Proclaiming Jesus in a Muslim Context

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1. An Introduction to the Problem

Many working in the Muslim World face a problem. In most Muslim countries proselytism among Muslims is strictly forbidden. The reason for this prohibition is that for a Muslim to apostatize *(riddah)* from Islam (i.e. to change his religion, the Arabic word also has the sense of 'treason' or 'dis-identity') is a capital offense. Under Shariah such a convert:

- loses his wife and children – i.e. it is an automatic case for divorce
- loses his right to all his possessions (land, house, clothes etc.)
- loses his right to inherit anything
- loses his right to life

For the Muslim community, apostasy is the very worst crime. Muslims feel very strongly that there is absolutely no need to convert from Islam to any other religion and that such an act very seriously weakens the solidarity of the whole Muslim community *(the Ummah)*. So apostasy brings shame and dishonour on the person on his family and on the whole of the Muslim community. It is considered by most Muslims, that Muslim governments do well to protect Muslims from unscrupulous unbelievers, who seek to prey on naive Muslims and draw them away from faith in God, by having laws against all forms of proselytism.

There is a Qur'anic verse that speaks of such apostates as being cursed – cursed by God, cursed by the angels and cursed by all of mankind among whom they dwell. There is a Hadith, *"Whoever changes his religion* (from Islam to anything else)*, brings an end to his life."*

So in Muslim countries where Shariah is in force a convert from Islam is beheaded according to the law. In the majority of Muslim states where Shariah is not fully implemented, conversion often leads to physical exclusion from the Muslim community *(the Ummah)*. This implies divorce, separation from children, disinheritance and being forced to flee with no possibility of return.

Any disturbance, nationally or individually in the *Ummah* is said to be deplorable in the sight of God. There is a Hadith that says *"No Muslim should be killed in Qisas (equality in punishment) for killing an unbeliever."* This Hadith is strongly upheld if one kills a 'convert'.

In one Asian country a Muslim recently stabbed to death a convert to Christianity. He surrendered to the police and claimed the above Hadith in justification of his act. Immediately the Islamic Press proclaimed the murderer a hero of Islam and promised to secure his release from jail, which they did.

In the light of this and a growing application of Shariah in Muslim countries, it isn't surprising that Muslim states and the *Ummah* take a very strong stand against any form of proselytism among Muslims.

Those who are involved in proselytism are viewed as having committed a serious crime. In the view of most Muslims they should be thrown out of the country (the lenient view) or they should be imprisoned or even killed.

So should we 'proselytise'? Is evangelism different to proselytism? What is conversion? Clearly we need to think **Biblically** about this issue. We need to put into context verses such as: Acts 4:29 ***"We must obey God rather than men!"***

This appears to lay down the principle of civil disobedience. As Christians we are called to be conscientious law-abiders and, generally speaking, to submit to human authorities especially in countries where we are guests. (See Rom. 13, Titus 3:1, 1 Pet. 2:13 ff) But if the authority concerned misuses its God-given power to command what God forbids or forbid what God has commanded, then the Christian's duty is to disobey the human authority in order obey God's authority and will.

And God has commanded us to, ***"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel".*** **(**Mk. 16:15)

So is disobedience to the law of proselytism in Muslim lands the right approach? Of course, it will produce persecution, but Jesus said as much: ***"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*** (Mt. 5:11-12) So we need to clarify a number of issues.

1.1 Our Authority to Witness

The Christian's authority to be a witness to the Gospel is derived from Jesus Christ to whom all authority has been given in heaven and on earth. Because all authority belongs to Him, we can't accept the concept of a "closed country". Every land is open to Him ***"Who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens"***. (Rev. 3:7) He said, ***"Go into ALL the world."*** Satan's power is both limited and derived. In all cases it is subject to Christ's supreme authority.

1.2 Our Obligation to Witness when Proselytism is forbidden

We have an obligation, implied in the Great Commission, to make disciples of **all** nations and to go to **all** peoples in the world. This obviously includes the world of Muslims. So what should our response be to the growing restrictions in Muslim countries? There are various options.

- **Don't go to these countries**

This is the easiest answer. It is based on the assumption that a government's prohibition on preaching is a sign from God to go elsewhere to some country where there is freedom to preach. Since, apparently, these people don't want to hear the Gospel, the proper response is to shake the dust from our feet (Mt. 10:14) and go to those who want to hear.

On the whole, this appears to be the answer the Christian church has given to the Muslim World. Very few workers go to the Muslim World to proclaim the Gospel to Muslims. However the early church didn't preach the Gospel to the First Century Mediterranean World because the people wanted to hear it, but because – as Paul puts it, ***"I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I don't preach the Gospel."*** (1 Cor. 9:16)

Each person in the world has the God-given right to the freedom of understanding the Gospel. The right to this freedom is presupposed in all the Scriptures. God's desire is to make the world a place where each person can see what God offers and what Satan offers. Having examined these offers as thoroughly as they wish, a person can make his/her choice. Any person who has been forbidden to hear about Jesus has no choice – only the light that comes from general revelation.

- **The Silent Witness of a Good Life**

The argument for this option goes that since I may not obtain a residence visa unless I promise to make no attempt to witness and share about Jesus, I will do just that. I will be quiet and witness by my life and behaviour. I will take a long-term view and assume that the door will open some time in the future for a more open type of witness. Arguing from 1 Pet. 2:13, ***"Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution"*** and similar exhortations to obey the powers that be, that this is a legitimate line to take, I convince myself to live a life of silent witness.

Those who follow this argument are convinced that some time in the future the country will open and that they can prepare the way – a kind of pre-evangelism – through godly living and good works. They emphasise the need for discretion and wisdom. They consider it wrong to do any overt or covert evangelism or to hold any illegal meetings of any kind.

There are a number of false assumptions underlying this solution. Firstly, we have a mandate to preach, to persuade, to talk – in effect, to verbalize our witness. The New Testament knows nothing of a silent witness. Secondly Peter, who wrote 1 Pet. 2:13, also said in Acts 4 that he must give a vocal witness to Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has been

given to us that we might have a vocal witness. (Jn. 15:26, 27) Thirdly, the assumption things are going to get better (more open) is not necessarily so. In 2 Tim. 4:3 it is stated that things are going to get worse!

It is also possible to delude ourselves into thinking we are communicating Christian truth by our lives because we make little effort to monitor and check what the observer actually understands. It is possible that leading a godly life and doing good works merely projects the fact that we are nearly Muslims in our actions and are trying to gain salvation through meritorious living. Failure to explain that we do these things by the motivating power of the Risen Lord Jesus is misleading and probably culpable (because we are involved in deception).

- **To Ignore the Problem**

A third option is to witness in these "closed" Muslim lands with the same methods and approaches that worked well in our own culture and country. This person will emphasise 2 Cor. 4:2, ***"We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we don't use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."*** This person emphasises the Biblical injunction to be bold: ***"The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion."*** (Prov. 28:1)

The problem with this approach is that such people rarely last long in the country! They are naive about probable informers. They don't stay long enough to learn the language and the culture. Much of their witness is so culturally biased that few could have understood the real essence of the Gospel from their efforts. Worse, they often discredit other workers and harm the lives of Muslim background believers. This answer is as ineffective as the two previous options!

- **The Correct Answer!**

There is no easy or simple solution. But there are some general principles to think through and pray over. There are also some good principles in some of the arguments in the three options above that we need to incorporate into our thinking:

- ✓ We should wholeheartedly agree with the need for **discretion, tact** and **care**.
- ✓ We would certainly see the absolute necessity of living before people in a godly way, but would say that, although necessary, this isn't sufficient.

With Gideon we would have to say, ***"Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early."*** (Judges 7:3) For much of the desire to maintain a "low profile" – a silent witness – **can** be motivated by fear. It may be fear of man, fear of prison, fear of losing our job, fear of what the government might do to us. These fears are often fuelled by rumours and stories of what has happened in the past. Fearful workers produce fearful disciples. Fear is a major enemy we fight against daily in Muslim lands. **We need to demonstrate freedom from fear!**

For those involved in intentional secular work in expatriate companies in the Muslim World extra pressure comes in this area. Western expatriate companies frequently misunderstand Islamic fundamentalism. They are aware that Islamists are very much opposed to "globalisation" and that western companies are part of this. So in their orientation for their employees going to the Muslim World great stress is laid on not offending the Muslim community. They are told that some sort of religious witness gives the greatest offense. The western company does this out of fear of losing its contract. The result is that employees face very great pressure from the company to maintain an almost non-existent Christian profile. Failure to comply with company directives frequently gets them fired.

The spoken word of witness was normative in New Testament times. Jesus commissioned His disciples to "herald" the Gospel to every person. This implies spreading the Good News

by word of mouth. There is an emphasis that links the message with the messenger. In Arabic "the spreader of good news" is a *mubashir* – used in a secular context as someone hired in a village to go around all the houses to spread the good news – usually of the birth of a baby boy – or a wedding ceremony about to begin. It is also used for an evangelist.

So this raises the question, **"What have we to say that when a Muslim hears it, he will say to himself – "Wow, that's good news?"** What is the good news for the Muslim?

If it is Biblical to go about quietly, have a low profile and live entirely within the rules laid down by the authorities, then Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Minor Prophets, Paul and even Jesus must be said to have lived more outside the will of God than in it!! Take time to ponder on Amos' message.

"Then Amaziah said to Amos, 'Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there. Don't prophesy anymore at Bethel, because this is the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom.'

Amos answered Amaziah, 'I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd and I also took care of sycamore and fig trees. But the LORD took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, and prophesy to My People Israel.' Now then, hear the Word of the Lord. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel and stop preaching against the house of Isaac.' Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'Your wife will become a prostitute in the city and your sons and daughters will fall by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up and you yourself will die in a pagan country. And Israel will certainly go into exile away from their native land.' " (Amos 7: 12-17)

We need to strongly affirm that we will be "open" to all people at all times. But this doesn't necessarily mean that **nothing** should be kept quiet. We should openly share when appropriate all the wonderful things that Jesus has done for us. Jesus said, ***"I have spoken openly to the world."*** (Jn. 18:20) Paul said, ***"You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house."*** (Acts 20:20) We are to walk in the light with people and never attempt to deceive. We read in Proverbs 12:17-23:

"A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies. Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment. There is deceit in the hearts of those who plot evil, but joy for those who promote peace. No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked have their fill of trouble. The Lord detests lying lips, but He delights in men who are truthful. A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly."

So we should speak the truth, but not everything needs to be revealed. Several times, in Mark's Gospel in particular, after healing someone Jesus commanded the healed person not to tell anyone. Jesus went secretly to the Passover. (Jn. 7:8-11) See also Prov. 17:27-28 and 25:2)

So as we speak, we need to have wisdom and discretion about **what** we are communicating. We need to know what **religion**, **proselytism** and **conversion** mean to those who forbid it. We will try to look at this in the following sections.

2. Some Definitions

2.1 Religion

There are two ways to think about religion.

- **You are born into your religion – faith is inherited.**

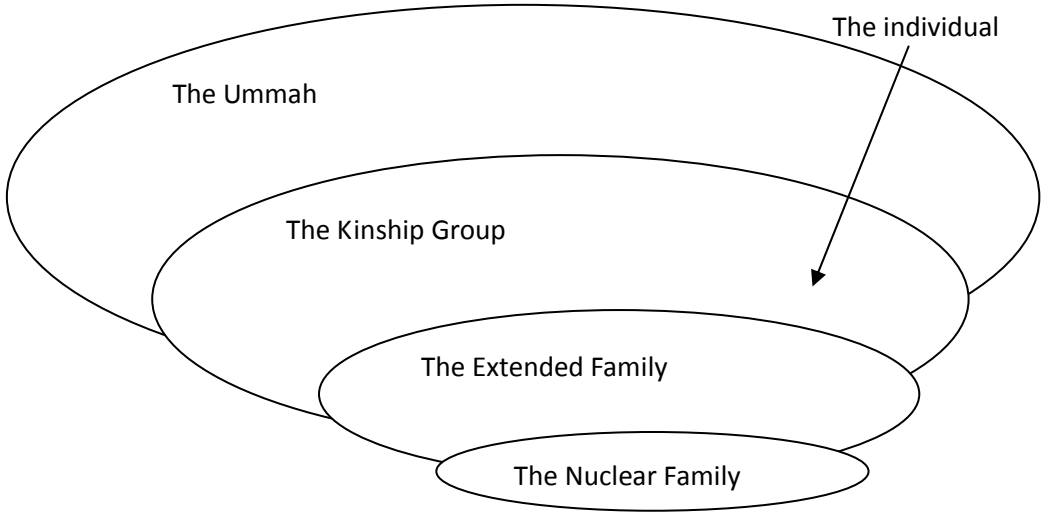
It is an Islamic doctrine that birth finds all naturally "Muslim" and that it is parents and culture that make us something else. It is a Jewish doctrine that one is Jewish by virtue of

having at least a Jewish mother. Why are we Christians? The assumption of all in the Muslim World is that we were brought up in "Christian" countries.

One's religion, culture, community and country – in fact one's very identity – are all very closely linked. This is an Islamic view and it is widely accepted in the Hindu, Buddhist and African national religions' worlds as well. This is the heart of Harvard University professor Samuel Huntingdon's thesis of the future – **Clash of Cultures.** He divides the world into six major cultures and predicts that future wars will be between these cultures.

The clashes will result from the will of one 'people' to dominate and exploit others. When this happens, the defensive instincts of people come into operation. It isn't a question of right or wrong, but of yours and mine. The individual born and brought up in one group seldom, if ever, has a chance to choose or select anything but what his ethnic group holds dear. Loyalty to the group takes precedence over every other consideration and any deviation is punished violently.

In Muslim societies individuals relate to each other in a highly complex system of blood relationships – a kinship group larger than the extended family.



So those who turn to Christ from Islam automatically lose their kinship group and are stripped of their entire social security – house, property, business and job. They also lose their wife or husband and children along with the extended family and friends.

An assumption inherent in this view that faith is inherited is that all religions are an outward expression of a deeper universal spiritual reality and that each region of the world has its own way to God. Therefore any attempt at conversion is not only unnecessary but it encourages tension and disloyalty. So truth depends on where you are and who you are. There are no absolutes.

This is a very attractive view. It isn't shared by Islamists but by the majority of the world's Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims. But this view and its pre-suppositions don't solve two basic problems:

- How do you choose between opposing values both in a culture and between cultures?
- It doesn't deal with the basic problem – the intractable problem of evil.

No one denies the existence of poverty, ignorance, disease, the growth of violence, superstition and growing corruption in the political sphere. Many Muslim governments are woefully corrupt and Muslim friends freely admit this. Muslims sometimes raise questions about the relationship between political power and a faith community. But the Medina model of the integration of political, military and faith under one leader pre-dominates.

The triumphalism of Medina is normative for authentic Islam. This corruption creates:

- a wider gap between rich and poor
- negligence in administration
- wastage in time and energy
- accidents in public works
- a distortion of the value of honest work
- a weakening of public morality, social justice, communal harmony and law and order

All Muslims will agree that evil is growing in society. The suspicion is that many evils are coming from outside – from the "Christian West". They also feel that the Christian West has nothing to offer because corruption and decadence in the west is so very apparent.

