



# Immigration Crisis Challenges Christian Ethics and Values

*Dr. Bruce Sidebotham*

**C**hristian views on illegal immigration fall anywhere in the range from helping undocumented workers stay in the country to feeling a moral obligation to turn them in. I can't give the "Christian" solution, but I can offer some perspective.

With my wife and four kids, I have personal experience at being illegal in a foreign country. Even the birth of our youngest son was undocumented, when for almost three years our overseas employer failed to process our labor and immigration paper work. I know what it is like to be coasting below the radar through uncontrollable circumstances while sorting out mixed messages from unresponsive government agencies.

Immigration in America features unenforceable laws and mixed messages. It's like a teacher who after passing out an exam leaves the room for two hours. Students who cheat are wrong, but the teacher bears some responsibility for creating a situation in which students are not only tempted but are also disadvantaged if they have integrity.

Cultural differences further complicate the situation. Ethical dilemmas result when values conflict. For example, most Americans would agree it was better to hide Jews from Hitler than to follow laws requiring Jews to be surrendered for "relocation." Cultures clash when they handle ethical dilemmas differently, because they prioritize values differently. I believe in



moral absolutes, and black and white with respect to right and wrong, but I know from experience that different cultures reach different conclusions on rightness and wrongness based on different relative rankings of values.

In the Army we don't allow extra time for family members on physical fitness tests. Candidates at the chaplain school were unanimous on the hypothetical that it would be "right" to fail a relative rather than give him or her one extra second or exercise repetition, even with retention on the line. For them, family honor ranked lower than preserving combat readiness through strict adherence to standards. Few of the world's cultures follow this system of priorities. They would not only allow but

would actually expect fudging for family as the moral thing to do.

In immigration we confront two different systems for ranking values. One system elevates loyalty to one's country and its laws. The other prioritizes loyalty to kith and kin. Some congregations of illegal aliens have pastors who are themselves undocumented workers, all functioning with perfectly clear consciences.

Many of the world's problems relate to cultural differences in priorities for handling ethical dilemmas. Diplomatic solutions usually allow both sides to uphold their respective versions of morality. The challenge for immigration lies in building a system with which the majority on all sides will voluntarily comply.

**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)**



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# Victoria Province in Australia Experiments with Religious Tolerance Law

by Elizabeth Kendal

Victoria's Racial and Religious Tolerance (R&RT) Act has already produced many victims. The first victim has been the religious harmony that was pervasive throughout Victoria (a southeastern state of Australia) before the Act came along.

The R&RT Act was not needed, and now that it has stirred tensions and produced a queue of litigants at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT), the Victorian state Labor government believes the R&RT Act will fix the problems it created in the first place.<sup>1</sup>

The R&RT Act has given rise to several complaints but the case that has caught the world's attention is that of The Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV) vs Catch the Fire Ministries and pastors Danny Nalliah and Daniel Scot. Using the Victorian R&RT Act, the ICV took Catch the Fire Ministries and pastors Nalliah and Scot to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) on charges of vilification of Muslims. After a lengthy and expensive court case, they were found guilty and convicted on 17 December 2004.

The charges arose when three Western Muslim "reverts" attended an "Insights into Islam" seminar run by Catch the Fire Ministries in March 2002, where Daniel Scot, an expert on Islam, was the speaker. As Mr Scot told *TIME* magazine (4 July issue), the aim of the seminar was to help Christians "understand Islamic beliefs and culture and, after the September 11 attacks, why some Muslims engage in terrorism."

The three "reverts" attended the seminar on the advice of May Helou, a member of the ICV who was at the time employed by Victoria's Equal Opportunity Commission to assist in education about the R&RT Act.

This case has set a precedent that vilification (saying or writing things that incite hatred, contempt or ridicule) of a

religious belief or practice may be regarded as equivalent to vilification of the people who believe or follow that religion.

The case has also demonstrated just how fragile justice can be when religious disputes are decided in secular courts. Daniel Scot was deemed to be "not credible" simply because the judge did not believe (and in some cases, understand) his teaching. Amongst other issues, the judge deemed Scot "not credible" and guilty of vilification on the grounds that he was frequently referring to Wahhabi, literal interpretations of the Koran, which are not, in the judge's personal opinion, relevant to the 21st Century. As noted by one observer, "This development represents a dangerous limitation on freedom of speech and the capacity of Christians to take up the cause of the persecuted church."

