



Is this What the World Needs Now? A Response to TIME

William Spaulding

In generally balanced and fair coverage, *TIME* explores some valid and critical issues involved in ministry to Muslims, including restrictions on Christian work; “tentmaking” (entering and serving Muslim countries through secular job skills); humanitarian work and missions; persecution (and martyrdom) of Christian workers and Muslims who decide to follow Jesus; and the use of media (the JESUS Film).

Thankfully, author Van Biema was sensitive in not using the names of organizations or individuals. Because of the tendency in Muslim-majority countries to inhibit human rights, the publication of names and locations could have made people vulnerable. The quotations from Christians working around the world give the reader a feel for the variety of people out there and the diverse approaches being taken.

TIME recoils at (but does not fixate over much on) “a troubling contingent of indeterminate size that combines religious arrogance with political ignorance.” The writer voices legitimate concern over the damage such “clumsiness” can cause in a volatile region. Agreed! This is one of the reasons many organizations provide pre-field and ongoing training, and a growing number of their members have earned advanced degrees. Their members immerse

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themselves in language and culture learning, making long-term relationships in their communities. By becoming proficient in Islamic history and culture and the languages of the Muslim world, their members feel they are able to maximize their sensitivity and respect for Muslim peoples.

TIME is candid in discussing the real tensions between humanitarian work and evangelism. It is clear that they prefer the first—Christians who witness through their actions, not their words. Yet they acknowledge the obvious sincerity of those motivated by Christian compassion and conviction to share their faith. *TIME*'s sketches of the latter evince a grudging admiration for these workers' dedication, knowledge of local languages and sensitivity to culture.

However, the story headlines project an unnecessary note of foreboding about Christian witness: “Growing numbers of Evangelicals are trying to spread Christianity in Muslim lands. But is this what the world needs now?” Overall, most of the responsibility for any “backlash” is placed on Christians.

The online page even asks readers to “vote” as to whether Christians should “convert” Muslims or not! (By the way, for the record—only God can “convert” people! See John 6:44.)

Yet nowhere does *TIME* ask us to vote about whether Muslims should “convert” people to Islam. Why is that? Also, why is responsibility for

“backlash” not placed on the Muslim governments, imams, and others who seek to stifle freedom of expression rather than create freer civil societies? Why do followers of Jesus face the threat of ostracism, expulsion from family or job, beatings or death simply because they want to follow God on the path of Jesus Christ?

In the marketplace of ideas and ideologies, Christians and Muslims should have a level playing field. Neither should fear the proclamation or seeking of truth. This is a critical human rights issue: the freedom to hear and the right to believe, the right to have and express one's faith according to conscience.

Rather than criticizing Christian witness, *TIME* could have addressed more pointedly the laws, oppression, and social climate that force such witness “underground” and create intolerant societies. Which is the greater threat to peace—compassionate Christian work and witness in the name of Jesus, or the perpetuation of a social system that violates universal standards of human rights?

Back to *TIME*'s question: “Is this what the world needs now?” For us, Jesus is the only One who can meet the world's need. Only He can remove the terror of sin from human hearts. So our answer is unreservedly “yes.” Now and always, the world needs Jesus.

Before rushing that answer to press, let's admit that even Jesus forewarned us that an inflammatory “backlash” is one response (not the best one) to His presence and message and followers. It has happened before. It happened to the Best on the cross.

It's a good question, really. Maybe *TIME* readers (and more than a few lethargic Christians) need to turn their faces upward and ask God that question, “Is this—living and teaching the gospel of peace through Jesus—*what the world needs now?*” If this gospel is what the world needs, then it demands our response. We must join God in his loving invitation to all peoples, as Jesus told us: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 🌐