

The Marsh Arabs of Southern Iraq

A Christian Perspective

Brother Samuel

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For my Wife

Foreword

In the book of Revelation it is said that “God remembered Babylon.” It’s not that God had ever forgotten her, any more than He forgets anyone or anything that He has determined to remember – after all He is the omnipresent, omniscient God – He knows the end from the beginning.

But insensitive people tend not to remember a lot of things – including the miserable plight of many in Babylon in general and some in the south in particular. Where do we mean? Well, that’s the story of this well-written account of the Marsh Arabs of the country of Babylon! Brother Samuel is the first-time author, but the account is necessary because little has been written about the people of the marshes for well over 40 years, and certainly not from a Christian point of view. So Brother Samuel attempts to remind us of this neglected people – and does a commendable job too.

Babylon you say? Indeed, yes. For Babylon is the modern state of Iraq. That’s where the ma`dan or al-ma`adi, the official name for the Arabs who populate the marshes survive. Babylon – Iraq – is the ancient Mesopotamia “the country between the rivers” of Tigris and Euphrates.

This book is a Christian missionary book. It’s a must-read if you’re a potential missionary to this seemingly God-forsaken, but not God-forgotten area of the world. Perhaps *you* will not go as a missionary. But missionaries need home support and senders need as much information about their missionaries’ adopted country and culture as possible. Therefore this story is as much for you as it is for them. But even if you don’t intend to go – and you’re not a sender – every Christian needs to become aware of this area where our Christian progenitor, Abraham lived (Galatians 3:29). This is for you too.

The account is written in an easy-to-read, down-to-earth style. Read and learn. God remembers Babylon as He remembers all of us. Even though great judgement will befall Babylon, God has not been totally oblivious of its inhabitants – and He will have some for His elect from “every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9) – including the ma`dan, the Marsh Arabs of Southern Iraq.

John White B.Th, Pastor-Teacher, Port Elizabeth

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Preface and Acknowledgements

“O love, that wilt not let me go” must surely be one of the most beautiful hymns in the English language. Written by George Matheson (1842-1902) in the year 1881, the hymn reflects his response to an event “which caused me the most severe mental suffering.” His words.

For our purposes and experience, the hymn also encapsulates the twin themes of God’s unrelenting love and pain of knowing their (i.e. the Marsh Arabs) fractured existence. God has poured His love for these people deep into our hearts...a lacerating love that feebly approximates the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:37. Yes! their ‘house too is sadly desolate’.

If the reader should detect and likewise respond to this love for the Marsh Arabs, then the author will be more than sufficiently rewarded. We are unashamedly looking for Marsh Arab lovers. This is our mission and driving mandate. At this point allow me the use of a personal illustration. I clearly remember the day when I told this young lady – soon to be my wife – that I loved her. Well! she replied, “what are you going to do about it?” And this is how love is, it seeks expression...may God guide you as you seek to express love to these dear people whose existence is wretchedness and woefully barren of hope.

John Donne’s immortal words “no man is an island” is probably no more true than when employed in an exercise of this nature. My good friends John and Glenn cheerfully read the manuscript and made many helpful comments. And they are still my friends! Needless to say they are absolved from any blame of anything untoward in this book. Glenn, Pat, Deenesh, Caroline, Etienne, Carolien, Helene, Hanlie, Mary-Lee, Glen, Antjie and Reinette endured umpteen ‘Marsh Arab Study’ lectures. Thank you.

I confess I am a bigamist. I have two wives. The first wife, my precious pearl called Pat unselfishly and unreservedly helps me as I seek to woo my second wife. And my second wife, well you’ll read about her in the rest of the book. Nevertheless, this book is dedicated to my first wife.

Finally, it has been suggested that some of the Arabic words need guidance in formatted English vocalising. This is particularly true of Chapter 3. So for this reason I have followed the guidelines of pronunciation laid down in the book “Encountering the World of Islam” edited by Keith Swartley (2005).

Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. Other Scripture translations are indicated as such.



Introduction: Why did I write this book?

I thought I should take a few lines and spell out why I actually wrote this book! It will help the reader – in a few minutes – to decide whether this book would be helpful or not.

Firstly, as I communicated in the “Preface and Acknowledgements”, these are the people whom I love. As I wrote this book, partly in trying to more fully understand them, my resolve to reach them with the message of Jesus only increased. I long for them to know the Prince of Peace.

Secondly, should anyone feel Christ is calling them to serve Him among these people, then this book will largely help them to understand what the implications are.

Thirdly, should anyone feel Christ is calling them to serve Him among them but stay at home, then this book will help them to be an informed sender or promoter or however the home calling may be.

Fourthly, as far as I know there is no Christian book that addresses the Marsh Arab need. This is a huge gap in the Christian market and this book, in some small way, seeks to address this issue.

Fifthly, the proceeds of the sale of this book will seek to serve them materially. Jesus did say ‘I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me’ (Matthew 25:35-36). Every book purchased will help us to respond to such needs in their communities.

Brother Samuel





1 Alphabetical Hello

An alphabetical introduction and overview of the Marsh Arabs of South Iraq

“Memories of that first visit to the Marshes have never left me: firelight on a half-turned face, the crying of geese, duck flighting in to feed, a boy’s voice singing somewhere in the dark, canoes moving in procession down a waterway, the setting sun seen crimson through the smoke of burning reed-beds, narrow waterways that wound still deeper into the Marshes. A naked man in a canoe with a trident in his hand, reed houses built upon water, black, dripping buffaloes that looked as if they had calved from the swamp with the first dry land. Stars reflected in dark water, the croaking of frogs, canoes coming home at evening, peace and continuity, the stillness of a world that never knew an engine.”

(W. Thesiger; 1964:23). He lived there intermittently from 1951 to June 1958

A. Arabic

The Marsh Arabs (hereafter) M.A. speak a type of Arabic that is considered “lower” or inferior to other spoken Arabic.

Some of the Arabic words they would use are *shukran* for ‘thank you’ and *afwan* for ‘you are welcome’. The numbers one to ten in Arabic would be:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
wahad	ithnayn	thalatha	arba’a	khamisa	sitta	saba’a	thamanya	tisa’a	ashara

Under this letter of the alphabet we also think of Abraham being called from ‘Ur of the Chaldeans’ (Gen. 11:31) The ruins of ‘Ur’ are in the

vicinity of the Marshes. Maybe in Abraham's time 'Ur' may have been located at the Marshes.

B. Bedouin

The M.A. culture is based on the traditions that come from the Bedu (Bedouin) nomads of the desert. But M.A. culture has been adapted to the Marshes of South Iraq. Further, M.A. culture has remained unbroken for many generations.

Also the ruins of Babylon are a little south of Baghdad. These ruins are approximately 300 kilometres to the north of the marshes. Baghdad is the capital city of Iraq. The Prophet Jonah (Yunus in Arabic) ministered in the north of Iraq. The ruins of Nineveh, approximately 400 kilometres north of Baghdad, are a popular tourist attraction.

C. Circumcision

M.A. boys are traditionally circumcised at puberty. However, many boys refuse because of the high rate of infections.

It is significant that the explorer Wilfred Thesiger gained great acceptance among them because of his ability to perform this operation.

Muhammad Imran Ashraf Usmani explains the importance of circumcision. He writes: "Khatnah (circumcision) before the age of seven is also a Sunnah (preferable practice) in Islam. The child's health must be taken into consideration before deciding to do Khatnah" (2006:16).

Also this letter of the alphabet reminds us that the M.A. call children "chicks."

D. Dinar

This is the basic Iraqi currency. 'D' also stands for dung. It is the responsibility of the women to make dung cakes for fuel. These buffalo dung cakes – although very popular – generate a lot of smoke.

E. Employment

The M.A. support themselves by fishing and tending small herds of water buffalo which they use for milk. Also they grow rice. Beautiful

reed mats are weaved and sold in the towns for extra income. Yoghurt and cheese are also made and sold. Of relevance too we note that the tomb of Ezra is at al-Azayr, not far from Qurnah, in the South of Iraq.

F. Food

The basic foods are fish, curdled water-buffalo milk, salads and rice. Home-made bread is always in abundance. Tea normally is very strong and sweet, served in small cups. Men and women eat apart and in silence. Talking is to be done before and after meals.

G. Gulf War (1991-1992)

Iraq invaded Kuwait prompting the U.S. and allied forces to intervene. Although Saddam's forces were driven out of Kuwait fairly easily, the dictator spoke of the war as having secured Iraq's honour.

The aftermath of this event was that in Iraq in the North (Kurds) and the South (Shi'is), resistance to Saddam's rule flared up. The rebellion was quelled by forces loyal to Saddam; although many Marsh Arabs were killed. Many fled to Iran as refugees.

H. Holidays

Most M.A. honour Islamic holy days such as Ramadan and the feasts of Eid-al-Adha (the Great Festival) and Eid al-Fitr (the Minor Festival). However, a trip to Mecca in Saudi Arabia would be too costly for most if not all M.A. Incidentally the eighth Imam 'Ali al-Rida is buried in Meshed, Iran and any male who makes the pilgrimage there is known as a Zair. A woman would be called a Zaira.

Popular belief is that the M.A. are heirs of the ancient Sumerians and Babylonians. So they provide continuity with ancient Mesopotamia. Further, their ethnicity has been heavily influenced by Persian and Bedouin association.

Hulegu, offspring of the famous Genghis Khan (c.1167-1227) not only destroyed Baghdad but also wreaked havoc on its irrigation system. Historians claim that this crime dealt Mesopotamia an irreparable blow.

I. Iraq

It has an area of 438,446 square kilometres.

Iraq is bounded by Turkey in the North, Syria and Jordan on the West, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the South, and finally Iran in the East.

The population is approximately 26,783,383 (July 2006 estimate. "The World Factbook: Iraq").

J. Joseph Dellapenna

This man is an expert on international water rights. Also this man (a professor at Villanova University Law School) as he researched Saddam Hussein's prolonged attack on the M.A. made the statement that Saddam Hussein was "...guilty of genocide against the Marsh Arabs...what makes this a crime (the draining of the Marshes) under international law was its purpose (namely)...to destroy a culture and to destroy a people. And that's genocide. And genocide is an international crime. It's a crime against humanity" (in James Bell; 2007:7).

K. Kurds

This people group estimated to be about 20 percent of the population of Iraq, inhabit the North of Iraq, in an area known as Kurdistan. In 1987 and 1988 many Kurdish villages were attacked by Iraqi forces... the many pictures showing people gassed by cyanide and mustard gas shocked and horrified the world.

The Kurds are known as the largest people group in the world without a country of their own. Unfortunately language and religious differences have made it difficult for them to be a united people.

L. Landmines

During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) many landmines were placed in the Marshes. Since many of these landmines are still exposed, returning M.A. refugees are especially at risk because of unfamiliarity with where these mines are located.

M. Marsh Arabs

The M.A. pronounced Mah-dahn have always lived at the juncture where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers meet. They are Shi'i Muslims which, more than anything else, defines their perspective on life.

It is estimated that under the rule of Saddam Hussein more than 90% of the Marshes were destroyed.

The letter ‘M’ reminds us of the word “Mesopotamia” (from the Greek word meaning ‘between the two rivers’). ‘Mesopotamia’ would represent today the area from central to Northern Iraq, till just below Turkey. This would extend into Eastern Syria as well.

N. Najaf

Najaf is a city approximately 330 kilometres north-west from Basra. “The burial grounds...(here)...came to be regarded as the most sacred by Shi’i believers” (Nakash; 1994:186). Here is where ‘Ali is buried. It would be the wish of every devout M.A. to be buried here.

O. Oil

It is a known fact that the Marshes contain huge oil reserves. It is speculated that one of the reasons Saddam drained the Marshes was precisely to tap these huge oil deposits.

During the U.N. embargo, French, Chinese and Russian oil companies were severely criticized for working with Hussein to exploit the oil in the southern Marshes.

P. Pain

I think one would have to look far to find a quote or statement that surpasses the following in clearly stating the horror that attended Saddam Hussein’s rule.

“By mid-January of 2004, 270 mass graves had been reported. The Free Prisoners Society estimates that five to seven million people ‘disappeared’ in the past two decades, the majority of them Shi’ites.”

National Geographic; June 2004:28

Q. Qasab

This is a giant reed that grows to about 8 metres. The Marshes are famous for these reeds – the M.A. split and weave them into mats as well as using them for building their dwellings.

R. Religion

All M.A. are Shi’i Muslims. This means that they believe after Muhammad died, leadership should have passed to ‘Ali, who was Muhammad’s nephew and son-in-law. In fact leadership after

Muhammad passed to Abu-Bakr, then Umar, then Uthman and then only 'Ali.

The word 'Shi'i' literally means follower of Ali. They are particularly strong in Iran and about 60% of Iraqis are Shi'ites.

S. Sports

Not much is known of the M.A. in this regard although it has been said that hunting is a favorite here. Also they love the popular Arab game "mahaibis" or "hunt the ring." Here the players divide into two teams. One team has the ring. One of the opposing team must guess who has the ring and in which hand. Normally it is hidden under a cloak.

Needless to say, and in common with all Iraqis, the love of soccer is also evident.

The Sabeans, a unique people of African descent have also made the Marshes their home.

Recently, the bird species – The Sacred Ibis has again been seen in the Marshes. They were feared to have become extinct.

Today, still the name of Saladin (c.1138-1193), the Kurdish General evokes respect and awe. The Crusaders found him a formidable foe. He is highly respected.

T. Tree

Qurnah, according to popular legend is the place where the Garden of Eden was. There is an old tree known as Adam's tree. This tree yields a plumlike fruit, called the Nabug (in National Geographic; November, 1999). Qurnah is 74 kilometres north of Basra. It is situated at the place where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers meet and become the Shatt-Al-Arab River.

U. United Nations

The terrible warfare that was launched against the M.A. is well illustrated by United Nation's deliberations. The following quote will clearly focus the problem: "The United Nations estimated in 2001 that '40,000 had made it into Iran as refugees, 20–40,000 still inhabited the remaining part of the marshes and 170,000 to 190,000 Marsh Arabs were either dead or displaced'."

V. Visit

Like all Arabs, the M.A. too would welcome guests. They would also provide food and housing without expecting payment – although recent events may keep them from being as precise on this as were their forebears. Interestingly a host will never help a guest leave because this would imply that the host wanted the guest to leave.

W. Water

Although the M.A. are a people who have enjoyed a unique water-based culture, the present quality of the water has deteriorated rapidly. Current challenges being faced are:

- High salination levels
- Prevalence of waterborne diseases
- After effects of Saddam's poisoning the Marshes
- The prevailing culture of always trying to defecate near water so as to be able to wash afterwards.

Also the Water-buffalo, so very important to the M.A., have been compared to the camel of the Bedouin-Arabs.

X. Xerxes

He was the king of the Persian Empire from 486-465 B.C. He is also known as Ahasuerus. He is mentioned in Ezra, Esther and Daniel. He reigned over an empire that would include Iraq. In fact his winter capital was Susa – this would have been a couple of hours ride from the Marshes. The ruins of Susa are still to be found in Iran.

Y. Youth

Sadly there are no schools on the Marshes. Young boys have the duty of collecting grass to be used as fodder for the water buffalo. This is almost a daily duty. Also part of the M.A. culture is a love for poetry, singing and even dancing. I would imagine that excepting children, there will be no mingling of the sexes.

Z. Zeal

Although the M.A. are Shi'i Muslims they are not known to be very zealous for their faith. Rather their piety is expressed in two distinct ways – a preciseness of speech. Terms like 'praise be to God' or 'if God wills' "oils" almost all conversation and has an appearance of

healthy religiosity. The other distinct way in which their faith is expressed is in a firm, stoical belief that all is according to the will of Allah. Fatalism often is the poisoning acid that neutralizes any thought of action or initiative.

“Our ministry views the restoration of the marshes as one of the highest priorities, not only as a symbol of justice, but also as a symbol of the rising of the country from the ashes of the destruction visited on the nation by the former regime.”

Dr. Normin Othman. Ministry of Environment
(in *The Marshes of Mesopotamia*; Uganda, 2005)



2 Arabic Keywords for Understanding Marsh Arabs

“Only when the Christian can understand and appreciate the Muslim’s reality as he (i.e. the Muslim) does, can he talk about his own Christian reality in terms which the Muslim can understand and in ways that enable him to appreciate the Christian’s point of view.”

Don Larson (in Nehls and Eric; 1997:13)

In the Preface and Acknowledgements we wrote that as far as possible we will be following the guidelines laid down by Keith E. Swartley (Editor) in the book ‘Encountering the World of Islam’ (2005; 487-536). There were times when the Arabic words we wanted to use were not transliterated into English. Fortunately such words were rare and in such cases, we drew on local expertise. In other words, at times an educated guess had to suffice!

Abaya (ah-bah-yah)

This is the long, black robe worn by Marsh Arab women that covers both head and body.

‘Abbas ibn ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib

(ah-baas ihb-bihn ahlee ihb-bihn ah-bee tah-lib)

‘Abbas was the half-brother of Husayn. Together they died in battle on the plains of Karbala. It seems that Iman Ali wanted a son who would be an excellent horse rider. Ali “took a Bedouin woman from the tribe of Kilab whose father was considered the bravest...and best rider...” (Nakash; 1994:144). Later fact or fiction lionized him as handsome, chivalrous, courageous...today still the Marsh Arabs regard him very highly. An oath taken in his name will be honoured. It is believed that his fierceness will overtake anyone who dishonours his name.

Ahlan wusahlan (ahlan-wasahlan)

This is a greeting of welcome.

Ahmad (ah-mahd)

This Arabic word means ‘praised one’. Same root word as Muhammad. It is claimed that Ahmad was prophesied in the Bible (surah 61:6) A Yusuf Ali translates this as:

And remember Jesus, The son of
Mary, said: O children of Israel I am
the apostle of God (Sent) to you,
confirming The Law (which came)
Before me, and giving Glad tidings
of an Apostle To come after me
Whose name shall be Ahmad But
when he came to them With clear
signs They said, This is Evident
sorcery.

Al-Ahwar (ahl-ah-wahr)

This is the Arabic for ‘The Marshes’ (E. Nicholson and P. Clark; 2002:174). Christopher Mitchell puts the original area at “an area of 17,000-20,000 square kilometres (almost the size of Wales) and made up the Middle East’s largest wetland ecosystem” (Ibid.:66) . They were situated at the bottom of the “Euphrates and Tigris basins, mainly within the triangular area formed by the cities of Amara, al-Nasiriyya and Basra” (Ibid.).

The three significant Marshes are...

1. the Hawizeh Marsh (extends into Iran on the East),
2. the Qurnah Marsh (the central one) and the
3. Hammar Marsh (on the West, below the Euphrates River).

The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are of major importance. The Tigris is 1718 kilometres long – of which 1418 km. are in Iraq. The Euphrates is 2300 kilometres long (of which 1213 are in Iraq). The two rivers meet and become the Shatt-Al-Arab that flows into the Arabian Gulf. This river is 110 kilometres long.

Al-Fâtiha (ahl-fahtee-hah)

This is the first surah in the Qur'an. In English it is called "The Opening." In all daily prayers it is recited...often it is followed by surah 112 (Parrinder; 1957:12).

Al-hamdu-lil-lah (ahl-hahm-doo-lihl-lah)

This very common Arabic word means 'praise to Allah'. Often said as thanks.

al-Hassan (ahl-hahs-sahn)

It was expected that al-Hassan would succeed his father Ali as the fifth Caliph. However, Mu'awiya, the Governor of Syria persuaded him to resign (A.D. 661). From now on Mu'awiya ruled not only Syria and Egypt, but the whole Islamic empire. However, al-Hassan died 8 years later. It is believed that he was "poisoned by his own wife at the instigation of Mu'awiya" (Nakash; 1994:141). Sir N. Anderson hints that the actual truth is he "...retired to end his life in dissipation at al-Madina" (1990:104). Hammond writes "...that Muhammad declared: he (i.e. – Hassan) is the master of the youth of paradise, married 70 women and had at least 31 children" (2005:84).

