

BOOK REVIEW BY CALLUM JOHNSON

**FROM SEED TO FRUIT:
GLOBAL TRENDS, FRUITFUL PRACTICES AND
EMERGING ISSUES AMONG MUSLIMS**

BY J. DUDLEY WOODBERRY

(Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008)

God is doing exciting new things in bringing Muslims to faith in 'Isa al Masih. Looking at such a movement this book does what it says on the label - it is an exploration of trends around the world focused on Muslim people groups and how mission is engaging with those groups. It also looks at what mission practices have been fruitful, with respect to seeing the development of alive and growing churches in these Muslim contexts.

People from a number of organizations were asked to feedback their experiences in these areas and were then brought together to discuss such questions. The initial insights were explored by a broad group of workers in the consultation held in 2007, and then further analyzed in subsequent months and compiled in this volume. The book is split into four parts:

Part I Global Trends: Soils, Seed, Sowers and First Fruits

This first part has 6 chapters from different contributors looking at these Global trends.

Part II Fruitful Practices: Sowing, Watering, Gathering, Reproducing

The second part of 6 chapters looks at factors affecting church planting and identifies some important factors that have contributed to significant church growth.

Part III Emerging Issues in Fruitful Practices: Birds, Rocks, Sun, and Soil

The third part of 7 chapters looks at issues that need to be grappled with in a deeper way, exploring issues like identity, oral communities, dangers in funding, and folk Islam.

Part IV Emerging Issues in Global Trends: More Birds, Rocks, Sun, and Soil

This last section looks at issues dealing with fundamentalism, peacemaking and suffering.

The target readership for this book is practitioners involved in Muslim work and students of mission. In this, it is a valuable resource of ideas and approaches for people to look at and assess their context and approach. As a lecturer in mission, I am exceedingly grateful for this and would recommend all involved in Muslim outreach to read it and use it as a tool for reflection and assessment. But, as useful as it is, and as well intentioned as it is, there are some things about the book that don't sit comfortably with me.

1. Global Trends: 'One goal for many of us is to see every Muslim unreached people group (MUPG) equal to or greater than 100,000 in population engaged by church planters by the close of the year 2012.' This stated aim lies near the heart of the reason that the consultation was called, and a lot of energy is being focused that way. Leaders of mission agencies discussed how to meet these aims and wrestled with questions like what does it mean to call a people group engaged. However, to me this seems a slightly odd focus for strategy making. It seems driven by an eschatology that considers that Jesus won't come back until all nations/peoples have heard the gospel and as a strategy it risks pushing resources towards reaching smallish groups at the expense of larger groups and needs. For example, can we really call the Bengali Muslim population 'engaged' even though it has a thriving MBB movement, when the unreached numbers in that one community are so huge? Where, as a mission leader, should I aim to focus resources?

2. Church Planting: The aim of this book is to foster effective church planting. Now I'm all for that, and personally work towards it. But I also see mission as having a holistic basis that is all but ignored in these pages. I am one of the first to admit that I think my mission has lost a lot of its focus on church planting and needs to recapture it in many areas, but the role of holistic missional approaches should be part of our aims and strategy. Much more discussion is needed in this.

3. Fruitful Practices: As far they go, they are fine. However, some readers will be left wondering where most of the meat is. Few of the issues raised are explored in the sort of depth that I was anticipating and I would have liked to see thorough thinking around a lot of the issues.

I suppose that sums up my view of the book. Even allowing for a focus on church planting and a strategy aiming reaching all MUPGs, including the small ones, it is slightly unsatisfying. It is a good resource, but it could have been so much more.