



**How imperceptible swelling of youthful and retired categories over three centuries has led to the exclusion today of 75 million Americans from productive labors and the loss of \$560 billion per year.**

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

In a minute I am going off on a tangent. First, a few words on all the rich content in this issue.

Iran is four times as large as California and has twice the population. It is well over twice the size of Texas with over three times the population.

Meanwhile it is ten times the size of Bangladesh yet has less than half of the population of Bangladesh.

It is unique among Muslim nations in having a still-strong background of the remarkable Zoroastrian tradition. C. S. Lewis said he would be a Zoroastrian if he were not a Christian. This explains why Cyrus was friendly to the Jewish captives.

And, it is a good bit of the reason why Iranians are Shiites and not Sunnis.

### Now, the Tangent

A little book fell into my hands this past week and I read it cover to cover, while going to and from a conference of nearly 4,000 Koreans who take over the Wheaton campus every four years. (If you send me an email—rdw112233@aol.com—I will send you a copy of my plenary paper there, “The Biggest Trend in Missions Today.”) Okay, this remarkable little book, *Do Hard Things*, was written by twin 19-year-olds, Alex and Brett Harris, whose fame may have already reached you.

This exciting book lays out irrefutably the fact that today’s teenagers are what-they-are because society does not

expect (even allow) much from them.

This is not just a theory. An enormous response to their web site, [www.TheRebelution.com](http://www.TheRebelution.com), and their face-to-face conferences literally all over the world, reveal a huge, powerful, and deep-seated exasperation on the part of millions of bright young people who (especially in the Western world) are essentially deprived of opportunity to do their best—through “low expectations” of society.

On page 97, for example, “Being considered a good teen only requires that we don’t do bad stuff like taking drugs,

and conferences) of teenagers plunging into all kinds of creative projects.

Look, every teenager ought to have this book. There are about thirty million U. S. teenagers (and older people—see chart) whose minds and hearts and lives are being stunted by the limitations and low expectations that surround them, engulf them, roll over them, capture them, degrade them. We need to wake to that enormous tragedy.

### Now So What?

Having said all that, this book does not go far enough (how could it?). After reading it, I stretched my mind and asked what it could well add. These thoughts are not criticisms so much as further examples of the enormous pit into which we have thrown our teenagers.

I speak in part as one who, as the book itself points out, is aware that teenager adolescence is pretty much a phenomenon of the developed world. I lived many years in an aboriginal society where children were creatively

U.S. Populations Suffering Low Expectations (and thus personal abuse) Along With Estimates of Their Potential Productivity (in \$Billions)								
Age Range	Hours/week	Hour Value	Value per week	Feasible Weeks/Year	Value per year, one person	Number People (millions)	Total Annual Value (Billions)	Billions
8-9	10	\$4	\$40	40	\$1,600	7.92	\$13	
10-14	15	\$5	\$75	40	\$3,000	20.7	\$62	
15-19	20	\$5	\$100	40	\$4,000	21.6	\$86	
8-19						50		\$161
65-69	30	\$20	\$600	45	\$27,000	10.5	\$284	
70-74	20	\$15	\$300	40	\$12,000	8.7	\$104	
80-84	10	\$10	\$100	20	\$2,000	5.7	\$11	
						25		\$399
[Only the shaded columns are guesses, otherwise U. S. Census Bureau or arithmetic]						75		\$560

#### How to read the chart

##### Example #1:

For those aged 10 to 14, if able to work 15 hours a week (in addition to school or as part of school), if their work is worth \$5 per hour, then assuming they work only 40 weeks per year, and there are 20.7 million of them, this amounts to \$62 billion per year.

##### Example #2:

For those aged 80 to 84, working only 10 hours a week at \$15 per hour, and only 20 weeks a year, for 5.7 million of them, this amounts to \$11 billion per year.



*Ralph D. Winter is editor of Mission Frontiers and the General Director of the Frontier Mission Fellowship.*

drinking and partying. But is it enough to be known for the negative things we don’t do?”

And I like this (after all their exhortations to do, do, do): “Please understand that we are saved by faith alone, but that true saving faith doesn’t stay alone (p. 151).”

This little book is bursting with actual examples (gleaned from their web site

and sensitively grown gradually into greater responsibility with no adolescent period involved.

I am reminded of this fact reading just today about the 250 high schools closed in the Nairobi, Kenya area due to the explosive exasperation of the students—who are being held back by the relatively new school process which effectively withdraws them from the real world, thrusting them into a new, artificial school world in which they are piled high with self-expanding work in a full-time environment of study.

Note the phrase “self-expanding.” In the real world you usually get paid for doing something of benefit to others, not for expanding yourself. In school, year after year, students are lauded for personal attainments of knowledge or skill. They are not solving someone else’s problems. Their main task is self-fulfillment. How perverting!

Most of what I have learned in my life I have learned on the way to solving someone else’s problems or serving others’ needs. Like right now. I have just learned something by putting

together the little table on the previous page. I did not do it to become educated. I did it to illuminate a problem. I discovered that our society is so poorly designed that we are throwing away annually \$560 billion in lost productivity, and far worse, are seriously damaging the lives of young and old alike.

There is a heartbreaking limitation for two 19-year-olds who write a book like *Do Hard Things*. They have gone through several years of “self-expanding” through personal activism. They were forced to create jobs for themselves from scratch—since our society is not effectively designed to help teenagers into the major activities of commerce and government, as would be the case in Germany. Thus, in writing this book they are unable to expect teenagers to be routinely accommodated into the existing adult world. The unusual exception that actually got them started was when Alex and Brett were invited and entrusted with running a state election campaign for a Supreme Court justice! But wait. Most of the many examples in this book (of what bright and determined teenagers can do) are jobs that

are teenager-invented. Good things, but projects, not careers. You don’t see much in this book about the nearly unavoidable reality of college in our society, much less, graduate studies, and Ph.D. studies. I am afraid that if the real, serious problems of the real world were available to them, even then those problems would more likely be seen as a means of teenagers expanding themselves. That is all to the good, of course, but is not the same as commitment to solving a real-world problem.

I wish a second book could be written that would scour this land for openings into the real world that are long-term, and where the activity involved would be seen as worth doing in itself, not only a means of a teenager growing and maturing.

Lastly, intergenerational collaboration, not just teen collaboration, does not appear. But I admit that is far more a criticism of the adult world—which tries not to bother with teens, who, bless their hearts, are finding things to do, HARD things to do with very little help from the too-busy broader society. f

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# Today's Iranian Revolution:

## How the Mullahs Are Leading the Nation to Jesus

Krikor Markarian

**“T**he only way were going to stop them is to kill them.” This seems to be the present consensus of Iran’s national cabinet concerning the growing Christ-ward movement

**Now today, it seems Iran is on the verge of yet another revolution, ironically caused by the first and with Jesus at the center.**

spreading throughout the nation. Legislation is now being prepared that would make it a capital offense to leave Islam. These strict measures have come about to stem the tide of a growing dissatisfaction with Islam

among Persian young people resulting from the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Now today, it seems Iran is on the verge of yet another revolution, ironically caused by the first and with Jesus at the center. The story of how this has come about is perhaps one of the most intriguing examples of God’s sovereignty at work to accomplish his unchanging purposes among the nations.

### A Little Background

In the early 1960s, just two decades before Iran would become completely closed to mission work, a team of American missionaries began a work among the Persian Armenian community in Tehran. Most of these Armenians were the descendants of a forced exile to Iran in 1604 under the Shah Abbas. Over the centuries they developed a unique culture, dialect, and appearance (don’t ask) as they assimilated with their host nation. The missionaries recognized the potential for these Persian Armenians to serve as a “bridge-people” between Islam and Christianity, and so began work among them with this in mind.

This Spirit-led hunch turned out to be correct. One of the first five disciples of the American missionary team was a man named Haik Hovsepian. In the late 1960s he received a call from God to go as a missionary to the northern province of Mazandaran with the specific purpose of starting a work among Muslims. Though he was officially commissioned by the church in Tehran for this purpose, his

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burden for Muslims was one that few Persian Armenians shared or understood at that time. Most believed he was wasting his time. However, by 1976, after about eight years of laboring, five house churches had been established with around 20 Muslim-

background believers. Though only a small beginning, somehow Haik had a sense that God was building a foundation for a much greater work. Having a gift for music, one of the most important investments he made in the future Persian Church was his translation and authorship of over 150 worship songs into Farsi. According to those who knew him, he envisioned the day such songs would be sung by millions of believers.

By 1981, the Persian church in Mazandaran had grown to around 60 members, and many leaders were emerging. In that year, Haik was asked to return to Tehran to become the leader of the Council of Protestant Ministers (a group that is roughly the

equivalent of the National Association of Evangelicals in the United States). His appointment to this post was very timely for the church in Iran. Just two years after the Iranian government was seized by the Ayatollah Khomeini, (an influential Muslim cleric with a vision for Islamicizing the country), the emerging church in Iran was beginning to feel the pressure of an increasingly hostile government.

However, at the same time, the church in Iran was not the only group to chafe under the new regime. The Persian people themselves were beginning to react in a negative way to the harsh restrictions imposed by the implementation of Islamic law. A silent rebellion among young people (70% of Iran is under the age of 30) was beginning to build momentum. Among this age group, if the government opposed something, they were for it. When the government burned American flags, they wrapped themselves in it. Most importantly, when

**The Persian people themselves were beginning to react in a negative way to the harsh restrictions imposed by the implementation of Islamic law.**

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the government began confiscating Bibles, they couldn't wait to get hold of one.

