

An Initial Response to TIME



Darrell Dorr

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



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



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

religious traditions and that Islam (like Christianity) is not readily subject to glib generalizations. Our primary interest is not in the truth or error of Islam or Christianity or any

other social and religious tradition *per se*, but in the faithfulness with which the *Bible* itself is portrayed and understood and in the extent to which the *living God* is honored and obeyed. Such an interest requires us to critique our own culture and Western (and especially American) Christianity with no less rigor than Islam and the societies in which it is dominant.

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

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

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

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





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.” 🌐

Evangelicals, Stereotypes, and Diversities

J. Dudley Woodberry

The cover story by David Van Biema, entitled “Should Christians Convert Muslims?”, in the *TIME* magazine issue of June 30, 2003 turned out to be far more balanced than many of us had feared. Originally we received copies of an internal memo (sent to *TIME* reporters researching the article) that indicated a very negatively-biased attitude toward missionary work by Evangelicals. Upon learning that the internal memo had circulated widely in the missionary community and discovering, as a result, that many missionaries were refusing to give out information, Van Biema circulated another memo that promised the greater balance the final article demonstrates.

On the positive side, the article, for the most part, does not stereotype Evangelicals. It indicates that they express a broad range of methods and

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Many in the secular press do not fully grasp the diversity and historical developments within Evangelicalism.

attitudes concerning Muslims, and that some show exquisite sensitivity. It uses pseudonyms and omits many locations to protect those in or returning to Muslim lands. Van Biema and his team of reporters note the missionary motivation of love and that claims that their deeds of charity are merely a “cover” for proselytizing do a disservice to them. They rightly note that some of the unwise actions on the part of missionaries should be

attributed to “short-termers” or to those sent without proper training by nondenominational churches.

TIME did some good background

work. For example, they correctly note the thrust toward “unreached people groups” resulting from Ralph Winter’s Lausanne presentation in 1974 and the focus on the “10-40 Window” coming from Luis Bush since 1989. It points out the dangers of retaliation and even death to evangelists, but especially to converts from Islam, and the negative repercussions on pre-existing churches and aid groups. *TIME* likewise notes the ethical issues that laws against proselytizing raise for those who feel called to witness in these contexts.

Despite a better grasp of the varieties of Evangelicals and their history than is commonly reflected in the secular press, it is in these areas that

the article’s major weaknesses are to be found. First, it sometimes falls into the trap of associating the movements the authors considered sensitive to Islam with Mainline denominations and those they considered insensitive with Evangelicalism. The article does not adequately portray the overlap between “Mainline” Protestants and “Evangelicals”. Such Evangelical networks as the National Association of Evangelicals, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, and AD 2000 and Beyond include many Mainline churches and individuals, e.g., Presbyterians and Anglicans/Episcopalians. These Evangelicals are in denominations that are part of the World Council of Churches and that have influenced the World Council’s statements on world religions (including Islam) to include evangelism as well as the social gospel.

Second, along this same line, *TIME* emphasizes Mainline Protestants’ and Roman Catholics’ focus on a social gospel that has stressed aiding the poor over preaching the gospel, contrasted with Evangelicals’ focus on evangelism. However, they fail to note the holism of word and deed expressed in the Lausanne Covenant (a major statement of Evangelical principles), though they do mention the relief and development ministries of some Evangelical groups.

Third, the article does not reflect the ecumenical concerns of many Evangelicals. It is true that many Evangelicals tend to ignore or scorn the indigenous churches of the Middle

East, but other Evangelicals (such as groups like Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding) focus on understanding and cooperation with the ancient churches. Many in the secular press do not fully grasp the diversity and historical developments within Evangelicalism. The breadth of the movement is one factor that has led both to internal tension and external misunderstanding.

Fourth, although the article understandably focuses on Christian efforts to convert Muslims, it does not mention the simultaneous attempts of Muslims to convert Christians. Hence any onus that may be inferred is only on Christians. In reality, both are missionary religions with a message for all people (Qur'an 25:1; 38:87; 3:20; John 3:16). Both faiths claim the final messenger (Qur'an

33:45; Heb. 1:1-2). Both groups are called to be witnesses (Qur'an 2:143; Mt. 28:19-20). Both scriptures make exclusive claims for their message (Qur'an 3:85; John. 14:6; Acts 4:12). Yet both are called to witness in a gracious manner (Qur'an 16:125; 29:46; 1 Peter 3:15).

