PREFACE

The document which follows is not yet a 'book' in the truest form, but represented the results of my own work and research on tribes.   As I have continued to teach on this subject, some have seen the need to have this document made available more widely and that is why thetribeofchrist.org has been created.   I am under no delusions that the dissertation format makes for interesting reading and hope to someday soon have this information in a format which will be more accessible to a wider audience.   I especially want to thank G. for his encouragement and willingness to create a web site where more people can explore what it means to be a part of "The tribe of Christ". (June, 2012)

BETWEEN TRIBE AND CHURCH:

TRIBAL VALUES IN THE FUTURE OF JORDANIAN CHRISTIANITY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

McALLISTER

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To Wisaam

Without his persistence in making me his "uncle" and including me in his tribe, I

would never have seen the remarkable potential of tribe revealed in this study.

Though he went to be with the Lord at a young age, our family will always be grateful

for both Wisaam and his family, who have loved us, sacrificially served us, and

demonstrated for us the ability of tribes to include outsiders.

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INTRODUCTION

Ministry Issue Addressed

Through my many years of living and ministering alongside Arabs in Jordan, the powerful dynamic of tribes has been evident in almost every aspect of the life and work of the Church. These dynamics have helped a Christian church to survive for two millenniums; however, under the current pressures, the future of these Christian tribes is uncertain. A country where Jesus ministered and which had a significant Christian presence now has a Christian community representing no more than 2 percent of the population. The tribe, while providing an essential unifying value for those who are bound in a common lineage, can also provide a formidable challenge to those who want to see the Church increase to include people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds.

It became obvious to me that the tribal heritage of the Jordanian church is rooted in deep biblical traditions. Living in a culture with concepts of community that echo a biblical understanding of community, I became convinced that God has preserved in tribal traditions elements that are especially significant for breaking down barriers that currently prevent the Church from overflowing its boundaries. My academic research and interviews of Jordanian church leaders will show that there are cultural and theological aspects of tribe that can empower the Jordanian church to traverse religious boundaries that currently cripple her.

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Audience

This dissertation is, first of all, addressed to all who are a part of the church of Jordan and long to see the church of Jordan grow beyond its tribal and religious limitations. As the number of those from Jordanian Christian tribes decline, these leaders can benefit from looking at the Jordanian church community through a common Christian and Muslim tribal heritage–opening the way for growth.[1]

By extension, the other significant audience includes those from outside the Jordanian Christian communities who are being drawn to Christ. There is a growing community of young people showing up at the doors of churches, wanting to participate. In Jordan, the two major forms of identification for Jordanians are their tribal identity (often indicated by their family name) and a government issued ID card, which brands the religion of the barer for life. This identification makes it very difficult for new followers of Jesus to become a part of existing Christian communities (consisting of different Christian tribal families/clans). Those who are from Muslim tribes who convert to Christianity can face charges of apostasy, which can result in the loss of both a convert's wife and children, along with any family inheritance.[2] The church involved in baptizing or encouraging such a believer can also face serious repercussions from the government. The focus of this research is to explore ways that these new believers can become a part of a wider "tribe of Christ."

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[1] In Turkey several years ago, a denomination was established called the Istanbul Protestant Church Foundation. Led by Turks from a Muslim background, this church models the rise of a multi-ethnic church birthed in a country where ethnic Christianity has become demographically insignificant. In the future, Jordanian Christians with a larger understanding of the Christian tribe could be catalysts in establishing such new movements.

[2] There are many other consequences that such believers face—such as loss of work, shunning by their family and neighbors, threats, and beatings. Even churches and Christians who welcome such believers can be harassed, directly or indirectly, by members of the convert's tribe and through government pressure.

As can be seen, the stakes are high, and the loss is potentially great for each follower of Jesus coming from a non-Christian background since they virtually lose their own tribal support in a society that still requires tribal connections for many aspects of daily life. Culturally relevant efforts can make it possible for those from a Muslim tribal background to participate in the future of Christianity in the region. It is important that he/she be connected to the larger "tribe" of Arab believers. This research is seen as a vital first step in exploring ways in which such integration can be facilitated.

One reason culturally relevant evangelism efforts are seen as so important and urgent today is that, proportionally, those from Muslim tribes will make up an increasing percentage of the believers in Jesus in the Middle East. Many individuals from this background now plead for equal acceptance into the Church. This study will attempt to show ways that the local body of Christ can more effectively integrate with these new believers.

Stakeholders

Who are the real stakeholders in this project? It is believed that this project would benefit each of the following organizations and individuals:

1. local ministry leaders in the Middle East

2. groups working with religious freedom issues in the Middle East

3. pastors and leaders dealing with issues of "tribes" within a church context.

The value of this research is great, but the subject is very sensitive in a Muslim context, so no individuals or organizations will be specifically mentioned. As in all predominately Muslim societies, religious change is seen as a one way street—with Christians coming to Islam and no legal possibility of the inverse happening.

Change, however, is happening. According to some, millions of Muslims are coming to understand the claims of Jesus. Using an open internet and satellite television, formerly banned Christian messages can now enter almost every Muslim home.[3] Once exposed to the message of Christ, many find their way to the doorways of churches in the Arab world. Individuals, the Church, the Jordanian government, and foreign embassies[4] all strive to avoid nasty religious conflict when dealing with Muslims who want to follow Jesus. Though leaders are sometimes asked by the government to refuse Muslims from entering a church building,[5] the Church cannot be obedient to Christ and close its doors to those seeking fellowship, regardless of whether they are from a Christian or Muslim background. The Evangelicals have been especially singled out and challenged in Jordanian society because of their willingness to receive Muslims. The accusation is made that they are foreign-supported entities that are stirring up intercommunity dissension.[6]

All who lead in the context of this deep societal struggle are stakeholders in solutions that will allow the Church to expand its borders. By operating more effectively within the tribal dynamics of society, it is hoped that church leaders will have greater authority and freedom of operation.

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[3] Millions throughout the Arab world now watch television/internet programs such as those done by an Egyptian Coptic priest named Father Zacharia Butros. Comparisons between Islam and Christianity and Muhammad and Jesus are openly discussed. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhlJoAMujvw (accessed February 15, 2010).

[4] Through its congress-mandated Religious Freedom Report, the U.S. Embassy is actually charged with reporting these incidents.

[5] A key Jordanian church leader told me that, in an interview with the Jordanian Secret Police in 2009, he was told that if evangelical churches refused entry to Muslims who came to church, the government would leave these churches in peace.

[6] They are accused of creating *Fitna.* This word is a very strong word implying that they are traitors or betrayers of their own tribe.

The Background of the Project

It has been my growing conviction that effective ministry within a Jordanian context requires one to have an understanding of how tribes operate in the society. Churches in Jordan have been largely influenced by foreign leadership who have often ignored the importance of the tribal groupings. As one missionary once told me their church leadership had made a commitment that "tribes must be left at the doorway" on entry into the church building. Practically, I have come to see that this demand is not only impossible but a tragic mistake since it requires denying the core identity of the individual, the Church, and the society. This attitude has unfortunately resulted in a church where tribal realities exist and are of great importance, but they are, in essence, pushed underground. Arab Christianity has a rich history dating back to the day of Pentecost.[7] Their very Semitic and ancient way of viewing community through tribes need not be ignored. By not dealing with the reality of tribe, the Church can appear to be following a "de-Semitized" Jesus, further distancing Christ's message from the Arab people.[8]

Young men and women from non Christian tribes are now looking for churches who will allow them to participate. They have often face persecution from their own tribe and even governmental organizations and are looking for a community willing to receive them. They do not want to leave their country, yet a person without a tribe has few options in a tribal society like Jordan.

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[7] Tony Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel : The Unfolding of God's Prophetic Plan for Ishmael's Line* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003), 191.

[8] Kenneth Cragg discusses this fascinating subject. Did Greek theology too quickly permeate the church and, in fact, pave the way for Islam which is a much more down-to-earth and Semitic religion? See Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian- a History in the Middle East* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991). 18-19.

This research was designed to find viable answers to the questions that such situations pose: What is the possibility of men and women from Muslim tribes becoming integrated into churches that are composed primarily of those from Christian tribes? How can the Church help men and women who are looking for a new tribe?

In addition, large numbers of Christian laborers from Egypt and Iraqi Christian refugees also make up a part of the body of Christ in Jordan.[9] Traditional tribal structures in most churches keep many of these on the periphery of the Jordanian Christian community. Is there a way for the hundreds or even thousands from these backgrounds to be accepted or "adopted" into the mainstream Christian community without limiting them to a "second-class" status as is often currently the case?

The Outcome of the Project for the Church

Over the years, some from non-Christian tribes have pleaded, asking that Christians understand that those from Muslim tribes are real Christians and want to be fully a part of Jordanian church communities. When ethnic Christians are less than 2 percent of the population here in Jordan[10] and are under persecution as a body, is it reasonable to ask them to defend and accept people from non-Christian groups into their churches? In Jordan, some religious and tribal leaders have aligned themselves

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[9] A study done in 2001 gives information on the diverse ethnic makeup of the Church in Jordan. The evangelicals have been especially active in forming churches for the refugee communities. While many Egyptians are a part of the Coptic Church, many are also a part of the evangelical churches. See: Clariss Tchatchou, "Christianity in the Jordanian Society: The Trends of the Relationship between Traditional Churches and Evangelicals in Jordan (1920-2000)," (Amman, Jordan: Ecumenical Studies Center, 2001).

[10] Exact numbers are unavailable and are very politically sensitive. The Palace wants Christians to be over-represented in Parliament because of their history of moderation and support for the King. Presently, eight of eighty seats in the lower house of parliament are reserved for Christians.

against a Christian tribal identity that includes all ethnic and religious backgrounds, yet, in talking to many Jordanian Christians in my interviews, it is apparent that many other church leaders are also committed to finding ways in which tribal difference can be overcome in order for Jordan to have a more unified and healthier church. This project seeks to add fuel to this discussion, which is already taking place.

The Contribution of the Project to Transformational Leadership

Middle Eastern Christianity has experienced a drastic decline as a percentage of the population in the last century.[11] The declining birthrate and immigration present the most obvious cause, and yet transformational leaders need a deeper understanding of what is going on and how the tide can be turned.[12]

Robert Linthicum, in his book *Transforming Power,* boldly challenges Christian leaders to use "relational power" to transform communities and even society as a whole.[13] His primary focus of ministry was in an American urban setting. In countries such as Jordan, relational power is primarily vested in tribal communities, where clans and genealogy play a determinant role in the society. Jordanians do not primarily define their identity as individuals but live within a tribal kinship group, which creates what is called a collectivist personality.[14]

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[11] Almost monthly, someone brings to my attention a news story highlighting this reality. For a particular helpful article, see Don Belt, "The Forgotten Faithful: Arab Christians," *National Geographic* June 2009.

[12] One of the harsh realities is that the smaller in terms of size the community, the more likely its members are to immigrate. There is tremendous uncertainty about the future among Arab Christians. See Bernard Sabella, "The Emigration of Christian Arabs" in Andrea Pacini, *Christian Communities in the Arab Middle East: The Challenge of the Future* (Oxford ; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 133-137.

14 Robert C. Linthicum, *Transforming Power : Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference in Your Community* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13.

[14] This collectivist personality applied equally to those of the ancient biblical world. See Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World : Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 62.

Since the advent of Islam, the Christian community in this context has often retreated in its use of such power. Restrictions on evangelism and the interdiction on conversion from Islam to Christianity through the centuries have forced a stagnant definition of church, consisting only of those born into Christian tribes. I believe the Jordanian church can recover tribal relational power by learning to take a broader look at the element of Christian tribe, as well as the biblical and theological definition, which is not bound by ancestral limitations. I will attempt to show that the Jordanian church can recover aspects of the tribal relational power that animated the early church. The church can use its relational power to break out of its current world, which strives to forcibly separate the Christian message from the rest of society. A transformational leader who is working within a Middle Eastern environment can grasp and learn to utilize the positive dynamics of the tribal society in order to see the Gospel pierce the walls which have been built around them.

In the West, new paradigms are being sought as church leaders look for the sort of community which Jesus intended to establish. Some are stumbling into this powerful concept of "tribe."[15] Some Western Christians are growing tired of individualistic concepts of church and are looking for stronger models of community. This study could provide fuel for those transformational leaders in the West who are undergoing this kind of paradigm shift. Western church leaders may have more to learn than they think from the ancient model of community, which is still quite vibrant in the Middle Eastern tribal society.

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[15] There are some Christian groups which have internet sites exploring the concept of tribe. See http://missionaltribe.org/about/ (accessed February 15, 2010). Others are actually defining their Christian community as "tribes," such as this church in Denver. See http://www.tribeofjesus.org (accessed February 15, 2010).

Conclusions

This chapter has introduced the need for exploring the subject of tribe in the face of demographics that are quickly marginalizing the Church in Jordanian society. As a result of extensive research and interviews, I will show that biblical aspects of tribe can provide tools that will help transformational leaders navigate a future church that can include the vast majority of Jordanians who are not from a Christian tribal background. Far from tribes being the problem, my conclusions will show that tribal concepts can actually provide real solutions to the problems facing the Church today.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It seems that there is very little knowledge base for my chosen topic.

Despite thorough searches of libraries, both internationally and locally, little was

found that focused specifically on tribes within a Middle Eastern church context. The

subject of tribe presents itself regularly in local magazines and newspapers as a

significant ongoing aspect of Jordanian society.[1] What has been alarming to see is

how little the Church has concerned itself with this important issue.

In order to provide background for my research, I focused on works

and stories that have been significant in helping me think through the important

aspects of tribe in relationship to society in general, along with implications for

how they can be utilized to help Christians function more effectively in the

church of Jordan and society. One thing of note is that, in Jordan, the understanding

of tribe for Muslims and Christians is in many ways identical, and studies of Muslim

tribes are equally helpful for the purpose of this research.

This following story perhaps exemplifies the sort of interchanges that are

not uncommon between Muslim and Christian tribes. In the town of ʿAdr near Karak

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[1] The February 2009 issue had articles summarizing the accomplishments of King
Abdullah, but several of the writers have a lightly veiled reference to the inability of Jordanian society
to move forward because of the nepotism and tribalism that is endemic. A former Minister of Foreign
Affairs, Marwan Muasher, pointedly condemns advisors to the King who consider loyalty more
important than competence and an election system giving power to tribal leaders whose only goal is to
help their own tribe. Marwan Muasher, "Jordan's Future Agenda," *Jordan Business* February 2009. 51-
52. Tribes just don't go away! Muasher entertained almost the same discourse in the 1980's. See Linda
L. Layne, *Home and Homeland : The Dialogics of Tribal and National Identities in Jordan* (Princeton,
N.J.: :Princeton University Press, 1994), 97.

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in the ancient country of Moab are found two tribes, one Muslim (Ma'ayta) and one

Christian (Madanat). They have lived together for many years. Prince Hassan visited

'Adr some years ago. He is known to be quite serious. A leader from the Ma'ayta

tribe succeeded in making him laugh by jokingly telling the Prince that the Ma'ayta

were disturbed that the Christian Madanats wanted to build a new church. He

besieged the Prince that the King shouldn't let the Madanats build a new church

unless they have someone from the Ma'ayta tribe be the priest. The Prince laughed.

While the religious divide seems wide, the sociological understanding of tribe and the

very human contact point between Muslim and Christian tribes make studies done on

Muslim tribes very beneficial.

Tribes of Jordan

While little has been written about tribal issues in a church context, on a

national level the tribal issues are not only fully acknowledged, but they are also taken

very seriously. Prince Ghazi's book *The Tribes of Jordan at the Beginning of the

Twenty-First Century*[2] is, at its core, a passionate defense of the tribal structure in the

face of what are perceived as modernist attacks on the tribes and their value to

contemporary Jordanian society. In the introduction, Ghazi lays out his purpose "to

reveal the *essential nobility* of the tribes of Jordan (and by extension all of the Arab

tribes)—and thus also how they can fall short of it—for the benefit not only of foreign

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[2] Ghazi Bin Muhammad, *The Tribes of Jordan at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century* (Amman: Turab, 1999). Prince Ghazi is a cousin to the King and, like King Abdullah, is a Hashemite descendent of the prophet Muhammad. He has served as a special advisor to Kings Hussein and Abdullah with regards to tribal and religious affairs. With earned degrees from both Princeton and Cambridge, he has spearheaded "A Common Word," which is an effort to bring Muslims and Christians together. "The Amman Message," (2008). http://ammanmessage.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=30 (accessed December 8,2008).

observers, but of the tribesmen themselves, many of whom now badly need to be reminded of it."[3]

Outlining the very essence of tribe and the formation of the Jordanian nation, Ghazi identifies some of the prejudices and vices associated with tribes. He also acutely notes how deeply ingrained in all Jordanians are tribal urges which come to the surface in times of crisis. His book is particularly concerned with the practice of "honor killings" as it attained much unwanted international attention.[4]

Ghazi is one of several who assume that religion is meant to control tribal instincts, and the Koran can help them move into the modern world while salvaging what is worthwhile in their dignity and lifestyle. Ghazi uses Islam to both dignify and challenge tribal value. What about the Christian tribes? This research will look at both biblical and historical reasons for dignifying the Christian tribes of Jordan. When approaching some of the problems of tribal mentality, it is correct in noting that religious education should be one of the solutions. While for Ghazi, religion (i.e., Islam) is primarily a tool for controlling tribes, I believe that this research will show how Jesus and an understanding of his tribal principles can be instrumental in helping Christian tribes adapt to the future.

A very significant work that helped me see clearly the actual flexibility of tribes in negotiation with modern realities is Andrew Shryock's *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan.*[5] Shryock did extensive research on several Muslim tribes in the North of Jordan. His

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[3] Ibid., 7.

[4] Muhammad, 50. Honor killing is the killing of a woman suspected of immorality. It is done to "cleanse" the tribal honor. Historically, this is a practice of both Muslim and Christian tribes, but today it is not heard of among Christians.

[5] See Andrew Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination : Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan*, Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies 23 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

research looked at oral traditions of tribes as they begin to form a modern historical narrative. Where his research triggered tremendous application for this study is in his looking at the way genealogies are being adapted by tribal politicians in order to increase their political power. In order to gain more prestige and the honor to proclaim oneself as a person who represents one's people, some tribal leaders actually adjust their genealogical tradition to include more people. In a country like Jordan where the King himself legitimizes his secular and religious authority by emphasizing his connection to the line of Muhammad, genealogy legitimacy is seen as essential. I will be looking extensively at how "genealogical imagination" is not only essential for political power, but also for an empowered church. This concept is key for a church conceptualizing its future in a tribal society.

Sociological Study of the Christian Tribes

There are many local genealogical studies being done in Jordan that look at the specific Christian tribes. Many Christian families have books on their shelves that outline their proud heritage and esteemed members of the family; however, Géraldine Chatelard's sociological and anthropological study of the Christian tribes of Madaba is a landmark study on this community.[6] Using extensive church sources, her study thoroughly examines both the historical and sociological reality of Madaba Christian tribes, from their roots in Karak in the nineteenth century through the twentieth century. This book, which is the fruit of her doctoral research conducted in the 1990s, provides a fairly current and comprehensive summary of the tribal journey, specifically of the Uzaizat tribe as they face the changing realities of Jordan.

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[6] G. Chatelard, *Briser La Mosaïque : Les Tribus Chrétiennes De Madaba, Jordanie, Xixe-Xxe Siècle*, Moyen-Orient (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2004).

The Uzaizat tribe is rooted in the wild country of Moab, where their descendents are thought to have helped Muhammad's army in its conquest of the city of Karak. This victory gained them a certain distinction, which is used to this day to help them identify with the Hashemite rulers who descend from Muhammad. The author delves deeply into their interaction with the Muslim tribes and the process by which they were installed in the ancient abandoned town of Madaba. The Uzaizat had converted to Catholicism, and Chatelard describes the complex dynamics of church and tribe through these centuries. The value of this book to this study has been in understanding the dynamics of tribe and church in their relationship to the Muslim tribes and country in which they live.

When the Christian tribes settled in Madaba in the nineteenth century, with the help of the Catholic Church, there was little awareness of the historical significance of the archaeological mound on which they began to build their houses. With the discovery of the significant mosaics and historic importance of the town, church leaders actually fortified these Christian tribes with religious significance beyond this small parish. They established for them a genealogical legitimacy for the community that was rooted in the ancient church. Their links with the prophet Muhammad dignify them genealogically under the Hashemite-led country of Jordan. This genealogical understanding means that in Madaba's public square, which is increasingly defined by Islam, they can fall back on a continuity and legitimacy more important than meets the eye.[7]

Faced with the demographic decline of these tribes in Madaba, Chatelard makes some significant observations. Tribes for the Christians of Madaba allow them to define themselves, in the context of the state, as a Christian genealogy with historic

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[7] Ibid., 320.

roots and legitimacy. While underlying both the religious walls between interreligious

marriage and conversion, her conclusions are very hopeful for the whole concept of

tribes facing other divisive issues in society, such as the Jordanian Palestinian

problem.

> For the Christians of Jordanian nationality, for example, there coexist two
> cultures (urban-rural for the Palestinians and rural-tribal for the Jordanians),
> two types of relationships to genealogical groups, two types of relations with
> the West (Catholic and Orthodox), two historical experiences, two conflicting
> national hopes. . . . The division between Muslims originating in Palestine and
> those in Transjordan are no less significant.[8]

Great difficulties can be overcome from seeing the flexible nature of tribes

and their significant theme for the political future of Jordan. This flexibility of tribes

also offers hope for those who see a church that is pushing its ethnic borders.

Chatelard asks a rhetorical question that applies profoundly to the Jordanian religious

context. "How, in the absence of communal memory, are the Christians going to be

able to form a community of action?"[9] If communal memory is not limited to the

Christian tribal boundaries imposed upon churches, there are great possibilities open

for the Church to include those from the Muslim tribes who surround the Christian

community.