'Ali ibn Abi Talib (ahlee ihb-bihn ah-bee tah-lib)

The fourth caliph and the first Shi'i imam. Assassinated in a mosque in A.D. 661 in Kufa. He was Muhammad's cousin and married to Fatima the daughter of Muhammad and his first wife, Khadija. 'Ali is buried in Najaf. This city has a large cemetery which is "considered the holiest and most highly sought-after place for burial among Shi'i believers" (Nakash; 1994:18). Of interest is that Muhammad denied him permission to marry a second wife. When Fatima died, he married 10 wives and had 19 slave girls as concubines (Hammond; 2005:84). Shi'is believe that Ali is an "intercessor" (Nakash; 1994:186) before God, hence it is very important to be buried in Najaf.

Allah (ahl-lah)

God. The Creator and Sustainer of all. The Supreme Being. Both the Qur'an and the Arabic Bible use Allah as the name for God.

Allah’u-Akbar (ah-lah-hoo ahk-bahr)

This very popular Arabic phrase means Allah is the most great. This chant is very common throughout the Islamic world. Takbir (tak-beer) is the Arabic for reciting or chanting Allah’u-akbar.

Anfish and Afa (ahn-feesh and ah-fah)

The Marsh Arabs believe that these are two monsters that are in the Marshes. Both are believed to be deadly.

Ashura (ah-shur-ah)

On the 10 October 680 or on the tenth day of the month of Muharran (1st month of Muslim calendar) of the year 61 of the Hijra (hih-j-rah) (Muhammad left Mecca for Medina, previously called Yathrib. Muslims date their calendars from this event) a decisive battle took place on the plains of Karbala.

Husayn (Ali’s son and Muhammad’s grandson) and a few of his companions were killed by forces led by Yazid (son of Mu’awiya ibn Abi Sufyan, governor of Syria). Husayn’s head was sent to Yazid in Damascus (Nakash; 1994:141) W. Thesiger recounts the events more poignantly: “Husain’s severed head was carried to Kufa and shown to Yazid’s governor, who slashed it across the mouth with his cane. In the appalled silence that followed an old man raised his voice. ‘Alas that I should have lived to see this day – I who saw those lips kissed by the Prophet of God’” (1964:53).

Yitzhak Nakash significantly adds: “Perhaps no other single event in Islamic history has played so central a role in shaping Shi’i identity as the martyrdom of Husayn and his companions at Karbala” (Ibid:142). Thesiger puts it more strikingly “...he (i.e. Husayn) chose to fight and by so doing altered the history of Islam” (1964:53). Ashura is the commemoration of Husayn’s death. It is an annual event. Amongst other activities there is the flagellation and cutting of male bodies. The shrine of Imam Husayn and his half-brother Abbas is in Karbala. Ashura celebrations were forbidden during the time of Saddam Hussein.

Atwa (ah-twah)

Sadly the Marsh Arab tribes are often locked in blood feuds. However, to declare a temporary truce – for instance for arbitration to take place – would be to affirm/call for atwa.

Baksheesh (bak-sheesh)

To hear this word being used would mean the person wanted a tip.

Banu (bah-noo)

Tribe.

Bayt (bait)

A house.

Bismillah (bihs-mihl-lah)

Every surah in the Qur'an (except the ninth surah) has the heading: 'In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful'; literally Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahim (J. Gilchrist; 1995:3). This formula is known as the 'bismillah'. At this point we note that two titles of Allah in the Qur'an are, 'ar-Rahman' (the merciful) and 'ar-Rahim' (the compassionate).

Dinar (dih-naar)

This is Iraqi currency and a Fils is a thousandth part of a Dinar (Thesiger; 1964:221).

Dishdasha (deesh-dasha)

This is the long Arabic dress worn by men and women in Iraq.

Du'a (dah-ah-wah)

This is spontaneous prayer. Salat (one of the 'Five Pillars of Islam') is the five prescribed prayers of each day.

Fasl (fah-sl)

What will be required for compensation or revenge by one tribe of another for a wrong committed. Sometimes referred to as "blood money." A Talawi would be a "virgin of marriageable age handed over in part settlement of a blood feud" (Thesiger; 1964:222).

Fiimaanila (fee-ahmen-ileh)

This is to say goodbye. It literally means “go with God’s blessing.”

Halal (hah-lahl)

Anything permitted by the Shariah (Islamic Law). The opposite would be Haram. That which is unlawful, forbidden or prohibited by Shariah. Transgression here would involve punishment.

Henna (hehn-nah)

This is a dye often used by Marsh Arab women on their hair and hands. Normally reserved for special occasions.

Hosa (hazz-zah)

War dance that prepares a tribe for attack or an act of aggression.

Hijab (hee-jahb)

Head scarf.

Iblis (ihb-lees)

The devil. In Arabic also called ‘Shaitan.’

Isa (ee-sah)

This is the name used in the Qur’an for Jesus.

Insha’llah (insha-al-Lah)

This is very common Arabic term meaning ‘if Allah wills’...at times uttered to profess great piety, at other times one suspects a means for procrastination.

Islam (ihb-lahm)

The word means submission. More specifically to the will of Allah as revealed in the Qur’an, hadith (traditions of the prophet Muhammad) and sunna (established examples that can be traced back to Muhammad). The source for the “sunna” would be the hadith.

Janna (jehn-nah)

This Arabic word means paradise (more exactly garden). The opposite would be Jahannam (jah-hahn-nahm), i.e. hell.

Jinni (jihh-nee)

Spirits. Singular Jinn. It is believed spirits (among them are believers and unbelievers) are created by Allah from fire. Human beings from mud and angels from light. (surah 15).

Ka'ba (kah-ah-bah)

This is a square stone building in Al-Masjid-al-Haram (the great Mosque in Mecca) towards which all Muslims turn their faces in prayer.

Kaffiyeh (kah-fee-yah)

This is the checkered head cloth worn by men.

Khadija (khah-dih-jah)

She was Muhammad's first wife. He was 25 and she was 40 when they married. She was a business woman and proposed to him. She believed that Muhammad's dreams were true and that "the angel Gabriel (Jibril) came to Muhammad as he slept and commanded him to write" (Swartley; 2005:14). They were married for 25 years before she died. Khadija had been widowed twice before.

Kubba (koob-bah)

This is a common food item in the Middle East...it is rice or meat packed with onions, spices, raisins then it is either baked or fried. It is very, very popular and very common but nevertheless very tasty.

Leban (laban)

In Iraq this would be served as yoghurt mixed with water.

Maasalaama (mai-salemah)

This is to bid someone farewell and it literally means go in safety.

Mashuf (mash-hoof)

These are the small canoes the Marsh Arabs use for basic transportation. This is to be distinguished from a Tarada which is much longer and distinguished by rows of decorative flat-topped nails along the inner planking (Thesiger; 1964:222). This Tarada is normally a sheikh's canoe.

Mudhif (moo-th-eef)

This is a guest house built in a half circle of reeds and matting. From time immemorial this has been a distinguishing trait of the Marsh Arabs.

Mullah (moo-lah)

Teacher of Islam.

Munkar and Nakir (moon-kahr and nah-keer)

These are two angels that the Shi'i believe will judge their acts immediately after death (Nakash; 1994:186). That is why, being buried near to 'Ali will "eliminate the ordeal of the dead in the grave, and reduce the interval between death and resurrection" (Ibid.).

Mut'a (moot-a-ah)

This Arabic word means temporary marriage...a distinctly Shi'i doctrine and practice. A marriage between an agreeable couple may be contracted for a stipulated time and at an agreed "dowry" for the bride.

Nabi Isa (nah-bee ee-sah)

The Qur'anic reference to Jesus namely: Prophet Jesus. Isa al-Masih (ee-sah ahl-mah-seeh) would be Jesus the Messiah.

Qalit (kah-leet)

This is the headman of the village and his position was hereditary. Thesiger writes after extensive Marsh Arab exposure: "His position was hereditary, even if he was senile or half-witted" (Thesiger; 1964:213). The difference between a qalit and a sheikh is that of authority: the sheikh had more power and in many cases owned huge tracts of land (Ibid. :28).

Qur'an (kohrr-ahn)

Muhammad (A.D. 570-632) is the founder of the last great world religion : Islam. His revelations were collected after his death. These "revelations" in the Qur'an (in Arabic) are contained in 114 surahs (chapters). Instead of verses there are ayat (which means proofs, evidences, lessons, signs, revelations, etc. Ayah is a single verse. Ayatollah comes from this Arabic word).

Further the standard view of Muslim scholars is because the Qur'an is of "Arabic nature,...any translation cannot be more than an approximate interpretation, intended only as a tool for the study and understanding of the original Arabic text. Since fewer than 20 percent of Muslims speak Arabic, this means that most Muslims study the text only in translation" (Khaleel Mohammed: Spring 2005).

Salam alaikum (sah-lahm ah-leh-koom)

This traditional Arabic greeting is: 'Peace be on you', to which there is the reply 'Alaikum as salam': 'on you be peace'. This is the most basic necessary Arabic that any foreigner will use wanting to communicate.

Sayyid (or 'Alim) (say-yihd, ahl-ihm)

These are people who claim to descend from the prophet Muhammad. They had religious and administrative functions. The Sayyids "were regarded as holy men...among the marsh dwellers...and they claimed to possess supernatural powers to cure maladies, cause misfortune, bring blessing, and practice various other magic rites. They gained money on account of this..." (Nakash; 1994:40,41).

Sayyid al-shuhada' (say-yihd ahl-shoohah-dah)

Shi'i believers refer to Husayn by this title: "prince of martyrs." D. Wells puts the issue precisely: "For the Shi'ite Muslim Jesus must replace Husayn as the ransom for his people and as the intercessor before God" (1989:108).

Shahàda (shah-hah-deh)

This is the first 'pillar' of the Muslim faith, namely 'There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet'. However, the Shi'i Muslim also adds: 'Ali the Friend of God the Successor of the Holy Prophet' (S.V. Mira Ahmed Ali; 1964:222).

Shi'i (shee-ee)

After Muhammad died, there were 4 Caliphs (Islamic political/spiritual ruler) namely Abu Bakr (the word 'Abu' means father: 'Ibn' or 'bin' is son) al-Siddiq (d.634), Umar ibn al-Khattab (d.644), Uthman (he ordered the codification of the Qur'an: d.656) and 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. Shi'is regard the first three Caliphs as usurpers...Shi'is believe that the Caliphate can only be passed along family lines. The Shi'is call Ali

Imam (leader) Ali. So in short what we are saying is that for Shi'is, Ali followed Muhammad as leader of Muslims.

They are a minority Islamic sect (10-15 percent). They also believe that 11 Imams descended from Ali. They are mainly found in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan and Lebanon. (Swartley; 2005:528). There are also groups called the Seveners and Fivers. They all believe in al-Mahdi (the rightly guided one) who will one day appear and be a forerunner for the return of Jesus (Swartley; 2005:124).

“The Muslims of the Shi’ia sect have a tradition that on the return journey to Medina, Muhammad halted the caravan in a very hot place in the desert and assembled the people around him. Then he called his son-in-law Ali to his side, appointed him as his successor, and bade the people obey him. This tradition is rejected by other Muslims as untrue” (Swartley; 2005:27). S.V. Mira Ahmed Ali writes “It is a historic fact that Ali was the greatest protector of the Holy Prophet and Islam” (1964:107).

What is also clear, however, is that later Mu’awiya, the Governor of Syria and Aysha Bint Abu Bakr (Muhammad’s favourite wife; he married her when she was 7...and taken to his house when she was 9 (Nehls; 1987:114)) accused Ali “of complicity in the assassination of Uthman...Ali...eventually was assassinated by one of his disillusioned followers” (Nehls and Eric; 1996a:39).

Shirk (shuhrk)

This is the sin of adding a partner to Allah (i.e. as Muslims believe Christians do by their belief in the Trinity). Muslims believe the sin of ‘Shirk’ is unforgiveable. Kufr (unbelief: pronounced as koo-fuhr) is also unforgiveable.

Shlonich (schlone-ich)

That is to ask a woman – how are you?

Suq (sook)

Market. So Suq Al Fuhud would be the market at Fuhud.

Tawhid (tahw-heed)

This very important word in Arabic is used to express the absolute oneness of Allah. This is Islamic monotheism.

Umma (oom-mah)

This word refers to the Muslim community with the supposed association of unity and equality.

Umm (oom)

Mother of. 'Bint' is daughter.

Yallah (yah-lah)

Let us go.

"To learn a language needs the desire to do so and perseverance."

John Kirkbright (in Spoken Arabic step-by-step. A beginner's course
In Spoken Arabic of the Gulf and Saudi Arabia; Book 1, page 4)



3 Marsh Children

“Psychologists have observed that young children deprived of genuine parental love suffer character difficulties and fail to achieve their potential growth emotionally and intellectually. Someone must give children more than shelter, food and nice clothes. Every person needs a proper self-esteem and sense of worth and direction. To develop such self-esteem, self-confidence, and sense of security, a child needs a happy, hopeful outlook on life. These prevent the aggressiveness and recessiveness of problem children.”

O.E. Feucht (in Zuck and Clark, Editors; 1975:29)

In this section we will look at Marsh Arab children in six propositions. This chapter is like the children, straightforward, unpretentious and uncomplicated.

And it was with the same disarming innocence and love that Jesus ‘took the children in His arms (and), put His hands on them and blessed them’ (Mark 10:16). The children of the Marshes, no less, need His arms and hands...the question is, will the Church provide them?

Numerous

There are many, many children among the Marsh Arab tribes. Now this is not to say that birth-control devices are unheard of. Also it has been acknowledged by some Marsh Arab women that boys are more important than girls. In private conversations with “M” (an anonymous Iraqi Christian) some Marsh Arab women have acknowledged the reality of abortion.

Tribe

Because children are conceived out of inter-family marriages, many bear the evidences of interbreeding. Squint eyes, deformed arms and legs – many we were told are so badly deformed at birth, that they are immediately killed. Unchecked incest will bring forth its terrible results.

Of course we are aware that in Marsh Arab thinking the tribe is of primary importance, meaning that interminable marriages take place in the context of affirming tribal identity, yet almost exclusively to the loss of personal happiness. One can only guess how many mothers, especially must grieve because of deformed infants not to speak of lives terminated at birth. The psychological guilt carried by the married women of the Marshes must be incalculable. Many, many tears have been shed. Here is surely a wound on the soul of many a Marsh Arab woman – created by a culture of sin – waiting for the word of forgiveness about Jesus from the lips of a MAT woman worker. And psychologists will tell us that mothers “wounded” in this way must inevitably in their relationship with their healthy offspring be adversely affected. To put it bluntly, the termination of one will skew how the other children are treated. Perhaps spoiled, over-compensated, but normality will be foreign. Guilt will be forever lurking in the wings.

Something so patently wrong may elicit the question... “will this tradition of inter-family marriage be taught against and shown to be harmful?” Well for a start, they know it is wrong. They live with its effects daily. But further, no, it won’t be preached against but lived against, meaning as the Marsh Arab women see the Christian alternative in the MAT workers, not only will curiosity be raised but questions will be asked. Then Bible teaching will be given and in all this the Holy Spirit will start His “underground” (not always immediately discernible) work of dismantling the building-blocks of Satan and then firmly, perhaps slowly but thoroughly laying the structures of the new Kingdom.

Marriage

Closely related to the above but worthy of separate elaboration is that it must be remembered that the children born are all products of arranged marriages. The implication is clearly this, the children are not born of a union that flowered because of prior choice and love. Legislated

marriages rarely if ever bring love in its wake. It is one thing to say the partners bear with one another; it is entirely another matter if real love is being spoken of.

Now we must be careful at this point. We hasten to add that despite arranged marriages and multiple marriages (the Qur'an allows a man up to four wives providing that he can care for them equally) within the same household, we are sure that children are not unloved but children thrust into this precarious environment are hardly being promised their parents' undivided attention and love. These children are certainly not growing up in an environment free of friction between parents.

The magazine: 'Fairlady'; December: 2005:84-88 carried the following terribly sad article: "For better or for worse." It is the story of a South African Muslim woman whose husband – they have been married for 21 years – decides to take a second wife, fifteen years younger than himself. Now this article (which includes an interview with the "Secretary General of the Muslim Judicial Council") is full of pain and anger; the hopelessness of the whole situation is barely concealed. One can only ask (and we realize that for Marsh Arab women this is an all too often frequent experience) where will this all end? How many lives will be irreparably damaged!

A few quotes to capture the mood and ethos of a second marriage experience... "she asks, could any woman 'in her right mind' not be devastated by such news?... He's a temporary husband and a temporary father... The fact that he's never around hurts the children the most. Her husband has also threatened to take the children if she decided to marry again... But I don't know if a man can love two women..."

This sad, randomly chosen testimony of the futility of a second marriage (one step removed from an arranged marriage) takes us back to our fundamental question: how much 'damage' will Marsh Arab children continue to endure? Something so basic, so encapsulated in Muslim and also Marsh Arab culture and thinking will continue to wreak havoc and lay seeds of much, much discontent.

Socialization

Those of us who are parents sometimes don't realize how much the process of "socialization" (Pikunas; 1976:201) helps us in guiding our

children to maturity and understanding. For instance a trip to the zoo to leisurely explain the various animals or even to the local park to retreat from the hustle and bustle of everyday life so that for a few minutes we can freshly appreciate the beauty of creation around us. And so we can go on. Now of Marsh Arab children, what ‘socialization’ factors are in place to help acquire healthy attitudes and social awareness?

The answer is embarrassing. Because the brutal answer is ... nothing. There are no parks, no zoos, no playing fields, no shopping arcades...the only thing they have to distract and amuse or entertain them is nothing. Their villages cut a picture of colossal hopelessness, that for parents, the struggle to survive is so persistent, that the last thing occupying adult minds is; how can our children be ‘socialized’ into awareness and maturity.

Now for the MAT youth worker, there are immediate implications. There are at least three that come to mind...

In seeking to minister to children with a view to salvation in Christ – and bearing in mind that the MAT worker is the only ‘socialization’ factor the child has ever experienced – the MAT worker will have to explore other ‘socialization’ means like story-telling, beautiful pictures, sport varieties, foreign sponsorships for tape and audio libraries...so their lack of ‘socialization’ will really require the MAT worker to be more creative and inventive. The MAT worker must seek to make their “world” bigger and more beautiful.

A further implication of their ‘socialization’ lack is that parents must be drawn into the education process. Because their parents most probably also lack ‘socialization’ realities – and we don’t want to educate the children ahead of the parents – the reaching of the children must include the parents as well. Obviously if the parents are unconcerned then we would proceed only with the children. But we are optimistic. We anticipate that the mothers especially – with what time they can spare because they are continually at work – will welcome the opportunity to expand their horizons.

To come into a culture so bereft of beautiful things that the MAT worker may be used to, will also require a willingness to get “the hands dirty” and so for instance, a start can be made by creating small but beautiful gardens. Or create outdoor tea-gardens or informal, small play-schools where children can be carefully entertained. That the Marsh Arab villages are so bleak and barren is really a challenge to all

MAT workers to see and ensure that a thing of ugliness can become a picture of beauty. Villages must become visual illustrations of salvation: namely ‘out of darkness’ and ‘into His marvelous light.’

Education

When talking about children, one of the first questions that come to mind is: ‘what of the education?’ Now the tragedy of Iraq is that almost the whole socio-economic structure has collapsed. Sewage, sanitation, medical services, education, water purification and the like have been reduced to non-existence or barely functional. Education has in particular been sorely hit. The resilience of the Iraqi people has been sorely tested.

But to talk of Marsh Arab children we must distinguish between those on the Marshes and those inhabiting the cities. Of the children in the cities we are probably safe in guessing that should schooling facilities be in place (although in the current situation it is more than doubtful) then they will avail themselves of this. This is of course subject to funds permitting. But of the children in the Marshes, the following are facts known to us:

Apparently during the time of Saddam Hussein buildings were put up that would serve both as clinic and school. The problem with his “kind gesture” was that he would normally build the facility a good walking distance away from the village/s. It has been said that since he was no friend of the Marsh Arabs, this was done in such a way to “punish them.”