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Finally, the article raises important issues for Evangelicals, such as the appropriate form of Christian witness at the present time in Muslim areas like Iraq. Jesus certainly showed the importance of timing when he healed a leper and then said: "Tell no one" (Mt. 8:3-4). Factors suggest caution in verbal witness in the current situation in Iraq, where verbal witness can be seen as opportunistic and where American motives are mistrusted. But ultimately witness includes both deed (Mt. 25:31-46) and word (1 Pet. 3:15). We also should note that the Church has been resident in Iraq for years – including the Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church as well as the ancient churches – and therefore whatever is done now by expatriates would be best done in consultation and cooperation with them. ☉

One Perspective from India

Ralph D. Winter

The *TIME* cover story tells us what many Americans think about missions. People in India may have much more critical views. In the July 12 issue of the *Economic and Political Weekly* (www.epw.org.in, an Indian type of the *Wall Street Journal*), after apologizing for even bothering to read so biased a magazine as *TIME*, one author says,

Western, largely American, Christian evangelist fundamentalists appear to be convinced that the time has now come to wage an all-out spiritual war against Islam. Islam, as many of them see it, is a Satanic-inspired programme of terrorism that bodes ill for all humankind, and represents the greatest challenge to Christianity and Christendom (sic).

Referring specifically to the *TIME* cover story, he observes,

As an American evangelist, identified simply as Barbara, puts it, Islam is in itself the ultimate weapon of mass destruction. Charged with a fanatic zeal to spread their faith to benighted Muslims, the story speaks of scores of Christian evangelists following close on the heels of American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan, offering aid, both material as well

as spiritual, with the latter, of course, being tied to the former.

He comments on his own perspective:

Personally, I have no problem at all with anyone wishing to change her or his faith, or even to anyone eager to convince others of the claims of his or her own religion.

What he despises, rather, is:

...any sort of proselytisation that disguises itself and conceals its ultimate goals is thoroughly condemnable.

He speaks of his own experience:

In the course of my travels, which have taken me across large parts of India, I have had numerous encounters with fiery evangelicals on the lookout for unsuspecting victims. Some years ago one could find them loitering around in Connaught Place, Delhi, passing around pamphlets and glossy tracts, proclaiming the end of the world and the impending dawn of the Day of Judgment. This literature was specially designed to catch the unsuspecting eye, keenly aware of the Indian penchant for vibrant colours. They were filled with brightly coloured cartoons of a bearded stern Jesus perched atop a fluffy cloud brandishing a sinister-looking sword; swarms of

red-cheeked, white-faced, distinctly European-looking angels astride galloping horses, their manes blowing wildly in the wind; hordes of men and women wearing crosses around their necks being lifted up to heaven on angelic wings; and a large swathe of humanity, dark-faced ghoulish most of them, going up in a ball of flame and smoke in Hell.

He proceeds to give careful and impressive details about several large Evangelical ministries in India and concludes with the following statement:

I have the most serious differences with right wing evangelist crusaders for whom all those outside their narrowly inscribed circle of chosen followers are doomed to eternal perdition. We have enough of such paranoid megalomaniacs in our country among Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others to deserve any more! If this be the road to salvation, then I, at least, would rather remain among the damned!

He assumes (incorrectly in most cases) that all Evangelical humanitarian efforts in India are mere smokescreens for evangelism rather than concrete ways of portraying the love and concerns of God. ☉

Why am I a Missionary to Muslims?

E.J. Martin

Four medical staff of Jibla Hospital in Yemen were gunned down in a morning meeting. Bonnie Witherall was shot on her way to a maternity clinic in Sidon, Lebanon. Heather Mercer and Dayna Curry were arrested in Afghanistan for showing a video on the life of Jesus. Martin Burnham was kidnapped and murdered in the Philippines. Four countries. Five missionaries killed. Two detained for months. And this list includes only some of the North Americans who have recently made U.S. headlines.

Being a missionary among Muslims may seem to have suddenly become a dangerous business. Actually, it's nothing new. Nor is it a dangerous occupation only in Muslim countries. Yet in light of these recent atrocities, it's reasonable to ask: Why do missionaries to Muslims intend to carry on with our work?

First, perhaps it's useful to sort through some of the reasons we can rule out.

E.J. Martin holds a master's degree in education and worked for several years in a Muslim country, where her husband was accused of distributing Christian literature and jailed for several months without being charged.

I am not a missionary to Muslims for any political reason. Many (although not all) Muslim nations are governed by various repressive regimes that pay mere lip service to the notions of human rights. Of course, I am particularly concerned about the basic human right of religious freedom. Under the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Those who would oppose this are opposing human rights and the most fundamental principles of freedom of belief and expression. In most Islamic countries, I have found that Christians have the freedom to become Muslims, but Muslims enjoy no such freedom to change their religion. Though I am appalled by this hypocrisy, bringing political change is not my aim. I am not interested in ensuring that

the West wins a so-called "clash of civilizations," because I believe there could be no winners in such a clash.