Mohanna Haddad also adds to the understanding of the sociological

significance of changes within the Jordanian Christian community.[10] Responding to

the rapid pace of social change in Jordan, Haddad's research looks at how churches

are faring sociologically in relationship to each other and the greater Muslim

community. This article makes some quite significant observations, especially with

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[8] Ibid., 369.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Mohanna Haddad, ""Detribalizing" and "Retribalizing": The Double Role of Churches among Christian Arabs in Jordan: A Study in the Anthropology of Religion," *The Muslim World* 82: 1-2, no. Jan.-Feb.l (1992), 67-89.

regard to the urbanized Jordanian Christians. One is that the denominations have contributed to the detribalization of Christians in Jordan. Through educational institutions and separate church legal systems, denominations have started to weaken—if not replace the concept of "tribe" for Jordanian Christians. Haddad says that:

> This form of Christian "retribalization" runs counter to the secular forces within Jordanian society which make for national unity. It also runs the danger of keeping indigenous Christian communities in a client relationship to centers of ecclesiastical power outside country, especially in Greece and Rome, and culturally in the United States. This is reflected in continuing rivalries between the clerical leadership of the various churches.[11]

While Haddad's concern is that such "retribalization" pushes Christians away from social and political involvement with the state, the turning of Jordanian Christians from their tribal roots has much greater dangers. The disunity and foreign connections that characterize the new "clerical tribal leaders" further distance Christians from the non-Christian tribes of Jordan. This disunity has indeed contributed to alienating Jordanian Christians socially and keeping them on the edge of Jordanian society. It also underlines the role of the Church in affecting the sense of Christian tribal identity.

If the churches in Jordan have indeed been able to effectively "retribalize" Jordanian Christianity, there is certainly the possibility that, with more locally and biblically grounded principles, the Church can be more effective in the future, which holds forth again the possibility that the principles discovered in this research can indeed be used to help build a healthier church, "retribilizing" the Church into a tribe which can receive outsiders more affectively.

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[11] Ibid., 88.

Dignifying of Arab Christianity

A poor understanding of the history of Arabs and Arab Christianity has tragically infiltrated even the Middle Eastern churches to the point that Arab Christians sometimes play down or even reject their Arab identity.[12] The tragedy of Ben Laden's terrorist attacks and the influence of Christian Zionism continually put Arab Christians in a defensive posture with many Western Christians. Tony Malouf lays out in his book *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel* the positive understanding of Arabs, which the Bible actually encourages. His book explores the rich blessing upon the Arab people which extends to them as descendents of Abraham, linking them genealogically with the blessings which have come through the line of Ishmael.

As a Lebanese Christian who had rejected his Arab heritage, Maalouf's research allowed him to embrace his Arab roots. At the core of this work is the hope of seeing Arab culture and tribal tradition dignified historically. Maalouf has done this well through his study of Arabs throughout the Old and New Testaments. One of his objectives was the removal of biases against Arabs which are based on a misunderstanding of the biblical text. Among his conclusions that are relevant to the modern Middle East is that "prioritizing the redemptive mandate over the political agenda harmonizes well with the heartbeat of Christ in the Middle East equation."[13] Western-perceived political and sometimes theological alignment with Israel puts them in an awkward position with their Muslim neighbors who see Christians as an

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[12]Camille Hechaïmé, "Cultural Role of Arab Christians Today," in. Pacini.168. One Jordanian church leader, when asked if he saw himself as a descendant of Ishmael or Isaac, identified his lineage as from Isaac. This kind of rejection of Arab heritage is common.

[13] Maalouf, 224. Abdu Murray's recent book has also picked up this call for evangelicals to focus on the Gospel and not obscure prophetic interpretation. Abdu Murray, *Apocalypse Later : Why the Gospel of Peace Must Trump the Politics of Prophecy in the Middle East* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2009).

extension of Zionism. This book is, in many ways, a plea to balance in evangelical commitment to Arabs as well as Jews.

My particular interest in this study revolves around expanding on some concepts that Maalouf touches on, such as in Christ Christians have a profound genealogical merging.[14] It was this type of intertribal merging that formed the early church, and there are aspects of this missional tribe that have been explored and developed in this study for the Jordanian church today. This study has shown that for a clear view of the future tribe, a genealogical understanding from the Bible is critical, especially in a society like Jordan where one's tribal genealogy is essential. Maalouf gives innumerable ways in which both Muslims and Christians can see themselves grafting into an eternal "tribe of Christ."

Kenneth Bailey, the author of *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes,* has produced an amazing amount of invaluable material, which is rather a "gold standard" in dignifying Arab Christianity. A missionary scholar, Bailey has focused his life on exploring the Bible through the eyes of those Arab villagers who so innately understand the biblical message.

> Middle Eastern Christians have been called the forgotten faithful. The world knows that across the centuries there have been Jews and Muslims in the Middle East. For the most part, however, Middle Eastern Christians evaporated from the Western consciousness after the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451. Few are aware of the existence today of more than ten million Arabic-speaking Christians who possess a rich heritage of ancient and modern literature. Speaking a Semitic language, these Christians are a people who live, breathe, think, act and participate in Middle Eastern culture; they are rooted in the traditional ways of the Middle East. Their voices, past and present, need to be heard in biblical studies.[15]

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[14] Maalouf, 115.

[15] Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes : Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 11-12.

The hope is that this research will serve to create an even greater value for an understanding of Middle Eastern culture. While Bailey focuses on interpretive views of Arabs for expanding the scriptural stories, this study seeks to show how this tribal society can offer insights into forming a community of Christians today similar to the early church. The unique community that God formed out of villagers from the Middle East thousands of years ago formed a dynamic tribe of Christians with the ability to bridge tribal barriers.

Christian Tribes United

Nabieh Abbassi, a Jordanian pastor and transformational leader, confronted in his doctoral research a nagging tribal problem which exists within the Arab Christian community in Jordan.[16] Christian leaders from the different denominations lack unity and look especially upon the evangelicals as the latest "sheep stealers" to attack their older traditional churches. Abbassi studied ecclesiastical, social, and political factors that have particularly alienated the evangelicals from the older traditional churches and denominations (Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian, etc.).

Being a Jordanian, Abbassi understands the essential need to help guard tribal unity. He is extremely sensitive to the fact that those who leave their religion lose their tribal identity and are essentially cut off from their people. In light of this, he openly discourages evangelicals from focusing on converting such traditional Christians to their own denominations.[17] His strong desire is to keep unity within the

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[16] Nabieh N. Abbassi, "Improving Ministry Relationships between Evangelical Churches and Historical Churches in Jordan" (D.Min Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002).

[17] Ibid., 115.

Christian tribes in order to impact the vast majority of the country which is non-Christian.[18]

Conclusions from Abbassi's study affirm that changes made by evangelicals can help bring greater unity to the Christian community of Jordan. For instance, Abbassi found that changes such as the wearing of clerical clothing and the use of Eastern design in churches, church bells, and stained glass by evangelical churches would bring greater acceptance to evangelical churches. Cooperative efforts such as the distribution of Bibles to all churches through the Jordanian Bible Society are also helpful.[19]

Clarisse Tchatchou also did a study for the Ecumenical Study Center in Jordan that focused on improving interchurch relationships.[20] Her study took into account the diverse makeup of the church in Jordan and encourages greater unity in the face of a decreasing status of Christianity in the country.[21] There are, however, much bigger issues at stake in Jordan. Tribes historically unite to face a common battle, and the battle at hand is how to be a part of the living Christ in the midst of the vast majority of Muslim tribes of Jordan; thus, a much deeper unity has to take place within the Christian tribes than Abbassi's and Tchatchou's studies deal with. These studies don't give any direction on how Jordanian Christian unity will help unite with those who are not from Christian tribes. This study seeks to go beyond these studies in looking at tribal commonality that could help enlarge the Church to include those from a non-Christian background.

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[18] The percentage of Christians has actually drastically declined since the writing of Abassi's dissertation.

[19] Abbassi, 111-113.

[20] Tchatchou.

[21] Ibid., 43.

Crossing Tribal Frontiers

While research is important, it is the narratives of men and women who are crossing the tribal frontiers who will empower a new way of thinking about the "tribe of Christ." Men and women like Abdullah Huwatmeh and his wife have lived on the edge of this divide, and their story can give an idea of what it will look like to be a follower of Jesus in Jordan.[22] They are literally creating the new lineage of the future, and their stories are critical to the future tribes of Jordan. This book, written with the help of Roland Muller, gives the testimony of a Jordanian from a Muslim tribe near the Sea of Galilee. Huwatmeh describes growing up in a very tolerant Muslim tribe, which had ancient Christian roots. Upon receiving a scholarship to pursue studies in Mississippi, he came into contact with a man named appropriately Mr. Love and a little Pentecostal church, both of whom became his American tribe. Following Bible studies, which allowed him to see the significant genealogical links of the Christian faith, and several miraculous encounters with Jesus, he became a Christian.

Upon returning to Jordan and taking up a highly respected position teaching engineering, he became emboldened to assert his identity as somebody who was following Jesus and connected with churches. His wife is from a Christian tribe, and his story shows the way in which many Christian churches, both old and new, linked hands with him in the face of great opposition. The Jordanian intelligence worked overtime to try and ensure the destruction of the church that he started.

Hawatmeh's struggles are not over, but one can sense in reading this story the powerful desire of a man to see others from Muslim tribes form a new type of community that follows Jesus. These communities should not be separate from the

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[22] Abullah Hawatmeh and Roland Muller, "The Man from Gadara," (Muller, 2002).

Christian tribes since they need each other. While initially facing strong persecution from his tribe, this story also shows the power of God to reconcile a man with his tribe. Looking at the concept of tribe and its potential can give tribal people a more flexible framework for establishing new Christian communities in Jordan. These communities, connected to a larger tribe of Christ, can function as their tribe when they are ostracized for their new faith. It can also empower them to go back and seek to reconcile and influence their original tribe for Christ. The church models which Hawatmeh saw in both America and in Jordan aren't nearly as flexible an indigenous "tribal" model of church community.

Conclusion

The research in this chapter has identified some of the key elements of tribe that affect the future of the church in Jordan. Specifically, the following areas have been identified as essential for an understanding of the Church that will overcome its tribal boundaries.

1. Muslim and Christian tribal practices offer common tribal understandings which can be built on.

2. Tribes are an essential and significant aspect of Jordanian society, which is very relevant to the future of the Church.

3. Education can be used to affect, shape, and pass on important values of a tribe.

4. Tribal genealogies are extremely important but very flexible and are essential to forming tribal identity and a vision for the future.

5. Arabs have an especially valuable biblical genealogy which can empower Christian communities in an Arab context.

6. The scriptures offer powerful parallels to the tribal situations which are faced today in the Church. That the early church broke its tribal boundaries allows one to see the potential of tribal communities doing the same today!

While the unity of the existing churches is important, such efforts are unlikely to facilitate the growth of the Church among non-Christian tribes and cannot hope to provide a solution to the religious tribal barriers.

7. Stories of those traversing the religious barriers provide a basis for new concepts of tribe.

While studies addressing the specific issue in a Jordanian context are few, there are resources available that are invaluable for exploring this subject in the Jordanian context. The next chapter will incorporate aspects of tribe that are important for seeing the broader context of the church situation in Jordan.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

In this chapter, I will explore more deeply the issues of tribe that effect both the use of this concept of community in the contemporary society and the solutions "tribes" can offer the Church in integrating outsiders. I will also explore historical, sociological, and theological concepts of tribe. These components would be essential and emphasized in a church that is operating effectively in a tribal society.

The Christian Historical Background

One of the earliest extra biblical references to the Christian early church was by Josephus in about AD 93, where he refers to them as "the tribe of Christians, so called after Him, has still to this day not disappeared."[1] The same text notes that Jews and non-Jews were united together in this group. While there are many ways of describing the early church, this picture of a multi-ethnic tribe is likely the way this community would have appeared to the surrounding tribal culture. Like a great tribal leader, Jesus produced a community that bore his name and would shake and change the world.

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[1]Josephus in G.P. Goold, ed. *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities Books Xviii-Xix*, The Loeb Classical Library (London Harvard University Press, 1965). 50-51. This portion of Josephus is referred to as the *Testimonium Flavianus,* and because of the Christology expressed in the passage, some scholars have called its legitimacy into question. If this was added by Eusebius, the statement on tribe would still indicate an identification of the early church with a tribal identity.

Arabs, whose language was supernaturally spoken on the day of

Pentecost, formed a part of this new tribal identity. It should be no surprise to

learn that, in the ensuing centuries, whole Arab tribes were converting to

Christianity. The early church historian Eusebius actually considered Philip the

Arab as the first Roman Emperor (243-249) to follow Christ. Historical evidence

would say that he was a "crypto-Christian" at best, but Philip offered a period of

great relief to the Christians of the Roman Empire who suffered waves of

incredible persecution up until Constantine.[2]

The region of Arabia and what is modern day Jordan and Syria was

especially noted for its monasteries and monks. They spread out, establishing

what, in essence, were mission bases. The church historian, Socrates, tells the

story of Mawiya, Queen of the Ishmaelites, who converted, along with her whole

tribe, to Christianity under the influence of a pious miracle-working monk named

Moses. In the early fifth century, an Arab tribe lead by Zocomos converted after

seeking out a miracle-working monk. The monk prayed for him and told him that,

if he converted, God would give him a much awaited son.[3] These tribes were all

formed into political alliances with Rome, and they became the defenders of the

Roman Eastern frontier against Persia.

Three bishops representing nomadic Arab tribes were at the Council of

Chalcedon when it convened in 451.[4] The tribe of the Banu Ghassan, which

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[2] G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983). 123-127.

[3] Michele Piccirillo, *L'arabie Chrétienne*, trans., Etienne Shchelstraete et Marie-Paule Duverne (Paris: Mengès, 2002). 194-195.

[4] Sadly, this was the council, which tragically, divided the Church between East and West.
J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1990), 118.

originated in Yemen, was an Arab Christian tribe that formed a vassal kingdom
to Rome. While the Gassanid tribal alliance fought alongside Rome, there were
always some theological differences, and Arabia was noted for its theological
diversity. This difference in theology may have eventually weakened their
commitment to Byzantium. By the time of the Battle of Yarmouk in 636, some
from this alliance turned against Rome. The Muslim army won a decisive battle,
which reduced the borders of Christendom permanently.[5] Since then, this area of
modern Jordan has been under the control of Muslim rulers, except during a brief
period during the Crusades. Even today, many of Jordan's Christians consider
themselves to be descendents from these pre-Islamic Arab Christians rooted in
the very first community of believers in Jerusalem.[6]

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Figure 1. Christians from the Sunaar Tribe, Karak, Jordan[7]

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[5] Piccirillo, 219-220.

[6] In a recent Jordanian worship service with about seventy present, I asked for a show of hands as to how many were descendants of the Gassanid tribes. Almost all raised their hands. See Attallah Mansour, *Narrow Gate Churches: The Christian Presence in the Holy Land under Muslim and Jewish Rule* (Pasadena: Hope Publishing House, 2004), 194.

[7] Thomas Durley, *Lethaby of Moab: A Record of Missionary Adventure, Peril, and Toil* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1910), 255.

From its earliest days in Medina, Islam had developed a system of "tolerance" towards non-Muslims. This system, called the *dhimma,*[8] was a collection of rules which Christians and other "People of the Book" needed to abide by in order to be protected in a Muslim society. Though abusive, this system offered more protection to Christians and Jews than the totalitarian systems in the West offered non-Christian religions during the same period. Taxes on Christians, who far outnumbered Muslims in much of their conquered territory, were an important financial asset to Muslim ruling communities.[9]

As long as the Christians did not form a social threat to the Islamic community, they could live in peace. Many Arab Christians contributed tremendously to the early Islamic world and translated much of the Greek heritage of the time in order to avail itself to an early Islamic world's hunger for knowledge. [10]

In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, often under the protection of colonial powers, Christian Arabs contributed to the whole of Arab society. In the formation of the modern nation states, they began to gain greater status; however, in a turnaround beginning in the early 1970s, vibrant Islamic movements began forcing the strict *dhimma* understanding, which made it

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[8] In the latter Ottoman times, this system is referred to as the *millet* system which, along with giving the non-Muslim a separate court system to take care of family and inter-Christian issues, sometimes required non-Muslims to wear distinctive clothing, ride only donkeys, or in other ways separate themselves from the Muslim population. The actual rules and enforcement of the *dhimma* by Islamic regimes have varied considerably throughout history. See Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi : Jews and Christians under Islam*, Rev. and enl. English ed. (Rutherford, [N.J.] London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press ; Associated University Presses, 1985).

[9] Samir Khalil Samir, "The Christian Communities, Active Members of Arab Society throughout History," in Pacini, 70-72.

[10] Ibid., 81.

Middle Eastern Christians
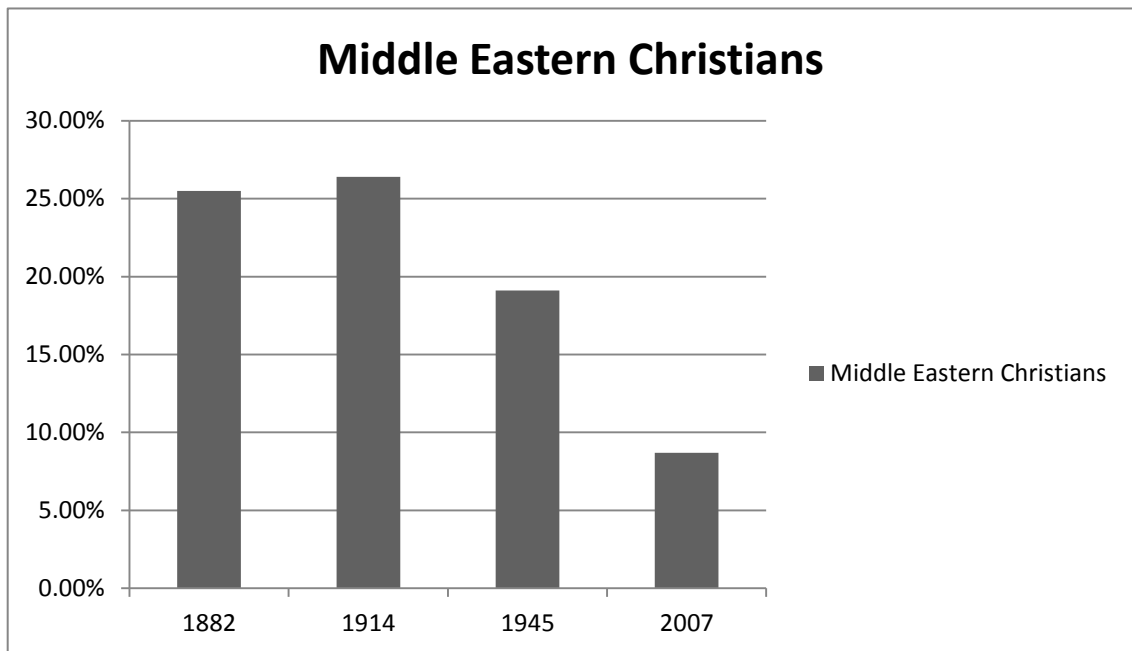
Figure 2. Middle Eastern Christian Exodus.

difficult for Christians to feel fully a part of society.[11] In the last century, there

has been what can be seen as an Arab Christian exodus because of social,

political, and economic pressures.[12] Figure 2 presents the decline in Christian

population in present-day Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and the Palestinian

areas.[13]

   The dark cloud that has been rising on the horizon has been the incredible

growth of more radical forms of Islam in modern Jordanian society. Richard Antoun

is an anthropologist who, over a number of years, has studied the impact of

fundamentalism on the bureaucracy in Jordan. Working with the government ministry

that trains imams (leaders in the mosques) and pays their salaries, Antoun was visiting

a mosque in 1986 when he noted a major change.

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[11] Ibid., 90.

[12] Belt, 87.

[13] Ibid.

Something happened that had never happened before over twenty years of conducting research in the area. Young men politely invited me to their homes and offered me tea and proceeded to tell me that if I did not convert to Islam I would end up in The Fire (Hell).[14]

Such experiences have an ominous ring. As an American of Lebanese Christian descent, Antoun observed something that all Christians in Jordan have noticed. Islamic fundamentalism, even within offices supposedly under the control of the moderate Hashemite government, is increasingly aggressive towards Christians. Traditionally moderate tribal structures and bureaucracies have become heavily influenced by Islamicists. The Jordanian school curriculum has become increasingly Islamic, and even though Christian children are not required to attend Islamic classes, an Islamic worldview is pressed upon all students throughout the curriculum.[15]

In a tribal environment, many Jordanian Christians now see themselves as so weak that immigration is their best or only option. A foreign passport is regarded as a needed insurance policy, allowing them to leave whenever things get too difficult. Recently, in ways reminiscent of how the Ottoman Empire used to control churches, the government took actions that specifically targeted the only seminary in Jordan, as well as evangelical churches that have operated legally in Jordan for most of the last century.[16] The Christian tribal weakness is both evidenced and compounded by the Jordanian society's inability to allow churches to truly welcome those from a non-Christian background.

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[14] Richard T. Antoun "Fundamentalism, Bureaucratization, and the State's Co-Optation of Religion: A Jordanian Case Study," *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* 38 (2006), 369-393.

[15] The Muslim Brotherhood has deeply influenced the Jordanian educational system. While overtly affirming the Christian community in Jordan, the Royal Family itself faces pressures from Islamicists and cannot afford to be seen as soft on Christians. See Pacini, 267.

[16] In 2008, the Jordanian government produced a document that was read before parliament. It had been signed by five bishops and a leading evangelical. This document condemned the only seminary in Jordan and disowned evangelical churches that have been in Jordan for almost a century. As in the Ottomon *millet* system, the government sees it as its duty and right to interfere in church matters. See "Jordan International Religious Freedom Report 2008", U.S. State Department http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2008/108485.htm (accessed April 20, 2009).

Tribal Considerations

Since the time of the crusades and into the modern era, Christians living in the area east of the Jordan River lived in a very tribal society much like their Muslim neighbors. Tribes of this region, for the most part, were operating under their ancient tribal law with little religious instruction and even less knowledge of their faith. In the late nineteenth century, two great religious forces were moving across the Middle East on a collision course. Out of Saudi Arabia was birthed the Wahabi movement, which sought to more strictly Islamicize the Arab Muslim tribes. From the West came missionary forces whose primary intent was to "Christianize" the nominally Christian tribes.[17]

Over the centuries, most of the Christians in this region became affiliated with the Greek Orthodox Church with its bishopric in Jerusalem. Over time, however, the influence of the church leadership weakened, opening the door for other Christian groups to enter. For example, in 1892 in the town of al-Husn in northern Jordan, there was the need for a local school. When the Greek Orthodox Church decided it could not provide the school, a Christian tribe actually became Catholic in order to get the school. Sometimes tribal conflicts would result in a segment of a tribe or an entire tribe changing their denomination.[18]

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[17] Chatelard, 107-108.

[18] Pacini, 260-263. For a fascinating look at a Christian tribal leader in the historical context of nineteenth century Jordan ,some stories of Ibraham al Twal, penned by an early Catholic missionary Fr. Antonin Jaussen, have been translated into English. These stories read like the book of Judges. See http://www.mariamhotel.com/family.html (accessed March 9, 2010).

