

# Training Latins for the Muslim World

Here is a close-up view of Two-Thirds World mission efforts to the unreached-Latin mission teams being trained, working in partnership with others, for the challenge of church planting in the Muslim world

by Pedro Carrasco

**M**y deep desire is that the Lord might motivate and show us that ministry among Muslims is really possible, is something that is being blessed in these days—not only in our ministry, but through the witness of many other missions working among them. I just want to share these things so that we can get more deeply motivated for reaching the unreached peoples of the world.

The subject I was supposed to present was, “Training to Reach Muslim Peoples.” But that is a broad topic. So I thought more specifically, “Training Latins to Plant Churches in the Muslim World.” Certainly to plant churches in the Muslim world is a huge challenge. To train Latins for planting churches in the Muslim world is something that is a double challenge.

PMI (PM International), which stands for Muslim Peoples International (translation from the Spanish), is an interdenominational and international mission agency that seeks to facilitate the Latin Church in reaching the Muslim peoples for Jesus Christ. By that we mean not only looking for funds and candidates from the Latin churches, but really to see Latin church leadership get involved in a more active role in our mission structure as well.

## Goals of PMI

Our goals for the next three years are to train and deploy at least 50 Latin adults in church-planting teams and to raise up 500 prayer cells in churches throughout Latin American, who would

intercede for the ministry among Muslims (and that encompasses not only our ministry, but all ministries among Muslims). For the year 2000, we intend to have at least 20 Latin teams effectively ministering among Muslim peoples, and though this may sound pretentious, to plant 20 indigenous churches, in the five main regions of the Muslim world, namely, in the Magrev, in the Sahel, in the Middle East, and in Central Asia. If the Lord hasn't returned, we also might find places in Southeast Asia.

At present, we have trained half of these young Latin adults. We have trained 22 adults. Our drop-out rate is 13%. We don't count on the casualty too much, but for many people it is very interesting to know the attrition rate. These 22 adults are deployed, in five church-planting teams ministering among five different Muslim people groups.

The most difficult part of the challenge is that we have only been able to mobilize around 50 prayer cells throughout the Latin churches. We don't blame anyone but ourselves for this. We also ourselves are struggling with praying regularly. But so far prayer seems to be the hardest thing to which to motivate people.

In order to carry out what we are doing, we are working with six mission agencies representing our ministry in Latin America. That means PMI counts on these organizations in recruiting and screening our candidates. These missions are using the momentum built in Latin America to motivate the churches and orientation of the candidates. From

our perspective, PMI is a “beach head” on the other side of the ocean, to carry on from that point on, doing the work through workers who already have been trained and deployed in teams. We're using what already is there, ministries that already are recruiting and motivating Latins and churches to ministry among the unreached peoples. We compliment each other. We have partnered with these six ministries who represent us with their organizations in Central America, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Colombia.

## Informal Training

We have also developed a training program in North Africa. As we consider training, I want to emphasize the informal type of training. We are active members of the North African Partnership, where more than 50 ministries working in the region coordinate all the global efforts to reach the North Africa region with the gospel. Out of this partnership we advise each other and put on the table all our goals and plans so that we can share in a pool of resources all that is available instead of duplicating efforts and wasting financial resources. So when somebody else is doing something we are really profiting from that partnership.

By the way, we are also part of the Central Asia Partnership, and we soon would like to be part of the Middle East Partnership. Just to find what is one's part in the chunk of the cake gives us more validity to our ministry. Certainly, we as Latins have our part to play in the Middle East. In that partnership we find our place. I think that there is a new move coming in

missions. It is partnership in missions. So we are really trying to advance the overall goal of all these ministries, of establishing God's kingdom in the various Muslim regions.

### Philosophy of Training

At this point I want to share with you some basic premises, some kind of a philosophy of ministry.

First of all, at PMI, we assume and we count on God's presence and mandate to do this type of work, of church planting among the Muslim peoples. From this perspective, you can see things from a clear point of view.

The second premise is that the human factor will be the variable, and flows between effective and ineffective church planting efforts. We blame ourselves for not advancing the Lord's work on the field. We don't blame the harvest nor do we blame the Lord of the harvest. Less than that do we blame the church. We are church-planters. The human factor is the big variable in succeeding and advancing, and in some cases, retarding the work.