Slowly but surely, a kind of solidarity was beginning to build between the persecuted Armenian

**As new Persian believers began pouring into the churches, the government issued an ultimatum demanding that all such believers be reported.**

believers and the "persecuted" youth of Iran. In defiance of the law, Haik began to encourage the Armenian Evangelical churches to open their doors to Persians and to begin using the Farsi language in their services. As new Persian believers began pouring into

the churches, the government issued an ultimatum demanding that all such believers be reported. In response, Haik courageously rallied the churches to send a unified response back to the government: We will never submit to such demands.

## Breakthrough

By the late 1980s, the number of Persian Muslim-background believers had grown into many thousands. Then in the 1990s, two things converged to turn this momentum into one of the greatest watershed events in the history of Persian Christianity. The first was a wave of government-organized crackdowns and assassinations of Christian leaders (including Haik Hovsepian in 1994, whose campaign to stop the execution of a Persian convert received both national and international attention). The result of this was that hundreds of Persian lay-leaders rose up to take the place of these martyrs and a nation-wide house-church movement was born. Indeed, the boldness of Haik and the other martyrs, both Armenian and Persian, had a profound effect on the Evangelical church, but most especially upon the Persian believers themselves. At Haik's funeral, hundreds of Persian MBBs turned out to honor him despite the presence of government agents documenting all who were present.

# Do Iranians Really Hate America?

**Krikor Markarian**

**"M**arg bar Amrika! Marg bar Amrika!" Death to America! has been the rallying cry of Iran's Islamic Revolution since its earliest days. Images of Persian crowds chanting the regime's favorite slogan have made a permanent impression on American minds.

Though this may be puzzling to some, it's not hard to see why they might hate us. Our government orchestrated a successful coup in Iran to control the nation's oil in 1953, the very act which led to the Islamic Revolution in 1979. A few years later we were aiding Saddam in the Iran-Iraq war. Even today there are still thousands suffering from chronic illness resulting from the use of chemical and biological weapons against Iran, adding to the hundreds of thousands who lost their lives. But ironically, today's Iranian young people have either forgotten about this or chosen to disregard it. For most, hatred of their own government is all-consuming, and anyone who hates the current regime as much as they do must be an ally. And so yet another paradox presents itself in this land of bountiful contradictions: Iranian young people actually love the United States of America.

This strange phenomenon has not gone without international notice, and the Islamic regime is struggling to know what to do about it. *Time* magazine reports in an article entitled, "How the Great Satan Became Just Great,"

"While elsewhere in the Middle East consumers are boycotting American goods to protest U.S. foreign policy, Iranians can't get enough of them. Coca-Cola's exports to Iran have increased nearly threefold this year. Toy stores are struggling to keep up with the growing demand for Barbie dolls."

The government's response to this was typical: they issued a doll series of their own—Sara and Dara, clad in good Muslim garb. But the public would have nothing to do with the proselyte Barbies.

The government has warned that American dolls and toys, which are being illegally smuggled into the country in mass quantities, are doing "irreparable damage" to Iranian children. Such dire warnings seem to only fan the flame. If the government says its bad, it must be good. The Mullahs have become the best marketing campaign for American products and culture there has ever been. And what the public can't smuggle in, they manufacture. Ever

All of this was God's foundation-building for what would come next. In the year 2000, Christian satellite broadcasting began beaming the gospel to almost every home in Iran. This was made possible by the fact that millions of satellite dishes had been illegally smuggled into Iran by corrupt members of the same government that had outlawed them. The Christian satellite programs became a lifeline for the church in Iran. Much more, when the Iranian people learned that the government was trying to scramble the broadcasts, they became an overnight sensation. Recent nationwide surveys reveal that over 70% of the population is watching Christian satellite programs. These same surveys indicate that at least one million have already become believers, and many millions more are on the verge.

This growth has happened so fast, the underground church can hardly keep apace. In one example, a house church that began with two people several years ago has now multiplied into over twenty groups. The leader of this network remarked,

"Starting churches in Iran is easy! Everywhere you go to evangelize, people are ready to receive the gospel, or they have already become believers through satellite broadcasts." Training leaders is also easy, remarks another leader. The government has left young people with nothing to do. So believers spend time with one another everyday. They are constantly gathering for prayer, Bible study and evangelism. When a group reaches 25 people, they divide in half and begin again. Within two years, a new believer is expected to become a leader of a new house-fellowship and a discipler of new leaders.



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entrepreneurial, Persians have begun tapping into their Western obsession by counterfeiting everything American—from franchise restaurants (Carl's Jr. and KFC), to clothing lines (Victoria's Secret), to food products (Baskin Robin's Peanut-butter Chocolate Ice-Cream). The moment you slap an American brand label on something, it becomes an overnight sensation.

Although American readers may chuckle over this demand for our iconic brands, it is actually rather strange when you think about it. Anti-Americanism is on the rise all over the Middle East and the Muslim world with one exception. If you had to guess the exception, Iran would probably be the last country to come to mind. But there it is, an island of goodwill towards the Great Satan in a vast sea of anger and frustration. What we choose to do with it could be very significant, though we should keep in mind that good-will in the Middle East is a very tenuous affair. If our government decides to disable nuclear facilities in the country, Iran experts predict this goodwill could vanish



overnight. One young Iranian put it this way to an American journalist, "As much as I hate this regime, I love my country more. If America were to attack Iran, I would be the first to lay down my life. Ask anyone and they will tell you the same." Another reporter was told, "If even one U.S. soldier comes to Iran all of this [love of America] will end." We would do well to remind ourselves that we are dealing with a worldview far different from our own. What

seem like paradoxes and contradictions to us make perfect sense to them.

The Mullahs are praying for a miracle, and perhaps the West will send them one in the form of bunker busters, stamped "Made in America." It would be the ultimate irony. Indeed the verdict is still out on which way the pendulum will swing. But at the end of the day, our most powerful weapons seem to be cultural and material. Hollywood, MTV, and Victoria's Secret are proving much more potent satellite-guided missiles than anything the Navy or the Marines possess. So choose your poison. It's no wonder the Mullahs think we're in league with the Devil. **f**

**Leaders of house-church networks have repeatedly expressed that one of their greatest needs is for more Bibles in Farsi.**

There are now so many believers in Iran, the satellite broadcasters have begun shifting gears towards more discipleship-oriented programming. The son of Haik Hovsepian, Gilbert, has continued his father's legacy by producing a series of "live-worship" broadcasts, as well as a CD and hymnal collection of over 500 songs for the underground church. He also broadcasts a weekly Bible teaching program that has been viewed by 40% of the population and is one of the top ten watched programs in the country.

As in China, the rapid multiplication of house-churches through the "cell-division" strategy has resulted in well-organized networks. Among those that derive from Haik's Makhaz church in Tehran, there are at least 1,000 groups, most of

which are the fruit of Haik's intentional discipleship of several dozen core Persian leaders in the late eighties and early nineties. One of these leaders, for example, oversees 137 house-church fellowships. However, these networks, while a strength on the one hand, can be a weakness on the other. Recently, in early 2008, a network of around 50 churches was infiltrated by government intelligence agents that responded to satellite broadcasts as would-be seekers. From there they were able to work their way into an entire network. The believers associated with these groups were rounded up and forced to sign a document that outlined their punishment if ever they assembled again. Due to such heightening security concerns, coordination between the underground church and satellite broadcasting ministries is growing increasingly difficult, though creative solutions are being sought to bridge this divide. Leaders of house-church networks have repeatedly expressed that one of their greatest needs is for more Bibles in Farsi. The stories of how God

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## Spiritual Vacuum

### Krikor Markarian

Officially, there are 1.1 million drug addicts in the nation of Iran. It is in fact illegal to say there are more. But in a recent international conference on addiction, a spokesperson for Iran's Interior Ministry publicly admitted the number is more like 10 million, or around 1 in 7 Iranians. With a cheap and plentiful supply of narcotics from across the border in Afghanistan (responsible for 93% of the world's opium), the disillusioned youth in Iran have proved a fertile breeding ground for a massive epidemic. Though possessing and using narcotics is illegal, the dangers posed by the rapid spread of the AIDS virus have forced the government to launch an emergency campaign to distribute free needles throughout the country. At the same time, billions are being spent to construct a massive wall between the Iranian and Afghan border which is 13 feet high and 16 feet wide.



The wall has become somewhat symbolic of Iran's futile attempts to protect its citizens from outside influence. No matter what they do, they only succeed in increasing the demand for whatever

it is they have most recently outlawed. One begins to get the feeling that a majority of the social problems in Iran are actually silent protests against the government's oppressive restrictions of personal freedom. While Iran's young people may not be allowed to march in the streets, they have found other ways to voice their discontent with the current regime, which are far more difficult to control.

### Point of No Return

Following the 1979 revolution, the Mullahs established a shadow government called the Guardian Council which essentially ran the country. In every way, this was the revolution: religion and the state were now in sync. But what



has used the Scriptures to bring entire families to Christ continue to pour forth from Iran. There is a tremendous hunger and widespread demand for the Bible. A new translation coordinated by Elam Ministries (one of the larger agencies serving the Persian church and founded by a Persian Armenian) has already had a profound impact. An audio version is now being prepared by Gilbert Hovsepian and will be completed within the year. It has been said that even if 10 million Bibles were available today in Iran, they would not be enough. One lady, who has personally distributed 20,000 Bibles, says never once did anyone turn her down. Rather, the vast majority received it as the greatest treasure they had ever been given.

### Rebirth of the Persian Church

In the last ten years a new term has become widespread throughout Iran, which can be literally translated "Persian-Christian," or as they would conceptually translate it "Muslim-Christian" (*farsimasih*). For centuries, it was assumed that if

you were a Christian, you were Armenian. If someone saw you wearing a cross they might ask, "Are you Armenian?" or "Have you become Armenian?" But today the question has changed.

