

# **Dream Encounters in Christian and Islamic Societies and Its Implications for Christian Ministry and Mission**

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### **An Introduction to the Nature of Dreams**

Dreams are commonly experienced by people in every society, but how they are perceived differs according to a person's perspective. One's education, socio-cultural and religious backgrounds all influence the way dreams are viewed (Bulkeley 1995:9). Phenomenologically, a dreamer is aware of certain events during this altered state of consciousness. They may be achieved through incubation, drugs or mere somnolence. For this discussion, I focus on dreams encountered in the natural course of sleep. The loss of self-awareness and control experienced when a dreamer dreams is sometimes more pronounced than encountered in a vision or a trance. However, such loss is not necessarily total. One may suddenly awake in a parallel physical enactment of the dream in the real world like dreaming of free-fall from a cliff only to be awakened by the fall from one's bed!

Though the example appears trivial, the subject is more serious. I will broadly survey the nature of dreams in its historical, anthropological and sociological contexts. We next examine how Scripture informs us about dreams to gain a Biblical framework to judge its ontology and validity. Dream encounters in Christian and Islamic societies will be examined, especially cases of dream conversions among Muslims, the chief aim to answer why are dream experiences so significant and common among Muslims but not among most Christians? Finally I will draw

some principles from this discussion and its application to missions, evangelism and discipleship as well as assessing potential benefits but some cautions along the way.

### *An historical overview*

Dream encounters and their acceptance by ordinary people are not new in history. Greek literature yields many references to dreams from Plato, Homer, Socrates and others (Kelsey 1991: 57-79). Besides Christian literature, such as Augustine's *Confessions* (1961:68), every major church father of the early church from Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen to Cyprian accepted dreams as another mean of communication in which God could speak to humans (ibid. 1991: 104-114).

In the Middle Ages, writings on dreams become increasingly absent in Christian literature. However they grew in Arabia with Islam's ascendancy during the tenth to thirteenth century (ibid:143). Meanwhile, in Christian societies, the revival of Aristotalian philosophy during this time that emphasized logic diminished dreams as a source of possible divine communication. If they occurred, they were likely thought of as aberrations of the human mind.

The Enlightenment's emphasis on the mind and reason also disregarded dreams as a way for God to speak to man. The twentieth century scientific-materialist worldview that traces its roots from this period still pervades our understanding of dreams (Sanford 1989:44). For example, modern science understands dreams solely as bio-electrical impulses of the neurons, occurring during rapid-eye movement sleep. There is little consideration of possible external divine stimuli.

The Enlightenment's influence on the religious nature of dreams also informed psychology's beginnings. Freud (1952:11) stated that dreams were simply "ingenious mythology" and that "only a small minority of educated people doubted that dreams were a product of the dreamer's mind." Even if one did not hold to Freud's view, for most modern Westerners a dream is a byword for flight, fantasy, imagination or fiction (Musk 1988:163). Where they have some bearing affecting reality, little attention is paid to it. Such reasoning has so strongly affected modern Christians that some doubt "that God has communicated with men by dreams since the close of the canon [of Scripture]." (Ruble 1968: 364)

Do dreams have any relevance or merit serious examination by us today? If they are studied today, it is mostly among secular or Christian psychologists. However, interest in dreams not only survives among psychologists. With the rise of post-modern philosophy and interest in things spiritual, its skepticism of scientific progress and absolute knowledge, interest in dreams has resurged and made a comeback in the West.

In societies little touched by the Enlightenment however, dreams are considered as sources of mystery, hidden knowledge or divine guidance requiring oneiromancy (dream divination and interpretation). For example in Africa, there are numerous documentation on the pervasive nature of dreams (Jedrej 1992). In Islamic societies, the importance of dreams and visionary experience there has been continuous from the tradition of Muhammad up to the present (Hermansen 1997: 2) Islamic literature lists over five thousand references alone devoted to dream interpretation. No

wonder dreams continue to be highly respected as a means of divine communication among folk Muslims.

