

WHY IT'S STRATEGIC TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST TO CREATE JOBS

By Patrick Lai

"If we do not act now and take the Good News to the Muslim world, we can expect to send our sons with guns," I shared these words with our home church when we were first sent to work with Muslims in 1987. The world has changed in many ways the past two decades, especially spiritually. Doors that were closing to missionaries in the 1980's are now closed. If we believe that only God's truth can bring healing and peace to the Muslim world, what are we to do? We start with prayer, and while continuing to pray I suggest we reread James chapter 2. We must put our faith into action. "In what ways?" you ask. In a word, "jobs." But allow me to explain.

Ideas do not spread in vacuum, they need to be watered and fertilized and cared for. Young men of any race or religion, with time on their hands tend to get into trouble. Consider the facts: of the 90 million Arab youth today (between the ages of 15 and 24), 14 million are unemployed. In Indonesia, some areas have unemployment over 25%. "There's not enough jobs and not enough hope," Jordan's King Abdullah told the audience at the Davos Economic forum. During the past 20 years there have been 16,000 more patents registered for new inventions in South Korea alone, than all of the Arab world.

Thomas Friedman of the NY Times writes,

"The war of ideas among Muslims can only be fought and won by their own forces of moderation, and those forces can only emerge from a growing middle class with a sense of dignity and hope for the future. Young people who grow up in a context of real economic opportunity, basic rule of law and the right to speak and write what they please don't usually want to blow up the world. They want to be part of it."

There is a dire need to give Muslims an opportunity to get more than an Islamic education, but when the only school in your county is the religious school, where will you send your 6 year old to learn?

At a recent meeting I attended of 200 workers serving in the Muslim world, many workers were asking, "How can we move from a NGO model (giving help similar to regular missionary strategies), to creating jobs for the people we minister to?" Since the early 1800's, as missionaries began taking the Gospel to every country, in some places the Word flowed among the people like an overflowing river, whereas, in other places, especially the Muslim world, those rivers have been tightly dammed. We began to hit "walls" in some places. To overcome these barriers we brought forth many new strategies; focusing on family heads, prayer walking, power encounters and various types of contextualized approaches. Each resulted in some breakthroughs, but in the Muslim world most "walls" still held firm.

Prior to meeting peoples spiritual needs Jesus often fed and healed the people. It was a practical way of demonstrating He was truly seeking the well-being of the people. His care of bodily needs, opened hearts to spiritual needs. Some missionaries still emphasize providing food and medicine as a means of winning friends so as to share the Gospel. This is a good strategy, but as more and more Muslim countries are cancelling missionary visas, this is becoming a less and less workable strategy. One charity worker who provides food for several hundred hungry people each day told me, "My NGO is getting no where. Every day we feed the same people. We are helping people to survive but we are not providing a solution to their poverty. They are totally dependent on us. We need help creating jobs which will employ and empower the people to make their own choices." In addition, like most Westerners, Ms abhor being seen as charity cases. So how do we give them back their dignity? For starters we can help them provide for their families, in ways that are independent of us. That means, "jobs."

Jobs create wealth, wealth creates independence, independence creates choices. One of those choices will be Jesus. Right now the people have no choices and so Jesus is not on anyone's

radar as an option to be considered. How do we get Jesus on peoples' radar? Create choices. The solution begins with a job, not a hand out.

Many times since 9/11, people have questioned me: "Muslims are really hateful people aren't they?" I am usually quick to disagree. Muslims are not hateful, but many are angry. My experience reflects that Muslims are not angry at me, or America or Jesus. Rather they are angry because they live in some of the most repressive societies, with little chance of education or advancement, few opportunities for women and youth, and among the highest unemployment rates in the world. Bad contexts create an environment of hopelessness and humiliation. People without hope are impatient. (Job 6:11) And "hope deferred makes a heart sick." (Proverbs 13:12) Thus, Muslims are angry. And no matter how fluent our language is, this anger plugs their ears from hearing the Good News. No matter how contextualized our homes are, this anger shuts the door to intimate friendships on a spiritual level. In short, it is impossible for us to expect Muslims to come to Jesus without us first providing a solution to the most basic things that give people dignity and hope; that solution is not a hand-out, it's giving them a "job."

Tentmaking done right creates jobs and gives people both dignity and choices. Tentmaking is no longer an option for reaching Muslims; it is now a major option. Organizations who are talking of "holistic" ministries need to move beyond traditional "feed", "heal" and "preach" to the poor strategies which meet surface needs, to providing dignity and choices which meet longer term needs. Rather than creating systems which encourage dependence. We need to free people through the providing of jobs, so that they will be independent and enabled to make decisions for themselves. Missions need to work toward empowering people to think beyond their day to day needs to consider eternal opportunities.