

A THIRTY-YEAR REPORT OF SAATU'L ISLAH (THE REFORMATION HOUR) 1988

Saatu'l Islah, (the Reformation Hour), is a daily ministry of the Word of God beamed to the lands of the Middle East and North Africa. It is broadcast on the following international radio stations: ELWA of Monrovia, Liberia; TWR on Radio Monte Carlo in Monaco; TWR on radio Monte-Carlo in Cyprus; CBC of Nicosia, Cyprus; FEBA of the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean and WYFR of Okeechobee, Florida.

Historical Background

My father was a convert from the Greek Orthodox Church. He served as pastor and mission school principal in Seleucia where I was born; and later on, as pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Alexandretta, near Antioch, Syria. In 1939, our province was ceded to Turkey by the French government, which had sovereignty over Syria. We fled to Lebanon, the ancestral land of my mother. My education took place in British, French and Arabic schools.

In 1948, I received the call to the ministry after the events which surrounded the birth of the State of Israel. In September 1950, I enrolled at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, PA. While attending this school, I was introduced by a Reformed Presbyterian pastor in Ohio, to the Back to God Hour. Thus, the CRC, through the Back to God Hour, played a big role in my theological formation.

My assignment for summer work in 1951 and 1952 was in Winnipeg, Canada. There I met Shirley Winnifred Dann, who at the time was the secretary of Grant Dexter, the editor of the Winnipeg Free Press. In June 1953, we were married and left for the Middle East to begin mission work at the schools of the RPC in Latakia, Syria. Due to a coup in 1954, and the emergence of a leftist government, which banned the teaching of the Bible to Muslim students at the mission schools, my work came to an end. We returned to Canada in July 1955. We then became members of the Winnipeg CRC in 1957. Classis Minnesota South advised me to spend one year at Calvin Seminary in order to become eligible for a call in the CRC.

Our family of four moved to Grand Rapids in September 1957. While attending Calvin Seminary, a Sudan Interior Mission official approached me with the possibility of being involved in radio missions over their newly established radio station, ELWA in Monrovia, Liberia. After consulting with Rev. Henry Evenhouse and Rev. Peter Eldersveld, I met with the BTGH Board and was appointed to my present ministry in May 1958. Synod ratified this action of the Board after giving the delegates the opportunity to ask me about my missionary goals. I shared with them the following three-fold goal of the Arabic Broadcast which has never changed:

- The evangelization of the Arabic-speaking Muslims of the Middle East and North Africa.

- The reformation of the old Eastern churches.
- The assistance of the Evangelical churches.

In November 1958, we moved as a family to the Chicago area where we brought up our five sons and one daughter.

Theological Reflection on the Christian Mission to Muslims

Arabic radio missions are a specific manifestation of a larger missionary endeavor among Muslims. During the modern missionary era, work among Muslims began early in the 19th century when most of the lands of Islam were under Western colonial rule. However, Christian-Muslim encounter had occurred at the very dawn of the rise of Islam in the 7th century. In order to properly ground our radio work within the historic Christian tradition, we must take into account certain factors, which played a role in the rise of Islam. We may point to the divisions within the Eastern Church, the Byzantine domination of the Church, the neglect of the teachings of the Bible among the Christians of the Middle East, the failure to translate the Bible into the Arabic language, and the rivalry between the two superpowers of the day: Byzantium and Persia.

The Quran acknowledges the Messiah's virgin birth, but denies our Lord's sonship, deity, crucifixion and resurrection. Muhammad claimed to be the greatest and last of the emissaries of God to mankind. Within 100 years after his death in Medina (632 A.D.), the Arab Empire stretched from India to Spain!

Gradually, most of the conquered peoples of the Middle East Islamized and eventually Arabized. In North Africa, the church which had very close connections with Rome, disappeared completely. Islam became one of the most formidable foes of Christianity.

Throughout the 1400 years of the history of Islam, its followers have seldom had the opportunity to hear the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. Most of the Christian subjects of Islam had very little knowledge of the Bible, and their Christianity was filled with unbiblical traditions such as the veneration of Mary and the saints. The liturgies of their various churches remained in ancient languages, which had ceased to be living vehicles of communication.

