MIDWESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

*MISSIOLOGICAL MODELS IN MINISTRY TO MUSLIMS*

A CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE

DR33330 BIBLICAL MISSIOLOGY

BY

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**Introduction**

Samuel Schlorff served as a missionary with Arab World Ministries (AWM) for thirty-six years in North Africa, France, and the U.S., seventeen of those years as AWM missiologist. He earned degrees from Wheaton College, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary, as well as two Arabic certifications from the University of Paris. His published works include *Discipleship In Islamic Society*, *Understanding The Muslim Mindset: Questions About Islam*, and articles in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* and *Missiology* regarding contextualization. He is considered a respected voice in the world of Muslim evangelism especially in light of the C1-C6 tension that has emerged in the past fifteen years. Schlorff’s book is currently out of print but obtainable at a premium via Amazon.com and other booksellers.

In his text, he asks and answers some central questions regarding the potential existence of factors within Islam that could serve as launch points for evangelism, our critique of non-Christian religions and how that critique colors our hermeneutic and methodology, and our overall desired outcome for mission to Muslims.

**Synopsis**

The author divides his book into three parts. In the first part, he reviews the six predominant

missiological models used in relationship to Muslims during the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries, and the major proponents of each individual model. The *imperial* (polemical) approach

was the principal model employed in the nineteenth century. The *direct* approach in the twentieth

century polished off the rough edges of the polemical and was more irenic, focusing on

destruction of Islam only “after one had become a Christian, or at least a serious inquirer.” (13)

This approach was acceptable within the evangelical movement.

The *indirect* (actualization or completion) model assumed an inherent ‘seed of truth’ concept

that saw a latent power (14) within Islam that allowed for a more positive approach for believers

to perceive certain constructive elements within Islam. These elements enabled Christians to start

with this ‘partial light’ foundation and build a gospel scaffolding upon it within liberal theology

and ecumenism. The *dialectical* model sought to combine discontinuity and continuity and had

some influence within ecumenism. The *dialogical* model began emerging in the 1950’s as an

interreligious attempt to find fulfillment from Islam ultimately in Christ, especially within the

ecumenical movement. The *dynamic equivalence* (translational) model has had significant

influence among the evangelical ecumenical community represented by the Lausanne

Movement, allowing for usage of the Qur’an as a theological starting point and bridge for

acceptable evangelistic and discipling contextualization among Muslims.

In part two of his text, Schlorff brings all of these models’ specific methodologies under the

microscope for consideration and evaluation. He begins in chapter three by exploring Qur’anic

language and the Protestant Arab Bible. He traces the linguistic history of much of the

misunderstanding between Christians and Muslims back to the beginning of Islam and how it

Arabicized and Islamicized biblical vocabulary and concepts for its own purposes. Schlorff states

this “language gap complicates Christian-Muslim communication.” (32) This includes

difficulties arising from semantic and phonetic differences between the two worldviews

linguistically when dealing with biblical and theological terminology imported into the Qur’an.

In chapter four the author presents the negative uses of Qur’anic phraseology, namely,

polemical uses that focused historically on the criticism of Islamic ethics and aspects of Islamic

history. The author succinctly reviews Islam’s rejection of Christian historical criticism of the

Qur’an and Muhammad, though it was a Muslim who helped pioneer the critical study of history.

However, thinking historically is “extremely upsetting to Muslims, who think transcendently.

They bitterly resent any suggestion that historical sources, whatever their nature, might have

gone into the composition of the Qur’an.” (56)

In chapter five, Schlorff examines positive uses of Qur’anic phraseology, that is, proof-texting

Qur’anic citations in order to support a Christian or biblical position. These uses concern the

divine authority of Christian scripture, the divine nature of Jesus as God, the ontological

existence of the Trinity, the historicity of the crucifixion of Jesus, and the doctrines of sin and

salvation. Schlorff makes clear that the Christian’s citations of Qur’anic verses to support a

biblical worldview regarding such hallmark distinctives of historic Christian theology do not

hold water with serious Muslims and their understanding of the Qur’an. Schlorff traces the

history of such proof-texting to the nineteenth century, its apparent demise in the 1930’s, and its

resurrection in the 1970’s and continuation in the new millennium.