Total Christians and Muslims

	1970	2005
■ Total Christians	83,390	273,889
■ Muslims	2,200,000	6,238,000
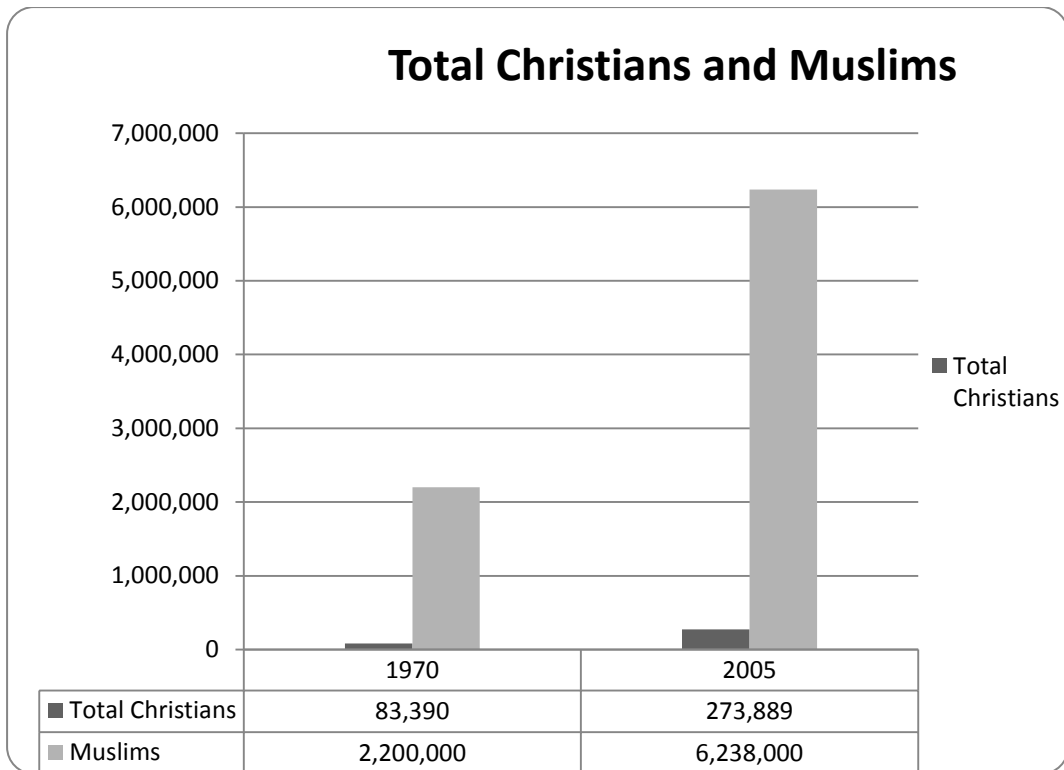
Figure 3. Decline of Christian Presence in Jordan[19]

The Muslim tribes have thrived over the years, while Christian tribes have declined in numbers and influence, as figure 3 shows. While many Christians have tended to look to Western powers to "bail them out" of their modern version of *dhimmi* status, they have been disappointed by a Christendom that no longer has the desire (or ability) to protect them.[20] As Haddad has noted, in many ways, the various churches present have successfully retribalized Jordanian Christians into denominations (instead of tribes), only to find that their community is now perceived as foreign.[21] What can be done? The current situation is indeed an affront.

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[19] David B. Barrett, George Thomas Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia : A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 419.

[20] Joseph Maïla, "Geopolitical Dynamics of Arab Christians," in Pacini, 40.

[21] Haddad, 79.

While it may look as if all is lost and the Church has been defeated, men like Father Zacharia Butrous claim that millions from non-Christian backgrounds across the Middle East actually want to follow Jesus.[22]

The actual churches on the ground are obviously now too weak to receive those from Muslim tribes, and governments are working actively to keep such seekers from showing up at these local churches. The line has been drawn, and many are looking at how to cross it; however, the body of Christ cannot afford to be silent for long. The very future of the Church here is at stake, along with its shape and future significance.

Crypto-Christians and Professing Christians

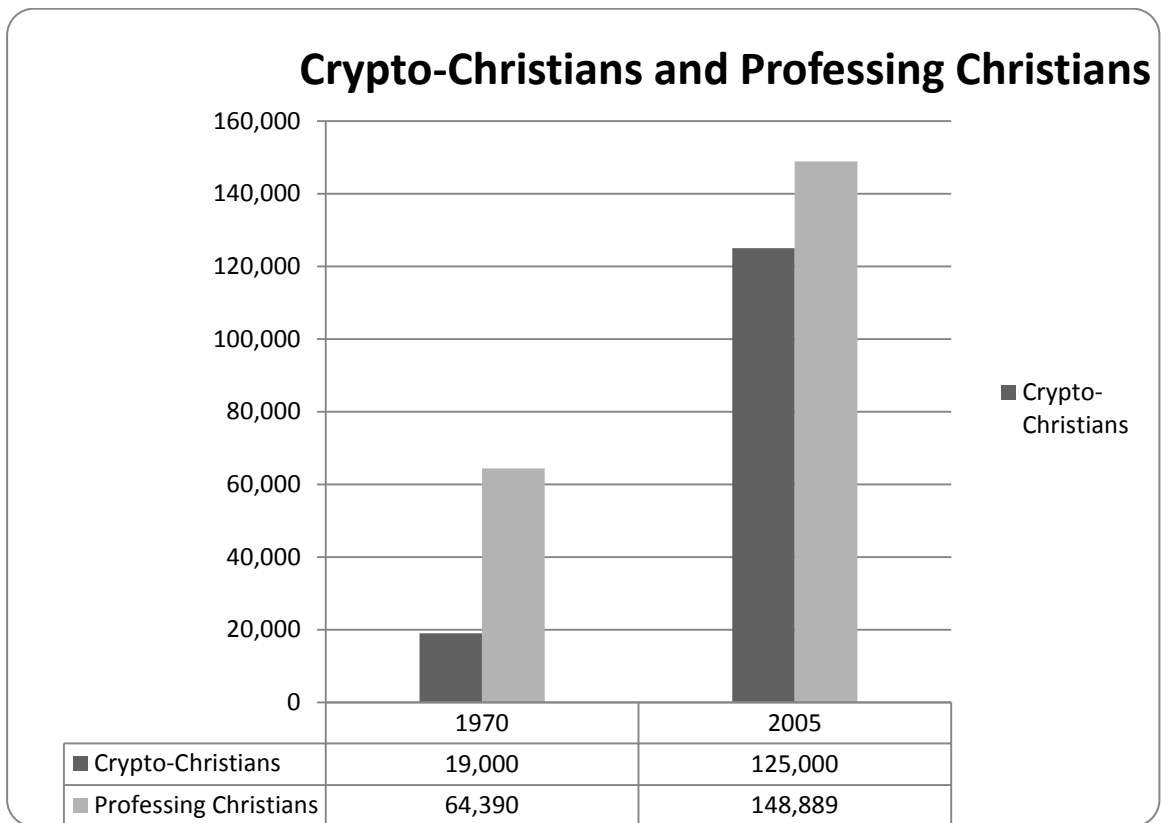|	1970	2005
■ Crypto-Christians	19,000	125,000
■ Professing Christians	64,390	148,889

Figure 4. Presence of Crypto-Christians in Jordan

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[22] There is a dramatic increase in Muslims who are interested in Jesus in most countries of the Middle East. Without question the number of "crypto-Christians" (secret believers) in Jordan is increasing. The graphs are based on information from the World Christian Encyclopedia. Barrett, Kurian, and Johnson, 419.

Meanwhile, as figure 5 shows, the statistically small community of traditional Arab Christians continues to labor throughout the Middle East. Missional Arab Christians are speaking the same language, living the same culture, and laboring in expectation of the next great spiritual harvest.

At the present, against great opposition and at great personal risk, some traditional and non-traditional churches are doing what they can within their minority context to encourage those Muslims interested in the message of Jesus. Only those willing to take the lead in seeing a new type of tribe formed from all those who are following Jesus will be able to see the fruit of this next wave. Those churches, whether traditional or evangelical, who fail to take advantage of this opportunity will fail to experience the blessing of this new harvest that figure 5 so clearly shows is taking place.

Percentage Growth: 1970 - 2005

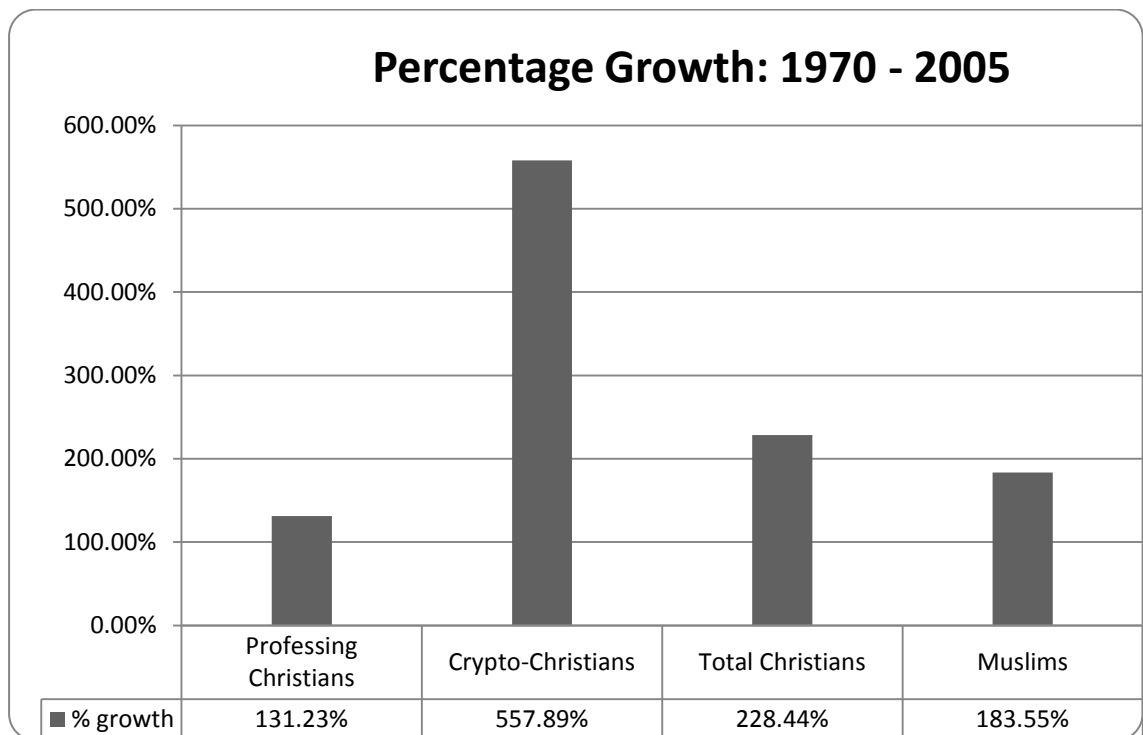|	Professing Christians	Crypto-Christians	Total Christians	Muslims
■ % growth	131.23%	557.89%	228.44%	183.55%

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Figure 5. Rapid Growth in Crypto-Christians in Jordan

No one can really predict what sort of new wineskin will be raised up to receive all of this new wine. What is evident from this study is that the very

indigenous concept of tribe can be a helpful catalyst for the Church in this important transitional time.

A Working Definition of Tribe

To understand tribe, it is important to have a working definition which can be use for this new type of tribe. The word *tribe* in English can have many different ideas in different languages. It is important to have a clear idea of what this study is focusing on, and Ghazi's book (written in English) seems to provide a definition which is good for purposes here.

> What traditionally makes a person "belong" to a tribe is not merely successive degrees of genetic relationships—which, after all, every family in the world has—but rather that a person and his/her tribe think the same way; believe in the same principles; assimilate the same values and ethos; act according to the same unique rules and laws; respect the same hereditary Shaykh (Tribal Lord); live together; migrate together; defend each other; and die together. In short, it is the consciousness of belonging to that tribe and behaving accordingly.[23]

On seeing this definition for the first time, it struck me that if one merely replaced the words "Tribal Lord" with "Lord Jesus," this definition is actually a fairly powerful definition of what Christian community aspires to be as well. This definition change could become a radical concept of church. While the study of tribe has myriads of complicated tangents, this definition is the sort that seems most useful and appropriate in a Jordanian Church context.

Jordanians live with this kind of identity deep in their beings, rooted in their deep tribal heritage. This identity issue came out last year while visiting a church in the town of Madaba. A friend who was interested in sending a group of American young people to this church asked a very mundane question of a group of young Jordanian college students that had congregated outside the church. Thinking to test

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[23] Muhammad, 13.

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their English level, he asked the simple question: "How big is your family?" There was an uncomfortable silence and the pastor, whose English is excellent, answered on their behalf. He explained, "They don't know what you mean by *family*." My American friend was probably thinking, "Their English is terrible if they don't even know the word *family*." When the students knew that the number being asked for was the number of people in their nuclear family, they, of course, responded quite easily; however, their initial reflexive response was to think of their larger tribal grouping. The natural tendency in Jordan is to translate the English word *family* with the Arabic word *ashira*,[24] which actually is their larger tribal grouping. This seemingly minor misunderstanding reflects a significant chasm that separates the tribal from a non-tribal understanding of the word. While this dissertation is focused on ways that the Church can welcome outsiders into this tribal context, it is essential that one first understands how strongly a person's individual identity is associated with his or her tribe. This tribal issue is more difficult for a Westerner to comprehend. Perhaps the following chart will help as some of the major differences between individualistic cultures and Middle Eastern tribal culture are compared.

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[24] The word *qabila* is used traditionally for the large Bedouin tribal groupings, but most Jordanians use *ashira. Ashira* formerly indicated the settled tribes but, with urbanization, this word is the word that most Jordanians identify with as their "tribe." See Peter Gubser, *Historical Dictionary of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan*, Asian Historical Dictionaries No. 4 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 78-82.

Individualistic Cultural Themes	Middle Eastern Tribal Cultural Themes
'Reality' centered conceptual framework	'Value 'centered conceptual framework
Primacy of the individual	Primacy of the 'tribe'
Liberty to develop independent life	One's place in web of social relationships
Equality of the sexes	Differentiation of the sexes
Task-oriented roles	Gender-associated roles
Achievement due to self-effort	Honor from a variety of sources
Guilt: result of breaking the law	Shame: result of failing someone
Emphasis on youth	Emphasis on age
Materialistic/humanistic in focus	Theocentric/God-oriented in focus
Love matches lead to marriage	Marriage to strengthen the tribe
Rights of each individual paramount	Duties towards tribe paramount
Open –ended attitude to economics	'Limited good' attitude to economics
Contract relationships important	Oral/trust relationships important
Public and private worlds separate	Public and private worlds integrated
Accumulation of private wealth lauded	Generosity/hospitality on demand lauded
Future oriented	Future linked to the Past
Freedom-focused behavior	Status-focused behavior
Personal preference primary	Conventional appearance primary
Competition on basis of individual merit	Advancement on basis of who-you-know

Figure 6: Modified from the chart in Bill A. Musk, *Touching the Soul of Islam : Sharing the Gospel in Muslim Cultures* **(Crowborough: Marc, 1995), 206.**

Tribes and Colonialism

Edward Said was a well-known Palestinian scholar who, through his controversial book *Orientalism,* challenged prevalent Western biases and assumptions when studying the Middle East. It is important to weigh his concerns as they present a health check to anyone trying to study this region in a fair and balanced way. Innate colonial purposes and goals have colored much scholarship, and Said notes that by using what he termed "quasi-scientific concepts about barbarism, primitivism, and civilization," Christianity, along with anthropology, linguistics, Darwinism, and a myriad of other forces active in the Middle East never wavered from imposing racist values of Western civilization upon the region.[26]

Said's arguments are certainly valid and are also an indictment on many missionary efforts in the region.[27] One story stands out from one of the earliest Protestant missionary couples to enter the city of Karak, Jordan in the nineteenth century. As English Methodists, William and Jane Lethaby were among the very few foreigners to brave the lawless country of Moab to establish a mission station. In their simple village house in Karak, they began classes in English and the Bible, as well as beginning a medical dispensary to bring healing to the sick. Their ministry seems altogether admirable until the biographer proudly shares an incident taken from Mrs. Lethaby's 1887 journal. Evidently one young Karaki named Joseph was accused of stealing, and Mrs. Lethaby recounts her actions.

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[26]Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 101, 260, 261.

[27] The word *colonial* is a hot button in the Middle East and is not always assigned to Western influence. Significant study has been done on how the Jordanian colonial institutions of law and the military have played a role in building the modern national Jordanian tribal culture. The Jordanian government itself uses colonial forces, sometimes ignoring real tribes and their history in order to create a mythical national identity. See Joseph Andoni Massad, *Colonial Effects : The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 73-79.

I went to the house of the boy and demanded from his mother the large picture of Queen Victoria we had given him, thinking he was honest, when even then, as we find; he has stolen pens from us. His mother and grandmother pleaded he was young, and it was not much to be angry about . . . but I took the picture down, telling them I could not let our good, honest Queen look down upon an unrepentant, dishonest boy. [28]

The Lethaby's zeal for the Gospel shines through everywhere else in the biography, but here one sees that among their activities was the sacred duty of handing out pictures of Queen Victoria. Like all people, the Lethaby's had their own mix of primitive tribal, nationalistic, and religious motives in doing their work. Men such as Lawrence of Arabia, Frederick Peak, and Glubb Basha were passionate about the tribal people of the Middle East, and they used their great knowledge and affinity for the Arab tribes to accomplish the British Empire's strategic colonial goals for the region.

While the piercing eyes of Edward Said or a Queen Victoria might indeed challenge one and serve as a "check" to one's motives in studying tribes in a Church context, one needs to be mindful of an even higher gaze—that of the Lord. His desire is to see all tribes come to the knowledge of his son, Jesus Christ. Roland Allen's words, penned in the early twentieth century, should be repeated as a sort of confessional by all of those involved in the missionary enterprise.

We have allowed racial and religious pride to direct our attitude. . . . We have approached them as superior beings. . . We have not learnt the lesson that our own hope, our own salvation, our own glory, lie in the completion of the Temple of the Lord. . . . We have not understood that the members of the Body of Christ are scattered in all lands, and that we without them, are not made perfect. . . . Consequently we have preached the Gospel from the point of view of the wealthy man who casts a mite into the lap of a beggar, rather than from the point of the husbandman who casts his seed into the earth,

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[28] Thomas Durley, *Lethaby of Moab : A Record of Missionary Adventure, Peril, and Toil* (London: Marshall Bros., 1910), 140.

knowing that his own life and the lives of all connected with him depend upon the crop which will result from his labour.[29]

Realizing that Allen's confession should never be far from a Christian's lips, understanding tribe is a way of encouraging the interdependence which is so badly needed. Far from looking backwards at a primitive concept of tribe in need of modernization, the tribal concept of community may offer an even better lens through which one can understand the Body of Christ in the Middle East. Colonial urges of tribal domination are universal and can affect every aspect of ministry if gone unchecked. By confronting the subject of tribe, individuals of any tribal loyalty (all have them) can build healthier communities that more fully embrace the interdependence which Christ demanded.

Genealogical Valuation (Individualistic vs. Tribal)

The way the West views genealogy is so fundamentally different from the way a Jordanian looks at it that I want to discuss here what might be a distinctive of a healthy approach to this critical subject in a church context. Westerners have a presupposition that too much interest in one's genealogy puts one in the Nazi category of those who try to establish paternal rights based on blood, land, and ethnic purity—which is sure to result in arrogance, if not something much more destructive. The actual religious value of bloodline and lineage is an aspect that is hard for Western Christians to fathom or blend into their reality. One especially astute article on Arab kinship concludes that because of ethical implications of modern technology and other major societal changes in the Middle East, the ancient notions of brotherhood

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[29] Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods; St. Paul's or Ours?*, American ed. (Grand Rapids,: Eerdmans, 1962), 142-143.

"might fade into the realm of genealogical oblivion."[30] Perhaps for those wanting to see gender bias and other social practices end, this fading might look like an appealing ending. Christians, however, live a very genealogical narrative that cannot be ignored.

Anyone who has lived in an Arab culture comes to see that genealogy is an essential part of Arab identity. In a car full of Jordanians headed to Madaba many years ago, I started a conversation about how somebody was related to someone. This conversation set off a group discussion that concluded with a young girl of about ten reciting from memory a genealogy that went back about seven generations. Family members coached and cajoled and provided hints to make sure she got it right. My initial reaction was a mix between, "Isn't this amazing! It's just like living in biblical times!" and, "Why do they bother?" Many have this same reaction when reading the genealogies in the Bible, but because they were important for the writers of Scripture and modern-day Jordanians as well, it's very important that one understands their significance.

Living in this culture has resulted in my reflecting deeply on the value of my own genealogy and looking for commonality. Like most Americans, I don't find in my own genealogy the depth of what makes it so important in Jordanian society; however, the pieces are there and seemed worth exploring. I have few memories of discussing genealogy with any of my peer group while growing up. My family learned of accomplishments and some stories about a few relatives, but it was never systematized. Relatives would visit and my family would visit relatives, but it never seemed significant as to how they were related. Most relatives, other than my siblings,

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[30] Edouard Conte, "Agnatic Illusions: The Element of Choice in Arab Kinship," in *Tribes and Power : Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East,* ed. Faleh A. JabarAnd Hosham Dawod, (London: Saqi, 2003), 44.

parents, and grandparents, were just like other friends. Like many Americans, I have observed that in retirement my father had more time and renewed contact with relatives and began writing some genealogical information.[31] On my father's side of the family, there are just a couple of things which stood out. A great aunt asked my father to help find documents that linked us back to a group called "Daughters of the American Revolution." She wanted her granddaughters to be able to join this prestigious group (despite the irony that this aunt herself was actually adopted and not blood related). The document my father found now reminds me of a connection we have to our country and its history. Secondly, and more importantly, I inherited a U.S. army issue World War I era Colt 45 caliber pistol, and this serves as a reminder of my ancestor's service to our country.

What has been most beneficial about my genealogy was my family connection with an energetic immigrant who started a bank in Illinois, in 1860. This bank stock had amazing resilience, and it survived the great depression, as well as later buyouts and mergers. In the 1980s, it turned into real bank stock worth real money. That good old work ethic paid off, and the lack of descendant on that side of the family meant that my father actually received some money from this genealogical reality. This inheritance helped immensely with my college bills. I'm thankful for the discovery of that energetic German in my family tree.[32]

My mother's side is quite different, and for reasons that are yet unclear, my grandfather left Salt Lake City and a great Mormon heritage behind (there are

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[31] Most Americans pursue genealogical research looking for a sense of identity. See Christine Rose and Kay Germain Ingalis, *The Complet Idiot's Guide to Genealogy* (Indianapolis: Penguin Group, 1997), 5.

