9, NIV: “Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites’” (emphasis mine).
biblical principle is clearly stated in Genesis 2:24. It is two that become one flesh, not three or four. Yet God did not rebuke David or even the patriarchs for their multiple wives, a practice with tragic consequences for family life in both instances. Whatever we make of 2 Samuel 12, God proved himself well able to work with people involved in a marital system contrary to his ideal. It took time for God’s original ideal in marriage to be restored.

Another startling story is found in 2 Kings 5. Naaman, military chief of staff to the Syrian king, is afflicted with leprosy. Upon the advice of an Israelite servant girl he goes to Israel to find healing. After washing seven times in the Jordan at the instruction of Elisha, he is healed and returns to the prophet with a strange request for two mule-loads of earth from Elisha’s property. He then declares his intention to worship no other God but Yahweh while asking for an exception. Would it be all right for him to bow down in the temple of Rimmon when he escorts the king of Syria there? “Go in peace,” is Elisha’s surprising reply.

There is a connection between the two mule-loads of earth and ancient religious beliefs. In all of known human history the era of the most radical religious change occurred in the first millennium B.C. (see Ellen White’s interesting comments on this historical period in White 1898:31-38). During this period people in general moved from a devotion to what we would call heathen religions, where religion was associated with the land and the forces of nature (Cogan and Tadmor 1988:11:67), to the philosophical or world religions we are familiar with today. All the great world religions of today either had their origin between 800-200 B.C. (Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Taoism) or are directly dependant on those that did (Christianity, Islam, Sikhism). These religions have largely displaced the primal religions although the primal religions still have influence below the surface in many parts of the world (Geering 1978:215-223).

For the primal religions of Naaman’s day, all gods were associated with one land or another (Cogan and Tadmor 1988:11:67; Montgomery 1951:377). That meant that Naaman could not worship Yahweh, the God of Israel, in Syria unless he brought with him Israelite dirt to spread in his garden. When he wanted to worship Yahweh, he would kneel on the Israelite soil (Cogan

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4See note on 5:17 in Montgomery 1951: “In [regard to] the transfer of the holy soil Thenius notes this as the earliest known example of a widespread custom; he cites the report of Benjamin of Tudela that the Jewish synagogue in Persian Nehardea was composed wholly of earth and stone brought from Jerusalem; the empress Helena similarly transported the holy soil to Rome.”
and Tadmor 1988:67; Montgomery 1951:375). When he entered the temple of Rimmon with the king, he would bow his head but not his heart. Elisha agrees with this arrangement, somewhat to our surprise (Montgomery 1951:375; but see some equivocation on this in Nichol 1955:2:878).

God uses Esther to accomplish his purpose (Esth 2:10, 14-17) in spite of the fact that she had not practiced her Jewish faith for years (Paton 1908:175, 179, 180; Clarke 1831:688). No matter how familiar we may be with Scripture we cannot totally predict how God will act in any given circumstance.

Things get really bizarre at times in the prophets of the Old Testament. God told Isaiah to wander the streets of the city naked for three years proclaiming a message of doom for the allies of Judah (Isa 20:2-4). Would we want to work with a mission partner who claimed God had told him to preach naked for three years? This command was not calculated to enhance Isaiah’s reputation (or even God’s reputation) among the people, yet this extreme action served God’s revelatory purpose to get the people’s attention (Wright 1964:61). While Isaiah must have been embarrassed by this command, Micah became even more of a laughingstock. He not only walked around naked, he was howling like a jackal and moaning like an owl (Mic 1:8).

Note the concept of “holy land” in Zech 2:12. “Although Naaman had recognized the fact that outside of Israel there was no God, he had not entirely divested himself of the view that the God of Israel was in some special way attached to the land of Israel, and in his own country he wanted to worship that God on Israelite soil” (Nichol 1955:2:878).

The reason Haman and the king did not realize they were betraying the king’s wife was because they did not know she was a Jew. That would not have been possible had she been living according to the Torah! Sabbath keeping and kosher eating are pretty hard to hide, especially in a marriage. On top of that, Esther 2 in the Hebrew makes it clear that Esther and the other candidates for queen left “the house of the virgins” to spend the night with the king, and then went to the “house of the concubines.” Translations usually gloss over that aspect of Esther’s behavior. Clearly something more than a beauty contest was occurring here. The story of the book of Esther is less about Esther’s faithfulness in a crisis than it is about God’s faithfulness in spite of human faithlessness. Esther’s obedience to her cousin and courage in a moment of crisis are definitely commendable. But we miss the deeper story of God’s character when we gloss over the flaws in the human characters of the story.

At that time the LORD spoke by Isaiah the son of Amoz, saying, ‘Go, and loose the sackcloth from your waist and take off your sandals from your feet,’ and he did so, walking naked and barefoot. Then the LORD said, ‘As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptian captives and the Cushite exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, the nakedness of Egypt’” (Isa 20:2-4, ESV). While the Hebrew words in this passage normally have the meaning of absolutely naked, they are sometimes used for “half clad,” naked from the genitals to the feet, like wearing only a T-shirt. This would be appropriate to verse 4, where the Egyptian and Cushite peoples are led into captivity. Such captives were often dressed in a way to expose the genitals and lower half of the body. Either way was an embarrassing experience for Isaiah, especially since the Hebrew implies that his action is not explained to the people until the end of the three years (see Gray 1912:345, 346!)

Because of this I will weep and wail; I will go about barefoot and naked. I will howl like a jackal and
God asks Ezekiel to deliberately defile himself by eating food cooked over human excrement (Cooke 1936:55 and Greenberg 1983:99), and when Ezekiel protests, God allows him to use animal dung for fuel instead (Ezek 4:12-15) (Nichol 1955 4:591). Each of God’s actions above is a surprise when read in the context of God’s larger principles written elsewhere in the Bible.

The story of Daniel 2 is widely known and appreciated, yet its implications for our thesis are often missed. Before God ever approaches the faithful Hebrew Daniel with a vision, he gave one to Nebuchadnezzar the pagan king, the enemy of God and his people. A careful look at the Aramaic of Daniel 2 and 7 makes clear how radical this action was. Most readers of Daniel think Nebuchadnezzar had a “dream” in chapter 2 and Daniel had a “vision” in chapter 7. But the Aramaic of Daniel 2:28 and 7:1 is essentially identical (Stefanovic 2007:248). Both men saw a “dream and visions of (their) head as (they) lay in bed.” Whatever it was that Daniel experienced, Nebuchadnezzar also experienced. In other words, God treated a pagan king, who did not believe in him and warred against his people, as an object of revelation on the same terms as a Hebrew prophet, and “the mode of revelation in these two cases was the same” (Shea 1996:155). This is hardly the kind of behavior most of us would have expected from God. His ways are not our ways.

These Old Testament references help us to see that while God never contradicts himself, he is never totally predictable either. We can often fit his words and actions into our understanding only with a great deal of discomfort. This has led me to a much more open mind in regard to creative approaches to God’s mission. Just when I think I have God figured out, he does or says something that surprises me. The unpredictable God is likely to be at work in our world in the places where we would least expect it.

moan like an owl” (Mic 1:8, NIV). As with Isaiah, the words here can express total nakedness or the half clad variety which still exposes the genitals. See notes on Isaiah 20 above and Smith 1911:38.

9Deut 23:13 warns the Israelites to take great care in avoiding contact with human excrement (see Keil and Delitzsch 1973:1:415). Leviticus 5:3 and 7:21 are not clear on what they mean by “human uncleanness,” but it likely concerns human excretions, which should not come in contact with food (see Keil and Delitzsch 1973:9:81, 82). Defilement occurred in OT times when a person touched something unclean. Food would be defiled when it touched anything unclean or when someone touched something unclean and then touched the food (see Keil and Delitzsch 1973:1:310-311, 325-326). If human excrement was considered unclean in the context of food, it would be understood that it could not be used for fuel when cooking food.

10Lucas notes one point of difference between the experiences of Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar was a passive observer of the vision, a mere spectator, while Daniel (Dan 7:16) participates in his vision by speaking with a member of the heavenly court (see Lucas 2002:20:177).

11I am indebted for the basic ideas above to Massey 2000:5, 6. According to Montgomery 1951:375, this text in 2 Kgs 5 has been a stumbling block to many orthodox scribes and scholars through the centuries.

12Traditionally, Adventism has tended to evangelize on a single-method principle. I have addressed the inadequacies of that approach in earlier works (see Paulien 1993 and 2008). I direct readers there for practical consequences in the Western context of the approach taken in this chapter.
The Unpredictable God in the New Testament

Some might argue that the revelation of God in the Old Testament is fragmentary and distorted by the primitive nature of Israel’s response to God there. It is true that the New Testament provides the clearest revelation of God’s way through the incarnation and earthly ministry of Christ. But the clarity of the revelation in Christ only highlights the unpredictability of God as something essential and inherent to his character. Several New Testament texts that bear on this issue will be examined below in canonical order.

John 1:1

It is felt in some circles that the Christian use of Allah as a name for God is a mark of syncretism. And there is a certain appeal and logic to this position or few Christians would hold to it. Guilt by association, right or wrong, is a major way that people negotiate their way through the various spiritual options available to them. Christian apologetic literature, therefore, notes the associations of the term Allah with the paganism and polytheism of pre-Islamic Arabia to draw the conclusion that both Christian and Islamic use of the term is unacceptable. But the unpredictable God of the New Testament seems less concerned with guilt by association than most Christians are. An example of this is found in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (theos).”

By the time the Gospel of John was written, pagan philosophers such as Heraclitus and Plato had long used the Greek term logos (Word) as a name or title for a “second god” who functioned as the creator and sustainer of the world and then as a mediator between the great God (theos) and the created, material world. Philo, a Jewish philosopher in Alexandria and a contemporary of Jesus, sought to make Greek philosophy palatable to the Jews and the Old Testament palatable to the Greeks. He applied this Greek term logos to the God of the Old Testament, the One who gave the law on Mount Sinai. For Philo the Word was a “second God,” the high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, an intercessor with God, the lawgiver, the mediator of creation, the mediator of revelation, and the sustainer of the universe. Philo also called him God’s firstborn, his eldest son, the image of God, and the second Adam.

There are strong parallels between Philo and Plato, on the one hand, and the New Testament descriptions of Jesus, on the other. When John called Jesus “the Word,” readers of the Gospel who had been influenced by Greek philosophy would have recognized the term as expressing everything they
knew about Jesus. John, a disciple of Jesus (John 21:24), had no problem using this Greek term in order to communicate important truths about Jesus. John was contextualizing the message and actions of Jesus in terms that made sense in the Greco-Roman environment.\textsuperscript{13} John’s reference to logos is explicit and unmistakable.\textsuperscript{14}

In a more general way the same pattern occurs with the biblical use of the Greek term for God, theos. In the pagan environment the term theos was used to denote a polytheistic totality of gods. Zeus was the father of the gods as well as the human race. One might expect that the God of the New Testament would encourage his people to stay as far away from this term as possible. Nevertheless, New Testament writers used that term for the true God some 1,300 times (Massey 2004b:285). The Muslim and Christian use of Allah may have some unfortunate associations in the Arabic language, but Muslims never use it in a polytheistic sense, it is only used with reference to the one true God (Massey 2004b:284). Even the English term “God” has plenty of associations with the paganism and polytheism of pre-Christian Europe.\textsuperscript{15}

Human language is an imprecise and problematic tool, but it is the tool God has chosen to reveal himself to the human race. The unpredictable God seems less concerned with “guilt by association” than many of his followers are.

John 16:12

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear” (John 16:12). This startling saying of Jesus makes it clear that it is not syncretism to say less than you know in a given situation. Jesus is clearly aware that there are many aspects of his message that his listeners “can’t handle now” (my translation). In the sharing of truth there needs to be great sensitivity to the standpoint of the listener at a given time. Truths that may be sweet at a later time can provoke unnecessary opposition when given before the

\textsuperscript{13}For more on this see Paulien 1995:39-41; Beasley-Murray 1987:liv, lv.
\textsuperscript{14}In saying this I do not mean to imply that John was dependant on the Greek concepts for his picture of Jesus. His world is still a Jewish world. But that did not prevent him from using this charged Greek concept (logos) to connect with his non-Jewish readers (see Keener 2003:341-347).
\textsuperscript{15}The Islamic world is not the only place where the choice of words for “God” is a challenge. Whenever a new language or culture is approached, a decision has to be made regarding what to call “God” in that culture. One has to choose between local words for God with all of their local connotations and bringing in an unfamiliar name for God, which brands genuine Christian faith as foreign or colonial in that culture. As noted in the main text, even the English word for God has pagan origins and connotations (see The Oxford English Dictionary 1961:4b:267).
listeners are ready. In a hostile environment, particularly, it is wise to begin with things held in common and move to controversial topics only after a heart connection with another has been established. In the Gospel of John, Jesus knows what is inside others even before they speak (John 2:23-25). But the knowledge of what is inside another is available to us only after careful listening. To put it another way, we must begin outreach to any community with careful exegesis of their customs, beliefs, and practices. It is equally necessary to love the other the way God loves them. Jerald Whitehouse has pointed out that every spiritual person has an argument need and a spiritual need. When we trigger the argument need by raising or responding to controversial issues between us and another, we may each feel good about “defending the faith” but no one will change for the better. When we avoid the argument need and supply something to the other’s spiritual need, a heart connection can develop, opening the way for spiritual growth in both directions. In John 16:12, Jesus recognized that there were truths the disciples were not ready for. He did not take them one step faster than they were ready to go.

Religious people often feel a strong incentive to give a “straight testimony,” telling people in no uncertain terms the truth exactly as they see it. In the process they damage many relationships and little spiritual good is accomplished. The unpredictable God revealed in Jesus Christ meets people where they are, not where we think they should be.

Acts 9 and 10

Chapters 9 and 10 in Acts are particularly relevant to the issue of whether a timetable for transitioning an insider movement to a standard church context is advisable. In Saul of Tarsus and Cornelius, the church had evangelistic prospects that stretched the limits. As a member of the very Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus and prosecuted the disciples and as one who had murdered believers, Saul of Tarsus would be a challenging addition to any first-century Christian congregation. As a Roman centurion, like the man who crucified Jesus, and a Gentile, Cornelius’ entry into the church

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16 There is an interesting tension between John 16:12 and John 15:15, where Jesus tells them that he shared with them everything his Father had told him. In mission as in John there is a tension between openness and authenticity on the one hand, and sensitivity to what the audience can handle on the other (see Brown 1966:714; Beasley-Murray 1987:282, 283).

17 By “insider movement” I am referring to the result of efforts to build faith in non-Christian contexts where traditional evangelism is not possible or advisable.
would also involve significant adjustments on the part of the church.

What is interesting about these stories (Acts 9:11; 10:7-8, 24-25) is that both Saul and Cornelius were quite willing in their response to the heavenly visions (see Munck 1967:82; Nichol 1955:6:232, 251; Fitzmyer 1998:448, 461). This is in contrast with the difficulties God had in convincing both Ananias and Peter to overcome their fears and prejudices (Bruce 1988:187; Munck 1967:95, 96). James Park suggests: “The angel's command to Cornelius, the revelation to Peter, the Spirit's command to him and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles in Cornelius' house—all were necessary for the baptism of the first Gentiles” (2010:15). Ananias is quite willing to respond to whatever the Lord might ask him (Acts 9:10) until he learns what the mission is (Acts 9:11-12). Instead of trusting that God knows what he is doing, Ananias argues with God (Acts 9:13-14) on the basis of Saul’s reputation. “Ananias recoils from the implied command. His obedient but human spirit balks at the thought of ministering to one with Saul’s dreadful reputation. He respectfully remonstrates with the Lord (Nichol 1955:6:232). Only when God gives him a forceful command along with some explanation does he obey (Acts 9:15-16).

In Acts 10:9-20 the Lord had to startle Peter with a shocking vision, while carefully arranging the timing of that vision with the arrival of the envoys from Cornelius and the Spirit’s insistence that Peter go and meet with them. Only then was Peter convinced to comply with the request. Peter’s “resistance was because of conscience. Peter had not yet learned that the distinction between Jew and Gentile was done away in Christ (Gal 3:28-29). That Peter failed to learn this fully even after this vision is shown by his later dissembling at Antioch, for which Paul so frankly rebuked him (Gal 2:9-21)” (Nichol 1955:6:249). Although Peter does not seem to have raised an objection to going with Cornelius’ men (Acts 9:29), he is clearly out of his comfort zone (Acts 10:28) and only went because God had intervened (Bruce 1988:210; Park 2010:15). Ellen White says that “it was a trying command, and it was with reluctance at every step that he undertook the duty laid upon him; but he dared not disobey” (1911:137).

In both cases the new believers, Saul and Cornelius, were more willing to connect with the church than the church leaders were to connect with them. The apostles did not expect that God would ask them to relate differently to Gentiles than their Israelite ancestors had done, they needed a special revelation to grasp that (Acts 10:28; 11:1-18), and even then it took time to sink in (Nichol 1955:6:249).

In the Roadmap for Mission adopted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Roadmap for Mission 2009), workers are advised
to set a timetable for bringing “special affinity groups” into traditional churches.\textsuperscript{18} This is wise counsel in general, but Acts 9 and 10 illustrate how problematic such a plan can prove in some circumstances, particularly on the side of the church. Four direct revelations from the Lord were needed to accomplish that task in Acts. And the two apostles were more reluctant to receive those revelations than were the new believers. Rather than setting timetables to bring murderers and Gentiles into the church, the apostles needed divine intervention to even begin to take up the challenge. So unless the idea of timetables is handled with great wisdom and flexibility today (being sensitive to the Lord’s timing) it could cause us to lag behind the Lord.

Acts 15

The early church faced a similar issue in Acts 15. Leadership was pressured to choose between structural unity and pragmatic diversity. Structural unity could easily have been achieved had the church remained a sect within Judaism. All Gentile converts would have had to become Jews in order to receive Jesus. The end result would have been a unified church that would have had little impact on the massive Gentile world.

There were many in the church who wanted to go in that direction. Representatives of that group went to Antioch and insisted that salvation was dependant on circumcision according to the laws of Moses (Acts 15:1-2). At the Jerusalem Conference as recorded in Acts 15, Christian Pharisees insisted not only on circumcision but entire adherence to the law of Moses (Acts 15:5) (Fitzmyer 1998:539, 540). In essence, Gentile Christians were to be treated the same as Jewish proselytes. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas argued against this position on the grounds of God’s acceptance of Gentiles through the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8), the role of grace in salvation (Acts 15:11), and the abundant evidence that God was working miracles in response to the Gentile mission (Acts 15:12) (Fitzmyer [1998:539-540] considers Acts 15

\textsuperscript{18}Adopted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on October 13, 2009. I particularly have in mind point 5 under section 20 15 in the Roadmap for Mission document: “Transitional Groups—In some situations, Seventh-day Adventist mission may include the formation of transitional groups (usually termed Special Affinity Groups) that lead the people from a non-Christian religion into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In forming such groups, a clear plan that emphasizes the end result should be followed. These groups should be established and nurtured only with the endorsement and collaboration of church administration. Although some situations may require an extended period of time to complete the transition, leaders of these groups should make every effort to lead the people into membership in the Seventh day Adventist Church within a deliberate time plan” (see also B 10 28 and B 10 30, emphasis mine).
to be the same event as that recorded in Gal 2:9-20, but see also Munck 1967:139 and Martyn 1997:200).

James added to these arguments the sense that the Gentile mission was a fulfillment of prophecy (Acts 15:13-18). He argued that Amos 9:11-12 predicted a time when a descendant of David would create circumstances in which large numbers of Gentiles would seek the Lord (Fitzmyer 1998:553, 555, 556; Nichol 1955:6:309). If that prophecy was being fulfilled in the mission of Paul and Barnabas, then the church should put no unnecessary barriers in the way of Gentiles receiving Jesus: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19; see also Dutch 2000:17-18). The strictures of Acts 15:20-21 were designed to make fellowship possible between Jewish and Gentile Christians (Fitzmyer 1998:556-557; Munck 1967:140; Nichol 1955:6:310-313). So unity in diversity was preserved.

In other words, the fundamental issue addressed at the council described in Acts 15 was less theological than a matter of community identity (Dutch 2000:18). Many agents of change in the Muslim world see God’s mighty hand in the outpouring of Muslim interest in Jesus. They feel that the church today needs to make accommodations similar to those of Acts 15 in relation to this new work of God.

Perhaps we could apply the situation of Acts 15 to the current situation in the following way. The issue of Acts 15 was: Does a Gentile have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian? The early church leaders answered, “No.” The issue today could be expressed: Does a Muslim have to become a “Christian” in order to become a Seventh-day Adventist? When becoming a “Christian” in the Islamic world includes eating pork, drinking alcohol, dressing immodestly, and having a lax attitude toward obedience, what does becoming a “Christian” have to do with Adventist faith? I believe the unpredictable God would encourage us to be creative in relation to movements we could not have imagined fifty years ago.

Acts 19:37

“You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess” (Acts 19:37). Paul and his companions began their work in Ephesus in the synagogue and later in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). Through miracles and exorcisms the gospel impacted the Ephesians with great power (Acts 19:11-22). The resulting downturn in sales of religious crafts provoked a riot (19:23-34) against the followers of Jesus.
What is significant for our purpose is the speech of the city clerk, who quiets the disturbance (Acts 19:35-41). He notes that the Christians “have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.” One might expect that Paul would have spoken out publically against such idolatry, and to not have done so might have left him open to charges of “syncretism!” Yet Paul seems to have acted with sensitivity to the local culture and sentiments. To quote Dutch, he chose “his battles wisely” (2000:21).

Once again, the temptation to give a “straight testimony” is present for all who have convictions based on their study of sacred texts. There is the feeling that if we do not deliver “the whole counsel of God” we will somehow have compromised our mission to a people group. But Paul was very sensitive to meeting people where they were (1 Cor 9:19-23) and building on the things he had in common with them. Like Jesus (John 16:12), he did not push them beyond what they could handle in the time allotted to him. At times in our zeal to deliver the truth, we make God over into our own image, which chafes at every misunderstanding or misrepresentation of our position. The unpredictable God seems well able to tolerate the misguided worship of him by those who do not yet know better.

1 Corinthians 7:17-20

Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.

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19 The language of Paul and his companions had been chosen with care when they had spoken about the special worship of Ephesus. They had inculcated the great principles that gods made with hands were not gods, and had allowed that statement to do its work (v. 26). Paul put the same restraint on himself at Athens, though he was greatly moved when he saw ‘the city wholly given to idolatry’ (ch. 17:16)” (Nichol 1955:6:383).
them (Keener 2005:66). While verses 17-24 are related to what comes before, they do read like a digression from the ongoing point (Orr and Walther 1976:216; Robertson and Plummer 1911:145). This digression is triggered by the missionary implications of verse 16, where a believing wife who stays with her husband can be the means of his salvation (Barrett 1968:167).

Paul’s point seems to be that we are not to put unnecessary barriers in the way of people accepting the gospel. To leave the marriage (assuming there is no abuse or danger to the wife) is to abandon the husband in a lost condition. Leaving the marriage on account of the gospel would place a barrier in the way of the husband’s accepting the gospel. On the other hand, remaining in a less than ideal situation could be a means of saving another. So while the context of verses 17-21 is marriage, Paul is stating a much broader principle: “This is the rule I lay down in all the churches” (Barrett 1968:168; Keener 2003:66; Orr and Walther 1976:216).

In verse 18 Paul moves from marriage to circumcision to illustrate his general principle, and slavery and freedom further illustrate the principle in verse 21. Circumcision was a big deal in Old Testament times as well as in Paul’s day (Fee 1987:313). It was the decisive marker setting off Jews from Gentiles. Yet Paul makes the radical statement, “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing.” To the Jew this statement would have seemed absurd for circumcision was one of God’s commandments in the Old Testament (Barrett 1968:169). Circumcision becoming nothing could only be true in relation to the gospel. The gospel is so critical that circumcision is not to stand in the way of someone receiving the gospel. Likewise, “A man who was circumcised before his conversion is not to efface the signs of his Judaism” (Robertson and Plummer 1911:146). The gospel missionary is not to put unnecessary barriers in the way of the gospel.

This principle addresses the kinds of community that might result from the preaching of the gospel. There were at least two distinct branches of the early church, a Palestinian Jewish branch and a Gentile branch. It was more than a matter of taste or culture. To truly be a Jew one had to separate

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20 According to Grosheide, the topic shifts here from marriage to vocation (Grosheide 1953:168). However, as Bruce himself notes (1988:174), the chapter returns to the topic of marriage in verse 25, so verses 17-24 are more of a digression than a change of topic.

21 The concept of “call” in verse 17 and following is the equivalent of conversion (see Fee 1987:310).

22 Scholars have debated the degree to which there was a difference between Palestinian Judaism and the Judaism of the Diaspora. Traditionally, it was assumed that Diaspora Judaism (in places like Egypt, Asia Minor, and Rome) was far more open and syncretistic than that of Roman Palestine, but recent research has suggested that the lines of distinction should not be drawn so sharply. Hellenism had widely impacted Palestinian Judaism by the first century, particularly in Galilee, but also in Judea and Jerusalem, as evidenced in the early chapters of Acts (see Hengel 1981).
oneself from “unclean” Gentiles. Paul clearly understood the need to work differently in the two environments (Gal 2:7-9). Among the Jews he used Scripture and kept feasts and even temple rituals (Acts 13:16-41; 17:2-4; 18:21; 20:16; 21:20-26). Among the Gentiles he spoke on the basis of general revelation and quoted Greek poets and philosophers (Acts 14:14-17; 17:22-29). Compared to the pagan writings Paul quoted from, use of the Qur’an in outreach does not seem a stretch.

In 1 Cor 7 Paul considers the distinction between Jews and Gentiles to be significant, even among followers of Jesus (Robertson and Plummer 1911:146-148). While the cross brings the two into a spiritual unity (Eph 2:11-16), they are to remain distinct for the sake of mission. There is no deception involved here, rather the recognition that God was working in two distinct environments. Rather than force an institutional unity, Paul preferred to maintain the distinction as part of his missionary strategy (1 Cor 9:19-23). Just as it was necessary to conduct two distinct missions in the first century, it may also be advisable at times for believing Muslims and Jews today to maintain some distance from traditional Christian communities.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from Gods law but am under Christs law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:19-23, emphasis mine)

This passage contains Paul’s clearest mandate for an outreach that accommodates itself to a variety of cultures and backgrounds. The more the

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24 These two paragraphs are based in part on Jameson and Scazlevich 2000:35, 36. See also Parshall 2004:290.
gospel worker enters into the life and culture of the recipients, the greater the success of the outreach. In so doing, Paul is taking risks with his own spiritual experience (1 Cor 9:24-27). Paul is even willing to risk being misunderstood. I have written on this passage at some length elsewhere (Paulien 1993:23-27; Paulien 2008:13-18).

A fascinating point comes into play in verse 20. To the Jew Paul “became” (a Greek aorist) like a Jew. But Paul already was a Jew. Yet there was a sense in which his Judaism had been altered by the gospel. Judaism was something he could re-adopt for the sake of the gospel (Barrett 1968:211; Grosheide 1953:212, 213). The use of “became” with the article suggests that Paul was referring to a specific occasion, perhaps that of Timothy’s circumcision or an incident like the one mentioned in Acts 21:23-26 (Barrett 1968:211).

In verse 22 Paul sums up saying he has become “all things to all,” with the final “all” being the sum total of Jews, under the law, apart from law, and weak that he had described in verses 20-22 (Barrett 1968:215, 216). There is a driving principle in all of Paul’s mission actions: place no unnecessary barriers in the way of those who need to hear the gospel. It is the obligation of the one presenting the gospel to cross the divide between the presenter and those who need to hear the gospel. It is not the obligation of the hearer to bridge that gap.

For example, “To the weak I became weak.” The term weak here is not used in the physical sense, it had to do with people who were over-scrupulous in spiritual matters. Rather than condemning their scruples, Paul abstained from things they thought were wrong even though he did not consider doing them to be wrong (Grosheide 1953:213, 214; Robertson and Plummer 1911:192). He did not allow his freedom in Christ to get in the way of the “weak” coming to understand the gospel (1 Cor 8:4-13), which is the only way the “weak” could become “strong” anyway.

The passage suggests that we accommodate those who need to hear the gospel even to the point of seeming to become just like them. What the passage does not address is the extent to which resulting communities of believers can deviate from the accepted custom among Christian churches. Paul has already dealt with that point in 1 Cor 7:17-24, whereas in 1 Cor 9:19-23 he is focused on methods of outreach.

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25 C4 and C5 missionaries tend to read “to the Muslim become like a Muslim” quite differently. Both use the text to validate their positions (Parshall 2004:290; see also Keener 2003:80, 81).
26 The first couple of chapters in 2 Cor make it clear that Paul’s flexibility in mission led to considerable tension with the church in Corinth. The Corinthians seem to be asking how they can trust someone who is constantly “changing his mind” (2 Cor 1:12-20), whose “yes” is really “no” and vice versa (see Barrett 1973:75-84; Keener 2003:159, 160).
1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Thess 4:11-12)

It has been said that knowledge is caught rather than taught. That certainly seems to be the case with regard to the gospel. In Paul’s day the church at Thessalonica had a number of members who used their Christian faith as an excuse to “freeload” off of pagan neighbors.27 This apparently made the church the object of disgust and derision in Thessalonica. The stated principle in this passage is also applicable today. As far as possible, we are to live our faith in such a way as to gain the respect of outsiders and avoid being disruptive of the social context in which a spiritual community is placed.28 Wanamaker calls it “maintaining a low profile” (1990:163).

In a Muslim society good relationships with neighbors are valued at least as much as truth, honesty, and wealth. When Christians ignore family and social responsibilities in order to “witness” for Christ they unwittingly communicate irresponsibility and social disdain in the Muslim environment. Paul would argue here that the first work of the follower of Jesus is to uplift family and community responsibilities. In that context the witness to Jesus has credibility.

When a person is converted to the Adventist faith in the developing world our first tendency is often to pull them out of their family and their environment and send them off to school to learn how to be an itinerant pastor. Such an action may make perfect sense in terms of building up the church as an institution. But the consequent impact on family life can do great harm in terms of the credibility of the church in the Muslim community. Would an unpredictable God prefer short-term results at the cost of long-term hits to the church’s reputation?

2 Timothy 2:24-26

And the Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently

27This was contrary to Paul’s own practice of working for a living even while preaching the gospel (Bruce 1982:91; Malherbe 1987:13; Wanamaker 1990:164, 281, 282).
28Paul’s counsel is interesting, exercising “ambition” to live a quiet life apart from politics and popular social affairs (Malherbe 2000:247).
instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Tim 2:24-26)

Paul’s use of the phrase “the Lord’s servant” implies that followers of Jesus will teach others in the way that Jesus did (Nichol 1955:7:339). The words “gently instruct” are based on the Greek word for meekness (Matt 5:5). To quarrel is the opposite of meekness. The basis for a kind, teachable, and meek approach is the recognition that those in the trap of the devil cannot be freed by human coercion or cunning. They can only be freed by the power of God. That power is best brought to bear by a Christ-like spirit.

This text leads me to think it is unfortunate when confrontational styles of mission are held up as models and more passive ones lead to a charge of syncretism. The appropriate approach is the one that has the best long-term effect on mission. Paul here, contrary to his reputation, seems to side with the “laid-back” approach that shows respect to others, even when one perceives that they may have become captives to the Devil.

1 Peter 2:17; 3:15-16

Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. (1 Pet 2:17; 3:15-16)

1 Peter 2:17 is a summary of the previous four verses (13-16) (Johnston 1995:81). Peter here essentially offers the same strategy for mission that Paul does in 1 Thess 4:11-12. He encourages believers to show sensitivity and respect toward the civil authorities and toward those who believe differently, even when the strength of their pagan views provokes them to slander. In principle, Christians are free from the bonds of society, the social order pales in value next to Christ. Yet Christians are to show respect for the sake of the gospel, and to avoid behavior that could be criticized by outsiders (Reicke 1964:95). Not only so, Peter wants Christians, as far as possible, to behave in ways that the pagan society would regard as praiseworthy, although their ultimate loyalty is to God (Johnston 1995:78, 81, 82). 1 Peter 3:15-16 repeats many things already said in chapter 2 (Johnston 1995:92). If advice like this can be offered in the pagan environment of ancient Rome, it is certainly
appropriate in the monotheistic Muslim societies of today (Dutch 2000:21).

This underlines a point made above under John 16:12. When truth is presented in an argumentative manner it loses its attractiveness. The object of truth is to make people more like Jesus, to share such truth in an unChrist-like manner is counter-productive (Nichol 1955:7:573). The key word here is respect. To approach others as if they know nothing of God, as if we are inherently superior to them, is to show disrespect and incline them to reject our message. But an open, respectful, teachable spirit is winsome and can bring people to conviction.

**Conclusion**

There is a natural human tendency to believe what we want to believe. That means that there is almost always a tension between what we believe about the Bible and what the Bible actually teaches. We get accustomed to certain conclusions based on “sound bites” drawn from familiar texts, while the vast reservoir of biblical truth is largely untapped. The goal of this brief article was to draw attention to overlooked texts and incidents in the Bible that have serious implications for the way we do mission to Muslims and other faith traditions. These texts suggest that God is more open-minded than I am. If I am serious about aligning my life with Scripture, I cannot ignore the picture of an unpredictable God who does things I would least expect on the basis of my comfortable selection of proof texts.

In sum, the above texts suggest a God who meets people where they are and is not limited by the reluctance of his own people to change. There will be many challenges in mission where the best course forward is not certain and it will be tempting to avoid change and favor the status quo. I believe the unpredictable God would urge us to take the risk of erring on the side of the people rather than plowing ahead on traditional grounds no matter the cost to those on the ground. This is the kind of approach Dr. Whitehouse has always taken. I honor him for his fearless action in service of an unpredictable God.

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29“In reforms we would better come one step short of the mark than to go one step beyond it. And if there is error at all, let it be on the side next to the people” (White 1948:21).

30To avoid any misunderstanding, let me be clear that I am not suggesting we throw off all restraint and do whatever we want in mission. While the Bible teaches that God is unpredictable, it also teaches that he is consistent, which is one of the bases for predictive prophecy. For a fuller development of this biblical tension between a God who is consistent and yet is unpredictable see Paulien 1994:43-64; Paulien 2004:33-61. We need to strike a balance between building mission on sound and consistent principles and striking out in creative directions to meet unusual situations. The fervor of this article is grounded in my conviction that in recent years we have gone too far in the direction of the former at the expense of the latter.
Works Cited


One of the greatest obstacles for Muslims to accept Seventh-day Adventism is faith in the Triune God, the fundamental mystery of the Christian faith (Berkhof 1979:82–99; Coppedge 2007; Culver 2005:104–121; Erickson 2000; Grudem 1994:226–261). As Seventh-day Adventists we confess that God is One but manifested in three distinct persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Whidden, Moon, and Reeve 2002; Canale 2000:105–159; Rice 1997:58–71; Seventh-day Adventists Believe 2005:23–33).

When we speak about God, we need to remember that we enter holy ground, and we need to do it in deep humility knowing our limits.1 We are using imperfect human language to describe an infinite God! The transcendent God always surpasses even our finest categories of thinking.

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1 Before God we are like a small child with an extremely limited understanding. It is said that Augustin was walking at the seashore while thinking about the vastness of God and the mystery of the Trinity. He saw a small boy who was pouring sea water repeatedly into his hole in the sand. “What are you doing?” Augustin asked the boy. “Well, I am trying to pour the ocean into my hole!” he answered. Then Augustin whispered to himself (in another version of the story, Augustin heard a voice from heaven saying): “You silly man, you try a similar thing, to put an infinite God into the boundaries of your small brain.”
and logic. The best attitude in such a situation is a humbleness to which God invited Moses when he encountered God: “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exod 3:5). We need to realize that we know God only because He has made Himself known to us. What we perceive about Him was revealed to us; we are totally dependent upon His self-revelation (Exod 34:6–7; Deut 29:29). Thus, our only correct response to His Word is to carefully listen, eagerly learn, and wholeheartedly obey (Isa 66:2).

The same reverence toward God is taught in the Qur’an where Allah (the Arabic term for God) is presented with many admirable attributes. Muslims need to repent, obey Him, and follow His right path (Qur’an 1:6–7; 2:1; 3:84–85; 4:17–18; 7:153; 9:104; 39:53). “Muslim scholars state that Islam is an all-encompassing system—a sociopolitical, socioreligious system, as well as socioeconomic, socioeducational, legislative, judiciary, and military system governing every aspect of the lives of its adherents, their relationship among themselves, and with those who are non Muslims” (Al-Bukhari as cited in Soloman 2007:62).

The basic confession of faith from the Hebrew Bible which a faithful Jew recites at least twice a day, “Shema Yisrael, Adonay Elohenu, Adonay echad” “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut 6:4), is a clear proclamation of monotheism in a polytheistic society. This Shema announces God as being one in a very fundamental and unequivocal statement. This oneness of God is stressed several times in the rest of the Old Testament, because He alone is the true God and besides Him there is none (Deut 4:35, 39; Neh 9:6; Ps 86:10; Isa 44:6; Zech 14:9).

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2 God surpasses even the best mathematical formulas, like $1+1+1=1$ (illogical one) or $1\times1\times1=1$ (mathematically correct), or graphic designs, like the triangle or the circle with three parts inside, or the unity of two persons in a harmonious marriage. All these analogies cannot express adequately the inner unity and harmony within the three persons of the Godhead.

3 Muslim scholars speak of about 99 names for Allah (see Vicchio 2008:1–2). In the introductory passage to the whole Qur’an in Al Fatihah, God is introduced in the following way: “In The Name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful. Praise be to Allah, The Lord of the worlds. The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful. The Possessor of the Day of Doom. You only do we worship, and You only do we beseech for help. Guide us (in) the straight Path. The Path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not (that of) the erring” (Qur’an 1:1–7; Ghali 2005:1; see also Khalidi 2008:3).

4 Islam means total submission and devotion to God in all spheres of life. See also Qur’an 3:19; 9:33; and Islam’s five pillars of faith: (1) Shahadah (Testimony): “There is no god but Allah”; (2) Salah (Praying five times a day); (3) Sawm (Fasting during Ramadan); (4) Zakah (Purification of Wealth or Giving to the Poor); and (5) Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca).
Does this Old Testament statement allow for a belief in the Trinity or is it excluded by definition? It is important to note that the New Testament authors also proclaimed that God is one (Mark 12:29; 1 Cor 8:5–6; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Jas 2:19), and thus they did not see this announcement as a contradiction to the Trinitarian thinking to which they adhered (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14). The Qur’an similarly attests that God is one (3:2, 6, 18; 13:30; 16:17–20; 18:20, 21; 25:2–3; 35:3; 114:1–3).

People usually think that the Trinitarian teaching can be found only in the New Testament. A basic question is to see if there is room for Trinitarian thinking in the Old Testament? Do we have any hints, traces, pointers, or allusions for the doctrine of the Trinity in the Hebrew Bible, the Holy Scriptures of Jesus and His apostles? Does the New Testament introduce a completely new concept which is foreign to the Hebrew understanding of God? Is the Old Testament’s view of the Godhead compatible with the Trinity?

This article will investigate how the Old Testament speaks about the Triune God and Christ, and if its language could be used in dialoguing with and witnessing to our Muslim brothers and sisters and others friends? What vocabulary would be Muslim friendly and close to their culture and acceptable to their Semitic thinking? What Trinitarian terms could help them to view this biblical doctrine as not being so offensive?

Before I go further into the theological study, I want to stress the following pastoral advice. Never engage in a theological debate about the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus with your Muslim or Christian friends unless you bring them first to an existential knowledge of Jesus Christ and help them to develop a personal relationship with Him. Only after a person accepts Jesus as his/her intimate Savior and Friend and falls in love with Him, who forgives sins and helps in our everyday struggles, will that individual be open to accepting the

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7 The word “Trinity” never appears in the Bible, however the concept of the Trinity is present and is progressively revealed. From it one can learn the lesson of how important it is to gradually present this teaching to our friends so that they may step by step become familiar with it and grow into a full understanding of God’s truth.
Allusions to the Trinity in the Old Testament

In the Hebrew language, a general term used to designate God is *Elohim*, a plural form of *El/Eloah.*
9 This plural form was often interpreted as an indication for the Trinity (Berkhof 1079:85–86; Coppedge 2007:71–72.). However, to state that the plural form of the word *elohim* is evidence for the Triune God is incorrect for the simple reason that this term is used to designate the true living God as well as pagan gods; its meaning depends on the context. “The word *elohim* is unique in its ‘flexibility’—it can be used both in the singular and the plural meaning, as a proper and a common name, as a designation of the God of Israel and of pagan gods” (Slivniak 2005:4). A good example of these two opposite meanings is encountered in Ruth 1:15–16: “‘Look,’ said Naomi [to Ruth], ‘your sister-in-law [Orpah] is going back to her people and her gods [*elohim*]. Go back with her.’ But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go

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8 Ellen White strongly admonishes: “If men reject the testimony of the inspired Scriptures concerning the deity of Christ, it is in vain to argue the point with them, for no argument, however conclusive, could convince them. ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.’ 1 Cor 2:14. None who hold this error can have a true conception of the character or the mission of Christ, or of the great plan of God for man’s redemption” (White 1911:524).

In order to accept the doctrine on the Trinity, it is necessary to study and responsibly answer at least three crucial issues: (1) Is the doctrine of the Trinity biblical? Is it solidly rooted in the Bible? Is it in contradiction to the Hebrew biblical thinking on monotheism? (2) Who is Jesus Christ? Is He the Savior? Can He forgive sins? Is He eternal? Is He the true and full God in the highest sense? (3) Is the Holy Spirit a mere force and influence, or a person? This article explores only some aspects of the first two issues.

We need to be very sensitive to the objections of our Muslims friends. A very fruitful approach in dialoguing with Muslims is to speak first about God’s uniqueness and His goodness in order that they may be attracted to the beauty of His character. After establishing this common ground, one can continue with explaining the work of the Spirit of God. Being under the influence of the Holy Spirit will open the heart and mind of people to understand the Word of God and accept Jesus as their personal Savior. Once the person experiences forgiveness of sins and rejoices in the assurance of salvation coming from Jesus, who died for our sins, then he/she is ready to see His elevated authority, exceptional qualities, and divine status. This paves the way for embracing the biblical (not philosophical) doctrine of the Trinity. People need to be lead from the relational experience to the deeper biblical knowledge, thus growing in the Lord.

9 The term *elohim* is used 2,603 times in the Hebrew Bible according to Even-Shoshan 1993:69–74. Several names or titles are used in the Hebrew Scripture for God, like *Yahweh* ("LORD"), *El* ("God"), *Elohim* ("God"), *Elyon* ("Most High"), *El Elyon* ("God Most High"), *Adonay* ("Lord"), *Shadday* ("Almighty"), *El Shadday* ("God Almighty"), etc.

Another title as a grammatical plural for the living God (besides *Elohim*) is *Adonay* ("LORD"). This term is used only for the true God and never designates pagan gods. He is the Lord of His household. See, for examples, Gen 18:30; Exod 34:23; Deut 10:17; Josh 3:11, 13; Ps 35:23; 45:11; 114:7; 135:5; Isa 6:1; Dan 1:2; Mal 1:6.
I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God [Elohim] my God [Elohim]” (see also 1 Kgs 18:24; Isa 37:15, 19). Therefore, one cannot argue from the plural form of Elohim for the notion of the Trinity. The term Elohim does not refer to three persons or three gods. It is rather a neutral expression; only the context decides what the precise meaning of the word is.

What is highly significant is that the name Elohim is used with a verb in the singular (a grammatical contradiction). For example, “In the beginning God [plural] created [singular] the heaven and the earth” (Gen 1:1). The same is true about the ten expressions of vayomer Elohim meaning “and God [plural] said [singular]” in the first Creation account (Gen 1). The translation is thus not “gods,” but “God,” the one true living God. It is also crucial to note that pagan gods are never designated in the Bible by the name of the Lord (Yahweh). This name is used exclusively for the God who entered into a covenant relationship with His people!

The “We” of God

God usually speaks about Himself in the “I” formula (e.g., Exod 20:2; Isa 41:10, 13). However, five times (in four biblical verses), He refers to Himself in the category of “We”:

1. Gen 1:26: “Then God said, ‘Let us make [na’seh] man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’”

2. Gen 3:22: “And the LORD God said, ‘The man has now become [was] like one of us [ke’achad mimmenu], knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’”

3. and 4. Gen 11:7: “Come, let us go down [nerdah] and confuse [venabelah] their language so they will not understand each other.”

5. Isa 6:8: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us [umi yelech lanu]?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

Three times these specific proclamations are stated in cohortative forms,

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10For exceptions to this rule when the plural verb is used with Elohim, see Gen 20:13; 35:7; Ps 58:11. God is called “Creator” (singular) in Isa 40:28; but in Eccl 12:1 for the expression of “Creator,” the plural form of bara’ is used. God is designated as “Maker” in the plural form of asah in Job 35:10; Ps 149:2; Isa 54:5. Plural adjectives that describe God as holy are in Josh 24:19 and Prov 9:10; 30:3.
i.e., admonitions in the first person plural (“let us make”; “let us go down”; “let us confuse”) and twice with prepositions (“of us”; “for us”). How should we understand these plural divine expressions? Are they in contradiction to biblical monotheism, or do such divine proclamations testify about the triune God?

In this context, it is important to note that in the Qur’an God speaks very often in the “We” formula (e.g., Qur’an 2:2–5; 10:66, 94; 17:13; 35:9; 37:104–107). Here is a potential common and fruitful ground between Christianity and the Islamic faith. It is crucial to observe that Christians, Jews, and Muslims speak about their God in the plural form. What does this plurality reveal about God in the Hebrew Bible?

There have been several attempts to explain this divine plural usage. In the history of the interpretation of this phenomenon, one can find eight main theories (an exhaustive list of different theories is not provided here).

Plural Interpretation Theories

1. Mythological Reminiscence Explanation

Some scholars argue that these plural expressions are reminiscence of a pagan origin, i.e., one god is addressing another god (or a pantheon of gods), because the first faith in a transcendent power was polytheistic, and this expression was used in the polytheistic society. So one god addresses another (or many) in planning to create humans. Gabler already in 1795 proposed the theory that in Gen 1:26 we have the “remnants of Semitic polytheism” (Gabler 1795). Also Gunkel is a proponent of such an interpretation: “God turns here to other elohim-beings and includes himself with them in the ‘we’. . . . The concept originates in polytheism, but is no longer polytheistic per se since it regards the one God (Yahweh) as the Lord, the sole determiner, but the other elohim as greatly inferior, indeed his servants” (Gunkel 1997:112).

It is true that in the mythological accounts of creation, gods talk among themselves when they create humans, like in Enuma Elish or in the Atrahasis creation epic. But the Bible and the book of Genesis in particular contain strong anti-mythological elements, therefore it would be very difficult to imagine that we have here some traces of mythological material. In addition, there is no room in biblical teaching for a progressive thinking from polytheism to monotheism.

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2. *The Divine Plural Is a Reference to Christ*

This view is attested to very early in the Christian church—in the Epistle of Barnabas and in Justin Martyr. The First Council of Sirmium in AD 351 not only affirmed that the *faciamus* (“let us”) of Gen 1:26 was addressed by the Father to the Son as a distinct person, but they also excommunicated those who denied it! Christians later traditionally embraced this interpretation and thus divine plurals became references to the Trinity.

This is not a tenable interpretation for the simple reason that the text itself does not state who spoke to whom. This theory imposes one's own view on the biblical text, putting the New Testament idea into the reading of this expression! Why limit God’s conversation to only two divine persons?

3. *The Father Communicates with the Holy Spirit*

Clines argues that the context of Genesis 1 points to the fact that the Father speaks to the Holy Spirit (Clines 1968:68–69). The explicit reference to the Spirit of God in Gen 1:2 shows that the Spirit creates which means that He is the Co-Creator with the Father (see also Ps 104:30).

This is a very attractive explanation. However, one wonders if we need to limit God’s “We” only to the interaction between the Father and the Holy Spirit, because it is evident on the basis of intertextuality that Jesus Christ is the Creator too (John 1:1–3 echoes Gen 1:1–3; Col 1:16).

4. *God Is Addressing Earthly Elements*

Some Jewish scholars in the past like Joseph Kimchi and Maimonides suggested that God speaks to the earth (Lange 1890:173). However, the serious question remains: Why would the earth be a partner to God in creation? God creates Adam from the ground, using it, but He did not elevate the earthly materials with the power to create.

5. *Plural of Majesty (Pluralis Majestaticus)*

This interpretation is young, and it is proposed in correspondence to the medieval speeches of European kings, because they spoke about themselves in plural forms: “We, the king of England,” “we, the king of France,” or the queen of England said: “We are not amused!” According to this interpretation, God is speaking in a solemn way about Himself like a king in the plural form. The proponents of this interpretations were, for example, C. F. Keil (2006:38, 39), August Dillman (1897:79), Samuel R. Driver (1943:14), and E. A. Speiser (1981:75). Some scholars argue that the plural of majesty exists in the Bible, like in Ezra 4:18 (“The letter you [Rehum and Shimshai] sent us [to King Artaxerxes] has been read and translated in my presence”),
however, it may well be that this “sent us” refers not only to the king but also to his government.

In the biblical records, there is no evidence that any Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Judean, or other ancient ruler would speak in this way! In other words, this rhetorical interpretation cannot be imposed on these divine “We” texts, because there is no indication that such a rhetorical style was used in biblical times.

6. God Addresses His Heavenly Court

According to this theory, God speaks to His angels or officials in heaven and then He creates humans. This interpretation is very popular (expressed already by Philo of Alexandria) and widely accepted among scholars today—Christian or Jewish, like Gerhard von Rad (1972:58), John Oswalt (1986), M. Kline (1993:28), Nahum Sarna (1989), Brevard S. Childs (2001), Bruce K. Waltke (2001:64, 65), John H. Walton (2001:128-130), W. Sibley Towner (2001:25), and Walter Brueggemann (2001). Oswalt argues that “it is possible, in the light of 1 Kings 22:19, that who will go for us [in Isa 6:8] is an address to the heavenly host, either visibly present or implied” (Oswalt 1986:185). Sarna states that “the extraordinary use of the first person plural evokes the image of a heavenly court in which God is surrounded by His angelic host” and maintains that “this is the Israelite version of the polytheistic assemblies of the pantheon—monotheized and depaganized” (Sarna 1989:12). Childs argues for a “divine court. God is consulting his entourage” (Childs 2001:56). Brueggemann uses the expression of “the plural of government” or “government of Yahweh” (Brueggemann 2001:60).

It is true that sometimes God addresses His heavenly court (see Job 1:6–9; 2:1; 1 Kgs 22:19–22; Dan 4:14; 10:12–13), however, it is highly improbable that this would be the case in our texts under investigation (see the rhetorical question in Isa 40:41). Such an interpretation of Gen 1:26 fails on two grounds:

A. Exegetical-Syntactical Argument. A close parallelism between Gen 1:26 and Gen 1:27 does not leave space for someone other than God Himself for creating humans in His image. In Gen 1:26, God states His intention to create humans: “Let us make man . . . ,” and in Gen 1:27 the result of His creation initiative is described: humans were created to His image. They were not created in the image of God and other heavenly beings (i.e., His court). The biblical text is explicit: “So God created man in his [not their] own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). It is plainly stated by parallelism of those verses that “His image” is “God’s image uniquely!” Humans were created solely in the image
of God and not in the image of God and His angels/court (compare with Gen 5:1–3).

B. Theological Argument. The biblical message consistently points to God as the only Creator. Besides Him there is no one in the entire Universe who could be designated as co-creator with Him! Thus, “let us” does not refer to angels or His heavenly court as being His co-creators! The biblical texts are unanimous and consistent: God alone is the Creator; only He created Adam and Eve in His image! The same truth about the God Creator is attested to in the New Testament (John 1:1–3; Col 1:16).

7. Plural of Self-Deliberation (Plural of Exhortation)

According to this view, God speaks to Himself (understood as being one person), and He encourages Himself to perform as we sometimes encourage ourselves before a difficult task by saying: “Let’s do it.” U. Cassuto (1961), John D. Currid (2003:85), P. Joüon (1947: paragraph 114e), Claus Westermann (1994:145), and Gesenius (1910:398) are among the defenders of this type of interpretation. Cassuto, for example, suggests that it is a plural of exhortation or self-encouragement (Cassuto 1961:55).

This interpretation is highly uncertain because of the lack of clear biblical parallels. It seems that this hypothesis creates God in our image, needing to encourage Himself as we humans need to exhort ourselves! According to scholars, the plural of self-deliberation is not found about God in the biblical material. I agree with Clines who argues that “the rarity of parallelism gives us little confidence in the correctness of this view” (Clines 1968:68). God is not a solitary Being who speaks aloud to Himself in order to exhort Himself.

8. Plural of Fullness—Plurality within the Godhead

In this interpretation, God speaks or communicates within the Godhead. He is in dialogue within the different persons of the divinity. The term “plural of fullness” was coined by Derek Kidner (1967:52) and many scholars followed his lead, like Stanley J. Grenz (2001:286–288), Gerhard F. Hasel (1975:65–66), Jan Heller (2006:15–16), and Kenneth A. Mathews (1996:162). C. John Collins goes beyond this understanding and actually explains Gen 1:26: “It is a ‘we’ of self-address (which can open the way for

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Those who argue for this position point to 2 Sam 24:14: “David said to Gad, ’I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.’” However, it is not certain that David speaks here only for himself. They also use Songs 1:9–11: “I liken you, my darling, to a mare harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh. Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with strings of jewels. We will make you earrings of gold, studded with silver.” Here again, the lover does not speak only for himself, because the craftmen should also be included.

The term “plural of fullness” is not very clear, even though the concept is substantial. It is obvious that the meaning of these plural divine expressions must be interpreted by the immediate context, and in this way to clarify their meaning, and also suggest a new terminology.

**Determination of the “We” of God by the Context**

What does the context provide for the understanding of the divine “Us”?

*First Passage (Gen 1:26)*

God the Creator deliberately presents Himself as “We” and not as “I” when He creates humans.

The divine “We” forms people in His image; it means that this divine “We” makes humans as “we” also (as husband and wife), that is, not as isolated individuals, but persons in relationship to Him and to each other. Thus, God creates humans into a close fellowship. God is plural and when He creates humanity into His image, He makes them in plural, that is, He creates persons into fellowship.

From the very beginning, God wants to be known not by His “I” but “We” in His relationship to humanity. This is why He also creates “we” (humans as male and female). Humans created into His image must also be a plurality as He is We; and as there is a unity within God Himself, so the two human persons, distinct and different, should become intimately one. Thus, the whole human being is “WE” and not “I”! This is only on condition that they live in close personal fellowship. To do so, they need to stay in relationship with Him who created them out of love. Thus, when God creates, He creates into fellowship, creates humans as “we.” On the background of this immediate context of Gen 1:26, I want to propose that the plural of the divine “We” is a plural of fellowship or plural of community within the Godhead. This conclusion is confirmed by three additional passages.

*Second Passage (Gen 3:22)*

The immediate context of Gen 3:22 is the fall into sin, a reverse or de-creation of creation. The human’s “we” is broken; they became sinners, degraded, and their “we” is wrecked. When the “we” of humanity is depraved (not only with one individual but also corporatively), then God again speaks in plural, and confronts “we.”

Humans were created in dependency upon God, in fellowship with Him, and when this intimate relationship was broken, then meaningful life
disappeared. When “we” is dysfunctional, then fellowship and integrity are ruined. The first couple wanted to be like God, to decide for themselves what was good and evil. By sinning, humans lost the capacity to discern what was good and evil. Only the grace of God’s We could bring healing to humanity.

The literal translation of this text (Gen 3:22) is: “Behold, the man was [not “has become”] like one of us knowing good and evil.” The meaning of the hayah ke is “was like” and not necessarily “become like.” The first couple wanted to be like God, which meant deciding for themselves what was good and evil. By sinning, humans lost the capacity to discern what was good and evil. Today we are totally dependant upon God’s revelation in order to know what is good and evil.

Third Passage (Gen 11:4–7)

God’s speech in Gen 11:7, “Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other,” is a direct reaction to the arrogant speech and proud attitude of the human’s “let us.” The Babylonians stated: “Let us build a city ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens” (Gen 11:4). When humans rebel and build their “we” against God, He reveals His We!

The passage of Gen 11:1–9 is written in a chiastic literary structure to help us to discern the whole pattern:

A—vv. 1–2 Narrative: humanity’s one language and their settling
B—vv. 3–4 Speech of people: “Let us reach heaven.”
C—v. 5 Narrative: JUDGMENT—God’s investigation
B’—vv. 6–7 Divine speech: “Let us go down.”
A’—vv. 8–9 Narrative: many languages and scattering of the people

Part A parallels A’, B matches with B’, and at the climax of the whole structure (C) lies a message of God’s judgment. The thematic correspondence matches well with different literary genres used in this passage; there is an alteration between narratives and speeches. For the purpose of our study, it is important to stress that v. 7 matches with v. 4. Humanity’s antigodly behavior “Let us build a city and reach heaven” is in direct opposition to God’s “Let us”? God directly answers to humanity’s rebellious “we” with His “We”: “Come, let us go down and confuse their language” (Gen 11:7).

When humans build their “we” against God, He reveals to them in His WE. God’s “WE” stands in contrast to humanity’s rebellious “we.” In this biblical text, as well as in the previous one, these plural forms of divine
addresses point to “the fate of humanity” (Sarna 1989:12). Humans need to submit to We and live in close fellowship with Him in order to live an integral, harmonious, and happy life with each other.

**Fourth Passage (Isa 6:8)**

In the vision of the holiness of God, Isaiah is convinced of his sinfulness. After divine cleansing, God asks: “Whom shall I send? And Isaiah responds: “Here I am, send me.” The prophet is sent with a special divine commission of calling a sinful people to repentance. In v. 8, God speaks for the first time. Only after purification is Isaiah ready to meet directly with God and learn God’s purpose for him. “Only when his sin, seen in all its massive and objective reality, is removed can Isaiah hear the voice of God” (Childs 2001:56).

In this setting, the divine plural statement refers to God Himself because of the strength of the Hebrew parallelism in the verse: (A) “Whom shall I send?” (B) “Who will go for us?” The “I” in the first question corresponds to the “us” in the second one. Thus the match leads to the apparent conclusion that it is God Himself who speaks here for Himself, and He is not doing it for Himself and additional heavenly beings, His court, His lords or advisers. Isaiah will be on God’s mission for His cause. The stress is on the divine commission. God sends and gives a message, and the prophet should go for Him. He is not a speaker for the heavenly court but for God Himself! He is accountable to Him! Isaiah is sent to people—to plurality. It is noteworthy that even though J. Alec Motyer argues in Isa 6:8 for a “plural of consultation,” he adds that the New Testament “relates this passage both to the Lord Jesus (John 12:41) and to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25), finding here that which will accommodate the full revelation of the triune God” (1993:78).

Our fresh investigation of the divine plural expressions in these four passages under scrutiny leads to a surprising conclusion. God speaks about Himself as “We,” and this expression points to a plural of fellowship or community within the Godhead. This plurality is a “plurality of Persons” (Hatton 2001:26). God communicates within Himself; He is in a dialogue within the Godhead.

Edward J. Young speaks about the “plurality of persons in the Speaker” (1965:254), Gerhard F. Hasel about “an intra-divine deliberation” (1975:65), and Allen P. Ross about “a potential plural, expressing the wealth of potentials in the divine being. . . . These plurals do not explicitly refer to the triunity of the Godhead but do allow for that doctrine’s development through the process of progressive revelation” (1988:112).
The “We” expressions of God do not contradict biblical monotheism, but point to the Trinitarian thinking rooted in the Old Testament even though they do not yet proclaim the Trinity plainly. It is crucial to observe that the New Testament is not presenting something which is entirely new or foreign to Hebrew thinking!

The “We” of Allah Explanations

There are two main explanations in Islam for the “We” of Allah used in the Qur’an. One group interprets this phenomenon as a literary stylistic form, and the others, as being a plural of majesty. Muzammil Siddiqi provides the first interpretation and states that it is “a style of speech” (2000:1). He asserts: “Sometimes the speaker says I and sometime[s] says we” (2000:1).13 A second very popular explanation among Muslims maintains that this plural pronoun is a “plural of respect and honor” as in royal proclamations.14 Hussein Abdul-Raof speaks about “the majestic plural” (2005:120). Scholars agree that God Allah is viewed and understood differently by Muslims than the Christian God: Allah is a solitary God in the sense of singularity (Geisler and Saleeb 2002:270), but the Christian God is plurality in unity who transcendence all our limited categories of singularity and plurality (Ratzinger 1979:128–129).

In view of the majesty and otherness of our God, we are not able to “explain” God, His Being, and it would be foolishness even to try. God reveals the essentials about Himself so that we can know Him and grow into His fullness (John 17:3; Eph 4:13). We should fellowship with Him and bow down in admiration before Him and His revelation (Isa 66:2)! This will enable us to cultivate meaningful relationships and fellowship with others. God is the foundation of society, because He is We, He is Plurality, and from Him flows all the blessing.

The Meaning of Echad (“One”) in Deut 6:5

We need to ask a very important question: Is the Shema of Deut 6:5 in contradiction to our conclusion so far? In the Hebrew language there are two words for expressing the idea of one: echad and yachid. The term echad

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13For example, the first person singular for Allah is used in Qur’an 2:186; 20:14, 82; the first person plural is employed in Qur’an 15:9; 85; 41:39; and both singular and plural pronouns are together mentioned in Qur’an 54:9–16.

14Muslims differentiate between “we” as a plural of numbers and “we” as that of respect and honor. See Deedat (n.d.:no.).
is used in the *Shema*. There are at least three nuances of meanings for the word *echad* in relationship to Deut 6:5.\(^\text{15}\) The Lord is ONE means that:

1. **The Lord Is Unique**
   He is utterly holy; it means He is different from anyone else. One can speak about the otherness of God, because as a holy Being, He is the Other One. Thus, one is not a numerical value but a description of the quality!

2. **The Lord Is Exclusive**
   God alone is worthy of our praise, because He is faithful. He is the God of all gods. It does not mean a hierarchy within a pantheon of gods with the Lord as the Most High God as would be suggested by the historical background of the polytheistic society, but rather His is exclusive in His position, because other gods are nothing—they have no life, they cannot hear, see, intervene, or act (Isa 44:6–20). Our God, the Lord is real. No one can be compared to Him (Deut 4:39; Isa 45:18).

3. **The Lord Is Unity**
   It means God is oneness. The word *echad* indicates also the invisible and indivisible unity of the Lord. It is interesting that in the *Shema* the two names for God are used: *Elohim* and *Yahweh*. Both terms contain a different message in their meaning. *Elohim* points to a mighty, powerful God (*'el* = “powerful,” “mighty”), universal, distant God, God of all humanity, God Creator, transcendent God who creates by His word (in the first biblical Creation account this phrase is used ten times: “And God said”—Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29; see also Ps 33:6, 9; 148:5; Isa 55:11; Heb 11:3). *Yahweh*, on the other hand, is an imminent, near, intimate God, God of the covenant, God of His people who enter into a covenantal relationship with Him. *Yahweh* is a personal God who creates persons by His personal, close involvement.\(^\text{16}\) These two names are an inner indicator for the different aspects of God’s involvement with humans.

   This term *echad* does not speak about the singularity or solicitude of God! He is one but not single or isolated. Here is the reference of plurality within the oneness of God. This term is better translated as “unity.” This can be observed from other texts which employ this word *echad*. For example, in marriage there is a close unity of two individuals (husband and wife): “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one [*echad*] flesh” (Gen 2:24). This oneness is not

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\(^{15}\)For the meaning of *echad*, I am indebted to Edgar (2004:69–84) and Pryor (2003:50–60).

\(^{16}\)For a detailed description of the theological usage of these two names of God, see Cassutto 1983:15–41.
about numbers but closeness of relationship, expressing a close unity! Other
texts to consider are Gen 11:1, 6; 34:16; Exod 24:3; Num 13:23; Ezra 2:64;
Jer 32:38–39; Ezek 11:19; 37:17, 19, 22 which speak about different people or
nations becoming one, that is, united (compare with Ps 133:1).

On the other hand, the term *yachid* (as masc., 9 times, and fem., 3 times;
“only,” “only one,” “lonely,” “solitary,” “single,” “precious life”) occurs all
together twelve times in the Old Testament (Gen 22:2, 12, 16; Judg 11:34;
Ps 22:20; 25:16; 35:17; 68:6; Prov 4:3; Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10; and Zech 12:10)
and expresses the idea of one in the sense of singleness, solicitude, and
exclusivity.

Our God is not *yachid*, “one,” in the sense of a solitary or lonely Being.
There is a fellowship of love and unselfishness within the Godhead, a unity
within a community of persons.

**Someone Coming from God Is God**

God promised that a special child would be born of a virgin (i.e., by
supernatural intervention), and this child would be God. It meant that
someone was coming from God and even though He was called “son,” He
was “God.” “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will
be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel” (Isa
7:14; compare with Matt 1:18–23). “For to us a child is born, to us a son is
given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isa
9:6).

**The Angel of the Lord Passages**

The Old Testament presents striking narratives of a being who is called
the “Angel of the Lord” or sometimes simply the “Angel,” but acts and speaks
like God and is identified as God. These manifestations provide a profound
riddle, because the “Angel of the Lord” is both referred to as God and also
distinguished from God who resides in heaven. There are a good number
of biblical passages with this theme of the “Angel of the Lord”: Gen 16:7–
13–30; Zech 3:1–2. Consider the following:

1. The phrase *malach YHWH* (the “Angel” or “Messenger of the Lord”) is used for the first time in the story about Hagar and Ishmael, therefore
Muslim friendly (Gen 16:7–14). Hagar recognizes that this Angel of the Lord is God, the Living One, who speaks to her (v. 13). The Angel of the Lord promises Hagar: “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count” (v. 10; reaffirmed in 17:20 and fulfilled in 25:13–16) which is similar to the statement God made to Abraham (Gen 13:16; 22:17). In this context for the first time, the Lord gives a name to a child—Ishmael (v. 11).

2. In Genesis 22 the Angel of the Lord speaks to Abraham and is identified as the Lord (compare vv. 12b and 16b). He speaks twice (vv. 11–12; 15–18), and God (Elohim) is mentioned five times (vv. 1, 3, 8, 9, 12). It is Yahweh who saves Abraham from sacrificing his son by providing the ram “as a burnt offering instead of his son” (v. 13), and blesses him. Three times the key phrase “the Lord will provide” occurs: in v. 8 it is Elohim who “will provide a lamb,” in v. 14 it is mentioned twice that it is Yahweh who will provide it.

3. The Angel of God plainly declares to Jacob that He is God: “I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me” (Gen 31:13a). Twenty years earlier in Bethel the Lord appeared to Jacob in a dream assuring him that he was not alone and blessed him, and Jacob made a vow to be faithful to Him (Gen 28:10–22).

4. When Jacob blessed Joseph, he equated the Angel with the Lord: “May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys” (Gen 48:15–16a).

5. “There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up” (Exod 3:2). When Moses came closer to investigate what was going on, the Lord God commanded him “from within the bush” to take off his sandals, because he was in His very presence (3:5). “At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God” (3:6b). The Lord then commissioned Moses to his special mission to lead His people from Egypt (Exod 3:7–4:17), and God miraculously liberated them (Exod 5–15; see also Exod 23:20–23; Acts 7:35–36).

6. In the period of judges, there are several episodes which deal with the Angel of the Lord. These narratives in chaps. 2, 6, and 13 demonstrate that the Angel of the Lord was the Lord of the Exodus: “The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, ‘I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers’” (Judg 2:1). Similarly in the story of Judges 6–7 about Gideon's splendid victory over the Midianites, the Angel of the Lord and the Lord are terms describing the
same reality (see 6:11, 14, 16, 20–25). The same is true in Judges 13 in the narrative about the birth of Samson (see especially vv. 3, 6, 13, 19–23) when Manoah, after encountering the Angel of the Lord who also appears in the story in the form of a man, exclaimed: “We have seen God” (13:22).

7. The Angel of the Lord passage in Zechariah 3 reveals the extraordinary position of that being: He rebukes Satan, commands others to obey him, removes iniquity, orders that new garments be put on Joshua, forgives sins, and commissions Joshua, the high priest (3:1–2, 4–6). These actions are prerogatives of God, yet this Angel is distinct from God Himself. This points to the plurality within God, to two divine distinct persons.

Thus, on the basis of the close reading of the above biblical texts in their immediate context and larger theological framework, one can conclude that this “Angel of the Lord” is a divine being, the pre-incarnate Christ appearing as God’s Messenger. It is significant that Zech 12:8 equates God and the Angel of the Lord. These appearances in the form of the Angel of the Lord were preparatory to Jesus’ incarnation, they were Christophanies. The Apostle Paul stresses that it was Christ who led Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land, thus he identifies who is the Angel of the Lord: “They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor 10:3–4).

It is noteworthy to mention that this terminology about Jesus Christ, as being the Angel of the Lord, is easily accepted by Muslim believers, because they strongly believe in the existence of angels. It does not offend them, so it is a good way to present to them many Old Testament stories and introduce them to the presence of Jesus, thereby demonstrating His active role in Old Testament history, because He was the One who at that time was in contact with God’s people.

**Theophanies**

A theophany is God’s temporal appearing in bodily form long before Jesus’s incarnation. This spacial manifestation is mentioned several times

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17How can we identify the Angel of the Lord as God? (1) He speaks in the first person singular with “I” formulas as if he himself were God when bringing a message (Gen 16:10; 22:16–17; 31:13; Exod 3:6; Judg 6:14). (2) The biblical text uses in parallel terms the “angel of the Lord” and the “Lord” or “God,” and thus identifies them as one Being (Gen 22:11, 15; 31:3, 11, 13; Exod 3:2, 4, 7; Judg 2:1–2; 6:11, 14, 22; 13:3, 13, 22; Zech 3:1–2). (3) He describes himself as holy (Exod 3:2, 5). (4) He carries out God’s judgment (2 Sam 24:16; 2 Kgs 19:35). (5) God’s Name is in Him (Exod 23:20–23). (6) He takes on a human appearance as in cases of theophany, God’s pre-incarnate appearances (Josh 5:13–15; Judg 13:6, 10, 21).
in the Hebrew Scriptures where God comes down and presents Himself in the form of a man in whom we recognize the pre-incarnate Christ, because in the context this Man is identified as God. These theophanies are actually Christophanies in the Hebrew Scriptures.

1. According to Genesis 18, three men visited Abraham (18:1–2), and he showed them his generous hospitality. Later in the story, two of them departed to Sodom (18:16, 22), and they are identified as angels or messengers (19:1, 15) but also as men (19:5, 10, 12). The Man who stayed and communicated with Abraham is identified as the Lord (18:10, 14, 17, 20, 22, 33) and the Judge of all the earth (18:25). Abraham is further dialoguing with God and asking for His mercy over Sodom to spare their lives if only ten righteous can be found there (18:23–32). The Lord graciously granted his prayer (18:32).

2. According to Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with a man (v. 14) who is later identified as God (v. 30). Jacob realized that he was encountering a heavenly divine being, because he asks this Man to bless him. God then changes his name and blesses him (vv. 28–29). Jacob explains why he named that place “Peniel” (“The Face of God”): “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared” (v. 30; see also Hos 12:3–5).

3. Josh 5:13–15 tells the story about Joshua meeting a man who is the “commander of the army of the Lord.” Joshua worshiped him and was not reproached for it. This Man commanded Joshua to do exactly the same thing that God had asked Moses to do according to Exod 3:2–6: “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.” Joshua is thus a new Moses and is commissioned to conquer the Promised Land.

4. Dan 10:5 describes Daniel’s vision in which he saw a “Man in linen.” The comparison of Dan 10:5–6 with Josh 5:13–15, Ezek 1:26–28, Dan 8:11, and Rev 1:13–17 leads to the conclusion that this Man in linen is a divine being, the pre-incarnate Christ (see Doukhan 2000:159–160).

The Son of God

The expression “Son of God” in Dan 3:25 is pointing to a supernatural being: “‘Look!’ he answered, ‘I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God’” (NKJV). King Nebuchadnezzar saw the pre-incarnate Christ who was walking with the three Hebrew friends in the fiery furnace and protecting them. As a pagan ruler, he most probably said: “… but the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods [or a divine son, or the son of gods; ‘bar elahim’ in Aramaic],” that is, a divine being. This was from Nebuchadnezzar’s religious
perspective. However, from our Christian perspective, we recognize that person as Christ, the true Son of God. He literally fulfilled God’s promise to be with His people in order to deliver them: “When you will walk through the fire, you shall not be burnt, nor shall the flame scorch you” (Isa 43:1). We need to remember that Daniel and his three friends were in contact with Nebuchadnezzar before that event, and they could have given him good insights into their faith (see Dan 1–2).

However, from the Muslim perspective, the expression “Son of God” is very offensive, therefore we should avoid it in our first contacts. The Qur’an states explicitly that Allah does not have a son: “Allah did not take to Himself a son, nor has He another god with Him” (23:91; see also 31:13). Daniel 3 also described the same being as the angel/messenger (v. 28), the term which can build bridges between us and our Muslim friends when we retell them this and other stories about Jesus.

**The Servant of the Lord**

In the book of Isaiah, there are at least four songs of the Servant of the Lord, ‘ebed YHWH (Isa 41:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12), so-called songs of the Suffering Servant which culminate with the fifth song about the anointing of the Messiah (Isa 61:1–3). All these songs point to the Messiah Jesus Christ (see especially Acts 8:30–39). In the inaugurating sermon of His public ministry, Jesus Christ read the first verses from Isaiah 61 and then boldly proclaimed that this prophetic statement had just been fulfilled in front of their eyes (Luke 4:16–21).

The phrase “the Servant of the Lord” describing the mission of Jesus is Muslim friendly. There is no problem for them to understand and accept that Jesus is the Servant of the Lord. It is profitable to gradually open to them the magnificent, salvific, and substitutionary role of this Servant on our behalf by explaining what He did and accomplished for us (see especially Isaiah 53).18

**Davidic King**

The Messianic personage portrayed as a royal heir to the throne of David, so-called Davidic King, is vividly depicted in Isa 11:1–16, Ezek 34:23–24; and 37:24–26 (Ladd 1978:7–12). His primary mission would be to establish

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justice as a just king. This King would be their true Shepherd.

This royal ambitious terminology is not really appealing to the Muslim world, because of the current political situation and the connotations with David, kingship, dominion, and rulership from Jerusalem. When we speak with them about Messianic expectations, we need to stress the spiritual and eschatological nature of this hope. The Davidic King, the Messiah, will establish an eternal kingdom of peace and justice. He proceeds from the kingdom of grace to the kingdom of glory. It is interesting to note that in the time of Jesus the figure of the Davidic king was the most popular notion about the Messiah: they expected a political ruler who would overthrow the Romans and expel them from their land. This false expectation of a political Messiah led leaders to reject Jesus Christ when he came as the Suffering Servant.

**The Word of God**

In the Hebrew Bible the Word of God is creative, active, and powerfully accomplishes the unexpected. It is explicitly stated that God was creating by His Word: “By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth” (Ps 33:6). The Old Testament speaks of the “Spirit of God” and the “Word of the Lord” in connection with the Creation of life (Gen 1:1–3). “For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps 33:6). God’s creative Word always accomplishes its purpose: “So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa 55:11; see also Jer 23:29).

Jesus Christ is presented in John 1:1–3, 14 as the Word of God in two capacities—as the Creator and as the Word incarnate: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” According to 1 Sam 15:26, Saul by refusing to obey the Word of God actually refused to obey God.

It is important to note that for Muslims the notion of the Word of God also lies at the heart of their religion. “The axis of Islam is not the person of the Prophet but rather the Word of God, as revealed through him and laid down in the Koran” (Schimmel 1985:142).
Wisdom of God

Wisdom is described in Proverbs as having God’s prerogatives and in chap. 8 is a hypostasis of divine Wisdom with an independent existence. Wisdom “was appointed from eternity” (v. 23) for a specific work as mediator and communicator between the godhead and creation; existed before “the world began” (v. 23), “before the mountains were settled in place” (v. 25); was there when the Lord “set the heavens in place” (v. 27); and was the master craftsman, that is, the Co-Creator with the Lord always beside and with Him rejoicing together in creative work (vv. 30–31). Wisdom seems to enjoy the divine status and personifies Jesus Christ.19

God’s Presence

God’s Presence (lit. “the Face of God”) is personified in several biblical passages. God assured Moses that His Presence (panay) would go with him and God’s people. Then Moses responded: “If your Presence [paneycha] does not go with us, do not send us up from here” (Exod 33:14–15). Knight correctly explains: “Here God’s face is clearly an alter ego of God, equated with the Name, and wholly equivalent to the Angel of the Covenant of Exod 23.20, in whom anyway the Name of God is to be found (23.21)” (Knight 1953:29). In Deuteronomy, Moses reminded the people how the Lord led them and the exodus occurred: “Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence [bepanayw] and his great strength” (4:37).

The strongest text in this regard is Isa 63:9: “In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence [unique expression appearing only here in the Old Testament; mal’ach panayw, lit. “the angel of His face”] saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.” The face of God is His Presence. “The Messenger of God’s Presence” was the Savior of Israel as was the Lord Himself (Isa 63:8).

Michael

The Bible mentions Michael (his name means “Who is like God?”) in five passages:
1. In Dan 10:13, Michael is presented as one of the chief princes.
2. In Dan 10:21, Michael is the only one who is able to help Gabriel in

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his battle over the minds of the Persian leaders. He is also portrayed as the Prince of God’s people.

3. Dan 12:1 depicts Michael as the One who stands for His people, i.e., he is their intercessor, protector, and help in the time of trouble. He is pictured as the great Prince.

4. According to Jude 1:9, Michael has authority to resurrect Moses and is characterized as an archangel.

5. In Rev 12:7, Michael is the leader of the heavenly army and defeats Satan and his fallen angels. His victory is described in a colorful manner.

When the above texts are connected with 1 Thess 4:16–18 and John 5:26–29, it becomes evident that Michael’s voice is the voice of the archangel, and this is the voice of Jesus at the resurrection day. On the basis of his role, authority, position, and mission one may conclude that Michael is Christ.

Muslims also believe in the existence of Mikal (biblical Michael) and those who oppose him will suffer Allah’s judgment: “Whoever is an enemy to Allah and His Angels and His Messengers, and Jibril and Mikal, then surely Allah is an enemy to the disbelievers” (Qur’an 2:98; the only but highly significant reference to Michael in the Qur’an).

**Allusions to the Plurality of Persons within the Godhead**

There are Old Testament texts which attest to the plurality of persons in God Himself (multi-personal God). Internal indicators point to this reality. Two clusters of such Old Testament passages can be gathered: the first list refers to two divine persons, and the second one points to three divine persons.

**Texts which Allude to Two Divine Persons**

1. *Gen 19:24*

   “Then the LORD [pre-incarnate Jesus who talked to Abraham] rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens [the Heavenly Father].” It is possible (hints lie in the narrative itself) to interpret this verse as an allusion to two different divine persons called YHWH, the LORD—one being in heaven, and the second one dialoguing with Abraham. This conclusion can be reached on two premises: (1) Genesis 18–19 is seen as a literary unit dealing with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and (2) The Lord who visited Abraham together with two other angels (Gen 18:1–2, 10, 13, 16–23, 33; 19:1, 18–19) and spoke with Abraham
in chap. 18 is still down on earth in chap. 19. In this way the last part of our text under investigation makes sense. God who is “down” sends fire from heaven, literally “from the Lord out of heaven.” Thus, God’s judgment upon the wicked of Sodom and Gomorrah comes as a result of close cooperation between the Lord on earth and the Lord in heaven.

2. *Exod 23:23*

Projecting future events related to the exodus and the conquering of the Promised Land, God proclaims: “My angel [the angel of the Lord] will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I [the Lord] will wipe them out.”

3. *Ps 45:6–7*

“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” According to Heb 1:8–9 the text is applied to Jesus Christ as the King who was anointed by the Heavenly Father for a specific mission.

4. *Ps 110:1*

David is speaking prophetically: “The LORD [Yahweh, the Heavenly Father] says to my [David’s] Lord [Adonay, Jesus Christ]: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” This royal Psalm is a direct Messianic poem taken as such by the early church, and is most frequently quoted in the New Testament in application to Jesus Christ (see Matt 22:43–45; Mark 12:36–37; Luke 20:42–44; Acts 2:34–36; 7:55–56; Rom 8:34; Heb 1:13; 5:6–10; 7:11–28; 8:1; 10:12–13; 12:2) who is presented as the King, Priest, and Judge.

5. *Prov 8:30–31*

The personified/hypostatized Wisdom is rejoicing in creating activities with the Lord as Co-Creators: “Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind.”

6. *Prov 30:4*

After God is described as the Creator, the text then mentions a surprising, puzzling, and unexplainable question about His Son: “Who has gone up to
heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of his son? Tell me if you know!”

7. Dan 7:13–14

The Prophet Daniel in his vision of the heavenly pre-advent judgment mentions two separate heavenly divine beings—the “Ancient of Days” and the “Son of Man.” The Ancient of Days, the Heavenly Father, presides over the judgment, but the prominence of the Son of Man is stressed by associating Him with the clouds as One “coming with the clouds of heaven”; clouds being a symbol used in conjunction with the appearance of deity; Davidson 1996:102–103 giving Him full authority and worshiping Him. Thus, two divine beings are presented in Daniel chap. 7: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” The most beloved title Jesus used for Himself and identified with was the Messianic title “Son of Man” taken from Daniel 7.

8. Hos 1:7

The Lord, the Heavenly Father, promises to save His people by the Lord, Savior Jesus Christ who is their God: “Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them—not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God.”

9. Zech 3:2

Yahweh is referring to Yahweh: “And the LORD [Jesus Christ] said unto Satan, ‘The LORD [the Heavenly Father] rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?’” The Lord Jesus Christ who speaks with Satan points to the Lord, the heavenly Father who will rebuke Satan, because he accuses Joshua, the high priest for his sins. On the other hand, the Lord Jesus Christ forgives, cleanses, and provides clean garments for Joshua.
10. Zech 10:12

“I will strengthen them in the LORD and in his name they will walk,’ declares the LORD.” It might be that the Lord speaks about Himself strengthening His people in order to walk in His name. However, God’s statement can point to the future and thus refer to another Lord, namely, the Messiah—Jesus Christ.

11. Mal 3:1

“‘See, I will send my messenger [John the Baptist], who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant [the Messiah, Jesus Christ], whom you desire, will come,’ says the LORD Almighty.”

Texts which Hint at Three Divine Persons

1. Gen 1:1–3

In light of John 1:1–3 where Gen 1:1–3 is alluded to, one can discover hints for the Trinity in this passage. God (Elohim), the Spirit of God (ruach Elohim), and the Word of God (vayomer Elohim; “and God said”—this significant phrase occurs ten times in the first Creation account, thus pointing to God’s Word) appear together in the Genesis text. In the Prologue to the Gospel according to John, Jesus Christ is directly named as the Word and the Creator. In this way all three Persons of the Godhead are alluded to in the Genesis Creation account.

2. Isa 11:1–2

This Messianic prophecy announces the coming of the Shoot from the stem of Jesse having in view the Davidic King Jesus Christ, then it mentions also the Spirit and the Lord. “Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.”

3. Isa 42:1

This and the following text (Isa 48:16) speak about the Servant of the Lord (ebed Yahweh). On the basis of his role and mission as well as intertextuality, one can safely conclude that this figure is the Messiah. His task is enormous which can be accomplish only by God, namely, He was appointed to be the
Savior for the whole world! 20 “Here is my servant [Jesus Christ], whom I [the Lord, the Heavenly Father] uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit [the Holy Spirit] on him and he will bring justice to the nations.”

4. Isa 48:16

One of the strongest and most explicit texts about the Trinity in the Hebrew Bible is “Come near me and listen to this: ‘From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there.’ And now the Sovereign LORD [the Heavenly Father] has sent me [the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ], with his Spirit [the Holy Spirit].”

5. Isa 61:1–2

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me [the Messiah, the Servant of the Lord] to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn.” Jesus Christ used this text in His first sermon when He began His public ministry and stated that this prediction was now fulfilled (see Luke 4:16–21).

6. Isa 63:8–10

This passage brings all three Persons of the Trinity together. The text asserts the personality of the Holy Spirit who is “vexed” or “grieved” by disobedience (see also Ps 106:33; Eph 4:30). This Hebrew verb is always used in conjunction with persons, never with power or inanimate things. “He [the Lord] said, ‘Surely they are my people, sons who will not be false to me’; and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence [Jesus Christ] saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit.”

