



THE MESSAGE BOARD
A Newsletter from
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Personal Reflections

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Middle East Study Tour

Part 4

Since arriving in Lebanon early Tuesday morning, we have spent many hours in study on the topic of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations.

Wednesday was perhaps one of the most challenging sessions because to listen, really listen, we had to set aside our defensiveness as Westerners, as Christians and as Americans. The subject matter put in the form of a question was meant to challenge us: "Why are Muslims so angry with the West?" Chapman insists that until Western Countries come to grips with these issues we will never understand what serves as the fuel for radical Islam and terrorist acts against the US.

In both his book, *Cross And Crescent*, and his lecture, Chapman suggests several underlying tensions:

- 1) The unresolved issue of the 4.5 million Palestinians who were dispossessed of their homes and property with the creation of Israel. For a personal account of a Palestinian Christian committed to reconciliation whose family was dispossessed read, *Blood Brothers* by Elias Chacour.
- 2) Christian Zionism which uncritically supports Israel's every action. IM has addressed this issue in some of their literature.
- 3) The impact of Western colonialism on the Middle East and what many still feel as the humiliation and contempt for Arab civilization and Islam
- 4). The presence of US troops (now withdrawn) in Saudi Arabia which is home to two of the holiest sites in Islam. Compare this to the outrage around the proposed mosque near Ground Zero.
- 5) Western dominance in influence in the Middle East - economic, military, political and cultural - especially the values portrayed in American movies and TV.

To honestly hear these grievances is what Chapman means when he asks us to try to "sit where the Muslims sit."

The path to peace and reconciliation in the Middle East is not an easy one. The attitudes towards Israel vary from, "we can never accept its existence" to "we can live with Israel as a state if there is justice for the Palestinians." The appeal for justice for Palestinians, both Christian and Muslim, demands our attention. Just as Christians do not accept uncritically every action of our government as in accord with our faith, nor can we accept every action of Israel as worthy of support. As US Christians we are rightly challenged to develop a more balanced view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the justice issues present in those communities.

As far back as the 1980's, the General Board endorsed a two-state solution which provides for a Palestinian state and the right of Israel to exist. Many - Jews, Muslims, Christians, politicians, and non-politicians - are deeply concerned that the peace talks initiated by President Obama move toward resolution. Every failure to achieve agreement on a peace accord only adds to the sense of despair in the region.

Lord Jesus, grant that we who have received the ministry of reconciliation and are the heirs of the prophetic tradition might neither shut our ears to cries for justice nor fall into despair. Give us the persistence of the widow who continues to pound on the door of the judge and the perseverance of the gardener who begged for yet another year to tend the barren fig tree that it might thrive and bring forth fruit. Amen.

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