### *An anthropological and sociological overview*

Dreams continue to be important in many societies worldwide for a number of reasons (Charsley 1992; Curley 1992; Jedrej 1992). A.F.C. Wallace (1967:190) notes that dreams may be an escape valve for individuals to relieve social tension within. For example, wet dreams fulfill this function for sexually frustrated males in American society. Dreams are also useful for the mind to work out certain problems encountered in the day as the dreamer role-plays imaginative scenarios in the recess of sleep. Dreams may also surprise a person into corrective behaviors (Musk 1988: 167) or used to seek ancestral guidance of the unknown by communicating with the dead (Lehmann 1985:81). Among Muslims, dreams are thought to warn against impending danger, guide him to a saint, solve judicial problems or interfere with political decisions (Schimmel 1980:123).

Dreams are also used to explain felt needs of suffering in society, providing answers and release anxiety in a world of questions to relieve tensions between an individual and society at large (Curley 1992:150). They may also reinforce certain local customs and mores (Musk 1988:166), empower socially outcast groups by according their practitioners powers and revelations (through oneiromancers or diviners) (Jedrej 1992:169).

Whatever functions dreams satisfy, most people perceive them as either real (i.e. supernatural encounters/out-of-this world experiences) or unreal (i.e. figment of the imagination or childish fantasies). The former view prevails in African, American Indian and most Muslim societies, incorporated within a worldview that sees no dualism of the natural and supernatural. Rather, life is looked at holistically (Hiebert 1999:16-17). In The latter view is seen in the modern, Western mind, conceived as a separate part of reality, by-products of a primitive belief (Freud 1952:11).

### *A Biblical view*

The Bible views dreams as ontologically real. They are mentioned numerous times throughout (Hubbard 2000: 41). The Bible distinguishes between a dream and a vision (ibid: 182-184). Visions are often sought, while a dream may come unbidden (ibid: 114). Dreams may be classified in various ways. According to Hubbard (ibid: 184), two types of dreams may be observed in Scripture: (1) ordinary dreams that all people occasionally have during sleep due to natural causes. It is believed that these sometimes have religious significance. (2) revelatory dreams in which God conveys information to man. They may have clear, direct meanings or be symbol-laden. A dream was not considered to contain divine truth unless a person or prophet could show credentials which could then make the dream credulous. Musk (1988:167) notes that “[t]here is no sense, in the Scriptures, of such dreams being second-class forms of communication between God and man. They are both natural and acceptable.” Husser (1999: 23) classifies dreams found in Biblical genre as these:

Figure 1: A classification dreams in the Biblical genre

<b>Symbolic dreams</b>	<b>Message-dreams</b>
(dreams that transmit a message from the gods but by means of images, pictures and events whose significance escape the dreamer)	(dreams are marked by unexpected appearances of “a divinity or of someone who communicated a message, the contents which are immediately intelligible to the sleeper)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joseph’s dream (Gen 37)</li> <li>• The Egyptians’ dreams (Gen 40-41)</li> <li>• The Midianite’s dream (Judg 7:13-15)</li> <li>• Nebudchanezzer’s dream (Dan. 2 and 4)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abimelech’s dream (Gen 20:3-7)</li> <li>• Jacob’s first dream (Gen 28)</li> <li>• Jacob’s second dream (Gen 31:10-13)</li> <li>• Solomon’s dream (1 Kings 3)</li> </ul>

Of dreams (and visions) in the New Testament, Padwick (1939:206) classifies them into three types based on several passages: (1) moral warnings (Matt 27:19; Acts 9:4) (2) guidance (Matt 1:20; Acts 10:3) and (3) encouragement (Acts 18:9; 23:11).

