

Opportunities for British Expatriates in the Middle East

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(undated)

Did you know that there are more Christians living in the Arabian Peninsula today than at any time in the whole history of the church? Before the rise of Islam in Arabia in the sixth century there were churches and congregations in Arabia. Today there are few church buildings but very many house groups. Did you know that the oil states are not all full of Arabs? They contain a fantastic mixture of peoples. Two out of every three people in Qatar are foreigners. Qatar has a population of about 50,000 Qataris. The foreign population includes over seventy thousand Pakistanis, several thousand Indians, Iranians and Westerners. Now more expatriate workers are coming from Korea, the Philippines and other parts of the Far East. In addition, there are Arabs from other parts of the Middle East.

The God of History – the God of Oil

There is one simple reason which accounts for these facts: OIL. Qatar, for example, possesses three percent of the known oil resources of the world and is the second largest producer of natural gas. The Bible contains several examples of the movements of peoples which turned out to have great importance in the plan of God for history. The reasons for such movements of people are generally religious persecution, political domination or economic pressure and hardship. Joseph was sold as a slave and sent to Egypt, but God used this to “save life” – and to save the children of Israel during a time of extended famine. The exile of the Jews in Babylon occurred through war and political repression, but we can see God’s hand so clearly in it as we look at it in focus. When Jeremiah sent a letter by hand from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon, he was addressing a group dispersed and transported through the political oppression of King Nebuchadnezzar. The king had taken the religious leaders – priests and prophets - the royal family, the craftsmen and the smiths among others into exile. (Jeremiah 29 vv 1, 2). God was clearly behind the dispersion, as Jeremiah states four times in his letter (vv 4,7,14 & 20). The first verses say that the king took them into exile, and the verses referred to here state the God took them into exile.

In the inter-testament period economic pressures caused many Jews to spread around the Mediterranean. Alexandria in Egypt, for example, had many thousands of Jews who lived there from generation to generation. In the third century BC, Jewish parents became very concerned about the religious education of their children, who were forgetting their Hebrew. The community desired a “Today’s Greek Version” of the Old Testament Hebrew. So the famous Septuagint was made in everyday Greek. Certainly, this translation was made for that Jewish trading community which had moved to Egypt for practically the same reasons that people go to the Middle East today – for economic reasons.

About every dispersion, whether it occurs for political reasons like the Jewish exile or because of religious persecution as experienced by the early church scattered from Jerusalem (Acts 8 v1), or for economic reasons as today in the Middle East, we have to ask several questions. Is it man's work, or God's, or both? What are the sovereign purposes of God in allowing this movement of peoples? With the perspective of history we can usually see God's greater purposes. The Septuagint was a great benefit for the people who first used it, but we now see how it was a preparation for the New Testament period a couple of centuries later. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Paul and Peter and the other writers of the New Testament were able to quote from the ready-made translation of the Old Testament when they wrote their New Testament gospels and letters in everyday Greek. The parents in Alexandria could never have foreseen what a contribution they were making.

So today arises the question as to what are God's purposes in allowing more Christians to live in the Arabian Peninsula than at any time in history since the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we look at the countries of the Middle East we see that there is no national church in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia or Libya. How will churches be planted in these lands? Probably it will be through believers from other lands whom God sends there. Christians from UK who have a conviction that Muslims can come to Christ, spiritually alive Korean construction workers who together with their home churches are praying for a harvest, Arab doctors and teachers from Lebanon and Egypt who have a personal faith and calling to share Christ – these are the people God may use. Where God's people are, His Spirit is present. He can accomplish His purposes if His people are willing in the day of His powers. We have entered an area in which the good news can only be spread by the person in secular employment. The great opportunity of the Christian church arises out of the potential impact of such a large membership in lands which until now have not had a significant Christian presence in modern times.

Openings

Among the skilled and the experts what are the opportunities for the British UCCF graduate in countries like Qatar, the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Libya? What are the possibilities in Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan?

Christian Institutions

There are still several well-established and highly reputable schools in the Middle East which seek some British personnel, especially in Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

From Casablanca to Cairo, and from Beirut to Bahrain, there is a demand for those qualified to teach English as a foreign language. At the present moment graduates with a one-year qualification in TEFL can obtain posts in some cities. The requirements are gradually increasing. As countries develop in their

educational systems and in other ways, the standard and qualifications required from expatriates increases. Soon a BA or MA in TEFL will be essential in most places. However, whenever new universities and colleges are opened, those available at that strategic time can often find appointments even if they are not full qualified. The field of teaching English as a foreign language is perhaps the most comprehensive single area of scope which is likely to last longest in the Middle East.