In India, Pakistan, Egypt, Lebanon etc., there is a definite Christian community that is usually very old. Christians from these communities have Christian names, their own way of dress and, in Arabic at least, their own vocabulary and style of speaking. Being a Christian is, by definition, being part of the Christian community. It is a matter of birth and family, not of personal conviction or spiritual experience.

Conversion (changing one's religion) is considered by both Muslim and Christian communities as a threat to family, community and culture. Conversion unsettles the boundaries by which 'selfhood', citizenship, nationhood and community are defined. These communities feel very uncomfortable if their borders are found to be permeable.

If there is more than one community in a Muslim country then there is more than one code of law. There is one law for Muslims and one law for those of Dhimmi status. Each community has separate laws for marriage, divorce, adoption and inheritance. So everyone is part of a legal/religious community.

So the Christian community also sees itself as a birth-ascribed kinship group and in many places Muslim-background followers of Jesus are not at all welcome.

The implication of all this is that one's religious affiliation has very little to do with one's relationship with God. **Religion is not a spiritual concept but a cultural one.**

- **The Other, Biblical View of Religion**

The Biblical analysis of the human problem of evil is radical. Its view of human nature is both extremely optimistic and very pessimistic. Human beings – all of them – are made by God. Each of us has a unique dignity and value. We are created as individuals but we are to live in community and our high destiny is to live in relationship with God. We are to live out His will and purposes in our world, co-operating and working with God. The potential of this relationship is limitless. An Early Church Father said, ***"The Glory of God is a human being fully alive."*** This is the positive side of Biblical truth.

The negative side is that **all** human beings have rejected this relationship and preferred to go their own ways. The Bible calls this "sin" and it is the cause of the alienation we experience – in ourselves, from each other, from the world of nature and from God.

So our problem isn't ignorance, but rebellion against God. The Bible says that people are perhaps unconscious of this alienation but nevertheless they seek for God in different ways and different places. Their images and ideas represent their yearnings for God. And God has graciously revealed something of Himself to everyone through nature and often in culture. He has placed "eternity in their hearts" partly by placing redemption analogies in every culture.

To an extent, everyone knows God as Creator and as the source of identity and being, though He is so much greater than all our imagining! So all of us are equally human beings, all are equally subject to God's law and all equally responsible for each other. But sadly

none of us have the ability or power to overcome the downward pull of sin and death.

But reality isn't just us seeking God, but also **God is seeking us**! He has set a standard by which all of us can judge how far our efforts to seek God have been authentic. God intervened at a certain point in space-time and actually became part of our world as a human being – Jesus. We are all judged by the standard He set!

The fact is that not all of us have been equally sincere. We have made our own choices about how things should be and how God should act. We have been idolatrous and often made God in our own image. We have often failed to do even what we thought was the right thing to do. Jesus came to judge us for our own deception of ourselves, our untruth and our lack of sincerity. He also came to show to us God's great love for us still and that there is a path of forgiveness. But forgiveness, although wonderful, isn't enough. We lack the moral and spiritual power to practise what we know. So God changes us! He transforms our nature. He gives us power to live good lives and ultimately He delivers us from the power of death.

So God has provided for us a Universal Saviour and a personal approach to God so that we can relate to this great Personal Being – the Creator of the Universe.

Early Christians in the first and second centuries were often accused of being atheists and having no religion at all! Why? – Because their relationship with God was so very unlike anything typically religious. In fact many have advocated the position that the Gospel of the Kingdom is not a religion at all! Neither is the Gospel a culture. Acts 11:26 says, ***"The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch."*** (See Acts 26:28 and 1 Pet. 4:16 as the only other references to 'Christians' in the N.T.) "Believers" was the more usual word. It was the mixing of Jewish and Gentile believers that required a new name to be coined by the bemused pagans who invented, '*Cristianoi*' – those who name Christ and owe allegiance to Him. Certainly it is radically different from what Muslims, Hindus and others think is the 'Christian' religion. Charles Duhens defined a Christian in this way **"*a decent, respectable or presentable person.*"** He had a cultural view of religion. A Christian represented the best in a culture! We will come back to this when we look at conversion.

What is the 'faith' we believe? It is almost impossible to summarize in a few paragraphs! There are **three** overlapping, inter-dependant concepts at the core:

- **Jesus is at the centre**. The background from the Old Testament is "the Kingdom" and "the Messiah". A Muslim must begin to understand these concepts **before** he comes to Jesus. Jesus came teaching, healing and serving. His affirmation of the forgiving Father, of accessible grace and of immediate and ultimate salvation, incurred steadily increasing hostility from the religious authorities as well as from the guardians of privilege and the status quo.

  Jesus understood this hostility in the context of the love that suffers. This 'mind' of Jesus is vital to an understanding of the Cross. We see **<u>who</u>** the Messiah is when we see **<u>how</u>** the Messiah is. When we learn **the pattern**, then we are able to identify **the person** – Jesus the Messiah the Saviour of the World.

- **Jesus is God incarnate**. The "mind" of Jesus is the mind of God. The idea of God is contained in Jesus and His relationship with the world. Jesus is God's great historic act of love for mankind. ***"The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the World."*** (1 Jn. 4:14) ***"The Word is made flesh."*** (Jn. 1:14) We worship God in terms of Jesus because we believe Jesus to be the self-expression of God.

- **Followers must have the same 'mind'**. (Phil. 2: 5-8) Those who know themselves to be redeemed must be involved in redeeming others. Our calling is to relate to every situation as Jesus would, namely with a love that responds in hope and grace. One of the effects of this 'Jesus-mindedness' is the breakdown of religiousness (racial/cultural religion) in followers of Jesus. Race has yielded to grace! We are no longer religious!

2.2 Proselytism

Dominant communities in the Muslim World refer to proselytism rather then conversion, because they want to emphasise the forcible nature of religious change. The term comes from the Greek word '*proselytos*' which means a stranger – one that comes from abroad or from another culture. The Hebrew words '*Ger*' or '*Necher*' have the same signification. The implication is to make a foreigner change his culture/religion to be just like yours. The word proselytism has become loaded with the concept of manipulation, propaganda and loss of individual self-control and will power. The assumption is that the 'convert' has no choice in the matter. Essentially proselytism is coercive and relates to terms like brainwashing, mind control, programming, coercive persuasion, thought reform and – at a material level – bribery.

It is assumed that proselytism and Christian activity are synonymous. So Christian witnesses are bad people who seek to undermine cultures, exploit weak-minded people and "de-culture" them. It is assumed that the 'convert' will change his:

- legal status
- name
- diet
- clothes
- housing

All this implies a transfer from one community to another and a major 're-socialisation' into a Christian community. They have to face an identity crisis and social insecurity at the point of conversion as they switch from one community to another. Proselytism is seen exclusively in terms of **external changes**.

Hinduism doesn't mind conversion as long as the convert continues to perform the tasks enjoined on him by his caste affiliation. So conversion is a threat in terms of political and economic power.

In the Muslim World proselytism is considered to be arrogant cultural imperialism by western cultures. Tolerance in the *Ummah* is meant to be **a freedom of continuity** to what one may have been if born outside it or the freedom to migrate to Islam. Proselytism by Christians seems particularly irrational for it is trying to reduce Muslims from being in that high state to an inferior position of dhimmi status – an 'inferiorisation' process. Conspiracy theories abound as to why we should do this.

Jesus warned the Pharisees, ***"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single proselyte (convert) and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."*** (Mt. 23:15)

Do we proselytise? Should we proselytise? The answer is 'yes' and 'no'. To the first question the answer sadly is often, "Yes". I have seen examples when, along with the Gospel, there has been an attempt to transfer western culture and western attitudes. We have been eager to extract 'converts' out of their families and culture and send them off to Bible Schools in the West never to return. The implication to the community is that we believe our culture is superior and Muslims are inferior. The *Ummah* feels that what has happened is tantamount to kidnapping! Our Korean brethren have also tended to do the same thing – the importation of Korean culture – especially Korean church culture – into the emerging fellowships of believers – sending Muslim background believers to Bible seminary in Korea etc.

The weakness of what we have been doing is that we have been making our disciples into followers of us! What we are called to do is to make followers of Jesus! It is a great tragedy when a 'Muslim convert' is killed because he has become like us and not a real disciple of Jesus Christ. We should never pressure people to 'make a decision'. This is true whether they are Muslim friends or our own children or anyone in any culture.

All strategies for conversion that are coercive and manipulative are very wrong! We should never proselytise! We should hate all forms of proselytism! We should determine by God's grace never to proselytise. With a clear conscience we should tell governments and the *Ummah* that we dislike all forms of proselytism, we think it is morally wrong and they are quite right to forbid it!

2.3 Conversion

This is a change of adherence from one religion or faith to another that can take place at any one of the following levels:

- **External level**

  Changes at this level are nothing more than external conformity. They are usually shallow, superficial and sometimes transient.

- **Authority level**

  Changes at this level are deeper than the external level. They touch on why people do what they do and **where** or **to whom** they turn for support – it could be a book, a set of cultic rules and regulations, a tradition or a person such as a 'pir'. This level is sometimes called a **value change**.

  Conversion to Islam occurs **only** at these two levels – the external and authority levels. The third level of transformation is unknown to them.

- **Transformation**

  Changes at this level take place at the very heart of one's being, right at the core centre. It is not a question of **form** but of **essence**; not of words but of inner spiritual and intellectual integrity; not of action, but of existence. It is a change of heart and mind **with a new personal relationship with God being established**.

- **Continuity and Discontinuity**

  This follows 'transformation'. By 'continuity', we mean a set of beliefs and behaviours carried from one faith into another when conversion takes place. Discontinuity stands for the opposite – beliefs and behaviours abandoned upon conversion.

Conversion is a multifaceted experience

Conversion is a phenomenon that raises many questions. What happens to a person in conversion? What are the consequences of conversion? How do we evaluate the process? Is it something to be sought after or feared? What processes are involved in religious conversion? The whole process can be looked at from a theological, psychological, sociological and phenomenological point of view. How you look at the issue very much depends on your worldview!

The New Testament Greek words (*epi* – and *apostrephein* and *metanoein*) are very seldom used by Paul – once in Acts 15:3. John also avoids using the loaded terms *'metanoia'* and '*metanoein'*. Throughout church history the meaning of the word has changed a great deal. In 325 AD when Christianity became the state religion, huge numbers of pagans converted at an external level. This was the meaning in Europe until the medieval period when "conversion" was understood totally in relation to the call to the monastic life. Reformers like Luther very rarely used the word (4 times in all his writings!). Repentance was the key word for the Reformers – not a single act but **a life time process of repentance.**

It was only at the time of "The Evangelical Awakening" in the 18th century that "conversion" came into widespread use meaning an individual, instantaneous event. It is this meaning that is used by evangelicals today. So the idea of "conversion" has been coloured by several non-Biblical factors.

The Biblical Language of Conversion

The Greek word *epistrepho* (conversion) involves the idea of turning back or turning around – a change in direction that involves both mind and spirit. In the Old Testament "national turning" involved repentance and a recommitment to the ordinances of worship and to the ethical standard of the Covenant. (Examples: 2 Chron. 29 and 30 in Hezekiah's day and 2 Chron. 33: 12, 13 Manasseh's "conversion". It is also used of a non-covenant people – Nineveh in Jonah 3:5-10)

In the New Testament, conversion is **a spiritual re-orientation**: **turning away** from sin and an allegiance to self and **turning towards** submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The word 'conversion' only appears once – Acts 15:3. Other words and phrases are used: e.g. through preaching people are "awakened" and turn from idols to God (See Acts 9:35, 11:12; 1 Thess. 1:9). It is clear that the New Testament is speaking about the level of '**Transformation'** and that the process involves **a decisive, Godward re-orientation of a person's inner world** that changes his/her basic relationship with God.

Rather than give abstract definitions of transformation, the Book of Acts gives the stories of five selected people from different backgrounds, cultures and temperaments. They have different prior religious experiences. Essentially they are representative of all people:

- The Ethiopian/Sudanese eunuch (Ch. 8)
- The Pharisee – Saul (Ch. 9)
- The Roman – Cornelius (Ch. 10)
- The merchant – Lydia (Ch. 16)
- The Roman Jailer (Ch. 16)

There are commonalities in the sequence of events that led to their "turning" to God. But notice **none were challenged to 'convert'**. The 'turning' was a **process** of several steps:

(i) All went through a period of preparation

- ✓ The Sudanese was reading the Scriptures
- ✓ Paul had training in Judaism and the Law
- ✓ Cornelius was a God-fearer and a man of prayer
- ✓ Lydia was a worshipper of God and in the habit of prayer
- ✓ The jailer probably listened to Paul and Silas before their imprisonment (Acts 16:12)

(ii) All heard preaching about Jesus, or experienced His presence

- ✓ Philip explains the good news of Jesus to the Sudanese
- ✓ Jesus appears to Paul
- ✓ Peter preaches to Cornelius
- ✓ Paul preaches to Lydia
- ✓ Paul and Silas preach to the jailer

(iii) There are questions – a dialogue – as part of the process

- ✓ The Sudanese questions Philip
- ✓ Paul asks Jesus about His identity
- ✓ Cornelius asks the angel for an explanation of the vision
- ✓ The jailer asks, "What must I do to be saved?"

(iv) There is evidence of the activity of the Holy spirit – i.e. something supernatural in the process

- ✓ The presence of Philip by the road
- ✓ Paul directly encounters the Risen Lord

- ✓ Cornelius sees an angel in his vision
- ✓ The Lord "opened the heart" of Lydia (Acts 16:14)

(v) The person undergoes baptism

Luke's summary of Paul's ministry: ***"Many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized."*** (Acts 18:8)

(vi) The results of the process were evident

- ✓ The Sudanese and the jailer are filled with joy
- ✓ Paul begins to preach about Jesus
- ✓ Cornelius speaks in tongues
- ✓ Lydia and the jailer show hospitality

Transformation is more than the work of a moment. There appear to be **5 key elements**.

- **It is God-centred**

  Jesus used the framework of the Kingdom of God and it is in this context that the call "to turn" was given***. "The time is fulfilled; the Kingdom … is at hand, turn*** (*metanoiete*) ***and believe the Gospel."*** (Mk. 1:15) The possibility of turning has now come because Jesus has come. Essentially a new relationship is established because of an understanding of God in terms of **my personal Father**. The change here is not like shifting the gear while driving the car. It is often a long and difficult process.

- **It is the whole human being re-establishing his/her relationship with God.**

  It concerns three aspects:

  - ✓ What you turn away from
  - ✓ What you are turning to
  - ✓ The act of turning itself

  Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, ***"… you turned (****epestrepsate****) from idols to be servants of the living and true God and to wait expectantly for the appearance from heaven of His Son Jesus."*** (1 Thess. 1:9)

- **It leads – via a "power encounter" – to the assertion that Jesus is Lord.**

  It is accepting that the claims and power of Jesus are greater than ordinary ties of loyalty – the power of money (Mt. 6:24) or the power of family relations. (Mt. 10:37) Loyalty to Jesus is supreme over all other loyalties. John in his writings particularly emphasises the words '*Krinein*' and '*Krisis*' of this power encounter with Jesus. (Jn. 3:19; 12:31; 16:8, 11)

- **Transformation isn't just conversion**; it is also baptism and enfolding in the believing community. (See Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:26-29, 1 Cor. 12:13)

- **Transformation is a positive and joyful process** (Lk. 15:7) even though it appears to be a slow and learned process!

