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THE MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE OF SIN

by J. Dudley Woodberry



Doctors base their prescriptions for cures on their diagnoses of the problems which they can observe. Traditionally Muslims have not diagnosed the problem of human nature as being as critical as have Christians. Consequently, Muslims have not seen the need for as radical a solution.

The Common Muslim Diagnosis of Human Nature

The East African Muslim, Badru Kateregga, notes that "Muslims believe that man is fundamentally a good and dignified creature. He is not a fallen being." The late Isma'il al-Faruqi goes on to affirm, "Islam denies, therefore, that God had to ransom humanity by means of oblation and sacrifice."

Muslims support these views with such Qur'anic verses as *Surah* 30:30, which speaks of "the state of natural purity (*fitra*) in which He created people." Al-Bukhari, the leading compiler of traditions about Muhammad, attrib-

utes to him the saying, "No child is born except in the state of natural purity and then his parents make him Jewish, Christian, or Magian."

This optimistic view of human nature finds additional support in one Qur'anic account of the Adam and Eve story. *Surah* 20:115 says, "We [God] made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot, and we found in him no determination." As a consequence of his act, Adam descended from the Garden to the earth "for a time," after which God turned toward him [in mercy] (2:36-37)—without any need for an atonement.

Subsequently God promises guidance and that whoever follows it shall have no fear or sorrow in contrast to the disbelievers who will inhabit the fire (2:38-39). The "fallen" seem capable of following God's guidance without new life and transformation. They do not, with Paul, cry: "I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do

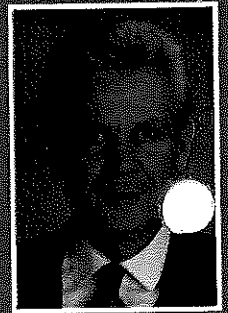
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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? Romans 10:14

Jim Bennett, Director
Center for
Ministry to Muslims



SINNERS—BUT NO SAVIOR

I asked my friend Tariq, “When you have sinned, what do you do?” Haltingly, he answered, “The first thing is that I’m not sure how to define sin, but I know when I have sinned because my conscience bothers me. I take a long shower and try to make myself clean before God. Then I pray extra prayers and ask God for his mercy and forgiveness. If I am fasting during the month of Ramadan, I am more hopeful that God will pardon my sins.”

I have asked many Muslims the same question and all of them answer in a similar fashion. Never once has a Muslim said anything close to “I am a sinner and need a mediator, a savior.”

In Dudley Woodberry’s article on page one he quotes the East African Muslim writer and theologian, Badru Kateregga, who said, “Muslims believe that man is fundamentally a good and dignified creature. He is not a fallen being.” Muslim scholars have always taught that sins are no more than acts of wrongdoing, breaches of the laws of Islam, which can be remedied by good deeds, repentance and the forgiveness of God. Sinfulness, as a state of the soul motivating humankind instinctively towards evil, is not a part of Islamic theology.


In *Sharing the Gospel With Muslims* John Gilchrist points out that the Qur’an uses two words which are usually translated simply as “sin,” namely *dhanb* and *khatiah*, and also often uses the word *dhulm* meaning “wrong.”

Muslims have traditionally distinguished between two types of sin, *kabirah*—the “great” sins, and *saghirah*—the “little” sins. The first are serious misdemeanors which, if not repented of, will lead to punishment, and the second are venial errors which are common to all believers and will be forgiven more easily. The Hadith records teach that Muhammad regarded seven sins as more heinous than all others, as in this text:

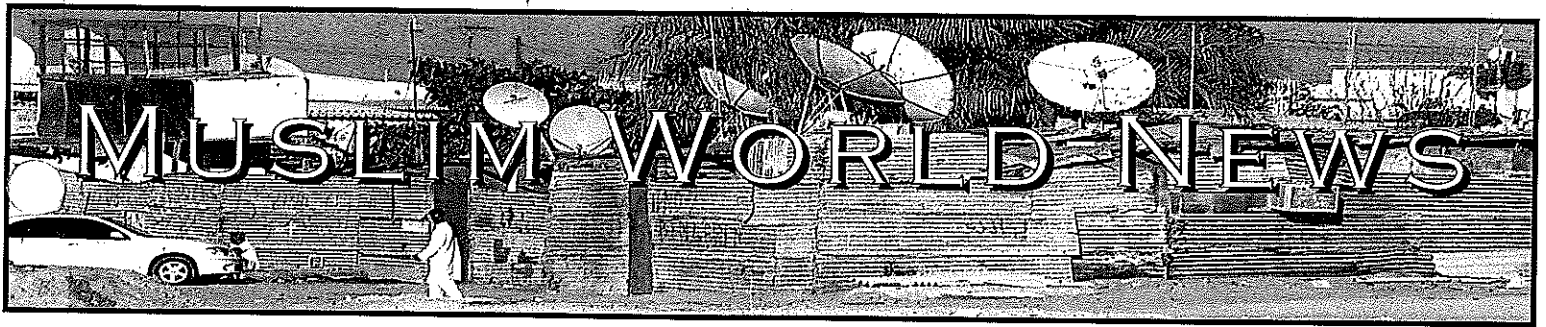
Abu Hurairah reported the Apostle of Allah as saying: Refrain from seven sins which cause destruction. He was asked, What are they, Apostle of Allah? He replied: To assign a partner to Allah, magic, to kill a soul (man) which is prohibited by Allah except for which is due, to take usury (interest), to consume the property of an orphan, to retreat on the day of battle, and to slander chaste women, indiscreet but believing.

—Sunan Abu Dawud, Vol. 2, p. 809

It has often been said that sin has created a Christ-shaped vacuum in every person’s heart. This is absolutely true and, no matter what a Muslim may be taught to believe about himself, it’s true of him too. Only Jesus can fill the dark void in the depths of the heart caused by the devastating effect of human sinfulness.

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would come to convict the world of sin (John 16:8) and, by praying for Muslims and witnessing to them, believing Christians can depend on the Spirit to open the hearts of Muslims to see their own sinfulness and their need of redemption. 





CMM NEWS

One exciting development taking place today is the growing involvement in world missions by churches outside the United States. For decades, churches in America have been sponsoring thousands of missionaries and outreach programs to plant churches abroad. In turn, many planted churches have matured to the level where they too can now send laborers into the fields of harvest. Because the 1.2 billion Muslim people represent the largest bloc of unreached people in the world, some of these Third-world churches are turning their attention to the peoples of Islam.

One of these growing and dynamic churches is the *Centro Cristiano de Guayaquil* (Christian Center of Guayaquil) of Ecuador, South America, pastored by missionary Jerry Smith and his team of associates. Two CMM team members were invited to the *Centro Cristiano de Guayaquil* to speak and teach at a six-day missions convention, which focused on the Muslim world. The seminar sessions held during the convention averaged 440 attendees. In addition, two Sunday services hosted an attendance of 2400 people. One evening session featured a drama and parade displaying the flags of the Islamic countries of the Middle East. The activities of the convention were arranged by the local congregation. As God raises up Third-world laborers, we pray for more. Surely "The Time Has Come" for a bountiful harvest throughout the world of Islam!—CMM

KAZAKHSTAN

More than 120 representatives of 18 religions met in Astana to condemn terrorism and advance the cause of religious tolerance. The Muslim president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, promised to build a palace for the new organization, the Congress of World and Traditional Religions. His country is roughly half Christian (Orthodox) and half Muslim, but also includes some 40 other religious groups and 100 ethnic minorities. The number of mosques has grown from 46 in 1988 to 1,623 last year, while the number of Russian Orthodox churches has grown from 62 to 225 in the same period.—Pulse

SAUDI ARABIA

After last spring's triple suicide bombings in Riyadh, authorities began to crack down on Islamic radicals. Three big terrorist cells have been uncovered. Quite unexpectedly, the government moved against the country's 50,000 mosques. Most preachers try to stay out of politics, but some 1,000 imams have been removed from their pulpits and taken to Riyadh for "re-education." The program aims to steer them from radicalism and to encourage tolerance of non-Muslims.—Pulse

EGYPT

In a harsh crackdown, Egypt's state security police arrested and tortured a Christian couple of Muslim background, along with 11 other Egyptian citizens accused of forging Christian identity papers for former

Muslims. Mohammed Ahmed Imam Kordy and his wife Sahar El-Sayed Abdel Ghany were arrested in Alexandria last October. The police action apparently came after the wife was implicated in a complaint extorted under police torture that she had helped another Egyptian woman secure false identity papers. At least 10 more Christians have since been detained and subjected to torture in the sweep, said to be headed by two security police officers known for illegal and cruel tactics against Christian converts.—Compass