[32] According to one study done in 1998, 92 percent of Americans will receive no financial inheritance. It is certainly ironic that people in a society where economic values are of supreme importance actually leave little economically for the next generation. See Steven J. Hendlin, *Overcoming the Inheritance Taboo : How to Preserve Relationships and Transfer Possessions* (New York: Plume, 2004), 87-88.

rumors that whisky played a role in this). We didn't talk much about that side of the family until one day an old relative showed up at our house from Salt Lake City. He was fascinated to see a bunch of dusty journals, which had been in my closet. Somehow we had ended up with journals of an ancestor who had been one of the early Mormon pioneers. He scuttled those journals off to a library in Salt Lake City, and we received a photocopy. We also received a book which showed our extended family tree. I later discovered that these genealogies serve to ensure that, when I am dead, I will be baptized in the Mormon Church, giving me the choice to choose the true church in the afterlife. One day, while sitting on the back porch with a friend, I discovered he too had Mormon family roots. We pulled out the book and, sure enough, we were related. Cool, but not very useful. That is the only time I have ever seen that book opened.

My father accumulated a file of genealogical research, and we have a large family Bible with some genealogical notes in it "just in case one of the grandkids ever gets interested in it." On my mother's side, my grandmother, who is now 100 years old, has an old Bible as well. It includes genealogical notes from her side of the family. She has twenty-nine descendents. Almost all of them have been through her house, and she has asked them what they would like when she moves on. Everything in the house has at least one potential heir, and almost every book has been designated, but no one had shown an interest in this Bible. She was thrilled to have me show an interest in it, and it will certainly be my inheritance. It will be nice to have, "just in case one of the grandkids ever gets interested in it" (to quote my father again).

Looking through my own genealogical background, I can find four points of actual value which go back several generations. There has been an *economic value*

(in my inheritance through my father's side). From my army issue Colt 45 and my aunt's interest in our connection to the founding fathers, I discovered that there is a *fatherland value* that connects me to my nation. There is what I will call a *mystical/religious value*, since for some reason old Bibles are depositories of many of our genealogical records. In addition, my Mormon connection assures me of a post-mortem baptism that will give me some supposed eternal options. There are also important *relational values*, but they come primarily through my nuclear family (my parents, grandparents, and siblings). Most of my closest friendships are not drawn from my genealogical tree. The sum total of all these values, however, is not enough to make digging up and/or reflecting upon my genealogy that valuable. Perhaps if one were a Rockefeller, Rothschild, Bush, or Kennedy it would be different. But for most Westerners, the sum of all four of these values is not enough for them to force their kids to learn seven generations of their genealogy, as my Jordanian friends had done.

By comparison, the Middle Easterner lives in a world where genealogy continues to have tremendous value on all four of these fronts. Malina offers some clues as to the difference in our perspective on kinship and genealogy:

> Thus we can fairly say, given our U.S. experience, that the focal institution of American society is economics. Within this framework, the organizing principle of American life is instrumental mastery—the individual's ability to control his or her environment, personal and impersonal, in order to attain quantity-oriented success: wealth, ownership, "good looks," proper grades, and all other measurable indications of success. Now, in the Mediterranean, currently and especially in the past, the focal institution of the various societies has been and is kinship. The family is truly everything. . . . Given U.S. social arrangements, persons enculturated here would find it hard to realize what it might mean for the family to be the central institution in a social system.[33]

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[33] Bruce Malina, *The New Testament:Insights from the Cultural Antropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 29.

It is essential that one grasps the fundamental truth that the vast majority

of Jordanians still see that their tribe[34] is "*truly everything*." All four of the values

found in my genealogy are found in a Jordanian's tribal value system, but to a much

more incredible degree. It seems instructional for this study to have a look at how a

Jordanian Christian finds value in his kinship and genealogy.

Economic Value

As in biblical times, one's family network will be the primary determinant

of one's economic opportunity. Private schools provide a much higher standard of

education, but they cost money. An uncle might be the one paying for such an

education. Why? Because one's father is his older brother and your father probably

paid for his education. An education is essential for a good job, but without a good

network of relatives, it would be a lot harder to find that job. Each level of one's

genealogy presents a new network of potential employers or contacts to such

employers. Tribes often number in the thousands, which presents an incredible job

search network. In retirement or in case of medical needs or other problems, a tribe

will feel obligated to take care of one of its members. Today these tribes also form

global connections which can be very important in a global economy. [35]

Fatherland Value

Someone from a solid Jordanian Christian family, the type who lived on

the East Bank of the Jordan River before 1948, would have a sense that the land

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[34] Replacing the word *family* with *tribe*" better reflects in English the larger Middle Eastern concept of family.

[35] Most Middle Eastern tribes have the sort of international network that groups like the Jewish people have. They can work very effectively in a global economy. See Joel Kotkin, *Tribes : How Race, Religion, and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1993).

belonged to them. Many Christians are now urbanized, but they identify some town or some land that actually is theirs for perpetuity, at least psychologically. That sense of belonging and attachment to an area and land provides a deep security.[36] Members of a family would have also served in the army, so they feel proud that their tribe had served the King and contributed to the tribe's success in an unstable region. This enlarges a person's fatherland to include the whole country. Some Christian tribes, such as the Uzzayzat, can proudly point to the fact that they fought with Muhammad's army. They connect their lineage to Islam and the King's family.[37] Any picture of King Hussein or King Abdullah II shaking hands with your father or grandfather will be displayed prominently for all to see.

Sacred/Religious Value

Much work has been done among some Christian tribes to trace their lineage back to the pre-Islamic Gassanids. In addition, with the discovery of significant Christian churches in Petra, Nabatean roots are also important to some. These types of connections give one the sacred privilege of being linked somehow to ancient Christians and even the original people who occupied this holy land.[38] One's bishop, priest, or pastor may be from his/her tribe, and church association has been passed on from generation to generation.[39] Whatever church community one is a part

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[36] In the transition of Jordan into a modern country, the concept of fatherland or homeland absorbs the traditional tribal land concept. Tribes still, however, identify themselves strongly with a specific village or area. See Massad, 72.

[37] Chatelard, 320-321.

[38] Ibid., 305.

[39] Pacini, 260.

of, there will be a spiritual continuity that can be traced back to the people who lived there in Bible times.[40]

Middle Easterners also continue to guard the sense that curses and blessings are passed down from generation to generation. Tribes are astute at emphasizing the blessings that have been passed down. Something like a mental or physical problem would be considered a curse and would be hidden as much as possible from the public eye.

Relational Value

Because traditionally tribes have lived close together or in the same quarter of town, one tends to have a very close relationship with cousins and extended family. While this is changing in the urban areas, all older relatives likely grew up in close proximity and make up an incredible support network. It is possible for a tribe member to marry a first cousin, whose parents and uncles may have married first cousins—which creates a very close family.[41] Parents are all more than willing to help their children find a possible mate, and divorce is less acceptable and more uncommon than in the West.

So what is the sum total of all these values found in your tribe? If one's tribe is not "truly everything" to the individual, it is at least almost everything. It's not something which one could truly calculate, but there is an immense difference between their genealogical inheritance and mine. As new associations form and society becomes more Western, certain of the current values which Jordanians find in their genealogies will decline, but their persistence surprises many. In a society where

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[40] Chatelard, 295.

[41] Such marriages have been forbidden by canon laws of the Greek Orthodox church but all churches seem to ignore this. See Pacini, 261.

the King himself derives his own authority largely from his genealogical connection to the Prophet Muhammad, genealogical legitimacy remains important.

Urbanization of Tribes

In Jordan in the 1950s and 1960s, Jordanian Christians and Druze were actually the first groups to organize family associations. These family associations have become centers for the continuation of kinship-based living in an urbanized setting. These kinship-based associations (*jama'iyyat*) now number over four hundred, and they represent one of the fastest growing organizational categories in the country. Many have buildings that serve as social centers, providing traditional hospitality for events such as weddings, funerals, and family meetings. They are adaptations of the older tribal guesthouse (*madafa*) in the shaykh's home. These societies also collect money for the poor in the tribe, and some even provide child care and other social services to their community. In a country with high unemployment, 44 percent of the membership of one such association indicated that job opportunities and increased business was a primary benefit.[42]

Feelings of Tribal Solidarity

There are tremendous psychological benefits to being a part of a tribe. Each generation of a genealogy provides a network of people who are potentially allies in life. All of those values which are so dear are embodied in that one social unit.

The word '*asabiyya* indicates the driving tribal solidarity which is expressed in Arab proverbs such as: "blood is thicker than water" and "my brothers

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[42] Anne Marie Baylouny, "Creating Kin: New Family Associations as Welfare Providers in Liberalizing Jordan," *International Journal of Middle Eate Studies* 38, no. (2006). 349-368.

and I against my cousin: My cousins and I against the stranger." One's tribe is the primary point of reference from which to find your self-esteem and identity, and there is always a willingness to fight for it. An effective early Muslim, General Khalid bin al-Walid, harnessed the effectiveness of this 'asabiyya and organized his troops into tribal units under the correct belief that they would fight far more effectively if motivated by both religion and tribal honor.[43] Albert Hourani notes the following:

> It would seem, however, that larger states (with some possible exceptions) were created not by a tribe acting as a tribe but rather by the coalescence of different groups with an 'asabiyya of a new kind. The point around which they coalesced might be a holy man or lineage; there are examples of this in Morocco and in Anitolia and Iran in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. [44]

The uniting of that tribal spirit offered incredible possibilities, and yet there is no question that it can be wild and difficult to tame. Women also had their role in fortifying this fighting spirit. In days of old, the unifying battle cry of some tribes would be the name of a symbolic sister. There are stories of virgins being put on camel thrones to lead the battle in order to stir up a greater fighting spirit.[45] The honor of any tribe is deeply attached to protecting its women.

At times today, inter-tribal hostility rears its ugly head in the most amazing places. Almost every year there are incidents of tribal battles taking place between students at Jordan University, the top school in Jordan. Even respected government officials consider whether they should undertake revenge for the death of a tribal

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[43] Muhammad, 24.

[44] Albert Hourani, "Tribes and States in Islamic History" in Philip S. Khoury and others, *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 307.

[45] Carl Reinhard Raswan, *Black Tents of Arabia (My Life among the Bedouins)*, The Paternoster Library, No.7. (New York: Creative Age Press, 1947), 142, and Frederick G. Peake, *A History of Jordan and It's Tribes* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1958), 189-192.

member.[46] Despite these difficulties, Jordan is considered by some to be a success story in its ability to integrate tribes into its national unifying identity.[47]

In the church as well, clergy sometimes have to deal with the deep urges that families have to cleanse their family honor in a violent manner. Homicide or accidental deaths stir up deep desires to take revenge. These urges then need to be calmed. Mr. Whitman, who is considered to be a founding father of the evangelical churches,[48] was known to have said something to the effect that "the Jordanian Christian can easily drop his cloak of Christianity for ten minutes, take revenge, and then put the cloak back on." [49] In Jordan, incidents of revenge and honor killing are notably on decline in the society as a whole, but in a society where one's tribal name and identity is almost everything, one can certainly understand why small offenses by another tribe might take on grand proportions.

Seeing the power of this tribal concept of *'asabiyya*, which can bring tragic results, reminds one that for the truly honorable aspects of tribe to be a part of the church, this tribal spirit has to be confronted. Paul was certainly talking to fellow tribesmen who knew the dark side of the *'asabiyya* when he spoke to them, as well as those from other ethnic groups, saying:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. . . . Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and

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[46] Prince Ghazi notes one such conflict at the University. These conflicts hit the papers only occasionally, but they are quite common. Muhammad,17-19.

[47] Yoav Alon, *The Making of Jordan : Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern State*, Library of Modern Middle East Studies V. 61 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

[48] Roy Whitman spent over sixty-five years ministering in Jordan. He died in 1992.

[49] In a conversation with someone from Whitman's church, February 25, 2010.

each member belongs to all the others. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord."[50]

Paul understood that the focus for improving the behavior of tribal people was a renewed mind focused on God, Christ's body and the blood to which Christians all belong,[51] as well as confidence in God's ability to take revenge.

Honor, Religion and Tribe

The honor of being a part of the tribe lends itself to every member playing its part in supporting passionately the values of that tribe. Melina points out that honor, like wealth, can either be bestowed upon one like an undeserved inheritance, or it can be acquired by excelling over others.[52] Religion in the tribal context has become an honor that is bestowed upon one by pure inheritance. One is born "Christian" or "Muslim" according to one's tribe. While Islamic and Christian practices are important for many Jordanians, there is often little real enthusiasm for the actual practice of religion. It is just one of those things one inherits which one is socially obliged to fight for (or at least give the public appearance of fighting for).

In looking at the Bedouin tribes who became Christian prior to the rise of Islam, Trimingham notes that changing religions was often "a simple shifting of functional relationship, as we might say, to another insurance company,"[53] a shift which put them in the political and protective orbit of the Byzantine empire. This shift

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[50] Romans 12:1-19.

[51] Older words for tribe in Arabic are *batn* and *hayy,* which express the unity of blood. See: Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel : Its Life and Institutions*, The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids, MI. Livonia, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. Dove Booksellers, 1997), 7.

[52] Malina, *The New Testament:Insights from the Cultural Antropology,* 32.

[53] Trimingham, 310-311.

would also explain the ease at which many abandoned their Christianity when Islam became the dominant empire to reckon with.

What these tribes could not have foreseen was that when they changed their religious loyalties to Islam, it ended up having far more impact than just changing insurance companies. Becoming a Muslim ensured that they entered into the greater *umma* (Muslim community) established by Muhammad. The *dhimma* rules of that community would forcibly prevent any individual or tribe from re-converting or returning to be a community that followed Jesus.[54] Rather than an insurance company, what happened is that these tribes bought into an arrangement similar to some "family plans" that some cell phone companies offer. I once joined such a "family plan" with a major U.S. cell phone company. All it took was a social security number and a valid credit card to receive free phones and this "wonderful plan." All was fine until I discovered that the network didn't work where my kids went to school. Then it came time to move overseas again, and the company turned mean. I then found out that there was no way to get out of that plan nicely. The small print in the contract I had signed and the company's so called "customer-service" department made it incredibly difficult to leave. The company basically wanted to own the whole family's ability to connect electronically with each other and the outside world for the duration of our life on earth!

Muslim tribes have, in essence, bought into just such a plan and, without being willing to pay an incredible price, there is no way for individuals of those tribes to get out. The Muslim "tribal plan" has been given a virtual monopoly on religion in

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[54] The *dhimma* in Muslim countries became "the formal expression of a legalized persecution." See Ye'or, 48.

countries such as Jordan. With the Islamists active in the Jordanian society, the enforcement of this unfair contract is increasingly harsh.

As in the cell phone industry, technology is changing, and monopolies, whether in cell phones or religion, will be broken. The networks are no longer entirely controlled, and because of satellite TV and the internet, it will be hard to keep the monopoly going. One powerful story is of a young Saudi Muslim girl named Fatima Al-Mutairi who desired to live a Christian life. Her family did everything to prevent her from learning about Christianity, but through the internet she kept connected to Christians. Before being killed by a family member for the honor of her tribe, she wrote the poem (shown on next page) and posted it on the internet.[55]

One of the remarkable things about this poem has been the number of Jordanians from Christian tribes who have brought it to my attention. Fatima's message is powerful for any Christian, but what should be noted is her reference to leaving Muhammad but loving her homeland and her show of respect towards her grandfather. She does not see, of course, why she, as a faithful Saudi who loves her tribal genealogy and her country, should be so hated. Of course, her ancestral "tribal contract" is the reason.

In a contrasting note, a Jordanian girl who was the daughter of a prominent pastor, converted to Islam and married a Muslim in the United States. She is now actively promoting Islam. While watching her on a Saudi TV station talking about Islam, another Jordanian pastor expressed well what all Jordanian Christians would feel in seeing her, and that is, "Thank God her father is not alive!" A change of religion in a tribal society is highly offensive to the solidarity of that system. I knew

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[55] See http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-man-kills-daughter-for-converting-to-christianity-1.124541 (accessed March 10, 2010).

this woman's father. Had he been alive, he would not have killed her, but the shame

might surely have provoked a heart attack.

And We For the Sake of Christ All Things Bear

May the Lord Jesus guide you, Oh Muslims
And enlighten your hearts that you might love others
The forum does not revile the Master of the prophets
It is for the display of truth, and for you it was revealed
This is the truth which you do not know
What we profess are the words of the Master of the prophets
We do not worship the cross, and we are not possessed
We worship the Lord Jesus, the Light of the worlds

We left Mohammed, and we do not follow in his path
We followed Jesus Christ, the Clear Truth
Truly, we love our homeland, and we are not traitors
We take pride that we are Saudi citizens
How could we betray our homeland, our dear people?
How could we, when for death - for Saudi Arabia—we stand ready?
The homeland of my grandfathers, their glories, and odes— for it I am writing
And we say, "We are proud, proud, proud to be Saudis"
We chose our way, the way of the rightly guided
And every man is free to choose any religion
Be content to leave us to ourselves to be believers in Jesus
Let us live in grace before our time comes
There are tears on my cheek, and Oh! the heart is sad
To those who become Christians, how you are so cruel!
And the Messiah says, "Blessed are the Persecuted"

And we for the sake of Christ all things bear
What is it to you that we are infidels?
You do not enter our graves, as if with us buried
Enough - your swords do not concern me, not evil nor disgrace
Your threats do not trouble me, and we are not afraid
And by God, I am unto death a Christian—Verily
I cry for what passed by, of a sad life

I was far from the Lord Jesus for many years
Oh History record! and bear witness, Oh Witnesses!
We are Christians - in the path of Christ we tread
Take from me this word, and note it well
You see, Jesus is my Lord, and He is the Best of protectors
I advise you to pity yourself, to clap your hands in mourning
See your look of ugly hatred
Man is brother to man, Oh learned ones
Where is the humanity, the love, and where are you?
As to my last words, I pray to the Lord of the worlds
Jesus the Messiah, the Light of Clear Guidance
That He change notions, and set the scales of justice aright
And that He spread Love among you, Oh Muslims[56]

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[56] Fatima Al Mutairi,
http://justiceseekers.ning.com/group/thepersecutedchurch/forum/topics/beautiful-martyrs-poem
(accessed March 10, 2010).

Genealogy is Alive

In both the Jordanian's tribal name and bloodline are encapsulated all the great values that are at the core of who they are—past, present, and future. The reason I have looked carefully at genealogical understanding is to point out that genealogy in Jordanian society is very much alive and is not just an incidental record of births and marriage.[57] The *jami'yyaat* tribal association is now able to artificially "mold" genealogy membership in the interest of increasing their tribe's economic clout. This understanding shows that concepts of tribe can actually be flexible, bending, and blending to new realities as necessary.

Because it is alive, it can become a source for better defining a new and larger Christian community, which can even transcend current traditionally Christian tribal boundaries. Historically, in Jordan there were tribes of Muslims formed because a Christian man wanted to divorce his wife and his church wouldn't grant this request. There is a large Muslim tribe named Khoury (meaning "priest") who are descendents of a member of a Christian family that left Christianity. There are also Muslim tribes with distinctive histories connecting them to Christians. King Abdullah's maternal grandfather is actually a strong Christian. I am aware of one tribal *jami'iyya* that is actually shared between a Muslim and Christian branch of a family, which still share the same tribal name.[58] In the very Islamic town of Ma'an in southern Jordan, Muslim leaders in the community express pride in the fact that their mothers or grandmothers were Armenian Christians.[59]

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[99] Shryock, 22.

[100] Roland Muller and Abdullah Hawatmeh, "The Man from Gadara," (Muller, 2002), 265.

[59] Women such as these were likely taken as wives by Ma'ani Muslim men under the most terrifying conditions in the course of the Armenian holocaust.

All Jordanians live on soil that once housed hundreds, if not thousands, of churches—some estimated to be the oldest in existence. Upon visiting Yemen recently, one Jordanian pastor told me that he had an opportunity to visit with some Yemeni followers of Jesus in an ancient fort. He was able to point out to them the fish and cross symbols that were present on their own soil and to remind them of their rich Christian heritage. They were incredibly encouraged to find that within their Yemeni heritage was a Christian root. Christians are now firmly placed within their Yemeni identity and tribal genealogy.

The perfect marriage for Arab tribes has historically been between first cousins, even though genetically this practice would have resulted in the destruction of a tribe due to inbreeding. One researcher has very persuasively pointed out that the paternal genealogies so treasured by these tribes are actually illusions. Bloodlines have never been that pure, and the pride of "purity" is greatly exaggerated.[60] Arabs historically conceptualized themselves as living in tribes based on common lineage, but the self image has always been somewhat misleading. A successful leader would naturally attract new followers and move to a different tribe, but as Hugh Kennedy points out, "Because they thought in biological links . . . men would not say that they changed tribe but rather that they must have been in some way part of that clan all along."[61]

The Muslim *umma* established itself as a new type of tribe and set out to dismantle other tribal loyalties. Because this new tribe is far more powerful than any

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[60] Edouard Conte, "Agnatic Illusions: The Element of Choice in Arab Kinship," ed. Dawod, ed.15.

[61] Conte in Jabor and Dowod, 38.

individual tribe, even today Jordanians create genealogies and even political parties, which give them pretences of power in the new tribe.[62]

Imagining New Tribes

The progress of nationalism's development in Europe was marked by the ability of some to "imagine" a community that was not defined by a Latin Church dominated Christendom.[63] This progress, in turn, helped create nation states that were free of the domination of Rome. Jordan's national debate and formation has been infused with genealogical conceptions of community, which while sometimes seeming imagined, actually have helped produce the modern state.

Genealogies aren't just about the past, but actually also present an opportunity for the future. Tribes desperately want an inheritance and generations to follow that will have blessings and strength that the present generation has not known. The merging together of tribes that was accomplished to form the great *umma* of Islam was powerful, and it continues to shape Islamic communities around the world. What can be the genealogical hope of Christians as their numbers plummet throughout the Middle East? While some tribes form Facebook groups to create multinational links with their kin of the Arab Christian Diaspora, the deep relationships built through generations cannot survive long if they remain only in cyberspace.[64]

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[62] Shryock, 324-325.

[63] Ibid., 317.

[64] The Uzaizat family of Madaba is probably the largest Christian tribe in Jordan. They are the tribe that is attested to have fought for Muhammad's army and their special status in a Muslim country certainly contributed to their size. Their website is worth looking at as an example of a Christian tribe functioning in an electronic age. See http://al-uzaizat.com (accessed March 7, 2010).

As with many types of human community, the tribe actually presents a realm of incredible possibility. Lawrence Rosen points out that, despite the factors that have molded the shape and forms of tribes, they do not lose their importance and may actually be stronger than the factors which shape them. His analogy is helpful in this regard.