Here we must be careful though. Their perspective on where their facilities were placed is obviously biased. It may also be that facilities were placed in such ways that many points of need could be served so here we have to satisfy ourselves with a little speculation. But for now we can at least reflect their view as told to us.

So from our experience – and we have no reason to doubt that it applies generally to all Marsh Arab children in the Marshes – we noted that the children were not going to school. Since their parents are illiterate or minimally educated, there then would hardly be any encouragement from their side to give guidance in education. The grounds for enthusiasm has hardly been prepared.

- But the Marsh Arabs are clear on one thing: they want their children educated. In fact one could almost say they are so desperate for the education of their children, that even to have them taught English would be preferable to the current situation where they are simply not being taught anything. A little is better than nothing even if it is not seen as immediately relevant to their situation
- Of course when we talk of the Marsh Arabs, we remind ourselves that “The Marsh people distinguish themselves as the poorest among the poor within the population of Southern refugees” (Le Roy in Nicholson and Clark; 2002:266) so obviously education would be at no cost to them. In fact it would be more than a privilege to humbly serve them this way.
- To speak of education, at least what is taught must be seen and believed to be credible. If we are asking children to invest hours in study (not to speak of parents and ourselves) then the “product” must be trustworthy, and for this to be so, the Iraqi Education Department (not that they have historically been over concerned about the Marsh Arabs) must be seen to give us their “blessing.” However, that someone will be able and willing to address the need of Marsh Arab children’s education would initially be welcomed. Especially if the education is seen to be as all-encompassing as possible, funds permitting.
- To state the obvious, but let it not be left unsaid, the quality or standard of education must be as high as possible. If Marsh Arab children have over the years had to exist on the ‘scraps’...let it be seen that MAT education works from the top end of the ladder: namely ‘Calvary’ demands we give of our best and that every effort is in place to ensure that the children receive it as such.

Of course there is always scope for informal skills training...let me proceed with some examples that hopefully will illustrate and unleash a whole reservoir of skills from the Christian community.

Example 1 A Christian worker (all these examples are at no cost to the Company; we are trusting the Lord that people will volunteer their ministries) who perhaps from South Africa may have definite singing gifts...then among the Marsh children we will facilitate schools of music where children will be intensely trained. The idea is to say train only 10 people – but that they will then train and teach others.

Example 2 Here is a qualified nurse that is specialized for example in speech and hearing defects. This person would be encouraged to come and share their research with us. Or someone can come and teach home-nursing skills. Also people with agricultural, veterinary skills will always be welcome. There is no end to the skills and talents we will be looking for.

Example 3 Quite different from the other two, is for example a ventriloquist... “come and bring laughter to children, but also share your skills.”

Now it may be asked: “what does ventriloquism have to do with the Gospel?” It can be positively affirmed that it has everything to do with the Gospel, encapsulated in two words; communication and confidence. Sharing the Gospel simply with a doll is a non-confrontational, indirect way of communicating the Gospel!

Views

While we have written of different aspects affecting the children, a final paragraph on their overall well-being will help us to focus on whether their present position is that of plight and poverty or paradisiacal and plenteous.

Now to try and get as close as possible to the painful reality of Marsh Arab children, I have lifted five quotes from my research. Sources that speak of first-hand experience.

“Today, a people that once lived in elegant reed-built villas on stilts are crammed into strips of scruffy mud-bricks where telegraph poles and the occasional satellite dish are the only signs of modernity. Children share homesteads with water buffalo, cattle and mangy dogs and drink untreated water from shallow green ponds that are all that remain of the marshes.

As the British patrol bounces along a sun-baked mud road just outside Amara, youngsters with eyes as green as the pools they drink from beg for gifts. Normally soldiers are asked for sweets; here, the pleas are more basic. ‘Water, mister, water’ is the endless cry.”

Internet: February 17,2005. Colin Freeman, Chronicle Foreign Service
“Troops tread softly in ‘Wild East’” – Google: Marsh Arabs

“But the Marsh Arabs still live in abject poverty. No schools, no hospitals. Not even clean drinking water.”

Internet: CBC News Online, April 15, 2004 Reporter: Margaret Evans
Producer: Edith Champagne from The National

“One woman expressed her concerns for the dangers the children of the marshes face, witnessing first-hand the struggles of fearful mothers struggling to maintain the health of their babies in such a harsh environment. ‘I am the only midwife for al Dibin Village...I help bring the children into our world...’ The 45 year old woman has a face ravaged by years of difficult economic and social circumstances... Forced into migration seven years ago by Saddam while she was pregnant, she lost her baby...”

Internet: International Medical Corps. Article: Marsh Arabs – a healthy future in an ancient culture. Tanya Habjouqa -18 August 2006

“Our life here in the village is very hard. There is no power and we have no schools...it is still the same as it was under the old regime.”

Kamel Mezher:Marsh Farmer BBC News Andrew North – 28 June 2006

“One problem the ministry of education admits it cannot solve yet is the shortage of pupils, largely because many people cannot afford to send their children to school. Families need their sons, especially, to help them get by.

‘I have five sons of school age but they work to meet the family’s needs’, said Abdallah Najim 48, a local resident. ‘I see an uncertain future for them. They don’t know how to read or write. But what can I do? Their wages barely keep us alive’”.

Internet. Institute for war and peace reporting. Mobile Schools set up for Marsh Arabs. 24 August 2006

Conclusion

I am sure all of us feel overwhelmed at the little we have “seen.” Later on we will look at the question: given the enormity of the problem, not to speak of the distance – can we do anything?

But for a start, let us look at another time when a “country vicar to whom a homeless woman turned for help, and who (doubtless sincerely, and because he was busy and felt helpless) promised to pray for her. She later wrote this poem and handed it (to) a regional officer of Shelter.

I was hungry, and you formed a humanities group
to discuss my hunger.

I was imprisoned, and you crept off quietly to your
chapel and prayed for my release.

I was naked, and in your mind you debated the
morality of my appearance.

I was sick, and you knelt and thanked God for
your health.

I was homeless, and you preached to me of the
spiritual shelter of the love of God.

I was lonely, and you left me alone to pray for me.

You seem so holy, but I am still very hungry – and
so close to God lonely – and cold.”

John Stott (1999:23, 24)

Thank you. You have taken the time to research a little the plight of Marsh Arab children. Thank you that the Marsh Arab children will never echo these words of the psalmist “...no one cares for my soul” (Psalms 142:4 E.S.V.)... **Because you have decided to become part of God’s answer.**

“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

James 2:26



4 Marsh Women

Let us talk about Marsh Arab Women

*“As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto the man is woman;
Though she bends him, she obeys him,
Though she draws him, yet she follows;
Useless each without the other!”*

H.W. Longfellow

Introduction

In this study we will first raise four “boundary-markers.” Four indications that will determine the “landscape” that we have to be familiar with.

The Holy Qur’an

“If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, Two, or three, or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.”

Surah 4:3. A Yusuf Ali

“Laila”

“I want to be more free...I want freedom and a life with no problems and not to work very hard and get so tired...”

An anonymous Marsh Arab woman to 'M'

“Selma”

“...marriage life is a failure...” Her family have told her she will marry her cousin – he is much younger than her!

An anonymous Marsh Arab woman

Yitzhak Nakash

“The tribesmen despised the marsh dwellers because of what they considered the latter’s mixed blood, their practice of temporary marriage, and their name ma’dan or al-ma’adi; which outside the marshes connoted ‘yokel’”.

The Shi’is of Iraq : 47

Anticipated concerns

Someone may well enquire, how justifiably can we speak of such a diverse group, namely Marsh Arab Women collectively?

To this fair question my response would be that their similarities far exceed their dissimilarities. They are all Shi’ite. Further they have lived in the same area for decades. Their society treats them all the same, they all go through the same living expectations (this will be detailed later) and their culture assigns to them roles that none transcend. The only women who by-pass the “system” are the elderly (they have an earned status; they have already been through the ‘system’) and the infirm. For the rest, it is much the same way for every day.

Also there is the query that since there is no other scholarship on Marsh Arab women, how can the present essay be verified as correct and objective?

It is proper that a certain reticence will attend efforts to ‘break new ground’. Does the author have any axe to grind – any hidden agenda? To these questions the answer is no! If there is one aim – one thrust – it is that others may follow and tell their story even better. They are a great unknown and it is hoped that in time to come a host of writers, researchers, etc., will proclaim their lives, needs and struggles more eloquently.

We live in a utilitarian age. Something must serve a purpose. Time has made us all pragmatists. So what purpose are we seeking to explore? It is that Christians, deeply motivated and mired in the love of God will seek to cross thresholds – step into this “unknown”, and with the tender love of a seeking Saviour seek to touch and transform empty and meaningless lives. There is an emptiness that needs to be filled, a hunger that needs to be assuaged, a thirst that needs to be slaked. If we are talking about those at the ‘bottom of the pile’ – and we are – it will need clear-minded people to go there as well. The proverbial ‘rose-tinted spectacles’ need to be taken off – sometimes rather rudely.

I want to now proceed and speak of Marsh Arab women under three headings. What is left unsaid can be inferred from these three headings.

Religion

All Marsh Arab women are Shi’ites. And as we have seen, up to four wives (surah 4:3) are permitted. But we go further. Surah 2:223 tells us that “your wives are as a tilth (this word means “cultivation, cultivated land.” Chambers Concise Dictionary; 1991) unto you; so approach your tilth when or how you will; but do some good act for your souls beforehand...”

Now we come to surah 4:24 which we quote in full. The translation is by A.Yusuf Ali, himself a Shi’ite. (Gilchrist; 1995, 141).

Also (prohibited are) Women already married, except those whom your right hands possess: Thus hath God ordained (Prohibitions) against you: Except for those, all others are lawful, provided Ye seek (them in marriage) with gifts from your property, - desiring chastity, not lust. Seeing that ye derive benefit from them, give them their dowers (at least) as prescribed; but if, after a dower is prescribed, ye agree mutually (to vary it), there is no blame on you, and God is All-Knowing All-Wise.

This is a very significant ayah. According to Shi'ites "...this arrangement (allowed) a Muslim (to) engage in sexual activity with a woman for a limited period of time after which she was to be paid a sum of money. Others beyond the Muslim community might justifiably interpret such activities as prostitution renamed. In later divisions over the issue Sunni Muslims claimed that Muhammad subsequently prohibited the practice. But Shia Muslims quoting surah 4:24, claimed it was permissible" (Robinson; 2003: 136). This practice is known in Arabic as Mut'a. On a personal note, Zuhair, a Marsh Arab has asked me on various occasions if I want a second wife...I wonder if this was on his mind? However, I didn't feel the need to explore his question.

Of course, for all Muslims the example of Muhammad is always hovering in the background. While the Qur'an tells the Muslim what Allah said, the sunna and hadith are modelled on how Muhammad lived. For instance did he dye his hair, what he said about flies, etc., etc. Now in surah 33:53 in part we read...

...That ye should annoy God's
Apostle, or that Ye should marry his
widows After him at any time. Truly
such a thing is In God's sight an
enormity"

(A.Y.Ali)

So, in one stroke the wives of Muhammad were forbidden to re-marry after his death. And in a nutshell devout Muslim wives, Marsh Arab women included, were effectively precluded from the prospect of re-marriage after the death of the husband. Of course the irony of this is that Muhammad himself after Khadija's death "...married about thirteen wives. All except Ayesha were widows or divorcees" (Nehls, Eric; 1996a : 25). Muhammad certainly did not practice the restraint that he legislated for his wives. We have already seen that Ali remarried after the death of Fatima.

Underlying these facts is an incipient sadness. The sorrow becomes enlarged in that widows with no husband to enjoy conjugal rights, become prey to immorality and sexual looseness.

Deborah Meroff has produced a startling book called "True Grit" (2004). Although it details many painful realities that women and children suffer worldwide, of interest to us are the details of Iraq. We are told that in Iraq "the country's population is 60 percent women, and

as many as 300,000 are war widows. Several thousand have accepted ‘temporary marriages’ in order to survive, although there is great shame and social stigma attached” (Ibid.183). Yet earlier, (Ibid.135, 136) we are told “Since this practice has official religious approval it is not considered sinful. Nobody has to have a guilty conscience... Huge numbers of widows see it as the only way to survive. Clerics who support muta‘a say it offers them sexual and financial freedom.” So while we may detect a contradiction; our point is that the practice is common and therefore Marsh Arab women – in keeping with their peers – would not be exempt of the influence of this iniquitous belief and practice.

There is another factor that inhibits help – it is that Arab tribal culture strongly affirms male-bondedness and superiority. The converse is also true: women are of secondary importance – after all did the prophet not say “...if I were to order anybody to make prostration to anybody, I would have ordered a woman to prostrate before her husband” (Mishkat 1:210) and “...the Messenger of Allah was asked: who among women is best? He replied: she who gives pleasure to him (i.e. the husband) when he looks, obeys him when he bids, and who does not oppose him regarding herself and her riches fearing his displeasure” (Ibid. 216; this and previous Mishkat quote from Nehls, Eric; 1996a: 143). Incidentally, “Mishkat” (the full name is Mishkatu’l Masabi) are the “‘most authentic’ Sunni traditions” (Nehls and Eric; 1996a: 160).

Now from this dismal section we turn to marriage and work. I am sure the reader is hoping that our study will get “lighter” or at least that there will be rays of hope to gladden our hearts...but I’m afraid, that you will find there is precious little in their context that suggests hope and comfort. Everything about them cries out: Christians do something!

Marriage and work

The Marsh Arab women are hardworking. Be it making yoghurt, butter, milk, weaving mats, looking after children: they are rarely idle. But it’s a hard life. Money is scarce. Barter at the suq (market) is tough. They have no alternative but to work hard. Generally too they feel the men are lazy and unsupportive.

To be sure, what is seen tugs at the heart of anyone who has a drop of compassion in their bones. But the unseen is more foreboding... namely, unlike the West, Marsh Arab girls will not decide whom they will marry. It will be decided for them. From the same tribe, uncles or close family members will decide which cousins shall marry and when. Then the young bride will be taken to the home of the groom. There the mother-in-law, ever ready to “guide” the young bride will instil a feeling of unease and unhappiness that hardly allows the bridal home to be a place of tranquillity and harmony.

Leon Uris (1984:141-149) captures the painful dynamics very well. A few quotes will underscore what we are saying: “Hagar often complained that she dreaded the day her sons would marry and bring wives into our house because she didn’t want to share the kitchen with anyone. Haj Ibrahim changed all that when he took Ramiza as a second wife...

Haj Ibrahim wondered aloud from time to time, if the old Sheik Walid Azziz had duped him in selling him Ramiza... The old sheik had no way of knowing if Ramiza was clever or stupid. He had so many daughters he scarcely knew all their names...

After a few months Ramiza became pregnant and the first burst of my father’s ardour diminished rapidly. He yelled at her frequently and at times punctuated his displeasure by slapping her...” (Ibid. 141-142). Leon Uris dredges up a painful picture. Surely arranged marriages must foist much pain upon Marsh Arab women. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (1965: 27-33) is a lot more cautious about her visit to the “Sheik’s harem”... but apparently “Selma” was known as the “favourite wife of the sheik”... much as one would suppose Aisha Bint Abu Bakr was the known favourite wife of Muhammad. John Gilchrist (1994; 83-85) even goes further. Apparently among his wives there were conspiracies and “intrigues against Muhammad...” so much so that surah 66:3-4 addresses the issue.

When the Prophet disclosed a matter
in confidence to one of his consorts,
and she then divulged it ... But if ye
back up Each other against him...

Indeed surah 66:5 even holds out the possibility that "...he (can) divorce you (all and) that God will give him in exchange consorts better than you."

So polygamous marriages carry their own seeds of dissension and unhappiness. The very life of Muhammad negated the injunction of surah 4:3 "... Be able to deal justly (with them)...that is women of your choice."

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. There are other factors that to a Western mind would appear strange, almost obnoxious. However, we hasten to add that Western values and criteria are hardly a sufficient yardstick. For a start, Marsh Arab women are eligible for marriage from the ages fourteen to sixteen and obviously have to be a virgin as well. Also in Marsh Arab culture, in the midst of wedding festivities the groom is expected to consummate his marriage by announcing the event with a gunshot. Also for marriages being consummated, not only is the gunshot the awaited signal, but the groom is also expected to produce a blood-stained sheet: truly the bride was a virgin! Needless to say no one calls the bridegroom's sexual history into question. After all, he is the male.

However, the plot thickens. W.Thesiger (1964;58-59) tells us that "the Ma'dan had a bad name with Arabs and Englishmen alike. In Arabic the word meant a dweller in the Adan or Plain, and the nomads of the desert used it contemptuously to signify any of the Iraqi river tribes, while the cultivators along the rivers used it disparagingly of the Marshmen...(and they)...despised the Marshmen for their dubious lineage, and the readier they were to impute to them every form of treachery and evil." So already you have the general perception among the Iraqi population that the Marsh Arabs are no good, a worth nothing people, hardly to be tolerated, preferably isolated, feared and as far as possible relegated and kept to the "backwaters" of the Marshes. To the uninformed, Marshes and people are the spice of tranquillity and harmony...but to the Iraqi, it is all one piece: a sufficient hiding-place to populate an unwanted people.

Now this is hardly a confidence-building, how to 'build one's self-esteem' framework for progress and advancement. But the tragedy is that it provided Saddam Hussein with a ready weapon with which to launch a vicious propaganda campaign. Not only did Saddam have a ready and sure platform in the population's dislike of the Marsh Arabs, but he was determined to drive the 'knife in even deeper'...Marsh Arab

women were particularly singled out as ‘sluttish and immodest’. The Marsh Arab women in particular were singled out for contempt and scorn. Now we are aware that they weren’t just “picked on.” No, the perpetrators of Saddam Hussein’s propaganda realised all too well that in any society, the woman be it wife or mother is the cornerstone of a stable society. So to concentrate an attack on this segment of the Marsh Arab society is to undermine and dislodge a foundation stone.

Of course the story becomes even more pathetic. Not only were Marsh Arab women maliciously maligned, but the question that immediately comes to mind is: who spoke up in their defence? Who sought to help an already hopeless slice of people, not even on the lowest rung of Iraq society – well the Christian Church certainly did not offer redress and correction. Not for nothing has it been said “all you need for evil to increase, is for good men to do nothing!”

Islamic human rights

‘The Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ (December, 1948) and ‘The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights’ (March 1976) have both earned the respect and praise of Christians. The Lausanne Covenant certainly commends the ‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’. In fact some Christians even feel that these documents, carefully used can be the means of the Gospel gaining entry in hostile situations.

Anyway, Islam has produced its own statement of ‘Human Rights’...(Swartley; 2005:272-275, 335) and the pamphlet by the ‘World Assembly of Muslim Youth’ (WAMY) namely “WAMY Series on Islam No. 10: Human Rights in Islam.” No date.

Now our interest in these Islamic documents is this – is there anything here we may subscribe to that will legitimately help Marsh Arab women? We believe there are at least 5 helpful pointers that not only hint at light but sagaciously used, will provide entrance for a gospel witness.

From the Islamic Council (London) (Swartley: Ibid.)

Article 12a

“Every person has the right to express his thoughts and beliefs so long as he remains within the limits prescribed by the law...” Marsh Arab

women can be encouraged to question this deadening tradition of arranged marriages. We have heard of Marsh Arab women committing suicide rather than submit to arranged marriages! Surely the hour is more than late for reappraisal and fresh analysis of a time-worn tradition. We realise we are criticizing the “glue” in Marsh Arab/Muslim culture, but we are seeking to be consistent to this ‘article 12a’.

The day will soon come when we will tell Marsh Arab women that you are made “...in God’s image...in His very likeness” (Gen. 1:26-27) and coupled to that exciting news is that He, even when you get married, wants your marriage to “extend” or “enhance” or “enlarge” this “likeness”...therefore you need His guidance on whom to marry! Man-made traditions will not be able to advance “His likeness”...only He can, so then the sooner we ask Him for help, the better it will be.