The third point is that we are unable as an organization, to do the church's responsibility of training-what we would call "pre-training" in Latin America-the candidates in the area of character development. We assume that the people who are coming to work in a church planting ministry will have some sort of a screening in the church in their character development-like for instance, spiritual maturity, zeal for cross-cultural evangelism, discipline, accountability, being rightly related to God, to one's family and to one's community. If one doesn't know how to do that, chances are he or she will find a hard time on the field. If at home we don't know

how to relate correctly to other people, we will find that on the field this problem will be greatly exaggerated.

A fourth premise deals with ministry. The church back home has a big part to play in helping us to pre-train our candidates in the ministry. At least 50% of this

etc. If they haven't learned in the at least 50% of this type of training, we as a mission agency will be over burdened in taking all of this responsibility on ourselves. So we assume that the church is going to do lots of the pre-training of our candidates in all these basic foundational areas of life.

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Lastly, since we believe in the priesthood of all believers, we at PMI essentially discard the difference between spiritual and secular activities. In this sense, we are a mission agency of laymen. This is not to say that we have no professional people in our mission.

foundational training is related to spiritual warfare and to communicating effectively in their own language. If our candidates don't know how to express themselves in their own language, in Spanish in Latin America, they will hardly be capable to communicate in Arabic or French in another culture.

It's important to build healthy relationships and friendships with people. We don't want candidates who are kind of melancholic, who kind of sit in a corner by themselves, not knowing how to relate to other people. Believe it or not, there are a lot of people on the field like that. I don't know how they got therein the first place. You know, they might be the type of people who like to work on computers but don't know how to talk to people. This is the type of pre-training that we expect the church to do for our candidates.

Another area is that our candidates would know how to evangelize, how to preach, how to teach and how to make disciples as well as how to train them. We could go on and make a long list including how to cope with stress and loneliness,

In the process of training in our mission we have changed our way of thinking. I know that in the States and Anglo-Saxons, people like to think in terms of departments, special areas such as training-and you have a specialist there in these areas. For recruiting you have a specialist there-a recruiter. He knows all about recruitment. For fund-raising, you have another specialist who knows how to raise funds and take the money out of people. But chances are he doesn't know much about anything else. Like, if you ask a fund-raiser about training he'll answer: "Don't ask me! The next office is the one you should address."

### An Integrated Approach

In the process of training our people for missions, we have taken this in a holistic sense. The end result dictates what our recruitment and training should be. By this I mean that out of the many mistakes that we are committing-as Latins-we are designing at the moment specific programs on the field that respond to specific felt needs of the people we are trying to reach, for which a

specific candidate can apply. We specific oriented. So out of our mistakes, we are designing a specific program. In our process of training, we are filling each post with real professionals that have real academic or job qualifications, and at the same time are committed Christians and committed to frontier missions. With the necessary cross-cultural tools, we go about our work presenting an integrated message to an integrated society like the Muslim peoples.

We have observed that the conventional approach of a professional missionary simply does not fit with the Muslim traditional world view, which also is true with other traditional societies. Have you heard the story of a Muslim asking a missionary, "What are you doing in my country? Why are you here?" This is a valid type of question which requires an honest answer. Have you heard the responses? As the missionary searches for words he says, "Well, I'm trying to teach, you, you know." "You teach two hours a week? And you live like the Minister of the Interior. How come? Where is your money coming from?" How do you answer those questions?? This is not an isolated case. It's the daily fare of a missionary in a Muslim society.

The Muslim society is where religion, politics, culture and family are integrated into one. You cannot separate life into areas or departments, as if your politics doesn't have anything to do with your religion, or your sports view doesn't have anything to do with your moral values-like in the West. That's one reason why our problems start as missionaries, when we come with a divided, dichotomized world view, the secular pitted against the spiritual.

The most fulfilled workers we have are those who have real professions, real jobs, who provide for their families and above all are committed Christians with a burden to

see the un reached reached with the Gospel. are really church, These are not tent makers per se, but really displaced Christians. This is one reason why you hear a lot of complaints from tentmakers. "Oh, I'm doing a lot of secular jobs, so I don't dedicate a lot of time to spiritual work." We would say, What do you mean? If you are teaching, that's your mission field, all the students in your classroom and fellow teachers are your mission field.

That's the strategy of one of our teachers—a real teacher with academic credentials, who studied in the university, with a master's degree in teaching English as a foreign language, has had incredible opportunities to share his faith with VIP officials. He is teaching to a minister in the government, be cause of his qualifications. That's his mission field. He's reaching high posts in the government and doesn't have to "pretend" being there with ulterior motives.

