

Editorial: The Challenge of the Muslim Frontiers

In the process of producing the last two special issues on Islam, I have become thoroughly convinced of several matters: 1) that missions to the Muslim peoples of the world is true frontier missions, 2) that Muslim missions is very difficult, and 3) that the task, although difficult, is not impossible.

The difficulty lies in that churches in most Muslim lands need to be planted underground. This is because of the hostile environment to anything Christian. Muslim converts to Christ run the risk of angry mobs and severe persecution resulting in loss of life and limb. In most Muslim lands it is illegal to evangelize or to change one's faith or religion for that matter. (See articles in Islam II that address these stark realities.)

On the other hand, although the work is difficult, I am also totally convinced that it is by no means impossible. Reaching the Muslim world *is a doable task*, given the innate power of the Gospel, the power of the Spirit to work in the hearts of men and women, and the willing and able hands and hearts of the Lord's laborers. Also we might add, we know more now than in the past. (See Dudley Woodberry's article in Islam II "When Failure is our Teacher: Lessons from Mission to Muslims.")

Here is perhaps the main reason for the unreached status of the Muslim world: So few able and willing missionaries have in the past, and even presently, shared the Gospel with our Muslim friends. Why is that? Although by no means designed to give us a rationale for our lack of involvement, I would like to suggest that maybe, just maybe, the broad context in the past was not yet in place—the *kairos* moment for the evangelization of the Muslim world as a whole had not yet come. Paul, the frontier apostle, preaching his great mission message to the Athenians reminds us that God "has made from one every nation

of men to dwell on the face of the earth, and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each of us." (Acts 17:26, 27)

Although much has been done before, and none of it is wasted since all of it will be useful, including our failures, nevertheless, based on a spiritual intuition, I believe that the broad context orchestrated by our Sovereign Lord is in place now as never before, the time and season (the *kairos* moment) for Muslims to seek the Lord and know Him as Saviour is now!

Add to that my conviction that missions to Muslims is true genuine frontier missions. Our missions to Muslims must be seen within that frontier framework. The quicker we realize this, the more successful we will be and the fewer failures we will have. Involved in reaching the Muslim world means crossing the frontiers into unknown and uncharted territory, i.e., frontier missions.

By definition frontier missions essentially means crossing and working on the frontiers among peoples, tribes and nations *where Christianity meets non-Christianity for the first time*. It's like crossing the line where civilization ends and the wild frontiers begin—truly going into unexplored territory, with all its uncertainties, perils *and* excitement, knowing that "it's a jungle out there." In most cases (among most unreached people groups) it means going where no one has gone before.

This is crucial to understand and appreciate. We can't rest on our past experiences and training. For most of us it means learning mission strategy all over again and from a totally different perspective. For instance, large parts of my personal experience and training in reaching tribal groups in Mexico is not applicable to reaching Muslims. I

must learn, and be willing to learn, (enter humility) in order to reach the unreached Muslim world for Christ. Contextualizing the Gospel for Muslims is going to be radically different than doing it for a Middle American Native Indian groups in Mexico or Guatemala. How the church is planted in each instance, and *how it needs to be planted*, is radically different. The sooner we see that and learn it deeply, the greater our success will be!

All of this points to the need to learn, to study, and to become prepared and skilled laborers of the Lord to the Muslim world. Frontier missions by definition demands it. We dare not give less. Good enough won't be good enough! Except for a handful of us who have gone before, we all need to get trained and retrained, including our support base. Both those who go, as well as those of us who stay, need to know the basics of crossing the Christian-non-Christian faith frontier in order to reach the Muslim world for Christ.

These last two special issues of the Journal, (Islam II and Islam III) as well as the first issue on Islam I (published in April 1994), have been prepared to equip, to train, and to train us. *The International Journal of Frontier Missions* recognizes the need to hear from those who have been on the "frontiers" in order to bring their first-hand invaluable knowledge and insights to bear on these very important mission challenges.

One who has been there before is the so called "apostle to Islam," who has been on the frontiers, who has buried his loved ones there, who is a first rate trailblazer for missions to Muslims. We do ourselves a great disservice by not deeply appreciating the life and ministry of Samuel Zwemer, and the legacy he left us concerning faithful and effective apostolic work to Muslims.

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A critical concern is knowing how to properly contextualize the Good News to Muslims. Dudley Woodberry, along with Warren Larson, lead us in that direction. What can modern day apostles to Islam use—*what should they use*—to critically and properly contextualize the Gospel for Muslims that leads to their conversion? Answer: Use common traditions, called “common pillars,” that Muslim’s use and identify with, and Christians can relate to traditionally. Here’s a way whereby we can “speak their language” and reach their hearts so that they might hear the Gospel, call upon the Lord and be saved.

We also need to learn how to minister in “power encounter.” Rick Love reminds us of the forces of darkness that need to be challenged by the forces of light that will be a major key to unlock the hearts of Folk Muslims who constitute by far the great majority of Muslims worldwide. Modern day missionary apostles need to know the spiritual realities of the Muslim world and in the name of Christ be able to route the enemy and display the power of the Gospel that leads to conversion. We all need to be able to say with the greatest frontier missionary, “my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (I Cor. 2:4, 5)

The bottom line of all this is salvation. All our efforts, all our prayers, all our training, all our sacrifices in reaching Muslims must focus on the all important journey that leads Muslims to salvation. Sultan Muhammad Paul, a former Muslim, recounts his own personal odyssey on this all important journey. Although this is an old story—written many decades ago—it still is fully relevant to what missions to Muslims is all about today! We must be able to lead them from where they are—based on who they are—and direct them to the Good News in Christ and salvation in Him alone. (Acts 4:12). May millions of Muslims soon find salvation in Him, through the efforts of thousands of trained skilled laborers of the Lord, who are supported by millions of Chris-

tians around the world.

This special issue ends with a very important article that is designed to lead us in further study and preparation. It is by Ernest Hahn who lists the main resources that can help us in sharing the Gospel with our Muslim friends. This literally is a gold mine for resources concerning missions to Muslims. [Note: Due to lack of space, we were not able to include an additional

resource list compiled by Zwemer Institute. However, if any of our readers are interested in that list contact Zwemer Institute in Pasadena California, or contact the editor.]

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