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20 Isa 49:6 records what the Lord says about the mission of His Servant: “It is a too small [light] thing for you to be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved [remnant] of Israel. I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles [nations] that you will be [not only ‘proclaim’ or ‘announce’ but ‘be!’] my salvation to the ends of the earth.” Consider also His salvific atoning death for humanity according to Isaiah 53. No wonder that the early church recognized that this role of the Suffering Servant was fulfilled in life and death of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:30–35).
7. Hag 2:4b–7

The Prophet Haggai in 520 BC, while encouraging God's people after their return from Babylonian exile to rebuild the new Temple, predicted that the Desire of all nations, the Messiah would visit this sanctuary. The Lord Almighty, His Spirit, and the Desired of all nations are projected to be together in this Second Temple in Jerusalem. This will be a cosmic event: "'For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.' This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations [Jesus Christ] will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty."

Conclusion

This fresh investigation of the Old Testament Trinitarian thinking leads to a stunning conclusion. Even though the divine expressions of “We” do not testify directly about the Trinity, they hint to a unity and complexity within the being of God. This plurality within deity is well attested and developed in the New Testament (see especially Matt 28:19; John 1:3; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). The biblical monotheistic belief does not think about God in terms of His solitude or His singleness but presents Him as “We,” or in fellowship within the Godhead. God created humanity in His image; He made humans in fellowship with each other, particularly husband and wife in a close intimate relationship, because He is fellowship, He is in relationship within Himself. This divine plural of fellowship suggests plurality of persons and points to the unity in His nature. This intra-divine fellowship of one God within plurality is a unique characteristic of our God. God is in communication within Himself and with His creation. We can sensitively invite our Muslim friends into a personal knowledge of this God of relationships and interactions.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not yet fully developed in the Old Testament, but one can find impressive expressions pointing to Trinitarian thinking. We discovered that the Old Testament uses a whole plethora of terms for describing the second person of the Godhead which are Muslim friendly. It seems that the most fruitful and non-offensive Old Testament terms referring to the divinity of Jesus Christ in dialogue with Muslims are “Angel of the Lord,” “Servant of the Lord,” “Presence of God,” “Angel of His Presence,” “Wisdom of God,” “Word of God,” “Son of Man,” and “Michael.” To speak about God as “I” and at the same time as “We” is also a point of contact
between Christians and Muslims, because the Qur’an speaks about Allah in those terms too. The biblical designation of God as “We” is Islamic friendly, and we can testify to them what this divine “We” means for us—believing in a personal, close, unselfish God of love, a God of relationships.

The biblical paradox affirms that God simultaneously exists in singular and plural. It leads to the conclusion that He is one but in different persons. God is not single nor married; He is in fellowship within Himself; He is community.\(^{21}\) The community of God is the source and basis of all other communities within His creation. The community of God’s “We” leads to the “we” of humanity and to the togetherness of all creation, even in the cosmic sense. God’s unity ties all of God’s creation together to form a rich diversity.

The expression “let us” is not a statement which speaks directly about the Trinity, but it does not contradict the Trinitarian teaching. It is not a declaration about numbers (numerals), but about uniqueness, the quality of our God. On the background of the Hebrew monotheism and divine plural speeches, it becomes clear that these expressions leave room for the doctrine of the Trinity, because *echad* not only affirms the oneness and uniqueness of God, but also points to the unity within a plurality of fellowship.

It is true that the term “Trinity” is not a biblical term, but this term very well expresses in one catch word the important aspect of the biblical teaching about the Godhead. There are many other theological words which do not appear in the Bible, and we rightly use them, like incarnation, theophany, theocracy, eschatology, inspiration, etc., because these terms well capture the biblical meaning of the point. The “plural of fellowship” in the light of its context leads to the recognition of different persons (not necessarily three) within the Godhead in interaction. However, this plural is an indirect witness about the “heavenly trio.”\(^{22}\)

The God *Yahweh* is plurality and always in relationship, first of all in relationship within the Godhead and in interaction with His creation. The love relationship within the Godhead is the basis for all other interactions and relationships. Our God longs for meaningful relationships with His creatures, because of His love He created them in multiple relationships to His image after His pattern (Gen 1:26–27). As God is not a solitary person so humans are not created for isolation but for social life in marriage and community.

\(^{21}\) Lagrange aptly states, “If he uses the plural, this supposes that there is in him a fullness of being so that he can deliberate with himself” (1896:387).

\(^{22}\) The expression was used by Ellen G. White: “There are three living persons of the heavenly trio” (1946:615).
We need to be careful, extremely careful, in our attempts to explain God to not create Him in our image! Humans were created in His image, and not vice versa. In view of the uniqueness and otherness of our God, it becomes clear that we cannot grasp the full picture of our Lord, as He is above our comprehension of His nature. We are limited in our understanding and capacities. We can only stand in awe before Him and admire Him. We can only ask for a wonder, for a glimpse to see Him and to worship Him, and to serve our awesome God who surpasses our concepts of understanding and logic (Exod 33:18, 19; 34:6, 7). He is always above all things and our expressions to grasp the reality of life. Instead of trying to explain the details regarding Him, let us relate to Him personally who is One and plurality of fellowship at the same time. Our goal should be to gratefully and faithfully follow God and interact with others whom He has put beside us as part of His marvelous creation.

Works Cited


Old Testament Trinitarian Thinking

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Introduction

Christians generally understand that Islam is a religion of righteousness by works (Becker 1909:70) and Muslims also seem to project their faith as such (Farah 2003). The divergence in Christian and Muslim theology (aqidah, plural ‘aqaa‘id) can be traced to what these two faiths believe about the nature of human beings in matters that concern sin. Christians believe that people are born sinful and therefore in need of a Savior (Ps 51:5, 10; Rom 3:23), while in Islam it is believed that people are born sinless, in a state of fitra (Qur’an 30:30) and hence not in need of a Savior. While there are many verses in the Qur’an that teach salvation by good works this chapter attempts to see if there could be a path that suggests righteousness by faith in the Qur’an. The big question that begs an answer is, How could there be righteousness by faith in the Qur’an, when Jesus is not part of Islamic redemption theology? This chapter looks at several Christian terms such as righteousness by faith in reference to the Muslim concept of attainment of paradise.

The Christian’s need of a Savior finds fulfillment in the life and ministry
of Jesus Christ who is believed to be the ultimate plan of God to provide redemption for human beings. According to the Muslim view, Islam is the straight path (Qur’an 1:5) that leads people to paradise (Ahmad 1992:105; Hussain 2007:27; George 2002:21). This chapter does not intend to do an exhaustive study of this subject, but to suggest how this subject of righteousness by faith could be further explored. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore all the Qur’anic verses that seem to allude to this subject, and so only selected texts are cited as an introduction, particularly those that seem to make an allusion to salvation as a free gift from God.

The Qur’an instructs Muslims to consult with those who read the book that was revealed before the Qur’an (10:91), a reference to the Bible. This is also an invitation to Christians to engage with the Qur’an and to some extent through the Bible. The Qur’an contains many Bible stories although not necessarily with the same details or perspective (see Reeves 2004:24; Kueny 2001:161-182, 1-22, 100), so it is not farfetched to read the Qur’an with the Bible in mind.

**Taqwa, Birr, and Zakiy: Key Theological Terms**

This chapter mentions some selected Qur’anic verses that present terms which seem to connote salvation based on God’s grace alone without works. It is worth noting that salvation in Islam is not the same as in Christianity. Chawkat Moucarry cites Isma’il Faruqi (Faruqi 1988:316, 317),

> Islam holds man to be not in need of any salvation. Instead of assuming him to be religiously and ethically fallen, Islamic *da’wah* (mission) acclaims him as the *khalifah* of Allah, perfect in form, and endowed with all that is necessary to fulfil the divine will indeed, even loaded with the grace of revelation! Salvation is hence not in the vocabulary of Islam. *Falah,* or the positive achievement in space and time of the divine will, is the Islamic counterpart of Christian “deliverance” and “redemption.” (Moucarry 2001:101)

The terms, *taqwa, birr,* and *zakiy* open the way to study further the possibility of righteousness by faith in relation to works in the Qur’an. Mufti Mukarram Ahmed outlines Islamic fundamental beliefs, the foremost of which are *iman* (faith), *birr* (good works of faith) and *taqwa* (piety, righteousness by faith) which he says lead one to become a fine Muslim. He goes on to say that Islam is more than just saying the *shahada* (declaration or confession of faith). He further explains how ultimate faith is acquired by doing good works which he then lists (Cornell 2007:125-126).
First and foremost I will suggest a conceptual framework in order to provide a basis to negotiate for some academic space where there is none. Muslims can read the Qur'an and make meaning out of it, but so can others. Second, I will argue against the commonly held position that lay readers (duʿāfāʾ) cannot read the Qur'an and make sense of it, because Muslims believe that only the religious scholars (ulamaa) can do so through the body of traditions (hadith) and classical commentaries (tafseer). Third, I will demonstrate from the Qur'an that good works alone are not sufficient to grant a believer paradise but grace, as a free gift from God, is also vital.

**Qurʾan as the Basis of This Study**

At this point it may be asked whether the state of righteousness by faith is indeed attainable, and if so, how can a Muslim believer attain it? An equally important question is to ask how faithful Muslims can discover this vital truth in their Qurʾans? This chapter avoids using the hadith (Islamic traditions) as a basis for Islamic theology, because of its contested nature even within Islamic scholarship (Bennett 2005:94; Engineer 1999:21). A deliberate circumvent of the hadith implies that this exploration of the qurʾanic verses would not result in the regular traditional interpretation by Islamic sources. It is expected by traditional Islam that those who read the Qurʾan must do so through the body of tafseer (literature) and those that have attempted to bypass this process in order to bring the Qurʾan into step with the contemporary world have met stiff resistance (McAulliffe, Gilliot, and Graham 2002:139, 140).

This chapter is divided into two main parts; the first part negotiates for the expansion of space in the community of readers to include non-Muslims who do not possess all the tools found in the field of qurʾanic interpretation. To achieve this, the contemporary debate on qurʾanic interpretation is introduced which takes into consideration traditionalist and modernist positions. Concepts such as ijtihad and taqleed are defined in the context of the subject under study. This chapter does not attempt to go into other areas that relate to qurʾanic interpretation, such as whether the Qurʾan should be studied topically or atomistically. Abrogated and abrogating verses and the occasion of the revelation of texts are beyond the scope of this study whose objective is to suggest the viability of the study of righteousness by faith in the Qurʾan. However it should be noted that those texts in the Qurʾan that deal with this subject are clear and therefore provide a possible foundation for an Islamic doctrine of righteousness by faith.
The second part of this chapter introduces the three key theological terms, *taqwa*, *birr*, and *zakiy* which aid in the exploration of the concept of righteousness by faith in the Qur’an. A step by step examination of a few selected verses from the Qur’an show how a believer acquires these qualities that commence with *taqwa* which enables a believer to produce good works, *birr*. This holy process is sustained by *zakiy* which creates a sanctified life in the believer. This process culminates in Jesus Christ as God’s plan for the salvation of people. The issue of the supposedly denial of the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross in the Qur’an is not dealt with, but a way forward is provided which does not negate the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

**Approaches to Qur’anic Interpretation**

Approaches to Qur’anic interpretation can be divided broadly into traditional and modernist methodologies. Traditional orthodox Sunni textual hermeneutics interprets the Qur’an through the body of classical *tafseer*, which locates “ideal” Islam in the medieval ages. This process of interpretation is simplified by Ahmad Von Denffer (1983) and Ameenah Bilal Phillips (1997). Modernist scholars mainly based in the West avoid classical *tafseer* and engage directly with the Qur’anic text thus by-passing the efforts of medieval Islamic scholars (Bennett 2005:101-105). Fazlur Rahman, Mohammed Arkoun, and Esack Farid are just a few examples.

Fazlur Rahman proposes historical-critical hermeneutics (Rahman 1984), while Mohammed Arkoun favors historical-anthropological hermeneutics (Schawi 2005; Bennett 2005:530; Kung 2008:529) whereas Farid Esack (1997) advances pluralist-political hermeneutics. Rahman and Arkoun are ideologues while Esack is a contextualist who advances liberation hermeneutics based on praxis. Esack sees the place for the *duaafá*’ (lay readers) in the field of reading the Qur’an as those who wish to engage with the Qur’an without exegetical tools and processes. He figuratively illustrates an *aabi d*’s (lay reader) approach to the Qur’an with his metaphor of the “uncritical lover” (Esack 2002:2) as an ordinary Muslim who simply wishes to read (not necessarily in Arabic or even being aware of *tafseer* principles) the Qur’an and obey its commands. In spite of the lack of hermeneutical tools and know-how such readers go behind the text and attempt to draw out its meaning.
Should Non-Muslims (Outsiders) Study the Qur’an?

Some Muslims hold that outsiders cannot understand Islam and the Qur’an, let alone appropriately interpret Islam and to an extent the Qur’an (Esack 2002; Kateregga and Shenk 1997:60). Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1981a:97) argues in support of the insider, stating that nothing should be said about any particular religion which is not corroborated or agreed upon by insiders. Bilal Sambur (2002) contests Smith’s position arguing that in the case of the study of Islam this term, outsider itself is not clearly defined in Islamic communities and scholarship. For example, Sufis refer to jurists as outsiders, since Sufis perceive that jurists have not internalized Islam as compared to Sufis (2002:27, 28). This position is supported by sociologists based on possible biases, for example, insiders may label themselves as “true” or “pious” and refer to outsiders as “false” or “wicked” (Alexander 2008:85), and of course a dominant group has a tendency of labeling a less powerful group as deviant (Alexander 2008:83). In addition, some even question whether an outsider could engage people of another race, say a Caucasian attempting to study blacks (Andersen and Taylor 2006: 47). Islam receives the Qur’an ipsissima verba, a view that is least held by outsiders.

Thomas Burman, in his book, Reading the Qur’an in Latin Christendom, 1140-1560, examines Christian scholarship’s interest in understanding Islam. He points out attempts to build bridges, defend Christian faith, and polemical aspects. Roland Miller, Muslims and the Gospel—Bridging the Gap, devotes chapters 9 and 10 to trace the history of Islam and the gospel from John of Damascus until the present. These scholars have engaged in the study of Islam and its related disciplines. Orientalists of the recent centuries are simply a continuation of what began in the earlier days of Islam (Miller 2005). Furthermore, the study of religion is presumed to be in the public space where scholars exchange ideas and therefore there should not be conditions of admittance into this arena (Ernst 2006:12), especially conditions based on whether someone is categorized as an outsider or an insider.

Furthermore, Islam is a world religion which attracts pedagogic enquiries from all spheres of academia, faith traditions, and nations. David Marshall suggests a rationale and a basis on which outsiders are to engage with the Qur’an and Islamic studies in general (1999). Marshall says that since Muslims hold that the Qur’an is a book for all and that Islam is a universal religion, and the future religion of the world, then it is appropriate to state that Muslims need to let outsiders critically evaluate their book and religion (1999:4, 5). The present world will not just take it as wholesome without
critical examination. The Qur’an invites adherents of the Judeo-Christian tradition to consider its message (Qur’an 4:171). The Qur’an seeks to build bridges with the people of the book, a title it accords to Jews and Christians (Qur’an 4:136; 29:56). A member of the community of the people of the book is obligated to respond to the call of the Qur’an to engage with it. Having laid down my rationale for engaging the Qur’an, it is important to inquire how other readers approach the Qur’an.

The Qur’an contains materials that bear resemblance to biblical content, which is an incentive for Christian scholars to investigate it. The Judeo-Christian influence on the Qur’an and early Islam cannot be underrated. The Qur’an seems to be addressed to the believers, of which Jews and Christians are included (Qur’an 2:62) if they remain true and faithful (Donner 2007:33). There is use of biblical materials, but in the Arabian flavor (Rippin and Knappert 1990:1). Samir Khalil Samir boldly argues that the Qur’an has been greatly influenced by biblical content (2007). Rippin notes that Bible materials (narratives) in the Qur’an are cited for moral and spiritual guidance (1993:250), while Seale attempts to prove that the Qur’an interprets the Bible (1982:71). It could be noted that the Qur’an has a symbiotic relation with the Bible so some take the position that members of the three Abrahamic faiths must learn to live with each other’s scriptures (Wessels 1997:9). This could arguably be construed to imply that a thorough study of each other’s scriptures is one way of learning to live with each other.

What each reader brings (*in prior*) to the text is appreciated, but the only problem is when one reader asserts that their interpretation is the only correct one (Wadud 1999:5). In essence a text has meanings and not meaning (Steinmetz 2000:36). In addition, to insist on absolute uniformity of interpretation is impossible and of no value (Rahman 1984:144). The same should apply to scholars who impose upon lay readers and others the idea that their reading is the only acceptable one. With this in mind the understanding of the Qur’an or any other sacred text is yet to be fully understood, as readers are at liberty to derive diverse meanings. Even a non-scholar is permitted to perform *Ijtihad* (personal effort to understand scripture) in certain areas where they are able and have need (Alwani 2005:105). The same applies to those verses that this chapter deems to infer righteousness by faith.

It is noted that less than a third of all Muslims are Qur’anic Arabic literate and so myriads depend on translations (Badawi 2002:113). Furthermore, the spread of literacy, numerous translations of the Qur’an, increased movement of people, and even the internet, enhance the access of the Qur’an for those that do not come from the *ulamaa* class (Saeed 2006:22). Many Muslims
with no scholarly knowledge wish to read the Qur’an and take it as it says—those that Farid Esack labels as “uncritical lovers” (2002:2). Understanding the Qur’an is not the preserve of the ulamaa, but is open to all who can make an effort through translations, commentaries, dictionaries, and even the internet, for they will find meaning in the study of the Qur’an. It must also be said here that dependence on taqleed (blind imitation of previous scholars’ views) rather than pursuit of ijtihad has worked against a growing understanding of the Qur’an.

**Taqleed or Ijtihad?**

The door of ijtihad was closed at the end of the 9th century (De Long Bas 2007:105; Alwani 2077:87). It is not known why the gates of ijtihad were closed but it seems that theologians of the days were afraid that with many voices interpreting the Qur’an, Islam would become so divided—a fear that caused the beginning of the decline of Islamic thinking and civilization (Sardar 1979:57). But others contend that the door to ijtihad was not closed as claimed (Alwani 2005:82). If Ijtihad is still a possibility, then new principles need to be explored rather than simply following those laid down by the classical schools of legal interpretation. New principles also need to be applied to the qualifications of a mujtahid because of increased literacy compared to past centuries. Diverse reading tools are also readily available and are enhanced by technological innovations and globalization which no longer allows Islam to exist in isolation. The ever mixing of peoples and cultures bring new situations that need ijtihad to guide Muslims in knowing how to deal with these new situations.

On another front it was argued that taqleed ensured that political leadership did not interfere with religious rulings, since it was required that adherents of each school follow its agreed rules/laws (Zaman 2002:18). De Long Bas defines taqleed as “the legal practice of imitating or adhering to juridical rulings of the past” and ijtihad as “the practice of the individual engaging in personal interpretation of the Qur’an and Sunna” (2007:105). In contrast to ijtihad, the fuqaha (legal experts) define taqleed as one’s “acceptance of another’s madhahab without knowing the other person’s justification” (Alwani 2005:97). Abd Ibn Al-Wahhabi contested this position and advanced the idea that ijtihad has to be there, because mujtahids who are humans are not infallible. Therefore Wahhabi favored ijtihad rather than taqleed. This was in the 18th century (Delong-Bas 2007:106). Wahhabi blamed taqleed for perpetuating false ahadith such as those that claimed Ali was a Prophet (107). Alwani asks:
What happened to the penetrating and enlightened mind, inspired by Islam that freed our ancestors from their idols and the obstacles blocking their progress? How did such a mind return to its former prison and fetters robbed of any chance to renew and reform the ummah through ijtihad? In a word the answer is taqleed, an illness that entered the Muslim mind and fed on it until it returned to its prison. (Awani 2005:71)

Alwani further blames taqleed and asserts that:

For the ummah, taqleed represents a blameworthy innovation (bid’ah) as well as deviation (dalalah) from the straight path. No researcher or scholar has ever found a valid text from either the Qur’an or hadith, or even an argument based on pure reason, to support Islam’s approval of taqleed, for the very idea is alien to Islam’s view of humanity. (2005:72)

Sardar heaps further blame on Islam by saying that as a result of taqleed, scholars have turned secondary concerns into fundamentals and proceeded to emphasize trivial things such as the length of a dress or long beards while losing sight of individual freedoms—something that has led to intolerant and despotic Muslim societies and governments (1979:58). Therefore, as we ask, Which is the best way to read the Qur’an? it is imperative to keep in mind the diverse views on taqleed and ijtihad.

Which Is the Best Way to Read the Qur’an?

Sectarianism in Islam is one of the many proofs that the Muslim community is yet to agree on the best method to read the Qur’an. Some readers offer very liberal views, suggesting that there is no wrong or right, true or false way to interpret the Qur’an, but that there are multiple ways to look at it (Campanini 2005:60); others suggest that what is important is not to look for an understanding that proves another wrong, but to look in the text itself and seek its message. Qur’anic scholars have shied away from studying the Qur’an itself, and have resorted to reading the Qur’an through the body of Tafseer throughout the years (Neuwirh 2007). This study on various texts in the Qur’an that make an allusion to righteousness by faith follows an approach of doing a topical study that is not common in the Muslim theological scholarly realm. The study of taqwa is the beginning point to explore the possibility of righteousness by faith in Islam.
God’s Gift of Free Grace: Righteousness by Faith

Al-Taqwa

Al-Taqwa is one of the most important Qur’anic concepts that permeate Muslim lives, with much being written on it (e.g., Ghazali 1995; Gunel and Unal 2004:45-52). Notice surah 2:1-4, “This is the Book; in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear God (Muttaqūna). Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them; And who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter.”

These four verses present the Muttaqūna as people who believe in that which they do not see. “The Prophet made taqwa (fear, piety, righteousness) the very heart and pivot of his (Muhammad) religious teaching” (Izutsu 2000:177). The Muttaqūn are those who fear God, those who sincerely revere him, they have taqwa in them. So what is taqwa? English translations of the Qur’an use the words “piety” (Al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan) or “fear” of Allah (Yusuf Ali 1989), “God fearing” (Qutb; Maulana Mufti Muhammad Shafi), “guard” as in to guard against evil (Shakir), “ward” off evil (Pickthal), “conscious” of Allah (Saheeh International 1997) just to mention a few, but others argue that taqwa has no English equivalent (Kirkwood 2001:21). Taqwa is from the root waqa and its Form I meaning is waqaha which means to protect, safeguard, shelter, keep from danger (What is Taqwa?). Its Form VIII (Ittaqa) means to guard oneself, to put one thing between self and another so as to guard/protect oneself exceedingly, therefore the al-Muttaqūn (pl.) of muttaqi (sing.) are the protected ones, those who fear God (Ghazali 1995:45). In other words, those without taqwa are spiritually unprotected.

Izutsu explains that the antonym of taqwa is kafirina and zalimina is the antithesis of Muttaqūna (Qur’an 45:18; 26:9-10). A synonym is Khayshah (the verb is Khashiya and Khauf) which denotes fear including emotional fear (Izutsu 2000:177, 178). Since it is so important to have taqwa, it is valid to inquire how taqwa is attained or who originates it. Is it something that humans can manufacture?

The text that best provides the answer as to who originates or provides taqwa to humans, is the one about the fall of Adam and Eve (the Qur’an does not mention Eve’s name) at the point when they covered themselves with leaves and realized that separation from God could not be mended by simple attempts to cover their physical nudity (Qur’an 2:29-38; 20:120-123; 7:16-27). Their own solutions were futile, so they cried out: “Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls: If thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us Thy Mercy, we shall certainly be lost” (Qur’an 7:23). God heard their desperate cry
and intervened on their behalf, “O ye Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness (walibasu al-ta'qwa)—that is the best. Such are among the Signs of God, that they may receive admonition”! (Qur’an 7:26). This shows that ta’qwa is Allah’s gift, it is a quality of faith that humans are unable to manufacture. Adam and his wife made leaves and attempted to cover themselves to no avail. Sin cannot be blotted away by human efforts, but God granted them a garment of righteousness. No matter what humans do, it is only God who grants ta’qwa by grace. This reminds Christian readers of Isa 61:10, “I will greatly rejoice in Jehovah, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels is Jehovah’s gift of righteousness.” After humanity’s parents were clothed, God issues another warning to the entire human race when he said, “O ye Children of Adam! Let not Satan seduce you (layaf tinannakumu), in the same manner as He got your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their raiment, to expose their shame” (Qur’an 7:27).

Al-Birr

Another key term that is also translated as righteousness is birr, (righteousness founded on generosity) from the same root as the word Barr, (a wide open space) Quran 3:92 (Cornell 2007:142). In most occurrences birr (pl. Abrar whose antonym is ashrâr the ungodly, the wicked) is mentioned alongside taqwa in the Qur’an. Qur’an 58:9 says, “O ye who believe! When ye hold secret counsel, do it not for iniquity and hostility, and disobedience to the Messenger; but do it for righteousness and self restraint and fear Allah (bialbirri waal-ta’qwa waittaqooAllaha) to Whom ye shall be brought back.” Al-birr is the term that best describes the “moral and religious spirit of the Qur’an” (Fakhry 1991:12). The following two verses capture Fakhry’s description, “Enjoin you Al-birr (piety, righteousness, good works) on the people and you forget (to practice it) yourselves, while you recite the Scripture [the Taurât (Torah)]! Have you then no sense?” (Qur’an 2:44). “By no means shall you attain al-birr (piety, righteousness), unless you spend (in Allah’s Cause) of that which you love; and whatever of good you spend, Allah knows it well” (Qur’an 3:92). Al-birr is attained by good deeds, for surah 2:177 says,
It is not righteousness (Laysa albirra) that ye turn your faces Towards East or West; but it is righteousness—to believe in God and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing (Allatheena sadagoo waola-ika humu al-muttaquna).

*Taqwa* is righteousness by faith while *birr* is righteousness by works. True *birr* (righteousness) does not consist in keeping meaningless taboos but fearing God (*taqwa*). See Izutsu 2002:208. These two concepts go together (see, for example, Qur’an 2:177; 5:2; 58:9) and seem to indicate that faith alone is insufficient, unless it translates into good works which is *birr*.

**Al-Zakiy**

The Muslim pillar of religion, *Zakat* comes from the root *zkw* which is purity, purify, or sanctify. The giving back of *zakat* to God signifies that the giver’s wealth is purified or sanctified and therefore legal for the owners use. *Zakat* is distinct from ritual purity, *thr* (Watt 1993:68), it does not denote righteousness, but describes a principle of life (Izustu 2000:189). The word that the Angel Gabriel employs in reference to Jesus Christ (Qur’an 19:19) as a pure/holy boy, is from the root *zkw*. Can individuals sanctify themselves through their own efforts? The Qur’an answers, “Hast thou not turned Thy vision to those who claim sanctity for themselves (allatheena yuzakkoona anfusahum)? Nay—but God doth sanctify whom He pleases. But never will they fail to receive justice in the least little thing. Behold! How they invent a lie against God! But that by itself is a manifest sin!” (Qur’an 4:49, 50). To claim self sanctity is a lie and actually a sin before God. Sanctity is entirely God’s work. In the wider meaning of purification people could purify themselves, but not in the sense of self righteousness before God.

**Summary of Concepts**

It could be said that the above three terms are essential in the spiritual economy of Islam. *Taqwa* which is the most desirable and is a gift from God, who only can enable humans to gain it, is said to be the garment of righteousness. The works of our first parents in covering their nakedness
would not suffice until they sought for God’s help who bestowed *taqwa* the garment of righteousness upon them. *Al-birr* is righteousness that proceeds from good works for God and to fellow believers and humans. *Taqwa* and *birr* go together like two sides of a coin. A third equally important term is *zakiy* which means to sanctify, purify, or justify and which can only be accomplished by God. Any individuals that would imagine that they can attain self sanctification are accused of inventing a lie against God. It can be concluded that these three faith qualities are essential to a believer’s well being and are necessary if one is to have assurance of the hereafter in paradise. Since human hearts cannot produce these faith essentials, how then could humans receive these spiritual necessities? Even good works (*birr*) proceed from a life of *taqwa* and *zakiy*. Yet Jesus Christ says in the Matt 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” In view of these principles, how can a Muslim believer be saved by faith that produces good works, so that at the end of this life he or she could see God?

**Restoration of the Human Heart in Conformity with the Will of God**

Islamic theology asserts that humans are born in a sinless state, but the sinful environment is what corrupts them. What does the Qur’an say about the human heart? Prophet Joseph says, “Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord doth bestow His Mercy: but surely my Lord is oft-forgiving, most Merciful” (Qur’an 12:53). This plea echoes that of Adam and Eve when they disobeyed God’s command to refrain from the forbidden fruit. Joseph confessed that he could not absolve himself from blame, because the human heart is inclined towards sin (or evil), and the only way out of this predicament was through God’s intervention. Centuries later Paul said in Rom 7:20-25 that he is inclined to do the bad that he does not intend to do because he was sold under sin, but then he looks at what God has accomplished through Jesus and gives praise to the Almighty. The heart is diseased (Qur’an 2:10; 9:125) and so humans find it comfortable to remain in a state of doubt and unbelief. Just like many centuries before, the Prophet Jeremiah stated that the human heart is utterly corrupt and who could know it (Jer 17:9)? No wonder both Joseph and our primordial parents cast their hope on God. Another important question to ask is, How does God help us?
God’s Powerful Help

What hope do we have since of ourselves it seems impossible? But God has not left us without definite and powerful help. “And that God may help thee with powerful help” (Qur’an 48:3). The Qur’an goes on to explain how God helps in surah 58:22 “For such He has written faith (amanah) in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself.” This indicates that God has a definite plan to help people out of this predicament. The human heart is diseased and unable to produce anything good including the ability to believe. Therefore, God starts with writing faith in peoples’ hearts. To ensure that his writing of faith sticks, God strengthens the implant of faith with a spirit from himself. For humans to appreciate this whole process that is strengthened by God’s own spirit it is imperative to identify who a spirit from God is.

Who Is a Spirit from God?

In the Qur’an it says, “Christ Jesus the son of Mary was a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him” (Qur’an 4). Another verse that adds to the identification of a spirit from God is surah 66:12, “And Mary the daughter of ‘Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit.” A spirit from God is Jesus Christ who gives life to corrupted and diseased hearts. As proof that Jesus is God’s definite and big help that God gives in response to human supplications seeking redemption from their helpless estate, Jesus must be seen to have his own inherent life. “Behold! I taught thee the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel and behold! thou makest (Wa ‘Idh Takhluqu) out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou bre athest into it and it becometh a bird by My leave, and thou healest those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold! thou bringest forth the dead by My leave” (Qur’an 5:110). Indeed Jesus as a spirit from God imparts the breath of life. He takes clay, creates forms of birds and breathes into them. It is best at this point to explore some verses that allude to the divinity of Jesus in the Qur’an.

Allusions to the Divinity of Jesus in the Qur’an

The nature and identity of Jesus Christ is one of the major differences between Islamic and Christian theology. Yusuf Ali’s explanation of
basmallah is quite interesting to someone from a Christian tradition. The phrase *Bismillahir-rahmanir-rahim* (In the name of God the Most Merciful and Compassionate) which occurs at the beginning of each surah except the ninth is explained in footnote 19 of Yusuf Ali’s (1989) Qur’an translation. Yusuf Ali says, “The words *Rahman* and *Rahim*, translated ‘most gracious’ and ‘most merciful’ are both intensive forms referring to different aspects of Allah’s attributes of mercy. The term *Rahman* is only applied to Allah while the term *Rahim* is also applied to Men.” Allah has more than one side to him, a part that is only known to him and that known by humans which is *Rahim*. This is the Muslim understanding of that one God. It is only as readers of the Qur’an are referred to the former scriptures (*Torah, Zaboor, and Injeel*) that a clearer picture of God is formed in their minds. In the Injeel, that part of God which is only known to himself is called God the Father while that part of God which he shares with humans is referred to as Jesus Christ, yet it is that one God. Even with this understanding humans are still very far from understanding and knowing the very nature of God. Islam does not purport to know the nature of God, but describes him by his attributes.

One of the attributes of God, of the 99 that he does not share with any other created being, is *al-Khaliq* (the Creator). When Jesus created forms of birds and breathed into them the breath of life, the Qur’an translators avoid the word “create” and instead employ the word, “make” (*ja’ala*), which is not used in surah 3:49. It seems that translators realize that creating is the preserve of God alone, and in the Islamic theology of God, Jesus is only a prophet with no divine characteristics, therefore the deliberate effort not to subscribe any creatorship or life giving attribute to Jesus. Surah 22:73 that questions why humans worship that which cannot create even a fly, seems to suggest that the reason why God is special and separate from his creation and therefore worthy of worship is his power to create and give life. In him is the breath of life or one could say the principle of life which no other being has. Note for example this rhetorical question, Is he who creates like him that creates not? (Qur’an 16:17). This suggests that the Creator and the created occupy different realms and have nothing in common. In fact in surah 112:4 the reference to God is that there is none like unto him. It could be said that God is like only unto himself and not like any other. The first of those attributes in which God is not like anyone else is his power to create and give life. Therefore, it can be said that he who creates is like he who creates and he who creates not is like him who creates not. Then if anyone creates, they would be like God and therefore worthy of human worship, but God is only one and not like any other except like himself. If Jesus took clay
and created forms of birds, then breathed in them the breath of life and they flew, then therefore Jesus is like God.

The ability of Jesus to create begs many questions as to his nature in the Qur'an, and seems to give him a status that is more than a revered prophet. It is further argued by those that play down the significance of Jesus creating that he creates only by permission from God. This line of reasoning fails to realize that in Islamic theology the greatest sin is that of shirk (associating God with partners). Those guilty of punishment receive the severest punishment in eternal fire. Now the question remains, if Jesus created by God’s leave, even was permitted to breathe the breathe of life just like God himself (and according to surah 22:73 he who can even create a fly is worthy of worship just like God), then who would be guilty of the sin of shirk by associating Jesus in God’s own divine act of creatorship and granting of life? Theoretically if those birds created by Jesus were to be asked, “Who is your creator?” What would be their answer? Would they be considered guilty of shirk (the sin of associating partners with God) if they answered that it is Jesus Christ? Indeed Jesus is a Spirit from God for the salvation of human beings to save people from their sinful natures in order to allow them to enter into the glorious kingdom of God.

Having seen from the Qur’an that the human path towards taqwa is achieved through God’s big help who is Jesus, there remains the task of working through surah 4:157 that seems to deny the atoning sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. It is suggested that this text be studied in the context of surah 3:55 and then make study of all those texts that mention tawaffa (death). After such a study I believe it will be found that there is strong evidence in the Qur’an for the death of Jesus, but that is the topic for another paper.

**Conclusion**

So far it is noted that in spite of Islamic theology which asserts that humans are born sinless and so they commit mistakes and errors, there are passages in the Qur’an that suggest to the contrary (2:2, 44, 177, 189; 3:92; 4:49, 50; 5:2; 58:9). The human heart is prone to evil, a condition which only God has the ability to deal with conclusively. As pointed out above, the Qur’an outlines how God solved this problem that culminated in the person and ministry of Jesus. The Qur’an gives counsel to those that wish to understand more about the acts of God in helping human beings to attain righteousness through faith. The counsel is that when Muslim believers doubt such things then they should, without hesitation, ask those who are reading (Yaqrә‘әnә)
the book that came before the Qur’an (Qur’an 10:94, 95) because “It was We who revealed the law (to Moses): therein was guidance and light” (Qur’an 5:44). “And in their footsteps, We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah” (Qur’an 5:46). Muslims are required to adhere to four principal books which are, the Torah (Guidance and light), Psalms (Celebration of praises), the Gospel (Guidance, light, and confirmation) and the Qur’an (Confirmation and Warning). God’s big plan for the salvation of human beings involves the attainment of taqwa, zakiy, and birr as personified in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The Muslim opposition to the saving grace of Jesus Christ is founded on surah 4:157 which seems to deny the death of Jesus Christ; however, when read in the light of other texts that mention death and in particular the death of Jesus, there is a valid argument in favor of the vicarious death of Jesus Christ (see Singh 2008). What is it like to interact with Muslims that have attained taqwa? “For non-Muslims it is a privilege to come into the presence of a Muttaqūn. The aura of God’s presence surrounds them, like that exhibited by Christian mystics whose spirituality is highly developed and readily felt” (Kirkwood 2001:23).

Works Cited


What is Taqwa? http://quranicteachings.co.uk/taqwa.htm (accessed March 6, 2010).


"In a world of violence the cross, that eminently counter-cultural symbol that lies at the heart of the Christian faith, is a scandal." (Volf 1996:26)

It is an honor to offer the following reflections to Jerald Whitehouse, close friend, mentor, and in celebration of a life well lived. Over the years his passion for God’s Word, his unrelenting vision for Muslim peoples, and his multi-layered understanding of mission has impacted the landscape of Adventist Mission in two main ways. On the one hand, he has engaged Muslims and Adventists with new approaches (either through interfaith dialogue or in ministry), and on the other he has courageously brought to the forefront pressing issues for cross-cultural mission which he has always carefully addressed from the Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy and the Adventist self-understanding of its identity and mission as God’s end-time movement and people.

His vast contribution¹ will become even more apparent and relevant as

¹Jerald Whitehouse is a prolific writer. Over the fifteen years that he has served as the Director for the
the years unfold and as God continues to call the Adventist Church to step beyond the safety and comfort of ministry to Christian peoples and into the world of non-Christian faiths.

The theme of the cosmic conflict as the end nears and the central issues that God’s people in these last days must uphold before the world has guided much of Jerald Whitehouse’s vision and action. It is within this meta-narrative that I reflect on the crucified Messiah in a world of violence as I seek to explore how the cross of Jesus can be retrieved as a healing force for Christian and Muslim communities in the Middle East.

This paper asks two simple questions: What if the cross of Jesus were to be unpacked before Muslims and Christians as the divine model by which God shows solidarity with a broken world? And, if the cross were to epitomize God’s Roadmap for Peace, what kind of model of justice and peace building would it offer?

In other words, do Christians and Muslims share in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection not just as individuals, but as communities? If so, in which way is the crucified Jesus a key to understanding what God is about in the real world of politics, nation states, tribes, and global markets?

My quest is not theological per se but rather intensely personal. I, a resident of a region (Middle East) torn by escalating expressions of communal violence am left to wrestle intellectually with reconciling faith and mission with the current social conflicts that are tearing apart the lives of people I count as my own. But at a deeper level, as I strive to follow Jesus, I recognize his call for engagement with the world around me as God’s way to become a peace-maker not simply a peace lover.

Sadly, prominent spiritual leaders in the region (both Christian and Muslim alike) seemed to have lost their spiritual compass as they treat their own doctrinal conclusions as substitutes for their sacred texts and seem unable to offer a spiritual alternative voice to counteract the highly

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Global Center for Adventist Muslims Relations, he has articulated in numerous articles his missiological understanding in areas such as: What does it mean to be an Adventist in non-Christian contexts? How can Adventists retrieve their biblical identity? How to discern what God is doing in mission? What are the guiding principles for biblical mission? What are the guidelines for interfaith dialogue? What constitutes fruitful practices in mission among Muslims? Where is common ground between Adventists and Muslims? He has also written extensively on biblical and qur’anic studies. These topics, articles, and materials can be accessed through the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

2Today the overwhelming majority of conflicts are clustered in the 10/40 Window, which is predominately Muslim territory. For an interactive map of the world’s major ongoing and recently terminated conflicts, see [http://www.opendemocracy.net/info/our-guide-to-conflicts](http://www.opendemocracy.net/info/our-guide-to-conflicts) (accessed September 2, 2010).
politicized opinions that are fueling this region. The people who should have the solution have become the people creating the problem. Religion has become ideology and the so-called clash of civilization is more accurately a clash of fundamentalism.

Both Christian and Muslim fundamentalists seem to have tried to grab the moral and theological high ground and by creating an end-time scenario that pits “the people of God” as per their intolerant definition against “the enemies of God” in a desperate battle. More space needs to be carved out for less strident voices calling for peace and reconciliation.

I am aware that the term road map is a heavily loaded one; it became popularized in 2003 in reference to the peace plan to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It aimed at bringing forward a viable three-phase plan for the creation of a Palestinian state that was to exist side by side with the State of Israel by 2005. It failed. In this paper, divine road map is not used as a religious equivalent to this political plan, but in broader terms seeks to describe God’s model for peace building and for reconciliation as revealed in the way he treated his enemies and sought to bring restorative justice to a broken world.

But it could be argued that if the world is doomed to destruction, is not peace building a distraction to soul saving? I do not think so, for in the words of N. T. Wright, Christianity “became what the enlightenment wanted it to be—a private system of piety which doesn’t impinge on the public world” (1997:154). David Moberg in the The Great Reversal (1972) makes a convincing case for the need to recover world missions from the straitjacket of early twentieth century Protestant theology which artificially pitted social concerns against personal evangelism. After all, in the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated on earth, it was he who pronounced a blessing on those who make peace (Matt 5:9) and it was God who sent angels to announce “Peace on Earth” (Luke 2:14). So, I believe that spiritual leaders desperately need to recover the appropriate role of biblical faith for transforming communities.

According to Prince Ghazy from the Common Word Interfaith Initiative, the hot buttons in the region are: (1) Jerusalem and the Palestinian question, (2) discontentment with U.S. foreign policy (especially the war in Iraq), (3) terrorism, (4) fundamentalism and fundamentalist propaganda (on both sides), (5) missionary activity (also on both sides), and (6) deeply rooted, historical, cultural, and racial misunderstanding, suspicion, and even loathing. Thus now, according to the results of the largest international religious survey in history (as outlined in a recently-published seminal book by Professor John Esposito and Dalia Mogahed), 60 percent of Christians harbor prejudice against Muslims and 30 percent of Muslims reciprocate (Volf, Gazhi, and Yarrington 2010:7).

For a detailed analysis of the “Great Reversal” see Winter 2009:5-11.

I am contrasting “appropriate role” with other more recent expressions of the so-called “social gospel” that have reduced the message of Jesus to social ethics. I grew up in South America at the time when
I owe this quest to my Muslim and Christian Arab friends who deeply love their communities and who cry out during troubled nights to the Almighty: “Why have you forsaken us?” (Matt 27:46).

Christians in the region understand and experience the cross in shared but also in unique ways, partly due to the diversity of the many faith communities that make up the Eastern churches in the region. Historically, irreconcilable Christological views led to the schism between the Eastern and Western Church, and over the centuries the churches of the East developed a strong mystical tradition unlike the Church of the West which invested its energies in establishing and systematizing its theological orthodoxy in philosophical language and Western logic. This mystical tradition makes it plausible to seek to experience the force of the cross beyond its theological articulations and underpinnings.

It is beyond the scope of this reflective paper to address any specific view of the cross as understood by Eastern Christians in the Middle East, but I will attempt to focus on how to convey the power, beauty, and meaning of the cross among Muslims in the Middle East for peace building. My hope is that this message will resonate deeply with other Christians in the region who are also seeking peace. For this purpose, I will first identify some of the principal Muslim objections to the message of the cross and ask if the Qur’an (when interpreted without its later accretions) makes allowance for an alternative reading of the crucifixion that is in harmony with the biblical account.

Islamic Objections to the Cross

The cross of Jesus for Muslims is dishonorable, shameful, and a scandal because it mars God’s reputation, his mercy, his justice, and his authority in the world. After all, what is just in requiring the paying of a price by a non-guilty party? What does it mean that there is an eternal order in which life is gained in exchange for a life lost? An anonymous young Muslim weblogger described his views in rather simple terms: “According to Christian

Liberation Theology was at its height, so I am aware that a social focus that does not start with a biblical worldview and an anthropological understanding can end up attacking the wrong evils.

There are several expressions of local Christianity among the ancient Eastern Churches of the Middle East: Assyrian Chaldeans (also known historically as Nestorians), Coptics in Egypt, Catholic Maronites in Lebanon, Orthodox Greeks in Lebanon, Syrian Orthodox, just to mention a few. After the nineteenth century, Protestantism took root in the region with the arrival of American and European missionary Protestant churches.
belief, the original sin of Adam and Eve of eating from the forbidden tree was so great that God could not forgive it by simply willing it, rather it was necessary to erase it with the blood of a sinless, innocent Jesus” (The Islamic and Christian Views of Jesus). Muslims believe that a God who needs human blood to be appeased so that his forgiveness can be realized, offends the reputation and authority of God. Even more, they believe that it reflects the tribal and pagan gods of the times of jahilyyah (ignorance) in Mecca that were challenged by the arrival of Islam in the seventh century.

Major Y eats-Brown in his The Lives of a Bengal Lancer, criticizes the Christian doctrine of the atonement in just a single sentence: “No heathen tribe has conceived so grotesque an idea, involving as it does the assumption, that man was born with a hereditary stain upon him: and that this stain (for which he was not personally responsible) was to be atoned for: and that the creator of all things had to sacrifice his only begotten son to neutralize this mysterious curse” (1939).

Bill Musk explains how “by such readings of atonement, the Cross has come to be primarily seen through the lens of sacred violence: the devil is paid off, or the Father’s wrath is satisfied. The creditor in this transaction could be either the devil or God the Father” (2008:124).

Joel Green and Mark Baker go further: “Many Christians join Muslims in questioning this doctrine: Are the sins committed by people who try very hard to live according to God’s standards deserving of a literal death debt they cannot repay?” (2000:26).

Over the centuries, the penal substitution theory of the atonement has obscured the final purpose and meaning of Jesus’ death and the character of God when presented without the wider biblical narrative of the Great Controversy and detached from a picture of a loving God who will go to any extent to reconcile by moral means his enemies to himself.

The Adventist worldview theme that has become known as the Great Controversy is crucial for redeeming the story and reality of the cross, not only for Muslims but also for other Christians because it provides the overarching structure (skeleton) for understanding and experiencing the biblical God in a way that preserves his honor and is truthful to his character.

The theme emphasizes that the death of Jesus does not enable God to

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7The only time I have come across the notion of debt in any significant Qur’anic concept is in the term Din (نُذل), often translated as religion (Al Imran 3:19), and at times as obedience (An Nisa 4:125). This term is associated with the noun نذل which means debt. http://dictionary.sensagent.com/نذل/ar-en/ (accessed September 12, 2010). See also http://www.missionislam.com/knowledge/DefinitionFitrat.htm (accessed September 18, 2010).
forgive. God is not bound by his holiness or the demands of abstract justice to cause an innocent person to die in order to grant forgiveness. Mathias Zahniser (2008a) rightly explains that the death Jesus takes upon himself results from the suffering inflicted by the sins of others and from his own faithfulness to God's way of being fully human.

The Great Controversy clarifies another serious Islamic obstacle to the cross, for they believe that by accepting the death of Jesus on the cross one must also accept that the Jews outmaneuvered God and managed to defeat him through the death of his prophet. After all, how can God's reputation be enhanced when the one he sent ended up dying as a common criminal, naked, abandoned by his own followers, and rejected? Joel Green and Mark Baker (2000: chapters 2, 3) seem to suggest a similar concern: "Does exclusive emphasis on Anselm's model not obscure the richness of NT teaching on the meaning of Jesus' death?"

Muslims traditionally have discerned intimations of God's approval in the miraculous victories of Muhammad when outnumbered by the pagan Meccans (Al Anfaal 8:26) and in the impressive victories of the Islamic empire; these became clear signs of being on the side of God. Political or historical victories over one's enemies were vested with sacramental value, and one's defeat came to signal God's disapproval. Therefore, the seemingly gross defeat of Jesus at the cross offends Muslim sensitivities. What is glorious about a shameful death? Is the God of Jesus a weak God?

Zahniser (2006) explains that the New Testament discourse on the atonement clusters around at least five "constellations of images": (1) "justification," drawn from Mediterranean legal language (e.g., Rom 3:23); (2) "redemption," drawn from the market place (e.g., Rom 3:24); (3) "reconciliation," drawn from personal relationships in the Greco-Roman world (e.g., 2 Cor 5:18); (4) "sacrifice," drawn from worship familiar to both Jews and non-Jews (e.g., Heb 7:27); and (5) "victory," drawn from the battlefield (Col 2:15) (cf. Green and Baker 2000:23, and chapter 4 where the death of Jesus is also treated as "revelation" [e.g., John 17:1]). None of these requires or enables God to forgive sins and none provides the only adequate interpretation of the death of Jesus.

There is in Islamic history a well-known event by which defeat was later interpreted as victory. On the 19th of March of 625 Muslims met the Meccans for the second time in what is known today as the Battle of Uhud. After the impressive first victory at Badr, the Meccans, who were seeking revenge, inflicted a serious blow on the emerging Muslim community. Muslims were confused, and sought to understand why God had not granted them a clear victory. Had He abandoned the Muslim cause and their Prophet? Later this battle was interpreted in the Qur'an as a victory in disguise (see Al Imran 3:121-180). "Your misfortune on the day the two hosts met was by God's permission, so that He might distinguish the believers from the hypocrites. It was said to them, 'Come, fight for God, or defend yourselves.' They said, 'if we knew fighting (with a hope of success, or, would actually take place), we would have followed you.' They are thence closer to unbelief than to belief. They speak out with their mouths what is not in their hearts, but God knows what they conceal. Those who remained back and said about their brethren, 'If they had obeyed us, they would not have been killed.' Say, 'Then prevent death from yourselves, if you should be truthful'" (Al Imran 3:166-168). Muslims came to believe it was a victory, not in physical terms, but spiritually, and an occasion by which "Allah might test what is in your breasts and purge what is in your hearts.
The Muslim line of reasoning is that God is powerful enough to decree forgiveness and it happens. Nothing can condition his will and authority; therefore he has no need of a sacrifice as a prerequisite for releasing his mercy. All he needs is to will something and it happens. “Be, and it is” (نَكِ نُوُكَ يَاكُن kun fa-yakūn). 10

But perhaps more subtle is the fact that in the Muslim mind the cross answers a non-existing question; it cures a non-existing illness; and in other words it is theologically unnecessary. In Islam, it is believed that all people have come into the world with an innate pure nature fitrah (قرطْف) by which a people are naturally drawn to God in submission when they receive guidance. *Fitrah* (قرطْف) does not merely connote a passive receptivity to good and right action, but an active inclination and a natural innate predisposition to know God, to submit to him, and to do right.

People are capable of achieving an-nafs al-mutma’innah, (self-made tranquility), a form of inner peace since their redemptive potential is centered in themselves. Salvation in Islam depends on faith (iman ناميإ), good conduct (ihsân ناسحا), and embracing Islam (مالسإلا). The concept of sin in Islam is one that makes biblical salvation unnecessary. And yet, experience has taught me that even though the orthodox understanding of the nature of humanity is one of goodness, at a visceral level every ordinary Muslim knows that there is something seriously wrong at the heart level, something that constantly misses the mark, which is a biblical definition of sin. Muslims experience defilement that comes from within no matter how much they might seek to achieve purity (tahara), and in the end they will have to cleanse themselves ritually over and over. Appealing to that which they already know at a phenomenological level is far more relevant than resorting to apologetics. 12

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10The Initiator of the heavens and the earth: to have anything done, He simply says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is” (Al Baqara 2:117). “She said, ‘My Lord, how can I have a son, when no man has touched me?’ He said, ‘God thus creates whatever He wills. To have anything done, He simply says to it, Be, and it is’” (Al Imran 3:47). “He is the One who created the heavens and the earth, truthfully. Whenever He says, ‘Be,’ it is” (Al Anaam 6:73). “To have anything done, we simply say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is” (An Nahl 16:40). “It does not befit God that He begets a son, be He glorified. To have anything done, He simply says to it, Be, and it is” (Al Maryam 19:35). “All He needs to do to carry out any command is say it to, ‘Be,’ and it is” (Al Fatir 36:82). “He is the only One who controls life and death. To have anything done, He simply says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is” (Al Mu’min 40:68).

11“Fitrah pertains to the deep, common spiritual essence of man. It is humankind’s natural and universal innate predisposition for goodness and submission to One God.” http://www.missionislam.com/knowledge/DefinitionFitrah.htm (accessed September 18, 2010).

12For an insightful article on how to present the gospel from the shame-honor perspective, see Bruce Thomas’ article “The Gospel for Shame Cultures,” which is online at http://www.emisdirect.com/emq/
The Qur’an presents a composite picture of human sinfulness that echoes the biblical one: “man’s very soul incites him to evil” (Yusuf 12:53); “man is truly unjust and ungrateful” (Ibrahim 14:34); “If God took people to task for the evil they do, He would not leave one living creature on earth” (Al Nahl 16:61); “man is more contentious than any other creature” (Al Kahf 18:54); “If it were not for God’s bounty and mercy towards you, not one of you would ever have obtained purity” (An Nur 24:21); and “man exceeds all bounds” (Al Alaq 96:6).

The Qur’an is unambiguous when it says, “That no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another, And that man will have nothing but what he strives for; And that the result of his striving shall soon be known; Then will he be rewarded for it with the fullest reward; And that with thy Lord is the final judgment” (Al Najm 53:38-42, emphasis mine).

Therefore, the idea that one person could die to remove someone else’s sin (substitution) or redemptive suffering is usually not part of the Islamic conceptual web, although for Shia Muslims the death of Imam Hussein had a redemptive purpose. Also, at a social level, Muslim communities in the Middle East seem to have no problem with the notion of the collectivization of shame or that the supererogatory deeds (nawafil) of the prophets could be imputed to Muslims on the Day of Judgment. If someone commits a sinful act, not only is he dishonored but his family, and at times his community, is also dishonored. One’s fault is not inconsequential to those related to him, just like one’s merits could bring honor to the whole community.  

Finally, a major obstacle to the cross can be found at a very deep emotional level because of the memories of the Crusades. Muslim revulsion of the Crusades is extended to what became its more visible symbol: the cross (salīb, al-hurūb al-salībiyya), and wars under the banner of the cross. The cross of the Crusaders is a formidable barrier for community and peace-building.

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13When reading the Qur’an through the eyes of the Bible, there is more common ground than what might be apparent in a casual reading. In As Safat 37:101-109 Abraham’s son was ransomed by a gift of a ram provided by God himself. This gift is defined as “great or momentous,” a term that functions as a name and qualifier prominently attached to God. So here is an important redemptive window to address the issue of substitution. Another less known redemptive window is the aqīqa ceremony which is practiced in some Muslim contexts on the seventh day in the life of a male child. The child is said to be redeemed by his aqīqa (Zwemer 1920:87). The Qur’an also says, “In the Day of Judgment, Let them [the unbelievers] bear, on the Day of Judgment, their own burdens in full, and also (something) of the burdens of those without knowledge, whom they misled. Alas, how grievous the burdens they will bear!” (An-Nahl 16:25, emphasis mine).
since it became intrinsically linked to Christian violence and colonization.

In summary, following Larson’s assessment (2009:12) Muslims believe that “theologically it [the cross] need not happen; morally it should not happen; historically it did not happen.”

For those vested in offering a theologically sound understanding of the cross among Muslims, a seemingly good starting point is to establish from Islamic sources the fact that Jesus indeed died. The next step would be to explore its meaning. Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection had been preordained before his birth in accordance to a divine plan (see Maryam 19:15, 33, and 21). The events of his life follow a natural sequence: “Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” (Luke 24:26).

In order to establish that Jesus indeed died, it is not enough to explain the impact and meaning of the historical event. Todd Lawson explains that Muslims who deny the crucifixion often reveal that the issue for them is not really the *historicity* of the death of Jesus but the “Christian theories of salvation” attached to it (2009:144). The theology of atonement that was developed in the West and was based largely on the penal substitution theory often fails to convey clearly the meaning of the cross for Muslims, since shame and fear, not guilt, are what needs to be addressed.

**The Cross in the Qur’an: One Ayat, Many Interpretations**

Judging by the scarcity of the treatment given to the topic of the crucifixion in the Qur’an, it becomes evident that the cross is marginal for Islam. Not only does the Qur’an barely address this issue, but it offers no affirmation or counterargument to the meaning that Christians have attached to the cross. This is especially interesting since the Qur’an challenges other core points of doctrine that heretical Christian groups held in Arabia.\(^{14}\) Could it be that Mohammad was not even aware of the centrality and meaning of the cross for Christians?

The Qur’an uses the word death connected to Jesus four times. Three of them seem to indicate a chronological sequence in which Jesus was born, died, and resurrected.\(^{15}\)

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\(^{14}\)This is in contrast with the strong denial of Jesus as Son of God which is understood in physical terms, or Jesus’ divinity, or the heretical version of the trinity (Mary, God, and Jesus as referred to in Al Maida 5:77, 72-73 which was widespread in Arabia at the time of Muhammad.

\(^{15}\)Notice these three verses: “Behold! Allah said: ‘O Jesus! I will take thee [muttawaffika] and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: then shall all return unto me and I will judge between you of the matters Wherein ye dispute” (Al Imran 3:55). “Never said I to them aught except what Thou
The fourth and main reference is found in Al-Nisa 4:157, which is the only text that addresses the issue of the crucifixion. This *ayat* was offered as an emphatic denial that the Jews had indeed crucified Jesus as they boasted and is understood in the context of downsizing or reducing their power over those appointed by God as messengers. If the Jews thought that their boisterous claims could intimidate Mohammad and deter him from pursuing his mission, they needed to know that “they (the Jews) said (in boast), ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah’—but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not—nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise” (Al Nisa 4:157-158, Yusuf Ali).

Here the Qur’an uses a rather puzzling Arabic expression, “it seemed to them” (ۚۡمُهَل َهِّبُش shubika lahum), an expression that continues to draw new interpretations 1,400 years later. What does “it seemed to them” mean? The text is ambiguous and elusive; and as Zahniser (2008a) has carefully argued, it can be legitimately read in a way that does not flatly contradict the biblical account; especially when read together with Al Imran 3:55 where the verb *tawaffa* is understood to mean death in twenty-five other uses in the Qur’an (three of them referring to Muhammad).16

The Qur’an offers itself as a book for guidance to all people. For it to fulfill its purpose, it has to be able to and enabled to speak to its receptor community at every stage of history. This has been achieved through the *tafsir* or Qur’anic exegesis.

The most influential orthodox Muslim commentators (al-Tabari, Fakhr al-Din al Razi, al-Qurtubi, al-Baydawi, and Sayyid Qutb) in their exegetical treatment of these texts that refer to the death of Jesus have offered a study of all the possible renderings of the verb *tawaffa* and their views regarding what happened at the cross.

Tabari (d. 923) explores four possible meanings, one of which is a real, 

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16 Anis Shorrosh says, “As an Arab who has been raised in a Muslim culture, Arabic is my native language. The critical word *mutawafika* means “cause you to die…. Even until this day, fourteen hundred years after the appearance of the Qur’an, you can ask any Arab about what happened to his uncle who passed away last week and he will use the same words as a past tense, “Tawafa,” which means he died. Since that term is used of Jesus, he must have died” (Shorrosh 1988:112).
literal dying. But one of his choices is the substitution theory. Fakhr al-Din al Razi (d. 1210) in reference to *Al Imran* 3:55 lists eight different possible meanings to *mutawaffika* but states that in his opinion, God is the one “causing you (Jesus) to die.” Al-Qurtubi (d. 1272) prefers the substitution theory, but he does acknowledge that other theories, including physical death, have had some support among Muslims. In reference to 5:117, he comments on the word *wafat* and indicates that it literally means death. Al-Baydawi (d. between 1284 and 1316) similarly lists all the various legitimate interpretations of various passages without giving a preference. Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) is one of the fathers of fundamentalism and is probably among the best-known Sunni commentator today. In reference to the crucifixion, he comes across as agnostic. His dispute with Christians is not over the history of the event but over the theology of it.

Muslim scholar Farid Esack (2005:155), in reference to *Al Nisa* 4:157 wrote: “Muslims in general deny the crucifixion, although the Qur’an merely stated that: ‘they did not slay him, nor crucify him, but it only seemed to them as it had been so.’” It is clear that the Qur’an is neutral in this matter of the crucifixion even though Muslims are not.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of Muslims today hold the view that in fact Jesus did not die, that he remains alive near God in heaven from where he is expected to return and usher in the Day of Judgment. Muslims believe that at the cross, God caused a substitute to appear in the place of Jesus, and that substitute that was crucified in Jesus’ stead was no other than Judas so that justice would be served, while God took Jesus directly to heaven alive. A less known view is that Jesus was indeed nailed to the cross, but that he only lost consciousness on the cross and subsequently revived in the tomb.

The non-death of Jesus is meant to safeguard God’s honor, as already explained, and yet it creates a disturbing scenario by which God misleads Jesus’ followers and even his mother Mary to believe a deception conceived by God himself. God then becomes the “Best of Schemers,” and it is on this basis that the Muslim writer, Mahmoud Ayoub (2007), agrees that the substitution theory is not plausible.

Since the focus of this paper is not to develop a theology of the cross for Muslims, this brief overview of the cross from an Islamic view will hopefully

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17This idea was first found among the followers of one of the earliest Christian heresies (late first century and early second century) called Docetism. This term, Docetism (from δοκέω [dokeō] in Greek means “to seem”). They believed that Jesus’ physical body was an illusion, as was his crucifixion, and that Jesus only seemed to have a physical body and to physically die, but in reality he was incorporeal, a pure spirit, and hence could not physically die. For a detailed study of this group see Ehram 2003.

18This is the view of the Ahmadyah group, which was more recently popularized by Ahmed Deedat.
provide enough background to allow this discussion to move forward toward
the issue of fostering a receptor-oriented model for peace building rooted in
the cross.

In the above discussion of the understanding, obstacles, and possibilities
of the cross among Muslims in the Middle East, I treated as self-evident
and unproblematic what is perhaps the most complex aspect of my object
of study: the problem of evil and subsequent theodicy (vindication of God’s
goodness and justice in the face of evil).

A peace-building model that takes the cross as emblematic needs to be
solidly rooted in a doctrine of God that is consistent with his revelation and
that is able to place the origin and agency of evil in its rightful place: “an
enemy has done this.”

The problem of evil does not assume a dominant position in Islamic
tradition, as it often does in Western thought, since it would be unthinkable
to question the justice or mercy of God, let alone his existence, in connection
with this issue. In Islam, the problem of evil stems either from free will or
human weakness, so evil results from forgetting the Creator. Furthermore,
human beings have no right to accuse God directly for the evils of this
world\textsuperscript{19} or the right to question God’s wisdom in allowing evil to achieve his
purposes.

Islamic theodicy centers on presenting a consistent conception of the
divine qualities: divine mercy, justice, power, and will. Said Nursi’s writing on
this topic emphasizes the fact that only a correct understanding of being and
how it is related to the Divine attributes of perfection can solve the question
of evil (1992:64-65). This, in turn, is incumbent on solving the mystery of
Divine unity (\textit{tawhid}). The parting of the ways takes place when, in order to
preserve the Divine unity of their strict monotheism, “the ultimate source
of evil is God himself. However, what causes the creation of evil is man and
jinn’s incapabilities and actions such as destruction, the failure to perform
duties, which are non-existent” (Covan 2010:116).\textsuperscript{20} Some Muslim
thinkers, in trying to temper this strident position, have suggested that evil
originates from non-existence, from the absence of goodness.

Only a biblical understanding of the Great Controversy has the power to
rescue God from the dual dilemmas of preserving God’s unity and goodness

\textsuperscript{19}There is no one position on this matter, but this is the most accepted one. For more details refer to
Bediuzzaman Said Nursi’s works especially “Risale-i Nur.” Nursi explored the issue of theodicy and justice
in modern thought in relation to the development of the state and society, and the crisis of Islam in the
modern secular nation-state.

\textsuperscript{20}“Hallowed be he in whose hand all dominion rests, since he has power over all things” (see \textit{Al Mulk} 67:1;
\textit{At Taghabun} 64:1; \textit{Al Talaq} 65:12; \textit{At Tahrir} 66:8).
while explaining the origins of evil as a mystery which allows for “saving his reputation”\textsuperscript{21} and from the Greek inspired Christian fallacy of matter/soul dualism in which the creation of matter is defective and inherently evil while the spirit (the platonic world of ideas or forms) is good. Creation and Creator in the Bible are good and with each Sabbath remembrance, God’s people participate in its celebration.

Why is this important? Because underlying the obstacles that I have already described in the previous section, there is a picture of God, of his character, and on how he governs the universe that needs to be broadened in order to enthrone God in human affairs again, for after all “He is God in heaven and God on earth” (\textit{Az Zuhruf} 43:84).

The cross was not meant to transform the heart of God so that he could accept sinners, but rather it is the sinful heart that needs to be transformed as it contemplates the revelation of divine love at the cross.\textsuperscript{22} “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor 5:19). God does not need to be reconciled to us; we need to be reconciled to him.

\textbf{Reframing the Discussion: The Great Controversy and the Cross}

In this section I would like to shift the focus and put at the center of the discussion the “Great Controversy” as that organizing principle from which the cross can take its rightful place.\textsuperscript{23} I will concentrate on the dynamics of relationships which God the Father and the Son established between the godhead and their enemies. Then, I will suggest possible ways by which these findings could be materialized for faith-based peace building.

It is helpful for this discussion to mention that the Qur’an offers a cumulative and positive picture of the Great Controversy and what is even more important, it offers an accurate description of the true nature of pride and the character of \textit{Iblis} or \textit{Shaytan} (Satan). This is a particularly important

\textsuperscript{21}I have taken this expression from Sigve Tonsted’s doctoral thesis.

\textsuperscript{22}The Islamic doctrine of God is neither static nor monolithic, it varies “between the original doctrine of the Qur’an and its early developments and influences from the philosophers, and the lasting changes Islam underwent under Sufism during the days of Al Ghazali (d. 1111)” (Rahbar 1960: 222).

\textsuperscript{23}I find it interesting that modern theologians (Wright, Sanders, and others) from the so called “New Perspective” seemed to be more keenly aware that there is an underlying narrative in the Bible, a horizon of meaning that cannot be ignored. This includes the story of God and Israel, God and Abraham, God and the covenant people, and the way in which that narrative came to its culmination \textit{when the time had fully come} in Jesus. How all this works itself out is still controversial and a point of debate among them.
area of common ground between Adventists and Muslims. Between the human predicament and the final ransoming, there is a divine drama that unfolds in history. This drama starts with a war in heaven of cosmic proportions by which Lucifer questions God’s moral standing as supreme ruler and his wisdom in the way he rules the universe. Lucifer also brings false charges against the law which sustains the government of God. He is intent on changing the nature of the trusting relationship that exists between God and his “community.” Here is encountered the first case of character assassination for “political reasons.” How will God deal with the insurrection “party of Satan”?24 Could the social fabric of the heavenly community ever be restored?

A key concept needed to understand God’s way of dealing with his enemies is to study the evidence. “You shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” (Matt 7:16). There are hints in the Old Testament that sin is still allowed time to display itself, so that when God judges he will be seen as just (Gen 15:16 and Dan 8:23). Ellen White explains:

God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble to the earth; but He did not do this. Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan’s government. The Lord’s principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God’s government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power. It was God’s purpose to place things on an eternal basis of security, and in the councils of heaven it was decided that time must be given for Satan to develop the principles which were the foundation of his system of government. He had claimed that these were superior to God’s principles. Time was given for the working of Satan’s principles, that they might be seen by the heavenly universe. (White 1898:759)

Peace building was to be secured on the basis of truth and allegiance without coercion. God granted time to Satan and his followers to display the evidence of Satan’s claims so that human beings could make appropriate choices.

(Satan) said: “O my Lord! give me then respite till the Day the (dead) are raised.” (Allah) said: “Respite is granted thee ‘Till the Day of the Time

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24“Satan has gained mastery over them and made them forget the remembrance of Allah. Such people are the party of Satan. No indeed! It is the party of Satan who are the losers” (*Surat al-Mujadala*:19).
Appointed.” (Satan) said: “O my Lord! because Thou hast put me in the wrong, I will make (wrong) fair-seeming to them on the earth, and I will put them all in the wrong Except Thy servants among them, sincere and purified (by Thy grace).” (Allah) said: “This (Way of My sincere servants) is indeed a Way that leads straight to Me. For over My servants no authority shalt thou have, except such as put themselves in the wrong and follow thee” (Al Hijr 15:36-42).

Let not the Unbelievers think that our respite to them is good for themselves: We grant them respite that they may grow in their iniquity. But they will have a shameful punishment. Allah will not leave the believers in the state in which ye are now, until He separates what is evil from what is good nor will He disclose to you the secrets of the Unseen.” (Al Imran 3:178-179a, emphasis mine)

At the cross “love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Ps 85:10).

**Fighting “In the Way of God”: The Moral Victory of God**

The idea of a cosmic/supernatural battle is not an exclusive biblical notion, for most world religions have their equivalents; neither is the idea that earthly conflicts are proxy wars that involve the spiritual realm. So what is specific to the biblical narrative, or in Jerald Whitehouse’s own words, what is “the value added” that could open up new possibilities for building peace? What is unique in the biblical account that other religious or philosophical systems fail to offer?

At the cross God deals with the problem of evil and with his enemies in a way that cannot be found in any other human or religious system. The cross leads to an encounter in a revelatory way that draws the human heart and invites undivided allegiance. Not only is a person’s fate overturned and the law elevated, but God’s character is vindicated. In the cosmic conflict, how the conflict is won is as important as who wins it.

God is God in his radical self-giving, descending to the most abject human condition and, in that human obedience, humiliation, suffering and death, being no less truly God than He is in his cosmic rule and glory on the heavenly throne. It is not that God is manifested in heavenly glory and hidden in the human degradation of the cross. The latter makes known who God is no less than the former does. . . . The radical contrast of humiliation and exaltation is

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25For instance, at the Battle of Uhud, according to the Qur'an, not only did the two warring parties meet (Muslims from Medinan and Pagans from Mecca) but there were also supernatural forces at work: God (Al Imran 3:166), angels (Al Imran 3:124-125) and Satan (Al Imran 3:155, 175).
precisely a revelation to who God is in his radical self-giving. He rules as the one who serves. (Bauckham 1984:50)

Mark Baker (2006) is right in pointing out that the New Testament portrays Golgotha along two lines: one with God as the acting subject, the other with Jesus as the acting subject. It will not do, therefore, to characterize the atonement as God's punishment falling on Christ (God as subject and Christ as object), or as Christ appeasing or persuading God (Christ as subject and God as object). In other words, Father and Son stand on the same side of the conflict.

At times Muslims have objected, and rightly so, that God could not be threatened by Satan. This notion of two opposing and yet comparable parties in conflict was at the center of Eastern ontological dualisms prior to Islam (i.e., Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism) but is not sustainable from a biblical perspective. Beelzebub (بابذلأ لعب literally “Lord of the Flies”) is no match for the Almighty.

Bill Musk (2006:330) argues that the difference between the Christian and the Islamic accounts of the crucifixion does not lie in the question whether Jesus was or was not crucified but in whether God displayed his sovereignty more clearly in giving Jesus to be crucified or in raising him to heaven. In other words, which outcome gives more glory to God: a rescue from death before the mortal moment or a rescue from death after the evil and death have had their way? Which process causes Jesus Christ to be a greater sign? Which God is worthy of worship, the one who brings rebels back by the use of coercive force or the God whose power is love?

The specific way of the biblical God is neither passive nor violent, but is passionately active and moral. God’s victory is moral because it is not the one who amasses a more decisive force who turns the tide, but the slaughtered lamb in utter dejection and utter weakness that overcomes evil in a way that defies all human logic: obedience to the point of death.

Jesus surrendered to the will of the Father, how different from those who seek to manipulate God by asking him to bless their actions, to perform according to their will. Jesus, who could have called the hosts of heaven to his side, chose to lay down his life. We deduce that to follow the way of Jesus is to follow the way of obedience not the way of worldly success.

In that sense, Mahmud Ayoub (2007) sees Christ as the “perfect Muslim” in that Christ embodies the highest form of submission to the will of God (Matt 26:39). Jesus died with an open-ended question, Why have you forsaken me? But his submission prevailed and the lack of a response from God did
not alter the outcome of his decision. Jesus remained submitted.

We learn from the cross that evil should not be allowed to determine the sort of person we shall be for sin no longer has any dominion over us. To be free is to be able to choose not to follow our natural inclinations any longer but to overcome evil with good.

Ellen White describes the final scenes of Jesus’ struggle in the Garden this way: “Thrice the prayer for deliverance was wrung from His lips. Heaven could no longer endure the sight, and a messenger of comfort was sent to the Son of God” (1898:760). In the presence of suffering God’s heart is moved to compassion and he sends his very Spirit to comfort. It is interesting that the title given to the Holy Spirit is *Comforter*. This should point to the fact that God was not taken by surprise by the suffering at the cross, but in his mercy he appointed One to deliver, to comfort.

The victory of the Lamb which was slaughtered speaks to those tempted to conform to the community average or to those defeated by a sense of powerlessness by challenging them to hold fast to the way of the Lamb and resist the temptation of trusting other notions of human fulfillment. The God of the Lamb is not defeated by the powers of sin, death, or evil. God is, in fact, moving history toward the full consummation of the victory of the Lamb—the healing of the nations.

The sign of Christ’s restored honor is his resurrection from the bowels of the earth. He is now raised up to God's right hand—the seat of Sonship—and has been given a new name plus unique authority over all creation. He has, through his obedience, vanquished the devil completely. Now he releases human beings from their captivity to hostile spiritual powers and re-establishes them with God their creator.

The history of the Middle East provides examples of honorable people who, from a position of power, chose the path of sacrifice.

One night in the early 1980s, the king (the late Hussein bin Talal, King of Jordan) was informed by his security police that a group of about seventy-five Jordanian army officers were at that very moment meeting in a nearby barracks plotting a military overthrow of the kingdom. The security officers requested permission to surround and arrest the plotters. After a somber pause the king refused and said: “Bring me a small helicopter.” A helicopter was brought. The king climbed into it with the pilot and himself flew to the barracks and landed on its flat roof. The king told the pilot, “If you hear gunshots, fly away at once without me.” Unarmed, the king then walked down two flights of stairs and suddenly appeared in the room where the plotters were meeting and quietly said to them:
“Gentlemen, it has come to my attention that you are meeting here tonight to finalize your plans to overthrow the government, take over the country and install a military dictator. If you do this, the army will break apart and the country will be plunged into civil war. Tens of thousands of innocent people will die. There is no need for this. Here I am! Kill and proceed, that way only one man will die.” After a moment of stunned silence, the rebels as one rushed forward to kiss the king’s hands and feet and pledged loyalty to him for life. (Bailey 2008:418)

“Men said to them: ‘A great army is gathering against you’: And frightened them: But it (only) increased their Faith: They said: ‘For us Allah sufficeth, and He is the best disposer of affairs’” (Al Imran 3:173).

**Non-violence: God’s Way of Empowerment**

“When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, . . . He hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort. He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer” (Luke 23:8-9, emphasis mine).

In the first century, the scandal of the cross was the apparent defeat of God’s Messiah. In the twenty-first century, the scandal of the cross is violence that is seemingly willed by and pleasing to God. Some have tried to portray the cross as a kind of child abuse—a perspective which is proper of cultic religions. This is but a gross distortion of the message of the cross, for the cross actually denounces the contemporary pervasiveness of violence.

People today face an epidemic of violence, but they also have a pervasive faith in violence which promises to be able to create peace. “The myth of redemptive violence,” as biblical scholar Walter Wink calls it (1999:50), permeates our consciousness and our culture.

The cross and the forgiveness it provides breaks the cycle of violence and models a way that is not conditioned by the enemy for it does not depend on their seeking forgiveness, but instead emphasizes the part of the one wronged to take the initiative. “For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!” (Rom 5:10).

Jesus entered a world of power with its fallen social structures and yet he lived out the non-violent way of God’s reign until his death. He remained free from violence even to the point of allowing the social/political powers to put him to death rather than give them his loyalty. At the resurrection, God certified that the way of Jesus was victorious over the powers of darkness, including violence perpetuated by dominant social systems. Just before his
The non-violent resistance of Jesus at the cross offers a counter-model for challenging violence, but even more important it clarifies Jesus’ command to offer the other cheek when one has already been slapped by the offender and not to resist an evildoer (Matt 5:38-42). “Jesus replied, ‘If I said anything wrong, you must prove it. But if I’m speaking the truth, why are you beating me?’” (John 18:23, emphasis mine). To offer the second cheek is to confront evil without succumbing to it. Jesus’ question, “Why are you beating me”? was an invitation to his persecutors to stop, to ponder, to face the consequences of their actions, to change, to be redeemed. Jesus modeled a way to seize the moral high ground that allowed him to retain his dignity while not resisting (antistenai) or using violence. This challenge to not give in to the degrading use of violence is the “third way” of the cross: no violence, no capitulation or resignation, but rather forgiveness and confrontation in dignity.

The crucified Messiah was God’s vigorous agent of redemption through his willed obedience unto death. The cross is the ultimate defeat of violence for at the cross Jesus absorbed its full force, at the cross Jesus swallowed up evil in his own body to its ultimate consequences: death, and this is how he disarmed it. The Cross—in the language of N. T. Wright—absorbed the power of death. “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:15). This is the dimension of the cross that needs to be clearly communicated to Muslims. God was not defeated, but vindicated and his honor was restored. This vindication is the basis of worship because God is who he said he was and demonstrated that he can be trusted. This is the ultimate triumph of moral force over coercive power in that he took sin and death on himself, he let it do its worst to him, but he imploded it on the cross and rose victorious!

Gustaf Aulen in his classic Christus Victor argues that for the first thousand years of Christianity the cross’ central theme was portrayed as God’s victory over the devil. Because of the unity of God, Christ’s sacrifice is not a legal offering to God in order to placate his demand for honor or justice, but as the decisive moment in the war against the powers of darkness (1931).

There is in the Good News a scandal of particularity in the way God relates to the world. Nancy Schreck in her study, “The Faithful Nonviolence of Jesus,” identifies three foundational dimensions of Jesus’ ministry that grounded his nonviolent resistance to violence: “First, the inclusive love of God that deems any exclusion as a form of violence.” Second, a vision of universal nonviolence was not an option, but an absolute requirement if people were to fully realize their human potential. Thus, Jesus modeled a way in which to confront the evils of the world without succumbing to them. Third, Jesus modeled a way to seize the moral high ground that allowed him to retain his dignity while not resisting or using violence. This challenge to not give in to the degrading use of violence is the “third way” of the cross: no violence, no capitulation or resignation, but rather forgiveness and confrontation in dignity.

Central to Dr. King’s vision for peace building was the notion of the “Beloved Community” a place where no one is excluded. In one of his first published articles he stated that the purpose of the Montgom-
healing. Third, an understanding that God is not a God of vengeance but of radical love who calls us to a spirituality purified of violence at its very roots” (Schreck 1999:54-55).

Non-violence, which is a godly form of resistance, has the power to break the cycle of dehumanization and can also foster growth because it does not threaten the existence of the other while challenging unjust structures that prevent people from engaging each other.

Non-violence that ultimately seeks mutual transformation for the oppressed and the oppressor can be realized by a power which goes beyond resistance. By remaining non-violent—even in the face of severe provocation, intimidation, and threat—people can bring social transformation in a very profound way. Only one who does not mind being belittled can resist. In contrast to the coercive and dominative power of violence, non-violent resistance can unleash the power of truth, love, growth, compassion, justice, and creation.

Rejecting the assumption that human history is driven by coercive power, John Howard Yoder argues instead that it was God—working in, with, and through the nonviolent, non-resistant community of disciples of Jesus—that has been the ultimate force in human affairs. If the Christian church in the past made alliances with political rulers, it was because it had lost confidence in this truth (1994:104).

Yoder sees in Paul’s thought concerning justification the clear sense that God in “making things right” centers primarily on the establishment of faith communities where former enemies are reconciled, where genuine shalom/salaam finds expression (1994:70). For Paul, human social structures, the “principalities and powers,” are seen both as part of God’s good creation and as fallen, thereby often failing to serve their created purpose of ordering social life for the sake of human flourishing.

Yoder concludes his masterwork, The Politics of Jesus, by saying:

To follow Jesus does not mean renouncing effectiveness. It does not mean sacrificing concern for liberation within the social process in favor of delayed gratification in heaven, or abandoning efficacy in favor of purity. It means that in Jesus we have a clue to which kinds of causation, which kinds of community-building, which kinds of conflict management, go with the grain of the cosmos, of which we know, as Caesar does not, that Jesus is both the Word (the inner logic of things) and the Lord (“sitting at the right hand”). (1994:246)

The bus boycott “is reconciliation, . . . redemption, the creation of the beloved community” (Smith and Zepp 1974:361).
The Divine Road Map

The God of the cross opened the gates of radical forgiveness even when a victim is no longer either able to forgive or alive to do so. “Father, forgive them!” This is a fulfillment of the prophecy: “He made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa 53:12). But for us this is the “specific” way of the cross. Is Jesus trying to convince God to forgive? No, Jesus is echoing the Father’s heart, speaking on the side of God. At the cross God redefined the lines of exclusion.

When God sets out to embrace the enemy, the result is the cross. On the cross the dancing circle of self-giving and mutually indwelling divine persons opens up for the enemy; in the agony of the passion the movement stops for a brief moment and a fissure appears so that sinful humanity can join in (see John 17:21). We, the others—we, the enemies—are embraced by the divine persons who love us with the same love with which they love each other and therefore make space for us within their own eternal embrace. (Volf 1996:129)

Only when entrusting ourselves to the One who judges with justice is it possible to follow the path of the crucified Messiah and refuse retaliation when ill-treated. The certainty of God’s just judgment at the end of history gives us the needed perspective and reframes our role. Paul says that Christ “disarmed” the powers of evil (2 Col 2:20) therefore, “we no longer have to accept the rule of oppressive structures or of deceiving and dominant social systems. Their transformation is also included in Christ’s work” (Myers 2008:36).

**God Meets Evil Not Only as Judge but as Creator**

The biblical eschatological Judge is foremost the Creator God. He is not a Creator whose transcendence places him above the reach of his people, but a God who gets his hands dirty, dips them in mud to touch matter and transforms it into a new creation: humanity. How does this God respond to the presence of evil? How does he create shalom/salaam?

N. T. Wright points out a pattern of God’s response to evil: God as Judge judges evil, confronts those who do wrong, and allows them to see the course of their action if they were to remain in that course; on the other hand, God the Creator creates something which did not exist before (rainbow, garments, ark, even a rescue plan that culminates in his self-sacrificial death) to bless, restore, and redeem (2006:48-53). In other words, as Creator he opens up new possibilities even in impossibly evil circumstances.

Allow me to exemplify this crucial concept with a real story that will
render any further explanations redundant.

During the terrible riots of 1992 [in] Gandhi’s home state of Gujarat a “Hindu” mob descended on a rural village. Almost all the village men were out in the fields. The women reacted quickly however, and took in their Muslim neighbors to hide them from the mob. As they lived mostly in one-room cottages, it often meant “hiding” them in plain sight, underneath their household altar. The mob stormed up to one home screaming, “Are you hiding a Muslim in there?!” “Yes,” the woman calmly replied. Somewhat nonplussed, the men barked out “We are coming in to get them!” Then the woman said, just as calmly, “First kill me, then only you may enter.” This happened repeatedly, as though by some prearrangement. Virtually every Muslim in that village—and some others—was saved. (What Is Nonviolence?)

The women later explained that this experience created an unbreakable community bonding with new meanings and led to a novel sense of autonomy that changed forever their self-perception. They no longer felt they were powerless ignorant women, but now an empowered community of women who could transform negative forces into constructive action. In the face of evil, they created new social dynamics—reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-20).

As Cameroon theologian David Tonghou Ngong writes, “The closest we can come to knowing how God wants us to act in a particular situation is how God has already acted in God’s eternal movement to give life to humanity and the rest of creation. This is the only way we can participate with God in God’s life-giving activity to promote the attainment of meaningful life for humanity and the rest of creation” (Ngong 2004:374).

**Beyond Crime and Punishment: Restorative Justice**

God’s justice is not that of a “cosmic vending machine” from which rewards or punishment are dispensed as good or bad actions are fed into the “heavenly deeds slot.” God loves justice but his definition breaks open all other definitions, since God’s justice is restorative, it is aimed at healing relationships, and does not just deal with the actions.

At the cross the inadequacy of retributive justice is exposed and superseded forever, for which “eye or tooth” could Hitler offer to assuage the pain or compensate for the death of six million Jews?²⁷

²⁷Hussein B., a Shia from Iraq who had suffered under Saddam’s regime for years, had anticipated a great deal of relief and vindication the day the dictator could finally face justice and pay for his crimes. On
The divine road map

The lex talionis (Lev 24:19-21; Exod 21:22-25; Deut 19:21) establishes a level of basic proportionality so that an eye will not be repaid with a life. These passages describe a raw form of justice but it was never God's intent that these principles would constitute the highest form of justice.