It is to the credit of the pioneer Protestant missionaries that they translated the Bible into Arabic and other Islamic languages such as Turkish and Persian. They opened schools and hospitals and engaged in works of mercy during times of war. They were instrumental in organizing evangelical churches after their efforts to reform the old churches did not succeed.

Missionary Strategy of the Arabic Broadcast

Saatu'l Islah seeks to acquaint the Arabic-speaking listeners with the contents of the Word of God with the specific goal of emphasizing the redemptive mission of Jesus the

Messiah. While not engaging in any direct polemic against Islam, the broadcast messages take into account the Islamic misunderstanding of the person and work of our Savior.

This strategy is implemented in a variety of radio programs:

Sermon Program: This is a 30-minute program broadcast on Sundays over five of the radio stations. A 15-minute version is used over the Cyprus outlet of Radio Monte-Carlo. These messages are of an expository nature and have covered both OT and NT books. At present, I am about to finish a series on the Gospel according to John.

Bible Study: This is a Bible teaching ministry, which covers all the books of the NT. These 15-minute programs are aired Mondays to Fridays.

Bible Doctrine: This is a series of 72 fifteen-minute programs, which cover the Heidelberg Catechism and the Geneva Catechism of John Calvin. I have adapted it from the French book, *A L'Ecole de Dieu* by Dr. Pierre Marcel. It is an Arabized catechetical program in which I have substituted the Nicene Creed for the Apostles' Creed.

Biblical Studies: This consists of a series of 15-minute programs, which seek to elucidate some crucial doctrines, which are misunderstood by Muslims: the doctrine of Inspiration, the Atonement and the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Church History: A series of twenty 15-minute programs based on the book of B.K. Kuiper, *The Church in History*.

Reflections in Contemporary Life: A series of over 100 fifteen-minute programs, which deal with the rise of neo-paganism (secularism) and the Biblical answer. This is aimed at high school and university students and is broadcast on a weekly basis.

Questions of Listeners: We deal in this weekly 15-minute program with the questions received from our listeners dealing with Biblical, doctrinal and ethical subjects.

Listeners' Response

Needless to say, I regard my reading of the mail as one of the most important tasks of my ministry. It is in this way that I get to know my audience in a personal way and to judge the impact of the broadcasts over Arabs living in a vast territory covering thousands of miles.

Every listener receives an acknowledgement of his or her letter. We inform our listeners about the radio stations they can pick up in their specific area. We encourage them to listen to all the stations which cover their area. We maintain different schedules on these stations so that our listeners may hear a variety of programs per day. Only four times a year, all the radio stations broadcast the same program: Christmas, New Year, Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Literature

Our literature is available in two different forms: books and tracts. During the decades of the fifties, sixties and early seventies, our books (which number around 17) were allowed to enter most of the 20 Arab countries. Unfortunately, due to the rise of Islamic radicalism, it is very difficult to get our books into most of the Arab countries today. However, we do maintain contacts with our listeners through a systematic mailing of tracts with cover letters. Furthermore, we inform our listeners that we stand ready to mail them our books c/o friends or relatives who may happen to live in Europe.

The Future

The Islamic world will occupy the attention of the West during the remaining years of our century and on into the 21st century. Islamic radicalism will most likely increase before its utopian dreams are shattered. This will leave the Muslim masses suffering from a terrible vacuum. As we contemplate such a future, we should be very grateful for the tremendous opportunities that are open to us thanks to radio. We have now the ability to acquaint the followers of Islam with the contents of the gospel. The Back to God Hour, has been bringing the redeeming message of the Messiah to the Arabic section of the Muslim world for so many years. Our Reformed heritage equips us to do our work in a solidly Biblical manner. We leave the results with the Holy Spirit. I am convinced that thousands of Muslims today are not satisfied with their legalistic religion. It is a joy to read the testimonies of those who write about their trust in the Messiah of the Bible.

This year marks my thirtieth anniversary in radio missions. I have always been proud to be associated with an ecclesiastical organization, so that my entire ministry would remain within the proper context of apostolic missions. It is a wonderful privilege to be able to herald the glorious message of Jesus the Messiah in the most authentically Biblical way, according to the Reformed tradition.

Bassam M. Madany - 1988