ERITREA

Government authorities in the capital of Asmara sealed the complex of the Full Gospel Church, ordering the church staff to evacuate the building permanently last October. The large complex had served as the Full Gospel Church's headquarters and meeting place for 11 years. Meanwhile, *Compass* has confirmed that of the 62 young people arrested and locked into metal containers last August for having Bibles in their possession at the Sawa summer military camp, all but six have been released. Another 12 young evangelicals from Asmara's Dubre Bethel Church arrested during a house prayer meeting in September are still refusing to sign a denial of their faith to gain release. Following other arrests in Massawa, Adi-Abytoo, Keren, Mendefera, Adi-kualla, Nakfa and Adi-Kihe, a current total of 180 evangelical Christians are known to be jailed for their faith in Eritrea.—Compass



the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans. 7:18-19). Since Muslims do not utter the same cry of despair, they do not feel the need for the new life of God's spirit (cf. Rom. 8).

Indications that the Problem is More Critical

A closer look at the Qur'an indicates that the human predicament may be greater than what Muslims have observed above. When we revisit the Adam and Eve story in the Qur'an, we see first the angels' concern that if humans are put on the earth, they will do corruption there and shed blood (2:30). Even the devil foretells that he will pervert and subjugate most of them (15:39; 17:62).

In parallel accounts of the Adam and Eve story in the Qur'an, Adam is not described as forgetting God's prohibition but is even reminded of it by Satan (7:20), and by eating the fruit he rebelled against his Lord and went astray (20:121). Adam rejects the type of creaturehood that God assigns to him in the Qur'an by attempting to become like angels or immortals (7:20; 20:120-121).

Finally, in the Qur'an, as in the Bible, Adam and Eve both know they have done wrong (7:23; Genesis 3:17) and feel shame (7:22; 20:121; Genesis 3:7-10).

Implications for Humanity of Adam's Failure

A key question is whether the Adam and Eve story has any implications for the human race. Kateregga said Muslims believe that "man" "is not a fallen being." Yet there are Muslims who acknowledge a connection between the Adam and Eve story and the human condition.

Abu 'l-Husain Muslim, the second most authoritative compiler of traditions about Muhammad, recounts a story attributed to Muhammad in which Moses says to Adam, "Because of your sin, you caused mankind to come down to earth."

Some Muslim scholars note that humans repeat the actions of Adam and Eve. The Qur'an notes that Satan tempts "the children of Adam" (7:26-27), and Tirmidhi, one of the compilers of the six "canonical" Sunni collections of traditions about Muhammad, attributes to him the words: "Adam forgot and ate of the tree and his offspring forgot; Adam sinned and his offspring sinned."

The Egyptian writer Kamil Husain does not go as far as to

say that human nature has a bias to wrong, but he does see the story of Adam as symbolic of the human condition and as dealing with the fundamental nature of humans.

Another contemporary scholar from Morocco, Uthman Yahya, distinguished two states in humans: "the first is his original constitution, the prototype created in the image of God; the second man is his actual condition." The latter he describes with Qur'anic support as feeble (4:28), despairing (11:9), unjust (14:34), quarrelsome (16:4), tyrannical (96:6), and lost (105:2). He then asks, "...if...man, as he actually is,



is capable of living in perfect blessedness, where is salvation and by what means is it to be made real?" Yahya gives the traditional Muslim answer—divine guidance. Christians would ask, "Is that enough?"

When we look at the Qur'anic survey of history, we see little to support the view that human nature is good. There it recounts that each community is sent an apostle (16:36), but one after another they reject him (e.g., 15:10-11; 50:12-14). It concludes, "Most men are not believers" (12:103). If human nature is good, we might ask why, according to the Qur'an, do most people reject right guidance?



SELECTIVE OF SIN

m page 1

The Qur'an does have hints that the problem is greater. For example, Joseph, after successfully rejecting the advances of Potiphar's wife, still notes, "The soul is certainly an inciter to evil" (12:53). This confession led Ahmad Zaki at the 1956/57 session of the Arabic Academy in Cairo to conclude that the soul of humans can be inherently wrongdoing.

The Qur'an goes as far as to say, "If God were to punish humans for their wrongdoing, He would not leave a single creature" (16:61). If this is the Qur'anic verdict, is there not a need for a radical solution?

"Man's calamity is his carnal desires, and this exists in everybody, and it is rooted in the nature of man."

Sin in the Quran and Subsequent Muslim Thought

The words for sin in the Qur'an are cognates of those in the Hebrew of the Bible and other Semitic languages. In the Qur'an, as in the Bible, God relates to humans through a covenant. The form is like the Mosaic covenant (Exodus 20), where, on the basis of God's care (vs. 2), the subjects must abide by certain stipulations (the Decalogue).