Article 12b

“Pursuit of knowledge and search after truth is not only a right but a duty of every Muslim.”

We tell our Marsh Arab friends that at this point the statement is especially to be commended...after all are not one of the “99 Beautiful Names of God, *The Truth*” (Al-Haqq).

In fact, we are reminded of a day when Jesus, hot and tired got into a conversation with a woman. Respectfully He asked (not demanded) for some water. But Jesus – thirsty as He was – really thought of the woman. He wanted to help her. He wanted to bring her to God...and in John. 4:23-24 He speaks to her about worship and that it must be grounded “in spirit and in truth.” Jesus emphasized truth particularly as it related to her life. The woman then acted as if Jesus was ‘the truth’ – she encouraged others to listen to Him. They did and became believers. The beautiful truth about the Samaritan women is that she demonstrated what Jesus would later say about Himself “... I am the...truth...” (John. 14:6).

Article 12c

“It is the right and duty of every Muslim to protest and strive (within the limits set out by the law) against oppression...”

We tell our Marsh Arab friends that there is an Arabic word we particularly love: it is called Salaam (pronounced sah-lahm; meaning peace. Swartley; 2005:525). Now Jesus loved this word too because in the Injil: Matthew 5:9 He said “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”

Now what did Jesus mean? Well it would seem that three aspects are being addressed. Firstly, Ephesians 2:15 tells us that through the death of Jesus on the Cross we have been made “peacemakers.” So as we accept Jesus as our Saviour and ask Him to take our lives and clean us up, we know that He can do this because He paid the price on the Cross of Calvary.

Secondly, a “peacemaker” has a definite focus and reference point; namely God Who has made us sons and daughters.

Thirdly, a “peacemaker” has an all-consuming, defining passion: peacemaking in a broken world. So if article 12c calls out “to protest and strive against oppression...” Then Matthew 5:9 encourages us along the same path, but with one important qualification: the agenda is not ours, but God’s, and the result will be peacemaking. There will be a specific fruit.

Article 13

“Right to Freedom of Religion. Every person has the right to freedom of conscience and worship in accordance with his religious beliefs.”

As we talk to Marsh Arab women, soon a simple question will have to be broached. The question is: “How would you describe real love, and if you want to, you can use your own life as an illustration or teaching?”

Now this question may evoke some sniggers or painful awareness of how barren their life’s experience has been thus far. But a meaningful conversation – no doubt also drawing on motherhood experiences – should at least detail the following realities.

True love is free and unsought – there is no element of action, then reaction. Or initiative and response. True love eschews any thought of having been found – it finds and overwhelms. It is free and full. True love is the pioneer, the originator, the first source.

True love is faithful. 1 Corinthians 13:8 tells us it never fails. True love is success-orientated, it sticks to our failure-prone carcasses and refuses to give up. Or go down. Or go away.

True love is vast. True love to be real, must extend beyond my birth and death. In fact it must be able to overcome death. It must be greater than death. But real, true love is aware that there are many counterfeits in life, therefore it is able to be tested in many different cultures, many diverse peoples, different countries, etc. So despite ethnicity, stations in life or experiences thus far true love, namely the love of God revealed in Jesus His Son (John 3:16) challenges the possibility of any comparison anywhere else in the world either present, past or future that can be made.

Article 2

“The Protection of Honour.” (From the WAMY Series on Islam. No. 10.)

If ever there is good news to proclaim to Marsh Arab women, it is here. From a society where they are regarded a notch higher than pack-horses and cheap labour, the prospect of being honoured by God must truly be thrilling. Yes, God is concerned about honour!

Reared in a society where they constantly have to perform and where their worth is closely aligned with calloused hands and deeply lined faces, to be told that in Jesus their worth and value is incalculable is surely to be likened to springs of living water bursting out of dry and barren ground.

‘Justification’ (Romans 3:21-26) is the clear call of Scripture that crooked and bent lives now viewed through the prism of Christ’s perfect ‘doing and dying’ are indeed objects of God’s special love. And all that God requires of us is that our weak faith should look to Him. To talk of being ‘in Christ’ is to reach the highest levels of worship and adoration (from the Christian) and affirmation and favour from God. Here is real ‘honour’ and it is found in Christ.

A Prayer

“Father, in the Name of Jesus please help us to reach Marsh Arab women in exactly the same way Your Son did many years ago to the Samaritan woman.”

Amen



5 Impressions

What do the people in Iraq think of the Marsh Arabs?

“He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame.”

Proverbs 18:13

Introduction

All we want to do in this chapter is listen! That is we want to listen carefully to many “voices” – Marsh Arabs included – so that we may understand our friends better. If we want their friendship – and we do – then let us eavesdrop...and even if we gain fragments of information, every grain of truth garnered is a step in the right direction.

We are not merely interested in hearsay. Nor do we want to amass a pile of “they said” statements. So then what do we want to do...what are we seeking to achieve? It is that in listening to others, can we critically formulate some conclusions? Are there discernible threads that through the tapestry of others’ impressions we can pull together – and arrive at some definite conclusions? We believe there are. Imagine a kind of boardroom meeting where others do the speaking – but it is left up to us to have the final, summing up word! Does this sound pompous? We hope not. In fact we are also acknowledging that we are more than grateful that others have taken the time and have the concern to speak meaningfully of the Marsh Arab need. Our hope has always been that many will speak meaningfully of the Marsh Arabs – their plight and pain needs to be clearly ‘published abroad’.

Of course our chapter title may prompt the question: where do you start and where do you finish? So for want of some parameters we have raised the following six headings...what is left unsaid, we hope, can be inferred from them. They are:

- Life under Saddam Hussein
- Current living conditions
- Crime
- Tribes
- Favourable impressions
- Women and girls

Before we launch into this chapter, one final comment. In going to the other ‘voices’, we noticed a preponderant emphasis on certain topics... like ‘Marsh Restoration’ or for instance the history of the Marsh Arabs prior to the Saddam Hussein assault. These aspects are good and needful. We have however concentrated on how things are now ...we have only dipped into history insofar as it helps us to understand and respond to the present. We are more passionate about the people than the place – after all not even the Marsh Arabs speak with one ‘voice’ regarding the Marshes being restored or how exactly they define their roots.

Life under Saddam Hussein

“Saddam Hussein treated the people of the marshes worse than dogs.”

A tribal sheikh in Rory McCarthy: March 18, 2004

“Mr. Ali points out towards the distant buildings of Basra... In 1990, the Baath party told us we had ten hours to leave. They said if we didn’t they would start shelling us...our homes were burnt, bulldozed and destroyed like thousands of other villages. There were lots of casualties, it was a time of great sorrow.”

Colin Freeman : The Scotsman. 16 August 2003

“Captain Al-Janabi, a former Iraqi intelligence officer, (stated that) in one day alone, two thousand prisoners, mainly Marsh Arabs, were executed...those who were arrested were blindfolded and abducted. Some of those arrested survived, albeit after undergoing horrific acts of torture... Rape was common...”

James W Bell. ‘Ancient Sumeria’. n.d.

“The language used by the Ba`th to distinguish between nationalists and traitors became bolder following the Iraqi Shi`i uprising in the wake of the Gulf War of 1991. Fighting for survival, the Ba`th attempted to drive a wedge between the Shi`is who rebelled in southern Iraq and the residents of Baghdad, who did not join the

uprising. At a time when army units loyal to Saddam Hussein were still trying to regain control of the south, the Ba`th published a series of articles in the newspaper *al-Thawra al-'Iraqiyya* attacking the identity and origins of Iraqi Shi`is, particularly the marsh Arabs. The writers presented the Shi`i rebels as a foreign people within Iraq. While some were of Iranian or Indian origins, others were Arabs who had lost their identity because they had lived for so long close to the border with Iran. The marsh-dwellers were depicted as barbarians whose value system was primitive in comparison with that of the people of Baghdad. The backwardness of the marsh people stood in contrast to the progress achieved by other segments of Iraqi society under the Ba`th, and hindered the attempt to build a unified state” (in Nakash. 2006:91, 92).

“Meanwhile, the Iraqi leadership made a determined effort to woo support from Iraqi Shi`is. Resources were diverted to the Shi`i south. The official government propaganda has cast the war with Iran in terms of the struggle between the Arabs and the Iranians for supremacy that occurred in the early days of Islam, trying to make the Shi`is of south Iraq identify more closely with their being Arabs in the face of the Iranian foe rather than their being Shi`is. Thus the Iraqi official propaganda uses certain symbolic key-words such as Qadisiyya (the battle at which the Arab armies defeated the Iranian Empire in AD 637) while the Iranian propaganda seeks to win the support of south Iraq's Shi`is by using such key-words as Karbala...

As the war with Iran has become prolonged, however, the Iraqi government has become more and more severe on the Shi`is in Iraq. Ayatu'llah Khu'i is now under virtual house arrest and Shi`is in all walks of life are under suspicion and pressure. In June 1984 some 95 Shi`i ulama, and in particular members of the al-Hakim family, were executed” (in Momen. 1985:263, 264).

Current Living Conditions

“But the Marsh Arabs still live in abject poverty. No schools, no hospitals. Not even clean drinking water. Even Sheikh Naim realizes his people can't remain trapped in the past...”

The Marsh Arabs: CBC News Indepth. April 15, 2004

“In the channel that runs along Ghayyad's village, the water is rising. The village is in a stark setting on drained land, devoid of trees, grass

or a functioning school. It's a mudhole in winter, and as the weather warms, mosquitoes savage anything that moves. The land is littered with unexploded ordnance. Yet several thousand people of the Ma'dan tribe live there. A single hut, built of mud and woven reeds, will support a dozen people or more... Saddam's regime dumped the villagers at this site in 2002 after years of shuffling the tribe through relocation camps..."

The Seattle Times: Inside Iraq. January 30, 2004

"Both bloody and watery diarrhea is rampant throughout the populace, as over 70 percent of patients admitted to the pediatrics ward of the Al-Amarah General Hospital (A.G.H.) comes from the marsh villages, according to Dr. Iman al-Saady, AGH physician."

Tanya Habjouqa: International Medical Corps. 2006

"The only water people have to drink is saline and polluted. Diarrhea is commonplace and according to Mr. Reiss, infant mortality exceeds 50%."

Economist.com. 24 February 2005

"It's all very well to idealize the simple life of the marshes, but Westerners forget that marsh children died of swamp fever and malaria, a tribal chieftain near Basra said... The marshes were romantic, but we paid a heavy price..."

James W Bell: Ancient Sumeria. n.d.

"Marsh Arabs such as Haider Mohammed are pleased but want more. After a decade of cultural annihilation; they are hoping the new government will make it up to them with schools, water treatment plants and medical clinics. If the government fails, there will be one more group of disappointed Iraqis. And they are very low on the list..."

I have seen 100 newspapers in Iraq and they never mention the Marsh Arabs but foreign newspapers are very interested... 'do you think the coalition will really rehabilitate the marshes or is it just propaganda?'"

Patrick Graham: Observer; October 19, 2003

"The coalition forces and agencies give their attention to the cities. Nothing has been done to improve the condition of the Marsh Arabs."

Patrick Graham: Observer; October 19, 2003

"IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) families living in the rural areas at the edges of the marshes live with very limited access to drinking water and sanitation facilities. For example, a survey of 11,000 displaced Marsh Arabs indicates that 98 percent of the surveyed

population live in camp-like settlements with little or no access to water or sanitation facilities. IOM monitoring shows that displaced Marsh Arab families living in the Al-Mejar and Al Kabi districts of the Missan province are, for the most part, cut off from the public water and sanitation infrastructure, and electricity and garbage collection services are not functioning in these areas. This has resulted in extreme deterioration of IDP living conditions, representing a threat especially for the most vulnerable, such as children and the elderly. Similar conditions, including a significant spread of water-borne diseases due to absence of proper water and sanitation facilities, are reported in other areas with concentrated populations of displaced Marsh Arabs. Contaminated drinking water has increased risk of diseases like typhoid and cholera in the summer. In the winter, health is at risk due to poor housing conditions and the high cost of kerosene for heating.”

Dina Abou Samra. AMAR London Conference; March 1, 2006

Crime

“In particular the tribes are desperate to profit from the investment they believe will eventually pour into the impoverished marshlands. Under Saddam, tribes would have fought strenuously to avoid being listed among Marsh Arabs, who were regarded by officialdom as thieves, looters and rebels. Today it is quite the reverse.... It's a feeding frenzy. Everybody wants to be a Marsh Arab now.”

Rory McCarthy: March 18, 2006

“Welcome to the ‘Wild, Wild East’, so dubbed by the British troops who patrol Maysan province’s lawless corner of southeastern Iraq. Here corruption, murder and vicious feuding are rife – and that is just among the ‘good guys’ in the local police, army and governor’s offices.”

Colin Freeman: February 17, 2005

“Persecution under the previous regime has earned them little sympathy locally. The Marsh Arabs may have been picture-postcard stuff to the outside world, but to their new neighbours, they were little more than uneducated gypsies whose lawless ways had provoked a dictator’s wrath. Ask who looted Basra after it fell to the allies, and the word ‘Madan’ – marsh ‘yokels’ – is frequently spat out.”

Colin Freeman: The Scotsman. 16 August 2003

Tribes

“...Stopped in their tracks at a military checkpoint, the gang of suspected carjackers duly handed over a stash of Kalashnikovs and fake police uniforms...they claimed they were off to murder someone as part of a tribal dispute. In their eyes, that was perfectly legitimate.”

Colin Freeman: February 17, 2005

“...Due to inter-tribal blood feuds, it is rare to see men at the markets...”

USAID: Iraq Marshlands Restoration Program; June 2003

“IMRP’s (Iraq Marshlands Restoration Program) date palm activity has been successful, but it has not been without conflict – not unexpected given the poverty of the region, the endemic intertribal rivalries, and the importance of the crop. For example, one marshlands sheikh had donated his land for a 1,000 date palm nursery, with plans to divide the anticipated 7,000 offshoots among his tribesmen. When a neighbouring tribe learned of the nursery, it threatened to burn all the trees unless it could participate and have a share. A mediator from a third tribe resolved the dispute: in a meeting of all parties, the sheikh agreed to give half the trees to the second tribe to maintain until the offshoots were removed and replanted, while he retained ownership of the original trees. As these date palms grow and produce dates and palm offshoots, there will be opportunities for greater tribal participation.”

USAID: Iraq Marshlands Restoration Program: Date Palm Nurseries
Bring Hope to Iraq’s Marsh Dwellers; June 2003

“How do you try to govern or provide government for a province with 54 political parties, at least 20 tribes and a dozen leading religious figures...?”

Book Review: The Prince of the Marshes by Rory Stewart; September 30, 2006

“With the often tense relations between the various Marsh Arab tribes and sub-tribes, it is clear the problem of the marshes is difficult to sort out.”

Patrick Graham: Observer; October 19, 2003

“The remote marshes have largely escaped the worst of the violence afflicting other parts of Iraq. But tribal disputes still cause bloodshed and insecurity here.

The people of al-Houta – who are from the Shaghamba tribe – have been locked in a dispute with members of the nearby Garamsha tribe for more than a decade. ‘We can’t leave the village and go to Basra’, says Kamel Mezher. ‘It’s not safe because of the Garamsha.’”

B.B.C. News. ‘Iraq’s uncertain marshland revival’; 28 June 2006

Favourable impressions

“In 1824, J. Baillie Fraser (Scottish traveler and novelist 1783-1856) brought the Marsh Arabs to the fore when he described them as the ‘stoutest fairest and comeliest of all Arabs’ and admired their ‘openness’, ‘frankness’ and ‘civility’. He was also moved enough to comment upon the emancipated women whose ‘beauty moreover was not to be surpassed in the brilliant assemblies of civilized life.’”

bbc.co.uk: 16 May 2002

“Though jealous of others, they were staunchly loyal to their fellow tribesmen; to betray a companion was the blackest sin, far worse than murder to people whose disregard for human life enabled them in settlement of a blood feud to knife an unarmed herdsboy with a jest. But while they were callous about their own sufferings, and the sufferings of others, they were never deliberately cruel. Their honour was easily touched and they were quick to repay an insult, real or imagined, but usually they were humorous and light-hearted.

Theirs was a character of opposites. Garrulous by nature, they were always careful of their dignity, and would sit in silence for hours on formal occasions. Indifferent to natural beauty, they had a passionate love for poetry. Often impractically generous, they would give away their only shirt to someone who asked for it. Their hospitality was legendary – a man would think nothing of killing one of his precious camels to feed a stranger who had chanced on his tent; but at heart they were avaricious, with all the Semite’s love of money. They were deeply religious and saw the hands of God in everything. It would have been as inconceivable for them to doubt his existence as to blaspheme. Yet they were not naturally fanatical, nor were they passively fatalistic. In their hard lives they fought to the bitter end, and then accepted their fate with dignity, as the will of God.”

Thesiger; 1964:99

“The Ma’dan have a lively and ribald sense of humor. They admire good singing, especially love ballads, and are great tellers of tales. Yet even caught up in an epic, they have the vigilant ear of a warrior people.”

- Gavin Young (in National Geographic; April 1976:514)

Women and girls

“Hajji Fulanain (1928) describes a Marsh Arab bride east of Amara in the following words:

She was a pretty girl, sturdily built, barely fifteen; a deep fringe of black hair hid her forehead, a silver ring set with blue stones was in her nose, and her skin was decorated with indigo tattooing.”

Ancient Tattooing in the Middle East; 2003 Phoenix and Arabeth

“For one Marsh Arab, Makir Jafar, the fact that she has been given enough education to help her 10-year-old son with his homework is enough. ‘Life is nice. There is the river. I do not want for anything’, she said.”

truthout.issues. For the women of Iraq, the War is just beginning;
Terri Judd: 08 June 2006

“If marsh dwellers are the poorest and most under-served people in Iraq, as seems to be the case, then marsh women and girls are clearly in the worst condition. In addition to their household chores as wives and mothers, usually going from one pregnancy and childbirth immediately into another, women are responsible for many of the income-gathering activities in their households. They play an important role in agriculture and post-harvest-work and are essentially the exclusive managers of livestock and the sole dairy processors and marketers. Only fishing is a largely male domain. While the educational system in the marsh region is barely operating, it is boys who largely attend school. Most women and girls are illiterate. Nor are they able to retain some share of the income for themselves, despite its being almost entirely of their making. There is effectively no existing service directed specifically at women and girls, save the work of AMAR which provides midwifery services in their three clinics. This task seeks to provide women and girls with opportunities for education, albeit very limited, and income-generation, using their livestock chores as a possible point of entry in the communities.”

USAID. Iraqi Marshlands Restoration Program. Task 3: Provide Educational and Income-Generating opportunities for Marsh Dwelling Women and Girls. n.d.

Some deductions

We hope that we have listened carefully. May those who read these concluding thoughts not feel that we have merely reiterated what has

already been said albeit with a different slant! We all long for freshness. This novitiate longs for newness.

However we do feel there are some “gaps” – four in fact. Let us go through them carefully.

Identity

Having read the impressions of others – and personal interaction – we still feel the question is: “Do we know and understand the Marsh Arabs?” Where do we read of in-depth personal and collective reminiscences? Is the sadness of their days not worthy of careful reporting?

Now we are all grateful to Wilfred Thesiger, who more than any other person of the twentieth century brought them to the world’s attention. He spent years with them and in various ways served them. He always spoke fondly of them. But for all his experience, he was a bachelor. He never had a wife or to put that into our context; there is a lack of the feminine in his writings. Women and girls appear fleetingly. What he was, influenced his impressions. Then, of course he also wasn’t a father, so hints of a fatherly heart are missing in his accounts and observations of the children.

So, it is our conclusion that they are still an ‘unknown’ – people whom others speak about, but don’t really know.

Tribalism

Tribe consciousness and affirmation is endemic to the Marsh Arab. They cannot be understood apart from this “glue.” This is their identity, their guiding principle. This reality will determine who they will marry, where they will live, who they will honour, etc., etc.