In chapter six, the author expands the previous chapter’s focus by exploring the ‘New

Hermeneutic’ that has emerged within the attempts to view the Qur’an positively. The New

Hermeneutic, Schlorff makes clear, takes Christian believers down a path of attributing

unwittingly some kind of divine authority to the Qur’an when we attempt to prove some form of

biblical doctrine on the basis of the Qur’an. He sums up this innate danger by saying

In sum, the Qur’an is treated as if it both possesses divine authority and does not possess

divine authority at one and the same time. No wonder the logic of the argument has not

commended itself to many Muslims! The ambivalence and contradiction inherent in the

approach prepared the way for a new hermeneutic of the Qur’an based on the assumption that

the book is in some vague sense a divine revelation. (73)

Schlorff states that attempts by well-meaning Western mission thinkers, beginning with Geoffrey

Parrinder and Kenneth Cragg, to use historical-critical methodology to examine the Qur’an, is

counterproductive with Muslims, and blindly empowering to evangelical Christians, for the

purposes of finding Jesus in the Qur’an. Muslims see the Qur’an as being independent and

transcendent, suprahistorical in nature, and therefore not subject to the superfluous study of

its historical context. (75) The author closes the chapter by contrasting the New Hermeneutic

with that of proof-texting, stating that whereas some Muslims may join Cragg in his quest, he

hopes that evangelicals will not.

In chapter seven, Schlorff critiques the *dynamic equivalence* approach of planting an

Islamicized church in an Islamic culture and the key influence of Charles Kraft in this vein

beginning in the 1970’s. At issue was whether a Muslim people group should move toward Jesus

within the context of a ‘Muslim church’ that remains within Islam mosque life, or, should

Muslims comprise new churches primarily reflecting Muslim *cultural* orientation, yet be outside

the mainstream of Islamic mosque life. Evangelicals seemed to be drawn more to the first

variant. Schlorff presciently states “no one has bothered to explain how a movement to Christ

that remains within Islam (a Muslim church?) differs from a church of Muslim cultural

orientation.” (81) Schlorff closes the chapter by reviewing three theories that lie behind the

dynamic equivalence model (extractionism, neutrality vehicle, Muslim forms with Christian

meaning) and the role of the EMQ debate over Islamicized contextualization triggered first by

Phil Parshall’s articles, and then continued by John Travis’ C-spectrum model for defining six

types of contextualized Christ-centered communities of faith among Muslims.

Schlorff begins the third part of his text by focusing on the object of Christian mission to

Muslims in chapter eight, stating “the fundamental fact to keep in mind about Islam then, is

that it is not just a religion but is also, and above all, a political ideology.” (97) On this basis, he

argues that the *Kingdom of God* and its ramifications must be central in evangelism to Muslims,

in order to overcome distortions within Islam and false teaching and political fallacies present

within the Qur’an. In chapter nine, the author posits the need for a biblical approach for a proper

theology of religions, with the necessary universal components for that, so as to approach Islam

and Muslims correctly and effectively. He also emphasizes the crucial importance of Galatians

4:21-31 (and its Genesis antecedent) as the basis for a biblical, theological evaluation of Islam.