> For if a tribe is, in a metaphoric sense, like, say, an amoeba and not a crystal, it may be precisely in its adaptability to changing forms in its environs that its fundamental qualities need to be sought. Without reifying the analogy, we may think of this as a highly adaptive structure, one that can come in and out of existence as context suggests and survive to another day in ways that more complex or rigid forms cannot.[65]

The church is something Christians would all like to see more as a "body" than an amoeba, but somehow the high level of organization within the Jordanian church has perhaps resulted in more of a process of crystallization. The actual biological activity has stopped working effectively. The tribe, like the amoeba, has an adaptability that will serve well the forming of new types of Christian community adapted to the present Muslim-Christian dynamic in Jordan.

In order to think about new communities more effectively, it is sometimes helpful to use different terminology. Those from Christian tribes are comfortable with denominational labels to describe their communities. There is, however, a designation which some Christians use to refer to a higher tribe based on Christ Himself, which does not carry some of the historical baggage of other labels. Some use the phrase "*asheerat al masiih*" (tribe of Christ). I've heard this used by a Christian whose family could not understand a Christian's amazing behavior in a difficult situation. She explained that she behaved that way because she was from the tribe of Christ, implying that being Christian or from a Christian tribe was not enough to explain her

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[65] Lawrence Rosen, *The Culture of Islam : Changing Aspects of Contemporary Muslim Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 48.

action. Some from Muslim tribes have also indicated that saying they are from a 'tribe of Christ' is less antagonistic to their relatives than being a Christian, which has a great deal of unpleasant history attached to it. The use of this sort of tribal terminology might help in seeing communities formed without the historical religious stigmas or labels attached to them.

Narratives in Competition

The first centuries of Christianity were marked by fierce competition, especially between the Jews and Christians in spreading their message. Today in the Muslim world, Christianity and Islam face off with two conflicting religious narratives. Islamic centers and mosques funded by oil wealth spring up across the world. Many Christians in the Middle East repeat the question, "How is it that God has allowed the Islamic states to have so much money to propagate their faith?" Such hard lines of religion have always existed but with effective government intelligence services now equipped with the latest technology for use in the "war on terror," Muslim governments are well equipped to stamp out groups and individuals who try to traverse clear religious barriers.[66] While some Western governments are interested in religious freedom issues, there is no longer a Christendom that is willing to help national churches. Rather, there is a basic understanding that economic and geopolitical issues, not religious issues, are of primary interest.[67] On the other hand, some Islamic courts continue to boldly confront those who traverse the lines of

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[66] At a recent conference, one Egyptian announced that the Egyptian intelligence has opened a new department that is just focused on keeping Muslims from converting to Christianity.

[67] One Western diplomat charged with handling issues of human rights informed me that issues of persecution are really just "family problems," not worthy of their attention.

religions by taking away their wives, children, and inheritance with little or no recourse.

God actually chose stories, not propositions, to be the means by which God's message would be passed on. Genealogies have primary value when they are attached to stories. The tragedy is that even many in Christian tribes are not being attached to their significant heritage through the learning of these stories. Winn Griffin reminds says, "We live in the present part of the Story and are connected to the previous episodes of the Story while moving towards its conclusion."[68] The ability to overcome the religious barriers separating Muslims from the telling of the profound stories of the Bible is critical to seeing a new and more inclusive community of God established. Stories like that of Abdullah Hawatmeh are essential "living stories" of God at work to create a new community.

As stated above, genealogies have greatest value when they are attached to stories. In Jordan, the Muslim narrative is being effectively taught and integrated into the Jordanian school system, yet there is also an interest in Jesus and His story. A local bookstore in Amman has a series of beautifully bound decorative books with luxurious covers on them.[69] They are largely decorative, made of aged wood with the name Jesus carefully inlaid in brass on them. Inside this book, in Arabic, French, and English, are the teachings of Jesus from the Islamic narrative. Thumbing through this book, one can sense the frustration of a reader. There is really no complete story here. Muslims who become interested in Jesus will have to find a Bible or somebody teaching the Bible if they are to learn more about the true Jesus. Genealogy and story operate in tandem.

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[68] Winn Griffin, *God's Epic Adventure:Changing Our Culture by the Story We Live and Tell* (Woodenville, WA: Harmon Press, 2007), 24.

[69] This book is decorative with no publisher or author indicated.

In Jordan today there is a struggle to find a place for the tremendous tribal oral traditions of genealogy, poetry, and narrative. Traditions, which were passed down faithfully and surprisingly accurately for hundreds of years,[70] are being forgotten as nights around the campfire drinking coffee, telling stories, and reciting poems turn into nights passively sitting in front of the television or computer.

Shryock notes that the Islamic narrative was successfully historicized from the ancient narratives very similar to the Jordanian tribal heritage which he studied among Bedouins. The early Islamic community turned Muhammad from an inspired tribal leader into a prophet who had transcended his tribal roots. Shryock notes that three aspects of tribal origins were preserved:

> (1)A respect for knowledge gained through proper *isnad* (that is "chains of transmission"); (2) a preference for the *oral* transmission of even textual traditions (hence, the importance of formal recitation); (3) a tendency to think of society as a framework of discrete human linkages of power and intellectual authority reproduced *genealogically*.[71]

The Christian narrative itself developed while rooted in similar traditions. Christian narratives, as recorded in the Scriptures, form a part of tremendous oral tradition that should empower the Church in this context. Christians actually have the advantage of a narrative which can be adapted to current dialects as well as a genealogy with far richer stories of common prophetic figures than those found in other sacred writings of other religions.

Conclusion

Before moving on to see some of the scriptural underpinnings of this project, I want to review some of the significant concepts covered in this chapter:

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[70] Shryock, 23, 33.

[71] Ibid., 320.

1. Jordanian Christianity is rooted in deep tribal realities which date back to the early church.

2. Today Christianity in Jordan is declining and has little future if the walls that currently isolate the Christian community from non-Christian sectors are not breached.

3. Tribes and churches are interconnected, and it is essential for the Church to adapt effectively to the culture surrounding it.

4. Great humility needs to be emphasized in studying this subject because of the negative colonial heritage of dealing with tribes.

5. Genealogy and tribe mean virtually everything to most Jordanians and touches most aspects of their lives.

6. Tribal solidarity is a powerful force that must be transformed by Christ.

7. Muslims wanting to follow Jesus face severe tribal challenges.

8. Tribes offer incredible flexibility, and with genealogical imagination, lines can be traversed.

9. Tribal genealogy and narrative go hand in hand and offer a powerful force for building the "tribe of Christ."

The points above summarize the powerful reality of tribe in Jordanian society, along with its future opportunity for a healthier church. Tribes in and of themselves have good and bad aspects, and in the following chapter will look extensively at biblical factors which can shape and mold a future "tribe of Christ."

CHAPTER 4

TRIBAL ELEMENTS IN SCRIPTURE AND MISSIONS

The previous chapter showed the importance of "tribe" in Jordanian

churches and society. It also demonstrated the flexibility of this concept, which can

help the Church overcome barriers between Christians and Muslims. In this chapter I

will look at some scriptural and missiological dimensions of tribe. Tribes are not only

relevant today because of the tribal heritage and identity of Jordanians, but also

because of the great tribal traditions which Jordanian Christians can find in the Word

of God. I will also point out that God has historically used tribes as a way of bringing

people to Himself and biblical aspects of tribe can provide Christians in Jordan with

tools to reach across religious lines.

The study of both the Scriptures and the history of the Church are

permeated with concepts of family, community, and national groupings, yet the more

individualistic Western mind is not tuned in to the nuances of people and these types

of natural groupings. A "tribe" or "clan" is a vague concept that does not fit easily

into the "self" or "family-centered" (meaning nuclear family) paradigms of Western

society; thus, translating the biblical concept of clan and tribe into a Western context

often seems redundant, superfluous, or unnecessary. An example is Eugene Peterson's

powerful dynamic equivalent translation of a verse such as Revelation 5:9. This

portion of a song, sung for the Lamb who was slain for sins, proclaims literally, "You

were slain, and You redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every tribe and language and people and nation." Contextualizing the concepts in this passage for a less community-oriented mindset, Peterson translates "Paying in blood, you bought men and women, bought them back from all over the earth."[1] In this translation, gender has become the significant element and the subtleties of race and other social groupings are completely dropped. This translation is an excellent dynamic equivalent for an American audience but not for people who live in tribal communities.

In Jordan and much of the Middle East, the tribal social groupings are at the core of people's identity. Unfortunately, these core identity labels have often been neglected, and theologizing has often been done from a more Greek individualistic orientation. In essence, most Jordanian churches no longer include the significant concepts of "tribe" in their biblical and theological approach to Christian living, which is unfortunate because these churches exist in a society where one's tribe is his or her most important social grouping.

The tribal desert dwellers of the Old Testament and tribal villages of the New Testament are the stage on which the biblical narrative is presented for Christians. Many contemporary Jordanians share Christ's Middle Eastern tribal worldview. This SHARED view should ensure a close identity with the biblical narrative. Seeing the significance of tribal grouping biblically and theologically can help the church of Jordan more effectively incarnate the Gospel within the tribal Jordanian society in which it finds itself. Of particular significance to the Church is its theological move from an exclusive understanding of tribe, which is prevalent both in

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[1]Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message : The New Testament in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1993), 521.

the Old Testament and Jordanian culture, to the more "missional" tribal groupings which marked the early church.

Providing a comprehensive biblical theology of "tribes" is outside the scope of this research, but based upon the research conducted, certain aspects of "tribe" were found to be especially important for the context of the Jordanian church. These ideas are the areas this section will explore. Other aspects of tribe will be left for others to develop more thoroughly.

Jordanian Views of the Old Testament

Every theological issue is colored by its environment. One of the difficult issues to address in the Jordanian context is the Old Testament. Modern Christian Zionism has given many Arabs the impression that the Christian God is only on the side of the Jews. This idea has affected how many feel about the Old Testament. Palestinians make up a large group within Jordan, and many of their families have lost homes, land, and lives since the creation of the state of Israel. So sensitive is this politically charged issue that many priests and pastors avoid teaching from Old Testament themes which emphasize the Jewishness because this might result in their being accused of being Zionist.[2]

One Jordanian layman who is very active in talking about his faith with Muslims expressed to me that when talking with Muslims, he goes so far as to say Christians should never refer to the Old Testament. "It's more violent even than the Koran," he exclaimed to me. "Never encourage them to look in the Old Testament!" Such complete avoidance of the Old Testament would, of course, weaken a Semitic

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[2]Dealing with this issue is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is being seriously addressed by some. Abbassi, 9, 104, 115, 116.

church, but it does point out the need to be very careful in what and how one uses the Old Testament in this context. Church teachers in an effective "tribe of Christ" will need to function as careful genealogists,[3] helping God's people come to an understanding of their deep roots in the people of God in the Old Testament, while avoiding the misconceptions and political confusion of the present.

The Twelve Tribe Genealogical Theme

While the story of Abraham and much of the early story of the Hebrews reflected a tribal existence, tribal grouping became especially important to the Jewish people when it came time for them to enter their promised land in the first part of the book of Joshua.[4]

Before crossing the border into the Promised Land, the Israelites were organized into tribal groupings. These groups were to function as God's organizational plan for His people in their new territory. The most serious study done on this period was done by a scholar by the name of Norman Gottwald. Gottwald refers to this period as a "risky venture in retribalization."[5] As an Old Testament scholar working in a context of social struggles that marked Berkeley, California, in the 1960s,[6] Gottwald's work is significant in seeing how important the tribal structure

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[3]In the secular realm, genealogists are professionals qualified to do research and find the genealogies of others. In the church, teachers need to carefully connect people to spiritual forefathers through genealogies.

[4]Even Islam guards this concept of the Old Testament Tribes. Muslims often refer to them as the Children of Jacob.

[5] Gottwald uses the term *retribalization* to refer to the process by which Hebrew society was organized within Palestine during the time period prior to the establishment of the Israelite Kingdom. Norman K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible : A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 285.

[6] Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh : A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 Bce*, Biblical Seminar (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), xxv.

was to the formation of the Hebrew people. Taking retribalization as a model egalitarian project worthy of emulating, Gottwald says,

> The socioeconomic relations of Israelites were egalitarian in the sense that the entire populace was assured of approximately equal access to resources by means of their organization into extended families, protective associations of families . . . and tribes, federated as an intertribal community called "Israel," "Israelites," or "tribes/people of Israel/Yahweh."[7]

Theological exploration with regard to this radical view of Israelite tribalism has been extremely limited in evangelical churches, but Gottwald's work finds value in the Old Testament tribal concepts of community for the Western world. Surely this would prove to be a rich vein for the Church, especially from a tribal society, to explore.[8] Some thinkers such as Claiborne and Haw seem to be picking up this thread with an eye towards a more radical model of community.[9] This tribal period was a period of Israel's history when God was close to His people, and should offer many community lessons that are applicable to the Church.

It is important to note that while God did initiate this twelve-tribe system, the very names of most of the tribes represented rebellious brothers whose jealousy pushed them to sell their little brother, Joseph, into slavery. Like all human organizations, the tribes which God organized were in need of redemption from a badly broken family. There is a reminder in this situation that a "tribe" without a relationship to their God offers little hope for its people.

Upon entering their promised land, the Jewish people were woven together by a covenant made with God. The tribes of Israel in the book of Judges become a showcase to future generations of the need to remain faithful to a covenant and the

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[7] Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible : A Socio-Literary Introduction,* 285.

[8] Some are beginning to ask what churches can learn from such a community. Griffin, 133.

[9] Shane Claiborne and Chris Haw, *Jesus for President : Politics for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2008), appendix 1.

blessing that can come through pleasing God. It is also a demonstration of what happens when people reject God's covenant.[10]

The cry from the people of Israel to be like the other nations who had kings is counted by John Piper as one of the "spectacular sins" of Israel. Only God should rule over the tribes and only in Jesus, the God-man, could this become possible.[11] According to Gottwald, the desire David had for centralized taxation and the need for an army resulted in the emasculation of the twelve-tribe system.[12]

In due time, Jesus himself was incarnated into a thoroughly tribal world. His genealogy emphasizes that He Himself is the ultimate King who, in His very being fulfills the hope of redemption of the Hebrew tribes (Matt. 1:1-17). Jesus is from David's royal tribe of Judah, from which a royal dynasty found its root and fulfillment. He is, thus, the inheritor of all the virtue and value that is to be found in the tribes of Israel.[13] Not just the tribes of Israel, but those from all tribes can now find their sheik or tribal leader in Jesus. Even for today's Jordanian tribes, their hope can be found in the tribal principles that Jesus Himself expanded.

Those who follow Jesus, in essence, become the inheritors of the tribal system's promises. Warren Carter explains that "making Jesus central to God's purpose, the [His] genealogy co-opts Israel's history, recasts it as the exclusive property of this small group of Jesus' followers, and does not recognize a legitimate

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[10] Griffin.

[11] John Piper, *Spectacular Sins : And Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2008), 87-95.

[12] Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh : A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 Bce*, 371.

[13] Jerome H. Neyrey, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 97.

place for those who do not follow him."[14] Jesus, in essence, appears to have been

retribalizing the twelve-tribe system of Joshua.[15] While the theme of the twelve tribes

continues on through to book of Revelation, God's tribes can no longer be viewed as

belonging exclusively to the Jews.

The new development of the concept of tribe was clearly pictured in the

way that Matthew lays out Christ's genealogy. Generally, women were not included

in genealogies, but Mathew goes out of his way to include four women, each one

connecting Christ's family tree to the Gentile world.[16]

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is pictured as giving his disciples seats at His

table in His Kingdom, along with thrones from which to judge the twelve tribes of

Israel (Luke 22:26,27). Christ's disciples, in essence, have been given the role of

judges and have authority over the new type of tribes that are to be established. In the

book of James, those within the churches themselves addressed as the "twelve tribes

scattered among the nations" (James 1:1).[17]

The book of Revelation does not lose the significance of the twelve tribes

but continues to include vivid pictures of other tribes as well. John Piper describes the

scene in Revelation 21 where God is dwelling with his people:

> This is a surprising and remarkable glimpse of the new heaven and new earth.
> . . . John (recording the angelic voice) seems to make explicit . . . that the final

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[14]One can sense in Carter's writing the irritation at the lack of Universalist sensitivity in Christ's genealogy. That all earthly tribes would find their fulfillment and natural ruler in Christ alone is not easy for many to accept. Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, Bible and Liberation Series (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 65-66.

[15] Jesus, whose name is the Greek version of Joshua, is presented in Hebrews 3and 4 as the new Joshua leading God's people into their true promised land. N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus : Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 5.

[16] Bailey, 42.

[17] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James : An Introduction and Commentary*, Eerdmans ed., The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Eerdmans, 1985), 32.

goal of God in redemption is not to obliterate the distinctions of the peoples but to gather them into one diverse but unified assembly of "peoples."

We may conclude from this inquiry into John's writings that John's conception of the unique task of missions is to reach more and more people groups until there are converts from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation." It is a task that he is utterly certain will be accomplished, for he sees it as already complete in the Lord's vision of the age to come.[18]

As Piper makes clear, God did not set out to obliterate tribes. His goal is to include them in this wonderful orchestra of worshippers. The very completeness of His symphony requires the presence of some from each tribe with their unique identity. Tribal concepts beginning in the Old Testament carry through right through to the grand pictures seen in the book of Revelation. John's revelation is particularly noted for groups of "every tribe and language and people and nation." The universal scope of God's plan of redemption is continually brought center stage and the tribes are a part of this picture.[19] With Christ's blood, people from every tribe and language and people and nation have been purchased.[20]

The final picture of the New Jerusalem , however, does not lose the powerful twelve tribes as a genealogical theme that runs through the scriptures. In Revelation 21:12-14 there are the gates of the great city inscribed with the names of the twelve tribes and the foundations inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles,[21] completing the synthesis of the ancient tribes of Israel and the "tribes of Christ" established by the apostles but merged eternally into the final dwelling place of God and His people.

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[18] John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! : The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 184.

[19] Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation : An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Eerdmans, 1987), 97.

[20] Revelation 5:9.

[21] In Arabic, both in the Bible and the Koran, the tribes of Israel are designated with the Hebrew name for tribes, *asbat,* making a clear distinction between Gentile tribes and the Hebrew tribes. In Jerusalem, St. Steven's gate is referred to by Muslims as the Gate of the Tribes.

Missions and Tribe

Astute missiologists have long seen the importance of understanding tribes. While the early church had to deal with ethnic tensions in order to become united as a larger "tribe of Christ," by around AD 300, groups such as the Armenians converted as a nation and language group to Christianity. Christianity in Ireland also spread through 127 tribes, and the Gospel took Europe tribe by tribe. Currently, the Gospel is also spreading through Africa and India, tribe by tribe.[22]

These tribal conversions often created mono-ethnic churches similar to the churches established among the Arabs by the fourth century. While the Church should promote brotherhood, it will continue to include many one-tribe clusters and should not seek to promote tribelessness. A tribal Christian should be more concerned for the tribal good and should outdo others in his or her tribe.[23] Tribal commitments should not get in the way of the spread of the Gospel, but instead should facilitate the transfer of that message to new tribes. Something unhealthy happens when tribes become stagnant and are no longer committed to the spread of the Gospel in their own tribes or the spread of the Gospel trans-tribally. There is also an inherent danger in following the homogeneous unit principle too far, and Paul Metzger notes that church growth, at the expense of race and class division, can be morally disastrous.[24]

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[22] Donald McGavran, *Understanding the Church in India* (Bombay: Gospel Literature Service, 1979), 121-122.

[23] Ibid., 124-125.

[24] Paul Louis Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Division in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans 2007), 47.

Pillars for Missional Tribes

Avoiding the sort of racism and ethnocentrism which one-tribe Christianity can produce requires churches to "move beyond tribalistic agendas and become partners with other "tribes" to break down consumer walls that divide people and build on the church's foundation."[25] Metzger points to the consumer walls that divide the Church racially in the United States, but in a tribal culture such as Jordan it is the religious walls which most effectively compromise the Church's ability to display the transforming power of Christ.

A Jordanian editorialist who admires the ancient Bedouin tradition in Jordanian society refers to their characteristics as "five pillars of Bedouin ethos" (analogous to the five pillars of Islam). These virtues are described as hospitality, generosity, courage, honor and self respect.[26] My research revealed several promising pillars of tribes that can contribute to the future growth of the Church in Jordan. Unity**,** humility, protection, reconciliation and hospitality have been characteristics identified as essential, deeply biblical, and worthy of defining the Christian community.

Missiologist Don Richardson found, as a result of his work within tribes in Indonesia, that there were what he called "redemptive analogies," which God had placed within tribal cultures. Using these indigenous "redemptive analogies," which pointed towards the message of Christ, greatly facilitated the communication of the Gospel message.[27] The five areas I will look at below in the light of the scriptures are "tribal analogies." They can be viewed as aspects of God's character and plan for

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[25] Ibid., 132.

[26] Musa Keilani is referred to in Layne, 98.

[27] Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Glendale, Calif.: G/L Regal Books, 1974).

presenting his truths to a tribal society in a way that they better can understand and relate to. One can see these as pillars for a "tribe of Christ" that follows Jesus in a tribal context. From my interviews and research, these can be especially valuable at bringing down the religious walls that separate those from Muslim and Christian tribes in order to create a stronger believing community.

The fact that there are remarkable similarities between the ancient Hebrew tribal structures and those of traditional Bedouin tribes underlines how relevant these pillars can be to the Jordanian church.[28] They represent ancient practices which are still a part of the collective memory of Jordanians.

Unity

Tribal unity is based on the fact that they are descended from a common ancestor and lineage. This lineage creates a family structure with common paternity, making all brothers and sisters. Even if this ancestry is not historically true for the ancient tribal peoples, De Vaux says "the whole social organization of the desert is summed up in a genealogy."[29] With this common ancestry, the twelve tribes formed a confederation. At the same time, they were unique as a tribal entity in that it was not only their kinship which held them together, but also their common faith in Yahweh whom they had agreed to follow (Jos 24).[30]

David sings in Psalm 133:

[1] How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!

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[28] See Dwayne Lyall Merry, "The Bedouin of Southeast Jordan:An Ethnographic Study of the Beni Sakhr Tribe and a Comparison of Their Lore and Customs with Those Contained in the Book of Judges." (Thesis (Ph D), New York University, School of Education, , 1969). Also Morris S. Seale, *The Desert Bible: Nomadic Tribal Culture and Old Testament Interpretation* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1974); De Vaux.

[29] de Vaux, 5.

[30] Ibid., 7.