In many narrative passages of the Bible, dreams are described as historical, matter-of-fact instances of life (Musk 1988:163). For example, dreams occur in the night (Gen 28:11,12; Job 33:15). They may warn of dangers (Matt 2:12,13), rebuke unbelievers (Gen 20:3,6; Matt 27:19), foretell the future (Gen 37:5-10), announce God’s presence (Gen 31:11) or provide comfort and encouragement (Gen 40:9-11; Acts 18:9; 23:11). Scripture also warns of possible encounters with false dreams and false interpreters of dreams (Jer 23:32; Ecc 5:7; Zech 10:2) while guiding us to deal with such counterfeit phenomena and false prophets (Deut 13:1-5; Jer 23:25,28; 29:8). Demons may also speak through dreams to mislead (Deut 13:1-5). On the other hand, non-believers may also experience dreams whose source is from the Lord (Gen 20:3-7, Dan 2, 4). Some dreams are clear while others need to be interpreted. It is God who gives the interpretation of dreams (Gen 40:8; 41:25,32; Dan 2:28). Dreams are considered a normal mode in which God could communicate to his people (1 Sam 28:15). However valuable dreams were, they were just a mediating channel. Instead of speaking through dreams, God could also speak to his prophet directly (Num 12:6). Just as dreams can be a legitimate form of communication that God uses to speak to humans, the phenomenon by itself does not indicate the credibility of the source. It must be tested.

How does a person practically test if dreams are from the Lord or another spirit? Two passages are insightful: Gen 28:12 and Jn 1:51. In the latter, Jesus is the fulfillment of Jacob’s dream as the Ladder to heaven. All dreams then that purport to signify Christ must in some way testify to him as the *only* way to heaven (Jn 14:6) if it is to come from the Lord. Oepke (1967:236) states that “[a]ll the records of dreams in the New Testament are properly only variations on the one theme of Christ.” Any spirit that manifests itself in a dream to a person must also testify that Jesus is God (1 Jn 4:2,3).

### **Dream encounters in Christian societies**

Augustine's *Confessions* (1961:68) records how his mother had a dream concerning his own salvation. Jerome encountered a conversion dream in the midst of his struggle to decide between his Christian family upbringing and his education. (Bulkeley 1995:8-9) Every major church father of the early church considered dreams as another means of communication in which God could speak to man (Kelsey 1991: 104-114).

Today, where documented, analysis of dream encounters occur in five areas: (1) the New Age (Gray. 1994) (2) anthropological studies (Lehman and Myers 1985) (3) missionary accounts (Padwick 1939) (4) counseling/psychological literature (secular or Christian) (Bulkeley 1995) or (5) Charismatic/Pentecostal circles (Oss 1996).

### *Christian psychologists and the dream*

Christian psychology that has focused on dreams and its interpretation, draws its roots from psychoanalysis. Established by Freud (1952:15) as a specialized field his work on dreams was significant because it broached an area considered private and unscientific by many. By researching and writing of it scientifically, he gave its study credibility. However, his conclusions were based on an evolutionary, atheistic worldview. For Freud (1952:12-16), dreams arose out of biological and mental phenomena of the dreamer's own doing. Thus, dreams could not come from any supernatural influences. Thus, its interpretation and meaning were purely for the benefit of the dreamer. However, if certain dream images were thought to be significant to the dreamer, psychoanalysts could help interpret these images for the dreamer.

Carl Jung understood dreams in another way. In his book *Dreams*, Jung (1974) thought these symbols represented universal meanings or "archetypes" that any society expressed its deep hidden meanings in. Though neither a Christian like Freud, his view of dreams expanded the emphasis on a symbolic interpretation of dreams. Instead of its meaning anchored solely in the subjective and interpretive mind of the individual, Jung thought that an intensive study of symbols in cultures around the world would unlock universally common meanings in dreams. Both Freud and Jung's understanding of symbols in dreams were distinctly Saussurian (i.e. a theory of semiotics by Ferdinand de Saussure that stated a symbol represents an absolute known meaning perfectly in the mind of the observer).

Jung's thinking influenced Morton Kelsey and John Sanford, predecessors who studied at the Carl Jung Institute. Both Kelsey and Sanford promote a Saussurian interpretation of dreams. Their approach is mostly individualistic, encouraging the dreamer to record their private dreams and seek for interpretations within known parameters of one's knowledge or setting.

In general, while Christian psychologists appreciated that dreams may impart meanings, Kelsey and Sanford's approach lacks strong biblical guidelines to determine the validity of dreams in emphasizing the dependence of the dreamer as the self-authenticator to the meaning of his or her own dreams. Scripture is used to authenticate and give meaning to symbols found in the dreamer's mind. Caution must be exercised here for dreamers often dream dreams that are reflective of many things found within their culture (Bulkeley 1995:9) and symbols found in the Bible may not impart similar semiotic equivalents.

