

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RON AND NANCY GEORGE

NAKED

MISSION

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Ron and Nan George today



Ron in Algiers, 1963

PROLOGUE

My wife Nancy is full of memories and stories of things she has done, insights gained through being paralysed and events in her life that make her a rich source of wisdom. She was the youngest of 9 children in a close-knit family. Some years ago, she was asked to write her story, which formed the book, “Treasure in Jars of Clay.” As I look back on our life together, the title seems apt.

I have always been a doer, so it is only now, in my later years, that I have had time look back on our life together and put pen to paper to give the story of my own life and, hopefully, add to the overall picture that we share.

Throughout life, I have been blessed in the people I have met, those team members that have contributed to my understanding of God’s ways, both with man in general, and myself in particular. Having been born in 1941, my formative years were influenced by WW2. It was hard and yet rich in experience. Joining OM and coming under the tutelage of George Verwer and others, as well as interacting with Asians, Africans, Europeans and Americans gave me an unusual perspective, which was reinforced through my studies, especially at the SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies.) I see very clearly how our interpretation of the Bible is often at the mercy, or blessing, of cultural experiences, and my experience with differing cultures helped shape God’s world for me in unusual ways. Such is the miracle of the Bible that it meets the needs of people from all the cultures, all of which are results of fallen men.

These experiences led me through a series of changing Christian ministries, from People International to World In Need, and now the Eurasia Education Foundation.

I spent 17 years with OM (1963 – 1980), but by the end of that time I felt I could no longer say that I worked with a youth organization, and it was time to move on. We took over a charity organisation that our Solicitor had “hanging” on the shelf. This organisation’s goal was to reach people who were doubly lost: they were Muslims living in Communist lands. It is

a goal that is still with us today, although many changes have taken place in the intervening years.

People International set out to serve the few Muslim believers who had come to Christ and make them successful. I had seen that the culture of Muslim peoples fell into five areas: Arab, Malay, Turkish, Persian and African. All of these cultures contained Christian communities and I believed it was these people who should do the church planting, rather than recruiting large numbers of westerners who didn't know the culture or languages, and weren't able to stay long term. Filipinas spoke a Malay language, Arab Christians in the Middle East knew Arabic, especially Lebanese and Egyptians, Turks were akin to Koreans, being an Altaic language and culture (for with the language comes the culture as a carrier.) Indians spoke the Persian language and Africa was full of Churches that only needed a vision to reach out to their close family members who were Muslim. (1980-2005)

The recruitment of these Christian communities came as a shock to the westerners we worked with and it was time to leave People International and go back to a more traditional cultural approach.

Within a week of leaving, we had set up another organisation. We wanted to carry the vision forwards, and World in Need (WIN) added to the concepts of the Kingdom of God. How could we preach to Kurds living on cold mountains with rains falling upon them without also meeting their human needs? This is a question which confronts every missionary and church when they encounter the suffering of people they need to reach. That suffering must be understood and tackled if we are to have a valid message of love and care.

World in Need was very successful in raising sponsorship for children. Using this method, we opened schools in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, Myanmar and India, but the drive to raise funds for humanitarian work overshadowed the task of establishing the church amongst Muslim peoples. Keeping a balance is difficult for all missions.

Sadly, the church often sees meeting human need as more important than sharing God's love, and the truth about Jesus. To bring about systemic changes where need was too often created as a result of sin and man's inhumanity to man, needs a balance of both. Wherever possible, this should be channelled through the local church rather than parachuting in development experts who stay only for the duration of the crisis. A change in the human heart is essential, and the local church is God's plan

for mankind. The local church can discern who needs help, and serious discipleship can take place, which can bring about a mature church in the long term.

Effective marketing of children in need overwhelmed the vision of the organization. Pictures of black babies going hungry proved more effective than raising money for evangelism, a situation I feel can be traced back to a lack of teaching in the church on missiological training.

Having handed leadership of World In Need over to other people, we took over the Romanian Aid fund, changing the name to Eurasia Education Foundation in 2019, so that we could concentrate solely upon Central Asian Peoples. We also support the Christian University in Moldova, where I teach Missions, Islamics, and use past experience and connections to advise this emerging new nation's churches as they get involved in mission. So far over 2000 young people have graduated, and they now serve the Lord in many different ways.

Chapter one

TURN THE WORLD BACK UP THE RIGHT WAY

I first met my father when I was 4 years old. I was swinging, straddled on the front gate of 2, Ancaster Crescent in Motspur Park, waiting for him to arrive back from the war.

He served in the Royal Engineers in North Africa, where he lost an eye. I knew him as a morose, negative person, although whether that was his natural character, or it arose from his life experiences, I was never sure. He had been weak as a child and suffered many difficulties growing up, which must have coloured his outlook on life. I cannot remember him saying anything positive or kind, although I am sure he wanted to. Maybe he thought he was being honest by saying things as he saw them, and not trying to make them seem more positive. He was a perfectionist, and often, striving for perfection brings everything under scrutiny.

Eeyore was a bit like that. He is the famous donkey friend of Christopher Robin in “Pooh of Pooh Corner”. Eeyore walked through life with a thunder cloud permanently tracking him, floating above his head no matter where he went. It was always threatening to break into a shower of cold, wet rain although everyone around him basked in a lovely British summer glow.

There are others, however, who cannot think negative thoughts and always see the best in all people.

Nancy, my wife, is one such person. She was badly injured in a whiplash in Yugoslavia AND SPENT 3 MONTHS IN A COMMUNIST HOSPITAL BEFORE BEING REPATRIATED TO THE UK. She suffered a paralysis down the left side of her body. From then on, she found walking difficult, but it did not dim her enthusiasm.

One day, we went to visit a friend in Ballymena NI. Approaching the cottage, bent low because of her injuries, she remarked, “oh what a beautiful

step". She was looking at the concrete step at the front of the door. It was quite unremarkable, plain and, from my point of view, unworthy of any comment. Not so with Nancy, she was programmed to look for good and beautiful things. She was the constant positive, jovial, non-aware of herself person who sees the best in everything in life.

Oh, how I hate that attitude. I prefer honesty, with an analytical mind, always looking for the reason behind someone's remarks, actions or the cause of an event. The basis of all life depends upon an exact interpretation of events. The minister who married us in Tehran in 1964 was also like that, Rev Dick Corley was always positive, smiling, and giving a good twist on negative remarks about others that he encountered. Maybe I inherited my mother's dour Scottish view on life, and misery attracts misery as companions on the road of life.

The Apostle Paul wrote to a young man who was weak and dependent on others, and said "Rejoice in the Lord always." Paul also wrote to the church in Philippi, "whatsoever is good, positive.... Think on these things"

My father was not like this. His childhood weaknesses, being the runt of the litter, and his natural disposition, made him a negative person. When he approached me swinging on the gate his first words to me were, "why didn't you meet me at the station?" He had arrived from the war, been demobbed and sent back to civvy street. He had spent four years of his life fighting a war in North Africa and Italy, only to be sent back to pick up where he had been before being snatched away to fight for king and country. Now he'd come back to no job, no home, and a wife and child to care for and memories he would have preferred not to have experienced. His complaint was completely unjustified because no one knew when he would arrive on the London train, neither the day nor the hour but he still saw our non-appearance as a snub and a rejection of his worth.

Life was hard after the war: work was not plentiful, many of those who fought in the war turned to crime, and suffered from depression and PTSD, although that condition was unknown then. My father had to work hard in anything that he could get and our first home away from his mother's house was in an old Army barracks in Petts Wood, along a railway line on which we boys played jumping the tracks. It was 1950 and the hardest winter ever in Britain. Farms ran out of fodder, roads closed, and life was hard, cold and severe. Yet my memories are warm about those days. We played, families pulled together and school was a tramp across frozen fields. My infants' school was a delight. Miss Harper's cat died and so I got her another one.

Life was made up of simple pleasures and change came, but thinking back on those times I cannot remember anything really positive that I gained from my parents. Our time was taken up with living, surviving and making our own pleasures. A brother was delivered, we found a house in Bromley in which Italian POW's lived, and I became friendly with one who even made me a Garage, which I delighted in playing with. On hearing where I got it from, my Mother burned it as a signal that the 'Ities' were the enemy.

Another move improved our situation and Rodway Road saw another addition to the family when Alan was born. His birth was a difficult one and was a sign that all was not well with my mother's health. She died of stomach cancer soon after that.

The family that lived in the flat above us also suffered a bereavement. Their son died and his common-law wife married my father. We were asked to move to her home on Bromley Common. By that time, I sought solace in Scouts, church choir and friends from the neighbourhood. Four of us were a "gang;" known as the Four Musketeers, we did everything together. Years later we all met up to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary and I realised that those intense friendships were an emotion that met a need in my life. I grew away by wanting better things from my family, which was slowly falling apart. There was nothing to hold us together as negativity, hard living and selfishness ate away at any bonds. Scouting became another family and so, when my father moved into his new wife's house, I turned to my mother's best friend and her husband. They also had three boys, and they took me in rather than allow me to emigrate to Australia. (?)

Tom and Dolf Scantlebury were real Londoners. They voted Labour and, come election day, theirs was the only house in the town to stand against the sea of Green as they flew their red bunting. In those days, people voted on tribal lines, working class against the toffs.

The three Scantlebury sons, Ray, Dave and Roger, drew me into the family. In time everyone in the family came to Christ and served the Lord in a variety of ways. Ray had hitchhiked from Iran to Canada to go to Prairie Bible college in Alberta. On his graduation both Tom and Dolf were there to support him and they came to Christ. She was faithful to Christ. Tom struggled with 10 pints of beer every night.

Later on, I came to understand myself, and the old observations going back to Persian polymath Avicenna (980–1037 AD) extended the theory of temperaments in his Canon of Medicine, which was a standard medical text at many medieval universities. He applied them to "emotional aspects,

mental capacity, moral attitudes, self-awareness, movements and dreams.”

The study of the “four humours” in Greco-Roman medicine affected George Balanchine’s 1946 ballet, “The Four Temperaments”. It also pops up in Symphony No. 2 by Carl Nielsen. In modern times Christian and Muslim thinkers have applied them to understanding of personal temperament, such is the applicability of these thoughts.

The four-temperament theory is a proto-psychological theory which suggests that there are four fundamental personality types: sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic. No one is completely just one, and most of us are a mix of two or three of them, having a dominant lead temperament while the others make for variety and great interest. To be 100% of just one would present a person of exceptional talent or madness: these are not far from each other.

The Choleric is a leader, a goal driven, dominant personality who takes charge in an emergency. They become Generals, successful business people, and heads of organisations. The opposite to this is the Sanguine which makes for a people person, concerned and warm in his character, a salesman, in fact. The Phlegmatic is easy going, tends to be seen as lazy, casual, and unflappable, a great asset in emergencies, whilst the melancholic is dark, moody, artistic, and tends towards depression and deeper thinking, a detailed person concerned with serious thought, an artist and creative mind.

Once I had seen this as part of the creation of life it was easier to not fit into other people’s assessment of myself, and it left me with the peace that I was made in a unique way with unique gifts to be honed, developed and used in the Kingdom of God. It allowed for others of, sometimes annoying personalities, to be appreciated for what they were, made in God’s image and for His purposes. I found that my basic temperament was Melancholic with a splash of Choleric. I love history, art, and thinking outside of the box, which to those around me who love stability and order is very disconcerting, and which has caused much grief. The choleric side is the goal setting, evangelism and other obsessions that drive me to master and fulfil those goals. My wife, on the other hand, is the opposite: sanguine and easy going, a people person and people-centred with a dash of phlegmatic. She certainly would never rush to anywhere, even if the building was burning down around her.

These differing types have different skills that are all found in Christ’s character. Thus as we become Christ-like we should expect to see a development and maturity in our own personalities. A resistance to any

changes means that we refuse to grow up into Christ and remain half baked, ('kacha' in Urdu, which is a green banana) immature, with childish personalities.