^{2} It is like precious oil poured on the head,
    running down on the beard,
    running down on Aaron's beard,
    down upon the collar of his robes.

^{3} It is as if the dew of Hermon
    were falling on Mount Zion.
    For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
    even life forevermore.

This kinship harmony brings forth the holy oil, normally reserved for the priest, and results in the profound eternal blessing. For the ancient tribe, it is apparent that family unity was essential for the blessing of God to be upon them as a people.

A tribe is intimately connected to a sense of common paternity. Christ's teaching his disciples to refer to God as Father indicated an astounding genealogical openness.[31] While Christians are clearly grafted into an amazing family tree, Kenneth Bailey points out that by using the term *abba* in prayer, Jesus:

> …affirmed a vision of a family of faith that went beyond the community of those who claimed a racial tie to Abraham. By contrast, every human being, of any tribe or nation has a father. Thereby if God is "our Father," all people are able to address him equally. There is no racial or historical "insider" or "outsider" with the word *abba*.[32]

Those from any tribe, through praying the way that Jesus taught to pray, have access to the living source of the family tree. Jacques Ellul identifies the Church as an anarchic institution based on this egalitarian access to God the Father. In his book *Anarchy and Christianity* he notes that while God has established all earthly power, there is in Christ the power to overcome all difficulties.[33] The unity

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[31] Leaders in the Middle East like King Abdullah take on the role of being a father to their nation—similar to how those from the United States talk of their "founding fathers." Fatherhood is also at the heart of many nationalist movements. See Massad, 226.

[32] Bailey, 96.

[33] Jacques Ellul, *Anarchy and Christianity*, 1st English ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 85.

established with God the father unleashes the anarchic power of Christ in the Church that can break all walls that stand against the Gospel.

The study of Arab tribes and their nomadic roots revealed that such tribes were accustomed to living in a state of literal anarchy.[34] I also showed that the Old Testament concept of tribe had this remarkable egalitarian emphasis. It dignified the individual in the light of a community in which leadership was vested in God and God alone.[35] Putting these two factors together, it is clear that Arab Christian churches today who are willing to live as if "Christ is among us" in multi-religious and multi-ethnic community may recapture this anarchic power available through the Father.

When Jesus, in John 14:2, tells His disciples that He is preparing a room for them in His Father's house, there is an especially vivid picture of the establishment of a new tribe, when seen through tribal eyes. Jordanian Christian villagers have indicated to me that normally one would prepare such a room when there was a wedding and a groom was bringing his bride from another village to live with that tribe. There was always a room ready for a visitor. The disciples are being intimately connected to the very community of God through a permanent dwelling place in His tribe.

The New Testament communities which were established looked like what anthropologists now refer to as "fictive kin groups." Bruce Malina explains that these groups had marked similarities to prevailing kinship institutions. "Thus, post-Jesus groups expected the "birth" of new members and their nurture until the group's

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[34] Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), 37.

[35] Ellul, 46.

ultimate goal of salvation was realized."[36] While the twelve tribes of Israel were named for their genealogical founders, there is little doubt as to why the name "Christian" became attached to these "fictive kin" groups. Though childless, Jesus established a tribe that included branches that were not genetically entitled to belong to the holy lineage, but they have been grafted into Abraham's family tree.[37]

A "tribe of Christ" would be united around the person of Christ and the common paternity in keeping with the leader's desire. DeSilva has pointed out that, in the early church, "A transition between natural kinship and the fictive kinship of the community of disciples is facilitated by the concept of God as Father."[38] Whether one is from a Christian tribe or a Muslim tribe, all are interconnected to the common Father in a common tribal vine which is expected to produce love for one another (John 15:1-11).[39]

Humility

The Bible says that Moses was the most humble man on the face of the earth,[40] yet he actually stands out as the key tribal figure in the history of his own people. Humility does not conflict with having a strong concept of one's own genealogical people. More individualistic societies tend to focus on humility as

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[36] Malina notes that the "fictive kin" groups which appeared post-Jesus are in marked contrast to the political action group (looking to societal change by God's intervention) that existed during the life of Christ. Malina, *The New Testament:Insights from the Cultural Antropology*, 214.

[37] Romans 11:17-23. The wild olive branches, representing Gentile tribes being grafted into the Hebrew family tree, give a very vivid picture of where such tribes fit in the new genealogy.

[38] David Arthur deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity : Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000). 196.

[39] The Hebrew word for tribe, *sabt,* actually means branch – linking the vine and branch analogy very closely with tribal connections.

[40] Numbers 12:3.

behavior which looks humble to the outsider. In a tribal society, what is important in a

humble act is that it bring honor to the greater genealogical audience.

Mary's amazing outburst, upon finding that her humble pregnancy fit into

God's genealogical plan, seems to be a significant statement about humility. In the

Magnificat, Mary describes a profound genealogical audience for humility:

> [46]And Mary said:
> "My soul glorifies the Lord
> [47]and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
> [48]for he has been mindful
>   of *the humble state of his servant.*
> From now on *all generations will call me blessed,*
> [49]for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
>   holy is his name.
> [50]His mercy extends to those who fear him,
>   from *generation to generation.*
> [51]He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
>   he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
> [52]He has brought down rulers from their thrones
>   but has lifted up the humble.
> [53]He has filled the hungry with good things
>   but has sent the rich away empty.
> [54]He has helped his servant Israel,
>   remembering to be merciful
> **[55]***to Abraham and his descendants forever,*
>   *even as he said to our fathers.*[41]

In her pregnant state of total humiliation in front of her fiancé and tribe,

God made Mary confident that out of her humility there would be generations of

descendants.   Her humble situation would actually bear generations of glory for her,

which caused her to burst out in praise, since genealogical significance in the great

tribe of their forefathers was the driving hope of all young virgins in Nazareth. In

Jordan even today, when a young woman delivers a first born son, there is almost a

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[41] Luke 1:46-55 [emphasis added].

change in personality and a new confidence. They have a sense of security in having provided future generations for the whole tribe. [42]

In the small tribal village of Nazareth, Mary's humble state as a pregnant unmarried virgin would, to most, certainly not have pointed to a significant genealogical future. The prospects for her son would have seemed even less hopeful. Malina points out that "a man's honor is involved in the sexual purity of his mother."[43]

Mary's humility, however, does have a genealogical reward. Throughout scripture, the underlying message is stated clearly in James 4:10 that "humble yourself before the Lord, he will lift you up." To act humbly in a tribal perspective, one needs to affectively visualize the audience for humble actions. God Himself is the one preeminent viewer. On top of that a "cloud of witnesses" to a tribal society includes the genealogical tribe along with those from the "tribe of Christ" (Hebrews 12:1).

Because Christians are a people of destiny, they are also a people of hope. Today in the Arab world, despite the demographic decline and persecution for those who follow Jesus, humble situations can become a source of real power and strength. Because of Christ's promises, Christians can be confident in a genealogical future, despite the humiliation which often abounds for minority Christian communities.

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[42]What is remarkable about Mary is that God provided this confidence in the midst of a village where surely the local rabbi would have echoed the words of Sheik Trad Fayez—a modern-day figure in the Jordanian Parliament who opposed a reform program which would have helped prevent honor killings. He said, "Within the family or the community, each woman is like a branch of an olive tree. If one branch of the tree becomes worm-eaten, it must be cut off to keep the rest sound." See Unni Wikan, *In Honor of Fadime : Murder and Shame*, Revised and extended, partly rewritten ed. (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 84.

[43] Malina, *The New Testament:Insights from the Cultural Antropology,* 48.

Protection

It was not assumed in the early church that the Church would always be able to protect its members. deSilva states,

> The leaders of the Christian movement, beginning with Jesus himself (see Mt 10:17,18. 24-25; 24:9-10) prepared their followers for society's censure and rejection ahead of time. By stressing that it was to be expected, and indeed that it was predictable, these leaders hoped that it would not be disconfirming when it actually occurred. . . . Suffering for Jesus' sake is even transformed into a badge of honor before God. This strategy represents perhaps the strongest tool the minority group has for reversing the effects of society's attempts to reign the "deviants" back into line with dominant cultural values.[44]

It is essential to prepare all those coming to Jesus for the reality of persecution and the eternal promises (2 Timothy 3:12). The possibility of martyrdom is very real even today. The Christians in Damascus came to a point where they saw that it was essential to help Paul escape in a basket lowered outside the city wall if he were to stay alive (Acts 9:25). Creative escape strategies for those facing persecution continue to be important today in a tribal society like Jordan.

Those who seek to follow Jesus in the context of a Muslim tribe often become, in essence, "deviants" and for many the only option is for them to flee to another tribe for protection, at least initially. God understood the power of tribe to wrongly judge an individual. He established cities of refuge for the twelve tribes.[45] The establishment of cities of refuge in the Old Testament tribal system offered protection for individuals wrongly accused. Churches need to explore how they can provide refuge to those who want to follow Christ.

While protecting those who have come to Jesus is an important obligation of a "tribe of Christ," there is a more radical type of protection that Jesus describes.

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[44] deSilva, 66.

[45] deVaux, 161.

Kenneth Bailey tells that in the story of the Good Samaritan, "compassion for the outsider has its finest expression in all Scripture."[46] In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus tells the story of a Samaritan who dangerously crossed a community line in order to protect a neighbor who should have been his enemy.

The crossing of religious lines can be seen in the Church in Jordan today as a sacred duty which, while sometimes dangerous, demonstrates the very essence of what the "tribe of Christ" was meant to do.

Reconciliation

With the rich connection which comes from a common genealogy and shared bloodlines comes also the tribal desire for blood vengeance for any perceived attack on the sacred bloodline. Lamek, the descendant of Cain, expresses the reality of unrestrained tribal society in Genesis 4:23-24:

> I have killed a man for a wound,
> A child for a bruise.
> The vengeance for Cain may be sevenfold,
> But for Lamek, seventy-sevenfold![47]

Blood debts had to be paid and, while the laws concerning the issue of penalty were mitigated in the establishment of cities of refuge, shed blood had to be paid for with blood (Numbers 35:31-34).[48] As noted earlier, in Jordan even today this deep desire for vengeance does not evaporate.

On the top of mountains throughout this region one finds places of sacrifice. On these, God's desire for vengeance against sinful people was placated by

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[46] Bailey, 297.

[47] War stories from one Jordanian tribe proclaim "one *Adwani* life is worth the blood of one hundred *Abbadis*." See Shryock, 68.

[48] deVaux, 12.

animal sacrifices offered by priests.[49] By Christ's death, the memory of sins has been wiped out, and His eternal priesthood has been established (Hebrews 9:9-14; 10:17).

The old law of vengeance has been usurped by the work of Christ on the cross. A "tribe of Christ," instead of seeking vengeance, brings people to the reconciler. Second Corinthians 5:17-21 lays the ground rule for a new type of tribe.

> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

From Scriptures like this, one sees that the work of a community following after Christ is essentially about bringing reconciliation to all tribes. A barrier such as that established between Muslim and Christian tribes is bound to fall if a "tribe of Christ" can begin to practice the sort of tribal reconciliation which Christ himself has established on the basis of His own blood.

Hospitality

Hospitality is one of the core values of the Arab people, and among many Jordanians today, the guest is still considered sacred. In Genesis 18:1-8, when three strangers showed up at the door of Abraham's tent, he undertook to prepare a feast for the visitors, acting just as a dignified Bedouin would. [50]

The Church has been told that this is indeed one of the qualifications for leadership in the Christian community.[51] Practicing hospitality also presents itself as

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[49] There are several such places preserved in the mountains of Petra in southern Jordan.

[50] deVaux, 10.

[51] Titus 1:8; 1Timothy 3:2.

an opportunity to serve God in a very direct manner. Guests may not be who they appear to be, and by such practices one may be entertaining angels unaware or even Jesus himself.[52]

At their very core, acts of hospitality express one's value for each other. People are indeed worth honoring, and C.S. Lewis states well why hospitality rituals are so important.

> It is a serious thing to live in a society of gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics.[53]

Honoring the God-given nature of an individual is a good place for the community of God to start when receiving outsiders. The "tribe of Christ," like the Bedouins and patriarchs of old, should certainly excel in these practices. Scripture exhorts to "offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1Peter 4:9,10).

The theological base for hospitality is immense and provides a core value that can be extremely beneficial to those seeking to welcome outsiders into the Christian community. Of course, it is a practice that is also of foundational importance within the Church. David de Silva points out the importance of hospitality in the early church:

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[52] Hebrews 13:2; Mark 9:37.

[53] C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 1st HarperCollins ed. ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 45-46.

Within the Christian culture, hospitality was also an important expression of the love of believers one for another, a living ethos of kinship within the translocal Christian community. . . . Both for the ongoing nurture of the local community and for the sake of ongoing connectedness with the larger Christian culture—the supra-local family of God—hospitality was a core value of the Church.[54]

Both in the early church and the Jordanian society, hospitality is a pillar for any "tribe of Christ" and cannot be neglected. It is a deep reflection of our honor for God and our eternal family.

Conclusion

In this chapter it has been seen that tribes are indeed at the very core of God's plan for the world. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, tribes are a significant element in the Scriptural narrative, which offers a relevant paradigm for talking about community in a country like Jordan.

There are certain key characteristics of tribes which can form pillars of a "tribe of Christ" in Jordan. Pillars such as unity, humility, protection, reconciliation, and hospitality can sustain a healthier understanding of the Christian community in Jordan. It also offers hope in bridging the religious walls which divide tribes.

In the next chapter I will look at the methods that were used to conduct the interviews that revealed the important aspects of tribe which this chapter addressed.

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[54] deSilva, 216-217.

CHAPTER 5

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This chapter will explain the research methods that I used to ascertain significant areas of tribe that are relevant to the Jordanian church (explored in the previous chapter). In the Church, there has been a censoring of the subject of tribe under the guise that such discussion might distract from "God's Kingdom" and the greater unity which Christians desire. The potential for divisiveness and negative "tribalism" is always there but, for the purpose of research, it was extremely important to find "transformational leaders" who could think clearly about tribe and see the positive value of this research. The primary goal was to discover and draw out reflections on tribe that might, in the context of the Jordanian Christian community, provide solutions for the future of a church in demographic decline, and help it face new challenges. In this chapter I will, first of all, describe the two methods of research employed in this study—appreciative inquiry and interviews, followed by a description of some of the challenges of conducting this kind of research.

To talk to somebody about tribes among Jordanian evangelicals is to enter a realm ever present but rarely mentioned. When anthropologist Andrew Shryock was doing research in Jordan and asking school children if they were learning about tribes in school, one precocious eleventh grader wagged her finger at him in a scolding manner and said, "of course not. There are no tribes in school." To explain the absence of tribal information in the school system, one astute informer noted to

Shyrock that, in actuality, they do learn about one tribe, the Hashemites, and that is the history that it is hoped the students will learn to respect and admire.[1]

Research Methodology

In this research, three methods have been utilized: a) a study of "tribes" and relevant aspects of tribe in the biblical and cultural context; b) appreciative inquiry, and c) interviews with transformational leaders. All have been an essential part in finding aspects of tribe that can be utilized in finding solutions to the challenges currently being faced by the Church in Jordan.

Appreciative Inquiry: A Story-Centric Methodology

This research focused on finding positive aspects of the Jordanian tribal society and exploring how they can be used redemptively within the Christian community for greater growth and stability in what can be a hostile environment. The research method that shared the most promise for discovering these pivotal elements was appreciative inquiry (AI). Some of the guiding principles of AI include looking for a "positive change core" and the "importance of continuity." As Burke explains,

> Threaded throughout AI literature is the identification of the organization's positive change core. This is the heart of AI. The idea that within every organization there exists processes and experiences where the organization performed at its best--A time when things worked right. No matter how remote or hidden this positive change core may be, we know that it is present. AI seeks to uncover those life-giving forces found within the positive change core of the organization and envisions an organization where high value moments are the norm and not the exception. . . .
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> It is important to preserve an organization's connection with its roots—its past. However, not just any old aspect of the organization's past but especially those

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[1]The Hashemites are the King's tribe and, in the interest of national unity, other tribes are de-emphasized. Shryock, 306-307.

aspects that respect the rich development of the organization; those elements that represent the organization's identity and character.[2]

The tremendous history of Arab Christianity certainly has both this "positive change core" and a continuity, which were explored in this research project. The rich stories and insights collected from the interviews yielded sufficient data and stories to look to the tribal possibilities for the future, while guarding the rich heritage of the past.

Interviews

Within the framework of AI, my primary method of collecting the solutions was through eight interviews with key transformational leaders from within the Jordanian church. These interviews were undertaken during visits to their places of ministry, in homes, schools, offices, and churches. They took place between May and December of 2009, with most of the recorded portion of the interview lasting an hour. Those interviewed represented different Jordanian churches and different denominations, Jordanians and non-Jordanians (Palestinians, Egyptians) who have been active in ministry for a cumulative total of over 150 years. Because of the tremendous sensitivity in Jordan to tribal issues, the names of those interviewed have been changed.[3] Questions used in the interviews were broad, with the primary purpose of evoking stories relevant to the issues of tribe and church interactions. This approach left room for the story telling which in AI theory, as well as Arab tradition, offers an "essential ingredient" to finding positive solutions.[4] The questions were

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[2] Robert M. Burke, "Appreciative Inquiry: A Literature Review," (Southfield: Laurence Technological University, 2001), 16.

[3] Yoav Alon recounts the story of how his Masters research in Jordan, after being reviewed by a leading Jordanian shaykh, resulted in a flurry of hostile newspaper articles and threats of lawsuits for libel. Alon's incendiary text consisted of quotes from historical records which placed the shaykh's father in a bad light. Alon, vii.

[4] Burke, 14.

1. Where do Christians fit in the national understanding of the "tribes of Jordan"?

2. Are churches operating as "Christian tribes" within Jordanian society?

3. Are some churches more tribal than others?

4. What are some of the tribal distinctives of our Christian community?

5. What are Christian tribal issues that are relevant to the inclusion of those from Muslim tribes into the Church?

6. What are the issues relevant to the inclusion of Iraqi and Egyptian Christians?

7. How do you deal with the tribal realities of Jordanian society?

8. What are the most important or relevant aspects of tribe to an Arab?

Research Design

It was critical that the right individuals be interviewed. For this purpose, my first step was coming up with a list of potential interview candidates. In consultation with my supervisor, a list was drawn up, representing a cross section of those most likely to make a positive contribution to this research.

Each interview was scheduled and recorded, and a copy of the interview was given to my supervisor.[5] A written transcript was made of the essential areas discussed in order for me to analyze and categorize the results. There was also the need for follow up questions and clarifications with many of those interviewed.

Because the subject of tribe is so rarely addressed in a church context, the interviews were also designed to spur more thinking in the area of tribe. With many, I again made contact following the interview in order to gain further clarification and explore threads of discussion which seemed profitable. There will also be value in

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[5] All of these recordings have been destroyed to preserve confidentiality.

continuing to follow up with these leaders in communicating the results of this research.

Transformational Leaders in Tribal Context

Asking a transformational leader about how tribal issues operate within the Church in Jordan was a little like asking a bird to explain how it flies. The operation of tribe in Jordan is so intuitive that any leader has certainly learned effectively to "fly" within the tribal system. They are not, however, accustomed to explaining how tribe functions within a church context. Based on discussions prior to this research, it became clear that only a very astute sort of interviewee would be helpful. Those interviewed had to have the ability to grasp quickly the theological possibility of tribal concepts. It was also essential that they had a reputation for ministering to those who are not a part of their own ethnic tribe. A leader's inclusiveness of other ethnic groups displays the sort of understanding of tribe that was most helpful to this research. It was also important to interview those from outside the Jordanian ethnic Christian tribes who had effectively integrated into the Jordanian church.

In the more individualized Western society, the first question asked in a new relationship is often related to work. By contrast, in Jordan to this day – the first question one asks is about the *asl* (roots) of an acquaintance. Asking questions about ethnic tribal roots is almost reflexive. One learns that discussing tribe in a Jordanian context requires sensitivity to the modern reality and how "tribe" is sometimes interpreted or perceived. Several reactions I have seen over the years helped me to avoid "landmines" in my conversations. Trying to avoid the landmines might have made the interviews less than productive. Exploring the subject of tribes with

individuals who have certain presumptions would have proven less than fruitful, and was therefore avoided.

Tribal Land Mines

Two spontaneous reactions to questions of tribe are memorable and helpful in negotiating the subject of tribes in Jordan. One young taxi driver, when asked about his *asl*, insisted he was from Amman. Prior to the establishment of Jordan as a country in the early twentieth century, Amman was nothing but a small Circassian village, so it was strange that he had not identified himself as a Circassian. When asked if his grandfather was from Amman, he began to become agitated. After acknowledging that his grandfather was from Hebron, he launched into a long diatribe about how there were no real Jordanians and Jordan was composed of Palestinians who had moved from the West to the East. This response is a Palestinian political reaction which negates the legitimacy of the Hashemite and "East Bank" tribal dominance of Jordan. The sense that illegitimate "tribal" groups have taken control of people in Jordan and have not treated others well puts a cloud over the study of tribes for many Palestinians in this country.[6] For this reason, only one Palestinian was interviewed–and he is married into a large Jordanian clan, giving him a more astute and positive understanding of the Jordanian tribal realities.

The second reaction came from a young Jordanian church leader. On hearing about my research, he immediately expressed a concern that tribes are for old people. In probing his response, I discovered that from his experience, tribes meant old people and submitting unquestionably to their reality. The future requires new

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[6] Shryock describes well the gap between Palestinian/Jordanian feelings on tribe. While Palestinians may, for political reasons, be less tribal, they often form or are a part of *jami'iya* associations in Jordan. Tribe-like structures pervade even in the West Bank of the Jordan River. Shryock, 72, 215.

education and understanding that the older generation did not have. Historically, tribes of the Middle East chose leaders who were competent to lead them in war and survival in the hostile region. To this leader, old men sitting around and talking about the past does not have relevance to the dynamic new society and the leadership needed, nor could they offer viable solutions. It is hoped that this research will help young leaders like this to value important aspects of tribe.

Interviews

Eight interviews were conducted with leaders from several different backgrounds. The primary focus was a Jordanian understanding of tribe. Five of those interviewed were from tribes who consider themselves primarily Jordanian. One was from a Muslim tribe, two were from the north of Jordan, and two were from the south. Both the Palestinians interviewed and one of the Egyptians are married to Jordanians; thus, they understand well the tribal framework. The conclusions I reached in applying these different methods of research will be detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

In the last chapter, I discussed the methodology of my research among transformational leaders. The objective was to find broad themes that could be useful in understanding the subject. In this chapter, I will focus uniquely on aspects of tribe that seem to offer help in morphing into the "fictive-kinship" type of communities that composed the early church. These are the categories that stood out as I analyzed the transcripts of my research interviews and AI stories.