However, this pride and potent reality which governs them is also a cause of much discontent. Tribal conflicts are very common. Rivalries are often barely below the psyche of much collective planning and discussion. The Marsh Arab body is clothed in a multitude of tribes. Ostensibly the signature tune is ‘honour’ and ‘home’...but the raw reality often is ‘hate’ and ‘hopelessness’.

Tribalism needs to address questions such as: co-existence and collective identity. Tribalism needs help in moving beyond revenge and

retaliation. Tribalism needs to explore unity without uniformity. Unfortunately tribalism ensures that fear remains a factor that will endlessly produce a cycle of distrust and disdain.

We feel we can be so bold as to say, what the Marsh Arab needs, even more than ‘Marsh Restoration’ is help on how to get along with each other and that in the ‘clothing’ of the tribe. This is a huge challenge but since ‘Calvary’ is the proof that love will overcome hate, this then is a ‘door’ beckoning the MAT worker to enter. Matthew 5:9 (Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God) and ‘The Prince of Peace’ are waiting.

Claims of Christianity

This is a huge and tragic ‘gap’. They have yet to have the Christian worker entering their lives as friend...then faithfully serving them, culminating in a challenge to carefully consider the claims of Christ.

The Lord Jesus was once asked: ‘Which is the greatest commandment in the Law to which He replied: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...and...love your neighbour as yourself’ (Matthew 22:36-39). Now Jesus is the perfect ‘neighbour’, He exemplified perfect love to God and to us. But the point is – He ‘neighbour’ love to us. Philippians 2:6-8 spells this out more clearly. And what the Marsh Arabs need, more than anything else, are good neighbours. Christians who will tell the good news buttressed by the testimony of a consistent life.

From an Old Testament perspective, the prophet Ezekiel also had to learn the importance of ‘neighbouring’ before he commenced his ministry. In Ezekiel 3:15 we read “I came to the exiles...where they were living, (and) I sat among them for seven days – overwhelmed.”

In April 1858, missionary John Gibson Paton and his young wife, plus Joseph Copeland set sail for an island in the New Hebrides. They were going to people who were known cannibals and warlike. Their tribes were constantly at war with one another. Paton, himself under no illusions knew that he would be exposing himself and his family to the ‘depths of Satan.’

In April 1859, “Mrs. Paton gave birth to a son, but within five weeks both she and the baby were dead. Paton was left alone” (in Five

Pioneer Missionaries; 1965:312). John Paton was starting to learn and enter into ‘neighbouring love’, a love that is always exercised under the shadow of the Cross of Calvary. Real love, which is neighbourly-love always bears the fingerprints of Calvary on it.

Hope

It was Alexander Pope who immortalized the phrase “Hope springs eternal in the human breast...” But one wonders.

As one listens in on the many ‘voices’ and gathers up impressions, you are left with the lingering question “and what of hope”? To many concerned people, ‘hope’ seems to be the reflooding of the Marshes or Marsh Arabs being somehow repaid for the many injustices they have suffered – but is this not all very short-sighted? There is no talk about hope. Is not hope by its very nature, forward looking, inspiring and ennobling? In short, is it not the reason why I am alive and an ideal to be cherished and strived after?

Much Marsh Arab discussion is focused on the past. We have chiefly concentrated on the present – now it is time to talk of the future.

Time Magazine (Feb. 12; 2007) had a major article on ‘The Brain’ of which a very important aspect is called “Hope” (Ibid. 56-57). We are told “The mind is a uniquely personal domain of thought, dreams and countless other things, like the will, faith and hope.” It seems that God in making us in ‘His Image’ (Genesis 1:26-27) gave us the raw material so that by His Grace we can make the transition from Ephesians 2:12 (c) to 1 Corinthians 13:13.

William Hendriksen in his commentary on Ephesians (1967:129-131) writes of the fivefold deprivation of Gentiles without Christ. In summary they were ‘Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless and Godless’. Apart from ‘stateless’, the other four certainly apply to the Marsh Arabs as well.

We love our Marsh Arab friends. But their picture is bleak. The horizon looks unfriendly. The way forward certainly does not look inviting....and as for us: will we be willing to be the embodiment of hope to them? Are we willing to enter their existence of emptiness as a neighbour like the Samaritan on the Jericho Road? (Luke 10:25-37).

Conclusion

We feel the last word should go to Dr. Arthur Glasser. He is a highly respected and esteemed missiologist...he writes the ‘four universals’ for mission training are: “spiritual development, communal experience, discovery of spiritual gifts and cultural awareness” (in Scott; 1980: 227). We agree, but would like to think we can add a fifth. That is when all has been said and done; continue to think in the confines of Scripture. As John Robinson spoke to the Pilgrim Fathers on their departure from Holland, part of what he said was “...for I am very confident that the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth out of His Holy Word” (in Present Truth Vol.4 No.2; 1975:34).



6 Contact and Common-Ground

In seeking to win them to Christ, what are the points of contact and common-ground?

'If the Church is not itself to be misunderstood, then it must take infinite pains to understand'.

Douglas Webster (in John Stott; 1967:69)

Introduction

In this chapter we will proceed on the basis that three clear facts are in place. There are three needful truths that cannot be overlooked and for the sake of absolute clarity must be re-stated.

In the first place what we dare not overlook is that “points of contact and common-ground” is between a Christian and a Marsh Arab. This is our perimeter; this alone is the scope of the chapter. Therefore, unashamedly we will look to the all-sufficient Scriptures to guide us. 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 teaches us that ‘All Scripture is God-breathed ... *so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*’ (my emphasis).

Secondly, we cannot remind ourselves enough that it is almost useless to talk of ‘contact and common-ground’ unless language proficiency and cultural sensitivities are clearly being attained. These two, namely “language proficiency and cultural sensitivities” are our ‘basic entry level’ and need to be in place for ‘contact and common-ground’ to be realized. We realize that these two are an ongoing area of labour but nevertheless their value needs to be clearly understood.

Thirdly, we desperately want the Marsh Arab to believe that these ‘points of contact and common-ground’ are true. They are real. They need to be believed...and for our Marsh Arab friend to grasp this, will require of the MAT worker an attitude of servanthood. An attitude of

love. The MAT worker first has to be a real ‘point of contact’ before the Marsh Arab will believe that there is ‘common-ground’ between them. Our lives must authenticate our message. Let us turn to the Apostle Paul as an illustration... “Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (although I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

So – what are our ‘points of contact and common-ground’ that will help the Marsh Arab to identify with us? That is to be able to see beyond our foreignness and comfortably feel, they can, in truth relate to us. How are we alike (common-ground) that will facilitate meaningful ‘contact’ for the Gospel.

Meaning

In Ecclesiastes the author laments that everything is ‘Utterly meaningless’.

Every human being has or continues to struggle with this question ‘what is the meaning of my life’? Why am I on earth? What is the purpose of my life? Where am I going? The text that comes to mind is: “...He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11b).

We carefully tell our M.A. friends that we have no control over our birth – or into which family we are born. Likewise neither do we have control over our death. But since we did not control our birth, nor do we control the day of departure – these two uncertainties can and do serve to increase our anxiety about life. That is, we all feel the need to at least have some control over our life. Hence many Westerners pour much money into insurances, home mortgages etc., so that in measure they feel they do have control over their lives. However, real control is only satisfying if it is with reference to an Ultimate Reference Point.

That is a “Reference Point” that gives to my life a sense of worth and well-being. A ‘Reference Point’ that is clearly greater than my birth, life and death.

The Westminster Confession recognizes and deals with this need in its very first question. The question is: ‘What is the chief end (or purpose) of man?’ To which the reply is: ‘The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.’

Our M.A. friend may initially feel a little hesitant that one can define God as the ‘Ultimate Reference Point’ but such hesitancy can be allayed by two statements. Since God created you, who then better to instill a sense of questioning in you? Who created you a ‘little incomplete’? And if you don’t feel that God is the ‘Ultimate Reference Point’, then what would you suggest is the alternative? What would you feel is not subject to ‘rust and decay’? No, no one said it better than Augustine ‘You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You’ (in Blanchard; 2000:246).

Now our M.A. friends may squirm a little and then confess that they do know God. But the MAT worker can continue to proceed carefully. What we will tell our friend is that Islam tells you about God. Yes you know about His Will, the things you need to do but this you do not know, the ‘God-shaped blank’ actually being filled. You know about God, but you do not know Him – and there is a huge difference. You do not, in the words of the Westminster Confession, ‘enjoy Him’.

Conscience

In Romans 2:14, 15 we read: “(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)”

So every human being has a “conscience.” Clark Pinnock defines ‘conscience’ as “According to the N.T. man has in the depths of his personality a moral monitor which sin has affected but not destroyed, placing him in touch with the objective moral order of the universe” (in C. Henry, Editor; 1973:127). We instinctively know it is wrong to steal, to lie, commit adultery, etc. And what is more, ‘conscience’ is part of the reality of being made in God’s Image.

Now we want to flesh this out further. We ask our M.A. friend, have you ever told a lie or taken something that did not belong to you? To which he may reply, probably yes. Okay, and so no doubt you felt sad about it afterwards – agreed? Yes, they will reply. So your ‘conscience’ hurt you, pricked you a bit...now how do you clean your ‘conscience’? How do you ‘make peace’ with your ‘conscience’?

Our M.A. friend may say something like – I said the prescribed prayers or I made a trip to one of the tombs of the Imams or I asked Allah to forgive me! So there are many ways to “soothe” the ‘conscience’ – or are there?

Gently we remind our friend how grateful we are for our ‘conscience’ – for, if nothing else it reminds us that we are unlike animals! We know when we have done wrong. It’s like a thermometer within us telling us we are not well. However, there are four things we would like to talk about at this point:

Since the ‘conscience’ is inside of us, how can external acts clean us up? We mean, even asking Allah...how do you know He has forgiven you? If you say, He will do what pleases Him, that is all good and well, but precisely where does that leave you? What about your assurance? Why would Allah expect us to be contented with uncertainty, when He made us as human beings with a desire for completion or finality or definiteness? We like to get things done. Get things finished. We like to know where we stand, as it were.

Further, if ‘things’ need to be done to appease the ‘conscience’, do you actually get power to not do these things again – or are you walking around with an unhappy ‘conscience’?

Also our Bible tells us in Hebrews 10:1-4 (and Heb. 9:9) that the Jews’ sacrifices did not stop them from feeling ‘guilty for their sins’... respectfully we say that in your heart of hearts you are also feeling guilty, because what applied to them applies to you as well! They serve as examples for us.

So the ‘conscience’ ‘stabs’ us, we feel bad. So we say to Allah we are sorry – we may even cry. Beat ourselves. But the question is: how much “sorry” is enough? I would think to kill someone should require a lot more ‘sorry’ than merely telling a lie? Or what do you think? How would your ‘conscience’ guide you here?

Jesus Christ

In John 1:4 we read “In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.” Then in v.9 we read “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.” In these two verses John calls Jesus both ‘Light’ and ‘Life’ and that every person has been affected by that life. No one has by-passed the sweep of His influence. The writer to the Hebrews says “The Son...sustains all things by His powerful Word.” (Hebrews 1:4).

David J. Hesselgrave is very clear on this point “Everyone who has ever come into the world has seen his light and heard his voice. For reasons of God’s design or human doing or both some have received more light and some less. But all have been enlightened to some degree. Some have heard more clearly and some less so. But all have heard to some degree – all people of every place and every time have received general revelation. Many – probably many more than we have sometimes been led to believe – have received special revelation as well” (2005:62). This is a lengthy quote but nevertheless very helpful.

So, we say to our M.A. friend, yes you do know about Jesus. And he or she will agree, after all, some memory will be recalled where the Qur’an speaks of Isa.

Now we want to be careful. Although we may enter into a spiritual conversation with our friend thinking their knowledge of the Qur’an is probably minimal...we must give them the benefit of the doubt and rather proceed on a more positive note...namely that he/she is fully informed about what the Qur’an teaches about Jesus/Isa.

So we will assume that our friend is fully enlightened at this point. He will know the following about Jesus from the Qur’an.

About Jesus	Reference
He came with wisdom	Surah 43:63
He was born of a virgin	Surah 19:20
He is holy, faultless (sinless)	Surah 19:19

About Jesus	Reference
Note: the following have sinned according to the Qur'an:	
Adam	Surah 7:22-23
Moses	Surah 28:15-16
Abraham	Surah 26:82
Jonah	Surah 37:141-144
David	Surah 38:24-25
Muhammad	Surah 48:1-2; 47:19
Jesus is called	
A Messenger, The Word of God, A Spirit from God	Surah 4:171
Jesus did	
He created life, He healed the sick, He raised the dead.	Surah 5:113
He came with clear signs	Surah 43:63
He is a sign unto mankind and a mercy from God.	Surah 19:21
He is a sign to all people.	Surah 21:91
He is illustrious in the world and the hereafter.	Surah 3:45
He is the Messiah	Surah 3:45; 5:75; 4:157; 5:19 etc.
He was raised to heaven	Surah 4:158
He will come back for judgement	Surah 43:61
He was strengthened by the Holy Spirit	Surah 2:253; 5:113
He died	Surah 3:55; 5:120; 19:33-34

About Jesus	Reference
The ‘other side of the coin’ our M.A. friend will also know:	
That the Qur’an teaches that Jesus was not Crucified	Surah 4:157
That He is not the Son of God	Surah 9:30
That He is not God	Surah 5:19; 75
That He was sent as an Apostle to Israel	Surah 3:49-51.
That He prophesied Ahmad	Surah 61:6
That He rebuked false worship (Specifically the worship of Himself and His mother Mary).	Surah 5:119-121.
That He was created from dust like Adam	Surah 3:59

(The above is adapted from Gilchrist (2003:107-156), Nehls and Eric (1996:55-58) and Goldsmith (1982:58-62)

Now how will the MAT worker proceed?

He will avoid a confrontational, argumentative approach... after all he will first be ‘a point of contact’. He will first be an illustration of the truth before idea. He will first be truth as example, before truth as entrance takes place. “Example” safeguards “entrance” and ensures its final success.

Now principally how does “truth as example” take place? Does it require perfection on the part of the MAT worker? Are we to portray ourselves as sinless before the M.A.? No, on the contrary...it is as we express love for the Saviour Who in full recognition of our sin purposed that this would not come between us and Him, and so in the Sacrifice of His Eternal Son put our sin away. We can love Him because He is so loving. The Qur’an speaks of His mercy; surah 19:21. As the Qur’an says, He really is illustrious in this world and the next (surah 3:45) and I know He loves me today. And I love Him.

We tell our M.A. friend that Isa is in heaven (surah 4:158) and we tell him; surely heaven then is where we all should long to be! It must be the place of supreme happiness... and we can't even imagine how happy Isa must be in heaven!

But Isa, when He was on the earth healed sick people and even raised dead people (surah 5:113). So He knows about life. He knows about our struggles and problems... so why do you not speak to Him and call upon Him to help you in your life? And since the Qur'an teaches that God said "Jesus, I will take thee to Me..." (Arberry; 1964:53), so to speak to Isa means that God hears too. And all you are asking Isa to do is help you as He did when He was on the earth. You are in your prayer humbly reminding Him that you believe He will remain true to Himself. As you believe He once was, so you believe He still is!

But says our M.A. friend, you are going too quickly. All my life I have been taught that Muhammad is the final prophet. He is the 'Seal of the Prophets'. He is the 'Final Messenger'. Jesus was only a prophet to Israel. And besides, your Bible (Injil) is corrupted!

Okay let's go back to the Qur'an. Surah 19:21 says that Jesus is "...a Sign unto men." Note, not just to Israel. Also in surah 21:91 God says "...and we made her and her son a sign for all peoples." Surah 4:172 says that He will gather all people to Himself. Furthermore surah 43:61 tells us that Jesus will come to usher in the final judgement... then surely He must have been more than a prophet to Israel, don't you agree? The Qur'an clearly speaks of Him in a universal way.

And I haven't forgotten that you said our Bible is corrupted. Now this would take a little time to discuss and we Christians do have an answer – but the main reason why you say that is because I believe in the Crucifixion of Jesus and the Qur'an doesn't.

Now this is how I answer here – "It is the Crucifixion of Jesus and His Resurrection that gives me the power to love you."

The Crucifixion tells me what God thinks of you and me. The Crucifixion and presently the Crucified Christ who stands by me and supports me, urges me to share with you the best news you have ever heard. So believe the Bible, its centre-piece is the Crucifixion of Jesus (history) and that our response now (the present) will determine how we will spend eternity (future). Yes our response to the Crucified Jesus will determine whether we enjoy the heaven that currently is the 'home' of Isa.

You know the other day I was talking to a Muslim friend and I asked him if he had any certainty about his final destiny. ‘Yes’ he replied because he was doing a certain number of things... to which I replied; “so you are paying your way.” And what is more will you ever know if you have paid enough... I mean if we are talking of an eternity with or without God, then surely you should be busy every moment trying to secure God’s favour. You really can’t rest for a minute!

The Christian message is both profoundly simple and simply profound. “Profoundly simple” in that Jesus paid the full price for my sin at Calvary but also “simply profound” – I will never, never understand such love. That God could go to such lengths for me in the Person and Work of His Son... it is simply too much for my little mind to understand. But He did. Therefore the ‘simply profound’ and the ‘profoundly simple’ beautifully coalesce into one word ‘grace’ – and that word says it all.

Pain

In Isaiah 53:3 we read “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.”

The prophet Isaiah (the Qur’an makes no mention of Isaiah... the only prophet from this era to appear in the Qur’an is Jonah) predicts the suffering and pain of the Messiah approximately 740-700 years before His birth.

Now some may charge us with being flippant, that is talking of the Messiah’s sufferings and that we humans also, in different ways, suffer – although in ways we hasten to add, totally unlike His. But at least when we talk of pain we realize none are exempt. It was the poet John Keats who wrote that while pleasure may often be a visitor, pain continually clings cruelly to us. So we realize that the Messiah is no stranger to our talk, but His experience here is totally beyond human comprehension and articulation.

Now the M.A. have suffered much. The sustained attacks of Saddam’s troops and their thinly-veiled attempts to obliterate the M.A. people has appalled and horrified many who have taken the time to familiarize themselves with the facts. Then there were the years as refugees in Iran. Then the return to Iraq, now not to expected freedom

but to live in a country that lurches from crisis to crisis in a continual state of conflagration. Every day new dangers are dredged up and spewed into the streets and homes of people. Every new morning brings the reality of new and unrelenting evil.

Hunger is forever stalking the M.A. Health-care, such as there is, is dwindling fast. Basic law and order has collapsed, tribe assertiveness has stepped in to fill the vacuum and crime, cunning and conflict are the long tentacles that extend throughout Iraqi society slowly choking the little life that there is. Iraq is stumbling. It is threatening to convulse and collapse. This body is riddled through with pain, fear punctuates every breath.

But if “your neighbour is looking out for you” then most probably the odds can be reduced a little. But for the M.A. there is no-one ‘looking out for them’. They are “man alone.” But then not only are the neighbours not too caring – the M.A. themselves don’t have a history of happily co-existing with one another. Sadly, they are a fractious and feud-driven people. Pleasure is often in proportion to the pain inflicted. Jeremiah lamented that “...children and infants faint in the streets of the city” (Lamentations 2:11)...this is not a far cry from the M.A. experience. However, Jeremiah could also go on to say: “the Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him...” (Lamentations 3:22)...this is where Jeremiah and the M.A. part company. His confession is unknown to them.

So pain is common to humanity. But again we hasten to add, some have drunk so deeply at the pit of pain that others like myself would be the first to admit, how slightly I have suffered. I am but a child in the school of suffering...how hardly can I compare my lot with others!

Pain is part and parcel of our existence. It is the air that we breathe, the bread of human existence. But can we make sense of pain? Can we rise above or respond to this inexorable and ubiquitous reality? Our fellow human beings can’t help us, because their lot is the same. Their existence is as fragile as ours.