I am not a missionary because I wish to lure needy people into a soul-for-food trade. This accusation rankles. First of all, it assumes the basest of motives on the part of Christians who leave the comforts of their own homes in order to provide compassionate humanitarian aid. Secondly, it assumes that I think such "conversions" would have any real meaning—as though I'm playing for points in heaven. Finally, such a ridiculous scenario insults the intelligence



Bonnie Witherall,
OM missionary
killed in Lebanon

Inducements

would not lead to genuine spiritual change, and everyone involved would know it.

of Muslims. Inducements would not lead to genuine spiritual change, and everyone involved would know it. This is a ruse thrown up by cynical on-lookers.

I am not a missionary because I have a martyr complex. Though

The Qur'an agrees with the Bible on this point: God converts whom He will.

I realize there are dangers, I don't wish to pay the price my recently fallen colleagues have paid. We are not wild-eyed weirdos, recklessly throwing away our lives. While we take reasonable precautions to protect ourselves (as I have done in writing under a pseudonym), risk is inherent in what we do.

The lifestyle of the missionary does come with certain perks. I enjoy adventure and travel, as do many of my colleagues. Our children benefit from their multicultural exposure. We enjoy experiencing new places and foods. We (mostly) enjoy the challenge of language and culture learning. Yet the fascination of adventure fades as quickly as most infatuations do. Thankfully, deeper affections take root.

For example, I enjoy my life as a missionary to Muslims because I have made many Muslim friends. As they show me the world from their angle, they enrich me. I discover in them a common humanity—people who love, hope, fear and dream as I do. I have even found in Islam many things that we can affirm together as true about the holy God.

Through knowing each other, we lay waste to the fallacious stereotypes that would pit our cultures against one another. I am eager for my friends to realize that I as a Christian join them in repudiating the moral degradation that the so-called "Christian West" represents for them; my life is not a Hollywood movie. On their side, they are eager for me to realize that not all Muslims are terrorists. Of course, some of the murders and atrocities dominating the news were

committed by terrorists who claim the cause of Islam. But for every Islamic jihadist, my colleagues and I know many more peaceable, loving Muslims as our friends.

Still, this is an insufficient answer to the question of why my colleagues and I choose to be missionaries.

Jesus Christ gave us the reason when he walked the earth: Do unto others as you would have them do to you. If I were poor and living in Yemen or Jordan, would I want someone to come and help me deliver my babies safely? If I desperately wanted to work but had no

am. I have been given so much. Do unto others Can our society no longer understand the Golden Rule?

Have I "converted" Muslims? My Muslim friend tells me that the Quran agrees with the Bible on this point: God converts whom He will. I honestly cannot convert people, but I am compelled to tell them the message that reached through history and touched my heart. Closeness to the holy God is an exquisite banquet, that we cannot keep to ourselves. We will not eat and let others starve. So yes, I have told friends about this exquisite banquet. God's forgiveness available through

Jesus the Messiah, an abundant life, independent of outward circumstances, the promise of life in heaven with the creator who made me. I'm grateful to the person who invited me to the banquet. My life has absolutely been changed for the better because of it. I have had the privilege of seeing other people's lives changed. And I have held the hands of Muslims who have endured rejection, prison and torture because they found life with Jesus worth this cost.

Will we missionaries to Muslims go home because of these recent, brutal murders? Taken in its historical context, this violent reaction to the message of Jesus is nothing new. I've heard about a fellow who was thrown into prison and warned by the local religious officials to keep his mouth shut about Jesus. The Apostle Peter's response? "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." 🌐



Closeness to the holy God is an exquisite banquet that we cannot keep to ourselves.

job skills or capital to start a small business, would I want someone to help me learn and loan me a little money until I could get my feet on the ground? If I had no clean water to drink, would I hope for some help to drill a well near home?

Jesus also tells me, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded." I grew up in small-town America. Loving parents. Plenty of food on the table. Top-notch education. An enjoyable career. Entertainment. ... Solid middle America. But when I compare my life to the rest of the world, I see how exceptionally wealthy I

Between

a Rock

and
a

Hard
Place



A taxi ride shows that it's not easy being an American Christian in the Middle East

Elliot Paulson

I love it when Americans ask me where I live these days. My answer: “Between a rock and a hard place.” Not many people can say that. Here’s why. English-speakers usually pronounce Iraq as “eye rack” or “a rack.” However, when Middle Easterners say Iraq, it sounds closer to “a rock.” Therefore, given the countries we share borders with, we can literally say we live between Iraq (“a rock”) and a hard place. Several hard places, actually. Look at a map. It’s a rough neighborhood.