In marriage I have found that opposites attract and over time merge together as one learns from the other. The Choleric sees the big picture, for as leader they must see way ahead of those who follow or accept his vision. Moses saw the future and took his people through enormously irrational acts to be able to set them free. But to do it he needed his brother and sister to translate those visions into the details that would need to be applied in an organisation of the people.

Added to this basic gifting were the experiences I went through. My mother died of cancer when I was 14 years old. Up to then, I had never had a conversation with my father, and my mother, of great fiery Scottish temper, spewed out her frustrations in violent bouts of temper. I remember her dragging me round the kitchen floor by my hair, screaming at me that I was no good because I dared to question her and not obey immediately! I was in the midst of school exams when all this happened, and it greatly affected what should have been good school marks. I was told I failed my exams because I was no good, not because I was preoccupied with mourning and loss. This has left a permanent mark on my personality and almost a self-fulfilling attitude that nothing I do would succeed. When I failed my driving test it was because I was no good, when prayers were not answered it was because I was no good, not that God had a better way for me to go. I was on the road to being a real basket case.

I had started to go to a YFC meeting in Bromley. They had an inter youth group quiz and I was asked at the last minute to go along with the team to look after them. In the interval a radical young man from New Jersey spoke of the need for people to join forces during the summer to "turn the world back up the right way" by distributing Christian literature in Europe for two months. I had nothing that tied me to any home, so I left, burned my bridges and join what later became Operation Mobilisation. For the next 17 years it was my family.

Chapter two

THE CALL

I find it a considerable conundrum that Christian people with a fine knowledge of the Bible and its teachings can live so easily in daily life away from its principles. Whether in church, business or government, fine bible-believing people can lie, attack, cheat, slander and do all sorts of things that non-Christians would never think of doing. In many ways, it is easy to see why the world levels accusations against the church. I once saw a cartoon that had a picture of a church, and on the roof was a sign, “the church for sinners only.” Yes, for where else would we expect sinners to be?

The problem is, although people come to Christ in order to believe and become new people, they lack a personal involvement with a more mature Christian, a person who can, first and foremost, be a model, and then answer questions about the application of the faith. Added to this, culture presses into our lives and we find non-biblical thought patterns and world views that have not been dealt with.

As a teenager I thought in black and white terms. If the Bible was God’s word and true, then it had to be truly true for everybody on the earth. The most difficult thing, to my mind, was to be a Muslim living under Communism. I therefore, logically assumed that every Christian should make it his life’s work to rescue them, and give himself to that task. Of course, this was underpinned by bible verses such as Matthew 28, Acts 2, Rev 5 and so on. Paul was held up as the ideal model, along with CT Studd, David Brainerd, Hudson Taylor and the whole panoply of outstanding saints down through the ages. This was the world I stepped into when I joined Operation Mobilisation (OM). I was with like-minded people, all bent on the task of changing the world. We went without pay or thought for old age to reach, at any cost the unreached. In many ways, I still believe this,

although that belief has now been tempered by several things.

The first was failure. We still have not won the world and every people. The second George Verwer. The leader/founder of OM was dynamic, radical, forceful and visionary, but he also had a strong dose of pragmatism about the human condition, and was willing to hear advice from older people that George respected. OM was blessed by having wise leadership and strong biblical principles. George coined the term “Messiology” to reflect the fact that church life can be messy at times, and in the mess God works out His purposes. In looking back, we can see His hand unfolding a bigger picture than ever we could conceive.

In my own life, an aspect of this messiness was the separation from my father’s house when he remarried, my going to live with Tom and Dolf and their three boys, and all that grew out of that: free living, lots of gambling, cards, parties and drinking locally. Tom was, in fact, an inward-looking, quiet person really. He could not talk without several pints of beer inside him. In all the years I lived with them, I don’t think I ever saw him fully sober, especially at night after work. He would get off the train, walk round to the pub and stay there all night. Dolf actually took a job as a barmaid at the pub just to get to see him every day. In all this, God worked out his purposes. One by one, they all came to Christ and, except for a few slips, Tom changed as well. Ray went on to serve the Kurdish people in Iraq, Dave in the local church as a deacon and Roger, who died early of a brain haemorrhage, did youth work in Otford’s Anglican village church.

During this drinking spell I had my own set of friends in another town called Bromley. There I was the Scout Master, teens club member and an upright Christian example to all and sundry. Then I went to a Billy Graham rally in a Baptist Church. I turned up late and was given a chair at the end of an aisle. Billy spoke of total commitment to the Lordship of Christ and God used that sermon to point his finger at me asking for my 100% commitment to his kingdom and world evangelism. I was strangely drawn forwards to a commitment of my life.

This was followed by a very real experience for me. One summer evening, I was sitting in a train carriage in Grove Park Station. I had an eerie sense that someone else was in the carriage with me. It was Jesus. He was not talking but gently urging me to follow him. Soon after I met George at the YFC rally and it was the opportunity to sell all my drawing instruments, leave home and join what was to turn out to be OM.

MY RADICALISATION

As a teenager I was a bit of a legalist, black and white thinker and very pragmatic. I was ideal for the career in Civil Engineering that I had fallen into. In the design of a building, absolutes are needed otherwise materials break, concrete disintegrates and problems arise. This way of looking at the world transferred into my Christian thinking. Actually, there is a case that whatever career you are in is continued after conversion: Paul the tentmaker built the church, Peter fished for men, etc.

I cannot tell when I became a Christian, but I can remember my Scottish Presbyterian mother reading the Bible to me and praying at night. However, she also swore like a trooper and had a violent temper. I did not see an inconstancy in this separation of faith and actions. I began to read books by Jonathan Edwards, a puritan from the USA. His sermons espoused correct teaching and strict adherence to Christ's words- revival was a norm in that early journey. I also learned more of total Christian living from C.S. Lewis and loved the range of openings it gave me.

So, when I met George Verwer at a Youth for Christ rally, I immediately took to the message that if the Bible was true, it should be for all nations, not just white Anglo-Saxons. (I assumed that was my identity although later I realised that a Scots Mother and Welsh father made me a Celt.) To me the task needed to be done in obeying Christ to the letter, by taking the gospel to every nation on earth. This would mean giving up my career, leaving home and going to the ends of the earth. George was just as extreme and what emerged as OM, started life with many similar characteristics to the hippy movement of our time. We were God's hippies and, as they lived on nothing in community, so also the early days of OM were like that. It was practical to be able to save as much money as possible and fulfil the task of worldwide evangelism. Looking back, I can see that many missions and Christian organisations start in this kind of radical way, only to mature and settle down to life's norms. It must be, otherwise burnout occurs.

However, it was great training and many of the attitudes in life are still with me. The zeal has matured and adapted as we age, like a fine wine. "True Discipleship" by William McDonald was required reading, it was the Christian answer to the threat of the total commitment by Communists in the cold war era. The task was so huge that money, ambition, careers, and the rest of life should be put on hold until the task had been accomplished. Dale Rhoton had even worked out a mathematical prediction of how it

could all be done by 1996. By making a disciple every 6 months and that disciple making one every six months it would take 34 years to produce 5,000,000,000 disciples. Of course, this has never happened because there is no allowance for sin in this equation. I still have a problem with singing songs in church that espouse world evangelism when no-one takes them seriously. Likewise, bible studies talk about the uniqueness of Christ and His being the only way to salvation. If this was really true, surely the church would be on fire and reaching every tribe, nation and tongue.

Leaving home was not difficult for me. I slept on the floor of George's small flat in Dalston and shared it with a huge Black American, Hoise Birkes. He was a gentle giant and served in that first team from America to establish what later became OM. Our job was to prepare the way for 500 young people who would come from all over Europe to spread bible tracts in towns and villages throughout Catholic areas of Europe: Italy, Spain, Austria, Belgium and Yugoslavia. It was a challenge, since many of these lands were almost like police states, and one could be imprisoned for distributing religious literature. One young American used to sleep on the floor of the conference room in preparation for being imprisoned in Yugoslavia. Today he is still serving Christ in Trieste and building up the church that emerged from the Messiology of our experiences. We were young, idealistic, unorganised, arrogant and dismissive of other organisations and churches that had failed to change the world in our generation. We were committed to the push to see the world changed and Christ preached in every nation. Thus, Europe was a training ground for an even bigger vision, moving out into the Muslim and Hindu world in Asia. Teams are still in Turkey, where even the law has been changed to accommodate the newly established church. Work in India, Pakistan Iran and the Arab Middle East saw teams driving in old bread vans from Brixton market out to the ends of the earth, carrying young people and literature, but that is another chapter.

STRATEGIC THINKING

So much duplication and waste has taken place within missions and the church because of the lack of strategic thinking. When the British Empire expanded, men and women went out as civil servants, cooks, soldiers and educators. They returned home or wrote letters regarding the fact that no churches existed in those regions, millions lay without a knowledge of Christ, and were subject to ignorance, superstition, evil and under-development. As a response, there was a surge of volunteers who went first

to the coastal areas, before pushing on into the interiors. Missions such as China Inland Missions sprouted up, as did Africa inland missions. London Missions went to the Pacific and so on. Footholds were established, but always new areas were entered into as news of the interiors or other islands came to the churches. Why, they argued, should people hear the gospel more than once when others existed with no knowledge? I have come to realise that the church must keep moving forwards, keep reaching out to new boundaries for the unreached or it will fossilize. Each generation must reach new boundaries.

I gained vital insight by reading and studying the writing of Geert Hofstede. In summary he says:

Differences between cultures

Putting together national scores (from 1 for the lowest to 100 for the highest), Hofstede's six-dimension model allows international comparison between cultures, also called comparative research.

- ♦ Power distance index shows very high scores for Latin American and Asian countries, African areas and the Arab world. On the other hand, Germanic countries, including Anglophone countries, have a lower power distance (only 11 for Austria and 18 for Denmark).

For example, the United States has a 40 on the cultural scale of Hofstede's analysis. Compared to Guatemala where the power distance is very high (95) and Israel where it is very low (13), the United States is in the middle.

- ♦ Germany scores a high UAI (65) and Belgium even more (94) compared to Sweden (29) or Denmark (23) despite their geographic proximity. However, few countries have very low UAI.
- ♦ Masculinity is extremely low in Nordic countries: Norway scores 8 and Sweden only 5. In contrast, Masculinity is very high in Japan (95), and in European countries like Hungary, Austria and Switzerland influenced by German culture. In the Anglo world, masculinity scores are relatively high with 66 for the United Kingdom, for example. Latin American countries present contrasting scores: for example, Venezuela has a 73-point score whereas Chile's is only 28.
- ♦ High long-term orientation scores are typically found in East Asia, with South Korea having the highest possible score of 100, Taiwan

93 and Japan 88.[10] They are moderate in Eastern and Western Europe, and low in the Anglo countries, Africa and in Latin America. However, there is less data about this dimension.

- ◆ Individualism (IDV) is high in the US (91), Australia (90), and Great Britain (89). Contrarily, Hong Kong and Serbia (25), Malaysia (26), and Portugal (27) are considered to be collectivists.[10]
- ◆ There is even less data about the sixth dimension. Indulgence scores are highest in Latin America, parts of Africa, the Anglo world and Nordic Europe; restraint is mostly found in East Asia and Eastern Europe.

Simply put, protestant countries had low power distance, high individualism, low uncertainty avoidance, high masculinity values. This equates to differences between protestant world views versus Roman Catholic, Asian and Muslim values of life.

See appendix ii for more details.

NORTH AFRICA

Why should people hear the gospel twice when others have never heard it? Falconer said, “If I had one candle to burn, I would want it to burn in the darkness and not in the light.”

