

The December issue of *Mission Frontiers*, focusing on “The Many Faces of Islam,” prompted many readers to write letters to the editor. Some of these are excerpted below. All but the first are responding to Don McCurry’s article on “Islam and Christian Militarism.” Note, at the end of this collection, that Don McCurry replies to these letters.

Don’t Ignore Palestinians’ Pain

I was shocked to open my *Mission Frontiers* this morning and to read [Rick Wood’s] rather off-the-cuff comment, “This phenomenon (the stunning brutality of Islamic terrorism) has been around for some time—Israel has battled it for the last 53 years of its history”.... I abhor any killing of innocent civilians by governments or by groups, but to throw in that “poor Israel” sentence at the beginning of your article is to ignore the deep pain of the suffering of the Palestinian people for 53 years. Terror tactics are weak people fighting for something, right or wrong, but when done by people under occupation we have often praised it and called those doing it freedom fighters. And, by the way, for many years one of the more radical Palestinian resistance groups was headed by one professing to be a Christian, not a Muslim at all.

There is more to this issue than to lump it as “Israel battling the stunning brutality of Islamic terrorism.” If the Jewish lobbyists can convince you and others to equate all the Palestinian struggle for their rights as of the same nature as what happened on September 11, then they will have scored a big one. I do not want to see our Christian media falling into that trap. Ask just about any of my colleagues who have lived and served as witnesses for Christ among the Muslims and Christians of the Middle East.

Sincerely yours,
Raymond Weiss,
Orange City, IA

Rick Wood replies:

I do not believe that my statement was inaccurate or untrue. While the Israeli/Palestinian conflict involves rights to land, it is not simply a territorial dispute between two peoples. The solution would

be simple if it were. The solution to this dispute is so elusive because the very existence of Israel on any portion of “Muslim” land is an intolerable affront to the followers of Islam. Israel’s existence is a shame upon Islam and only through Israel’s extermination can the shame be removed. (See Bob Blincoe’s article on page 18 of the last issue.)

The U.N. voted to create Israel and a Palestinian state, but the Arab nations rejected the U.N. vote. On the day when Israel declared its independence, the Arab League Secretary, General Azzam Pasha, declared “jihad,” or holy war. He said, “This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre.” The Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin Al Husseini, stated, “I declare a holy war, my Moslem brothers! Murder the Jews. Murder them all.” Then five Islamic countries attacked to eliminate the infant Jewish state. There have been three other major wars to eliminate Israel and countless terrorist attacks.

There have been many opportunities for the Palestinians to have a state of their own, but each time they or their Arab benefactors have refused because it meant allowing the Jews to remain in some small portion of Muslim land. The suicide bombers with dreams of paradise are motivated by their Islamic faith, not simply by territorial aspirations. Those who ignore this key element will strive in futility for a solution to this long-standing conflict.

Don’t Forget Palestinian Christians

Thank you for the excellent issue on “The Many Faces of Islam”. The articles were all very good, especially the one by Kenneth Cragg. However,

my concern here is more directed toward the excerpt from the book by Don McCurry entitled “Islam and Christian Militarism”, and his comments on the treatment of the Muslims in the Holy Land and their violent responses. I have not read his book, and since your article was only an excerpt, perhaps he has in fact dealt in another place in his book with my concern below.

True, it has been the Muslims who have lashed back with suicide bombs in Jerusalem and other areas of the Holy Land, but I’m sorry he didn’t mention that the many Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Gaza have also been victims of oppression by the Israelis. They have not been completely silent in their suffering, given the books written by Elias Chacour (*Blood Brothers*) and others. But they have been there suffering all the same, even ignored in the tours of the Holy Land by American Christians sponsored by certain evangelical organizations. When making comments against the background of the September 11 attacks, one of course has to single out the violent wing of Islam. But when we discuss the Israeli part in the oppression of Muslims, please do not forget that the Arab Christians in the West Bank and Gaza are also suffering. We join with them in our prayers that they are suffering redemptively.

In Christian love and concern,
Bill Wagoner

Premise Wrong, History Selective

I read Don McCurry’s article on “Islam and Christian Militarism” with interest, having thought long and hard about the question of Christians bearing arms myself. I agree with many of his conclusions (military atrocities have been wrongfully committed in the name of Christ; this hampers our witness to Muslims who desperately need to hear the gospel), but his major premise is wrong. There can be no area of a believer’s life outside the lordship of Jesus Christ, including politics. Most Muslims have a better grasp of the fact that there must be a relationship between one’s religious beliefs and political views than do many Christians....