This new identity is highly significant, testifying to the presence of a truly indigenous, self-reproducing movement. It has long been believed that a breakthrough among Persians could have significant impact on surrounding peoples in Central Asia and the Middle East. This has certainly proved to be the case in Iran itself. Persian missionaries are now being sent to nearby minority peoples, such as the Azeri, Luri and Kurds, with funding coming directly from the Persian believers themselves.

**One lady, who has personally distributed 20,000 Bibles, says never once did anyone turn her down. Rather, the vast majority received it as the greatest treasure they had ever been given.**

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the Mullahs seemed unprepared for was the fallout that would follow from such an alliance. When the state failed to deliver on its promises, it reflected on Islam as well. And over time, the inconsistent behavior of public officials left the Islamic regime with little moral credibility. (A case in point was the arrest last March of Tehran's police chief, who had led a yearlong crusade against "immodestly" dressed women. He was caught with six prostitutes in a raid on a brothel. However, in the end he received a slap on the wrist. He was released from prison in June and dismissed from his post.)

But long before any government scandals ever surfaced, the seeds of discontentment were being planted for many Iranians right from the start. Many trace their disillusionment with Islam to the very first year of the Revolution, when the Iran-Iraq war began. The conflict soon became the Iranian equivalent of America's Vietnam quagmire, only with serious religious overtones. Little children were enlisted to clear minefields with nothing more than their own bodies, and were then declared to be martyrs for Islam when blown to pieces. Saddam's use of chemical weapons against border towns revealed the cruelty and brutality of what became *Jihad vs. Jihad*. Yet there was nothing sacred about it. It was just Muslims killing Muslims, and clerics

on both sides condemning the other and providing justification for the mass-slaughter of innocent civilians.

With casualties of over a million persons in Iran, the rapid social decay which followed became something the government desperately needed to keep under wraps. Iran was supposed to become a model for the entire Muslim world of what an Islamic society should look like. The Mullahs promised health, wealth and prosperity, but all that followed was war, unemployment, and widespread corruption. And in the end, the greatest irony of it all was that the Revolution produced the very thing it set out to stop: the complete secularization of the hearts and minds of the Iranian people.





**Interestingly, the only churches in Asia and North Africa that survived Islamic occupation were those that had the Scriptures in their language.**

Though all of this is cause for rejoicing, it is important to remember that the Persian church has been here before. In fact, it was a cross-cultural missionary from Persia, Gregory the Illuminator, who was instrumental in Armenia becoming one of the first Christian nations. Gregory was the fruit of a growing spiritual awakening among Persian peoples that was occurring in the late third century.

Up until this time, most believers in the Persian Empire were of Jewish or Assyrian descent. But around the time that Armenia embraced Christianity, a powerful move of the Holy Spirit could be seen across the border among native Persians as well. Unfortunately, this breakthrough would be short-lived.

In 312 AD the Roman general Constantine was led to believe he should conquer in the name of the cross. His conversion to Christianity and subsequent rise to power as the emperor of a united Rome, suddenly brought a political dimension to the new faith. From then on, Christians in the Persian Empire were seen as a potential “fifth column” and a new wave of government-organized persecution began. By the end of the 4th century, hundreds of thousands would be martyred. Finally with the coming of Islam in the 7th century, the fledgling Persian church gradually declined and then disappeared.

Interestingly, the only churches in Asia and North Africa that survived Islamic occupation were those that had the Scriptures in their language. The Armenian, Syrian and Coptic churches are some examples. However, among the Persians, Berbers, and Arabs, no Bible was available in their mother tongue. That mistake would only be rectified in modern times, and it is likely no coincidence that with the presence

## Spiritual Vacuum (cont.)

### Iran's Unique Dilemma

Far from achieving their ideals, some would argue the Mullahs have done the Muslim world a favor by disproving the feasibility of their own political theories. But in a honor/shame culture like you find in Iran, nothing could be more painful than to experience the embarrassment of an entire population spinning out of control while its leaders stand by helpless, and seemingly heartless. Indeed, one can't help but feel the desperate frustration of the government coming through with every new piece of increasingly despotic legislation.

But adding to the embarrassment and frustration of the regime is the fact that the Islamic Revolution *has* to work. They have no choice but to make it work—the entire Sunni Muslim world is watching this Shia experiment. The violent split between Shiites and Sunnis in the 7th century occurred over the very issue that fed Iran's Islamic Revolution over a millennium later. The Shiites favor clergy-run governments, and the Sunnis oppose it. So what is at stake here is the very

legitimacy of the Shiite tradition. This explains why disillusionment with the government in Iran can only lead to disillusionment with Islam itself. It's all rolled together into one package, and no other alternatives are possible.

The sense that there is no way out of this has only added to the despair and hopelessness of what is fast becoming a lost generation—an age group which represents 70% of the country. Today, young people commonly ask their parents the same question: How could you let this happen? Why did you support something so dark and terrible as the Islamic revolution? Being unfamiliar with what led to the current reign of the Mullahs and only familiar with the strict measures it has imposed on their lives, this bizarre event simply makes no sense to anyone under 30. Why would anyone choose this? To an entire generation there can only be one answer: Surely our parents must not have known what they were getting themselves into. The Mullahs deceived them, and now we have to pay for it.





of the Bible in these lands, the Church has begun to grow once again.

Among the Persians, that rebirth has been truly dramatic, and may eventually change the course

of Iran's history. Although presently this new movement is entering into a new period of trial, this time around they have a strong international network of believers, churches and ministries standing ready to help them. Now they have the Scriptures in Farsi, contextualized worship songs, leadership training programs, and satellite broadcasts. And last but not least, they have the promise of Jesus, who said, "I will build my church . . ." Without any doubt, the move of the Holy Spirit in Iran is evidence of that ultimate and enduring reality. **f**

**With the presence of the Bible in these lands, the Church has begun to grow once again.**

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With no other Islamic or religious options permissible, an entire generation of young people has little choice but secularization, and thanks to Afghanistan, a hopelessness made a little easier with a heavy dose of sedation. In fact, some Iran watchers believe law enforcers secretly support the narcotics trade and control it as a win-win scenario: officials get to pack their slush funds, and the young, would-be revolutionaries are too stoned to care.

## Desperate Times

The virtual secularization of the country has created a vast spiritual vacuum which something has to fill. Presently there are two major options: drugs or Jesus. The government can't seem to make up its mind which one is worse, though if current proposed legislation is passed, possessing Jesus as a Persian will become an automatic capital offense. In the past, judges had flexibility in dealing with converts to Christianity, but the new law would make execution the mandatory sentence.

The government has also stepped up their efforts to crackdown on secret Christian gatherings. But this is nothing new for Iran's young people. For decades they have become very creative in staying one step ahead of the police. You might even say Iran's secret youth parties were preparation for the birth

of the underground church, because they are organized in much the same way. There is the intermediate meeting place where several

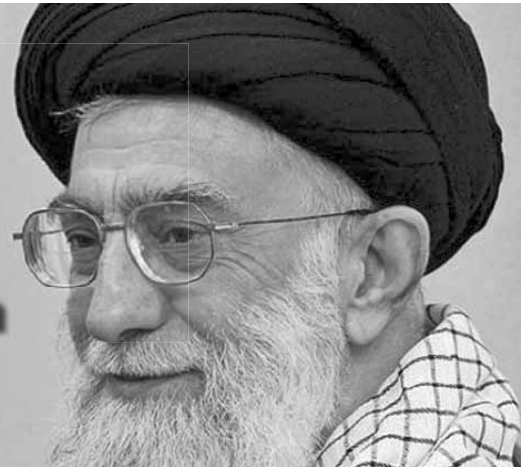
groups come together separate from one another to check everybody out. Then there are the scouts that guide people to the meeting place. Once inside, the head-coverings come off and the dancing gets started. The only real difference is the dancing is to Jesus, and no drinks or drugs are being passed around, just the Holy Spirit.

For the Iranian government these are the worst of times. It was tough enough to bring a generation of disillusioned youth into submission, but now with Jesus thrown into the mix, it's an even tougher sell. How do you take away from a million new Persian believers something which has given them a reason for living? That's the sort of thing people will die for, and every arrest only adds another martyr to the roster. **f**



# The Long March Forward: From Cyrus to the Ayatollah

Krikor Markarian



The first non-Jewish worshippers of Jesus may have been Persian Zoroastrians. The “magi from the east” recorded in Matthew’s gospel were likely members of an ancient Persian tribe who, like the Levites in Judaism and the Brahmins in Hinduism, had become the priestly caste in Persian society. They were astrologers who looked to the heavens for guidance, and when the sign of Christ’s birth appeared, they knew what it meant.

Although astrology was something forbidden under Jewish law, here we find God giving a graphic demonstration of what would become the hallmark of the Christian faith: meeting people where they are to take them where they need to go. Thus in our first New Testament example of contextualized cross-cultural evangelism, God decided to make known the mysteries of the gospel through means of an astrologically significant event in order to reach the priests of a foreign, non-Jewish tradition.