### *Charismatic/Pentecostal views of the dream*

Charismatic and Pentecostal formulation of systematic theology has favored the subject of dreams. In emphasizing that the outpouring of the Spirit and his work at Pentecost in Acts 2 is ongoing and continual even for today (Oss 1996: 247-8, 266-7), the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29 is key (see also Acts 2:17). Certain Charismatics and Pentecostals may understand the gift of discerning of Spirits in 1 Cor.12:10 to even include the interpretation of dreams (Jackson 2002). While the interpretation of dreams may or may not be a necessary gifting of the Spirit, it is definitely a revelation from the Divine that God reveals to the hearer according as He wills (Gen 40:8; 41:25,32; Dan 2:28). For purposes of discussion on dreams, I will use Husser's definition (see earlier Figure 1) especially in examining dreams in Islamic societies.

### **Dream encounters in Islamic societies**

Dreams are central to an understanding of Islam as great credence is given to it in Islamic societies. It is found in Muhammad's life, the Quran and the Hadith (Kelsey 1991:144). Ibn Ishaq, a renowned Muslim commentator, believed that Muhammad's "first signs of prophethood...were true visions...shown to him in his sleep." (Peters 1994:147). Dream passages in the Quran are found in Surah 8:43; 12:36,41; 12:43-49; 21:5; 37:102 and 48:27. Surah 12 is notable for the fact that "...Islamic tradition considers the prophet Joseph to be the foremost interpreter of dreams." (Renard 1998: 345). The surah is also "the most beautiful story" in the Quran (Sachiko 1994:222).

Many Hadiths also show Muhammad's expertise at dream interpretation. Good dreams are attributed to Allah but bad ones to Satan (Parshall 1994:154). Whoever claims to see a dream which he did not see will be punished in hell (ibid:138). Interestingly, the Messiah is also described in a dream in the Hadith. He is pictured as a Muslim in a dream by Muhammad walking around the Kaabah assisted by two men (ibid:161). One of the traditions records Muhammad having a dream or visionary experience where he encounters the prophets of Islam, including Jesus, on his way to heaven. (Peters 1994: 146). In another Hadith, an Indian Muslim recounts a mysterious dreamlike vision where Jesus appears stating that he is a "Son of God." (Lawrence 1998: 349).

Among the three major Muslim sects (i.e. the Sunnis, Sufis and Shi'ites), the Sufis, are notable for their dream experiences. They

[are] in a unique position within Islam in regard to interpreting their dream and visionary experiences since they are able to exercise an element of interpretive control conveyed by their claim to superior spiritual status and training. This both privileges their interpretive authority and allows them to apply the significance of their interpretations to realms beyond individual concerns. (Hermansen 1997:4)

This emphasis on such oneiric experiences occurred at about the end of the eleventh century (Lewis 1976:119). Theological grounds for full acceptance of such experiences were laid by the Sufi theologian Muhammad al-Ghazali (ibid). He writes:

The rational soul in man abounds in marvels, both of knowledge and power. By means of it we master arts and sciences, can pass in a flash from earth to heaven and back again, can map out the skies and measure the distances between the stars. By it also we can draw out the fish from the sea and the birds from the air and can subdue our service animals like the elephant, the camel and the horse. Our five senses are like five doors opening on the external world; but more powerful than this, our heart has a window that opens on the unseen world of spirit. *In the state of sleep, when the avenues of the senses are closed, this window is opened, and we receive impressions from the unseen world and sometimes foreshadowings of the future* (added). Our hearts are like a mirror that reflects what is pictured in the Tablet of Fate. But, even in sleep, thoughts of worldly things dull the mirror, so that the impressions it receives are not clear (Fadiman 1997:104-105).

These experiences “gained in importance as symptoms of the student’s inner state and of his psychic progress. The teacher interpreted his dreams and visions for him, and the first steps were taken towards a system of interpretation.” (ibid.)