Schlorff then offers thoughts in chapter ten regarding the proper contextual starting point

for taking the gospel to Muslims: the Christian scriptures, not the Qur’an and Islamic receptor

culture, stating “the fundamental problem with using the religious thought of a culture as

theological starting point is that it fails to take into account the devastating effects of repression

and substitution on that culture.” (122) Schlorff’s main point in chapter eleven comes as the

answer to his question “what hermeneutical method is most appropriate for interpreting the

biblical message to Muslims?” (124) as he shows that a synthetic approach (e.g., proof-texting, which is one-way synthesis, or the New Hermeneutic, which is two-way synthesis) cuts the text off from its context, cuts the text off from its original meaning, and introduces an authority conflict into new believers and young churches. His own hermeneutic is based on analysis of the original language to find textual meaning, discerning interpretation based on the believing community’s presuppositions, and interpretation based in the believing community of each respective holy book. The author concludes his book in chapter twelve with his own approach to hermeneutical method he calls ‘the betrothal model’ (141) based on 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, in which a disciple-making church planter ‘betroths’ the new believers and church to Jesus. This model allows Muslim believers and churches to remain within their cultural contexts rather than taking a dynamic equivalence approach that does not contain adequate safeguards for

contextualization, nor addresses the danger of extractionism as a justification for that model.

**Evaluation**

Schlorff’s text stands in a class by itself because of its clear purpose: to address, to

critique, and to recommend biblically-authentic and biblically-contextualized approaches for

connecting the good news of Jesus and His kingdom to Muslims: polemical, dislodgment,

common ground, actualization (completion), or regeneration? Schlorff also analyzes the worldview of Islam and the subsequent biblical steps necessary, in light of that analysis, to approach Muslims with the gospel. He also reviews the possibility of finding anything redeemable or bridge-worthy missiologically within Islam for Christian mission purposes.

Schlorff engages a useful grid in chapter two when evaluating each twentieth-century model for connecting with Muslims. This rubric aids us in evaluating the objective of mission, theology of the non-Christian religion, contextual approach taken, hermeneutic used, church-starting strategy, strengths of the model, weaknesses of the model, and the nature of the model’s contemporary existence. This matrix is useful not only for Islam, but also for all world religions.

Schlorff displays obvious unease in how the Qur’an, Muslims, and the entire system of Islam

dilute the Bible’s authority and claims for itself because of importation of biblical vocabulary

and concepts into the Qur’an and subsequent Arabicizing and Islamicizing of them, stating

Is it not interesting, then, that the Christian community continues to use the phonetically

unchanged terms *tauraah* and *injil*, even thought they have undergone such substantial

connotative change in the Islamic context, while avoiding the form *zabuur* that is unique to

the Qur’an? (40)

This unease on the author’s part forms much of the basis for his serious concerns about

substantial use of the Qur’an as a theological launching point for evangelistic endeavors with

Muslims. His unease is to be commended. Schlorff references Arab Christians’ resistance to

Qur’anic language in evangelistic encounters with Muslims as another red-flag reason for

Western missionaries and missiologists to be overly cautious in such actions.

This writer is particularly thankful that the author included a helpful appendix that unpacks

his ‘betrothal model’ and puts meat on the bones of the skeleton he initially constructed in

chapter twelve, in which he briefly summarized the model via statements regarding the objective

of mission in Islamic culture, a theological evaluation of Islam, a cultural/theological starting

point, a cross-cultural hermeneutical method, and a church strategy. The model makes much

more sense having read the appendix.

An aspect missing from the book is an overarching review of theological and missiological models to Muslims within the context of history from the rise of Islam through the Enlightenment period. It is widely known that the Reformers did not make a large emphasis upon mission, especially within the early part of that historical period; nonetheless, there are strands of outreach to Muslims during that time period that Schlorff might have included.

**Conclusion**

Schlorff’s text offers fair critiques of multiple models while adroitly building the case for his

‘betrothal model’. It is unfortunate that this writer came to know of Schlorff’s contributions only

after nearly seventeen years of mission service among Muslims, though he had been exposed

early on in mission service to contributions from Phil Parshall, Ebbie Smith, Charles Kraft, and

many other authors. The book is a valuable resource that should be read by every missionary

who has or expects encounters with Muslims. Readers will need to have a fairly high

competency level regarding the history of Islam, Qur’anic terminology, and the various schools

of contextualization, in order to understand fully the issues that Schlorff confronts, critiques, and

corrects in the continuing debate regarding gospel contextualization to Muslims.