At the cross the logic and strict application of this model breaks down for what scale can equalize humanity on one side and God in the flesh on the other? Some may argue that at the cross God did not die but only his beloved Son, but again can even the agony of God be compared to the price of humankind? How can clay be redeemed at such a cost? Instead the cross requires that we seek another way to understand the heavenly dynamics and logic for ransoming us: God’s tremendous love.

Retributive justice is a system of rules that determines blame and administers pain in a contest between the offender and the state. It emphasizes repairing the harm caused by crime. However, in restorative justice the focus is on transforming the relationship between the parties in question. When victims, offenders, and community members meet to decide how people can live in harmony again, the results can be transformational. Restorative justice is the way by which we can love our enemies.

Howard Zehr (2002) explains how the restorative justice model posits a paradigm shift that is in contrast to the common three questions asked for the typical system of justice. Those common questions are: (1) What laws have been broken? (2) Who did it? (3) What do they deserve? Instead Restorative Justice asks, (1) Who has been hurt (listening to the story of the victim)? (2) What are their needs that this wrongdoing has created? (3) Whose obligations are these (accountability and confession)? (Restorative Justice).

In Miroslav Volf’s terms if you are ultimately after justice, you must ultimately be after embrace. Actions against injustice must be placed in the framework of the will to embrace the unjust. That is, one should continually be ready for embrace, even as one pursues justice.

Jürgen Moltmann (1992:20-29) explains how a theology of the cross for peacemaking holds up the innocent victims, but it also approaches humans trapped in their own wickedness and lack of empathy for the suffering they have caused.

God responded to the cross with restorative forgiveness bringing people back into right relationship. The dying Jesus asked forgiveness for his tormentors, the resurrected Jesus returned to the disciples as a forgiving

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December 30, 2006, Hussein's dream came true but soon he came to the stark realization that retributive justice had no power to heal. Saddam was gone but the memories of pain were still present.
presence—intent, not on reproach, or seeking reprisal for their betrayal and desertion, but on reaching out in love and inviting them back to renew their relationship with him. The powerful waves of that forgiveness extend to us today as the living Christ continues to respond to human betrayal and rejection with forgiveness.

“Moreover, it was because the father rejected the older brother’s demand for plain justice and instead insisted that ‘relationship has priority over all rules’ that reconciliation—the ultimate goal of justice—could be made complete” (Volf 1996:164).

But how does God bring justice? This theme alone could fill many pages, but allow me to point that the establishment of justice by decree, as at times Muslims have suggested, is arbitrary. God’s way is the path of faithfulness. “In faithfulness he will bring forth justice” (Isa 42:3) as fulfilled in Jesus (Matt 12:20). Is the faithfulness of God which was made known to us in Jesus the base of justice? “The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever” (Isa 32:17). In the specific way of the cross, God’s faithfulness cannot be divorced from his law. Peace building requires the upholding of the righteous laws of the Creator.

Because Jesus’ cross was a direct consequence of his confrontation with the social status quo, it actually reflects the presence of the kingdom of God. Jesus loved his enemies, embodied a justice greater than the scribes and Pharisees, identified directly with the poor and oppressed, and even forgave those who killed him. In doing so, Jesus displayed the core values of the new social and political order he had been commissioned to bring into being.

Only those who are forgiven can overcome the temptation to pervert justice into injustice. In that sense, the cross is not for us and against the other but rather it is the place that summons oppressor and oppressor alike. “In the presence of God, our rage over injustice may give way to forgiveness which in turn will make the search for justice for all possible” (Volf 1996:124). Peace is thus deeply linked to justice, since peace is not the absence of violence but the presence of justice.

**Shame and God’s Solidarity with the Sufferer**

Christ was so committed to the inclusion of those oppressed and rejected that he was willing to die rather than comply with the norms and practices of those who shamed them, again showing that God’s love is stronger than death. At the cross Christ fully identified with us in our experience of shame and exclusion as the hateful mob acted out the ultimate expression
of exclusion through a humiliating and shameful death on the cross. Jesus was displayed naked before the crowd, a crown of mockery was placed on his head, a soldier slapped his face, but he “endured the cross, scorning its shame” (Heb 12:2).

The cross, however, offers more than a promise of God’s solidarity and God’s empathy of knowing what it means to experience shame. The resurrection of Jesus after his death on the cross exposes false shame and breaks its power to instill fear (Col 2:15). Jesus’ death and resurrection invite and enable us to live in freedom from dehumanizing shame that Jesus took upon himself on the cross (Heb 12:2; 1 Pet 2:6).

The theme of shame often goes unnoticed in Western circles, but it needs to be retrieved if the message of the cross is to be communicated clearly among Muslims and Christians in the Middle East. At the root of much of the existing tension and violence in the region is the real sense of being ashamed, and a strong desire to recover lost honor and dignity.

The cross shattered the notion of the impassibility of God. One of the specifics of the biblical God is his capacity to make himself vulnerable, not out of necessity, but as a loving choice. Only Christianity has a God who has suffered, proving his commitment to us in our brokenness. “To our wounds only thy wounds can speak, and no God has wounds but thou alone” (Shillito 1958:235). This is a foreign notion to the Islamic doctrine of God. The God of Greek philosophers is a God that evades the possibility of being moved by suffering and pain and who is therefore incapable of offering personal comfort. Add this to the fact that in Islam God’s vulnerability is rejected because it is viewed as weakness.

“God is a fellow sufferer who understands” not because God cannot be otherwise, but because God wills to share in our lot and in doing so he reveals a largesse of heart that compels us to worship. The Arabic concept ghurba (which Edward Said translates as estrangement) is helpful to convey the state of being a foreigner, homeless, lonely, separated, and a stranger in one’s own land (Hammer 2005:60). God in Jesus knows what it means to be in a state of ghurba, to be crushed, but unlike us who often are unable to change our circumstances, God chose this path.

For Jürgen Moltmann, in his classic *The Crucified God* the cry of Jesus from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” was decisive. If the Son of God knows what it feels like to be abandoned by God, then he can understand Moltmann’s own pain and despair. “The crucified God, however, shares in the suffering of the world, and in Jesus’ dying question he himself takes up humanity’s protest against suffering and the open question
of God’s righteousness in the world. Thus for the sufferer God is not just the incomprehensible God who inflicts suffering, but the God, who cries with him and intercedes for him with his cross where man in his torment is dumb. *God himself maintains the protest against suffering*” (Moltmann 1993:252, emphasis mine).

However, if God were only “the fellow-sufferer who understands” as suggested by Alfred Whitehead in his often quoted phrase (1978:351), it is arguable that the problem of suffering would not be alleviated, but aggravated. It is no consolation to the sufferer to know that God is as much a helpless victim of evil as he is himself unless he understands how God’s suffering mitigates evil and how God transforms the character of suffering.

But, why is that suffering still among us? I do not know, but the cross is the proof that God is committed to ending it.

Those who live within the *pathos* of the crucified Messiah are enabled to experience real love that is sensitive to suffering, love that is ready for the pain of loving those who are unlovable, love that can make us vulnerable and yet open to the anointing of the joy that characterized Jesus’ life. Because God was at the side of the suffering Christ, we too should be by the side of those who suffer today, accompanying them even when we are not clear as to what mode God’s presence takes when we are present. We have peace with God and with other human beings through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1; Isa 32:17).

**Breaking the Cycle of Victimization Through Forgiveness**

The road to sustainable transformational peace must include trust. Without trust there can be no possible engagement between parties, no possible relationship. It is a mistake to assume that trust can be delivered through policies, especially foreign policies. Trust comes from God and starts with the stark realization that the human heart is deceitful and in need of healing before it is able to trust. When we turn to God he can rebuild our ability to trust, a trust that requires that we forgive and re-humanize the other.

Dehumanization of the victim leads to self-dehumanization of the perpetrator.

In light of the justice and love of God . . . hate recedes and the seed is planted for the miracle of forgiveness. Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from
the community of sinners. But no one can be in the presence of the God of the crucified Messiah for long without overcoming this double exclusion—without transposing the enemy from the sphere of monstrous inhumanity into the sphere of shared humanity and herself from the sphere of proud innocence into the sphere of common sinfulness. When one knows that the torturer will not eternally triumph over the victim, one is free to rediscover that person’s humanity and imitate God’s love for him. And when one knows that God’s love is greater than all sin, one is free to see oneself in the light of God’s justice and so rediscover one’s own sinfulness. (Volf 1996:124)

The passion’s narrative is about the Lamb who goes to death rejecting violence, loving enemies, returning good for evil, praying for his persecutors, and forgiving all. Forgiveness and self-awareness of one’s true heart condition has the power to uproot the pervasive psychological dynamic of victimization. Those who have been grieved are not condemned to live in this state forever. George Irani says that victimization is a crucial concept to grasp when dealing with protracted conflicts, whether personal or political. Overcoming feelings of victimization, which, unfortunately, are endemic to the human condition, is the most important step towards healing. Usually, acts of violence (whether inflicted on an individual or a group), are the results of deep feelings of being victimized, regardless of who is the victim or victimizer. (2000)

For some in the region (Muslims, Jews, and Christians), victimization has been abused by legitimizing the immoral use of past atrocities as a moral justification for present brutalities and violence. The memory of real human tragedies is therefore trivialized and the endless cycle of victimization becomes unbreakable. It was never God’s intention that anyone’s identity be one of a victim.

In Jerald Whitehouse’s own words, Adventism offers “a reconciling message that restores peace and quality of life amidst increasing chaos and destruction as evil displays itself more strongly in the world” (Who Are We and What Is Our Identity?). The story of the Cross is meant to generate a praxis of the Kingdom of God in every historical and cultural context.

The church has a role to play in creating a space and preparing for reconciliation by being a community where the guilty can be open to asking for and receiving forgiveness, and where those who suffer are allowed to enter into new relationships of trust and healing. When Jesus said that “these words are fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21), he made clear that the eschatological fulfillment he had in mind was not at the end of time but
rather the transformation of social life during his lifetime and onwards.

“The major role of the Church in relationship to the greatest issues of justice and peace will not be in its formal pronouncements, but in its continually nourishing and sustaining men and women who will act responsibly as believers in the course of their secular duties as citizens” (Newbigin 1989:139). This lays a heavy responsibility on the churches in the Middle East because they are often the victims of vicious attacks themselves.

Forgiveness in the Qur’an and in the Bible is an important area of common ground and unavoidable for peace building.\textsuperscript{28}

\section*{The Prince of Peace}

Traditional Muslims believe that Jesus had a role in the past, will have a future role, but has no role in the current state of affairs. In the future, at the appointed time, Muslims believe he will come alongside the Mahdi to destroy the Antichrist (\textit{dajjal}) and bring about a reign of peace. In the past he had an exalted role as a prophet sent by God with light and guidance and a clarifying role about what is right and wrong.

The Qur’an offers a positive and cumulative witness to the peace-loving Jesus while on earth but it is not clear how he ended his ministry. Muslims widely believe that he is near to God but not sure what he is doing there. Therefore, establishing Jesus’ current role and involvement as the Great Controversy plays out in these last days offers a rich area for Seventh-day Adventists to have a clarifying role among Muslims.

In my personal experience, I have found it useful to direct Muslims and Christians back to the exalted and unique roles that Jesus had on earth (healing, forgiving, interceding, loving, showing mercy, purifying, creating, judging, etc.) while pointing to the fact that these exclusive and exalted roles did not end once he was taken up to heaven, but rather he received even more authority now that he is near to God.

Mark Siljander (2008), in his widely circulated book \textit{A Deadly Misunderstanding: A Congressman’s Quest to Bridge the Muslim-Christian Divide}, offers a compelling case for upholding the way of shalom/salaam/shlama (peace) as taught and embodied by the Messiah from God. For over a decade Siljander has proven the success of peacemaking by clarifying areas of apparent misunderstanding which were blocking the path to the spiritual

\textsuperscript{28}For an excellent survey on this topic see Moucarry 2004.
heart. Removing stones frees the soil to receive the specific way of the cross for reconciliation, which is Jesus.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace at the present. He is the Prince of Peace because he is Lord (Acts 2). Jesus is Lord, and this is what the Good News is all about. Not any Lord, but One that emptied himself of all desire to dominate and became a Servant. Because Jesus is Lord it is he who owns each community. It is he who has every person’s transformation under his authority; because Jesus is also a Servant, this has strong implications as to how that change is to be implemented.

We need to be clear that the problem of evil is not something we will solve in this present age as long as the line of demarcation between good and evil continues to run through the human heart. Evil is neither a problem of just “us and them.” The constant awareness of this reality should provide us with a dose of much needed humility when we meet “the other.”

Since sin is not something humans can solve, our primary task is to bring forth signs of God’s activity and seek his healing power in the world. Our task is to lift up that Light that has the power to pierce darkness and swallow it; to bring back the Sabbath as “a metaphor of paradise and a testimony of God’s presence” (Heschel 2005: xv).

It seems pertinent to conclude with John Howard Yoder’s words:

To follow Jesus does not mean to renounce effectiveness. It does not mean sacrificing concern for liberation within the social process in favor of delayed gratification in heaven or abandoning efficacy in favor of purity. It means that in Jesus we have a clue about what kind of causation, which kind of community building, which kind of conflict management, go with the grain of the cosmos, of which we know, as Caesar does not, that Jesus is both the Word (the inner logic of things) and the Lord (sitting at the right hand). It is not that we begin with a mechanistic view of the universe and then we look for cracks and chinks where a little creative freedom might sneak in . . . it is that we confess that the deterministic world to be enclosed within, smaller than, the sovereignty of the God of the Resurrection and Ascension. (Yoder 1994:246)

**Obstacles on the Road to Peace: Three Common Errors**

Before I offer my final reflections on peace building, I wish to address three misconceptions that could have a negative effect in peace building. First, the common view that democracy, as a model of governance, is the solution to heal the deep sense of brokenness among the communities of the Middle East needs to be challenged. Neither should people expect peace to emerge out of the ashes of violence and war. The “strongman model”
might be effective in restraining insurgency but can it deliver reconciliation, forgiveness, trust, justice, or any of the other components that are needed for peace?

A political solution has its proper place, but that place is much more limited than what politicians are ready to admit. Greg Mortenson, the founder of Pennies For Peace and co-author of the New York Times bestseller, *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School At A Time*, and *Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, is an inspiring example of the difference between peace building and state building. Trudy Rubin, from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote: “Sometimes the acts of one individual can illuminate how to confront a foreign-policy dilemma more clearly than the prattle of politicians. Such is the case with Greg Mortenson, whose work gives insights into an essential element of fighting terrorism with peace.”

Second, it is important to learn from the failures of secular peace-building strategies what happens when these models are at odds with local needs, local perceptions, and indigenous ways of making peace. In a previous section I surveyed some of the theological issues Muslims and possibly some Christians face when they explore the meaning of the cross. I hope that a better understanding of this subject can help Christians offer peace in the name of Jesus while avoiding the existing misunderstandings; but let’s make no mistake, sustainable peace requires more than theological clarification.

Peace initiatives based solely on economical and political enticement or purely strategic considerations cannot last if they are not accompanied by an honest and profound exploration of the underlying, emotional legacies of fear, hatred, and mistrust resulting from decades of warfare and unending cycles of victimization and vengeance. What policymakers are starting to discover is that if they want to foster peace in the Middle East, they will have to harness the indigenous spiritual capital of the people they seek to influence. But even more, they need to look beyond politics. Sami Awad (Holy Land Trust), an extraordinary Palestinian peacemaker, rightly explains that the two state solution for Israel and Palestine is just one step toward building peace but not the final solution. ²⁹

It is not enough to be able to co-exist side by side with one’s neighbors. God created us for engagement. This is a clear Islamic notion: “O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of

you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa (the pious). Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware” (*Al-Hujraat* 49:13).

Roberts (2010) suggests that the failure to achieve political peace is due partly to the fact that often polices are irrelevant to the everyday lives of people, especially those who live far removed from the state institutions. The fact is that political top-down peace building mainly happens in capital cities, while largely ignoring the vast majority of the rural populations whose priorities are neither in political institutions in distant capitals nor in liberal values couched in the language of human rights.

This means that a peace initiative based on the cross, which does not incorporate local language and images, and which does not address heartfelt needs will be perceived as illegitimate and irrelevant. “In assessing the applicability of Western-based conflict resolution models in non-Western societies, theoreticians and practitioners alike have begun to realize the importance of being sensitive to indigenous ways of thinking and feeling, as well as to local rituals for managing and reducing conflicts” (Irani 2000). The rituals of *sulh* (settlement) and *musalaha* (reconciliation) are examples of Arab-Islamic culture and values and should be looked at for insight into how to approach conflict resolution in the Middle East as a step towards peace building.

In other words, (again I am indebted to Jerald Whitehouse for this insight) if God’s story, and our story does not blend with the community story, we will not see sustainable transformation. When our stories are blended together, our story and their story are enlarged, we are changed, and we all grow.

Third, it is important to challenge senseless biblical interpretations that obscure the doctrine of God. The current crisis in the region cannot be simplistically attributed to God’s vengeance falling upon today’s children of the East as punishment for the sins committed hundreds of years ago by their ancestors, even by high ranking ancestors such as Abraham.

This negative and distorted view estranges people from our common humanity, from God’s mercy, and condemns them to be God’s appointed enemy against the people of God. We desperately need to recover the heartbeat of God and live out his compassion but also we need proper exegesis of the Bible stories, especially a new look at the story of Hagar, Abraham, Ishmael, and God.

To contribute towards a more peaceful future requires a re-interpretation. The current narratives regarding who God is and who the other is, while containing elements of truth, are not sufficient to deliver peace because often they are too narrow in their understanding of how God deals with the
material world, of how he engages and transforms cultures and diversity, and how he deals with the problem of evil from within.

**Under the Cross**

I do not pretend that I can give a definitive conclusion, but I offer a modest attempt to list some practical suggestions within the Muslim and Christian context of the Middle East for promoting peace. I wish to spotlight possible productive areas for peace building at the intersection of personal faith, missiology, biblical theology, and contemporary society (more specifically community peace building) in the region. I am grateful that as we engage with real people in building peace, God’s precious Word and his Holy Spirit guide and empower us all for the task ahead.

At the beginning I posed two simple questions which I wish to restate: What if the cross of Jesus were to be unpacked before Muslims and Christians as the divine model by which God shows solidarity with a broken world? If the cross were to epitomize God’s “Roadmap for Peace,” what kind of model of justice and peace building would it offer?

If the cross was to be unpacked in its larger framework of the cosmic conflict it could answer two crucial questions which “frame and anticipate all other questions” (Mayers 1999:23). Who is God and what is he doing? A biblically sound theology of the doctrine of God cannot be divorced from peace building which ultimately should lead us back to him.

Diana Francis in describing a faith based peace initiative in Madagascar quotes Vololona Razafindrainibe: “Belief in a higher God, more loving and egalitarian . . . is slowly being promoted and a new movement is growing for a lasting peace, based on spiritual values” (2010).

Adventism contributes with a third key question. “What are the issues at stake in the cosmic battle between God and Satan?” Answering this question is crucial for peace since it restores the rule of law to its rightful role, retrieves Jesus’ rightful place, unmask sin, and discloses the truth about Satan for who he is, and finally, helps us to better understand the origin and end of evil. Answering this question enables us to disarm some of the Muslim’s fiercest arguments against the cross since the cross and God are on the same side of the battle, not against each other. In terms of eschatology, the way of the cross challenges the idea that the end of history is found in the clash of nations rather than in the coming return of the slain Lamb. But even more important, the pathos of the cross offers a concrete model by which communities can be healed.
The specific way of the cross is non-violent; it heals, for victims no longer must live under the shadow of their past but are freed to choose a different way of life. The way of the cross is the way of forgiveness by which relations are prioritized over actions. It is the way in which enemies are no longer enemies but “loved enemies,” which by definition destroys the notion of hatred since no one, not even enemies, should be outside the reach of love. The way of the cross is non-coercive; it disarms evil, and empowers the sufferers to beat their swords into plows. It redefines what victory is, and how to receive peace. Peace building ultimately must point back to the Prince of Peace who is also Lord. Those who seek peace through the cross will receive a new identity. They are not simply marked by their ethnicity or nationality, but are now identified by their inclusion in the family of God.

Unlike other regions of the world, the Middle East is a deeply religious area and not interested in engaging with the secular West. If anyone is going to engage with their story, they cannot be oblivious to God’s story. In other words, this region needs a new narrative that could offer reconciliation and peace on earth, and the Bible has it.

Specific expressions of peace-building initiatives should include a multiplicity of forms as diverse and creative as music or visual art as presently used by “visual peacemakers” (see http://visualpeacemakers.org/index.php?documentaries/story/take_the_journey). Considering the growing impact that TV has in the region, it is likely that media will be an important vehicle for peace building. But it must be media that combines the best of communication with local values and with the message of God reconciling the world unto himself in Jesus.

I wish to conclude this reflection with an appeal to the biblical remnant to partner with God in peace making, to seek new venues to live out and promote peace in the Middle East, to uphold the way of the crucified Messiah who alone can draw Muslims, Adventists, and Christians closer to each other. This call is not to a project but a way of life. Finding common ground that ensures the dignity of the other calls us to the generative work of de-centering self and truly participating in the life of God.
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The story of Ishmael within the structure of the Book of Genesis and Exodus seems to carry a more relevant role than the same story would if read by itself. In the unfolding of God’s plan to save Israel and humanity as a whole, God used symbols and types. In this sense, one could explore Ishmael and Hagar as types for Israel’s slavery in Egypt, redemption, and the journey to the Promised Land. The story and meaning of Ishmael’s name seems to communicate a paradigm of how God consistently acts and responds in favor of his people and all who are oppressed by sin, misery, and affliction.

This article will briefly examine literary elements like chiastic structures, word plays, character interactions, and parallelism in the books of Genesis and Exodus which might provide relevant information for a better understanding of the Ishmael story.
Views on Ishmael

Through the centuries Jews and Christians have influenced each other in the interpretation of the Ishmael story and have greatly differed in their assessment of Ishmael and his mother Hagar. Carol Bakhos examined how rabbinic sources dealt with the figure of Ishmael and came to the conclusion that “the portrayal of Ishmael before the rise of Islam can be neutral, positive, or negative; after the emergence of Islam, however he is consistently portrayed more negatively” (Bakhos 2006:2). Augustine, Jerome, and Calvin seemed to have gone that direction in their writings. However, Origen, Theodore, and Luther were more sympathetic. Two seemingly extreme cases in point are Calvin and Luther. Calvin at times would take extreme positions almost to the point of hating Hagar and her son. Luther would defend Hagar even where there was no need to do so (see Thompson 2001:17-99). In light of today’s events there is often a polarization of views in the Christian as well as in Adventist circles. Genesis, however, does not place a negative mark on Ishmael.

The Biblical View of Ishmael

In Genesis, Ishmael is the treasured son of Abraham (Gen 17:18). He receives all the promises given to his father Abraham, except the one to be the son of promise. He is blessed of God (17:20; 21:12, 30; 21:17) and “God was with the lad” (Gen 21:20, NKJV) as God was with Jacob and Joseph (Gen 28:15; 39:2, 3, 21). The annunciation story puts Ishmael “in a surprising company of others similarly chosen by God”: Isaac (Gen 18:10), Samson (Judg 13), Jeremiah (Jer 1:5), John the Baptist (Luke 1:13), Immanuel (Isa 7:14; Luke 1:31) (Hamlin 1990:137). “Only those whom God calls to some special service does he ‘call by name’” (Nichol 2002:1:661). Noteworthy is the similarity of the annunciations of Ishmael and Jesus:

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“And the Angel of the Lord said to her:
Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael” (Gen 16:11). “You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the Lord has heard your affliction” (Gen 16:11, NKJV).
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“Then the angel said to her …
And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus” (Luke 1:30, 31), “And you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21, NKJV).
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The hearing motif within Ishmael’s name, “God hears,” became a source of comfort and strength to not only Hagar, but to Abraham, Ishmael himself, as well as the people of Israel when they experienced God’s liberation from bondage in Egypt (Exod 2:23-25). There are indications that this hearing motif continued to be found in the history of Israel. Thomas Neumann makes mention of studies that confirm that Ishmael was the thirteenth most beloved Jewish name given to boys from 330 BC to AD 200 among the people of Israel. By the second Century BC, 2 percent of Jewish men carried the name Ishmael in Palestine. This is unusual because by this time the negative image of Ishmael as Isaac’s enemy and rival was espoused in early rabbinic literature. Apparently the hearing motif of Ishmael’s name was still powerful enough for those families and childless mothers who had experienced God’s miraculous intervention in their lives as a result of prayer and supplication. Simeon (God has heard) is a variant of the same root as Ishmael. The deep appreciation for the name Ishmael and its meaning is echoed in Jewish saying: “He who sees Ishmael in a dream will have his prayer answered by God” (Naumann 2008:23, 24, 36).

The Promises Concerning Ishmael in Genesis 16

The promises concerning Ishmael in Genesis 16 which at first might seem negative and odd to the Western mind are to be understood in the light of the angel’s command to Hagar: “return to your mistress and submit to her” (Gen 16:9). God’s plan to bless Ishmael required him to be educated and prepared by his father Abraham. Ishmael was to live under the shadow of Abraham’s tent.

The command to “return to your mistress and submit to her” is followed by the promises, which in turn would give strength to fulfill such a difficult command. The naming of Ishmael brought strength and comfort to Hagar as well as the assurance of God’s presence.

The phrase, “He shall be a wild donkey of a man” (Gen 16:12, NIV) requires the reader to look more closely at the biblical context to better understand the expression, for the phrase does not sound very positive for the 21st century reader. In Job 39:5 (NIV) it says, “Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes? I gave him the wasteland as his home, the salt flats as his habitat. He laughs at the commotion in the town; he does not hear a driver’s shout. He ranges the hills for his pasture and searches for any green thing.” One could say that the wild donkey was the king of the desert in biblical times. Genesis 16:12 describes Ishmael’s future destiny: he would
enjoy a free-roaming, Bedouin-like existence. The freedom his mother sought would also be his one day (Wenham 2002:10). “In contrast with the oppression which she had endured and still would endure, she received the promise that her son would endure no such oppression” (Keil 2002:1:141).

The phrase, “His hand shall be against every man, and every man’s hand against him” (Gen 16:12b, NKJV) is connected with the first prediction and indicates that in the context of defending his freedom, Ishmael would be fierce. “The syntactical structure of this verse with no connective particle between the first two clauses governed by the Hebrew verb “to be” implies that the second is a direct implication of the first.” The first prophecy guarantees his freedom; the second is the “qualifier” of the first one (Maalouf 2003:71): it as the price Ishmael would pay for his freedom. “His hand” and “every man’s hand against him” should also be understood in light of Abraham’s expression and Sarah’s action: “So Abram said to Sarai, ‘Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please’” (Gen 16:6, NKJV).

The above promises, however, revolve around the main promise: “I will multiply your descendants exceedingly” (Gen 16:10; see also 17:20). This promise was first given to Abraham, but now it is given Hagar and her son Ishmael. It is also reminiscent of the command given to Adam and Noah. But here, along with the command is the guarantee that God will himself fulfill it.

A Word on Paul’s Reading of Genesis 21

In his letter to the Galatian believers, Paul faced the challenge of the judaizers who claimed that obeying the mosaic ordinances and precepts was essential to salvation. He chooses an allegory (4:24) to rebut the judaizers. Paul uses Hagar and Sarah as types (Gal 4:21-31) of respectively two covenants: “Mount Sinai” and “Jerusalem above.” Paul’s reading of Hagar and her son has significantly informed the understanding of Ishmael for many Christians through the centuries. “Paul uses Sarah and Hagar typologically. Paul’s line of reasoning, though, uses a different paradigm in relation to the one used in the Genesis story. ‘However, Hagar and Ishmael certainly have a typological function in the Torah, especially in Genesis 16’” (Römer 2008:10).

It is important to discuss aspects of the typological functions of Ishmael and Hagar in Gen 16, 17, and 21. Both Ishmael and Hagar seem to be types for the people of Israel in their experience of slavery in Egypt as well as their redemption by God.
Janzen, in his commentary on Genesis argues that “the final form of the text is greater than the mere sum of its sources, and that the theological vision which it presents is greater and more profound—more ripe or mature—than can be gained from studies of the historical events and social situations out of which the text arose” (Janzen 1993:1).

I would like to focus this study in a similar way that Jenzen has contemplated Genesis in his commentary. In this line of thought I have chosen to focus mainly on Genesis as well as the first part of Exodus to examine the context of Ishmael’s story in both of these books. In the next section I will consider the literary elements salient to the text.

**Hagar in Genesis 16: From Marginal to Central**

Genesis 16 takes place in the context of the covenant of God with Abraham (Gen 12, 15, 17) and the fulfillment of God’s promises. God promises to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, and make his name great (Gen 12:2) in contrast to the people of the Tower of Babel, who were attempting to make a name for themselves (11:4). Furthermore, Abraham would be a bridge to bless or curse people depending on how people would treat him. Abraham would *be* a blessing and “all families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:3). In Genesis 15, God reaffirms this promise: a son will be given to him. Sarah, however, is only mentioned by name in Genesis 17, when Ishmael is already thirteen years old.

At first sight, the story of Genesis 16 seems to be an interruption to the Abraham narrative (Gen 12-22). It is as if the reader is caught by surprise and at the outset, God does not intervene and allows choices to follow their course. Humanly speaking Gen 16 seems to be a quagmire, as a result of a series of wrong choices by each human character. But by noting the structure of the story and its context in the narrative one can begin to discover aspects that would not be perceivable otherwise. Parallelism, word plays, chiastic structures, and other literary elements can also add meaning to this story.

The pericope begins with Sarah as the one who takes the initiative and acts; it ends with Abraham accepting Hagar’s vision of God and naming his son Ishmael. It seems at first that Sarah will be the central character throughout the story. “Just as Abram gives Sarai to Pharaoh (Gen. 15:8), now Sarai takes Hagar and gives her to Abraham. Abraham the donor becomes the receiver, and Sarai the pawn becomes Sarai the initiator” (Hamilton 1990:446). The idea to build one’s family through a surrogate wife because of infertility was culturally appropriate. Sarah easily convinces Abraham to be
part of the project, and so she “takes” Hagar (ger: possibly meaning pilgrim or foreigner) her Egyptian servant and “gives” her to Abraham. As soon as Hagar becomes pregnant, Sarah’s plan backfires. Hagar looks down to her mistress (or so it appears in Sarah’s eyes). In Gen 12 Pharaoh gives Sarah back to Abraham; in Gen 16:6 Abraham seems to give Hagar back to Sarah. By now none of the characters—Abraham, Sarah, or Hagar—seems to be blameless. Hagar, however, was the only one who had no choice in accepting the plan. Abraham and Sarah do not call her by name but by her label: the maidservant or simply as “her” (Hamilton 1990:447-8). Ironically, “Hagar, Sarai’s maid” (Gen 16:8) and her son will soon become central to the story.

The way Sarah treated her maidservant seems to point forward to the oppression the people of Israel suffered in Egypt. “So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites” (Exod 1:11, 12, NIV). “The Lord said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering’” (Exod 3:7, NIV).

“In Gen. 16 the roles of oppressor and oppressed are just the opposite from Exodus. Here it is a matriarch of Israel oppressing an Egyptian” (Hamilton 1990:448). Ironically, Sarah comes to symbolize the Egyptian oppressive power and Hagar, the Egyptian servant, represents the people of Israel, and their pilgrimage to the desert. Sarah “dealt harshly with her” (Gen 16:6, NKJV), “abused her so much” (NAB), “oppressed her” (Darby 1890:15), “afflicted her” (Young 1953:9). This very same word (‘anâ) is also included in God’s prophecy to Abraham concerning his descendants (Gen 15:13) and it is used to describe the Egyptians oppressing and afflicting the people of Israel in bondage (Exod 1:11, 12; 3:7).

| “Then He said to Abram: “Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years” (Gen 15:13, NKJV, emphasis mine) | “And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence” (Gen 16:6) “... and Sarai afflicted her ...” (Gen 16:6, Young’s Literal Translation, emphasis mine). |
God Intervenes

Hagar fled (barah, Gen 16:6, 8) from Sarah, Israel fled from Egypt (Exod 14:5, 13-15) and God intervened in both instances.

This is also the very first instance in Scripture where an Angel of the Lord meets a human being, and Hagar, the Egyptian servant is the chosen one. “Now the Angel of the Lord found her” (Gen 16:7).

In spite of the grandeur of this story, it is still puzzling to many how God acts in mercy and compassion toward the “marginal” character of the story.

It is one thing to acknowledge the centrality of Abraham and his descendants in the overall plot of the book of Genesis, but there is something amiss when the center is allowed to fill or erase the margins, especially when some of these apparently marginal characters may fairly claim to be the focus of God’s benevolent concern in ways that parallel or even rival the divine attention paid to other, seemingly more central characters. (Thompson 2001:18)

In this specific context the “reading for the center” would lead one to choose Isaac and reject Ishmael while the Genesis text does not require this. Isaac is indeed the son of promise (Gen 17:19) through whom the covenant will be established. Ishmael, though, “is the oldest son of father Abraham. He is not adopted, not an intruder, but born to the man of promise” (Brueggemann 2001:183). From the very beginning God makes a special commitment to Ishmael and “cares for this outsider whom the tradition wants to abandon” (183). At times, as we will see, Ishmael “mysteriously” shares center stage with his brother Isaac.

God’s initiative to find Hagar is intentional and is a result of mercy. This has profound theological and missiological significance. This is the God of Genesis. As God found Abraham and called him out of his clan, culture, and city, so he also finds Hagar, He hears her cry and gives a command and promises. As God enabled Abraham for his journey, Hagar was also strengthened to obey through promises of God’s providence. As Abraham had a vision of God, so did Hagar. God’s choosing of Abraham for his covenant does not exclude the “other.” It seems as if God was rehearsing for his future stories used to describe his mercy.

Chiastic Structure of the Abraham Narrative

In his book Bible Lives, Jonathon Magonet proposes the following chiastic structure for the Abraham narrative found in Genesis 12-22 (1992:25).
The chiastic structure indicates a progression from the extremes to the center. Note that Genesis 12 and 22 correspond with each other for both contain the call of God to Abraham to go “to a land that I will show you” and “to offer his son as a sacrifice. The Hebrew expression ‘Lech l’cha’ (go for yourself) which is only found in these two chapters again links both chapters in a special sense. Magonet points out that the Rabbis considered the story of “Isaac’s binding” not as the only one but the tenth of a series of tests God gives to Abraham. There seems to be a progression in the intensity of the tests and the chiastic structure reinforces this.

Likewise, Genesis 12b and 20 describe stories containing the wife-sister motif in Egypt and Gerar. Genesis 13-14 and 18-19 describe different circumstances when Lot and his family are in danger. Genesis 15 and 17 describe the covenant that God initiates and fulfills with Abraham.

For Magonet, the center of the chiastic structure is the story of Genesis 16. Not surprisingly, he struggles with this conclusion, though, and calls it a “false climax” (1992:29). Goldingay, however, contends it is the actual center of the narrative. “Rhetorically or dramatically it is simply not the case in Genesis 12-22 that ‘the center stage belongs to Isaac.’ . . . Isaac shares it with Ishmael. Centre stage was Isaac’s destiny, but before his birth his father gave it away” (Goldingay 1998:147).

If the chiastic structure of Genesis 12-22 (chapters 23-25 are left out) has Genesis 16 as its center there are at least two short chiastic structures in Genesis 17 which point to Ishmael. The following chiastic structure focuses once more on the centrality of Ishmael (Wenham 1994:26).

19a Sarah will bear a son for you, Isaac
19b I will establish my covenant with him
20 **But I will bless and multiply Ishmael**
21a I will establish my covenant with Isaac
21b Sarah will bear him for you.
The God Who Seeks and Finds

There are several unique features in this story which help confirm it as a center. This is the first time God reveals himself to a woman, an Egyptian servant. This is the first time that God announces in advance the birth and the name of a child to be blessed. This is the first time when someone is granted the privilege of giving a name to God. This is the first time that the Angel of the Lord appears to a human being.

Perhaps the most important point to strengthen the centrality of Genesis 16 within the narrative is that this story portrays who God is in unique ways. God is Savior and Redeemer. He is merciful and compassionate. He seeks and finds the lost. This chapter also seems to set the pattern of how God consistently acts toward his people throughout Israel’s history, in spite of Israel’s waywardness and deviation from following God’s instructions: God seeks and finds because of who He is; He sees and hears; He knows the situation of his people; He rescues them and educates them for mission. The God who sought and found and rescued Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is also the one who found and rescued Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian servant, and her son Ishmael. Mother and son, then, seem to become types that point to Israel’s experience and history, slavery, and redemption.

Although Sarah, Abraham, and Hagar are far from flawless, God is able to transform the whole situation and even make this story a “preview” of what will eventually take place in the story of Abraham’s descendants.

The story seems also to communicate a warning: even people called by God can deviate from his plan and choose to act independently, treating other human beings with harshness.

The story of Genesis 16 captures in unique ways how unpredictable God is in his loyal and faithful love (hesed). It sets the tone for the story of redemption in Exodus. The God who saved Hagar and her son is the LORD who seeks, finds, and hears Hagar’s afflictions. He is “the living One who sees me” (Gen 16:7, 11, 14). “Ishmael” (God still hears) became a perpetual sign of God’s mercy (White 1890:146).

I suggest that the meaning to the name Ishmael carries much weight as it becomes a paradigm of how God will disclose himself to his people and humanity both in Scripture and through history. For God is the one who hears and sees, seeks and finds, the One compassionate and merciful God. This sign of God’s mercy would continue on through the rest of Scripture.

It could have been the end of Hagar and Ishmael’s story, but “the Angel of the Lord found her” (Gen 16:7). This finding is intentional and is initiated by God himself, signifying “divine intervention for a redemptive and elective purpose” (Culver 2001:53).
The God Who Hears

Three times in Genesis the name of Ishmael becomes a personal sign of God's intervention and response to prayer (Gen 16 to Hagar; Gen 17 to Abraham; Gen 21 to Ishmael himself).

Exodus seems to hint to the fact that “Ishmael” is a sign of God’s mercy that would not be forgotten: “Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them” (Exod 2:23-25, emphasis mine).

Although Ishmael is not mentioned by name in the verses above, the memory of his name would certainly be clear as the Hebrews read the expression “God hears” in this text. Neither is Ishmael mentioned by name in Genesis 21:8-21, but he is referred to in four different ways: “son of Hagar,” “son of the bondwoman,” “the boy,” and “the lad.” The absence of Ishmael's name in Genesis 21 and Exodus 2 could point to the relevance of the name's meaning in conveying who God is and how he acts.

Indeed Ishmael's name is not mentioned in the whole of Exodus or in Genesis 21:8-21 but the remembrance of his name seems to be implied by the similarity in language. “I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows” (Exod 3:7, NKJV, emphasis mine).

“So the people believed; and when they heard that the Lord had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped. (Exod 4:31, NKJV, emphasis mine)

And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I am the Lord; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exod 6:5-7, emphasis mine).

As Ishmael became a sign of God’s responsiveness in time of need for Hagar (Gen 16), Abraham (Gen 17), and Ishmael himself (Gen 21), now
“Ishmael” becomes a sign of God’s mercy, compassion, and redemption to the people of Israel.

With this as a background of the story, Genesis 16 can be considered a climax of the Abraham narrative in the chiastic structure because it pointedly portrays who God is, how he consistently acts in mercy and compassion, and how the name of Ishmael depicts these realities. In the next section I will briefly examine parallels between Hagar, Ishmael, and other Bible characters which can further elucidate this point.

**Parallelism: Hagar and Moses**

Back in Genesis 12 Sarah is “sold” into Egypt in order to save Abraham. When Pharaoh finds out the truth he frees Sarah along with slaves and gifts to guard her honor. It is possible that Hagar was received as a slave at this time. Whereas Pharaoh sets Sarah (and Abraham) free from Egypt along with gifts, in Genesis 16 Sarah oppresses her handmaid Hagar. In the context she seems to symbolize Egypt which in the future would oppress God’s people.

If Hagar, on one hand, is a type of the people of Israel’s later experience in Egypt and in the desert, on the other hand she prefigures in many ways Moses’ own experience in Egypt, in the desert, and back in Egypt.

Hagar and Moses both have a dual identity: she is an Egyptian slave and becomes the second wife of Abraham; Moses is the son of a slave in Egypt and becomes adopted into Pharaoh’s family. Moses and Hagar both received a revelation from the Angel of the Lord (Gen 16:7; Exod 3:2). Both received a message of liberation: to Moses the promise of freedom from Egyptian bondage; to Hagar the promise that her son would never be a slave for he would be like a “wild donkey.” In both verses the noun “affliction” or “oppression” is found.

Hagar and Moses share several similarities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hagar</th>
<th>Moses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness (Gen 16:7)</td>
<td>The Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush (Exod 3:2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees</td>
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Several points in common stand out in these two revelations to Hagar and Moses. The presence of the Angel of Lord is at the beginning of each call. In both revelations there is an interaction between Egypt and Abraham’s descendants. Ishmael and the people of Israel are guided and strengthened respectively by Hagar and Moses in the wilderness. God hears the cry of the boy but he does not know that God has heard. God tells Hagar “to lift up the boy and hold him by the hand”; similarly, God hears the cry of the enslaved people but they are not aware that he has heard their cry. God tells Moses to let the people know that I will deliver them out of the affliction of Egypt. As Moses looked back at these stories and its parallels with his own experience with God and that of the people’s, it must have been a source of hope and encouragement to both Moses and the people. In this context, the Hagar and Ishmael typologies seem to be intentional and to point to God’s plan to save his people.

### Ishmael and the People of Israel

There are other interesting parallels in this study. The son of an Egyptian slave was received and educated by Abraham and Sarah, the son of an Israelite slave in Egypt was adopted into the Pharaoh’s family. Both sons were sent to the desert.

Ishmael, not Isaac, seems to represent the people of Israel in these narratives. Just as Ishmael had to go in order to be blessed and for the promise to be fulfilled, so too the people of Israel had to leave Egypt in order to worship God. Just as Ishmael had to pass through the desert in order to grow and allow God’s promises to be fulfilled, so Israel also had to pass through the experience in the wilderness before arriving in the Promised Land. Just as God heard the boy cry, he also heard his people’s cry for help. Just as God commanded Hagar to “take the boy by the hand and lift him up,” so too he commanded Moses to let the people know that he had heard them
(Ishmael). Both Ishmael and the people of Israel brought with them to the desert the trauma of their experience. But God was with them (Gen 21:20; Exod 25:8).

Ishmael and Joseph are also connected in that God was with them specifically in their time of distress and despair (Gen 21:20; 39:2, 21). Both were sent away from home. In so doing, both fulfilled God’s purpose for them. Likewise, the people of Israel would also be connected with the descendants of Ishmael in their journeys. In Dotham, Joseph would be “saved” from the hands of his brothers and sold into Egypt. The Ishmaelites, unknowingly, would be instruments of salvation and rescue to Joseph. God’s providence would transform that tragic situation so that Joseph would become God’s instrument to preserve the remnant of Jacob.

In order to fulfill God’s promises of blessings to Ishmael, he was to remain in the desert. He was to be as free as a “wild donkey” in the desert; his mother was a slave but he would never be a slave. He became an archer and he was to “dwell in the presence of all his brothers” (Gen 16:12), including Isaac. His mother chose an Egyptian wife for Ishmael and he had twelve sons who became princes. Isaac’s son, Jacob, who later became Israel, also had twelve sons, so it seems that all of the promises given to Abraham and Isaac were also given to Ishmael, except the promise to be the son of the covenant.

Ishmael and Isaac

Since the beginning, Ishmael and Isaac seem to be connected, even in the way their birth is described:

| So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. (Gen 16:15, 16) | For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him—whom Sarah bore to him—Isaac. (Gen 21:2, 3) |

Except for the somewhat ambiguous text of Genesis 21:9, Ishmael and Isaac do not seem to have personal difficulties with each other. Their mothers are the ones who do not get along. In verse 9 there is a word play for the word “laughter” to describe Ishmael “laughing” (ESV), “playing” (NRSV) with Isaac or “mocking” (ASV), or “scoffing” (NKJV) him, depending on the translation. In the original language the expression sounds like Ishmael was “Isaacing” with Isaac. The original word for Ishmael’s “laughing” (קחצ)
actually points to the meaning of Isaac’s name. The same word is used to describe the laughing of Abraham (Gen 17:17), Sarah (Gen 18:12, 13, 15), and Isaac himself (Gen 26:8).

In Genesis 21 Isaac and Ishmael are separated because of family conflict. However, their connection seems to continue on through the parallelism found in Scripture.

At a certain moment in his adult life, Isaac moves into the proximity of Beer-Laai-Roi (Gen 24:62), a well named by Hagar as gratitude for the vision of God and the promises given to her son Ishmael who is also Isaac’s brother. The story says that Isaac had come from this well and was now meditating or praying. The well Beer-Laai-Roi is now connected with God’s revelation to Hagar, the promises of God to his brother Ishmael, and above all points to the fact that God is one who hears, sees, and knows. The narrative seems to connect Isaac to this reality. As God heard Hagar by the well, so Isaac desires that God would hear and guide him in his future marriage. He, too, searches for the God who hears. He, too, will be comforted. Here there is a connection between Isaac and Ishmael’s mother, Hagar.

Another event seems to cast light on Isaac’s relationship with Ishmael. The blessing Esau had lost to Jacob, seemed to be connected with Isaac’s command “not [to] take a wife from the daughters of Canaan” and Jacob’s obedience to the command.

Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,” and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram. Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had. (Gen 28:6-9, NKJV, emphasis mine)

Isaac and Ishmael meet again when their father died. (In a similar way, Esau and Jacob meet for their father’s funeral, which seems to confirm their reconciliation.) Their meeting is noteworthy. Only Ishmael and Isaac meet here. The other sons of Abraham are not mentioned. Only Isaac and Ishmael are called “sons” of Abraham in Genesis. The other sons are not called Abraham’s but Keturah’s sons (Gen 25:4; 28:9; 1 Chr 1:32). But there is yet another relevant parallelism which will be discussed next.
The Two Sacrifices of Abraham in Genesis 21 and 22

Rabbis have noted similarities between the two chapters and have seen the “sacrifice” of losing Ishmael as a preparation for the greatest test: the near-sacrifice of Isaac. The comparison of both “sacrifices” not only ties the two brothers closer together but can also bring new light and dimension to both stories. Notice some parallels between the two stories as listed in the appendix.

The number of parallelisms are too numerous and evident to be neglected. This seems to indicate that both pericopes must be read together for a more complete understanding. This comparison connects the two stories and its characters and brings new dimensions to both stories. The similar terms used to describe both stories (commands, verbs, and terms) confirm the same reality. The Angel of Elohim speaks and rescues in the Ishmael story (Gen 21). The Angel of YHWH calls and saves in the Isaac story (Gen 22), which calls attention to the covenant. In contrast, the Angel of YHWH appears to Hagar in Genesis 16.

Conclusion

Although circumstances are far from ideal in the story of Ishmael and his mother Hagar, and the characters in the story are not exempt from flaws, there are several noteworthy elements in the Ishmael story and in its Genesis context which make it relevant for mission and theology. There is the meaning of Ishmael’s name, the annunciation of his birth, the promises concerning Ishmael that are similar to promises made to Abraham, the manifestation, guidance, and protection offered by the angel of the Lord, and word plays as well as chiastic structures—all these can contribute to a better understanding of the Ishmael story as well as the Abraham story.

The connections with other “main” characters in Genesis and Exodus also seem to indicate that Ishmael and Hagar are typological figures in Genesis who represent the people of Israel in their own journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Sarah and Hagar, “with the human roles reversed . . . anticipate the story in the book of Exodus” (Janzen 1993:46).

While reaching out to Muslims and other peoples of the globe, God’s people cannot afford to follow their own ways and devisings. They have no monopoly on God’s redemptive plan to save humanity. However, the way God’s people fulfill God’s mission counts. Showing love and forgiveness gives credibility to the gospel (John 3:35). As Genesis connects Ishmael and
Hagar with Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, and the people of Israel, the whole story takes on new meaning. In the same way the gospel story takes on new meaning as Jesus’ disciples begin mingling with others desiring their good, ministering to their needs, winning their confidence, and communicating the gospel in winsome ways (White 1905:143).

The story of Ishmael in Genesis is not isolated or fragmented. It is more than an interruption to the Abraham story. It is the story of the Sovereign God and his salvation to humankind. Above all, the Ishmael/Hagar story point to the centrality of the God of Genesis and his unpredictable love. Ishmael’s name becomes for Hagar—and for those who earnestly pray to God—a “perpetual sign of God’s mercy.” In this sense Ishmael’s name has become a paradigm of how God consistently acts in mercy in spite human failings.

If indeed Genesis 16 is the climax or the center of the chiastic structure of the Abraham narrative (Gen 12-22), then the center of the center just might be the message that “the Angel of the Lord found her” (Gen 16:7), again indicating that God is a God who hears and who responds in ways that result in blessing.
Genesis 21:8-20 (NRSV)

Command:
"But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you'" (21:12).

So Abraham rose early in the morning (21:14) and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder.

And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba (21:14).

Crisis:
When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes.

Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept (21:16).

And God heard the voice of the boy (21:17) and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him" (21:17, 18).

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink (21:19).

Genesis 22:1-19 (NRSV)

Command:
"He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you'" (22:2).

So Abraham rose early in the morning (22:3) and took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac (22:6).

So the two of them walked on together (22:6). So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba (22:19).

Isaac speaks:
"Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

Abraham responds: "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (22:8).

Crisis:
When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood (22:9)

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son (22:10)

but the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”

And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place “The Lord will provide” as it is said this day, On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided (22:13, 14).
Works Cited


Would the Seventh-day Adventist Church exist without the Book of Revelation? The Adventist Church is founded on the concept that the last-day remnant movement is God-planned and prophetically introduced in Revelation. The church’s eschatological understanding, which is given “fundamental belief” status, is strongly Revelation based. The concept of the “Great Controversy” as the foundational worldview to which all other doctrines are only secondary is largely based on the Adventist understanding of the book of Revelation. It is no wonder that Adventists are known for teaching and preaching from the Apocalypse. It is the very center of its evangelistic content.

There is a strong tendency, however, to interpret the book’s content only in a future-events manner. In Adventist infatuation with the time-lines and beasts of the Apocalypse, their enthusiasm in knowing what the future holds, and their intent to understand the prophesies correctly, have many Adventists overlooked the fact that a central theme in the book is God’s mission? Pictured here is a God who provides salvation to “whosoever will” accept it, a God who calls people out of the symbolic “Babylon” so they will not be under its curse. The prophecies of the book are not only revealing what God is going to do to end this age of sin; but they show God’s mission
to vindicate himself and his people while saving sinners. It is a mission that God’s people are to join for his glory.

Although it might be possible to show that God’s mission is the central point of the Apocalypse, this article’s intent is only to survey three of the biblical concepts of mission that are highlighted in this book. The “Great Controversy vision” (Maxwell 1985:61) of Rev 11:19-14:20 will be the key passage for this study of mission implications in the Book of Revelation. This passage has been chosen for the following reasons: (1) it is a section with traditional Adventist interest because of the Church’s application of its message as specifically relevant to the Seventh-day Adventist Church; (2) it includes the one section of Revelation that the Church has seen as its mission statement, the “three angels’ messages” of Rev 14; and (3) this section seems to look at the cosmic battle that underlies the symbolically represented events in the rest of the book, thereby making it an ideal place from which to survey the mission themes of the book as a whole.

The Source of the Mission: God
(Missio Dei in Revelation)

The Father is the source of all that happens in Revelation. The book does emphasize that it is a revelation of Jesus Christ; but the book is clear that it is the Father that is actively revealing the Son, and it is through the Son that the Father is revealed to the inhabitants of the earth. The mission to destroy sin and save the redeemed comes from God, himself. Mission is a divine initiative.

All that happens in the Great Controversy vision is shown coming from the presence of God in the temple in heaven (Rev 11:19). As the temple is opened for John and his readers to see, God’s presence is no longer hidden from us. The ark is “symbolic of the very presence of God,” and the “flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, earthquake, and heavy hail are conventional ways of expressing majesty and power attending the manifestation of the divine presence” (Ladd 1972:164). Although the temple is seen in heaven, God’s presence is shown through his activity which is seen in the vision to follow.

In the vision the beast does nothing except that which is “given” to it by God. It is true, of course, that the dragon is directly responsible for the beast’s power and activity (Rev 13:2), but Revelation is reminding us that the Devil can only do as he is allowed from the temple in heaven (see Rev 17:7).
The saints also are what they are because of the power available from the throne of God. They are saints because they have the “Father’s” name written on their foreheads. This is God’s seal indicating his choice. They “belong” to him (Johnson 1994:1195).

God is the one who saves the Child and the Woman of Revelation 12 from the dragon. Events on this earth may seem to be happening mechanically or even demonically, but the message of Revelation is that God is pulling the strings—at least in these things that are connected to the salvation of the earth. “God always effects his purpose” (Morris 1987:155).

Right from the beginning of the book we notice that all that happens is under God’s direction. The introduction of the book, the introduction of the Jesus theme of the book, is clear that the revelations in this book come from God. The first verse of the first chapter says, “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him” (Rev 1:1). In Revelation 4 and 5 John specifically states that “there before me was a throne in heaven” (Rev 4:2) and it was from that throne room that John receives the subsequent visions.

The Mission Is God’s

The book emphasizes that this work of God is for his mission to save. God is the one who elevates his Son to a position on his throne (Rev 12:5). The overcoming of the dragon and the beast is seen as the victory of God’s plan, that is, “the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God” (Rev 12:10). Those who are saved are the fruit of the labor of “God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4).

Even in chapter 5 where the sacrifice of the lamb and his central position in the salvation story is dramatized, the book portrays this salvation as coming from the throne of God. The introduction to this vision in chapter 4 is the beautiful symbolic picture of the throne room and its glory that drives all creatures to their knees in worship and praise. Then the scroll that no one but Jesus could open was held in the right hand of God on the throne (Rev 5:1). As the heavenly beings praise Jesus and sing of his worthiness to open the scroll, they emphatically declare that he saved people for “our God” (Rev 5:9, 10).

The message of the whole book is that God is saving for himself a people. The 144,000 and the “great multitude” know that “salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne” (Rev 7:10). They sang, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God (Rev 19:1).

Yes, salvation is from God and for God. The book of Revelation declares
that the outcome and very purpose of salvation is to take people from the kingdoms of this world and make them part of God’s kingdom. The opening verse of the Great Controversy passage states that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev 11:15). This world has become God’s kingdom through his plan of salvation pictured in the visions of the book.

The kingdom of God upon this earth has been launched with the overthrow of the Devil’s position (Rev 12:10). Although God’s people will be still be bothered by the Devil in his fury, his authority is gone. God’s Son has accomplished it; the kingdom has come. This was God’s plan all along. “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen” (Rev 1:6).

The Message of God’s Mission: Jesus
(Uniqueness of Jesus)
Jesus Is the Only Source of Salvation

Jesus is central in the visions of the Apocalypse. As we have seen, all that he does for the salvation of the world is divinely appointed. Salvation is the mission of both the Father and the Son. But Revelation underscores the biblical truth that “salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10). The message of God’s mission is that Jesus provides the salvation that God offers.

The Great Controversy vision illustrates that Jesus Christ is provided for the purpose of bringing salvation to God’s people and providing for them his kingdom. Jesus comes to be the ruler of that kingdom, for the glory of God and the benefit of his saints (Rev 12:5, 10). This explains why the dragon tries to thwart God’s plans by having the offspring killed. He “regarded the nations as his legitimate prey” (Beasley-Murray 1994:1441-1442), and fights to keep it that way. God takes the child back to his throne room and protects the church (the woman) that carries on the message of salvation as it is in Jesus. The dragon is portrayed as fighting Jesus (Michael), but it loses the war and his hold on God’s world.

Continuing on in the vision, it is significant that salvation comes only to those who are connected with Jesus (the Lamb). In Revelation 13, the whole world, it seems, worships the beast; that is, “all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the
creation of the world” (Rev 13:8). In Revelation 14, those that are on God’s side in the Great Controversy are those who have been redeemed by the Lamb, “These are those who . . . follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4).

The centrality of Jesus to the mission message is dramatically illustrated in the vision of chapter 5. The scroll cannot be opened by anyone except the sacrificed lamb. Although commentators have differed on the exact explanation of the scroll, it is clear that the scroll must be opened if God’s salvation plan is to be accomplished. It is even more obvious in this vision that it would not happen without Jesus. We are told that because he is the victorious ruler of “Israel,” he is the messiah of prophecy that would set his people free forever:

No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev 5:3-5).

Just as God had been wholeheartedly worshiped by the heavenly creatures for who he is, so the Lamb, Jesus, brings forth the devotion of heaven because of the salvation that comes only from him. They sing,

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9, 10).

The Alternative without Jesus

The book of Revelation not only shows Jesus to be the source of Salvation, and thus the main message of God’s mission, but it also reveals the fate of those who are without Jesus. Salvation in Jesus is the offer of God in Revelation; the alternative is clearly outlined.

The Great Controversy vision emphasizes that the consequences of being outside the kingdom of Jesus is to share in the demise of the beast. Those
who are not in the “book of life” worship the beast (Rev 13:8). They have chosen the God of this world. They, along with the beast “will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath.” They “will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name” (Rev 14:9-11).

The letters to the seven churches (chapters 2 and 3) make it clear that to be without the salvation in Jesus is to be outside the kingdom and to receive the “wrath” of God. Some in Ephesus have lost their “first love” and their place among the “lampstands” in God’s sanctuary will be removed (Rev 2:4). This is symbolic of losing a place in God’s kingdom. Those who do not repent in Pergamum will come under the sword of Christ (Rev 2:16). In the other churches, those who are not following Jesus suffer similar fates.

The book of Revelation ends with the same conclusion, a person is either with Christ and saved; or he is outside of Christ and lost. There are just two groups of people, those whose names are found in the “lamb’s book of life” and those whose names are not written there. “John does not leave us with an irresponsible dream: to be outside of Christ is to be left outside of eternal life—and some are outside of Christ. This fact should impel God’s people to mission” (Hedlund 1991:265). God’s kingdom will only be for those who belong to Jesus. “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21:27). Those not saved in Christ will be “outside” his kingdom (Rev 22:15). In fact, those not in Christ will be destroyed. “If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:15).

The prophecies are not pronouncing a curse but shouting a warning. “If a minister of Christ thinks that he may gather from this . . . a commission to go to sinners rather than to sin with ‘tidings of damnation,’ he mistakes alike the Master whom he serves and the commission with which he has been entrusted” (Milligan 1903:251). The book of Revelation is urgent with its call to be separated from the beast and Babylon. The call is to “come out of her my people” (Rev 18:4) and be counted among those who are “faithful to Jesus” (Rev 14:12). This is God’s mission. If Jesus is the only source of salvation and those outside of Christ suffer the judgments pronounced in the Apocalypse, then the gospel must be heard.
The Scope of the Mission: All Peoples
(The Inclusive Kingdom of God)

Revelation portrays salvation as the need of the nations. Without salvation in Christ, the nations are headed for eternal punishment. We have already seen that those not in the “book of life” are worshipping the beast and will join in his judgment (Rev 13:8; 14:9-11). The nations who are involved with the prostitute of Babylon will be overcome by the Lamb (Rev 17:13, 14). The nations will be involved in the final battle between the Devil and Christ which will end with a consuming fire from heaven (Rev 20:8, 9).

Without Christ, the nations are under the bondage of the Devil. Revelation 13 says this is because of their allegiance to the beast. No one can oppose the powers through which the dragon works (Rev 13:4), because he is allowed authority over all of the nations (Rev 13:7). The second creature, that creates an “image of the first beast” (Rev 13:14), is said to “make” (Rev 13:12) the nations worship the beast and he deceives (Rev 13:14) them by miracles. “People follow and worship the beast because he is apparently invincible: ‘Who can make war against him?’” (Johnson 1984:190).

The Great Controversy vision reveals that God’s desire is to save people from all the nations, from every people group. His mission is not limited to a select few. The first angel in Revelation 14 reveals that God desires all people to be called to “worship him” so they will be found to be among his people at the time of the judgment. “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people” (Rev 14:6).

The second angel announces the “fall” of Babylon. If we understand that message to be to all peoples, like the first message, and if it is meant to be given for the purpose stated in a later vision, “come out of her, my people” (Rev 18:4), then it is another example of God’s desire to save all who will let him.

The Lamb’s sacrifice is said to be for all people. In their worship of the Savior, the heavenly hosts declare that Jesus “purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). The book ends with a very inclusive call to enter God’s Kingdom: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life” (Rev 22:17). The rest of the book has made it clear that “whoever” includes all peoples.

Since the book is a book of prophecy, “what is and what is to come,” it is fitting that the book not only tells us that God’s mission is to tell everyone...
about the salvation he offers in Jesus, but to also reveal that the mission will be successful. The Great Controversy passages only hints at this fact. All nations receive the invitation (Rev 14:6) to serve God. Some from the nations do not receive the “mark of the best” and the consequences because they are “written in the book of life” (Rev 13:8; cf. 14:6-12).

John saw in other visions, however, that the saved, the people of God’s kingdom will definitely include people from everywhere.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” (Rev 7:9, 10)

As Roger Hedlund wrote: “How fitting, then that the Bible ends with a warning (22:18-19) and an invitation: ‘Come!’ The word is repeated (22:17) in language reminiscent of the great invitation in Isaiah (55:1). And who is to come: The invitation is open to all” (1991:265).

Conclusion

The Apocalypse is a foundational book for Seventh-day Adventist understanding of God’s plan. It is in this book that Adventists have discovered their prophetic role in God’s salvation plan. It is this book that outlines the eschatological beliefs of the church. Looking to the book for an understanding of God’s mission does not abrogate those important contributions of this last book of the Bible, but rather enhances them. The book is a beautiful revelation of God’s character and purpose and his mission is based on those attributes. The book informs the church about God’s plans for the last days. His mission is to prepare a people for that time—a people who will be on the right side of the great conflict and a part of his kingdom. The book explains the role of his last-day church. His mission is the purpose of that remnant movement—a people who will reflect his character and bring glory to his name so people of all nations and tribes will be drawn to worship their Creator.

A study of the book of Revelation with the theme of mission in mind will also enhance the reader’s understanding of all the other themes that are contained in this book. After all, God’s whole purpose in all his revelations throughout the entire Bible and all other contacts with human beings is to fulfill his mission of saving all those who will trust in him.
Works Cited


Section 3

HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

a man of

PASSIONATE REFLECTION
I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, heal’d by the same means, warm’d and cool’d by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed?

Empathy is more than feeling sympathy. It is attempting to enter into the experience and feelings of another. It is showing understanding and sensitivity to how others think and feel. To quote Atticus Finch in To Kill a Mockingbird, “you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them” (Lee 1960:279).

The word empathy, which did not enter the English language until the early 20th century, is a translation from the German word Einfühlung (coined by the German philosopher Rudolf Lotz)—literally meaning passion in suffering or feeling.

Empathy is obviously not a term used in the Bible, but it is amply illustrated

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1Sections of this paper were adapted from Krause 2008.
2William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, Act 3, Scene 1, 58-68.
there. It is Jesus looking on the crowds with compassion, entering into the life and experience of the woman at the well, dealing with the woman with the issue of blood, protecting Mary who anoints his feet with oil. It is the ultimate empathy of the Holy Son of God being incarnated, bearing the sins of the world, and asking God to forgive those about to kill him—because they do not understand what they are doing.

Christian witness at its best is an act of empathy. It is looking at a fellow human being not just as an object to be converted to our way of thinking, but as a son or daughter of God who needs to experience God’s grace and forgiveness, and the life change it brings. It is giving another person our best love, our best respect, our best care, our best understanding, our best testimony about our God. Christian witnesses seek to enter into another’s worldview, to understand their ways of thinking and acting. They learn what they value, what they cherish. Witnesses seek to understand their context, their history. They seek their friendship, their trust. Witnesses seek to build bridges, not knock them down.

Empathy means refusing to accept caricatures or second-hand summaries of others and their beliefs. It means focusing on best reports, not worst reports. A witness of empathy invests time and energy—avoiding quick-fixes, guaranteed conversion methods, winning strategies.

According to Ellen White it is all about taking the time to mingle with people, and showing concern and best wishes for their good. It means showing sympathy and helping where we can. It means earning people’s confidence. It is only within this context that we dare introduce anyone to Jesus (White 1942:143).

Henri Nouwen, writer, theologian, and academic, held prestigious teaching and research posts at Yale University, the University of Notre Dame, the Menninger Foundation, and Harvard University. He was a prolific and highly respected writer on many topics, but his writings on spirituality are perhaps the most appreciated. But all this was not enough for him.

Throughout his career Nouwen looked for ways to help the poor and oppressed. In the 1960s he joined Martin Luther King’s civil rights movement. At one time he even traveled to South America to see if he could serve as a missionary.

Finally he quit academia and went to work for the Daybreak Community in Toronto, Canada—spending the last ten years of his life caring for six mentally handicapped children, helping them in their daily needs.

Author Philip Yancey recalls having dinner with a group of Christian writers, including Richard Foster and Eugene Peterson. At one stage Foster
and Peterson mentioned “an intense young man” who had asked them both for spiritual help. Foster and Peterson wrote back, suggesting reading materials that might help him spiritually. Foster had just heard that the same young man also contacted Nouwen. “You won’t believe what Nouwen did,” said Foster. “He invited this stranger to live with him for a month so he could mentor him in person” (Yancey 1996:80).

C. S. Lewis, despite heavy demands on his time as a prolific and famous author and academic, personally responded to each of the thousands of letters he received. He often prayed for people who wrote to him and would welcome walk-up visitors into his home and even serve them refreshments. Lewis also provided scholarships for many students who could not afford an education. During World War II, he opened up his home to children in need. On one occasion, a mentally disabled teenager stayed in his home for three months. After teaching elite students at Oxford University during the day, he would come home and help this troubled boy learn how to read (Staub 2007:133).

This type of winsome empathy must undergird any dialogue and witness to people from other world religions. In recent years the Adventist Church has grown rapidly in regions where non-Christian religions dominate. Partly by choice, partly by force of circumstances, and partly from the desire to work together in common causes such as religious freedom, Adventists have increasingly been drawn into interaction with non-Christian believers.

Today many Christians are eager to demonize those who think differently. In the wake of 9/11, for example, many sermons from Christian pulpits caricatured and stereotyped Islam. In the prescient words of philosopher Bertrand Russell: “Neither a man nor a crowd nor a nation can be trusted to act humanely or to think sanely under the influence of a great fear” (Russell 1943:25). Adventist witness operates differently. It believes that perfect love casts out fear.

**Early Adventist Views of Non-Christian Religions**

The language of empathy is largely absent in early and even some later Adventist references to other religions. In 1898, D. A. Robinson wrote about “the hard, cold, Christless creed of fate of the Mohammedans” and “its blighting influence upon millions” (1898:436). In the same year, G. C. Tenney wrote of the “ponderous and soul-crushing establishments” of “Hinduism,” “Brahmanism” and “Mohammedanism” (1898:445). G. P. Edwards called Hindu priests “living incarnations of the character of the
evil one” (1900:458) and Carrie Stringer wrote of “the blight of heathenism, Buddhism and Mohammedanism” that made people’s lives “sad and hard” (1927:3). In 1912, J. E. Bowen described Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism as “baneful and false religions” (1912:5) and the Sabbath School Quarterly said that “Moslem influence on Christianity was as deadly as the sting of a scorpion” (Adult Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly 1974:87).

Evangelism and conversion were the dominant Adventist discourse about other religions, but within this there were occasional and growing hints of the need to add understanding, bridge-building, and empathy into the mix.

In 1946, the Adventist Church established the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) to promote religious liberty and freedom of worship (The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia s.v. International Religious Liberty Association). Over time this organization inevitably involved leaders from other religions in discussions and planning. World conferences of the IRLA now feature prominent leaders from non-Christian religions. Today it consistently calls for greater understanding and dialogue between world religions (See Adventist News Network 2007).

As early as 1902, American Guy Dail, then recording and corresponding secretary of the German Union, wrote of the need for missionaries to arrive “at a mutual understanding with our newly acquired neighbor” and added that one of the “first duties” is to “recognize whatever is good in them and in their institutions, and, with some nationalities, as the Chinese, and the educated Arabs and Hindus, it will be to our advantage to have an appreciation of their literature and history.” He concluded that the missionary “must study the art of pleasing others, of putting himself out for the sake of being agreeable and affable to them” (1902:207, 208).

A Broadening Perspective in the 1960s

During the 1960s there were significant Adventist moves toward building a better understanding of non-Christian religions. The General Conference Executive Committee voted in 1956 to start an orientation program for missionaries that would include studying “indigenous religions and educational systems” (Minutes of the General Conference Executive Committee, 1956). This did not happen until ten years later when the Institute of World Mission (IWM) and the Department of World Mission were established at the Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

The IRLA grew out of an earlier International Religious Liberty Association, established in 1893, which evolved from the National Religious Liberty Association, established in 1889 (The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia).
Russell Staples, who joined the IWM as an instructor in 1971, recalls that “the need for a more informed interaction with non-Christian world religions was certainly a major issue” leading to these additions to the seminary. He adds, “The establishment of the Institute of World Mission opened the way for more direct and concentrated study regarding relationships with the world religions” (Staples 2009: e-mail to author).

In 1967, at the Adventist World Headquarters in Takoma Park, Maryland, the Home Study Institute (HSI) announced a new course in comparative religions. It involved a “careful study” of major world religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Animism. “A careful study of world religions can provide a sympathetic understanding of other faiths,” said HSI president D. W. Delafield (Holbrook 1967:3).

Despite its roots in the inter-denominational Millerite movement, Adventists have tended to be skeptical, if not suspicious, of ecumenical activities. But in the words of the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, the Adventist Church believes that “the ecumenical movement has promoted kinder interchurch relations with more dialogue and less diatribe and helped remove unfounded prejudices” (The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, s.v. Ecumenism).

The Adventist Church has moved with even greater caution in the area of the interfaith movement with other world religions. But Angel Rodriguez, director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference, writes that “despite the potential dangers,” dialogue with other Christians also has “potential benefits.” He adds, “Therefore we should not discourage, formally or informally, approaching other Christians and even non-Christian religions” (Rodriguez 2003:8, 9). John Graz, director of the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Association, says: “[interfaith dialogues] are indispensable if we are to develop understanding, good will, and peace” (Graz, 2008:101).

In January, 2007, William Johnsson, retired editor of the Adventist Review, was appointed as a part-time special assistant to the General Conference president for Interfaith Relations, particularly to help arrange dialogues with “non-Christian entities” (Minutes of the General Conference Administrative Committee, 2007). Later that year, Johnsson wrote that Adventists should “seek to engage leaders of Islam in conversation.” He added: “The reality is that both their religion and ours occupy the same territory, since we are world religions. We should seek to know them better and help them to know what we believe and stand for” (Johnsson 2007:10).

As a sidebar to Johnsson’s article in Adventist World, General Conference
president Jan Paulsen wrote: “What then are the values that should mark our relationships with those who do not share our faith? Respect, sensitivity, and a desire to move beyond caricatures toward mutual understanding—let this be our goal as we continue to engage in the mission that has been entrusted to us” (Paulsen 2007:8).

Rodriguez adds: “Only the truth is most effective in dealing with others. False stereotypes and the lack of correct information weaken witness. It is precisely the purpose of the conversation to create an environment in which we are willing to listen to each other in a Christian spirit of love and cordiality” (Rodriguez 2007:28).

Two Case Studies
Empathy with Buddhists

According to William Hutchinson, formal religious discussions between Christians and Buddhists did not really start until the 1980s (Hutchinson 2004:189). The Adventist Church was not far behind when in 1992 the Far Eastern Division, supported by the General Conference Office of Global Mission, asked Clifton Maberly to establish a Buddhist Study Center (information in this section is from e-mails sent by Clifton Maberly, February 2009).

At first Maberly was hesitant. “My first thought was that we didn’t know enough about Buddhism to begin authentically,” he says. “Yes, we had Buddhists in Thailand who had become Adventists, even Buddhist monks who were now pastors, but as far as I knew, no one had built bridges between the two disparate worlds.” He adds, “I was sure none of us knew who we were speaking to or what we had to say that was relevant.”

Maberly knew exactly where he wanted to establish the center, near the Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University (MCU), the largest public Buddhist university in Thailand, with more than 10,000 monks enrolled.

Maberly made an appointment to see the head Buddhist monk for Bangkok, the highest ranking member of the Sangha (the society of Buddhist monks) for Bangkok, also the abbot of Mahathat Temple. He explained to the monk that he was setting up a study center to explore the similarities and differences between Adventism and Buddhism, and asked for the monk’s blessing and suggestions.

The monk supported the venture, and suggested that a location near the university would best allow for getting to know each other properly and good interaction. Maberly found a place at nominal rent, on temple property,
fifty meters from the main entrance to one of the most prestigious Buddhist universities in the world. He then met with the chancellor of the university, a leading Buddhist scholar. The chancellor was impressed with the project and encouraged university lecturers to assign their students to visit the center and do comparative studies under Maberly’s supervision.

Maberly set about establishing the center with room to study, debate, and dialogue. He began working on a library and set up a computer lab. Soon twenty to sixty monks were visiting the center—named the Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture—each day. He encouraged university groups to use the center as their place of meeting, and various associations of monks began meeting regularly there.

“I soon learned that we learned the most if we assumed monks were our colleagues,” says Maberly. “When we exchanged notes as fellow-shepherd—fellow pastors—we got a measure of each other. We spent hours talking through the challenge of caring for congregations. I was even asked for tips on preaching—on homiletic skills needed to keep the attention and convict listeners. I became confident to talk to Buddhist monks anywhere about anything.”

It was important to Maberly to engage monks in the center and implement their suggestions where possible. Soon he had a group of what he calls monk “owners” who felt this was their center.

In 2002, Scott Griswold was appointed director of the center. He, too, has continued focusing on “walking in the shoes” of Buddhists. “Dialogue’s intention should be two-fold, focusing on commonality and recognizing differences,” Griswold says, “actually sharing [with] them in a helpful manner so they can see what we truly teach and its great value for them” (Griswold 2009:e-mail to author).

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4 Maberly describes the center’s first steering committee attended by representatives from the Far East Division, Global Mission, the Thailand Mission and elsewhere. They came to see how the center was developing, and give input into its operation. But he had a “problem.” Three of the monk “owners” were sitting around in the center and showed no signs of leaving as the committee members arrived. He couldn't ask them to leave, so he explained that some of the center's sponsors were meeting to discuss its future role. The monks were delighted and pulled up their chairs to join the discussion. He says it was one of the most unusual steering committees he had ever chaired. The church administrators had to discuss goals and plans with monks as part of their audience. Maberly had no chance to “prep” them in any way, but says, “fortunately they were intelligent enough to read the situation.” Maberly still smiles at the finale. At the conclusion of the meeting, the church leaders rose to leave. The Buddhist monks leapt to their feet, opened the door, thanked them for their support, and invited them to come back any time.
Empathy with Muslims

Robert Darnell, Field secretary in the Middle East Union in the 1960s, was an Adventist pioneer in building bridges to Muslims. He called Muslims “our friends”—a theme echoed by others in the church in the Middle East at this time (see for example, Semaan 1964:6). In 1963, he wrote: “The true spirit of Christ is the spirit of love for our neighbors. We believe that among the Christians the Muslim has no more sincere friend than the Adventist. Adventist-Muslim friendship will be a demonstrated fact when we enlarge the circle of our love and take the Muslim in. Until then we will continue to be an unknown, unappreciated minority” (Darnell 1963:10).

In Tehran, Iran, Darnell pioneered a new approach to public meetings. “The lives and sayings of the prophets were treated in typically Muslim style and quotations were made from the Qur’an and Muslim traditions where appropriate,” reported the Middle East Messenger. “The lecturer spoke in an atmosphere of respect for Islam, its book and its prophet” (Darnell 1967:7).

In his work as the first director of Global Mission’s Global Center for Islamic Studies, Børge Schantz argued that Muslims should be treated with “Christian love, courtesy and respect” (Schantz 2008). It was a theme Jerald Whitehouse, appointed director in 1995, built on. Whitehouse renamed the center the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (GCAMR), reflecting his priority on dialogue and building bridges to Muslims within their own socio-religious culture (New Directions 2006). According to Whitehouse, empathy must be at the heart of relating to Muslims. “Respect for the Muslim’s faith is a given,” he says. “They are not heathen or pagan” (Whitehouse 2006:73). He talks about the importance of a nonoffensive and respectful encounter and says that Adventists “must stand as a healing force, a force for reconciliation between peoples, and between humanity and God” (Whitehouse 2002).

In February 2003, GCAMR participated in a “Building Bridges Conference” sponsored by the Trans-European Division. Since then the center has been involved in many dialogues, including personal meetings with Muslim leaders, a dialogue with Sharia Muslims in England (2006), the “Yale Common Word Conference” (2008), interfaith conferences in Doha, Qatar (2007 and 2008) and a dialogue at Mindanao State University, Philippines (2008).

In Mindanao, Whitehouse and then-Adventist Mission coordinator for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, Rick McEdward, joined fifteen Seventh-day Adventist leaders and scholars and fifteen leading Muslim scholars for
a two-day conference at King Faisal Center for Islamic Studies at Mindanao State University.

An influential Adventist faculty member at the university had approached McEdward and said, “Pastor we need to do something here, they respect us but they don’t know us.” She made the initial arrangements, and then invited GCAMR to care for the dialogue.

At the conclusion of the dialogue, the Muslim scholars said that according to the Q’uran, Christian groups are more similar to Muslims than any other group. But, they added, Adventists were the only ones they could relate to. They also said that if any tension ever arose between Muslims and Adventists over any issue, they would be happy to act as mediators to diffuse the problem (McEdward 2009).

Conclusion

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church has grown in the 10/40 Window, and as migration has brought adherents of non-Christian religions to America and other areas where the Adventist Church is relatively strong, growth in interfaith interaction, whether planned or unplanned, official or unofficial, was inevitable. These can range from the Adventist-Muslim Relations Coordinator of the North American Division speaking at interfaith dialogue dinners, to Adventist laypeople in suburban Australia talking to Muslim neighbors over the back fence; from formal visits to the General Conference by non-Christian religious leaders to formal debates between Adventists and Muslims in Indonesia. In this growing contact with

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5 McEdward reported that the Muslim scholars gave a “massive round of applause” after a presentation by the Mindanao Sanitarium and Hospital and Health Sciences College about how they work to accommodate the distinctive needs of the large Muslim population they serve.

6 In 2007, for example, the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—with huge territories dominated by Islam—voted a major official Statement on Islam, designed to foster good relations and build bridges between the church and Muslims.

7 Visit www.youtube.com and you’ll find dozens of videos of debates between Adventists and Muslims in various parts of the world, uploaded to the Internet by Adventists. These videos carry titles such as “Seventh-day Adventist vs Islam,” and tags such as: “Again, SDA won the debate.” Some dialogues occur at the institutional level with cooperation between various Adventist organizations, such as the “Our Father Abraham” Conference held at Andrews University in March 2006. Sponsored by the International Religious Liberty Association, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, and Shabbat Shalom, the conference brought together Muslim, Jewish and Adventist scholars for a better understanding of each religion. Other meetings appear to just “fall into place,” but without consultation with other areas of the church that are also involved in interfaith dialogue. For example, in November 2008, a consultation entitled, “Sabbath in Text, Tradition, and Theology,” involving Adventist, other Christian, and Jewish scholars began in Boston. Co-chair Tom Shepherd, an Adventist theologian from Andrews University, says the goal of the conversation was “to foster an open and rewarding dialogue between Jews and Christians on
people from other religious traditions, the principle of empathy becomes increasingly important.

Twenty years sociologist Robert Wuthnow pointed to a “declining monopoly of specific religious traditions over the enactment of religious convictions” (1988:301). Today in the West Christian denominationalism is becoming less important, suspicion of specific truth claims by any organization is growing, and accepting all religious beliefs as equally legitimate is elevated to a virtue.

The dominant discourse about religion in the democratized world is pluralistic, and it is tolerant. In such an environment the words conversion, proselytizing, and missionary become dirty words—subverting the dominant discourse—while words such as co-existing, mutual respect, and working together fit comfortably.

The historical approach of the Adventist Church to its mission does not fit comfortably with this dominant discourse. While respecting the adherents of other religions and championing religious freedom, Adventism has historically always been concerned with discovering God’s truth and sharing that truth with others. For the Seventh-day Adventist there can be no compromise regarding the Great Commission. The question is whether Adventists go into all the world with a triumphalist, critical, and strident voice, or whether they go in the humility of Jesus, showing his empathy and love.

As official interfaith dialogue grows stronger, it is ironic that in practice Christians appear to be totally ignoring their non-Christian neighbors. Research by Todd Johnson and Charles Tieszen suggests that Christians are hopelessly and inexcusably out of touch with non-Christians in their communities. They found, for example, that in North America only 35.6 percent of Buddhists, 22.7 percent of Hindus and 67.8 percent of Muslims say they know even one Christian. They conclude that around the world, 86 percent of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslim do not know personally know even one Christian.8

These statistics give mockery to Christian claims of being salt and light in their communities—at least communities of non-religious people. Many Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians are living as if these people do not exist.

The time is more than ripe for Adventists to broaden their horizons to

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8 In Europe only 31.8 percent of Buddhists, 57.6 percent of Hindus, and 18.5 percent of Muslims say they know at least one Christian. See Johnson and Tieszen (2007).
engage non-Christian believers in an open, empathetic, Christ-like way. Since the Adventist Church was founded in 1863, the Church has done a lot of talking, preaching, writing, and broadcasting—at people from various religious traditions. But has it also listened and learned? Has it worked to understand? Has it demonstrated Christ-like empathy?

In 2003, Malcolm Bull wrote, “If growth continues at the same rate in the next century, Seventh-day Adventism will become America’s single most important contribution to world religion” (Bull 203:279). Now is the time to humbly, and empathetically, rise to that high responsibility.

Thank you, Jerald, for your years of empathetic ministry.

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Over the past 120 years the Seventh-day Adventist witness in Muslim lands is a history of difficulty, discussion, and dialogue. This article looks at three periods of Adventist witness among Muslims: (1) early Adventist mission, (2) post World War II mission, and (3) recent developments. The scope of this study cannot include all interaction or mission activities; rather it is intended to point out the overarching trends of Adventist mission among Muslims.

**Early Adventist Mission**

The Adventist movement developed during the declining years of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman territory covered parts of Southern Europe, across North Africa, Asia Minor, and the Middle East. During the time when the Advent movement was developing in response to the preaching of William Miller and other early Adventist promoters, the Ottoman Empire was still a major political force in Islam (Damsteegt 1977:27). The earliest Adventist reference to the Ottoman Empire provided a strong impetus for missions among early Second Advent believers when Josiah Litch predicted
that the Ottoman Empire would fall on August 11, 1840.

Two weeks prior to August 11 Litch predicted the end of the sixth trumpet of Revelation 9 represented by the end of the dominance of the Ottoman Empire. On the date in question a significant restriction of the Ottoman control was realized (Damsteegt 1977:28). News came back to North America that his prediction has been fulfilled, giving early Adventist believers new motivation for mission. Seeing prophecy fulfilled before their eyes, Adventists were given courage to publish the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 and share it with the world (26).

The early years of Adventist engagement in Islamic lands is essentially a history of Adventist presence in Muslim lands, but often lacking any significant witness among Muslims. During this period there was a continuing effort along traditional lines of Adventist outreach including publishing, medical work, and correspondence schools (Bethmann 1950:255-279; Far Eastern Division 1961; Oster 1963).

In 1840 the Ottoman Empire was no longer at the peak of its political strength, but long after the prophetic interpretation of Litch, the Ottomans still ruled vast areas of the world. Out of necessity Adventist missionaries and leaders interacted with the Ottoman government years into the Adventist mission in the predominately Muslim areas of Asia Minor and the Middle East (Pfeiffer 1981:35).

The first known Adventist missionary to the Muslim areas of the world was Alexander Ribton, a doctor, who became an Adventist through the work of J. N. Andrews, the church’s first official missionary to Europe. Ribton soon raised up a group of believers in Naples, Italy (Schwarz 2000:142). It was this group that began sending *Les Signes de Temps* to an Italian colony in Alexandria, Egypt.