I had met Dick Dryer and Maynard Tom at a conference for OM people who decided to stay for the one-year training programme. They had been appointed leaders for a team that was going to drive with a car and bread truck from Spain, down into Morocco, onto Algeria, throughout North Africa, round into Israel and Turkey, then back to Europe. They would be resupplied with literature in English and French, and any other languages needed. 300 Young people fanned out across Europe and Asia as part of that thrust to reach people with the Gospel so that the “glory of the Lord would cover the earth as the waters cover the seas”. It was heady stuff. I joined that North African team and each land we passed through called for a different strategy. In Morocco, it was a losing ministry. We were asked by North African Mission to distribute Bible correspondence leaflets in French to be able to expand the network of students, and the professional missionaries would do the follow-up. In some places we even drove through the town scattering multi-coloured leaflets out of the back of the van. Eventually, we stopped to distribute some in shops, only to get caught. They actually

only wanted to arrest the driver and while he went with them, we skipped town and hid the tracts in a culvert under the road, then returned to town for lunch. Of course, they then had to prove that Johnny Addison had been guilty. They searched the van, only to find nothing incriminating. We were overjoyed at having escaped the offence and retrieved our precious cargo.

Eventually we turned eastwards to enter into Algeria, a land that had just concluded seven years of war with the Colonial French. That was 1963 and the inhabitants were overjoyed to welcome us, their first tourists. Everywhere we went we sold books, gave out leaflets and prayed in the early hours of the morning for fruit to be borne in each town and village that we entered.

Years later I returned to Algeria to a conference of church leaders who represented 30,000 new believers, which quickly grew to 300,000. The Bible says that His word will not return to Him void, and it certainly bore fruit in Algeria. But the trigger point was a bloody and evil civil war, aimed at gaining independence and removing colonial rule.

After Algeria the team moved onto Tunisia, where we did much the same thing, and then onto Libya. A Sanusiyya sect ruled there. This was a branch of the modern-day Wahhabi from Saudi Arabia, and we had no freedom to do as we wished. We attended an international festival and “lost” tracts in the grounds of the event. This was not very satisfactory, we were soon caught, and the team moved onto Egypt.

Morocco also has seen a church emerge out of the prayers, a sowing that we did, along with other missions at the time.

I left the team in Libya and flew back to Europe to help line up an even bigger event that summer of ‘63. My route took me via a stopover in Malta, an equally fanatical Roman Catholic land which had been invaded by all the numerous nations around them. Only the church had been able to preserve their culture and ways. Anything that made the RC weak was an enemy of the state.

I spent the night in the airport and met the morning cleaners, one of whom was very open to hear about the Lord. I gave him an NT. He, in fact, became the first believer in the Island when Ray Lentzch took over from me, and had numerous gospel “crusades” on the island, resulting in the establishment of the evangelical church. God moves in mysterious ways, and we can never underestimate the power of chaos and disaster to open the doors of the human heart.

Chapter three

MARRIAGE

I met Nancy on OM. She had come over from the USA to spend the year working with George as a secretary, and to help prepare for the massive (as it seemed at the time) outreach into Europe to reach people and villages that did not have a gospel witness. Many of the European nations had been affected with liberalism from Germany, the aftermath of two terrible wars that caused so much suffering and its concomitant result, the turning against God for not having stopped the madness. In 1962 I was assigned a team in Belgium and gave out leaflets offering course to study the bible. A local woman followed us, gathering up the literature and burning it in the street. Nancy went to Spain and led a girls' team using an old Gypsy Land Rover vehicle, much like a cut down Landrover. The adventures a bunch of girls had, sleeping out in fields, visiting small Spanish villages, which often had a fanatical priest ready to shoo them away. As the teams gathered at the Lamorlaye Bible College for the 1962 outreach, I approached her and asked her to pray about marrying me. Her response was, "I have been, all this year." So that was that.

We travelled to Iran overland to begin our courtship from a distance. She went door to door in Tehran and I was on a boy's travelling team on a circuit from Tehran, western Iran, through Kurdistan, down south to Ahwaz with its rich oil fields, then back up through Isfahan, where we stayed with the Anglican Hospital under Dr. Ron Pont, a brilliant surgeon and his even more brilliant wife, who were "wasting" their lives in this fly-ridden desert town instead of making themselves successful in England. I learned by my rubbing shoulder with people like them.

CRISIS

Every year, new teams would go to replace the previous year's volunteers in OM. This meant someone returning to Europe to recruit, brief, and take the new team back to Iran or India to take over the previous team's work. Part of the work was to link up with young people in those lands and travel within the country, preaching, selling Christian literature, and in other ways preparing a national force to carry on the work. It was part of the strategy. I look back on those years and see that I grew through the experiences we faced. Nationals were always part of the vision, to be able to replace us and build the church themselves. At our wedding a young friend from the local church was part of our circle of friends. He later established Elam ministries in the UK, and has had a major impact upon British Christianity and the making of Persian disciples.

In 1964, three months after Nancy and I were married, we volunteered to make the journey from Tehran to Europe in one of the famous old OM VW camper vans, stripped out to allow for luggage, literature and people. This time it was just the two of us, two of the girls returning home, and two Pakistani Christians who wanted a lift to Germany. All went well and we stopped for a break in Istanbul for a bath, a rest and fellowship with the team who were facing constant police harassment, confiscation of literature and expulsion from the country. It was a secularised Islamic land, the runt of the once great Ottoman Empire, smaller but more compact, Europeanised by admiring Luther's reforms of Christianity, moulded by events in WW1, and combined by 100 years of debate, experience and reflection on how to resist absorption by colonial powers. It was a time of Al-Islah Reform all over the Islamic world, led by Attaturk in Turkey, Reza Khan in Persia, Maududi in India, Iqbal in Pakistan and Hasan al Bana in Egypt. Socialism was the model, but it turned sour eventually, as all revolutions do, into an even more oppressive force of government once the flush of change was over.

We left Istanbul, slept in a vineyard in Bulgaria, and headed to Europe through Yugoslavia. We climbed in to the hills on a dirt track, as most nations in those days did not build roads all the way to the border, for defence and lack of funding forced a neglect on these mountain roads. Winding down a hill, our front wheels dropped into a large rut made in the wet winter by a heavy truck and then dried out. We jerked, and Nancy who was sitting over the engine, was flipped out of the side doors, which had sprung open. She crashed into the gully running alongside the road. In

the accident, she had displaced a 4th vertebrae and was paralysed from the neck down. Miraculously, an ambulance was returning to its base in Nish and it picked her up and took us both to the Bolnizta – hospital there.

That night was terrible. The lady in the bed next to hers died, and Nancy awoke to find she had no feeling or mobility from her neck down. The world of a new marriage, fascination with world mission, all of it came to a screeching halt, and we were not sure how things would eventually turn out. What a mess. Later, one dear friend asked us, “where was your God? How could you be serving him in Iran and He allows this to happen to you?” Actually, it was the friend who complained, not us. We were confident that God does not change with circumstance, whatever life throws at us. He remains constant and the revelation is that He is the epitome of love and justice, and nothing gets past his gaze and knowledge. Somehow, we were to be allowed to move onto a new chapter of learning that He is faithful, although circumstance said otherwise. One could say that when the sun does not shine there is no sun. Wrong. It is still shining but clouds obscure our gaze of it. God is love but sometimes life interrupts our gaze on Him.

An X-ray revealed that Nan’s neck was displaced at the 3rd and 4th vertebrae and was pressing upon the spinal cord, causing the paralysis. The doctor decided that we needed urgent and adequate treatment and the small township of Nis (Nish) could not offer that care. She was transferred to Belgrade in an ambulance in which the orderlies smoked all the way. I followed with the car and the other passengers, who then returned to Europe by train.

In the hospital there was an English-speaking doctor, Dr. Simic, who had trained at the Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital in Stanmore, Middlesex. My role quickly came to be that of nurse, since no one else spoke English.

We now had a dilemma. Should we fly back to the UK for treatment or undergo treatment in a Communist hospital in Belgrade? Enquiries showed that all flights had now left, so there was no option but to go ahead and undergo an operation in Belgrade. Even in this situation we relied on the God of all events to guide those events for our good and His kingdom. I say operation. It was surgery in the hospital, but as the doctor drilled into the thick bone above her ears to fix pins he was making, Nancy said she could see the drill bit passing between her eyes. The whole theatre laughed their heads off. I sat outside, wondering what was happening, not being

party to the joke!

This, then, fixed our stay. She lay in her bed, tilted up so that she tended to slide down, but the pins attached to a calliper were attached to a large weight that pulled her back. Thus, her neck was stretched so that the displaced vertebrae could be eased back into the right position. Unfortunately, her head wound became infected and puss built up under her skin and had to be released and cleaned out. This shortened the length of time in traction, and it failed to cure the displacement. This has left her partly paralysed down the left side, with no feeling in the right.

Being in a Yugoslav hospital had its challenges. Language was one of them. Thus, I had to do all the care and nursing as she was able to communicate with me. It was a full-time job all hours of the day and night. Few were the nights when either of us got any uninterrupted sleep. However, it did give some advantages. As the bed was on wheels, I was able to push her around to all the wards to visit and meet other patients who had been referred from other hospitals in the provinces. Usually this was because of poor nursing care, so serious bed sores had added to the complicated aftercare. Once more we were made aware of how blessed we were to have a wonderful National Health Service back home.

These visits also meant that the scripture portion that had been smuggled into us were distributed without interference from the hospital staff. Our doctor complained to the British Consulate that we really should not distribute Christian literature in a Communist hospital, but there was not much they could do about it. We were their guests for the foreseeable future. Literature is such a powerful tool; although little fruit can be seen at the time, it comes years later when crises arise in the life of the reader. Such was the case for Dr Simic who came to Christ at the right time, but that's another story.

After four months, during which she had daily physiotherapy, and better food than the others, Nancy healed quickly and exercise improved her walking. During those months we had many visitors, all with a story. OM teams en route to India and Turkey popped in to see us and bring greetings from OM people all over the world. It was a great strength to be members of such a caring community. On one visit, a family came and their son swung on the rope attached to Nan's head!

At another time, a German lady came in with her Palestinian husband. They had been speeding at night and a punctured tyre rolled the car, breaking her back. I remember her leg bone sticking up through her thigh,

she was such a mess. Since we were the only English speaking “residents,” we shared our room with them and tried to share the gospel but this just made her husband mad at us.

On another occasion two lads from Liverpool joined our happy little home. David had dived into 18 inches of water on the Adriatic Sea and broken his neck. His friend Alf, with whom he was travelling, came with him but was of little help as he could not face the crisis they were in. David was flown back immediately to the UK, where he has lived under care for the rest of his life. He did come to Christ, though we were never sure it was a sincere decision, due to his fears for the future. On meeting up later in life, we found he had passed his exams as a lawyer, and had become the only stable person in his family; the rest all came to him with their troubles. Again, Christ had worked for good for others through the suffering of his servants. Nancy could say to David as he lay there on the bed, paralysed for life, such a young man with all to lose, “I know how you feel, but Christ...”

The experience was rich and rewarding, although we could not see the benefits at the time. One small blessing was time to read, and I was able to get a copy of Don Camillo, which I read each night to Nancy to help her sleep. It was such a funny book especially as we had both travelled the villages of Italy that summer, spreading the word with a large team to villagers who need Christ.

The time came for repatriation and nervously we planned for her to be airlifted on a BOAC (BA these days) flight. Of course, she could not walk but was stretchered onto the plane and placed at the back, where two seats had been removed to enable her to lay on the floor all the way back to London. Questions plagued us: what would happen? how would it all pan out? would there be someone meeting us? As these thoughts rolled over us, we pushed them back to our loving, caring father who could be trusted.

On Landing the engines whined to a slower pitch and were replaced by a raucous voice from a nursing sister who rushed up the gang plank in the rear of the plane, shouting, “out of the way, I have a patient up there, get out of my way”. Praise God we were back in England under the National Health Service, into strong, informed and caring arms.

The following months of treatment, exercise and restoration gave hope, and eventually Nancy was well enough to come home. Our first child was conceived, and she gave birth on October 20th 1964 but the millions in India was on our hearts, as well as our dedication to the family of OM, and to George and his family. Once Nancy was well, we felt the time was right

to renew our service and we made plans to join the growing team in India.