Of course, this was not the first time that God spoke to the Magi in the Bible. It was King Darius who was so impressed by the young Daniel’s ability to interpret dreams that he appointed him as *Rab-Mag*, or chief of the Magi in his kingdom. Daniel’s influence on the Magi may be more than history records, for it was the Magi that developed an alternative to Zoroastrianism known as Zurvanism that historian Samuel Moffett describes as a “creeping monotheism, undercutting the radical dualism of the popular orthodoxy.”<sup>1</sup>

The Persians encouraged pluralism and religious tolerance within their empire, and even supported the rebuilding of local temples with state funds, including the Jewish temple under King Cyrus. By the

first century AD the Jews formed a large and significant minority within Persia, rivaling the numbers of their cousins in the Roman Empire. And unlike in Rome, where the Jews were considered impossible to govern and even seditious, in Persia they had come to be regarded as a beneficial addition to the empire. Here they learned to contextualize their faith to a much greater degree, and were taught by their leaders that the “civil law of the government is as valid for the Jews as their own law.” As a result they were willing to adopt regulations regarding the use of fire and water, which had religious significance for the Zoroastrians, without feeling that they had compromised their own orthodoxy.

Due in large part to these favorable circumstances, Persia early on became a strong center of Christianity and a place of refuge for persecuted Roman believers. Christians from all throughout the eastern part of the Roman Empire emigrated to Persia and formed a truly international church.

This, of course, had its advantages and disadvantages. What it meant for Persians was that Christianity increasingly became associated with foreigners, and as a result, the formation of an indigenous Persian-speaking Church suffered. Rather than use Farsi, the Eastern Church adopted the use of Syriac as its liturgical language. (Syriac was a form of Aramaic that came to be widely used beginning in the 2nd century AD and which became for the Eastern Church what Latin would become for the West.) Regrettably, as far as history records, the Bible was never translated into the Persian language until Henry Martyn took on the task in the early 19th century. The significance of this speaks volumes about the importance of using the mother tongue in Bible translation. For although today a community of at least 1.5 million Syriac-speaking believers have survived in Iraq and Iran, the Persian church would eventually vanish until its recent reemergence in our day.

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## Enter Constantine

The reasons for the extinction of the Persian church comprise one of the greatest lessons history has to teach us concerning the dangers of political associations with the faith. While Constantine's conversion to Christianity was heralded as a triumph in the West, it was deplored as a disaster in the East. His infamous letter to the Shah in Persia announcing his conversion would unleash the greatest, most systematic and violent persecution against the Church ever known in history. Constantine's letter was interpreted by the Shah to mean that the emperor of Rome was now the protector of Christians everywhere and that the Persian Empire was answerable to him for their treatment.

Though it is hard to decipher Constantine's motives, it is even harder to believe that he did not understand the consequences of such a letter to his archenemy. But one thing is certain, as a result of the persecution of Persian Christians which followed, all of the border kingdoms between Persia and Rome permanently switched their allegiance to Constantine. These border kingdoms, such as Armenia, Adiabene, and Edessa were strategic buffers that had been constantly fought over by the two eastern and western empires throughout history. But by the early 4<sup>th</sup> century they had all become Christian, and due to Constantine's support of their faith, unswerving allies of Rome. What is more, the ruthless persecution of Christians in Persia gave Constantine the justification to go to war with his empire's historic nemesis. At the time of his death, Constantine was preparing for the Church's first crusade, summoning the empire to a holy war in the name of the cross.

From this point on, everything changed for Christians in Persia. To be Christian was to be Roman and a traitor. Wisely, perhaps, the Persian church began to distance itself from Rome and adopted a controversial movement known as Nestorianism. The founder of this movement was regarded as a heretic in the Roman Empire, and as a result, the Persian Church would eventually be condemned as apostate. (Nestorius opposed the use of the phrase "Mother of God" in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and was summarily condemned, defrocked and sent into exile.) They in turn condemned the Roman Church, and as a consequence, the Persian Shahs once again began to smile upon the Christian faith.

By the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Chosroes II, the last "great Persian emperor to rule," openly departed from Zoroastrianism and made known his favorable intentions towards Christianity. This was due in part to the sanctuary

given him by the Byzantine emperor Maurice and the witness of a wealthy Christian family that provided him protection when he had to flee Persia as a young man. Once restored to power, like Constantine, he helped finance the building of churches and had Bibles imported into the empire. However, the united power of the Zoroastrians was too much for any Persian emperor to move against, (unlike the divided nature of the Roman pagan religions in Constantine's day), making any possibility of declaring Christianity the state religion rather remote.

Ironically, the undoing of Chosroes II, and by extension the Persians as well, was the murder of Emperor Maurice by his enemies, who usurped his throne. Chosroes declared war against them to avenge Maurice's death, and the subsequent battles that followed would so weaken the Persian and Byzantine empires, neither would have the strength to withstand the Arab onslaught that was soon to follow.

## Under the Crescent

Just at a time when the Persian church was beginning to gain momentum, and its missionary zeal was impacting peoples throughout Central Asia, China and India, another changing of the guard would confront the resilience of this expanding and dynamic movement.

Between 634 and 652 AD half of the Byzantine Empire and all of the Persian Empire would fall to Arab armies. Within a span of less than twenty years, Arab nomads would accomplish the unthinkable, establishing an empire that spanned from North Africa to the Khyber Pass of Afghanistan. For the first few centuries, the Arabic conquerors were greeted with enthusiasm by the Persian church. After all, they shared the same holy book—the Bible—as the foundation of their faith. And far from being regarded as a new religion, the new Arab faith was seen as yet another viable alternative to Roman Christianity.

A Nestorian chronicler writing in the 9<sup>th</sup> century describes how the Persian believers viewed their conquerors and how they fared under their rule:

*"The Arabs treated them with generosity and by the grace of God (may he be exalted) prosperity reigned and the hearts of Christians rejoiced at the ascendancy of the Arabs. May God affirm and make it triumphant!"*

Since it cannot be known what the early Muslims actually believed doctrinally speaking, the embrace of many Persian Nestorians of Islam need not be seen as apostasy from orthodoxy. The first copies of

the Quran would not appear until much later, and there is much evidence that the Quran as it exists today was developed over many centuries. What we do know with certainty is that Zoroastrianism was permanently dethroned, and this was viewed as a triumph for all those claiming a biblical faith.

## Rebirth

Over time, Islam in the East and Catholicism in the West went their separate ways due almost entirely to those politically-generated hostilities that throughout history have been the driving force for most theological divergence. Indeed, Islam would not be the first faith to develop politically—and culturally—motivated doctrine and apologetics, nor the last. Those who consider themselves Protestant Christians are proof enough of that reality!

If anyone wonders why Muslims have such an aversion to the cross, one only has to recall its use as a symbol of bloody conquest by Roman Catholic armies, beginning with Constantine and culminating in the Crusades. Of course the Crusades were not the only factor in creating this divide, but they certainly widened it more than any other force.

Widening it even further were the Christian colonial powers that imposed their will upon a decaying and fractured Islamic world in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The culmination of this Western Christian dominance resulted in the ultimate shame for the Muslim world: the loss of the Caliphate and Jerusalem's Haram al-Sharif (the third most holy site in Islam) to the "idolatrous" West and an occupation of Jews.

In the midst of this shame has risen a fundamentalism that asserts the reason for loss of power and honor has been a lack of devotion to God. And so in Persia began a movement to reverse the effects of westernization and secularization that led to the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution. But the results were far from what was expected. Had the Mullahs known their revolution would tear down in 30 years what took 1200 years to build, perhaps they would

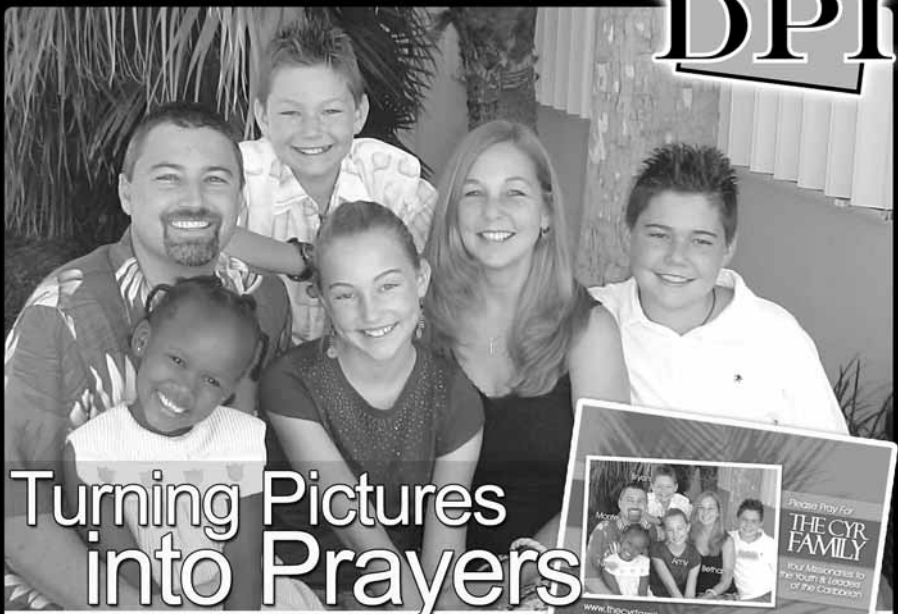
have given it a second thought. But then again, it seems history left them no choice.

Now today, after over a millennium of silence, praises to Jesus in the Persian language are once more beginning to rise from this ancient land. Redeemer, Savior, and Coming King—a new Hope is rising that may yet transform the nation. With an estimated one million new believers who call themselves *farsi-masihi* (Persian-Christians) coming to faith in the last seven years, the rebirth of a Christward movement in Persia has been nothing short of supernatural.

Truly, it has been a long journey—perhaps the longest for any people besides the Jews themselves. But the story that began in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. with the Jewish exile to Babylon may yet have an ending that will surprise even the greatest skeptic. This is truly His story, and as such, we are far from its glorious ending.