But lately I flinch when Muslims ask me where I am from. My answer: “Nice weather today, isn’t it?” Seriously. Here’s why.

Exactly ten days before the Second Gulf War officially started, I hopped in a taxi on the way to the airport. I was on a journey of about 4000 frequent flyer miles, which is not all that interesting except that I was flying on a Muslim country’s flagship carrier (complete with direction finder for Mecca for those who want to pray enroute), I would be flying on the edge of Iraqi airspace, and I would be changing planes

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in a Muslim country smack in the middle of the Gulf. That’s not all that interesting either, except that I would be reversing my route just hours before every commentator was predicting missiles would start falling on Baghdad.

As the taxi driver effortlessly navigated his 1600-cc, LPG-fueled tin can through red lights, angrily honking at motorists who dared to try to pass through the intersection on the green, my wife’s parting words were ringing in my ears. “Try to stay inconspicuous.

Don’t advertise the fact you are an American.”

I promised I would heed her warning and even joked with her that on my trip, if I had to speak English in public places I would pronounce words with a Middle Eastern accent.

My taxi driver was a sociable fellow, and during the normal pleasantries he innocently asked, “Where are you from?”

We’d already noted the temperature and precipitation in our chit-chat, so I obviously couldn’t divert his attention with, “Nice weather, isn’t it?”

So I offered him another deflec-

tion. “I’m from Anchovy Province.” This made him jerk his head toward me and squint his eyes in a fiercely doubtful examination of my facial features. (This also meant, of course, that he took his eyes off the road, but that had little practical effect on his driving.)

During our conversation he’d picked up clues that I wasn’t a local, so before he could blurt out an expletive of incredulity, I slowly raised my right index finger to my olfactory organ and said with a grin, “Isn’t it evident from my nose?”

He chuckled and glanced back out front just in time to cut off a bus and

barely miss a push cart.

The natives of Anchovy Province are famously proud of their Roman noses, and mine, though not as noble as their benchmark profile, is nonetheless more prominent than most here. My driver glanced at me again and laughed, pleasantly surprised at my knowledge of his culture.

I seized my chance to make him forget his original question about my origin. “Where are you from?”

“Tea Province.”

“Why, that makes us practically

Lately I flinch when Muslims ask me where I am from.

neighbors,” I said. Anchovy and Tea Provinces are next to each other.

“You know,” I went on, “if you ask me, I think that Tea Province is the most beautiful province in the whole country.” (Note: If my kids ever tell you that I say this to every taxi driver, no matter which of the 80-some provinces he is from, I will deny it.)

His smile showed that he agreed with me, and I could tell his thoughts wandered back to the pristine air and the hillside tea groves of his homeland, displaying their thousands of shades of green framed by sapphire skies. But he snapped back to reality

being unpatriotic, let me explain. When I meet a Middle Easterner, I can’t always tell immediately what his opinion of Americans, and therefore of me, is going to be. A man sporting blue jeans and a golf shirt might be as anti-American as one who is clothed in 7th-century Arab garb. I’ve found that my joke about my choice of birthplace usually softens even the most prejudiced Middle Easterners, whether they are anti-capitalist leftists or anti-Christian Muslims. Once I have shown them I am not a stereotypical American, we can have a decent, mutually-respectful dialogue. But as much as pos-

one thing, but aren’t you proud to be an American?”

Well, I prefer to say that I am grateful to be an American. But I certainly cannot say I am proud of everything that is known as American culture or of American foreign policy. Living for 18 years in a Muslim country has given me a broader world view than most Americans have.

But infinitely more important, I know that it is no great personal character virtue to have been born in a given place. I am not the only human being who had no choice where he or she was born. And certainly, no one can claim any personal merit

from his or her birthplace. In fact, we have nothing that we have not been given, including our natural talent, intelligence, and health. So, along with our birthplace, finding any of these things as a

Once I show I am not a stereotypical American, we can have a decent, mutually-respectful dialogue.

as an overloaded and seriously listing minibus belching black diesel exhaust roared past us on our left, cut in front of us and swerved to the right curb, squealing his brakes and tossing his human cargo about, just to pick up a single passenger for whom there was no room. After leaving his own skid marks and cursing the minibus chauffeur, my driver shifted into first and pulled back into the traffic flow.

“No, really, where are you from?” he repeated.

Seeing no way out, I gave an honest answer, but camouflaged in a cough. “Amggouffhhkkhaa.”

“What?” he persisted, with furrowed brow.

“America,” I said as quietly as possible. Then louder, “But don’t blame me, nobody asked me where I wanted to be born.”