Conversion and Culture

It is very important **Biblically** to understand the relationship between conversion and culture. How should a 'convert' relate to his culture? It was just this problem that the apostle Paul wrote about in his letter to the Galatian Christians. He had been their 'midwife' in their 'transformation'. (Gal. 4:13, 19) His answer was that instead of being bound by the superimposed culture of 'the midwife' (in this case Judaism and its central cultural symbol – circumcision) they were to live out the freedom which is granted to all believers as they start their process of 'transformation' by Jesus.

The implication of Paul's letter to the Galatians is that new life in Christ is freedom from all cultural compulsives. So a transforming believer is free to work out his freedom in the

framework of any culture. So when a Muslim is 'transformed' by Jesus, what will be new and what will remain from Islam – that is both a culture and a religion? This raises the issue of cultural continuity and discontinuity.

Continuity and Discontinuity

To empower people is to give them options and the Holy Spirit empowers us. We live in a world where change is inevitable. It comes from all directions and there are always multiple sources of change. Change is always complex and change brings conflict.

All Muslim cultures are under pressure to change – from globalisation and many other factors. What are the options for these cultures?

- ✓ **Isolation and withdrawal** – the Taliban attempted this.
- ✓ **Assimilation** – incorporate the changes as they come along, as all are equally valid. This seems to be the preferred option of the 'West'.
- ✓ **Selective accommodation**: this is surely one we can agree on with the Muslim community.

It would be **nice** to come to agreement on the importance of all communities having religious freedom – to worship, to teach, to change their faith or to be left alone not to change. But this probably will not happen due to Satanic opposition.

Some Muslim background believers have experienced 'transformation'. Can they stay within their culture? But transformation in the centre of their being will have outward effects and these will be noticed. The Gospel centres on grace, forgiveness and the acceptance of who we are. What are some of the consequences of transformation?

(i) There are ethical effects

There will be new attitudes to the poor, to corruption, to selfishness and ambition and to money. So there are social and economic changes. The believer is no longer willing to accept or pay bribes. But essentially he will stay within his extended family and kinship group and ultimately within the Ummah. All cultures have good and bad aspects. The bad ethical aspects have to be rejected. This might lead to some pressure from the majority. But this should not mean separation from the extended family and the kinship group.

(ii) Political consequences

Essential to the Gospel is the appeal to personal choice. So believers ought to speak about this. Another Biblical principle is that all are equal under the law and all should be called to account. But certainly this is not common in the Ummah. All should have the same rights. There is no Biblical form of government so there is latitude in this area. Essentially the believer will champion the cause of individual freedom **linked with** a concern for the well-being of all. So social exclusion, inequalities and ruthless competition are not compatible with "Kingdom" values. But what I want to stress is that **there is no need for a new believer to leave his home, family and kinship group**.

The Muslim community uses the word 'conversion' to mean 'level two' (the authority/value level) where a 'convert' leaves his own community, changes his legal status, his name, his diet, his clothes and his housing and transfers all this to another community. Is this the outcome we are hoping for? **The answer is most emphatically not!** Using the words **as Muslims commonly understand them**, we are**n't** trying to convert Muslims into Christians! Our aim isn't Muslim 'converts'! We would do well to erase this word from our vocabulary! Much misunderstanding is caused by words like 'conversion' and 'convert'. If you are asked, "Are you trying to convert Muslims?" the answer should be an unequivocal "No". Because by this Muslim's term of reference the implication is that you wish to transfer a person from

the Muslim culture (out of his family and kinship group) to the Christian community (which has all the vices of western culture). This is not what we want to happen!

So we don't "proselytise"!

We don't want to "convert" anyone!

We don't want anyone to apostatise!

3. Conversion to Islam in an African Context

The purpose of this section is for us to appreciate how Muslims see conversion. I will mainly quote Dr. Tohunboh Adeyemo's paper: **Social and Theological change in Conversion in the African Context**. It reflects his experience and that of his tribe – the Yoruba of Nigeria.

The Yoruba originally followed an indigenous form of African traditional religion. This was the heart of their culture and their worldview was the product of their perception, encounters and reflection on their experience of the world in which they lived. Basically their world consisted of two overlapping spheres – the visible, tangible, concrete world of people, animals and vegetation – the physical sphere. The other sphere is spiritual and invisible – the sphere of a supreme God and other gods, spirits good and evil, ancestors etc. There were two overlapping spheres but one whole.

Some of their beliefs include:

- ✓ belief in a supreme God, but also in the existence of lesser gods
- ✓ belief in spirits good and evil
- ✓ belief in ancestors
- ✓ belief in taboos and that moral violations cause disruption in human relationships
- ✓ belief in sacrifices – to ward off evil
- ✓ belief in the continuing existence of the dead
- ✓ belief in judgement from the high god and the living community of elders

These belief systems have the following functions.

- ✓ They are used as a medium of education. For example teaching taboos about dietary laws – other taboos teach sexual morality.
- ✓ Religion serves as a container of a people's history and cultural values
- ✓ It inculcates a life of union and responsibility to the tribe
- ✓ It is used to govern the social organisation of the tribe
- ✓ It promotes respect for old age
- ✓ It has generally been tolerant of other religions

Religion promotes the following values:

- ✓ The sanctity of life – life is believed to be the properly of the high god and no man has the right to terminate it
- ✓ People–centeredness – things are made for the benefit of man
- ✓ Being part of a community
- ✓ A holistic approach to reality – religion is at the centre giving meaning to all
- ✓ Sense of shame rather than guilt
- ✓ The acquisition of power through divination is very important

Islam entered the Yoruba tribal area from the north through Hausa and Fulani traders. Being a "book" religion and the Yoruba being largely illiterate, propagation was mainly by oral communication. Conversion to Islam was based on Allah who was the supreme god and salvation consisted in believing in the supreme god and doing righteous deeds (Sura 2:75). This was expanded to include the six principles of Iman and the five Pillars (Sura 2:172).

With the Yoruba, tribal and family **solidarity** is given preference over religious affiliation. Conversion consists of saying the Shehadeh, followed by a ritual bath and the adoption of an Arabic name. In some Sufi groups the new convert wears white robes. People become Muslims because:

- ✓ Islam promotes brotherhood
- ✓ Islam offers material prosperity
- ✓ Islam admits that you can continue many traditional practices such as polygamy. In other words there is little discontinuity.

Essentially conversion **for most** occurs at the **external** level and there is a syncretism between traditional Yoruba religion and Folk Islam.

For some conversion takes place at an **authority** level. The convert has to obey the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Now there is only one god, but what is allowable is a whole hierarchy of other spirits. Worship changes radically. The language is Arabic and the place of meeting is the mosque. Probably the mark of authority level conversion is the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Note that there is **no note of inner transformation**. There is **no** radical change of worldview. Values change very little since mixing or accommodation is the order of the day. For example: Christian concepts are entirely absent such as:

- ✓ the understanding of God in personal terms and in a personal way as My Father
- ✓ prayer as a conversation
- ✓ the person of the Holy Spirit giving us power to live a new life

The Yoruba Muslim convert to Islam is modifying his culture to some extent. There is very little **spiritual** change expected at all. But the **political consequences** are very great. The Yoruba have to choose between Christianity and Islam. It is fashionable to become a Muslim – especially among the illiterate. In some quarters it is a group or village phenomenon: "everyone is doing it." If you know anything about politics in Nigeria, you will realise that the Christian-Muslim split is at the heart of so much unrest. So to Muslims "conversion" is effectively **choosing political sides**.

For the Muslim community, the external level of conversion is perfectly acceptable and strengthens their hands politically. For the Islamists, they would **prefer** conversion at the authority level. The transformation level is unknown, unthinkable and unbelievable.

4. A Biblical Approach to Muslims: Our Attitudes

Before we look at methods of evangelism I believe it is very important to have the right attitudes of heart towards our Muslim friends. Correct methodology with wrong attitudes is being a "clanging gong". ((1 Cor. 13) So here are a number of key attitudes that need to be deeply rooted in our hearts. These roots need to be constantly fed and watered so that the attitudes are sustained – without this they will wither.

4.1 God has created of one blood all nations on the earth (Acts 17:26)

When we approach Muslims we should see them as fellow human beings, created in the image of God. As human beings we are all addressable by God and we all have the capacity to hear God's voice. We must learn to focus on **the spiritual qualities** that our common humanity gives us. Our tendency is to focus on what makes our Muslim friends **different** from us. This quickly engrosses us in the abstract concepts of theological Islam. As westerners we have a worldview of dichotomisation – separating entities into different parts. This helps us do a systematic analysis of Islam as an abstract **system**. We develop **our** Christian system vs. **their** Islamic system and we argue. We have forgotten that the essence of life as a human being is relationships and the most fundamental of these is our relationship with God. It **is** necessary for us to understand and appreciate the belief-systems and worldview of Muslims in our effort to build the quality of our **relationships** with our Muslim friends. But we must never forget the commonality we have with them.

4.2 The Lord is sovereignly in control of all history

So often we forget that Jesus is Lord! He has worked and is working in the nations and ultimately nothing can thwart His purposes. In fact, even apparent evil can turn out for the furtherance of His Kingdom.

A completely pagan king (Nebuchadnezzar) – with all the cruelty of autocratic Babylonian power – was described by Jeremiah as ***"God's servant".*** (Jer. 43:10) Cyrus, king of Persia, is called by Isaiah: "***God's shepherd***" and "***God's anointed***". (Is. 43:28, 44:1) There is no evidence to suggest that Cyrus was consciously pursuing Yahweh's will and purpose. God is the Lord of all rulers and all systems – religious, political and cultural. So cultures and worldviews are never totally evil and irredeemable. God has been at work in all religious and cultural systems, preserving them from being utterly wrong. We easily forget that God is Master of all.

Why did God allow Islam to develop? At many points He could have interfered in Muhammad's life and in the subsequent history of the spread of Islam and yet He allowed it to grow, why? I don't know. This is speculation on my part, but here is a hypothesis.

The revelation God gave of Himself in the Old Testament period was given in a Semitic culture and in a Semitic language to a Semite. This was clearly in the purpose of God. The early church was a Jewish church made up of Semitic believers. At enormous cost, this church contextualised the Gospel into the Greco-Roman worldview of the first century and the New Testament was written in Greek. But by the third century in the Roman Empire Semitic Christians lost all their distinctiveness and in the Western church Semitic thought forms were lost. Greco-Roman thinking has dominated western culture over the centuries and in the 19th/20th centuries this worldview was globalised as modernity. Now we are increasingly discarding this worldview in the West – post modernity.

Over the last 14 centuries Islam has been the guardian of a Semitic worldview in the world at large. The Evangelical Church in the Arab World is very heavily westernised in its culture. As the Greco-Roman worldview breaks up, what a wonderful thing it would be if **Semitic Christians** helped the world-wide church to get back to understanding its roots. This could only happen if large numbers of Muslims became followers of Christ **and** kept their Semitic culture! What about the Messianic Assemblies in Israel? They too can help, but most Jews in Israel came from Europe and are heavily dichotomised. This has influenced the Messianic Assemblies. Is this in the heart and mind of God? Possibly it is. It would certainly explain the growth of Muslim communities (12% of world's population in 1900 and 22% of world's population 2000).

The point I am trying to make is that God very often works with wide horizons and long time–lines. His perspective is so much greater than ours. Our lack of humility is very similar to Abraham's when he pretended his wife was his sister. He lied because of fear and failed to appreciate God's sovereign control over the pagan Abimilech.

4.3 The Work of the Holy Spirit and the place of conscience

We often minimize the ability of the Holy Spirit to convince men and women of sin and to draw them to the Father. It is so easy to allow the Evil One to shrink our faith over time as we see little outward response. The fact is that in every Muslim friend we have a secret ally – our friend's conscience. Now this conscience might have been quietened over the years due to cultural pressure. But when the conscience hears **the truth** it always responds to truth with affirmation. This may well be an alarming discovery to our Muslim friend. It is often the awakened voice of conscience that causes outward anger and fear in our friend. The Holy Spirit will quicken that conscience. Our role is to plant seeds of truth in faith, believing that God will draw people to repentance and faith.

Cornelius is very like a sincere Muslim. He was a "***devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms liberally to the people and prayed constantly to God***." The angel

told him that his prayers and his alms had ascended as a memorial before God. God answered the prayers of this, as yet unsaved, man and ultimately he and his household put their trust in Jesus and were baptised. (Acts 10:2, 4, 44 - 45)

So in the light of Scripture, I believe there are many Muslims who are devoutly seeking God. I believe many will find Him! The bottleneck in the story is not the Holy Spirit's inability to speak to Cornelius, but Peter's unwillingness to see this as a possibility. Are we as prejudiced as Peter?

4.4 The Power of the Word of God

We are committed to the unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible, even though we have to contextualise the vocabulary so that others can appreciate and understand the message. As western Christians, unlike most aural preference learners, we tend to underestimate the power of the Word of God. We don't major on memorisation. We don't quote Scripture often enough. We think our **personal** testimony of Jesus Christ is likely to communicate more effectively that the Scriptures.

For Muslims this is a mistake. Studying the Scriptures together with a Muslim friend should be a major aim in our ministry. It is usually best to start with Genesis. Memorizing verses of Scripture together should be a part of every visit if possible. Why? The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures very effectively to speak into the hearts and minds of Muslims. We need to have great confidence in the effectiveness of the Scriptures.

4.5 Contextualising the Gospel

The Bible gives a great deal of flexibility as to how the Gospel should be presented. For example, the central issue of the Cross has to be presented, but is there only one way to do this? No, for in the Bible these are several different illustrations explaining the necessity of the death of the Lord Jesus.

- **The Sacerdotal Picture**: using the language of priest, tabernacle and of animal sacrifice on the altar (the book of Hebrews uses this approach). There is not much correspondence in Islamic cultures but there is some. Eid al Adah for example – the concept of a substitute is present.
- **The Forensic Picture**: the language of crime and punishment judgement and justification. The book of Romans is strong on this approach. It was written to Roman believers at the heart of the Empire's legal system. Roman law is at the heart of much western culture. This approach is largely not understood by Muslims. They don't have the legal background to understand it. Shariah is based on very different principles.
- **The Victory Picture**: the language of the defeat of evil spiritual forces (Col. 2:15). This is extremely appropriate with people involved in Folk Islam who live in constant fear of evil spirits.
- **The Redemption Picture**: the language of emancipating slaves by paying a ransom (Mt. 20:28 etc.). This has some value with Muslims.
- **The Relational Picture**: the language of estrangement and costly reconciliation (2 Cor. 5: 18-21). This is almost universal in its appeal.

So because the Bible gives several different pictures to explain the Cross, we are free to select the Biblical explanation that is most likely to prove helpful in a particular Muslim cultural context or with a particular person.