<sup>1</sup>Much of the history in this article is indebted to the research done by Samuel H. Moffett in his seminal work, *A History of Christianity in Asia*. **f**

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# But Can We Trust Mustafa?

by Nabeel T. Jabbour



*There are some Christians who believe that Islam is too evil and therefore it is impossible for any Muslim who puts his/her faith in Christ to stay among his/her own people as salt and light. Let me present a fictional situation to demonstrate this attitude of prejudice that does exist among some Christians. I will play the role (of a composite of an Egyptian) young man with this kind of attitude of prejudice against Muslims.*

Every Thursday evening, I go to our Protestant church in downtown Cairo to attend the meeting for working men and women. Because I was discriminated against during my university days, I have a certain prejudice against Muslims. In our Egyptian newspapers, we often read articles written by Muslims attacking Christianity and the Bible. Furthermore, a Muslim equivalent of a TV evangelist keeps insulting our religion.

On a certain Thursday, I go to our weekly meeting at church. My friends tell me that we have a guest speaker tonight, a Muslim who has become a Christian. My response to the news is a mixture of pleasure and suspicion.

Is he a genuine Christian, or is he playing a role in order to deceive us? When he enters the church, he automatically repulses me as I notice that he has a bruise on his forehead, a hypocritical manifestation of his fake spirituality. Fanatical Muslims with a zibeeba (a bruise on the forehead) attempt to communicate the message that they have prayed so many times, kneeling and touching the carpet with their foreheads, that they got that bruise. Another thing that repulses me is the way he greets me. He says, "Asalamu 'alaykum" (peace to you). Only Muslims use that terminology when they greet one another. Perhaps he is not a true Christian. Something that repulses me even more is his name. How could he

come to our church with the Muslim name Mustafa? Mustafa means "the chosen one" and is one of the names of their prophet Muhammad because they believe that he was chosen by God. I wonder what kind of meeting we will be having tonight.

After the singing and the prayers, this man is introduced as a former Muslim who has become a Christian. I sit there wondering whether my friends who invited him were duped and trusted him prematurely. I need him to convince me that he has become a "real and true Christian," just like me, and I am not an easy person to convince.

When he starts sharing his story, I, like most of those in the church meeting, quietly listen to him to find out whether he is genuine. As he warms up and starts attacking Islam and ridiculing Muhammad and the Muslim faith, I start enjoying his story. From our laughter at his jokes about Islam and our agreeing with him about his attacks, he finds out how to win our approval. By the time he finishes, we are all elated and encouraged by his sharing, although we wish he were more polished like us and used our Christian terminology. But we know we need to be patient because this polish will come with time and practice. After the meeting, I, along with others, thank him for his sharing and congratulate him on his conversion. As people come and thank him, he feels as though he has finally found his place of belongingness in our church meeting because he is being treated like a hero with a halo around his head.

I still do not like the zibeeba, the bruise on his forehead. I hope that in the future he will put cream on it in order to cover it up. During the informal time at the end of the meeting, I follow him with the corner of my eye and notice at one point that he is talking to my younger sister and to other women. When I see him doing that, I begin to wonder about his motives. Is he coming after the women? Why would a Muslim want to believe in Christ other than for women, money, or a desire to go to America? So back at home, I warn my sister and advise her not

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*This article is an excerpt from The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross, by Nabeel Jabbour. Used by permission of NavPress. Copyright 2008, all rights reserved. [www.navpress.com](http://www.navpress.com).*

to get too excited just yet that he has become a true believer. We will need to wait and see "fruit" before we trust him. I even quote to her the litmus test: "By their fruit you will recognize them" (Matthew 7:20).

When Mustafa returns the following Thursday to our church meeting, not as the speaker but as an ordinary person, he finds that most of us respond to him with plastic, artificial smiles. We keep him away at a safe distance because he still greets us by saying "Asalamu 'alaykum," and he still "smells" like a Muslim. It seems I was not the only one from our group who preached to a family member a little sermon about the need to avoid Mustafa until we see fruit! So Mustafa starts wondering whether he has come to the right church. Very soon he meets another Protestant Christian in Cairo, who invites him to his church. The halo returns temporarily but does not last long. Then he gets invited to another church and to another, and in the meantime he learns how to please the Christians: by making fun of Islam and by attacking Muhammad and the Qur'an.

As the months pass, he begins to get more polished in his terminology. At the same time, he ruptures every relationship he had with his Muslim family and friends as he becomes openly critical of Islam. He even changes his name from Mustafa to Peter and gets baptized. Shortly afterward, he comes to our Thursday meeting again, this time to give a testimony of how he is suffering for Christ. He is not Mustafa anymore, but brother Peter. I never felt at ease by calling him "brother Mustafa." Brother and Mustafa did not mesh. He no longer uses the Muslim terminology he used to, and he lifts up his arms in church during the singing and shouts, "Hallelujah" and "Praise the Lord." Now he has really become one of us; he is inside our "fortress with thick walls" that protects us from the Muslims outside. **f**

*This composite sadly describes how we Arab Christians, who tend to be very churchy in our culture, have treated Muslim-background believers over the centuries. Does the Bible teach that a Muslim, upon believing in Christ, should rupture his relationships with his Muslim family and friends and get integrated into Christianity? Is it possible for a Muslim background believer in Christ to remain among his own people? A few chapters in my book deal with these questions.*

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200813



# What God Do Muslims Worship?

by Rick Brown



The rise of Islamist terrorism has enraged people across the world. Muslims have suffered the most from terrorists, and they have suffered from the Western backlash as well, so they are fearful and angry at the militants. Many Christians, on the other hand, have directed their fear and anger towards all Muslims and towards their whole culture. Many have expressed their anger by demonizing Islam, to the extent of accusing Muslims of worshipping a demon. A key element of this attack has been the claim that the name *Allah* refers to a demon or pagan deity, usu-

**The Kingdom of God, however, is never advanced by untruths, and so this matter needs our careful consideration.**

ally the “moon god,” and that Muslims worship this pagan deity. Such claims are found in a multitude of books and websites. They have even been made by scholars who are otherwise reputable in their own fields, but who are poorly

acquainted with the language, culture and history of the Arab world. The Kingdom of God, however, is never advanced by untruths, and so this matter needs our careful consideration.

## The Meaning of a Word

Lexical meaning has at least two components, its referential meaning (often called “reference” or “denotation”) and its conceptual meaning (often called “sense” or “semantic meaning”). Reference is the intentional act of using a word or expression to identify a particular entity. When I say to you

*the moon is full tonight*, I am using the word *moon* to identify an object I am talking about, known as the “referent.” That is the word’s “referential meaning” on that occasion. The reference is determined by my intention and by my expectation that you will understand my intention. As for the conceptual meaning of a word, it is the cluster of properties commonly ascribed to the referents of that word, bundled together in the mind as a concept. So the concept moon includes attributes typically ascribed to a moon, and it is evoked by using the word *moon*. In the case of the word *Allah*, we need to examine both its usual referential meaning and its conceptual meaning. We also need to consider how a word like *Allah* gets a meaning, and how that meaning changes over time.

Meaning becomes associated with words as a social convention based on common usage. When people in a society use the same word to refer to the same things and to describe those things in nearly the same way, then by social convention that becomes its lexical meaning. In English, for example, people normally use the word *dog* in reference to canines and the word *cat* in reference to felines. It is normal, however, for lexical meanings to change over time, especially when the society and its conventions change. Recent examples in English include words like *gay* and *wired*. The word *conversation* has changed over the centuries. It occurs twenty times in the King James Version, always in reference to behavior (although Philippians 3:20 should have meant citizenship), but today the word *conversation* means talking, not behavior. Since there is continual change in the meanings of words, the meaning of a particular word must be determined by its contemporaneous usage rather than by its previous or subsequent usage. So when people use the word *conversation* in normal discourse today, it would be wrong to claim they mean behavior, and it would be wrong to interpret *conversation* in the King James Bible as a reference to talking. Similarly for those today who

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*Rick Brown is a Bible scholar and missiologist. This article is derived in part from the article “Who is Allah?” in the 23:2 Summer 2006 issue of the International Journal of Frontier Missiology. For supporting documentation see that article and related ones at [www.ijfm.com](http://www.ijfm.com)*

call God *Allah* in their language: the meaning of the word is a function of its usage in their society today, not its alleged usage in some ancient society.

Consider the names of the days of the week in English. Most of them were named in honor of Anglo-Saxon gods. Wednesday, for example, is named after the Anglo-Saxon god Woden (= Norse Odin), from whom most of the Anglo-Saxon kings claimed descent, while Monday is named after the moon god Mona (= Norse Mani). For that reason there used to be pious English Christians, mostly Quakers, who refused to use these names and instead named the days *First day*, *Second day*, *Third day*, etc. Today, however, the word *Wednesday* has lost its pagan meaning and is used without hesitation by all Christians, even Quakers. People use it with no thought of referring to Woden. To claim otherwise, based on the origin of the word, is to commit the “etymological fallacy.”

To give another example, there were Christians in Holiness circles who avoided the word *enthused*, because it originally meant to be inspired by pagan gods. Its formerly pagan meaning, however, has long since disappeared, and when Christians today talk about “enthusiasm” they are not referring to spirit possession.

The ancient Canaanites used the term *El* as the name of the chief deity of their pantheon of gods. His wife was Asherah and their son was Baal. When Isaac, Jacob and their descendents adopted the language of southern Canaan (which came to be known as Hebrew), they used the term *El* to refer to the God of Abraham, who was the Most High God and the Creator of the universe. This was the intended reference of their usage, and it became a conventional reference among them. In this way they shed the pagan meaning of *El*, and in the Bible this pagan meaning survives in only one reference to a Canaanite temple (Judg 9:46).