Dreams were one of the means in which the mystic’s ultimate longing for union with Muhammad could be achieved (ibid: 123). Thus Sufis found this significant as it answers the question of guidance in seeking supernatural knowledge (Hiebert 1999:189). Muslims also related dreams to sleep and death. Sachiko (1994:223) explains that

all Muslims knew that dreams were not to be taken at face value. Dreams had to be understood in terms of some appropriate correspondence between the image and the meaning that had become embodied through the image. And everyone knew that sleep and death were somehow similar in their characteristics. Hence, to many Muslims thinkers, it was self-evident that we can throw light on the nature of experience after death by investigating the nature of dreams and the correspondence that exist between the perceived images and the meanings that appear in the images.

Among Shi’ites, “initiatory” dreams are experienced among some followers into their calling to the point even doctrines developed later in many writings are inseparable from teachings received in dreams (Corbin 1966: 403). It is thus unsurprising to find Shi’ite works on ethics and moral counsel replete with dream citations. Such dreams answer ordinary Muslim concerns of the good life and search for blessing (ibid:134-5).

Dreams are still central to folk Muslims today (Musk 1988:164). Musk records of how a Muslim acquaintance foretold an illness by a dream and another where a Turkish man “...had first been awakened to interest in Christianity by two dreams.” (ibid: 166-168) Padwick (1939: 206) notes of Muslims converting to Christianity through dreams. In one account a Muslim dreamed Christ appearing in “green robes (the Muslim sacred color) and ordered the man in question to read the gospel and follow his way.” In Pakistan, Sheik (1980:35-45) has told of dreams influencing her conversion to Christ.

Why do dreams exert such strong influences among Muslims? The fascination of Jesus images among folk Muslims (and possibly in dreams) may be understood in that

Jesus is always identified as a Muslim prophet – and this must be constantly borne in mind, for he is after all, a figure molded in an Islamic environment. As if to emphasize the fact, several [Muslim] stories depict him reciting the Qur'an and explaining it, praying in the Muslim manner and going to pilgrimage to Mecca... Traditions from the time of Muhammad stress the special closeness with Jesus...[and] even if we think of him as an artificial creation, he seems to be an unusual instance of the way in which one religion reaches out to borrow the spiritual heroes of another religion in order to reinforce its own piety (Khalidi 2001:44).

Musk (1988:167) summarizes the Muslim attitude concerning dreams, noting that

[i]n the full and complex cosmological world of popular Islam, dreams are of central importance, especially with regard to religious activity. Concepts of causality, as defined within popular Islam, come to the surface in the practice, for example, of divination by dream. As far as the concept of personal "force" is concerned, appropriate powers are fixed upon and even activated in dream/trance state by qualified practitioners. The natural and supernatural worlds coalesce as part of the one reality: the dreamworld unites them. In consequence, dreams are highly motivational within the worldview of popular Islam.

### **Implications for Christian missions and ministry**

#### *Dreams as a form of evangelism*

When people convert to another spiritual worldview, they do so in the context of some kind of disequilibrium, such as crises within one's sphere of understanding (Bulkeley 1995:8). In virtually *all* cases of conversion dreams among Muslims, some sort of crisis has occurred within their scope of thinking as part of their turning to Jesus Christ as Lord. When Muslims dream of Jesus directing them to read the Bible, turn to the gospel (Padwick 1939:206), or find peace and comfort (Sheik 1980:52-56), they also experience cognitive dissonance in the process. Some psychologists remark that a primary function of dreams is to "help people adapt to and to overcome crises of various sorts." (Bulkeley 1995:8) In this respect, "conversion dreams are crisis-resolving dreams *par excellence*." (ibid.) If this is so, then missionaries may note two potential means of utilizing this understanding in Muslim evangelism: (1) awareness of possible "crisis" events which might trigger dreams in the Muslim (e.g. natural disasters, family crisis, physical or financial hardships, presentation of the gospel) and (2) preparedness to enter in and offer oneself as an "interpreter" of their dreams. When message dreams are triggered by a crisis that testify of the Christ of Scripture or the gospel especially, missionaries become oneiromancers in that they have the full revelation of the gospel as found in the Bible as the key to unlock these dreams. Musk (1988: 168, 170) states that

[I]t would seem that dreams of guidance have *frequently* (added) been part of the process of movement toward Christ for those coming from a Muslim background. In such dreams, angels, or Jesus himself, have appeared, urging the person concerned to seek Christ. ...the world of dream life [appears to provide] an entrée to the center of the folk-Islamic worldview. That

medium is already functioning within the context of folk-Islamic belief and practice. History records the central importance of dreams in evangelism of ordinary Muslims where care has been taken to note the reality and significance of such phenomena.”