I joined the OM team on a boat journey to India, and Nancy followed by plane, me meeting her at the airport. I was shocked how big Nathan had grown with all the care and food with which she had lovingly nurtured him. “What happened to my baby?” I exclaimed, as she emerged from the customs hall with a cot, and Nathan perched on top of cans of SMA baby milk.

We were to find out that Bombay weather was not good for a child as the heat caused prickly heat rashes and made him cry most nights. In fact, our second son arrived and between them we never slept a full night through until they were two years old. What an introduction to the ideals of being a parent. All parents need a medal but more than that, they need older people around, who can coach them and tell them when serious problems occur. A great deal can be added to the mix by having a surrogate aunt or mother with experience and care they can share with the new parents. God put us into families for a reason and often, we only see the reasons after the event. Our two boys have grown into very mature, sensible parents in spite of the father they have.

Chapter four

INDIAN ODYSSEY

India had been a part of the British Empire, in fact a major part, since the Indian Mutiny of 1856. It supplied raw goods like cotton, jute and flax to the “dark Satanic mills” of England, fuelling the industrial revolution. In exchange roads were built, hospitals introduced, a civil service the envy of many nations, law for all castes and creeds, and a standing army that defended the nation against its many enemies to come.

Our task was twofold. Take the gospel literature from companies like MIK in Delhi, GLS in Bombay, and other Christian publishers around the country, and distribute them to the masses. I remember in one day we gave out one million tracts for the correspondence courses in Bombay. We had to hold the literature in fourteen languages as we plied our offerings to the masses rushing by at the major railway stations.

What a gift the Indian train service was to the nation. It was an amazing uniter of the nation going from Kerala in the south to Amritsar in the Punjabi up north, from Gujarat in the west to Calcutta in the east, and all points in between.

Most of our teams travelled in old bakery vans bought in the markets of London. They ranged from three tons to a great big red Big Bertha. They held up to 20 Indian Christians and tons of literature, and drove into many towns and village in India, modelled upon the summer campaigns we had tested in Europe. We would roll up to the centre of a village, sing, wave books and cry, “Nahlah Postegem, partyia paisa,” which meant, “good books only 5 paisa”. They were cheap, popular and powerful reading for an emerging educated people. We have seen the fruit of that sowing as hundreds and thousands of Indians have turned to Christ over the years. It was such a joy to look back over a valley and see village after village that we

had preached in and where we had distributed follow-up literature. A by-product of that was that many of us learned to preach lengthy sermons on the street of India. These experiences stood us in good stead over the years; we learned to think on our feet as opportunities arose to teach, preach and call people to follow Christ. There were dangers, and some fanatics raised mobs to run us out of town but they were usually cowards and we began to recognize the signs of someone out for a spot of popularity, or a bribe.

We learned that stories were far more effective than the dry theological arguments which flowed out of seminaries and western based education. Strangely, the Lord used parables to entrust the world with his word, rather than the dry bread crusts of the Pharisees. Most religions of the world rely upon a parable-based salvation history, and we in the west need to humble ourselves to use “children’s” stories rather than deep philosophical arguments in our teaching ministry. Everyday life gifts us with illustrations and parables, but we ignore them for the more gratifying approaches of philosophy. Brash Bonsall of Birmingham Bible College claimed that he wrote a story from his life every day.

The second by-product was the training of both the westerners in Christian ministry and skills in leadership, and the building up of Indian leaders for the churches and new missions that would arise out of our foolish efforts at serving the Lord Jesus. I look back to those days as being foundational in my Christian life. The other thing that helped us was to, “endure hardness as a soldier of Christ”. The lessons learned from the message of OM, its close fellowship, the emphasis on frugality and not wasting anything, and the absolutely mad things we did has been character forming. We had an unshakeable belief that it was possible to evangelise the world in our own generation. Of course, we should have known that the Edinburgh World Missions conference of 1910 basically said the same thing, but the extremisms pushed the boat out a little bit more than would have been done through relying upon the local churches. A church, by its nature, is committed to the local people, their needs and constant need for teaching, whereas mission is goal-focused and often extreme to be able to go where no other man has gone before. I remember an eighteen-year-old coming out to India simply because he had a driving license. His job was to drive an old London bread van, loaded with literature and a team of Indians. He came from an Anglican church in Greenwich and so had no “ministry” skills that we could see. However, Indians are Indians, and the fact that he was a foreigner told them he knew a lot. They graciously

pushed him to the front to preach, both on the street and in local churches they were visiting. At the end of the year, after having to preach for up to two hours at a time, four or five times each day, he knew the Bible and had developed skills that no one guessed he had.

INDIA

In India the Church was made up largely by Malayali and Tamil peoples in the South. The vast North India was unreached and lacking in sufficient churches to be self-sustaining. It was OM that brought three-ton trucks out from London overland, (a story in itself) and recruited south Indians, to drive north and distribute Bible Correspondence courses in Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Oriyya and so on, laying the ground work for these very same Indian young people to grow up, mature and move to live and plant churches in the north in the years to come. Eventually, they realised this largely western form of evangelism was unsustainable and switched to starting new schools, which has led to an even greater influx into the Kingdom of God. As water always flows downhill, the gospel goes to the unreached through the heart of God. The sad thing is, most western missions go either to a place where they know the language, i.e. English-speaking places like East and West Africa, or to places where there is already a church. Added to this, their funds go to the agencies in these lands which reflect the more western form of church doctrines. I asked one new movement in Kenya what was their vision, and learned it was to combat another kind of church that they disagreed with. Instead, the resources could have gone to reaching tribes that had never responded to the gospel, or even heard of it. Of course, the effect is to delay the return of Christ as lack of strategic thinking causes bad decisions to be made.

It has been the work of The Joshua Project to tabulate the state of world evangelism, and it identifies tribes, tongues, people and nations, and the degree to which they have been reached, to assist the church and allow it to have an intelligent approach to mission action.

We can see in the New Testament, the church was using that plan of action. From Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the outer most parts of the world (Acts 1 v 8). Look at the hymns we sing. They often reflect the need to reach every nation, every tongue, to go, to pay the price and obey Christ's commands. Instead, lovely Christian families make wealth, education, success and comfort the goals for their children to follow.

Chapter five

CULTURES IN CONTEXT

One of the immediate impressions I had on sailing into Bombay harbour was that it looked like an ant hill, swarming. People were everywhere: in streets, on buses, on the outside and inside of train carriages, hanging out of windows floor after floor. Pavements were blotted out by the thousands of people going hither and thither. Streets were crowded with cows, people, dogs, carts, coolies, sellers, buyers, banana carts, cane sugar crushers, potato sellers, all seeking to make a paisa to survive that day. There were cripples by accident, cripples by birth, cripples by need, the parents having broken their bones, tied back their limbs and even blinded them to make them more effective as beggars. My heart became inured to suffering as everyone was a suspect in a gigantic show to gain that elusive paisa or dollar.

Church was just as much of a shock. The police stood guard outside as elders fought over whose turn it was to read the lessons for the day, and who controlled the organ donated from America. In this strange world, I was supposed to make a difference. How on earth could a 21-year-old like me change this world of self and chaos into an orderly and spiritually obedient society where Christ ruled and guided his people?

My journey into sanity began when I encountered Mrs Durham. She and her husband had come to India in about 1946, after the war. I have met many missionaries who caught a vision for missions and Christian service by seeing the needs of people as they travelled as military people. It was a mission calling and preparation at the cost of the British government. In some ways this was the biblical pattern. Paul knew Asia Minor and it was to that area that he returned to preach the gospel; he had already seen the needs of the people. Others who travelled with him also got a vision for the work and moved on. I have found it almost impossible to pass on a

mission's reality to local churches because people have not experienced and seen for themselves the needs and the work needing to be done. This is why short-term mission trips are of such value: they build an experience and a vision. It is not enough to just read the bible, because we can interpret the bible in such a way that it has no effect upon us. Jesus gave his disciples an experience by travelling for three years around Palestine, and afterwards said, "Go into all the world." Paul did the same thing.

Christianity died and fell into a stupor when it stopped pioneering, making disciples and instead sent young men and women off to theological schools to become intellectually qualified or trusted not to rock the denominational boat. Time and time again, God has had to revive His church through men and women who caught a vision, like Patrick of Ireland, Bakht Singh in India, Stanley in Africa etc. Travellers like Hudson Taylor, or slave traders like John Newton, government employees like Henry Martyn of Persia, Knox, Calvin, Luther, Hyde, the Wesleys and so on.

From this time on, I have been on a journey to search out examples of theology and context. Later, the word "Contextualisation" emerged, and is explored in a book called, "What others have said". This is a collection of events in the life of missions around the world, amongst many climes, exploring the Biblical expressions of theology in context over all time. The word has come to mean many things to different people, ranging from a form of liberalism to our expression of the Good News. My conclusion is that, like a soda being shaken until the bottle explodes, so a shaken church explodes out of its containment so also a church that cannot express a people's desire to love God in their own way explodes into new versions of itself. Of course, this then settles down to be the "norm" and needs shaking up again. The active ingredient is missions.

In Chapter 10 I talk more of the work of Peter Phan who argues for a reversal from Church as the prime focus, then onto Proclamation, then onto missions and finally – if time allows -onto the Kingdom of God. Thus, we ought to start with an awareness and focus on the Kingdom of God, which reveals His sovereign work in the world today. Then we can do mission and serve the poor as Jesus did., This leads to proclaiming His good news and culminates in church being raised up as fellowships of believers in His Kingship, and the circle starts all over again.

One of the great blessings that I have enjoyed is to come across books that help me understand myself, the world we live in, and the contribution that other cultures have made to wisdom and story telling that we can all

learn from. One such contribution comes out of the Russian stable. Maxim Gorky caught my attention in his book, "Mother". He spent pages and pages describing a pot belly stove! I find most short stories fascinating, as traditional stories carry the culture of the people and now belong to a world public. Whilst doing my PGCE (teachers qualification) I found a volume of short stories by Tolstoy. One was about a ship passing through the Baltic sea. A bishop was on the Bridge with the captain when the peasants down below became so energised by the ship passing an Island. "What's this all about?" demanded the bishop. The captain pointed out this was a special Island, inhabited by three monks. The Bishop felt it his ministerial duty to land and coach the hermits in the Lord's Prayer. This was arranged, and after a long hard day he was successful in teaching these elderly monks how to recite that prayer.

Off they went again. Sometime later, as the sun dropped over the horizon, the peasants became excited again. "What now?" asked the Bishop as the shimmering mirage got closer to the ship. Soon, it became clear that it was the three Hermits, running across the top of the waves, demanding that the ship stop. "Stop, stop," they cried. "We forgot the prayer. Can you teach it to us again?"

This Russian story is one of many, many I have read and used in preaching to Anglo audiences. Every culture teaches its young using stories, and it was with such as these that Jesus met the needs of his people in Israel, giving us a model that is rarely used. These ignored stories have been replaced by Germanic philosophy by preachers. We would find every nation and people group in the world has a library of stories to give them standards, life skills, to pass on wisdom and create pleasure to its peoples, from Somali, to (Inuit), from Berbers in North Africa to Mongols in Siberia. All are waiting to find the culmination of what they are looking for in Jesus Christ.

Chapter six

DEATH AND ILLNESS

I had never seen a dead person until I went to India. Even my own mother died whilst I was at school, and as I walked home, I passed the undertakers as she was carried into the funeral home in a coffin. My father's comment on meeting me was, "you have just passed your mother!" Never was I allowed to see her in that end state. I was so angry that people kept going about their business whilst she lay there dead.

In India, it was almost a daily occurrence to see dead people. Muslims were buried, Zoroastrians placed upon Towers of Silence for the vultures to peck away at their flesh, and Hindus were cremated, sometimes in ghastly ways. Often as the fire caught hold by the river Ganges, or on a waste piece of land, the body sat up straight as the spine contracted, and functionaries used long poles to keep the body down flat.

