

The Evangelical Alliance Conference, High Wycombe
6th-9th January, 1976

Christianity and the World of Islam Today

Paper-Future Strategy-Vivienne Stacey -1st January, 1976

Christian Strategy is to know the will of God and to do it. This applies to individuals, as well as to Churches and fellowships; it applies to today as well as to tomorrow. Nothing of itself is strategic – neither the towns, not the villages, neither the students, nor the newly literate, neither leadership training nor radio evangelism. Strategy can be considered in abstract, but Christian strategy essentially concerns something happening now, somewhere, to people. Christ was the first strategist of the Way. He was born at a particular place, at a particular time, and He influenced particular people. Herod recognized something of the national strategic significance of Christ's birth and tried to liquidate Him. Pilate, years later, failed to realize the universal strategic significance of Christ's life and washed his hands and tried to maintain neutrality.

Christ knew the will of God and did it, therefore remaining the perfect strategist. In this, as in everything else, He is our example. He died, but He ensured that His redemptive purposes would be fulfilled. He gave His followers the Holy Spirit. He founded the Church. Today we can look at God's world horizontally, as it were, and see the geographical frontiers of the nations; we can see religious frontiers where systems of thought encounter each other; we can attempt to assess the situation. In a way we can look back vertically through the centuries, and by our study of the Bible and of history we can compare Paul's methods with other people's methods and with our own. We can list our present resources and try to estimate our potential. When we have looked intelligently at the past and the present, we are in danger of planning our future strategy. Our only hope and the world's only hope is for us to look to God. He is the only One who knows the strategy and has the resources to put it into action. He is sovereign.

It is fashionable to have a programme and to know how to implement it. As Christians we have a programme, but we do not know who to implement it. Our programme is to be God's witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the world (Acts 1:8). How should we implement this programme?

Every encounter between a Christian and a non Christian or between a Church and those outside it is a frontier situation. Every Christian is a frontier pioneer. There have been similar encounters through the days and through the centuries, but never the same encounter. We can study the strategy of past encounters by reading the writings of theologians, historians and scholars, and it is the duty of some to do this. We can sit at the feet of a Gamaliel or admire the mobility and success of the Apostle Paul, but in the last resort we have to confess that the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man. Some strategists argue that we should engage more in institutional work. Others argue that we should be far more mobile. I would like to argue that way, but in the last analysis neither our mobility or our immobility is anything. God has given us His Holy

spirit that we may know the mind of Christ as individuals and in the fellowship of His Church for the fulfillment of His will. He has also given us the Scriptures. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches" and he will know the strategy of God. His eyes will be opened to see that "there is a purpose and an order and an end in what often seems the blind tumults of the nations". (Westcott: The Historic Faith, P.37). In changing world affairs he may recognize the opening of new highways for witness to the love of God in Christ.

We read in 1 Chronicles 12:32 that the children of Issachar were men who "had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do." This implies an effort to see what God is doing in this world. Clearly He has a time programme. In the fullness of time Christ was born (Galatians 4:40, in due time He died for the ungodly (Romans 5:6) and in the dispensation of the fullness of times He will gather together in one all things in Christ (Ephesians 1:10). There seems never to have been an adequate Christian answer to Islam. According to the International Congress on Worldwide Evangelisation, Lausanne, July, 1974, and also according to Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi at the Muslim Foreign Ministers Conference in Jeddah in July, 1975 there are over 600 million Muslims in the world today. (Mr. Kaddoumi was the representative of "Palestine".) Apart from a movement into the church in Spain in the thirteenth century and large movements in Indonesia in our time there have been no large responses to the Christian message in the Muslim world. It would seem logical and surely for the glory of God and the vindication of His Son that many Muslims should find Christ before history reaches its consummation in Christ. Let us therefore try to see what God is permitting in the Muslim world and what He is actively doing through His church.

Much as we can praise God for what He is doing in Indonesia we have in the end to look closely at the centre of the Islamic world remembering that Arabic is the language of the Qur'an. The principal nations involved would seem to be Saudi Arabia the religious centre of Islam, protector of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, Egypt the intellectual centre, Pakistan the political expression of Islam and Libya the revival centre. Let us look at the Muslim build-up which is occurring before our eyes:

There is a build-up politically: The Islamic summit conference was held in Lahore, Pakistan in February, 1974. Thirty-seven countries were represented. An article by Mohsin Ali in the Pakistan Times of 1st March, 1974 describes the six major achievements of this Muslim summit. Mohsin Ali writes "the Declaration of Lahore inevitably invites comparison with the Declaration of Rabat issued "on September 25th, 1969, after the first Islamic summit. In the Moroccan capital, 24 Muslim states, "and Jerusalem had contented themselves with a tame appeal to the world to ensure Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories. At Lahore the Conference on the other hand has declared that "full and effective support should be given to the Arab countries to recover, by all means available, all their occupied lands". Further, in a separate resolution, the member States of the Islamic Conference organization have pledged "to take action in all fields to force immediate and unconditional Israeli withdrawal". In the Declaration of Lahore, the Islamic summit for the first time, recognizes the Palestine Liberation Organisation headed by Mr. Yasser Arafat as the "sole legitimate

representative of the Palestine nation” and calls for “the restitution of their full national rights including their right to return to their homeland and to self-determination”... At Lahore, the Summit, taking note of the world economic situation and the forceful pleas for “backing unity with dollars” made by the Chairman of the Conference and the Presidents of Algeria and Libya, set up an eight-member experts committee (Algeria, Egypt, Kuwait, Libya, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Senegal and the United Arab Emirates) to devise ways and means for eradicating poverty, disease and ignorance from member-states, ending exploitation from abroad, regulating the terms of trade, ensuring full control over their natural resources, fighting inflation and for mutual economic co-operation and strengthening of their solidarity... The Lahore summit’s fourth major departure from the first Summit at Rabat is in its close identification with the African struggle for emancipation. Hailing the “constructive initiatives” of the African states in support of the Arab cause and in severing diplomatic relations with Israel, the Second Summit urged member states to pledge all-out support to the African struggle against colonialism and racist regimes particularly in Rhodesia, South Africa and in the Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique... The fifth major achievement of the Lahore Summit is the opportunity it afforded on King, one Sultan, three Amirs, 13 Presidents and six Prime Ministers from 37 states of the world of Islam to come together on a common platform, know one another personally and become acquainted with the problems, stirrings and aspirations of different parts of the world of Islam from the sands of the Sahara to the rain-forests of Malaysia... The sixth (achievement) is the reconciliation between Pakistan and Bangladesh.”

Another illustration of the political coming together of Muslim nations is the conference of forty foreign ministers of Muslim lands held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia in July, 1975. The Times editorial for 17th July, 1975 is headed ‘Foolish and Damaging’ and starts “It would be interesting to know whether anyone among the Islamic foreign ministers meeting in Jeddah yesterday believed he was doing something useful in voting for the resolution calling for the expulsion of Israel from the United Nations.” It is interesting that the Organization of African Unity meeting a few days later and including 19 Muslim nations did not endorse this unanimous resolution. To understand the resolution of these 40 presumably intelligent foreign ministers one has to study the Arab Israel question and to appreciate the emotion behind the view of Jerusalem as the third holy city of the Muslim world. One of King Faisal’s ambitions was to pray in Jerusalem before he died. Secondly there is a build-up economically in the Muslim world. The radio, T\V. and press focus enough on the oil question so one need say little here. In the Middle East in 1935 the oil production was 11.49 million long tones of oil out of a total world production of 225 million long tones. In 1965 the Middle East production was 415.2 long tones out of a total world supply of 1549 million. In 1975 over a third of the world oil was produced in the Muslim lands of the Middle East. This volume of wealth is rapidly transforming the desert lands. Saudi Arabia plans to spend \$142 billion (Pounds 67,000million) on her next five year plan 1976-1980. The implementation of this calls for much skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour, much of which must come from other lands. Saudi Arabia must have been surprised by the results of its first ever census held in September 1974. The figures show a total population 5.9 million. The U. N.

estimates had been over 8 million. Saudi Arabia's crisis of manpower is therefore heightened.

Thirdly, there is a build-up religiously in the Muslim world. Islam is a missionary religion. Recently the Saudi Arabian Government offered the Government of Pakistan 12 million dollars for the building of a mosque in Islamabad. I have seen a mosque outside Beirut built by donations from Muslims in Kuwait. Later this year we will see the opening of the new Mosque in Regents' Park, London. I have personally met Muslim missionaries – a Saudi Arabian revival team in Pakistan, Jama'at –e- Islam literature distributors in Murree, Pakistan. The text of the World Muslim Organisation Conference held in Mecca 1974 is becoming widely known with its analysis of Christian missionary strategy and its outlining of Muslim objectives.