4.6 Our need of Compassion

What should motivate us to share the Gospel with Muslims? Should not the love of Christ constrain us, as it did of Paul? There is a lovely strong phrase used of the Lord Jesus: ***"He was moved with compassion"***. The Greeks thought the seat of our emotions was in the gut (abdomen). The actual root of the word compassion is being moved at a "gut

level" – at the depths of who you are. It is the strongest word for love. It **is** pity, but far, far more. There are **five human conditions** that evoked this feeling in the Lord Jesus and moved Him in the depths of His personhood and drove Him to action:

- **Sickness**: ***"He had compassion on the multitudes and healed their sick."*** (Mt. 14:14 see also Matt. 20:34 related to blindness)
- **Hunger**: ***"I have compassion on the multitude for they have been with me three days and have nothing to eat."*** (Mt 15:32)
- **Death and bereavement**: The widow of Nain was leaving the town to bury her only son. She had lost her husband and now her son. If you know anything of Middle Eastern culture you will empathize with this woman. The Lord Jesus, ***"Felt compassion for her and He said to her, 'Do not weep'. Then He went up and touched the coffin and those carrying it stood still. He said, 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' The dead man sat up and began to talk and Jesus gave him back to his mother."*** (Lk. 7:11-17)
- **Loneliness and alienation**: I am thinking of the loneliness and alienation of lepers. Not only were lepers suffering from Hansen's disease (a bacterial infection), but they were outcastes in society. They certainly suffered from loneliness and alienation. It was a doubly sad life for lepers. When lepers came to Jesus and asked for help, He was ***"moved with compassion"*** and stretched out His hand and touched them and said to them, ***"I am willing. Be clean!"*** (Mk. 1:41)
- **People lost, harassed and helpless, without leadership and guidance**

  "When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Mt. 9:36) Then follows a commission to His disciples to pray.

  Mexico City in AD 2000 had a population of 35 million people. The average age was 14 yrs. Just to maintain the current rate of unemployment, which was already far too high, the city would have to create one million more jobs each year. About six thousand tons of pollution fall from the air every day on Mexico city! In terms of carcinogenic toxicity this is equivalent of everyone smoking five packets of cigarettes a day!

  When the Lord sees cities like this, how does He feel? His heart is moved with compassion and He commissions us! How? **By moving our hearts with compassion and by motivating our wills to do something.**

  So our witness needs to be motivated by compassion. It is this love – this deep emotional response – that will:

  - ✧ cover a multitude of "sins" (cultural and linguistic mistakes)
  - ✧ communicate warmth and show empathy with people
  - ✧ pave the way for a verbal explanation

4.7 Developing an appreciation for the cultures of Muslim peoples

We need to read **source material** about Muslims, not just what expatriates have written about them. So read the Qur'an; read a life of Mohammad written by a Muslim; read the Hadith and prayer manuals. It is always helpful to read what is written by practising Muslims. It is valid to read about Muslims from missionary sources, but that should be a supplement not a substitute for reading material from "insiders" in Islam.

Also seek to read stories – especially short stories – about heroes of that particular culture. Legends, poetry and proverbs are also very helpful in understanding the values of your culture. Micah 4:13 is an interesting verse.

4.8 Developing a heart to pray

I am convicted by Paul's agony in prayer for his kinsmen. He says, ***"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart for them."*** (Rom. 9:2) As a result of this Paul prays, ***"My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved."*** (Rom. 10:1) Are we willing to imitate him in our prayer life just as he imitated Jesus?

Nothing much happens without prayer. It will be prayer for your friends that will deepen your friendships with them. It is **prayer** that God would open the hearts of these friends that will lead to their salvation.

There is so much that could be written here, but it has been written elsewhere. **Sharing your faith with a Muslim** by Charles Marsh is particularly helpful in stressing the importance of prayer.

5. Some Principles of Witness to Muslims

5.1 Incarnational witness

Dr. Sa'eed of Iran was a believer from a Kurdish Muslim background. He died in 1942. In the '60s, an old man living in the area where Dr. Sa'eed had worked was asked if he had ever known the Doctor. The old man went pale and whispered, *"Dr. Sa'eed was Christ Himself."*

Our great desire is that Jesus, in all His fullness, may be visible to Muslims in our lives. However it is our western (foreign) culture that is often **so** visible to Muslims that they have trouble seeing Jesus.

Incarnational witness means more than just the Living Word of God (Jesus) being clothed in flesh (ours). Jesus became flesh in a specific space-time setting. There were cultural implications in the incarnation. God specifically prepared beforehand the particular cultural matrix that Jesus was incarnated into. Incarnation does not occur in a vacuum, it is always tied into a culture.

For Jesus, incarnation meant a **human** expression of His divine nature and a **Jewish** expression of that nature. His was a Jewish way of life with Jewish culture and customs. It also meant subordination to a Jewish family setting. Paul sums it up succinctly, ***"For I tell you that Christ has became a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth."*** (Rom. 15:8) The same should be said of us – **we have become servants of the Afghans on behalf of God's truth**. So incarnational witness requires a servant-heart.

Jesus involved Himself with the Jewish people. See Him on the Mount of Olives just before the Crucifixion. His tears splash on the dusty ground. (Lk. 19:41) He cries, ***"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How often would I have gathered your children together, even as a hen gathers her chicks … but you were not willing."*** (Mt. 23:37) His was a servant heart.

Nassim, a Muslim, listened with an open heart to the Gospel as it was being explained to him. When asked why he was so open and had no objections, he replied with deep emotion, *"Years ago, a friend and I saw two nuns holding out their hands to receive money for a new Christian hospital. As we passed my friend spat with contempt into the hand of one of the nuns. Thoughtfully, she pulled out her handkerchief and wiped off the spittle. Then, smiling at my friend, she said, 'All right, that was for me. What will you give Jesus?' "* Nassim looked with tears in his eyes and said, *"Can anyone forget love like that?"*

Incarnational witness to Muslims demands that our service be motivated by love. It must be a love that will throw its arms around our Muslim friend's culture and embrace it. Nothing less will do.

- **An example of incarnational witness across culture from the life of Jesus**

The disciples were shocked to find Jesus bridging the culture and gender gap between Himself a Jew and a Samaritan village woman (John 4). They didn't relate at all to the despised and hated Samaritans who held wrong beliefs and who were polluted by Gentile

blood. All the disciples saw was the hardness of the Samaritans and their distance from the truth. Many see Muslims in exactly the same way – wrong and mixed up beliefs belonging to ignorant and inferior cultures. Jesus, on the other hand, said that Samaritans were a harvest field that was ripe. (Jn. 4:35) The problem was not in the hearts of the Samaritans, but in the hearts of the disciples! The Jews called the Samaritans "dogs" and the disciples had this spirit in themselves. Jesus loved the Samaritans. They sensed this and were deeply touched.

Arrogance and pride of nation, race, culture, status and even our belief system keeps us aloof and stops the flow of love. This happened in the disciples. But Jesus embraced these Samaritans, sleeping in their beds and dipping His fingers into the same bowl with them at mealtimes. (Jn. 4:40 etc.)

An attitude of superiority builds walls between us and Muslims. The woman in Jn. 4 asked where one should worship (Jerusalem vs Mt. Gerizim for Samaritans; Jerusalem vs Mecca for Muslims). Jesus lifted worship above specific places and forms, stating that the time was coming when true worship was to worship God ***"in spirit and in truth"***. Jesus presented Himself to the Samaritans as the Messiah – the Saviour of the World. But significantly, Jesus left the physical forms and places of worship a blank page even after discussing the subject. How did the Samaritans worship the Father after He left? Isn't Jesus really saying, *"The outward forms you use to worship may change. They are not crucial as long as you have the right focus and intent and are in relationship with the Father"?*

Muslim background believers sometimes say that their deepest experience of worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ is when kneeling with their foreheads in the ground. **They are free to worship that way!** They can structure their forms of worship according to their own preferences. Jesus has freed them! It is very sad for **us** to enslave them again, this time to western patterns in western-styled buildings. How willing are we for Jesus to be incarnated in a sanctified Muslim culture?

Is this not part of the meaning of Christ's incarnation? The previous state of Christ's person in indescribable glory was brought so completely into subjection in the incarnation that Jesus actually appeared before men as one of them. Though He always retained His divine nature, He was distinctly like us. Jesus became a Jew in order to reach the Jews. Paul became as a Gentile in order to reach the Gentiles. Through us Christ wants to be incarnated in "Muslim-form" in order to reach Muslims!

Why do we find this so strange? Probably because of the prejudice and resentment built up over the centuries in our 'Christian' hearts against Muslims! This is very similar to the attitude the disciples had towards the Samaritans! **No**! Incarnational ministry is born out of love in the heart of the one who is "like-minded" with Jesus, ***"Who, being in very nature God … made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death".*** (Phil. 2: 5-8)

The amazing thing here is that while Jesus was completely without sin in every point, yet he was so incarnately encultured with Jewish people (with such affinity and closeness) that He was actually mistaken for a sinful human being! The self-righteous accused Him of being a glutton and a winebibber! They found fault with Him for eating with sinners, implying that He was also one. (Mt. 11:19; Lk. 5:27-32) The Samaritans felt so much that Jesus was one of them that they invited Him to stay with them, eat with them and sleep in their beds! Jesus felt like family!

- **An example of incarnational witness across culture from the life of Paul**

Paul said, ***"I make myself a slave*** *(doulos)* ***to everyone, to win as many as possible." "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."*** (1 Cor. 9: 19 – 23)

Paul is saying that, **in respect to culture the messenger must change** rather than the hearer of the message. The only exception to this principle is where the culture of the hearer is so linked with sin that it cannot, in this part, be cleansed by God. (See Acts 15:20 for three examples) Paul is saying that the living message must be demonstrated in a cultural space-time setting. Christ must become incarnate in many different cultural forms in order to reach the lost.

Paul writing to **Gentile** believers Galatia says, ***"Formerly, when you didn't know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods."*** (Gal. 4:8) Clearly these believers were Gentiles and Paul was arguing that for anyone to impose Jewish customs and laws on Gentile believers is tantamount to making those customs and laws necessary for salvation. In that case, they would be making these laws and customs equivalent to, or at least on a par with, the person and the finished work of Jesus Christ. Paul rightly rejects this as "another Gospel".

So the principle is that our religious culture only becomes legalistic (another Gospel) when it is **added to Jesus** as a means of salvation and is then imposed on another culture. Because then the believer in the second culture is obliged to practise the imposed religious culture as well as to believe in Jesus. This makes the alien religious culture as important as the Lord Jesus Christ.

So when I, an evangelical Englishman, require a Muslim background believer to adopt my English religious forms (wearing a suit and tie to church), I am doing the very thing that Galatians condemns as acting in pure legalism. I might like ties and suits (in fact I don't!) and wear them without intending to impose them on others, but **I will still be a model they will copy**. I am then guilty of introducing "a false Gospel" according to Galatians!

Paul clarifies his case in Galatians when he says twice that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything. (Gal. 5:6, Gal. 6:15) It is in no way meritorious before God. But with circumcision you can't be a fence–sitter you either have it done or you don't. Which should you choose? The answer is simple, if you are a Gentile, don't be circumcised. (Gal. 2:3) If you are a Jew, conform to your own cultural pattern. (Acts 16: 1-3) Just don't believe that circumcision has anything to do with salvation. Any religious-cultural element, no matter if it is Jewish, Gentile, Christian or Muslim, is like "dung" when it comes to salvation and being accepted by God. (Phil. 3:4-9) As far as salvation and spirituality is concerned all religious-cultural forms are ***"weak, beggarly elements"*** and can't bring us to God. (Gal. 4:9) So never impose your religio-cultural forms (in my case English) on Muslim background believers, even if those forms are helpful in the way **you** live and worship.

- **What is Incarnational Witness?**

It is a witness to the Gospel of the Kingdom by a messenger in whom love (compassion) has worked so deeply that the messenger's own personal, national, racial, cultural and even outward religious forms/expressions are brought into complete subjection, so the hearers can see objectively the beauty and the wonder of Jesus demonstrated (revealed) to them – the Lord Jesus being incarnated again before their own eyes.

It is the witness of the messenger who seeks in every way possible (within the bounds of Biblical ethics and morality) to become **as the hearers** so the life of Jesus "shines forth" (is manifested) in the thought forms, in the communication forms and in the religio-cultural forms that are relevant and meaningful to the hearers and don't offend them.

The incarnational messenger knows there **is** an offense to our sinful proud nature inherent in the Gospel itself, but he/she will seek to remove all other objectionable factors. As an Englishman, I need to constantly remind myself that because of history and because of my lifestyle as an Englishman there will be much in me that can be offensive to a Muslim and that has nothing to do with the Gospel.

How far should we be willing to go to carry in ourselves "the incarnate Jesus" to a Muslim

community? We should become like them in everything but their sin. Hudson Taylor said we should become as much like the people we are witnessing to as possible in **everything** but their sin. This is not syncretism – the merging of conflicting Christian and Muslim beliefs – it is an identification that Jesus made **with** us and **for** us. This is costly!

- **An Example**

At the heart of many of Muslim religio-cultural forms are those that are associated with the various rites of passage ceremonies. These would include:

- ✓ The Cradle Party – 40 days after birth
- ✓ The Circumcision Party – varies with age – pre-puberty
- ✓ The Wedding Party
- ✓ Burial
- ✓ Commemoration of the Dead – 3 days after burial – 7 days – 40 days and finally one-year later

In addition there are major religious festivals.

In Persian cultures:	New Year
In all Muslim cultures:	Eid al-Adha (Kurban)
	Ramadan
	Eid al-Fitr (3-day celebration at the end of Ramadan)

The Shi'a celebrate the Death of Hussain on the tenth of Muharram.

Some cultures also celebrate the birthday of Mohammed.

I would just like to look at one of these rites of passage – the Iranian Muslim wedding. The bride and groom sit side-by-side facing a mirror. This symbolises that up to this point they have not known each other directly (even though in fact they may be first cousins). This relates to moral purity.

On a cloth in front of them is placed:

- A Qur'an in the centre on a *Kursi* – a symbol that God's Word should be at the centre of their lives
- Fresh greens – a symbol that their marriage may never go stale
- Goldfish in a bowl – a symbol that their marriage may be full of life
- Bread – a symbol that their table may never be bare
- An egg – a symbol that God may make the marriage fruitful
- A candle – a symbol that God may give them light on their new, untrodden path

At the end of the ceremony they break sugar cubes over their heads that their life together may be sweet!

How would a Muslim background believer in Iran change these religious-cultural forms? He would put the Bible in the place of the Qur'an and conduct the ceremony in the same way using a Christian message. I think Jesus would be delighted to attend this wedding!

- **Some Basic Guidelines for Incarnational Witness.**

1. Biblical teaching (doctrine), ethics and morals are not negotiable.
2. Most of the religio-cultural forms we grew up with in our own cultures aren't commanded in Scripture. They aren't wrong. In fact they are necessary because the life of Jesus should have a religio-cultural form as the context of its expression.
3. Under no circumstances should we impose our religio-cultural forms on the

believers of another culture. If we insist on doing so, we elevate these forms to the level of the Lord Jesus so that they too have saving merit. This becomes "another Gospel" (Jesus **+ my** religious culture). **This is wrong!** In no way can I add the ***"weak and beggarly"*** English religio-cultural forms to the person and work of Jesus on the Cross.

4. God deliberately left a blank in the New Testament in regard to almost all religio-cultural forms so that the Universal Lord Jesus could be expressed in and through any given culture – including Muslim cultures. And within Muslim cultures there are many forms He can use.

5. If a particular religio-cultural form violates Scriptural doctrine, ethics or morals in its actual elements and if it cannot be cleansed, it must be abandoned. Scriptural examples include forms relating to idolatry and immorality.