There are three aspects of the covenant that are significant. First there is a *Person* behind the law. God is described as giving the covenantal commands in the Qur'an (5:7) as in the Bible (Exodus 20:1-2). Therefore, sin is *rebellion* against

God (e.g., *Surah* 7:77; Isaiah 59:2).

Second, the covenant is described as *revealed* (3:81-84; Exodus 20:1-2). Sin, therefore, is *disbelief* (e.g., *Surah* 3:86).

Finally, the Mosaic form of the covenant is the basis of law; so sin is a *transgression* of that law (*Surah* 2:229; Joshua 7:11). Thus, there are similarities between the Qur'anic and biblical understandings of sin. Yet there is a contrast between their understandings of the function of the law, especially in the New Testament. The New Testament describes the human predicament which we only see hints of in the Qur'an.

There continues to be an awareness in the Muslim community that sin is a problem in human nature. The traditionalist al-Bukhari attributes to Muhammad the words, "Satan touches every child when he is born...except Mary and her son."

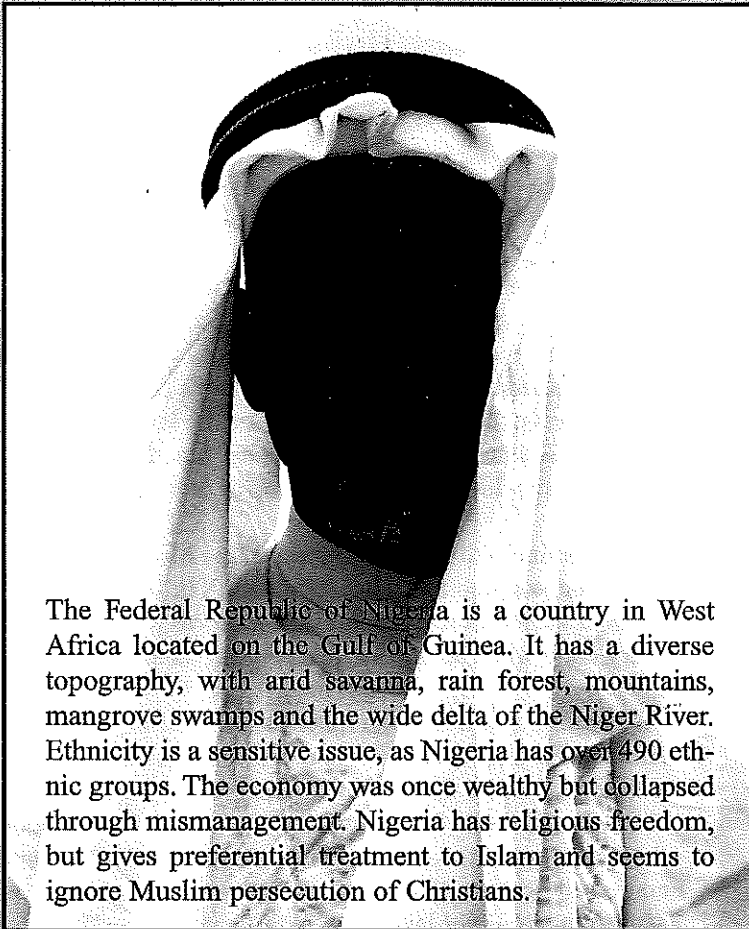
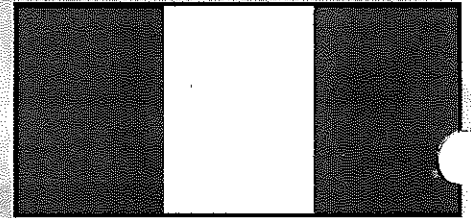
Muhammad's earliest biographer describes a dream that the Arabian Prophet had in which two men in white raiment extracted a black drop from his heart and then washed it clean. Ibn Hanbal, the founder of one of the four orthodox Sunni schools of law, related that companions of Muhammad confessed to him, "We have no control over our hearts." Muhammad did not take issue with their awareness of their condition but only referred them to the Qur'anic "God charges no soul save to its capacity" (2:286).

In Muslim theology and philosophy we see the concept of *al-nafs al-ammara* (the uncontrolled appetitive soul or carnal desire), which is always there to lead astray. Ibn Hazm, a champion of fundamentalism, believed that the human soul, if left to itself, is spontaneously inclined to dishonesty. Al-Ghazali, the most celebrated of Muslim theologians, believed that the fall was repeated by each individual.