Ribton, who spoke fluent Arabic (Bethmann 1950:256), moved to Alexandria in 1879. Dr. Ribton met Guiseppe Rupp who had a love for the advent message, and who had prepared a young Israelite for baptism (256). While learning Greek, Ribton opened a day school and held Bible classes, sometimes supporting himself as a physician (256). He worked among the sailors in the port and was active with door-to-door visitation and translating literature into Arabic (Schwarz 2000:143). The group Dr. Ribton started in Alexandria was primarily made up of expatriates. Ribton’s main objective was to train each member to spread the advent message, claiming in one report that soon his group would be able to do so in at least five languages (Bethmann 1950:257). Sadly, in 1882 Ribton and some of his colleagues were assassinated during the Arabi Pasha riots (143). Pfeiffer reports,
The first attempt to enter the Arab world suddenly ended disastrously on June 11, 1882, when during the anti-western uprising by Colonel Arabi Pasha, Dr. Ribton and two of his followers were killed in Alexandria. With the loss of its leader and the dwindling foreign community, Seventh-day Adventists were also dislocated from Egypt and the mission was forced to withdraw. (Pfeiffer 1981:51)

The work in Egypt lay dormant until 1898 when Elder H. P. Holser visited, and soon afterward he issued an appeal for workers. A team of self-supporting missionaries restarted work in Cairo. They started a nursing home, conducted Bible work (Bethmann 1950:258), included health training, colporteur work, and vegetarian cooking. This resulted in activity among the expatriate community but was not effective in reaching many Egyptians (Schwarz 2000:51). In 1901 Brother ‘Awayda ‘Abd al Shahid of Luxor, a Protestant minister, became the first baptized Egyptian Seventh-day Adventist.

Holser also visited Palestine in 1898 and upon his return to Germany he recruited J. H. Krum and his wife (Bethmann 1950:263). After his arrival in Joppa Krum began studying with some Germans, but after being disappointed with their resistance to the message, he began giving simple water treatments to a Muslim boy. The boy improved and as Krum became known for his water treatments, requests for his help began coming in from several Muslims in the area. Eventually Krum opened up a hydrotherapy room in Jaffa (264).

Sheikh Shakir (264), a Muslim, became a believer in Jesus through Krum’s witness, but when he attempted to share his faith with other Muslims he was arrested. While confined for seven months, Krum requested a leave for him for one night and, under the cloak of darkness, baptized Shakir as a Seventh-day Adventist (265). Shakir was deported for his faith, and eventually moved to Aden (Yemen) where he taught the Bible. Shakir, who was fearless in his witness, was badly beaten there in Yemen and was later sent to Egypt (265).

Krum also studied with and later baptized several other Muslims around this time. After the men were baptized they were stoned by the entire community, including their own wives (266). The new converts fled to Gaza, but when their faith became known, they moved on to Beirut, where any record of these men was lost. The dangerous circumstances made it advisable for Krum to leave Palestine, and finally, due to illness, he relocated to Jerusalem (266).

In other parts of Asia Minor work began among the Armenian Turks (Schwarz 2000:213). Several groups were started in Asia Minor by Theodore
Anthony and Z. G. Baharian (General Conference Mission Board 1891:56), but the two workers often worked under intense persecution. By the end of the 19th century several hundred Adventist believers were found in Turkey (Schwarz 2000:214). In 1900 the Adventist work in Alexandria was cautiously restarted (214) by opening a restaurant. In 1901 Elder Conradi organized the first Adventist church in Egypt (214).

The calling of the faithful was, of course, not extended to the Muslim communities . . . due to the lack of cultural and religious affinities . . . even though some similar views on doctrines existed. The hostile relationship between Islam and Christianity in the Ottoman Empire did not inspire Seventh-day Adventists to take the initiative toward Islam but caused them rather to remain aloof since they, like other Christian communities, felt the oppressive presence of Islam. Thus Seventh-day Adventism basically remained a mission among Christians. (Pfeiffer 1981:37)

The killing of Adventist leaders in Muslim lands was not limited to Alexandria (1892). In 1909 the Adventist leaders of the Armenian mission in Turkey were lost in a massacre of Christians, highlighting the tension between religious groups in that era (38). The Adventist membership in Turkey experienced a significant decline during World War I through evacuations and massacres, including the murder of Elder Baharian, President of the field (50).

In 1908 George Keough began work among the Coptic Fellahin people along the Nile, living and working with the people. Working together with Yacoub Bishai, Keough sought to adapt ministry to the people of the area. Some of the Fellahin responded and several were baptized. Keough’s early success among the Fellahin provided a new incarnational model of witness that gave hope for reaching people of Eastern cultures. In response to the work of Keough and his plea for greater training of missionaries, the School of Oriental Studies in Cairo was founded. Missionaries were required to study both Arabic and Islam to prepare for service in the Middle East (58).

In 1908 W. K. Ising joined George Keough in Egypt for a short time before moving to Beirut to work (267). Ising held Bible studies at his home with four young men, and after baptizing them in 1912 he trained them to be literature evangelists. One of these men, Ibrahim al Khalil, had become a Christian from a Muslim background. Another, Bashir Hasso, returned home to Mosul, Iraq to share the good news with his family. When World War I broke out in 1914 Ising was sent to a British prisoner of war camp in Malta (Hasso 2010; Bethmann 1950:270). Ising worked tirelessly to follow
up interests (268), in one case riding his horse to a far away village to find a young man who had read the *Review and Herald*. He found Shukri Nowfal who studied and eventually became the first ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister in Syria and Lebanon (268).

When Ising was released at the end of WWI he surveyed the Adventist work in the Middle East. In a 1920 visit to Mosul (275) Iraq, he found that Bashir Hasso had seven people prepared for baptism (Hasso 2010). The first group in Iraq was organized with eight members and Bashir Hasso became its first leader. The new Adventist group included Bashir's brother, Nasif Hasso, and other family members. Over time the Adventist message spread along family lines in Iraq including the Hasso, Fargo, and Sa’thi families.

In 1929 Ising became the Middle East Union President and held strategy conferences in 1929 and 1935 on how to reach Muslims. He established a working group “to find ways of approaching Islam from a Moslem point of view” (Pfeiffer 1981:55). This committee included Wilhelm Lesovsky and Erich Bethmann (86), however, the work of Ising and others was interrupted by the start of World War II.

George Keough served in Upper Egypt from 1908 until 1929 after which he taught at Newbold College. He returned to the Middle East twice for extended periods of service, 1937-1942 and 1946-55 (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* 1996:863). Keough was also the key figure in a training program for missionaries to the Middle East initiated by the General Conference in Washington, DC (863). Throughout his years of service he had a major impact on missionary training and methodology.

In 1911 Pastors F. F. Oster and H. Dirksen were the first Adventist missionaries to arrive in Persia (Bethmann 1950:271). Dirksen returned to the United States in 1913, but Oster settled in Maragha, now Azerbaijan (Bethmann 1950:271). The Osters, with a brand new baby along with many Christians, fled their home in Maragha and escaped over the mountains when war broke out. During the war the Osters stayed in Tabriz ministering to the waves of refugees which settled in the city. Groups of Sabbath keepers were started in Tabriz and in the nearby villages (272). Later, the first Adventist hospital was established in Qum in 1923 by Dr. Arzoo (272).

World War I had a devastating effect on the young Adventist churches in the Middle East. According to Bethmann there was only one church left in Istanbul, two village churches in Egypt, and a few members remaining in Palestine, Syria, and Iraq.

Adventist missionary Erich Bethmann came to Upper Egypt in 1927, learned Arabic, and ministered there for four years. He was a pastor in Jordan
from 1933-36, and in Iraq from 1936-39 (Kilgore:41). Bethmann became a respected specialist in Middle Eastern affairs and was often consulted as an expert for various publications which benefitted missionaries of the time (Pfeiffer 1981:87). He authored *Bridge to Islam* (1950) and encouraged a spiritual approach when working with Muslims (Bethmann 1950:287; Pfeiffer 1981:88). Bethmann was in Bagdad when World War II broke out and was a prisoner of war for seven years (Bethmann 1950:278; Pfeiffer 1981:88).

Bethmann developed some key insights into missionary outreach to Muslims. He wrote, “Christ on the Eastern road should be clad in Eastern garb” (Bethmann 1950: 287). Pfeifer considers Bethmann's key missiological insights to include (1) considering Mohammed to be a prophet to his own people, (2) encouraging a much deeper learning of Islamic culture and beliefs, and (3) encouraging an approach of respect to Islam (Pfeiffer 1981:86). Following his work as a missionary Bethmann was one of the co-founders of the American Friends of the Middle East, an organization encouraging understanding and friendship with the Middle East (Kilgore 1991:41).

Wilhelm Lesovsky was another pioneer worker among Muslims who served from 1920 until World War II. Lesovsky was an important conceptual pioneer for Adventist views toward Islam. He personally admired the lifestyle of the Bedouins and warned against capitalism (Pfeiffer 1981:94). He considered “the people of the book” from Sura 5:85 to be significant. Lesovsky wrote, “God has used Islam as a religious, political, and social reform movement. . . . Seventh-day Adventists should take up the role of the Nazarenes who are recognized in the Qur’an and restore in Islam its keenness which it had possessed under the influence of the Nestorians” (quoted in Whitehouse 2008:2).

This brief survey shows that the early Adventist witness was marked with persecution of the believers, difficulty for the missionaries, and even death for some of the pioneers. However, the work of men like Keough, Ising, Bethmann, and Lesovsky laid a solid missiological framework for Muslim work, but unfortunately this did not translate into evangelistic success. As history indicates, there was a strong reliance on traditional methods that did not bring Christ any closer to the minds of many Muslims (Pfeiffer 1981:62, 63).
Post-World War II Mission

World War II brought about major changes in Seventh-day Adventist mission in Muslim lands. While most of the Middle East was not part of the main theater of war, the war caused turmoil throughout the Arab world. At the beginning of the war most of the foreign missionaries were German and were evacuated as the war began (Bethmann 1950:278).

According to Bethmann the General Conference did not see this as a time of diminished mission, “During all these times of upheaval and stress, the General Conference never for a moment considered the possibility of retreat. Instead greater plans were laid” (Bethmann 1950:279-280). To prepare future candidates for mission service the General Conference hired George Keough who began teaching an Arabic course at the Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. As a result, in 1950 Bethmann notes that several of those trained were doing “good service in Muslim lands” (280).

In 1947 Francis D. Nichol, editor-in-chief of the Review and Herald, travelled to parts of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East to see Adventist Mission work first hand (Nichol 1948:7). He records impressions of the work in several Muslim countries. During Nichols visit, Neal Wilson, who would later become General Conference President, was the president of the Egypt Field (82) and E. L. Branson was the President of the Middle East Union. That union spanned North Africa, Israel, the Middle East, and included Turkey and Iran.

By 1947 there was a church and a school at the Egypt Field office in Heliopolis (81) and an orphanage in Cairo (85). A seventy-acre tract of land in Fayum had been purchased for a school near Cairo where the students were meeting in tents for classes. This school later would become Nile Union Academy (119).

Adventist mission work in Iraq during this time included a hospital in Bagdad with two doctors from the School of Medical Evangelists (102) and a school with 150 students—both largely the result of the faithful work of the Hasso brothers (Nichol 1948:101; Bethmann 1950:282).

In Nichol’s account mention is also made of a hospital in Tehran, Iran, under the direction of Dr. H. E. Hargreaves, an eye specialist and Dr. A. Arzoo (105). Nichol also records a mission station 600 miles to the south of Tehran staffed by second-generation missionaries, Kenneth and Dorothy Oster (107). He reports at least two congregations meeting and outreach work among Muslims in three parts of Iran, which he points to as hopeful for the future (108).

Bethmann records the membership of the Middle East in 1948 to be 1,236 baptized members (Bethmann 1950: 286), which included:
In his book, Bethmann laments the vast unentered territories and the groups of people among whom the gospel had not yet been heard (1950:286). In 1960 the General Conference Autumn Council recommended that each of the five world divisions with a significant concentration of Muslims should convene a division-based conference. These conferences were “to ascertain what has already been done, and the best methods of approach to Moslems, in an endeavor to plot a course of action for the future” (Far Eastern Division 1961:A-1). Each of the five world divisions held the conferences, the final one being held in the Far Eastern Division from September 7-12, 1961 in Singapore (A-1). It was also voted that if these regional Islamic conferences merited follow up a world-wide conference would be convened. This follow up was held on the campus of Middle East College in Beirut, Lebanon in September of 1963 (Oster 1963: Foreword).

Representatives from various administrative levels and local fields gathered at these conferences to discuss (1) beliefs of Islam (Far Eastern Division: C 1-47; Oster 1963:29-57), (2) Adventist attitudes and understanding of Islam concerning the Qur’an and Mohammed (Oster 1963:58-105), and (3) ideas generated from each department in regards to the methods and approaches thought to work better among Muslims (Oster 1963:109-225).

While the majority of the topics in these meetings focused on traditional Adventist methodology (i.e., temperance, correspondence schools, health, personal work, branch Sabbath Schools, filmstrips), there were a number of key questions that were addressed by Ralph Watts, General Conference Field Secretary (later Vice President), during these meetings. Watts asked how Adventists should view Muslims and how Mohammed should be viewed. Regarding Adventist attitudes toward Muslims Watts concluded:

If we are to reach Muslims we must lay aside our prejudices and preconceived erroneous concepts. . . . We must probe deeper into the areas of agreement in our beliefs and strive to establish more firmly the commonality between our religions and thus avoid making prominent the points in which we differ. We must stress our brotherhood with Muslims and point out that Seventh-day Adventists are the spiritual descendants of Abraham and firmly believe in all the prophets of old, and that today we are attempting to adhere to the great principles enunciated by them. (Oster 1963:101)
After a summary article of various views and data regarding the role of Mohammed, Watts proposed that Adventists should develop a new attitude toward Mohammed.

We now come to the important question, was Mohammad then a prophet of God? Many ask this question. I cannot fully answer. Perhaps much more needs to be known than is known; but we cannot escape that he was an instrument or “tool” in the hand of the Eternal God, raised up to provide millions of men in his generation with a better religion than they had before, and to testify that there is no god but God. (Oster 1963)

Watts’ comments challenged those in attendance, most of whom were active in Adventist witness among Muslims, although it is unclear if Watts’ recommendation had a significant impact at that time.

One of the active participants in the Muslim conferences was Kenneth Oster who was the editor of the minutes for these meetings. Oster was raised in Persia, also served there as a missionary with his wife, and remained active in witness. Oster authored two books in which he shared mission insights: *Islam Reconsidered* (1979) and *To Persia, With Love* (1980).

Robert Darnell also attended some of those conferences and was voted to be the director of the Islamic Study Center, even though he never took up that post. Though the Islamic Study Center was opened in 1989, Darnell was never associated with it. Darnell, as the Middle East Union president, created Thrust for Evangelism Among Muslims (TEAM). TEAM developed significant materials for outreach to Muslims including one book of sermons (Middle East Union TEAM:1972) which was field tested by Kenneth Oster. Darnell’s theoretical work became foundational to Adventist contextual ministries among Muslims. Darnell also served as a mentor to several people, significant among them was Jerald Whitehouse, who later became the director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (Whitehouse 2008:2).

**Recent Developments**

Børge Schantz became the founding director of the Global Center of Islamic Studies in 1989 and served in that position until 1995. Schantz also taught a yearly class on ministry to Muslims at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary on the campus of Andrews University and raised awareness of the needs of the Muslim world through newsletters (Schantz 1991a:1). During his time as director, Schantz organized symposiums and
seminars around the world (Whitehouse 2008:3; Schantz 1991a) and published several books with information and suggestions for church members on how to reach their Muslim neighbors. More than anything Shantz was a tireless promoter in urging the church to have a strong witness among its Muslim brothers and sisters.

One of the more recent examples of creative outreach among non-Christians was the work of Jerald Whitehouse in an unnamed Muslim nation (Islamex). Whitehouse had been a medical missionary in Libya and Sudan off and on from the 1960s to the 1980s. Whitehouse, influenced by the theoretical work of Robert Darnell, began to develop a contextualized approach to ministry among Muslims (GCAMR 2000).

This approach promoted a system in which new Adventist believers would not be extracted from their culture and would be able to remain within their Muslim context. Rather than promoting a rejection of the new believer’s background, the Faith Development in Context (FDIC) approach sought to critically sift that culture and religious background through the biblical message.

The ministry that began in 1990 in Islamex is still active and has been duplicated in several countries today (Whitehouse 2008:6). Leaders of these ministries have been primarily mentored by Whitehouse, but are led by local believers. This type of ministry begins where people are in their context, leads people to believe in the Scripture as the basis for faith and religious life, and encourages the believers to accept Jesus (Isa) as Lord and Savior as they live out their life of faith within the Islamic context.

Since this movement does not extract followers from their Muslim context, it allows for the adherents to use the Qur’an as a sourcebook of spiritual encouragement (GCAMR 2008:FDIC, C1-C6) while moving them into accepting the ultimate authority of the Bible and encouraging them to develop a deeper study of God’s word. The movement encourages a gradual approach to conversion (FDIC, C1-C6) following a receptor oriented spiritual path. While no official membership records of Muslim background Adventists is available, as a result of these receptor oriented ministries, there is a growing number of followers of Christ today in several Muslim countries. These followers have a basic Adventist understanding of Scripture but are not officially recognized by the church.

While official numbers are impossible to know, ministry leaders suggest that approximately 4,000 Muslim background believers become followers of Christ each year. Current estimates indicated that there are about 30,000 Adventist Muslim background believers globally, including those who have an open Adventist identity and those who are part of a contextualized ministry.
Guidelines for this type of ministry were officially voted by the General Conference in July of 2003; these guidelines outlined various issues related to the use of other sacred writings, transitioning to the use of the Bible, transitional structures and their relationship to the church, and how structures of this type are to be developed (Global Mission 2003).

Discussions about this type of insider ministry have been heated at times with two distinct sides: those who support it as a way of impacting Muslims with faith in Christ, and those who see this ministry as over-contextualization. In reaction to perceived over-contextualization, meetings were held in January, 2005 at Andrews University. Papers covered a wide range of biblical, theological, and practical issues, and were presented by scholars from a theological and missiological perspective. Those papers were later published as a book by Bruce Bauer, Chair of the Department of World Missions at Andrews University (Bauer 2007).

The General Conference Missions Issues committee recommended new guidelines in April 2005, allowing for Special Affinity Groups (insider movements with no official connection with the denomination) and Special Arrangement Structures (creative church structures in areas that are difficult to access politically or religiously), but restricting the ability for local entities to create them without permission from the higher levels of church structure (Bauer 2007:277).

During the time Whitehouse was the director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations the center grew to include three associate directors. The staff of the center focused on mentoring leadership, fostering a biblically centered critical contextualization process, pioneering ministry among women, and developing curriculum for Islamic studies within the Adventist Church.

In 2008 major training events were held for those engaged in Muslim ministries in several regional territories. One training event was coordinated by the Southern Asia-Pacific Division in September (Southern Asia-Pacific Division 2008). This training brought together instructors from the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (GCAMR) and eighty participants with a background in Muslim witness. The focus of the training was to encourage Adventists to communicate their faith to Muslims in a way that is peaceable and cordial.

As director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations Whitehouse made several significant contributions to Adventist witness among Muslims. These include (1) the encouragement of a cordial witness to Muslims, (2) training initiatives conducted in many locations around
the world, (3) the development of various models of how Adventists can develop positive relationships at the local church and institutional level with Muslims, and (4) the pioneering of and participation in interfaith dialogue. Jerald Whitehouse retired in 2009, passing the torch to Lester Merklin Jr. who became the new director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations.

Recently, interfaith dialogue has been given new significance. Prior to 2007 scholars, including the directors of GCAMR, were engaged in interfaith dialogue. In 2007 the General Conference appointed William Johnsson, former editor of the *Adventist Review*, as a coordinator for Adventist interaction with other world religions. Adventists participated in two conferences in 2008. The one in Doha, Qatar featured adherents from Islam, Christianity, and Judaism and had presentations by two Adventists. Adventists also participated in the Common Word meetings, in an interfaith dialogue in Jordan, and an interfaith dialogue between Adventist and Muslim scholars in the Philippines (Krause 2008:16).

While many reasons for interfaith dialogue exist, these dialogues are held with the goal of seeking to understand more clearly people from a Muslim background, but also to aid in clearing up misunderstandings Muslims may have toward Seventh-day Adventists. The role of interfaith dialogue between Adventists and Muslims is continuing with additional representatives from the Biblical Research Institute and Global Mission joining in the discussions (Johnsson 2010:11). There are other examples of interfaith relations within Adventism, such as Faith House Manhattan founded by Samir Selmanovic. Selmanovic attempts to provide a faith community which learns from all faith backgrounds (Krause 2008:19).

Another unique form of interfaith dialogue was pioneered by Oscar Osindo in Kenya. Osindo, who currently serves as an Associate Director of GCAMR, conducted televised debates with Muslim leaders, but under the ground rule that they had to be gentle and respectful. These debates have become quite well known and have developed some notoriety in Kenya.

The historical witness of Seventh-day Adventists, as found in hospitals, schools, and in ADRA, still provide a strong basis for interaction with Muslims around the world. Many Adventist hospitals remain popular among Muslims because of the dietary restrictions and similar faith backgrounds. Outreach using literature and correspondence schools are still being used today, but the landscape of Muslim ministry has changed dramatically with the development of incarnational mission models and their implementation in ministry.
Critical Issues in Witness

As noted above, with few exceptions, the early Adventist witness in Muslim lands largely focused on sharing Adventist beliefs with other Christians, both foreign groups living in Muslim lands and indigenous communities. The actual engagement with Muslims through traditional Adventist approaches was in large measure ineffective. As I have surveyed the historical trends and literature regarding Adventist mission a few important qualitative issues have surfaced that I feel have enough importance and potential to include here.

While the discussions regarding outreach and methods of the 1960s do not seem to have had an immediate impact, out of those meetings came a move to begin a different kind of engagement with Muslims, largely as a result of the theoretical work of Robert Darnell. It was during the conferences held in the 1960s that the idea of starting a study center for the purpose of developing a deeper understanding of Islam and fostering useful approaches to other world religions was placed on the agenda. Unfortunately those centers were not started for many years.

The development of the Global Mission initiative eventually led to the establishment of the Islamic Study Center, followed soon after with centers for the other major religious groups. Today there are study centers for each of the major world religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, and for Secular/Post Moderns). The study centers are positioned to provide solutions as the church faces critical issues in its witness among all the world religions.

In the area of Adventist witness among Muslims there are three important areas for future development: evaluation, leadership development, and theological reflection. Development in these areas is needed to assist the Adventist Church as it seeks to expand its witness in the world, not only in its work among Muslims but also in any ministry that is attempting to share the gospel.

Evaluation

The Adventist Church and its supporting ministries are engaging more and more in non-Christian environments. As these ministries engage new people groups among the world religions and try new methodologies Adventists need to be more active in evaluating the effectiveness of its mission endeavors. With Global Mission and many supporting ministries working in the area of church planting and other types of evangelistic outreach, the
church needs to analyze and evaluate training programs, policies, funding, methodologies, and the goals of each of the various programs. Without evaluation the same programs and methods are used year after year, sometimes for generations, with no evaluation to measure the effectiveness of a ministry. Evaluation can provide needed feedback that could alter strategies, budgets, and ministries, and lead to better use of funds and personnel. The evaluation needs to have criteria based on models that are not tied to baptismal rates. Although we need to know membership statistics, the criteria for evaluation should be based on broader discipleship and wholistic ministry approaches so as to provide a balanced perspective on a ministry.

Leadership Development

After more than 100 years of work in Muslim nations and areas, the need for a cordial witness has not diminished. Adventist pastors and church members around the world face the immediate challenge of building relationships in a world that is more polarized than it was even fifty years ago. There is a great need for the development of leaders who understand issues in outreach toward other religions.

Admittedly, there is a positive upswing in the development of future leaders due to education and training. Educational institutions are beginning to focus on Islamic studies. Newbold College had a program in Islamic studies. Currently Andrews University is offering a masters degree, the first of its kind, focusing on the Muslim world. Regional training by the staff of GCAMR has also helped develop significant leadership. In spite of these fragmented approaches, more systematic leadership development for mission in these areas is still lacking.

In order to foster an active and positive witness among Muslims, Adventists must face the important challenge of leadership development for Islamic witness in Africa, Central Asia, South and South-East Asia, and the Middle East. Adventists have the ability to foster meaningful relationships in local neighborhoods and through education and healthcare; but in order for this to happen significant progress must be made to break down fear and prejudice. As is clear from the history of Adventist interaction with Muslims, witness in this critical area is not a fast process; it is one that demands thorough research, long term thinking, and a sacrificial missional purpose—qualities that result from intentional training and education.
Theological Reflection

In the current missiological arena several foundational theological issues remain inadequately addressed from a biblical and Adventist perspective. Some of these issues are so foundational to the current discussion that without deeper reflection it seems unlikely that a more effective witness among the world religions can develop.

Over the past few years papers from conferences on witness and missiological books have been published by the Department of World Mission at Andrews University. A systematic theology of mission including biblical soteriology and ecclesiology is needed as the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces the challenges from the world religions in new settings.

Critical theological issues include: (1) an Adventist understanding of its own identity as it relates to the world religions, (2) a biblical understanding of the theological and theoretical foundations for authentic contextualization, (3) understanding the role of hermeneutics and epistemological concerns in applying biblical principles in non-Christian settings, and (4) issues regarding inclusive and exclusive views of salvation.

As these issues are addressed in witness among Muslims, Adventists will have a better chance of maintaining a prophetic and cordial witness which will sow seeds for the expansion of God’s kingdom in preparation for Christ’s second coming.

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Muslims today start with a disadvantage in relation to Christianity and the Western world. In the Christian camp, it is generally taken as a matter of course that Christianity is superior in the realm of theology, and still more superior with respect to society and culture. One reason for this preference is the current ‘war on terror,’ a war that tends to see Muslims as the culprit and the enemy. Another reason, more remote, is that the Christian observer generally takes a more forgiving view of the history of Christianity than of Islam. The Christian apologist is quick to assert that the spiritual values of Christianity were not reproduced in the social and political structures of the countries in which Christianity assumed a dominant role. Authentic Christianity, as the Christian spokesperson sees it, must not be confused with the political reality of Christendom.

Such a qualification is rarely applied in equal measure with respect to Islam. Western observers assume that the spiritual values of Islam are faithfully reflected in the social and political structures of the countries in which Islam is the dominant religion. Few scholars have approached Islam on the assumption that the spiritual aspirations of Islam may have been compromised in its history as much as Christianity often has failed to reflect the values of the New Testament.
Seventh-day Adventists are not immune to this bias. When a Seventh-day Adventist looks at the history of the Christian Church, he or she will do so through Adventist glasses, but when the same person looks at Islam alongside Christianity, he or she is prone to see Islam through the same glasses as any Westerner. The result is a comparison between the best of Christianity, meaning its biblical ideal, and the worst of Islam, meaning Islam as we have come to see it through the news media or sources of information that keep the ‘war on terror’ on the front burner.

In no area of theology will the Christian sense of superiority be more apparent than with respect to Christology and the way of salvation. Whatever grey zones there might be in other fields, this one is thought to be clear-cut. Muslims lack a Savior. From the Christian point of view, the Muslim deficit will not be negated by any of the positives that might otherwise be brought to bear on the discussion. Christology is the non-negotiable item that highlights the Christian advantage.

In the following, I wish to question these assumptions. I do not write as a scholar of Islam and will therefore not challenge the alleged Christian advantage by raising the profile of Christ in the Muslim paradigm. My concern is mostly the Christian Christological deficit. I will argue that Christology is no less a challenge in the Christian paradigm than it is to Islam. My choice of emphasis in this respect is deliberate even though it might leave the impression that Islam is treated more leniently. This apparent ‘unfairness’ is unavoidable because a defect in Christian behavior can more easily be represented as a Christological deficit than a similar defect in Islam. First, I will discuss defining moments in Christendom prior to the rise of Islam. Second, I will look at some of the main features of Islam as seen through the eyes of historians of late Antiquity. Third, I will specify the most glaring Christological deficit in Christianity. Finally, I will discuss a text that proposes an overlooked Christological priority in the New Testament.

**Defining Moments in Christendom Prior to Islam**

The cradle of Christianity stood in the Near East, yet Palestine, Syria, and Egypt were the first countries to come under Muslim dominion. The transformation of the political landscape was soon followed by a profound shift in religious affiliation. Contrary to a view still widely held in the West, this shift did not come about because of forced conversions under the menace of advancing Muslim armies. Historians have long pondered the factors that caused the majority of the Christian population in these countries to turn
their back on their religion, adopting in its place the new faith emerging from the Arabian Peninsula. In the eyes of the common person, including the middle class, the new religion appears to have been seen at least as an equal to the old one. In some respects it was regarded as more simple and straightforward and thus better suited to meet the needs of ordinary people.

Several features of Christian culture and history in the Byzantine Empire prior to the birth of Islam are likely to have contributed to this religious shift. Among noteworthy trends in Christianity are (1) the Christian monastic ideal of withdrawal from the world, (2) endless and fierce theological squabbles, and (3) ruthless persecution of heretics and dissenters during the long reign of the emperor Justinian (527-565), hitting precisely the areas that were first to turn Muslim. These developments can all be represented as a compromised Christology in Christianity.

**Monasticism**

Christian monasticism was in the beginning a phenomenon of Eastern piety more than of the West. Its theological underpinnings were platonistic. The most influential church fathers, Clement and Origen, had adopted from Plato a dualistic view of reality. They saw the physical body as a transitory stage of human existence within which the immaterial soul was the true expression of the divine intention, temporarily imprisoned in the body of flesh. Withdrawal from the business of the world, while not the choice of all who professed Christianity, was nevertheless the ideal embraced by those who came to be seen as the most dedicated followers of Christ. In their wholehearted otherworldliness they were the ones who truly lived the Christian life.

During the fifth century the monastic movement attracted a huge number of followers to make it a highly visible feature of life in the East. One of the early pioneers, Pachomius, founded eleven monasteries in Upper Egypt before he died in A.D. 346, claiming a total of 7,000 adherents by that early date. Less than one century later Jerome claimed that nearly fifty thousand monks took part in the annual convention of this order alone. In the area of Oxyrhynchus, also in Upper Egypt, it has been estimated that there were ten thousand monks and twenty thousand virgins (Frend 1984:746). It goes without saying that such huge numbers, replicated in cities and communities throughout the Near East, expressed an ideal that would be hard to sustain, let alone an ideal that ordinary believers would be inclined to emulate. Nevertheless, the movement attracted a huge following throughout the East Mediterranean
countries. Thousands of people withdrew to the Syrian Desert during the fifth and sixth centuries, dedicating themselves to a life of contemplation. One, Simeon Stylites (d. 459), earned his name because he spent thirty-nine years of his life on top of a column fifty feet high in the desert in the vicinity of Aleppo, exposed day and night to the elements. Simeon’s spiritual pursuits attracted such fame that the pilgrim church built on the site of his pillar became the second largest church in Eastern Christendom, surpassed only by the gigantic Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The monastic movement was not a monolith, but its dominant tenor was withdrawal from the world.

Islam, by contrast, did not take a negative view of the body or the world; it did not preach withdrawal. The ideals of Islam were simpler, less philosophic, and far more earthy and practical. Islam presented an ideal that lay within the reach of the ordinary person, and one that could be fulfilled without committing to a life of celibacy or by turning one’s back on family and society. While monasticism hardly represents all of Christianity in the immediate pre-Islamic period, it is a marker of an orientation that affords a striking and representative contrast between two conceptions of the believer’s life and commitment.

The alien anthropology of the Early Church colluded with a bleached Christology to make this development possible. The Gospel of John says that “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14). “The Word” represents Jesus in his pre-existence. In John’s account this Word became flesh (Gr. sarx), adopting and embracing human existence in its most material and physical expression. This Word “lived among us.” The disavowal of the flesh and withdrawal from the world that characterized the monastic movement went in the exact opposite direction of the movements described in this text. Indeed, withdrawal compromises a central tenet of the Christology of the New Testament.

Theological Disputes

The theological disputes of Christianity began early and consumed enormous attention and energy. No subject was more controversial than the nature of Christ. Was he a created being, or was he not? That was the controversy to be settled at the council in Nicaea in A.D. 325 (Ayres 2006). What kind of human nature did he have? Was he a real human being, or did he merely appear as one? And how did his divine nature blend with his human nature? Were the two natures fused into one, or did he have two natures in one body? What happened to his divine nature when he died?
Did he really have two natures in one body or just one single divine-human nature? Another ecumenical council met at Chalcedon in 451, determined to resolve these questions (Frend 1984:741-785).

The problem was not only that the path to orthodoxy was fraught with endless controversy and impending schisms. It was also that theology, in the experience of ordinary believers, raised issues that had little bearing on people’s daily lives. Monasticism beckoned with the intimidating ideal of celibacy and withdrawal from the world. Theology offered a mental and spiritual menu whose intensity of feeling was only exceeded by its complexity. In short, the preoccupation of the church was drifting away from the common person, setting the stage for people to welcome a new faith whose tenets of belief were more concise and to the point than in Christianity, and whose general standard of behavior was seen as its equal.

Christology was not compromised in the sense that the subject was neglected but rather because it was pursued to excess, vastly exceeding the narratival parameters given by the New Testament and rarefying the subject by abstruse philosophical concepts.

**Persecution**

It did not help matters that once the church councils came to a decision on controversial issues it was binding on the members of the church whether or not they personally concurred. Large segments of the Eastern Church certainly did not abandon the teaching of Arius even though the council of Nicaea declared it to be heretical. Constantine was convinced that the survival of the state required unity of belief. It followed that unorthodox belief was a crime against the state, and thus civil sanctions of varying degrees of severity were legitimate. Stamping out dissent was accepted as the God-ordained duty of the emperor.

When all tyranny had been purged away, the kingdom that belonged to them was preserved for Constantine and his sons alone; who, when they had made it their very first action to cleanse the world from hatred of God, conscious of the good things he had bestowed upon them, displayed their love of virtue and of God, their piety and gratitude towards the Deity, by their manifest deeds in the sight of men. (Eusebius 1927:9: 9)

This tribute, greeting the founding of the Christian Roman Empire under Constantine as the culmination of divine design, comes to us from Eusebius, the leading historian of that period, who died as bishop of his native city,
Caesarea, in A.D. 339. He wrote as Constantine’s contemporary, and the unreserved acclamation reflects the church’s enthusiastic embrace of the emerging union of church and state. He saw the emperor as God’s chosen vessel to bring about the reign of Christianity on earth. Though a man of the church, as propagandist and historian, he founded the political philosophy of the Christian state. However, his vision of this state was more indebted to the Roman Empire than to the New Testament. It has been noted that Eusebius’ perspective is thoroughly politicized; his accolade to Constantine contains “no wistful regret at the blessings of persecution, no prophetic fear of imperial control of the Church” (Greenslade 1954:10) It was outside the mental perception of this uncritical apologist that protection by the state leads to religious servitude on the part of the church and that persecution of dissenters leads to religious hypocrisy even though both of these pitfalls could easily be discerned in his own day.

Christianity adapted itself to become the religion on which society would be built at the cost of shedding fundamental principles, one of which was its view of the state and the commitment to religious liberty. Under the emperor Theodosius I (379-395) the basic elements of the Christian empire fell into place. Even at such an early stage and even after the cessation of pagan imperial persecution of Christians, new incentives for persecution emerged, this time under the auspices of the Christian state. Heretics, as people who held dissenting views were labeled, were forbidden to assemble. Their churches were confiscated, and their members lost the right to inherit property. Theodosius II (408-450) followed suit by enforcing even stricter measures. He “inflicted the death penalty on those who denied the Trinity (the Arians) and on those who repeated baptism (the Donatists)” (Bainton 1966:1:103). Although it might seem strange to us, the crimes that were prosecuted with such vigor and with such fateful consequences, were tenets of beliefs judged to be aberrant.

Persecution on a large scale did not happen till the reign of the emperor Justinian (527-565). Arians, Montanists, Sabbatarians, and other dissenters were ordered to renounce their beliefs under threat of severe penalties. According to his contemporary, the historian Procopius, Justinian “engineered an incalculable number of murders. His ambition being to force everybody into one form of Christian belief. He wantonly destroyed everyone who would not conform, and that while keeping up a pretence of piety. *For he did not regard it as murder, so long as those who died did not happen to share his beliefs*” (Procopius 1966:106, emphasis supplied).

From the fourth century onward the official church adopted a policy of
coercion against dissidents, regarding it as a legitimate method of dealing with resistance. According to the philosopher Karl Popper, “it can hardly be doubted that with Justinian’s persecution of non-Christians, heretics and philosophers the dark ages began” (1966:2:24). Popper proposed the year A.D. 529, a year not very distant from a traditional Seventh-day Adventist marker for this period—A.D. 538 (cf. Smith 1944:590). Two items in Popper’s paradigm deserve to be highlighted. First, his criterion for calling this period ‘the dark ages’ refers to the consolidation of practices that effectively curtailed independent inquiry and the right to dissent. A coercive rule was now solidly in place in the Christian realm. Indeed, as Frend points out, the Christian Roman Empire was more intrusive and less tolerant than its pagan predecessor. “In practice, the ancient world has exchanged the guardianship of one set of divine masters, capricious but generally benevolent, for another that would brook no opposition” (Frend 1984:505).

The second point relates to the timeline of these events. If ‘the dark ages’ began roughly around A.D. 530, we are almost within sight of the rise of Islam. Less than a hundred years later the stirrings that swept the Arabian Peninsula spread to territory that had been badly bruised by the Christian internecine conflict. The call to withdraw from the world, as represented by the monastic movement, proposed an ideal for piety that was neither realistic nor sustainable. The quest for orthodoxy and unity of belief had led to a preoccupation that to the religiously austere monotheism of Islam seemed esoteric, impractical, and even unorthodox. Controversies regarding Mary and wide acceptance of the concept of the *Theotokos*, the mother of God, exposed additional weak spots in the Christian armor with respect to monotheism. A growing veneration of icons was gaining ground among Christians well before Muhammad began calling on his kinsmen to give up their idolatrous superstitions. In Muhammad’s original context, where the leaner monotheism of Judaism constituted another point of reference for the religious reformer, the trend in the Christian church stood in sharp contrast to the stern monotheism that would characterize Islam. In fact, the expanding Christian pantheon might even invite the thought that the monotheism of Islam arose as a necessary reform.

Persecution of Arians under Justinian, successful though it may have been in terms of decimating the numerical strength of the followers of Arius, weakened the church in the East. It is more than a curious historical quirk that the spread of Islam began where the persecution of Arians under Justinian had been most severe. The new religion adopted the spiritual ancestry of Judaism and Christianity, spoke with deference of “the people
of the book” while offering its own book alongside it, and it shared a similar view of reality. Islam might have been orthodox Christianity all the same except for the fact that its Christology, in the most accommodating view of its ambiguity on this point, was Arian.

But this Christological deficit in Islam, so incriminating in the eyes of orthodox Christianity that it had warranted the death penalty within the Christian context, is itself the item that shouts the Christian Christological deficit from the rooftops. In the very triumph of Christian orthodoxy is a Christological deficit that will prove impervious to correction because it is oblivious to the notion that there is anything to correct.

**Defining Characteristics of Early Islam**

It is impossible in a few pages to do justice to the vast literature dealing with Muhammad and the rise of Islam. Here we must be content to extract a few morsels from selected sources. The closing chapter in Peter Brown’s little book *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971) gives the salient points necessary for the present purpose. While far from exhaustive, the book is very easy to read, and it offers conclusions that other scholars have generally supported.

First of all, Brown points out that Islam represented a break with the tightly knit, traditional tribalism of Arab culture. The Muslim believer, by contrast, was an individual, living his life, not as a member of the tribe, but as a finite atom before the Almighty. “Whatever he may have thought about the Christian church, the Muslim guided his conduct by exactly the same considerations as did any Christian or Jew throughout the Fertile Crescent. He, too, was a ‘God-fearer’. He, too, had faced the terrible choice of the Last Judgment, infallibly revealed to him in a Sacred Book. He, too, must think on it day and night” (191).

Muhammad, initially driven from Mecca in 622, was ultimately hailed as the one who had brought peace and unity among the feuding parties of his countrymen. When his followers decided to extend the boundaries of the house of peace after the prophet’s death in 632, it should not be seen as though they thereby embarked on a heaven-ordained conquest intrinsic to Islam. With growing influence came an increased tendency to pursue other considerations than those of the spirit. According to Brown, there was a shift in the focus of Islam just as there had been in the focus of the Christian church once it rose to political prominence. “It was the chieftains of the Bedouin tribes who created the Arab war-machine with their rude followers, and it was the style of life of this warrior-aristocracy—and not the sheltered
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piety of the core of devout Muslims—that held the empire together” (Brown 1971:194).

This is a remarkable statement, deserving of thoughtful reflection. Brown spots a spiritual aspiration, a genuine God-orientation, in Islam. This aspiration does not fully carry over into the early Muslim conquest, the latter driven by forces that are not intrinsic to the original Muslim piety. If the original piety provides a close-up of the Muslim ideal, exposing a commitment that had nothing to do with conquest or militancy, it follows that we must look elsewhere for the source of the subsequent conquest. But this also means that the evolution of Islam as a political-religious entity has been subject to erosive forces not unlike the ones that Christians will recognize in the history of Christianity. Moreover, the quest for Muslim hegemony will match up against a religious structure that was hell-bent on preserving its hegemony. In short, Islam early on adapted to the prospects brought by its increasing power and not necessarily according to a trajectory that was dictated by its spiritual aspirations.

The exact nature of the Muslim conquest nevertheless warrants a closer look. To begin with, the facts break with the stereotype of the radical Muslim in Western eyes today. According to Brown, Muhammad “had created a religious empire in Arabia almost exclusively through negotiation” (1971:193). Diplomacy rather than bloodshed also marked the Muslim advance into Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. “In the first decades of their conquests, the Arabs gained as much by treaty as by the sword: key cities, such as Damascus and Alexandria, fell because the Muslim High Command was instantly prepared to offer generous terms—protection and toleration in return for a fixed tribute” (193).

Peace and tranquility were the lot of those who lived within the walls of the growing Muslim empire. Trade, craftsmanship, scholarship, and culture blossomed. “As the storm of the Arab armies rolled over the horizon, the population of the Near East sat back to enjoy the sunshine,” (197) writes Brown. Eventually, the privileges of prosperity diffused to other layers of culture than that of the Arab conquerors. The quest for prosperity also offered an economic incentive to conversion. In what might be seen as a giant project of assimilation akin to what the United States has been in modern times, the emerging Muslim culture in the Near East became an energetic melting pot for diverse peoples throughout the empire. The door of opportunity was thrown open because “Islam made all its converts equal, whatever their racial origin” (198).

The view that Europe was saved from the Muslim menace by the victory
of Charles Martel at Tours in 732 is not shared by Peter Brown. Perhaps the notion of the Muslim menace is a fiction of the Western imagination as much as the notion of its great victory. The defeat in the West had been preceded by the fact that the Muslim center of gravity had turned eastward. Leaving Damascus behind as its capital, the Abbasid dynasty established instead its new home in the immediate vicinity of the capital of the late Persian Empire, in Bagdad, where it also felt more at home. The shore of the Mediterranean was already far from the new seat of the empire, not to speak of the outer extremity of its acquired territory such as Spain or France. Thus, “it was not the Greek fire of the Byzantine navy outside Constantinople in 717, nor the Frankish cavalry of Charles Martel at Tours in 732 that brought the Arab war machines to a halt. It was the foundation of Baghdad,” (202) says Brown.

There is more to this story than the notion that a civilized and Christian Europe successfully faced down the crude Muslim menace. The struggle was hardly a simple confrontation between good and evil. Bagdad was in 781 the site of a remarkable conversation between Mahdi, the third of the Abbasid Caliphs at Bagdad, and Timothy, the Patriarch of the East Syrian Church and the recognized head of all Eastern Christians (Jenkins 2008:16-21; cf. also the primary source, Timothy’s Apology 1928:1-90). Prominent in his own right, the Caliph is best known to history through the fame of the second of his sons, Harun al-Rashid. His conversation with Timothy is remarkable for its tone as well as its substance.

As to tone, neither of the discussants strikes a tone of superiority or condescension. On matters of substance, Timothy tries valiantly to explain the doctrine of the trinity and the person of Christ. How can God be three persons and yet one? How can Christ be a son without having a beginning? How can he be one person with two natures, one with a beginning in time and one without a temporal beginning? The philosophical categories of the Christian beliefs are daunting, such as Timothy’s careful attempt to show Christ as one begotten of God and the Spirit as a procession of God, precise language that will defy the comprehension of many even today. Daunting, too, is Timothy’s defense of God as a being without matter or form, and his apology for the immortality of the soul.

But it is the tone that should interest us the most, the tone of mutual respect, of trying to find common ground and to acknowledge it when it is found. Timothy will not yield ground on his conviction that God is revealed in Jesus, but he proves that it is no easy task to express distinctive Christian tenets of belief in comprehensible (let alone persuasive) philosophical terms. Listening to Timothy, who does most of the talking, one might wonder
whether Christians on this point have taken on an explanatory project that goes beyond the simpler narrated Christology of the New Testament. Christology certainly does not seem like a project that can hope to achieve the degree of certainty that merited capital punishment for getting it wrong, as was the case during the reign of Justinian. Nevertheless, at one point the Caliph is so impressed with Timothy’s articulation of his faith that he fairly exclaims, “If you accepted Muhammad as a prophet your words would be beautiful and your meanings fine” (*Timothy’s Apology* 1928:54).

When the Caliph asks him point blank, “What do you say about Muhammad?” Timothy puts Muhammad in a context that makes the latter a spiritual reformer if not quite the singular prophet that the Caliph wishes to have acknowledged.

Muhammad is worthy of all praise, by all reasonable people, O my Sovereign. He walked in the path of the prophets, and trod in the track of the lovers of God. All the prophets taught the doctrine of one God, and since Muhammad taught the doctrine of the unity of God, he walked, therefore, in the path of the prophets. Further, all the prophets drove men away from bad works, and brought them nearer to good works, and since Muhammad drove his people away from bad works and brought them nearer to the good ones, he walked, therefore, in the path of the prophets. Again, all the prophets separated men from idolatry and polytheism, and attached them to God and to His cult, and since Muhammad separated his people from idolatry and polytheism, and attached them to the cult and the knowledge of one God, beside whom there is no other God, it is obvious that he walked in the path of the prophets. Finally Muhammad taught about God, His Word and His Spirit, and since all the prophets had prophesied about God, His Word and His Spirit, Muhammad walked, therefore, in the path of all the prophets. (61)

There is a sense of confidence in Timothy’s apology, and yet his tone is not predicated on disparaging the convictions of the Caliph. Actually, the decadence of the Christian profession that I intimated at the beginning of this chapter is mitigated by Timothy’s winsome presentation: He does not come across as a person who has lost faith in the Christian confession. Throughout, however, he speaks as a person who does not think that the Christian claim to truth makes all other claims irrelevant. The level playing field that is denied to the Muslim in our time is granted to him by Timothy.

O our victorious king, in this world we are all of us as in a dark house in the middle of the night. If at night and in a dark house a precious pearl happens to fall in the midst of people, and all become aware of its existence, every one
would strive to pick up the pearl, which will not fall to the lot of all but to the lot of one only, while one will get hold of the pearl itself, another one of a piece of glass, a third one of a stone or of a bit of earth, but every one will be happy and proud that he is the real possessor of the pearl. When, however, night and darkness disappear, and light and day arise, then every one of those men who had believed that they had the pearl, would extend and stretch his hand towards the light, which alone can show what every one has in hand. He who possesses the pearl will rejoice and be happy and pleased with it, while those who hand in hand pieces of glass and bits of stone only will weep and be sad, and will sigh and shed tears. (Timothy’s Apology 1928:88)

Timothy’s analogy is more all-or-none than the subject warrants, but it has a tone of humility; it seeks to entice more than to dictate. In a subtle sense, the argument anticipates one of the keenest thoughts in the writings of Martin Luther: “Every man runs his own risk in believing as he does, and he must see to it himself that he believes rightly” (Luther 1999:108).

The Caliph at this point makes a comment that should probably be heard more as a question than as a statement of fact, “The possessors of the pearl are not known in this world, O Catholicos” (Timothy’s Apology 1928:89). To Timothy, however, such a conclusion would be too pessimistic and unwarranted. And so he answers, “They are partially known, O victorious King” (89).

How, then, are they known, the Caliph wants to know. As the conversation winds down, Timothy, in seeming harmony with the Caliph, commits to a test of true belief that transcends doctrine. “By good works, O our victorious King, and pious deeds, and by the wonders and miracles God performs through those who possess the true faith. As the luster of a pearl is somewhat visible even in the darkness of the night, so also the rays of the true faith shine to some extent even in the darkness and the fog of this present world” (89). Timothy continues by recapping some of the tenets of Christian belief, but he has put in place a test that values practice as much as profession.

At the very end of the exchange, the two parties seem won over to the imagery of the pearl and the value of possessing it. The Caliph says wistfully, “We have hope in God that we are the possessors of this pearl, and that we hold it in our hands” (89). And Timothy answers, “Amen, O king. But may God grant us that we too may share it with you, and rejoice in the shining and beaming luster of the pearl! God has placed the pearl of His faith before all of us like the shining rays of the sun, and every one who wishes can enjoy the light of the sun” (89, 90).
Muslim-Christian Relations: The Watershed and Beyond

Less circumspect persons than the Patriarch Timothy and the Caliph Mahdi will eventually take command of the dialogue on both sides of the Christian-Muslim divide. There can be little doubt that the watershed in their relationship, the defining moment *par excellence*, came with the Christian Crusades. This initiative began at the behest of Urban II in the year 1095, carefully planned and choreographed in person by the pope. Here was one militant religion mobilizing to face another, also militant, but no more so than the Christian renegades that heaped terror and bloodshed on people on their way to the Holy City. In point of fact, the Muslim regimes that controlled Palestine at that time represented a benign rule, and the prosperity of Jerusalem itself was considerable.

The immediate antecedent to the Crusades combined misinformation, prejudice, and fanaticism. For one thing, the West had never accepted the loss of the Near East, but it had not been in a position to challenge the superior forces of the Omayyads and the Abbasids during the first four centuries of Muslim dominion. With Muslim states at increasing loggerheads with each other, the prospect of a holy Christian war seemed less daunting. Christian pilgrims had for centuries made their way to the city of their Lord, usually without incident. Beginning in the tenth century, the desire on the part of many people to travel to Jerusalem increased greatly. When some pilgrims brought back reports of problems on the way, the accounts became a pretext for action. The pope also welcomed the prospect of asserting his influence more directly in the Eastern churches. This was the background when Urban II called on the faithful to make Holy War on the Muslim infidels, proving, incidentally, that the concept of jihad, holy war, is not unique to Islam. The cause was God's own, and for those who might die in battle, the pope promised full absolution of sin.

When Jerusalem was conquered after a protracted siege in 1099, the Christian crusaders massacred the entire population of Muslims and Jews, not sparing women and children. Steven Runciman writes that when one of their leaders, Raymon of Aguilers, went to visit the Temple area on the morning of victory, “he had to pick his way through corpses and blood that reached up to his knees” (Runciman 1980:188). For all the savagery seen in the Holy City throughout its bloody history, this massacre has hardly been surpassed. Its details are vividly portrayed to this day in history books throughout the Middle East, and its fruit was both immediate and lasting. “It was this bloodthirsty proof of Christian fanaticism that recreated the fanaticism of Islam” (188), says Runciman.
This, too, is a telling statement that we should pause to ponder. What might seem like Muslim extremism, then and now, does not happen in a vacuum. Fanaticism is not intrinsic to Islam any more than it is intrinsic to Christianity. The notion that Muslim fanaticism was ignited by a Christian antecedent fully as savage as its Muslim progeny reduces the Christological advantage of Christianity to rubble. In thought and practice, Christians had wholeheartedly embraced the concept of Holy War.

For the next two centuries crusader citadels throughout the Middle East held their ground in a sea of hostile Muslim territory, adding to the hostility with each passing day. The impressive ruins of these fortifications may still be seen by Western tourists even though their significance largely eludes them. But even as a military conquest, the Crusades ended in failure. “Within two centuries the last Crusader settlement on the Asian mainland had fallen back into the hands of Muslims, Muslims more bitter and hostile than any had been before the Holy War” (192). The moment of revenge did not come until Constantinople fell in 1453, and the atrocities then committed by the Ottoman forces must be understood against the backdrop of what Christians had done to Muslims in Jerusalem several centuries earlier (Wheatcroft 1995:1-22).

Even with the subsequent radicalization of Muslim rule, especially during the Ottoman centuries, the record of Islam in many respects surpasses that of Christendom. The Islamic civilization of the Omayyads, and even the less tolerant Abbasids that succeeded it, developed a more tolerant and sophisticated culture than the Christian West. Bernard Lewis writes that “in most respects the position of non-Muslims under traditional Islamic rule was very much easier than that of non-Christians or even of heretical Christians in medieval Europe, not to speak of some events in modern Europe or, for that matter, the modern Middle East” (1984:62).

As noted earlier, the emperor Justinian closed the Academy in Athens in 529 and burned all its books. Some of those books on philosophy and on natural science had been in circulation for a thousand years, and their destruction represents an incalculable loss to civilization. What remains of this heritage was chiefly preserved by the more inquisitive and tolerant Muslim rulers. Many of these rulers distinguished themselves favorably in contrast to their Christian counterparts. When the last ruler of the Muslim Moors was expelled from Spain in 1492 by the forces of Ferdinand and Isabella, his Christian successors proceeded with a ceremony taken straight from a page of Justinian 900 years earlier: They emptied the great library in Granada and burned all its 80 000 volumes in the public square.
Muslim tolerance did not extend only to books. Muhammad had preached respect for Christians and Jews, and his followers practiced his maxim of tolerance, tentative though it was, with greater care than Christians did despite the far more explicit injunction of tolerance preached by Christ. A case in point may be found in the large Jewish community in Spain. When Muslim warriors marched into the Iberian Peninsula less than one hundred years after the death of the prophet, they were greeted as liberators by the Jews (Cantor 1993:133ff.). Malcolm Hay writes that “while the Spaniards in general were naturally a tolerant people, hatred against the Jews was primarily the product of clerical propaganda” (Hay 1992:35). The Christians had embarked on a program of forced conversion, an idea that the Muslims, for their shortcomings otherwise, rarely seriously contemplated. When the Muslims at last were expelled from Spain during the fifteenth century, the church revived and intensified its efforts at coercing conversion (Pérez 2005; cf. Reston 2006). With the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition thousands of Jews saw their synagogues burned, their property confiscated, and their rights to practice their faith revoked on penalty of death. Many Jews fled, finding a haven of refuge in the Muslim Ottoman Empire in the East. The true friends of the Jews during this period, if they had any, were the Muslims. From the vantage point of our time, it might be well for intolerant Muslim countries today to revisit Islamic history on this point and to relearn the policy of tolerance that was practiced by Muslim rulers in earlier times.

The Christian society of Europe became everything Christ had refused to be, intolerant, oppressive, and cruel. With reference to the Middle Ages it is not an overdrawn assertion that the Creator was presented to people “as clothed with the attributes of the prince of evil himself—as arbitrary, severe and unforgiving.—that He might be feared, shunned and even hated by men” (White 1948:5:738). Those who did not submit to the official faith were discriminated against, harassed, or killed. To dissenters such as Jews and Christians, speaking of the condition of these communities under Muslim dominion, the Muslim rule was generally more benign.

Islamic ideology differs from the Christian ideal that is found in the Bible because Muhammad carried a sword. If we are to believe the caretakers of the heritage of Islam, the sword is still on display today as one of the chief treasures of the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul. Muhammad was an acknowledged political leader as much as a religious reformer. But many of the most important Christian leaders who are credited as great reformers were also political figures. Ulrich Zwingli became a city magistrate in Zürich, and his Protestant city council voted to drown the Anabaptist reformer Felix
Manz. According to William Estep the execution of Felix Manz marked the beginning of Anabaptist martyrdom (1996:43-48). It is fascinating that one recent Zwingli biographer merely refers to the Zwinglian reaction to Anabaptism as “harsh measures,” failing to inform the reader that the harsh measures were capital punishment (Gäbler 1986:125-131). Another Protestant reformer, John Calvin, became the equivalent of city mayor in Geneva, where he imposed a strict and intolerant rule. The most searing blight on Calvin’s Genevan rule is the burning of Michael Servetus on the charge of heresy (McNeill 1954:174). It is more than a moot point in the present context that Calvin thought the condemnation and execution of Michael Servetus justified precisely on the ground of the latter’s semi-Arian Christology (176). Servetus was willing to die for his convictions, maintaining sufficient composure in the face of the flames to hold his denial of the Trinity till the end. Servetus is said to have prayed, “Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have mercy on me,” not “Eternal Son of God” (McNeill 1954:176).

Martin Luther was zealous for political control where his doctrine was ascendant, and there is no Muslim counterpart to Luther’s diatribe against the Jews in Luther’s day or even to this day (Luther 1971:278). When Martin Luther in 1543 wrote his blood-curdling denunciation against the Jews it caused widespread dismay even among people accustomed to shrill rhetoric. In addition to advocating the burning of Jewish synagogues and books, their forced attendance at church, and what has been seen as an understated prescient hint at a ‘final solution,’ Luther summarized that “next to the devil, a Christian has no more bitter and galling foe than a Jew” (Luther 1971:278). These Christian leaders are regarded as important messengers of truth even though they had in common the fact that important truth also eluded them. To the extent that they merit the status of religious reformers, one might do well to extend the courtesy of such a possibility even to Muhammad. No group professing Christianity might be in a position to do so with greater humility and sensitivity than Seventh-day Adventists, conscious that we, too, began our witness to Christ with a Christology that was deficient. With this background in mind it may also be possible to look with patience and generosity on our Muslim brothers and sisters who are seeking more fulfilling answers and a clearer picture of God within their own religious context.
Christological Deficits and Priorities

According to the Koran, “the Jews say, ‘Ezra is the Son of God’; the Christians say, ‘The Messiah is the Son of God.’ That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted!” Sura 9:30 (Arberry 1955:210). Incriminating evidence like this has led many Christians to regard Islam as a religion that is incurably hostile to Christ, ignoring the sometimes ambivalent and sometimes affirming statements concerning Christ found elsewhere in the Koran. Nevertheless, to the question of whether this represents a Christological deficit in Islam, the answer must be yes.

As suggested earlier, however, the blind spot in the Christian perspective is the assumption that Christian history vastly surpasses Islam with respect to Christology. Occasional Christians have had the perception and courage to admit otherwise, pointing out that the significance of the incarnation is not simply a matter of creed or profession. In the booklet The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience, published in 1644, Roger Williams asserted as his tenth tenet that “an enforced uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state, confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that Jesus Christ is come in the Flesh” (Williams 1842:2).

Enforced uniformity means a system making use of coercion and civil penalties in matters of faith and conscience, a practice to which the church has been committed throughout much of its history and from which it has only desisted when pushed to do so by other influences. Williams’ insight means that Christianity, too, in its historical record, has a Christological deficit. It has, de facto, denied “that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.” Denying the incarnation, assessing the depth of this belief in practical terms, is not a sin unique to Islam.

A Christology pursued on the terms of the New Testament would cut a wider swath and would not content itself merely with definitions and doctrinal formulations. In the Gospel of John, Jesus sets forth a vision in regard to his person that makes Christology subservient to theology and not an end in itself. At a critical point in the heated Christological debate of this Gospel, Jesus says to his critics, “If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:37-38).

The pointed hypothetical negatives in this statement set priorities for what can and what cannot be surrendered in Jesus’ give-and-take. Jesus is willing to forgo the honor of being the object of their belief, even offering to
remove himself from the picture, hypothetically speaking, if only his works are allowed to shape their view of God. His works are “the works of my Father.” As these works bring to light what God is like, they take priority over other things that this Gospel would like people to believe. Indeed, the works are placed in the category of self-evidence, less subject to bias or subversion than anything else. On the one hand, Jesus will surrender everything but the works, including the prospect that people will believe in him. On the other hand, when the works are given their due, they will bring everything else with them, obviating the need to surrender anything (John 10:38d). In the context of John’s unfolding story, this statement is a last straw offer. John thus makes the Christology of John subservient to its theology. The works of Jesus are the lingering image on the screen that is meant to transform the believer’s picture of God and shape the believer to the same image. In light of this priority, the most glaring Christological deficit in Christianity has been to downplay this point or ignore it completely.

Adding this up, we see that monasticism, theological controversy, and an evolution of belief and practices that were offensive to true monotheism preceded the emergence of Islam in the countries that constituted the cradle of Christianity. Fierce persecution on behalf of orthodox belief may also have conditioned the non-orthodox to yearn for a more tolerant rule. It is well documented that Islam, though militant, gained a foothold in these countries by methods that made it look more attractive than the Christian political dominion.

The Crusades stand to this day as a defining event for later Muslim-Christian relations. Its record has poisoned the relations between the two blocs almost irreparably, precluding posturing on the part of Christians as the representatives of a theologically and morally superior religion. A Seventh-day Adventist outreach to Muslims need not carry the burden of this Christian heritage, as is bound to happen if Adventists present themselves chiefly as a Protestant denomination, a member of the Christian bloc of power in the world, and with a Christology that is blind to the Christological deficit in Christianity. It was the vision of Robert Darnell, one of my former teachers and a pioneer with respect to Muslim-Adventist relations, that the Adventist mission must shed the trappings of such a narrow perspective. He saw in Islam, too, a genuine spiritual yearning that has been blunted in its history. This has also been the vision of Jerald Whitehouse, the leading Adventist pioneer to implement Darnell’s vision. For years, Jerald has tirelessly engaged Muslims in dialogue, respectful of their faith commitment and solicitous of embarking on a forward spiritual journey together.
“Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and in the Last Day, and works righteousness—their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow,” Sura 2:59 (Arberry 1955:36). Such signals, and Jerald Whitehouse’s understanding of the prophetic mission of his own community, has strengthened the conviction that the Adventist outreach must proceed quietly as a third way, conscious that true believers exist in these communities. Beginning with the acknowledgment of common ground, the call to the teachable remnant to follow him whose kingdom is not of this world applies to all believers. As I have intimated in the foregoing, a reorientation in this direction will hardly be possible unless the Christological deficit in Christianity is acknowledged and rectified. At a time of increasing polarization and militancy on both sides of the great historic divide, Jerald Whitehouse’s pioneer work toward this end represents a legacy to be safeguarded and a treasure for which Seventh-day Adventists should be profoundly grateful.

Works Cited


Introduction

In 2008 Harper Collins published a landmark book, *A Deadly Misunderstanding*, written by Mark Siljander. Siljander, former U.S. congressman and alternative U.S. representative at the U.N., chronicles his personal journey from deep suspicion and mistrust of Islam as a violent enemy of Christianity to a new viewpoint. This new understanding replaces the old “deadly misunderstanding” which has poisoned Muslim-Christian relationships for centuries and paves the way for new cordial interaction.

The high levels of personal contacts and relationships demonstrated in the book are impressive. The book is endorsed by James Baker III, the 61st U.S. Secretary of State and Edwin Meese, former U.S. Attorney General. Both an endorsement and the preface are written by Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations.

From the Muslim side, praise for the book comes from Muslim academics and validation stems from personal contact with Muslim heads of state from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia as reported on in the book.

In this essay I will review in some detail the contents of the book and
then evaluate it. I conclude by suggesting some things that can be learned from the book and steps that might be taken to further enhance Muslim-Christian relations.

Siljander’s Personal Journey

The true organizing principle of the book is the personal journey of Siljander himself. The book records Mark’s pilgrimage from a rabid anti-Muslim politician/Christian who wanted to either defeat or convert Muslims to a bridge builder whose life quest is to bring peace and love to Christian-Muslim relationships. This volume records the step by step blow-by-blow unfolding of this journey.

This pilgrimage is personal in at least two ways. First, it is most obviously what Siljander as an individual himself experiences. Second, it is a record of personal encounters with a wide variety of Muslims, most of them key leaders in the Muslim world in either the political or religious realm. Siljander has a passion to actually interact face to face with Muslims and he records for us in detail many of these meetings.

Paradigm Crashes

The first part of the book emphasizes three key life-changing encounters that Siljander had with three important people in his life and development. Each of these encounters led to what he calls a “paradigm crash” (chapter 2). He calls these crashes because in each of them key concepts that are part of his original (mis) understanding prove to be false.

In the first crash Siljander’s friend Doug challenges Mark with the question of whether the Bible supports the idea that Siljander says is the core of Christianity—the conversion of Muslims (and other non-Christians) to the Christian faith. For a solid year Siljander attempts to find a biblical basis for this idea. In the end he concludes that Jesus never sought to start a religion but planned rather to found a movement that was a relational revolution of the human heart (18). Siljander concludes that if he had been wrong on this point there possibly were other areas where he might also be misinformed.

Along with this religious paradigm change Siljander also became disillusioned with typical diplomatic procedures. Such procedures he found, neglected personal relationships and personal interaction which most diplomats believe can demonstrate weakness. So instead diplomacy often
promotes adversarial impersonal relationships which only allow room for one’s own political agenda. As a result, Siljander makes a decision that in his quest for understanding he will make true personal relationships essential.

The second worldview shift that Siljander describes comes through his American born Assyrian pastor friend, John Booko. Booko introduces Mark to the Aramaic language. Siljander comes to realize that Jesus and his disciples spoke Aramaic and begins to believe the viewpoint that the New Testament was originally in Aramaic before it was translated into Greek. Using nuances in language based on Aramaic understandings Siljander comes to the conclusion that some ideas that divide Christians and Muslims disappear if terms are properly understood.

The third worldview change came when a Nepali friend told Siljander that Jesus was extensively mentioned in the Qur’an. That prompted him to begin an intensive ongoing study of the Qur’an and Arabic and led to a major shift toward growing appreciation of the Muslim holy book.

Building Peace and Love

Based on these three worldview changes Siljander begins to put his new discoveries into practice in high level personal contacts where mutual respect, love, and friendship rather than adversarial relationship based on traditional diplomacy prevail.

Two main issues dominate the last half of the book. First, Siljander spells out his answers to the long-standing core theological issues which have divided Islam and Christianity. Foremost are questions about Jesus. Who is he and how are we to understand him? What should we call him? What does the Bible mean when it calls him “begotten”? What about the crucifixion? How are we to understand the trinity? Siljander speaks to these issues and more in some depth. He also attempts to defuse the emotional issue of jihad and demonstrate the false definitions held by militant Muslims.

Second, Siljander defends his views by sharing stories of both Christians and Muslims, who at least in general have come to support his message. He describes these encounters where dialogue is possible and where the general response he reports is that his teaching is seen to be revolutionary.

Siljander closes with an appeal to all readers to be personally and individually involved in building bridges of understanding. He stresses that if people would begin to love their enemies and begin to interact face to face with them they would have a part in changing the world.
A Moving Story

Siljander’s book has a way of pulling us into his story. His openness is admirable and makes it easy to identify with him. The whole narrative approach makes the book interesting and appealing. In the end it is hard to argue with an appeal to love and an approach that can help change our world with its many fractured relationships.

The stories of Siljander’s meetings and encounters with Muslim leaders sound almost too good to be true. I was especially moved by his apology for the killing of Qaddafi’s daughter Hanna (94) and the results of that meeting. That story alone is worth the price of the book.

I agree with this book in broad outline. I like his methodology—a personal narrative framework. His diagnosis of the problem is correct—there is a general misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians that can and has been deadly at times and it should be addressed. In general I approve of the idea that openness and the careful study of the Bible, the Qur’am, and language is a key part of the solution to the challenge. I salute Siljander for a creative approach to a real problem. I believe all who care about this issue should read this book.

Serious Questions

Having said many positive things, I must admit on the other side that I have serious questions about the specifics of some of his arguments.

One of those questions concerns Siljander’s first paradigm crash. In a narrow specific sense he is correct—we as Christians do not have as our main duty the conversion of people to Christianity. Jesus does not come to establish a religion in the institutional meaning of the word. His goal was not a formalized structure with all that entails. It would certainly follow that conversion to something he did not intend to establish is not our main task. Jesus came to start a movement.

Although I agree with Siljander’s basic point it strikes me as somewhat superficial and narrow. The actual question and conclusion may be related to the continuation of a fundamentalist mindset which carries over from Siljander’s earlier life. If Jesus wanted to begin a movement, as Siljander argues, didn’t he invite people to join that movement? Didn’t he want people to “convert” or change to follow his teaching? What it means to join that movement seems to be a very key question which Siljander does not specifically answer. To explain what joining the Jesus movement meant seems extremely relevant at this point but that question is not dealt with by
Siljander. If this issue is discussed in the proper context it does not seem to necessarily destroy the mutual respect between Muslims and Christians that he seeks to foster. Siljander seems to support something he calls “messianic Muslims” or people who remain culturally Muslim but who also follow the teaching of Jesus (204, 216). Is this not a form of change that might be called “conversion”? It seems to me that at its core what Siljander is arguing for is a new definition of conversion rather than the abolishment of it.

A somewhat similar problem exists with Siljander’s treatment of Aramaic. It is true that Jesus and his disciples spoke Aramaic which is closely related to Hebrew. For decades scholars have talked about possible Aramaic originals of the Gospels (see Black 1998). There is nothing secret about this. Why does he title his chapter on Aramaic “The Secret Language of the Bible”? I was required to study Aramaic as part of my work for a graduate degree in Old Testament because parts of the Bible are only extant in Aramaic including Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26; Dan 2:4-7:28. To call his study of Aramaic words revolutionary strikes me as an exaggeration or ignorance. Insights he mentions based on Aramaic may mostly be true but have been known before and do not seem to be decisive for his argument.

Siljander is on much firmer ground when he relates language to culture (29) in a brief section of his work. He is right in pointing out that translating “Eastern” thoughts into “Western” languages or thoughts opens the way for serious misunderstanding. My personal belief is that in large part the present misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims stem from core worldview differences deeply imbedded in the respective cultures. Language differences are simply one part of cultural differences. To really comprehend the depth of the misunderstanding we must move beyond just linguistic differences to the broader area of all that is entailed in worldview. The culture of Jesus and his disciples bears a striking resemblance to current Middle Eastern culture. Middle Eastern Muslims can, therefore, in many ways relate to Jesus and his teachings with clearer insight than people from Western cultures (see Bailey 1983).

There is one important cultural topic that Siljander does not discuss. A major issue in biblical and Middle Eastern culture is the honor/shame concept. Much of the animosity between the West and Islam is due to this honor/shame issue. As a result of colonialism and modern history the average Muslim feels deeply shamed by the West. There is a deep corporate sense that Muslims have been dishonored and disempowered by the so-called Christian nations. Honor has been lost. Since this sense is corporate most feel solidarity with other Muslims and the loss or disgrace of other
Muslims is their own dishonor. Their personal sense of worth is threatened. I am convinced that this explains why many, even moderate Muslims, who do not support the militant view of jihad find it hard to decisively denounce al-Qaeda. At a deep level they sense al-Qaeda is striving to restore power and honor to a shamed Islam and they empathize even when they personally do not buy in to the ideology and methodology of militant Islam.

Followers of Jesus should be sensitive to this issue because Jesus himself understood the deep need to receive honor. The apostle Paul admonishes believers in Jesus in Rome to “outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:10). If truly practiced this principle could revolutionize relationships. Paul can urge this because the power of God in Jesus has taken away his shame of sin and honored him as a child of God (Rom 1:11-16). In essence, though he has not stated it, Siljander has followed this principle in his personal face to face meetings with Muslims. Showing them honor has removed their sense of shame and disrespect and enabled a relationship of mutual honor and respect to develop.

Siljander’s Quest and Contributions

Reading Siljander gives one the sense he believes he is on a lonely quest with few fellow travelers. The people he quotes to represent Christianity are usually those who think similarly to the old fundamentalist Mark Siljander. I would suggest to him that Franklin Graham (218) and Pope Benedict XVI (217) do not represent all of Jesus’ followers. There is a small but growing group of Jesus believers who think in many ways like Siljander. They recognize the good in Islam and the Qur’an. They love, honor, and respect Muslims. They rejoice in the “messianic Muslim” movement that does not expect Muslims to become cultural Christians and they just look to support Jesus’ followers no matter the cultural label. Siljander needs to expand his already wide friendship base by seeking out and interacting with this special band of people.

In many ways Siljander’s book parallels the writing of Philip Jenkins. His 2002 book, The Next Christendom, published by Oxford University Press has made a significant impact. Jenkins argues that Christianity is not in serious decline as many in the secular “global north” believe but is advancing rapidly in the former mission lands of the “global south.” Colonial collapse was political not religious and a dynamic form of the Christian faith, somewhat different from mainstream Christianity of the global north, is flourishing and spreading in the former colonial areas of the world. Knowledge of this
fact did not begin with Jenkins. Many Evangelical Christians, often led by Ralph Winter (Winter 1969), knew and wrote of this phenomenon for at least the last thirty to forty years. It is simply the fact of who Jenkins is—a history professor in an Ivy League university published by Oxford University Press rather than a mission professor in an evangelical seminary published by a Christian press—that he has been able to catch the attention of the mainline media and academia.

Siljander’s book is much the same. Many of the facts he presents and the attitudes he promotes have been known and often been espoused by a small but significant group of Christian scholars for a number of years. Siljander is a non-theologian and former congressman and diplomat moving in high circles. He is published by a secular press and supported by Muslim and Western academics. What has been in general known and taught for years by a small group of Jesus followers has now, because of Siljander’s work, become widely known and explained to a wider audience.

In my opinion, both Jenkins and Siljander have greatly benefitted Christianity and the world by communicating widely and effectively several key concepts and understandings that can hopefully bring healing.

Conclusion

While much more could be said, I close with two simple things we can learn from Siljander’s work. The first applies to the global north in general—to the whole population but especially to Christians. Most people are woefully ignorant of not only Christianity but of non-Christian religions in particular. Most people in the global north know little or nothing not only about Islam but also Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism, etc. If this book does anything it points out how crucial religion is to all of life, including politics, economics, international relations, etc. All areas of life are deeply and irrevocably related to religion.

Two basic reasons lie behind this ignorance. First, America and Europe have a long standing Christian history. Christianity has had a semi-monopoly on religion so many do not see a need to learn about or interact with those who are different from the Christian majority. Second, the dominant secular culture is dismissive of religion. Religion is often seen as a narrow specialized area of life which has less and less influence. This is patently false. No one can seriously read Siljander and not be impressed with the broad comprehensive sweep of Islam’s influence not only on Muslim life but also in the global village of our world if not on our life in the West as well.
The study of world religions should be core educational curriculum along with math, language, and history. This should be true of all educational levels even in government schools. This is even more imperative for Christian schools because of the international character of Jesus followers. The **deadly misunderstanding** that Siljander so eloquently explains is much broader than just Christianity and Islam but stretches to include all religions.

The second lesson is one that especially applies to my particular field of missiology. We as missiologists must learn to communicate better to our broader society and culture. We needed Jenkins and Siljander because we have not done well at telling our story to others. We must work to avoid other deadly misunderstandings and hopefully help prevent additional clashes between religious groups. The least we can do initially is to encourage not only the reading of Siljander’s book but also to personally become involved in a movement to practice love and understanding in our broken and angry world.

**Works Cited**


Faith Development in Context (FDIC) is an “incarnational” and redemptive approach to mission that eventually leads to the emergence of end-time Jesus movements mainly among people groups of major world religions. This happens when the past and present activity of God in the history of each community is retrieved and the gospel is communicated in understandable, relevant, and meaningful forms through indigenous spiritual change agents.

“Our goal in not just to proclaim the gospel and to see a few individuals enter the Kingdom of God. Our purpose is nothing short of establishing naturally multiplying communities of believers who follow Jesus within their cultural norms to the extent they can with integrity” (Adams and Adams 2009:141).
When engaging in mission, Christian witnesses have the rare opportunity of standing where the veil between heaven and earth thins out. From this privileged position God’s witnesses often can catch a glimpse of how God’s glory transforms peoples and communities from within. In this chapter I will describe this transforming process as I have witnessed it and studied it for the past fourteen years in numerous communities both inside and outside the 10/40 Window. I will explore the key components that lead to the development of faith in high identity and high religious practice communities. I will also offer a practitioner’s description of the resulting Jesus movements.

Additionally, I will explore in detail the components of what years ago Jerald Whitehouse and I coined as “Faith Development in Context.” I will limit this chapter to the offering of a practitioner’s description without entering into a lengthy and detailed exploration of the theological basis for each component. I will assume that this description will be sufficiently self-evident to justify this approach. As a field practitioner I am open to further dialogue and interaction that would clarify or provide a stronger biblical framework for FDIC work.

This chapter will define FDIC, describe four basic missiological assumptions that frame FDIC work, offer seven cultural, socio-religious factors that are the key components of FDIC, list four fruitful practices that contribute to the development of movements, and finally share three ongoing activities that nurture the process of spiritual growth.

**Definition of Terms**

*Faith Development* is the development of a faith focused on spiritual development rather than on a mere intellectual assent to truth. Faith is a gift from God “that comes from hearing” (Rom 10:17), so doctrinal and biblical content clearly feed into our understanding of who God is and how he deals with the sin problem. That understanding in turn feeds into the development of faith. Because a mere knowledge of God does not necessarily lead to the development of faith, FDIC practitioners begin by calling disciples to a deepening faith relationship with God through Jesus. The weight of God’s holiness crashes into sinful desires and moves the heart, mind, and soul to deeds of obedience to God’s law. This is at the core of a spiritual transformation that challenges people to heart-felt submission to God, but not out of want of reward or out of fear of judgment.

*In Context* refers to a receptor-oriented communication of the gospel
which becomes embodied in the life of the host community as core to their identity as God’s end-time people. In context means that the context or the realities of the host community must be taken into consideration so that the gospel will be perceived not only as truthful but also as relevant. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of relevance, for being relevant means that the gospel answers the host community’s longing, heartfelt needs, and affirms whatever is godly and biblical in their culture.

In summary, FDIC combines a biblical understanding of God’s self-revelation in the past and his activities in these last days with careful consideration of pressing sociological, anthropological, and theological issues that the new disciples face within their communities.

In seeking to understand God’s activity in the world, God’s witnesses also encounter the tragic reality of the presence of Satan. It is crucial to discern the specific local forms by which the deceiver holds people captive and to discover his devices and tools that obscure the character, the law, and the government of God.

In other words, what are the particular expressions of the “Great Controversy” in the given community and, how do those expressions fit into the larger meta-narrative of what God is doing on the earth. Understanding and operating within the Great Controversy worldview, gives FDIC practitioners a unique Adventist feature that will be explored in more detail in another section of this chapter.

Towards a “Working” Definition of FDIC

Why a “working” definition? Because this is still a work in process. Let me explain. As God’s witnesses go to the ends of the earth to see what God is doing in establishing his dominion, understanding is sharpened, advanced, and new treasures are found that had not previously been understood. This will impact the understanding of mission. Therefore, in order to reflect this reality the following definition carries the sign “under construction.”

I would further define FDIC as a redemptive missional approach by which the gospel is embodied in word and deed in the host community under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Such an approach takes place through a process of critical contextualization which eventually leads to a worldview transformation from within. No dimension of reality remains untouched when God’s story enters the community story and fuses with it. All elements of faith, worship, values, cultural practices, and even everyday life will look different as a result of this encounter.
Let me stress that FDIC is not a new method, the latest trend, nor a clever technique, but a return to a New Testament model of mission as found in the Gospels and particularly in the book of Acts. As practitioners we are constantly wrestling with the stories of the Bible, to gain deeper insights to better respond to each new situation. But ultimately we are reminded that mission is God’s activity, is God centered, and is God led. The Holy Spirit is the driving force who makes change real. Our role is to contribute in any way that God calls us to within his plans. Thus, at times we have discovered that in different communities God is drawing people in a variety of expressions that are challenging our former notions of “what to do.” God has sometimes sent dreams that have enabled the discipling movement to discover fresh meanings in old practices; he has given signs and created divine appointments, and has bonded people’s hearts together who formerly were enemies. God’s Holy Spirit has revealed the true place of his Word by often using the existing sacred text of the local community.

For me personally, engaging in FDIC has been the most challenging and rewarding thing I have ever done. It has strengthened my faith in God and expanded my understanding of God’s mercy in reaching the world he loves so deeply. The Bible, read from other people’s perspective and challenged by their questions has become ever richer and has revealed the depth of wisdom found in God’s Word. As I have ministered to others, God has ministered to me through them.

In this process, God has used some key people to whom I will always be indebted. Thank you Jerald Whitehouse for your understanding of mission, your keen heart for the Muslim people, and your deep insights into the Bible, for these blessings will continue to impact my life and will inspire me in the years to come. May God continue to guide you as you continue to guide others.

Four Foundational Premises

Premise One

“The light of God is ever shining amid the darkness of heathenism.”

(White 1940:59)

God’s Kingdom is present wherever there are people who live under the lordship of God, that follow his commandments, and have the faithfulness of Jesus. Our role as God’s witnesses is to call people closer to the center of God’s
Kingdom, to reject all darkness, and to live in full submission. Ellen White helps us to understand that even among the pagans there are people to whom the Holy Spirit has been imparted and they are following his promptings in obedience even though they might not know it (White 1940:638, 639). By calling people into the center, we acknowledge the guiding activity of God in their life and clarify who the One is whom they have been answering to. We invite them to continue to live under the lordship of God but now through Jesus they have a more complete disclosure of the full revelation of God as presented in the Bible. We bring to their attention the principles of God’s government as established in his law, and disclose how by faith people enter into a saving relationship with God. At times people have traits that reflect the faithfulness of Jesus in their characters even though they had not known him. In such situations it is our privilege to point to the author and finisher of their faith—Jesus Christ.

Premise Two

_God has left his footprints among all people groups in various forms._

Today in every land there are those who are honest in heart, and upon these the light of heaven is shining. If they continue faithful in following that which they understand to be duty, they will be given increased light, until, like Naaman of old, they will be constrained to acknowledge that “there is no God in all the earth,” save the living God, the Creator. (White 1917:253)

Faith Development in Context is a redemptive “up-down” approach to mission in which one attempts to discern mission from God’s “throne-room perspective.” It is “up” as in redemptive, “down” as in incarnational.

An important premise and practice that informs our approach involves understanding that God has not left himself without a witness in any community (Rom 1:18-20; Acts 17:26-27; Amos 9:21; Acts 15:17) and that such a witness is part of every people’s spiritual heritage. When this revelation is retrieved it allows God to reveal himself from within—through an incarnational approach.

What this means is that both the discipler and the recipient community actively seek to discover traces of God’s activity in their own past history and in present events while at the same time attempting to determine the expected future God has for that host community. God’s presence and activity in the receptor community often go unperceived by the cross-cultural discipler due to unfamiliar “incarnational” local forms through
which God has revealed himself to that people in the past through sacred ceremonies, symbols, rites, sacred writings, prophecies and biblical truths that are inherent to the people group. I have observed that God has not only left evidence of his activity in the past, but today is significantly disclosing himself in visions and dreams within many Muslim people groups.

God’s activity can not only be found in the forms of a culture, but also can be discerned among the “persons of peace” that are usually present in each community. This concept of looking for the person of peace is based on Luke 10:5-7 where Jesus instructed his disciples, “When you enter a house offer peace. If a Person of Peace is present, your peace will rest on him. Stay in that house, eat and drink what is put before you, and do not move around from house to house.” This spiritual “gatekeeper” is the person God has prepared for that community and is one who can promote righteousness that can lead to positive social and religious change (see also Erich Baumgartner’s chapter in this book).

The FDIC model seeks to offer useful tools for retrieving these important missional dimensions. Once the discipler understands these concepts, it is easier to cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in aligning and bringing God’s will on earth to bear (as it is in heaven), and all this under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

As God’s witnesses begin to comprehend the incarnational presence of God in these last days within each distinct people group, it helps them (and us) realize that God is preparing every nation, tribe, people, and language to stand before the throne of the Lamb. When we realize the extent of the actions of the Holy Spirit among all people, John’s prophecy in Rev 7:9, 10 where these groups will comprise the great multitude that no one can number becomes a kingdom reality.

FDIC practitioners seek to answer several questions. Where has God already been at work in a specific people group even before the cross-cultural discipler arrived? How can biblical faith take root and become integral to the receptor community? What will the expression of God’s end-time people look like among a given group of a major world religion?

Are these questions valid? I believe they are. Due to resistance to change among the adherents of the major world religions, it becomes necessary to ask new questions. John Travis, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary and a major proponent of indigenous Jesus movements among people of the major world religions, recently pointed out the need to rethink mission beyond the animist and pagan tribal contexts. He explained that historically “Christianity has successfully established a lasting presence and even
become the official religion of regions that formerly were animist tribes; that is Western Europe, South America, and other parts of the world. But in countries in which Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Shintoism is the faith of the majority, Christianity by and large has not been able to get deeply rooted except in isolated pockets. This should lead us to ask why the Christian message resonated among certain animist pagans but failed to impact nations where a major world religion already existed?” (personal communication with author).