On Wednesday, 22 June 2005, Judge Higgins of the VCAT handed down his "remedies" (penalties) to Catch the Fire Ministries and pastors Nalliah and Scot.

The religion editor of *The AGE* (Melbourne), Barney Zwartz, reports, "Judge Higgins said the pastors were otherwise of good character, but their passionate religious beliefs caused them to transgress the law. He ordered them to publish apologies on their website, in their newsletter and in four advertisements in Melbourne newspapers and to promise not to repeat the vilification anywhere in Australia."

Daniel Scot points out that it was primarily his quotes from Koran that had been deemed to vilify Muslims, therefore it would very difficult to obey the judge's order not to repeat the vilification without a Koran that has been suitably edited. "I told the judge earlier," Scot informed *The AGE*, "you haven't provided me with a new Koran with the illegal verses removed, so I have to use the same Koran. He doesn't say

which parts I quoted are illegal; he is asking a very vague thing."

Scot told *TIME* magazine's Elizabeth Keenan that he believes his real offence was "talking about the parts of the Koran that Muslims want to hide from people."

Nalliah and Scot have vowed to go to jail rather than publish newspaper apologies, the wording and size of which have been ordained by the tribunal and will cost \$52,740 (US). Scot will not suspend his teaching seminars. "You don't compromise truth for fear of jail," Scot told *The AGE*. Likewise Nalliah told *The AGE* that he would not surrender "freedom of speech to a law which is *sharia* law by stealth."

*The AGE* reports, "The pastors' lawyers have already appealed against the verdict to the Supreme Court, claiming that the act is unconstitutional and that Judge Higgins made errors and showed 'irredeemable bias.'"

Amir Butler, the head of the Australian Muslim Public Affairs Committee, says that there are Muslims who welcome debate, and he does not want to see the R&RT Act used to prevent it. Amir Butler told *TIME* magazine, "If Muslims rush to the courts, some people will get the impression we can't respond to the arguments and think there must be some truth in them. The only way to fight offensive ideas is to confront them intellectually. Legislation cannot make bad ideas disappear."

Two Christian pastors (who have been continuously misquoted and vilified in the media) and others like them who desire open debate are all victims of this "religious tolerance" law. But the greatest tragedy in this drama is that Victorians stand to lose their openness and with it, their religious liberty to stand up as Christian apologists and evangelists, confronting evil and error, and engaging with the lost on matters of life and death.

Notes:

1. "Free speech farce," Andrew Bolt (Associate Editor - *Herald Sun*). 24 June 2005 <http://www.heraldsun.news.com.au/printpage/0,5481,15708881,00.html>  
The most comprehensive, regularly updated coverage of these cases can be found at the Saltshakers website: <http://www.saltshakers.org.au/>

# United Nations Commission on Human Rights Votes to Protect Islam from Defamation

In an astonishing move on 12 April 2005, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) moved from promoting respect for human rights (the rights of humans) to promoting "respect for all religions and their value systems."

by Elizabeth Kendal

On Tuesday 12 April 2005, the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), meeting for its 61st session in Geneva, Switzerland, passed Human Rights Resolution 2005/3 entitled, "Combating Defamation of Religions."<sup>1</sup>

Islam On Line (IOL) reported it this way: "The United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted on Tuesday, April 12, a resolution calling for combating defamation campaigns against Islam and Muslims in the West."<sup>2</sup>

IOL quotes Cuba's delegate, Rodolfo Reyes Rodriguez, who claimed that Islam has been the subject of a "very deep campaign of defamation." According to IOL, it is this defamation that breeds disharmony, hatred and discrimination.

Ehtasham Khan reports from Geneva for Rediff.com (India), "The resolution was pushed forward by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). It was put under Agenda Item Six that deals with racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination."<sup>3</sup>

It took a month of diplomatic lobbying, but the OIC nations managed to gain majority support and the resolution, which failed last year, was passed this year with

thirty-one countries for, sixteen against, five abstentions and one delegation absent.

Khan reports that the United States, United Kingdom and Israel were amongst those nations that voted against the resolution on the grounds that it was unbalanced and biased.