Now, before you accuse me of



Along with the great privilege of being an American Christian comes a great burden of responsibility to do good to all nations.

sible, I avoid smashing into the rock of brandishing my passport.

Now don’t get me wrong. I am thankful I was born in America. I grew up in relative prosperity, peace and health. I had the luxury of choosing a university, a course of study, and a profession. I had the freedom to both select a faith and to practice it with little or no discrimination or social cost. I am deeply aware of my blessings, and thankful for them. So total denial of my American heritage would put my conscience in a very hard place.

Some may ask, “Being thankful is

source of pride is totally in vain (1 Cor. 4:7).

In addition, Jesus said that the more we’ve been given, the more we will have to give account for (Luke 12:48). Along with the great privilege of being an American Christian comes a great burden of responsibility to do good to all nations (Gen. 12:3, Matt. 28:18-20).

This phrase, American Christian, leads me to a second between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place situation we constantly live in. Your average Muslim here has never met either a Christian or an American. Not that

they make the distinction: they think that all Americans are Christians. If you are born there, you are a Christian, just like if you are born here, you are a Muslim.

The fact is, Muslims get literally all of their impressions of Christians and Americans from Hollywood and/or the Islamic press. They see every American actor and every American politician as Christian. So, if I voluntarily identify myself as a Christian to Muslims, they hear me confessing that I am immoral, imperialistic, or both. That is the rock on my one side. To avoid hitting my head on it, I almost never use the word Christian when describing my faith to Muslims.

But some may protest, "First, you are not proud to be an American and now you are ashamed of being a Christian. Repent! The Bible says we are not to be ashamed of the gospel!" (see Rom. 1:16).

To which I reply, "Being ashamed of the gospel is one thing. Distancing myself from Muslims' uninformed and prejudiced opinion of Christians is another. When I have a chance, I say that I am a follower of Jesus the Messiah by choice, not by birth. I tell them they can call me by a variety of names: Messianic believer, disciple of Jesus, member of the fellowship of Jesus. Sure, these are strange terms for Muslims, and when I see their faces contort with incomprehension, I put them out of their misery by saying, "Or you can call me a True Christian."

I know that sounds like arrogance, just the opposite of the humility that Jesus taught us to have. Who am I to say that I am a true Christian, implying that someone else is not? Yet, I am in a hard place. I must still somehow show Muslims that I am different than the bulk of the Hollywood stars and Washington pundits who come to their media-manipulated minds. So I quote Jesus himself, hoping they'll get the point: "Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven; only those who do the will of my Father will enter." (Matt. 7:21)

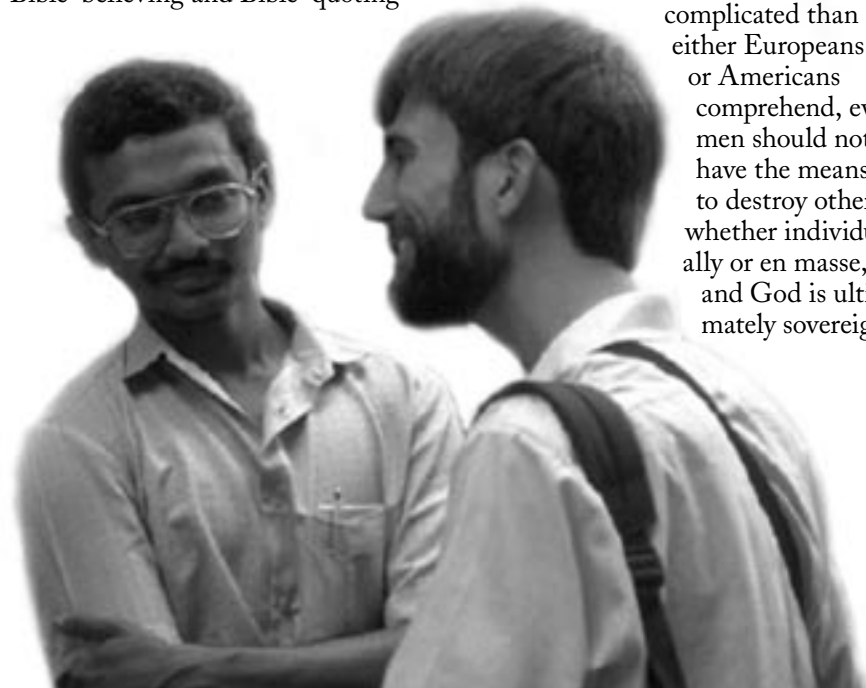
If you think that I could soften up that hard place by simply explaining to Muslims the distinctions between the varieties of nominal, liberal and conservative/evangelical American Christians, and if you then think that by identifying myself with conservative evangelicals I will enhance my credibility and reputation with Muslims, think again. Sadly, most Muslims are unaware or have forgotten that a Nobel Peace prize-winning and evangelical Christian former president opposed this war. But informed Muslims know full well that many of the most hawkish politicians and a large slice of the current president's constituency are Bible-believing and Bible-quoting

"Which one?" I replied with a grin. He took his eyes off the road one more time and glanced at me.

