

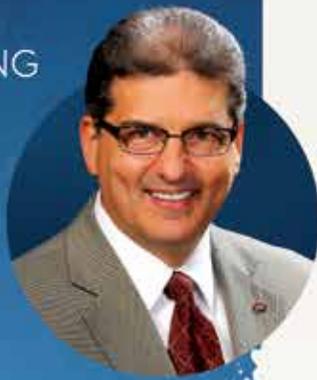
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ISSUE FOCUS

REACHING REFUGEES



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

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God's eternal purpose is to establish His name among all people and publish His salvation unto the end of the earth. He accomplishes this through human messengers. He sends some to lands and cultures beyond their own, carrying the message of good news. Others He places in strategic locations to which He brings people of different lands so that they can learn of the true and living God, believe in His Son, and go back to their own lands and peoples. God's messengers are not just those who go, but also those who stay at home as witnesses to those on their doorsteps.

An example can be found by studying maps of the ancient Middle East, which usually included caravan trading routes. These show roads intersecting on the coastal plains of the eastern Mediterranean – the crossroads of the world where Europe, Africa, and Asia meet. Caravans from many nations crisscrossed this area. It wasn't without plan that God placed His people in this very land! In fact, God gave them instructions of how to treat strangers (Lev.19:33-34).

In the Church Age, God also seeks, in part, to accomplish His purpose by placing His people in strategic locations and drawing listeners to them. On the Day of Pentecost, God brought people from many nations to hear the Good News (Acts 2:5). The Ethiopian eunuch heard the message and believed, after having come from his distant homeland (Acts 8:27-39).

Although over 30 countries have a non-admittance policy for Christian missionaries, students, workers, and immigrants from many of these countries are within reach of Christians who never leave their homeland. God is serious about the Great Commission. If we cannot easily go to them, God brings them here to us. The foreign field is no longer only Tibet, Mongolia, and China, but New York City, Boston, Chicago, and even Greenville, SC! Twice as many Jewish people live in the U.S. as in Israel. The U.S. is the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world. Cleveland, OH, is second only to Budapest in the number of Hungarian residents. Dearborn, MI, has the greatest Muslim population second only to Baghdad. And 600,000 new immigrants arrive in the U.S. each year.

Regardless of our personal opinions on immigration, we need to acknowledge that the mission field is at our doorstep. Then we should ask, "What would God have me to do to establish His name and witness of His salvation?"

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Serving
**SOMALIA,
ERITREA,
BURKINA FASO,
SYRIA...**



By Brad McKenzie

About a year ago a neighbor, observing my frequent coming and going, said to me, "Herr McKenzie, you can't save the world!" I thought, "No, I can't, but I know the One Who can." With this hope, we minister to refugees.

Our church in Magdeburg, Germany, prays frequently for persecuting nations and Christians there. Recently we have had the joy of sharing the Word with people from many such nations: Somalia, Eritrea, Egypt, Benin, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, Dubai, India, Iran, and Iraq. Interestingly, we never even stepped one foot into any of these countries. How is this possible? Because they have stepped into Germany. What follows is an account of the grace of God that brings salvation (Titus 2:11).

WHY THE INFLUX OF FOREIGNERS?

Various factors have led to a huge migration of refugees into Europe. For some the primary factor is war. With a quarter million casualties in Syria already, families there pool their resources to send their sons outside the country, often via Turkey and Greece. Afghans flee for their lives when armies come recruiting. Africans flee warlords. No doubt, many are not simply trying to survive, but are also seeking a better life economically.

Many refugees are not permitted to work in their host land, though they desire to land a job. They sleep, play with their cell phones, and await their second interview which will determine whether they may stay. If the decision is to deport them, they no longer receive financial aid but are referred to soup kitchens or depend on the kindness of their roommates in the refugee homes. Some turn to abominable things that cause shame before their god and families. At this low point, they often will listen to people who will share the Good News of Jesus Christ with them rather than disdain them.

WHERE ARE THEY LOCATED?

Some countries in Europe cannot bear the additional economic and social strain of thousands or millions of refugees. Others openly oppose a shift from Catholicism (e.g., Austria) or Protestantism (e.g., Denmark) toward Islam. So some countries are more attractive than others (e.g., Germany, Sweden).

HOW LONG DO THEY STAY?