I had seen the Towers of Silence where Zoroastrian people were laid over a grating for the vultures to pick clean so that in the monsoon rains the bones would fall to the bottom, to be dissolved with lye into nothingness. At Palmyra in Syria, I saw the towers of death where people rented a space in the building to be kept safe, but when the family could no longer pay the rent, the box was tipped out onto the adjacent land. Like taxes, death seems to always and forever be with us.

The biggest shock was the oceans of people we saw, milling around, hustling and bustling like a disturbed ant hill where a call for action had sounded out. Old men stooped over canes, women in revealing saris carried washing or rice or mangoes on their heads, coolies touted for business, children, oh, the children by the shoal, running, dancing, staring at the pinkish visiting man, and all of them looking for that act of pity that would help them meet their needs before the end of the day. One coolie

dropped dead after carrying our luggage up three flights of stairs. He just disappeared from sight, as if someone had been waiting for him to end the day.

One day our secretary, who was from Essex, came to the office very distraught. She had been in a taxi following a loaded red London bus as it overtook a construction lorry, but it came just a bit too close. It skimmed off those people who hung miraculously off the platform, mashing them into lumps of mangled bodies on the roadside. This was a common occurrence on the trains as people sat on the roofs of the carriages, only to hit a bridge or cable as it passed by. This was India, hot, muggy, noisy with Hindu bells, Muslim calls to prayer, vendors calling for sales, machines that rumbled, coughed, spat and hissed at all creation in those crooked streets in Bombay. It was the same in town after town as we got used to the patterns and throb of life. Soon we adjusted to it all and settled down to making Christ known amongst all the other voices calling for attention. Life had to go on and, hopefully, get better and better, as it has done for 5000 years.

Chapter seven

IRAN

Iran: a mystery wrapped inside a shroud of beauty.

My little family was growing and we decided that we should come back to Europe. The route was to be a massive adventure. A ship from Bombay to Karachi in Pakistan, a train from Zahedan in southern Pakistan, a bus to Tehran, then train again to Brussels, the international OM HQ.

The Pakistani train was so crowded our two boys had to sit on sacks of cannabis being “smuggled” openly into Iran and onwards. The TBT bus was pleasant enough and the OM staff in Tehran met us. It was a relief to rest with them. We were so intent on evangelising unreached people we had little or no time to contemplate the history of our surroundings, which we regarded as transient and irrelevant to the task in hand. How wrong we were as good evangelism has everything to do with culture and our surroundings. The cultures that had lasted for 10,000 years was being buffeted by interfering western plyers of goods under the protection of greater powers, forcing through the Shah’s modernisation programme, because oil was now King. The British navy switched over to oil fired boilers after the first world war, and the west’s thirst for oil forced through so many changes at a pace that local shepherders were not used to. The resultant explosion is still going on today. How do you change a 5000-year-old nation, which has been invaded by Greeks, Arabs and Turks but which has overtaken these invaders due to a superior culture, a Machiavellian political mind-set, and a poetry that had ruled the Islamic world and fascinated the western one. I heard the names of Hafez, Ferdowsi and Rumi, but took little notice.

Oil prices rose fourfold, giving a medieval people a wealth undreamed of even by Croesus. Of course, the west saw this as a means of trading, and persuaded Iranian government officials that they needed this and that, with

no thought of what good it would do for the nation of Iran. A friend was a pastor of a church in Fulham and also secretary to a light bulb company in the UK. He came out to sell light bulbs to the Iranian Railway Company, which ran a line from Tehran to Mashhad. He was asked, "how many light bulbs do British rail buy from you?" He gave the answer and was promptly told to double it from Iran, even though the specs for Iranian trains were completely different.

Another friend sold Concorde. The Iranians bought two, unaware that Concorde could not take off at the altitude that Tehran airport was sited at.

The Americans supplied jet aircraft to a nation that had been herding sheep for two thousand years. A fly-past by Iranian fighter jets supplied by America flew over Tehran's airport to welcome a Sheik from the Gulf. Accidentally, the pilot hit the fire button. Two rockets shot across the runways, slamming into a building but not exploding. An irate minister of the military asked why they did not explode, believing they were duds. Investigations showed that an American Master Sergeant had disarmed all missiles when flown by Iranians, as they were so "cowboy" in their attitude to these lethal machines.

Into this mix we came, thinking we could make a difference. The boys' team took an old VW bus and toured the towns and villages, selling Christian books bought from a cluttered Presbyterian book depot, or Bibles from the tiny bible society, or printed their own booklets with funds given in the US or the UK for people's favourite editions.

In the four years we stayed there, we visited every city and went door to door selling books, Bibles and distributing bible correspondence material that International Missions ran. Our task was to serve the missionaries and get the word out to the masses, theirs was to teach the word and plant churches. It did not matter if we were arrested and sent away, we had to go to every hamlet, village and crossroads, to get people to know the story of Jesus. We found Iranians were hungry to read the bible and never really had a problem.

One strategy we came up with took place during the rush hour. Tehran, and Iran generally, benefited from the access to untold billions of dollars. There was a splurge of selling, and massive importation of goods into the country. Bulgarian white cheese, Finnish chickens, Bengali truck drivers, American goods galore, and Europeans fed on the crumbs left behind. This meant massive traffic jams in the narrow streets of the city. It could take two hours to drive five hundred yards at peak times. This gave us an

opportunity to drive in the lane near the pavement and hand booklets sharing the gospel to passing pedestrians. It was a brilliant means of reaching the masses from the comfort and safety of our van. At the same time, several young people from an Iranian orphanage that had been set up by missionaries came to work on our distribution teams. We learned from them and they learned from us. Today many of them are still in Christian service, although sadly not in Iran. That was one sad thing about the arrival of westerners: it gave opportunities for nationals to leave their own lands for a better life elsewhere. I vowed not to be part of extracting nationals from their own people. Unfortunately, these young people lived on a team of mainly westerners, and were a minority within their own country, causing many Muslims to suspect them of ulterior motives. It also removed them from their own people and so they lost their identity, a major factor in the decline of converts continuing in the faith.

BOB PIERCE MISSIONARY EXTRAORDINAIRE (WITH FEET OF CLAY)

It was during our stay in Tehran that I met an extraordinary man. He was a friend of Howard Harper's and they were two of a kind. Everything they did was for the Kingdom of God, and even their families came second to that "obsession". Howard called me and said Bob Pierce was dropping by to see him on his way from one unreached nation to another. Would I like to meet Bob at the airport on this fleeting stopover? As I believed that faith was caught, not taught it was an exciting invitation to meet a real live "man of God".

Our meeting place actually turned out to be a local hospital rather than the airport. Bob had leukaemia and had to be stretchered off the plane, taken to the hospital and given a blood transfusion before getting onto another plane to Somalia. His role was to visit pioneering missionaries who needed funds. He would sit with them, write out a cheque, then phone his office in Los Angeles to tell them what he had done. These were not \$10 cheques, but amounts big enough to establish hospitals to serve the local people, hold out God's love to the community, and leave a witness of Christ serving mankind. Here, I came across my first clash between management and ministry, something which was to be repeated time and time again. Managers hate surprises, and men of ministry feel that management is there to serve the all-important ministry. The result of this clash was that Bob was fired from World Vision, but went onto establish Samaritans Purse, ably assisted by Billy Graham's son Franklin. Both went on their

way, and both have been and are being used by God, but not in the way man imagined.

As a postscript, Bob lost his wife because he was away so much of the time, and his daughter committed suicide in a Japanese hotel. She asked her father to call her but he was late in responding. One could say that people like Bob were mould-breakers, serving the Kingdom, “forsaking all” to serve Christ. Others would disagree and point out the suffering imposed by the demands of the gospel. Only God could answer such a clash of visions.

My own view is that management is there to make the visionary capable of delivering the vision, but the visionary must listen to those who manage the structures holding them in place. Usually, the visionary is ejected from the mission he founded and so the mission loses its vision and becomes goalless. The missionary is of such a nature that nothing will dim his vision and he starts all over again.

Our Persian young people told us that the secret police (Sasmania Amneat) were asking questions and had asked me to attend an interview. They gave me 24 hours to leave the country and took my passport away. I was deflated and Nancy and I went up a mountain to think out our next step. East to India or Afghanistan or west to Turkey. On that day away, we met a man who asked us to drink tea with him and he asked if we liked Iran. “Yes”, I responded, but said we had been told to leave. “That’s no problem,” he said. “My brother is the head of all secret police.” Within a week we had a resident permit and work permit. It was here that I learned that in the Middle East, there is no such thing as a final no, it all depend upon who you know. Of course, that then leads to requests for favours from the giving party. We know the King of Kings arranges all for our good; this approach has lasted a lifetime and kept us going in spite of enemies at the door. However, this breakthrough was not without its cost, and the man soon asked me to teach him English.

Chapter eight

ANSWERS AND QUESTIONS

During our time in Iran our oldest son needed to move on with his education. Since we were close to the Verwer family and they had sent their son Benjie to Emmanuel boarding school in Swansea, we felt that it would be good for Nathan as well. I remember his cries at being left at that school, begging us to not leave him. We knew the headmaster and many of the other teachers, and felt sure that he would do well. We assumed that the house master would be an experienced, mature guide to Nathan, and so we promised him that, if at the end of the term he did not like it, we would pull him out and return to the UK. We met in Cyprus which was a haven for missionary families in the Middle East. On arriving, he proudly announced that he had finished his term and did not want to stay. True to our promise, we made plans to move back home. Andrew, our second son, also found being separated from his brother disturbing, and would have suffered if we had continued. Ministry had to give way to family, although that has not always been true and we regret many of the decisions we made in this area. It is so easy to pass over the responsibilities God has given in the name of the Kingdom, and the many verses to do with keeping our hands to the plough can be misinterpreted to fit the occasion.

So, what can a Persian speaking colporteur do back in the UK? We needed to recharge our batteries, refocus our calling and reflect on what we had gone through. Later I came to see that what I really needed were questions that went with the answers we had accrued over time. I was offered two university places, one in London and one in Swansea. The Swansea one was studying anthropology and the other, at SOAS in London, was to study Islamic religion. Since the lecturer in Swansea had majored in the study of clowns, I really had a simple choice. London it was.

As I progressed through my studies it all began to slot into my experiences. Studying Browne's History of Persia helped me understand what a proud nation Persia was. It had culture, tradition, survivability, the arts were prized, it truly is a superior culture to many on earth. Professor Wansbrough helped me study hard because he said things that I disagreed with, especially in his liberal approach to the bible. In time I came to appreciate that his pioneering work on Islamic origins were to be invaluable to me. He saw the Qur'an and the subsequent emergence of sects in Islam as a compilation of sectarian warfare taking place in Arabia and Syria, within Judaism, Christianity, and the newly formed alliances of Southern Arabs into what is now Islam.

He set me on the path of examining the origins of Islam, and the historicity of even Muhammad himself. He was a maverick but a highly intelligent one, and a pioneer in Islamic studies. Where he led others have since followed. Out of this has flowed new approaches to the world of Islam. I now see that theological studies for missionaries, although important, are not adequate to prepare them for ministry. They must be able to argue and debate with Muslims, not just win them with understanding and love.

Dr Geza Fehervari from Hungary gave me a love for archaeology and this came to fruition in reading Gibson's book on Qur'anic Geography. This uses archaeology to establish that, in the first hundred years of Islam the direction of prayer was towards Petra, not Mecca. This has led me to surmise that the wise men who came to Jesus were, in fact. Ishmaelite Nabateans, who brought the work of their own businesses: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Nabataeans were descendents of Ishmael's first-born son Nabajoth (Gen 25 v 13). It would be just like God the father to honour his son, Jesus, through the other son of Abraham, Ishmael, so that both were treated equally. This completely changed my attitudes towards Islam, and I now see it as a movement to honour the Messiah, and possibly preserve a knowledge of One God in times when sin abounded.