We must look elsewhere...we must look to the living God, Who in the Person of His Son entered our world and there absorbing our pain into His, ascended to the Throne of Calvary and suffered a God-forsaken death. Our God knows pain and suffering. Calvary speaks of God loving the very people with whom He is angry... As John Stott put

it “...His love and His wrath which together produce His pain” (1986:322). He quotes Luther... “God striving with God” (Ibid.). God makes “sense” of our pain by telling us to look to Calvary – see the towering pinnacle of pain (dwarfing all other pain) – prizing open the purest and most passionate of love. It took blood and bone for us to see the beseeching heart of God – we are so rotten, that nothing less would get our attention, slap down our self-confidence and strike our puny little dreams.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked at 4 Truths that are common to all. It is as we seek to establish contact and common-ground that meaningful commitment can be sought, indeed pressed for.

I want to close with a quote that I believe brings together the strands of contact, common-ground and commitment. It says it all. I often reflect on these words... they are from John Stott (1986:351).

“It is the crucified man that can preach the cross. Said Thomas ‘except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails... I will not believe’. Dr Parker of London said that what Thomas said of Christ, the world is saying about the church. And the world is also saying to every preacher: Unless I see in your hands the print of the nails, I will not believe. It is true. It is the man... who has died with Christ,... That can preach the cross of Christ.”



7 Dangers

In seeking to win them to Christ, what are some of the dangers to be avoided?

I Corinthians 13

Even if I could speak the languages of men and of angels, if I am without love, I am no better than a clanging gong or a clashing cymbal.

Even if I have the gift of prophecy, even if I understand all the secrets which only the initiates know; even if I am wise with all knowledge; even if I have faith so complete that it can move mountains, if I am without love, there is no value in my life.

Even if I dole out everything I possess, even if I welcome a martyr's death in the flames, if I am without love, it is all no good to me.

Love is patient with people; love is kind. There is no envy in love; there are no proud claims; there is no conceit.

Love never does the graceless thing; never insists on its rights, never irritably loses its temper; never nurses its wrath to keep it warm.

Love finds nothing to be glad about when someone goes wrong, but is glad when truth is glad.

Love can stand any kind of treatment; love's first instinct is to believe in people; love never regards anyone or anything as hopeless; nothing can happen that can break love's spirit.

Love lasts for ever.

Whatever prophecies there may be, they will some day be ended;

Whatever utterances of ecstasy there may be, they will some day be silenced;

Whatever knowledge there may be, it will some day pass away.

We have but fragments of knowledge and glimpses of prophetic insight; but when the complete will come, the fragmentary will be ended.

When I was a child, I had a child's speech; I had a child's mind; I had a child's thoughts, but, when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Now we see bewildering shadows in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face;

Now I know a fragment of the truth, but then I will know as completely as I am known.

The truth is that these three things last forever — faith, hope, love — and the greatest of them is love.

We have started this chapter with a well-known portion of the Bible. The reason being that this Scripture quotation just about ‘says it all’.

Now in writing of “some of the dangers to be avoided”, one would automatically think of the Marsh Arab situation. Perhaps one would think of the war in Iraq or how safe our living conditions will be, or how we will adapt to their food, water etc. So our chapter heading may suggest external factors – factors ‘out there’, external to us and over which we largely have no control.

The thrust of this chapter is rather the “internal”... that is the spiritual co-existence or unity or togetherness of the MAT workers. To put the issue more forcefully, one seed of discord in our camp will wreak more havoc than a thousand bombs falling around us. If ‘one of our members suffer’ then all will be affected. However, we don’t want to create the impression that we are insensitive to the external factors like where to live, time of entry, ministries to be pursued, etc., etc. These ‘external factors’ have however a ‘safety-net’, namely group discussion, the Lordship of Christ and the important prayers of God’s people. This we call the tri-pod of divine guidance. All three “legs” are necessary for the seat of certainty.

So we will look at 1 Corinthians 13 with particular reference to the MAT worker...it will more than alert us to the dangers facing us! Also as we proceed in this chapter, we will be flexible. We will use various Bible translations and clearly indicate the different renditions. The translation of William Barclay was used for the introduction, but we will range further than one translation.

Verse 1

If I were to speak with the combined eloquence of men and angels I should stir men like a fanfare of trumpets or the clashing of cymbals, but unless I had love, I should do nothing more.

(J.B. Phillips)

The MAT worker will seek to be as proficient as possible in Arabic – bearing in mind that excellent language skills do not guarantee love. On the contrary, they could also be the occasion for pride.

Verse 2

If I had the gift of foretelling the future and had in my mind not only all human knowledge but the secrets of God, and if, in addition, I had that absolute faith which can move mountains, but had no love, I tell you I should amount to nothing at all.

(J.B. Phillips)

The MAT worker is going into a culture that has a veneer of religiosity. In such a culture ‘holy men’ are highly revered. They are esteemed and exalted above the rest. The MAT worker may be perceived to have direct access to God. The Marsh Arab, who will continuously be assessing the MAT worker will sense they are different...hence “please pray to God.” This will often happen. The MAT worker – even should the Marsh Arabs see mighty answers to prayer – will then only take to his lips and life the words of John the Baptist: “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30). Piety must never become self-serving.

Verse 3

If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

(English Standard Version)

The MAT worker must be very careful of gifts, hand-outs and “things” given – we may associate them with love, the recipients not. The material side of the ministry must be seen to support and affirm the primacy of the spiritual.

The MAT worker may be called by God to pay the ultimate sacrifice (death). This would be an honour and privilege...

Yet we are warned. There is a possibility that Christian bodies may be given over to death yet be devoid of love. How would we know whether our death demonstrates or denies Calvary? We live in a world where often death is glorified ... but the words of the Apostle are stark and blunt: no love, no life!

There is only one answer. Jesus on the Cross prayed for His persecutors (Luke 23:43). Stephen understood this (Acts 7:60). The MAT worker may very well, as we said earlier, be called upon to pay the ultimate price ... but in that very event, love must be evident.

Verse 4

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud

(N.I.V.)

Since “Love is patient”, the MAT worker must be ‘prepared for the long haul’. Don’t expect quick results...the work will be slow, but by God it will be deep.

Kindness is what we personify when we are criticised, attacked or misunderstood. The Marsh Arab culture does not know kindness – so if we are pricked: this is what we will bleed.

But someone may interject...can kindness not be misunderstood as weakness? Our reply is, “so what”? If our hearts seek to follow the injunctions and teachings of Scripture, then God will be in the impressions and outlook of our “enemies.” He will honour His Word. As has been quipped, 'if you think meek is weak then try being meek for a week'.

MAT workers esteem one another as better than themselves. Failure to do this will allow the defiling presence of ‘envy’. To be sure we all have different strengths and weaknesses...and the tendency is to hide the ‘weak’ and portray ‘the strong’. But let us not be fooled. Because of our sin we all resort to the same duplicity. It has been said that like the iceberg so is the human personality...one tenth visible, but nine tenths submerged. These things are known to God, for our part let us esteem one another as better than ourselves.

The latter part of v.4 is translated by J.B. Phillips as “...it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance.” The MAT worker strives hard to get others to share the vision. A sense of urgency marks him. However, this ‘call’ for others to join must be free from a sense of superiority. That is, “that I see the vision, therefore I am better than you” or even should the ‘call’ be rebuffed then “obviously your Christianity must be slight or superficial.” F.F. Bruce (1977:19) quotes Thomas Erskine who said ‘in the New Testament religion is grace, and ethics is gratitude’. He, i.e. F.F. Bruce goes on “love is a more potent incentive to doing the will of God than legal regulations and (a) fear of judgement could ever be” (Ibid.). In short, the ‘law’ wounds...love liberates for joyful service.

We all suffer the lust to produce results that justifies our ministry. We all long for credibility, especially to those who are financially supporting us. We cannot and do not assess our motives enough. However, 1 Corinthians 3:13 is categorical. 'The Day' will test our 'work'...the results are His. And we solemnly remind ourselves that the opposite of work is laziness. At this point we need to reflect on the wise words of Leon Morris. He writes "Judgement according to works means more to God than it can ever do with us, because He knows as we cannot the many factors which lie behind apparent success and failure" (1960: 66).

Verse 5

Love never does the graceless thing; (Phillips: "Love has good manners") never insists on its rights, never irritably loses its temper; never nurses its wrath to keep it warm.

(William Barclay)

The MAT worker – even if he comes from a country with a strong emphasis on 'human rights' will not allow this mentality to govern his actions. It is others first.

Also our treatment of one another. We have all heard and suffered from the statement 'I don't beat about the bush, I speak my mind'. Also to work in a group where all the people are highly focused and work-driven can easily cause frayed tempers. And to add to this, all of us can 'spot' very easily the sins of others, whereas to our own we are strangely blind. J.B. Phillips aptly reminds us: "Love is not touchy."

Yes, the dangers are huge and can seem almost insurmountable but the Lord helps us here. Daily we will take to our lips and lives His petition: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.'

Since, 'Love never nurses its wrath to keep it warm' we will firmly remind our Marsh Arab friends that the emphasis on vengeance or revenge in much of their tribal culture is wrong. It not only denies love but provides fertile breeding ground for hate. Feuding must give way to love.

While they have a strong insistence on 'honour', we will gently insist that this comes into its own by love. 'Love' which is 'the greatest', longs to destroy the garbage the evil one litters into their culture.

Verse 6

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

(N.I.V.)

May the Marsh Arabs often see the tears in our eyes and hear the sob in our voice. As Dr.J.H. Jowett, years ago reminded us ‘tearless saints can never be the heralds of salvation’ (in Ravenhill; 1959:122).

The MAT worker continues to labour in Christian doctrine...he is continuously seeking more of the mastery of God’s truth over his own soul. But flowing out of this “mastery”, will be greater skill in ministry. So love and truth are like twins...to see the one is to see the other. The one being the alter ego of the other.

Verses 7 and 8

Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope: it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen. For if there are prophecies they will be fulfilled and done with, if there are “tongues” the need for them will disappear, if there is knowledge it will be swallowed up in truth.

(J.B.Phillips)

To hopefully not be too blunt, MAT is looking for “no quitters.” Missionary attrition or missionary fall-out takes a heavy toll on the morale of others. We are looking for the ‘do or die’ type...after all ‘love endures to the end’.

These verses remind us that various gifts and ministries will one day have run their course. For our part we are to ensure that all is permeated with love so that one day when we cease to exist, the essential, namely love will still be sensed and its lingering aroma long appreciated.

Verses 9 and 10

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

(English Standard Version)

We note the humility of the apostle. He did not claim to know it all – and even more so is this our confession.

One of the greatest missionary motivations in the New Testament is the soon return of Christ...may this more than grip our lives to render ourselves 'approved unto God'.

To say that we 'prophesy in part' may suggest an element of incompleteness or even error. More precisely we labour with imperfect or imprecise "tools" – at least let the hand that wields them, namely 'love' be very clear and evident. Here there must be no doubt.

Although we lament that 'we know in part', this does not gainsay or disprove what Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:15 "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.."

Verse 11

When I was a little child I talked and felt and thought like a little child. Now that I am a man my childish speech and feeling and thought have no further significance for me.

(J.B.Phillips)

Paul is here talking of the maturing of the human personality. This is basic human development that even the unsaved can identify with. This is something that is natural and so obvious that it hardly deserves mention.

But we go further. How does this verse help the MAT worker? We feel in two ways...here Paul is talking of two states: 'child' and 'man'. On the one hand all our preparation and planning (good as that is) is still the 'child stage'. We understand imperfectly. To actually get there and be there is to enter into 'manhood'...it will be much more exacting and demanding. This will be when the theory (the 'child stage') achieves the actual (the 'man stage'). Or to put it colloquially, that's when 'the rubber hits the road'. It would also not be wrong to see this as necessary progression in our mission...a little pain there may be, but the thrill of entering into our purpose will be nothing short of pleasure. The 'child' longs for 'adulthood'.

Further, Paul is saying the ways of a child are unsuited to adulthood. Yet there obviously is some continuity between the 'child' and the 'man'. Is Paul not reaffirming what Jesus said in Luke 5:38 "... new wine must be poured into new wineskins"? Or to re-cast that into our context: much of what we experience and discover will have the

smell of newness or adulthood about it. Or as much as we appreciate what we have learnt from other missionaries, nevertheless God desires that we also experience the 'new wine'; that we enter our own manhood. Some other missionary's 'man', may be our 'child'...we, under the hand of God, have to discover our own 'man'.

Verse 12

Now we see bewildering shadows in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face; now I know a fragment of the truth, but then I will know as completely as I am known.

(William Barclay)

Leon Morris explains that while "Corinth was famous for its mirrors...few Christians would have been able to afford them. They would then have used polished metal...meaning the reflection would not have been very good" (1958:187, 188). This reality from their homes gives Paul a point of departure to illustrate a spiritual truth. Paul, according to Weymouth is teaching that 'For the present we see things as if in a mirror, and are puzzled' (in Morris; 1958:188). J.B. Phillips beautifully helps us. His translation is: "...all we see is the baffling reflection of reality; we are like men looking at a landscape in a small mirror..."

It is a salutary reminder that His ways are not our ways...times there will be when we cry out with the hymn-writer 'darkness does veil His face'.

How did the poet put it:

*Watch His methods, watch His ways,
How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects,
How He hammers him and hurts him
And with mighty blows converts him
Into trial shapes of clay which only God understands,
While his tortured heart is crying and
he lifts beseeching hands...*

Or, in the words of Scripture, 'whom the Lord loves He chastens' (in Davidson; 1970:50).

Our God will perfect His Kingdom. His will, will be realized in the earth. His Kingdom ‘will come’... the God Who knows no defeat, no detour, no declension in His loving resolve to honour His Name. He will establish righteousness in the earth. Hallelujah! Our God reigns... therefore we press forward, as faithfully as we can till truth, which at present we often experience as fragmented, receives its unity. It’s wholeness, it’s largeness will cover creation. We labour in hope. All our prayers, planning and perseverance will receive the Smile of His Pleasure. He will be ‘all in all’ and we will be satisfied.

Verse 13

The truth is that these three things last for ever – faith, hope, love – and the greatest of them is love.

(William Barclay)

This verse has puzzled many Christians. Leon Morris puts his finger on the problem when he writes “...we should not press Paul’s comparison too closely, and waste our time inquiring into the precise manner in which love surpasses faith or hope (though it may not be without significance that in verse 7 he has spoken of the other two as modes of love’s outworking). It is not Paul’s intention to rank these three in order” (1958:189).

The MAT worker is forward-looking. The ‘Day’ will come when we will be part of “a great multitude that no one could count”... standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9). We labour in hope feeding on faith. Our tomorrows are as bright as the promises of God because as Bruce Winter reminds us “the future comes to us from the hands of a God who will not fail us – and love” (in Carson, D.A.; France, R.T.; etc.; 1994:1181).

So the ‘greatest is love’. But how does this help the MAT worker? Allow me to call on four other saints whose breadth and spirituality pales mine into insignificance.

“Of love there be two principal offices, one to give, another to forgive.”

John Boys (in Thomas; 1975:177)

“Lord it is my chief complaint that my love is weak and faint yet I do love Thee and adore oh for grace to love Thee more.”

William Cowper

“The primary qualification for a missionary is not love for souls, as we so often hear, but love for Christ.”

Vance Havner (in Ravenhill; 1959:114)

*“Give me the love that leads the way,
The faith that nothing can dismay,
The hope no disappointments tire,
The passion that will burn like fire,
Let me not sink to be a clod:
Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.”*

Amy Wilson Carmichael (in Ravenhill; 1959:86)

Quote

*Love, love changes everything: hands and faces, earth and sky.
Love, love changes everything: how you live and how you die.
Love can make the summer fly or a night seem like a life-time.
Yes love, love changes everything: now I tremble at your name.
Nothing in the world will ever be the same.
Love, love changes everything: days are longer, words mean more.
Love, love changes everything: pain is deeper than before.
Love will turn your world around and that world will last for ever.
Yes love, love changes everything, brings you glory, brings you shame.
Nothing in the world will ever be the same.*

Andrew Lloyd Webber (in Stott; 1992:235)



8 Concern

Why should the church be concerned about the Marsh Arabs – that is concerned enough to do something?

We should be 'jealous' (as Scripture sometimes puts it) for the honour of his name – troubled when it remains unknown, hurt when it is ignored, indignant when it is blasphemed, and all the time anxious and determined that it shall be given the honour and glory which are due to it. The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God, verse 18), but rather zeal – burning and passionate zeal – for the glory of Jesus Christ.

(in Stott; 1996: 53 expounding Romans 1:5)

This certainly is a long quote. But as it stands it must be one of the most beautiful pieces of English literature describing the supreme 'missionary motive'. Others can be added, like the return of Christ, or the judgement seat of Christ, or 'justification by faith' but when all has been said and done, the overriding 'passion', the all-consuming 'passion' of the Scriptures is that Christ will receive the honour due to His Name.

Now we must ask, this 'zeal – burning and passionate zeal' - can we unbundle these words further? Is there more that can be said, more light lest any nuance escape our attention? Yes, we believe, around these words 'zeal – burning and passionate zeal' there are at least five further emphases we need to draw attention to.

To be more specific, we have chosen three individuals and two movements who will further help clarify this 'zeal – burning and passionate zeal.' Their lives, labours and love help 'flesh out' this key

thought further. And what guided the author to choose them? Well there were primarily two considerations:

Firstly, they already are acclaimed and acknowledged by the broad evangelical church. Their lives have inspired countless other missionaries. Also we tried to preserve a 'balance' as closely as possible between individuals and movements because clearly God works in both ways.

Secondly, although only five were chosen, their particular emphases highlighted the variegated ways in which God works. They display a beautiful array of gifts and people and that while I'm sure others can be referred to that will reveal talents and gifts not reflected here, I don't think much more can be written that is not already been revealed by these people and movements.

Floyd McClung

Floyd McClung in a helpful article spends his opening paragraph defining the word 'passion'. He firstly discards the careless way this word is often used and then describes it as "passion means whatever a person is willing to suffer for... the root meaning...comes from the Latin *paserre*, to suffer" (in Winter, Hawthorne; 1999: 185). He goes on: "It is what you hunger for so intensely that you will sacrifice anything to have it" (Ibid.).

So 'passion' is that which demands "pride of place" in our lives. It is a mind-set that filters out lesser visions...it meshes the combination of one's total being so that only one fuel will ignite. Jesus in John 4:32 said "I have food to eat that you know nothing of..." He was talking of His 'passion'. His focus. Similarly the apostle Paul wrote of himself as "...one thing I do..." (Philippians 3:13). He was writing of his 'passion', his heavenly fixation.

Now we need some illustrations from Church history that will further help us in our understanding. Further clarification.

Henry Martyn

Henry Martyn (1781-1812). By all accounts this man seemed destined for great academic honours. In 1802 he became a Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge. He had already graduated and was nominated

‘Senior Wrangler’. His marks in mathematics at Cambridge were unsurpassed. He was a brilliant scholar. After a brief two years as ‘Charles Simeon’s curate’ he left for Calcutta, India.

He proved to be a great linguist. “He mastered Urdu (closely related to Hindi), Persian and Arabic, the three principal languages of the Moslem world, and his Urdu New Testament has remained the basis of all subsequent translations”(in Stott; 2001: 154).

Later he would, in Iran, complete the Persian New Testament in one year. However, in this last exercise he was helped by an Islamic scholar, Mirza Sayyid Ali who told him that recently “so many Russian Christians had been killed that Christ from the fourth heaven took hold of Mahomet’s skirt to entreat him to desist” (Ibid.).

Henry Martyn, in his own words tells us ‘I was cut to the soul at this blasphemy...I could not endure existence if Jesus was not glorified; it would be hell to me if he were to be always thus dishonoured’ (Ibid.).

On October 16, 1812 he died, a lonely man in Tokat, Armenia. He was only thirty-one. Burnt out. His last days spent in tremendous pain and raging T.B.

As we look closely at the life of Henry Martyn we note that one of the hallmarks of ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’ is a distinct disdain for personal comfort and regard. Here is no succumbing to the perennial lust for luxury and ease. No coddling of self, nor craving after “creature comforts.” Henry Martyn entered deeply into the words of Jesus “If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Mark 8:34).