Prior to the coming of monotheism, the Greek word *theos* and the Latin word *deus* were used in reference to pagan deities, but the inspired authors of the New Testament used *theos* quite intentionally to refer to the Most High God, the Creator, the God of Abraham. Similarly in the Anglo-Saxon language, prior to the coming of Christianity the word *god* was used exclusively in reference to pagan gods. Now, however, *God* is used in English as the very name of the Supreme Being.

The list could go on. The point is that the meanings of a word are a matter of social convention and speaker's intention, as revealed in context. Among the Hebrews it was the convention to use *El* in reference to the Creator, the Lord of the

universe, and among Greek Christians it was a convention to use *theos* with this same meaning. The words could have other meanings as well, but the Biblical authors used them with this manifest intention. Among the Jews, Christians and Muslims who speak Arabic, it is the convention to use *Allah* to refer to the Creator, the Lord of the universe, the God of Abraham and the prophets, and this is their intended reference when they use it. However, unlike the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and English words for God, which have pagan origins, the word *Allah* has no other meaning in Arabic than the one true God, and as we shall see, it has no history in Arabic of ever having had a different referential meaning.

### The Referential Meaning of the Name *Allah*

When speaking English, Muslims use both the words God and *Allah* to refer to the God they worship. By both convention and intention, they are referring to the one true God, whom the Qur'an affirms to be the Creator, the God of Abraham, the God of the Bible, and the God of the Christians (Qur'an 2:135; 6:73; 29:46, 61). The thought of Allah being the moon had never even entered the mind of a Muslim until they heard of this abhorrent claim being made against them by “missionaries” (which is their term for all anti-Muslim polemicists). Muslims regard this as slander against themselves and as blasphemy against God, leading them to doubt the honesty, piety and good intentions of Christian missionaries. Like all antagonistic approaches to Muslim society, this creates defensiveness and resistance to the Gospel.

Writing in the *Christian Century* (2004, issue 17), Dr. Umar E. Abd-Allah politely understates that “as a Muslim, I am naturally sensitive to attempts by others to define what I or my community believes.” As for the God Whom Muslims worship, he writes (p. 36),

From a Muslim's perspective, the premise that Muslims, Jews and Christians believe in the same God—the God of Abraham—is so central to Islamic theology that unqualified rejection of it would, for many, be tantamount to a repudiation of faith.

The fact is, Arabic-speaking Jews, Christians, and

**Unlike the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and English words for God, which have pagan origins, the word Allah has no other meaning in Arabic than the one true God.**

Muslims all use the term *Allah* to refer to the one and only God, the creator of the universe, the sustainer of life, the bestower of blessings, the sender of prophets, the author of Scripture, and the judge of all nations. That is what the term *Allah* means for them, not a moon god. *Allah* is simply their name for God in Arabic, as it is in the Qur'an. Whatever meaning the word may have had in more ancient times is irrelevant to its monotheistic meaning in the Qur'an and current usage, just as the ancient pagan meaning of *El* is irrelevant to its usage in the Bible and in Modern Hebrew as a name for God.

Whereas Jewish scholars recognize seven names for God in Hebrew (*El, Elohim, Adonai, Yhwh, Ehyeh, Asher-Ehyeh, Shaddai, and Tseba'ot*), Muslims use only *Allah* as a proper name, although they recognize 99 or more divine epithets, or "attributive names". So wherever Muslims took the message of monotheism, they used the name *Allah*

for the one and only God. As a result, the name *Allah* has been borrowed into many languages and has been used by both Muslims and Christians in their worship and in their translations of the Bible. In many languages *Allah* is used in addition to indigenous names for God, such as



*Khuda* (Persian), *Mungu*

(Swahili), and *Tuhan* (Malayo-Polynesian).

Although Western Christians tend to associate the name *Allah* with Islam or even with Islamists, they should understand that for Christians from North Africa to Indonesia, *Allah* is a dear and highly revered name. A Christian leader named Rafique, writing in the 13:1 (1998) issue of *Seedbed*, made the following plea:

Speak, if you wish, against their book, the Qur'an, and against their Mohammed, but PLEASE never never against the glorious name of Allah, a name that has been loved and revered by millions of God's children down through the centuries.

### Could Allah be a Moon God?

The lexical argument above should be enough to demonstrate that Muslims use the term *Allah* to refer to the Omnipotent Creator, the God of Abraham and the Bible. Some polemicists, however, note that the symbol of the crescent moon adorns the tops of many mosques and is widely used as a symbol of Islam. So they claim that Islam stems

from worship of a moon god named "Allah," and that the crescent moon symbol has been passed down from an ancient moon religion to a modern moon religion called "Islam." Muslim scholars readily acknowledge that before the coming of Islam, many "gods" and idols were worshiped in the Middle East. That was true in ancient Israel as well, where many Hebrews worshiped the sun and moon and stars (Jer 8:2; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3; 23:5; Deut 17:2-3). The name of the ancient Near-Eastern moon god, however, was *Sin*, not *Allah*, and he was not particularly popular in Arabia, the birthplace of Islam. The most prominent idol in Mecca was a god with the name *Hubal*, and there is no evidence that he was a moon god, in spite of claims to the contrary.

Polemicists have presented some highly dubious arguments for an Arabian moon religion. For example, the temple ruins at Hazor in Palestine have been presented as evidence of Arabian moon worship. This is based on a carving there of a suppliant wearing a crescent-like pendant. This site is not, however, an ancient Arab religious site but an ancient Canaanite site, destroyed by Joshua in about 1250 BC. As for the "crescent," it looks like the horns of a bull, which was a symbol of strength and a symbol of Baal, a Canaanite god.

Further evidence is claimed from an ancient temple in the ruins of the kingdom of Sheba (Saba), in Yemen, which includes inscriptions to the kingdom's patron god, with the name *Almaqah*. It has been claimed that he was a moon god, based on a partially excavated symbol that looked like a crescent moon. But as an article on "South Arabia" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* notes, when fully excavated the engraving turned out to be a bull's head with horns. In any case scholars now think Almaqah was a sun god.

The ancient Arabs worshiped hundreds of idols, including no doubt the sun and moon, but *there is no clear evidence that moon-worship was prominent among the Arabs in any way or that the crescent was used as the symbol of a moon god or that the name Allah was used for a moon god*. Furthermore, there is no evidence that any of these pagan gods were identified with Allah, in spite of claims to the contrary, and there is no evidence that the crescent moon was used as a symbol of Allah or anyone else in ancient Arabia.

In fact, the crescent moon was a political symbol originating in Christendom. It was used as one of the symbols of the Byzantine Empire and was seen wherever the imperial flag was placed. It evidently symbolized the empire's claim to rule everything

under the heavens. As it happens, many of the ancient Turkish tribes also used a crescent-like symbol, although it might have been derived from the horns of a bull rather than the moon. So when the Ottoman Turks completed their conquest of the Byzantine Empire in the 15th century, including the Middle East and North Africa, they retained the Byzantine crescent as a symbol of empire. In fact, they affixed crescent symbols atop public buildings throughout their empire as a symbol of their imperial rule. It also figured in the flags of their vassal states, even after the states became independent from Turkey. Once the crescent no longer represented Turkish imperial rule in these countries, it was reinterpreted as a symbol of Islam, and that is its modern significance. *So the crescent symbol has not been passed to Islam from a moon religion but is a recent symbol promoted by the Ottoman Turks for political reasons.*

If Christians tell a Muslim that when he mentions *Allah* he is talking about a moon god, and that he worships the moon rather than the creator of the universe, then he will view them as idiots or as slanderers. Worse yet, their testimony will have no credibility with him, because he knows his own intentions, namely that he is directing his reference and his worship to the Supreme Being, the creator of the universe, the God who sent the prophets and revealed the Scriptures.

### **The Origin of the Name *Allah***

So where did the name *Allah* come from? Prior to the rise of Islam and for some time afterwards, Aramaic was widely used among Jews and Christians in the Ancient Near East and many Aramaic words were borrowed into Arabic. The usual term for God in Aramaic was *Alāh(ā)*. It is the term that Jesus would have used. It is used as the term for God in the books of Ezra and Daniel, in the Jewish translations of the Bible (the Targums), in the Talmud and in the Aramaic Bible used by many Middle-Eastern Christians today. When Judaism spread across Arabia, it brought many Aramaic names and terms, including *Alāh(ā)*. When Christianity followed, the Christians used Aramaic Scripture and liturgy in most of Arabia and Mesopotamia. As a result the Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians introduced many Aramaic words and names into Arabic. In a research paper entitled “Who was ‘Allah’ before Islam?”, I present evidence from pre-Islamic inscriptions and manuscripts to show that Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians were using *Allah* as the name of God in the centuries prior to the rise of Islam. (This is being published by William Carey Library in *Rethinking our Assumptions About Muslims*. A

prepublication version is available at [www.contextualization.info/rickbrown](http://www.contextualization.info/rickbrown).)

It should be noted that Muslim scholars do not like to admit that the Arabic of the Qur’an has loanwords, and they suggest that the name *Allah* is derived from the expression *al ‘ilah*, meaning “the God,” with the article of uniqueness. The word *‘ilah* is related to the Biblical Hebrew words *‘eloh* and *‘elohim*, meaning “God,” as well as to the Biblical Aramaic words *elāh* and *alāhā*, so regardless of the derivation, the word is related to the Biblical terms for God.