Russia and China voted in favor while India was among those who abstained.

UNCHR Resolution 2005/3 is flawed and dangerous. It completely fails to address the issue of human rights violations that are legitimized by discriminatory and barbaric religious mandates. Thus it protects the religious mandate above humans' rights.

The resolution was formulated by the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and specifically seeks that Islam be protected from "defamation."

It is critical to note that "defamation" is normally defined as: "communication to third parties of false statements about a person that injure the reputation of or deter others from associating with that person." (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law)

Historically, inherent in the charge of defamation is the falsity of the statement. If a person can prove that their statement is true, they cannot be said to have defamed.

So, to echo Pilate, "What is truth?" Well,

the UNCHR resolution clarifies that for us also, stating, "Islam is frequently and wrongly associated with human rights violations and terrorism." Thus, accusing Islam of being associated with human rights violations is, according to the UNCHR, an act of defamation of Islam. This presents a serious challenge to human rights advocates and reporters. The UNCHR resolution also guarantees that those who pursue an agenda to defame Islam will be branded "extremists."

The UNCHR resolution calls upon States to "actively combat" defamation of religions, Islam and Muslims in particular especially "in human rights forums." It also calls upon States to provide constitutional and legal protection of Islam against defamation and its consequences, i.e. lack of respect, or hatred.

The UNCHR resolution requests the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance to continue to examine the situation of Muslims and Arab peoples in various parts of the world and monitor defamation of Islam. The Special Rapporteur will report his findings to the Commission at its 62<sup>nd</sup> session (April 2006) and make recommendations to improve their situation.

## Notes:

1. The text of this resolution can be found at: [http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/CHR/resolutions/E-CN\\_4-RES-2005-3.doc](http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/CHR/resolutions/E-CN_4-RES-2005-3.doc)
2. "UN Calls for Combating Anti-Islam Campaigns" GENEVA, April 12, 2005 (IslamOnline.net & News Agencies) <http://islamonline.net/English/News/2005-04/12/article06.shtml>
3. "UN to monitor defamation of Islam" Ehtasham Khan in Geneva, 13 April 2005 <http://in.rediff.com/news/2005/apr/12un2.htm>

## resource

# International Bible Correspondence Course

The Bible Correspondence Course program sponsored by OPERATION MOBILIZATION in Turkey has been an exceptionally effective outreach. Their most recent report is available at:

[www.bccturkey.org/DUJREAB/2004AnnualReport.htm](http://www.bccturkey.org/DUJREAB/2004AnnualReport.htm)

# Missionary Phobia Surrounds EU Admission

by Barbara G. Baker, researched by Rajiv Lee in Istanbul

from *Compass Direct*. [www.compassdirect.org](http://www.compassdirect.org)

For the past six months, both Islamist and nationalist circles in Turkey have launched strident broadsides against what even state officials are calling “dangerous” Christian activities. In the context of a conservative backlash against the secular but overwhelmingly Muslim Turkey’s push to join the “historically Christian” European Union (EU), the campaign is not surprising.

For decades, charges that Christian missionaries have a political agenda have been a staple of the Turkish media, often fueled by self-serving political circles. Until now, the government has rarely given these claims such open backing. Yet ever since the EU’s decision last December to begin membership accession talks with Turkey, religious freedom has been on Europe’s short list of major issues for Turkey to resolve, both on paper and in practice.

During dinner meeting last week in Ankara with Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, EU ambassadors voiced direct criticism of comments made before the Turkish Parliament by State Minister Mehmet Aydin, whose portfolio includes the state-run Religious Affairs Directorate.

“The goal of missionary activity is to break up the historical, religious, national and cultural unity of the people of Turkey,” Aydin had said on March 27. Accusing Christian missionaries in Turkey of “ulterior political motives,” he claimed their activities “have a historical background,” and that “a significant part of missionary activity is done in secret.”

According to *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, during their June 15 meeting with Erdogan, the EU ambassadors labeled Aydin’s comments “exaggerated and divisive.” Belgian Ambassador Jan Mattysen openly questioned Ankara’s repeated insistence that Turkey’s religious minorities experienced “no difficulties.” *Radikal* newspaper noted Back on March 22, Interior Minister Abdulkadir Aksu had weighed in on the controversy, accusing missionaries of taking advantage of sectarian and cultural differences inside Turkey – as well as natural disasters like earthquakes and floods – to evangelize among low-income families.