6. The messenger must take great care that new believers see the Scriptural principle that **the Lord Jesus wants to express Himself through their unique culture**. He made their unique culture. He loves that culture and wants to redeem that culture from all elements that mar it. In the future, people from that unique culture will worship around the Throne of God, purged and purified from all sin. (Rev. 5:9) This will take a special effort because those from the target culture naturally equate the Christian message with the messenger and his original religio-cultural background.

We must carry out incarnational witness in the Muslim World. We are not minimizing the necessity of the power of the Holy Spirit to change human lives. There is no new birth apart from God though the work of Jesus Christ by the regenerating agency of the Holy Spirit.

My contention is that we have disobeyed the Scriptures in much of our Muslim evangelism over the last two centuries and in some cases we are still doing so? James said, ***"It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for Gentiles who are turning to God …. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements."*** (Acts 15: 19, 20 and 28)

But we **have** made it difficult for Muslims who are turning to God! We have made it difficult by our lack of love and the resulting unwillingness to pay the price of submitting all our cultural, racial, thought and communication forms to this one task of being a messenger of the Gospel and allowing Jesus to be seen in us.

Paul writing to the Corinthian believers said, ***"You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the Living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."*** (2 Cor. 3:2-3)

5.2 The Principle of sowing and reaping in Scripture

The Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel emphasises, ***"Make disciples of all nations …."*** (Mt. 28:19) The inference for people from a western culture is one-on-one evangelism followed by individual disciplining of the new believer. In community-based cultures to "***make disciples***" involves church-planting – the church being a community of believers.

In Mk. 16:15 Jesus said**, *"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."*** Luke writes, ***"Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached*** (the Greek implies "heralded" – a loud and overt proclamation) ***in His name to all nations".*** (Lk. 24:47) The implication of these verses is that part of our commission is to indiscriminately proclaim the Gospel to everyone. This is sometimes called "mass evangelism" or "saturation evangelism".

It is part of the DNA of our movement – to attempt to reach **everyone** in a given area with a least something of the Gospel in their own heart language. For much of the last forty years the focus has primarily been on **literature** evangelism. But also in the last forty years we

have recognised the value of Christian radio, direct TV broadcasting via satellite, CDs, DVDs, audio cassettes and videos etc.

It has often been said of the Muslim World that one of the reasons results (in terms of people repenting and turning to God) have been very low is that there has been little sowing – so little reaping.

Paul expounds a principle shown throughout Scripture, ***"Remember this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."*** (2 Cor. 9:6) The context is giving, but the principle is obvious. The Parable of the Sower that Jesus taught us (Mt. 13:3-23, Mk. 4:1-12 and Lk. 8:4-15) emphasises the principle of sowing the seed of the Word of God and stresses that it **will** surely produce a harvest. This is reinforced by a beautiful passage in Isaiah 55: 10-11:

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 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."
Ps. 126:5-6 says, ***"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him."***

A major influence in the experience of almost every Muslim who has become a believer is that he/she was drawn to Jesus through reading the written Word of God. Because of their reverence for Holy Books, which God preserved in Islam, many Muslims treat the Old and New Testaments with respect. The Holy Spirit uses this: ***"The unfolding of your words gives light".*** (Ps. 119:130) It is for these reasons that "sowing the seed" has always been a high priority. It must continue to be so!

Focus Seed sowing among Aural Preference Learners

It is also true that there are two crucial factors in "sowing the seed" (reaching the masses with the Gospel).

1. The Scripture and other materials need to be in **the heart language** of the people to produce a better harvest. Wycliffe Bible Translators and others should be commended for emphasizing this point.
2. The vast majority (over 90%) of Muslims are aural preference learners. Literacy rates are low in the Muslim World. In many cases they are dropping due to high population growth. But in any case, the majority of Muslims prefer to learn things by watching and listening, rather than by reading about them. TV, films and videos are immensely popular everywhere. People enjoy stories, especially when there is a moral point to the stories. People also appreciate listening to cassettes and to the radio.

My belief is that most of our sowing should be among aural preference learners. This doesn't mean we no longer distribute Scriptures and Christian books. We should continue to distribute literature – especially Scripture. But Scripture distribution isn't enough.

The use of the Old Testament is very important. Let us do what we can to encourage people in radio and TV ministries to produce good quality materials. There is ample evidence that networking and partnership with others working in this area, so that there is a seamless operation between production, distribution and follow-up, greatly enhances the fruitfulness of evangelism.

Focus on Felt-needs in Seed Sowing

Tim Mathery wrote a book on felt-needs of Near-Eastern Arabs: **Reaching the Arabs – A Felt-needs Approach**. It was written in the 70s based on research done in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Research done today may be a little different. But to give you an idea of the possible felt needs in your community here is his list:

- ✓ The need to solve the basic survival needs of life – water, food etc. – the base of Maslow's pyramid of the hierarchy of needs
- ✓ The need to solve urgent social and communal problems. (It was during this period that "Black September" in Jordan and the Civil War in Lebanon were going on.)
- ✓ The need to reconcile modern thought with traditional religion
- ✓ The need to maintain community
- ✓ The need for honour
- ✓ The need to show hospitality in the midst of poverty
- ✓ The need for protection from the evil eye and evil spiritual beings
- ✓ The need for an all-encompassing religion (worldview) that made sense of everything – people felt their worldview was fragmenting
- ✓ The need for blessings – a sense of being blessed by God
- ✓ The need for freedom from sickness
- ✓ The need for freedom from shame
- ✓ The need to be thankful – when there was so little hope
- ✓ The need for inward spiritual vitality
- ✓ The need to overcome the fear of death
- ✓ The need for a mediator between God and man (!)
- ✓ The need for individual freedom
- ✓ The need for education

This list is not prioritised but the researchers found that the vast majority of those interviewed expressed most of these felt-needs. It should be noted that rapid urbanization was going on in the Near East. Probably the last two felt-needs result from this. Some are universal needs, but many of the needs are an indication of a spiritual hunger and dissatisfaction with formal Islam. Folk Islam was partially meeting those felt needs. Since the 70s Wahabi-ism (the Islamists) has grown in influence, but it hasn't satisfied the vast majority of Muslims.

Our strategy of "mass evangelism" must seek to meet **the felt-needs of the Muslim community that we are seeking to reach with the Gospel**.

Step One is clearly to **identify the felt-needs of your community**.
This will involve you in a sociological survey, similar to the one Tim Mathery did.

Step Two is to produce audio-visual materials that address a particular felt-need.

Step Three is distribution. In all this partnership with others in vital!

There are serious spiritual misunderstandings in Muslim minds such as:

- ✓ Fear of punishment makes a man better
- ✓ God loves strong people – He despises the weak
- ✓ Man's main problem is ignorance etc.

These need to be dealt with.

The Use of Scripture in Evangelism

The art of witnessing to Muslims is telling stories. Memorise 20-30 Bible stories during language learning. Jesus taught through parables – so should we. When story-telling, start with stories from Genesis. Muslims will have a better understanding of redemption history if you start at the beginning and tell your stories in a chronological way – slowly, carefully and with great patience.

In most Muslim cultures something new or innovative in religion and culture is automatically considered bad. The Arabic word for "heresy" is literally "something that is new". So

through telling Old Testament stories from Genesis you are emphasizing that the Gospel (good news) is not **new** news!

In Western cultures retention of a story is often as high as 75% a week later. For a sermon without illustrations it is 3%! Usually aural preference learners have a higher retention rate for stories. This is especially true if the Biblical story is interspersed with local proverbs and sayings.

When visiting friends, suggest that they memorize a verse of Scripture with you before you leave. Teach them a Scripture verse related to a felt-need in their lives. When you next meet ask them if they can recite the verse. The answer will probably be, "Yes". Then ask if it has been a help in their situation. Storytelling like this, especially about "the prophets" or "the old, old, story" (of Jesus and His love) is not considered threatening or confrontational.

Finally, teach people how to read the Scriptures. If they are seekers, give them a reading list and show them how to find their way about the Bible.

Use secular channels of distribution if possible

I think one of the major lessons the Holy Spirit wanted to teach us all during the decade of the '90s was that far more Scriptures and other Christian material could be sown in the Muslim World if we would use secular channels of communication, rather than using Christian workers to distribute Scriptures.

Examples of this are:

- The use of satellite broadcasting in the Arab World by SAT-7 and others
- Christian radio and local FM stations in parts of the Muslim World
- Book Fairs
- Secular channels of wholesaling videos and cassettes.

So part of our strategy should be explore, research and develop as much as we can the use of these secular channels of distribution. One of the advantages, is that local purchasers are usually happier to have in their home a "Jesus video" that they purchased from a local outlet, than one given to them by a foreigner. Usually they will have no qualms about showing the film to family and close neighbours if it was purchased locally .

5.3 The Place of the Supernatural

What did Jesus do when He "preached the Gospel"? He went into Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of God, ***" 'The time has come,' He said. 'The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the Good News!' "*** (Mk. 1:14-15)

Again in Matthew, ***"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Good News of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people."*** (Mt. 4:23) In a parallel passage in Luke's Gospel Jesus went into the synagogue, as was His custom and read Isaiah 61:1:

> ***"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed Me to preach the Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind; to release the oppressed; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."***

To heal diseases and cast out demons and so bring liberty to the oppressed is also a costly part of our calling and calls for deep compassion, commitment and prayer on our part. Jesus found it costly because of the amount and depth of prayer it demanded – see Mk. 4:35-38; 1:35; 6:31; 9:28 and Lk. 8:46.

In a restricted access nation in many parts of the Muslim World, if a worker says to a Muslim friend, *"The Kingdom of God is near",* it will be probable be meaningless to his friend. But if this worker is a transformed person, filled with Spirit, the hearers will take notice. And if that worker heals the sick, delivers the demonised and brings hope and joy to the oppressed, then the community will certainly notice!

I want to say a little about "signs and wonders". I am not going to try and build a theology of this but to state same empirical observations.

- **We should not be gullible.**

  We are all on a learning curve in this area. Some are further along the curve than others. We should share more with each other where we are and where we are not.

  So firstly, we don't believe that if we get involved in this area everyone is going to fall down and cry out *"What must I do to be saved?"* The Bible makes it clear that the miraculous power of God is released by the Holy Spirit **to confirm the Word of God.** There are different ways you can confirm the Word. Josh McDowell, standing up in a debate, may confirm the Word of God by apologetic argument. Even if he convinces everyone in the audience of the logic of what he is saying, that does not imply that all will be saved. There are other factors – such as moral factors. Remember the story Jesus told of the Rich Man and Lazarus. (Lk. 16: 19-31) Abraham told the rich man, ***"If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."***

  Signs and wonders are given by God to confirm the Scriptures. We shouldn't make too much of them or too little. They are given to confirm the truth of the proclamation to those who are seeking the Living God. But not everything given by God comes immediately to a wonderful conclusion.

- **They are often a measure of God's moving in the hearts and minds of people.**

  If there is not much happening supernaturally, then usually there is not much happening! When we begin to break through in intercession and in spiritual warfare then things begin to happen. People get dreams and visions of the Lord Jesus. Sometimes there is unusual financial provision. Supernatural events on the earth are often a sign that we have shifted something in the heavenly places. This is why these supernatural events are so important. If we pray we should expect God to work.

- **Here a few positive factors in this area**

  1. ***"Signs" usually occur in the context of evangelism.***

     The power of the Lord to heal is in the context of evangelism. There is a healing ministry internal to the church that is valid (See James 5:14-15). But "signs" are signs in that they point to something. "Signs" (such as healing) direct an unbeliever to the believability of the message of the Gospel. They confirm what the messenger says.

  2. ***It is in the context of courage.***

     We will never see our full potential in ministry unless we have courage to begin to move in the Spirit's power. It must have taken great courage for Elisha to stretch himself out on a dead boy – stiff with rigor mortis! But he did it and the dead body came alive. (2 Kings 4:32-35)

     It must have taken courage to do what Peter and John did at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple when Peter said, ***"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."*** (Acts 3: 1-10) It must have taken courage in Peter's heart to go into the upper room where Dorcas lay dead and raise her to life again. (Acts 9: 36-42)

     We need a quiet courage to pray for people in Jesus' name. It is a principle of Scripture that our courage releases the supernatural power of God.
     See 1 Sam 14: 6-15 for another example.

  3. ***It is in the context of pioneering***

     God seems to have a special anointing for people on the frontiers who are pioneering in new areas. This is very clear from church history. It is when

you are on the cutting edge that you see the greatest release of the power of God. Most of our teams among Muslims are on the cutting edge. We should expect to see the power of God released in various signs confirming the truth of the Word of God.

There is a story of a Bible translator who was working among a tribal people in East Malaysia. He translated a portion of one of Gospels and read it back to the people in one of the long houses to test if they understood it. They understood it. Shortly, afterwards the tribal chiefs called all the sick people from all the long houses to a particular place and asked the translator also to be there. When the translator arrived he was asked to heal all the people as Jesus did! Now the translator came from a background where one never prayed for the sick. He was terrified and embarrassed, but felt he had to do something! So he got all these hundreds and hundreds of sick people to sit on the ground. He then prayed and asked God heal them. He then walked about the sick people scattering palm oil over them as he walked up and down. This was the best that he could do because there were too many to lay hands on all of them. Then he quickly left frightened that nothing had happened.

He stayed on to finish his translation of the New Testament. It took several more years, but wherever he went in Sarawak and Sabah he met people who said, *"Do you remember that day? I was there and I was healed!"* Hundreds were healed. Most of the tribe became believers and followers of Jesus.

Why did God do it? He was on the frontiers. God pours out His goodness and mercy particularly in the hard and difficult places. There is release of power on the edges of things.

4. ***"Signs" are released in the context of spiritual warfare***

Prayer and intercession are the foundation of a release of power. If we shift things in the heavens, then there will be consequences on the earth.

5. ***In the context of faith and expectation***

Jesus could not do many mighty works in Nazareth, His hometown, because of their unbelief (or, if you like, because they had no expectation Jesus could do anything except make tables and chairs). It is noticeable that on teams with a high focus on intercessory prayer – especially when some team members are out in ministry and others gather to pray for them at the time – there are high levels of faith and expectation and this releases the power of God.

We need to avoid all forms of "hype". Never organise "healing meetings"! There is a helpful verse in Luke 5:17, ***"One day as He was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there."*** (almost like a gathering of Taliban leaders) ***"and the power of the Lord was present for Him to heal the sick."*** The impression I get is that in that particular environment ***"the power of the Lord was present"*** – **it was noticeable and tangible**. But notice it was a **product of prayer** (Lk. 5:16) ***"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."*** Prayer (v. 16) produced "the climate" (v. 17) to heal!

6. ***In the context of crisis***

When we are in a crisis we can expect a release of the power of God. An example would be the story of Samson. (Judges 14: 5-6) ***"A young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power."*** All of Moses' great signs and wonders were done in the context of crisis.

7. ***In the context of apprenticeship***

Where did Joshua learn to do "signs and wonders"? It was from Moses. It is

discernible that Elisha learnt from Elijah, that the Apostles learnt from Jesus, and that Stephen and the other deacons learnt from the Apostles.

If you feel this is an important area in your gifting and in your ministry, it is worth spending a month or two with people who are moving in power in this area. As in so many areas of development in the spiritual life (personal evangelism, preaching etc.) seeing "signs" in ministry is not learned in seminars or by reading books. It is more usually learned in some sort of apprenticeship scheme.

