

An Initial Response to TIME



Darrell Dorr

Despite some errors of commission or omission, David Van Biema and his colleagues at *TIME* are to be commended for their attempt to fairly portray evangelical mission initiatives among Muslims. We thank *TIME* for their attempt to present different sides of the issues and to protect the safety of missionaries working in difficult situations.

The visiting instructor (“Barbara”) cited early in the article does not represent the official position either of the *Perspectives* Study Program (www.perspectives.org) or its sponsor, the U.S. Center for World Mission (www.uscwm.org). As the name *Perspectives* suggests, this introductory course offers students the opportunity to explore multiple perspectives on many issues in world mission, only one of which is service among Muslims. Visiting instructors, contributing authors, and the students themselves have the freedom to explore and express opinions that sometimes vary from those held by the members of the U.S. Center for World Mission, and within our own ranks there is diversity of opinion.



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As a rule, however, we at the U.S. Center for World Mission would not agree with “Barbara” that Islam is “the terrorist” or a “weapon of mass destruction.” Instead, we have observed in our various publications that Islam (like Christianity) is an enormous and varied cluster of

religious traditions and that Islam (like Christianity) is not readily subject to glib generalizations. Our primary interest is not in the truth or error of Islam or Christianity or any other social and religious tradition *per se*, but in the faithfulness with which the *Bible* itself is portrayed and understood and in the extent to which the *living God* is honored and obeyed. Such an interest requires us to critique our own culture and Western (and especially American) Christianity with no less rigor than Islam and the societies in which it is dominant.

The question “Should Christians Convert Muslims?” can be misleading because of the varying meanings ascribed to “conversion.” Many people (including many Muslims) understand conversion primarily as a *change in social allegiance* from one group to another – what is properly known as proselytism. By contrast, we subscribe to the Biblical emphasis on conversion as

personal and social *transformation* and as a continual “turning of the heart” toward God as He reveals Himself to be. Such an emphasis is equally applicable to Muslims and Christians and is accompanied by the aspiration that the one “converted” remain a loyal, productive member of the society into which he or she was born.

TIME helpfully recognizes that there is a “broad range of methods and attitudes” among evangelical missionaries. We, too, have deplored religious arrogance, political ignorance, the amateurish floundering of some well-meaning churches and short-term workers, and the kind of superficial “tentmaking” cited in the *TIME* article. By contrast, we applaud the sensitive application of “contextualization” by missionaries who represent Jesus with integrity and excellence in all spheres of life. See previous issues of our magazine, *Mission Frontiers* (www.missionfrontiers.org), to read more about our positions on such issues.

We welcome the opportunity to clarify our own opinions and to join others in the evangelical Christian community in seeking new faithfulness to Jesus Christ and His Great Commission. We thank *TIME* for providing this opportunity and for suggesting ways we might improve. ☉