Answering a deputy’s query in parliament, Aksu said that over the past seven years, 338 Muslim Turks had changed their religious identity to Christianity, with six converting to Judaism.

The interior minister’s statistics clearly refuted wild claims in the Turkish media, topped by an unsubstantiated article in the *Aksiyon* weekly of March 28, alleging that 35,000 “house churches” were meeting clandestinely across Turkey.

On a somewhat smaller scale, pages of fabricated charts published by Ilker Cinar, a self-proclaimed ex-missionary from Tarsus, claimed there are 1,800 house churches led by 1,883 foreign missionaries in Turkey, with congregations totaling nearly 60,000.

But in reality, there are only 95 known Protestant congregations, 40 of them meeting in homes. The remainder worship in rented or purchased facilities registered with local authorities as places of worship. Their combined congregations total no more than 3,000, according to the Protestant research group SILAS based in Istanbul.

“There’s a reaction against Christianity by Islamists and nationalist groups,” observed Ihsan Ozbek, chairman of the Alliance of Protestant Churches (APC). “The missionary issue is being used by them to spoil the relationship between Turkey and the EU.” To these sectors of society, joining the “Christian club” of the EU means risking the loss of their cultural and religious identity.

Back in February, the *Turkish Daily News* had reported that a sermon prepared by the Religious Affairs Directorate would be read in all the nation’s mosques on March 11, portraying Christian missionaries as the “new Crusaders.” Reportedly this came “as a reaction to missionary activities in Turkey and EU demands for religious expression.”

But in an apparent backdown, the directorate’s website indicates that a different sermon was preached in its place.

According to *Yeni Safak* columnist Ahmet Tasgetiren, the inclusion of missionary activities as a threat to Turkey’s national security is rooted in “the Islam that lies in the deep conscience of the people of

this country.” But *Hurriyet* newspaper columnist Ozdemir Ince, writing on May 2, linked it rather to a common government thesis that Protestant missionaries helped “in the creation of the imaginary [Armenian] genocide” perpetrated 90 years ago by the Ottoman Empire.

Whatever the causes, religious tolerance has suffered in the wake of the ongoing media hype and government comments.

“In January there were small incidents of attacks and beatings of Protestants,” Ozbek told *Compass*, “but this has escalated,” as demonstrated by recent Molotov cocktail attacks against churches in Ankara, Gaziantep and Izmit. “It’s political, because these groups see the EU as the enemy.”

Now, Ozbek admitted, “There’s an extreme prejudice against Christianity. If we showed the ‘JESUS’ film now, we could easily be beaten up,” he said, even though the Christian documentary on the life of Christ is legally distributed in Turkey.

Last month, the government agency controlling radio and television programs ordered Shema Radio, a Christian radio station in Ankara, to pull its May 18 Bible-reading program. “We were told to replace it with a documentary on Mersin which they provided,” station manager Soner Tufan said. “If we hadn’t, they would have fined us \$40,000.”

The censored text was the first three chapters of the Old Testament book of Daniel. “We wrote them a reply, saying that if we were committing a crime, then the whole Bible should be outlawed!” Tufan said. “But they didn’t accept our arguments.”

Shema Radio has opened a court case on this issue, to discourage future censorship.

In addition, seven libel cases have been opened to date by various Protestant church leaders against prime-time programs on three TV channels which aired slanderous accusations against local Christians. The slurs ranged from saying Christians were spying for foreign intelligence agencies and paying people to change their religion to trying to divide and destroy the nation by alienating Turks from their communities, families and culture.

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# Christians Allegedly Want Ethnic Divisions

by Barbara G. Baker

from *Compass Direct*: [www.compassdirect.org](http://www.compassdirect.org)

Intelligence agencies within the Turkish state have concluded in a new report that Christian missionary activities inside the country have a second motive, parallel to their spread of Christian propaganda.

According to a June 11 article in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, the state believes that foreign missionaries also promote ethnic divisions, particularly among the Kurds.

Declaring that missionaries “cover Turkey like a spider’s web,” the report accuses them of focusing on sensitive regions of the country and using the cover of “faith tourism” to target lower-income citizens, youth, children and women.