- **Negatives: What hinders the release of power in our ministry**

1. ***Ministry overload***

How often I have heard - especially from leaders, *"I am so desperately trying to keep the ship afloat that I don't have time to get into new areas of ministry."*

2. ***Rigidity in ministry plans/patterns***

We have all learned to proclaim the Gospel in our home context. (We were taught the " Four Spiritual Laws" or "the Bridge Method".) Moving into the Muslim World we had to **unlearn** what we had learned and learn another approach/method for the new context. Then we settle into those patterns. This gives rise to rigidity. There is no lateral thinking in our approaches. It is difficult to shift gears, but we must do it. Learn **to add new ministry patterns** to your present ones (don't substitute but add). Learn to pray for the sick.

3. ***Most of us have a crisis of confidence in this area***

We are unsure of our authority in this area. Most of us need to get an understanding of our authority to use the name of Jesus and to grasp the implications. We don't need more authority; it is getting a grip of what we already have. We need to be humble; but humility has nothing to do with self-esteem. We need to believe in the power that results from our relationship with God. **He has sent us in order that He can use us**. The enemy is very good at finding out what you don't know (your ignorance) and using it as a weapon against you. Unless we are **absolutely convinced** that we have authority in the name of Jesus, we will never see the breakthroughs that we pray for.

4. ***We are overwhelmed by personal needs***

We feel that we can't pray for others to be healed when we have needs for physical and mental well being ourselves or in our families and team. We are reluctant to minister to unbelievers in an area where it is clear that we are in need ourselves. But we must realise that **my personal need is no impediment to the release of the Spirit's power** through me to bring blessing to others. It is a lie from Satan that *"God can't use you unless you have got it all together."* Paul states the exact opposite in 2 Cor.12:7-10, ***"But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness!' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me."***

5. ***The fear of failure***

This is a fear that we will discredit the Gospel and the Lord Jesus. For example, I may say, *"I am going to pray for you that the Lord Jesus will heal you, because He has given to me authority to use His name and His power in this way".* I pray and it doesn't work and there is no healing. Doesn't that bring discredit to the Gospel and the Lord Jesus (and me!)? Aren't we all failures?

In general this is not so. The Gospel is not usually discredited as we pray for the sick. Usually this depends on your approach. If you say *"Jesus is going to heal that ulcer right now."* You might well run into difficulty! Some people

think you can't pray for the sick without some very categorical statements, like the one above. A better approach might be: *"Do you know that Jesus loves you and because He loves people so much, He still heals people today as He did when He was on the earth. Sadly, not everyone I pray for to Jesus is healed, but would you mind if I prayed for you?"*

Typical responses to prayers are: *"I am so glad that you prayed for me last week. I felt the peace of God…I felt loved. I am really much better."* Pray in a sensitive way. Even if the person is not immediately healed, the Gospel will not be discredited because there will always be some mediation of God's peace, love and joy in the situation.

Abuse comes from lack of wisdom. The more you can pray for people, the better. In the Muslim World people are **"word-weary"**. As we pray, people will sense the reality of God beyond all our words.

6. ***Sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's leading***

Not all are to be healed! Why? I don't know, but it is a fact. Jesus said, ***"I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian."*** (Lk. 4:25-27)

"Signs" are signs. Try and listen to the Holy Spirit's leading and direction in deciding whom you should pray for.

7. ***The Problem of Delayed Feedback***

You may often pray for people. They may be healed, but they may not let you know! Other times there is a delay in healing or in the sign. Don't expect much feedback. Don't expect God's timing to be ours. Learn to walk in faith.

- **Conditions for Power**

A major characteristic of the early believers (first two centuries AD) was the power and effectiveness of their witness in Europe, Africa and Asia. Our problem is often lack of power. Our greatest need is often to be conscious of our powerlessness and to have a yearning for spiritual power. Remember Mark 9:18. The Father said, "***I asked Your disciples to drive out the spirit, <u>but they could not</u>.'*** " Later the disciples asked, ***"Why could we not cast him out?"*** The lack of power was sad but it had a significant saving feature – they were conscience of it and they didn't want to remain powerless! So they confessed it. Spiritual power is imparted to us only when our hearts are in a state of preparedness. These are the conditions:

1. ***Renunciation of revealed sin***

Ps. 66:18, ***"If I regard*** (hold on to) ***iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear."***

We must honestly satisfy ourselves that we:

- ✓ Harbour no known sin in our hearts
- ✓ Don't have any secret sympathy for any sin
- ✓ Have confessed to others in all cases that are necessary
- ✓ Have paid restitution where appropriate
- ✓ Have no wrongful indulgences, appetites, passions or doubtful practices that will lead us into conformity with this world.

2. ***A willingness to do God's will***

If you want to qualify for God's power, you can no longer demand the right to

have your own way. The power of God is only available to do God's will and not your own. Hold nothing back from God and He will hold nothing back from you.

3. ***A passion for Christ's Glory***

   God will delight to endue us with His power when we are willing to be invisible. We must yearn for His Glory – not for spiritual pleasure and satisfaction – not for prominence but for His Glory. If you have selfish motives it will lead to self-defeat.

4. ***Prayer and appropriation***

   It was as Jesus prayed that Holy Spirit descended on Him. (Lk. 3:21, 22) It was as the disciples prayed that the Holy Spirit descended on them. (Acts 2:1-4)

   I think it is every believer's privilege and duty to **claim** a distinct anointing of the Holy Spirit to qualify him/her for the work God has assigned to them. If we meet all the other qualifications for the job, but fail to claim the Lord's anointing, then we will fail! Claim the anointing of power in prayer, appropriate it by faith and use it.

   "I take the promised Holy Ghost. I take the power of Pentecost to fill me to the uttermost. I take. He undertakes."

5.4 Principle of Gifting

It is always mildly amusing to hear leaders discuss a particular problem. One leader will say something like, *"The root of the problem is that we have lost our passion for evangelism. How many hours are been spent in evangelism? Almost none!"* But looking at the same problem another leader will say something like, *"The root of this problem is the lack of pastoral care. The leader is all gung–ho on his goals. He is totally goal focussed and he is chewing up his people in the process." Yet another* leader will say, *"No, no you have it all wrong, the root of the problem is a lack of good Bible teaching. They are ignorant of Biblical principles! No wonder they are making a mess of things."*

In fact we **all** look at the world through the eyes of our particular gifting, whether it is the gift of an evangelist, pastoral carer, Bible teacher or administrator etc. This is one of the reasons we need team leadership.

There **must be room** for a variety of people to develop their particular gifts. The church that is emerging in Afghanistan or elsewhere needs **to see** this variety of gifts being used by the Lord Jesus. We need to affirm the principle of unity in diversity. Some have the gift of an evangelist and are called to a more open approach of literature evangelism. They must be given the freedom to develop this ministry.

At the same time in the Arabian Peninsula there are those who are doing a quiet work focussing on building credibility in the local community through development and business. They don't do much direct literature evangelism. Many of them have a real gift of mercy and they are using the gift God has given them with great effectiveness.

Surprisingly there are not many "evangelists" (those with a specific gift of evangelism) in God's work in the Muslim World, but there are many with the gift of mercy. But no matter what our gifting – **all are called to witness** through incarnational, love-compelled witness. **All are called to use their gifts. All are called to claim the power and the anointing of God for the ministry.**

This will lead to a variety of approaches. This is a very good thing. A judgemental spirit can kill a ministry! Someone with a particular gifting and ability who demands that everyone else should be like them will kill a team! We need to know what is the calling of each one and then determine which team/project/approach will best facilitate that particular gifting.

So I have no problem with using many different approaches in the whole spectrum: *literature and mass evangelism* ⟷ *quiet incarnational evangelism*

In fact this is exactly what many do.

5.5 Conclusions

The Divine Commission to preach the Gospel is imperative. We don't make the choice. It has already been made for us by God. The great missiologist, H. Kraemer, in his book, **The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World** wrote this:

*"Islam's great function has been, and will probably continue to be for the present and for the immediate future, to remind the Christian Church that Christian mission must be **really Christian**, that is to say, mission must spring from the apostolic obligation towards a new divine commission and not be driven by motives of spiritual conquest and success, but by the urge towards **faithful** and **grateful** witness to Christ."*

Being followers of Jesus Christ, and being filled with the Holy Spirit (who was sent into the world to witness), we will be witnessing communities and through our witness the Kingdom of Heaven will reach out into the world.

Our witness is to a message of very Good News. We don't have as our primary task the business of giving good advice to our Muslim friends. We approach them with the Gospel, **not** because we are experts on how to live this life, but because we have Good News to proclaim. We don't say to anybody, *"Look at us. We are experts on life's problems. We are far ahead of you. You must catch up with us. Come to us and we will tell you how to do it."* That is sheer arrogance! Rather we say, *"Look at Jesus the Messiah. We have looked at Him and continue to look at Him, because in Him we have found the God of human experience fully and completely revealed. In His life, death and resurrection we have discovered something about the source of life and the source of truth which has liberated us, and we deeply desire for you to know Him as well."*

You can go on to say that Jesus has transformed us:

- ✓ from moral weakness to spiritual courage
- ✓ from meanness to generosity
- ✓ from self-worship to mutual caring
- ✓ from despair and hopelessness to joy and inner peace

We don't have all the answers to the tangle of life's problems, but we know that God is changing us from within and we have been led by an inner constraint to a gracious and glorious experience of God's forgiveness and love. Share with them that you have proved that the wonderful claims of Jesus are true **in fact and experience**:

"Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt. 11:28)

"I am the Light of the World." (Jn. 8:12)

"I am the truth." (Jn. 14:6)

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away." (Mt. 24:35)

"I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly." (Jn. 10:10)

"I am the Resurrection and the Life." (Jn. 11:25)

"I am the Good Shepherd that gives His life for the sheep." (Jn. 10:11)

"I am with you to the close of the age." (Mt. 28:20)

We sometimes use the phrase, *"to share the Gospel"* – a phrase developed by our brothers in Campus Crusade in the '50's in order to reach Californians with the Gospel. It is a helpful phrase but not a Biblical one!

In Luke 24:44-49 we have Luke's version of the Great Commission. The word translated

"preached" (***"repentance and forgiveness of sins will be <u>preached</u> in His name to all nations…"***) is in fact the Greek word *'keruchthenai'* meaning *"to be heralded"*. It stands first in the Greek sentence and so receives the main emphasis. Jesus has made His church – us – the **herald** of His Gospel – to publish, to proclaim, to shout it aloud to the ends of the earth. We are primarily **heralds** – not business people or development workers! This is our **primary** calling! It is true, however, that on earlier occasions in Luke (9:1 ff and 10:1 ff) the disciples were told not only to preach the Gospel but also to heal the sick and, according to Mt. 10:8, even to raise the dead!

We need to have a holistic view of the Gospel. But in that holism there needs to be a **large place** for "heralding the Gospel" – not merely "sharing".

6. Matters of Conscience

6.1 The Place of Conscience in our lives

The conscience is never mentioned in the Old Testament, but it is a major feature of the New Testament. The conscience is a faculty God has placed within us that decides as to the moral quality of our thoughts, words and actions. It gives a consciousness of the good of our conduct or motives or causes feelings of remorse at our evil doing.

Having a clear conscience is one of the qualifications of leadership. ***"They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience."*** (1 Tim. 3:9) Twice, when on trial, Paul spoke of his clear conscience. ***"Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, 'My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.' "*** (Acts 23:1) Later, on trial in front of Felix in Caesarea, Paul said ***"So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."*** (Acts 24:16)

Having a clear or good conscience is very important both in our walk with God and in our wrestling with ***"the principalities and powers and forces of wickedness"***. (Eph. 6:12) In matters of conscience you can lose your liberty and a loss of liberty will damage the quality of our worship. Having a bad conscience will disable you in the spiritual warfare.

The conscience is **not** God's voice. But it appears that the mechanism in our spirits by which we listen to the voice of conscience is the same mechanism as that by which we listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. If you refuse to obey the voice of conscience – i.e. you violate conscience – you damage the listening mechanism in your spirit. This is extremely dangerous for a believer, for now you cannot perfectly hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. Continual rejection of the voice of conscience ***"Sears the conscience as with a hot iron."*** (1 Tim. 4:2)

So **always obey your conscience**. Do nothing that violates your conscience. If you do you will feel guilty and your ministry will suffer. 1 Cor. 11:28 says, ***"Let a man examine himself…"***. Failure to do so causes serious problems: ***"That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep."*** (1 Cor. 11:30)

John Wesley, in his typically methodical way, taught new believers to ask 'conscience' questions. These are some of the questions they had to ask themselves everyday.

- ✓ Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better person than I really am? Am I a hypocrite?
- ✓ Am I honest in all my acts and words or do I exaggerate?
- ✓ Can I be trusted?
- ✓ Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?
- ✓ Did the Bible live to me today?
- ✓ Am I enjoying prayer?
- ✓ Am I defeated in any part of my life by jealousy, impurity, a critical spirit, irritability or a distrustful heart?

John Wesley asked himself questions on a weekly basis. He called it examining himself:

Sunday: He examined himself on his love for God.

Monday: he examined himself on his love for his fellow human beings etc.

Why was he so emphatic that each believer ought to examine his conscience? It was because he knew how important it was in Christian ministry.

"But the man who has doubts is condemned … everything that does not come from faith is sin." (Rom. 14:23)

Should you always obey your conscience? Yes! But you not only need to **examine your conscience**, you also need to **question your conscience**. Our consciences were damaged at the Fall and they are not always right. A good conscience is one that has no feeling of reproach against you. It doesn't accuse you of wilful wrong. A conscience needs to be **educated** or **trained** to recognise what God sees as good and evil in an absolute sense. Its action is involuntary and is determined largely by the **culture** you have been brought up in. All cultures have a hierarchy of virtues and vices. These vary tremendously. But these hierarchies of what is right and wrong are inculcated into us at an early age in our lives.

Most of us have a conscience that has been educated and trained in a Christian sub-culture of the culture of their own people group. It has been moulded by that culture that is not necessarily aligned with Scripture. As you move on to a multinational team and into a new culture there will be many different and conflicting voices of conscience. Some may feel a certain course of action is commendable (their consciences affirming them), while others on the team are horrified at this course of action (their consciences condemning them). This was the situation in Rome over whether or not to eat meat that had been offered to idols and then butchered in the temples. (Rom. 14)

Many such issues can arise among us, especially in the area of speaking the truth; explaining why we do what we do etc. Are we to be governed by "situational ethics"?

The answer is 'No'! We should always question our conscience and ask if, on this issue it is aligned to Scripture or aligned to our cultural upbringing? So we need to dialogue with our conscience and input it with Scripture.

So question conscience and educate it so that it coincides with revealed truth in Scripture. **Never act if it is not clear. Never disobey conscience**, for anything that damages the temple of the Holy Spirit is dangerous. In fact it is sin, but not sin in an objective moral sense of a violation of the law of God, but in the fact that the spirit is damaged. There is a lot of **false guilt** where the conscience has been violated but where there has been no transgression of the law of God. False guilt comes from an uneducated conscience. So don't obey conscience mechanistically. Don't be the conscience of others. If you can't proceed in faith with a good conscience – don't proceed at all. Enrich your conscience with knowledge.

6.2 Educating our Conscience

So the simple rule "If in doubt – don't" is overly simplistic! Learn to conform your conscience to the Word of God.

What should you do when Scripture doesn't speak to a particular issue and as a team you have divergent views? Share the problem honestly with your colleagues – talk it out and then decide. Don't let others lay false guilt on you.