Henry Martyn exemplified the truth of 1 Corinthians 2:2... “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him Crucified.” Martyn honoured this text throughout his ministry and death – surely here we have an eloquence of “speech” that must rank as one of the most sublime sermons ever preached.

The Anabaptists

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was by anyone’s account a happening that had far-reaching implications. It was a time of rapid religious, social, moral, political and economic change. In this time of

transformation amongst other things various religious movements were brought to birth. One such group was the Anabaptists.

However, within the Anabaptists we have to distinguish further. We will concentrate on the particular grouping that Leonard Verduin calls the ‘Stepchildren of the Reformation’ (1980:13). Alan F. Kreider simply calls them ‘Anabaptists’ (in David Bugden; 1975:28-44). William R. Estep discusses the various terms that Church historians have used, then opts for the label ‘Anabaptists’ showing that the true group worthy of analysis will indicate “that Anabaptism was primarily a reform movement that developed within the context of the Swiss Reformation” (1986:195-196). Wilbert R. Shenk calls them “the Radical Reformers” (1984:8).

Now it is probably already clear that to speak of a grouping so diversely called, is to suggest a complex phenomena. And this is partly true – however, many other factors are crystal clear. There are many aspects about the Anabaptists that are as obvious as the noonday sun, but even more important is that we are assisted to further understand these words of John Stott’s ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’.

So, as tempting as the prospect is...we will not spend too much time describing the ‘Evangelical Anabaptists’, rather only enough that will help us and prepare us to see how they exemplify a ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’.

Alan F. Kreider in his article draws out some clear reference points that will help us to understand the Anabaptists. In a world ready to wield the sword they were “pacifist.” At a time when citizens would often be called upon to swear oaths of allegiance, they bluntly refused. They also refused to bear arms or kill and they discouraged Christians from seeking office in government. Moreover, they saw themselves as the “missionary movement of the Reformation” (these and other details from an article by Kreider in Bugden; 1975:28-44).

Wilbert R. Shenk (Editor) brings together thirteen essays illustrating ‘Anabaptism and Mission’. There are certain ‘notes’ that appear frequently...we will concentrate on them.

The Great Commission was fundamental, in that it required “central significance” (1984:19) in their assemblies.

There was a strong emphasis on believer’s baptism. ‘Anabaptism’ from the Greek text would mean someone who had been rebaptized.

This was a “label” they rejected. Infant baptism (christening) was regarded by them as meaningless.

One ‘note’ that occurs repeatedly is that of suffering and death. The famous words of Menno Simons, the Catholic priest who was converted to Anabaptism is worthy of our notice at this point. He wrote “We preach, as much as possible, both by day and by night, in houses and fields, in forests and wastes, hither and yon, at home and abroad, in prison and in dungeons, in water and in fire, on the scaffold and the wheel, before lords and princes, through mouth and pen, with possessions and blood, with life and death. We have done this these many years, and we are not ashamed of the Gospel of the glory of Christ” (in Shenk; 1984:147). Earlier, Franklin H. Littell (Ibid.23) wrote that “The Anabaptists made much of the struggle and suffering in Hebrews 11:33-38 and the analogy between baptism and death... Martyrdom was their carrying power, their triumph beyond obvious defeat...” (Ibid.23). I would have thought that seemingly ‘obvious defeat’ would have been more appropriate.

Surely these few quotes strongly imply an extraordinary people. Here we have a Christianity that was strangely fearless – to modern ears – remarkably free from materialism and clearly burning with a fervour that would sadly jar with much contemporary Christianity. How do we account for this? Is there some factor that has yet to be indicated and may even be the clue to introduce us to their ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’?

A word that occurs frequently in the book ‘Anabaptism and Mission’ is the word “revival” (see pages 56, 70, 79, 85, 86 and 135). While page 56 does not use the word ‘revival’ nevertheless what is detailed is strongly suggestive of such an event, namely “These farmers, who otherwise certainly were accustomed to hide their feelings broke out in wailing and weeping.” A final word of summary that neatly encapsulates this thought of ‘revival’ is on page 86: “This is one of the foremost reasons that the healthy center of early Anabaptism is today rightly seen by church historiography as a genuine revival.”

So, ‘revival’ is to be seen as an over-arching truth of the pure Anabaptist movement, just so ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’ would be, and is, the outworking of such ‘revival’. Those who will be driven by this ‘zeal...for the glory of Jesus’ will be a living embodiment of this ‘revival’. Those who experience ‘revival’ will find nothing less than a consuming passion for the ‘glory of Jesus’. The

Anabaptist movement shows us “both sides of the coin” – it is a costly currency, no wonder it is in such short supply in Christianity!

The Moravian

We live in a highly individualistic age. Significant people – even within the Church – are sometimes so honoured and praised that unwittingly a self-serving and solitary model is held up as an example of accomplishment. And without a doubt there have been times that individuals, often at great cost to themselves, have forged new ways of thinking and action. Where would we be without the courageous Luther – the path-finding Edward Jenner, the doggedness of David Livingstone, the unyielding Winston Churchill, the simple sincerity of Abraham Lincoln and many other such examples?

However, in looking at the ‘Moravians’ we again see a group that exemplifies this ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’, certain individuals within their community were certainly prominent, but they would probably like to be remembered as that the sum total of their parts was greater than its individual members. Collective action was high on their agenda

Colin A. Grant (in Winter, Hawthorne; 1999: 274-276) has written a brief, but excellent overview of “Europe’s Moravians: A Pioneer Missionary Church” (Ibid.). His opening paragraph sets the scene: “Sixty years before Carey set out for India and 150 years before Hudson Taylor first landed in China, two men, Leonard Dober, a potter and David Nitschmann, a carpenter, landed on the West Indian island of St. Thomas to make known the gospel of Jesus Christ. They set out in 1732 from a small Christian community in the mountains of Saxony in central Europe as the first missionaries of the Moravian Brethren, who in the next 20 years entered Greenland (1733), North America’s Indian territories (1734), Surinam (1735), South Africa (1736), the Samoyedic peoples of the Arctic (1737), Algiers and Ceylon (1740), China (1742), Persia (1747), Abyssinia and Labrador (1752).

This was but a beginning. In the first 150 years of its endeavour, the Moravian community was to send no less than 2,158 of its members overseas! In the words of Stephen Neill, ‘This small church was seized with a missionary passion which has never left it’” (Ibid.). Unfortunately this quote of Stephen Neill’s omits the important preceding words: “Under the leadership of Zinzendorf this small church...” (1964:237).

Now we need to distil from the article by Colin A. Grant both their strengths and weaknesses. What we will see is that while they do exemplify ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’, they were not perfect. Mistakes were made. Like us, they were “earthen vessels”, also prone to hasty and not well thought out plans and decisions.

For a start, we are told their “missionary obedience.....was essentially glad and spontaneous” (Ibid.). Missionary candidates were not praised and held up as spiritual heroes! That people were willing to go, and should go, to obey the ‘Great Commission’ was expected. In fact, if any strangeness was acknowledged, then surely it must be that some were unwilling to go. And those who did go, went “quietly.” No fuss. All that was urgently sought and more than abundantly found was “the fervent prayers of the congregation” (Ibid.).

Then at the core of everything they sought and did was “a deep, ongoing passion and love for Christ” (Ibid.). This was beautifully illustrated by their leader, Nicolas Zinzendorf who was an evangelical Lutheran nobleman. We are told that he “wrote more than 2000 hymns and the central emphasis was... ‘I have one passion, and it is Him, only Him’” (Ibid.).

Also they exhibited tremendous courage, and at times they were faced with what seemed insurmountable problems. One quote will more than convey an excellent understanding of their huge difficulties. “...the early years took their inevitable toll. In Guyana, for instance, 75 out of the first 160 missionaries died from tropical fevers, poisoning and such. Men like Andrew Rittmansberger died within six months of landing on the island” (Ibid.). Oh yes they paid the price. The toll was heavy. But the joy was great. Coupled to this courage was an unflinching determination “...a tenacity of purpose” (Ibid.).

But there were blemishes too. It seems that in their eagerness to obey the ‘Great Commission’, there was “inadequate preparation” and that there was more of a concentration on “evangelism than on the actual planting of local churches...also a weakness on developing (local) Christian leadership” (Ibid.).

Yes, this brief introduction does prove they knew ‘zeal – burning and passionate’. They were “pure in heart” (Matthew 5:8). Their obedience was wholehearted. Here was no ‘halting between two opinions.’ But still we need to boil this down further, is there a specific that illustrates their zeal? Is there a single trait that we can say applies

to the whole? To my mind it would be humility. Their King had spoken. His Word was clear. To them was given the humble privilege to receive and obey. Let us look at the example of David Zeisberger who for 62 years worked among the Huron and other tribes. Grant describes a specific time in his life when “one Sunday morning he preached on Isaiah 64:8. The year was 1781. Marauding bands broke into the Church and compound... In the subsequent burnings, Zeisberger lost all his manuscripts of Scripture translations, hymns and extended notes on the grammar of Indian languages... Zeisberger bowed his head in quiet submission to the overruling providence of God and set his hand and heart to the work again” (Ibid.). Surely the humble affirmation of Job “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (Job 1:21) may be superimposed over the response of Zeisberger to his sudden tragedy. His humble demeanour exemplified the movement.

William Carey

It is a rare Christian who does not know of the legacy of this man. He has been called the ‘father of Protestant missions’ (in Winter, Hawthorne; 1999:293). His “small book”, ‘An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens’ has been called by Winter “the Magna Carta of the Protestant mission movement” (Ibid. 254). The ‘Enquiry’ was published in May 1792.

Perhaps we are getting ahead of ourselves. It will do us well to reflect on the main events of his life and then finally arrive at how he illustrates for us ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’.

He was born on the 17 August 1761 at Paulerspury, England. On the 31 May 1792 he preached what would become the well-known and famous sermon: ‘Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God’. S. Pearce Carey called it “The Deathless Sermon” (1993:73). On the 13 June 1793 he and his family left England for India. When he died on the 9 June 1834, the Scriptures had been translated into many Indian languages. He was highly praised.

S. Pearce Carey (1993: 393, 394) spends two pages neatly detailing all of William Carey’s “Biblical Translations.” The graph succinctly distinguishes between “Year of publication, New Testament, Pentateuch, Histories, Prophets and Hagiographa” (holy writings). One is overwhelmed at Carey’s prodigious output.

But, if this is not exhausting enough, Ruth and Vishal Mangalwadi have a fascinating first chapter in their book (1993:1-8) detailing the answers from an imaginary group of students responding to the question “Who was William Carey?”

‘Well’ says the first student ‘he was a botanist’. And the student goes on to elaborate why this is so (Ibid.).

The second student volunteers the answer that ‘William Carey was the first Englishman to introduce the steam engine to India, and the first to make indigenous paper for the publishing industry’ (Ibid.). The student then goes on to substantiate his answer.

The third student announces that ‘William Carey was a missionary...who introduced the idea of Savings Banks to India, to fight the all-pervasive social evil of usury. Carey believed that God, being righteous, hated usury, and the thought that lending at the interest of 36-72 percent made investment, industry, commerce and the economic development of India impossible’ (Ibid.).

A fourth student says that ‘William Carey was the first man who led the campaign for a humane treatment for leprosy patients. Until his time they were sometimes buried or burned alive in India because of the belief that a violent end purified the body and ensured transmigration into a healthy new existence’ (Ibid.).

The fifth student says that ‘Dr William Carey is the father of print technology in India. He brought to India the modern science of printing and publishing and then taught and developed it. He built what was then the largest press in India’ (Ibid.).

The sixth student responds that ‘William Carey was a Christian missionary who established the first newspaper ever printed in any oriental language...because he believed that “Above all forms of truth and faith, Christianity seeks free discussion.” His English-language journal, *Friend of India*, was the force that gave birth to the Social Reform Movement in India, in the first half of the nineteenth century’ (Ibid.).

The seventh student replied that ‘William Carey was the founder of the Agri-Horticultural Society in the 1820’s, thirty years before the Royal Agricultural Society was established in England’ (Ibid.).

The student goes on ‘Carey did a systematic survey of agriculture in India, wrote for agriculture reform in the journal, *Asiatic Researches*, and exposed the evils of the indigo cultivation two generations before it collapsed’ (Ibid.).

The eighth student says that ‘Carey was the first man to translate and publish great Indian religious classics such as the Ramayana, and philosophical treaties such as Samkhya into English.’ The student goes on... ‘Carey transformed Bengali; which was previously considered fit only for demons and women into the foremost literary language of India. He wrote Gospel ballads in Bengali to bring the Hindu love of musical recitations to the service of his Lord. He also wrote the first Sanskrit dictionary for scholars’ (Ibid.).

The ninth student chimes in, ‘Carey was a British cobbler who became a professor of Bengali, Sanskrit and Marathi at the Fort William College in Calcutta where civil servants were trained’ (Ibid.). Also, the student adds he ‘began dozens of schools of Indian children of all castes and launched the first college in Asia at Serampore, near Calcutta’ (Ibid.).

The tenth student excitedly adds that ‘William Carey introduced the study of Astronomy into the Subcontinent’ ...also ‘he cared deeply about the destructive cultural ramifications of astrology, fatalism, superstitious fear and an inability to organize and manage time... He did not believe that the heavenly bodies were deities that governed over lives’ (Ibid.).

The eleventh student quietly affirms that ‘William Carey pioneered the idea of lending libraries in the subcontinent...his objective was to create indigenous literature in the vernacular. But until such indigenous literature was available, Indians needed to receive knowledge and wisdom from around the world to catch up quickly with other cultures’ (Ibid.).

The twelfth student excitedly announces that ‘William Carey was an evangelist... He believed that if the Gospel flourishes in India, the wilderness will, in every respect, become a fruitful field. He became the first man in India to write essays on forestry, almost fifty years before the government made its very first attempt at forest conservation, in Malabar’ (Ibid.).

The thirteenth student we are told was a feminist Social Science scholar, who firmly announced that ‘he was the first man to stand against both the ruthless murders and the widespread oppression of women, virtually synonymous with Hinduism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ (Ibid.). The student then went on to detail the ways ‘The male in India was crushing the female...’ (Ibid.). It makes for sad and depressing reading.

The fourteenth student quietly states that ‘William Carey was an English missionary... (who) transformed the ethos of the British administration from indifferent imperial exploitation to civil service’ (Ibid.).

The fifteenth student calls ‘William Carey a preacher who revived the ancient idea that ethics and morality were inseparable from religion. This had been an important assumption underlying the Vedic religion. But the Upanishadic teachers separated ethics from spirituality...’ (Ibid.).

‘Carey began to affirm that human beings were sinners and needed both forgiveness for sin and deliverance from its power over them... (later) Raja Ram Mohun Roy, one of the greatest Hindu scholars of the nineteenth century, came in contact with Carey, (and) he began to question seriously the spirituality then prevalent in India... he would later write: ...I have found the doctrine of Christ more conducive to moral principles, and better adapted for the use of rational beings, than any other which has come to my knowledge’ (Ibid.).

The sixteenth and last student excitedly speaks. ‘Dr. William Carey is the father of the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ (Ibid.). The student then went on to detail the many evils William Carey challenged, all because ‘He saw India not as a foreign country to be exploited, but served, a society where truth, not ignorance, needed to rule’ (Ibid.).

The chapter ends with the question being raised again: “So, who was William Carey? Well, he was a pioneer of the modern missionary movement of the West, reaching out to all parts of the world; a pioneer of the Protestant Church in India; and the translator and/or publisher of the Bible in 40 different Indian languages. Carey was an evangelist who used every available medium to illumine every dark facet of Indian life with the light of truth. He is the central character in the story of the modernization of India” (Ibid.).

The previous paragraph provides us with a neat summary. However, in the light of our opening quote by John Stott, we still pursue our basic question; what would account for his ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’ that was so undoubtedly true of him? What do we believe provided an integrating center that would account for his many and varied accomplishments? What was the ‘one’ that would explain the ‘many’?

The answer is not hard to find. His life and labours can be explained under the truth that was paramount to him: A solid and sure commitment to the Scriptures. His prodigious output – ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal’ – bear testimony that the Scriptures were his first and consuming love.

In 1803 he wrote to Andrew Fuller. Part of his letter tells us how he was planning his life. He writes: “If we are given another fifteen years, we hope to translate and print the Scriptures into all the chief languages of Hindustan. We have fixed our eyes on this goal. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall perform this” (in S. Pearce Carey; 1993:385). Yes, this ‘zeal of the Lord’ was true of him, his love and devotion to the Scriptures was an outflow of this ‘zeal’.

Conclusion

Finally we return to our chapter heading: “Why should the Church be concerned about the Marsh Arabs – that is concerned enough to do something?” The question may be raised – are we not concerned about their physical sufferings...why has this not been put forward as at least part of the reason why the Church should be ‘concerned’?

This is a worthy question and we would like to answer it like this. The Marsh Arabs’ suffering is a matter of deep and grave concern. That they continue to struggle along in a meager existence does touch us deeply. However, how Christ will be served among them in both physical and spiritual needs (the spiritual need is primary) will require men and women who are consumed by ‘zeal – burning and passionate zeal.’ The Marsh Arab needs are gigantic. Prospects of alleviation are bleak. Therefore, while we affirm and strongly believe in the Lordship of Christ, nevertheless our call is for men and women who are burning – they are being eaten/driven by ‘burning and passionate zeal’.

Finally, we are all aware of the cliché: cometh the hour, cometh the man. Too true. But more than this, we are looking for special men and women – and our opening quote neatly defines the ‘special men and women’ we are looking for. They alone will be sufficient for the challenge.



9 Questions and Answers

A friendly dialogue between John and Samuel tying up loose ends

“Dialogue is a serious conversation in which we are prepared to listen and learn as well as to speak and teach. It is therefore an exercise in integrity.”

J. Stott (in Dudley-Smith; 1995:328)

In this final chapter, John has set some questions from a context of mutual concern for the Marsh Arabs as well as the mission that is seeking to reach them with the gospel. Thank you John. This last chapter is somewhat more relaxed and slow-paced. There are no quotes. No other author intrudes. But hopefully the reader will feel part of the conversation.

John

Will the ultimate aim be to get indigenous Christian Iraqis to finally take over and work amongst and for the Marsh Arabs?

Samuel

This is certainly one of our goals. One of our aims is to get Iraqi Christians to work with us, with the definite goal of reaching the Marsh Arabs.

We are certainly open to the idea of Iraqi Christians ‘taking over the work’...and I’m sure in time they will see this vision and own it. Later on, if in the counsels of God it was seen that we were merely path-finders and pioneers laying a foundation, that others could build on, then we would be more than satisfied.

For our part, we can’t emphasize it enough, that we are open to working with any Christian, as long as we share this common calling. This sentiment would apply to any other Christian organization as well.

John

In ministering to the Marsh Arabs, what practical steps should a missionary take? What sort of training does he need?

Samuel

We have a rather stringent application form that every MAT worker would need to fill in. It then is assessed by a ministry board – I confess I even find this application form somewhat intimidating!

Some of the things we are looking for are:

1. **What are you doing for missions now?** We are looking for people who are already up to their ears in local evangelism.
2. **Give five facts about the Marsh Arabs.** We would expect someone who feels called of Christ to serve Him amongst these people to at least have researched them as far as possible. There is much information on the internet.
3. **Describe what Bible and theological training you have had.** We are looking at setting up a one-year internship with a local Church...but this is very much in the embryonic stage. Thus far those who are seeking to serve here do have Bible school training – but food for thought; the likes of William Carey and ‘Bruchko’ went in this sense unequipped.
4. **The Marsh Arabs speak Arabic.** Describe your response to this? Although this book gives some small help in this regard, and there are various study-aids available locally, the need for intensive study of this language must be clearly grasped. However, should a worker come to the field with say an Arabic vocabulary of 200 words...we would then encourage such persons to come and in the context of the Marsh Arabs, add further vocabulary and language learning to their basics. Thankfully, Arabic is like the proverbial dog “whose bark is worse than its bite” – it’s not as intimidating as many people make out! It’s amazing – as always – what God can do with a willing heart.
5. **Provide two letters of commendation.** We are asking all MAT applications to be supported in this way. These two letters of commendation are from people who know you and believe that God has called you to this work. So it is not

simply that he or she is such a nice person (which I'm sure is true anyway) but rather from someone who is already strategically involved regarding the Marsh Arabs in the applicant's life. For example someone who is already praying for the applicant. We would regard it as strange if someone confessed a burden for the Marsh Arabs, but no one in their immediate circle was aware of this.