The prophet of Islam claimed to preach a continuation of the message of the Jewish prophets and the Messiah Jesus, so it stands to reason that he would use the same names that Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians were using. Evidence for this is found in the Qur’an itself. For example, it cites the claim of Christians that Jesus is Allah. This claim is rejected in the Qur’an, which says, “In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary” (Sura 5:17, Yusuf Ali translation). The very next verse in the Qur’an criticizes Jews and Christians for claiming that they are “sons of Allah” (Sura 5:18). So in addition to other historical evidence for the pre-Islamic use of *Allah* by Christians, the Qur’an itself reflects a situation in which Christians were already using *Allah* as the name of God.

**If Christians tell a Muslim that when he mentions Allah he is talking about a moon god, and that he worships the moon rather than the creator of the universe, then he will view them as idiots or as slanderers.**

### **Different Conceptual Meanings of the Name *Allah***

Concepts vary somewhat among individuals. For example, if one’s concept of dogs is built on bad experiences with mongrels, it will be somewhat different from the concepts held by a dog-lover, a hound hunter, or a canine patrolman. Concepts vary among cultures as well. In Muslim cultures, dogs are viewed as unclean animals that should remain outside the house.

Societies also have different concepts of God. Even within cultures that share a Christian heritage, sub-cultural conceptions of God can be quite different. Mormons, for example, think of God as a man who became a god, created the earth, joined with spirit women to beget spirits for human

babies, and coupled with Mary to beget Jesus. My mission to Mormons is not to change their terms for God and Jesus but to redefine them, and that requires a change of their concept of God.

Jews and Muslims typically think of God as one and indivisible, without distinctions of person, and without being incarnate as the Messiah. But Jews conceptualize God as favoring Jews over others, whereas Muslims think of God as preferring Muslims to Jews. Like Jews and Muslims, Jesus-only Protestants are non-Trinitarian, but unlike Jews and Muslims they view Jesus as God. Liberal Protestants do not view God as incarnate in Jesus but as simply revealing his characteristics and message through Jesus. Some Christians view God as punitive and requiring regular propitiation through the sacrifice of the mass. Deists view God as distant, uncaring, and uninvolved. And then there are Evangelical conceptions of God. All of these people use the same word 'God' to refer to the same being, yet they have different concepts of who God is. Similarly in the Middle East, Jews, Christians, and Muslims use the same word *Allah* to refer to God, but their concepts of God differ. The significance is this: *One cannot change a person's concept of God merely by changing the name he uses for God. Any name that denotes God for someone will evoke that person's concept of God. What is required for reconceptualization is new information about God that will change the concept itself.*

**Similarly in the Middle East, Jews, Christians, and Muslims use the same word *Allah* to refer to God, but their concepts of God differ.**

God, especially in one's mother tongue, that one's concepts and worldview are reformed. This change in one's concept of God may involve eliminating some attributes of one's God—concept (such as capriciousness and dispassionateness) and adding new attributes (such as sympathy and joy, consistency and reliability, purposefulness in guiding history). It may involve increasing the strength of existing attributes of one's God—concept (lovingness and holiness), and decreasing the strength of others (such as vindictiveness). It may also involve adding new information to one's concept of God, such as God existing as Father, Word and Spirit,

way that it builds and revises one's concepts of God and man, creation and destiny, sin and holiness, Jesus and salvation, and so on. It is through reading or hearing the Word of

and God revealing himself incarnationally in Jesus. And this is what *Allah* means for people with Biblical worldviews.

### **What if the Qur'an was Inspired by a False Spirit Speaking in God's Name *Allah*?**

There are a few polemicists who accept that *Allah* was the pre-Islamic name for God in Arabic, but they still object to its use on the dubious grounds that it was used in false prophecy. Although most non-Muslims assume the Qur'an is a human composition, and scholars cite sources for parts of it, others say it was inspired by a demon. According to Islamic accounts, the prophet of Islam received the texts of the Qur'an from the angel Jibreel (Gabriel), and when he first heard Jibreel speak to him in a cave, he thought Jibreel was a demon. This reminds some Christians of the event recorded in 1 Kings 22:23, where God allowed a false prophet to be inspired by a lying spirit and to speak messages in the name of God; the false prophet's messages were not actually from God, and the foretold events did not come to pass.

How should God's people respond to false prophecies? Deuteronomy 18:22 gives the following directive:

*"When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him." (Note: The Hebrew text actually says the name Yahweh, not the title Lord.)*

This verse instructs us to ignore the claims made by false prophets and not fear them. It does not say to quit calling God *Yahweh*, *Adonai*, *Elohim*, or *Alaha*, just because a false prophet and his followers used that name for the Supreme Being. The Biblical prophets did not stop using those names for God, just because some false prophets had used them! Consider an English example: Most Christians regard the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith to be a false prophet, but they do not stop using the name *God* just because it was used in the Book of Mormon. Yet a few people are saying that if the Qur'an was inspired by a spirit who spoke falsely in the name of God, which in Arabic was *Allah*, then Christians should never call the Supreme Being *Allah*. In other words, in the many languages where for centuries Christians and Muslims have been referring to God as *Allah*, they should stop doing so, because a lying spirit once used that name when it claimed to speak in the name of God. It seems evident that this rationale owes more to fear and prejudice than to Scripture and logic.

## Implications for the Gospel if the Name *Allah* is Rejected

There is another aspect to this issue, and that is the barrier to communication raised by rejecting the use of *Allah* in languages where it is the name of God. If I am speaking the language of people whom I hope to influence with the Gospel, and if the normal word for God in their language is *Allah*, then any refusal on my part to use that term will distance me from the very people I am trying to reach, and it will distance them from the Gospel message itself. My insensitivity to the linguistic conventions of their society will signal a lack of genuine care for them and a lack of respect for their culture, heritage, and identity. My rejection of their preferred terminology will signal a rejection of them personally and of their community in general. Thus my attempt to draw them will actually repel them because I reject their way of talking about these things. So it is important to use their language authentically, as they themselves use it, without communicating rejection by refusing to use their names and terms. To put it another way, *if we wrap the message of salvation in the language of rejection, we provoke our listeners to reject it.*

Kevin Greeson describes it this way: If missionaries refuse to use the names and terms customarily used by their audience, then in effect they are saying, "I do not love you enough to communicate with you beyond *my* comfort level. If you want to hear the Gospel of salvation, then *you* must come out of *your* comfort zone and come talk with *me* in terms that *I* am comfortable with." Kevin adds, however, that he does not know of any missionaries who still reject the name *Allah* for God.

The Yale professor Lamin Sanneh, in his book *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West*, draws a significant conclusion from his study of the spread of Christianity across the non-Western world. He notes that wherever a society's traditional name for God was used in translations of the Bible and in Christian outreach and expression, it facilitated social and cultural renewal. More significantly, "in the relevant cases *Christian expansion and revival were limited to those societies that preserved the indigenous name for God*" (pp. 31-32, emphasis added; cf. p. 79). Need one say more?



Modern Turkey, for example, has two main Muslim subcultures: modern Turks and traditional Turks. Modern Turks use a "Turkified" language in which traditional Arabic and Persian loanwords have been replaced with words based on Turkish, while traditional Turks retain many of the Arabic and Persian loan-words, especially those pertaining to religion. The Turkish Bible Society has produced an excellent new translation of the Bible that suits modern urbanized Turks quite well. But traditional

Turks, especially ones who are highly religious, refuse to read it, even though many of them long to know what the Bible says. This is because the modern translation has replaced the word *Allah* with the Turkish word *Tanrı*, and religious Turks consider *tanrı* to mean "god" in a pagan sense. In their view, if the Bible does not contain their name for God, *Allah*, then it does not come from God. So the very group of Turks who are the most concerned about spiritual issues and the most eager to hear God's Word are locked out of the Bible by the total absence of the word *Allah* in the translation.

## Conclusion

The "Allah" whom Muslims worship is the Creator, who alone is God; they do not worship a moon god or idol. Nevertheless, their concept of God is incomplete and distorted without the revelation of God that is presented in the Bible. In this respect they are like non-Messianic Jews, whose concept of God is uninformed by the New Testament revelation. The Apostle Paul wrote about this in Romans 10:2, saying, "For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge." Many Muslims have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with Biblical knowledge. They want to please God and attain salvation, but they lack the benefit of Biblical revelation regarding the nature of God and his provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. The problem is not their name for God but their concept of God. The concept of a holy, loving, consistent, triune God comes from absorbing the worldview revealed in the Bible. What leads Muslims to a fuller concept of God is not the use of a different divine name but the revelation of the Word of God, illuminated and confirmed by the Holy Spirit and the testimony of the saints. **f**





# Perspectives<sup>TM</sup> National Conference

by David Flynn

Imagine attending an event where all the people are extremely committed to the same goal. There is no need for convincing people to get on the same page—they already are. There is no agenda to convince them of, nothing to try to sell them. And they bring with them a level of energy, excitement and enthusiasm that fuels the time spent together. That is what happened in Dallas this past June 12-14 when some 400+ *Perspectives* coordinators, instructors, agency representatives and coordinator team members gathered for the *Perspectives* National Conference.

The focus of the conference was based on the historic adage of William Carey, "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God." In many ways, this was fulfilled in the conference itself. Planning a national conference is not something the National Office Staff are experienced in. But attempting such an event and expecting God to bless it for His glory is exactly what took place.

The main goals of the conference were to renew the energy and vision of those involved in *Perspectives* through Global Reports, plenary and workshop speak-

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ers, and networking; to train and re-train coordinators; and to introduce the 4<sup>th</sup> edition revision of the text. Attendees were exposed to just how broad the *Perspectives* Movement is through reports from several *Perspectives* directors in countries around the world. Workshops included training coordinators and coordinating team members on some new procedures. In addition, a *Perspectives* Coordinators Workshop took place, with over 60 participants trained and certified as new coordinators! There was also a focus on what the 4<sup>th</sup> edition revision will look like, which is expected to be completed in time for Spring 2009 classes.