The goal of mission is to establish and nurture a vibrant faith community of believers in “every tribe, language and people and nation,” and not merely the conversion of a few selected individuals. In other words, FDIC approaches mission from a community perspective. The yeast of the gospel is planted along existing social networks that are connected to groups, clans, and families. This very crucial dimension will be explored in more detail later in the chapter.

As corollary of the redemptive approach, communication becomes incarnational—utilizing the local thought patterns, local logic system, local cultural expressions, and local art forms, music, and analogies. This is crucial since an incarnational expression of the gospel more easily results in spontaneous growth along existing social networks.

**Premise Three**

*Every people group has their own worldview, cultural matrix, and heart-felt needs that the gospel answers and transforms.*

Robert Darnell’s article, “Peopling the Earth” (unpublished paper available from the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations), describes an important Adventist foundation for missions among non-Christians. He noted that from the time of creation God’s purpose has been for people to be fruitful, multiply, and fill (replenish) the earth (Gen 1:28; 9:1, 7). God sent people out to populate all the earth, but they refused and instead lived concentrated in one location. God got the people moving out by confounding their language. As they spread throughout the world they formed new communities, developed different cultures, and vastly different worldviews that reflected the new realities they encountered but also the distorting influence of Satan. Language became the collective tool by which their shared thoughts about their world, about reality, about God, about what constitutes right and wrong, about each other, and about the natural world were expressed.
Darnell also noted the important place that geography played in this process as people groups interacted with their environment around them in an attempt to subdue it and make it inhabitable. God was not absent as this process unfolded and continues to unfold. He is guiding the affairs of every community and is intimately interested in embedding his laws and revelation in every culture and worldview. This premise, which is closely related to the previous one, becomes evident in Paul’s words when he says: “From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:26, 27).

I believe that an important Adventist insight is the one that stresses that not only has God been at work in his creation but also Satan is part of what Adventists have termed the Great Controversy. This principle, that there is a battle raging for control of each people group and each individual, is very liberating for the host community since they can develop an authentic appreciation for everything in their culture that carries a positive witness to God while rejecting those things which reflect demonic influence. They can clearly identify who the enemy is while realizing that it is not their culture as a whole that is evil but only those elements of evil that have embedded themselves in their culture and worldview.

**Premise Four**

*God has limited his self-revelation among non-Judeo/Christian communities.*

It is helpful in understanding the FDIC model to realize that God has limited his self-revelation among non-Judeo/Christian communities. This helps explain why they have not received the core of the plan of salvation or understood Jesus’ full identity. This also helps us understand why many people from major world religions strongly deny some of the core biblical beliefs, such as the divinity of Jesus. This also helps explain why so many are polytheists.

My personal observation and study on this topic has led me to conclude that while God has revealed certain key aspects of himself, the revelation he has given to non-Judeo/Christian communities consists mainly of his will and basic attributes of himself (see Rom 1:20). Note that there are key aspects in the culture that point to greater truths regarding the plan of salvation and the Messiah, and these are usually found within the sacred ceremonies and sacrificial system of the people. Often though, the meanings
of those ceremonies have become obscured and only partially understood by most. For example, Confucius’ greatest desire was to know the meaning of the broader sacrifice that was annually held in China since the beginning of their history. Though he traveled the nation looking for its meaning no one knew, but all knew, it was important. Confucius told his people that though they did not know the meaning of the ceremony, the future of their people depended upon its continued observance and happy would be those that would one day learn its meaning. These symbols known as redemptive analogies are powerful windows to disclose the gospel to the host community. Thus it is apparent that although God has limited his verbal self-revelation he has left in forms and symbols the greater truths about the plan of salvation in an “encoded” system.

Why would he do that? Allow me to suggest that it is God’s intent to win the cosmic conflict from a point of utter weakness. It would seem that due to the accusations leveled against God, his character, his law, and his government, God chose to limit his self-revelation to the apparent weak and fragile human lineage coming from Abraham. In the end, the universe will clearly understand the superiority of God’s government for “good will triumph over evil” not by force but by the power of truth in seeming weakness.

This is seen in the fact that God revealed the truth of the Messiah to Abraham, through the line of Isaac, through the line of Jacob, and finally through the spiritual line of Jesus and his disciples. This lineage was carried by weak and fragile human beings. First, the promise of the Messiah was given to Abraham, a man married to a barren woman. In the case of Jesus he entrusted the message of the kingdom to a group of men that were uneducated, unrefined, and that had many weaknesses, but this is the story of his kingdom that out of great weakness can come great strength in the power of God. It is in this strength out of weakness that evidence is given to the superiority of the government of God.

This messianic line has been given as a gift to the world, appointed to be a “kingdom of priests,” not selected just for personal salvation, but called to give a message of salvation to the world. But unfortunately this line, time and time again, has become obsessed with their social/religious identity equating it as a prerequisite to salvation. This line has often been blind to God’s activity around them and outside their socio-religious community.

Research has shown that most peoples of the world have seven or eight of the ten commandments and have a significant knowledge of biblical truth. God has also placed redemptive analogies in their culture that point to the
great controversy and messianic redemption. For example, in the highlands of Bolivia among the Aymara and Quechua people, there is an annual ceremony that takes place for three days. Villages come together and draw lots to determine who will represent good and who will represent the powers of evil. This ceremony commemorates the great war in heaven between good and evil. After three days of playing war the communities come back together and sacrifice a llama with great joy. This ceremony to the God of heaven is celebrated by people who have traditionally worshipped Inti, the sun God.

The Aymara and Quechua people have known though that the real God is Veracocha, the Creator of heaven and earth. However, over time they admit that they have forgotten how to worship him. There are also ancient prophecies that indicate that one day a people would arrive that will teach them how to worship Veracocha once again. This is just a little representation of hidden truths that are still discernable among most people groups in the world religions. For example, there is strong evidence that Indus and Chinese people in their past were monotheists for their sacred writing appears to point to this. It is also true that most people groups do not live up to all the light they have and much has been forgotten or misunderstood. This was also true of Christianity during various periods in Christian history. In Islam, for example, the idea that Jesus did not die and was not crucified is based upon one weak verse which can be translated “the Jews thought they killed him but didn’t.” There are three clear Qur’anic verses that refer to Jesus saying, “the day I die and the day I am resurrected,” while another one says, “the day I die the day I am resurrected for the purification of many.”

Thus it is evident that not only have people groups lost sight of what has been revealed but also most people groups have redemptive analogies that point to greater truth that is just a part of God’s self-disclosure. This is where the work of the cross-cultural discipler comes into the picture for disciples are to make disciples and bring the lost or hidden truths to the forefront and disclose the good news about God.

Ellen White in the book Evangelism has given Adventists a lot of information and a wealth of mission principles that should enable them to discern God’s activity outside the Christian community.

Finally, it seems that God has limited his self-disclosure not only to give evidence of the power of God, but also that the sender communities and cross cultural disciplers may be enriched by seeing God through the eyes of the host communities where they faithfully witness. Many times new believers discern biblical truths that the sending communities have been blind to. Thus, God’s witnesses are witnessed to by the baby Christians.
Seven Core Internal Cultural and Socio-religious Components

FDIC practitioners operate on the basis of the previous premises but are not tied to them alone. As a result of those four premises an additional seven core cultural components have been identified that are integral to the gospel being birthed into a major religion context. These seven components have become synonymous for the most part with FDIC.

Empirical evidence indicates that when more of the seven components and their sub factors are present in a ministry, the stronger it will be both spiritually and numerically. The first two components have to do with sociological factors, the next two are spiritual/religious factors, and the final three deal with anthropological issues.

Sociological Components

Birth Community Identity (BCI) Factor

The first and most important factor identified for allowing a Jesus movement to emerge into high practice and high identity areas is for new believers to retain their birth community identity. The more identity they retain, the stronger and more effective will be their testimony and witness through their new life in Christ. The following areas are critical in this regard.

1. Family Identity. Great effort must be exerted to preserve one’s place in the family and retain one’s legitimate relationship as a son, daughter, mother, father, or husband. The new believer is taught to honor their father, mother, and elders, and to give them a high place of honor in their lives in accordance with the fifth commandment as long as this does not compromise their faith. This translates into not exchanging their name for a foreign one as has often been customary for baptismal candidates. Changing one’s name is interpreted as a blatant affront to one’s family and a source of deep shame for the family in their community. Also, the new spiritual identity of the believer does not need to be asserted by belittling the tenets of the family’s faith and practice or by putting down their Holy Books or their Prophet. Witness should rather focus on lifting up the truth of God as found in the Bible. Truth has a way of exposing falsehood in God’s appointed time. Finally, it is foundational for the new disciples to be able to convey their new faith and relationship with God in Christ by using means that are familiar to their family. The new believer’s identity is not to be described in institutional terms but rather in relational terms and in terms of a new heart experience and spiritual growth.

2. Society and Citizenship. Disciples need to be sensitive to the “neural points” of their community. They need to be careful not to provoke
unnecessary tension. For example, publically insulting the Prophet Mohammad among Muslims is bound to provoke an angry response and even endanger the new believer’s safety. In some cases, women who are Muslim background disciples have chosen to retain their headscarf to avoid being perceived as women who have lost their morals and respect toward their husbands.

3. Religious and Spiritual Identity. Disciples from major world religions might chose not to join a formally organized Christian church for a variety of reasons. Churches often are associated with a foreign presence or minority groups in their country that use forms of worship or even a religious language not familiar to the new believer. Converting to Christianity in some parts of the world is equated to becoming a traitor to one’s community, family, and country since this was the faith of the colonial masters. Thus, the new disciples might choose to fellowship with groups of other believers from their own cultural background who are also part of a local Jesus movement where they can grow in Christ and bond with each other.

Often these disciples do not refer to themselves as Christians—which is a term that has often been distorted in that cultural setting and which carries heavy immoral baggage. Instead they often use locally appropriate terms that more accurately describe their new identity in Christ. Over the years I have come across a variety of expressions that local believers feel could better convey their new faith. Unfortunately, these terms have sometimes been misunderstood by outsiders as a denial of one’s faith, disloyalty, or a way to conveniently seek to avoid persecution out of fear. I do not believe that this is the case.

Those who choose to retain their birth identity feel called to remain as an active witness in the place and community where they received a call to become followers of Jesus. They feel love for their land and people, but above all retain a deep desire to serve God as yeast in the dough for God’s end-time local people and thus remain as a sustainable, local witness. Does this mean that if they choose to retain the name of their former religion that they are falling into syncretism? Not if they qualify that former term. A common qualification is to describe themselves as a Messianic Jew or a Muslim follower of Isa al-Masih, or even a Hindu Bakhti. This enables them to safely explain themselves by retaining some of their own content in their identity, rather than being mislabeled before they even have a chance to open their mouth. I have noted that those who qualify their identity are often asked what it means and this gives them an opportunity to witness. In my case, as an outsider, I have favored the use of an Adventist identity over
any other term. Again, this is helpful but often the inquirer wants to know, do you mean Christian? Even when I qualify what Christian means for me, there is a still a barrier that Muslim Background Believers do not face.

Note that there are also varying degrees of involvement that a new believer might choose to experience in the religious life of the birth community.

A. There are those that do not attend any religious services or participate in any rituals or ceremonies. But neither do not criticize or attack those who follow the old ways in the old religion. These disciples usually see themselves as secret Christians, but they have a somewhat split identity and their influence is limited.

B. There are those who attend certain services such as burials, births, and other high festivals from time to time. Attendance at these events does not prove they are an actual part of the community, but at least it keeps them involved at the fringes.

C. There are also some that regularly attend community and religious functions as active change agents, as “the yeast or leaven” that will draw the community closer to the center of the kingdom of God. Field experience and research has shown that those who are engaged in the center of religious life are more prone to lead a local movement. This challenges the old myth that in mission it is better to reach out to the secular sector or the lukewarm adherents (at times referred to as moderates) while avoiding the deeply religious people. Once again, experience has shown that often deeply religious people are also more receptive and committed to the gospel when they become believers. They are the ones seeking God and connecting with him through the means and forms that are familiar to them in their faith community.

I should clarify that in no way does participation in community life imply an uncritical acceptance of one’s birth religion. Indeed, new believers are led through a process of careful critical analysis of the old ways by applying the principles of the Bible. Aspects of the local culture that are incompatible with the Bible are to be clearly rejected or when possible, reinterpreted like the use of the Christmas tree (White 2001:481, 482) to convey biblical meanings (the biblical guidelines for the process of reinterpreting cultural forms will be discussed later in this chapter). It is in this reinterpretation context where the greatest convergences of Christ movements emerge as people transform their society and place it under the lordship of Christ from within.

4. Emotional Identity. New believers continue to feel a strong emotional attachment to their family and people. This emotional bonding grows even stronger as the new believers discover God’s activity among their own
people. Their hearts are moved when they realize the many ways God has left a witness of himself in their culture. This bond is further strengthened as they realize that God not only loves the world, but that he loves their very own community and wishes to see his rule fully established among them. As they come to understand Christ’s role in the great controversy they can more clearly see the strongholds and deceptions of the evil one. Many, at that point, have a growing desire to see their people and family experience the freedom they have found in Christ, so they become agents sharing a call to repentance for their blindness to God’s presence in their past and for their rebellion to his call in the present. Over the years I have sensed the Holy Spirit moving the hearts of the new believers to have great compassion for their own family and people and to have a growing sense of responsibility before God for the lost among their people.

The emerging movement, even though it remains a part of the birth community, has an end-time, remnant identity in Christ. This I believe was one of Jerald Whitehouse’s major contributions to Adventist mission thought as he discovered a redemptive window into the Islamic spiritual heritage and culture upon which to build an end-time remnant community. It is a window into the very heart of Islam, which when the gospel shines through, it has a powerful impact at the very heart of the Muslim. It impacts the key spiritual motivators in a culture and belief system (Whitehouse 2002:10-13). Thus, he helped give Jesus Muslims an identity, a remnant identity, that has been preserved within their culture to this day and proven to be a blessing for the thousands who have embraced it.

**Existing Social Networks Factor**

The second most important component in establishing groups among community oriented cultures is to do so within existing social networks. The discipler should see these networks as possible vehicles the gospel can penetrate and utilize instead of creating new social structures for the same purpose but which would not be as effective. New social structures are often perceived as competing structures and are more likely to be rejected or easily exposed as foreign implants in the indigenous soil. Therefore, it is better to establish work that is based around the family, clan, or tribe, or that uses the already existing social and religious associations. As faith develops within this context, it is easier to create the momentum needed for an ongoing people movement. Within these types of structures, small groups (using local forms) often emerge for study, worship, fellowship, and witness. Because of this dependence on existing associations these types of
ministries are generically known as insider ministries.

From a careful reading of the story of Israel in the Old Testament it is apparent that God does not disengage from culture or social structures, but instead works for the spiritual revitalization and purification of a culture from within. Therefore, when the existing social networks come in contact with the yeast of the gospel they do not remain the same, but are transformed, affirmed, and judged. In other words, FDIC attempts to establish redeemed social networks as God’s sovereignty through Jesus is once again reestablished among his people. This redemptive work results in a redefinition of the collective self and identity.

The more influence a person has among the existing social networks, the more they will have in the emerging Jesus movement. Usually the person with the most influence becomes the leader of the group on a national or regional level as they seek to transform their existing network, society, or religious organization.

The guiding questions in this regard that we seek to answer is, Is the leader ministering alongside already existing social networks or is the leader trying to create a parallel system? What is the possible impact of one approach versus the other approach?

This characteristic of working within existing social networks is at the very core of the FDIC approach and helps explain the growth the various ministries are currently experiencing. When the gospel enters into large groups (either families, clans, a whole mosque, or a tribe) what happens is that the new believers, from the very beginning, have a support community around them. They grow spiritually in this community and they witness in this community. For community oriented peoples this is very affirming and offers the support group conscious people desperately need.

Spiritual Components

Recognizing God’s Footprints in a Culture—The R Factor

At the very core of FDIC is the need to identify God’s footprints in the local culture. Where is God already known or present in the religious heritage of the host community? Which core biblical truths are known? Where has truth been obscured, distorted, or forgotten?

These gems of truth become part of the building blocks for the path of spiritual progression that is used in the discipleship process. They affirm truth that is present and reaffirm truth that has been lost sight of within the local culture. Again, this was one of Dr. Whitehouse’s major contributions
as he sought the seeds of Adventist beliefs and practices in the qur’anic text.

Retrieving God’s truth from the local culture leads people to a deep ownership of the gospel as they realize that God has never abandoned them. He has, after all, been there all along as made clear in their new understanding of the meaning of ancient religious traditions, symbols, and ceremonies. God was always reaching out to them, even when they did not know it. Before, in their times of ignorance, this was pardoned, but now that they are aware of deeper truths they are faced with the question of what they are going to do with it. How are they going to respond, now that they are without excuse? Are they going to repent and turn from their time of ignorance and walk in the light?

It is also important to note that as the new believers edge closer to God via the path outlined in the Bible, that more and more allegiance is shifted until God’s Word as found in the Bible becomes the rudder for the new movement and the final source of authority.

**Locating People of Peace—The Peace Factor**

Integral to building an insider ministry is identifying within the existing networks the man or women of peace (see Luke 10:6). Many times entire groups have been located who are already being led by God within their given community and are preparing for the last days under the guidance of a person of peace. Once such a person or group has been identified, mutual spiritual dialogue should ensue and continue through a process of spiritual progression until the seekers come to full faith in Jesus. The person of peace often is then the catalyst for bringing the entire web of relationships among family and friends to a similar faith in Christ.

In practice this happens by recognizing where God has already been working through such a person or people who are known for showing hospitality, kindness, and other important kingdom values as outlined in the constitution of the kingdom as found in Matt 5-7. Christ taught his disciples to initiate their work through a person of peace in the communities where they went and not to move around from house to house. I have known several of these leaders, people of peace, whose influence has opened up entire communities to the harvest.

**Anthropological Considerations—Developing Local Theologies**

In this section I shall speak to the three main anthropological categories which FDIC considers significant in the development of local biblical
explanations that impact the deeper issues of a local culture. The development of local theologies weave biblical truths into the rich diamonds of truth that already exist in the religion of the host culture in such a way as to support biblical truth.

**The Cultural Matrix—The Matrix Factor**

Basic to an FDIC approach is comprehending the emic cultural matrix so that local biblical understandings can be developed for addressing indigenous issues and so that biblical explanations can be communicated more clearly. Take for example, the traditional Christian explanations regarding penal substitutional atonement.

If the traditional Western approach is taken to explain the message of the Cross for people in an honor/shame culture, most of those hearing such a presentation will feel that the Cross is meaningless or unnecessary. FDIC practitioners recognize the importance of using a variety of atonement metaphors and looking at them from the shame/honor cultural perspective. This approach enables the story of the Cross to convey its message with power, for after all, at the Cross Jesus dealt not only with our guilt but also with our shame (see chapter by Linda Smith in this book).

There are basically three important cultural matrixes. Every people group has some shade or mix of these three. Western peoples have a predominately redemption-guilt cultural matrix that pursues freedom from guilt; hamitic and tribal peoples have a peace-fear matrix that searches for protection and power; and Eastern peoples tend to follow an honor-shame cultural matrix that when shamed search for restoration of honor. Theologies developed in these various cultural settings must respond to the deep sense of need that each type of culture displays.

**Emic Heart Felt Needs—The Felt Needs Factor**

FDIC practitioners have found that for a message to be relevant it needs to address heart-felt needs that are already deeply embedded in the host culture. These could be existential questions that are not being fully or appropriately answered by traditional answers. These could include problems in the society that have spiraled out of control and that need spiritual solutions.

Jerald Whitehouse has pointed out two main heart-felt needs among Muslim peoples: fear, and the desire to receive blessings. Muslim fear is often associated with the Day of Judgment and the uncertainty of salvation, but can also include fear of *jinns* (evil spirits) which has led to a host of Islamic folk beliefs and practices.
The second heart-felt need is the need of blessing, which in the case of Islam is also a key religious motivator. Traditional Islamic societies yearn for blessings, both from God and their elders. This need is the glue that runs through the Bible studies that teach how to receive richer blessings from God. The Bible lessons also stress how those who receive God's blessing can in turn bless others. These two heart-felt needs must be identified early on and then answered in the light of the gospel message.

**Worldview—The Worldview Factor**

FDIC recognizes the importance of the indigenous worldview and the need for the emerging Jesus movement to work within it and not impose a Western worldview on the people. The gospel not only answers the highest ideal of any given worldview, but must also challenge and transform it. In the case of Islam, “tawhid” (the oneness of God) is part of their ideal worldview, and yet, only in Christ can anyone be truly brought back to “at-one-ment” with God.

**Four Key Indigenous Fruitful Practices Needed for the Development of a Movement**

For a strong movement to develop, four fruitful practices have to be established: (1) an indigenous discipleship path to grow spiritual progression has to be developed from within, (2) the language used in the Bible translation must communicate to the heart of the people by using religious language that is familiar to the major non-Christian communities, (3) indigenous leaders and people of peace who are deeply connected to their land and people must emerge, and (4) in order for the movement to become strong it needs to reach the point of becoming financially self-sustainable.

**Indigenous Discipleship Path**

In order to establish a mature, discipled community, a path of spiritual mentoring must take place. Through this procedure, the believer learns what it means to be part of God’s end-time community, what values should regulate life, and how the law of God, through the imbuing of the Holy Spirit, enables one to live a life of obedience. Each step contributes to a growing relationship with God in Jesus as biblical principles are embodied in real life situations. As the spiritual leaders walk alongside the new believers, they need to be able to identify the areas that are more difficult for people in that
context to understand and then build carefully and gradually a platform that can facilitate the indigenous discipleship path. Take for instance the issue of the divinity of Christ. If one were to focus in the beginning on this difficult matter, it is likely that one would never move past the first meeting.

Jesus, as he walked among people, offered a progressive revelation of his character and identity. As his followers, his example should guide our practice. Jerald Whitehouse developed a discipleship path based on a simple six-step model which gradually discloses Jesus for who he is. The process focuses on Jesus and his role in the great controversy. It invites those who are seeking after God to be a part of God’s last-day people who are preparing for Christ's second coming.

Over the years, revised versions of that model (which Whitehouse called the Spiritual Progression Path) have been developed by various local leaders, but I have noted that even those who had not seen his model developed a similar path with similar steps. Whitehouse has carefully identified the biblical and doctrinal content that best fits each step so there is a gradual progression and growth in understanding of biblical truth. However, he would be the first one to admit that his work is but a guiding tool and not intended to limit what God can do. God has a variety of ways that can only be recognized once the trainer is in tune with him and his Word. No check list can ever replace that.

The most important agent active in bringing change is the Holy Spirit. Whitehouse had that clear from the onset, for it is the Holy Spirit who must convict of truth, and as I have been able to confirm by observation, it is he who in God’s time enlightens and brings about the life changing evidence that the spiritual leaders have advocated and worked for.

Again, Whitehouse knew this and consequently incorporated this important principle into his study guides in fourteen progressive stages that gradually presented Muslims with the evidence God has given to aid in understanding the role and identity of Jesus. Because of the nature of this approach, over the years he and I have encouraged, affirmed, and assisted local leaders in preparing their own relevant materials, rather than offering a one size fits all solution.

Indigenous Language Bible Translation

FDIC considers that a language-specific Bible is foundational to any Jesus movement. Though there are Bibles in many languages—Arabic, Bengali, Urdu, and so forth, these have usually been translated using the religious
language of minority people groups and are not easily understood by the majority Muslim population. In places where the complete Bible or even portions of the Bible have been translated using the familiar language of the Muslim majority population, those in Jesus movements have preferred this type of translation and those user friendly translations have been a key component in the growth and expansion of the Jesus movement.

Indigenous Leaders

FDIC practitioners are aware of the importance of enabling indigenous leadership to emerge out of existing social networks. When foreigners become the local leaders, the emerging church plants tend to depend on them and movements are unlikely to result. The return home of a foreign leader can also have devastating consequences for the emerging church. Because of this, FDIC has focused on equipping and affirming local leaders. This focus has proven to be crucial for sustainability. Foreigners can have a role as supporters, prayer partners, advisors, learners, or mentors for the local spiritual leaders, but leadership should be indigenous.

Financial Sustainability

Finally, it is important for FDIC sponsored groups to develop financial sustainability. Financial ties to foreign organizations can cause problems and endanger the lives and security of those involved in the movements. Financial dependence can also affect the spiritual health of the community by cutting the nerve of stewardship and giving the impression that the local believers are not responsible for the sharing of what they are learning.

The Process Involved in Spiritual Growth

What could be at first sight perceived as the coexistence of truth and falsehood in the context of “loving concern” is better explained as a gradual disclosure of truth in a lengthy and gradual process. Loving concern leads us to wait for the work of the Holy Spirit to take root before moving to the next stage of development. The whole process could take up to several years.

The process involved in spiritual growth is, like any growth path, never fully completed for there are always new developments ahead. But I can sum up what takes place in the three following modes: (1) personal discipleship, (2) formation of small groups within the existing social networks, and (3) a four-step process of critical contextualization.
Personal Discipleship

One-on-one discipling and mentoring is important. The spiritual leaders and disciple-makers lead the new disciples to live under the lordship of Christ in two main areas. First, by giving them a spiritual progression path, and second, helping them to gain freedom in Christ from any spiritualistic baggage or addictive activities that could be trapping them. We are learning about this area, but still have more work to do. We need to better understand the premises underlying certain spiritualistic practices and beliefs, and we need to learn how to more quickly expose the lies of the evil one embedded in a particular worldview.

Small Groups

As people discover more and more biblical truth it is important that they be organized into small groups where fellowship, worship, and inductive Bible study can occur. In the past few years, we have seen the Jesus movements becoming more and more adept in interacting with the Bible. Their leaders have also sought more training in how to lead inductive Bible study groups. Some have also introduced what is called in mission the “Manuscript Bible Study Method” which is an inductive study of a whole book or a large portion of a book using exegetical tools. This approach has resulted in a renewed appropriation of the Word of God from different perspectives that has enriched not only those being discipled but also impacted in positive ways the understanding of the spiritual leaders. On a personal note, as I have sat and listened to people from other worldviews read and interpret the Bible, I rediscovered an obvious truth—the Bible is not a Western book, and at times people from other communities are closer to the culture of the Bible than we are. This means that they can bring to light certain nuances in the Bible stories that we are blind to. In the past few years small group Bible study groups have been developed not only for men, but also for Muslim women.

Four Step Process of Critical Contextualization

In critical contextualization, the Bible remains the ultimate source of authority in the development of faith and truth. Even when the sacred writings of the recipient communities are not rejected, they are brought under the supreme and final authority of the Bible. Anything that is incompatible with the biblical message has to be dealt with in biblically appropriate ways.
In other words, critical contextualization is an ongoing process that accords the gospel its rightful primacy within a culture by speaking both no and yes and giving both judgment and grace. In the critical contextualization process the new faith community moves through four steps of critical analysis to determine what in the local culture can be kept, what needs to be discarded, changed, or revised, and what needs to have a biblical functional substitute.

The biblical evaluation of religious beliefs and cultural practices could strengthen some of the traditions and identity of the people by purifying them, while others may need to be discarded. The biblical evaluation of beliefs and practices should be done with a group of local believers, qualified exegetes, and outsiders who are familiar with the culture and the process of critical contextualization. This is also where the larger body of Christ (the hermeneutical community) should assist the local believers as they work through this process and where the spiritual leaders and outsiders often contribute the rich insights that the universal church has gained over the centuries of its existence in various cultural settings.

It is important to understand that while the group working on this process seeks to understand how God speaks to their own group of peoples, they must also be aware that the larger body of Christ, the global church, has much to share with these local expressions of faith in context. In terms of theology, the church universal has a clarifying and enlarging role to play, especially when it can point out blind spots that exist in a particular community and can share possible themes and issues that the local group of believers was not aware of. In this interaction between the church universal, theology, and local communities there is a tremendous wealth of spiritual content and knowledge that cannot be achieved when the different entities work in isolation or when one of them tries to dominate or control the other entities.

In a very sketchy way, allow me to describe the basic steps of this crucial process.

**Step One: Exegesis of the Culture**

The first step, exegesis of the local culture, is a non-judgmental study of the various facets of the culture. This first step involves an uncritical gathering and analyzing of all the traditional customs and beliefs connected to the issue at hand. The local people should be intimately involved in this aspect of the process for they know the culture much better than any outsider ever could. This gathering of information phase should include the study of the
cultural element, the identifying of common practices, the origin of the cultural element, the various forms and current meanings it has within the culture, and a clear understanding of what kinds of beliefs and practices are tied to the cultural element in the people’s existing socio-religious belief system. This step involves knowing the deep meanings and nuances of the issue being discussed. Foreign and local believers working together make a stronger team than either group working on their own.

**Step Two: Careful Bible Study Related to the Issue**

Step two involves careful Bible study to make sure the principles of God’s Word are understood in order to be applied to the issue at hand. This is again an area where it is important to have people present who know their Bibles well. But the experts must also be able to allow the local group of believers to discover biblical truths for themselves. This step should resemble the early Adventist Bible conferences where groups of believers spent hours and hours over several days struggling to discern God’s message in His Word.

**Step Three: Evaluation of the Custom in Light of Newly Discovered Biblical Understandings**

The third step evaluates each cultural practice or element in light of the newly discovered principles and truths from God’s Word. If a belief or practice is consistent with biblical principles it is allowed to remain a part of the believer’s practice. If it contains a redemptive analogy, it may be retained to convey biblical truth. If however, a practice is demonic or destructive or has spiritualistic implications it should be discarded and replaced by a new functional substitute consistent with biblical principles. This substitute should aim to preserve divine truth and social honor and should carry the deeper meanings of the culture that are in harmony with God’s Word. If the practice is not bad in itself but has a negative connotation it should be redefined or replaced with a biblical functional substitute. If it is not demonic or wrong, is part of the local culture, and breaks no biblical principle it may be left alone. All parts of a culture that do not go against biblical principles should be left alone so that the process does not become burdensome to the local people. There may be neutral elements in a culture that some may wish to discard, but before dropping anything of this nature it would be good to take into account the larger community and their reaction to dropping the practice. For example, in some places there are long months of fasting from certain foods which can be very burdensome. But if the practice should be dropped it is important to ask what if any impact the dropping of the
practice would have to the witness of the new believers in their community. Some of the probable outcomes from this third step include the possibility that many cultural elements will be retained, some will be modified, some will be discarded, some new forms may be borrowed from other cultures where there are Jesus followers, and some biblical functional substitutes will be developed.

**Step Four: Holy Spirit Guidance in Decision Making**

The fourth step involves seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit by the local believers in deciding just what can be retained, what needs to be modified, and what needs to be discarded. Often the local believers will throw out elements of the culture that the foreigners on the team were willing to keep because local people can discern the deeper cultural meanings that only they can see. This fourth step also engages the new believers from the very beginning in the process of reading God’s Word for themselves and not becoming dependent on someone else telling them what the Word says. This step also encourages local believers to take responsibility for deciding what to do, what not to do, and how to live as God’s end-time people. When biblical rules are imposed on a group, the rule-givers become the rule enforcers, but when a community decides what the Word says they live the biblical message they have discovered.

**FDIC Distinctive: The Great Controversy Paradigm**

The FDIC approach is not the only model that seeks to cultivate the Kingdom of God in indigenous soil (we are indebted to several other models). So a logical question would be, What is distinctive about this Adventist mission approach? While Adventists share much with other models, there is at least one distinctive trait that is foundational to the Adventist FDIC approach. There would be no FDIC without the Great Controversy Paradigm.

The Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy frames the Church’s distinctive views on God, on his Kingdom, on the role of Jesus, on the Sabbath, on the Judgment, and on the vindication of the character, law, and government of God. As inheritors of the 19th century Adventist Movement present day Seventh-day Adventists carry a distinctive mission that can be summarized in Jerald Whitehouse’s words based on Revelation 16:6-12 and 18:4 as follows:
1. Adventists have a special end time emphasis of the “good news” about God and his handling of the sin problem.
2. Adventists have a warning message of the nearness of the end of time and the coming Day of Judgment.
3. Adventists have a calling out message that calls people to faith in the One true God and to prepare for his second coming.
4. Adventists call people to worship God as the Creator as symbolized through faithful observance of the Seventh-day Sabbath that is a memorial of his creative work.
5. Adventists have a clarifying message regarding the great controversy that has taken place between God and the forces of evil in which the accusations have been leveled by Satan against the character and government of God that he is arbitrary, unfair, unjust, unloving, and unmerciful. God has allowed time to pass and has been involved in the affairs of peoples and nations in an effort to keep the issues clear in this controversy, allowing for intelligent and free choice on the part of each individual regarding matters of faith.
6. Adventists have a reconciling message that restores peace and quality to life in the midst of increasing chaos and destruction as evil displays itself out ever more strongly in the world.
7. Adventists share a message concerning the mediatorial role of Jesus in the context of this great controversy and in relation to the personal salvation of each believer.
8. Adventists have a message of hope that God will put all things right at the end of time when Christ returns. Putting things right involves a judgment process that will clarify all things and result in eternal life for the righteous and an eternal end to sin, evil, and those choosing to not believe and accept God’s gift of salvation.

It could be added that because of the Great Controversy paradigm FDIC practitioners put a special emphasis on healing the picture of God in the different receptor communities. In witnessing to people of other world religions, Jesus, his divinity, his lordship, and his place as Savior are disclosed, but it also is made clear that God was in Jesus reconciling the world to himself and that Jesus came to reveal the truth about the Father. In other words, people who accept Jesus and become his followers can no longer hold views about God and the Holy Spirit that cannot be substantiated by the Bible even if their understanding of Jesus is biblical.
Answering Issues of Identity and Ecclesiology

In this section I would like to give answers to some of the questions that are often asked about the FDIC approach or about views or practices that are said to be part of the FDIC approach.

1. Do proponents of FDIC encourage western missionaries to pretend or masquerade that they are members of world religions such as Islam? No, emphatically no. Albeit in the early days some practitioners did adopt a Muslim identity. However, in 2000, the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (GCAMR) issued a paper in which it categorically opposed non-Muslims, especially westerners, engaging in any short-term mission activities while pretending to be Muslims. Furthermore, the paper clearly said that GCAMR did not support anyone pretending or masquerading to be someone they were not. It did, however, recognize as legitimate people holding a spiritual identity and in some rare cases it recognizes that God has called an individual or two to live out long-term ministries among people of monotheistic religions (for a copy of this article contact GMACR through www.global-mission.org).

2. Are believers in the FDIC Jesus movement baptized? Yes, by immersion, and in accordance with the biblical model.

3. Are the Jesus movements sponsored by the FDIC approach truly Seventh-day Adventist? Or are they only followers of Jesus? The FDIC communities are indeed Adventist for they hold firmly to all that any other Adventist would uphold as truth. They share in our beliefs such as the mortality of the soul, the soon return of Christ, the sanctity of the Sabbath, and they have a clear end-time self-understanding of their identity as part of God’s end-time remnant. Yet, for the reasons explained in the identity section, at this time they have chosen not to be official members of the organized Adventist Church. In other words, their spiritual identity is Adventist even when they might not be connected to the institutional and organizational structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

4. Are the people in a FDIC movement aware of their affinity with the Adventist Church? The leaders of these Jesus movements have deep connections with the organized Adventist Church and have in many cases come seeking some of its leaders after being led by dreams, visions, or other providential means. Even when they have sought the guidance of Adventist leaders, they have understood that they must continue among their people. Under the present circumstances and due to severe security concerns it would be unwise for the majority of the believers to have an open relationship with Christians. Such a relationship could also lead to the closure and loss
of official government church registration for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in some countries.

5. Shouldn’t the believers be brave and come out into the open even if they are persecuted? Doesn’t the Bible say that God’s people must undergo persecution for his name? While it is true that the Bible does indicate that believers will face persecution for Christ’s name, not all persecution is for God’s sake. Some new believers have brought persecution upon themselves due to insensitive provocation in the name of God. For instance, some are persecuted, not for following Christ but for turning their backs against their families, others for attacking and shaming their former faith, or for causing what is perceived by their families and countrymen to be traitorous acts. They are persecuted for being perceived to be against social order and social institutions. On the other hand, I am aware of some people within the Jesus movement who have died for refusing to compromise their faith which was incompatible with local practices. A man was beaten for declaring Jesus to be his Lord, another punished by saying the *shahada*, but in the name of Jesus.

6. Is it possible that FDIC is just another mission fad that is doomed to disappear with time? The earliest Jesus movements did not start because someone had a great missiological idea and decided to seek a new method and called the results a Jesus movement. In the case of FDIC movements, theory is following the observation of what the Holy Spirit is doing. As in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts, God is moving in this particular way and Adventist practitioners are trying to catch up by analyzing carefully what is taking place in this phenomenon.

7. Is it true that FDIC practitioners, in their desire to build on common ground, fail to offer a balanced view of Islam? Neither FDIC practitioners nor new believers see their primary role to denounce the evils of Islam or other world religion. Furthermore, such an attack would destroy almost any opportunity to minister to people in those religious systems. Over the years FDIC practitioners have chosen to uphold and focus on what is true. As Adventists we are reminded that “the way to dispel darkness is to admit light. The best way to deal with error is to present truth. It is the revelation of God’s love that makes manifest the deformity and sin of the heart centered in self” (White 1940:498). We are painfully aware of the shortcomings of some Muslim communities and we pray that God will make us into peacemakers thereby allowing for understandable presentations of the gospel.

8. What is the relationship between a FDIC Jesus movement and the larger hermeneutical community of faith in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? As
mentioned above all the ministry leaders I am aware of are connected in some way or another with the larger Adventist hermeneutical community. The recommended practice is that biblical evaluations of beliefs and practices should be done with a group of local believers that include qualified exegetes and outsiders who are familiar with the culture and the process of cross cultural witnessing. Exegesis of Scripture should be foundational to this process. Change agents and the spiritual leaders should guide the local people in study and should present the Adventist biblical teachings and concepts in culturally understandable ways. I believe that the relationship with the larger Adventist hermeneutical community is foundational for the spiritual growth of a FDIC Jesus movement.

The Vision of Jerald Whitehouse

I cannot finish this article without mentioning that it has been a great honor for me to work closely with Jerald Whitehouse over the last ten years. Whitehouse’s very raison d’être has been to champion the cause of liberating “the good news about God and how he resolves the sin problem” from being contained and controlled by any western Christian church. This has also been life transforming for me.

Dr. Whitehouse has indeed had an apostolic calling and has obediently cast a vision of how the kingdom of God can be established without the cultural trappings of traditional or western Christianity. Because of his hard work and sacrifice today we have seen the birth of many new Adventist communities of faith emerging in societies that had been resistant to traditional Christianity. Whitehouse’s passion and foresight of what is possible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit has ignited a movement that is unstoppable and only when we reach the other side of eternity will we know how far his influence has reached, for in recent years we have seen these ministries expand across the globe.

Who would have thought that such a small seed would grow to a worldwide movement? Who would have said that we will see the day when thousands of Bibles would be scattered like the leaves of autumn in so called “closed countries”? Who would have believed that some of those early believers would one day play key roles on changing even national policy in their homelands?

Dr. Whitehouse, your impact on mission within Adventism and the history of Christian mission will not go down in history unnoticed. Many more after you will carry the torch into the generations to come if our Lord
does not come to take us home. In fact, your impact on mission to Muslims is unprecedented in Adventism and I will dare say in mission history itself.

I still can hear the echo of Dr. Whitehouse’s initial challenge to me: “Marty are you willing to think and work outside the box”? Are you willing to plan far into the future, not looking for quick numbers, but doing all in your effort to firmly establish the kingdom of God in your of sphere of influence? Are you willing to become a disciple and discipler who is deeply concerned about the spiritual growth of those God has called you to? Are you willing to venture into the unknown and push your comfort zone? Will you allow the kingdom of God to develop naturally within other cultural frameworks and not try to impose your own cultural framework on others”? Are you willing to do this, Marty?

**Other Contributors**

I cannot conclude this article without mentioning a few more names of people who have made a significant contribution towards FDIC.

Robert Darnell and his team laid the missiological and theological framework for FDIC work. He was a linguist and devoted years of study to the Bible from a missiological perspective while also studying the Qur’an as he sought for redemptive windows.

Glen Fleming laid the foundation for strategic missional thinking pushing people to discern where God had been at work in the past and where he is working in the present. His own thinking was profoundly impacted by Don Richardson who is the father of the concept of redemptive analogies.

I wish I could mention the names of several men and women after God’s own heart who as local leaders daily guide their people one step closer to the center of God’s Kingdom. They have helped us to understand the cultural, socio-religious, and other theological issues that often go ignored in mission to one of the world’s religions. For security reasons we cannot write your names in this book, but God knows who you are and we want to acknowledge your contribution. Many of you are laboring at great personal cost and even at the risk of losing your lives. Your names are written in a modern chapter of Hebrews 11. Thank you for laboring on and keeping your eyes on the goal of seeing your people come to faith in Jesus even when others foreign to your context do not understand you.

Carl Coffman’s book, *Unto a Perfect Man*, was of great importance in fostering Whitehouse’s understanding of what constitutes faith formation and the stages of spiritual development.
There have been additional people who have enabled FDIC in different capacities. Mike Porter has supported the ministries in three major ways: (1) as a sounding board for practitioners and by sharing his vast administrative experience he has proven to be crucial in the first stages of some ministries in the 10/40 Window, (2) by enables several people, like myself, to move forward, and (3) he has raised funds to cover thousand of Bibles for FDIC contextual ministries taking place in closed countries.

Louisa's vision was and is still multifaceted. Not only did she set up the first educational program to train workers ministering among Muslims, but she had a clear vision to empower, affirm, and equip Muslim female leaders. Louisa's curriculum of studies for the formation of Adventist practitioners has had a major impact in several educational centers where they have seen the wisdom of her progression and fine choice of content. Louisa is unknown to many, has never been one to call attention to herself, choosing instead the praise of God over the praise of people.

Thank you, Bruce Moyer, for your untiring help in providing financial and moral support to the majority of the FDIC ministry leaders.

There are many others that have contributed through their influence or thinking such as Jon Dybdahl who drove home the importance of the “new birth,” Jon Paulien who has developed an eschatological framework regarding remnant theology, Eric Baumgartner who brought to our attentions the importance of identifying the person of peace, and Bruce Bauer who has helped think through the use of proper terms and had the vision to produce the first published material in this area. There have been a host of other on the ground enablers that for security reasons are not mentioned.

The movements we have been involved in have been significantly enriched by other people outside our Adventist faith community, people of God such as Milton Coke, who pioneered the concept that believers of Jesus movements should legally retain their birth community identity. Others like John Travis who have helped us learn ways to communicate to those within the church what God is doing on the front lines of mission. Theologian and missiologist Rick Brown has also offered in-depth biblical research on several key Christological matters and his scholarly insights have helped us to better understand how to communicate Jesus’ role, identity, and mission. In the area of Christology there are also excellent works by Richard Bauckham on early Christology in the gospels and more recently Martin Parsons on Christology for the Islamic context have also proven useful to us.

The work of Common Ground on better understanding how to describe the centrality and nature of the Kingdom of God has been helpful as we have
learned to describe the theology that gives the framework to FDIC.

I do not want to finish without thanking my wife. She has been integral to my life and ministry, and over the years she has vested her passion and energies into writing, training, and encouraging women ministry leaders. My wife has traveled extensively and together we have reflected and grown together in our understanding of God.

**Conclusion**

I am not a prophet, but based on what I have seen and the projected trends that other Adventists and Christian practitioners are forecasting, in the next few years I believe that we are going to see large numbers of Jesus movements growing in places where the traditional extraction model of mission to Muslims is not allowed or tolerated.

I believe that our eyes will be open even further to discern God's activity in places we had not even considered before. We will learn better ways to communicate the biblical message from within Islamic people groups. As we minister to others, God will minister to us, enhancing our own understanding of who he is that will result in a more vibrant end-time faith community. This new growth in understanding will allow us to see the blind spots we have in our own worldview and call us to walk ever closer with our Lord not only as individuals but as whole communities of faith.

In the years to come I do not see fewer in-context ministries but many more. I see more missiologists, theologians, local leaders, local followers of Jesus, and regular Adventist members who will be wrestling in a humble spirit trying to discern what this “new thing” is that the Lord is doing in these last days and searching how they can each come on board in unity as the body of Christ.

**Works Cited**


Section 4

CULTURAL REFLECTIONS

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PASSIONATE REFLECTION
Introduction

An issue of high interest in Seventh-day Adventist mission is ministry among the world’s 1.2 billion Muslims. Since the 1990s, there has been an increase in Adventist engagement in Muslim ministries as well as a debate on how best to go about it. Much of the subsequent missiological work and tools developed have helped make the witness of the gospel culturally relevant in Muslim contexts. However, with all the necessary focus on the recipients of this witness, less anthropological attention has been paid to the bearers of the Adventist message. While some emphasis has been put on modifying the messengers’ surface-level behavior, the deep-level cultural values held by many Adventists has remained mostly unchanged and unchallenged. In consequence, the Adventist Church has tended to view culturally sensitive approaches to Muslim mission as simply programs or techniques that will bring Muslims “into the fold,” complete with traditional Adventist ways of behaving and thinking. When this does not occur, it leaves both Adventists and Muslim converts confused.

This article is a case study of a current ministry in the process of developing
a biblically and anthropologically sound worldview among both Seventh-day Adventists and Muslims—a worldview that enables cordial witness, joint ministry, and the development of communities of submitted followers of God through Christ. This process entails six stages of transformation, each illustrated with examples from the ministry under study. Also identified are the likely pitfalls caused by ignoring critical anthropological and missiological principles at each stage. It is my hope that this case study will stimulate further examination and application of worldview transformation in the field of Adventist-Muslim relations.

Background

The Adventist Muslim Fellowship Association (AMFA) is a ministry that began in Atlanta, Georgia in late 2007 when God brought together a unique team of Adventists with a passion for Muslims, a commitment to ministry among them, and a willingness to pioneer new biblically-based approaches. These members all have significant and positive cross-cultural experience and/or experience working among Muslims in various parts of the world. Working alongside us are the Muslim members of AMFA, united “under the common belief in the One, True, Creator God (Allah in Arabic) and choosing to live their lives in preparation for the return of Jesus (Isa) and the final Day of Judgment” (Adventist Muslim Fellowship Association of Atlanta website 2008).

AMFA’s ministry arises in a unique anthropological context. Muslims in the United States are some of the most diverse in the world; only Makkah during the Hajj (pilgrimage) rivals the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of North America’s Muslim population (Marion 2006). Likewise, American Muslims’ socioreligious views span the Islamic spectrum, ranging from militant fundamentalism to traditionalism, from modernist to progressive, and even secular. This variety of perspectives is guaranteed to remain intact by the steady influx of Muslim immigrants (Maloof, Ross-Sheriff, and Asani 2003) and the fact that over one third of American Muslims are native-born (Pew Research Center 2007:1). Given this great diversity, no one set of cultural features can be isolated with which to develop a single Adventist witnessing technique that is culturally appropriate for all Muslims in the United States.

This impossibility proved to be crucial to the development of AMFA, for it forced us to take a step back and see the larger issues. What emerged was the realization that Seventh-day Adventists and Muslims alike need complete
life transformations if they are to display the glory of God to the watching cosmos and thus call all to a final decision for or against God. Far deeper than a few surface-level behavioral adjustments is the need for change of the deepest levels of culture. These deep levels constitute one’s worldview, defined by Kraft as “the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments/allegiances underlying a people’s perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions” (1996:52).

Thus, AMFA has chosen to work toward biblically transformed worldviews in both the Adventist and Muslim communities, which will provide the foundation on which significant spiritual development and change can occur. Thus, AMFA focuses first on worldview transformation among Adventists which leads to the first of the six stages of ministry.

**Stage One**

Before Adventists can approach people with different opinions and value systems, they must themselves be grounded in key spiritual matters. Do they see the entire Bible as one coherent story describing the sovereign kingship of God? Do they understand that Satan has challenged God’s authority and method of governance? Do they understand the means by which God will restore his Kingdom once and for all? Do they understand that salvation is primarily about raising up people who are safe to save because they are so convinced of the trustworthiness of God and the rightness of his government that throughout eternity sin will never spring up again? Do they have a picture of God as a compassionate Savior who is passionately pursuing all his children in all times and places? Most importantly, do they have an experiential humility arising from being broken and receiving the overwhelming grace of God?

Thus, the first stage is the creation of a core of Seventh-day Adventists who have their worldviews firmly rooted in the principles of God’s righteous governance of the universe. This worldview understanding is closely connected to the concepts involved in the Kingdom of God. As used in this article, the Kingdom of God includes not only the established evangelical definition of the Kingdom as “the sovereignty, reign, or rule of God” (Achtermeier 1985:527) but also the particularly Adventist focus on the cosmic controversy over the right of God to reign and the methods by which he governs his kingdom.

Creating a cohort of Adventists who view reality through the lens of the Kingdom of God entails first an intentional focus on worldview issues,
since people seldom question or are even conscious of these deep-level assumptions. Second, it calls for continual encouragement to check all ideas against the criterion of the Kingdom and the Bible. Adventists may find that a surprising number of long-held “truths” and standards turn out to be Western cultural interpretations and assumptions. As Brown perceptively notes (2006:130), “there are no Christian denominations that are in perfect harmony with the Biblical worldview; all have syncretistic worldviews to some extent.” Third, is the realization that facilitating paradigm shifts in long-held missiological and theological assumptions takes time and much repetition.

Case Examples

AMFA prioritizes the task of giving Seventh-day Adventists a solid framework for mission. Thus, it always begins by focusing and spending significant time on Kingdom worldview matters prior to addressing Islam. Some of the issues that are discussed include our pictures of God, the great controversy between God and Satan (Hart 2006; Maxwell 2002; White 2005), the way God is working to reveal himself to all peoples (Olson 2005; Richardson 2003, 2005), our attitudes toward people with different viewpoints, principles for ministry from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, the Kingdom of God and the church (Ladd 1993), exclusivist versus inclusivist views of salvation (Bauer 2008), bounded versus centered set approaches to salvation (Bauer 2007:59–78; Hiebert 1994:107–137), and the Kingdom circles illustration (Common Ground Consultants 2009:7–17). We address these concepts in various ways, both directly and indirectly. Only after these worldview values are in place do we move on to an introduction to Islamic beliefs and practices, appropriate ways of relating to Muslims, and various tools for building relationships. Throughout this latter process we continually reinforce the worldview concepts previously introduced.

AMFA has used a number of educational vehicles to help Adventists embrace a Kingdom worldview and find ways of relating positively with Muslims. One is a training seminar and accompanying manual entitled Called to Display His Glory: Giving and Being the Loud Cry (North American Division Center for Adventist Muslim Relations 2005). The first half of this seminar is devoted to intentionally addressing Kingdom worldview issues; the second half connects these principles to Muslim ministry. Other tools that AMFA has found helpful in providing the worldview and cultural understandings for work among Muslims include the books A Deadly
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*Misunderstanding* (Siljander and Mann 2008) and *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* (Medearis 2008), as well as the informative conferences offered by Common Ground Consultants. AMFA also works to promote worldview transformation among Adventists through various training sessions at churches, camp meetings, academies, universities, Adventist-laymen’s Services and Industries (ASI) conventions, and regular Adventist Muslim Relations Summits.

These methods of worldview transformation are proving effective at various levels. For instance, I was invited to speak about understanding Islam at an Adventist academy. The presentation focused on helping the students discover and apply biblical principles for relating to people with differing beliefs. A few weeks later, a student described the changes that had occurred among fellow classmates: “Before that class, a lot of students were saying bad things about Muslims, but now they don’t say those things anymore” (personal communication, March 7, 2009).

Although AMFA is working in a North American context, this first stage of worldview transformation is crucial and relevant wherever Adventist engage Muslims, for worldview issues are universal. The most important result of Stage One is the creation of a core of Seventh-day Adventists who are well prepared to interact with people of other faiths. Having adopted a Kingdom worldview, they are ready to live out God’s compassion for people, look for evidence of God’s work in other people, and invest in long-term, loving relationships. In addition, Stage One creates automatic support for ministries such as AMFA. When the worldview issues become clear and people can see a ministry that actually operates according to these values, very often, they become supporters of this work, whether financially or by lending their voices in support of and in helping others understand the issues.

**Potential Pitfalls**

Unfortunately, we as Seventh-day Adventists have often been quick to point out the need for worldview transformation among Muslims but remiss in calling for the same in ourselves. This utterly fails to take seriously the need for change in all of us. As Foster points out, “It is essential to realize that barriers to change are at least as prevalent within the innovating organization as within the target group . . . and that it must be studied just as thoroughly as the target group if results are to be optimized” (1973:180). Thus, Adventists must be willing to subject their own encultured
interpretations and presuppositions to the judgment of the Word of God. Conn terms this process *de-contextualization* and says that “the demand for de-contextualization, ignored largely by both liberation theologian and evangelical, becomes as important as contextualization. It does not take up the questions of culture without evaluating the legitimacy of the questions themselves” (1984:258).

There are serious consequences to approaching a Muslim ministry without first establishing a Kingdom worldview in the Adventist messengers. Lack of attention to one’s own deep-level assumptions and those of others promotes a monocultural perspective that is ethnocentric and absolutistic and that affirms a naïve realist/idealist epistemology, in which one’s perceptions of reality are equated with reality itself (Kraft 1996:69–70; Hiebert 1994:26).

Adventists who approach life from this viewpoint are preoccupied with truth and falsity, based on the assumption that their understandings of reality are complete and without cultural bias; thus, anything that does not agree with their point of view must be wrong. Such an approach is also absorbed by comparative issues—for instance, the inspiration of the Qur’an versus the Bible, the life and role of Muhammad versus Jesus, and the use of “Allah” versus “God.” Likewise, they can find good in Islam only as far as it agrees with their views. In short, they limit their perspective so that the truth they have equals all truth.

This is not to say that truth is not of vital importance. Instead, it seems wiser to recognize that “now we see in a mirror dimly” and “know in part” and that only in eternity will we “know fully” (1 Cor 13:12, NASB). Thus, not only should we remain open to further truth but we should also expect others to be discovering God-inspired truths that will enable every person to make an informed choice for or against God. Nor does acknowledging truth outside of our own perspectives automatically open the door to theological pluralism or compromising ecumenism. Rather, we evaluate all truth by the Bible, which is “the final criterion against which to measure theological truth” (Hiebert 1994:30). If Adventists attempt to do ministry among Muslims without addressing these deep-seated assumptions, it will simply be a case of pouring new wine into old wineskins (Luke 5:37), as new points of view and sources of truth simply do not fit into narrow, black-and-white understandings.

Finally, embarking on Muslim ministry without dealing with the messengers’ worldviews leads to a focus on techniques rather than transformed thinking. A clear example of this is the current controversy over contextualization. Many Adventists seem to have assumed that
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contextualization is a means of making the system of Christianity culturally acceptable. Thus, contextualization become a technique by which Christians can facilitate the transfer of their fairly complete understanding of truth to people who do not have those understandings. In contrast, few Adventists seem to have considered Hiebert’s description of contextualization as “an ongoing response that sees the gospel as outside culture . . . the message of salvation, not from West to East, but from God to peoples in all cultures” (1994:64; italics mine). Note the emphasis on the gospel, without any direct association of it with Christianity. This latter definition calls all God-followers to the continual process of examining and aligning their contextually influenced beliefs and practices with the worldview of God’s Kingdom. Thankfully, those involved in Adventist-Muslim relations are giving increased attention to Adventist worldview transformation.

**Stage Two**

Once Adventists have embraced a Kingdom worldview, the next stage can occur. Stage Two is the development of logical, appropriate, and real reasons for interactions with Muslims. First, ambassadors of the Kingdom need reasons for interaction that their communities see as relevant and valid. Note the example of the Apostle Paul, whose manual labor gave him credibility and allowed working-class Gentiles to identify with him (Siemens 2009:760). In addition, those seeking to work among Muslims should focus their initial interactions on people’s felt needs before moving on to the ultimate human need for salvation (Hiebert 1994:66). Finally, Adventist interactions with Muslims are best when they are done cooperatively, doing things with the local Muslim communities instead of for them. Examples could include any jointly done humanitarian activity, refugee resettlement services, micro-enterprise development, after-school tutoring programs, practical skills training, and community-based programs that take a stance against problems such as domestic violence, human and sexual trafficking, drug use, or gang involvement.

**Case Examples**

AMFA has connected with the Muslim communities around Atlanta in various practical ways. One of our best bridges into the community has been the establishment of an educational center that addresses the English language and literacy needs of the immigrant Muslim community. Muslims
in the area invited AMFA members to help in this area of immense need, and the response has been far greater than we imagined. Not only do students continually refer other Muslims to this center, but the deep relationships formed there have also enabled rich interactions between Muslims and Adventists outside the walls of the center.

In addition, AMFA has found valid reasons for interaction through the avenue of health. Muslims and Adventists have partnered in running a number of health expositions within Muslim communities in the area and elsewhere. These interactions have not only enabled AMFA to bless Muslims and address felt health needs, but they have also provided opportunities for Adventists and Muslims to work side by side, getting to know each other while they meet community needs. Such cooperative events have incredible potential. For example, after AMFA’s first health expo, Muslim community members insisted that the next event be held at the local mosque and that we train their Muslim young people how to hold a health expo.

AMFA is still developing further opportunities for interaction. One of the neighborhoods where we work has a large number of Muslims who are refugees; thus, job creation and training are high priorities. In response, AMFA is considering setting up a business that will provide jobs for refugees, offer on-the-job training in English and customer service, and create logical opportunities for regular interaction with Muslims.

Potential Pitfalls

Stage Two represents Adventists’ first interactions in a Muslim community and thus an opportunity to create goodwill and open doors to further relationships. However, Adventists who do not embark on this process with a Kingdom worldview can cause roadblocks to relationships. Many view this stage as merely a technique to get a foot in the community so they can begin the “real” work of evangelism. This ignores the fact that followers of God are called to minister to needs simply as expressions of God’s love and compassion (Luke 6:35). In addition, Muslims will quickly detect the ulterior motives behind such an approach and resent the duplicity.

Another danger is that the establishment of programs to meet needs will be seen as the final goal. Given that the American church has a Western worldview, “the tendency for westerners (and those trained in western ways) is to be program oriented rather than people oriented” (Kraft 1996:410; italics in the original). Thus, Adventists may become so focused on social and development programs that building relationships with actual Muslims becomes eclipsed.
Stage Three

The group interactions in the previous stage provided opportunities for Adventists and Muslims to meet each other and connect. Stage Three is the deepening of these connections as individuals of each faith get to know each other on a personal basis. The product of such relationships is what Hiebert terms a “bicultural bridge,” where members of two different cultures learn to understand and adapt to each others’ culture; in turn, these bridge builders work as insider advocates to help their own communities understand and accept those of the other culture (1994:147–149).

Stage Three is a crucial stage, for in it Muslims have the chance to see the uniqueness and beauty of the Adventist faith. Adventists can discover admirable points in Islam, and both must lay aside misconceptions of each other. A humble, teachable attitude is essential here. As Donald N. Larson notes, in “entering a new community as a sincere learner . . . the missionary approaches the local residents with humility, offering dignity to the people from whom he [or she] learns” (2009:455).

This stage builds a solid framework of trust, which must be in place before more testing truths can be tackled (White 1905:143; 1915:119–120). As in the previous stages, the Stage Three relationship building process cannot be rushed. It takes time and regular interaction for any deep relationship to form, longer still when there are fourteen hundred years of prejudices to undo.

Case Examples

The members of AMFA are regularly engaged in pursuing deeper and more informed relationships with members of the Muslim community. Relationships with students and professors in university have continued long after graduation. English tutoring sessions have turned into mutual sharing of life’s joys and crises and faith. Educational efforts and health expos have resulted in Adventist members invited to serve on the boards of local Muslim organizations.

While the Muslim members of AMFA explain their particular cultural and faith practices, Adventists help Muslims navigate the confusing web of American bureaucracy, culture, and pluralism. Members attend an Islamic cultural festival one month and share Thanksgiving dinner the next. Thus, there is evidence of traffic in both directions across the bicultural bridge.
Potential Pitfalls

Stage Three ties with Stage One as being most critical for successful ministry among Muslims, yet unfortunately it is frequently ignored or treated lightly. One danger for Adventists is an attitude of superiority; this may stem from ethnocentricity, ethnic prejudice, or denominational pride (Brown 2006:129). A lack of humble teachability can quickly ruin a promising relationship, particularly in the spiritual arena. Other Adventists appear eager to learn about Muslim culture and beliefs; however, they are only looking for openings, which they can leverage to make their theological points. Neither approach allows Muslims to challenge Adventists themselves to grow in their own faith. A final problem is the desire to rush through relationship building to get to the next stage. This may result from an attitude that values programs over relationships or results over process. Regrettably, these tactics short-circuit the very point of Stage Three: building a foundation of trust that will be able to handle heavy truths. All of the above problems stem from worldview issues that should have been addressed in Stage One.

Stage Four

Deep relationships between Muslims and Adventists naturally lead to discussion of shared spiritual interests as there is an automatic spiritual bond between people who seek to live fully submitted to God. The fourth stage of ministry intentionally fosters opportunities for Adventists and Muslims to interact spiritually. This is also the stage where we focus on spiritual growth and joint worldview transformation.

Case Examples

AMFA is currently in Stage Four. In order to create space for spiritual sharing between Adventists and Muslims, we have established a weekly study group that looks for important spiritual truths that affirm biblical doctrine and teaching. We have begun with the Qur'an, knowing that many Muslims have inherited prejudices against the Bible that preclude their reading it. Our inductive studies follow the lives of the biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur'an and focus on what the Qur'an terms “ayat,” or signs that point us to God. Through these studies, we are laying the foundation of a Kingdom worldview. Core truths that we emphasize include the trustworthiness of God, Satan’s battle for our allegiance, the waywardness of humanity,
affirmation of truth wherever God reveals it, the unity and perpetuity of
the message of the prophets and the Holy Books, the need to base all belief
and practices on God’s Word over traditions, God’s way of bringing people
into the Kingdom, the future and full establishment of God’s Kingdom
throughout the universe, characteristics of a true believer, and many more.
Adventist members regularly mention the Bible in the discussions; when the
Qur’an makes clear reference to it and our Muslim members are ready, we
will begin studying the Bible inductively.

There are several unique aspects of these studies. First, AMFA members
have openly Muslim or Adventist identities, yet both groups strive to use
culturally appropriate language and practices in order to demonstrate respect
for the other. This makes it a safe environment for learning and growth.
Second, members do not simply compare and contrast the respective beliefs
of Adventism and Islam but rather approach these studies as people of faith
journeying side by side in search of further truth. Each member views the
others as believers in God from whom much can be learned. Furthermore,
these studies are immensely practical. Whenever truth is found, members
seek to incorporate it into their lives, encouraging and praying for each
other in the application of this truth.

AMFA is still in the early phase of Stage Four, slowing building a Kingdom
worldview from what we find in the Qur’an and later from the Bible. Christians
unfamiliar with the process often ask, “So, when are you going to get the
Muslims to accept Jesus?” While this is something we pray will happen, we
have chosen to focus on the transformation of their worldview so that it
can accommodate the earth-shaking understanding of Jesus’ identity and
role, rather than trying to force Jesus into an unchanged Islamic worldview.
As Hiebert emphasizes, “Although conversion must include a change in
behavior and beliefs, if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run
the gospel is subverted and becomes captive to the local culture. The result
is syncretistic Christo-paganism” (2008:315). Thus, AMFA’s approach is not
a technique to simply get Muslims to accept Jesus but rather a whole way
of thinking. We believe that if we follow biblical principles, create a safe
environment, ground all our beliefs in the text, and apply every truth we
discover, Muslims will come to an understanding of who Jesus is when the
time is right. Like Simon Peter, they will be able to confess, “You are the
Messiah, the Son of the living God” when God reveals this to them (Matt
16:16–17, CEV).
Potential Pitfalls

Critical to reaching this point is the groundwork laid in Stage One. Such studies of the Qur’an would be impossible if members did not have worldviews that view all truth as from God (Ps 31:5; White 1964:207), believe that God has left truth in every culture (Eccl 3:11; Rom 2:14–16; White 1975:638), and focus on lifting up truth instead of pointing out error (1 Cor 13:6; 1 Thess 5:21; White:207). Likewise, we as Adventists must take seriously the injunctions to begin our witness where people are (1 Cor 9:19–23; White 1900:58). We are reminded, “as God meets us where we are, so we are to meet men where they are. Let us not, by refusing to meet our fellow-men where they are, place ourselves outside the compass of God’s love and mercy” (White 1902:1143). Finally, the trust built in Stage Three is also necessary, as both Adventists and Muslims are out of their religious comfort zones.

Stage Five

With a solid groundwork of trust and foundational principles in place, we are ready for Stage Five: the formation of a unique and self-sustainable Adventist Muslim fellowship. Let me immediately clarify that we are not advocating that Adventists and Muslims abandon their original faith and adopt a sort of hybrid Adventist-Muslim religion. Rather, we envision this fellowship group as a safe spiritual environment where Muslims and Adventists can each grow in true faith and invite others to embark on a similar spiritual journey. This is also the stage where the group becomes a known presence in the community.

It is important that this step take place, for at some time Muslim members of the group will face the question of allegiance. Will they choose to follow the religious traditions, interpretations, and teachers they have grown up with? Or, will they have found such hope and truth in what they have discovered that they will be willing to shift their primary allegiance to scripturally defensible positions? This does not necessitate the total renunciation of their cultural structures (including faith practices and religious communities); rather, it is an internal allegiance shift to a Kingdom worldview. Nor does this allegiance change mean that they are now Seventh-day Adventists or that they are finally saved according to the traditional Christian understanding. Instead, participation in Stage Five represents a transitional move, from traditions to a more Scripture-based worldview.

Stage Five is also the culmination of the worldview transformation
process that has been taking place all along. At this point, Adventist and Muslim group members intentionally examine every aspect of their cultures and worldviews and bring them into alignment with their allegiance to God. This conversion of worldviews involves three steps: (1) phenomenology—collecting and examining data about one’s beliefs and practices; (2) ontology—studying Scripture, critically evaluating one’s beliefs in light of that, and formulating new, more biblical ways of looking at reality; and (3) missiology—discipling believers to live out a Kingdom worldview (Hiebert 2006:30–33). In short, all members must be involved in the process of critical contextualization.

Case Examples

AMFA has not yet reached Stage Five, although the groundwork is being laid. We have consistently emphasized the importance of turning to God’s written revelations for authority over our own traditions, as well as the regular practice of applying what we learn to our lives. In addition, one of AMFA’s strengths is that members come from multiple cultural backgrounds, which help in avoiding the biases that occur when contextualization is done without consultation with the global hermeneutical community.

Potential Pitfalls

Critical contextualization is essential in Stage Five to avoid the syncretistic extremes of under-contextualization and over-contextualization (Bauer 2005; Brown 2006). Hiebert suggests a number of safeguards against syncretism (1994:91). First, believers must take Scripture seriously as the final rule for faith and practice. As Hesselgrave affirms, “Acceptable contextualization is a direct result of ascertaining the meaning of the biblical text, consciously submitting to its authority, and applying or appropriating that meaning to a given situation. The results of this process may vary in form and intensity, but they will always remain within the scope of meaning prescribed by the biblical text” (1995:116). Second, Hiebert continues, that critical contextualization recognizes that the Holy Spirit is able to guide all believers to apply scriptural truths to their lives. Third, contextualization is the responsibility of the entire body of believers and should be done with reference to both the global community and historic understandings.

It is important to remember that Stage Five is transitional. Thus, participants will go through the same transitional quandaries experienced by
all communities of faith who are involved in critical contextualization. One particularly thorny but expected issue is the use of the Qur’an. Members in this stage will likely refer to both the Qur’an and the Bible, as the Kingdom worldview and epistemology laid out in Stage One allow for God to reveal truths about himself in sources outside the Judeo-Christian Scriptures (for Adventists) and outside of the Qur’an (for Muslims). However, as the process of allegiance change takes place, the Bible will naturally rise in significance. To condemn the use of the Qur’an entirely at this stage is to forget the transitional nature and role of the contextualization process.

Stage Six

The final stage is the multiplication of the group. As members share with their communities what they have learned and live out transformed lives, it is natural for their families and friends to want to know more. Thus, Stage Six focuses on the birth of new Adventist Muslim Fellowship groups from the original group.

Multiplication takes place in three directions. In one direction, Adventist members of AMFA raise up new biblically grounded Seventh-day Adventists. This follows Ralph D. Winter’s idea of E-1 evangelism, or using messengers of the same culture as the receivers (Bergquist 1981:67). Kraft terms these messengers “in-culture advocates” (1996:401). In a second direction, Muslim members of AMFA work within the Muslim community, again following Winter’s E-scale typology and Kraft’s in-culture advocates. They share what they are experiencing and learning with their immediate families and larger Muslim community. Testimonies such as these from within the Islamic community build goodwill, create interest, and prepare other Muslims to join the fellowship groups. The third direction of multiplication is the formation of completely new AMFA groups.

Case Examples

Although AMFA is only at Stage Four, members are already laying plans for multiplication. Work among Adventists has begun in various areas, with AMFA members accepting speaking engagements and training opportunities in churches and at conferences, addressing issues of worldview in preparation for further training in ministry among Muslims. At Southern Adventist University, we discipled a student-led small group focused on understanding and loving Muslims, drawing on the material
from the *Called to Display His Glory* training manual. Meanwhile, Adventist members of AMFA have responded to requests from evangelical groups in the Atlanta area for training in how to connect with Muslims. This has opened up wonderful opportunities to share Adventist truths in the context of discussing worldview transformation.

Elsewhere, the Muslim members of AMFA are working as in-culture advocates within the Muslim community. The following is how one Muslim member expresses her role: “If people here [referring to the local Muslim community] ask what we are doing, why we are meeting together with non-Muslims, I tell them, ‘These Adventists are good people. They’re true believers. They know the Qur’an better than most Muslims. Of course we should meet with them!’” (personal communication, n.d.). This young woman shows strong leadership qualities and a deep understanding of spiritual issues and is already engaged in the transformation of her community.

In addition, new AMFA groups are coming into being. The student-led group at Southern Adventist University attracted the attention of the wider community, whose interest was reinforced by an Adventist Muslim Relations Summit hosted on the campus in early 2010. This has led to the establishment of an AMFA chapter in the Chattanooga area. The group is working through Stages One to Three, and strong relationships have already been built with local Muslims. Meanwhile, God is creating spiritual interest among new communities of Muslims in the Atlanta area. Current AMFA members, both Muslim and Adventist, have already volunteered to start up new AMFA chapters around these communities.

### Potential Pitfalls

Stage Six is basically the cumulative results of Stages One to Five. Thus, failure to adopt a Kingdom worldview and use basic missiological and anthropological principles for ministry will become most evident at this stage. In that case, one of three results is likely: (1) the original group will remain as it is with no multiplication occurring, (2) new groups will be formed but will die off quickly or become absorbed into traditional Adventism or Islam, or (3) new groups will embrace a syncretistic blend of Christian and Muslim beliefs and practices. Thus, it is absolutely essential that a solid biblical foundation be laid from Stage One onwards.
Conclusion

This article described the general ministry plan used by AMFA in connecting Seventh-day Adventists and Muslims in the United States. The six stages above are as far as we have been able to foresee. Note that these stages do not represent six discrete periods that occur in a sharply linear, chronological manner. Instead, many of these stages overlap or even occur out of order. For example, AMFA is currently focusing on developing shared spiritual interactions (Stage Four). However, we continue to work on new interaction opportunities (Stage Two) and new relationships (Stage Three), while various members are already preparing new territory (Stage One) for the formation of a new group (Stage Six). We are still in process and recognize that there may be further stages which have not yet been envisioned, as well as further development and refinements of each stage.

In addition, there are aspects of our ministry that require additional study. For example, we are still in the process of understanding and developing ways that facilitate a shift from a naïve realist/idealist epistemology to a critical realist outlook. This is an issue that is relevant to many outside the sphere of Adventist-Muslim relations. Also, AMFA’s ministry plan has not followed standard church-planting principles of focusing on one family group or people group and letting the gospel spread through natural relational networks (Patterson 2009:633–642; Lewis and Lewis 2009:690–693; Garrison 2004). More attention needs to be focused on planting fellowship groups within existing communities. Perhaps the second generation of AMFA groups will be more organic in its approach. We welcome critical input from the wider community of Adventists working among Muslims.

Although we recognize that AMFA’s approach is imperfect, we believe that it offers an important contribution to the largely untouched field of Islam in America. AMFA is breaking ground in exploring new ways for Seventh-day Adventists to relate to Muslims in a Western context. We have been encouraged by the enthusiasm with which this ministry has been received by Adventists and Muslims alike. More importantly, we have seen God working to steadily transform worldviews so that they reflect the values of his Kingdom. We pray that we will remain fully submitted and available to God so that through AMFA, many Muslims and Adventists will be part of the people of God who stand in the last days of earth’s history, humbly displaying the character of God before the entire universe. May we be just one glimmering facet in the vindication of God’s glorious name so that Christ can come at last to take his people home.
A Case Study of Worldview Transformation

Works Cited


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During my ministerial training in Romania I was assigned to work with an unusual church: a Gypsy church. Although it was organized like all other Seventh-day Adventist churches, things were different. One Sabbath, the elder of the church, a young Gypsy, invited me for lunch. We talked about several issues in the church and I made some suggestions. He was reserved, even hesitant to accept my solutions and finally took me over to the previous elder of the church, the oldest male in the church. I was surprised that the young fellow asked for the blessing of this elderly member concerning our plans before implementing them. Such a procedure is not part of the Church Manual, for usually a church elder would consult with the pastor and not with people who held no office in the church. This was only the first in a series of surprises I encountered while working with that Gypsy church.

Later, as a young pastor, I was again confronted with the cultural ways of the Gypsy minority, but in a sad way. Only a week after I was introduced to my district of churches, the board of the largest church informed me that they had to disfellowship a few families. I soon discovered, to my chagrin, that they were all Gypsy families. I visited the families and asked the board for more time to understand the issues involved, but the board decided
unanimously to disfellowship them for living a different lifestyle than the one recommended by the Bible. To my amazement, Gypsies lived in some respects closer to the biblical culture.

**Who Are Gypsies?**

The Roma people, also called Romani or Gypsies, are one of the oldest people groups living in Europe. Their language is one of the earliest European languages. Gypsies are found on all continents, including the Americas, but the majority of them live in Europe. Although they have lived in Europe for more than a millennia, Gypsies have preserved their culture and traditions and have refused assimilation or integration. Official figures estimate a minimum of 6.5 million Gypsies living in Europe, but specialists estimate that more than 16 million would be a more realistic figure (Council of Europe Stats 2009). The difference in numbers is due to the fact that many Gypsies who do not read or write, do not apply for identification papers, and thus are not counted in a census.

Gypsies are a very diverse people. Known as *Roma* in Central and Eastern Europe, *Kale* in the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Europe (Finland), *Sinti* in Northern Italy, Austria, and Germany, *Romanisacl* in the Scandinavian countries, *Manoush* in France and the Netherlands, and *Romanichal* in England, they share the same roots. Language wise, “after an evolution extending back for more than a thousand years, with no written models to foster uniformity, there is no single standard of Romani speech. Instead, we have a multiplicity of dialects (in Europe alone, something like 60 or more), obviously related to each other to an important degree, but often mutually unintelligible” (Fraser 1995:12).

History tells us that Gypsies left Punjab (in Northwest India and today’s Pakistan) in waves, starting in 1026 because of the Islamic threats and pressure, and conquered Europe without guns or swords. During the 1192 wave they met the Tatars on their way and were deeply influenced by them. In only a few years Gypsies circled the Mediterranean territories and moved on to the Byzantine Empire where they discovered Christianity, then further on to Europe. “As well as words, the Gypsies acquired in Byzantium and Greece a familiarity with the Christian world. On the roads and in the ports, they encountered travelers from all over Europe. They may have learned additional languages. They would certainly have heard of the Holy Land; they had seen that pilgrims were privileged travelers. All this knowledge would be profitable to them one day, when they decided to pursue their
migration into the world of western Christianity” (Fraser 1995:56).

The first document indicating a Gypsy presence in Europe dates from 1068 and refers to events which happened in 1050. Most Gypsies came as Indians, each of them belonging to a caste with a specific trade. However, Fraser notes that

in being uprooted from India and maintaining a mobile existence, a changing identity becomes inevitable. Their ethnicity was to be fashioned and remoulded by a multitude of influences, internal and external. They would assimilate innumerable elements which had nothing to do with India, and they would eventually cease to be, in any meaningful way, Indians; their identity, their culture would, however—regardless of all transformations—remain sharply distinct from that of the gadžé who surrounded them and on whom their economic existence depended. They had no promised land as a focus of their dreams and would themselves, in time, forget their Indian antecedents and, indeed, show little interest in their early history, leaving it to the gadžé, centuries later, to rediscover and pursue obsessively their past and their lineage. (1995:44)

Some Gypsies today describe themselves as being of Jewish descent. They claim to be the heirs of one of the defeated northern tribes of Israel which migrated to North (India) and then moved to the West. In support of this hypothesis, Gypsies point to several parallels between their history and culture and the Jewish counterparts. Gypsy tribes, like the Jews, survived for centuries while other peoples disappeared (i.e., the Bretons in France). They experienced deportation and annihilation attempts for centuries. Their worldview is oriented toward the past, expressing the same melancholy as the Jewish worldview. The clothes of certain Gypsy tribes still contain the blue border and tassels on the edges of their clothing, as described in the biblical account. Their trades include investing in and processing silver and gold, while their songs, traditions, and customs have similarities with the Jewish ones. Gypsies also have a particular word to identify those who do not belong to their ethnic group, gadžé, which is the equivalent of the word Jews use to identify non-Jews, goim (gentiles). The non-Gypsy is seen as impure, but not based on a theological concept as is the case for Jews. “The passionately held view of most Gypsies is still that gadje are dangerous, not to be trusted, and, in the interest of the survival of the group, they are to be avoided except for dealings in business. Indeed, in the most general sense, gadje are considered to be mahrime: polluted. To develop unnecessary relations with them is to risk contamination” (Fonseca 1995:12).
However, there are also differences between Jews and Gypsies. “One cannot cease to wonder at their [Gypsies’] extraordinary tenacity. The Gypsies’ diaspora has sometimes been with that of the Jew; however, theirs was a diaspora of a people with no priestly caste, no recognized standard for their language, no texts enshrining a corpus of beliefs and code of morality, no appointed custodians of ethnic traditions” (Fraser 1995:44). There is even a legend which says that Gypsies were the makers of the four nails ordered by the Romans and used to crucify Jesus. However, Gypsies stole one and the Romans ended up driving only one nail through Jesus’ feet.

Often described as a people without a country, Gypsies have never asked for a country and never started a war for one. Known as a nomadic people, they are found all over Europe today. Persecuted, they moved from one country to another. Due to their trades, they travel even today and preserve the nomadic character of their ethnicity. Some countries tried to settle them, and some clans or tabors accepted the land offered. However, the settling did not solve the integration problem. In those countries where Gypsies were forced or helped to settle down, they chose areas that favored their trade. The Rudari tribe settled by the river beds to collect silver and gold from the flooding areas. They sold it to goldsmiths and silversmiths in another Gypsy tribe, who traveled to fairs and large events to sell their products. The Gabors, those who cover the house roofs with tin, go wherever they are needed and called, while the Kalderash (coppersmiths) travel through cities and villages patching and selling tins and tubs.

The European Union launched a project called “The Decade of Roma Inclusion: 2005-2015,” but at midcourse the project is a failure. The deportation of Gypsies from France, the demolition of Gypsy settlements in Italy, the burning of Gypsy houses in Hungary, the shooting of Gypsy families in Slovakia, and a report on the sterilization of Gypsy women in the Czech Republic have brought the Gypsies to the forefront of media attention. Artists, like Madonna or Bono, supported them publicly in their European concerts. Gypsy bands are becoming stars in the postmodern society. Several renowned artists claim Gypsy heritage. But this people remain different than the rest of the population they live with. Different countries on the continent passed laws to support and integrate the Gypsies. But there are no real signs of integration. Many people believe that what kept Gypsies distinct from the majority population were their language, culture, and folkways or “their migrancy, the mobility of their dwellings, and . . . their reliance on family-based self-employment” (Mayall 1988:181). In this article I suggest that the main factor is deeper than the cultural or social differences; their distinctiveness is rooted in their worldview.
The Gypsy Worldview

The Gypsy worldview is based on different values than the Western worldview and the two worldviews frequently clash in societies where Gypsies are present. The Gypsy worldview is built on shame and honor and comes closer to the one shared by Mediterranean peoples. For example, Gypsies are very superstitious and treat omens, dreams, visions, and spells with utmost reverence. They believe in fate and luck and this may be one of the major reasons Gypsies do not welcome change and are very fatalistic. Although Gypsies are a people without their own particular religion, Gypsies have often adopted the religion of the locals but retained their worldview. Since most Gypsies are located in countries where the majority of the population is Eastern Orthodox, they found it easier to become Orthodox Christians because eastern Christianity presented similarities in many worldview areas. However, to become a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, for example, is not easy since it causes shame not to be able to drink a glass of wine any longer with the family, and this shame impacts the extended clan or family. From this perspective, even to become a Christian sometimes brings shame, a view shared by Jews and Muslims. Anything that distances or separates one from the rest of one’s family is a danger to fight against.

Shame and honor values are often expressed by a fairly rigid purity and pollution ideology that is also found in Islam and Judaism. For example, Gypsies do not greet each other by shaking hands, as Romans do, but use the Indian greeting based on the pure/impure religious value. The purity value is also seen in the system of trades that divides them and which reminds one of the Indian caste-based society from which they originated. Today, the social structure of Gypsy population is unchanged, and Gypsies remain divided by castes, families, tabors, and trades. Even the non-governmental organizations run by Gypsies cannot come under the same umbrella. There is no social or civic tradition of unique representation, so each of them tries to represent their family, clan, tribe, or trade. Gypsies do not have political parties, institutions, or any type of structure. As a result there is no Gypsy church either. Each family and clan has its own pride and individuals try to defend the honor of their extended family.

Gypsies are oriented more toward the needs of the day, and do not make long term plans or share a long term vision. They are oriented toward the past, not the future. The past is the source of their pride and honor which they defend at any cost. Their songs exude nostalgia for past ages and long passed heroes. Gypsies are also very emotional, impulsive, and short fused; they lack patience, and want things done now or they leave the project. If they
have been shamed, Gypsies react quickly and violently. One day I traveled in a bus with a Gypsy driver. When one of the travelers complained about the bus being late and made reference to the ethnic origin of the bus driver being the cause, the Gypsy driver got angry and fought visibly to control himself and keep his emotions under control. For the rest of the trip he was shaking and very nervous. Life for a Gypsy has value as long as it brings honor, and any shame needs to be revenged even if it means killing someone.

If laid off from a job, most conservative Gypsies would not accept the unemployment benefits of the country as this is seen as affecting their honor and pride. They cannot accept the stigma of being unemployed, which is a shame in their communities. Gypsies like to fight in order to defend their honor, but do not like competition between equals as a societal or cultural value. They discriminate between each other, do not marry one from another caste or clan, and discriminate against the “gagii” (or gacho/gorgio/busne/gadge/gagże), the non-gipsy (see Wedeck 1973:147, 157). History records that Gypsies who traveled through Europe stole from the gadże, but not from their own. They were frequently labeled “the most cunning thieves in the world” (Foster 1995:72). Yoors admits that “the Rom might have as many prejudices against us, the Gaje, as we had against them” (1967:16).

On the other hand, Gypsies are very impressed by suffering, by stories about suffering, and are very receptive to solutions that provide an end to suffering. The story of Jesus’ sufferings and death is very appealing to them and they shed lots of tears. It is not difficult to convert Gypsies to Christianity; it is difficult to keep them Christian. When conversion implies only the acceptance of a set of beliefs, without changing the deep seated values, the result is frequently either backsliding or syncretism. Recently, there was a notable conversion of Gypsies to Pentecostalism or Charismatic movements. For example, Florin Cioaba, the King of one of the Roma tribes, became a lay Pentecostal pastor. He is the President of the Christian Center for the Roma, which has over 100 churches under its jurisdiction.

Pentecostalism offers Gypsies a kind of Christianity that allows for free manifestation of emotions and sentiments. This is a problem for Adventists when introducing Gypsies to a set of doctrines or intellectual propositions. The classic Adventist evangelistic approach of presenting historic timelines based on the book of Daniel to prove the reliability of Scripture has little impact when used with Gypsy groups. Gypsies do not ascribe value to books since their culture is an oral culture. However, Gypsies are more attracted by the story of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the honor that Daniel received as a result of revealing and interpreting the dream. Joseph’s story and his
capacity of interpreting the dreams keep Gypsies on their toes and stretch their emotions for Gypsies believe in dreams and are receptive to messages that come to them in this way.