John

What sort of sacrifices must be met in going to Iraq that may be different than ministering in other areas?

Samuel

This question is often raised. And our response is always 'we simply don't know'! But this should not throw us off balance...our further answer is: are you sure that Christ has called you to serve Him amongst the Marsh Arabs? This is the million dollar question because if the going gets tough – and it will – you won't falter because the knowledge of His call – grounded in Scripture – will keep you rock-solid and focused. We certainly don't want to pretend that serving Christ among the Marsh Arabs won't be unique (but then every mission calling is) But we remind ourselves that it is primarily a pioneer work.

And talk about 'sacrifice' – well we like to say, measure up to Calvary. Look at the Cross of Jesus afresh and then like Isaac Watts confess 'my richest gain I count but loss'. Joyfully we cry out, sacrifices there may be (and there is no mission without suffering) but being in the center of His will is joy unsurpassable.

John

Missionaries are often family men and women. Will missionaries – should missionaries – be able to take their family with them? What will this mean for their children?

Samuel

This is certainly a tough one. Let me start off by saying there is no "legislation" in our company either way. The company is willing to speak or counsel the parents, but they, under the hand of God, must arrive at their own decision. Then stick to it. The only concern we do

have – and this sounds so mercenary – is that missionaries with large households will put quite a financial strain on the financial coffers of the company. So, if a large family is joining us, then we simply ask if adequate financial planning is in place.

Now as I said earlier this is a tough one. I mean look at David Livingstone, called the missionary who ‘discovered’ Africa. In his old age he realized he had spent far too little time with his family. The children had grown up hardly knowing their father – in 1864 his son, Robert, died in the American Civil War. He had enlisted under a false name.

Samuel Zwemer, by all accounts was a highly gifted and energetic man, often called the “Apostle to Islam.” Yet, concerning his family, he certainly had his fair share of suffering. We are told that in 1904 – in an age before air conditioning – he lost two daughters. Their ages were four and seven and they both died within a period of eight days. This was a time of incredible sadness for Samuel and his wife Amy.

Or think of Hudson Taylor. His daughter ‘little Gracie’ dying before his eyes. Surely an understatement when he wrote of his and his wife’s sufferings as from ‘torn hearts’.

Or think of John G. Paton, missionary to the New Hebrides. As a young missionary, hardly starting the work then his wife and newborn son die. Almost from the inception of his missionary labours he learnt, painfully, that family ties must loosely bind the heart. They, like all things of the earth, are subject to the providential rule of God.

Now I realize there is another side to the story – many missionaries have had, shall I say, cost-free family lives. And that is good and blessed of the Lord. But I have concentrated on one position as it were simply to enforce the point that whatever the Lord appoints for His servants, His obeyed will is always true and synonymous with an individual’s calling.

Perhaps another way to look at this would be to see that Marsh Arab missionaries are sent for the well being and spiritual good of Marsh Arab families. In the equation, MAT families seek to fulfill that, even if there is a cost involved! And if there is one thing the Marsh Arabs need to see, it is that Christian families are radically different and that true love and real family life can be theirs as well under the Lordship of the Messiah.

John

What immediate goals do you have once you are established in the Marshes?

Samuel

Flexibility is the name of the game. I like the way you put ‘goals’ after the verb ‘established’! And by established we would mean relationships of trust and confidence are being clearly formed.

But we need to go with some clear ideas in mind... after all, they want to know why you are here! So here are some ideas that we have been tossing around...

Some English teaching. We have already noticed that several of them have this desire, and so we will pursue it as thoroughly as possible.

Possibility of a clinic. Some of our members have medical training, so even if it is a very basic clinic, we will purposefully start small and then hopefully grow.

Micro-business projects for Marsh Arab women. The hearts of our team really go out for the Marsh Arab women. We want to encourage small business projects that will simply broaden their horizons and make them feel better about themselves. I realize the deadening sin of materialism is ever at the door, but for our part we envisage business projects that will lift them out of their perpetual ruts into that which makes life just a little more interesting. A little more challenging...employment that is a little more stimulating.

Existing N.G.O. projects. I can’t say too much here, but there is a very strong possibility of slotting into existing N.G.O. projects. Sorry if this all sounds a bit vague, but I can’t really put to paper what is not hard and fast yet.

Also I fear I may have already said too much. I mean our philosophy is rather start small, but aim for growth rather than arrive with too many ideas and then down the road get disillusioned because we have bitten off more than we can chew. Our bottom-line is that we want to honour Matthew 25:35-36, that is the activities described there. And let’s face it, the activities the Lord Jesus describes here do not require college degrees or high-powered planning...simply to be there and allow their pain to be our teacher!

John

Are you aware that many aid agencies discourage concentration on the Marsh Arabs? I suppose the latent rivalries that lie just below the surface may erupt and exacerbate the precariousness of the tribes' co-existence in the South.

Samuel

Yes, you are right. We have come across this concern in our research. For our part – on a human level – you must aim at something. There must be a specific goal or target in view. So our goal is the Marsh Arabs (on the divine side, this is where the Lord Jesus had told us to go) because to say we have a definite goal or purpose does not mean that we will exclude others.

No, we will work on the inclusionary principle – namely have a specific focus, but include whoever else wants to come under the ambit of a specific MAT ministry. But to work on the exclusionary principle – namely to exclude anyone who is not a Marsh Arab will surely cause us to lose a huge gospel opportunity. We will lose the opportunity to teach the Marsh Arabs the needful respect and tolerance that is due to all of us – even if they are not Marsh Arabs!

Now, I know what you are probably thinking. In time, because of the relationships formed, some Marsh Arabs may feel they 'own' us... we are obviously concerned about them, so we must stick with them. And the possibility of relationships going the wrong way is a need for careful vigilance.

All of us, not just Marsh Arabs are complex beings – none of us is as straightforward as we think! But I think if we can move away from 'money' (they are living in such grinding poverty) to 'services' as quickly as possible, and if we have been honest from the word go, namely that we cannot be confined or restricted, then they will also accept the inclusionary principle.

John

In the days of Saddam Hussein no-one wanted to be a Marsh Arab. Now because of all the talk of Marsh Restoration, everyone wants to be a Marsh Arab. A bit of an overstatement but I think you will get the point.

Samuel

We have come across this bit of ‘wisdom’ but we think it is hearsay. Besides we haven’t been called to be Sherlock Holmes in the marshes! If someone says they are a Marsh Arab then that’s it, we accept what they say.

But at a deeper level, the Marsh Arabs have always been regarded as so different and with so much disdain that for anyone to simply say they are a Marsh Arab is highly unlikely. But we will have to see as we go along.

John

Will you be able to “lock into” a financial base extra to your Church funds in order to facilitate your work (N.G.O.’s, government agencies, etc.)?

Samuel

D.L. Moody was once criticized because some American breweries were sponsoring his preaching trips. He replied something like this: ‘I would preach even if the devil sponsored me’!

Now I don’t think we will go this far – but we are certainly open to whatever financial aid is given to us, providing it doesn’t compromise Matthew 28:16-20 being obeyed among the Marsh Arabs.

And, quite frankly, we are optimistic. Once we make it known that specific practical projects are being tackled, money and aid will be forthcoming.

But even more than additional funds, we are looking for people to help us. Projects are good, but foreigners working alongside in these projects will count for much more. Foreigners who are gripped with a ‘burning passionate zeal’ knowing that Christ can make a difference in individuals and communities lives.

Perhaps, coming back to your original question – will we canvas for funds? Most definitely. We feel if we expect people to act responsibly and caringly then they must be given the information. People can’t respond to what they don’t know. Many mission organizations in the past worked on the ‘faith’ principle...namely speak to God and He will move hearts. All we are saying is that we speak to God and man – still knowing that at the end of the day those who do respond, do so because He has prompted their hearts.

John

What are your personal thoughts on ‘Marsh Restoration’?

Samuel

Well there is such a lot of emphasis on this today that I approach this topic with a great deal of diffidence. So many well-informed people have addressed this issue and many have promised huge financial assistance to help restore the marshes. Of course whether this materializes is another story.

My thoughts along this line of ‘Marsh Restoration’ are essentially four:

Do the Marsh Arabs themselves desire and request this? As far as I know they are not united on this matter – don’t forget, no matter how we idealize and romanticize their past, the Marsh existence was isolationary and hard. They were outside the pale of necessary modern advance like hospitals, clinics, schools...whatever they did experience of these things was always rudimentary. You know basic clinics, elementary schooling, etc.

Further, below the Marshes are huge deposits of oil. So on the one hand you have the conservationists crying for a back to what nature gave us, and on the other hand lucrative enrichment possibilities are being eyed by oil conglomerates. So how do we ‘marry’ the two bearing in mind that ecological and heritage claims often cannot withstand the lust for quick short-term capitalistic gains?

I don’t have an answer other than to suggest that all the stakeholders must arrive at a consensus. By stakeholders I mean an acknowledged Marsh Arab voice, someone representing oil interests, another representing ecological concerns and finally an impartial person or persons who is able to assimilate the broad picture and make an informed decision. An informed decision that proves originality of thinking and understanding of the issues involved. An objective fourth party to the discussion is an absolute necessity.

For me, the talk of oil drilling on a large scale cannot by-pass the Marsh Arab question of how this will benefit them. This will require some strenuous thinking!

When we talk of Marsh Restoration we must bear in mind the big dams that have already been built higher up on the feeding rivers. So

whatever we mean by Marsh Restoration, the reality of getting it to be the size it was in its heyday is impossible. Perhaps the talk should be, say 80% of the original Marshes...so our goal should be, if it is Marsh Restoration, to at least be a lot clearer, that is that a percentage of the original Marshes are being restored.

Much of the water is simply not fit for human consumption and this is obviously an aspect of Marsh Restoration that we are more than concerned about. But to talk of Marsh Restoration that benefits the Marsh Arab, I think is a question that needs to be more fully explored. Do they really want to live as they did 50, 60 years ago...won't the juggernaut of modern progress slowly crush them or at least relegate them to the backwaters of stagnation and suffocation? I think Marsh Restoration should rather be that they be encouraged to move into modern society but with the proviso that their uniqueness will be respected and even enhanced. Marsh Restoration should focus on the people that the Marshes have served for many millennia but in such a way that the order of the day is 'newness' or 'progress' not backwardness and reactionary.

So, John you asked me a very pointed question. I suppose the modern idiom 'go with the flow' – pardon the pun – very much conveys how we feel. Our 'mission' is people...that others are concerned about their place is gratifying to us, but it is secondary to our mission. We feel the people first, and once they realize and respond to their choice of place, that then will be our choice as well.

John

Will you aim to point other Christian agencies (such as Bible Translators) to the work amongst the Marsh Arabs?

Samuel

What a pleasure! Yes, come and join us. And it is amazing how quickly the news spreads in the Christian community when pioneer fields have been opened.

There is one proviso though. No one comes with a denominational axe to grind. No sloughing in the back-door any particular denominational "demons"! No, it is not that we are unsympathetic to our own respective Churches and denominations that nurtured us, it is simply that we want the Holy Spirit to create a fresh,

new work amongst them – giving birth to a uniquely Marsh Arab Church. Won't that be wonderful – don't the Scriptures freely use the word 'new' in so many different places – can't we trust the Spirit to do a 'new' thing among them?

Yes, I must admit the writings of Roland Allen have influenced us greatly at this point. But this is not the place to elaborate further, the previous paragraph is sufficient to convey our thinking at this point.

John

Are you planning to write any more books after this? Is this your last book?

Samuel

You certainly know how to ask questions! One 'book' that has been burning on our hearts for a long time is a book filled with Marsh Arab biographies. A book that interviews a number of them and then allows them to 'speak' to many others that may never have heard a Marsh Arab voice. In this small way others will be provided with an entrance into the Marsh Arab world.

Then we are looking to write a book that helps others to enter the collective Marsh Arab world. A book that helps you sit in the market with them, a book that travels around the village, a book that tells you what the women are talking about as they are doing their washing, what games the children play, how it feels when a water buffalo dies and so on. In short, a book that describes life among the Marsh Arabs.

John

What is your latest time frame for going to Iraq?

Samuel

As soon as possible. Let me clarify this a bit. For us who are going as workers to the Marsh Arabs, our guidance and timing rests upon three 'legs' as it were. Our guidance looks to three strands to perfectly come together.

For a start those who are willing to go must have a clear conviction that this is so. A clear knowledge that Christ has called them to obey Matthew 28:16-20 in the context of the Marsh Arabs.

Then secondly, those who are going to work in the context of a company that has been formed to obey Matthew 28:16-20 among the Marsh Arabs. They (often referred to as ‘senders’) must affirm those who are going, support them, and definitely be the arms that keep those who are sent, in the field. So just as the ‘hands’ must not get tired, so likewise the ‘arms’ must not get tired either.

The last strand, and not the least important, is Iraqi Christians (not Marsh Arabs) – must indicate their feelings about the missionaries coming. The million dollar question here is – will they feel endangered if we come now and as they guide us? So till they give us the ‘green light’, we continue to plan and promote here at home. We labour in hope.

I realize too that this question will somewhat ‘date’ the book...a few years down the line (D.V.), the guidance tri-pod will be different, namely the people planning to go, those supporting those going and then the MAT workers already based either among the Marsh Arabs in the Marshes or serving the Marsh Arabs in the cities.

John

In reflecting on our 'dialogue', I don't recollect you mentioning how you became involved with the Marsh Arabs? To put it colloquially, I think we need a “word of testimony” from you?

Samuel

I would think this question really goes to the heart of it all – how it all began, became alive and with time increased in momentum. Praise God. I would just like to add a word of caution, namely we must always bear in mind one man's experience mustn't become another man's rule of thumb or criterion. God is sovereign and He will always reserve the right to act with freshness and newness, within the confines of Scripture. After all, “His mercies are new every morning” (Lamentations 3:23).

I was pastoring a medium-sized church called Gelvandale Baptist in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. God had given us some missionaries to support, we frequently opened our pulpit for missionary speakers and regularly as a congregation travelled the world in prayer, concentrating our attention on missionary needs and areas that were particularly hostile to the Church. So God was good to us. Our church had a

missionary “flavour” to it...others referred to us as a 'missions-minded church' and so on. Even though we were thankful for the little we could do, we were still dissatisfied. We had the nagging feeling that more could be done. Further steps could be taken...actually we longed for God to stretch us even more! So our Missions Committee felt, that under the hand of God, we would look for an area in the world that had not been touched by the gospel. Romans 15:20 and Matthew 28:16-20 were strongly impressed upon us by the Spirit. And the church set out to pray for us. Then the Missions Committee sought to find such an untouched area. We really researched this aspect well. We attended mission conferences, appointed certain people to research 'unreached people groups' and generally did all we could to familiarise ourselves with the spiritual needs of the world.

Now many were the times we were just about 'spiritually floored'...many were the times we were so overwhelmed, that had God not sustained us, we would have given up. There are just so many areas that have little or no gospel exposure...one can only wonder how God must feel as all this is constantly in His view! Again and again we were reminded that the “fields are white unto harvest” but the labourers are enjoying their “churchianity”! But seriously, we would encourage every church to familiarise themselves with their world. Our planet has many places and people that are just about literally crying out: “church do something”!

To cut a long story short – after about two years – as the Missions Committee was going through the book of Zechariah (never let it be said the Old Testament is short on missions!), marrying Scripture to our research, we felt the Lord wanted us *to adopt the Marsh Arabs*.

The Missions Committee made the recommendation to the Church and everyone was glad. Little did we realise that our journey coupled with much spiritual ignorance (maybe it was just as well that we were so clueless) was only beginning – there being many twists and turns in the road ahead – but as always, we would prove time and again the faithfulness of God. God doesn't offer us a 'smooth ride', but He does promise us that we will get to our destination.

In 2001, 5 of our church set out to visit Iraq as tourists. Remember this was the time when Saddam Hussein still ruled the country. Our mandate from the church was to “spy out the land”, find out what we could and report back. It was a good introduction/exposure trip. We went to the north, saw many archaeo-

logical sites and after a real struggle, got our guide to take us to the south. We were being exposed to their raw fear of the southern area of Iraq – lawlessness and criminality just about ruled unchecked despite a strong army presence and many check-points.

We didn't make contact with any Marsh Arabs although we did meet some members of one tribe of the south. They are still our precious friends and we keep contact with them.

In 2003, the Allied forces entered Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein. Early 2004 we re-entered, that is Pat and myself and we did make contact with some Marsh Arabs. They are of the As-Shaghamba tribe. What a happy, happy moment it was...how this actually happened in Iraq would require almost a book of its own!

In 2005, five of us re-entered Iraq, made contact with more Marsh Arabs and among ourselves started discussing career-mission prospects. While it was all very exciting – how, under the hand of God, we humbly felt new ground was being broken, nevertheless there was a terrible tenseness in the air. We were being presented with our first challenge...the insidious influence of fear and if it is not recognised and addressed by the promises of God's Word, can have a paralysing effect.

When we got back to South Africa, we soon realised that the enormity of the challenge was really beyond the capacity and resources of a single church. So we created and had registered a Section 21 Company (that is a company that provides tax relief but such registration requires stringent auditing) that in fact became a 'home' for many supporting churches. Churches that support our vision of obeying the 'Great Commission among the Marsh Arabs of South Iraq'.

And so to the present. What are we doing? Well we are living with “a bags packed” mentality. Not easy. But so what? In this year we have had extensive tours into our own country, promoting the Marsh Arabs vision – especially creating prayer awareness and interest.

Now John, I'm sure you would like me to say something about the response of the churches we have visited? Well we have encountered the whole gamut of feelings that I think can exist in Christians...all the way from we didn't know or we don't care to churches that say: here we want to be involved. Here we want to pin our colours to the mast and promote this vision, assisting this ministry come hell or high water!

By God's grace we are here for “the long haul.” God has given us a vision – and that He is faithful is really our strength and stay.

We are itching to get there...burning in fact, and the raging civil war does deeply disturb us. We are horrified at the carnage, how such a beautiful nation and people can continuously “rip it's own guts out”! Pardon the vulgarity of the language, but a country knee-deep in blood and bone can only be appropriately addressed in strong language. We need to be on our knees more often for this suffering nation.

William Carey once referred to himself as “a plodder.” To borrow this great man's words...may we too “keep our hand to the plough and not look back” (Luke 9:62). The glory is His. The work is ours. Such a great privilege to be “God's fellow-workers” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

John

Is there a final word from you...something that you would like to leave with us that sews it all up?

Samuel

Yes. Please go back to the previous chapter. Read the chapter heading carefully. Re-look at the question raised.

Then look at the quote by John Stott. It is the answer to the question. Then further, we, in that chapter look at three men and two movements exemplifying the zeal necessary.

Now it all comes down to having read what is written – despite all its imperfections – how do we square up? Where do we stand? How will we respond?



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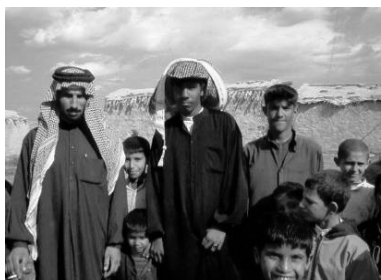


A Small Gallery of Impressions from the Marshes



★ اللهُ★ أَكْبَرُ★







Buffalo coming in for feed



A village scene on the canal



Beautiful Marshes



Marsh children and a mother waiting for the photographer



Idle hands need to be employed



Can you help to school them?



Our Marsh friends smiling...do they know you are coming?



Marsh women are always working



Sheikh, grandson and friend





A canal scene



Slowly the reeds (very useful) are returning



What do you think this young mother is thinking?