For half of those interviewed, the subject of tribe and church had never been broached previously. These interviews were less insightful since it was new territory for them to contemplate; however, even the less fruitful interviews did show me that, while the subject of tribes in the Church has been largely avoided, once initiated there is much interest in discussing this issue. The tribal pillars that emerged were unity, humility, protection, reconciliation, and hospitality. While they were looked at theologically in chapter 5, in this chapter I will look at different stories and observations that revealed their importance and significance for this project. Alongside the results from the interviews, other stories and insights gleaned from this study have been added in order to offer more illumination to these key aspects of tribe. The goal in this section is to present stories and comments that help to see the "positive change core," which can help the Jordanian church bridge current tribal

barriers that are keeping the Church from realizing its full potential in these very critical days.

Unity of Tribe

Several of the Jordanians interviewed decried the loss of their tribal characteristics in the evangelical Church. Both Aamir and Fadi noted that the Greek Orthodox Church operates more effectively within a tribal environment. Despite their obviously Greek and foreign influence, the Greek Orthodox Church has generations of Arab Christian heritage, complete with impressive and ancient buildings and an overwhelming sense that they have helped unite the Christians of Jordan. In contrast, Aamir points out, "When we evangelicals talk of personal relationship with God, it makes the way we do church sound foreign to our culture" (neglecting the important collective aspect of culture).

There was general agreement that the evangelical individualistic approach to evangelism and Christian community is a hindrance because it doesn't take into consideration the importance of unity and interdependence in the Church. Ibrahim expressed clearly why a sense of tribal unity should be nurtured in the Church. He explained that in a tribe,

> You become part of a bigger community. Whatever good you do, all will benefit from it. Whatever bad you do, all will suffer from it, or be angry. You are practically a part of something really big. It would be good to take some of these characteristics and have them in the church. We need to be one real family in which members are a help to everyone. In the West you are free to do whatever you want. Your uncle or somebody in the family has no authority over you. [But here] The church is affected by everybody's actions. This tribal aspect is there in the church and it is good to nurture it. . . . We have to be one to help each other which is the meaning and goal of the tribal system. . . . Honor is one of the important things that a tribal system has. If someone commits a sin, the whole church is dishonored.

This collective identity does exist to some degree in the evangelical community and many denominations or churches are highly identified with certain ethnic Christian families. Many indicated the importance of strengthening this unity, as well as the danger of losing it altogether to Western individualistic thinking.

With regard to increasing this unity to include those coming from Muslim tribes, there are realities that have to be overcome. Sami pointed out important elements in this struggle.

> The biggest problem is that we say we are not tribal but we are tribal. When we rub against a real issue, the tribalism shows. . . . The Muslims were the ones who were our enemy, and that has affected the church. The second thing which makes the church reject these people is because we have not understood that we should be a new tribe. I need to allow Jesus to transform the concept of the tribe. . . . The uniting factor in our tribe is Jesus' blood. The uniting factor in the other tribe is their grandfather's blood."

It is by recognizing the tribal realities of the Church that the Church can be allowed to move on in developing a healthy understanding of tribe. This "new tribe," which is more effectively united around the blood of Jesus, is the sort of tribal understanding that all of these transformational leaders espouse. Most of the time, their tribal values were not perceived as being in conflict with their responsibilities as Christian leaders.

Humility of Tribe

Arrogance is a very tribal characteristic. Pride or haughtiness is described by the word '*anafa* derived from the word *'anf* for nose. One of the greatest insults one nomad could do to another was to press the other's nose in the dust. Seale shares about one leader's incredible tribal pride:

> Jabala ibn al-Ayham, the last prince of the nomadic realm of the Ghassanids who ruled the country around Damascus and Palmyra in the mid-seventh century A.D., provides a striking example of 'anafa in action. Of the many stories told of his pride and quick temper, one legend has it that, newly

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converted to Islam, he accompanied the Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattab on a pilgrimage to Mecca. When circumambulating the black stone of the Ka'aba, a Fazari tribesman happened to tread on his waistband which came undone. The prince lashed out and struck him. The injured man complained to the Caliph who ordered Jabala to pay compensation or else allow himself to be struck in return. How could this be, asked Jabala, seeing that he was a prince and the other a poor tribesman. The Caliph reminded him that in Islam all men were equal. The prince, acting quickly, left Mecca that night with his retinue and made his way to Byzantium where he became a Christian. In another version, the brawl takes place in a bazaar in Damascus, but the moral of Jabala's proud impetuosity is the same.[1]

Here are the roots of a problem that continues to haunt the Church. Jabala actually became a part of Christianity because he felt that in this religion he and his tribe would be more honored than what he had experienced in Islam. What has to be remembered is that the little incident in Mecca or Damascus was not a personal offense. As the leader of a tribe, that simple clumsiness of a fellow pilgrim in Mecca took on the sense of a fundamental disregard for his whole genealogical being.[2] It is the honor of who he represented as the leader of a tribe that created this exaggerated reaction. What was done to Jabala personally in that incident became indicative of how Islam would treat his people.

Jabala's proud lineage did not count God as a Father, nor did he understand the sacrifice and model of Christ in humility. The lack of this core value of Christ's church has perhaps been a reason the Church has had trouble crossing tribal boundaries. Several of the leaders interviewed noted that some in their churches wore their lineage with this kind of tribal pride.

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[1] Seale, 128-129.

[2] Malina notes that collectivist thinking creates a context where "to get to know one member of the group is to get to know the whole group." While this is considered stereotyping in our individualistic culture, this idea is common in traditional Middle Eastern thinking. In this context, Jabala sees the behavior of the one man in Mecca as indicative of the whole Muslim tribe. See Malina, *The New Testament:Insights from the Cultural Antropology*, 64-65.

Samir described the fact that when dealing with tribal conflict, he has been amazed at the power of coming humbly to the other party. Behavior which is both humbly demonstrated in hospitality when receiving outsiders, as well as humble when approaching outsiders was seen as especially effective for a church and its leaders.[3]

Nabil described a situation in which he was directing a Christian organization in Jordan. Tribe members came to him and were upset at him because he had not hired a relative for a position he had applied for in the organization. He explained to them that someone better qualified had to be hired, and they were not happy. His humility before God and submission to his tribe became mutually exclusive. What was actually perceived as arrogance by his tribe was humility before God. Above all, Nabil was thinking of the ability of this organization to benefit a more important lineage, that of Christ's.

It was Nabil who also pointed out to me that most of the time there is no conflict between the expectation of His tribe and what God wants. When it comes to approaching other tribal situations, he noted that humility such as is modeled for in the scriptures becomes very powerful. Nabil and I talked about "mature Christians" not having trouble crossing barriers for the Gospel. In a genealogical sense, that means that tribal people in churches need to have a clearer view of the genealogical future of the people of God, a future with people from all tribes worshiping Christ together.

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[3]Acting with a deferential shyness and hospitality is also demonstrated in the trinity. Making the other feel significant and welcome is certainly a Middle Eastern characteristic, which can also be attributed to God Himself. John Ortberg, "The "Shyness" of God" (accessed February 5, 2001).

Protection of Tribe

Fatima, in her poem in chapter 3, described Jesus as her Lord and the "Best of Protectors." It is quite sobering to reflect on the fact that this young Saudi woman who was actually killed for her faith depended on Jesus for her protection. Deep in the core of what it means to be a part of a tribe is the aspect of protection. There is an Arabic expression that says, "He who seeks cover with other than kinsmen is bare."[4]

Fatima had taken Jesus as her kinsman, and He certainly could have protected her. Many like her are coming to churches and Christians, asking for protection. What does protection mean? Sometimes, as with Fatima, God allows the martyrdom of individuals, but often the Church can actually do something to help such individuals. There is no question but that offering protection to people like Fatima could get whole churches in trouble with the government.[5]

Ahmad, who comes from a Muslim tribe, expressed to me his disappointment with the Christian church and their unwillingness to offer effective protection for those from a non-Christian background. He explained to me that his Muslim tribe would offer better protection to a Christian who had to flee his family than he had received from the Church. The church had offered little protection to him as a Muslim seeking to follow Jesus and facing persecution. The well-known tribal tradition in Jordan is that anyone may flee to seek protection and be received for three days by a different tribe, just for asking.[6]

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[4] Clinton Bailey, *A Culture of Desert Survival : Bedouin Proverbs from Sinai and the Negev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 123.

[5] Tchatchou, 41.

[6] Even Lot would have sooner sacrifice his own daughter than to not protect a guest who had come under his roof (Genesis 19:8). See de De Vaux, 10.

Ibrahim described the hesitancy that Christians have towards any Muslim as a classic Jew-Gentile type of problem, similar to the problems seen in the early church. He affirmed that many Christians lack the maturity to see that a person from a Muslim tribe can really be his/her brother or sister in Christ. To immature Christians like this, Muslims are considered unclean on a personal level and they should be kept away from the Church. Publicly, however, they will try to maintain normal relations. Ibrahim insisted that the Church needs teaching that breaks down this type of immaturity and brings greater love towards outsiders.

All of the leaders that were interviewed seemed to indicate that there was a real need to find meaningful ways to facilitate the acceptance of those who want to follow Jesus from a non-Christian background, especially in this area of protection. Ahmad voiced a concern, which is heard from many like him, that the Church itself is too cowardly in its approach towards defending those like him who face severe persecution.

Many of those interviewed described the ideal situation in which those from a Muslim tribe are encouraged to stay within their tribal situation, if possible, and try to form groups that could follow Jesus within their tribes. Husaam indicated that there is a red line, however, which those following Jesus from Muslim tribes face. If they are forced to repeat and comply with the *Shihada,*[7] their effectiveness as followers of Jesus becomes negligible. In this case, it is better that they seek refuge among Christians who are willing to receive them. If Muhammad is acknowledged as their prophet, Husaam has found that there is no possibility of growth in their

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[7] This is the Muslim statement of faith. "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God" (in English).

Christian faith. With time, some of those who must initially flee for safety can return to bring light to their community.

Aamir has committed himself to providing protection to those from Muslim tribes who ask for it. This commitment has sometimes meant appearing in Islamic *Sharia* courts[8] and finding lawyers for those at risk of losing their children and other rights, due to their conversion. He is also involved in helping groups like Middle East Concern[9] publicize incidents of persecution. These measures often mean that those from Muslim tribes become high profile. They then have to leave the country due to increased persecution, which results from the press attention. Aamir also noted that, "If we pull them out from their tribe, we are blocking their way forward to be a blessing to their tribe."

These observations might seem a bit contradictory. How can somebody offering protection also make it difficult for those from a Muslim tribe to re-enter his or her society (even though they fundamentally believe that it would be better for them to re-enter their tribe)? Aamir explains:

> The honorable things for a man are to sacrifice, to be honest, to protect the stranger and the weak. These are tribal and Christian values. I don't need the Good Samaritan story. My father found a Bedouin man who was burning in his tent. He took him to a hospital and then to our home. He stayed a year and became my uncle. His children became my cousins and Bedouins still tell this story.

Offering protection to those who ask for it or who need it is a most important virtue in tribal society. To not practice this appears cowardly and highlights the weakness of today's church. The job of offering protection is most difficult and delicate, and comes with those who are from a large Jordanian or Palestinian Muslim

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[8] These are the Muslim family courts set up for the enforcement of religious laws. In Jordan, these operate in parallel with civil courts which deal with most legal matters.

[9] Middle Eastern Concern is an organization, based in Cyprus, which follows stories of persecution in the region.

tribe. Those from Iraqi Muslim tribes have been able to become a part of some Jordanian churches more easily because of the fact that the government is less interested in their plight. Without negating the impact of basic Jew-Gentile type division between the Muslims and Christians, tribal and governmental pressures have been a very real part of keeping churches from receiving and protecting Muslims.

One of the most powerful demonstrations of Christ's love is, of course, when somebody crosses a religious line and demonstrates protection for somebody who is weak (as Aamir's father did). Good Samaritan stories model sacrificial acts of protection, and these cross racial lines.

One such story was told to me by a member of the Momani tribe, located near Ajloun in the Gilead Mountains. While sitting having coffee one afternoon with Abdullah, I asked him if his wife was from the same family as he. A slight smile appeared on his face and he asked me if I had time to hear a story. Abdullah began to explain to me that as a young officer in the Jordanian navy, he had been on leave and had come home to Ajloun for a break. His family arranged for him to meet and marry a young girl from the Turk tribe. The Turk tribe is a branch of the Momani tribe that had descended from a Turkish soldier who had been injured while fleeing the British and Arab armies, following the defeat of the Turks (probably in 1917 or 1918). Left for dead, this soldier was cared for by someone from the Momani tribe, who brought him back to health. The Turk was a strong man and had no interest in returning to Turkey (where it is likely he would have been treated as a traitor). He began working for a Momani tribesman, proving himself very capable. Seeing his strength and commitment to the tribe, his employer made him an offer. If he would work seven years for him, the Turk could marry one of his daughters.

True to his word, the Momani gave his daughter to him as a bride after seven years. The descendents of this marriage became the Turk branch of the Momani family.[10] Abdullah's bride was a grandchild of this Turkish soldier. Abdullah was fascinated by his bride and her family and had a great idea for a honeymoon. He asked his bride's grandfather if they could visit his family in Turkey. The Turk had never returned to his family, but he found an old letter written in Turkish from his brother, which he gave to Abdullah. Abdullah and his bride had limited time and money, but they decided to try and find her lost family. Following their wedding, they took buses through Syria to the region of Eastern Turkey where her grandfather was from. Not knowing Turkish, it took several days of showing the letter to people. Finally, in a police station in a small village, the lights went on and a policeman identified the writer. They were immediately delivered to a Turkish village where there was a joyful reunion. The village, upon hearing their story, held a second wedding celebration for them and then paid for them to stay in a nice hotel nearby. Abdullah proudly noted that the newly found Turkish tribe generously put them on a bus to Istanbul where they enjoyed a few more days of their honeymoon before flying back to Amman. They arrived with only days to spare before he had to return to duty, with money to spare..

Emboldened by Abdullah and his granddaughter's experience, the Turk returned to his native village on holiday and has renewed relationships with his lost family. In this story one can see a remarkable act on the part of somebody in the Momani family. The Turks were hated by the Arabs, but through an act of protection offered to a wounded soldier, the tribe was blessed with ancestors they could never have imagined.

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[10] This is an ancient process of tribal adoption. See deVaux, 6.

One of the biggest Muslim tribes in Southern Jordan, the Majalli tribe, owes much to the Christian Madanat tribe. One of their key ancestors, Muhammad Majalli, was brought up by the Madanats as a foster brother to Abdullah (later to become a key Madanat leader) in Karak in the nineteenth century.[11] Good Samaritan stories like these do not result in conversion, but represent the ability of tribes to overcome barriers.

Many of those interviewed are actively pushing boundaries and are seeking to provide help to those coming to Christ from other religions. Several of the transformational leaders that were interviewed have carried on effective ministry with non-Christian tribes, while those interested in following Christ remain within their original tribes.[12] This approach seems to be the most effective for encouraging the message of Christ to go forward among the Jordanian non-Christian tribes. Even some like Ahmad at one point fled the country due to persecution, but he later returned and eventually was able to re-integrate into his tribe.

Fadi saw the lack of acceptance of those from Muslim tribes as being the result of government forces that are stirred up against the Church if it does indeed accept those from Muslim tribes. He insisted that the Church is too weak to effectively accept those from Muslim tribes, and that the government itself forces this segregation and would make it harder for churches to receive those from Muslim tribes. He recounted how, in doing counseling based on Christian principles, he had faced struggles from the security services and had been accused of "proselytizing" because the husband had not agreed with the marital advice he had given.

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[11] Durley, 119.

[12] Samir was involved in such a group from a Druze tribe. The Druze are an Islamic sect with a small community in Jordan.

Here lies the great cloud over receiving Muslims into the Christian churches. The government and tribal situation in Jordan dominated by a Muslim tribe cannot allow Jordanians from Muslim tribes to participate openly in a Christian church. Realizing this problem, transformational leaders encourage those from Muslim tribes to stay within their tribal system but they commit to come to their defense in the case of threats.

There is an obvious tension if Jordanian Christians strive to force those from Muslim tribes into existing Christian churches, and the transformational leaders interviewed all saw this.

> We evangelicals have misapplied the teaching of Christ. We want people to become Christian but we need to avoid the title of Christian. It is not biblical that we have to bring them all to our evangelical tribe. We need to be more open minded and become a new type of tribe. They need to be salt and light and be melted and sprinkled in their family. Let them be rejected for their love for Christ, not for being a "Christian" [in name].[13]

This "open minded, new type of tribe" is an essential component of any future church. There is a sense among many of these transformational leaders that they need to be a part of maturing their communities to the point that they can receive those from Muslim tribes as equal members. Churches can serve as "cities of refuge" to those persecuted in their community; however, the goal of any such protection should be to help them re-integrate into their tribe and incarnate their lives as members of their Muslim tribes whenever possible.

Reconciliation

One of the functions of tribes is to bring reconciliation and avoid extended blood feuds. In Jordan today, blood feuds are most commonly practiced in the event

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[13] Samir.

of a car accident in which somebody is injured or killed. While Jordanians all carry insurance, there is the basic knowledge that when blood is spilled, money is not enough. The driver (regardless of who is at fault) is responsible for the spilled blood and the injured can take revenge. Drivers who are involved in an accident that causes severe injury will often go directly to the police in order to be imprisoned for three days for their own protection. The driver's family must visit the injured party quickly to try and ensure that there was no malicious intent. In this situation, a *Musalaha*" or reconciliation meeting must take place that allows for the compensation of the victim, and an agreement must be reached between the tribes involved.

Several of the leaders interviewed described times when their church functioned as this sort of de-facto tribe, providing means of reconciliation on behalf of a person who had no Jordanian tribe. Both Egyptians and the Palestinian interviewed indicated that they had benefited from being included in this tribal framework by their churches.

Here is an example of how they operate in modern Jordan. Late one evening about ten years ago, my wife and I were on our way home from an engagement party. We were in our car stopped at a stop light on a major intersection. Suddenly, from behind, there came a huge crash as a Jaguar plowed into the back of our car, pushing us into the middle of the intersection. Shaken up, but not badly injured, we got out of our car. A tall man in a suit jumped out of his Jaguar and stumbled towards us in a drunken state. We were pretty shaken up with whiplash, and he actually inappropriately put his hand on my wife's shoulder, saying that everything was okay, don't worry. In excellent English, he bragged about being with the King in the U.S. and that he would take care of everything. He was from a Bedouin family in

the Palace guard. A crowd had gathered, and a policeman approached slowly, hoping we would work it out without the need for him to get involved.

A friend happened to see the accident and warned me not to leave the scene unless I had his driver's license. Not wanting to see him drive off again in a drunken state, I was relieved to see his radiator explode. After receiving his license and two phone numbers, we were able to drive off, despite the damage to our car.

I obtained a bid on the repairs for the car and called the numbers he had given me, only to find that they were not in service. His driver's license was expired and we didn't have his family name; however, a friend of my wife asked us to give her the name on the license. Within hours, she got back to us with a telephone number, saying if anyone asked where we got the number, we were to tell them from the post office (a virtual impossibility). I called the number given me and found myself talking to the brother of the man who had hit us. His first reaction was surprise. Where had I gotten his number? He immediately started defending his family, explaining that they were honorable and that they wanted to visit me right away. Within ten minutes, the man who caused the accident was on the phone, assuring us that he would visit and make all things right. Once he realized that we were not random foreigners and actually had a tribe defending us, the whole situation had changed.

We told a Palestinian neighbor, a Jordanian pastor, and some others friends that the man would visit us and each said the same thing, "We want to be there!" The event had become tribal without our knowledge and was to be taken very seriously. An official s*alha*[14] was taking place, reconciling two tribes and preventing further conflict. When the young man arrived in our house, all the men were seated in

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[14] The *salha* is the reconciliation meeting while the *atwa* is the settlement.

the front room, including my young boys and a brother-in-law who was visiting. This situation was all turning into a big deal! The young man arrived with a box of candy and, seeing that there was a room full of men, his posture changed markedly and he stared at the ground. The Jordanian pastor took the lead and no coffee would be served until the young man acted appropriately. The women looked in through a key hole in the kitchen door. One woman remarked, "We are always the ones causing accidents and having to *salha* someone else's tribe! It's great being on the receiving end."

Everyone looked grim and the young man confessed to his failure and having shamed the King and his family. The pastor mentioned the touching of my wife, and this set off a new round of penitence. Finally, he said that he would pay for the car and do anything else required. The pastor agreed and, after sharing a word about reconciliation from the Bible, the coffee was served, sealing our tribal agreement. He made good on his promise to fix the car and called me regularly, asking if I needed anything else. As foreigners we would be in a weak position without a tribe. Our church, a Palestinian neighbor, and even my brother-in-law visiting from the United States had become our "tribe".

Husaam described an incident in which a beauty salon that had been opened by a member of a Christian tribe had been torched and destroyed by some young radicalized youth from a large Muslim tribe. Following the incident, a large number from the aggrieved Christian tribe assembled at the house of one of the tribal leaders. Seeing the number of cars in front of the Christian tribal leader's house, the Muslim tribe quickly assembled a delegation to meet with the aggrieved family and compensate the victim on behalf of the Muslim tribe. While this incident could have

turned into a Muslim-Christian conflict, by working through it in a tribal framework, the more inflammatory religious element was avoided.

While the Church will not always be able to provide protection for its members who are facing persecution, church members or pastors with stronger Jordanian connections or roots[15] who are willing to engage on behalf of members of their churchcan be especially helpful in tribal situations. They can help the society see the tribal solidarity of Jordanian believers.

When it comes to those from Jordanian Muslim tribes who want to follow Jesus, the situation is much more difficult. One pastor described an incident where a believer's father was threatening him for his contact with his son. To end a particularly threatening and abusive conversation with the father, Fadi yelled, "I am from the X tribe and you are from the Y tribe, and I will not put up with this." Suddenly the conversation turned polite and very respectful. Bringing in the tribal element can be useful in holding off the violent tribal reactions and might eventually allow those from Muslim tribes to reconcile with their families.

Nabil told me the story of a Yemeni follower of Jesus who had been something of a rebel and had rejected his tribal traditions to find his own course in life. Upon finding Jesus, he actually came to appreciate his tribe again. His mother was a leader in the tribe and, while she did not agree with her son's faith, she defended him before the rest of her tribe and outsiders. Her status actually made it possible for him to distribute Bibles to his whole tribe. It also protected him from persecution from outsiders in the government or other tribes.