"Do you mean the American one or the one here, in my adopted homeland?" His smile and nod showed he appreciated my identification with his people.

He never did say what he thought of Americans, and therefore, of me. But by the time I reached my destination, an American Christian and a Middle Eastern Muslim had agreed on lots of important principles: innocent people should not die in war, the motives of politicians are rarely clear, let alone pure, the Middle

East situation is a lot more complicated than either Europeans or Americans comprehend, evil men should not have the means to destroy others whether individually or en masse, and God is ultimately sovereign.



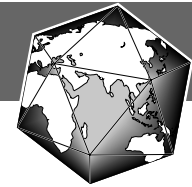
By the time I reached my destination, an American Christian and a Middle Eastern Muslim had agreed on lots of important principles.

Christians. In short, Muslims see these Christians as the ones launching the missiles. Like I said, a rock and a hard place.

But back to my taxi ride. My Muslim driver had not yet revealed his opinion of my being an American. He probed some more. "What do you think of your president?"

As I paid my fare, I placed my hand on his shoulder and sighed, "You know, younger brother, if only they would ask us, you and I could solve the problems of the world, couldn't we?"

Handing me my change, he smiled one more time. "You're right, older brother, you're right." 🌐



BRITISH COLUMBIA

Chilliwack	Sep. 9 (Tue)	Reg Toews	604-823-6364
Delta	Sep. 8 (Mon)	Carol Moerman	604-467-1636
Langley	Sep. 11 (Thu)	Pat Burman	604-854-3818
Surrey	Sep. 8 (Mon)	Doug Friesen	604-597-9082

ONTARIO

Missassauga	Sep. 3 (Wed)	Wayne Matthews Kelly Kang	905-458-1687 905-455-7821
Toronto-Richmond Hill	Sep. 4 (Thu)	Marilyn Chung Colleen Stevens	905-508-2007 416-223-0034

SASKATCHEWAN

Regina	Sep. 9 (Tue)	Femi Ogunrinde	306-522-6541
Saskatoon	Sep. 8 (Mon)	Graham Knox	306-343-9341

ALABAMA

Auburn	Aug. 25 (Mon)	Rob Martin	334-887-7094
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CALIFORNIA

Arcata	Sep. 1 (Mon)	Steve Taylor	707-445-0281
Fresno	Aug. 25 (Mon)	Jim & Carrie Tienken	559-435-5357
Fullerton	Sep. 1 (Mon)	Jerome Hannaman Dick Palm	626-398-2464 714-871-1380
Los Angeles	Sep. 8 (Mon)	Tallis Chang	818-701-9866
Thousand Oaks	Sep. 8 (Mon)	David Cragoe	805-446-7007

COLORADO

Franktown	Sep. 1 (Mon)	Sharon Springston Brenda Bollwerk	303-841-1908
Littleton	Sep. 3 (Wed)	Dee Dee Douglas-Toney	720-283-2000 x2570

GEORGIA

Atlanta-Midtown/ Buckhead	Sep. 4 (Thu)	Jon Levy	770-350-9273
Atlanta-North & NE	Sep. 4 (Thu)	Kate Bova Laura Dill Warner	770-290-5729 678-405-2229
Atlanta-NW	Sep. 3 (Wed)	Amy Johnson	404-261-0720

ILLINOIS

Champaign-Urbana	Aug. 28 (Thu)	Beverly Hillmer	217-337-5288
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KENTUCKY

Louisville	Aug. 19 (Tue)	Brian Wright Melanie Mitchell	502-253-8160
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MICHIGAN

Grand Rapids	Sep. 8 (Mon)	Marlene Cole	
Kalamazoo	Sep. 9 (Tue)	Marlene Cole	

MINNESOTA

Bemidji	Aug. 26 (Tue)	Greg Giles	218-751-8671 x1262
Moorhead	Aug. 25 (Mon)	Mark Fugere Lon Cockerill	701-297-0282 701-232-9436

PENNSYLVANIA

Pittsburgh	Oct. 4 (Sat)	Jen Haddox	724-898-1016
Sinking Springs-Reading	Sep. 9 (Tue)	Jim MacArthur	610-375-0300
Warrington	Sep. 16 (Tue)	Fran Patt	610-647-9888
York	Sep. 2 (Tue)	Steve Niphakis	717-417-1486