If a Muslim has a dream that no one in their community is able to interpret adequately, Christians might seek the Lord for possible in-roads or a sign to confirm the significance of these dreams for them. Dreams, if and when properly interpreted for the Muslim who receives them, may thus open doors for the gospel to penetrate their hearts.

In light of this, it is therefore not impermissible to pray for God to speak or reveal himself to the Muslim through dreams. It is only one kind but not the *only* means of evangelism among them. This may be especially so among folk Muslims, Sufis and certain African societies where dreams are considered superior to reality. A missionary who listens to the dreams of the unsaved may also understand much better the deeper thoughts and concerns of a person. Missionaries should also consider that a dream *they* encounter in their very own sleep be possible prompters from the Holy Spirit to pray for certain individuals or situations realized in the dream.

### *Dreams in discipleship*

Because dreams have been a part of God’s people in the Bible and in the early church, we must not rule out this mode of communication where God still speaks through dreams through certain people today (Barfoot 2002). If a person comes to Christ through dreams, the work of discipleship must begin. However dreams are experienced by the person during the conversion process, we may not be able to determine whether there is some ontological reality to it. However, Bulkeley (1995:4) notes that one can determine that dreams do have a powerful capacity to transform a person’s spiritual life and that a developed, solid, well-reasoned understanding of that capacity can be formulated. The need for discernment, correction and instruction are important (Hiebert 1999:190). The Bible must increasingly become the newborn’s surest guide to revelation and understanding of who God is. Their dreams must not take precedence over Scripture but rather the Bible must inform and transform their thoughts (Rom 12:1-2). If this does not occur, syncretism may creep in.

Interestingly, nowhere in the Bible is the saved believer encouraged to seek God in dreams. This is because Jesus has already shown us who God is (Jn 1:18). He who has seen Jesus has seen the Father (Jn 14:9). His presence is here with us in the person of the Holy Spirit (Jn 15:26). There is thus no need for an intermediary medium where one is unnecessary. This does not mean that a Christian should seek to deny dreams as a part of their life, only to note of dangers in seeking dreams as an end by themselves. Any attempts to seek meaning or guidance in dreams for personal, magical or manipulative use may cross over into divination. A believer should be cautious of any recommendations to seriously seek dreams and find personal meaning in them.

Besides evangelistic opportunities, disciples must be open if given an opportunity or ability to continue interpreting dreams of the saved person. In doing so, they must also note that a person’s dream experiences and the dreamer’s culture exert a mutual influence on one another (Jedrej 1992) as the influence of culture and the dream is reflexive both ways (Bulkeley 1995:9). Viewed in this way, Muslims thus may dream of Jesus because he is among their Quranic

prophets which in turn reinforces or reshapes their internal worldview. However, in instances where external and inexplicable dream images are found (i.e. supernatural elements angelic, demonic or otherwise) such influences exerting their presence into the dreamscape of the dreamer may be a likely explanation. We must not be trapped in the naturalistic-materialistic worldview of society. Just as the Lord can speak through dreams, so can Satan and his demons (Hiebert 1999:193).

Where the phenomena are not spiritual, one must note that not all oneiric manifestations may be significant. Some may arise as random, spontaneous, unmeaningful collections of thoughts the mind plays during sleep. Undue preoccupation or repeated attempts to read meanings into every dream may be unfruitful. When dreams are experienced as real and considered significant by the dreamer (and ontologically proven so by those whom God has given insights into the dreamer's life and can verify to real signifiers in a person's life), we must also not deny their reality as reported by the dreamer. Doing so will lead to a split-level Christianity that affirms Biblical truths on one level but conceal deep and private beliefs on another (ibid:15). Where it is tested ontologically against Scripture and found real, Christians should affirm this mode of communication that the Lord has apparently chosen to speak to the dreamer. Where there are avenues of providing reliable means of interpretation (such as a gift of interpretation or wise Christian counselor or pastor that is able to shepherd and counsel the dreamer in assessing its credibility and relevance), we must not ignore it nor dismiss it. A proper methodology and understanding in how one interprets dreams merits further careful study among Christians. A Jungian view that dreams signify fixed universal symbols that are inherently identifiable with clarity to the dreamer is not always true (Bulkeley 1992: 200). This is similar to a Saussurian understanding of signs that there is a one-to-one correspondence that a symbol signifies a fixed mental image. Dreams have some form of reality to them that is not always clear to the dreamer. However, these oneiric symbols are also influenced largely by the dreamer's socio-cultural background.