As part of a recently disclosed intelligence report entitled “Reactionary Elements and Risks,” the state’s assessment of missionary activity was coupled with a separate analysis of Islamist terrorist groups and their leaders active within Turkey.

Currently, foreign missionaries were said to be increasing their pace in the Black Sea and eastern Anatolia regions of Turkey, *Cumhuriyet* noted. In search of potential converts, the report said, missionaries were targeting the ethnic Kurdish and Laz communities, as well as adherents of the Alawite sect.

According to the report, the majority of foreign missionaries come from South Korea, the United States, England, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Sweden and Romania.

They were said to represent Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox groups of Christians, as well as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Baha’is.

In addition, the report stated that in recent years, Turkish and foreign citizens were cooperating to form non-governmental organizations (NGO’s) in the Turkish Southeast, where it was noted that church

members make up “an important portion” of the staff of these NGOs.

Addressed in the report were concerns about Bible courses being formed under the guise of “investigative” studies, as well as individuals going door to door distributing religious books, brochures and magazines. Occasional seminars and meetings were also being organized, the report said.

Istanbul was identified as Turkey’s missionary headquarters, although places of worship were known to be established in Ankara, Izmir, Eskisehir, Antalya, Hatay, Mersin and Kusadasi, the report said.

In the intelligence report, Jehovah’s Witnesses were said to be presenting themselves as the true and only pure Christians, while Baha’is reportedly focused on developing relationships with state officials, journalists, progressive businessmen and people in the performing and fine arts.

*continued from page 4, Missionary Phobia*

On June 11, *Cumhuriyet* newspaper devoted nearly a full page to a new state intelligence report titled “Reactionary Elements and Risks.” According to the article, the first half of the report examined religious terrorist groups, and the second section focused on missionary activities.

Even secularists have taken up the cause, with public complaints from Rahsan Ecevit, the outspoken wife of leftist ex-prime minister Bulent Ecevit, that “Turkish citizens, sometimes by persuasion and sometimes for their own material benefit, are becoming Christians. “We cannot ignore this activity,” Ecevit warned on January 2. “At the time we say that we are entering the EU, we’re losing our religion.”

But other secularists deride the anti-missionary tirade. With Turkey’s non-Muslim population less than two out of a thousand, *Cumhuriyet* columnist Oral Calislar noted, it was hard to see how it could be considered a political threat.

“Think of Germany,” Calislar wrote on January 9. “Almost three million Muslims from Turkey have settled there, setting up

hundreds of mosques and propagating their faith. Most of their imams are sent and paid by the Turkish state.” So in Turkey, Calislar declared, “Just as Muslims consider it a right to propagate their faith, so Christians, Jews and atheists have the same right.”

Turkey’s Mazlum-Der human rights organization has also criticized the overt campaign against missionary activities, declaring back in mid-January that this “supposed threat” was being used to restrict freedoms of expression and religious practice in the name of national security.

“People who campaign against missionary activities make non-Muslims a target,” argued Mazlum-Der director Ayhan Bilgen. “These people also fabricate fears, to legitimize the restriction of religious freedom. In Turkey, where secularism has been interpreted unilaterally, some believe it is their right to intervene in religions as they like,” Bilgen told *Turkish Daily News* on January 14.

“The freedom of expression should be guaranteed by the law and its implementation.” On paper, Turkey’s new

reform package of laws put into effect on June 1 makes it crystal clear that it is legal to express and promote one’s religious beliefs and meet for worship accordingly.

“Missionary activity not a crime, but a right” declared a front-page banner headline in *Radikal* on June 12. According to the details of Articles 115 and 215 of the new penal code, the daily stated, it is actually a crime punishable with three years in prison to “prevent or obstruct anyone from expressing or changing their religious, political, social or philosophical views or from meeting for religious worship.”

But unless the ruling Justice and Development Party changes its rhetoric, one Turkish Protestant pastor told *Compass*, it will be guilty of spreading “active disinformation.”

“The government should be pro-actively educating the police, the judiciary and the press about freedom of religion,” declared Zekai Tanyar, chairman of the APC’s legal committee. “It should stand up openly against media attacks, instead of deliberately turning a blind eye to them.”