TEXAS

Arlington	Aug. 26 (Tue)	Allan Mann	972-602-9017
College Station	Sep. 8 (Mon)	David Swanson	979-693-3571
Temple	Sep. 2 (Tue)	Jennifer Poppy	254-778-3233

VIRGINIA

Fredericksburg	Sep. 8 (Mon)	Lisa Stoltzfus	540-785-5127
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WISCONSIN

Madison	Sep. 2 (Tue)	David Lippiatt	608-268-0779
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WYOMING

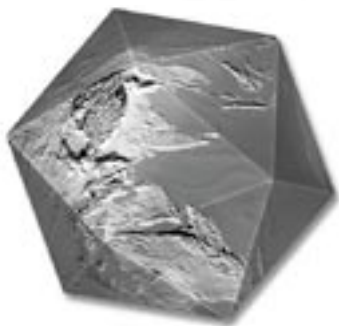
Laramie	Sep. 2 (Tue)	Nader Wadie Jeff Brown	307-745-8710 307-742-6656
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Starting dates are listed above and classes meet once a week for 15-16 weeks. Contact a coordinator to visit a class near you.
See www.perspectives.org for up-to-date listings of classes and regional contacts.

For information on other classes that are part of the broader frontier mission movement and have grown out of the *Perspectives* course, see www.perspectives.org/movement/programs.
Perspectives is sponsored by the U.S. Center for World Mission.

PERSPECTIVES

ON THE WORLD CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT



Mobilizers Meet in Amsterdam to Advance the *Perspectives* Movement



The *Perspectives* Global Desk, a working group of *Perspectives* leaders at the U.S. Center for World Mission, convened an April 24-26 consultation in Amsterdam for mission mobilizers focused on education. This small group of 14 met to survey the advance of the *Perspectives* course, and courses derived from *Perspectives*, in other languages and lands in order to support the course's emergence into strategic settings beyond the United States.

The Amsterdam gathering was not intended as an exhaustive representation of leaders working to adapt the *Perspectives* course. However, the participants did demonstrate the wealth of missiological vision found in the mission mobilization movements in Asia, Africa, Australia / New Zealand, the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America. Though some participants have only recently begun their efforts, most have been

involved in such work for years.

In order to grasp the significance of *Perspectives* content areas, the meeting's opening session reviewed the course's history and development. In 1974 Ralph Winter conceived of and developed the course, framing it around the advance of God's purpose in history. His fellow designers subsequently realized that Scripture's mission passages powerfully reveal a single, unfolding story which gives urgency and force to the completion of world evangelization. The link between biblical history and the Christian movement's advance provides the *Perspectives* course with a unique vantage point. From as far back as Abraham, believers can see the needs and opportunities of the present hour in light of the certainty of God's promises. Rather than mere exposure to the world's need, the course focuses on the sure hope of

God's purposes, an emphasis given even greater prominence since a 1999 curriculum revision. Furthermore, the vision of *Perspectives* is intended to give integration and significance not only to aspiring missionaries but to every Christian.

For nearly a full day, the Amsterdam participants reviewed five case studies, illustrating the contextual diversity of the *Perspectives* course in Nigeria, India, New Zealand / Australia, Korea, and Latin America. Three other case studies featured reports on the Condensed World Mission course in the Philippines and beyond, the World Mission course developed initially for schools, and the development of core materials for non / semi-literate people, each study exposing participants to cultural and educational challenges as well as creative innovations.

Also announced in Amsterdam was the emergence of the *Perspectives* Global Desk (PGD), intended as a reference point and clearinghouse for inquiries about *Perspectives* plans and programs. Leaders from the PGD are available to help course initiators and adapters with development documents and consultation, and to assist in the evolution of *Perspectives* curricula. The PGD presented "Core Ideas", the most foundational of these development documents, and highlighted the great value of using two or more curricula in the same setting in order to

reach different audiences or to impact the same audience with introductory or follow-up materials. One participant captured the consultation's mood and solidarity of purpose by declaring the existence of a "*Perspectives* family" of curricula. Concern was expressed regarding the clear and consistent use of the *Perspectives*

Anounced in Amsterdam was the emergence of the *Perspectives* Global Desk, intended as a clearinghouse for *Perspectives* inquiries.



name so that specialized curricula are not confused with adaptations of the standard curriculum. A consensus was quickly reached by those representing courses derived from *Perspectives* to take it upon themselves to protect the name and identity of the standard curriculum.