Besides a possible ministry of dream interpretation (i.e. Joseph or Daniel of the Bible), Padwick (1939:205-7) points out some benefits of keeping a diary on the mission field as a means of recording dream stories shared by the locals. They may provide key insights into the lives and concerns of ordinary people, serving to form deeper understandings and relationship with those who take the time to listen and share out of their innermost thoughts. This also enables Christians to be better ministers of the gospel.

## **Conclusion**

Only recently have social anthropologists categorized dreams as a social phenomenon having effects being felt by the people, society and culture of the dreamer rather than as individualistic preoccupation that relegates them to private thoughts and emotions in the realm of psychology (Jedrej 1992:6). They also have continuing relevance to the lives of ordinary people even today. If Joel 2:28 still awaits its complete fulfillment, then we have reason to take the study of dreams seriously. Stories of people who have had dreams or visions of someone bringing them God's word still abound (Hiebert 1999:131).

The Bible also informs us capably of the efficacy and possibility of dreams as a valid form of divine communication. However, much is still unknown to us such as our understanding of what constitutes reality, and the relationship between the soul and dreams. Musk (1988:170) asks, if dreams are a part of reality, "...can our horizons of what constitutes "reality" expand toward a more biblical norm?"

In light of the above, what are some broad missiological lessons we can learn from and apply concerning dreams? Besides some specific examples already discussed in evangelism and discipleship, I suggest the following for further engagement concerning:

(1) The influence of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on logic and rationalism in ministry. For missions to be more effective, we must guard against a mindset that splits the supernatural and the natural that produces an excluded middle (Hiebert 2000:418) (a worldview that distorts a recognition of unseen, spiritual realities that our rationalistic emphasis dismisses easily). Additionally, we should not overemphasize human logic while minimizing divine mystery in our witness. For example, much Muslim-Christian discussion (and evangelism) on God has centered around logical (as much as possible) explanations of the incarnation and the Trinity, overemphasizing logic while minimizing the mysteries of these concepts. This produces a thorough-going rationalistic approach to evangelism in expositing the Bible and Christianity that leaves Muslims cold. Instead, might missionaries ask Muslims to pray about these matters and ask for God to reveal these mysteries to them (by dreams or otherwise?) instead of relying wholly on our theological outlines and apologetics memorized from seminary days?

(2) Our understanding of how God works in missions, with regard to the Holy Spirit and our theology of missions. If the Holy Spirit is rightly accorded his place in evangelism and discipleship, we understand his role in the convicting, converting and sanctification process of the unbeliever and in the empowerment and gifting of the believer for the ministry. However, less stressed is his role in making the presence of God known to unbelievers in illuminating God's mystery and revelation through the Bible, signs (i.e. miracles), creation (i.e. nature) and through dreams. To what extent is our under appreciation of the Holy Spirit's role in these aspects of ministry a blind spot in allowing us to be flexible and open to the various ways in which God reaches out to people? If missionaries are susceptible to this, then it may be greater among theologians, much less systematic theology treatments of it.

(3) The phenomenon of dreams among American Indians, New Agers, and psychologists to mention a few. Because they are taken seriously among such groups of people, fruitful means of evangelism may be yet unexplored by Christians among these audiences. After all, if we can understand better how folk Muslims view the world and experience it through their dreams and evangelize to them, how much more among others who reckon dreams seriously? An intriguing question to consider is if God may capably witness to Hindus (entrenched in a worldview that considers the world as a dream) *through* dreams as well? Further anthropological studies combined with missiological strategies engaged in people and cultures whose see the dream as continuing significance still await us all.

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