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[15] Jordanian roots may mean just good connections with a member of the royal family or intelligence services. There are some families, such as the Toukan family or Queen Rania's family, which are clearly Palestinian but have close relationships with the Hashemites due to their intermarriage.

Waliid described an incident in his family where a young Christian woman fell in love with a Muslim. They were in the United States, and the woman's tribe prides itself in the fact that there are no Muslims in their family. The woman insisted that she would only marry if she could get her father's permission. The man, being a wealthy consul representing a Gulf country in Washington DC, flew over with plenty of gifts and asked her father for his daughter. Permission was granted. The honor of the family marrying into wealthy connections overruled the shame of their daughter marrying a Muslim.[16] The tribe, rather than rejecting the marriage, actually condoned it.

Part of the dynamic in this situation is that the woman lived abroad. When operating beyond tribal territory, sometimes a tribe can look the other way. While doing doctoral research in Oman, Unni Wikkin discovered one aspect of tribe that was relevant to her research on honor killings. What she noted is that the tribal society actually covers up many moral infractions, and it is only those that come into the public eye that bring shame and produce violence.[17] When looking at issues of conversion as well, sometimes the best option may be to lay low or spend some time in another country which may indeed allow time for reconciliation.

Hospitality of Tribe

Jordanians traditionally pride themselves on their hospitality, and the Egyptians interviewed especially saw this as an important part of church life in Jordan. Waleed commented that, like Jordanians, Egyptian Christians from Upper Egypt have the same tradition that visitors should be entertained and welcomed for

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[16] Traditionally such a girl might have been killed for even having a relationship with a Muslim man.

[17] Wikan, 88.

three days in their home before being asked the purpose of the visit. According to

both Egyptians interviewed, this Jordanian tribal hospitality goes beyond what they

had experienced in Egypt, and the Jordanian church practice is often very

commendable.

Traditional tribal hospitality can be seen as just part of a complex desert

survival strategy,[18] but when seen in the light of the scriptures, it can provide insights

into how a healthy church can relate to outsiders. Samir indicated to me that not all

Jordanian churches practice this effectively towards outsiders, even though his pastor

always made him, as an Egyptian, feel welcome.[19]

Waleed described how the presence of many Jordanian Christian tribes and

even Egyptians represented in his church helped facilitate the entry of many

Christians from his community into the Church. The presence of these groups

represented an automatic "welcoming committee" for these groups.

Deeply attached to the honor of any traditional Jordanian tribe was the

practice of hospitality. Christian tribes excelled in this practice, and a poem written

around 1900 outlined what was something of a competition between the Abujaber

tribe and two houses from the Uzayzat tribe to feed the visitor upon their arrival in the

area around Madaba.

> Three encampments on the roadside
> Abujaber, Abu Shwayha and Hanna
> United as if in line of battle
> They hasten to present food to their guests without delay[20]

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[18] Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests : How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In,* 39.

[19] Egyptians in Jordan are primarily manual laborers and are looked down on by many Jordanians.

[20] Raouf Abujaber, *Pioneers over Jordan : The Frontier of Settlement in Transjordan, 1850-1914* (London: Tauris, 1989), 227.

This is not like Western half-hearted attempts to pay a restaurant bill for others. The warlike competition to serve a guest properly is a question of honor. I am reminded of what happens after funerals done in one Jordanian Christian village. Following the funeral and burial, everyone goes through a condolence line to comfort the bereaved and then heads to their cars. The last part of the ritual, which can be skipped, is the traditional mansaf meal of rice and lamb, eaten with one's right hand around large trays (men and women separated). The number of guests at these funerals is huge and Bedouins from miles around come. The young men of the tribe block all the exit roads from the village with their bodies and do everything they can to force the guests to partake of the meal at the tribal center (*jam'iyya*).

Figure 8. Bedouin preparing for guests- holding Mabkhara (incense burner), with coffee grinders and pots at his feet.

In Jordanian society, the symbol of hospitality is the coffee pot, which actually offers continuity with ancient hospitality rituals, such as the use of incense and anointing with oil. When it comes to these hospitality values, religion is unimportant. Instead, it is the critical social interaction of honoring someone from another tribe that counts.[21] Coffee is now used to welcome guests, and the careful serving of bitter coffee with cardamom has been a way of honoring guests in a Jordanian home since the fifteenth century.[22] Even today in countries such as Yemen, a visitor is anointed with expensive *oud* (perfume)

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[21] Christine Jungen, "Chrétiens et musulmans:l'hospitalité à Kerak," from Riccardo Bocco et Géraldine Chatelard, ed. *Jordanie: Le Royaume Frontière* (Éditions Autrement, 2001), 82.

[22] For an explanation of the traditional Arab ritual, refer to Annegrett Nippa, "Art and Generosity: Thoughts on the Aesthetic Perception of the Arab" in Dawn Chatty, *Nomadic Societies in the Middle East and North Africa : Entering the 21st Century* (Netherlands ; Boston: Brill, 2006).

when he is received by a tribal leader. While society is changing rapidly, the Jordanian people have a tremendous heritage of hospitality. The conversation surrounding the practice of hospitality notes that the person receiving the hospitality is "a guest of God" because, indeed, it is God who makes the provision for the host.[23] Realizing that hospitality as a concept morphs into generosity, there is a story recounted by Wilfred Thesiger, an explorer famous for crossing the vast empty space of Saudi Arabia with the Bedouin. The story illustrates what one could call "extreme hospitality."

> Once an old man in rags joined us. My companions, some thirty of them . . . greeted him with great respect. I asked the youngest why they paid him so much deference. "Because he is famous," he answered. For what? I asked. "For his generosity," he replied. I wouldn't think that he had anything with which to be generous. "He hasn't now but he once owned many camels. He killed them all to feed his guests till at last he had none left. I could hear the respect, even the envy, in the boy's voice.[24]

This old man so valued and honored each and every visitor that he gave all he had in order to gain a reputation for hospitality. Such action may be viewed as following "desert survival" practices to the extreme but, Christians have an unassailable model of such extreme hospitality in their tribal leader Himself. Driven by love, He "gave Himself up as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Hebrews 5:2).[25]

Conclusion

Certainly there is a general consensus from the transformational leaders that were interviewed that a better understanding of tribe and how they can morph

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[23] Bailey, *A Culture of Desert Survival : Bedouin Proverbs from Sinai and the Negev,* 198-199.

[24] Wilfred Thesiger in Clinton Bailey*, Bedouin Poetry From Sinai and the Negev* (London: Saqi Books, 2002), vii.

into a larger Christian view of tribe is worthy of pursuit. While not all the important aspects or "threads" of this tapestry have been identified or thoroughly explored, five key areas did emerge: unity , humility, protection, reconciliation, and hospitality. These areas offer at least a beginning point in the quest for a more vibrant, growing Jordanian church in the twenty first century.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the previous chapter, I looked at key themes that emerged from interviews with transformational leaders in the Jordanian Christian community. These interviews confirm that the concept of "tribe" presents possibilities for the Church as it looks at how it can open itself up to allow in those from non-Christian tribes. This chapter will draw together the different threads of this study to present both a summary of the findings and the opportunities for "tribes" to be a part of a future paradigm for a healthy church. To do this, I will again revisit the goal of the project, thinking through implications of tribes, tribal uses of power, living in a tribal community, and thinking of how the Church can imagine tribes. Lastly I will look at suggestions for further study.

Goal of the Project

This research set out to look at ways that cultural and theological aspects of tribe could empower the Jordanian church in reaching across the religious lines that are crippling her. The research has overwhelmingly shown that there is a flexibility within tribes that allows for a future more inclusive Christian community. The line established by Islamic forces and enforced by the government and tribes make it hard for those from non- Christian tribes to join with existing Christian churches.

Regardless of whether or not such Christians can be organizationally joined together, there are certain tribal characteristics that can form the backbone of a "new tribe" way of thinking about church in the Jordanian Christian context. The transformational leaders that were interviewed all saw the essential need for a connection between the different religious background groups who seek to follow Jesus in the Jordanian context. The traditional Christians offer a genealogical legitimacy that predates Islam and roots the believer in a legitimate heritage. Those coming from a Muslim background have a boldness, and their lack of concern about denominational distinctions can invigorate and unite the greater Christian community of Jordan.

Tribes, Power, and Anarchy

Much of the available research on tribe emphasizes the use of the concept of forming states and molding the power and authority structure. Whether in formerly Christian towns such as Madaba,[1] or in a national or Middle Eastern perspective, it is the raw power of a genealogical tribe that attracts much of the attention. The dynamic spirit of the tribe, or 'asabbiya, has not failed to grab the attention of Machiavellian power seekers throughout history. Here is where my research unfolded the incredible distinctive of truly "Christ" empowered tribal thinking for the Christian community.

Undergirding much of the secular thinking about tribe is a "Darwinian" concept of survival. The survival of the fittest and the need for secure lineage passed on to future generations is certainly a prevailing theme of "tribe."[2] This pits tribe against tribe in the sort of bloody tribal combat seen in all tribal cultures. Many today refer to tribalism in this negative sense of ethnocentrism. In the theological section, I

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[1] As seen in Chatelard, *Briser La Mosaïque : Les Tribus Chrétiennes De Madaba, Jordanie, Xixe-Xxe Siècle*.

[2] Bailey, *A Culture of Desert Survival : Bedouin Proverbs from Sinai and the Negev*.

have shown that there is something profoundly different about Christ's definition of such a community, which is in stark contrast to the world's. In humility before God, the essence of tribal honor is broadened to include a genealogy that goes far beyond a narrow tribal understanding.

If the blood of Christ has indeed become a basis for a new lineage, Christians have a theological basis for a church which is truly exciting. It can be a demonstration to the world of a God with the incredible ability to break down all walls and human division and show the world who Jesus is. Those religious or secular figures who seek to maintain these walls will, of course, see this as a sort of anarchy.

This requires more of a divesting of self and Christian communities of the nationalistic and colonial attachments which "retribalized" the Church under foreign powers, but given the fact that the Western sources of denominations in Jordan, whether Greek, Roman, or American, are all affected by a virtual collapse of Christendom, the Church in Jordan has very little to lose by embracing this "new tribe" thinking. The role of transformational leaders in the Jordanian context will indeed revolve around their effectiveness in dealing with the "anarchic" power of Christ among Christians in this tribal context. While the role of prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit have not been discussed in this study, prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit are the underlying sources for the new tribal anarchy that is needed. If for no other reason than the reality that Christian tribes are in dramatic decline, the time is now for the Jordanian church to cry out for new power to live as a "tribe of Christ." Now is a time for all transformational leaders to seek new insights from God into how they can receive power to be a tribe for those left weak and seemingly tribeless.

Roland Allen identifies how the Holy Spirit worked in the early church to break boundaries:

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The apostles received that Spirit. They too desired the salvation of men; but intellectually they were bound by their early habits of thought. They thought only in Jewish terms; but the Spirit which moved them was a Spirit which desired the salvation of all men in Christ; and when they came to express that Spirit in words, it did not lend itself to limitations.[3]

Tribal barriers such as these early Jews knew all too well were transcended, not through intellectual prowess, but through the Holy Spirit putting new words in the mouths of the apostles. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit, through this examination of tribal characteristics, will enable transformational leaders to overcome limitations that are keeping the Church from expanding.

Living Tribal Community

Martin Robinson, in his book looking at the future of the Church in the context of a Western world where Christendom has collapsed, notes the following:

To the extent that the loss of a power to coerce is replaced by a focus on the power to build communities that flow, from genuine repentance and humility, then the relative powerlessness of the church in the West might actually be a cause for hope in the context of mission. The power of a message to transform lives will need to be more important than the power of an institution to control lives. It is for this reason that what happens in the life of the local congregation is so important.[4]

The coercive power, which the Western church had, has collapsed and, like the early church, both in the West and in the Middle East, the Church is actually pushed to look at Christian communities that flow out of "genuine repentance and humility." No longer can foreign powers be relied on to defend and protect the Church, and in many ways, the Church in the Middle East is cast upon the need to depend only on God's hand to provide the assistance. As never before, the Church is praying that those who can protect His people would be raised up to high levels in the

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[3] Roland Allen, *The Ministry of the Spirit* (London,: World Dominion Press, 1960), 26.

[4] Martin Robinson, *Winning Hearts, Changing Minds* (London: Monarch Books, 2001), 228.

government, and that some in foreign embassies would take to heart the need to defend the "human rights" of those who are persecuted. It is clear, however, that God Himself is the only One who can provide such protection.

The local "tribe of Christ," however, will demonstrate to the Jordanian community the reality of Christ. It can become the best of tribal peoples if biblical standards are integrated into its community. The five essential pillars which I have identified in this research form a basis for rethinking important characteristics for a church in a Jordanian tribal context.

Unity

The blood of Christ represents the essence of the unity in the "tribe of Christ." This unity is a new bloodline that is available and a new genealogical reality which can go beyond denominational and religious tribalism, allowing for creative solutions to tribal problems within the Church.

Humility

As seen with Mary, the core of humility means living for a bigger audience than even the Trinity. The whole of Christians' genealogy, past and future, drives a "tribe of Christ" to humble themselves in any situation in which they are confronted, knowing that God will lift them up, which should affect the way a community acts towards both those from other religious backgrounds and those from our their family of faith.

Protection

While God is the ultimate protector, a "tribe of Christ" has to honor its Lord and defend a brother or sister in need when the opportunity presents itself. When

individually or communally people ask for protection, there can be no question as to what Christians are called to do. This tribe has no borders, and creative ways can be found to protect brothers and sisters, using the international nature of the body of Christ. Both church and parachurch structures can form strong networks that offer protection. The church needs to cry out for protectors in government and high places who will display God's concern for his people at the right moment. Good Samaritan stories will become the norm, and those following Jesus will find endless opportunities to protect the weak and poor from any religious background, and thus demonstrate the power of Christ.

Reconciliation

A "tribe of Christ" needs to be poised to engage in reconciliation efforts, big or small. Christians at any time should be ready to form de-facto tribes to defend and reconcile in situations which require it. They can do this because of the model of Jesus who has reconciled them to God and through the power which He can give them. The deep desire for vengeance can be conquered by the model and blood of Jesus Christ Himself.

Hospitality

In a society where evangelism is very sensitive and virtually outlawed, a "tribe of Christ" can resort to the ancient practice of loving and dignifying their neighbors, opening the way for a natural crossing of religious boundaries. "Extreme hospitality" can become a way of demonstrating the amazing love and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such hospitality knows no boundaries, and by "administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10) the Jordanian Church can form a

community which both internally and externally demonstrates the generosity of our Lord.

Two of my sons and I recently joined a group of men from our church in a camel excursion into the famous deserts of Wadi Rum, an area now frequented by desert lovers and rock climbers. Wadi Rum's Bedouins are ready to host groups like ours and share with us some of their traditions. Following our much anticipated two hours on a camel, our sore back sides were thrilled to see an encampment ahead. We dismounted to enjoy coffee, tea, and a feast that would have made any Bedouin proud. The problem came when the main course was brought out. An Iraqi refugee and his son who were a part of our group are descendents of a proud Bedouin tribe from the North of Iraq. The father was insulted that chicken (a lesser meat, unseen in traditional Bedouin encampments) would be served. The lack of authenticity and hypocrisy of these Bedouins was obvious to nobody but our Iraqi friend; however, it caused friction between host and guest.

As in the case of these Bedouins, whose hospitality falls short in the eyes of some, the "tribe of Christ" will fall short in the actual practice of the incredible standard that Jesus raised for His tribe. Christians can, however, have a sublime confidence that in their spiritual DNA is the presence of their tribal leader, Jesus. He animates them to act better than they could act otherwise. Their individual failures at implementing the high standards of "tribe," which Jesus established, do not nullify the genealogy they have been given. In the church context, there are many stories of failure—Christians failing to welcome those from Muslim tribes as fellow believers; those from Muslim tribes who abuse hospitality and betray or take advantage of their host.

These grievances lose their punch if all see each other as attached to the same tribe. If our Iraqi friend had been from the same tribe as our Bedouin host, one can be assured that he would not have complained about the chicken. He might have run out, found a sheep, and slaughtered it himself for our meal in order to assure that his relatives were not dishonored. He would have done this, not to get some credit in heaven, but to preserve the honor of his community. Having the same blood would have meant that he would do anything to help them look good.

The tribal system is fundamentally based on nepotism and not meritocracy. This fact is perhaps the most difficult adjustment for all of those raised in a Western community. It is also foundational to a truly grace-oriented tribe. If God is indeed one's Father, then that, in and of itself, legitimizes the "tribe," and that affects one's behavior, which is reinforced by others in the tribal context. The communal meal, which was established as a core practice, reflects the tribe orientation. Christians celebrate a blood and body relationship with one another. Honoring God in this context forces all activity to be consistent with His nature and His tribe.

While the possibility of forming an organizationally united church is impossible, the possibilities for creating tribal alliances of "tribes of Christ" that cross tribal religious lines are enormous. What seems to be happening informally has resulted in some Christian leaders reaching across their church lines to encourage those from a Muslim background. All are acutely aware of the Islamic and governmental line when trying to create an integrative church, but most know that it is the will of our Father to graft in other groups.

Pushing the Tribal Imagination

In countries like Jordan and Lebanon, the legacy of missionary institutions is a powerful reminder of Christian activism. The American University of Beirut was founded as a missionary institution and now counts as a sort of Harvard of the Middle East. These institutions were founded by Christians with a genealogical vision for seeing Muslims and Christians together before God's throne of grace. Over time, however, many have lost this emphasis. Christian communities are the "tribes" with the genealogical vision into the future. It is essential that truly Christian work in this region recover the importance of our future genealogy to present behavior. This change will invigorate Christian efforts and make them more relevant in a Semitic society. In honor killings, one expert has noted that for such things to happen there has to be an approving audience—a group who will prescribe to the code of honor that would condemn a girl accused of immorality to death.[5] A "tribe of Christ" following the practices of Jesus, along with a genealogical audience, would not provide the audience for such brutal behavior. In contrast, such a tribe is cognizant of its biblical genealogical audience and this awareness provides incentive for truly honorable activities.

Both the scriptures and anthropological studies have highlighted for me the incredible flexibility of genealogical tribes. This idea has personally freed me to imagine what I could not before. The hope is that transformational leaders, armed with heightened imaginations, can develop increased vision for what the "tribe of Jesus" can look like.

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[5] Wikan, 15.

Fundamentally, the narrative of the Christian faith in a religiously divided Christian world has lacked this larger picture and final chapter. The Christians often have not been envisioned to see what it means for a Christian to act like a Christian and the immensity of the audience for Christ-like behavior. The commitment to the Good Samaritan stories and the emphasis on the diverse character of the "tribe of Christ" must be central to the story. Otherwise every group is tempted to take on itself the arrogance of a "chosen people" around whose throne all tribes must worship. John the Baptist reminded the religious leaders of his day that "out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). Christians also need this continual reminder. A community which has lost God's genealogical purpose is of little use to Him.

The community itself forms its narratives based on people who are actually living its themes and stories. A "tribe of Christ" brings people along with them when the "missionary action of the church" becomes the exegesis of the Gospel in their community.[6] Clarence Jordan describes well the hearing problem which most have. Christians need to see the new genealogy that Jesus talked about. In a segregated South, he began an interracial community called Koinonia. Asked to hold revival meetings at a nearby Baptist church, he was shocked by the results of his challenges against racism in the Church. He expected a negative reaction, but instead:

> . . . When I got through preaching, these dear ole deacons came by and said, "That was a *sweet* talk." And I wondered where they were during the sermon! They again asked me to preach and again I tried to make it clear. I supplied for the pastor time and again but somehow I could never make myself heard. But gradually, as Koinonia took shape and the word that had been preached to these people became flesh and they could see it, then they caught on. Not only was I not asked to preach to those people anymore, I was excommunicated, along with all the rest at Koinonia, from the membership of that church. At

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[6] Newbigin, *Truth to Tell,* 34-35.

last, the sermon had been delivered. Men can see but men find it difficult to hear.[7]

A "tribe of Christ" crossing old tribal boundaries is not easy to imagine if there is no group "on the ground" who is willing to provide the visuals. In the everyday Christian life in Jordan, there is a deepening of contact between those who want to follow Jesus from the non-Christian tribes and those from the Christian tribes. These connections will certainly be challenged, but they present a badly needed visual for the future genealogy and tribes.

Recommendations for the Future

In undertaking this study, I have come to see how little the subject of "tribe" has been mined for valuable teachings that can benefit the Church as a whole. The concept of "tribe" needs to be explored more seriously by all those interested in all aspects of the church in this society.

Kenneth Bailey pursued a strategy of gleaning from the village life of the Middle Easterners as much knowledge as he could in order for the Church to understand better the scriptures which Christians read.[8] In the same way, study centers need to be established to allow Middle Easterners and Christians from all over the world to study together their tribal heritage. There are Christian villages today in Jordan with a living memory of ancient practices waiting to be explored.

Modern historians have hung their teaching on a chronology, but the biblical teaching organized itself through narratives attached to genealogy. Teachers

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[7] Clarence Jordan, *The Substance of Faith and Other Cotton Patch Sermons*, ed. Dallas Lee, New York: Association Press, 1972, 32.

[8] Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant; and, Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 34.

need to become genealogists capable of attaching stories to genealogical characters from Genesis through Revelation. More effective teaching in a Middle Eastern context will work at making these attachments.

Many workers in the region work under the assumption that tribes are something from the past that need to be ignored in the modern states. From this study, I think it is important that anyone working in this area take a hard look at the genealogical makeup of his/her community. This natural network of kin, along with studies based on interaction with other non-Christian tribes, should offer a base for the Church to imagine its future genealogy.

Efforts focused on publicizing acts of persecution against individuals crossing the religious lines need to be reinforced. While this has to be done carefully lest there be repercussions, Christians everywhere should stand with their brothers and sisters in trials—at least in prayer. Islamic countries need to realize that, while there is no Christendom, there are brothers and sisters around the world who are concerned for the welfare of their fellow tribe members. Some countries can be pushed to behave better as a result of public shaming, which has to be done with a spirit of humility and prayer, realizing that Western countries often do not treat other religions respectfully.

There are certain projects and ministries of the Church in Jordan today which show real aptitude at bridging the divide. These projects need all the support they can get locally. Foreign involvement should always focus on empowering the local ministry in such a way that their impact can be reproduced locally. Too often foreign efforts delegitimize the power of the local "tribe of Christ" in the way they try to help. All should work to reverse what has been a real "retribalization" of the churches under foreign control. At the same time, almost everybody in Jordan (including the King) has foreign connections and relatives, and it should be expected

that the body of Christ internationally should want a strong connection to the "tribe of

Christ" in Jordan.

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