Miracles are something normal for Gypsies. They believe in magic and attribute special powers to witches or old ladies who know how to cure diseases or foretell the future (Fraser 1995:71, 122). If they have a marriage problem, they go to an old woman, recognized by the community to have supernatural powers, who gives them a special potion or an amulet to cast away the spell. “An old woman is in league with the supernatural, she has the gift of second sight. She charms and bewitches, practices as a doctor and advises lovers” (Block 1939:241). However, the stories of Jesus’ or Old Testament prophets’ miracles get an audience among Gypsies because they can easily identify with those healed. However, the border between spiritualism, magic, and authentic miracles in the Bible is fuzzy and leads frequently to confusion and syncretism.

Stories are the main venue of communication for Gypsies. Most of them are uneducated from a Western perspective because they did not go to school and do not have a formal education. There are no words in the Gypsy languages for “write” and “read.” “Gypsies borrow from other languages to describe these activities. Or else, and more revealingly, they use other Romani words” that refer to reading the palm rather than a written text (Fonseca 1995:11). Some Gypsy tribes allow their kids to go to school only until the fourth grade to learn the basics of reading, writing, and calculation, after which they join their parents and perpetuate the trade of the family or clan. Schooling is seen as a concession or adaptation to the local culture that will allow their kids to be able to cope and survive in it. Emancipation of individuals is sacrificed in favor of preserving the group (Fonseca 1995:16).

Gypsy culture is an oral culture, and their history is transmitted to the next generation by stories, poems, or songs. Children are taught to memorize long poems which praise the heroic acts of their predecessors. Most Gypsies do not sign documents, their word being the seal of an agreement and carrying important weight. Those who decide to pursue a higher education are often treated with suspicion, while those who place value on written documents are considered handicapped or having memory problems. The oral traditions excluded keeping written documents, and as a result they did not have a written language until recently and only from gadže sources. Today there are attempts at unifying their written language and the more than sixty dialects, but the process is hampered by the pride of each Gypsy tribe who claims theirs is the best language.
Without land ownership they did not educate their children scholastically or academically. When life was difficult, Gypsies preferred to become slaves or serfs in order to be under the protection of nobles, kings, or monasteries, as a way to survive. This was a widespread phenomenon among the Gypsies. In Valachia and Transylvania, Gypsies were serfs until the mid-nineteen century, and because they were skilled in metal-working have been assigned to manufacture weapons which gave them a royal servant status (Fraser 1995:108). Because of the advantages of protection and gifts, Gypsies asked wealthy gadžé to become godparents for their children (93).

Under communism, the few Gypsy intellectuals got together and decided to fight for the right to be recognized as a separate ethnicity and people. At the end of the 1970s, Romania’s dictator Ceausescu wanted to be known as a promoter of ethnic and cultural diversity, so Gypsies were encouraged to develop, and to display their cultural traditions. Up to that point they could be officers in the army, communist party activists, and have different trades without mentioning their ethnicity. In the 1980s, however, they were free to admit their Gypsy origins. The communist government protected their villages, allowing them to have their own organization and structure, but intervened when ethnic or clan conflicts became violent. After the fall of communism life for the Gypsies did not improve and ethnic conflicts increased. Houses were burned, people killed, and Gypsies had to flee and hide in the forests.

Today, Gypsies are still discriminated against when it comes to employment all over Europe. Although they like to preserve family and live in their communities, European governments seldom have any plans to support their integration in society. As a result, most of them live in shantytowns or illegal settlements on the outskirts of large cities. This is considered the secret of their survival, not fighting the majority, but retreating to the margins and preserving their identity in community, family, or clan/tribe. By separating from the rest of society (like the Jews), Gypsies survived as an ethnic group or a people while other peoples disappeared. In times of crisis they developed a culture of poverty, became satisfied with less in order to be able to survive.

Religious Life

In spite of the popular belief that Gypsies are not interested in religion and being labeled “heathens,” “Saracens,” or “Tartars,” they are a religious people and often have embraced the religion of the locals in order to be accepted
and survive. ‘Thus there are Catholic Gypsies, various types of Protestant and Orthodox Gypsies and, throughout the Islamic world and those parts of south-eastern Europe where the Ottomans recently ruled, large numbers of Muslim Gypsies’ (Fraser 1995:312). Groper notes that in the U.S. ‘the Rom usually follow the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church, mainly because so many of them came to this country from areas of Europe in which they were practiced’ (1975:109). The Gypsy religious worldview considers that spirits and powers are part of the natural world (108), but men do not perform religious rituals since these are left to the women.

Gypsies found it humiliating and shameful to worship in small churches or house churches probably because their ancestors used to worship in large temples in India. They often prefer to join the religious majority that worship in large churches than be in a position of shame in the religious realm. This is one of the reasons they more easily adopt the religion of the masses. They believed that if you do like the majority, you will be honored—the main motivation is to get honor—and their religion is based less on a conviction that the chosen church faithfully follows the Bible. The same criteria may be noticed when Gypsies join Protestant churches for they prefer the ones with large numbers of members, like the Pentecostal or charismatic churches.

Protestant churches helped Gypsies change their religious mentality and lifestyle, and also helped them abandon smoking, drinking, and other destructive behaviors (beating spouses, stealing, cheating). Those joining the Eastern Orthodox Church live more of a nominal and mystical type of Christianity, being attracted by rituals, by religious traditions, and by the mystical side of Orthodoxy. Certain foods are forbidden and people who deal with body secretions (i.e., midwives, doctors) are declared impure. Ancestors are worshipped out of fear, so the prayer to saints is not foreign in their midst (Lucassen et al. 1998:47). Eastern Orthodox society, although calling the Protestant Gypsies names, appreciates the changed behavior and welcomes them. Baptism became popular among Gypsies, but “they often went their own way in matters of burial and, particularly, marriage” (Fraser 1995:313). The following is a description of marriage and burial traditions of Gabor Gypsies as witnessed by the author and confirmed by his Gypsy friends (Gabor Gypsies are 85-90 percent Seventh-day Adventist).

**Engagement and Wedding Customs**

Gypsies marry their kids early, in their early teen years. They argue that the young ones will leave the family and traditions if they do not get married
early enough. Girls are usually married when they are 12 or 13, while boys are 14 or 15, but they could be promised years before, when the kids are only 8 or 9 years old. Marriages are arranged by parents who get special honor the younger the newlyweds are. The girls’ parents start planning and looking for appropriate partners in terms of social and economic rank, as well as the honor position in society and the level of conservatism and faithfulness to tradition. It is an issue of honor to keep one’s promise as a parent, and once the marriage arrangement becomes public other offers become inappropriate and must be rejected. The friendship relations of the parents and their character traits are the basis of the marriage arrangement.

A liberal minority among some Gypsies no longer keep their agreement; many times they change their minds in favor of a better offer. Sometimes they go so far as to offer their daughters to simply shame the initial bride’s family or get revenge for an issue from the past. Honor and shame are still the basis of the agreement, but these values are often used in a negative way. Most of the negotiations are conducted by males, while women are only informed about the decision. However, women have the right to express their opinion. Very rarely do Gypsy women present a strong enough argument to change the mind of their husbands.

The engagement ceremony takes place at the future bride’s house where both extended families witness the agreement, although the date of the wedding may be ten years in the future. There is no written or signed document, but the given word seals the honor-based agreement. However, the father of the future groom has the possibility to annul the agreement if something dishonorable is found in or happens to the future bride. The father of the future bride can break the agreement only if the girl is abducted and dishonored. Sometimes a plan is purposely designed for abduction so the father can save face when the agreement is broken.

Most of the time an advance from the dowry has to be paid the day of the engagement as a warranty that the agreement will not easily be broken. The engagement cannot be made on Mondays or Thursdays due to a superstitious belief that such days do not bring luck. The food offered at this event must be traditional Gypsy food, the father of the bride brings chicken and the guests are advised not to bring expensive gifts to the families but only symbolic gifts to the future bride. The males traditionally gather together in one room and the ladies talk about the future of the couple in another room. The couple may not even stay with the party; sometimes they take a walk or go shopping, or play in the courtyard if they are too small. When they are very young (6 or 7 years old) they may not even be aware of the significance of the ceremony.
Gypsies practice endogamy. The identity of the group is preserved by marrying someone from the same extended family or clan. The Gypsy clan of the Gabors preserves their identity by not marrying their kids outside the clan or tribe. If a Gabor marries someone from another Gypsy clan or a non-Gypsy, the person is excluded from the clan and disowned. This parallels the Amish closed communities or many Muslim traditions. If a young Gypsy decides to fall in love with an outsider, that person is perfectly aware that this will bring shame on the family and clan. Although the person will not be killed, the relations with the other Gabors become as with an outsider.

Love is not a requirement for marriage. It is assumed that the parents know what is best for their kids and the kids are taught to trust and respect the parents’ decisions. They do not learn to love in order to marry but marry in order to learn to love. Up until the wedding day the bride and groom have no specific responsibilities in the families except to learn a trade. However, after marriage they continue to live from the groom’s parents who take care of all their needs. This is a period of “formation” for the young couple, who do not have any say yet in the major decisions regarding their own family. In fact, as long as the father is alive, he will have the last word. The authority of the eldest in the extended family is faithfully preserved. Even if three or four generations are living, the last word in choosing a partner for the youngest belongs to the eldest male.

If the father of the groom decides to make no arrangement until the boy is 14 or 15 years old, he usually receives several offers from families who have girls. The father chooses the girl who has the best “pedigree” (looking at the families to which her parents belong), and who also shows more flexibility in accepting to be “formed” or shaped in the future family. The mother of the groom has the responsibility to teach her daughter-in-law the secrets of life. Since the father of the girl pays a dowry, sometimes the marriage becomes a chance for the parents of the groom to get out of poverty or to make a good financial deal.

The wedding usually takes place close to an important holiday, like Christmas, New Year’s Eve, or Easter, because this is the time when the extended family comes home. Due to their trades and nomadic lifestyle, the males or sometimes the whole family are gone for most of the year. The males in the groom’s family go to the bride’s parents to ask that the girl be given in marriage. Usually this is done with short notice, the ceremony taking place during the week after the initial contact. There are no expensive gifts involved, but the groom’s family brings 4-6 chickens, fresh fruit, and drinks as a sign of deference and respect. Food is a very important part of
the ceremony, and the host family prepares plenty of food in order to honor the guests.

The ceremony lasts a few hours, and during this time the groom sits with the males, while the bride and the females eat in a different room. They all eat traditional Gypsy food, which consists of chicken stew with vegetables. The discussion includes the presentation of the extended family and their past important and honorable events, culminating with the request for marriage. At this moment both the males and females come together and the groom's father asks for the bride to be “released.” In this traditional speech, the father of the groom has to “convince” his future in-laws that he will take care of and protect the girl. Symbolically, he has to “pay” a toll in order to take her beyond the gate, and the groom’s family can leave only after this traditional ceremony is enacted.

The girl will live with the females in her new home until the ceremony of covering up of her hair. Until that time the girl wears her hair in braids and is not allowed to cover it up. During this period the young couple spends time together and learns to like and love each other. The wedding ceremony takes place at the groom's house. The extended family and the guests have to be at the groom's house at 9:00 in the morning to attend the symbolic rite of passage as the bride transitions from childhood to maturity as symbolized by the covering of her hair. It is considered a shame to come late or to miss the ceremony, and if this happens the guests do not attend at all. This is the moment when the ladies play their important role. The mother of the bride and the mother of the groom start combing the bride's hair and re-braid it with red bands. Then the mother of the groom gathers the bride's hair in a traditional bun, and the groom brings the covering that signifies that from this moment on she is his wife. The bride does not wear a white dress but a brightly colored one, and only a Gypsy can usually distinguish the difference between the bride and the rest of the ladies present at the wedding.

The family and guests then begin to eat traditional Gypsy food consisting of two or three main dishes based on chicken or calf meat. No potato salad or corn is included since these are considered the food of the poor. In the past there was no special dessert or cake served, but today’s ceremonies have added the wedding cake. Again, the females and males sit in different rooms. The ceremony culminates with the showing and paying of the dowry to the groom's father. The dowry includes traditional clothing for the bride, bedding, shoes, kitchen utensils, etc. Gypsy clothing is usually very expensive. If the bride’s family is poor, they borrow money and purchase the dowry in order to preserve their honor in front of the groom’s family and the guests, even
if they have to work hard to pay back the money for years and years. If the dowry is in the form of money (usually a considerable sum), it will be saved until a house will be purchased or built for the young couple. If the groom’s father already has a house built for the couple, the money is kept until the groom proves himself to be on his own and mature enough to wisely invest or use them for at this stage the couple is not considered mature enough to be let alone, so they do not even go on a honeymoon.

Christianity has changed or influenced some of the Gypsy traditions. Most Christian families marry their kids when they are at least 16-17 years old, and the importance of the monetary dowry is diminished. However, the virginity of the bride is still considered a sign of honor for her family, and the morning after the wedding the two mothers visit the bedroom of the young couple. If the bride was not a virgin at the time of her wedding, the two mothers try to cover up the fact by not telling their husbands. If the bride was a virgin, the bedding sheet is exposed outside the house so the whole community witnesses the honor of the family. If they cannot produce the proof, the community understands the message but nobody says anything publicly. Everyone understands the shameful situation, and this is considered one of the possible reasons for divorce. However, Gypsies can accept the situation and live with it, but the families will insist on divorce if the bride is not faithful or if she cannot have children.

If the new family cannot produce children 5 to 8 years after marriage, the parents are expected to separate the couple and begin divorce proceedings. Although the emotional distress will be great for the couple, it is considered more shameful to have no children as a family than to remarry or even remain single and stigmatized by society. The bride is considered the guilty party in this situation, and her only chance to restore her honor is to remarry a widower who already has children. Gypsies consider having boys to be a blessing because they carry the family name. Elwood Trigg states that a simple separation is considered sufficient to effect a divorce, without any ritual being required. . . . If, however, the wife is young, it may be necessary for the matter to come before the council of elders for their consideration. . . . With few exceptions, it is usual for such a court to decide in favor of divorce. The court’s purpose is chiefly to determine responsibility for the breakup of the marriage, and, if the woman is young, and there has been some financial arrangement made between the former parents-in-law, to make an appropriate adjustment. (1973:90)

Christian Gypsies usually postpone the wedding so the young couple can
marry within the legally designated age and also receive the blessing of the church. If, however, the couple is too young to marry legally, it is considered that God can still bless the couple directly and an elderly male prays for them instead of the pastor. The church is not allowed to give its blessing to a couple until they are married legally, and this comes in conflict with the Gypsy tradition of marrying before the legal age.

Death and Burial Traditions

Today, when a Gypsy dies, within a few hours of the death, all the members of the extended family or clan all over Europe are informed by phone. All come, even from far places or countries, to support the family, regardless of age or social status or even family relationship. It is also a moment when the quota of honor can be increased for one’s participation at a wedding or funeral creates an honor obligation to attend the other’s life events in response. Those who have embraced Christianity quote, “Weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice,” but the gathering has to do more with the cultural tradition than the biblical text (which was, surprisingly, written in a shame and honor culture).

The Gypsies keep watch over the dead person, but the tradition differs here between those who watch only two nights and those who watch three nights. Friends, relatives, and visitors gather at sunset and begin wailing and singing sad songs that tell the story of the deceased. Different people are invited and given the honor to say something, and most of them say it in song form. The deceased is praised and the highlights of his or her life are included in the songs. Later in the night, the eldest male Gypsy present begins telling stories about the family of the deceased and the rest of the extended family. The others join in and continue the story.

Those Gypsies who have accepted Christianity do not praise the deceased but sing songs that praise God for his goodness. They tell stories, not about the merits of the person who died, but about what God has done for them and for the extended Gypsy family in general. They use this occasion to acquire more honor. At each funeral at least a few hundred people come together, and when the deceased is young or the person died in an accident or in a special situation it is not uncommon for a few thousand people to gather from all over Europe. In the past, the family prepared food and snacks for the participants at the funeral who ate all night long. Today this custom seems to have been abandoned.

Depending on the number of participants, at least three or four and
up to twelve people are asked to serve as organizers of the night watches. The organizers serve tea, juice, or water and keep order because Gypsies often have the tendency to talk all at once. The close family members stay in the room where the corpse is kept, while the males (with the older ones in the middle) sit in the adjacent room. Christian Gypsies talk about God and everyone who wants to say something that praises God is welcome to dialogue with the elders. Non-Christian Gypsies talk about their clan and the traditions associated with it, but only the elderly ones are allowed to speak because it is considered that they are the keepers and preservers of the traditions. Such gatherings provide an occasion for the younger ones to learn about their history and culture.

The funeral begins at noon, but the family gathers earlier in the morning to spend the last hours with the deceased. If the dead person was a Christian, the church takes over the funeral program with the pastor or priest being present. After the religious ceremony, a farewell letter is read. For Christian Gypsies the farewell is written in the friends’ and family’s name. Non-Christian Gypsies read a letter in which the deceased is supposedly saying good-bye to each of the clan’s families and close friends, and also to all the cities, villages, and places where the dead person lived, worked, or traveled. This is an honor response to the honor brought by those who came to the watch and the funeral.

Those clans who keep watch for only two nights over the dead person do not allow the thousand of guests to come to the interment ceremony; there only the close family joins. The guests remain at the home and are served a meal at which the family does not participate. Those who keep watch for three nights allow everybody who wants to come to be with them at the cemetery. Christian Gypsies no longer light candles by the coffin as the tradition requires to provide light on the path of the deceased person’s soul, but they still put soap, antiperspirant, a comb, money, and spare shoes (so the person will not be ashamed to walk barefoot), the traditional hat, and many other things traditionally believed to be necessary “on the other side” in the coffin to show the deceased person’s status and the fact that the person owns things and has money that brings honor even beyond the grave. Although Adventist Gypsies no longer believe in an immortal soul, they still follow the traditional customs that emphasize honor. People in the audience may even bring money to the coffin for other deceased relatives and some may shout messages to be taken over to other dead relatives.

During the grieving period, which lasts at least a year, all the women in the extended family wear black or dark colored clothes if the deceased was
under 50 years old when he or she died. If the deceased was older, the women in the family wear their regular colored dresses, and only a black or navy blue scarf to cover their heads as a sign of grieving. Men in the immediate family do not shave or cut their hair for a year, while relatives more removed do so for only six weeks. During the period of grieving the TV is not only turned off and unplugged but also covered so nobody in the house would be tempted to smile, laugh, or have joy. Entertainment is seen as incompatible with the traditional grieving attitude. Weddings initially scheduled during the time of grieving are postponed and members of the extended family do not attend other weddings. Sometimes traditional families place food and water at the entrance of the house to attract the soul of the deceased. If the soul returns it is considered an honor for the family. On New Year’s Eve the family pours a bucket of water on the ground so that each deceased in the family will have enough water for the coming year.

Another tradition supposed to enhance the honor of the dead person (and implicitly the remaining family) is to bring a band to the funeral, the equivalent of the honor showed at military funerals. Each family is supposed to bring a large flower wreath, so an honored person could end up with hundreds of wreaths that would go before the coffin as a sign of great honor. As a sign of mourning, the family members do not take a shower and the women do not comb their hair. After forty days (six weeks), and after a year, a remembrance meal is offered in the name of the deceased to whom the food is dedicated. Even Christian Gypsies continue to keep some of these traditions for which they find biblical support (time of grieving for Moses, Jacob, etc.).

The day after the funeral the elders in the community gather together and the amount of money spent and the number of people who attended is announced. This increases the honor of the deceased and the family. The whole community is waiting for this announcement for it brings honor to the whole community, not only to the dead person’s family. No donations or contributions are accepted because these are considered shameful and humiliating. If the family does not have enough money, they will borrow but will not accept any monetary gifts. Only those who do not have children or a family are buried based on the donations of the community. In such a case it is mandatory for the community to step up and cover the costs, otherwise it is shameful to not care for the poor in their midst.
Conclusions

In light of the above description it is clear that the Gypsy worldview, based on honor seeking and shame avoiding, informs their lifestyle, including their religious ceremonies and practices. When conversion to Christianity implies only a public statement of belief the result is syncretism or nominal Christianity. Christian mission should be an informed mission that changes the whole person for God’s Kingdom.

For centuries many have tried to integrate Gypsies into Western society but those attempts have largely failed. Stereotypes about Gypsies abound even today and their culture often clashes with the host cultures where they live. The secret is that the deep-seated values of their worldview have not been changed and apparent changes are only superficial. Christians did not fare any better in their attempt to introduce change. The flexibility of Gypsies to adapt to the local religion and say what the majority wanted to hear has prevented real conversion. Many Christian denominations failed to notice that the Gypsy traditions were far more powerful than the adopted religion.

On the other hand the church should not rush to disfellowship Gypsies, but should seek to understand them first and work with them from within their worldview. A Western-based small group approach may not work for honor-seeking Gypsies. Local church structure should be adapted to the Gypsy culture and should build on their value of respect for age. If the way to their heart is through the eldest male in the village or the chief of the clan, the gospel has plenty to say about such cultural traditions. Christian mission should not cause unnecessary shame, but point to the real cause of pollution—sin—and should seek to attract Gypsies to the honor God promises everyone who overcomes a shameful past. God has a solution for Gypsy suffering and the Adventist Church should offer them not only a message of spiritual healing but also a message of physical and emotional health.

An oral people need an oral gospel. The audible Word should be equally powerful as the written Word. Biblical stories that resonate with the Gypsy worldview should become the framework for presenting biblical values. The possibility that God might reveal himself to them in dreams should be acknowledged. At the same time, Gypsies need to be encouraged to send their children to school to learn how to read and write. They should be able to check for themselves the truth of the Scripture. Pentecostal-types of approaches that allow emotions to be manifested during worship, although useful, should be cautiously employed, always checking for syncretistic influences. Since some of the Gypsy tribes are still nomadic, incarnational
mission requires that Christian witnesses become like them. The old adage is more than true in the case of Gypsies: “If your pulpit can fit on a horse, you are welcome to preach to us!”

Gypsy culture and worldview resemble in so many ways the Muslim worldviews and cultures. The two groups share the concepts of shame and honor, hospitality, and many family values. The work of Jerald Whitehouse and the missionary methods he advocated for Muslims apply equally to other ethnic groups that live in the Western world but who preserve their Eastern mentality. Those working with Gypsies will greatly benefit from the experience and wisdom of a missionary whose life was dedicated to understanding, adapting, and presenting the gospel to people with a different worldview.

**Works Cited**


Section 5

STRATEGIC APPROACHES

a man of
PASSIONATE REFLECTION
THE EMERGING ADVENTIST THEOLOGY OF
RELIGIONS DISCOURSE: PARTICIPANTS,
POSITIONS, PARTICULARITIES
THE EMERGING ADVENTIST THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS DISCOURSE: PARTICIPANTS, POSITIONS, PARTICULARITIES

Stefan Hoeschele

Introduction

In just one generation, the theology of religions has grown from a specialists’ subject in the periphery of the theological encyclopedia to one of the issues of major public interest and among those that theologians debate. Due to the globalized context of contemporary discourses and interfaith encounters on various levels, missiologists and systematic theologians alike have increasingly seen the need to pronounce their positions on this topic (see, e.g., Knitter 1985; Hick 1987; D’Costa 1990 and 2009; Rommen and Netland 1995, Dupuis 1997, and Kärkkäinen 2003; for a comprehensive bibliography and helpful discussion of publications, see Bernhardt 2007a and 2007b).

Both Roman Catholics and Protestant—including mainline and Evangelical Protestants—participate in the debate, and even Pentecostals have started to contribute to it (cf. Yong 2000). By way of contrast, Seventh-day Adventists have not yet produced any major systematic study on this subject. The desideratum expressed by Russell Staples in 1992, that
Adventists “are also forced to clarify . . . the uniqueness of Christianity amid world religions” (Staples 1992:13) still holds true. Nevertheless, Adventist theologians have published a few short essays on the topic during the last twenty years (Beardsell 1990; Dybdahl 1999; Oosterwal 1999; Rilloma 2003) as well as a several books that contain aspects of a theology of religions at least implicitly (Al-Rumi n.d; Hole and Schantz 1993; Owusu-Mensa 1993; Schantz 1993 and 2004; Bauer 2005a and 2005b; Doukhan 2002 and 2004; GMIC 2003; Heinz and Heinz 2007). In addition, there are a good number of unpublished dissertations and theses of a similar nature (see the works cited).

Unfortunately, the most elaborate Adventist reflections on the theology of religions so far have not been published (Oliver 1987; Sarcevic 2006). However, a few relevant statements crafted by church committees (BE-IRLA 2000; BE-IRLA 2003; BRICOM 2003; AJFC 2005; AMR-TED 2006; Bauer 2006:179–185; TED 2008) and the existence of the denomination’s Council on Interchurch/Inter-religion Affairs and various centers for the study of non-Christian religions testify to the fact that the interest of Adventists in the topic has increased in the recent past. The same can be said with regard to Adventist-sponsored journals and magazines, notably Shabbat Shalom and Fides et Libertas, and significant contributions to Ministry, the Adventist Review and Adventist World (see, e.g., Zachary 1999; Whitehouse 2001 and 2002; Schantz and Whitehouse 2003; Dybdahl 2006; Owens 2009; Johnsson 2009 and 2010).

While one cannot, in the absence of a monograph on the topic, speak of a clear-cut Adventist theology of religions at present, altogether these various documents do create a picture that is worth analyzing. Moreover, given the fact that the production of literature on the issue is increasing, this picture must be considered as an emerging discourse in its own right. Certainly a book-length work or dissertation on the topic would be needed to do justice to the issue and the Adventist materials related to it. This paper, therefore, provides a research bibliography but cannot discuss all the issues arising from the publications found in it. Rather, it gives an overview of positions taken, highlights the contributions of major participants in the Adventist theology of religions discourse, and formulates a few insights regarding the particularities of the debate in the context of this denomination. It is not the intention of this study to support a specific view found in Adventist writings so far or to develop a novel approach to the field; instead, it aims at presenting some overall findings and a tentative analysis of Adventist positions so far. Therefore, this article is written with the intention of clarifying the logic
in the Adventist theology of religions discourse and to provide a basis for further discussion.

**Discourse Contributors**

**Phases and Persons**

When analyzing the history of Adventist theology and missiology, one can distinguish three phases with regard to the interest in the theology of religions. In the first phase—the 19th century—the main denominational focus was the conversion of other Christians to the Seventh-day Adventist faith. The contact with, and reflection on the fate of, non-Christians was, therefore, limited to a few instances. Therefore, there are hardly any references to Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or other major religions. Consequently one also finds little if any theological reflection on the adherents of these religions and the possibility of their salvation.

An exception to this picture is found in the writings of Ellen G. White. In several instances she emphasizes how God works among non-Christians. One example shall suffice to illustrate her inclusive thought, which differentiates between human worship and organized religion. “Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God” (White 1898:638).

A second phase includes the first three quarters of the 20th century. In this period, Adventist missionary activity regularly confronted the church with non-Christian religions. Hardly any Adventist missionary or scholar developed a strong interest in these religions as such due to the urgency they felt about their missionary task (cf. the absence of materials on Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism in the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* [Neufeld 1962]; in the *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Students’ Source Book* [Neufeld 1966], there is a general article on Islam). There are, however, a few instances of individuals whose thinking penetrated to deeper levels of such religions. Three outstanding examples of European origin for an interest in and a constructive approach to non-Christian religions are Ernst Kotz, Wilhelm Lesovsky, and Erich Bethmann.

Kotz, the most famous German Adventist missionary, was the first Adventist to translate a full New Testament into a new language. He worked
among the Pare of Tanzania and took a keen interest in the culture and religion of his host people. His two books on the Pare (1922 and 1925) are quite critical of major elements of Pare traditional religion in spite of Kotz’s sympathetic and perceptive view of traditional culture in general. Still, being the first Adventist ethnographer, Kotz deserves respect for finding some traces of God in a context which most of his Adventist contemporaries rejected as merely “heathen.”

Bethmann and Lesovsky both worked in the Middle East during the following decades. While their view of Islam differed, both took Muslims seriously (for a thorough analysis, see Vierus 1991). Bethmann was the first Adventist to produce a monograph on Islam, in which he presents a critique of conventional missionary methods and stresses the need of a properly theological approach to build a “Bridge to Islam” (Bethmann 1950; cf. Bethmann 1966). Lesovsky, a medical doctor and scholar of education, produced the most far-reaching conclusion; in his thinking, what he calls “proto-Islam” and Adventism are identical. Thus, according to Lesovsky, Adventist mission was to unearth the original content of Islam and thus point Muslims to the Adventist message (Lesovsky 1936). Altogether, these examples from the early and mid-20th century demonstrate the potential for later developments in Adventist reflections on the theology of religions even if these first attempts remained sketchy.

The third phase, beginning in the 1980s, is characterized by a growing number of voices and increasingly explicit theological reflection on non-Christian religions. Among the many writers of articles and dissertations, six who have contributed significantly to the discussion should be mentioned in particular. While other scholars have written only single pieces of reflection or produced unpublished dissertations, these few have brought forth a discourse, even if it is still in its infancy.

The largest number of significant contributions have been made by Jon Dybdahl and Bruce Bauer, two of the denomination’s leading missiologists. Dybdahl has produced the most varied relevant writings: reflections on Buddhism (2000), non-Christians in general (2004), the question of their salvation (1999), and the kind of theology needed in non-Christian environments and arising from within such contexts (2006). In addition to writing on folk religion (2000) and directing many dissertations related to non-Christian religions, Bauer has been instrumental in editing several volumes which document the rising Adventist interest in the theology of religions (2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007).

Although other authors have directed their attention to particular
religions, their contributions have advanced the discourse by providing case studies yielding principles for the theology of religions as a whole. Thus, Jacques Doukhan with his works mainly on Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations (2002, 2004, and as editor of *Shabbat Shalom*) also broadened this scope in a 2005 special edition of the journal entitled *Israel, Islam and the Church* and in earlier reflections (1994). This is a logical step considering the fact that the largest amount of Adventist attention in the whole field in the last two decades was directed towards Islam. Naturally, the most active contributors to the discussion were the director of the Global Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations, Jerald Whitehouse (1998; 2001; 2002; 2006), and his predecessor at what was then called the Seventh-day Adventist Global Centre for Islamic Studies, Børge Schantz (1983:705–724; 1993; 1993 [with J. Hole]; 2004). Two recent contributions by the retired editor of *Adventist Review*, William G. Johnsson, add to this picture (2009; 2010). Altogether, the last two decades have clearly been the most productive as far as Adventist reflections on the theology of religion is concerned.

### Religions and Church Entities Involved

The observation that the reflection on particular religions regularly forms the basis for more general theological thinking can be further substantiated when comparing the relative weight that the various religions carry in the totality of the available publications and studies of this field. While there are only five items each related to Hinduism and Buddhism, items focusing on Judaism and Folk/Traditional Religions count more than ten each. Certainly this is partly due to the fact that Asian Adventists have not been very active in scholarly publishing until recently and that there is no easy accessibility to their academic work. Another factor is that both Judaism and African Religions are traditionally of more interest to Adventist scholarship because of the mission successes on the African continent and the Christian and particularly Adventist roots in the Jewish religion. Still, the fact that there are studies from all regions indicates that the discourse, even if still weak, has grown into a global phenomenon.

This is definitely true also for the discussion on Islam, which has contributors from various continents. With more than thirty items, this field of discussion is the largest single set of Adventist studies containing theology of religions content—even slightly more than the studies dealing with religions in general. This should not come as a surprise given the growing importance of Islam globally both in the realm of politics and as a challenge for Christian interfaith relations.
The growing number of studies on diverse religions contributing to general reflections on the theology of religions is paralleled by an ongoing diversification of organizations, institutions, and levels of church administration involved in the discourse. On the one hand is the denomination’s General Conference, which renamed its Council on Interchurch Affairs (established in 1980) “Council on Interchurch/Interreligion Affairs” in 2007 when Bill Johnsson was appointed as an assistant to the General Conference President for Interfaith Relations. Its activities so far include dialogue meetings and conferences with Muslim organizations and representatives of the Jewish faith, which presupposes the recognition of positive elements in these religions. Together with the long tradition of Adventist lobbying for religious liberty manifested in organizations such as the International Religious Liberty Association (cf. BE-IRLA 2000 and 2003; Liberty; Conscience and Liberty) and the appointment of an assistant to the General Conference president for interfaith relations (cf. Johnsson 2009 and 2010), this situation shows that the very leadership of the denomination is aware of the need to continue exploring the Christian stance vis-à-vis other religions.

Another approach to the issue is represented by the denomination’s Religious Study Centers and a forum in which their directors convene annually, the Global Mission Issues Committee. They drafted a number of statements in 2000 and 2002 dealing with the relationship between Adventism and Muslims, Jews, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as well as with World Religions in general (Bauer 2006:179–185 and 2007:94–95). Although these texts have not yet become official statements, they indicate the need to appreciate what is agreeable in other religions while spelling out major differences with Christianity. The same need led to statements on Adventist-Jewish relations and on Adventist-Muslim relations, the former issued by the denomination’s Biblical Research Institute Committee (2003), the latter by the Trans-European Division (2008) and its Adventist-Muslim Relations Committee (2006). This church region includes the Middle East, which explains the special interest in the issue.

When assessing the different types of Adventist texts dealing with the theology of religion, one can thus find that many entities engage in, and various categories of studies contribute to, the emerging discourse. Ranging from official pronouncements to scholarly studies and from popular to academic articles, all but academic monographs on the issue are available today. What is more, with an institutional anchorage in several organizations at the highest level of the denomination, the issue will undoubtedly keep its momentum in the near future.
Theological Aspects

A theological evaluation of positions regarding the religions must ask several questions. The foundational question is soteriological: Is there a way for non-Christians to attain salvation? Given the intimate connection of soteriology with christology, some aspects of the latter are included in the debate, although it does not focus on the classical controversies on Christ’s nature but on the more functional question as to what role his salvific acts play for persons who have not made a commitment to him.

A second major area of theological concern is ecclesiology. What part does the church take in the plan of salvation as far as non-Christians are concerned? How is church membership connected with it? Although this discussion commonly focuses on the church as an organized community of believers, this is also a pneumatological question; after all, the church is part of the third article of the Apostolic Creed.

In the following presentation of Adventist thought regarding these issues, these two areas cannot be neatly separated. However, an attempt is made to focus on ecclesiology in the first subsection, on soteriology in the second, and to consider the Adventist synthesis of the two in the third. These two foci also coincide with two common positions in the theology of religions, exclusivism and inclusivism, for which Adventist evaluations will be presented.

Exclusivism and the Ecclesiological Question

The exclusivist position in the theology of religions is the view that salvation can solely be attained through Jesus Christ—by either only those who have made a commitment to him (radical exclusivism) or also by those who receive the benefits of his salvific acts in another way (moderate exclusivism). It excludes any role of non-Christian religions as far as salvation is concerned. While the role of the church does not need to be a decisive issue in the debate for moderate exclusivists, radical exclusivists would deny the possibility of salvation for non-church members with few exceptions such as underground Christians. The latter position, therefore, may be well summarized with Cyprian of Carthage’s dictum extra ecclesiam salus non est.

Although Seventh-day Adventists have not linked church membership (or membership in the Adventist Church) to soteriological notions, the denomination’s pronounced “remnant” ecclesiology entails a tendency to view the affiliation with the church as an indispensable element in what may
be called the unconscious Adventist *ordo salutis*. This tendency is enhanced by the “Great Controversy” motif, which contains the apocalyptic view of only two discernible groupings at the end of world history, one being God’s faithful people and the others those who reject him.

At the same time, the Adventist type of exclusivism has remained explicitly moderate, evidently on the basis of the insight that the end of time is yet to come. Thus salvation is portrayed as definitely accessible for non-Christians in Adventist writings on the issue. Whether this view is based on Ellen White statements, on the tradition of God judging people according to the light they had, on progressive revelation (for all these, see Oliver 1987:44–45), on people’s good deeds as depicted in Matt 25 (Christo 2006:16), or on biblical case studies—there is unanimity that God saves according to criteria beyond the mere confession of Christ. Even empirical research has confirmed that Adventists hold a significantly more positive view regarding the potential access of non-Christians to salvation than most other conservative Protestants (Stark and Bainbridge 1985:58; here the statement “Being of the Hindu religion would definitely prevent salvation” is affirmed only by 17 percent of Adventists).

Still some discussion has been evoked during the last decade on the question as to what role the church should play in view of movements to Christ in contexts where these Jesus followers remain embedded in their respective traditional religions. The fact that several such movements exist in different non-Christian contexts, including quasi-Adventist segments (cf. Bauer 2005b and contributions to Bauer 2006 and 2007), demonstrates the need of further ecclesiological reflection with inspiration from the theology of religions. Among the fruit of this reflection has been the release of two official denominational statements (GMIC 2003; GC-EC 2009) which express the desire for an alignment of such movements with the organized denomination while conceding that “transitional structures” are a reality.

At the basis of such deliberations is the question whether a more ecclesiocentric approach or a more kingdom-oriented view should be the point of departure of Adventist thinking on salvation and the religions. While these two should not be viewed as opposites, it is clear that they are distinct concepts and that God’s kingdom is not immediately linked to the church, although the latter is an instrument of the kingdom (Johnston 2005). Thus Staples (2006 [1999]) is right in emphasizing that “Adventist ecclesiology is more functional than ontological,” implying that Adventists believe the “remnant” has been called to do a particular work of proclamation but is not an exclusive vessel of mediating God’s grace. God’s Spirit is at work even
beyond the church as an institution and God’s Spirit may act even outside the Judeo-Christian tradition (cf. de Alwis 1982:297–299). The Adventist non-sacramental ecclesiology stresses the importance of the church’s witness to God’s saving work but refrains from limiting access to salvation to persons with a nominal church membership (cf. Sarcevic 2006:41–42).

**Inclusivism and Issues of Soteriology**

With its pronounced but predominantly functional ecclesiology, it is also mandatory for an Adventist theology of religions to consider aspects of the inclusivist position. This position concedes the possibility or even the fact of divine revelation in some religions and therefore attributes salvific potential to them. At the same time, the inclusivist’s own religion is considered superior; thus ultimately the other religions depend on it to reach completion. Together with exclusivism, the inclusivist view can, therefore, uphold the essential difference between Christianity and other faiths while evaluating the latter in a more positive light.

Although Adventist writers have not gone so far as to ascribe to particular elements in other religions actual salvific relevance, the evaluation of non-Christian systems of belief has been generally well-balanced. Dybdahl (2000:82) for instance emphasizes that a Christian “promise-fulfillment” outlook on Buddhism is more adequate than a “search and destroy” attitude. According to him, Adventists should approach this faith with an “attitude of learners willing to see good in Buddhism” (81; cf. also Insom 2008). This is a position that rejects a simplistic black-and-white scheme and sees both positive and destructive elements in religions, a perspective that is typically Adventist (cf. Rilloma 2003; Dybdahl 2004; Doss 2009).

Due to this balanced approach, Adventist authors do not idealize religions either; thus, certain types of religious activities and identities are depicted in a critical way. Folk religion and faiths with “animistic” and ancestor or spirit veneration components (Ncube 1988; Chikwekwe 1997; Almocera 2000; Bauer 2000) as well as folk Islam with its superstitious and magical elements (Twumasi 1996) are consistently rejected. At the same time, one meets an appreciation of at least some features of traditional religions such as their holism (Nwosu 1995) and elements pointing to a heritage connected with Judaism (Owusu-Mensa 1993; N’Getich 1996).

The most lively debate relevant to the inclusivist position has been going on regarding Islam during the last decade. While some Adventist scholars depict Islam mainly as a competitor to Christianity and a stumbling block to salvation for its adherents (Schantz 1993 and 2004; Coleman 2004), others
recognize its monotheistic teaching as a framework in which spiritual growth and even genuine followership of Jesus is possible (Whitehouse 1998 and 2006; Lepke 2001; Carr 2002). Thus they assess Islam as a quasi-Old Testament paradigm. Again others stress certain ambiguities in Islam (Worschech 2002; Heinz and Heinz 2007; Diop 2008).

The Adventist assessment of Islam is of special interest when comparing it to the theological interpretation of contemporary Judaism. The last decade has seen a number of publications that stress the continuity of the Jewish and Adventist faiths (Doukhan 2002 and 2004; BRICOM 2003; AJFC 2005), and that counteract the theory that Israel has been rejected by God in the Christian dispensation. The differences between the Jewish and Muslim faiths must be duly recognized, not least the fact that one is pre-Christian while the other considers itself as post-Christian. Nevertheless, the Adventist treatment of the two, which takes their monotheistic basis into account, must be viewed as peculiar: Judaism and, at least partly, Islam, are regarded as special cases in the Adventist theological reflection. Soteriologically, this is a necessity either because salvation is viewed in a theocentric manner (which would be contrary to the christocentric Adventist approach) or because one sees potential to redefine the respective faith through biblical Christianity. The latter is happening in both cases in that models have been developed in which Christ becomes the focal point of new variants of the respective religion.

The Jewish and Muslim cases—i.e., theologies of specific religions—are important not only with regard to the differences in assessing the two, but also because they show the limits of a general theology of religions. Such a general theology presupposes that all non-Christian faiths should be called “religions” and be grouped together. The fact that Judaism is often removed from the debate due to its special relationship to Christianity indicates, however, that reality is more complex. Once one assigns Islam the role of another special case and continues to apply the principle of differentiation to other traditions, the whole endeavor splits into theologies of single religions.

This insight may be helpful in understanding the Adventist approach toward the religions. On the whole Adventist theologians see no soteriological value in religious traditions of any kind; at the same time, though, these traditions need not be a complete blockage for salvation. With such a dialectical stance, an Adventist approach to the faiths of the world would decline to give a comprehensive theological judgment on “the religions”; rather, it would preferably evaluate each religion and its elements in their own right (cf. Rice 1985:215).
This Adventist consideration of inclusivism can conclude, therefore, that the recognition of traces of divine revelation in some religions can indeed be derived from denominational tradition. A salvific potential in non-Christian faiths, however, would be denied. Adventist thinkers would reject the concept that other religions depend on Christianity to reach completion if this entailed some sacramental notion but they would accept it as far as “truth seeking” is concerned. Finally, the view that Christianity makes its adherents superior in some way does not fit in with the Adventist understanding of faith (cf. Rice 1985:215). Adventist theology stresses the importance of sharing access to salvation with others; therefore, the question is not one of superiority at all but of responsibility.

An Adventist Contribution: Missiological Universalism

A third position which is commonly discussed alongside exclusivism and inclusivism is the pluralist theology of religions. According to this theory, many religions are fully valid paths of salvation. Representatives of this pluralist thinking are to be distinguished from those who teach universal salvation, for the latter view includes even those in the divine therapy and restoration of the cosmos who reject particular or all religions. Nevertheless, the pluralist position is to be viewed as a further step on the continuum ranging between the radical exclusive and universalist extremes.

The model of such a one-dimensional continuum is certainly helpful in that it clarifies options on the basis of one tangible criterion: access to salvation through particular religious systems. The strengths of models, however, are often also their weaknesses. In this case, one dimensionality provides clarity but also represents a somewhat schematic approach to the relationship of religion and salvation. It presupposes that religions as such are salvific systems and eclipses the possibility that salvation is not dependent mainly upon institutional religious belonging.

Adventist approaches to the religions provide an alternative to this model. They clearly reject the pluralist position (for an exceptional and non-representative Adventist position, which appears to come close to pluralism, see Selmanovic 2009). The recent “Roadmap for Mission” document of the denomination’s General Conference, for instance, while granting that there is a “genuine quest for God in world religions,” stresses that mission is not merely to make “Hindus better Hindus, Muslims better Muslims, Buddhists better Buddhists, and so on” (GC-EC 2009). At the same time, Adventist theologies of religion incorporate one of the major concerns behind the
pluralist position (and behind inclusivism): an emphasis on God's abundant grace, which is not bound to institutional Christianity. Still Adventist thinking would emphasize that this grace is not inherent in other religious systems. This view is connected with the conviction that the gospel includes a global mission, which is why many of the Adventist works with theology of religions implications focus on mission (see, e.g., Roth 1983; Sundaraj 1992; Solomon 1994; Osindo 1996; Twumasi 1996; Babu 2000; Kilonzo 2001; Kujur 2001; Saputro 2002; Roy 2003; Gumbo 2008). In other words, at the basis of the reflection on the religions stands a need for both communicating God's plan of salvation and a positive view of people's potential access to his grace for all humans, whatever their affiliation to particular religious systems.

I suggest that this position be called “missiological universalism.” It stresses that God gives each person the chance to enter his kingdom, although none is taken in against his will, and the importance of sharing the good news of this kingdom with everyone. It takes seriously both the exclusivist stress on Christ's unique salvific role and the pluralist and universalist desire to see all people saved. Yet it also relativizes both: it emphasizes the greatness of God's grace, which is not bound to organizational ties and birth in auspicious historical circumstances in which people have a chance to hear about Christ—and the necessity of individual commitment, i.e., living faith.

A missiological universalism of this kind entails several crucial theological aspects. It is theologically founded on a subtle balance between ecclesiology and soteriology. Missiological universalism stresses that salvation is larger than the church but assigns the church the important task to spread the good news of this very salvation. God's Spirit is viewed as being at work beyond the borders of institutional Christianity, but non-Christian religions are not considered as vessels of grace. This also implies a theology of the world taking into account both eschatology and protology, i.e., two of the defining elements of Adventist theology. In this framework, some aspects of religions may be assessed as part of the human condition as created in the beginning while others must be evaluated as standing under God's judgment. Thus missiological universalism takes seriously, and maintains a fruitful tension between, general and special revelation.

While this kind of thinking is not limited to Adventists, it may be considered the typical Adventist position and as such a contribution to the theology of religions discourse. Several Adventist authors have actually observed that their thinking on the religions does not neatly fit in with the common categorizations (Schantz 1983:724; Oliver 1987:34–46; Beardsell 1990:34; Dybdahl 1999:59). They correctly note that the characteristic
Seventh-day Adventist stance combines traits of all the major positions, for it is (1) exclusivist regarding the salvific agency, which is only Christ, (2) inclusivist regarding the opportunity of salvation for adherents of any faith, and (3) it stresses God’s intention of saving all humans.

Other Adventist scholars advocate something like a moderate exclusivist position while clearly rejecting radical exclusivism (Staples 1992:13; Bruinsma 2000:133-142; Rodríguez 2009). Yet a proposal has also been made to call the Adventist position “open exclusivism” in order to indicate that Adventists do not aim at adopting a fixed, inflexible theology of religions (Sarcevic 2006:41). Rather, they are open to God’s actions in contexts and ways with which Christians are unfamiliar—in or in spite of particular cultures with their religious traditions. Such an open exclusivism is essentially synonymous with the missiological universalism charted above.

The open exclusivist / missiological universalist stance is intrinsically linked to a missional ecclesiology. Perhaps it is the Adventist genius to combine in the denominational tradition a rejection of sacramental notions of “church,” thereby conceiving the church wholly as a mission agency, with a stress on individual responsibility as far as the relationship with transcendence is concerned. Therefore an Adventist theology of religions will not construe a neat separation between those who call themselves Christians and non-Christians but emphasize the search for truth and the need for a practiced faith, leaving the issue of salvation with God alone.

**Issues and Consequences**

This last section presents, in lieu of a conclusion, two issues arising from the Adventist theology of religions discourse which deserve closer attention: interreligious dialogue and the hermeneutics of non-Christian sacred scriptures. The latter implies consequences for theory, the former for praxis. Thus an Adventist theology of religions is not merely a result of denominational theologizing but does in turn influence the activities and thinking of the church.

**Dialogue**

The theology of religions and the engagement in interreligious dialogue are distinct but related discourses and fields of activity. Their relationship is shaped by the specific theological positions taken: a radical exclusivist persuasion, for instance, implies the tendency of viewing such dialoguing
as unnecessary, while a pluralist stance commonly welcomes dialogue as a replacement of mission.

A differentiated Adventist view as outlined above would follow another path. As its long engagement for religious liberty with its dialogical foundation has shown, the denominational tradition has not avoided constructive relationships with those belonging to non-Christian traditions. Moreover, on the basis of what may be called a “communicative theology,” a missional theology that views outreach, witnessing, and overcoming barriers between humans as paramount, the Adventist approach to the religions contains an intrinsically dialogical dimension. While listening may not be the first priority and the strongest ingredient in the traditional Adventist ways of approaching adherents of other religions, it is evident that proclamation is only possible for persons who are also ready to listen and learn which messages people are ready to receive (cf. the thinking behind the book Missions: A Two-Way Street [Dybdahl 1986]).

As far as dialogue practice is concerned, the denomination has made a number of positive experiences so far together with Muslims and Jews (AJFC 2005; Johnsson 2009). Thus the Adventist engagement in this field is comparable to the denominational experience in interchurch dialogue (cf. Höschele 2010) and in fact grew out of the organization dealing with it, the Council on Interchurch/Inter-religion Affairs. Clearly the necessity of interfaith dialogue is recognized by Adventists across the theological spectrum (Rilloma 2003; Davis and McDaniel 2000). A task that remains, however, is to develop a thoroughly reflected Adventist concept of dialogue. While there is much Christian literature on this theme in general, only one major study on dialogue has been done so far by an Adventist theologian (de Alwis 1982). It is telling that this study is not a treatment of dialogue as such but presents reflections on a meta-level—it discusses another Asian theologian’s view of dialogue, thus approaching the theme mainly in theory. De Alwis is to be credited for investigating the issue all the more considering the fact that it took another generation for Adventist interfaith dialogues to develop in practice.

**Hermeneutics**

Interreligious dialogue, which lacks common holy scriptures except in the Christian-Jewish dialogue and, to a much lesser degree, in conversations with Muslims, raises a significant hermeneutical question for Christians: the way non-Christian sacred writings should be used. Many Adventists
would probably not see a fundamental difference between interchurch and interreligious dialogues due to their inherited reservation towards Christian traditions of the “established church” type. However, at least intra-Protestant dialogues are clearly easier to handle because they can be based on the biblical scriptures, thereby excluding other sources of religious truth claims. In encountering people adhering to non-Christian religions, the situation is inversed; the dialogue partners can only agree to disagree on what should be considered authoritative for faith.

The question of the Christian use of non-Christian scripture has been discussed extensively only in one Adventist publication so far (Maberly 2006 [1998]). Still, it should be viewed as a major issue connected with the theology of religions. Clifton Maberly, at the time director of the denominational Buddhism Religious Study Center, distinguishes the use of non-Christian scripture in polemics, apologetics, liturgy, Bible study groups, instruction in school, and in theological training and correctly points out that each of these situations has different parameters to be taken into consideration. Yet he encourages the use of such scriptures as starting points to meet people where they are and to build upon what they treasure, basing this suggested method on several biblical examples where a similar procedure is employed.

Two denominational statements on mission approaches which were released during the last decade adopt this perspective (GMIC 2003 and GC-EC 2009 both call this “building bridges”) but emphasize the unique role of the Bible. According to them, “the nurture and spiritual growth of new believers” has to rest “on the basis of the Bible and its exclusive authority” (GMIC 2003 and GC-EC 2009) at the same time, the first document concedes that non-Christian sacred writings “may contain elements of truth that find their fullest and richest significance in the way of life found in the Bible.” Thus, the potential and the limitations of the use of non-Christian scripture is presented in a balanced manner, which corresponds to the Adventist missiological-universalist orientation.

Like the theology of religions in general and interfaith dialogue, the question of an appropriate use of extrabiblical sacred writings awaits a more detailed analysis. When done by Adventists, such an inquiry would presumably follow the lead of Jon Dybdahl’s reflections on “Doing theology in mission” (2005; 2006) with its model of dynamic biblical theologizing. Beyond the reflections presented here, such a comprehensive study would show that the theology of religions is of enormous importance even for fundamental theology, i.e., the very way in which Adventists conceive of understanding and reflecting on God.
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Quite suddenly dialogues between Muslims and Christians have become the “in” thing. The rash of attacks by Muslim fanatics—in Great Britain, Spain, India and Indonesia, and especially those of Nine Eleven—have jolted the forces of moderation on both sides into meeting together in an effort to understand and bring healing.

In a comprehensive article “Muslim-Christian Dialogue” Charles A. Kimball (2010) notes that such exchanges are anything but new. They go back to the rise of Islam in the seventh century. Since then these communities of faith have been linked by both theological understandings and geographical proximity. The modern movement for dialogue dates from the 1950s when the World Council of Churches and the Vatican organized meetings between Christian leaders and representatives of other Christian traditions. In 1964 Pope John Paul VI established a Secretariat for Non-Christian religions, which in 1989 was reorganized by John Paul II and renamed the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. The World Council of Churches set up its Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies in 1971, with Muslim-Christian relations as its primary focus.

In recent years hundreds of interfaith and intercultural centers all over
the world have endeavored to counter the centrifugal forces unleashed by fundamentalist and extremist movements. Likewise, various world governments have made efforts to bring together people of moderation, as with the Amman Message originating from Jordan in 2006 and the Saudi Interfaith initiative from Spain in 2008.

October 2007 marked a milestone with the release of an open letter signed by 138 leading Muslim clerics and scholars. Titled, “A Common Word Between Us and You,” and addressed to leaders of Christianity, it invited Muslim-Christian dialogue on the basis of what it stated are the common elements of both religions—love to God and love to neighbor (see www.acommonword.com). Eventually more than 300 Muslim leaders attached their names to the letter.

The open letter sparked a widespread and largely favorable response, with the Vatican, the Archbishop of Canterbury and leaders of the major churches weighing in.1 One month after the release of “A Common Word,” a response developed at the Yale Center for Faith and Culture was published as an open letter in the New York Times. This statement, which became known as the Yale Response, (it along with accompanying articles can be found in Volf, Ghazi, and Yarrington 2010) was subsequently endorsed by a large number of Christian theologians and leaders.

Since the release of “A Common Word” and the Yale Response, dialogues between Christians and Muslims have proliferated at all levels from local churches to international conferences. Prejudice and false stereotypes still abound, but large numbers of individuals, both Muslims and Christians, are seeking to understand one another through personal encounters.

Although Seventh-day Adventists are a comparatively small body, we have been involved with dialogues with Muslims for decades, long before the current wave of interest. Our sense of world mission has taken us into lands where Islam is the dominant religion. Adventists have interacted with Muslims at all levels, from casual encounters to friendships formed with leaders of government and religion. Our medical work, with hospitals in several countries of the Middle East, and the long-standing relationships between Loma Linda University and Medical Center and medical and civil authorities in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan have brought Adventists and Muslims into informal dialogue.

Among Adventists who have sought to engage Muslims in dialogue, Jerald

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1“A Common Word” was released Oct. 13, 2007. On Oct. 19, 2007 the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists sent an official response, one of the first, applauding the initiative and welcoming opportunity for interfaith conversations with leaders of Islam.
Dialogue with Muslims

Whitehouse has taken a prominent role. He endeavored to understand Islam and its adherents at a deep level, entering into the thinking of the Qur’an and appreciating the rich history and values of this world religion. For the most part he has worked behind the scenes, unobtrusively, not seeking the limelight. Dialogue?—Adventists have been at it for years with Whitehouse and others leading the way.

**Dialogue Since 2007**

The beginning of 2007 saw a new Adventist thrust in dialogue, however. General Conference President Jan Paulsen decided that the time was right for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to give official recognition to dialogues with the world religions. For some twenty years the Church had engaged other Christian denominations in conversations—Dr. Bert B. Beach initiated these encounters and chaired the Adventist side—but now, with the Adventist Church growing rapidly around the globe and members occupying the same ground with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and so on, it simply made sense that Adventists should be proactive toward these other faiths.

I had just come to the conclusion of a long tenure as editor of the *Adventist Review* and *Adventist World* magazines and was preparing to go back into teaching. Paulsen tapped me to stay on at the General Conference as his personal assistant for interfaith relations. He asked me to take over the chairing of the conversations with other Christian bodies and to initiate contacts with leaders of the world religions at the highest levels, with a view to acquainting them with the beliefs, values, and mission of Adventists and, where possible, to arrange for official dialogue. Because of the global nature and importance of Islam, it was agreed that this world faith should be the initial focus of effort.

I could not have dreamed what I was getting into. I was launching out on a journey that would profoundly impact my life and thinking. I would meet new people, people of sterling character and intellect; I would become immersed in new cultures; I would visit new places; and I would contemplate new horizons with possibilities that would stretch my mind.

I am now into my fourth year (2010) of dialogues with Muslims. These years have been a series of adventures marked by surprise, satisfaction, and ultimately soul-searching as I have been forced to confront new and deeply troubling questions. In no sense am I an authority, let alone an expert, on Islam and Muslims. My experience thus far has been shaped by interactions
in the United States (where I first put a tentative foot into the waters of dialogue), Jordan, Australia, and Turkey.

**Surprise:** I have been happily surprised at how easy it has been to enter into dialogue with Muslim leaders, even when having to work around the obstacles of a foreign language, such as Arabic and Turkish. Especially notable has been the experience in Jordan. I have made three visits so far to that country and have established close relationships with several prominent leaders. Among the dignitaries I have met are the following: The Chief Judge of the civil and *sharia* courts; the Minister for Information and Communication; the Minister for Islamic Affairs; the former ambassador to the United Nations; the director of the Royal Jordanian Institute for Interfaith Studies; the Director of the Arab Bridge Center for Human Rights and Development; the director and staff of the International Moderation Forum; and an Islamic scholar of national reputation. All of the visits with these high-profile leaders lasted at least one hour.

On a recent visit we were received by HRH Princess Basma bint Talal, sister of the late King Hussein. Princess Basma, who earned a D.Phil. degree from Oxford University, is a leading advocate in the Arab world for women’s and children’s rights. She invited four prominent individuals from Amman—one of them a Christian—to join her for our meeting. We sat on opposite sides of a long table, and for some 90 minutes discussed human rights, acceptance of others, social work, and education of children.

The Adventist Church in Jordan is very small, with only about 400 members. We operate no hospital or clinic; we own a large orphanage building, but it closed its doors several years ago. I was astounded that with such a meager church profile Adventists were granted access to an array of dignitaries. In this instance, as in others, the opening to these authorities came about through a personal contact. An Adventist pastor in Jordan, well-known for his weekly column in an Arabic newspaper, with one or two telephone calls was able to arrange multiple high-level meetings.

A further area of surprise has been the warmth with which I have been received. A pattern quickly became discernible: cautious politeness in the initial moments that quickly changed to amazement at learning of Christians who do not eat pork or drink alcohol, who adhere strictly to the teachings of the Bible, and who do not have a pro-Israel stance. Those leaders whom I have met have minimal or zero knowledge about Adventists and our teachings; further, our observance of the Sabbath tends to confuse them. All encounters concluded with expressions of appreciation.

**Satisfaction:** It has given me a sense of fulfillment as concrete results
have come about from these personal contacts. In Australia, a Sufi sheikh who is spiritual guide to some three million Muslims in the Middle East and Europe has developed a deep appreciation for Adventists. Strongly convinced that Jesus Christ will return soon, he has expressed a desire to work with us in telling the world about that event. He invites Adventists to speak at Friday services in his mosque, and frequently tells his followers that they should “live like the SDAs.” I have had extended discussions with him on four separate occasions. Each time the focus was the Second Coming and on each occasion I was entertained with warm hospitality in his home.

In Jordan a public meeting involving international experts on human rights and religious liberty will convene in Amman in cooperation with the Arab Bridge Center for Human Rights and Development. In addition, an organization dedicated to promoting tolerance and understanding, The International Moderation Forum, has expressed a desire to engage the Adventist Church in an official dialogue. Beyond these tangible results, the favorable image of the Adventist Church in TV and newspaper reports has given our members a boost in their self-esteem.

Soul searching: I have come to know some Muslims at a deep level, and the experience has led me to search my heart.

At the superficial level, simply getting to know these children of Abraham as human beings, as friends, has given the lie to the myths that circulate widely in the media and into which many people, Adventists included, have bought. These people are anything but radical and violent. They abhor violence in all its manifestations; they have no truck with extremists and terrorists. Rather, they are kind, hospitable, considerate, and generous to a fault. That others who profess the same religion may be different, and some radically different, I do not doubt. I simply share the impact on me of those with whom I have been engaged.

I think it likely that the close human ties that I have experienced stem in large part from the fact that I am a Seventh-day Adventist. I have become convinced that of all Christians, Adventists are the closest to Muslims. This affinity goes far beyond points of contact in the respective teachings, important as they are, and the mutual prohibitions against pork and alcohol, also a big advantage because they allow for uninhibited table fellowship. No; I have in mind the spiritual dimension—the sharing of heart and spirit in the devotion to the one God. For those followers who take their religion seriously, Islam is a demanding faith: prayer five times each day, fasting during Ramadan, the giving of alms (zakat), and the Hajj. The Muslim experience of God focuses on his oneness, his greatness, his separateness.
For the sincere Muslim, religion is a 24/7 matter, a life lived with the Last Judgment ever in view.

For the Adventist Christian, there is much here to admire and even to emulate. There is a deep resonance of the spirit.

Inevitably, the question of Jesus, never far away, intrudes itself. The crucial issue he himself raised in Ceasarea Philippi cannot be kept in the shadows: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt 16:15). And on this very point, Islam, it seems to me, finds itself in tension with itself. On one hand, Islam strives to preserve and protect the oneness of Allah, following its founder who taught the Bedouin tribes to forsake their many gods and worship only one God, the Creator. From this stance, the classic Trinitarian doctrine proclaimed by the Christian fathers is an offence, a blasphemy that substitutes three gods for Allah. On the other hand, Islam gives a high place—an exceedingly high place—to Jesus Christ. Although it teaches that Muhammad was the greatest of the prophets, it also holds that Jesus was born of a virgin. The implications of that admission, which is found in the Qu’ran, are profound. If Jesus was born of a virgin, he is utterly other, apart from every other person that this world has known. Add to this idea the teachings also found in the Qu’ran that he was without fault and that he will come again to this earth, and the Muslim, like the scribe in the Temple courts, is not far from the kingdom of God.

Not far—but one thing is lacking. And a very big thing it is—the Cross. Islam has Jesus, but not the Savior.

So how will the Lord deal with these his children who seem so near and yet so far from the Good News that our Scriptures proclaim? These friends whom I have come to admire and to love, who speak so highly of Jesus as the unique one who reveals God to us—how can they be led to see the light of Calvary? These sincere seekers who submit to the will of Allah, whose history is stained with the blood from crusaders’ swords under the banner of the Cross, how can they be led to see that symbol as one of life and hope?

These are the issues that wrack my soul as a result of my close encounters with Muslims.

My life has been so enriched from these contacts that I wish many others could experience the profound blessing I have received. After I wrote about my encounter with the sheikh in Sydney (2010:25-27), among the many responses from readers was a letter from a man who wrote how fortunate I was to be given such opportunities and expressing the wish that he too might share in them.

In fact, every Christian who so wishes can experience, if not in the same
measure, the essence of what has so impressed me. One does not have to be a scholar of Islam or of the Qur’an or to have gone through a course of training. The principles of dialogue with Muslims are so straightforward as to be accessible to any eager Adventist who has a Muslim neighbor or acquaintance.

Principles of Adventist/Muslim Dialogue

Charles Kimball distinguishes between several distinct modes of dialogue: parliamentary dialogue, institutional dialogue, theological dialogue, dialogue in community or dialogue of life, and spiritual dialogue (2010). For Seventh-day Adventists, however, these conversations must be seen as coming squarely under the rubric of Adventist mission. We should think of mission as taking place on three levels: friendship and cooperation, dialogue, and witness. At the first level Adventists interact with Muslims in making friends, offering and accepting hospitality, and perhaps joining in community projects. At the level of dialogue, both parties sit down together and seeking to learn and understand the other’s beliefs and practices. In this process, the intent is not to correct the other or try to prove that one is correct and the other wrong. Dialog develops mutual trust that may open the door to the next level—Christian witness, where we share from the heart what Jesus means to us. These levels are not mutually exclusive.

When I embarked upon my new assignment, no model existed to show me how to proceed. Islam is a religion that encircles the globe, with wide variations from one country to another. It has no pope, no single leader or council upon which one can focus in an effort to introduce Muslims to Adventists and their values. How to start? Where to start?

First, I met with Dr. Jerald Whitehouse, director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations, at Loma Linda, California. During the one day we spent together he provided an excellent orientation to the world of Islam, and in particular to the possibilities of dialogue.

A couple months later I had my first experience of Muslim dialogues. The Department of Sharia Studies at the University of Qatar in Doha convened a conference of the children of Abraham—Muslims, Christians, and Jews.² For three days those in attendance, numbering about 200, listened to papers and made speeches. The dynamic that developed was more monologue than dialogue, however. Few if any of the speeches responded to the paper

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²This was the fifth interfaith conference organized in Doha.
just presented; rather they were preplanned statements that were more like
diatribes. At times feelings ran hot with participants behaving rudely and
storming from the conference room.

The Doha conference provided insights into the religious and political
tensions of the Middle East. In terms of dialogue, however, it highlighted for
me a negative model rather than indicating the dynamic Adventists should
adopt. That conference showed me that dialogue should be kept small (ten
people maximum) and involve academics who do not bring to the table a
political agenda.

In dialogue one should not try to score verbal points. Genuine interfaith
conversation is an exchange of views in an open, honest, respectful manner
that seeks to understand and be understood. There are no winners or losers,
except as the truth emerges as the winner through the setting aside of false
stereotypes and the correcting of misinformation and misconceptions.

Jerald Whitehouse has accurately described the nature of genuine
dialogue:

Dialogue implies a mutual commitment between the two or more parties
engaging in the exercise to respectfully listen and communicate with each
other for the purpose of understanding and appreciation of the other’s faith
tradition. It seeks to set aside attitudes of superiority and focuses on issues
of our common humanity. In doing so it seeks to see the hand of God, or—in
the case of faith systems which do not acknowledge a Supreme Being—the
elements of our common humanity in the other. Dialogue does not preclude
addressing of diversity or differences, but always does so with respect and
with the desire to understand the unique elements that provide particularity,
without losing sight of the commonalities which link us with each other. It
follows that, if engaged in with the proper spirit, such interaction will lead to
a growth in spiritual understanding by each of the parties involved. Dialogue,
therefore, should not be understood as standing apart from or in contradiction
to the evangelistic mission of God’s people in these end times. Rather, it can
fill an integral and important role in the overall spectrum of evangelistic
initiatives of the body of believers. (Whitehouse 2006)

More recently Bert B. Beach, in his essay “Evangelism and Inter-Faith
Relations in a World Parish” (2009:379-388) lists eight key principles for
inter-faith relations: high ethical standards, knowledge of culture, standing
for morality, no material inducements, pro-family stance, adaptability and
context, establishing credibility, and flexible multiple idea approach.

From my experience, the most important principle is the stance one
adopts. Who we are is more important than what we present. We should be
transparently open, humble, and honest with no attempt to conceal what we believe and with no hidden agendas. The messenger commends the message.

Over and over in my contacts with Muslim civil and religious leaders, I have had the sense of being sized up. While our teachings and values awaken interest, for them the greater concern is the messenger. When the Muslim becomes convinced that we are genuine, the doors of reserve burst open and warmth and hospitality flow freely.

Before this can happen, however, two types of clutter have to be removed. The first type is the clutter within—the prejudices, stereotypes and myths that we bring to the table. Because of the events of recent history and the influence of the media, we come to the table with suspicions and apprehensions. The violent acts perpetrated by a small number of Muslims have led to a general perception that all Muslims are violent, whereas the vast majority are not.

The other type of clutter stems from the misperceptions and stereotypes that circulate among Muslims concerning the West and, in particular, Christians in general. Muslims think that Christians are pork-eaters and alcohol users with low standards of morality and family and wedded to a pro-Israel, anti-Palestinian ideology.

Many Christians do fit this stereotype, but Adventists certainly do not. In meeting an individual for the first time, from the outset I give a thumbnail sketch of Adventists, who we are and what we believe. I position our church as a reform movement among Christians that seeks to be faithful to the Holy Bible in what we believe and how we live. Our mission is to tell the world that Jesus Christ is coming soon. We observe the Sabbath as the day of worship, not because we are Jewish, but because this is the day taught in the Scriptures. Because we believe that Jesus is coming again, and we must appear before God at the Last Judgment, we seek to live 24/7 as his humble servants. We are keen students of Bible prophecy, but our interpretation does not lead us to assign a special role to Israel in the end-time. We are apolitical: we stand for peace and justice for all people.

As the Muslim leader learns of our teachings and practices, a light goes on. It glows brighter and brighter as he absorbs more information about us. And he opens his heart.

These principles are not new, nor do they require advanced training. They are as old as the counsel from Ellen White:

Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.” (1942:143)
If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one (White 1948:189).

Conclusion

Every Christian who so desires may experience the personal fulfillment that comes from Muslim dialogue. In today’s world the followers of Islam are found everywhere; our neighbors, the letter carrier, the doctor, the store clerk. We do not have to go overseas in order to find dialogue.

Ultimately, dialogue comes down to questions of the heart, to love and prayer. Only a heart touched and changed by grace can flow out in love to embrace the Muslim and in turn be open to receive the love that flows back. And only the life that is watered and nurtured by abiding prayer can be ready to discern the kairos, the moment of divine opportunity.

Works Cited


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
A Person of Peace

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**


This chapter is dedicated to Dr. Jerald Whitehouse, whose focus on meeting the spiritual heart needs of Muslim people touched an answering cord in my heart. At the center of all that Dr. Whitehouse has shared, both with Muslims and those of us who have been fortunate enough to journey with him, is the need for our hearts to be transformed through a living relationship with God. This focus has led me on a most unexpected journey, which not only transformed my own spiritual life, but has given me the privilege of being a witness to the work of God in the hearts of my Muslim friends.

Introduction

In this article I propose that ministry among Muslim women requires first and foremost a spirituality focused approach through which an individual or group or community connects with God at a deep spiritual level, thereby meeting their heart-felt needs.¹

¹Felt needs are at the heart of a person’s and communities’ worldview which, as Charles H. Kraft notes, is at the deep level of “assumptions, values and commitments” (1989:20).
Before proceeding it is important to define the term “spiritual” or “spirituality.” This is an often ill-defined concept in today’s world. Eugene Peterson notes that this pristine word, once used exclusively in religious contexts, has been used indiscriminately by all sorts of people, often being dragged into the rough and tumble dirt of the market place and playground (2005:27). In the process of retrieving its original meaning based in Scripture Peterson defines it as “an operation of God in which our human lives are pulled into and made participants in the life of God” (2005:31). Such a definition alludes to something that is both transcendent and yet intimate, something that is living and transformational and totally focused on God, rather than ourselves. It is in this sense that the term “spiritual” or “spirituality” is used in this chapter.

In the last five years or so I have been witness to the fact that when Muslim women have gathered together to worship God, a spiritually focused approach based in the heart-felt needs of women has set in motion a process of significant spiritual growth and development on a personal and communal level. Integral to this process has been the understanding and acceptance of the truth that God wants them to know about him and his plan for the resolution of the problem of sin appropriate to the particular stage in their journey of faith. A further significant factor was that we who were acting as facilitators found that our personal spiritual lives were also deeply enhanced and expanded as we witnessed and participated in the spiritual transformation taking place through the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of women among whom we were ministering.

Such an approach is not centered on a method that is based on scriptural proof-texts which provides evidence or truth which is accepted or not, although the understanding of the truth about God and his plan for the salvation of human kind at a cognitive level (relating to the thought process) is absolutely core to the spiritual growth and development process. Neither is it a program which targets Muslim women with doctrines or theological explanations formulated in a foreign context. Instead, it is a holistic spiritual growth process which is triggered through a combination of the following seven dynamic interrelated key elements: first, through acknowledging and receiving the presence of God; second, though the escalating activity of the Holy Spirit as women seek to live a holy life before God; third, the dynamic interaction between God and the community or individual through prayer; fourth, a context specific community related approach to meeting spiritual heart needs at a deep worldview level; fifth, the communication of the truth about God's revelation of himself in language, concepts, and thought categories which are familiar to Muslim women; sixth, a truth encounter
resulting in shifting allegiances; and finally, the influence and impact of the local spiritual leader.

While these seven elements have been separated for discussion and clarity purposes in this paper, it was evident that they were in constant dynamic interaction with each other, shifting and moving according to the spiritual needs of the women in their groups and communities and the very specific work of God's Spirit in their lives in particular situations and locations.

Due to the need to respect the privacy of the groups, instead of describing a single gathering, I will combine the experiences of several women's gatherings drawn from different setting and occasions and describe them in a single composite case study. In the process I will identify various elements in the spiritual growth and transformation process, which to a greater or lesser extent, were reflected in all the gatherings. From time to time I will refer to a particular gathering to make a particular observation.

A composite case study approach as described in Clark Moustakas' *Phenomenological Research Methods* (1994) is a particularly useful tool for this study as it is based in experience. While the composite case study described and analyzed in this chapter arose out of personal participation, experience, and observation in various women's gatherings rather than from specific formalized research, Moustakas' methodology provides a useful framework within which to describe and analyse the various experiences that I and my colleagues have had as we have ministered among Muslim women.

Moustakas notes that the phenomenological research framework facilitates the identification of the "unique qualities of an experience that stands out"—the "core horizons" which enables the researcher to offer "thematic portrayals of the experience" (1994:131). From this an individual "composite textual description" is constructed (133) on the basis of vivid descriptions (135) which facilitates the development of a composite description where the invariant themes of all participants are studied and incorporated (138). Composite textual descriptions also incorporate "imaginative variations" (1994:141) which seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination to arrive at a structured description of an experience (97, 98, 141). Finally there is a synthesis of meanings and essences through the "integration of the composite textual and composite structural descriptions, providing a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience" (1994:144).

This chapter is divided into four parts. First, in a composite case study I will describe what happened in several women's gatherings which took
place in differing regions where Muslims are largely "high identity" although ranging from "high practice to low practice," depending on their spiritual maturity. Usually all of the key elements outlined above were in evidence, but not always, and at times in a different order. Second, I will outline the principles of engagement that facilitated the experiences described in the composite case study. Third, I will examine the nature of the interrelated key elements which brought about such significant results within such a short period of time with the purpose of demonstrating how each element contributed to an accelerated process of spiritual growth and transformation, individually and corporately. Finally, I will draw some conclusions.

Due to the complexities of differing societies and the multiple differences in the way that Muslim women respond in different geographical or situational settings, adjustments were continuously made by the leaders and facilitators as they followed the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore it is recognized that while generalizations are made in the analysis of the seven key elements outlined in the composite case study, it was very clear to us that women respond differently in differing contexts. It would be impossible to include all of these finer details due to the length of this chapter. Due also to the need to respect the privacy of the various groups this chapter does not identify the locations or give a full explanation of all the teaching that took place during the gatherings as presented in the case study below. Only the main aspects which clearly contributed to the spiritual growth and transformation process are outlined and examined in the analysis section.

**Composite Case Study**

In this section, you, as the reader of this chapter, are invited to enter into an exceptional story of the work of God among Muslim women in differing contexts. As has been noted in the introduction, several gatherings are described in this composite case study. The journey begins with a gathering where a large number of women sat together on the floor in a culturally appropriate way, chatting together in groups. Most were literate, some semi-literate and a few illiterate. Many were already part of a community of believers that formed part of a growing in-context spiritual movement. For the purposes of this chapter "high identity" refers to Muslims who have a strong identity as a Muslim. "High to low practice" refers to Muslims who are on a continuum between the two extremes in terms of practicing their faith. Some may be "high identity," but "low in practice" of their faith. In this case a movement can be defined as a spontaneous response on the part of people to the spiritual heart-felt need to better understand God’s will for their lives. The participants in the movement are
which is currently taking place across a significant geographical area. Many of the women had already matured in their faith, they trusted and believed in the Holy Bible (referred to as the Bible from now on) and read it regularly. Some were still in the early stages in their spiritual journey, understanding the importance of believing in the Bible, but having little trust in it (this group understood that it was the Word of God, but found it difficult to understand). Still others were entirely new to the believing community and did not trust the Bible at all. They also did not know much about their Book which was central to their faith, the Honorable Qur’an (referred to as the Qur’an from now on). This new group presented the facilitators with a challenge. After a quick consultation it was decided to focus mainly on aspects in the Qur’an which could act as a bridge to biblical truth and to introduce the use of the Bible in progressive stages.

As the time approached to start the first session, the atmosphere in the hall was electric with expectation and anticipation. This was the first time the women were invited to attend such a large gathering with others who were on a similar journey of faith. Up to this point many of the women had only heard about other believing groups who were also meeting together and keeping the Sabbath holy, but they had not met them before. In advance their spiritual leader had informed the women that there was going to be a special event and that they needed to prepare themselves to come and hear what God has to say to them about how to live a holy life. Many were eager to understand this better and those that had a copy of the Bible and the Qur’an opened them and placed them on the especially dedicated tawla (holder).

As the spiritual leader entered the room followed by the facilitators, a respectful silence descended on the group as the day started with a du‘a (prayer of personal supplication) prefixed by the Arabic words auzobillahi minishaitanir rajim bismillahir rahmanir rahim. . . . ya Allah.

Key Element 1: Responding to God’s Call to Live a Holy Life:
Acknowledging and Receiving the Presence of God

Almost without exception, in all the varying contexts, the facilitators started each session with a particular spiritual heart-felt need. Invariably

attached to clearly identifiable social groupings while at the same time seeing themselves as part of the wider community of faith. At the core of this movement is the perceived need for personal and communal change. The movement has a spiritual leader who has inspired and fostered the need for change. It also has an organizational structure which is geared to support the growth of the movement rather than being an end in itself.
many women do not think that they are worthy of God's attention and fear that they will not be one of the *ashab-al-jannah* (those who believe and do good deeds and are destined for paradise (Surah *Al Baqarah* 2:82). This was a matter of deep concern for them. To address this crucial issue the facilitators focused on building a picture of God which showed him as being interested in the everyday affairs of women and actively desiring to be involved in their lives.

Intentionally starting with the *Qur’an*, due to the presence of those not able to fully trust the Bible in this particular group, the facilitator focused on God’s call in Surah *Al Baqarah* 2:186:

> “When my servants ask thee concerning Me; I am indeed close (to them): I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me: let them also, with a will, listen to My call, and believe in Me: that they may walk in the right way.”

The women pondered over this *ayah* at length. The question hung in the air. Does this really refer to them as women? Does God also call them? The more spiritually mature among them affirmed that it did as they are believers in God. Then they considered the meaning of the rest of the *ayah*. Does it not also mean that they need to be responsible now as to how they live their lives? They pondered over this question for a few minutes and talked among themselves and then agreed—it is necessary to respond now so that they can be ready for the Day of Judgment (*Yawm ad-Din*) and be able to enter Paradise (*Jannah*).

As the interest built, the facilitator gave examples in story form of people who heard and responded to God’s call, answered him, and in so doing invited his presence in their lives. A lively discussion centered around examples of those honored by God such as Abraham (whom Muslims refer

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4 Unless otherwise stated, the Abdullah Yusuf Ali Translation of The Meaning of the Holy *Qur’an* is utilized.

5 The concept of *da’wah* referred to in Surah *Al Baqarah* 2:186 is mentioned many times in the *Qur’an* and covers a range of etymological meanings from addressing, calling, appealing, requesting, demanding to worshiping (Racius, 2004:4) and prayer (Kassis 1983:358, 362). Walker (1995) notes that “in the *Qur’an* (2:186) a basic meaning for *da’wah*—perhaps its cardinal meaning—is the single act of prayer: “When My servants ask thee about Me, I am indeed close by and answer the prayer [da’wah] of everyone when they pray to Me.” *Da’wah*, therefore, can indicate a certain person’s prayer or an entreaty addressed to God.

... Each servant must recognize God’s own *da’wah*, his summons, requires their response. The ultimate *da’wah* is that of God himself. This double principle—that God both summons through his *da’wah* and that He alone answers the *da’wah* of his servants—results in a sense of the true *da’wah*, the *da’wat al-haqq* of Surah *Al Ra’d* 13:14: “To Him is the prayer of truth [da’wat al-haqq] and all those they pray to, other than Him, answer them not at all, no more than if they stretched out their hands to reach for water, which reaches them not, for the prayer of the unbelievers is futile.” In the sessions with the women the concept is utilized as described by Walker to open up wider spiritual conversations about how God relates to humankind from a biblical perspective. The concept of *da’wah* has, however, been developed further with multiple meanings, particularly in recent history. Racius (2004) covers the topic thoroughly.
to as a Prophet) and Isaiah who heard God’s call to live a holy life and who answered that call.

A particularly moving example which women relate to is found in the life of Hajar (Hagar) which is told in Muslim traditions and in the Tawrat (Gen 16 and 21). Almost without exception, whatever the group or context, I have found that women listen to this story and identify with it at a deep spiritual level. In one of the gatherings, after the facilitator told the story, she emphasized that in Hajar’s time of deepest distress and suffering, when she had no status or the basic necessities of life, she not only submitted to God, but she also became the object of God’s special care and attention in an exceptional way.

Several of the women identified with the story and together as a group concluded that it is one thing for Allah (God) to come close to a man or a prophet, but quite another thing for him to notice and engage with a woman who was a slave. Tears fell from the eyes of some who had suffered in their lives. As a community, after some had shared their pain and received love and attention from one another, they concluded that if Allah could be close to someone like Hajar then he could also be close to them. Significantly at this time, God, who had always seemed to be so distant, was now seen to be close and interested in their affairs as women. As a result of this time of sharing, women in this particular context were deeply moved by God’s Spirit to open themselves to the call of God and respond to that call by inviting God to be present in their hearts through du’a (supplication to God). What happened was not only an individual response, but a response of a whole community of women which included the leader and facilitators. We were all drawn together to respond to God’s call and invite his presence in our midst.

In another context women who were still in the early stages of their spiritual development responded differently to the story of God’s intervention in the life of Hajar. Instead of seeing God as imminent and interested in and valuing women, they rather reflected the traditional orthodox Muslim worldview of God as distant, judging, and punishing women who do not obey and who are not worthy of his attention. They exclaimed that if Hajar had not done as the angel told her God would have punished her for her

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6The Qur’an never mentions Hajar (Hagar) by name in any of its 114 surahs, but reference is made to her and her child in Abraham’s prayer to God in Surah Ibrahim 14:37: “Oh my Lord! I have made some of my offspring (dhuriyyati) to dwell in the valley without cultivation, by the Sacred House, in order, O our Lord, that they may establish regular prayer. So fill the hearts of some among men with love towards them, and feed them with fruits so that they may give thanks” (Abuqideiri 2001:83). For the purposes of this chapter Hagar will at all times be referred to as Hajar, which is the Egyptian pronunciation.
disobedience. God’s concern for *Hajar* was not perceived. This gave the facilitators the opportunity to retell the story and give a step by step reflection on the verses in the Bible and references to some of the 99 names of God. After considerable discussion, a new and different picture of Allah began to emerge. They felt that perhaps Allah is after all interested in the affairs of women. Time and time again during the week together, different aspects of Allah and his relationship with people was explored and discussed. Finally through the work of the Holy Spirit a shift in worldview began to emerge.

One of the women exclaimed, “Yes Allah did care about *Hajar*, and he does also care about us. We do not need to be afraid of him.” Several of the other women nodded in agreement.

As previously explained, we have often found that there are women in a gathering who have not been used to using the Bible. In one particular gathering there were quite a few women like this who were present. Before long some began to raise questions as to why Muslims were reading the Bible which had been corrupted by Christians and therefore could not be trusted. Almost in an instant, ripples of dissention began to spread from group to group. With a gentle smile and a relaxed manner the spiritual leader reached for the Qur’an and encouraged the women to see for themselves what it had to say. In a way appropriate to the context the major key *ayats* (verses) relating to the previous revelations were studied which indicated clearly that the Qur’an confirms (*musaddiqan*) the scriptures that came before (Surah *Al Ma’idah* 5:48) and affirms the validity of the previous revelations (Surah *Al Ma’idah* 5:23, 24; Surah *Yunus* 10:94) and that there can be no change (*tabdil*) in the words of Allah (Surah *Yunus* 10:64; Surah *Al Kahf* 18:27). The women continued to listen intently as the spiritual leader showed that the Qur’an spoke against those who tried to change the meaning (*yuharifun*) of the previous revelation (Surah *Al Nis’* 4:46).

Much depended on the acceptance of this explanation by the women in this particular gathering. The women discussed the matter for some time, pouring over the *ayats*, struggling to determine the meaning. The spiritual leader, still with a smile, gave constant encouragement to the women to determine the meaning of the *ayats* for themselves, and then answered more questions. Some of the mature believers also got involved in explaining the *ayats* to the women who were new to the group. This had a significant impact on the outcome. Eventually, the majority of the women were satisfied, and everyone relaxed and settled down to hear more about how to live a holy life before God.
Key Element 2: The Escalating Activity of the Holy Spirit

As I have reflected on what we have witnessed in the varying contexts, it has become clear that the Holy Spirit always goes before us. Thus, even before we start to speak the women’s hearts are open and receptivity is at a high level. In addition there is invariably a visible increase in the activity and movement of God’s Spirit during these events evidenced by the response of the women themselves.