# Beyond the Bombings Churches Grow

feature story for 8 July from *Compass Direct*. [www.compassdirect.org](http://www.compassdirect.org)

**B**eneath the rubble of news about bombings, hostage-taking and political wrangling in Iraq lies a more positive picture of fledgling evangelical churches.

In the northeast, Iraqi Kurdistan offers a haven for Christian activity as the two rival Kurdish governments grow in their toleration of Muslims becoming Christians. In the south, the evangelical church is growing rapidly.

In Baghdad, fifteen evangelical congregations have started since Saddam Hussein's removal in April 2003. Officially, only two evangelical churches – both Presbyterian and led by Egyptian nationals – existed in the capital during Hussein's rule. Now there are Baptists, Methodists and Christian and Missionary Alliance congregations, all led by local Iraqi pastors.

"The people are open like never before," said Ghassan Thomas, pastor of a Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Baghdad. "It is because we have no peace. This is how we connect our message to the nation: I preach on the topic, 'How do we get peace?' and everyone listens, especially when I talk about the deeper peace that Christ brings."

Most of the members of the new churches come from the Presbyterian Church, and some come from historic Christian denominations such as the Chaldean Catholic or Syrian Orthodox, which have been in Iraq for centuries.

"Muslims too want peace," Thomas said. "Many of them are frightened. When the hostages are killed, often a Quranic verse is used to justify it. So many Muslims are scared of their own God. When we preach that God is love, it is so liberating to them."

Southern Iraq is deemed too dangerous for foreign Christian workers, so most have pulled back to the more stable Iraqi Kurdistan. More than four million Kurds reside in this northern mountainous region, which has enjoyed autonomy since the first Gulf War in 1991. Two Kurdish political factions control the area. Arbil is the main city of the domain of Massoud Barzani's Kurdish Democratic Party, and Sulaymaniyah is the power center of newly-elected Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

In both regions Kurdish refugees are flooding back. There is little street crime, and authorities have severely curtailed the activities of Islamic extremists. This has brought much prosperity to the area, which many believe is one reason the respective administrations – in their courting of Western investment – have markedly improved their defense of religious freedom.

According to Yousif Matty, a leading pastor of the Kurdish Evangelical Church, a denomination in the north comprising Kurdish and Arabic Christians, "The last ten years have been a golden time here, and it is set to continue with Talabani becoming president. He has been very strong on emphasizing the rule of law. Also, the Kurds have suffered at the hands of Islamists and have no love for them." Matty's churches have a few hundred members, from both Muslim and Christian backgrounds. He runs four bookshops, two schools and other projects, and he received a \$500,000 plot of land from the government to build his church. The government has also welcomed other Christian NGOs.

The other evangelical denomination in the north is the Kurdish Language Evangelical Church, which is exclusively Kurdish-speaking and made up primarily of Kurds.

"There is always persecution from the family when a Muslim becomes a Christian," said the Kurdish pastor of one fellowship in Arbil. "That will not change any time soon, but it used to be that the new convert would face persecution from the state also, yet this is less true today."

The influence of the Kurds, who represent twenty-five percent of the Iraqi population, is important to the future of the country. President Talabani has less power than the Shiite prime minister, but some Christian leaders believe the best bulwark against a strongly Islamic constitution may be the influence of the Kurds.

Though Sunni Muslims, the Kurdish people are one of the least observant groups in the Middle East. They are expected to oppose the Arabs, whom they feel have humiliated them for decades. Nestorian

Bishop Issac of Dohuk predicted the Kurds would keep the constitution from becoming too Islamic.

"*Sharia* is really Arabic, and the Kurds will resist all attempts to Arabize the culture of Iraq," Bishop Issac said. "If we go the *sharia* route, it will be like in Iran where our [Nestorian] church is less than ten percent of the strength it was before [Ayatollah Ruhollah] Khomeini took power."

Another point of light for the Iraqi church is that many of the 40,000 or so Christians who fled after a spate of bombings last August have returned to the country. Yet the numbers of those still in refugee camps in Jordan and Syria remain significant – perhaps 10,000, though precise figures are not available.

According to Bishop Issac, "It's not the end of the world that so many Christians have fled, because it has spread the Iraqi church over the world, and the new communities established in America and Australia are providing many resources we would not have received if we had all remained in the land."