Lastly, there is in our time a cultural and educational build-up in the Muslim world as evidenced by the World of Islam Festival to be held in U.K., based in London from April to June of this year. Let me quote the brochure:

“The World of Islam Festival will reflect the splendor of this civilization and encourage a new, informed understanding of Islam for both laymen and scholars. The sponsors, that is The World of Islam Festival Trust and its organization, are entirely non-political. Their concern is the presentation of the scholarly, cultural and artistic achievement inspired by Islam. The realization of the Festival is based on the support of Islamic countries. The scope of the Festival is immense. It is an attempt to put the whole culture of Islam into perspective. Major institutions and cultural organizations, including the Arts Council and the British Museum, have joined together with the World of Islam Festival to achieve this. In addition to the exhibitions programme, the Festival will incorporate music, performing arts, books and symposia. The South Bank Auditoria will host performances of classical music and the Albert Hall, a three-day festival of folk music and dancing. The BBC and television networks throughout the world intend to show six films made by the Trust. A series of books on Islamic subjects will be published and a programme set up for academic institutions and schools.”

Let me conclude this brief analysis of the Muslim build-up and turn from what God is permitting to what He is positively doing in our time. I would be scriptural to assume that God the Sovereign Lord of history is fulfilling His strategy – a dynamic activity of His Spirit in and through the body of Christ for the revealing of the glory of the Trinity-Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For this strategy the main tools of the people of God who are members of the body of Christ are prayer and the Word of God. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” 2 Corinthians 10:4. See also Ephesians 6:10-18. There are at least three areas of divine strategy to which we must pay great attention:

Firstly the Migrations of peoples. We have already considered this to some extent in the papers by Clive Sinclair and myself on Migrations. It is reasonable not only to consider the present migrations but to study future trends and possibilities in the light of national

development plans and political upheavals. Some newly developing countries will now be open to all the influences of the modern world and the development plans will call for skilled and semi-skilled help from many nations – there will therefore be a percentage of Christians included. It is interesting to note from the Church of England Newspaper (1st August 1975) that the reorganization of the Anglican Church in the Middle East occurs on 6th January 1976. It is reorganized into four dioceses – Jerusalem, Iran, Egypt, Cyprus and the Gulf – forming the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East. The report states that “The Gulf States have a large and increasing expatriate population and there are now more Anglicans located there than in the other three dioceses of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East. According to the Bishop of Cyprus and the Gulf the chaplaincies are barely adequate to cover the need, but in young, ecumenical and forward looking communities the work is exciting and dynamic.”

Secondly the revival of religion. My reading of Joel 2:28-32 is that before the consummation of all things the world situation will get worse but even so there will be significant outpourings of God’s spirit. Revival could affect the center lands of Islam in two streams:

a) Revival in the ancient churches would have profound effect. There is some evidence of this in the Coptic Church in Egypt. Most of the ancient churches in the Middle East were there before the rise of Islam. As Bishop French pointed out in the last century they are like dry river beds where the streams of living water can flow again. Wherever people are constantly checking their traditions, their lives and their teaching by the Bible revival situations occur.

b) Revival of the churches of the subcontinent. It is interesting that without previous consultation Mr. DJ. Richard, an Indian speaker at the Centenary Keswick Convention General Missionary Meeting and I representing Pakistan and the Muslim world, stressed the need for revival and conviction that God would bring it. The revival streams from India and Pakistan would affect the dispersion communities in the gulf areas. Consider the possible mingling of revival streams – those from the ancient churches and those from the sub continent in say Libya where there are 35,000 Egyptian Copts and 22,000 Pakistani – some hundreds of whom are Christian. Anyone wishing to consult a brief handbook on the ancient churches should read Rediscovering Christianity Where it Began – a survey of Contemporary Churches in the Middle East and Ethiopia – by Norman A. Horner. 1974 Near East Council of Churches.

Thirdly, the total mobilization of Christian resources. We are indebted to L. Fenton in his book “Myths about Missions” published in 1974 by IVP, for his clear statement about missions that it is a myth that a few go, that some give and all pray. He restates the Biblical position that all go, all give and all pray. We are all Christian disciples of all nations called to make disciples of all nations. Matthew 28:19 and 20. We need to be fully delivered from that myth. Missions have yet completely to die to themselves – why should they draw the focus of prayer and advocate their cause without due recognition of those other disciples of Christ who also go at His bidding and need even more prayer support? Let us state this categorically – all disciples are to make disciples. There is no