Syrian refugees talk about staying only until the war is over. Afghans and Africans tend to stay until, in keeping

with the Dublin Accord, they are sent to the country where they first entered Europe (e.g., Bulgaria, Greece, and Italy). Some go into hiding in big city ghettos. Others, homesick or disillusioned, would gladly return home. Having no money and having turned over their papers to human traffickers, however, they find themselves trapped in the very Europe they escaped to. Recently a whole family returned to Iran. The children liked Germany, but the parents could not adjust. We hope they took the Scriptures we gave them, and they have the memory of our kindness, prayers, and witness.

WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES?

Several refugee homes exist in Magdeburg, some fenced and closely guarded, but the Lord has narrowed our ministry primarily to one relatively accessible apartment building near our church. Thanks to special offerings for refugees, I filled three crates with Gospels, New Testaments, and Bibles in dozens of languages and purchased a smartphone because refugees use WhatsApp. Our van is the Ethiopian's chariot, so to speak. I put together a simple website and Facebook page, printed calling cards, and began handing out literature anywhere I saw refugees. I volunteered to teach German literacy and was assigned a few refugees. As I spend time with them in widely different circumstances, opportunities to give them the Scriptures and talk to them of Christ almost invariably arise.

How do we minister to people whose language we do not speak? Some things communicate without words. A smile, a squeeze on the shoulder, weeping with the bereaved, a helping hand, a piece of chocolate, a set of bike tools, a hat, a toy. But there are also verbal means such as phone apps. Using bible.is on my smartphone, I can quickly show the Scriptures in their language or even play an audio version of John 1. In addition, other phone apps translate simple messages to and from scores of languages. I keep a supply of New Testaments in my satchel and car. But we ask the Lord of the harvest to give us native speakers for such languages as Arabic, Dari, French, Portuguese, and Tigrinya.





WHAT ARE THEIR RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS?

The majority of people coming from Arabic lands are Muslim, but they are by no means unreachable. Dozens of Iranians in Magdeburg profess Christ and meet in refugee homes, sometimes at 11 p.m., for private Bible studies. I have not attended these meetings, but I have kept one of the young pastors supplied with Persian New Testaments. On the other hand, many African refugees from Eritrea are Eastern Orthodox and have fled Muslim persecution. Some are able to powerfully convince the Muslims, as Apollos did the Jews (Acts 18:24-28). Admittedly, they need to have the way of God expounded to them more perfectly, but there is good potential there. With no Orthodox church in Magdeburg, the faithful generally attend Catholic services, which is a great concern. I am beginning to make inroads into their homes and to supply them with the New Testament in Tigrinya.

HOW LONG?

This ministry will last until the Lord closes the door. This initial dependency, curiosity, and relative lack of organization within their ranks could soon end. An Islamic center recently opened in our city, much to the joy of several for whom I pray the most. Several migration routes have closed, and the flood of refugees has been reduced to a trickle, preventing many families from being reunited. A German nationalistic reaction threatens to drive wedges between German residents and foreigners seeking residency. Many applicants are being turned down and deported. Those who remain illegally dread the knock of the police at their door. But as God said to the church in Philadelphia, "I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it." By the grace of God, our ministry has been unhindered so far!

A CHANGE IN OUR MINISTRY?

Has our outreach to Germans decreased? Definitely not! We and our German brethren are reaching out to the "strangers," giving them donations, engaging them in conversation, helping in various ways, and inviting them to our homes. These circumstances allow us to equip the saints for ministry more than ever. I have far more contact with unsaved Germans than previously. For instance, I now regularly interact with German social workers and neighborhood volunteers, some of whom are "Christians" of some sort. Others are simply big-hearted atheists or politically left-leaning activists striving for a better world. I believe that in the long run this refugee "crisis" with all of its uncertainties and changes will lead to the furtherance of the Gospel both in Germany and in many persecuting nations around the world. As families are reunited here and in so-called "closed countries," the potential for the Gospel being preached "world-widely" is very realistic. "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of [our] God," Who has granted open doors for the Gospel to spread to every nation! 🍷