Secondly, his history of Muslim-Christian military engagements is a bit selective. The “occupied Muslim

lands”, to use his phrase, were in most cases conquered in the first place by force of Muslim arms. The Crusades were not the initial military confrontations between cross and crescent; the Battle of Tours in 732 AD, where Charles Martel defeated the Muslim forces and kept the rest of Europe from being overcome by Islam, would be a better historical example.

Thirdly, McCurry definitely skews the military history between Jews and Muslims. In condemning the Crusades (which most modern Christians do), he overlooks the fact that Muslim rule there was established by military conquest!

Probably the most telling sentence in the whole article is, “The Muslims, in spite of various peace efforts, are waiting for the most propitious time to commence jihad militarily.” The United States’ policies regarding Israel may or may not be wise; we have *never* provided “unquestioning support” of Israel, the article’s assertion to the contrary notwithstanding. But as long as the USA or any other country admits that the state of Israel has a right like any other state to exist within secure borders, we shall always be an enemy of Islam in the eyes of many Muslims (not all, to the latter’s credit). And as long as Jews want to live anywhere as Jews, they will always be the target of jihad by many Islamic elements.

We are indeed sent out as sheep in the midst of Islamic wolves; McCurry is certainly correct in that. He is also correct in stating that we must avoid complicating clashes on nationality, patriotism, and politics, whenever possible. Unfortunately, unless we decide to subscribe to a dualistic hierarchy of “spiritual concerns” vs. “worldly matters”, like the Gnostics of old, this may not always be possible. The good news is that *all* power on heaven and earth has been given to our Lord Jesus Christ, and one day *all* kingdoms—political, financial, national, spiritual, whatever – will be under His Lordship.

Respectfully submitted,
Glen I. Reeves, MD,
Modesto, CA

Scapegoat of Governments

... Mr. Don McCurry supports and promotes Bin Laden’s position quite clearly with regards to the US, in the

name of God no less. His failure is in delivering a quickie editorial without understanding what he is talking about. Jihad is glossed over with a wave of the hand. All of Christianity throughout the ages is condemned for even lifting a hand when self-defense is allowed clearly.

In Islamic tradition, McCurry does something unusual. He preserves Islamic honor. However, in the process he makes a scapegoat of every government associated with Christians....

David Mathes

Honest and Balanced

Thank you for publishing the article “Islam and Christian Militarism” by Don McCurry. It is an honest and balanced description of the encounter between Islam and “Christianity” down through the centuries and into our own time. I hope you are not discouraged or intimidated by [others]

There is little hope for peace in the Near East until Western countries in general and the U. S. in particular learn to see the situation more accurately and reach a more even-handed policy toward the countries involved, including Israel. Christians especially ought to be free of the political bias which impairs judgment and confuses faithfulness to Christ and his kingdom with loyalty to a particular national or international agenda. Mr. McCurry has helped us in this.

Yours in Christ
James Vanderlaan, Ph.D.

Some Points Debatable

Although I agree with Don McCurry’s thesis that Christian missionaries need to be very careful about how they associate and identify with the foreign policies of their governments, there are some points that Don mentions that are debatable.

The point that Mohammed used the warring Byzantine Christians as his model for jihad, while it implicates the Byzantine Empire, does not justify Mohammed’s use of violence and conquest to advance Islam....

Don’s point that Christian missionar-

ies to Muslims are sheep among wolves is well-taken, though many Muslims are indeed peace-loving and excel in moral virtues, often to a greater degree than Christians boasting of the same excellence. I agree however, with Don, that Christian missionaries among Muslims must be humble and must avoid political debates, triumphalism, or direct attacks on Islam as a religion, with which it shares many similarities, despite vital differences. Pointing Muslims to the historical and living Christ, and inviting them into the Kingdom of God through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his atonement for the forgiveness of sins, his imputed righteousness and his presence in the indwelling Spirit: this is the true spiritual battle that we are engaged in as Christian messengers of the Good News to Muslims....

Anonymous

Don McCurry replies:

The words that I wrote were neither meant to approve or disapprove of American foreign policy. They were written as objective pieces of history, and the purpose of their writing was to show *how we are perceived by others*.

Also, please note, we go forth to preach the Kingdom of God and the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are not to be confused, as American Christians, as to what our message is.

Jesus said, “If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight; but my Kingdom is not from here.” Martin Luther developed the doctrine of the two swords: the temporal sword, that is the state, and the spiritual sword, that is, the Gospel message in the Word of God. As missionaries, our job is not to defend our foreign policy, but rather to present the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

May the Lord show us all how to be both good citizens of our respective countries and even better citizens of his wonderful kingdom.

Don McCurry, Colorado
Springs, CO