Government Schools

In a number of Arab countries there are opportunities for teachers of various subjects to secure appointments, especially in Egypt and North Africa. The pay is likely to be low. For those who secure appointment as teachers in the oil states, the remuneration will be high.

Universities

There is a great variety of openings in both the old and the new universities of the Middle East and North Africa for the well qualified graduate. Examples of old universities in which the medium of instruction is English are the American University of Beirut, the Beirut University College and the American University of Cairo. New universities have been established in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (in Al Ain and Abu Dhabi). New faculties are still being added in these two universities. Another new university for the Gulf region is to be established in Bahrain. Sometimes there are English Language Centres attached to universities, as for example the English Language Centres attached to the UAE university in Al Ain. In Libya and Algeria new universities are developing and, of course, in Saudi Arabia which in one generation is moving to almost total literacy.

All these appointments in education, whether in school, university, language centre or in teaching English as a foreign language, are suitable for those who wish to spend two or three years in the East as well as for those who wish to stay longer.

Chaplaincies

The influx of Christians from East and West into the Arab oil lands means that churches should be interested in

- a. the pastoral care of Christians
- b. the relationships of Christian groups to each other
- c. the relationship of host and expatriate communities
- d. outreach in evangelism among expatriates
- e. outreach in evangelism among nationals.

Without a deliberate and determined policy, it is likely that only the first two will be catered for. The existing chaplaincies are largely inadequate to cover the need. One hopes that more chaplaincies will be created and existing ones more fully manned, perhaps by teams rather than by a lone worker. Devout Muslims and religious governments are likely to see the importance of Christian churches providing pastoral care, especially when Westerners so often flagrantly break moral and religious standards by drinking, immorality and immodest behaviour.

Such governments are likely to respond positively to requests for more pastoral oversight. Some new chaplaincies have been established already.

It is well to remember the types of chaplaincies in existence:

- a. Denominational Chaplaincies
The Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf of the *Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East* has chaplaincies in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Bahrain, Kuwait and Muscat. The Diocese of Egypt of the same church has chaplaincies in Ethiopia, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria, as well as in Egypt. The *Southern Baptists* have chaplaincies in Tripoli (Libya) and in Jeddah.
- b. Oil Company Chaplaincies
Some oil companies have for many years allowed and sometimes supported financially the work of chaplains. ARAMCO in Saudi Arabia recognises five protestant chaplains.
- c. There are UK and USA naval, army and air force chaplains in the area from time to time. Also, the *Missions to Seamen* supports chaplains in Port Said and in the Gulf.
- d. A fourth type of chaplaincy is that created for the international English-speaking congregations from various Protestant traditions in places like Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Muscat, Salalah, Kuwait etc.

Chaplains are likely to have a more effective ministry if they have had some previous experience in cross-cultural communication and if they have some knowledge of Islam. There are a considerable number of former missionaries – many of whom are ordained or could be ordained – who for family or other reasons left an effective ministry abroad to return home. After several years at home some of them might now be willing and free to take a two or three years' chaplaincy in an oil state. A list could be compiled of such persons belonging to various churches and missions, and openings brought to their attention.

The importance of chaplaincies should be fully grasped. Manned by the right people, they can be the means of helping others to develop their potential for ministry and outreach. Lay initiative, especially in starting and running house groups in the Middle East is outstanding. This initiative needs further encouragement. It does not mean that there is no need for clergy. The relationship of laity and clergy has been well described by Dr. F D Coggan (now Lord Coggan), the former Archbishop of Canterbury, in his sermon at his enthronement on 24th January 1974. He was referring primarily to the needs of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion, but what he said applies to all churches: *"Why do I on such an occasion fasten on the need for recruits for the ordained ministry? I do so precisely because I believe in the ministry of the laity. And if that sounds paradoxical or even contradictory, I can only say that the main work of Christ's church will be done by the witness of the faithful laity. But if, however, that witness is to be intelligent and infectious, it will demand an adequate supply of full-time, well-equipped, highly qualified clergy whose primary task will be to train the front-line troops for their warfare."* A shortage of clergy for some of the most problematic, traumatic and challenging situation of the century is tragic. A laity not reaching its potential withholds to some degree the healing

and reconciling power of Christ where it is most needed. Clergy and laity together are debtors to all men. (Romans 1 v.14)

Business

Business and commerce provide many opportunities for qualified personnel. Some can offer consultancy services. Oil companies employ a wide range of professional people including accountants, medical personnel, architects, lawyers; as well as those whom one would most naturally associate with oil production.