In all of the locations, building on the same theme of the need to answer God’s call to live a holy life before him, the facilitators explained that answering this call from God is never just a simple matter because we know from our daily lives that we all struggle with wrong doing and this is the work of Shaytan or Iblis (Satan). In one of the locations, this particularly touched the hearts of many of the women, who nodded their heads in assent and voiced their agreement. Together, as women, we acknowledged this as a serious dilemma which we face as we live in this world (dunya).

Placing the matter of the seriousness of sin within the framework of the Great Controversy theme and within the heart-felt need for purity which women long for, the facilitator (starting with the references in the Qur’an and then moving to the Bible) explained how Iblis or Shaytan rebelled against God and was cast out of his presence. Then turning to the story of creation and the fall of the world’s first parents Adam and Hawa (Eve) the women listened to the story that showed the seriousness of sin and the consequences for all of humankind. Through stories and textual references, the facilitator demonstrated how Iblis is always ready to deceive human beings into thinking that God is unjust and vengeful, obscuring the true picture of God who is deeply interested in the affairs of women and their families.

Following through on this topic with the same group, the facilitator explained that God does not leave us alone to struggle with sin which leads us to feel ashamed and impure. Rather he enables us to live a holy life before him by giving us a free gift of righteousness. “It is not something we can just have because we want it. We cannot go to the shop to buy it. It is rather a free gift from God which we need to accept,” the facilitator told the women. “However, in order to receive this beautiful gift, we need to allow God to fill our hearts with his Spirit which strengthens us,” she said. Through a story which illustrated the role of the Holy Spirit, the women were invited to open up their lives and receive God’s Spirit into their hearts so that they could be purified and transformed.

In all of the locations, this invitation resulted in a significant response. In this particular location the response was instantaneous. It could be
described as a visible movement which surged and flowed thought the whole
community. Thus, in this context, it was not only an individual response,
but also a communal response where significant numbers of women moved
together. Through tears and expressions of deep spiritual emotion women
quietly articulated their longing to be cleansed from impurity and to live
holy lives before God. The facilitators were also moved to tears of joy as the
Holy Spirit also touched their lives—for the Spirit moved in the hearts and
lives of everyone present. None were excluded from this movement as it
swept around the hall reaching even those who were new to the group and
were hearing this for the first time.

Key Element 3: The Dynamic Interaction between God and
the Community or Individual Through Prayer

Deeply connected to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the
women was prayer,7 which became a living and dynamic experience where
Allah’s healing power was demonstrated in the lives of the women, from
the youngest to the oldest. Focusing on the du’ā form of prayer (personal
supplication) the women in all the locations were encouraged to seek help
from God for their own personal needs and for the needs of others. Many
were not used to approaching Allah for personal spiritual and physical
needs. However, when it became clear, both through the discussions and
in the prayer sessions, that Allah both hears and answers the prayers of the
believers, which included both women and men, the Holy Spirit was seen to
move in tangible way among the women.

Once again you are invited into the story in one of the locations. After
some discussion about the true meaning and centrality of prayer in the
believer’s life and how Allah hears and answers prayer, the women quietly
formed into groups, sharing their problems and heartfelt needs with each
other and then praying for one another. At the invitation of the leader and
facilitators, some requested special prayer, bringing before Allah their need
for spiritual and physical healing, some requested prayer for their families,
and for help with the deep sorrows in their lives. Some also requested that
Allah would give them a pure heart so that they might live righteous lives
before him.

At first the prayer sessions lasted a short time. However, as God’s Spirit
stirred the hearts of the women, the du’ā sessions lasted longer each day,

7There are two forms of prayer: salat (formal prayer) and du’ā (personal supplication).
until on the fourth day all the presentations were cancelled as women, old and young alike, gave public personal testimonies. Some were moved to seek forgiveness from one another and reconciliation between friends and families and between mothers and daughters took place publically. Thus, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, healing was widespread in the community as a whole.

The spiritual leader said afterwards that “it was clear during the du'a sessions that the teenagers also felt that Allah was interested in them, even in their youth. Not only did they start to pray for themselves, but they also asked God for healing and forgiveness and renewal of body and spirit for their brothers, mothers, fathers, husbands and others whom they loved. They felt important before their Creator!” It was not only the lives of the women who were touched. We, who were leading out, were profoundly affected by the experience of the movement of God’s Spirit in our midst and also received significant renewal and blessing in our personal lives. That day we were witnesses to the power of God moving among us for everyone was part of it in differing ways—each according to their need.

Join me in another location, where after several days of discussion about Allah’s willingness to answer the prayers of believing women (with many examples from the Bible), the group decided to pray for one of the women present who had experienced a persistent illness. Every day as she came to join the group her suffering was evident for all to see and was obviously a long-term illness. For three days the women, who had never before engaged in prayer for one another let alone prayer for healing, prayed for the afflicted women. Each day, she was a little better until on the fourth day she no longer showed evidence of her illness. One year later I enquired about her health. The spiritual leader informed me that she was fully healed and restored to her community. Once again we were witnesses to the power of God moving among us according to the needs of the community.

Key Element 4: A Context Specific Community Related Approach to Meeting Spiritual Heart-felt Needs

Once again I invite you to enter into the story. In one of the locations the women were seated on the floor clustered together in their own social groupings. A presentation had just been given and the women conferred with one another within their group about the meaning of a text or the spiritual heart of a story. One or two people in a group ventured to share what they thought the text or story meant to them within their own thought
patterns and framework of thinking which they then shared with the others in the group. The others grasped it and added to it. Before long the whole group reached a similar understanding. When invited to share what they had found in each of the groups, one person shared their conclusions on behalf of the others in their particular group, who then all nodded in agreement. The momentum grew as another group picked up on the topic in hand until there was a contagious chain reaction around the hall, as group after group, led by the Holy Spirit, grasped the idea, belief, or concept, and internalized it.

As part of the process, individuals, supported by their groups, articulated in public their willingness for God to transform and change their lives. For example, after one story which showed the difference between a woman who lived a holy life and one who did not, one woman shared. “I have been just like the woman that you have described who has not lived a holy life! From today I will no longer be like that any more.” Other women followed her example sharing how they too wanted to change their lives. As the momentum gathered, those who were new to the group also experienced the desire to change and grow in their faith (iman). The Holy Spirit was also poured out in equal measure on this group.

Reflecting later on this experience, the spiritual leader of the community said, “What was achieved during that event was something amazing and truly the work of the Holy Spirit. For those who have been regular members, it was a culmination of their spiritual renewal, but for others it was an ‘unexplained experience.’ That is why a large gathering like this was Allah’s way of giving the Holy Spirit to those who were new to the believing community.”

Key Element 5: Communicating about God in Concepts and Thought Categories Which Are Familiar to Muslim Women

Integral to this process of spiritual transformation which took place in the hearts of the women was the way in which the truth about God was presented. Recognizing that the women were at various stages of their spiritual journey the facilitators referred to Qur’anic passages which provided windows to understand biblical truth. Gradually biblical truth was revealed in progressive stages, as and when the women were ready to receive it. Islamic
Ministering to the Spiritual Heart

concepts which related to the spiritual life such as taqwah and mutaqeen found in the Qur’an were explored, enhanced, and extended by consideration of the biblical meanings (with the Bible as the final authority). This was then applied to the life of the community as a whole and consequently to individuals within the group.

A further important factor was the sharing of biblical truth through stories which utilized concepts and thought patterns familiar to the women, yet at the same time directly challenging and transforming current understandings of faith (iman). At times the sharing took place through a story in parable form which was then applied directly to their life situation. For example the story of Mary’s beautiful act of pouring perfume on the feet of Isa al-Masih (the Muslim name of Jesus) was told through the perspective of a defiled woman being restored back into the community, purified, cleansed, and forgiven through her encounter with Isa al-Masih. This resulted in an instantaneous response as it met one of the deepest heart-felt needs of Muslim women—the longing to be pure in the sight of God.

At other times it was the women who had been part of a believing community for some time who took the lead through sharing their spiritual journey, focusing on how their lives had changed. They also shared their struggles as they sought to live a holy life before Allah. Also included were references to the everyday life of women, such as food, clothes, cooking, and household duties, which were utilized to convey spiritual meaning within their context.

Key Element 6: An Encounter Which Reveals the Truth about God Resulting in a Shift in Allegiance

While our approach in all the events was spiritually focused and centered on God’s desire for women to have a “new heart” experience, there was also, throughout the various sessions, a significant sharing about God at a

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8 Most English translations use the word “piety” or “fear of Allah” when referring to taqwah. The aspect of “fear of Allah” was present early in the usage of the word, especially in the light of the expected judgment. Eventually, “as attention was focused on building the spiritual life of the believers in Medina, this end time ‘fear of Allah’ was replaced with the spiritual life understanding of ‘piety’ or ‘righteousness’” (Nur 2003). Hibba Abugideiri refers to taqwah as “God consciousness” (2001:82).

9 To be one of the mutaqeen means to be a person who has taqwah—a person who has the assurance of the hereafter. Surah Al Baqararah 2:1-4, defines this as follows: “This is [the] book; in it is guidance for sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah [mutaqeen—those who have taqwah]; who believe in the unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out of what we have provided for them; and who believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the hereafter.”
cognitive level. This was done through an intentionally staged process which built an atmosphere where questions of ultimate spiritual concern relevant to the particular group could flow naturally.

Enter into the story again with me in some locations where the women themselves set the agenda rather than the facilitators. Already stories and information about Isa al-Masih had been shared throughout the sessions, starting from the understanding from a qur‘ānic perspective, and then consistently moving to the biblical account. After some time the questions started to flow: “Where is Isa now and did he really die?” “How can we be ready for the judgment day (Yawm ad-Din)?” Such questions originated from the felt need of the women for more knowledge of God’s purposes for humankind. Further questions flowed such as, “What happens when you die?” “What shall we do about polygamy?” The answers were often arrived at by the women themselves either through discussion or personal testimonies. Throughout the process current beliefs and practices were challenged, expanded, or developed to include new understanding from a biblical text which the women pondered over (with the help of the facilitators where necessary) until they had arrived at a conclusion themselves.

As the understanding of the women developed over time, allegiances shifted from old ways of thinking about God, faith, and practice, to a new biblically-based perspective, resulting in shifts in allegiance at deep worldview levels. This transformation took place in a way that the truth about God from a biblical perspective was recognizable within their cultural context and thought categories. In other words the gospel was incorporated into their cultural context in a way that was uniquely theirs in each of the contexts.

**Key Element 7: God Inspired Local Spiritual Leadership**

Central to the process of spiritual growth and transformation in the community was the role of a spiritual leader, who at some significant point in his or her life had heard God’s call and answered it with dedication, perseverance, and trust in God for guidance. Modeling what it meant to live a righteous life and focusing on communicating the truth about God in ways that connected and resonated with local culture and faith, a deep trust developed between the leader and the people. With deep love and concern as well as a spiritual authority conferred and confirmed by God, the leader guided and directed the community to a deeper appreciation and understanding of the biblical picture of God. Constantly challenging both men and women to come to conclusions themselves about their own faith
journey (both on an individual and communal level) the leader facilitated the development of local theological understandings rooted in God's revelation of himself found in Scripture during the gatherings.

Intimately connected to and part of the community, we saw that the leader lived out a life which demonstrated a truly sacrificial, incarnational, and deeply loving form of servant leadership which was and continues to be totally dependent on God in every respect. The leadership style and the structures put in place to support the growing movements were clearly not imported, but rather rooted in the local cultural forms and thus easily reproducible.

In conclusion of this section of the chapter, it is evident that the seven elements discussed in this section facilitated a dynamic process of spiritual growth and transformation resulting in significant shifts at a deep worldview

Diagram 1. The Process of Spiritual Growth and Transformation as Evidenced in the Composite Case Study
level. Inevitably once women opened their hearts to God, his Spirit became an active driving force for change, while at the same time correcting and aligning all of our understanding of what it truly means to live a holy life before God. Diagram 1 illustrates the process of spiritual growth and transformation which took place.

Finally, as a witness to what I have outlined in this composite case study, I can affirm, along with my colleagues, that it has often been a deeply moving and often exhausting experience to witness and be part of the demonstration of God’s power and might as his Spirit has convicted hearts and minds, cleansing all and perfecting in holiness.

Principles of Engagement When Ministering among Muslim Women

As has been evident throughout the composite case study described in this chapter, focusing on spiritual heart-felt needs acted as a trigger to significant spiritual growth and transformation of both the individual within their social groupings and the wider community as a whole. In this section I will discuss principles of engagement gleaned from several models, which together, formed the foundation of all the interaction which took place during the women’s gatherings. These principles are also the key to the spiritual dynamics that led to spiritual growth and transformation. In addition, the concept of “conversion” will also be discussed and conclusions will be drawn as to how to relate to this sensitive topic when ministering among Muslims. These principles could also apply when ministering in any context.

Carl Coffman’s Spiritual Growth and Transformation Framework

Carl Coffman’s thesis, Unto a Perfect Man (1976), while written within a Western Christian faith context which focuses on the individual rather than a group or communal level, articulates many of the principles which formed the foundation of our approach during the women’s gatherings. Coffman places the conversion process within the “Plan of Restoration Framework” (1976:13-16) which focuses on the physical, mental, and spiritual restoration of the human race into the image of God resulting in “a new perfect creation” and the “end of sin” (Rev 20) and which emphasizes the priority of fostering a personal spiritual experience which is living and transformational, rather than taking a doctrinal proof-texting approach.
Driving the point home Coffman asks the question, “Does our normal presentation series have any tendency to be overly proof-text in nature, toward the development of an overwhelming mountain of evidence from which a person cannot possibly escape?” (12). Furthermore he also affirms the importance of avoiding the use of terms that are “too theological for digestion of some most important truths. Again, [he notes] we are striving to lead him [the person receiving Bible studies] to an experience, not to theological ideas” (15).

Furthermore, Coffman advocates a progressive presentation of the more difficult doctrines, noting that “when the heart and mind are ‘surrendered,’ ‘subdued,’ ‘melted,’ then we are to present to a man or woman who loves the Lord the doctrines, the testing truths” (1976:19). Another key aspect that Coffman notes is that the doctrines are not “just subjects which are singular points needful of acceptance before becoming a member of the church” (20). Instead he posits that “every teaching of the Bible plays a part in bringing or deepening the conversion experience of the needy sinner. In other words, the experience of conversion restores a man to a right relation with God where God can treat him as ‘safe to save’ even though he has much to learn” (20, 21). Coffman also points to the need for there to be a salvation focus to every doctrine with every doctrine becoming “a step towards final, complete restoration” (22). In other words it is not a question of just believing something, but rather an understanding of what that belief means in terms of its transformational effect on the heart and life of the person who is seeking the truth about God.

Finally, Coffman outlines four spiritual dynamics which are an evidence as spiritual transformation takes place in a person’s life and character (facilitated through the Holy Spirit): (1) a hunger and thirst for truth, (2) a growth in confidence [faith] in God, (3) a personal [and in our case when ministering among Muslims a communal] response of love towards God, and (4) an experience of the joy of forgiveness and a sense of God’s enabling grace (1976:38, 39). As is evident from the composite case study all of these dynamics were in action during the women’s gatherings.

Concluding this section it is important to note two things. First, that at no point does Coffman advocate the watering down or minimalization of the gospel or the role of Jesus in the salvific process. His approach is rather to facilitate a spiritual growth and transformational experience which enables the acceptance of the truth about God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, resulting in an enduring change in the person’s life. Second, when the principles advocated by Coffman were applied in the Muslim context
of social groupings and at a wider community level rather than just on an individual level, it resulted in significant numbers of people moving together through a process of spiritual growth and transformation. This will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

Lewis Rambo’s Model of the Stages of Conversion

While Coffman (1976) outlines a staged process, Lewis Rambo adds to the discussion by proposing seven stages which he has labeled context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment, and consequences (1993:168, 169). At the heart of this staged progression is a transformational process which includes change, active searching, new orientation and commitment (166, 167, 168), and the experience of surrender which “empowers the convert with a sense of connection with God and the community” (169).

Rambo’s model is helpful to this discussion in several ways. First, his focus on conversion as a staged transformational process affirms the approach taken by the facilitators and the spiritual leaders as they led the women through a carefully thought through progression, which led to the expansion of their worldview to include the biblical perspective and at the same time reject certain aspects of faith due to deep worldview level changes. Second, Rambo’s assertion that of all the stages he outlines “context” is the most comprehensive as it is the “dynamic force field in which conversion takes place” (165) proved to be a highly significant factor during the women’s events as it took place within social groupings which formed part of a wider community. Third, his model also includes the notion of a significantly transformed life (168, 170) which is fostered through relationships and therefore based in community (167, 169). This is particularly helpful when it comes to facilitating a transformational process within entire communities. His model will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter.

Developing an Appropriate Approach to “Conversion”

While it is not possible to do full justice to this topic due to the length of this chapter it is essential to discuss the matter of conversion. Several problematic assumptions have undermined what it means to be converted. Coffman notes the tendency to treat conversion as one of our many doctrines (1976:13) which is to be believed rather than experienced. To address this problem he advocates the importance of beginning with a “block of studies that leads to the experience of conversion” (19). This does not mean that
doctrine is not shared. On the contrary doctrines provide the building blocks which lead to a transformed life. Coffman’s suggested approach was taken in the women’s gatherings with an intentional focus on a transformational faith experience intended to build a joint response to God’s call.

A second problematic assumption is highlighted by Andrew Buckser and Stephen Glazier when they note that academic models of conversion tend to draw heavily on Christian imagery, particularly on such dramatic scenes as Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus. These images construct conversion as a radical, sudden change of belief in which old ways and associations are left behind as a result of a new theological outlook. How can such models encompass non-Christian religions, which often regard belief as less important than religious practice? How can they accommodate the slow and partial stages through which conversion often takes place? (2003:xvi)

In some rare cases such a sudden type of experience does occur, especially if a Muslim is geographically removed from their normal communal environment and location. But experience has certainly shown that this is rare among Muslims who live in communities that are largely “high identity,” even though they may not necessarily practice their faith.

In the preface of Buckster’s and Glazier’s book this discussion is extended further when it is noted that inevitably there will be some continuity with past faith and practice. This, it is argued, allows for the possibility that certain aspects in a person’s previous faith system, if it does not contradict the new faith, can legitimately remain (2003:xviii). Following this line of thought Diane Austin-Broos describes conversion as “a form of passage, a ‘turning from and to’ that is neither syncretism nor absolute breach” (2003:1). For Austin-Broos, this passage involves “interrelated modes of transformation that generally continue over time and define a consistent course” (2). In her view, if conversion is neither syncretism nor an absolute breach with the past (which is rooted in a person’s social life) then it is also “a quest for human belonging.” It is a passage which “involves an enculturated being arriving at a particular place” (2).

A fact that we often overlook is that the disciples of Jesus (Isa al Masih) went through a process of change in their understanding and convictions. Ellen White with prophetic insight states,

When on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the disciples, they understood the truths that Christ had spoken in parables. The
teachings that had been mysteries to them were made clear. The understanding that came to them with the outpouring of the Spirit made them ashamed of their fanciful theories. Their suppositions and interpretations were foolishness when compared with the knowledge of heavenly things which they now received. They were led by the Spirit, and light shone into their once darkened understanding. (White 1957:76)

Richard Peace adds the concept of “spiritual journey or pilgrimage” to describe the “conversion process” as the metaphor enables the identification of various typical stages of pilgrimage which “helps us to see and understand exactly where a person is in spiritual pilgrimage” (1999:309). Once again a staged approach is outlined: quest, commitment, and formation (311-317). However he notes that the process of formation never ends (316), not just in terms of a person who is coming to faith as we would like to think, but also extends to those of us who have been on a faith journey for some time (328). To emphasize the point he writes, “As Witherup [1994] has shown, in the Old Testament the message of conversion is addressed internally to the people of God, and not externally to others.” . . . Through conversion we make frequent course correction or order to embrace the relationship to God anew” (328, 329). This helps us to recognize that we too are on a journey into the “greater light” as the Spirit of God leads us day by day and as we seek to know him and his will for our lives.

Additionally, Peace, through Ronald Witherup (1994:18), provides a definition of the conversion process in the Old Testament which is “not a singular event but an ongoing process of realignment to God. God continually reaches out to human beings in relationship, yet we continue to stray from that relationship. Through conversion we make frequent course correction in order to embrace the relationship to God anew” (329).

Since many of the concepts that are integral to the Hebrew worldview as found in the Old Testament also resonate with the Islamic worldview, considering conversion from an Old Testament perspective is helpful in developing a theology of conversion that is both familiar to the Muslim context while at the same expressed in a way that opens up possibilities for new conversations and understandings as a person or community matures in their faith.

Finally two challenging verses in the Bible and some principles outlined by Ellen White add further to the framework under discussion. First, Jon Paulien (2005:18, 19) reminds us that God “is not without witness” anywhere in this world (Acts 14:17). Second, John 1:9 states that Jesus (the Word) is the “Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (KJV).
We can, therefore, expect this light to be shining among all people in all contexts. Ellen White explains:

Among all nations, kindred and tongues, He [God] sees men and women who are praying for light and knowledge. . . .

. . . The “Light”, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9), is shining in his soul [the noble seeker after truth]; and this Light if heeded, will guide his feet to the kingdom of God. The prophet Mica said: “When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. . . . He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness” Micah 7:8, 9.

Heaven’s plan is broad enough to embrace the whole world. . . . Constantly He is sending his angels to those who, while surrounded by circumstances the most discouraging, pray in faith for some power higher than themselves to take possession of them and bring deliverance and peace. (1917:376-378)

Lesslie Newbiggen places this in our practical everyday life in today’s world when he says that we “shall expect, look for and welcome the signs of the grace of God at work in the lives of those who do not know Jesus as Lord. . . . He [Jesus] is the true light of the world, and that light shines into every corner of the world in spite of all that seek to shut it out” (1989:180).

A question that arises at this point is at what stage do we see the conversion process beginning in a person’s life? If human beings are the recipients of light from God, even if they do not know who Jesus is, then it is reasonable to suggest that the conversion process starts at the point when they respond to the light that God is pouring on them, in their specific situation.10 Once again Newbiggen gets to the heart of the matter when he says, “In our contact with people who do not acknowledge Jesus as Lord, our first business, our first privilege, is to seek out and to welcome all the reflections of that one true light [Jesus] in the lives of those we meet” (1989:180).

Another way of expressing it would be to say that it is when we expect, look for, and find the evidences of God’s work among people groups, and identify the redemptive analogies11 that have been preserved within that context, and build on those, we become effective stewards of the “light” that God has left among all people. This opens up possibilities for wider and new spiritual conversations to take place from a biblical perspective. Furthermore we ourselves may be able to benefit and learn from the “light” that God has

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10A distinction is made between knowledge of Christ (epistemology) and the eternal existence (ontology) of Christ in relation to salvation.

11Redemptive analogies are defined as cultural phenomena which have been preserved by divine purposes which can be used to illustrate and make clear certain biblical truths.
left among Muslim people. Mathais Zahniser (2008:3) makes an important point when he quotes David Shenk (Kateregga and Shenk 1997). “The profound Muslim appreciation of the sovereignty and transcendence of God is a witness . . . Christians need to hear” (34). Newbiggen makes an extremely relevant point when he says, “There is something deeply repulsive in the attitude, sometimes found among Christians, which makes only grudging acknowledgement of the faith, the godliness, and the nobility to be found in the lives of non-Christians. Even more repulsive is the idea that in order to communicate the gospel to them one must, as it were, ferret out their hidden sins, show that their goodness is not so good after all, as a precondition for presenting the offer of grace in Christ” (1986:180).

So where does this leave us? Does this mean that we are taking a pluralist theological position? The answer is definitely no. Once again Newbiggen offers a way forward which enables us to be faithful from a biblical perspective, while at the same time facilitating the work of God’s Spirit in today’s world in the lives of those who are not yet ready to call Jesus Lord.

It has become customary to classify views on the relation of Christianity to the world religions as either pluralist, exclusivist, or inclusivist. . . . The position which I have outlined is exclusivist in the sense that it affirms the unique truth of the revelation in Jesus Christ, but is not exclusivist in the sense of denying the possibility of the salvation of the non-Christian. It is inclusivist in the sense that it refuses to limit the saving grace of God to the members of the Christian Church, but it rejects inclusivism which regards the non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation. It is pluralist in the sense of acknowledging the gracious works of God in the lives of all human beings, but it rejects a pluralism which denies the uniqueness and decisiveness of what God has done in Jesus Christ. (1989:182, 183)

In summary, the following principles underpin the re-generative process of spiritual growth and transformation which took place, and continues to take place during the women’s gatherings: identifying and meeting spiritual heart-felt needs of the women, embedded within the “Plan of Restoration” framework as they are gathered together (in groups and in community) in worship before God; a spiritually transformational approach which leads women to experience God’s saving grace through the work of the Holy Spirit; a salvation focused staged approach to sharing doctrinal truth as questions arise, with testing truths (such as the divinity of Christ) being shared later in the process; avoidance of complicated theological terms; understanding conversion largely as a staged process of spiritual growth and
transformation—a spiritual journey, embedded in a context which resonates with the Old Testament worldview and yet opens up spiritual conversations which leads to a full understanding of the process of salvation from a biblical perspective; the recognition that no people group is left without the “light” from God and that it is our responsibility to welcome all the reflections of that “light” and build on it as we are led through the work of his spirit in our lives. As we recognize the “light” in others, so we ourselves are deeply moved by God to grow and develop spiritually in our own lives as we join others on their journey of faith.

An Examination of the Seven Key Elements Which Contributed to the Spiritual Growth and Development of Muslim Women

This section does a brief post-analysis of the seven key elements described in the composite case study. While it is hoped that this will bring a certain amount of understanding as to how the key elements in dynamic interaction with one another produced the kind of response described in the composite case study, it is also known that it is impossible for us to grasp fully all that God is doing in the hearts and lives of people who are open to his leading. With this in mind I will proceed to make an analysis of the seven key elements in terms of their contribution to the spiritual growth and transformation witnessed during the various gatherings.

Key Element 1: Responding to God’s Call to Live a Holy Life: Acknowledging and Receiving the Presence of God

Not only is the Qur’anic worldview theocentric, but the majority of Muslims live out their daily lives recognizing and acknowledging that everything finds its source and meaning in God. Notice the concept of ‘ilm al Tawhid, the oneness of God in Al Ikhlas 112:1. “Say: He is Allah, The One (Ahad) and Only.” Farid Esack explains this in terms of the “absolute oneness of God” (2005:45), while as Mathais Zahniser notes for Sayyid Qutb (1974:3:390), a leading Islamist and intellectual of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 1960s, the meaning of tawhid is not “only the singularity and unity of the Divine (tawhid al-ilahiyah) but also the unity and order of the way we are to live (tawhid al-qawamah) that results from this basic unity” (2008:28, 29). This “unity” or “oneness of God” is central to the unity of the community which is expressed as Muslims unite together with a common purpose of worship through the hajj (the pilgrimage), salat (ritual prayer)
and during sawm (fasting particularly at the time of Ramadan) (Harlan 2005:67).

Furthermore Harlan notes, closely connected to the concept of tawhid is the orthodox Muslim understanding that God is utterly transcendent and unknowable (2005:67). At the heart of this belief is the “throne verse” which expresses God’s otherness and self-sufficiency.

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\text{Allah! There is no god but He—the Living, The Self-subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there that can intercede in His presence except as He permitth? He knoweth what (appeareth to His creatures as) Before or After or Behind them. Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He willeth. His Throne doeth extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, The Supreme (in glory). (Al Baqarah 2:255)}
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This concept of God as remote and inaccessible has roots in the theological debates in Islamic 'Ilm al-Kalam (theology) concerning whether it could be said that divine attributes such as mercy and compassion (al-Rahman, al-Rahim) existed in God. The Mutazalites, influenced by Greek philosophy and rationalism (believing that there is no conflict between reason and revelation) argued that divine attributes did not exist in the divine being, even though the Qur’an contains imagery and descriptions of God’s ways and nature that reflects the attributes of his creatures. For example, as Frederick Denny notes, Surah Al Baqarah 2:225 refers to “God’s throne” which suggests that he sits as a cosmic ruler and Surah Ali ‘Imran 3:73 and Surah Ya Sim 36:71 speaks of God’s hands, while Surah Hud 11:37 and Surah Al Baqarah 2:115 suggests eyes and face and “speaking and hearing and seeing, these last three frequently” (2005:173). However, according to the Mutazalites such anthropomorphisms (tashbih) were considered metaphorical not literal and were there to help humans understand about God. They feared the unity of God would be compromised.

The Asharites, who ultimately defined orthodox Sunni kalam, disagreed with the Mutazalites on the issues of God’s attributes being metaphorical in nature arguing that “God’s attributes are not identical with, but not other
than His essence; and anthropomorphisms (tashbih) are real, but bila kayf\textsuperscript{12} (without asking how)” (Harlan 2005:151, 152). In summary Asharites “neither anthropomorphized (tashbih) God, nor stripped him bare (ta‘til) but took a middle course known as tanzih, “keeping pure,” in the sense of refraining from speaking of God in human terms” (Denny 2005:182).

Conversely, the 99 names of God (al-‘isma al-husna), are revered by Muslims who follow the Qur’anic command in Surah Al A‘raf 7:180. “The most beautiful names belong to Allah: So call on him by them.” In their daily life Muslims call on God by the use of these names. It is very likely that when you enter a believing Muslim’s home you will find a book containing the 99 names of God wrapped in green silk cloth and placed in the highest part of the room along with the Qur’án. Although there has been some dispute as to the meanings of these names among Islamic theologians, Bill Musk points out that “some may be seen as nouns expressing who God is in essence (titles in effect) or as adjectives describing his “action-attributes” (2005:135). Musk then goes on to say “some of the names are known as ‘glorious’ (such as ‘the Nobel, ‘the Forgiver’), others as ‘terrible,’ (such as ‘the Taker of Life,’ ‘the Avenger’). The contrast is reminiscent of God revealing himself as ‘merciful’ and ‘gracious’ in Exod 34:6 and ‘jealous’ and ‘furious’ in Ezek 16:38” (135, 137). Given the history of the development of Kalam (which I have only dealt with briefly with specific regard to how Muslims view God), it is not surprising that in the practical realities of everyday life of orthodox Sunni Muslims the idea that God is far away and disconnected from human affairs persists despite familiarity with the 99 beautiful names of God. (However it should be noted that the same cannot be said for Sufis\textsuperscript{13} who focus on both the transcendence and immanence of God). The understanding of God as transcendent rather than immanent was clearly at the core of the worldview

\textsuperscript{12}Daniel Brown, commenting on the concept of bila kayf, points out this meant that al-Ashari “denied any resemblance between God and his creatures. The danger of associating God with creation was so serious, in fact, that it would be sinful to even move one’s hand while reading a passage concerning the hand of God. It was wrong to seek out metaphorical explanations, thus denying the plain sense of scripture; it is equally wrong to attribute human characteristics to God. Thus the language of the Qur’án and the tradition is simply to be accepted, bila kayf, without knowing how … without recourse either to rationalistic speculation or indulgence in anthropomorphism” (2004:147).

\textsuperscript{13}Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who is both Shi’ite and Sufi, in the context of discussion regarding the names and qualities of God sees God states that “all that can be said of the Divine Nature as being both transcendent and immanent, Creator and beyond creation, personal and suprapersonal, Being and Beyond-Being pertains to Allah, Who is the Divine as such and not one of the aspects of the Divinity to which other Qur’anic Names of God refer ” (1987:312). Al Ghazali (d.1111), a follower of the Ash’arite school and a Sufi, wrote many fundamental scholarly writings (philosophy, fiqh, logic, and theology). He achieved a synthesis between Sufism (by reforming aberrations) and kalam which was generally accepted as orthodox by consensus (Harlan 2005:147).
of the majority of the women represented in the composite case study, although some who had been part of the believing groups for some time had already made considerable progress in their thinking due to exposure to the Bible.

Recognizing the importance of relating to God as transcendent and yet understanding the deep heartfelt need for God to be present and active in women's lives, we intentionally, in the first instance, focused on the greatness and transcendence of God, which it is possible to affirm both from a Qur'anic perspective (e.g., the concept of Ta‘ala—to be exalted in Surah Ta Ha 20:114, “High above all is Allah. The King, The Truth!” and from a biblical perspective (Deut 10:17), while at the same time linking into the deep heartfelt longing of women to be worthy of receiving God’s attention to their needs in their daily lives.

It was this initial primary focus on God as the epicenter of faith and practice, and the connection with the deep heartfelt need to be close to him that opened the way for us, as believing women, to invite God’s presence to be in our midst. This in turn opened up the hearts of all present to the further work of God’s Spirit, setting in motion the understanding of God as both transcendent and imminent, and intimately interested in the affairs of women. As the composite case study showed this was a significant step forward both cognitively and experientially. It also held significance for those of us who were leading out, as we were witnesses to the beginnings of a transformation of thinking about God and his relationship to women at a deep worldview level, albeit at differing levels of understanding depending on the spiritual maturity of the person and the dynamics within the group and the wider community.

There are many ways of taking this particular conversation to new levels of understanding about the imminence of God and his relationship with people. Mathais Zahniser (2008:246, 247) offers one way forward. Referencing Surah Al Shu’ara 26:68 which says, “And verily thy Lord is He, the Exalted in Might, most Merciful.” Zahniser says, “The mighty one, the merciful”: obvious common ground exists here with the Bible; God is clearly both ultimate and intimate.” He then argues that one name in the Qur’an which is particularly helpful in interpreting how these two attributes come together is the name al-Halim [one of the 99 names of God] “forbearing, ever-forbearing, or most forbearing.” Appearing 15 times in the Qur’an, with 11 of those times describing God (Surahs Al Baqarah 2:225, 235, 263; Ali ‘Imram

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14 Much depends on how far the women have progressed in their understanding and experience of God in their lives as to whether it is necessary to start from the Qur’an and then move to the Bible.
Ministering to the Spiritual Heart

3:155; Al Nisa 4:12; Al Ma’ida 5:101; Al Isra’ 17:44; Al Hajj 22:59; Al Ahzab 33:51; Fati 35:41; Al Taghabun 64:17, Zahniser shows that halim “occurs in the rhyme phrase at the end of the verse [ayah]. When it contains a name or attribute of God, a single rhyme phrase often provides a commentary on its verse or verse group from the divine perspective. And together such rhyme phrases in a thematic unit of the Qur’an provide a theological and ethical frame for the content of that unit” (2008:247).

Expanding on this further, Zahniser notes, “In six of the eleven instances where the Qur’an attributes halim to God, the name is combined with “Oft-forgiving” (ghafur). That is, God is in complete control and has the unfettered freedom to forgive whomever he pleases. But God is friend, trustee, loving and guardian, but always from a position of superior strength” (2008:247).

While recognizing the Muslim tendency to emphasize the ultimacy of God, Zahniser pursues the possibilities of opening up wider conversations from a biblical perspective about the intimacy of God within the Islamic frame of reference when he refers to other Qur’anic names for God. For example al-Wudud (the loving one—Suras Hud 11:90 and Al Buruj 85:14) which points “in the direction of God’s intimate concern for humankind. Such an understanding of God is compatible with the name Al-Halim” (Zahniser 2008:255, 256). Turning to the Bible Zahniser states:

The Hebrew scriptures also feature stories about God and names for God that support divine intimacy. Among the names is ha-’Ozer, “the Helper:” “You have been the helper of the orphan” (Psalms 10:14); “O Lord, be my helper” (Psalms 30:10); and “But surely God is my helper (Psalms 54:4). In the Gospels a related term is rich in meaning: ho parakletos, “the Helper, the Advocate, the Mediator,” is used for the Holy Spirit in John 14:26. The same term is used for Jesus in 1 John 2:1. What Jesus taught about the Father coheres with this concept. God is certainly the Ultimate Reality; but God is also the Intimate Reality. (2008:256)

In conclusion through this limited analysis of the worldview assumptions of Muslims, it is clear that God is able, through the work of his Spirit, to shift long held views about himself in terms of his transcendence and imminence and rapidly replace them with new understandings when women are gathered together (albeit it still in a staged process). This has been clearly demonstrated in the composite case study. Moreover, as Zahniser has

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15. "But ask forgiveness of your Lord, and turn unto Him (in repentance): for my Lord is indeed full of mercy and loving-kindness."

16. "And He is the Oft-Forgiving, full of loving-kindness."

shown, there is within the Qur’an itself the possibility of developing a
different picture of God which is far closer to the biblical picture of God
than is commonly understood today.

Key Element 2: The Escalating Activity of the Holy Spirit

The introduction of the Holy Spirit very early on during the Muslim
women’s gatherings, or in fact any gathering, including those in our own faith
community, is something that I and my colleagues have come to understand
through experience is vitally important to the process of spiritual growth
and transformation. However, when we made the decision to implement this
we were not aware of the significant impact this would have on all of our
lives. Quite frankly we were amazed to witness the intense escalating activity
of the God’s Spirit. Never before, in my experience, had I or my colleagues
(especially in one particular gathering), witnessed God’s Spirit so strongly
evident among a group of people or so strongly personally challenging those
of us who were leading out. So what happened which caught us unawares?

In one of the gatherings we particularly witnessed a momentum building
up each day which enabled rapid shifts in worldview (as described in the
composite case study); there was evidence of the fruits of the spirit expressed
in word and deed; the fact that we as facilitators and leaders often said so little
and yet so much was happening was significantly beyond human initiation;
and finally the sudden epiphanies which occurred as women narrated their
personal testimony or during discussion about faith within a group. Norman
Denzin defines an “epiphany” as a “turning point” (1989:70). However, from
my experience it may not be seen by the person as a significant turning
point, but rather a sudden revelation of truth (for which the person has been
seeking for some time) through the power of the Holy Spirit which results
in action, at both an internal and external level, albeit as part of a staged
process. Furthermore, epiphanies were also experienced by the facilitators
as the Spirit of God worked among them.

The expressed need for God’s spirit in the women’s lives and the speed of
the transforming work of God’s Spirit evident in their lives in a particular
circumstance has led me to seek answers. Why did this occur so readily
among Muslims who are still on a journey of faith? Why did God’s Spirit
become so central to people’s spiritual growth and development during the
gatherings? A further question I had was, Why did we, as facilitators and
leaders (particularly so in one of the large gatherings), experience a sense of
the Spirit’s leading and direction so acutely, to the point where we felt that
we were simply channels through which he was pouring out his enabling power on the women? It seemed that our words were no longer necessary for God to do his work among his people.

To try to explain the workings of God’s Spirit is almost impossible to put into words, however several contributing factors come to mind which could be said in some small way to explain what we experienced. Bryant Myers makes a simple point which I believe is a vital key. He suggests that “the Holy Spirit is [already] indwelling in all cultures” (2009:237). It is just a question of being the channel through which the Holy Spirit can work further. The concept of God’s Spirit or the Holy Spirit, is referred to in the Qur’an, but is not developed or understood as it is outlined in the Bible. It is little understood or known in the Muslim context and most importantly has not been a point of controversy between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Today most Muslims simply think that the term God’s Spirit, or the Holy Spirit refers to the angel Gabriel. Thus the concept does not carry with it the baggage that is attached to the cross or the divinity of Jesus, therefore providing the opportunity to introduce the Holy Spirit into the context with little resistance.

It is not my purpose here to outline in detail how the Qur’an relates to the term Holy Spirit, or God’s Spirit as it is sometimes referred to. That is the topic for another paper—one which should be pursued. However, one of the verses (ayats) in the Qur’an which helped provide an initial platform for introducing the Holy Spirit from a biblical perspective to the women is found in Surah Al Mujadila 58:22 which says, “For such He has written Faith in their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit of Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens beneath which Rivers flow to dwell therein (forever).”

The understanding that God promised in the Qur’an to strengthen people with his Spirit plus the biblical stories and personal testimonies of the facilitators of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, touched a deep heartfelt need—their sense of unworthiness, impurity and powerlessness—among the women. In an uncertain and hostile world where women often

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17 Fig 8-3: Helping each other change worldview.
18 In note 5365 commenting on this verse Yusuf Ali indicates his own difficulty in describing God's Spirit when he says, “cf. 2:87 and 253, where it is said that Allah strengthened the Prophet Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Here we learn that all good and righteous men are strengthened by Allah with the Holy Spirit. If anything, the phrase used here is stronger ‘a spirit from Himself’. Whenever anyone offers his heart in faith and purity to Allah, Allah accepts it, engraves that Faith on the seeker’s heart, and further fortifies him with the divine spirit, which we can no more define adequately than we can define in human language the nature and attributes of Allah.”
seek after spiritual power which is not from God, the understanding that God was making available a legitimate form of spiritual power was liberating and empowering for many. However, the facilitator cautioned the women that “to receive something that is from God means that we ourselves need to take responsibility for what is not good in our lives and ask God to empty everything out of our lives which is impure and allow him to fill us with his Spirit.” This challenge reached right to the deep heartfelt need for purity. As women expressed their yearning for God to strengthen them through his Spirit and prayed for cleansing from all that was evil in their lives, so God’s Spirit was released among us as a group.

Having discovered through experience the importance of prioritizing the Holy Spirit early in our conversations with Muslim women, I came across an article by S. P. Steinhaus in which he advocates a “Spirit first” approach which resonated closely to our experience. He notes that several times while talking about the Spirit to Muslims “I have been interrupted with this wonderful question ‘Yes, but how does a person receive the Spirit?’” (2000:24). One of the most relevant points that he makes is that focusing on the Holy Spirit does not in any way minimize the importance of Jesus in the process of salvation, but rather the Spirit’s role is to “work in our spirits so that we will be moved to listen to, believe, obey, and glorify Christ” (2000:28).

Steinhaus makes a further important point when he says that Jesus and his apostles gave people seeds rather than the whole message at once. “There were occasions where a more complete gospel was presented in one meeting [he notes that John 3:1-21 was probably the clearest presentation from Jesus himself, but also identifies the central role of the Holy Spirit], however these are in the minority.” Utilizing John 14:16 Steinhaus notes that the role of the Holy Spirit is to work in the interests of Christ as one who “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (Steinhaus 2000:28). Certainly, as described in the case study, when women heard the stories of Jesus from the Bible and became more aware of the unique role of Jesus in the Qur’an, significant steps forward in understanding the nature of Jesus (Isa al-Masih) from a biblical perspective were taken. Later, we witnessed one of the women from one of the gatherings having an epiphany experience which led her through a staged process to a clearer understanding of the true nature of Jesus and his relation to God from a biblical perspective.

Moving from the personal practical experience of the work of the Holy Spirit in our everyday life and our response to him to the wider implications of the work and role of the Holy Spirit, the Bible reveals a compelling picture of an ever present accelerating transformative force. I believe that this is far
more significant than we have allowed for or comprehended as a possibility. The Holy Spirit (also referred to as the Spirit of God or the Holy Ghost) of the Bible is portrayed as overwhelmingly evident and active, especially at times of new beginnings or when some momentous change or transformation is about to take place is in the process of taking place. While it is impossible to include all of the biblical instances, a few significant examples will be given. For example Christopher Wright underlines that in Gen 1:1-2, at the time of creation the Spirit of God was “hovering” (ESV), “poised for action” (Wright 2006:14); at the conception of Jesus, Mary is informed that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Luke 1:35 ESV); at the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:16 KJV) “he [Jesus] saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove” which marked the beginning of his transformational ministry; at Pentecost (Acts 2:4) the intense activity of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of the proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. This resulted in the birth of the new community of faith as the Holy Spirit moved among the people which not only, as Peter Roennfeldt points out in his chapter in this book, took “the gospel across the cultural divide to the Gentiles, [but] it also reshaped the message of the gospel for the Jewish believers and recreated their movement of faith” (Acts 15) (Roennfeldt 2011:83).

In conclusion, it is clear that the role of the Holy Spirit is not only central to the salvation process, but it is the key active agent in the process. Furthermore, at this time in the history of the world, he is intimately and actively involved in the development of faith in whole communities and in the hearts of individuals who are part of those communities. The Holy Spirit is also central to the process of restoration of the relationship which was severed between humankind and God at Eden. In John 16:12-15, Jesus told his disciples, “I have many things to say to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”

Steinhaus significantly challenges us when he asks if “we personally are living in step with the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:25)” (2000:29). This question needs to be continually in our minds as we come before God in humility seeking the infilling of his Spirit in order that we may truly reflect the image of God to those with whom we seek to share the gospel. We cannot call others to something we are not experiencing ourselves. I concur with Steinhause when he says, “Whenever I talk with a Muslim I am reminded
of my own shallow experience with him [God] and yet God’s willingness
to ‘give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him’ (Luke 11:13). I believe this
promise extends to Muslims as well” (Steinhaus 2000:29).

Key Element 3: The Dynamic Interaction between God and the
Community or Individual Through Prayer

One of the reasons why such significant spiritual growth and development
was able to take place during the women’s gatherings was, in my opinion,
due to the fact that prayer is so central in Islam generally and in the life of
Muslim people, whether it is the formal prayer (salat) which is very public
in nature, or prayer of personal supplication (du’a). Integral to these two
forms of prayer is the heartfelt need to be pure (salim)\(^\text{19}\) before God and
to receive blessing (barakah)\(^\text{20}\) from him. Dudley Woodberry, through
extensive research, shows that the term chosen (salla “to bow,” from the
noun salat) is not as foreign as we might think as it “had long been used in
institutionalized prayer in Synagogues and churches.” He notes that “‘Aqama
‘l-salat (to perform the prayer) was apparently borrowed from the Syrian
church while Muhammad was still in Mecca” and that the roots of the prayer
service are also seen in Judaism, including postures and content (1996:175).

In his excellent and detailed article Woodberry (1996:175-178) points to
various references in the Bible and Jewish practice which highlight regular
prayers and removal of sandals (which was also practiced by the Eastern
churches) and ablutions associated with impurity/purity. A point relevant to
the discussion in this chapter is made when he says that “Jewish Christians
maintained their former institutionalized prayer times and places (Acts 3:1;
10:9; 16:13)” (175). This is helpful in terms of deciding how to relate to the
Salat as in-context ministries develop.

It is not my purpose in this discussion to go into greater depth concerning
the origins and meanings of the Muslim formal prayer of Salat (nor du’a)
except to say that we need to be aware as we minister in the Muslim context
that rituals in all faith traditions can become corrupted or an end in
themselves and can lose their original meaning and content. For example

\(^{19}\)Taken from the Arabic root *S L M n.m (adj)—pure; safe, secure; whole, unblemished, unimpaired;
sound (Hanna Kassis 1983:1078). See also Surah Ash Shu’araa 26:89 (Malik translation) “and when none
shall be saved except him who will come before Allah with a pure heart.” Others translate it as “heart free
of evil!” (Assad translation) and “whole heart” (Marmaduke Pickthall and Yusuf Ali translation.
\(^{20}\)Taken from the the Arabic root *B R K Barakah n.f. blessing and Baraka vb (III) to bless (pcple. pass)
one who is blessed, holy (Hanna Kassis 1983:332).
Salat in orthodox Islam is focused on bodily purity for the worship of God, whereas in Popular Piety (Folk Islam which is based in the spirit world) the meaning changes, focusing on removal by water of demonic pollution and sins. If meanings have changed, then it is important to clarify the extent to which this is the case in ministry contexts in consultation with the local leader and then address the specific aspects that are problematic as well as building further understanding from a biblical perspective.

During the gatherings it became clear to us that women wanted to pray and as has been shared in the composite case study we focused on duʿā, personal supplication to God, starting, in many cases on the first day of a gathering. While some of the women were more comfortable initially repeating memorized duʿā prayers which they had in written form, it soon caught on that it was possible, and indeed preferable to formulate one's own prayers to God, either on behalf of one's self or for others in the group. Parallel to the prayer sessions the facilitators and leaders built up the women's understanding of how to pray in a way that is acceptable to God so that the purity and blessing that they longed for could be received. “This is not something that will help you gain merit or earn you something or something to be worked for [the leader said in one of the gatherings], it is rather a gift from God which is freely given—all you have to do is receive this gift.” The scriptural texts and stories about Jesus (Isa al-Masih) and the way he related to women provided the impetus to understand the legitimate source of forgiveness, blessing, and purity.

In conclusion, it was very clear that as women prayed, the Holy Spirit moved upon their hearts correcting former understandings, bringing new knowledge, healing, and blessing at varying levels, depending on the stage a woman (or the group of which she was a part) was at in her spiritual growth and development. In some cases it was demonstrated that a small step had been taken towards a new understanding of the meaning of prayer, while for others, their prayer life would never be the same again due to their new understandings as a result of their own experience of the power of prayer rooted in a picture of God that they had not clearly understood before.

21 Folk Islam, now known as Popular Piety, is based within an animistic worldview which operates within the domain of “spirits, demons, blessings, cursing, healing, evil eye and sorcery” (Love 1994:87). It should be noted that there is a broad spectrum from little to high involvement, while many Muslims are not involved in Popular Piety at all.
Key Element 4: A Context Specific Community Related Approach to Meeting Spiritual Heart-felt Needs

As demonstrated in the composite case study both context and community played a vital role in the women’s spiritual growth and development. In this section I will first examine those aspects of context which have particular relevance to spiritual growth and development, either personally or as a group. Second, some relevant aspects of community will be discussed with a view to understanding their importance both as an inhibitor or accelerator to the spread of the gospel.

Lewis Rambo’s assertion that context is the most comprehensive of all the seven stages of the conversion process has already been discussed in this chapter. Before proceeding, a further comment made by Rambo is worthy of our full attention, as, in my opinion, it has been one of the major inhibitors in our ministry among Muslims. He argues that many theories or even popular beliefs tend to divorce a person from his or her context which can include political, economic, religious, social, and cultural influences. People tend to forget that human beings shape these influences and then conversely, are “shaped by the socialization process of the wider world” (1993:166). The discussion below will show the importance of not divorcing people from their context when it comes to faith development.

One of the most important aspects of context in relation to a person’s receptivity to the gospel is connected to culture. In recent years much attention has been given to the importance of understanding culture in order to communicate effectively in differing cultural settings (see Nida 1954; Hiebert 1983, 1985; Grunlan and Mayers 1988; Hesselgrave 1991; Lingenfelter 1992; Kraft 1996, 2005). For the purpose of this article culture is defined as the “complex structuring of customs and the assumptions that underlie them in terms of which people govern their lives” (Kraft 1996:31). Thus, every human being is part of a specific culture and is influenced by it and responds to their immediate context and the wider world through a specific cultural framework.

The connection between culture and emotion and the importance of understanding how emotions are expressed in differing societies has recently been highlighted as vital to understanding the communication process. Research by Shinobu Kitayama and Hazel Rose Markus note that not only is culture and emotion “mutually and reciprocally related” (1994:2) but that the “emotion process, and thus the ensuing conscious experience of emotion, may be drastically different, depending on the socio-cultural environment” (4). This certainly was demonstrated to a greater or lesser extent during our
various gatherings of Muslim women or in single interactions with women. Emotions were always evident, but there were differences in the way that they were expressed and experienced, depending on the person, group, or location.

A good example of the culture/emotion connection is given by Phoebe Ellsworth who indicates that some “societies assign greater power to destiny or to supernatural forces not easily controlled by human efforts,” and that in such cultures “sorrow and resignation would be more common emotions” (1994:33). I would also add the strong emotion of fear of the unknown. These kinds of emotional responses are common among Muslim women who are involved to a lesser or greater degree in Popular Piety (Folk Islamic practices). However, when a woman or group of women understand that God is able to both release and protect from illegitimate sources of spiritual power, there is a significant emotional response—a movement from sorrow and resignation to one of joy and hope. This may be expressed through tears, physical hugging and touching, or through language of joy and repentance. The stories in the Bible of Isa al Masih casting out demons—particularly the story of Mary, out of whom seven devils fled at the command of Jesus (Mark 16:9), is particularly appealing to such women.

Since research has shown that emotion is linked intimately to spiritual development, it therefore is important to understand how culture affects the experience and expression of emotion in order to not misunderstand, offend, or cast blame, or cause our attempts to share faith rejected. For example, when sharing biblical truth in some societies, there would be little point in emphasizing the concept of “guilt” (which is the dominant emotion found in more individualistic societies) in relation to the Atonement in a society where the emotions of “shame” and “honor” are dominant (as found in societies that have a collectivist orientation). Rather, God’s way of dealing with the problem of sin needs to be shared within the “shame/honor” paradigm as this will provide the most significant motivating force for change. Among most Muslim women, shame/honor and defilement/purity are examples of just two significant culturally related emotions which provide the motivating force for spiritual growth and change.

There is another aspect of the emotion/culture link which needs attention—the way that emotions are described in language. Anna Wierzbicka argues that every language imposes its own interpretive grid, lexical or grammatical on the various emotions experienced (1994:135-139). Not only is the study of language itself very complex but what is understood and experienced will
vary significantly. Harry Triandis affirms this and adds that cultures are more than just customs. They include subjective elements which are widely shared and transmitted from generation to generation such as “characteristic ways of categorizing experience, linguistic terms that correspond to these categories, widely shared associations among the categories, beliefs about how the categories are linked to each other, beliefs about correct action in specific situations (norms), beliefs about actions that are appropriate for persons who holds specific positions in social structures (roles) and guiding principles that direct the lives of individuals (values)” (Triandis 1994:285). He also notes that “people develop specialized vocabularies and learn to feel differently in different situations” (286). Additionally the more differentiated the vocabulary the more complex the emotions that are experienced in a given society (286).

Thus the importance of understanding linguistic forms and their attached emotional components which are linked to a person’s culture is vital to the mission process. This is reflected in research done in Sefrou, Morocco, by Lawrence Rosen who examined the linguistic form known in Arabic as the nisba. This relates to a person’s identity which “encapsulates a particular attachment or quality by which its bearer may, in part be known” (1984:19). Although his discussion is not directly related to the culture/emotion/faith link, it does provide some insight into the way that terms and concepts embedded within a local culture have certain meanings and inevitably also carry emotional components. Rosen notes:

The root of the term nisba (n-s-b) yields a variety of words centered around verbs “to link,” “to bring into relation,” “to trace one's ancestry.” Among its many ramifications are words that translates as “lineage,” “relativity,” “proportionate,” and “apt.” Nisba itself means “attribution,” “ascription,” and “relationship,” and as a linguistic form it thus encapsulates a particular attachment or quality by which its bearer may, in part be known. (1984:19)

This notion of attachment and place, which is very important to the way Moroccans identify others and create a baseline for relationship, is itself embraced in the Arabic word asel. In its basic application asel means “origin,” “root” and “source.” . . . [In addition] its derived forms include “to found or

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22An example of the complex nature of linguistic terms is cited by Wierzbicka when she shows that in French the word émotion differs in meaning from the English word emotion with the French word “referring only to internal events that are intense and difficult to control. For example, triste (sadness) or dépression, déprimé (depression, depressed) are not considered by my French informants as des emotions, whereas in English, sadness and depression rate highly on the list of prototypical emotions” (1994:150).
establish,” “lineage,” “descent,” “nobility of descent,” “real estate,” strength of character,” “authentic,” “proper,” and “indigenous.” . . . To be attached to a place is therefore, not only to have a point of origin—it is to have those social roots, those human attachments, that are distinctive to the kind of social person one is.” (Rosen 1984:21, 23)

Any discussion related to a person’s identity and place in society will have emotional components attached to it. For example, a person who is respected and has established significant social relationships and networks within a particular context will feel emotions such as pride, happiness, belonging, and empowerment. On the other hand if something occurs which creates disequilibrium, such as one of the family members embracing a “foreign” faith, emotions such as anger, fear, grief, shame, sadness, and embarrassment may be felt and become a driving force to re-establish what is accepted as the norm within the community.

In the light of this brief excursion into the field of linguistics it seems clear that as we journey with Muslims to deepen relationships with God the question we need to be asking is, How can understanding the linguistic form, such as the nisba and all that it implies for the individual and community become a vehicle for the spread of the gospel rather than an inhibitor? Kitayama and Markus make a relevant point when they state that we should “try to enter the conceptual world of other peoples and abandon our Anglo perspective [I would add Western or whatever other perspective we come with] in interpreting that world” (1994:139).

Interestingly, as we have ministered among Muslim women, we have found that it is not just abandoning our perspective and stepping into their world and respecting culturally embedded emotional responses at the deep worldview level that is needed. It may also mean assisting the work of the Holy Spirit in awakening hidden emotional responses which have been suppressed and allowing them to flow naturally within the context of sharing faith. For example, at one gathering it was clear that women were not normally expected or allowed to reveal their emotions. It was not until two or three days into the event that the women came to understand, after hearing the testimonies of the facilitators and leaders which included deep emotional responses, that it was legitimate to express their thoughts and emotions. Significantly in one particular case it was in the context of being given Bibles and then being asked to interpret what they were reading themselves, that women felt empowered to express their thoughts and eventually their feelings in a culturally appropriate way, thus providing opportunity for the gospel to be incorporated seamlessly within their own thought patterns and
emotional responses. In that particular situation the use of object lessons which appealed to the five senses—sight, sound, hearing, taste, and touch—facilitated the process of spiritual growth and development.

The second important consideration in relation to context is the importance and strength of the community in the life of Muslims and its relationship to the receptivity and spread of the gospel through strategic networks. As we have already noted, all that is implied in the *nisba* in Morocco is community based, particularly in the light of the socialization process. The community (*ummah*), which is intimately connected to culture, is an important topic when ministering among Muslim women. As Denny notes, “Islam is a complete way of life and not merely a system of belief and ritual practices” (2006:263). While there are significant variations according to the context and the individual’s response as to what it means to be “Muslim” within a particular context, Islam invariably manifests itself as a highly integrated and complete way of life into which individuals are integrated. Such a society has collectivist characteristics where women’s lives are particularly integrated into the community due to cultural customs and *Shariah* (particularly family law) which give very specific roles to women that are significantly different to those given to men.

Harry Triandis presents a number of characteristics of collectivist societies (or another way of putting it in the Muslim context, a group oriented mentality in which cohesiveness comes from the same Islamic worldview) which help inform us as we help facilitate spiritual growth and transformation in the lives of Muslims. Examples of these characteristics include subordination of personal goals to the group; in-group/out-group mentality; interdependence and family integrity and the values; obedience and duty; in-group harmony and in-group hierarchy, and personalized relationships (1994: 287, 286, 292). Triandis also notes that “collectivists interact mostly with in-group members and relatively little with strangers or in formal situations. The result is that they value intimacy and feel uneasy about superficial relationships” (293). Such cohesiveness can be a barrier to change and the incorporation of the gospel into the community. However, if the gospel is shared in a locally sustainable and transferrable way which enables the group as a whole to move together, it provides the kind of environment which facilitates a movement as illustrated by the composite case study.

Another key point is made when Triandis says that there is significant variability within cultures so that “in both collectivist and individualistic cultures there are individuals who are countercultural” (1994:289). Again
this can result in both positive and negative outcomes. On the one hand, individuals such as these are often able to change from one faith system to another in whatever form it is presented. However, as the mission endeavor has shown, this is the exception rather than the rule for in most cases such a person becomes isolated from the community and any possibility of witness within that community, particularly in “high identity” contexts (whether it is high, low, or medium practice) are curtailed. Unfortunately, many struggle to survive psychologically, emotionally, and socially unless they can be part of a community which provides them with the kind of support and nurture which has significant familiarity.

For example, if a woman from a large core, high identity culture decides to leave Islam and becomes a Christian, she will inevitably have to leave her family (she will be divorced by her husband) and flee to another country (often under a death threat) in order to practice her new faith. Often, the receiving faith community either does not understand the extent of the disruption and disequilibrium such a person faces in terms of her identity and need for social, spiritual, and communal support, or does understand it, but is not able to provide what is needed. One woman I know was searching desperately for the similar kind of support framework and sense of belonging in her new adopted faith community when I met her. In her former Muslim community, family law (one of the branches of Shar’iah) provided clear guidelines as to how she should live her life in practical terms as well as providing social support. To illustrate the importance of understanding the impact of family law in the lives of women Evelyne Reisacher quotes the reason why a young Pakistani mother of five children did not want to become a Christian. She said, “I love the words of Jesus in the gospel, but if I decide to follow him, what will my daily life look like? What will I do with the laws my family follows? How will Christianity work for me on a practical and legal level?” (Reisacher 2005:56). Reisacher then poses questions which we cannot ignore and which must be engaged, such as, “How for instance, do Christians take into account the legal aspect of Islam when they share their faith in Jesus? What response can they offer to women’s questions about the law?” (2005:56).

A further factor that we must engage with is the levels of emotional and practical support that women receive within the Muslim community, whether it is characterized as a large core high identity community or a small core low identity community. Within the family, women support one another in a positive way (although there are exceptions). If there are strong moral and spiritual values within the family there is usually an older woman to whom a younger woman can go to for advice and help on every aspect of
life. This might be her mother, or mother-in-law, or the second wife of her father. There will also be a prominent male figure who, ideally, will protect her honor within the family and community and provide for her until she marries and who will continue to provide some form of protection even after she is married. The wider community, through laws and customs, can also act as a safeguard for women within an often quite hostile environment (again there are exceptions to this). If this kind of support is not available or even understood in a woman’s adopted faith community she finds herself vulnerable, alone, and without all the normal structures in place to provide her with emotional stability and a sense of belonging. This is an urgent matter that we must understand and address as we minister among Muslim women, as it becomes the driving factor in a decision to return to the former faith community, rather than it being a question of rejection of the new faith and its associated beliefs.

Paul Markham emphasizes the importance of community in the process of faith development when he says that

the religious community is the “structuring cause” of conversion—the community through its respective cultural-linguistic context, makes possible the particular kind of agent through which God can act. It is an important theological truth that this community is a holy community [referring to the Christian community] that God brought into existence through the incarnation . . . a community embodying the dynamic reign of God in the world (Kingdom of God). (2007:186, 187)

In summary Markham is pointing out that God acts in our lives through the local culturally embedded spiritual community.

Michael Welker makes a further important point when he says that “complex and strengthening sentiments arise in me when my action is embedded in an interconnection with the action of other human beings” (Welker 1999:171). Thus we need to be relating to others as we develop our faith. Markam takes this one step further, namely that such corporate, service communities are actually “conversion communities” as opposed to “communities of togetherness” and that “while communities of togetherness share affinity and culture-shaping potential, conversion communities act as divine structuring causes of human transformation by providing the possibility for believers to act as agents of God’s work in the world” (2007:201, 202). This understanding of social embeddedness and its connection with spirituality implies that God works through the interactions of the spiritual community to help facilitate spiritual/socio-moral development.
I believe that this is one of the key elements which explain the kind of spiritual transformation that I and my colleagues have witnessed among Muslim women as their spiritual growth and development was taking place organically within the community with which they were familiar.

Concluding this section it is clear that not only does the context and community in which people live out their lives provide a favorable and essential environment for spiritual growth and development, but it also opens up possibilities for the development of in-context movements among people groups.

Key Element 5: Communicating about God in Concepts and Thought Categories Which Are Familiar to Muslim Women

Whenever God calls and we respond, the heart and mind become open to hear what God has to say to us and we begin to recognize that we are spiritually in need. This is universally applicable. As has already been outlined in the composite case study, through the work of the Holy Spirit, this spiritual neediness was expressed in a variety of ways by the women which in turn led to doctrinal questions pertinent to their salvation flowing naturally from the conversations that we were having. Central to this process was the utilization of language, concepts, and thought categories which are not only familiar to Muslim women, but which also bring understanding about all that God wants them to know about their salvation.

Paul Hiebert’s insights are important to note when he says “all cultures can adequately serve as vehicles for the communication of the gospel” and people “cannot receive it apart from their languages, symbols and rituals. The gospel must become incarnate in cultural forms if people are to hear and believe” (1985:55, 54). In our experience this has proved to be one of the most important aspects in the transformative process described in this chapter. However, at the same time note Hiebert’s statement that “the gospel calls all cultures to change. . . . A truly indigenous theology must not only affirm the positive values of the culture in which it is being formulated, but it must also challenge those aspects which express the demonic and dehumanizing forces of evil” (1985:55, 56). These challenges must ever be before us as we seek to facilitate the development of local theological explanations of God’s revelation of himself.

An example of how to utilize familiar concepts to build up and further develop a person’s understanding of God can be found in the Qur’anic concept of Guardian (Wakil)—one of the names of God: “someone in whom
one trusts: a Guardian, a Trustee, a Disposer of Affairs” (Hanna Kassis 1983:1271). For example, Surah Al Nisa’ 4:81 invites people to “put thy trust in God; God suffices for a guardian.” Surah Al ’Imram 3:173 affirms that “God is sufficient for us; an excellent Guardian is He” (Kassis 1983:1271). Associated with the concept of Wakil is Waliy (listed as one of the names of God in Kassis 1983:93). This broadens the Qur’anic picture of God, not only as protector but also friend. Surah Al Nisa’ 4:123 indicates that “they shall not find for them, apart from God, a friend or helper” (Kassis 1983:93). The concept is extended further in Surah Al Jathiyah 45:19, “Allah is the protector of the Righteous,” thus hinting at God’s special attention to those who seek to live a holy life before him.

As has been already noted, the role of guardian in the life of Muslim women is usually part and parcel of their lives. For some it will have been a negative experience, while for others it will have been positive. Even if it has been negative, women understand that in their society it is a necessity and that in an ideal world it has a positive function. Having read the Qur’anic verses (ayat), the idea of God in the role of Guardian of her honor (and consequently her purity) is particularly appealing, especially if a woman has seen God to be distant and uninvolved in her life or as one to be feared. Once the Bible becomes part of a woman’s faith journey, the picture of a loving God portrayed in the life of Jesus as he related to women, invariably leads to a desire for cleansing from sin that defiles the human heart, thus taking a significant step in their spiritual growth and development.

In conclusion, as we discuss matters of faith with Muslim women and participate with them in a shared journey of faith, we need to humbly acknowledge our own need of God’s saving grace. It is only with this spirit of humility that God will be able to do the work of cleansing and healing in our own lives and in the lives of the women he places in our pathway.

Key Element 6: An Encounter Which Reveals the Truth about God Resulting in a Shift in Allegiance

At several points throughout this chapter I have indicated that shifts at the worldview level took place as women gathered together to worship God. Out of the several examples that have been given already, one significant shift is worthy of being mentioned again—the rapid shift in their understanding of God as both transcendent and imminent—a God both interested and

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Ministering to the Spiritual Heart

intimately involved in the affairs of women.

To change one's worldview is a complex matter. Exactly how and when changes take place are in God's timing, not ours. From my observation, in some locations the changes described in the composite case study took place through a single small step, while in other locations, significant changes took place as the women's worldview enlarged rapidly to include new facets of understanding about the role and nature of Jesus in relation to God. For others, seeds were planted which bore fruit at a later date. For example, one woman, not long after one of the women's gatherings, had an epiphany while sharing her testimony during which she made rapid shifts at a deep worldview level from seeing Jesus as a prophet with special powers, to seeing him as intimately involved in the process of her salvation. At the same time she took significant steps towards acknowledging the divinity of Jesus. Such shifts are often preceded by a dream or vision in which Jesus appears, giving women confirmation (in the form of a male figure which is often a necessity for women) that they are doing what is right.

For those of us involved in ministry it is important to be aware of the complex nature of worldview. Societies are changing all the time, but in an uneven and complex way. An excellent example is current day Turkey. I have personally observed, at least on the surface among some Turks, a materialistic worldview with a focus on economic gain and self improvement, which appears to push spiritual matters into a secondary place. Due to this phenomena Turks have been labeled as “secular” Muslims. However, Wonho Kim, who rightly states that Folk Islam is widely practiced, offers some significant insights into the complexities of worldview change. On the one hand he points out that the spirit world can act as a barrier to change as Muslims influenced by folk traditions tend to be protective of their worldview assumptions (2006:102). However, on the other hand, he indicates that involvement in the spirit world can also be a motivator in a person's faith journey because “the majority of folk Muslims feel oppressed by evil spiritual powers [and] one of the most powerful motivators for change is the desire to gain greater spiritual power. In particular, Muslims who feel oppressed by evil spiritual powers tend to be more open to the gospel than those who have not [been oppressed] (Kraft 1996:392)” (Kim 2006:106).

Before concluding this section, two statements made by Bryant Myers in relation to the process of changing worldview are also worthy of attention. First, worldview change is more than changing behavior, beliefs, or values. It rather means “changing a people's entire story so that the community adopts a new story [I would add here a familiar, yet new story which is “theirs” rather
than “ours” as the gospel challenges aspects of faith and culture that are in need of transformation]. This can only be done [says Myers] by people, not by individuals. While changing the worldview of a people must be the goal of discipleship, it is the work of the Spirit of God” (2009:236, 237). Second, Myers reminds us that our witness needs to be holistic, bringing change to every level of a person’s worldview (2009:238). This includes those aspects which are usually hidden. Paul Hiebert refers to this hidden area of the spirit world as the “excluded middle” (1994:196) because many who live in the West are unaware of the extent of its existence.

Finally, I would like to conclude this section with the observation that as I have been involved in personal relationships with Muslim women and the spiritual leaders of the various ministries, I have undergone a change in my own worldview in terms of understanding the full extent of God’s gracious salvific activity among Muslims demonstrated in diverse ways. We have been continually reminded that God is already at work. It is his story, not ours. We are graciously invited by him to be part of it, not to own it.

**Key Element 7: God Inspired Local Spiritual Leadership**

The final key factor in the dynamic interactive process of spiritual growth and development outlined in this chapter is the role of the local spiritual leader. As I have interacted with our in-context ministry leaders it is clear that their effectiveness as leaders is due to their total commitment to being part of and deeply embedded in the local community which they serve. While they reflect expected social, moral, and spiritual norms, at the same time they exceed traditional leadership models in terms of their deep spirituality, knowledge of God and his Word, and their sacrificial and authentic love for the community they serve. As I have seen some of our leaders in action it is clear that their spiritual authority is both perceived and acknowledged by the community itself resulting in a deep level of trust. This trust and the respect that accompanies it, enables the community as a whole and individuals within that community to develop and grow spiritually. In short, these significant men and women lead the transformation of entire communities from within at a deep worldview level.

Much discussion has taken place with leaders recently to try to identify the dynamics of change that is currently occurring in their communities. It is clear that the leaders themselves, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, are a significant factor in the transformational process in the following ways (although it should be noted that it varies according to the context): first,
local theological explanations which are transferable in their own context are being developed and transmitted; second, local leadership from the community is being developed; third, whatever is done, is incorporated in a transformational way within local structures which are deeply embedded within the community; fourth, training is continually taking place, facilitating cordial witness, and resulting in enduring change at a deep worldview level; fifth, strategic networks are channels of change and transformation in entire communities. Another dynamic worthy of note is that as individuals and groupings within the community search for greater spiritual understanding and meaning in their lives, their trusted leaders play a central role in leading and guiding the spiritual transformational process.

Up to this point, while the leaders are operating within various contexts, specific thought has not been given to the development of an in-context leadership model for our ministry leaders which is devoid of Western influence. This is currently in the process of being constructed as the leaders themselves reflect on what constitutes spiritual leadership in their contexts while at the same time firmly basing it on biblical values. The Islamic model of moral leadership outlined by Rafik Beekus and Jamal Badawi provides an Islamic example. It includes the central role of belief, willing submission to the Creator, a focus on serving Allah, and spiritually-based concepts such as *iman* (faith) in Allah; *taqwh* (fear of Allah, or more recently understood as piety or righteousness), and *Ihsan* (love of Allah) (1999:19-25).

A major factor which needs to be considered in any formulation of a non-western leadership model is the kinship system. Kinship relationships, whether through affinal, consanguine, or fictive ties are the bases of the social structure of most non-Western societies, and are at the heart of family and community life. A quote from Stephen Grunlan and Marvin Mayers encapsulates this importance: “What is a man? A man is nothing without his family. Without his family he is of less importance than a bug crossing the trail, of less importance than the sputum or exuviae. . . . A man

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24 Kinship is constructed from a set of categories, groups, relationships, and behaviors based upon culturally determined beliefs and values concerning human biology and reproduction.

25 Affinal ties are kinship relationships tied together by marital bonds; consanguine ties are relationships tied together biologically, e.g., father son; fictive ties are socio-legal relationships where someone outside the network is ceremonially or religiously tied to that group. It should be noted that there are many nuances attached to these three basic categories.

26 While it is recognized that kinships are not static structures and do change over time, they still constitute the basis for social structure, to a greater or lesser extent, even if the family moves into a Western environment. Certainly this is often the case at the first and second generational level. Much will depend on how closely the migrant group remains in contact with their family in their homeland. My own experience with a migrant group has been with a first generation family group who were clearly operating within this structural framework and passing it on to their children who were born outside their homeland.
must be with his family to amount to anything with us” (1988:161).

The implications of this statement are far reaching as experience has shown that people who have had to leave their family (particularly those located in high identity areas) due to identification with Christianity will likely find it difficult, if not impossible, to share the gospel with their kin (even if they are low practice or Muslims that have been categorized as “secular”). Thus the kind of Spirit-led obedient reflective action (based on biblical antecedents) taken by the Jerusalem Council in response to the movement of the Holy Spirit among the Gentiles as advocated by Roennfeldt in his chapter in this book becomes a vitally important model for consideration when ministering in Muslim contexts today.

The key is a healthy respect for the realities of the everyday life and culture in which Muslims live out their daily lives. At the same we need to recognize that there are aspects in every culture, including our own, that have become captive to Satan as humans have made sinful choices, thus bringing a corrupting influence to bear on all societies. However, when biblical truth is expressed in a society appropriately and the society is open to change, it inevitably will challenge and expose what is contrary to the values of the Kingdom of God as expressed most succinctly through the life and ministry of Jesus, bringing transformation and healing into the lives of individuals and communities.

Another factor that has to be considered in any model of leadership is the patron/client system which constitutes the chief bond of human society in non-Western societies. It needs to be understood by the wider hermeneutical community that part of being an in-context leader is to be part of the patron/client system and its associated networks, but living a transformed life from a biblical perspective. The importance of this cannot be underestimated as it is one of the major keys to enabling the gospel to be transmitted through large family networks. Due to the length of this chapter, it is impossible to do full justice to this theme which needs to be the topic of a full paper. However, I will give a couple of examples.

Todd Elefson’s study on the socio-religio-political power of men in the Javanese context is particularly helpful. He notes an ongoing pursuit by

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27See Kraft 1996, chapter 3 for a thorough discussion of this complex topic which refutes the view that cultures are evil in themselves. Kraft argues that cultural structuring is natural though warped by the pervasive influence of human sinfulness. For Kraft it is people themselves who make sinful choices which lead to the development of certain negative aspects in culture. In Kraft’s view people are not determined by culture as they are the ones who create culture and who have the choice to bring about change. Others take a less positive view of culture. However, I have chosen to take a respectful view of culture coupled with a high view of Scripture.
men of the holistic *berkah* (Allah’s blessing) complex which is “derived from *karisma* ‘Islamic potency,’ and social capital in personalized hierarchical social networks” (Elefson 2008:2). These social networks are formed through constructed kinship circles which include the nuclear family, extended family, kin-like neighborhood groups, kin-like personal networks, and kin-like associations (2008:44). Elefson also notes that those individuals “with the most highly endorsed social power [which is achieved in a variety of complex ways specific to the cultural framework and includes significant levels of trust] have the greatest number of strands in their relationship” (2008:305). It is through such networks that every aspect of life is lived. Obviously those with the most social capital and endorsed social power will be the most influential in the community and therefore be able to share their faith most effectively.

Recent research has confirmed both the importance and necessity of utilizing local networks to facilitate the organic flow of the gospel within a given context. For example, Eric Adams, Don Allen, and Bob Fish conducted extensive research among 300 practitioners, and identified social networks as one of the seven themes of fruitfulness when ministering in a Muslim context. They state:

Fruitful workers also tend to be more effective when they allow the gospel to transform networks among whom trust relationships already exist, such as within families and other natural social groups. Some call this a transformational model of forming fellowships. This approach was demonstrated to be more effective than an attractional model of forming fellowships, which extracts people from their natural social networks and gathers them into new parallel networks of relative strangers who may have little trust for each. (2009:78)

The significance of working through these networks is only just beginning to become clear to many of us. The urgent question is whether we, as a faith community which was founded in the West, can grasp the potential that this holds for future ministry in the Muslim context and find ways to facilitate the flow of the gospel organically in a way which is uniquely theirs. As I have ministered in various contexts it has become clear to me that each community is unique and complex and yet within that context there is a key to spiritual growth and transformation. Our local spiritual leaders are the ones who can identify that key and use it in a way that enables the gospel to be locally transferable and sustainable, although they would be the first to

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Elefson notes the elastic nature of relational lines in the Javanese context. We need to be aware however that in another context the lines could be more clearly defined and less flexible.
recognize that theirs is a story that is still unfolding from day to day.

Furthermore, our local spiritual leaders would be the first to recognize that their spiritual journey, which they understand to be rooted in God’s mission, has been and still is being enhanced by those of us from outside their particular community who have also answered God’s call to minister in the Muslim context. As God has placed each within the other’s sphere of influence for a time, mutual learning, mentoring, visioning, and involvement in a shared hermeneutical and exegetical process has enhanced their story of faith development, as well as ours. Not only have the leaders of each community been challenged by the relationship, but it is helping, even as you read this chapter, to define an appropriate shared eschatological vision. Diagram 2 illustrates the process of transformation at a leadership level through the convergence of their story with our story.

Finally, it is clear that I would have had no story to tell in this chapter if it had not been for godly men and women leaders and their families. Year after year they have responded to God’s call not only to live exceptionally challenging and lonely lives, but they have unflinchingly dedicated themselves to following the leading of God’s Spirit, even in the face of what appears to be insurmountable obstacles. They have experienced persecution, been mocked, misunderstood, and rejected, and yet they have continued with a humble spirit to serve the One who called them with passion and dedication, recognizing their personal limitations, and yet ever seeking to be the instruments through whom God challenges and transforms the human heart and the community in which they serve.

Conclusion

As has been evident throughout this paper, reaching the spiritual heart of Muslim women and Muslims in general is first and foremost the work of God rather than our work. We are simply invited to join God in what he is already doing in the hearts and lives of Muslim people through the work of the Holy Spirit. Along the way, as we have journeyed together, we have come to understand and identify particular spiritual dynamics which contributed to a wholistic process of spiritual growth and transformation, not only in the lives of Muslim women and the communities of which they are a part, but also in our own lives as we have ministered among them. Rather than summarizing all that has been said or giving recommendations, I prefer that the story and the consequent analysis of each of the elements that have been identified speak for themselves, as you, the reader prayerfully consider what is written in these pages.

However, before finally concluding this chapter I would like to address two issues that we have to wrestle with when ministering among Muslims and then make some closing remarks regarding the missional process.

The first matter that needs to be addressed is the way that we share with Muslims about Isa al-Masih. As has been noted throughout this chapter, there is a vast difference between contexts and people groups as to whether or not there is an openness to discussion about Isa al-Masih. In the case of the composite case study described in this chapter, the spiritual leaders knew their people intimately. Therefore, they were able to identify and communicate to us whether the women needed to be gently led through a series of steps until they themselves reached their own conclusion as to the nature of Isa al-Masih and his relation to God, or whether they were already
familiar enough with the Bible to listen to stories about him.

The communities of Muslim women described in the composite case study all required a staged process to bring them to the point where their worldview had expanded sufficiently to incorporate the picture of Isa al-Masih from a biblical perspective. At the same time those of us leading out also had to expand our own worldview to find ways in which we could present the biblical picture of Isa al-Masih in a way that could be understood and transmitted effectively within their contexts. Invariably it was essential to start with the known references to Isa al-Masih in the Qur’an and then move to the unknown as found in the Bible. However, in all the contexts we reached a point where we could share about Jesus through stories about the way that he related to the women of his day, restoring, healing, forgiving, and treating them with honor and dignity. As a result many of the women made significant shifts in their understanding as to the nature and role of Isa al-Masih in relation to God, either instantaneously (through a small or more significant step) as a story was told, or through a discussion about a text. Or, as has already been shared, in some cases the shift took place at a later date when reflecting on what they had heard during one of the gatherings or when reading the Bible.

The second matter that must be addressed in this paper is syncretism. A question that always must be before us is, How do we remain faithful to biblical truth and yet at the same time open up the possibilities of new locally sustainable and transmittable theological explanations being developed? At the same time we have to be aware of the realities of the ministry contexts. Bruce Bauer makes a relevant point when he says that “syncretism is present every time a person begins the conversion process and turns toward Christ” (2007:72). Through a discussion of the centered and bounded set model originated by Hiebert (1979) and expanded upon by authors such as Andrews (2005), Hjalmarson (2005), and Collins (2005), Bauer points to a possible combination of the two sets as a way of ensuring that syncretism is addressed and yet such a model facilitates inclusion of those from other world religions and secular societies.

The length of this chapter does not allow a full discussion of this topic. Therefore, only those aspects pertinent to the discussion in this chapter will be explored. Bauer (2007:65, 66) argues that centered sets (intrinsic rather than extrinsic in nature) that are characterized by a person’s relationship with and movement towards the center (which has as its focus the Cross and all that this implies regarding God’s plan of salvation) are the most appropriate in the missional process, particularly with regards to the other
world religions. In this model an individual (or group) can be at some distance from the center, but at the same time be included as long as they are moving towards the center (implying that that people or a group will be at differing levels of maturity and yet still be accepted as part of the community of faith as they journey towards the center).

Bauer notes that in the centered set model, belonging to the faith community does not depend on “giving mental assent to a list of essential beliefs [although these are important], but belonging is instead based on a life of living and being because of commitment to a common center” (68). This allows for those who have not yet fully developed “a biblically shaped worldview” (Bauer 2007:69) to be considered as believers as long as they are pointing towards the center. However this does not mean that change does not take place. Those pointing to the center are continually developing and growing in their spiritual lives and moving ever closer to the center.

To deal with the issue of syncretism Bauer advocates an approach that initially is based on the centered set model where “much emphasis is placed on a relationship with the center, of tasting to see that the Lord is good” (71). At the same time, based on suggestions by Frost and Hirsh (2003), Hjalmarson (2005) and Cuder (1998), the idea is put forward that centered sets should be soft at the edges but include an inner bounded set residing at the center (73, 74). The purpose of this would be to have a carefully defined theological and spiritual center that deals with corporate theological and behavioral aspects which mature believers adhere to and new believers learn (74, 75).

To illustrate this, Bauer proposes a model that “is more like a funnel—far from the spout there is width, but as people move towards the spout there is a narrowing and movement towards the center, or even movement towards a bounded set in the centered set” (2007:71). Such a model, it is argued “incorporates the vital importance of spirituality and continued movement towards the center, while at the same time realizing that the direction for those growing in faith is towards the bounded set that has greater and greater definition as people mature in their faith in Christ and have their worldview impacted by the Word of God (74).

My conclusion is that Bauer’s (2007:72-78) suggestion as to how to deal with syncretism and yet also facilitate inclusion of those of other faith has significant merit. However I would like to add to this particular conversation by referring back to the composite case study in which the Holy Spirit was involved in the process of spiritual growth and transformation. The more the women reflected and acted on the deep convictions of their hearts, the more
the activity of the Spirit increased by stimulating questions and bringing new knowledge that helped to bring shifts in thinking at a deep worldview level and inspiring them to seek reconciliation and ask for forgiveness. Furthermore, the work of contextualization was clearly taking place as women reflected on what they read and heard and started to express it in their own words to one another—either arriving at their own conclusions or seeking the help of the spiritual leader to reach conclusions which helped the process of shifting from one set of worldview assumptions to another.

My experience in ministry leads me to add two further dimensions to the funnel model proposed by Bruce Bauer (see diagram 3). First, as has already been mentioned in the composite case study, it was clear to those of us who were present during the events that, in addition to personal transformation, the increased activity of the Holy Spirit stimulated doctrinal questions which helped the women take a significant step forward on a cognitive level. On reflection, it could be legitimately argued that during this phase the women were moving towards the area that Bauer has identified as the narrower end of the spout (2007:71). Thus, I have added to Bauer’s model the growing contextualizing activity of God’s Spirit as women began to shift allegiances and start to demonstrate change in their behavior. Second, when reflecting on Bauer’s model and my own personal experience, I have identified a distinctive point on the diagram at the base of Bauer’s funnel spout where the Holy Spirit acts as a contextualizing force, bringing worldview change not only among the people in the community, but also in our own theological and missiological worldview assumptions. My observation is that when such a change takes place in tandem, it facilitates the movement of locally sustainable, culturally appropriate, and transmittable forms of the gospel to flow effectively through strategic networks deep into the heart of the communities we are called to serve.

Finally, when reflecting on all that I and my colleagues have been witness to as we have had the privilege of ministering among Muslim women, I am reminded that it is their story and yet at the same time our story as there is only one story, the story of God’s sacrificial love for humankind which transforms the human heart and mind.