The news is not all positive, of course. Iraq remains a country in crisis. At a recent conference for seventy pastors, all had to travel early in the morning to avoid trouble on the roads. And although they stressed that the streets gradually have become safer since the beginning of the year, church meetings throughout the south are held at 4:30 in the afternoon -- with everyone at home behind locked doors by 7:30 for fear of insurgent and looting activity.

Law and order still has not been adequately restored, nor have basic services. Patience has run out with U.S. and British forces' failure to restore stability after two years in the country. Said one pastor, "No population will support an army that cannot protect it -- the goodwill has completely gone." Middle class Christians are also continuing to emigrate in alarming numbers, as those in key professions such as medicine are targets for kidnapping and extortion. Some newer evangelical churches have been decimated by this exodus.

The Iraqi churches also face internal

challenges. Some priests from the historic churches have bullied the new evangelicals. In Baghdad, a priest from the Chaldean Catholics told those who had left his church to attend Baptist services, "We will not bury your relatives who attend our churches." Some leaders of the older church denominations have slandered evangelical congregations as "part of a Jewish conspiracy to control Iraq."

Also, although the evangelicals are skilled in evangelism, the church is young and immature. Warns Matty, "Our outreach activity is so much stronger than the discipling function of the church. We have radio outreach, schools, bookshops, but the church itself is not concentrating in deepening its life, nor are the leaders getting trained enough."

Some church leaders see the splitting of the evangelical churches into so many new (and often foreign-backed) denominations as an indication of disunity. And not all missionary aid is well spent; some pastors have used foreign support to buy expensive cars and upgrade their lifestyle, leading to envy among other pastors.

Yet for all these challenges, the mood among 70 evangelical pastors meeting in April was guardedly optimistic. A pastor of one of the three Baptist congregations in

Baghdad, who did not wish to be named, forecast three trends.

"One, the evangelical church will grow stronger, but many of its numbers will leave. However that's not so bad. They will probably come back with more teaching and maturity and it will benefit the church in the long term. Two, the historic churches will get even more negative. I see them as the major persecutor of the evangelicals in the future. It is as it always was. I am translating a book called *The Trial of Blood* which calculates that the institutional churches killed fifty million Christians from 315 to 1570 A.D. Three, the Islamic extremists will moderate, though it may take a generation."

Yet even when conflicts are at their sharpest, there are hopeful signs. Pastor Thomas tells of an incident that occurred when he received death threats written on cardboard after erecting a sign outside his church that said, "Jesus is the Light of the World." On the cardboard was scrawled, "Jesus is not the light of the world. Allah is, and you have been warned." It was signed, "the Islamic Shiite Party."

Thomas loaded up a van full of children's gifts from a Christian relief agency, together with some Bibles and medicines, and drove to the headquarters of

the Islamic Shiite Party. When he came to the compound, he demanded to "see the big sheikh, I have gifts for him."

He was taken to meet the leader, and he introduced himself as a pastor.

"We respect you," the sheikh said.

Thomas said, "Christians have love for you, because God is love, our God is a God of love."

Again the sheikh replied, "We respect your God. We respect Jesus."

This was the opening Thomas had been praying for. He said, "If you respect Jesus, would you let me read you His words?" He took out his Bible and read the words of Jesus from John's gospel, "I am the light of the world." Then he brought out the cardboard with the death threat.

The sheikh read it and looked ashamed. He said, after a moment's pause, "We are sorry. This will not happen again. You are my brother. If anyone comes to kill you, it will be my neck first." The sheikh even attended Thomas's ordination as the pastor.

Thomas concluded, "No one is expecting the situation to improve for the better quickly, but we believe that God is moving in these times, and that the future will be more peaceful, especially if Christians will befriend good Muslims and work together."

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## Kingdom of Heaven

### Conventional Wisdom on Crusades Must be Challenged

The film, *Kingdom of Heaven*, demonstrates the conventional wisdom that the history of war gets written by those sympathetic to its victors.

Only recently have historians begun to revisit formative conflicts such as those between European settlers and American Indians to discover new perspective on both sides. Maybe it's time to give the same critical attention to the Crusades.

If the Crusades were really an attempt to force one civilization's religion down the throats of another, as *Kingdom of Heaven* suggests, then securing democracy in Iraq with military might seems dangerously close to a repeat performance.