We are concerned that some of our people are really struggling with these problems on the field. "Oh, I'm trying to do this kind of cloak-and-dagger operation. I'm here with a profession, but the real intent is to give you a tract!" You know this kind of cloak-and-dagger operation that missionaries do in the Muslim world. We need to integrate the gospel. The gospel is for real people ministering to real needs.

The priesthood of all believers in some sense implies that we can eliminate the difference between "spiritual" and "secular" activities. When we become believers, all areas come under the lordship of Christ, including our jobs, professions, time and relationships. The Muslim world is an integrated society where religion, politics, culture and family are integrated into one Islamic concept. We cannot separate life into different areas or

departments like we do in the West, where one area like politics has little or nothing to do with religion. Our rationalistic society produces a dichotomized world view, the secular versus the spiritual.

## Immersion Situation

The last thing is that, interestingly enough, our training course has given us the necessary feedback to plan these kinds of strategies. When we put our people into a Muslim family situation, where they have to live for weeks, and even have lived for months-with families who are not Christians, we don't put them with Christians—to eat with them, to live with them, and just to observe and learn from them. They don't have to preach. They don't have to write a prayer letter where they say, "I have a contact! Now you can see the picture! I am with them; this is a result of my ministry." In fact we forbid our people to write for about one year. You know, the typical string attached on- to the missionaries there, that they have to produce results, otherwise they will lose all their support. They have to learn how to love people. Perhaps that is the hardest thing. They don't have anything to write about in their prayer letters-just about suffering, and eating in one dish, drinking with one glass of water; thirteen people crammed into one room, living and sleeping with them. I'm talking about adults with kids, and Latin kids living in the same situation.

You think that Latins have an advantage in reaching the Muslims? I would say that there are no real advantages. Somebody has said, "Oh, there are something like 2,000 Arabic words imbedded into the Spanish vocabulary." That may be good, but really good for nothing. Personally I haven't heard any of those words being used in the field.

Regarding the training course it self: We put our people into a four- month-long

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session. It's only four months of sacrifice. Sixty percent of this time is spent living with Muslim families—living and observing and writing down ways that they see how the people communicate among themselves on different subjects. How do they communicate the truths? How do they communicate anger? How do they communicate making a decision in a family? Some 60% of this time is spent living with families, while 25% is spent studying a crash course in Arabic. From the beginning they have to learn Arabic, because if they don't learn it they won't survive in the culture. I tell you, after a few years of living in the field, they are speaking enough Arabic to get along in a very fluent conversation of the gospel. The last 15% is spent just debriefing, giving them some classroom hours of cultural anthropology, etc., giving them at least some tools so they can interpret what they are observing, and how to put into words what they are seeing. At the end of the course we ask them to write a monograph of one aspect of the culture that they see as relevant to sharing the gospel. If they don't know how to write this paper, they don't pass the course, and therefore, they are not accepted

as missionaries with PMI.

So this in a nutshell is the training course. We believe that the job can be done with committed people. What we have at the moment is—what we would describe our workers as being—displaced Christians. Our people are not tentmakers necessarily, nor missionaries necessarily. It's not necessarily a label like that. We just call them displaced Christians for the sake of the Latin American church. An example of a displaced Christian is a civil engineer that at the moment is ministering to villages—Berber villages—digging water wells. He's doing it because he knows how to do it. He knows how to follow up all his engineering work. The people respect him. Out of this ministry he has approached elders in the villages to whom he has clearly presented the gospel. At least two villages are asking him to come and continue the studies of the gospel that he started, all along explaining to them the message of the Lamb who was slain and what that means for the whole village. I'm talking about small villages of one to two hundred people. We hope and pray that these are the beginnings of a

people movement to Christ. God wants, of course, to give us this privilege. This is one of the ways we are seeing that people look at us in an integrated way; not seeing us as people with ulterior motives.

Let me just give a warning here. Even though we present the gospel in an integrated way, we still have lots of criticism, lots of opposition, and lots of struggles in the spiritual, emotional and physical realms. So we cannot escape the persecution about which Paul warned. Persecution is inevitable for the Christian. So we are not trying to escape it. That's not why we are making these approaches. What we are looking for is ways of affecting whole families, whole villages if possible, in stead of individuals, extracting them from a society where they don't have a say in the decision-making for the people.

*Pedro Carrasco is a pseudonym for a frontier mission's leader in the Muslim world.*



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