What should you do when there is a conflict of absolutes? For example: compassion is driving you to a particular course of action, but honesty (truthfulness) says you may not take that action. The answer is cry out to God for wisdom! (James 1:5) Wait upon Him. Don't be hasty. (See 1 Samuel 13 – Saul, with a conflict of issues, makes the wrong choice through haste.) The Holy Spirit will show the way through. Look up 2 Kings 5: 15-19 where

Naaman wanted to be loyal to his new commitment to the one true God and yet he realised that that loyalty may be compromised by his official duties. God made a way through this dilemma.

6.3 Ethical Issues

There are so many ethical issues. In most Muslim countries, as in our home countries, there is a measure of corruption. One of the important parts of our witness is how we manage corruption and this relates to conscience issues. I think corruption is one of the major principalities and powers we face and we **must** confront and challenge it. The welfare of any people group or nation is threatened more by corruption than by any other factor – including terrorism! There is an **Index of Corruption** published annually by the Economist magazine that lists nations on levels of corruption. Muslim nations do poorly.

The reasons for corruption are many but they include:

- ✓ Very low salaries for government workers – it is assumed they will receive huge supplements in bribes and through extortion etc.
- ✓ Greed in the heart of man.
- ✓ An opportunity to succeed (success is largely measured by wealth, and wealth gives power and prestige).

<u>Dealing with Corruption</u>

There is a curious verse in Prov. 2:14, ***"A gift given in secret soothes anger and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath."*** Is this advocating bribery? No, for it contradicts many other verses such as Prov. 11:1, 16:8, 22:16 etc. But it is a reflection of reality in many countries.

We should never pay bribes. But often life is less simple than this. The authorities make you aware that they won't process your papers unless … . Then there is a series of options:

1. A demand for money **and** a threat if you do not pay up
2. A demand for money and a promise to help the papers to go through speedily
3. No demand is made, but a promise to help process the papers speedily is made with a gift of gratitude asked for or expected
4. No demand is made, help is given and a gift is not asked for, but hidden cultural pressure is put on you to give.

Now at which level do you say, 'No'? Isn't level 4 acceptable? Isn't it a form of cultural adaptation? This is where the conscience comes in. It is important to build relationships with tribal leaders and governmental leaders, but we need to emphasise that this is "grace" and not "payment" unless it is an honest payment for services rendered.

In a development agency or in a business you can't stop fraud, but it is essential that the organisation should have systems of fraud-prevention. Only in this way will it be a shining example to the community.

We also need to put in place classes on ethical principles for employees of the development projects. These should explain the Biblical worldview (essentially Semitic) and the basis of ethics. These ethical principles should be modelled consistently.

6.4 Attitudes to Governments

The last issue relating to conscience is our attitude to governments. It is interesting to discuss this subject on a multi-national team. You get a spectrum of views depending on the cultural backgrounds. These range from a cavalier attitude to a rigid obedience model. Key Scriptures are Rom. 13: 1-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; Titus 3:1 and 1 Pet. 2: 13-17.

Bonhoeffer, in his book **Ethics**, points out the reformation view that government was

ordained by God for mankind as a 'grace' to limit the effects of sin. We need protection from the anarchy that unrestrained sin produces and we need an orderly life for culture and the economy to prosper.

The Biblical passages describe what government **ought** to do. There is no assertion that all governments follow the pattern laid down in Scripture. So the crux of the issue is: How should we respond to a government that is corrupt and intent on doing evil – i.e. a sub-Biblical government?

There are no clear guidelines in Scripture about this. We are commanded in Scripture to pray for governments. (1 Tim. 2: 1-4) It is clear that the government of the Roman Empire was not free from corruption. Pilate carried out a gross violation of Roman Law in permitting the execution of the Lord Jesus! In spite of this, Paul taught us that regardless of the character of a state's leaders, its authority was still to be recognised because that authority proceeds ultimately from God. Note Paul was writing to the Rom. (13:1-10) Claudius had been poisoned and Caligula was murdered because he was clearly mad. He was followed by Nero who was equally mad! Still Paul set an example for all believers by submitting to the laws of Rome. Peter requires believers to submit to ***"every authority instituted among men"***. Even when they refused the order to worship the emperor, still believers had to honour the authority figure in government. (1 Pet. 2:17)

Is there a case for civil disobedience? Probably there is, but it should only be done rarely. Anything that disintegrates the state inevitably brings social chaos and this is contrary to the purpose of government instituted by God. There is a case to be made that sometimes we should disobey constituted authority – i.e. it is our duty. The fundamental principle is stated plainly by Jesus. We must, ***"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and we must still more render to God the things that are God's"***. (Mt. 22:21) Peter reaffirmed this. ***"We must obey God rather than men!"*** (Acts 5:29) This is true wherever their commands clash. Yet the clash must be evident, not imaginary or a supposition.

The Scriptures give three examples of disobedience to the state:

1. Pharaoh ordered the destruction of all the boy babies of a race of his slaves. According to Egyptian law and custom he was well within his rights as a god-king to order such a thing. But God specially blessed the midwives who disobeyed his inhuman order. God specially commends to us for our example the faith of Moses' parents in disobeying Pharaoh. (Ex. 1:17-21; Heb. 11:23)
2. Herod, the king, ordered the massacre of all the baby boys of a small town, with the intention of including Jesus among the dead. Joseph was divinely instructed to frustrate the intention of the king. Joseph, Mary and Jesus fled to Egypt. (Mt. 2:13-18)
3. Nebuchadnezzar ordered a co-ordinated, universal state worship of himself. Religion was the adjunct of the state and worship had to be in the proscribed form. This is typical of many states. Religion is to be subservient to the ruler's power and ends. The three Hebrews refused obedience and they are set forth in Scripture as great examples of faithfulness without compromise. (Dan. 3: 1-30)

Paul and Peter, who laid down so positively the general duty of obedience to government authorities, were themselves often in prison for refusing this obedience in the realm of the freedom to preach the Gospel, but in no other realm.

It seems to me that God has given no authority whatever to rulers and government officials in the sphere of the relationship between God, the Creator, and man His creature. In this sphere the ruler and authorities are trespassers and no trespasser can plead the right of the law for his trespass and the acts connected with it, since the trespass itself is contrary to the law. Therefore he can't complain if those he has wronged by his trespass refuse to do as he asks.

So 1 Pet. 2:13 doesn't lay down the duty of unlimited obedience to civil authority, but only

asserts a general principle of obedience, subject to exceptions. Unlimited obedience would be rendering the things of God to Caesar – i.e. robbing God!

So in summary, if the government commands:

- ✓ what is contrary to the plain command of God
- ✓ immorality
- ✓ injustice
- ✓ trespassing into the realm of spiritual things

the believer has **no** compulsion to obey. In fact **he should disobey** – not actively resisting, but simply enduring the penalties the authorities may inflict – even into death (which is what happened to both Paul and Peter).

There is no place in Scripture for lawlessness. The Antichrist is called the lawless one. We must ask God to keep our minds from becoming infected by this spirit of Antichrist that is increasingly powerful in the world today!

7. The Issue of Suffering

7.1 The Place of Suffering

In any thorough–going Biblical theology of missions, the component of suffering occupies a central place. This follows from the falleness of man and the grip "the principalities and powers" have on us all. Bringing about man's liberation through the Gospel can't be achieved without blood, sweat and tears. The long history of the expansion of the church in the world testifies abundantly to this. It costs to be fruitful!

So part of incarnational ministry is the willingness to suffer. We are, ***"Imitators of God, as dearly loved children"*** and we have been called to ***"live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us."*** (Eph. 5:1-2) We are to walk the way of the Cross. We are to allow God to draw us into ***"the fellowship of His sufferings"***. (Phil. 3:10) There are several levels to this "call".

- ➢ **It is a call to deny self** (Mk. 8:34)

Every day we should each consciously take up our 'cross' – the symbol of death to self. What does it mean to deny self? Peter denied Jesus. He disowned Him and turned his back to Him. So to deny self is to disown ourselves, renouncing our supposed right to go our own way. It is to reject the idolatry of self-centredness. (Gal. 5:24, Rom. 8:13, Col. 3:5, 1 Pet. 2:24) Death to self is a **moral** death and it is the essential pre-condition for a life of righteousness and power in fellowship with God.

- ➢ **It is a call to suffering service**

We are imitators of the Lord Jesus who is called "The Suffering Servant" in the "Servant Songs" of Isaiah. Jesus said, ***"As the Father sent Me, so send I you."*** (Jn. 20:21) Jesus was meek in character and in conduct – never shouting in the streets. He was gentle in His dealings with people – never breaking a bruised reed. But He was called, chosen, appointed by His Father and filled with the Holy Spirit to bring the Old Testament People of God back to God so they could be a light to the nations.

In this task Jesus persevered – ***"Setting His face like a flint".*** (Is. 50:7) He was misunderstood, beaten, mocked and spat upon. He was ***"led like a lamb to slaughter"*** (Is. 53:7) and He died by crucifixion. There is, in the ministry of the Lord Jesus, a complete integration of suffering and servanthood. He was ***"the Suffering Servant"***.

Now the mission of Jesus is to be fulfilled by the church. (Acts 13:47) And that includes us. Suffering and service always go together. Why is this necessary?

- ➢ **It is a call to follow the only path to effectiveness** (Jn. 12:23-26, 32-33)

The principle is clear. Death produces fruitfulness. If you stay alive, you stay alone. If you die, you multiply yourselves. This is the principle of effective service.

- **Paul's re-statement of this principle of suffering service**

"Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, which is the church." (Col. 1:24)

What does Paul mean in this verse, ***"I rejoice in suffering"*** ? (Col. 1:21) What is lacking in Christ's suffering? There is absolutely nothing lacking in the death of Jesus either in respect to the atonement for our sins and the covering of our guilt or in the whole issue of overcoming Satan and ***"disarming the principalities and powers"***. We can never add anything to this. So what does Paul mean when he says, ***"I fill up … what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions"*** ?

This phrase, "fill up" or "complete" is found in only one other place in the New Testament – Phil. 2:30. Epaphroditus almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to "fill up" or "make complete" (in one version "make up for the help you could not give") the gift the Philippian believers had sent to Paul. The Macedonian believers were poor but they had sacrificially collected money as a "love offering" at the time that Paul was imprisoned in Rome. But they had an insoluble problem – how could they all go to Rome and present the gift to Paul? The solution was that Epaphroditus, personally and on their behalf and with great personal sacrifice, made up that which was lacking – **the presentation in person of a love gift.** This was a vital part of 1st century Mediterranean culture. Gifts had to be presented in person.

Notice Paul's understanding of mission. He sees that there is something lacking in the suffering of Jesus. What is lacking is that the tremendous gift (of His salvation, of the Holy Spirit, of being adopted as children etc.) **has to be presented in person** to the people for whom Christ died. Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. Who is going to present the gift? This is what mission is all about! It is a presentation in person, to the nations, of the accomplishments Christ's suffering – "***Jesus Christ and Him Crucified"*** – by means of the suffering of His people.

So the price of missions to Muslims is the Cross! There are no closed countries, but some countries demand a higher price than others. Most unreached Muslim people groups live in the harder parts, demanding sacrifice in order to reach people.

But in the eyes of an unbelieving world who measure the worth of a hidden treasure by what people will gladly sell in order to purchase the field where the treasure is buried, if we, as believers will not sell everything, endure everything, then what we are saying is that what we **have materially** is of **more value** to us than the treasure out in the field!

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then <u>in his joy</u> went and sold all he had and bought that field." (Mt. 13:44)

The extent of his sacrifice and the depth of his joy are measured by the value he puts on the treasure in the field. Our suffering and loss, **joyfully accepted** for the Kingdom of God, show the supremacy of God's worth and God's will (world evangelism) more clearly to the world then all our celebrations, church meetings and conferences. Our suffering is the most powerful and effective way we can demonstrate the value **we** place on the Gospel.

- **The place of suffering and sacrifice in mission history**

The greatest single secret in missionary effectiveness is the willingness to suffer and to die. It nearly always means:

- **Death to popularity**: "The narrow way" of only having access to God through Jesus is always going to be attacked. We will always be unpopular if we uphold this truth.
- **Death to pride** and complete dependence on the Holy Spirit
- **Death to racial and national prejudice** (cultural identification with others)
- **Death to material comfort** and willingness to adopt a simple lifestyle. We need an ability to endure hardship.

- **Death to selfish ambition**
- **Death to a selfish home life**

Taking up the cross has always meant self-imposed discipline. A wave of enthusiasm won't do! Part of this discipline is the discipline of secret prayer that no-one else knows about – the prayer that costs. Dying to self releases resurrection power – power to be effective in the task – crucified in weakness and living by the power of God. (2 Cor. 13:4)

So the choice is, as always' between the crowd and the cross. Where we choose the cross, **there** eventually the breakthroughs will come. ***"If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him."*** (2 Tim. 2:12) If we are prepared to live as He lived and serve as He served, it is gloriously true that we will share with Him the joy of harvest. We will reap if we are patient and don't take our hand from the plough. The suffering servant (us) will see the travail of his/her Master's soul and both will be satisfied!

The whole concept of a totally God-centred life is sacrifice. But suffering is **not only physical**. Paul was rejected by his own Christian brothers. He wasn't received on his first visit to Jerusalem. It is easy to say that this was because of the fear they had for this former persecutor of Christians. But throughout his life he had trouble with Judaistic Christians. Possibly he was attacked so often by "friendly fire" because he went to the Gentiles. He adopted their worldview etc. and the ethnic and racial bias of his "Christian" Jewish brothers soon surfaced with the charge: ***"He has joined them!"*** It didn't matter that he was fruitful among the Gentiles. The fact was that he had broken his own cultural moorings. To win Gentiles brought him great joy and personal satisfaction, but it also created great pain – for it meant rejection by his brothers. This can also happen to us!

Paul wasn't given much credit for his amazing accomplishments. Even though he was the one who had been the spearhead of mission to the Gentiles and had pioneered in so much of the new conceptualisation of the Gospel to the Greeks, it was James who made the public announcements of the results to the Jerusalem Council and Peter who got the credit! Apparently, Paul never stood high in the estimation of the church establishment. He was overlooked again and again. We easily overlook the pathos expressed in a line he wrote as an old man in prison awaiting his execution: ***"You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me."*** (2 Tim. 1:15)

So part of the price of suffering is rejection and misunderstanding by our ethno-centric friends and supporters. Then there is also the pain of being misunderstood and rejected by the people we have been sent to. In Lycaonia Paul and Barnabas were received as gods. In Ephesus they were considered to be a threat to the local industry. In the end Paul was charged with being the enemy of government and because of this he lost his life.

There was the psychological trauma of rejection by his brothers and the pain of rejection by those he sought to win. There were all the beatings, stoning, shipwrecks etc. There was the suffering involved in serving in a world overshadowed by the Prince of Darkness who so often attacked Paul through exposing him to physical danger, hunger and sickness.

So, Paul paid the price! He persevered, both in finishing his course and in keeping the faith. We will need to pay that same price in our day.

7.2 The Place of Tools in Evangelism

In World War II, the cry was, *"Give us the tools and we will finish the task."* The implication was that there were desperate dedicated men with empty hands facing an enemy armed to the teeth. Today technology has given us awesome tools: speedy transport, satellite communications, multi-media, great linguistic and sociological tools, cultural anthropology, new methodologies and models of church planting. We have literature, radio, satellite TV, etc. We have the tools – are we doing the job?