**Basic Premise:** God is already at work in all communities through His Spirit. See numbers in diagram below.

1. People respond to God’s call to live a holy life and start to move towards the center.
   1a. People’s spirituality and belonging is defined by their movement towards the center.
2. Those not yet ready to call Jesus "Lord" are drawn into the spiritual transformation process in stages which starts from where they are in their faith journey (soft edges in the centered set model which has clear boundaries)
   2a. Activity of the Holy Spirit increases, acting as the motivating force for spiritual growth and transformation (see composite case study in this chapter).
3. As the new believer moves towards the center, doctrines are clearly defined resulting in changes in worldview (bounded set within the centered set)
4. Holy Spirit acts as contextualizing force in the process of change
5. Development of local theological explanations of the gospel appropriate to each community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit
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Wagner Kuhn

Introduction

This article is dedicated to Dr. Jerald Whitehouse who for many years was involved in holistic ministries involving both relief and development work in Muslim contexts. He, along with Paul Kulakov, was part of an ADRA team to visit Naxcivan, Azerbaijan, back in 1993, where this story first began. ADRA\(^1\) (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) is responsible for the humanitarian work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide, and its objectives are primarily to help people in serious need. The motto of the agency is expressed in the following words: “changing the world one life at a time.”

The Agency believes that “through humanitarian acts we make known the just, merciful, and loving character of God” and its mission “is to

\(^{1}\)See ADRA’s official web site: http://www.adra.org
provide assistance in situations of crisis or chronic distress, and work toward the development of long term solutions with those affected” (ADRA c.1996:B1-4). In 1993 ADRA learned that hundreds of thousands of the people in Azerbaijan and in the Naxcivan Autonomous Republic were in desperate need, and thus decided to respond.

**ADRA’s Arrival in Naxcivan and Its Relief Assistance**

ADRA sent its representatives to visit Azerbaijan and Naxcivan in mid-1993. As a result of a visit to the central government of Azerbaijan (in Baku) it was decided that ADRA’s priority would be to work in the enclave of Naxcivan, which was suffering the most due to the war with Armenia and its consequent isolation because of its blockaded situation.

In October 1993, ADRA representatives returned to Azerbaijan and signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which an agreement was reached: ADRA would provide assistance to the people of Naxcivan and the government of Azerbaijan would facilitate all the required documents, visas, etc., to help ADRA perform its work.

ADRA received a grant from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its staff arrived in Naxcivan in December 1993 to start a winter emergency food distribution program. The work in Naxcivan was established under extreme hardships and difficulties. Some of the expatriates arrived in Baku in October 1993, and after having visited Naxcivan and having tried to adapt to the situation, decided they could not live there. Others came in December and endured a little longer. Marty Phillips agreed to interrupt his studies in Argentina in order to join ADRA and played a vital part in laying the groundwork for the establishment of the ADRA relief program in Naxcivan.

On April 4, 1994, two ADRA workers, Marty Phillips and Swight Woods, were interviewed by Helsinki researchers from Human Rights Watch (HRW), and in the HRW/Helsinki Report of December 1994 the following statement was published:

In Nakhichevan the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), the only western humanitarian organization to have a presence in this enclave, disburses twenty kilogram food packages to 20,000 families a month. The United States government pays for the food parcels, which are shipped from Mersin, Turkey over the Bridge of Hope. According to an ADRA official who

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2For a detailed and comprehensive description of ADRA’s work in Naxcivan, see Kuhn 2004:182-255.
is stationed in Nakhichevan, “the blockade has totally ruined the economy. Agriculture is at a standstill, people are eating their seeds. Irrigation also collapsed—no spare parts for the pumps. Everything is deforested. You really have to go up in the hills before you see trees that haven’t been turned into stumps. Both sides do it. Some of my drivers are terrified to take parcels to some remote villages.” Small kitchen gardens and subsidized prices for bread prevent real undernourishment. (HRW 1994:76-77)

The above description shows the reality and conditions in which the people of Naxcivan were living and how much they were in need of help.

**Encounters, Challenges, and Culture Shock**

One of the greatest challenges to ADRA workers was the need to learn the cultural patterns and traditions of Naxcivan. There was also the isolation and loneliness but these would fade away as the ADRA expatriates developed friendships in the local community.

In July 1994, my wife and I arrived in Naxcivan to work as relief workers. We found the place to be quite different from what we expected—in fact, it was much worse than we had imagined. Not even basic needs could be met at that time. The mountains, along with the kindness of the people, were the only things that brought encouragement and beauty to any foreigner who lived there. The government officials received foreigners with admirable hospitality, and the people from different places where we needed to go were very friendly. Neighbors also did their best to help the foreigners even though there was hardly any communication due to the language barrier.

Being the only foreigners living in Naxcivan was quite a unique situation. Living in a traditional Muslim culture and society was especially challenging. As foreigners, my wife and I were the focus of attention in our neighborhood, by the national ADRA workers, the police, the mullahs, the government officials, and even the KGB. Everyone took an interest in the lives of any foreigners living in the country.

The living conditions in Naxcivan were very poor. In the major cities electricity was rationed in cycles of two to three hours. Frequently entire sectors of the city would have electricity for only two hours per day. In most places in the rural areas there was no electricity at all, and for most houses or apartments, running water did not exist. The extremes in temperature varied
in the summer and winter, from +50 to -35 degrees Celsius.\textsuperscript{3}

For a foreign woman living in Naxcivan, life was much harder, for the cultural patterns were very much dictated by men. Local women were often supported by their female friends and family members, whereas a foreign woman first had to be accepted in order to be considered part of the community. It was really challenging for foreigners to live and work in Naxcivan because of the hardships encountered, the isolation, and the loneliness that pushed them to the limits of what they could endure.

**Spiritual Life and Spiritual Needs in Context**

Religion is important to the Naxcivani people. As the relief workers observed the people’s spirituality they came to understand that the emergency food assistance would impact the community more if relief was done in relation to all the many needs of the person, not only the physical needs or just the need for food. There was also the need for friendship, for new and better opportunities, and care for the spiritual needs of each person.

In both the cities and rural communities in Naxcivan people are quite spiritual. Most do not go to the mosque every week but their whole lives or the way they relate to one another and the way they understand themselves have to do with understanding spiritual values or the religious values of their Muslim tradition. If something good happens it is because God allowed it to happen. The same perception is seen when negative things happen. Most people strongly believe that God is in charge of everything that happens to human beings, thus their way of life or worldview is heavily reliant upon the spiritual world.

Because of this worldview value most of the vulnerable and destitute people who were beneficiaries of ADRA’s food distribution program believed it was by God’s providence that they were being helped and were receiving food. However, if the ADRA workers did not understand that the food aid they were distributing was seen as also spiritual in nature and did not act accordingly, they would certainly have failed in their responsibility to serve people in the full range of their needs and would have also failed to honor the philosophy and operating principles of ADRA.

\textsuperscript{3}Due to the extremely hot weather and very long hours of work, in August 1994 I got so sick that I thought I would die. Apparently the sickness was caused by an intestinal infection and dehydration. It was through God’s providence, my wife (a nurse), and our local Azeri neighbors that I recovered. The local medicine proved to be good for this dying foreigner. One week later my wife also became so sick that she fainted twice, but she soon recovered, to our relief.
ADRA’s beliefs and mission statements provide the basis for a holistic ministry and do not neglect the spiritual side of life. The following sentences from ADRA’s belief statements confirm this fact with clarity (ADRA c. 1996:B2):

1. Through humanitarian acts we make known the just, merciful, and loving character of God.
2. To work with those in need is an expression of our love for God.
3. The compassionate ministry of Jesus is its own abundant motive and reward.
4. It is an agency of change, and an instrument of grace and providence.

There are in these statements a strong emphasis on the spiritual side of life, on the fact that ADRA workers believe in God, in his just, merciful, and loving character, in his providence and grace, in the compassionate ministry of Jesus as motivation and example, and that ADRA as an agency of change can make the world a better place to live, changing and touching lives one at a time.

ADRA’s first purpose statement also declares that “ADRA’s mission is to reflect the character of God through humanitarian and developmental activities,” and its first operating principle indicates that “ADRA upholds its beliefs and mission in its decision making at all levels” (ADRA c. 1996:B3-5). Thus, it is within ADRA’s operating principles, mission, and belief statements to plan, carry out, and implement programs that provide relief and development to people while taking into consideration all aspects of human life. All programs should support this goal of holistic development.

Although there were few if any Christians in Naxcivan at the time we worked there (1994-1996), many people were committed to a spiritual life in a way that impressed us and many of them had serious physical needs that had to be ministered to. But there were also those who, in spite of their great physical need, had even greater spiritual needs. They wanted ADRA to minister not only to their physical needs but also to their spiritual needs.

Not only did ADRA help hundreds of thousands of people through relief assistance programs (mostly feeding programs) in Naxcivan, but ADRA workers also ministered to the spiritual needs of those living there, for “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt 25:40).
Transition from Relief to Development

Between 1997 and 2000 a transition took place as a result of an effort by ADRA to bring to Naxcivan programs that were more developmental in nature. The shift from emergency relief (food distribution) to development was gradual during this period, but the relief programs still had not been discontinued even by 2000.

From 1997 to 2000 a lot of effort was put into training and developing the leadership skills of national employees. Many developed and grew and later assumed key positions of leadership within the ADRA programs in Naxcivan.

The development programs started in 1996 when 500 family greenhouses were distributed to refugees and vulnerable families. Also, the Health Emergency Initiative program that started in August 1997 and ended in May 1998 was the precursor for the health development program. The Micro-Credit program commenced directly as a development program and was not considered a transitional project from relief to development.

With effort, and despite opposition from several fronts, the transition from relief to development took place, and those who believed in and supported it were the ones who most benefited from it. They were not only the thousands of ADRA’s direct beneficiaries, but also individuals and communities, as well as a few government officials who understood that the presence of ADRA was a benefit for them.

Contextual Challenges

There were several challenges that ADRA faced during the years between 1997 and 2000. While ADRA did not engage in evangelization, it kept faith with the government in regard to its belief in holistic development and Christian values. In all its activities ADRA showed respect for the government and the people of Naxcivan.

As the pressure from religious authorities (Muslim and Orthodox) to force the government to restrict the religious activities of Christians increased, ADRA workers faced increasing problems. ADRA was perceived to be a Christian NGO and this created problems for ADRA and its expatriate staff.

Notwithstanding the challenges, the holistic ministry of ADRA was first seen in its employees, mostly those who were spiritually committed and technically and professionally competent. The relief and development programs also demonstrated a degree of God’s love towards ADRA’s
beneficiaries, but only and insofar as the persons managing the programs lived out and demonstrated it.

The Struggle to Maintain a Holistic Development Program

From the beginning of 2001 to mid-2003 ADRA Azerbaijan passed through some very difficult times including severe persecution and accusations from the media, government officials, and also religious leaders. Nevertheless it kept moving forward with the intention of expanding and strengthening its development programs. During that same period ADRA was faced with an internal request to restructure and review its country programs and procedures, and also with the need for a new strategic plan. During these challenges and activities ADRA struggled to maintain a program that was balanced between its developmental principles and practice, but also spiritual in nature—a holistic program.

Although ADRA Azerbaijan oversaw the activities of the whole country, including the Naxcivan enclave, the programs implemented in Naxcivan represented about 50 percent of ADRA’s activities. Some of the observations of the Country Review document in regard to the Vision/Mission/Strategies of ADRA Azerbaijan highlighted the following about ADRA’s programs in Azerbaijan, but especially in Naxcivan:

1) Interviews indicate a slightly more developed articulation of the ADRA Mission, especially among staff in Naxcivan; 2) Numerous interviews characterized ADRA with terms such as; integrity, committed, disciplined, ethical, and transparent when describing ADRA Azerbaijan’s strengths; 3) ADRA conducted a Strategic Planning process with a report in 1997; 4) The Country Director is valued for his patient spirituality. (ADRA 2001, 2002a:2)

It would seem from the description above that elements of a holistic mission were seen by the observations of ADRA personnel in Naxcivan and by their articulation of ADRA’s mission. Moreover, through words such as integrity, ethical, transparent, and committed, ADRA personnel were exemplifying in themselves some of the attributes of a holistic ministry aimed at the whole person; most assuredly they were describing what they saw in each other, and also what the beneficiaries testified about ADRA.

ADRA was not only distributing food, clothes, seeds, and relief items, or implementing developmental programs, but was also enabling people to see hope beyond the things provided to them through the character of ADRA’s employees who were the bridges and agents and who demonstrated
the loving character of God. Thus, holism, seen in its proper perspective, requires that each and every person working towards the good of the neighbor would do his/her work the best way possible (professionally) and with utmost Christian commitment.⁴

Expansion of Development Activities—Programs and Systems

At the end of 2001 the activities of ADRA Azerbaijan, as reported in the annual report, showed a total of 627 employees, 12 different programs (8 of them were development programs), and a total of 11 million U.S. dollars in implemented activities. The total number of beneficiaries who had received help, were trained or developed, or who had been touched by ADRA was 595,920 (for more details see ADRA 2002b:16). This demonstrated the need ADRA faced to recruit and train dozens and dozens of new employees and at the same time retain its professional and committed staff while trying to hire better personnel.

With new programs and the growth and expansion of its ongoing development programs, ADRA was forced to rethink its own structure. Of special concern was the way the Administrative Committee (ADCOM) was structured, the number of its members, and the types of agenda items discussed there. Moreover, the lack of field ADCOMs impacted directly on the management and size of the country ADCOM.

Early in 2001 the ADRA Azerbaijan Institutional Assessment Tool revealed several discrepancies in the organizational structure. A specific issue was the following:

Committee agendas (The Country ADCOM has been overwhelmed with lower-level admin issues resulting from the increase in number of programs. The number of voices has also been increased. Both of these issues have resulted in less committee efficiency.)

The agency is currently dealing with these issues through a combination of strategies, including expansion of the Baku administrative staff to include a Programs Officer, decentralization of decision-making authority within established parameters to the Regional ADCOMs (to streamline the agenda for the Country ADCOM), empowerment of Regional ADCOM Chairpersons to provide monitoring and technical backstopping to programs in assigned

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⁴This is a characteristic that can be seen throughout ADRA’s belief statement, mission statement, and operating principles. It is also substantiated by ADRA’s philosophical basis which states that the basis for ADRA’s “existence, its reason for being, is to follow Christ’s example by living for, helping and working with those in need” (ADRA c. 1996:B5).
regions, revisions of policies and procedures (e.g. procurement) to ease the burden on the Baku office. The process is also requiring agency staff to increase their communications skills to ensure that requests and responses are timely, as well as clearly understood the first time. (ADRA 2001:24)

It took awhile for the country administration to convince the regional offices, including Naxcivan, to create their own ADCOMs and Technical Committees (TechComs). The changes were implemented gradually, but the Naxcivan field office started to hold TechCom meetings more often and to discuss most of the program issues at the field level. Then on October 15, 2002, the Country Board took several actions to restructure the administrative meetings, but even more important they voted to establish Technical and Management Committees for the country and for all the field regional offices. The action also decreased the membership of the committees and restructured the terms of reference of the country ADCOM.\(^5\)

With an increase in and a further expansion of the development programs, several inter-country visits were organized. On several occasions the management of the Naxcivan Health Development Program (NHDP) sent key personnel to other regions of Azerbaijan to visit different health programs. ADRA also sent health personnel from its other programs in the main areas of Azerbaijan to visit and exchange experiences with the NHDP in the Naxcivan enclave. The Health Reform Team from the Ministry of Health in Azerbaijan accompanied by health personnel from other NGOs also went to Naxcivan to see the NHDP. Other inter-country visits between the staff of the NHDP and the staff of the health program of ADRA in Georgia (a neighboring country of Azerbaijan) took place in 2001 and 2002.

This type of exchange was even more utilized by the Naxcivan Enterprise Development Program (NEDP). Several inter-country visits were organized by Jeff, Conrad, and Sevinj during 2001, 2002, and 2003. Inter-country visits also took place between the staff of the reforestation and nursery (greenhouse) programs. In 2001 and 2002 several visits occurred between the Naxcivan and Ganja USDA-funded agricultural programs. Gerald and Adalat from Ganja and Julio and Bahman from Naxcivan were the ones most involved in these inter-country visits. Gerald visited places outside his region within Azerbaijan and also other countries such as the United States, Georgia, and Brazil. He brought back many new techniques, tools, and seeds to be utilized by ADRA in its agricultural programs in Azerbaijan.

\(^5\)For the specific actions please see “ADRA Azerbaijan Board Meeting Minutes” (October 15, 2002c: actions #028, 029, 030, 031, 032).
ADRA's reforestation programs in Azerbaijan were the first of their kind in the country and became a role model for other NGOs, national government departments, and private enterprises.

The Need for Strategic Planning for ADRA as an Agency

Periodically ADRA needed to evaluate and redefine its policies through self-appraisals and assessments in order to improve its programs and operations. Through country board meetings and the less frequent strategic planning meetings, ADRA kept working on its relationships with its partners and constituents, which in turn provided effective channels for mutual growth and action.

By the middle of 2000 it became clear that ADRA Azerbaijan had outgrown its 1997 Strategic Plan and a new strategic planning process was needed. It was tentatively scheduled for November 2000, was delayed until February 2002, and then the first phase of the strategic planning process (workshop) finally happened on April 11-12, 2002. Later a major strategic planning summit was held in Baku from September 3-6, 2002.

The whole process, both the workshop in April and the summit in September, was extremely important to articulate the vision and strategic objectives of ADRA as it planned its development activities and portfolios for at least the next three years (2003-2007) (see ADRA 2000; ADRA 2003a:3; ADRA 2002d).

Participation in ADRA’S Master Degree Program

ADRA’s Operating Principles numbers 13 and 14 state the following: “ADRA acknowledges that its personnel are of essential value and must, therefore, be treated with fairness, respect, and equity” and “ADRA carries out policies which define and dedicate appropriate resources to the development and upgrading of its human resources” (ADRA 1996: B-5). These principles have to do with the development and appropriate training of ADRA’s personnel, both national and expatriate.

In order to develop the capacity and skills of the national staff, ADRA Azerbaijan sent nine of its employees to be part of the ADRA Professional Leadership Institute (APLI). The program was a partnership between ADRA International and Andrews University and offered a master’s degree (MSA) in International Development. Over a period of four summers the students were able to receive a master’s degree, and thus ADRA helped to build the
capacity of many of its national staff, enabling them to better perform their responsibilities (see committee actions ADRA 2002f:#2002-017m ADRA 2002e:#2002-033).

Four of the nine participants were from Naxcivan and by participating in the MSA/APLI program ADRA hoped that they would better understand the principles and practices of a holistic approach to relief and development and would be able to apply them in the field. This involvement with the master’s program also provided an opportunity for the ADRA staff in Naxcivan to better understand the relationship between body, mind, and spirit as espoused by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and implemented in many of ADRA’s development programs worldwide.

**Lessons Learned**

1. As new government rules and regulations were being put in place and implemented, some government authorities had difficulty understanding that although ADRA carried the word Adventist in its name, it was not there in Naxcivan to be directly involved in religious activities on behalf of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This taught ADRA that it was imperative to dialogue and communicate who it was and what it did to its counterparts in the host country, especially government officials in various levels. Moreover, as the government of Naxcivan understood more about the scope of the Adventist Church throughout the world and the role that ADRA played in relief and development, it realized it needed to treat ADRA different from other religious non-government organizations. All this was happening during a time when the local authorities were placing enormous pressure on the local Seventh-day Adventist Church but the government was more flexible and friendly towards ADRA and its relief and developmental activities.

2. Another important lesson is that there is a tremendous need for people to be trained in holistic ministries if they are to effectively work for and represent ADRA. It is not always easy to find people who have the courage, enthusiasm, passion, and love to go to different places and become relief and development workers. Before anyone engages in holistic ministry, be it relief or development, that person, along with his/her family, should receive serious training in holistic ministries.

3. A further lesson that should be learned is that holistic programs or programs that integrate the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of the human person are rare and not easy to implement. It is one thing
to talk about integration and holism, but it is another to put the theories and principles of biblical holism into practice, especially when the Christian faith is perceived as a threat to the host community.

Conrad Vine was working in Naxcivan when he wrote an article entitled “To Change the World . . . an Impossible Dream.” In it Vine states that “a life of selfless service to others can, by the grace of God, transform the life of an individual—even millions. Together, as individuals in unison, we can change the world, one life at a time! Let the change begin today with me” (2002:11). I also believe that an integrated or holistic program only happens when all those involved are united and share the same goals and objectives. The one who manages such a program must be transformed by God first, and then transformation and changes in the lives of many, even millions will follow. However, holistic ministry and integration will always remain a challenge.

4. The last lesson is that there is always the danger of dichotomy between being and doing. The challenge of “to be” and “to do” is directly linked with holistic programs. For a program to be holistic, it is necessary that those who implement it also be whole in their being and doing, in their words and deeds.

**ADRA’s Holistic Ministry in Naxcivan**

There were many challenges and opportunities as ADRA worked in Naxcivan. ADRA, for the most part, lived out the principles of the gospel, thus rightfully being able to interpret the gospel. In loving God above all, and in loving their neighbors as themselves, ADRA was able to interpret and live out the gospel in Naxcivan, and thereby its programs were holistic in nature and practice.

Certain restrictions were applied to ADRA so it could not engage in Christian witnessing. However, there were no restrictions on the amount of good, or serving others, or being good and kind to everyone. ADRA was able to interpret the Christian gospel by healing, educating, providing water, food, clothes, shelter, credit, and in many other ways. I have also observed that people in Naxcivan respected ADRA not because of the religious affiliation of its employees but because they initiated conversations about the people’s spiritual concerns and because they respected and revered God.

This is at the core of a genuine holistic ministry and is what the ADRA employees were trying to do. They were trying to do what Jesus did, what Jesus would have done. To restore health, to restore dignity, to restore respect, to reconcile people with people and people with God through relief.
and development programs is genuine holistic ministry. I have seen a lady, a widow, with half a dozen children getting a loan and after several months being able to build a home with two small rooms for herself and her children. That is authentic and holistic ministry, an activity consistent with the spirit of Jesus, an action that expresses the holistic gospel of Christ, an action of transformation.

Having been directly involved as part of the ADRA team in Naxcivan, as well as later being the ADRA Azerbaijan country director for more than seven years, I have had the privilege to experience firsthand what it means to be part of holistic relief and development programs that carry and encompass Christian values. In November 2003 I received a letter from one of my colleagues from Azerbaijan, Mr. M. T., a former ADRA employee, a medical doctor, a good Muslim, and a man of God. The letter read:

I thought a lot about you and your family all these last days when we were busy with celebration preparations. You must be proud of the work you did here in Azerbaijan.

I will say something very important, but believe me this is truth. If the country director would be another person at that time ADRA Az would be just as commercial as other int NGOs here. . . .

Yes, yes […], only the way you did everything with all the time remembering and praying to God, brought ADRA to condition when spirituality every worker can feel presence of God in our organization. God bless you, …! (e-mail message to author, November 4, 2003)

This was quite an interesting and gratifying experience as one never thinks one's own influence could be so positive. The gratitude and honor goes to God, the one who has allowed ADRA to be established and minister to the needs of people in Naxcivan, as well as in Azerbaijan. ADRA's holistic ministries in that country are a demonstration of God's character of love and kindness to his children.

**Toward a Holistic Approach to Relief and Development**

Having described ADRA's Relief and Development Program in Naxcivan, it is now time to reflect on these experiences, draw some conclusions about the program, and offer recommendations with regard to holistic ministries. The program was undertaken at the invitation of the new government of Azerbaijan in 1993. The government had not yet developed its policies, but the country faced urgent needs and requested help in meeting both emergency
relief needs and long-term development goals. Assistance was sought from both foreign governments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

The framework for this article involves the interplay between ADRA, with its vision of holistic development, and the Government of Naxcivan, Azerbaijan, that was seeking solutions to immediate needs for food, social welfare, and longer-term development. During the period of this study the government policies and regulations were being formed, but ADRA also was challenged to clarify its philosophy and program approach.

Thus, it is from the context of this particular Christian relief and development journey in Naxcivan (1993-2007), together with biblical/theological, historical, and contemporary understandings of human development that the following suggestions and recommendations are offered in the hope they can be of help both to ADRA, to the scholarship of this discipline, to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and to countless relief and development workers.

**Redefining Development**

If development has to do with the restoration of human dignity, as demonstrated in this study, then it follows that development must encompass every dimension of human existence: physical, moral, psychological, social, and spiritual. ADRA’s philosophy is based on the assumption that love is the foundation for a Christian vision of human development (1 Cor 13) because development is relational. Although development will include material, and technical and capital inputs, these alone are inadequate. A person without dignity is a person who is not loved and valued. The goal of holistic development is a person-in-community transformed by love, whose dignity has been restored, and who has found a productive and socially responsible role in the community.

As a Christian development and relief agency, ADRA assumes that sound human development will be based on the Bible. This assures a framework for integrating the multiple forms of ministry: relief, development, plus the social and spiritual dimensions. The foundation for ADRA’s approach is laid out in its Philosophical Basis for ADRA’s Existence as an Agency of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

True development is achieved when the poor, the oppressed, the sick, the vulnerable, and the miserable in a society have been enabled to participate as responsible members of the community with each one contributing to the realization of a just and free society. When people’s basic needs are met,
individuals become responsible members of a community and participate in shaping their own future because they have access to resources and opportunities. This kind of development is multi-dimensional, encompassing every dimension of human life.

Jesus said: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). That is the mission of Christ, a mission that wants everyone to live abundantly. This is true mission, a mission that integrates all of life’s aspects. That is also what gradually happened in Naxcivan. ADRA has worked in Naxcivan for close to fifteen years and many good things have happened. ADRA first entered the country to help the refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and the extremely vulnerable through its relief programs. After establishing its relief program, ADRA began to start some development programs, and did so quite successfully.

These humanitarian relief and development programs and the other aspects of missionary work certainly happened because God saw that all of them were necessary in order that his loving character would be demonstrated in Naxcivan.

The Challenges as ADRA Moves Forward

In the future the challenges for ADRA in Naxcivan or Azerbaijan will not be that different from the challenges faced by ADRA and other NGOs in other parts of the world. The main challenge, which is also a task, is to provide opportunities for people so that through developmental programs that are holistic in nature and through the people’s own initiatives, individuals and communities are transformed.

Moreover, it remains a fact that ADRA’s development workers in Naxcivan cannot predict or control how the government will make decisions or act, nevertheless the government is a necessary partner. Accordingly, ADRA can continue to work in Naxcivan so long as the government sanctions its presence and desires its contribution. Government policies and regulations continue to develop and ADRA must always work within these guidelines. Inevitably, there will be points of disagreement and tension due to differing philosophies and goals; but one can be hopeful, in view of at least a dozen years of fruitful cooperation, that ADRA’s development programs have had and will continue to have a positive impact on many lives and communities there.

For ADRA in Naxcivan, the challenge to pursue holistic development programs will continue. To fulfill this task requires a great deal of continuous
dialogue and cooperation with the government and other partners, and considerable and consistent training in holistic development—training that not only aims at preparing technically competent persons but also at providing a balanced understanding and knowledge of holistic relief and development programs which are build upon moral and spiritual values that are Christ centered.

Appropriate Training

An ADRA relief and development worker should be a person with the courage and enthusiasm to work in another country, to serve and help in the designing, planning, and implementation of holistic development programs. Such a person needs appropriate training, training that will provide the skills and required understanding.

It is not easy to find people who have the courage, enthusiasm, passion, and love to go to different places and become relief and development workers. When these persons are found, in many cases they do not initially have the skills which are necessary for them to be effective relief and development workers. Others have the skills, but may lack the most important qualities: love, passion, enthusiasm, and courage. To build professional and technical skills while at the same time developing spiritual gifts would be the best approach, therefore there is the need for appropriate training to prepare workers that would include a holistic and integrated approach to relief and development activities.

I believe that before anyone engages in a cross-cultural assignment, be it relief, development, educational, medical, and so forth, either in an overseas assignment or a local one, appropriate training should be given to that person, the spouse, and the children.

Because of some past negative experiences and the necessity of having professionals involved in any cross-cultural assignment, appropriate training is a must. Many times candidates will have all the good qualities or skills needed to go as a relief and development worker but will have no idea of how to apply those skills. Even worse is when the skills and good qualities the person has are not relevant to the place he or she has been assigned to. If ADRA wants fewer dropouts or negative experiences in any given cross-cultural experience, training must be required of all who are hired and sent as relief and development personnel.

Appropriate training for ADRA workers should be offered in as many places as possible. The modes of training and education should include three
modalities: formal, non-formal, and informal. Formal training is directly related with schools and what is taught there. Non-formal education has to do with the administration of planned learning outside schools or universities, and is generally administered through seminars, workshops, conferences, and education by extension programs. Informal education is based more on the interactions the person has in various social settings.

It is important for ADRA to continually provide appropriate training for candidates as relief and development workers through the Seventh-day Adventist educational system, through its master's program in International Development offered in partnership with Andrews University in several parts of the world, and also through local seminars and workshops. ADRA workers also must be sent abroad where they can receive the appropriate training as required for them to perform their responsibilities.

In my opinion, appropriate and relevant training should be given to candidates before they go to their field. This avoids misunderstandings and unnecessary problems and also provides the opportunity the candidates need to decide not to go, or if they do go, to arrive better prepared for the task and place they are assigned to. When training cannot be given before going to the field, arrangements should be made for the training to be provided as soon as possible after arriving in the field. Another option is that during the first furlough or vacation, training should certainly be sought by the ADRA worker or anyone working for a relief and development organization.

It is also recognized that it is not always possible to train people before they go overseas due to time constraints, cost of training, appropriate types of training, lack of teachers, no facilities for training, no materials or resources, and perhaps, no interest in offering training or being trained. With that in mind one has to be flexible and adaptable in order that the best could be done even in the worst circumstances.

The purpose of appropriate education and training is to prepare and equip ADRA relief and development workers to be the best professionals while fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted to them. Through this preparation they should reflect professionalism and act accordingly, and should be able to bear fruit as they minister to other people through the activities assigned to them (see Elliston 1996:236).

Any training that espouses Christian values must take the Bible seriously and apply its principles to the situation in a relevant way. If that is done appropriately, holistic relief and development programs will always have the purpose to help, heal, build, save, transform, and redeem, not only for this life, but for the life to come because Christ's example of care is the true motivation for our service.
Inter-Agency Cooperation

It is unfortunate that there is little cooperation among Christian relief and development agencies. Sometimes there is little cooperation even within the same agency or NGO constituency. There are still a lot of restricted access countries, and in order to enter these countries and implement successful programs, relief and development agencies (such as ADRA) should work in a rigorous and disciplined and cooperative way among themselves.

Another aspect to be considered within this context is dialogue. Many times there is no cooperation because there has not even been any intentional dialogue. It is usually after dialogue occurs that agreements are made and cooperation can be established. It is through dialogue and cooperation that agencies can pull together and in the same direction for the common good of all involved in holistic relief and development programs.

Stephen Hoke and Samuel Voorhies wrote the following:

Time is short and resources are too limited for Christian relief and development agencies to not commit themselves to more rigorous and disciplined cooperation in implementing the training function. There must be intentional cooperation between the community, churches, and agencies in the region for wholistic development to be truly effective. Closer cooperation would include networking human resources, sharing of facilities, coming together for prayer, needs assessment, and careful long range planning.

(1989:233-234)

At Pentecost the disciples were all united in the same spirit, were in one accord, were praying together, and had laid aside all differences. The spirit of unity and cooperation that existed among the disciples was certainly the trademark of the early apostolic Church and its mission, and contributed to its growth and expansion. Certainly ADRA, other church entities and departments, and other NGO relief and development workers must cooperate with each other in an effort to carry out and implement holistic relief and development programs.

Communication and Dialogue

The challenges that ADRA faces in various contexts: geographical, political, religious, economic, and so on, require that ADRA continually improve its communication skills and strategies as well as the way it dialogues with its partners. It is of great importance for ADRA to maintain a healthy
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and continuous dialogue as it enters into partnerships with governments and local authorities that do not know or understand its operating principles and are biased against Christian NGOs.

ADRA should also continually seek to improve how it communicates its belief and mission statements to its constituency, its employees, its partners, and the vulnerable and needy people it serves. As more people come to know and understand what ADRA is and does, it will be able to better carry out its holistic relief and development programs.

Vision for the Future

While engaged in relief and development activities, both ADRA as an agency, and the relief and development worker, must keep alive a vision for the future, a vision that is accurate and focused (see Hickman 2009). Vision also involves sustainability, which is a development component that can only be accomplished when a holistic approach is present in every intervention. Thus, both sustainability and a holistic approach must be an integral part of this vision for the future.

As ADRA’s development workers and the members of the community look towards the future, their vision must be one that has to do with desiring and seeing transformed individuals and communities living a life that is full (John 10:10), anticipating the coming of Jesus, and the final establishment of his kingdom.

Compassion for the People

ADRA, as a relief and development agency, believes that Christ died for all, that his death is for all with no regard to gender, ethnicity, political ties, economic status, or religious affiliation. Compassion and love for people should inspire all ADRA workers to imitate Christ in their holistic relief and development activities, in their mission of healing, educating, comforting, curing, feeding, redeeming, and saving. This compassion and love will develop in each ADRA employee a greater desire to communicate Christ’s holistic gospel cross-culturally and among the people they serve.

If ADRA wants, like the Apostle Paul, to serve and witness where Christ is not known, to heal the sick where there is no doctor, to feed the hungry where there is no food, to clothe the naked where there are no clothes, and to love where there is no love, it certainly needs to have a clear vision for the future that includes compassion and love for vulnerable people whose hearts are aching for the healing touch of Jesus.
Appropriate Contextualization

In order to understand the holistic nature of God’s message in the Old Testament (see Kuhn 2010) and his holistic gospel as demonstrated in the life of Christ in the New Testament, ADRA must constantly contextualize its ministry (see Kuhn 2007). Through appropriate contextualization ADRA’s holistic ministry can become an instrument through which the image of God can be brought back to the human race, for the image of God can only be seen in people when people are wholesome. This image of God has best been captured in the language of redemption and reconciliation that God desires for all of us. Dean S. Gilliland aptly states the following:

The word “creation” itself leads us back to that greatest first event when God made man and woman. It was a whole and entire being that God made. Nothing less than the remaking of the entire person is what salvation in Christ provides. The re-creation of persons on this order touches the ethical, the moral, the aesthetic, the physical, and the social. These redeemed people are in a real world; they have bodies that need to be healed, minds that must be taught, spirits that long for encouragement; they have worries about families and security. This complete being lives in a complex world, each part of which is destined to be touched by the recreating gospel. And the good news is that we have a Bible that has touched people in every known human situation. . . . Jesus’ own ministry corresponds in deed to what the psalmist declared concerning God, that along with other graces he “lifts up those who are bowed down, . . . watches over the sojourners, he upholds the widow and the fatherless” (Ps. 146:8-9). . . . Wholeness characterized the ministry of Paul. Perhaps no word describes his theology better than the term reconciliation. . . . Reconciliation brings us back again to that which God intended for his creation before the fall. (1989:21-22)

It is important to note that although the fall corrupted the image of God in humanity, it is through redemption in Christ that human beings are brought back into wholeness of life—into reconciliation with God and with each other. It is in regard to this spiritual aspect that ADRA must also contextualize the holistic relief and development programs it implements so as to reflect not only the Christian values it espouses but also to take into consideration the values and principles of the people with whom it serves and partners.
Conclusion

Individual or community holistic development in all its perspectives and forms is a radical concept. It involves all aspects of life: physical, mental, social, and spiritual. It also has to do with the redemption and transformation of the structures and powers that hinder and obstruct people from living the abundant life Christ wants everyone to enjoy.

Personally, and as an ADRA worker, I have come to the firm conclusion that development as understood and practiced from a holistic Christian perspective offers much more hope and has a better chance to succeed than does secular development that dichotomizes between body and soul, between the physical/material and spiritual realities of life.

A holistic approach to relief and development seeks to be inclusive and integrative, aiming at addressing the person in his or her wholesomeness. In this sense, it is in Christ that we have the one best example. Therefore, any theology and practice of holistic ministries, especially for ADRA, should always carry the principles of Christ’s holistic gospel which aims to transform the whole human being—body, mind, and spirit (see Sterns 2009 for a broad perspective on this topic). Consequently, anyone who desires to be involved in welfare relief and/or transformational development programs along with being a Christian witness must be careful to follow the principles and concepts presented in the Bible. They must study the life of Christ to see how he imparted life and salvation as he ministered to all—healing, teaching, and preaching the good news. In the end, everyone needs to understand that preaching the good news and healing the human body is one and the same activity, an activity that is carried forward by individuals through the Spirit.

A holistic and integrative approach to God’s mission understands that relief, development, and Christian witness are the hands and feet of one Body—the Body of Christ. Thus, holistic ministries must be carried out together and in an integrated manner as God’s people endeavor to live the good news of God in the wisdom and strength of the Spirit and in the love and grace of Jesus Christ.

Works Cited


Festschrift: Jerald Whitehouse


A common Christian stereotype about Muslims is that they are strongly and uniformly resistant to the Christian message. This stereotype is seemingly supported by the varied expressions of Islamic opposition to Christian mission that are visible around the globe. The fact that Muslims almost everywhere respond to evangelistic invitations at a relatively low rate also lends support to the stereotype.

While the realities mentioned above are undeniable, there is another reality that is also undeniable. Christians of all denominations invest a tiny fraction of their mission resources in the 10/40 Window where most Muslims reside. In light of this sobering reality, Christians need to challenge themselves with two questions: Should some people who are labeled as “resistant” more properly be called “neglected”? Are Christians comforting and excusing themselves for what they have not done by labeling certain people “resistant”? (see Liao 1979).

This article will suggest that one of the necessary steps toward more effective mission among Muslims is a deeper understanding of resistance and receptivity from a theological perspective. Developing a theology of resistance and receptivity is important for fulfilling God’s mission among Muslims.
What is “resistance” in the mission context? Michael Pocock says that “the resistant are those who have or are receiving an adequate opportunity to hear the gospel but over some time have not responded positively. They are not simply ‘unreached people’” (Pocock 1998:5). To be “adequate,” gospel teaching has to be shaped in a way that allows it to enter the hearer’s cultural-religious frame of reference and must take place over a sufficient time for the hearer to make a life changing decision. Inadequate gospel teaching may be rejected, giving the impression that the hearer is resistant when that may not be true.

Pocock’s statement about resistance refers to related missiological terms—the “unreached” and, by implication, the “reached.” His definition implies that a “reached” person is one who has had an adequate opportunity to accept the gospel. Referring to the famous motto “The evangelization of the world in this generation,” John R. Mott said that the motto does “not mean the conversion, or the Christianization, or the civilization of the world, no matter how much the volunteers may believe in each of these. It does mean that the Christians of this generation are to give every person of this age an opportunity to accept Jesus Christ” (Mott 1897:141). In other words, every non-Christian must be reached or be given an adequate opportunity to accept Christ during their lifetime. This goal sets a very high standard for mission in terms of the magnitude of the task and the need for excellent methodology.

What proportion of Muslims living today have been reached? Only God really knows the answer but the proportion may be distressingly low. Reaching all Muslims is not a minimalist objective, like trying to have every person to hear one broadcast or receive one piece of literature. On the contrary, giving all Muslims an adequate opportunity to accept Jesus implies a depth of missionary education and commitment of resources well beyond what Christians are now doing. If, through God’s power and grace, a significant number of those reached are to be converted and be fully discipled, the challenge is even clearer. Because most converts to Adventism have historically come from other Christian denominations, Adventists do not always realize how long and hard the conversion journey is for many Muslims. If the journey from being a Methodist or Baptist to being an Adventist is comparable to climbing a step ladder, the journey for Muslims

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1The eternal destiny of the unreached is not addressed in this article. Adventists usually affirm that God’s justice would not doom an unreached person to eternal death if that person had responded positively to the unseen voice of Holy Spirit and to general revelation. This belief does not decrease the missionary challenge of each generation of Christians to reach all non-Christians.
might be comparable to climbing a fireman’s ladder to the top of a skyscraper. This highlights the significance of understanding what makes Muslims and others resistant or receptive to the gospel.

The church growth school, led by Donald McGavran (1955; 1959; 1970) and Peter Wagner (1971; 1976; 1979), originated the missiological discussion of people groups who are receptive or resistant. Missionaries encounter people not as isolated individuals but as members of groups which have different characteristics. As groups, some are more inclined and some less inclined to accept the gospel. Over the passage of time, groups change their receptivity levels. This implied that the movements of people groups should be observed so that mission initiatives could be selectively targeted toward the most responsive groups. Within people groups, the most responsive segments should receive priority. “Mission strategists should direct most of their efforts to the receptive mosaics and ‘occupy lightly’ the people groups or parts of the mosaic that are yet resistant” (Van Engen 1998:28).

One of the key biblical supports used by the church growth school is the parable of the sower (Matt 13:1-23). Peter Wagner wrote that the parable “teaches that intelligent sowing is necessary” and that before sowing one must “test the soil” (1971:42). The goal is to find the good soil so that the perennially scarce seed (mission resources) will produce the best possible yields.

For church growth thinkers, a receptive people group was one in which “some churches were growing rapidly” and where a “people movement” could be discerned (Van Engen 1998:31). Dayton, McGavran, Wagner, and others developed a “Resistance-Receptivity Axis” which ranged from “Highly Resistant” (-5) to “Highly Receptive” (+5). Careful study was done to define the factors that would cause a people group to occupy a particular position on the axis. Most of the factors involved the sociological, economic, political, institutional, or historical characteristics of a people group.

The church growth approach has been critiqued for being dominated by modern demographic and sociological analysis while ignoring theological factors. Charles Van Engen affirms the usefulness of the church growth approach but says it does not probe deeply enough into the nature of people groups. The church growth school approach makes “second-level derivative observations” that describe growth patterns rather than “inherent or intrinsic” factors like “a group’s worldview, its cultural or religious systems, its faith-issues, its spiritual openness, or its psycho-emotional willingness to receive new ideas” (1998:32-33). A first-level, or deeper-level, understanding about receptivity and resistance comes from theological reflection. In other
words, a demographic and sociological analysis about a particular Muslim group in a particular context is helpful but it must be linked with deep theological thinking about what makes people receptive or resistant so that the best possible mission strategy can be shaped.

Van Engen’s critique of the church growth school analysis is relevant to mission among Muslims because church growth analysis would rank most of the Muslim world as resistant. The poor or non-existent church growth rates in many Muslim contexts are undeniable. Thus, fresh initiatives would be kept to a minimum as the church continued to “occupy lightly.” However, the church’s obligation to reach all Muslims now living makes token or wait-and-see-what-happens initiatives unacceptable. Furthermore, there is anecdotal evidence of strong receptivity among some Muslim groups when they are reached appropriately.

Church growth analysis ends up producing circular logic when applied to mission among Muslims. Fact 1: Christian mission has historically invested a small proportion of available resources in mission among Muslims; Fact 2: Mission among Muslims has been historically less productive than in other contexts; Conclusion: Christians should continue to invest a small proportion of available resources or to “occupy lightly” among Muslims. In the language of Christ’s parable about the sower, the narrative would go like this: The farmer had a field in which he had done little sowing for many years. Because he knew the field was unproductive he sowed his seed in other fields. The challenge of reaching every living Muslim demands that Christians break out of circular mission logic. The starting point is to move beyond what Van Engen calls “second-level derivative observations” about Muslims to first-level theological reflection.

**Toward a Theology of Resistance and Receptivity**


**All Humans Are Loved by God**

First, “All humans are loved always by God” (Van Engen 1998:37). This affirmation, based on John 3:16 and many other texts, has both a *particular* and *universal* dimension. In other words, while God loves humanity as a whole, he also loves each individual and the particular people group in which that individual is immersed. God loves all humans and he also has a
particular love for Muslims and each segment of Islam.

The complementarity of God’s universal and particular love is clear throughout the Bible. In Genesis Abram’s particular chosen clan was to be a blessing to all nations (Gen 12:2). God’s particular love for Israel was to be the channel of blessings for all nations. In the Gospels Jesus was incarnated into a particular people group while he provided salvation for all humanity at the Cross. In Revelation, every language, people, and nation worship the Lamb (Rev 5:9; 7:9) and all the kings of the earth are among the redeemed (Rev 21:24).

The way God’s love is understood influences views of and responses to receptivity and resistance.

Too strong an emphasis on universality will drive us toward uniformity and blind us to cultural distinctives—and the differences in the particular response/resistance represented by a particular people group. Too strong an emphasis on particularity will push us to narrow our mission endeavor to only certain groups of people whom we have tagged as “receptive,” ignoring or neglecting others. Either option has serious consequences for following Christ in mission. (Van Engen 1998:41)

Could it be that Muslims lose out in two ways? To the extent that too much emphasis has been placed on God’s universal love, Christians may have seen mission as a generic activity and thus have failed to adapt it to the particular context of each Muslim people group. On the other hand, if Christians over-emphasize God’s love for particular peoples they may have given the bulk of their attention to peoples who are more responsive than Muslims. God’s universal love for humanity and his particular love for Muslims compel Christians to not merely “occupy lightly” because they perceive Muslims as a resistant people.

All Humans Are Receptive

The second affirmation is that “All humans are receptive: They have a profound spiritual hunger to know God” (Van Engen 1998:42). In spite of almost a century of communism and blossoming secularism, the human race remains incurably religious in the twenty-first century. That inner longing for God is strikingly visible among Muslims as they direct their prayers, songs, and hopes toward Allah.

The belief that all humans long for God is expressed in a range of missiological assumptions: When missionaries successfully navigate social,
cultural, linguistic, and relational barriers the innate receptivity of receptors is enhanced. When the gospel is contextualized and presented via receptor-oriented communication people will be more likely to accept the gospel. Certain life experiences can make people groups more receptive. “Contact points” and “redemptive analogies” can be used to appeal to the innate longings of humanity (Van Engen 1998:47-49). In other words, aspects of Muslim practice and belief that reveal the deep longing of the soul for God can be used as starting points from which to link them with Jesus, the water of life.

This second affirmation and the resultant assumptions produce some optimism about being able to reach Muslims successfully. Christians can affirm the Muslim longing for God as a point of shared humanity upon which to build an effective approach.

Because of Sin and the Fall, All Humans Are Resistant to God All of the Time

The third theological point somewhat upsets the optimism produced by the previous point. “Because of sin and the Fall, all humans are resistant to God all of the time” (Van Engen 1998:50). This sobering truth has some implications for understanding resistance: Although resistance can be described in sociological or demographic terms, it is fundamentally a theological stance—refusing God’s invitation to fellowship. No matter how skillfully a person is reached, only the Holy Spirit can overcome the soul’s innate resistance to God. Humans are not neutral objects being manipulated by good and evil forces but subjects biased within on the side of evil who need “radical conversion and total transformation” (52). Finally, because they continue to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12), missionaries themselves retain elements of resistance in their own hearts that should give them a very real sense of shared humanity with those to whom they witness. Mission could be characterized as the resistant pointing the resistant to Jesus. From this perspective Christians must approach Muslims in deep humility.

This third point reminds believers that the very best methodology for reaching Muslims will not be enough by itself. It also cautions against a naïve optimism that ignores specific factors within the Muslim context that build resistance to the Christian message.
Some Humans Are Resistant All the Time to All Missional Approaches

Fourth, “Some humans are resistant all the time, to all missional approaches” (Van Engen 1998:53). Van Engen challenges the application of the parable of the sower which calls for selective sowing. Rather, the parable teaches that “given the same gracious invitation on the part of God, different persons will respond differently” (53). The parable is primarily about reaping—not sowing. The farmer does not test the soil but sows indiscriminately, knowing that the seed falls on different soils which will yield differently when he reaps.

This interpretation of the parable has several implications about resistance: The gospel message is to be proclaimed freely, in appropriate ways, in places of mixed receptivity levels. Ultimately, people respond to God—not to the messenger. There are factors that cause some hearers to be more resistant. The harvest comes through the providence of God, however good (or bad) mission methodology may be.

Van Engen does not say that all selective mission initiatives are wrong but that the parable of the sower teaches indiscriminate sowing. There are texts that do support selective mission initiatives. In Matt 10:14 Jesus told the disciples to “shake off the dust” when people reject them. In Matt 10:6 Jesus sent his disciples to the lost sheep of Israel. In John 4 Jesus needed to go to Samaria, a specific people group. Van Engen does not specify when he thinks selective mission initiatives are appropriate and thus leaves some tension in his analysis. I believe that tension is inherent in mission strategy because the church never has enough human or material resources to do all that could be done. Some selective sowing is unavoidable.

The historically low level of mission engagement among Muslims suggests that this is not the time to sow sparingly but rather the time to sow more freely. As in the time of Jesus, his disciples regretfully have to “shake off the dust” when all mission initiatives are rejected by particular people segments. However, missionary withdrawal should always be seen as temporary. Under these circumstances, McGavran’s “occupy lightly” strategy seems appropriate.
Some Humans Are Resistant Some of the Time to Some Things

Fifth, “Some humans are resistant some of the time to some things” (Van Engen 1998:57). If God was the exclusive agent in his own mission to humanity, rejecting his initiatives would be rejecting him. However, God has chosen to use human agents and this complicates the picture. The fallibility of the human agent means that sometimes people reject God’s agents and their methods without rejecting God himself.

Factors Causing Resistance

Van Engen discusses three factors that make some people resistant to some things some of the time:

Contextual Factors

First, there are factors in the local context. “These include worldview, religious, socio-economic, political, and historical factors” (1998:59-60). Because societies are in constant flux, effective mission planning requires constant analysis of changing conditions. But contextual analysis must include theological reflection that addresses certain key issues: What elements has God placed within the local context that are consistent with Scripture and are therefore useful as bridges for mission? How has God been working in the group through his providence to make it more receptive? Has the group gone through suffering that could affect its receptivity?

Clearly there are factors in the general Muslim context that increase overall resistance, even though Christians may refrain from indexing resistance levels for reasons already discussed. The power of positive thinking may be potentially helpful but naïve, and wishful thinking will hinder the serious, critical analysis that must accompany Spirit-led witness. The worst mistake is using the same habituated, comfortable methods used for generations in other contexts. For example, using the same evangelistic sermons and sermon sequence, possibly with the addition of ethnically appropriate pictures, that are used among Christian audiences will fail to reach Muslims effectively. Failure to adapt fully to the Muslim context is a failure of mission.
Institutional Factors

Second, there are factors in the church and among its agents. Christian churches have a variety of features that increase Muslim resistance to the gospel. Sometimes churches are so absorbed in the business of “doing church” that they lack a basic missional focus and intention. For some churches, Islam is a religion “over there,” while the Muslims “over here” do not even appear on the missional GPS. Some Christians lack the intercultural competence needed for developing relationships with Muslims. A low level of spirituality in the church weakens its witness. Although styles of spirituality differ between religions, Muslims are able to discern spiritual authenticity in Christians. The church may not understand how Muslims interpret aspects of typical Christian worship like wearing shoes into the place of worship, handling the Bible carelessly, or praying without prostration (see Bauer 2008:99-101). They may be unwilling to develop a model for worship with Muslim visitors in mind. The church may expect converts to experience a rapid, punctiliar conversion process that overlooks the true magnitude of life change that is involved.

Relational Factors

Third, there is often a lack of an established relationship between the church and the receptors. The ease of building good relationships between a local church and a local mosque varies a great deal. In the West moderate Muslims welcome dialogue and fellowship in the wake of 9/11. The problem is that even where such relationships are easy to establish Christians often do not seek them.

Conclusion

Perhaps the best way to end a reflection on receptivity and resistance to the gospel among Muslims is with a modified version of the parable of the sower.

The sower had always wanted to sow in all of his fields but he had become accustomed to sowing mostly in one part of his farm. He had worked hard in his favorite fields and they yielded good harvests. When he realized that the Lord of the harvest wanted to reap a harvest from all of his fields, the sower began to give special attention to the fields that he had partially ignored.
Works Cited


“The shades of a July evening were drawing over the landscape, as the express left the Michigan Central depot at Battle Creek, bearing us away on our journey around the planet on which we reside. The last farewells had been said, the last visit to familiar spots had been made, and now the long trip was really commenced” (Magan 1890:2).

So began Stephen N. Haskell’s and Percy T. Magan’s two-year trip around the world to survey the opportunities and challenges facing Adventist mission. The year was 1889 and Seventh-day Adventists were on the verge of a worldwide expansion. “The ‘Shut Door Mission’ period (1844-1852) had allowed for the development of a doctrinal base; the ‘Partially Opened Door’ period (1852-1874) had afforded time for the building of a power base in North America for the support of mission to other Protestant nations; and the ‘Mission to the Christian (“Protestant”) Nations’ period (1874-1889) had provided for similar development in England, Europe, Australia, and South Africa” (Knight 2005:xvii). Mission interest among Protestant denominations was at a high point in America and Europe in the 1890s. Dwight Moody and the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions aroused Protestant mission fervor with their call for “the evangelization of the world in this generation” (Mott 1979:21-23, 38).
This far-reaching vision for foreign mission stimulated Adventist thinking as well. The November 1889 General Conference Session voted to combine the Foreign Mission Committee and the Executive Committee of the General Conference to make up the fifteen members of the Seventh-day Adventist Foreign Mission Board “for the management of the foreign mission work” (General Conference Bulletin #15 1889:141, 142). Also in 1889 the General Conference had sent Haskell, founder of the Tract and Mission Society and president of the California, Maine, and New England conferences, on an around-the-world trip to look for potential mission sites. Magan, at the time a student at Battle Creek College and later a renowned Adventist educator, joined him in England and the detailed reports in the Youth's Instructor of their two-year trip were widely enjoyed by young and older Adventists at home. Ella White Robinson recalls how “as a child, she eagerly implored any adult who seemed to be enjoying a little unnecessary leisure, to read aloud those Round the World stories signed PTM” (Robinson 2004:97).

Based on his observations, Haskell recommended changes in traditional Adventist approaches that had far-reaching results in some cases, as the following two examples show. In South Africa, Haskell and Magan visited missions of other denominations to understand what contributed to their success among non-Christian groups. Haskell, a strong tract and literature man, realized that self-supporting literature evangelism would fail because of the widely scattered population and non-monetary nature of the indigenous culture. He recommended starting schools and clinics as other denominations had done. Solusi Mission, Malamulo Hospital, and other such training institutions quickly followed and today the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division has more Adventists per capita than any other division of the world (see table1).

After visiting Australia, Haskell pleaded for a school to be opened there “and also that Ellen G. White and her son W. C. White spend some time in the field” (Robinson 2004:123). The strength of the work in the South Pacific cannot be separated from the influence of those two recommendations. While causes and effects are certainly many, it is interesting to note that in the two decades (1890-1910) following the creation of the Foreign Mission Board and Haskell's and Magan's survey, workers outside of North America increased from 56 to 2,020, church membership outside of North America exploded from 2,680 to 38,232 (Knight 2005:xxi) and Seventh-day Adventists had reorganized the church to better serve the needs of mission.

Since 1890 our church has grown to a membership of over 16 million with more than 23,000 licensed and ordained ministers in churches that
span the globe. Adventists can only praise God for the amazing growth he has blessed the church with throughout the 20th century, but what about the future? What does Adventist mission need to do to continue to flourish in the 21st century? How will the church structure mission and use human and material resources to meet the mission challenges of today’s world? God has greatly blessed the Adventist Church as it has circled the globe, but just as Haskell and Magan surveyed the world to identify mission needs, so must we.

Adventist Mission 2010

The simplest way to look at the state of Adventist mission is to compare membership to population. According to the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook, Adventists numbered just over 16 million at the end of 2009. With a world population of 6.8 billion, there is one member for every 424 people in the world. When Haskell and Magan surveyed the world there was only one member for every 20,000 people. Our growth has been incredibly blessed, yet, as will be seen, the growth has also been incredibly uneven.

Division Population Ratios

Generally, those divisions with the largest populations have the fewest members per population. The seven divisions (WAD, SSD, SUD, ESD, NSD, EUD, and TED) with substantial territory in the 10/40 Window have the fewest members to population. The six divisions with little or no territory in the 10/40 Window (SID, IAD, SPD, ECD, SAD, and NAD) have the most members to population.

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1 Statistics in this article are taken from the General Conference Online Statistical Data Base, Adventist Online Yearbook, and General Conference Secretariat website, and were accessed March 2010.
2 Throughout this paper standard division acronyms are used: ECD East-Central Africa Division, ESD Euro-Asia Division, EUD Euro-Africa Division, IAD Inter-America Division, NAD North American Division, NSD Northern Asia-Pacific Division, SAD South American Division, SID Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, SPD South Pacific Division, SSD Southern Asia-Pacific Division, SUD Southern Asia Division, TED Trans-European Division, WAD West-Central Africa Division.
When one union or country is removed from the statistics, membership to population ratios can change, sometimes dramatically, especially in the six divisions with the fewest members per population.

The six divisions with the most members to population (SID, IAD, SPD, ECD, SAD, NAD) account for only 20 percent of the world’s population (1.4 billion) while the seven divisions with the fewest members to population have 80 percent or 5.4 billion people to reach. Better membership to population ratios do not mean the work is finished but obviously some divisions have much more to work with in terms of human resources. Is it only a coincidence that the five divisions with the largest populations (SSD, SUD, NSD, EUD, TED) also have proportionately fewer members to reach those large populations?
While some may say these areas of the world are unreached by our message because they are resistant, we must ask ourselves whether the picture would be better had we invested more resources there. The *Atlas of Global Christianity: 1910-2010* reports a surprising fact. When the number of baptisms is divided by the number of Christian witnesses received, many areas of the 10/40 Window are among the most responsive parts of the world to the Christian message (Johnson and Ross 2009:321).

### Least-Reached Unions

Every division has needy areas within its territory. Table 3 shows the least-reached union\(^3\) in each division. The membership-to-population ratios in the least-reached unions are spectacularly elevated in some divisions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Membership to Population Ratio</th>
<th>Least-Reached Union/Territory</th>
<th>Union Membership to Population Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SID</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Indian Ocean</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAD</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAD</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>Sahel</td>
<td>2,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>5,538</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUD</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>Northern India</td>
<td>3,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>2,013</td>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>9,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>2,565</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>8,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>3,382</td>
<td>Trans-Mediterranean</td>
<td>972,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TED</td>
<td>5,749</td>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>13,944 (109,141(^4))</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^3\)Some divisions have less-reached territories. They may be small geographically with small populations (e.g., islands, small countries, or political enclaves) or politically isolated and areas unentered by the church. Because of their larger population size and the availability of statistics, unions or large territories were used in this chart.

\(^4\)Ratio if Sudan’s 7,879 members are removed from the Middle East union’s total membership of 17,861.
Least-Reached Unions/Territories in the World

Thirty-four unions have less than one member for every 2,000 people. Fourteen unions have less than one member for every 5,000 people. And one territory with a population nearly as large as the entire Inter-American Division has almost one million people for every church member! Just think what a ratio of one member for every million people would mean for other parts of the world: there would be only 340 members in NAD, 311 in SAD, 268 in IAD, 159 in SID, etc.

Case Study—Unreached Country: Turkey

Turkey, part of the Trans-Mediterranean territory, is a prime example of an unreached country. Turkey has a large Muslim population with very few Adventist members despite its proximity to the West, its constitutional freedom of religion, and the significant number of its citizens who live and work in Christian countries. It has a population of 74,816,000, a church membership of 77, and a ratio of only one member for every 971,636 people in the country.

Table 4. Least-Reached Unions Membership to Population Ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trans-Mediterranean</td>
<td>268</td>
<td>260,554,000</td>
<td>972,216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek Mission</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>11,277,000</td>
<td>22,112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan Union</td>
<td>12,877</td>
<td>180,808,000</td>
<td>14,041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East Union</td>
<td>17,861</td>
<td>249,069,000</td>
<td>13,944 (109,141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea Mission Field</td>
<td>521</td>
<td>5,073,000</td>
<td>9,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Union (ESD)</td>
<td>6,538</td>
<td>61,306,000</td>
<td>9,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel Field</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>7,634,000</td>
<td>8,735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans-Caucasus Union</td>
<td>1,946</td>
<td>16,489,000</td>
<td>8,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan Union</td>
<td>15,317</td>
<td>127,568,000</td>
<td>8,329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Union</td>
<td>8,760</td>
<td>60,720,000</td>
<td>6,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish Union</td>
<td>5,710</td>
<td>38,146,000</td>
<td>6,681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>3,702</td>
<td>20,502,000</td>
<td>5,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh Union</td>
<td>29,757</td>
<td>162,221,000</td>
<td>5,452</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^5\)Ratio if Sudan’s 7,879 members are removed from the Middle East Union’s total membership of 17,9861.
### Table 4—Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Ministers</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Franco-Belgian Union</td>
<td>14,371</td>
<td>73,946,000</td>
<td>5,145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal Field</td>
<td>7,503</td>
<td>27,504,000</td>
<td>3,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Union</td>
<td>380,295</td>
<td>1,362,069,000</td>
<td>3,582</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern India Section</td>
<td>194,148</td>
<td>668,808,622</td>
<td>3,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands Union</td>
<td>4,845</td>
<td>16,527,000</td>
<td>3,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Russian Union</td>
<td>6,690</td>
<td>22,268,723</td>
<td>3,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Union</td>
<td>2,801</td>
<td>9,288,000</td>
<td>3,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Union</td>
<td>15,070</td>
<td>47,032,000</td>
<td>3,121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Russian Union</td>
<td>34,608</td>
<td>93,585,372</td>
<td>2,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adriatic Union</td>
<td>3,767</td>
<td>9,672,000</td>
<td>2,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahel Union</td>
<td>42,491</td>
<td>109,009,000</td>
<td>2,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia Union</td>
<td>84,250</td>
<td>209,943,000</td>
<td>2,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North German Union</td>
<td>20,134</td>
<td>47,794,340</td>
<td>2,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far Eastern Union of Churches</td>
<td>3,482</td>
<td>7,942,984</td>
<td>2,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasus Union</td>
<td>7,951</td>
<td>18,041,921</td>
<td>2,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Union</td>
<td>29,736</td>
<td>66,590,000</td>
<td>2,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Indonesia Union</td>
<td>98,679</td>
<td>220,824,526</td>
<td>2,238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish Union</td>
<td>2,523</td>
<td>5,634,000</td>
<td>2,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South German Union</td>
<td>15,329</td>
<td>34,185,000</td>
<td>2,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austrian Union</td>
<td>3,883</td>
<td>8,374,000</td>
<td>2,156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarian Union</td>
<td>4,667</td>
<td>10,024,000</td>
<td>2,148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ministerial Workforce**

The way the Adventist ministerial workforce is distributed reveals that Adventist workers tend to follow membership. The TED, the division with the fewest members per population, also has the fewest ordained and licensed ministers—693. Sometimes the smaller the membership, the better the minister to member ratio, for example, the ESD’s Southern Union with only 6,538 members has one licensed/ordained minister for every 100 members and the EUD Trans-Mediterranean Territories with only 268 members has one for every 33 members. The SAD, on the other hand, has one minister for every 687 members. The perspective changes, however, when population is compared to the number of ministers.
When division ratios are compared with ratios for the least-reached unions in each division, substantial disparity is found in the number of ministers to population.

### Table 5. Licensed and Ordained Ministers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Population/Ministers</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUD</td>
<td>1,199,531,000 / 799</td>
<td>1,501,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>1,563,757,000 / 1,269</td>
<td>1,232,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TED</td>
<td>638,155,000 / 693</td>
<td>920,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>596,017,000 / 1,113</td>
<td>535,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>779,784,000 / 1,952</td>
<td>399,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD</td>
<td>336,275,000 / 1,024</td>
<td>328,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>279,459,000 / 1,227</td>
<td>218,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>298,277,000 / 1,909</td>
<td>156,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SID</td>
<td>159,164,000 / 1,399</td>
<td>113,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAD</td>
<td>311,096,000 / 3,274</td>
<td>95,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAD</td>
<td>268,528,000 / 2,895</td>
<td>92,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>340,583,000 / 4,197</td>
<td>81,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>35,425,000 / 958</td>
<td>36,978</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6. Division Population to Ministers Ratio and Least-reached Union Ratios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Ratio Population to Ministers</th>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Population / Ministers</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>535,505</td>
<td>Trans-Mediterranean Ter.</td>
<td>260,554,000 / 8</td>
<td>32,569,250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUD</td>
<td>1,501,290</td>
<td>Northern India Union</td>
<td>668,808,622 / 100</td>
<td>6,688,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TED</td>
<td>920,859</td>
<td>Middle East Union</td>
<td>249,069,000 / 47</td>
<td>5,299,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD</td>
<td>328,394</td>
<td>Sahel Union</td>
<td>109,009,000 / 62</td>
<td>1,758,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>1,232,275</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>127,568,000 / 116</td>
<td>1,099,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>218,840</td>
<td>Southern Union</td>
<td>61,306,000 / 63</td>
<td>973,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>399,480</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>20,502,000 / 23</td>
<td>891,391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SID</td>
<td>113,770</td>
<td>Indian Ocean Union</td>
<td>22,503,000 / 28</td>
<td>803,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>156,248</td>
<td>Ethiopian Union</td>
<td>83,689,000 / 168</td>
<td>498,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAD</td>
<td>95,020</td>
<td>Ecuador Union</td>
<td>13,625,000 / 72</td>
<td>189,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>81,149</td>
<td>Canadian Union</td>
<td>33,713,000 / 308</td>
<td>109,458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAD</td>
<td>92,756</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>11,225,000 / 128</td>
<td>87,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>36,978</td>
<td>Australian Union</td>
<td>21,865,000 / 327</td>
<td>66,865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inter-Division Employees

Inter-Division Employees (IDEs) are sent by the General Conference in response to calls from divisions. The numbers of IDEs in divisions are affected by history and tradition. For example, SID and SPD have the most IDEs per population of all divisions 120 years after the church acted on Haskell’s recommendations to send missionaries to those regions of the world. IDE numbers are also affected by the location of General Conference institutions. For example, most IDEs in NAD are at the General Conference headquarters. Despite these various factors, seven of the eight divisions with the fewest IDEs to population are the same divisions with the fewest members to population and the fewest ministers to population. The exception is SAD where there are many members and ministers but very few IDEs.

Table 7. IDEs to Population and Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>IDEs</th>
<th>Ratio IDEs to Population</th>
<th>Ratio of Members to Population</th>
<th>Ratio of Ministers to Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUD</td>
<td>1,199,531,000</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>66,640,611</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>1,501,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>1,563,757,000</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40,096,333</td>
<td>2,565</td>
<td>1,232,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>596,017,000</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>37,251,063</td>
<td>3,382</td>
<td>535,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>279,459,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12,702,682</td>
<td>2,013</td>
<td>218,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAD</td>
<td>311,096,000</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11,965,230</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>95,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TED</td>
<td>638,155,000</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>8,077,911</td>
<td>5,749</td>
<td>920,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD</td>
<td>336,275,000</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6,725,500</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>328,394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>779,784,000</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>4,754,780</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>399,480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAD</td>
<td>268,528,000</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2,856,681</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>92,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>298,277,000</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>2,787,636</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>156,248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD</td>
<td>340,583,000</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>2,415,482</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>81,149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SID</td>
<td>159,164,000</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2,273,771</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>113,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>35,425,000</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>932,237</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>36,978</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case Study—The Buddhist World: Thailand

Seventh-day Adventists have had a presence in Thailand for over a hundred years. While the church has grown among some groups, the majority Buddhist population remains largely unreached. Membership has fluctuated only slightly for the past twenty years. Finding workers and budgets for

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Even though the SSD has the largest number of IDEs (many at AIIAS, a GC institution), it still has one of the lower proportions of IDEs to population.
ministry among Buddhist populations remains difficult. Very few IDEs work in Buddhist evangelism. Thailand has a population of 67,764,000. It had an Adventist membership of 12,988 in 1988 that declined to 12,821 in 2009.

Global Mission

Twenty years ago the church recognized the urgency of the unreached population groups in the world and set up the Global Mission fund to address those needs. Almost 10,000 Global Mission Pioneers are currently serving in 163 countries. Notice the percentage of Global Mission money and manpower used in the seven divisions with proportionately fewest members, ministers, and IDEs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Membership to Population Ratio</th>
<th>Ministers to Population Ratio</th>
<th>IDEs to Population Ratio</th>
<th>Percentage of GM Pioneers</th>
<th>Percentage of GM Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TED</td>
<td>5,749</td>
<td>920,859</td>
<td>8,077,911</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>8.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>3,382</td>
<td>545,505</td>
<td>37,251,063</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>11.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>2,565</td>
<td>1,232,275</td>
<td>40,096,333</td>
<td>16.08</td>
<td>18.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>2,013</td>
<td>218,840</td>
<td>12,702,682</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>7.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUD</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>1,501,290</td>
<td>66,640,611</td>
<td>14.86</td>
<td>5.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>399,480</td>
<td>4,754,780</td>
<td>15.17</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>328,394</td>
<td>6,735,500</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>6.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Global Mission Fund

While Global Mission funding has proved a blessing in some of the least-reached areas of the world, those resources are not strategically distributed based on the number of people still to be reached. The seven divisions (TED, EUD, NSD, ESD, SUD, SSD, WAD) that make up 80 percent of the world’s population receive only 60 percent of Global Mission money and have only 60 percent of the Global Mission Pioneers. These are the same divisions with the fewest members to population, the fewest ministers to population, and the fewest IDEs to population. Is it surprising that Adventist growth has been limited where human witnesses are so few?
Conclusion

At the General Conference Session of 1891, Adventists leaders listened with interest as Haskell emphasized the great need to take the gospel message to the world. The theme of his address was “The abundant grace given by the Father through Jesus Christ….This supply of grace is sufficient to meet every emergency and thwart every attempt of the enemy…. Every difficulty only opens the door for another installment of the infinite grace of Christ (Robinson 2004 121). Church members packed the Dime Tabernacle Sabbath afternoon eager to hear more stories about the two-year trip around the world. Haskell told of Pacific Islands, ready for the gospel, where no missionary had yet gone. His travels had shown him, he said, that the Lord had gone before the Adventist people to prepare the way for the third angel's message. Concrete results followed, urged on by Ellen White. “The missionary work in Australia and New Zealand is yet in its infancy, but the same work must be accomplished in Australia, New Zealand, in Africa, India, China, and the islands of the sea, as has been accomplished in the home field” (White 1915:338). The Iowa Conference voted to send one-half of their laborers to the mission fields and committed to continuing to pay their salaries (Daniells 1904). New channels for mission giving were created and new structures for mission were established.

As we survey the world today we see many places where the church is strong but we also see areas of striking need. We see that large populations of the world have very few witnesses, lay or clergy. We find that, in most divisions, the least-reached unions are also the least served by church workers. The larger the division, in terms of population, the more dramatic these inequities appear. Even the Global Mission Fund, established to help address this problem, has only been partially successful. In 2010, 80 percent of the world’s population still has less than 30 percent of the Adventist membership and ministerial workforce. Although Adventists have many more members and workers than in 1890, the population still unreached by the Adventist end-time message has swollen from 1.5 billion people to 6.7 billion.7 Unless Adventists work together as a world church, strategically using the resources God has provided to reduce regional imbalances by crossing cultural, religious, and administrative boundaries, the task ahead is impossible. The Adventist Church needs the God-given fervor of its pioneers in mission if it is to fulfill its task.

7World population 6,805,652,275 minus membership 16,049,101 (accessed March 2010).
The Bible tells us the gospel will be taken to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people before the end will come (Matt 24:14; Rev 14:6, 7). As Seventh-day Adventists we proclaim Jesus’ soon return but we are only proclaiming it to a portion of the world’s peoples. The largest populations of the world have the fewest witnesses. Yet we are not fully harnessing the mission energy of the church. If we had the same proportion of missionaries to membership today as we had in 1910, we would have over 300,000 missionaries! Could it be that over time our church structure has evolved and now, rather than facilitating mission it creates challenges for mission? For example, in the decades following Haskell’s and Magan’s trip, the General Conference chose places to send missionaries and found ways to send people who came with a burden to go. Now the General Conference has to wait for a call to come from a division and then try to find someone willing to go. If a church member has a desire to be a missionary they are often turned away unless there happens to be a call at that time that fits them. Unfortunately, unentered areas and unreached people do not issue calls and the mission energy of our church members remains underused by the available calls.

Every person is precious in God’s sight and he does not wish any to perish. We must find a way of planning for mission across organizational boundaries. Guidance is necessary so different parts of the church do not have to reinvent structures and processes over and over again. We have to look at the broad spectrum of needs and help unions and divisions and missions build a mix of mission resources. We must carefully examine existing mission structures to see if they are really meeting the needs of mission or if they can be adapted or new types created so we can empower the thousands of members from all over the world who want to serve.

Who will provide the leadership to creatively share the human and material resources of the church to take the news of a soon-coming Savior to the Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu worlds? Will areas where the church is strong give workers and budgets? Is the church willing to change its organizational structures, create new opportunities for mission, and sacrifice regional goals so it can make a difference in the least-reached areas of the world? Are we ready to follow the example and heed the prophetic voice of our pioneers relying on the infinite grace of Christ to open every door? Does the way we do mission show that we are eager for Jesus to come?

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“This paper was first read at the Global Mission Issues Committee, March 24, 2010.”
Works Cited


Global Partnerships has been an initiative within the Adventist Church to place trained, self-supporting Adventists in creative-access countries, countries where conventional missionaries are not allowed or are in very short supply. Tentmakers are Adventists who use their expertise, profession or business to support themselves in these challenging areas for the purpose of discipling new believers and, where possible, planting churches. Today it operates within the office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference office.¹

Tentmaking, as a mission strategy in Adventist ranks, had its inception in conversations among some missiologists² in the mid-1980s when it became obvious to some of us that we were witnessing an exploding international job market in what were generally considered “closed” or “restricted access” countries such as China, Saudi Arabia, the Persian Gulf. As these countries were entering the world of Western commerce and telecommunication

¹For further information contact Gary Krause at krauseg@gc.adventist.org
²Notably Gottfried Oostervel, Wesley Amundson, and myself, at a Mission Institute session in Loma Linda, CA.
they became aware of the need for ESL, engineers of all types, college and university professors.

In 1992 I was invited to set up a temporary office at the General Conference and begin to put flesh on the skeletal idea of a tentmaking program. Names were gathered from various sources such as the Office of Volunteerism and the Secretariat, application forms were developed, countries and areas were prioritized, and contacts were made with other similar programs offered by various para-church groups operating under the umbrella of “Intent” that met annually to share ideas and resources. The organization ceased to exist in about 1999.

At that stage, the idea went dormant, probably because it did not fit any existing office or program within the denomination. It was probably too far out of the box and seemed, realistically, to lack the necessary structural controls.

In 1994, I moved from Silver Spring, MD to the Institute of World Mission (IWM) at Andrews University and was asked if I was interested in picking up the pieces of the tentmaking program. After minimal preparation the idea was launched at the Utrecht General Conference session. There was little to go on to build the program so it developed into a learn-as-you-go affair. It was still viewed as far outside the box of church structure, and it was discovered that many people in the Secretariat, the office most responsible for mission at that time, had difficulty grasping the concept.

Over the next few years a number of people were recruited and trained as tentmakers. These included educators, health professionals, ESL teachers, business people, etc. It was discovered that the tentmaking office did not have to find jobs for the people as they found their own and those people that required considerable “hand-holding” were generally unfit for tentmaking types of missionary work.

The training followed the standard IWM training curriculum and generally tentmaker candidates participated in actual institutes with additional hours that focused on specific tentmaker issues such as the relationship of work to witness, time management, and a biblical tentmaker identity based on Paul and the work of Priscilla and Aquila. There was also instruction on living and operating effectively in “creative-access” countries where proselytism is illegal. These self-supporting missionaries were given to understand that they were as fully “missionaries” as church-sponsored missionaries in calling, training, and commitment.
Sometime later the Middle East Union invited a few of us to visit their area and meet with expatriates already living and working in Oman and the UAE as well as other expatriates who would come from neighboring countries. Generally these expatriates were Philippinos, Indians, and Sri Lankans, but with also a sprinkling of people from Africa and Europe. At the height of the program tentmakers numbered over 120 missionaries, all working in countries where conventional missionaries were not allowed.

Admittedly the program had its weaknesses. To begin with there was little time or money available to regularly visit and update these missionaries. Secondly, tentmakers, like Priscilla and Aquila and Paul himself, tend to be a transient group. There is constant movement in and out of various countries, ideally necessitating regular training and updating of both new and more established people. Third, there was the difficulty on the part of church administrators to see how these tentmaker missionaries could be strategically integrated into their overall plans, and how they could cooperate with other church-sponsored missionaries. Another unavoidable weakness was the lack of any church control over tentmakers. It may be that if the Secretariat or the local unions had been more involved, providing regional retreats for the tentmakers that some level of “control” might have developed.

A CONVERSATION

A look at one tentmaker will help introduce a vision of what is possible, but also the challenges involved.

This past June (2010) a party visited groups of tentmakers in the Persian Gulf. Our assignment was to update and strengthen previously trained tentmakers and develop new tentmakers. One of the people we met was Mr. David Onchagwa.

Mr. Onchagwa is the Assistant Manager for Health, Safety, Security, and Environment at Texas A&M University. He is currently working at the campus in Education City, a 50+ acre campus in Doha, Qatar, in the Persian Gulf. He has a BA in Geosciences and an MA in Environmental Management. He is also the first elder of the Qatar Seventh-day Adventist Church. He worked at Columbia University in New York City before going there.

Qatar Foundation, www.qf.org, is the sponsor of all the universities at

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3The party included Jerald Whitehouse, Jerald Lewis, Peter Roennfeldt, Mike Ryan, and myself.
4Name used with permission.
Education City. The universities are George Washington University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Carnegie-Mellon University, Texas A&M University, Cornell University, and Northwestern University. The faculties are all from those universities and the students are from the entire world. The buildings are all of striking architecture and design. It occurred to me that if Education City is successful, it may be the best answer to the radical jihadis and Al Qa’ida types, who seek to direct Islam along the paths and lifestyle of Wahabbism, or reactionary 15th century Islam. As I toured Education City I was immediately reminded of and thrust into the reality of Thomas Friedman’s recent book, *The World Is Flat, 3.0.* Here I viewed students and educators gathered from all over the world, engaged in the process of education and research in what may be the most “open space” in the Islamic world. I was surrounded by people speaking Arabic, English, Farsi, Bahasa, Hindi, Urdu, French, Russian, and Chinese among many others. The process of intellectual cross-fertilization was intense.

I had lunch with David, in the Education City cafeteria and we talked about his work and life in Qatar.

**BCM:** David, where are you from originally?

**David:** I am originally from Kenya, born a 3rd generation Seventh-day Adventist in rural western Kenya. After high school, I was trained as a grade school teacher and worked for twelve years before proceeding for further studies in the United States in 1989.

**BCM:** Where did you work before coming to Qatar?

**David:** After completing my studies in New Jersey, I worked for hazardous waste management companies for three years and then joined the Columbia University Medical Center as a safety officer for research. After five years at Columbia, I then joined Texas A&M University at Qatar as a Safety Coordinator.

**BCM:** What sort of work do you do?

**David:** Here at Texas A&M University at Qatar, I work as the safety officer for all the laboratories. I facilitate new training for all the new employees and students before they get to work in the labs, and inspect and provide the needed equipment for the labs. I manage the hazardous chemical waste generated from all the labs in our institution. I also investigate incidents and

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5 Thomas Friedman, *The World Is Flat* (New York: Picador, 2007). (Further updated and expanded, release 3.0.)
accidents that may occur in the labs. The crisis management program is part of my duties.

**BCM:** How does your work here in Qatar differ from previous work environments in the U.S.?

**David:** My work is different here in Qatar because of several reasons. Just to name a few, this region of the world doesn't have the safety culture like in the U.S. or Europe. Most workers assume that everything is safe to use or work with except for those who have worked in the gas and petroleum industry where safety is a paramount issue. The North American and European safety laws and regulations are far more elaborate than the way it is here. Training workers on safety here takes a long time to have the safety culture established than in the West.

**BCM:** Previously, you worked at Columbia University in New York City. How does Doha compare with the U.S.?

**David:** Working at Columbia in New York City is not comparable to Doha at all. Columbia is an Ivy League school where I would see lots of people from all parts of the world. It was a crowded world but Doha is just a small place even though you have people from almost all parts of the world. My work load at Columbia was huge whereby I managed two seventeen storey buildings with over two hundred lab spaces compared to Doha where we have about twenty operating labs. My duties at Columbia were quite confined but here they are really diverse. I could say there is a lot of social life in New York City, you are able to spend time visiting places, parks, travelling on the subway, and the weather are all things that will be part of your life, but Doha is very small with limited social or entertainment settings.

**BCM:** What sort of people do you work and associate with here in Qatar?

**David:** Here in Qatar, I deal with people from almost every part of the world but mostly from the Arab world. They are really good people to work and associate with. Most of the time we have these misconceptions when we don't get to know people.

**BCM:** We are here, eating, in the central Education City cafeteria. It looks like a page out of Thomas Friedman's book, The Earth is Flat 3.0, being played out in widescreen, HD, and 3D. Is this setting the new global reality?

**David:** Sure, We can see a new global reality here. People from all parts of the world with diverse cultures congregate here and work as teams.
BCM: David, how would you describe this new reality? How is it different from the past?

David: Here you get to understand people and learn how you interact with them. You learn to cope with changes. Here there is a required balance of different cultures. It is not like in the U.S. whereby everyone comes and more or less as they please. Here greater sensitivity is required. You come and do what will make your associates comfortable without offending anyone, and you learn from each other.

BCM: Your wife works there in Qatar also. How is her work part of that new reality?

David: My wife has had wonderful experiences of being a kindergarten teacher. She has been a better witness. She has been able to speak to parents who have issues with their kids’ learning. She has been able to assist parents in solving some of the problems which would not be solved by teachers from this region. One parent has really expressed her appreciation for my wife because she didn’t think that her son would ever speak but within two months my wife was able to help this child to start pronouncing words which he never did before. These particular parents have insisted that their child will have to stay in my wife’s class.

BCM: To some this is the end of the world. Are there many Adventists in Qatar?

David: There are more than one hundred regular church attendees every Sabbath. There are others we know who do work on Sabbath and have been seeking permission to attend church services but have not been able.

BCM: Where are they from?

David: “Many of our church members come from the Philippines, others come from India, Kenya, Zambia, South Africa, Australia, Lebanon, Spain, Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, and many other countries of the world. All these people are here because of work. They work in various sectors of the country. Some are teachers, nurses, information technology engineers, construction workers, business experts, and accountants, just to mention a few.

BCM: How are you able to express your Adventist faith in your work here in Qatar?

David: This really depends on who you are talking to. Most people know that we are Christians but they don’t really understand what type of
Christians we are. At times we have to explain to them when they find out that there are things we do which other Christians don't do so they want to find out why we do or don’t do something. It is quite challenging if you have to speak to Muslims about this but most times very few really try to find out about your faith unless you have a special friendship with them.”

BCM: Do you see yourself as a “missionary” in Qatar? And, if so, what are your goals?
David: All Christians, wherever they find themselves, are missionaries. People's daily lives cannot be separated from their beliefs. As you live, work, and interact with people, somehow you are going to affect them someway. You are a missionary except you do not have the name tag on your shirt. My major goal is help someone to see how good the Lord is and that he or she can be saved by accepting what Jesus has done for them.

BCM: If someone wanted to do what you are doing now, how would they go about it?
David: I believe you have to ask God to give you a vision and then give yourself to the Lord to be used. It is the willingness to be used that really matters.

BCM: This discussion is being printed in a book of interest to missionaries and missions scholars. What counsel would you have for these readers?
David: You do not need to be an ordained minister to be a missionary. You can't preach openly here but you can preach a wordless sermon on God by showing his goodness to the world. I see people who have everything but lack the happiness they think will be coming from what they have. Show mercy, kindness, and hope where you find yourself. They will ask you why you are different and then you can tell them what you believe. Let God use you as his vessel.

I thanked David for the lunch, his time, and his insights. There was no doubt in my mind that I was talking with a 21st century Paul, a “tentmaker” who uses his expertise to take work in a different (and difficult) culture with the purpose of meeting new people, making disciples, and extending the boundaries of the Kingdom of God.
THE CHALLENGE

What could happen, I mused, if another ten committed Seventh-day Adventists were to join David in Education City to meet, mingle, eat with, talk, and share their beliefs, their convictions, and their Lord with all these other people gathered here to seek new knowledge and insights and to make sense of the world?

What would it take to visit the educational institutions represented at Education City, identify mission-minded Adventists in those institutions, and train them for effective mission at “the center of the world”?

When will we have the will and the resources to engage the Islamic world seriously?