

14. *Envisioning Effective Ministry. Evangelism in a Muslim Context.* Edited by Laurie Fortunak NICHOLAS and Gary N. GORWIN. Wheaton, IL, Billy Graham Center, 2010. 288 pp.

In 1964, the first issue of the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (*EMQ*) appeared. The journal's express objective is to encourage Christian missionaries by "stimulating" and "edifying" them (p. 14). Shortly after the *Quarterly's* 45th anniversary, two of its present editors selected some 40 articles that had previously appeared in *EMQ*. They all speak about "ministry to Muslims" (p. 20). The oldest article is from 1971, the most recent ones date from 2009. The individual contributions are not very detailed; most of them are short between two and five pages. Authors can be divided into four groups. They are either converts from Islam to Christianity, or missionaries serving in Muslim countries, or mission administrators, or scholars. Some in the first two groups publish under a pseudonym; they seem to sense a danger in being identified. Most of the contributors are U.S. Americans.

The texts have been grouped in five thematic sections. The first is called *Understanding Islam*. We read that "the most zealously devoted to the Qur'an's teachings and the Hadith are overwhelmingly the most violent and unmerciful" (p. 25). Another author finds it disappointing (p. 28) that Islam is not crumbling but thriving (*ibid.*) and therefore sets out to answer the question "what will it finally take to win Muslims?". His responses are clear: he calls for a "hard look at our prayers, priorities and preparation". Muslims should be "on our daily prayer list" (p. 28), we even "need to mobilize prayer", agencies have to "figure out how to capture a new generation of missionary recruits", and the new workers should "gain the attitude of leaving their bones on the mission field" (p. 29). This is the language of strategy; indeed, a military mind seems to be at work.

Section 2 is entitled *Theology*. David Teague introduces a post-modern category when he tries to answer the question how to speak about Jesus as God in the context of Muslim monotheism. The divinity of Christ should be asserted, says Teague, "as a part of the biblical metanarrative" (p. 88). The point seems to be that he wants Christians to say and explain that Christ is divine by showing him to be the fulfillment of God's covenant. That is a valid approach. However, the usage of Lyotard's concept (metanarrative) for the covenant history witnessed by the Bible may be problematic. It might put the history of Israel into the role of a backdrop. God's faithful action with his people is not just the framework of salvation; it is salvation, accomplished in Christ.

The third part gathers 12 contributions on *Contextualization*. Contemporary Catholic missiology would here use the concept of "Inculturation". A hot topic is where syncretism begins (p. 113). It is not obvious why an article that calls for more argumentation in interfaith "debate" is in this section; but the author, though not wanting to resort to "belligerent, rude or aggressive behavior" (p. 104), seems convinced: "Let us

be honest. The battle is engaged, and for too long we have been losing it big time. Yet we have been given one of the key weapons with which to fight the battle—historically corroborated evidence which not only authenticates our scriptures but eradicates the authority of the Qur'an" (p. 110). We are back to combat categories.

Building Relationships is the heading of section 4. One article reflects on whether it is advisable for a Christian missionary to keep the fasting with Muslims during Ramadan. The author encourages the practice, especially because it is a chance for "initiating new relationships" (p. 184). Another contributor is rethinking self-critically what he calls the antinomian attitude of *American evangelicals* (p. 192), that is, the attitude to see rules and religious practices as empty: a "plethora of futile rituals" (p. 186). Is it, in a life according to the Gospel, possible to live "under the law", he wonders. And his answer is: yes, it is "a biblically viable, missiological paradigm" (p. 192). He shows how Paul, for all his liberty, was able to live "orderly, keeping the law" (p. 188; Acts 21:24). The author's self-critical insight was motivated, however, because he wanted Christianity and his character to be respected, as he admits (p. 186).

The last section is on *Evangelistic Methods & Church Planting*. It is noteworthy that dialogue is mentioned as one of the possible models of evangelism; but, Mark Terry clarifies, it has "four purposes: (1) to learn what Muslims believe and to appreciate their beliefs in relation to their culture; (2) to seek to establish both contact and rapport, on the basis of sincere, honest friendship; (3) to learn how to witness to them; and (4) to bring them ultimately to salvation in Christ" (p. 206, quoting Ray Register). Puzzled by statements from the late 1960's, Ralph E. Brown worries that dialogue might dilute the gospel (pp. 216-217). In contrast, he holds that Christian-Muslim dialogue "can, and should be 'an evangelistic tactic'" (p. 217). Bruce Thomas wonders whether a paradigm change is needed; Muslim cultures are, he states citing the anthropological distinction of the 1930's, shame cultures rather than guilt cultures. The feeling of shame is peer related, while the sense of guilt comes from an internalized sense of values. This change of gear might, Bruce Thomas wonders, "revolutionize outreach and church planting in some of the most resistant parts of the world" (p. 231).

The book's articles are all characterized by a clear language and structure; they are practical both in background and orientation: authors palpably have life experience in Muslim contexts; and they give very concrete hints on future moves. They are marked by a sincere and energetic wish to serve Jesus and to do so according to the Bible's words. So, the book's goal to support evangelical missionaries is fulfilled. Three questions may be in place.

- a. Serving. The three concepts most frequently used for what the missionaries are doing among Muslims are: evangelizing, outreach and ministry. Ministry is, first of all, service (δῆλονία, Romans 12:7). If one feels Christ's sending to serve non-Christians, would a less strategical attitude not be more congruent with Jesus? Can the impulse of God's gratuitous love not transform human beings to love just out of love? If friendship and dialogue are becoming part of a strategic agenda, are they still friendship and dialogue? A test case would be: What do I do if my Muslim friend does not discover Christ as Lord, as much as I hope for that?
- b. Prayer. Prayer comes into view only as asking God to fulfill my wish, that is, the way I understood his commission to evangelize all people (e.g., p. 28). But can prayer not also become a moment of listening, of exposing myself to God's mysterious ways, allowing him to transform my primary desire to win, a moment of discernment, where I gain self-distance and enter into a new way of collaborating with God, beyond activism? Then, e.g., evangelization may be discovered in a different light. Trying to contribute to evangelization, rather than strategic evangelism, may turn out to be oriented towards transformation

of the face of the earth, even its political and social structures, in the sense of the Gospel. Does God not want to act sacramentally, through the witness of the Church as the visible transformation of the Kingdom already begun?

- c. Reflection. Maybe a small grammatical mistake is significant. On p. 103 we are told that the New Testament verb for “to dialogue” is “*dialego*”; rather, in fact, the Greek is “*διαλέγομαι/dialegomai*”. It is always used in the middle voice; a “passive” element of self-involvement is present in real dialogue. It is not only something I am doing; I am also experiencing to be changed in it. The aspect of the missionary’s own transformation has not found any reflection in the articles of the journal, and, consequently, in the book. Its aim is to encourage; and that is clearly accomplished. But the book’s strategic aim became too strong for other core questions to be answered. No reflection is ventured on why Muslims convert, what they find attractive, whether there are not-so-pure motives mixed into a wish to be baptized; and no one in the book has (or dares to share) a non-strategic liking and respect for Islam. Is there not also a beauty in Muslims’ generosity as hosts, as friends, as searchers of God?

One can learn a lot from this book; especially, that any enthusiasm for evangelizing needs patient discernment, so that the missionary drive can become ever more Christian in its respect and readiness to learn from others. – *Felix Körner, SI.*