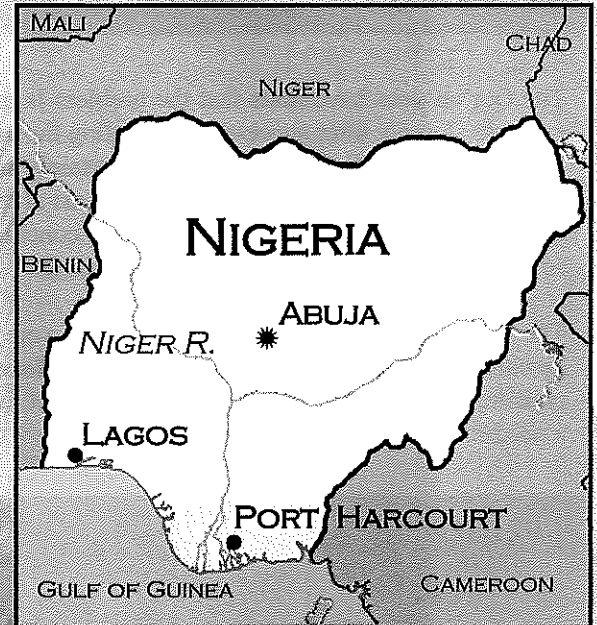
One of the clearest statements is by the late Imam Khomeini, on the occasion of the inauguration of President Khomeini in 1985, when he said, "Man's calamity is his carnal desires, and this exists in everybody, and it is rooted in the nature of man." Such a diagnosis calls not for right guidance alone but new birth, with its divine transformation of our nature.

This article is condensed from a chapter in a book by CMM called "Through Muslim Eyes." You can receive a copy of this book by sending \$2 to CMM, 2032 E. Kearney, Ste 205, Springfield, MO 65803.

NIGERIA



The Federal Republic of Nigeria is a country in West Africa located on the Gulf of Guinea. It has a diverse topography, with arid savanna, rain forest, mountains, mangrove swamps and the wide delta of the Niger River. Ethnicity is a sensitive issue, as Nigeria has over 490 ethnic groups. The economy was once wealthy but collapsed through mismanagement. Nigeria has religious freedom, but gives preferential treatment to Islam and seems to ignore Muslim persecution of Christians.



Population: 130 million
Religions: Christians 50%, Muslims 44%, Ethnic Religionists 4.5%
Official Language: English
Peoples: Hausa 18%, Yoruba 18%, Igbo 14%, Toroobe Fulani 4%, Yerwa Kanuri 3%.

Location: Borno province in northeastern Nigeria

Population: 3.6 million

Religion: Muslim (Sunni) 100%

Language: Kanuri

PRAY THAT...

...churches will accept the challenge of adopting and reaching the Kanuri with the gospel.

...the Holy Spirit will soften the hearts of the Kanuri so they will be receptive to the gospel.

...God will use the small number of Kanuri believers to share the gospel with their friends.

UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUP...

KANURI

The Kanuri consist of the Yerwa Kanuri, the Manga Kanuri and several other sub-tribes. The Kanuri live in northeastern Nigeria, where they are the dominant people group. They are also located in Niger, Chad and Sudan.

Most of the Kanuri are farmers. They raise sorghum as their staple crop and supplement it with corn and peanuts. They raise sheep, goats and horses.

Kanuri settlements contain several compounds surrounding several mud or grass huts. The compounds are surrounded by fences with thatched, cone-shaped roofs. Farms and fields surround each settlement.



Information from Operation World, 2001 edition and Bethany World Prayer Center's "The Unreached Peoples Prayer Profiles."

Jumaa Prayer Fellowship

Praying for Muslims
Around the World!



Friday, March 5, 2004. Please pray

...for the Christians in Eritrea who are being arrested, beaten and jailed for worshiping without official permission. Pray for God's intervention in this continual crackdown. Several hundred were arrested last year.

...for Shahbaz Bhatti, a prominent voice for the voiceless of Pakistan. He is in grave danger because he has spoken out for Christians and other religious minorities. Pray for his protection and continued strength in spite of persecution and harassment.

...for two pastors, Danny Nalliah and Daniel Scot, who are on trial in Australia for "vilifying Muslims" by quoting the Qur'an concerning *jihad* during a church seminar for Christians. Pray for justice in this case.

Friday, March 12, 2004. Please pray

...for protection of the Christian girls in Kano, Nigeria who are forced to wear the hijab, Islamic headscarf, in state schools as all the Christian schools have been closed. Pray for equity and protection for Christian students.