Gibson proposes that Islam went through three stages of change and growth according to the orientation of ruins of Mosques in the Middle East:

Stage 1 was using the monotheistic concepts of praying in one direction to honour the faith. This was towards Petra, Capital of the Nabataeans. 1AH-107AH (622AD-725AD)

Stage 2 was chaotic, as various sects within the emerging Arab revolution and expansion into Byzantium and Persia formed their own sectarian doctrines and faced every which way, North, South, East and West. 107 AH- 207AH (725AD-822AD)

Stage 3 was when the Abbasids conquered the Islamic world after years of agitation and propaganda concerning the rights of Ali to rule the empires. Meccans gave unity, stability and an Arab orientation to this final wave of emerging orthodoxy. 201AH-Present (822AD to present). Later the Muslims fossilized in the Mihna-time of disagreement.

A made me ask, if Islam is not from God as Muslims say it is, (and they disagree with each other as to whether it is an eternal book or a man-made one rooted in time and space,) then how could I explain Islam's great successes, its spirituality, rituals and dogmas that were quickly established? That journey is still ongoing, but I have found many pointers hidden away in University libraries, which, because of the internet, are now being revealed. Western critical thinking is now part and parcel of the way many Muslim academics think, and they, too, are asking serious questions. Of course, the Jewish people themselves spearheaded a lot of these studies, because the Qur'an is largely a Jewish book based upon the Old Testament, as well as sectarian argument in the church of that time and ideas borrowed from the prevalent cultures of that day, fed by the traders that plied their goods from China, India, Persia and Arabia. I have observed that the Qur'an is an Arab version of the Old Testament, its main purpose to create an Arab prophet, something they had never had, while their cousin-brothers had the OT prophets with regular revelations from God. This first-born son of Abraham felt slighted because the God of Abraham had not included him in the revelations that were given about the coming Messiah. These people also yearned for a father-like involvement with God's plan and promises.

In spite of all the arguments that go on amongst followers of all the religious fanatics, the Qur'an does recognise the centrality of the Messiah. The Qur'an talks about 4 or 5 times about Muhammad, over 400 times of Moses, and 195 times about Jesus the Messiah. In fact, it protects His true identity by calling him Messiah, Word of God and Spirit of God. What more does one want?

Chapter nine

NEWER PATHS

Each time I formed a Mission to reach the nations, I came to a point where I realised the lifeless activities of administration were not for me. I discovered more about inter-cultural issues between Muslims and Christians, so I founded PI to target Central Asia. It has grown into a mission that is still around today. Having formed a movement with goals, objectives and understanding of the Islamic world, others, who did not have that gifting, felt they could do a better job by taking over the admin work.

At such a time of crisis, I came across a study from Talbot Seminary in California regarding conflicts within church and missions, and specifically about takeover bids by employees who wanted the leadership. It was couched in management speak regarding the clash between pioneers and managers.

A man has a vision and inspires others to join him. The work grows and expands into thrilling answers to prayer and growth in the movement. Then Satan counter-attacks and troubles occur: lack of funds, staff shortages, loss of key people and so on. The followers will not blame themselves and so conclude that it is in fact the founder that is wrong, and if they remove him, all will be well. The founder of a new church, or mission is removed, and the new leaders make changes. However, they have now lost the visionary, and management takes over. The growth chart plateaus, and the vision is lost, or changes to something more marketable or profitable. However, God does not abandon the leader, and the death of his work is, in fact, an opportunity to break him, revive the vision and go onto greater effective work.

The renewed vision for me was to understand the issues in Muslim evangelism by looking, first of all, at the environment in Southern Arabia in pre-Islamic times. Islam reflects those issues. Then, I looked at the Qur'an in the light of these cultural elements, to understand how the Qur'an came

about and thus be able to interpret it in the light of the issues of those days, and interpret them more accurately. We can start with Qur'anic texts and how they actually are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. What the Muslim (or Hindi etc.) is looking for is actually completed in Him. This is because the pre-Islamic Arabian culture was actually made up of Jewish and Syrian Christians, looking for a saviour from the coming Roman Byzantine clash of cultures. (Persian as well) In Syriac, the word used for the Messiah was the Blessed one, "MHMD," or Muhammad, which is an adjective, not a noun.

Out of this emerged a thrilling short journey to gather case studies of contextualisation of the gospel across many nations and though a long period of time. I concluded that the Spirit of God had been working outside of the church as well as within it. He had spoken into all cultures, and there were bridges, illustrations and links that all fed back to the Christ, the Messiah. Actually, what greatly helped was Gal 3, where Paul says that the Gospel was preached to Abraham as well. How could that be? Abraham, in fact, shows the Gospel when he tells his about-to-be-sacrificed son that God will provide. And God did. Thus, the Gospel is revealed to those who are looking for it, (and who remember that the word Gospel means "Good News").

"What others say" is a collection of case studies of contextualisation over many cultures and periods of history. Published by EEF.

So, what is the gospel and has its meaning been altered by culture and theology?

There is a range of attitudes held by church leaders and missionaries regarding the term "Contextualisation". This range goes from being an expression of liberal theology, a watering down of the gospel and a Counter Reformation Trojan horse, to a clearer expression of Biblical truth! The problem seems to be, how do you interpret Scriptural truths that have been handed down from a previous generation? That interpretation is seen as absolute truth because it is an expression of the Bible, but, in fact, it has been influenced by the current cultural perspective. Carried over into a culture that neither knows or understands the previous generation's cultural interpretation, it is seen as unchanging truth, and therefore, change equals the slippery road to heresy, or at least compromise.

There are three aspects that need to be considered in this subject:

1. The interpretation of Scripture within our own culture so we can clearly see and understand the changes relating it to previous interpretations and choose whether they are negotiable or "firm foundations". Thus,

the argument goes, theology developed in the 18th century, being taken from Scripture, cannot be changed as “Scripture does not change.

2. The interpretation of Scripture as missionaries from the west sought to make the gospel clear to people of a different culture than themselves. Thus, texts about “sins being whiter than snow” cannot be understood by a culture that has never seen snow. Those missionaries were trained in a theology that, in fact, was an interpretation of that same Scripture, but from its Greco-Roman philosophical world view. Now they realise that anthropology shows how Scriptural application is not understood, or is confusing.
3. The interpretation of Scripture by nationals in Asia and Africa and other non-Anglo-Saxon cultures to their own people. Thus, we get Korean theology, Water Buffalo Theology for Thailand, and other national expressions. Often their lack of theological training sets them free to explore other interpretations based upon Scripture, but seen through their own eyes. Thus, the Uzbek church is questioning the Russian church model they sense is not “Uzbeki” enough.

Chapter ten

FAILURE LEADS TO SUCCESS

Once we were back in England it was a time to reflect and try to make sense of the many new things we had seen and thought about. In fact, I think I had answers but did not know the questions. We had landed in Swansea because my son, Nathan, had been sent back to the UK to live at the boarding school with Benjie Verwer, who was in Emmanuel Grammar school. This has been set up by Rees Howells – an Intercessor during the Welsh revival for the education of missionary children.

The Bible College School (Emmanuel School from 1955) was an independent school founded in 1933 by the Bible College of Wales, its intention partly being to provide accommodation and education to the children of missionaries. It was situated in Derwent Fawr, Swansea, near to the Bible College of Wales, and consisted of a preparatory school and a grammar school. The school closed in 1994 for financial reasons.

We felt it would be an ideal place for a young man who needed an education, stability and a sense of identity? Little did we know that even missionaries have emotional and psychological problems. His house father was a returning missionary who had had a breakdown. Caring for 12-year-old boys was no way to recover from this, and his shouting and angry explosive character caused Nathan to claim the promise that, if he did not like it, we would return and put the family first. Not only did he not like it, but by now he was beginning to stutter. Looking back, the radical call we responded to from books like “True Discipleship,” and the drive of OM to reach out to the whole world, did not allow for the building of strong family bonds. Money was preserved for the reaching of the lost. Even a coke was a waste of money in those heady days. Later, I came to realise that I had denied my two sons, Nathan and Andrew, a normal life, and the damage

done may not be retrievable. I put the work and the vision first, and not their mother or themselves, to my great regret today. Looking at such errors, I realise that most new movements have an element of extremism in this, and it is others who suffer from these new start-ups. Church planting movements, new missions, and other Christian organisations all need to have power to gain lift-offs, and the next generation corrects these extreme patterns. Founders of new initiatives have to be extreme in order to carry out the founding of a vision.

Andrew is much like his mother in that he is a people person, and he suffered from losing new friends, who changed every year as teams rotated. He made many friends, but it was Nathan, loyal to a tee, that kept them. They have grown to be fine fathers themselves, avoiding the mistakes of their father.

I realised I had lots of experience with Muslim people, and some with career missionaries, but I did not have a way of processing that knowledge to meet the needs of my family. It was this that led us to move to Tunbridge Wells to be in a local assembly with Howard Harper and family, to take part in working with the assembly, and to be close to London to study at SOAS.

It was a thrilling time for me in studying Islamic History, the arts, beliefs, and practices of Islam. I was able to fit past experiences into a pattern of development and growth of Islam. Years later, this emerged into a clear proposition that Islam actually emerged from an Arab-Jewish coalition, formed to stand against the Byzantine and Persian attempts to attack the Arab south, calling upon the Messiah who was expected to come and save the people. This was a typical Messianic expectation. However, the Syriac word for this blessed redeemer was MHMD and gradually this MHMD took on human characteristics, becoming a person rather than an adjective describing the Saviour.

I can best explain this process by looking at the large number of people in the UK whose names are taken from their former family occupation. Thus, a farmer, (George was the Saxon word for a farm) moved from being an adjective, to a family name, a noun. So, we get Smith, Harper, Baker, Driver, Potts, Teasdale and so on. As Arabs waited for the blessed warrior to save them, he becomes 'Muhammad' the blessed one. After three hundred years, so prolific were the stories that grew around this figure they had to stop the invention of stories and collect them together into sets. There are 600,000 of these stories, or Hadis, giving us 5000 stories per month, or 160 per day in his life. An amazing feat if he really was a man and not just a hope.

The result of this observation was that I no longer had to compare Jesus with a man, but to simply live, tell and present Jesus. Every Muslim would eventually realise that his whole construct was not able to meet his every need. Also, I did not have to spend laborious hours studying apologetics, but simply tell the gospel story as Paul did in Galatians 3. Abraham had the gospel preached to him, but that is another study. Thus, deep academic studies eventually return to telling the old, old story.

During these three wonderfully stretching years, Howard invited me to join him on an Open Doors trip to Soviet Central Asia, organised by Keston College who had to drop out at the last minute, leaving just four of us. First stop was to be Moscow, then on to Tashkent, Samarkand, Khiva and back home. We all were given quantities of newly translated gospels to smuggle in on that trip. Open Doors people had sophisticated compartments in their suitcases and overcoats, I had them stuffed into my pockets and Howard took a Tesco shopping bag full (looking like Duty frees). There were a dozen or so passport checks and each one had an extra machine to check carry-on baggage and luggage. I noticed that at the end of the row was an exit labelled, "International Book Fair delegates only". I asked the officer if I could pass through that gate, as we were due to visit the book fair as part of our sightseeing in Moscow. His reply was, "yes of course," and all four of us passed through customs unscathed and breathing a sigh of relief. On the bus to the swanky hotel, UK sales people complained that they had stood for three hours waiting to get through and we had done it in three minutes. We deduced God was with us.

We did visit the book fair and were surprised by a white-haired American man who was running a book stand exhibiting bibles. What?! Bibles in a Communist state? He was instructed he could only exhibit the books, not sell them. See, but don't take.

BUT, he was allowed to replace any that were stolen, so he had passed the word, "come and steal a bible." No-one teaches that in Bible college. It was the beginning of learning to live and minister in Central Asia. Since then, I have also learned that theology really flows out of experiencing God and his love, care and holiness. The overwhelming evidence of this is that the Bible is a record of the history of man and God, and the New Testament is largely built upon the stories that Jesus told, and Paul experienced. Few preachers today just tell stories, that is too simplistic and does not feed their intellectual penchant for teaching complex philosophies.