If, however, the Crusades were an attempt to defend European civilization against Arab and Turk expansion by taking the battle to the center of enemy gravity,

then defending America from terrorist attacks by establishing a presence in their respective homelands repeats an ancient strategy (which, by the way, worked).

In the seventh century AD, before Mohammed unified the Arab tribes, Latin and Greek speaking European civilization, featuring Christian religion, had spread throughout Asia Minor (modern Turkey), the Middle East, and North Africa. Farsi speaking Persian civilization featuring Manichaeism, Zoroastrian, and Nestorian faiths, filled what is modern Iran and Iraq.

Within 100 years, Arab civilization featuring Islam subjugated all of these lands in much the same way that English speaking Europeans swept across North America. As native Americans got assimilated, killed, or put on reservations, so native Middle Eastern peoples like Phoenicians, Jews, Copts,

Assyrians, and Armenians, got converted, annihilated, or isolated into ghettos.

By 1000 AD, the recently converted Seljuk Turks were poised to invade Central and Western Europe by way of the Balkans. What would later happen to the Apache, Navaho, and Cherokee nations was about to happen to England, Germany, and France.

Remembered today in school books and films for their atrocities, fanaticism, and eventual defeat, the Crusades saved European religion, languages, and civilization from the ash heap of history.

Faced with terrorism exported from Middle Eastern lands and the new specter of WMD destruction, how will European (including American) civilization use the lessons of history? Hopefully with better balance than conventional wisdom and the caricatures of Hollywood.

For more reading on this film and the Crusades visit:

[www.frontline.org.za/news/kingdom\\_heaven\\_review.htm](http://www.frontline.org.za/news/kingdom_heaven_review.htm) and [www.frontline.org.za/articles/crusades\\_all\\_about.htm](http://www.frontline.org.za/articles/crusades_all_about.htm)

## Understand My Muslim People Delivers on its Promise

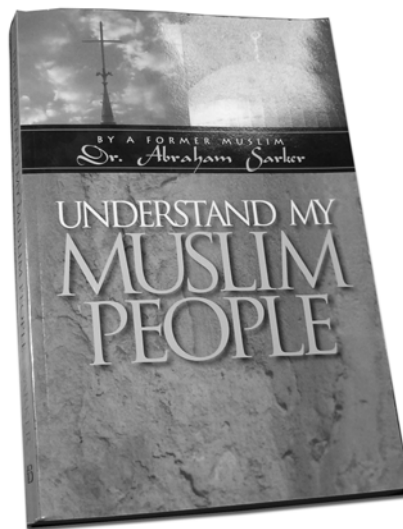
What? Another book purporting to help us understand Islam! I have grown pretty cynical of this genre.

Books written by Christians tend to take on an us-and-them flavor, demonizing many with good intentions. Books by non-religious secular scholars frequently sugar coat hard realities, promoting self deception. Books by former Muslims often exude bitterness towards the system against which they revolted.

Aside from repeating some exaggerated statistics from doubtful sources, Sarker's work delivers on its claim to promote genuine understanding.

Abraham grew up with devout and loving parents and an intense desire for a personal relationship with God. From early childhood he faithfully performed the ritual prayers. By his early teens he was calling his Bengali community to prayer through the amplifiers at the local mosque.

Today, with a doctorate from Regent University, a bachelor's and MBA from Dallas Baptist University, and a Bible degree



from Christ for the Nations Institute, Dr. Abraham Sarker directs a ministry called Gospel for Muslims, Inc., and teaches as an adjunct professor at Dallas Baptist University.

Drawing transparently from his ordinary upbringing and spiritual journey, Dr. Sarker

communicates not just the fundamentals of Islam which can be found in any Encyclopedia, but helps us to grasp the emotional meaning and social function these fundamentals possess for average Muslims who are practicing their faith. Through his writing, we compassionately see the perspective devout Muslims have on their own history, practices, and beliefs and we get a sense of the needs and longings inspiring their devotion. And finally, Dr. Sarker gives practical advice on how to relate better as Christians with Muslims.

Brother Abraham manages to write as a former Muslim without the hostility and bitterness which characterizes the work of many other Muslim background believers (MBBs). I highly recommend his book as one of the best in its genre.

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