...for Christian Uzbeks who are continually being harassed and fined. Christian literature is being burned, churches are being banned and Christians are being jailed. Pray that in the midst of this, the gospel may continue to be preached. Pray for Lepesbai Omarov who has lost his teaching job because he is a Christian.

...for Christians in Indonesia who returned to their villages to rebuild them after being burned out only to have a repetition of the same. Many have fled again. Pray for God's care and protection.

Friday, March 19, 2004. Please pray

...that President Megawati Sukarnoputri will be able to effectively combat the horrific problems of terrorism and corruption in Indonesia. Pray that her Christian advisors will cause her to open herself to Jesus Christ as her mom did before her death.

...for the mobilization of evangelical Brazilians to provide the gospel to the growing number of Muslims in that country. Brazil has become the hub for Islam in South America with several hundred thousand Muslims with a significant number of illegal immigrants, making it difficult to get accurate statistics.

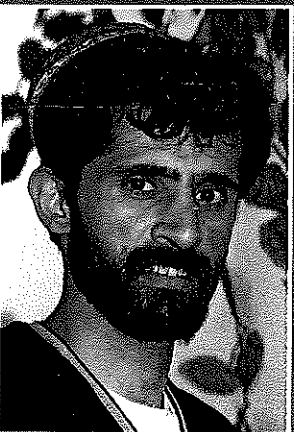
...that God will thwart the impact of Islam in Zimbabwe where only 1 percent of the population is Muslim. Libya has gained an economic influence for Islam by bailing out the corrupt Mugabe regime.

Friday, March 26, 2004. Please pray

...for secret believers in the intensely hostile heartland of Islam and for those who try to help and disciple them.

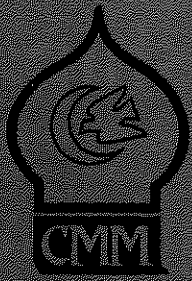
...for the Harari people of western Ethiopia. They have had little opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel. Pray that national and expatriate Christians will live among them and break down societal and cultural barriers to the gospel.

...that Westerners will see through the propaganda and Islamic idealism and open their hearts to the gospel. An increasing number of Americans and Europeans are now converting to Islam.



Urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.

1 Timothy 2:1, NIV



Jumaa Prayer Fellowship

Praying for Muslims
Around the World!



Friday, April 2, 2004. Please pray

...for the CMM-sponsored 8-week Institute of Islamic Studies which begins next week at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary in Baguio, Philippines. Pray for safety in travel for all the participants. Please remember to pray for this request throughout these two months.

...for those in Turkey who had an opportunity to receive literature from the Doulos ship when it docked in Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya and Mersin.

Friday, April 9, 2004. Please pray

...for swift stability to Iraq. Mobile medical clinics are being established in Iraq to provide care for both Christians and Muslims.

...for a teacher in Bangladesh who has made a profession of faith in Christ. Pray that as he diligently reads the Scriptures, he will grow in faith. Pray for his protection and that his wife will also be brought to the Lord.

...for the 80 churches that have been started among the Ansari Muslims in India. Pray that God will supply more laborers and increase the fruit in these churches.

Friday, April 16, 2004. Please pray

...that women who live in countries that are hostile to Christianity will be enabled to turn despair into hope through help in training them to read and prepare for a vocation.

...for two Pakistani men who were sentenced to life in prison. Their families are finding it difficult as they continually receive threats from Muslims in the community.

...for wisdom for Christian leaders in Eritrea who find it difficult to lead their fellowships in an atmosphere of increasing fear and uncertainty.

Friday, April 23, 2004. Please pray

...for the house fellowships of women believers in Djibouti, that they will be strong in the Lord and able to withstand the persecution, harassment and poverty in their situations.

...for S., a Christian worker in Turkey, who is working to open a Christian bookstore. Pray he will have many opportunities to share the hope and healing he has found.

...that the Shiite Muslim refugees in Lebanon, who are mostly women and children, may find the love of Christ and respond to Him.

Friday, April 30, 2004. Please pray

...for a number of churches in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan who have been banned from worshiping. Pray church members will remain firm in their faith.

...that God will empower Iraqi Christians for witness as their nation is being rebuilt. Pray that divisions between traditional Christians and underground evangelicals will be eradicated and unity of purpose will prevail.

...for Christians in Egypt who are actively sharing Christ even though it is illegal to evangelize Muslims there. Pray for God's protection and His provision of all their needs.



I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.
1 Timothy 2:1, NIV