Engineering

Most of the oil countries have used some of the profits from oil to build new roads, airports, industrial towns and complexes. New radio stations, satellite installations and other communication networks are all part of the infrastructure. Almost every conceivable type of expertise and skill is required and desired in building new cities in ancient deserts. Agriculture figures quite high in the five year plan priorities of most of these nations. Sweet water has become as valuable as oil and desalination plants have been built. However, more research and experiment are needed to deal with the whole problem.

Some sources of information for job opportunities

- a. professional journals eg the British Medical Journal, the Nursing Times, the Times Educational Supplement.
- b. Embassies of the relevant countries
- c. Firms working in the relevant countries eg Taylor Woodrow, Mothercat, etc.
- d. The Intercontinental Church Society (formerly the Commonwealth and Continental Society) – for details of some chaplaincies.
- e. Overseas Information Service Bulletin obtainable from the UCCF
- f. IVCF (USA) Overseas Counselling Service. Their information is computerised. Much of it would apply to Britishers as well as to North Americans.
- g. Personal contacts
- h. Christians Abroad – an agency based in London.

Counting the Cost

Christian missions. Though small, were represented in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and several other areas before the discovery of oil, and they have a credibility of their own and a reputation for disinterested service and compassion. The government medical services in Kuwait soon became so comprehensive and highly developed that the mission hospital of the Reformed Church of America could not compete, and so it closed. In Oman the two mission hospitals opted to become part of the national health services of the country and the Mission still contributes personnel to the health services. In UAE and Bahrain there are some Christian medical institutions, but it may well be that most Christian service and

witness will not be through missions for the reasons I have described, or because the restrictions are so great. In several of the countries we are considering, missions as we have known them are simply not allowed. Those who work outside traditional mission structures and fellowships need to count the cost, take note of the difficulties, and make adequate preparations. Often lines between foreigners and nationals are hardened by legal enactments relating to citizenship, housing and education. Expatriates are invited and authorised to work simply because of what they can offer in manpower and skill. The inducement is high pay. The whole arrangement promises to become entirely a financial matter. Those who have philanthropic or religious motives come under question. Materialistic approaches alienate national groups from one another, and possible motives other than financial are generally excluded.

Once I met an Arab engineer in a Gulf State. When he discovered that his firm was involved in exorbitant exploitation of labour, his Christian conscience pricked him and he resigned and found a job with another firm. Gradually he was again faced with the same problem, so now he is praying about starting his own company, in which he will have control in these areas. Some agents sell labour for more than twenty times what they pay for it. This is part of the oil slave trade, where profit is the prime consideration and the unskilled labourer from Pakistan or the Philippines is inadequately recompensed for his hard slog and can be rapidly dismissed as ever cheaper labour becomes available from countries further east. To cope with such materialism and other challenges, you may need to think through such ethical questions before you arrive.

Your testing may be in another area. You may need to develop or acquire some of the following qualities (quoted from the IFES Information Sheet on the Middle East and North America):

- discretion and tact – for situations which are politically sensitive.
- a willingness to enter sympathetically into the religion and culture of Islam.
- determination not to lose sight of spiritual goals when so much of your time and energy are consumed with the business of living, with all its frustrations (and pleasures).
- inner spiritual resources to accept loneliness - so that you can survive (like a camel) between one oasis and the next.
- patience and realism which will help you not to be looking for immediate “results” and “successes”.
- a willingness to change your life-style, and to think through your own faith in relation to Islamic theology, and to learn some Arabic.

You need to believe that Muslims can come to Christ and find new life in Him. I once met a hydrologist working in the Arabian Peninsula – a UCCF graduate – who did not believe that Muslims could come to Christ. Granted that there was little evidence of Muslims coming to Christ in the country in which he worked – perhaps 40 Believers in a country of three-quarters of a million.

You may not find a church of your own denomination or a large number of Christians from your own country. However, you are sure to find Christians from many different countries. You may need to enlist the prayer backing of your

home church and other friends before you go abroad, and to keep them informed while you are abroad. You need to be willing to accept the political, social and religious restrictions in certain countries (eg women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia, Sunday is generally a full working day, Friday is the day off). Sometimes places of work and residence are very isolated from those of other communities and enterprises. In selecting a job you need to consider how much contact this particular job will give you with nationals and with Muslims from other lands.

Above all, you need to know the will of God for you. The experience of living abroad may change you. You may become a different person. Certainly you will not remain the same. You will share the unsearchable riches of Christ, but you will be enriched by other cultures and their peoples.