Other sessions in Amsterdam focused on the challenges and opportunities of serving churches and mission structures through mission education courses. Participants reviewed the world's major instructional and commercial languages as possible indicators of future course development. While poring over a global map, they noted dozens of initiatives underway in order to identify more clearly and strategically languages and lands to target.

Discussion intensified over tools necessary to deal with the contexts of education, finances, and anti-Christian hostility. Mobilizers exchanged ideas about different media, different arrangements for classrooms and instructors, and the intricacies of publishing and distributing materials. The Amsterdam participants agreed with the PGD to convene a larger, more comprehensive gathering of course developers in Pasadena, California December 10-13, 2003, with an emphasis on how the *Perspectives* course may be improved and how supportive, introductory, or follow-up courses may also be supported or developed. Expectations are high that this new spirit of collegiality will

accelerate efforts to multiply appropriate forms of mission mobilization through education.

Prospective participants in the December 10-13 consultation, "Advancing the Perspectives Movement Globally," are invited to write global@perspectives.org for further information. 🌐



Can a Distracted Church Reach Muslims?

Greg H. Parsons



The overall impression of the June 30 *TIME* cover story is that opinions related to converting Muslims are all over the map. Some people share in ways that are bolder—and can cause trouble, while others live out their witness in more sensitive or guarded ways—which may not make progress. Rather than further discuss pros and cons of witness in the Muslim world, I'd like to focus here on U.S. Christianity in general.

American Christians look at an article like *TIME*'s and react all kinds of ways. Some say, "Of course we should be out there spreading the good news." Others secretly wonder why we are sharing with Muslims anyway; "they don't want to hear, so why go?" one elder told me 20 years ago. Even with our increased focus on the Muslim world, we are involved in so many other good things and, after all, we can't "save" everyone. So, some might argue, let's focus on the "easy" people groups who welcome us and offer less challenge.

Perhaps we get involved in other good things because we are not sure what to do to reach out to those who hold other faiths strongly. Or perhaps we are simply distracted by all the opportunities within Christian circles. Think about it. In the last couple of weeks, what kinds of Christian activities and causes have you heard or read about with which you could get involved? Whether it

is in our churches, on Christian radio or TV, via mail or email—there are hundreds of ministries and causes out there. Many of them are considered "worthy." Are they?

Perhaps we get distracted because Christians like to feel we can fit in and not stick out too much. A friend who works in the Muslim world has a full beard. He was interacting with another friend who noted that "holy" men in various religions have beards. Whether it is Jewish rabbis, Hindu sadhus, or Muslim clerics, everyone who is genetically capable has a beard if they are seeking God (or just fitting in with their culture). Everyone except Christians, that is. Evangelical leaders in particular don't have beards. In fact,

to various ministries. But it becomes a problem when a ministry becomes an end in itself—something we need to watch even here at a mission-focused structure. When the Church is not being built where the gates of Hades hold sway, no amount of passion about a specific issue should displace the things Jesus wants done.

Paul is also far more concerned with the building and extending of the Church than anything else. He worked diligently both to grow deeper the lives of those in existing churches—as in 1 Thessalonians 2, as they and others reached out to see it go places it hadn't—as in Romans 15:19-21. Paul appears to have settled on a distinction between the temporal and the eternal and to have focused his efforts accordingly. He also labored to see God represented more accurately, helping all—believer and non-believer—to see God more clearly and to glorify Him in all we do.

What the future of the U.S. as a nation may look like may hinge more on what the Church here does to advance those tasks that we know Jesus wants us to do, rather than on other causes, however urgent they may sometimes seem.

Evangelicals seem to pride ourselves on fitting in to our culture. We want to blend in, to "relate." But perhaps we've tried so hard to fit in that few see any difference.

It might seem that God has blessed us for our own sake. Yet if we don't pass on those blessings like Abraham was told to do (Gen. 12:1-3), will God continue to bless us and use us for His purposes?

Paul and Jesus give us a clue as to what those purposes are for us today. Jesus made two statements that direct the way to extend God's global purposes most effectively: "I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19) and "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). To be sure, God calls us

I hope and pray that when many of us said or sang "God Bless America" in recent months and years, we realized it is a prayer and that we prayed it for other nations—like Iraq and Afghanistan. I also pray that the Church in America can continue to powerfully contribute to the advance of God's Kingdom in the future. God is certainly working through other parts of the Body of Christ to extend His Church to every people—as He has for centuries. What the future of the U.S. as a nation may look like may hinge more on what the Church here does to advance those tasks that we know Jesus wants us to do, rather than on other causes—however urgent they may sometimes seem. 🌐



Rev. Greg Parsons is General Director of the U.S. Center for World Mission. He's been on staff at the USCWM for 20 years.