A sub-theme to the conference was "Celebrating the Past, and Looking to the Future". A dynamic 30-minute DVD that shared the history of *Perspectives* was presented, featuring interviews and stories of those involved in the very early days of establishing *Perspectives*. This was followed by an introduction to Dr. Ralph Winter, which prompted a standing ovation by the crowd.

In addition to the plenary speakers, there were 19 workshops and forums held that covered a wide spectrum of topics, all geared specifically towards

instructors, coordinators and coordinator team members.



William Carey himself showed up at the conference in a special dinner theatre presentation where he described his life and ministry from childhood to shoe maker to missionary. The final evening, a special concert was given by the very gifted Annie Moses Band, which was followed by David Bryant, who shared and led the group in a concert of prayer. Dr. Mark Bailey, President of the Dallas Theological Seminary, addressed the crowd on the last morning following regional breakfast meetings.

What was accomplished as a result of the conference? Well, it is impossible to measure all which took place between individuals and in their relationships with God. From the feedback and evaluations we've received, it appears that the coordinators, instructors and coordinating team members left with a much greater sense of how their role in *Perspectives* is part of something much bigger that God is doing around the

world. Many sensed a greater commitment and motivation to "press on". Others learned new ideas that they will bring back to their classes or incorporate into their teaching. A strong sense of camaraderie was evident, and regional *Perspectives* Networks were strengthened. Agencies also re-committed to strengthening their involvement in *Perspectives*. In short, the goals of the conference were met, and in many ways exceeded. For this we give praise to God!



What's next? Conference feedback favors a National Conference every four years, with regional conferences two years after these. This will be prayerfully deliberated in the following months. In the meantime, there is much to do in the continued growth and development of *Perspectives* nationally and globally. We dare not rest on our laurels.

Below is a small sampling of some of the feedback we received. We are grateful to

all of the workshop leaders, speakers, international guests and Regional Directors for all of their hard work in making this event possible. We send this out to you.

Dave Flynn  
for the National Office Staff



This conference was the best organized and executed, jam packed with no wasted time to get the most for one's time and money. Annie Moses Band-no words (great blessing from God).

I felt this conference was a gift from God... I feel so blessed to have been able to go to hear how GOD IS ON THE MOVE!!!

I really can't praise enough the organization of this conference, its contents, the speakers, the diversity of roles, backgrounds and regional representation, site or anything else. I give it an A+.

The combination of the PCW, plenary sessions, workshops and bookstore was so helpful! The first day of PCW training, I felt completely overwhelmed, but as I collected instruction, tools, insight and relationships, my fear was replaced with excitement!

I never met anyone but my coordinator before, so seeing all the pieces of Perspectives come into, well, perspective was great.

I've been to a bazillion conferences over the past 40 years of ministry. Including Lexus versions like Urbana. But I can say to you without qualification that the conference you guys just pulled off was absolutely one of the best I've ever been to.

An all around superb job. Absolutely no negatives to speak of. No "weak" spots. Very good use of time. Very honoring to coordinators, to the Perspectives movement and to God. This was a great "tool" to encourage me (and I'm guessing others) to press on.

# Raising LOCAL Resources

by Glenn Schwartz

## From Paralysis to Proclamation

I have long felt that promoting healthy self-reliance is not an end in itself. The purpose of overcoming unhealthy dependency is to allow churches everywhere to make their own contribution to the global Christian movement. Churches paralyzed by unhealthy dependency not only cannot sustain themselves, they cannot send out their own missionaries to those yet unreached. If you are in a church that knows the joy of missionary sending, imagine what it feels like to be in a church that does not send the Gospel beyond its own community.

Fortunately, in some places when churches were planted, missionary vision was introduced from the beginning. In other places churches learned they could overcome unhealthy dependency and experience the joy of sending out their own people.<sup>1</sup>

## One Example

About ten years ago in Central Mozambique I had the privilege of leading a two-day seminar encouraging African churches to become missionary-minded. I began by asking how many years the Gospel was preached in that area. The 65 or so pastors chatted among themselves and agreed that the Gospel first came to them about 1915—85 years ago. I then asked how many of their own people went out as missionaries since that time. With some embarrassment they admitted that they had received many missionaries, but they had not sent out any of their own—85 years after having the Gospel.

In the middle of my presentation, the one translating for me asked for permission to address the pastors. He reminded them about their missionary obligation and recommended that, right then and there, they should pray a prayer of confession for being receivers but not senders. Before the two-day meeting ended



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they appointed an interdenominational committee of leaders who would begin to look for ways to send out their own people. Soon thereafter they sent some of their own people to Northern Mozambique and to Brazil and Portugal. They discovered that they could do more than depend on others; they could make a contribution of their own.

## Good News on the Horizon

There is a movement that began in Vancouver, British Columbia about 25 years ago that promotes missionary outreach. This is done through an annual Missions Fest (or festival) with other missions-related activities throughout the year. At their Missions Fest event earlier this year they had 35,000 people pass through the doors on one weekend in Vancouver. Festivals are now being held in Portland (Oregon), Seattle (Washington) and various other cities in Canada. In addition, this year in Africa, Missions Fests have been held in Pretoria (South Africa) as well as Lubumbashi and Kinshasa (Congo). This is happening because churches in Africa are discovering that they can become mission mobilizers, not only receivers of mission activity from the outside. There are many sending agencies in Asia, Latin America and Africa that have mobilized tens of thousands of their own missionaries. Missions Fests are helping to get the churches behind such mission effort.<sup>2</sup>

In one place in Africa church leaders were invited to come together to learn about how a Missions Fest could be held in their city. When church leaders learned that people would be coming from North America, many churches sent representatives to learn what it was about. Unfortunately, some came to the meeting looking for resources they thought might be coming with the North Americans (a classic sign of the dependency syndrome). At the meeting they learned that a Missions Fest should be locally owned, operated and supported within Africa. Some left with disappointment because they anticipated getting, not giving. Thankfully later on, some who left came back to join the movement.

That kind of change occurs when the emphasis shifts from what churches can get to what they can give. Imagine the blessing that is in store for cities all across Africa and elsewhere when they discover that they can overcome unhealthy dependency, lay aside their differences and joyfully participate in making the Great Commission a priority for their churches.

## Endnotes

- 1 For stories of churches that overcame unhealthy dependency see *When Charity Destroys Dignity: Overcoming Unhealthy Dependency in the Christian Movement* page 17 and following. The book can be ordered on the WMA website at [www.wmausa.org](http://www.wmausa.org).
- 2 For more information on how Missions Fests are conducted, see the following website: [www.missionfestinternational.org](http://www.missionfestinternational.org). Also for articles on local sustainability, see [www.wmausa.org](http://www.wmausa.org).



# China

Greg H. Parsons



Over the last month, we've all heard a lot about China. I write this before the Olympics start on 08/08/08. There has been an extended focus on China around the world. If the Olympics are uneventful—as we would pray and China would like—the focus will likely turn elsewhere.

For many reasons however, we shouldn't forget China. First, let us look at a few facts from *Operation World* 2001.<sup>1</sup> China has:

- 1.3 billion people. More than four times the U.S. figure of just under 300 million.
- 9,573,000 sq. km., only 43,000 more than the U.S.
- Some 91 million “Christians” (of all kinds) growing at 7.7% annual growth rate (AGR).<sup>2</sup> The U.S. has 235 million “Christians” growing at 0.7% AGR.

China is big and diverse enough that these nationwide statistics only hold minimal value. As someone

**God is working in ways we would have never dreamed or thought or planned.**

once said, “Everything you've ever heard about China is probably true somewhere in China.”

If you only look at these big numbers, you could think that it is the U.S.

that has a greater need. We realize that many of these 235 million Christians in “Christian” America don't really follow Christ very well, if at all. Some say China has more true followers of Christ than 91 million—partly because there usually aren't many “nominal Christians” in a society that has a history of persecuting them. Certainly, we in the U.S. have major needs and problems, as does China. When we look at unreached people groups and major population segments still untouched with the Gospel, China wins.

But I find it interesting that as China “modernizes” through research, planning, and ingenuity, some of their top economic experts point to the fact that they realize that the U.S. has achieved much of its progress because of the positive aspects of Christianity.

A friend who's been in China for about 18 years visited me recently when I was in Asia. He detailed some amazing stories. Where he lives, near a major

city, Chinese believers are very open and forthright in their testimony. Officials in the Communist Party and those who advise top Party officials have come forward and expressed the need for the moral foundation they believe comes from those who follow Christ.

Many of these same believers are being creative and entrepreneurial in their work and witness. I wish I could share more. God is working in ways we would have never dreamed or thought or planned. When they get a ministry idea, they run with it now, often without much knowledge of the real situation or cultural sensitivity. Like us, they make a lot of mistakes and learn along the way to be more effective.

These are not necessarily pastors. It is the businessmen, or other local Christian leaders who establishes a “beachhead” from their day-to-day work place. They leverage their circle of influence to impact as broadly as possible.

Some might read into this and wonder if we should still send workers to places like this. That is the wrong question. It is not a question of “whether or not” but “what kind.” The kind of person we need engaged in places all over the world is shifting.

Why not discuss this with those in your fellowship or missions team? What are the additional characteristics needed today?

As we seek the advance of God's name among the nations, praise Him for what He is doing in China. Pray for the Church globally (including the U.S.), that we might all grow into a vision like Paul, who sought “the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of His name.” (Romans 1:5b)

## Endnotes

- 1 Using 2010 extrapolations for population figures.
- 2 Annual Growth Rate is more than an interest rate—this is a significant increase.



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