

Islam and the Counterintuitive Francis

In 1986 the little town of Assisi, the 12th-13th century hometown of the celebrated St. Francis, was chosen by Pope John Paul II to be the place for prayer with leaders from other world religions. His choice of venue reminded the world that during the violent Crusades at least one man displayed a counter-cultural approach to Islam.

If you have not heard the story, it goes like this. Between 1212 and 1219, Francis tried three times to make his way to Islamic turf. Shipwreck and disease prevented him twice, but in 1219 he finally landed in Damietta (Egypt). There Francis witnessed firsthand the horrors of crusading combat as Christian forces clashed with the forces of al-Malek al-Kamil. The future saint sought to convince the armies of Christendom to relinquish their violent approach to Islam. He failed. Francis then asked his commander for permission to walk across the demilitarized zone between the opposing armies in order to bring a Christian message to Kamil. His request finally granted, Francis and his traveling companion crossed that frontier. After being roughed up a bit, Francis found himself in the presence of the Sultan. Legend is mixed as to what actually happened next, but it seems the encounter was transparent and extended. Ultimately, we only know that Francis walked back across that zone to the Christian forces and then made his way back to Italy, never to speak of the encounter again. Contemporary historical accounts try to interpret what happened between Francis and the Sultan that day. In the end, we're forced to admit that Francis' approach did not succeed in its original mission—the Crusades continued. Still, we have the sense that a real Christian and a real Muslim met each other that day, and that this encounter probably changed them personally. But this type of encounter doesn't happen unless one has a different disposition towards Muslims.

Through the centuries we've derived some benefit from examining Francis' fresh approach to Islam in the medieval age. Radical, counterintuitive and politically-incorrect, his manner exposed the futility of force in achieving the mission of God among the Saracens. The Franciscan order that emerged in the wake of this story would continue to challenge the crusading spirit. In fact, fresh approaches to translating the Qur'an and new inter-religious apologetics had already emerged, for the failures of crusading armies had forced a deeper examination of the more common medieval predisposition towards Islam.

Editorial *continued on p. 92*

The views expressed in **IJFM** are those of the various authors and not necessarily those of the journal's editors, the International Society for Frontier Missiology or the society's executive committee.

Editor

Brad Gill

Editor-at-Large

Rory Clark

Consulting Editors

Rick Brown, Darrell Dorr, Gavriel Gefen, Herbert Hoefler, Rebecca Lewis, H. L. Richard, Steve Saint,

Copy Editing and Layout

Elizabeth Gill, Marjorie Clark

Secretary

Lois Carey

Publisher

Frontier Mission Fellowship

2016 ISFM Executive Committee

Len Barlotti, Larry Caldwell, Dave Datema, Darrell Dorr, Brad Gill, Steve Hawthorne, David Lewis, Rebecca Lewis, Greg Parsons

Web Site

www.ijfm.org

Editorial Correspondence

1605 E. Elizabeth Street

Pasadena, CA 91104

(734) 765-0368, editors@ijfm.org

Subscriptions

One year (four issues) \$18.00

Two years (eight issues) \$34.00

Three years (twelve issues) \$48.00

Single copies \$5.00, multiple copies \$4.00

Payment must be enclosed with orders.

Please supply us with current address and change of address when necessary.

Send all subscription correspondence to:

IJFM

PO Box 433303

Palm Coast, FL 32143

Tel: (888) 895-5566 (US); (386) 246-0171

Fax: (626) 398-2263

Email: subscriptions@ijfm.org

IJFM (ISSN #2161-3354) was established in 1984 by the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, an outgrowth of the student-level meeting of Edinburgh '80.

COPYRIGHT ©2016 International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions.

PRINTED in the USA

The articles in this issue are also quite counterintuitive. They examine the presuppositions and attitudes we carry in any encounter with Muslims. We are very grateful that Ayman Ibrahim was willing to extend his interaction with Harley Talman on the matter of Muhammad's prophethood (see 116–35). This interaction, over two different IJFM issues, requires patience and is not for those who wish to automatically determine whether Muhammad is a false, fallen or "functional" prophet. Talman believes that a careful re-examination of Islamic textual sources may allow us to place Muhammad on a more nuanced spectrum of prophetic-type roles, and that this might improve Muslim-Christian dialogue. Ibrahim disagrees, and displays academic rigor in presenting the integrity of a traditional Christian interpretation of Muhammad as a false prophet. That said, he believes that his interpretation can inform an open and warm approach to our Muslim friends. Mission scholar John Azumah applies an African sensitivity to Muhammad's prophethood in his response to Talman (108–13). We encourage you

to get a hold of his more complete treatment of Muhammad at the 2015 Fuller Seminary lectureship.¹ While he diverges from the interpretation that Muhammad fits the bill of the anti-Christ in 1 John, he believes Talman's effort to place Muhammad in some kind of positive prophetic status will be rejected by Muslims as an imperialist missionary endeavor. The motives we carry are too easily suspect.

In his lead article, Bradford Greer explores our epistemological and theological starting points (93–100) and pushes us to examine our hidden missiological orientation in any encounter with Islam. Frankly, it's hard to dismantle our bias, to admit to certain predispositions, but Greer helps us understand what we transport into other religious worlds.

Evelyne Reisacher insists that we carry more than intellectual baggage; it's also a matter of attitude. She makes this clear in addressing the absence of joy in our witness to Muslims. Baker Academic has generously allowed us to publish a chapter of her new book (103–6), and we hope you'll purchase her entire study.

Evelyne writes with a scalpel, yet with sensitivity. Her ability to burrow into the psyche of our Christian witness to Muslims makes one feel as vulnerable as if one were lying on a surgeon's table. She, like the other authors in this issue, forces us to examine what we carry into relationships with Muslims.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ "Mission in the Islamic World: Making Theological and Missiological Sense of Muhammad" in *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness*, ed. Charles Van Engen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 197–214.

The **IJFM** is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The World Consultation on Frontier Missions and the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the **IJFM** seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the **IJFM** (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the **IJFM** for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.