Surely our failure must be with the men and women to whom these wonderful facilities are entrusted. Is our commitment to Jesus matched by the technical advantages

available to us that previous generations never had?

We can get very excited about the tools of mass evangelism, but become indifferent to our calling and task **to be witnesses**. The bare, tool-less hands of the disciples in the early church turned the world upside down! They were goal-orientated. The best tools won't finish the task in the hands of those with mediocre commitment to God's commission. But with those committed to the task, who haven't been seduced by a focus on the tools; those with unhampered dedication, **we will finish the task** – tools or not.

But the disciples in the early church weren't tool-less! It is true they had very few of the tools we have today. But they did have a "tool" that we largely neglect today. In this last section I want to emphasis the greatest "tool" that we have in evangelism – the **authority of the Lord Jesus**. We have the authority to use the **name of the Lord Jesus** in prayer, in dealing with the demonised, when confronted by human need and in a host of other circumstances.

Sadly, Jesus appears to have lost His authority in missions today! The basis of this authority in the New Testament is that at His resurrection **Jesus was clearly declared by God the Father to be both Lord and Christ**: vested with **absolute** Lordship and with **all** authority. This authority has always been challenged by "the world" and by "the principalities and powers". **Today it is sad that this authority is being ignored by the church!**

"All hail the power of Jesus' Name" is like the national anthem of the churches. It is true, Jesus does exercise authority. He does decide moral and ethical standards for us. He should be Lord over us – our goals, our objectives and our methodology. But in practice this is not so. The Lordship of Jesus is increasingly being relegated to the hymnbook, where it is comfortably disarmed in the flow of pleasant religious emotion.

As evangelical believers we **say** that Jesus Christ has the absolute and final authority over us all, in every detail of our lives. But in practice we accept the values of the group – their beliefs, practices and ethics. What the group says is Scriptural, we do. So we avoid the sharp point of obedience to plain instructions given to us by Scripture. We use our 'wisdom' to come up with elaborate explanations that are tailor-made to suit our flesh. So we excuse comfort and carnality and make the words of Jesus of no effect. The result is that custom and tradition become the 'Lord' of many a mission!

The one supreme test both of the present and of the ultimate worth of what we are doing is **the place that the Lord occupies in it**. Is He really Lord or is He a mere symbol? Is He in charge or is He just a team member! Does He decide things or is He there to help carry out the plans of others? **Is Jesus Christ truly Lord?**

Whether our works prove to be wood, hay and stubble or gold, silver and precious stones in that Great Day will depend on the right answer to this question.

If the answer is that Jesus Christ **is** Lord and His authority **is** fully accepted **then** we have **the power of the name of Jesus**. With this "tool" we have both the power and the equipment "to overcome" wherever God has placed us.

8. Some Guidelines and Conclusions

8.1 Some qualities of life that we need

- **Earnestness**

I would like to quote Henry Martyn, **"The earnest purpose of the 'worker' needs always to be maintained and seriously and steadfastly pursued. Seriousness in discussion seems most desirable, for without it they will laugh away the clearest evidence. Zeal they are used to and generally they attribute it to a false motive. But a tender concern demonstrated for their souls is certainly new to them and seemingly produces corresponding seriousness in their minds."** (Written while in Iran)

- **Clearness of mind and clarity in our speech**

We have been given a clear message and we need to "herald it" with clarity. Back to Henry Martyn: he was ill and he died a few months later, but it was the clarity of what he said that made such an impression on the Persian officials. They told the British Ambassador, **"He came in the midst of us and sat down and made such remarks about the Qur'an as cannot be answered. Our Shah has called upon the wise men to answer them, but they cannot."**

We too, need to be ready to present with clarity, ***"the reasons for the hope that is within us."*** (1 Pet. 3:15) Plain speaking is needed – always tempered with tact.

- **Tact and conciliation**

We need to practise a genuine, unaffected, sympathetic tactfulness in all our relationships with Muslims. It is needed in our work, in the bazaar, in making new acquaintances and with old friends.

- **Courtesy**

It is well worthwhile to acquire as rapidly as possible the polite forms of speech used by everyone. In Arabic, at times, it is polite to use indirect speech forms or the passive. Learn when to use these forms.

Never send a friend – especially a new one – away without seeing them and speaking to them face to face. To send them away would be seen as extremely rude. If at all possible, lay aside what you are doing at that moment, invite them in and exchange a few words with them. Let them know how very glad you are that they came and that you are sincerely sorry that you cannot, at this moment, spend a lengthy time together. Make a time in the future for further discussions.

If a person wants to visit you, fix the time early in the day – as early as you can. At least in the Arab World, the earlier an appointment is made with an acquaintance, the greater will be the evidence of your desire for his friendship.

Learn about the things that, while innocent in themselves, are considered mildly offensive to local people – gestures and other non-verbal forms of communication.

- **Gentleness and patience**

Zeal on our part in convincing people will only produce a zealous backlash. We need to remember that, ***"The Lord's servant must not quarrel, instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. He must gently instruct those who oppose him in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth and 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)

Henry Martyn was identified as a man of God by the Persians because of his gentle humility and patience.

- **A life of holiness**

For credibility with Muslims, there is nothing to be compared with a holy life lived among them. ***"We are letters known and read by all men, even a letter from Christ."*** (2 Cor. 3:2-3) So just **talking** about your faith won't do! People have the sure instinct of little children. They are very discerning, expert mind readers and expert in understanding **meta**–language. They closely observe whether the power of the Risen Lord Jesus is lived out in a life of purity and holiness among those who call themselves the followers of Jesus.

We must be ***"living letters"***, consistent, transparent, loving and self-giving. Individually and as a team we are witnessing and we are communicating something all the time. If the message is clear and consistent, then we won't lack appropriate opportunities to share the Word of Life.

➢ **Our spiritual equipment**

We need a daily commitment to seek an ever-fuller spiritual life. If we lose the will to strive after a greater and greater measure of holiness, a closer walk with Jesus and a greater conformity to His will, we will always be ineffective.

By God's grace we must determine to pursue:

- Daily consecration to the Lord
- Daily maintenance of unbroken communion with God
- Patient endurance in a life of holiness
- Love that bridges every gap between as and our Muslim neighbours

God's great and wondrous love in Jesus must be released in our hearts and minds and flow through us to others as we seek to break with them the bread of life. We can do this by giving them a small part of God's Word (a verse or two) and praying that they may 'eat' and that their eyes would be open to see Jesus being lifted up for them and in seeing, they may live!

8.2 Our Relationship with Government Officials

- Take a keen interest in each person as a person. Try and get to know their likes and dislikes, their problems and their family relations.
- Listen very carefully to his ideas. Give the person a feeling of worth and importance. Try and quietly 'sell' ideas as suggestions in such a way that he thinks the idea is his. Always be objective and to the point in discussions on a point of doing "business".
- Look out for political leaders who might be the people you will have to deal with later when they have climbed up the ladder a bit. They will be grateful for your helping hand then. Always be kind and courteous and build a relationship with them. Never give the impression to minor officials that they don't count, because they may count more in the time to come!
- Develop an attitude of friendship with everyone, because everyone is worth understanding. You can potentially learn from everyone.
- Always give time and courtesy to "the Babus" and peons in the offices – the tea carriers. They may be more important than you think and it will pay to have a friendly relationship with them. Often it is these people who have relations in the Intelligence Department where a file is being kept on you!
- As a routine practice, after a visit or an interview in a government office note down and file the names of people you talked to and something you learnt from them. You can use these notes in preparation for future dealings with that department.
- Read the local papers. Take and file cuttings from them of anything that has a bearing on you and your ministry.

8.3 Guidelines for witnessing

1. Our purpose is to minister to the needs of the people in the name and in the Spirit of Jesus. We want to make Him known by our words and by our lives. We want to make disciples and build and strengthen the "ecclesia".
2. We are subject to the government(s) and the laws of the land. These set limitations on us. These laws are based ultimately on Shariah. Two specific matters are not usually tolerated.
    - ✧ Distribution of religious literature not approved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (*the Ulema*).
    - ✧ Any activity that would encourage a Muslim to change his religion.

In practice, the restrictions imposed at any time and in any place stem from the prerogative of the **local** government officials. So application of the law can change.

3. All governments object to proselytism and attempts at conversion. But at the same time, this may be a convenient label to hang on us because they object to the political consequences of our work – empowering the poor for example.
4. Often, in fact, the law is: *"don't cause us political embarrassment by your activities"*. Politics and religion are nearly inseparable. Frank and direct discussions about what might cause "embarrassment" are simply not possible for they vary with each circumstance. So we have to be sensitive to hints and third party communication.
5. The answer is not to have firm policies about what you should or should not do. Be flexible. In reality we have four options:
   (a) **Do nothing** – don't go to xxxxx country. Affirm that we must obey God rather than man and pray that God would honour our faith by removing the restrictions.
   (b) **Reject the limitations**. Shake the dust off our feet. Protest at what is happening and go voluntarily from the country.
   (c) **Boldly keep preaching the Gospel** and doing open evangelism and suffer the consequences.
   (d) **Accept some limitations**. These may vary across the country. Have variable guidelines! This is what I propose, together with praying that a more open witness becomes possible.
6. We will accept that, as guests in the country, in the sovereign providence of God, there will be some restrictions both on our verbal witness and on "media" distribution. But God has sent us to work in a situation that He has permitted and so we will wait on His will and from time to time we will modify any guidelines.
7. We will recognise that a restriction on verbal witness doesn't mean God is limited, but that He will actively use the witness of our lives. A sensitive, patient and timely witness requires strong faith in God. We must be convinced that He permits limitations and works through them to fulfil His purposes. It needs a deep sense of dependency on God and His sovereign grace. He has chosen us to go to this place so we will fulfil His purposes and our labour will not be in vain, despite restrictions.

   At the same time we need to be absolutely convinced that **Jesus is necessary for everyone** – that no-one can come to God the Father but by Him. This conviction can be demonstrated in a clear, relaxed, unpretentious and informal confession (witness) in every day contact with people. The power of the Holy Spirit will be at work. God is not limited by our restrictions. He will work in us and through us to reveal the Way, the Truth and the Life to all who seek. We are under limitations. God is not!
8. We will show genuine love and genuine respect for the other person's feelings and culture. We will show genuine care for his interests and well-being. We won't exploit his weakness or need. We are engaged in an enterprise of love – by love we will serve.
9. We will de-programme ourselves of offence concepts and vocabulary relating to proselytism and conversion.
10. We will be sensitive to the Holy Spirit at all times – both His restraints and His constraining influence on our lives to be proactive. God often unfolds His truth slowly men's hearts. We will be patient and understanding. We will pray for spiritual discernment – for ourselves and for others that they too may discern the truth.
11. We will carefully evaluate the sincerity of questioners. We will answer naturally, directly and simply, in keeping with the situation. We won't be manipulative. We will rest confidently in the Lord of the Harvest.

12. We will tell those who seek the truth that God will reveal it to them if they will seek Him with all their hearts. We will pray for them because then, under the urging of the Holy Spirit, we won't give up! Jesus was often guarded and slow in responding to those who sought Him. ***"He never spoke except in parables"*** (Mt. 13:34) to protect the truth from the prejudiced and to lead on the true in heart.
13. We will pray for individuals and when appropriate we will tell them we are praying for them. If acceptable, we will pray **with** them sensitively, courteously, inconspicuously and without preaching. **We will always expect God to answer**.
14. We will share God's Word with discretion. We will **all** pray that God will grant free course to His Word.
15. We need to be sensitive in our witness. We mustn't press our position on another person and use resources or services to induce a response. Love must be genuine and disinterested. Any response must be freely given.
16. We will be patient in witness. The metaphor of the seed implies this since there had to be soil preparation – germination – ripening etc. God will give us a crop – a harvest. We must allow God to **strengthen our hope** in the strong certainty that He will build His church. One sows and another reaps: love, patience and people with different gifts are all necessary.
17. We need to be timely in witness. The right timing controlled the ministry of Jesus. He waited till His "hour" had come. He wouldn't be pushed into premature action.
18. Each team will have to decide how much literature and media they will store and distribute. Some might feel freer – probably short-term teams – while others may sense God is not calling them to that type of ministry.
19. The 'workers' will be subject to one another and considerate of the viewpoints of others. We may unwittingly overstep an undefined and ever shifting line of what is permissible. In this case, rather than endanger the work of others, we will be prepared to leave after due consultation and if asked to do so by our leader. In other words, we regard ourselves as expendable.
20. Not all teams should have the same policies since different situations pertain in different cities, but all should have an agreed policy. Not all people can accept the limitations of service that some may impose. This is fine! It is a matter of calling and gifting. Such people should leave that team with the understanding, goodwill and prayers of all. We must never judge others as more or less spiritual in this matter.
21. All should agree to the policies before they join a team.
22. If someone has a crisis of conscience over a matter, he/she should discuss this with their leader and, if necessary, should transfer to another location.
23. So, under restrictions permitted by God but in the liberty and integrity of the Spirit, we will be confident, patient, prayerful and expectant. We will resist the spirit of fear and bondage. We will work together in love, joy and peace because it is God who works in us to fulfil all the good pleasure of His will.
24. If we are working for an aid or development agency, we must remember we are not establishing Christian institutions; rather we are running projects for the government. We are responsible to train locals and hand over to them at the end of the contract period. So the projects we are involved in are not "private" or "Christian". They are part of the government's service to its people. The "independent administration" we have must be considered a privilege and not a right.
25. If we are working for a development agency we must be convinced of the inherent rightness and value of compassionate service. Jesus went about doing good and

healing. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power for this ministry. He came to serve as well as to save. He responded with compassion to all manner of needs. His response was interwoven with His teaching and became the basis for much that He taught. There was a harmony in what He was, what He did and what He said. This generated great power.

8.4 Our Challenge

We must see **no second causes** and no second best in our situation. There is much in the perplexing mystery of God's sovereign providence to challenge faith, patience, submission and obedience. There is much in complex, frustrating and uncertain situations that requires us to put into practice all the qualities of Christ-like character and behaviour if we are to see the fullness and flowering of the Holy Spirit in the life of our teams. The love of God through the Holy Spirit is to be evidently at work in each person.

I believe that the Lord is calling us all to move forward. **He** will deal with the formidable barriers in the path of His purposes. All 'workers' – both present and prospective – need to be continuously filled with the Holy Spirit. 'Hard countries' are not a calling for the spiritually indifferent but for our highest and our best. We need men and women of:

- ✓ patience and prayer
- ✓ faith and confidence
- ✓ discipline
- ✓ submission to the Holy Spirit's control both constraining and restraining
- ✓ vision and perspective

We should call on all who have faith in God for Muslim people groups to move forward in faith. Each day we will be committed to live with confidence in God and fulfil our calling in the firm assurance that our work in our assigned tasks will not be in vain in the Lord. He is Sovereign – the Lord of His world. He is at work. He is the Master Husbandman who works with skill and patience.

He purposes a harvest. He prepares the soil by storm and wind and by snow and frost. He knows the right time for sowing. He knows the time and conditions for germination. He watches the ripening harvest and sends and equips the reapers. Harvest time and all seasons are in His hand. He will not fail. Have faith in God!