special aura round missions – they are one instrument. Christianity is a “going religion”. We cross a street in London and we may be crossing a culture at the same time. As the Bishop of Winchester said at Keswick in July 1975 “The great call is the call to availability – availability to the Holy Spirit – a call not to a locality, but to mobility. We have put far too much romantic emphasis on geography...I was hooked on geography and God was interested in availability.” Disciples to make disciples – this is total mobilization – no leaving it to the clergy- no leaving it to the missionary – no closed lands. I know of no closed land – no land to quote Harvie M. Conn’s sermon on Acts 1:8 entitled “A World to Win.” Talking of Witnessing Worldwide he says “This dynamic witness of the Spirit is worldwide in extent, stretching to the farthest bounds of the known world. Instead of a Kingdom restricted to the nation of Israel (Acts 1:6), the borders of the Kingdom of God are to expand past Jerusalem ‘to the ends of the earth’. The theme is world evangelism by dispersion journey...Jesus’ ministry is fulfilled in journeying, the pilgrim Son of God proclaiming the gospel to the Jews but with His face set to Jerusalem and the cross. Acts continues that journeying theme of the Gospel. The risen Jesus, now speaking and acting through the Holy Spirit in the life of this pilgrim people, continues to journey...the gospel itself receives a new name that indicates its travelling nature – “The Way”...this is Luke’s unique designation for early Christianity, journey language to describe a journey gospel.” Let us agree that there be a total mobilization of Christian resources – but where does strategy come in? We are always crossing new frontiers and it would be presumptuous of me to outline a strategy for the Muslim world today. I write this paper on the eve of our Conference – God the Holy Spirit will be revealing, and teaching us all during the conference and when we come to our strategy session we can expect new insights and concerns. We must come with all the options open. However, everything is not new. We must at least plead for:

1. A greater co-ordination between Christian radio and T.V. programmes and Christian publishing houses. Do they complement and support each other?
2. A new look at literature to reach the masses. See Middle East publications. We must not allow our natural conservatism to prejudice our consideration or new visions and methods.
3. Wider circulation of the Scriptures in language meaningful to the Muslim. We must examine the implications for the Muslim world of the 14% cut in the British and Foreign Bible Society funds.
4. A preparation for revival by the spreading of materials and the preparation of further materials. One test of real prayer for revival is whether in faith we are actively preparing for it and for the consolidation of the church. One lesson from the 1904 revival in the Punjab is that no-one was really prepared for it and so some of its benefits were lost.
5. An examination of new ways to make disciples from the Muslim communities- family to family evangelism – Christian communes and communities which converted Muslims can join and find true brotherhood and fellowship in what is an extended Christian family situation.

It is for this conference to add to this list.

However, I venture in concluding to mention what I consider the most strategic area of all – that of leadership training. Various sorts of training is given and we rejoice in this but I personally conclude after 21 years in the Muslim world spent mainly in Pakistan but with opportunity for travels in 20 Muslim countries that here is the area of greatest weakness. I suggest:

1. More training in depth and more specific training for missionaries going to Muslim areas. A deep knowledge of the Scriptures is essential as Islam is a theologically orientated faith. A knowledge of Islam is needed but evangelism is caught rather than taught and so far more practical in service training is needed at home and abroad.,
2. More training for “seculars” going to Muslim countries. Why do “seculars” not train together and go together? I envisage teams of seculars so trained- some of whom can train others when they arrive in their place of work. No one attempts to climb Everest alone but sometimes a committed servant of Christ goes to one of the most difficult parts of the Muslim world with no real training in mountaineering. No wonder so many are discouraged or ineffective or both.

Could there not be at least one training center in U.K., one in USA, one in Africa (Nigeria?), one in the Middle East and one in the Far East where disciples of Christ – “seculars” and missionaries go for a short period of training which will involve some actual evangelism. (I do not envisage setting up new institutions but using existing ones).

I am working more and more on the principles that Rev. Fuad Accad so ably describes in his address at the Lausanne Congress. He spoke on the theme “God at Work in Circumstances: personal meetings (Acts 8:26-40). One should expect to meet key persons in key places at key times. How else can a comparatively few disciples reach the millions? I have reached the place in my own ministry when I not only expect God to lead me to key people but when I am trying to teach the principles of evangelism in action I expect God to demonstrate this to my companion also. The amazing thing is that the more one does this with God the more He answers.

The Muslim world therefore needs Christian disciples with a passion for Christ and for people – disciples whether missionary or secular who are available to the Holy Spirit, who are will-trained and yet always in training and who endeavour to train others. 2 Timothy 2:2 To my knowledge “seculars” for all their brains have not got together in a planned strategy. The mobilization has not been total because there have not been enough in-service trainers of others. “The unsearchable riches of Christ are greater riches” than the oil wealth. Let us keep on reconsidering the question of training so that we do not fail in the hour of greatest opportunity. For some of us our God is too small – He is after all the God of the impossible. We face the impossible and we face it now. All the odds are against us except that God is God. Winning the Muslim world for Christ is no more impossible than the Incarnation. Luke 1:36,37.