On returning to the UK, Howard and others helped me set up a mission to

support evangelism, pioneer research on Islam and encourage training for national believers. On our first trip, we had gone to meet the local church in Tashkent to deliver our scriptures to the pastor. A lady architect was brought in to translate for us on the discussions we had in the church. On leaving, we offered to hand the scriptures over to the pastor but a negative nod by our translator forced us to dump the books into her lap, which she quickly covered with her pinafore. Later, we were told that the pastor was actually in league with the KGB, and would have informed upon us.

She went on to train new pastors, establishing five teams of translators for Bibles in Central Asian languages, and five food distribution teams for the poor. Her work came to an end when she invited her own evangelical pastor to Korea for an international conference. At the conference he saw people holding their hand up in worship; this greatly offended him, as Baptists have nothing to do with Pentecostals. Her work was taken over and disbanded by the pastor when they returned, and he stated that women could not lead mission organisations. The church had become a hindrance to the expansion of the Kingdom of God. She left to live in California.

Our own mission was destroyed in another way. The Soviet hammer and sickle flag lowered for the last time over the Kremlin, replaced by the Russian tricolour. Mikhail Gorbachev resigned his post as president of the Soviet Union, leaving Boris Yeltsin as president of the newly independent Russian state. The Collapse of the Soviet Union was from 1989-1992. Central Asia was flooded by western missions, and with the mighty dollar. Not knowing the language, they “bought” most of our staff in order to fulfil the mandate set by boards across the USA and Europe. Another lesson learned. Years later one of my students was to ask me, “how do we get rid of the missionaries?”

These experiences set me on a course of evaluating the role of the foreign worker and the need to raise up nationals so that they do their own theology, manage their own goals, train their own people, and evangelise their own countries. This is just so important, especially once we realized that local churches in the west were not focused on reality in missions, but held some kind of romantic vision of what missionaries do and how they should live. No wonder Paul kept moving, leaving the work in local hands.

I remember a missionary who arrived in the desert of North Africa with 15 barrels of goods, including a flushing toilet. It came to be a hindrance to his work, as people queued up outside his house just to view the flushing.

As the west flooded into Central Asia and bought out our teams, the

work declined rapidly and there was a need for a new vision that suited our skills and abilities. My own vision was almost totally evangelistic, and both my time in OM and with the Central Asian work was geared for that approach. Having seen the poverty and frailty of the few churches in Central Asia, I realised that Peter Phan's call to reverse the emphasis upon the church, then proclamation, then mission and finally, if time allowed, the Kingdom of God, gave a better and more biblical structure for mission. This should start with the Kingdom of God, who rules over all the earth. This creates a call or desire to do mission, as we see the need of people crying in the wilderness. By helping them in their suffering as Jesus did, we are given the invitation to proclaim the goodness of God, the saving grace he dispenses to us all, and his salvation through Jesus Christ. This leads to people claiming his promises and learning to walk daily with him, thus making disciples. It is no accident that the book of Acts begins chapter one, and ends in chapter twenty-eight, on the central message of the Kingdom of God.

Thus, we took over and formed an existing registered but unused mission, and we aimed it to do social work and serve the great needs we saw in Asia and Africa. For a time, this was successful. Children were sponsored, schools built, teachers employed, and villagers proud of their new facilities. The danger was that we never really knew if people were sincere or not, as they grew, so the application of the gospel became marginalised, and we fell into the finance trap, where the costs grew and we needed to apply budgets, fund raisers and that whole world of business and finance. The objectives of the missions changed, like so many that start with spiritual goals and end up being a social help enterprise.

What did come out of this period was a better understanding of matching culture, so that the right kind of nationals can be recruited, trained and sent, having a greater awareness of how to act and what to do. Now, let's be clear that a humble German will do more spiritual work than a proud Pakistani or Afghan, but his people would still side with the Pakistani.

As we look around the Islamic world we can see five distinct cultures: Arab, Persian, Malay, Turk and African (split into two more cultures of Chadid and Nilotic). Although Islamic, they interpret both the Quran and Hadis from their own perspective, just as Christians do the Bible. Once we understand the culture, we can assign countries, with Christians coming from the same culture, often including the language, of that particular Islamic land. So, for example, Turks and Koreans come from an Altaic

culture, Persians from and Indian one, Malays are related to Filipinos and, of course, there is a large Christian Arab community in the Middle East and Egypt. Unfortunately, the Christian community often ignores, if not hates, their fellow countrymen who are Muslims. If only we could get them to love Muslims, the gospel would run like wildfires do.

From then on, I committed to doing all I could to empower nations that came from these like-minded cultures into missions. One young man that joined us was Aurel Ghita from Romania. He had become aware of Mihai Malancea, who was studying at Bucharest University to prepare to mobilise Moldovans into Central Asia. Once his studies were over, he joined others to form a bible study to prepare missionaries to go to Turkey. He was aware that in Moldova there was a Christian community called Gagauz, which is a Turkish language. He figured that sending Gagauz missionaries would greatly increase Christian missions to the Islamic world. He was right. However, these Gagauz people had been Christianised over centuries, and were not able to enter modern Turkish thinking.

Chapter eleven

DIVITIA GRATIAE UNIVERSITY (DGU)

I am so thankful for Aurel putting me in touch with Mihai and Sergei, the two leaders running this brand-new institution, which has now grown into a major tool in God's hands to transform Central Asia. We have seen over 1800 graduates who have started their own works, often because their pastors became threatened by their better knowledge of the Bible and church life because of DGU, and drove them out. The old story of the old leader of the herd being challenged by a younger one still holds true in the churches.

My first brush with Soviet Central Asia had been on a tour. In 1970, we were accompanied by a guide who was actually a Sergeant from the army, training for the KGB. He was dedicated but rather dumb in life's ways. His role was to watch us and report back each day to his superiors in the Secret Service. Each night, after touring the sights of the city, we sat with him, each of us pretending a simple tourist event had taken place. During the day, we dodged him, and met up with contacts in the local churches.

One of our party was an American. He was from a family that had migrated to the USA, where he was born. One day, we were attacked by several KGB thugs, who told him, "tell your father that we can still reach you." Their objective was to spread fear amongst all who rejected the old system, which was crumbling even then.

By making visits in this way we met and helped people we could trust. One day, in a conference of missions seeking to work in Central Asia, I was accosted by a rep who worked for a radio mission. We had teamed up with a German who had been adopted by a Kazakh family when his parents died in the deportations Stalin imposed upon Germans living in Russia, largely Mennonites by background. The rep desperately wanted to please

his American backers and they needed a Kazakh voice. I protected the man from American materialism, and was told it was my duty to release his name to them, so they could start their ministry. This struggle between ambition with wealth, and the simplicity of locals is an ongoing struggle that is a feature of international missions. It's not all heavenly cooperation.

My real induction into Central Asia came on a 5000-mile-long trip, visiting churches and training centres that Mihai and the team had helped their graduates to set up. Graduates were encouraged to return home and set up centres of training. These were small to begin with, and grew as the church was blessed through their teaching and counsel and labour.

Our first stop was Tobolsk, the old capital of Siberia. This was the city to which people were sent for offending the authorities. The audiences studied in the day time as we lectured, and in the evenings the group swelled with church members. I was delighted to meet Davoud, who had been one of my students, who was serving with the local church, setting up study groups and developing a small Bible college. Participants had their work assessed, and marks went towards a period of attendance at the Moldovan mother college, so that they graduated faster. He also pastored a small church made up of Central Asian people such as Tatars, Uzbeks and Kazakhs.

On a day trip we went to a Muslim village and met with a lady Imam who ran the local mosque, and who invited us to visit anytime. I had grown up reading Russian novels and wanted to learn Russian and her village was what I had imagined when reading Tolstoy or Solzhenitsyn. My pen holder is part of the Mosque, which I picked up as a reminder to pray for her and the village.. Other cities we visited and taught in were: Alma Ata, where I was treated as a royal(?) guest and given half a horse's leg at a special meal; Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, where I met Sergey, the labourer at the Bible school. He did all the heavy construction work, but at lunch time he entertained us with classical music played on the church piano. He had graduated from St Petersburg conservatory in classical music, then had joined the army. He served in Afghanistan and became addicted to drugs, which brought him down to the lowest depths before he was reclaimed by Christ in the church.

A drive up the passes into the Himalayas was breathtaking, and we arrived in Khujend that night. Here the church hosted the bible teaching and we got to know quite a few people who were hungry for teaching and guidance. I was treated well and the leadership took me to lunch at a kebab shop, where I had the best shashlik steaks that I have ever had. During the

meal I asked the three men hosting us, pastor, secretary, and chairman, what their background was. One said twelve years, another ten, and the other six. I looked puzzled. They laughed and explained they were all ex-cons who were caught drug smuggling. It turned out that the local church visited the prison where some 800 men lived in each room, and existed on a poor diet. The church brought food and news from home, and took letters back to the families. This had led to an explosion of home churches; 63 when I was there.

Our summer team programme sent small teams to Turkey with 60 New Testaments in each bag. As they travelled around a specific province they made friends but they were NOT to evangelise them. Most Turks are very hospitable and would invite you to eat or help you catch a bus. The law of reciprocity was very much part of Turkic culture. In other words, if someone did something for you, you were obligated to return the favour. This was done by giving a gift, a New Testament. All very culture based.

In fact, it can be a problem as well. Getting off a bus for a tea break, a fruit seller invited me to buy some cherries. He had been kind and jovial and made me feel at home, so I bought a half kilo. In return I offered him some from the bag, but he stubbornly refused until it became a battle between us. In the end, he made the shop boy take some and eat them. Only when the bus got going did I realise that all the cherries had maggots, and he knew it.

Being in Turkey, I could not resist the thought of taking the gospel over the border into Chechnya and Dagestan. DGU has a far better strategy of training nationals who understand the culture and seek to build the church there, but I needed to see first-hand and be able to challenge people to take up the vision.

My first visit was fraught with dangers. It all started when the immigrations officer claimed that my Russian visa was invalid and I would not be allowed in. A call to the pastor was met by a rejection of me, telling the officer to send me home. This shocked me, but in fact it was a wise move to call the officer's bluff. He wanted a bribe to allow me into the country. I was soon with the church. The seminar was a great time together, in spite of our apartment being raided by potential kidnappers (the main occupation of the populace), the local Russian army barracks being car bombed by Caucasian separatists, and a meeting with a weeping mother about her son in prison in Moscow for drug offenses.

During the week, I was taken to a small dacha on the Black Sea coast. This was the church's outreach rehab centre for drug addicts, probably the

greatest illness in the community as drugs were so widely used to contribute to a family's income. One inmate was so blessed that he gave me a handful of seashells as a gift. That was the limit of his wealth, picked up on the beach that day.

One of my most memorable experiences was in Makhachkala, capital of Dagestan in the Caucasus.

Derbent is a city in Dagestan, located on the Caspian Sea. It is the southernmost city in Russia, and it is the second-most important city of Dagestan. Derbent occupies the narrow gateway between the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus Mountains, connecting the Eurasian Steppe to the north and the Iranian Plateau to the south.

Derbent claims to be the oldest city in Russia, with historical documentation dating to the 8th century BC, making it one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Due to its strategic location, over the course of history the city has changed ownership many times, particularly among the Persian, Arab, Mongol, Timurid, and Shirvan kingdoms. In 1813, the city passed from Persian into Russian hands by the Treaty of Gulistan.

It is often identified with the Gates of Alexander, a legendary barrier supposedly built by Alexander the Great in the Caucasus.

Derbent's location on a narrow, three-kilometre strip of land in the North Caucasus between the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus mountains is strategic in the entire Caucasus region. Historically, this position allowed the rulers of Derbent to control land traffic between the Eurasian Steppe and the Middle East. The only other practicable crossing of the Caucasus ridge was over the Darial Gorge.

SHOCK AND AWE

In 654, Derbent was captured by the Arabs, who called it the Gate of Gates (Bab al-Abwab), following their invasion of Persia. They transformed it into an important administrative centre and introduced Islam to the area. The Sassanids had also brought Armenians from Syunik to help protect the pass from invaders; as Arab rule weakened in the region at the end of the ninth century, the Armenians living there were able to establish a kingdom, which lasted until the early years of the thirteenth century. The Holy Saviour Armenian Church still dominates the skyline, though it is used as the Museum of Carpet, Arts and Crafts today, due to the decline in the Armenian population.

A year later, I returned for a second session and the Mother I had met hugged me, saying that her son, the one in prison, had been saved (in her words “Repented”). I had asked the Slavic Gospel Mission to deliver a Russian Bible to him and through that he had come to know the Lord. My promise to help that old lady bore fruit. One of the fruits of the spirit is faithfulness, and non-Christians need to see the word of God in action before they can understand its implications and trust us. It’s no good winning a discussion with a Muslim if it is not backed up with acts of love and truthfulness.

I have learned that Bible truths can be so cerebral, and there is great emphasis on being biblical these days without the action to back up these truths. The church has sunk into the fallacy of singing and teaching about witness and evangelism, without the full implications of the application of those truths. No wonder they are in decline.

The following year the pastor was shot dead for witnessing to Muslims about Christ.

NANCY’S HEALTH

Through all the activities and travelling that we have done over the years, Nancy was able to overcome incredible obstacles, weaknesses, disappointments and, still putting her husband and her children first, has blessed many. She kept us all together. But in about 1996 her spine started to curve. At first, she tripped up a lot, and then her tendency to fall got worse. Tests revealed that she was succumbing to ageing and that curvature of the spine was a permanent feature that would form our future.

But as we enter our 80s we see our role changing and, in fact, by empowering others we are more fruitful than ever we were when just youthful enthusiasts of Christ. Wisdom and experience help us make sense of the mess our world exhibits daily. Thus, our hope is firmly in the Kingdom of God.

APPENDIX I

Illustrations are essential for any teacher of God's word. I love gardening and so have used that source to illustrate spiritual values.

MY GARDEN

I love spending time in the garden. Gradually it dawned on me that life is like gardening.

THE VALUE OF GARDENING

Plants have great value to us and our environment. The planet would not survive without trees and plants to breathe and recycle the air, to protect species, and to feed all of us, human and otherwise.

Left by itself it has a self-balancing act, but Genesis 2 vs 4-15 called man to take care of the earth. These actions are called gardening, which is the control, design, production and multiplication of its fruits, i.e. management. Farming is the action of managing these plants to feed a greater number of people as it often entails larger units.

PLANTS: They are larger like Redwoods, Oaks, Beech, Pines. They exist in all climates, even deserts produce dates and palms. They have fruits that are good and bad for man, fruits like apples, Bananas, Jackfruit.

They are small like mosses, lichen that feeds Reindeer in adverse frozen conditions. They exist above, in and under the seas, on the tops of mountains and under the earth in dark caverns.

THEY SEEM TO BE ONLY ON ONE PLANET, OURS

Plants provide wood for construction, engineering, bridges, and transportation. They can be made into idols to worship or burnt on fires to provide us warmth. From them we get medicines and poisons e.g. Malarial.

Gardening is an art form which can produce vegetables, flowers, medicines. It can fix the earth to prevent hillsides from slipping, and transform our air.

Plants can be stunning in beauty and form, and wild. Gardens provide quiet spaces, calming influences, places that are private, provide a backdrop for parties, celebrations, marriages and rituals for the church.

Gardening is also able to provide free work for retirees that makes life of value and pleasure.

The gardener's parable of the Christian life.

1. SOIL
2. SEED
3. ENVIRONMENT
4. PRUNING
5. DEVELOPMENT
6. HARVESTING
7. LAST THINGS

1. SOIL. There are many different types of soil: clay, loam, acid, alkaline, sandy, water logged, polluted etc. The soil can be contained openly or in pots. Usually, the ground needs to be cleared of rocks, roots, rubbish and dangerous intrusions. It should be prepared if possible, so that there is nothing to stop the life of the seed, it will add to its growth, and should be well drained. Every person also comes from such a variety of backgrounds, circumstances, and limitations. BUT by being a friend that soil can be changed. In the Christian life this is similar to pre-evangelism where a person's false ideas and prejudices can be a danger to the growth of faith. The context is vital to produce fruitful growth. There should be no importation of foreign matter that will stunt the growth of faith. The soil is the person himself.
2. SEED. So many things can spoil the harvest required. The right seed must be chosen, the gospel must in context and be relevant to the soil. Paul chose to use different approaches and illustrations. Some need fragmentation, like placing them in a fridge to simulate winter dormancy. Small seeds need to be sprinkled on the surface, some must be sown quarter inch deep, other much deeper to protect from frost. Prov. 26 v 7
3. ENVIRONMENT. Some plants do not produce seed and collection needs to be through cuttings. Our way of presenting the gospel must be by a wise evangelist with a pastor's heart and knowledge. Wisdom guides us when to act and when to wait. Some plants are suitable for

the English climate and others, important though they are, will not survive. Larger trees can stunt growth by shading, weeds can choke the young plant, insects can eat the young roots and shoots. New believers in Christ need to find a suitable community to grow in faith and become able to live their faith in their society. This is often called “Discipleship,” and often is a process of modelling oneself upon an older Christian. It is interesting that Jesus called us to make disciples, knowing that once that process has been established it will continue on “unto the end” Matt 28 v 19

4. PRUNING. I can remember the time when I discovered the art of pruning. For any fruit tree to bear fruit its energy must be channelled into producing fruit and this is done by cutting back on the growth so that fruit emerges. Pruning to remove damaged, dead or diseased parts can be done at any time of the year. Most trees and shrubs, especially those that flower should be pruned in late winter or early spring, before the onset of new growth. There are three primary types of pruning: cuts, thinning cuts, reduction cuts, and heading cuts, each giving different results in growth and appearance. So also, must a young Christian limit his life to allow growth in spirit to take place. Often this is called “Discipleship,” and should primarily be a system of modelling on an older Christian life as he models Jesus. Too many times, discipleship is actually induction into a denominational constraint rather setting free to be fruitful
5. DEVELOPMENT. The elements needed for strong growth are air, water, weeding, food, heat (or cold). If the heat is not right it will damage development; water is needed, at the right time and in the right amount; heat acts like a trigger for fruit and further growth; without fertilizer during the fruiting or flowering period the results will be damaged. Different Christians need different elements. Some need gentle care and coaching, some a violent challenge towards a greater goal in life. Organisations like OM, YWAM, etc., provide an outlet that the church does not seem to be able to commit to. Thus, mission will be led by specialists acting as part of the wider body, not in competition but in acceptance of one another. The young plant needs to be protected from birds, slugs, mould, disease and malnutrition. The right person needs to do the discipling of a young believer. Heb 5 v 12

6. HARVESTING. Care during harvesting is important. Seeds can be collected, broken skin can damage the fruit, storage needs to be controlled, structures to be in place. In evangelism, aftercare is important and often this is the task of deacons and elders, who see the bigger picture that the pastor does not see. Mk 6 v 30, 1 Cor 5 v 4
7. LAST THINGS. After the harvest, the land needs to be put to bed and be readied for another round of cultivation of unkempt land. The challenges to the church are to, “go into all the world” Rev 5 v 9. Each generation is responsible for expanding the plant to other areas where Christ is not known.

APPENDIX II

The Hermes Corporation is a large computer company in Switzerland. It has 40 factories around the globe and saw the need for a management standard for each centre. To do this each factory was given a copy of the same manual of operations. However, they found that many did not follow the manual and in actual fact disagreed with it.

A Cultural anthropologist was brought in to find an answer. The result was a survey of each country and the identification of the individual cultural values. These were tabulated in accordance with a questionnaire regarding certain values.

The values were Power Distance, Individualism, Uncertainty avoidance and male or Female characteristics. Protestant countries came low on Power distance but high in individualism, low in Uncertainty avoidance and high on male characteristics. Whereas Catholic, Muslim and Asian countries were variously the opposite.

DIMENSIONS OF NATIONAL CULTURES

- Power distance index (PDI): The power distance index is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally”. In this dimension, inequality and power is perceived from the followers, or the lower strata. A higher degree of the Index indicates that hierarchy is clearly established and executed in society, without doubt or reason. A lower degree of the Index signifies that people question authority and attempt to distribute power.
- Individualism vs. collectivism (IDV): This index explores the “degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups”. Individualistic societies have loose ties that often only relate an individual to his/her immediate family. They emphasize the “I” versus the “we”. Its counterpart, collectivism, describes a society in which tightly integrated

relationships tie extended families and others into in-groups. These in-groups are laced with undoubted loyalty and support each other when a conflict arises with another in-group.

- Uncertainty avoidance (UAI): The uncertainty avoidance index is defined as “a society’s tolerance for ambiguity”, in which people embrace or avert something unexpected, unknown, or away from the status quo. Societies that score a high degree in this index opt for stiff codes of behaviour, guidelines, laws, and generally rely on absolute truth, or the belief that one lone truth dictates everything, and that people know what it is. A lower degree in this index shows more acceptance of differing thoughts or ideas. Society tends to impose fewer regulations, ambiguity is more accustomed to, and the environment is more free flowing.
- Masculinity vs. femininity (MAS): In this dimension, masculinity is defined as “a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success.” Its counterpart represents “a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life.” Women in the respective societies tend to display different values. In feminine societies, they share modest and caring views equally with men. In more masculine societies, women are somewhat assertive and competitive, but notably less so than men. In other words, they still recognise a gap between male and female values. This dimension is frequently viewed as taboo in highly masculine societies.
- Long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation (LTO): This dimension associates the connection of the past with current and future actions/challenges. A lower degree of this index (short-term) indicates that traditions are honoured and kept, while steadfastness is valued. Societies with a high degree in this index (long-term) view adaptation and circumstantial, pragmatic problem-solving as a necessity. A poor country that is short-term oriented usually has little to no economic development, while long-term oriented countries continue to develop to a level of prosperity.
- Indulgence vs. restraint (IND): This dimension refers to the degree of freedom that societal norms give to citizens in fulfilling their human

desires. Indulgence is defined as “a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun”. Its counterpart is defined as “a society that controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms” (*Culture’s Consequences*, Geert Hofstede).

NAKED MISSION

A potbellied stove, an exploding soda bottle, a flushing toilet transported to the North African desert, international money transfers and KGB thugs. Adventures delivered in an old bakery van. A journey that will take you from England to India, Russia, Moldova, Greece. In fact you'll lose track of the borders that you cross before ending up back in an English garden. All this and much more, not in a thriller novel, but in this book. It's partly personal, historical, geographical, reflective and always exciting. "I heard that Bible truths can be so cerebral, and there is this great emphasis on being biblical these days without the action to back up those truths", writes Ron George.

These pages are the printed reality that stories are far more effective than any theological arguments. If you have a vision for the Kingdom of God you will find this riveting and if you don't have such a world vision when you start the book, then be assured you will at the end.

Desi Maxwell



Desi Maxwell is a very gifted speaker and Bible teacher. Now living in Lisburn, Northern Ireland, he was born and raised in Ballymena. His education took him through Ballymena Academy, on to the University of Ulster, then Westminster and Princeton theological seminaries in the USA. After seven years of pastoral ministry, three in Canada and four in Belfast, he has been a senior teaching fellow at Belfast Bible College for the past two decades.

Desi is founder of Xplorations Ministries which is a ministry to help Christians understand the Hebrew background of the Bible, helping us get back to more of the original meaning of its teachings. He also leads tours of Israel which reinforces his widely accepted teaching ministry.



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