WITH GRUFFY AND NANA'S HELP

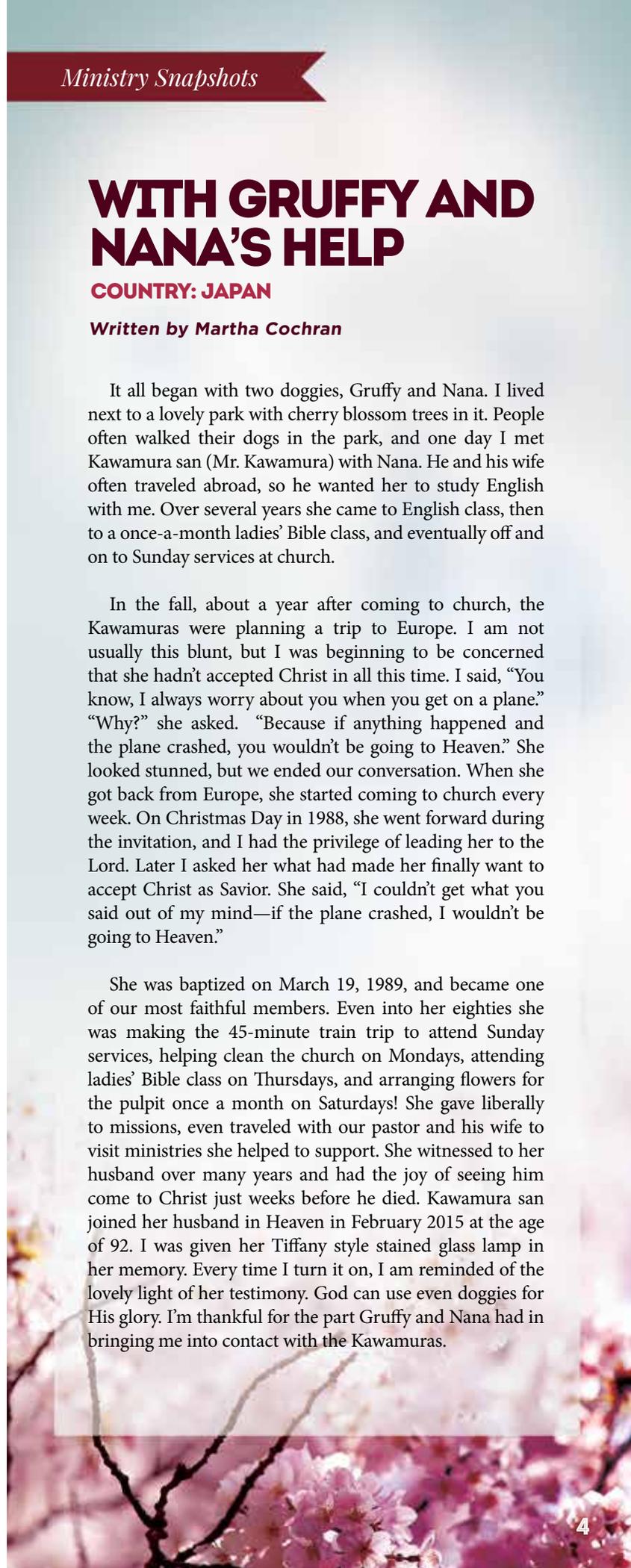
COUNTRY: JAPAN

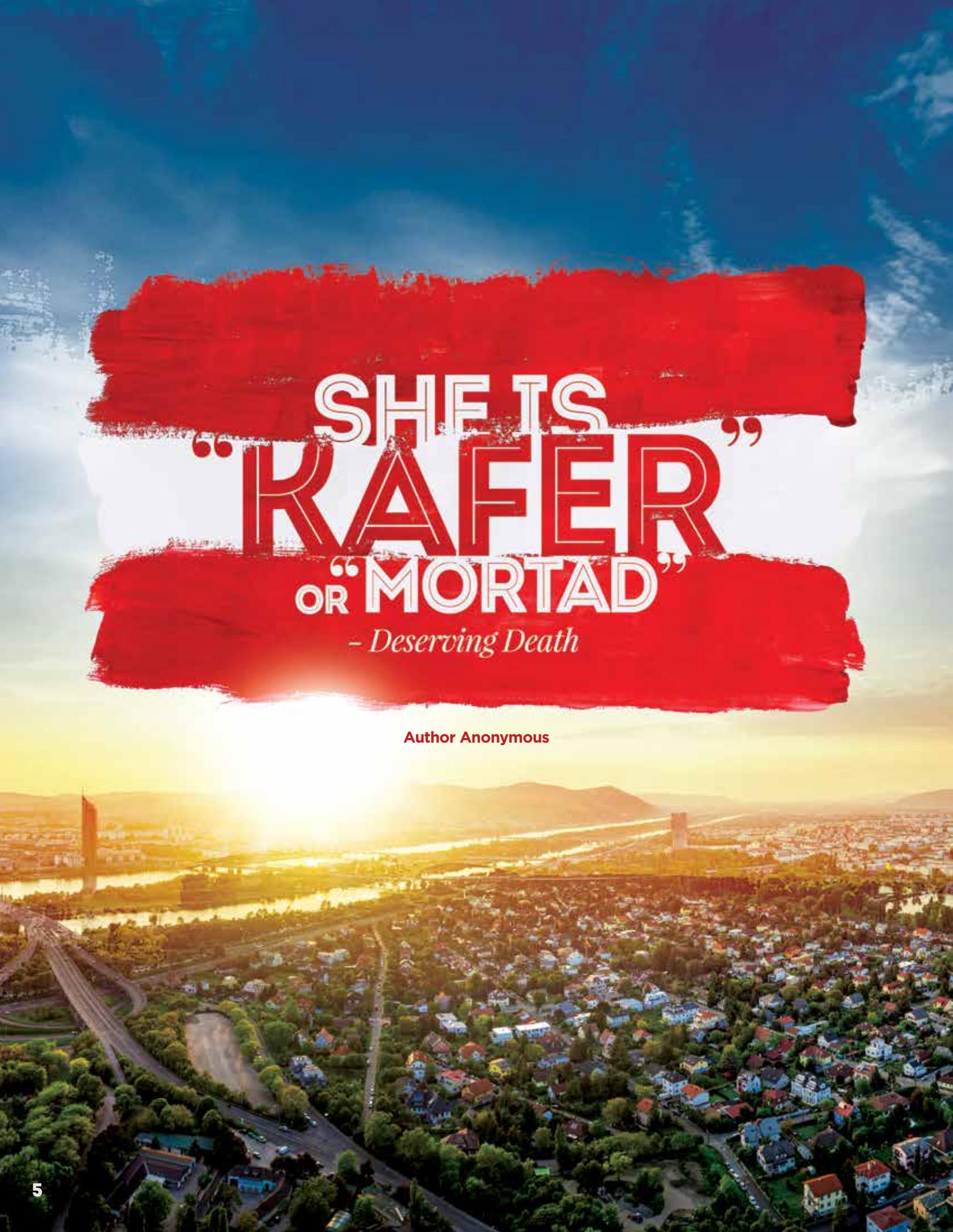
Written by Martha Cochran

It all began with two doggies, Gruffy and Nana. I lived next to a lovely park with cherry blossom trees in it. People often walked their dogs in the park, and one day I met Kawamura san (Mr. Kawamura) with Nana. He and his wife often traveled abroad, so he wanted her to study English with me. Over several years she came to English class, then to a once-a-month ladies' Bible class, and eventually off and on to Sunday services at church.

In the fall, about a year after coming to church, the Kawamuras were planning a trip to Europe. I am not usually this blunt, but I was beginning to be concerned that she hadn't accepted Christ in all this time. I said, "You know, I always worry about you when you get on a plane." "Why?" she asked. "Because if anything happened and the plane crashed, you wouldn't be going to Heaven." She looked stunned, but we ended our conversation. When she got back from Europe, she started coming to church every week. On Christmas Day in 1988, she went forward during the invitation, and I had the privilege of leading her to the Lord. Later I asked her what had made her finally want to accept Christ as Savior. She said, "I couldn't get what you said out of my mind—if the plane crashed, I wouldn't be going to Heaven."

She was baptized on March 19, 1989, and became one of our most faithful members. Even into her eighties she was making the 45-minute train trip to attend Sunday services, helping clean the church on Mondays, attending ladies' Bible class on Thursdays, and arranging flowers for the pulpit once a month on Saturdays! She gave liberally to missions, even traveled with our pastor and his wife to visit ministries she helped to support. She witnessed to her husband over many years and had the joy of seeing him come to Christ just weeks before he died. Kawamura san joined her husband in Heaven in February 2015 at the age of 92. I was given her Tiffany style stained glass lamp in her memory. Every time I turn it on, I am reminded of the lovely light of her testimony. God can use even doggies for His glory. I'm thankful for the part Gruffy and Nana had in bringing me into contact with the Kawamuras.



An aerial photograph of a city at sunset, with a large red brushstroke overlaying the top half. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow over the city and a river. The red brushstroke is thick and textured, framing the text.

SHE IS
“KAFFER”
OR “MORTAD”
- *Deserving Death*

Author Anonymous

With an increased influx of immigrants comes a new element of opportunity for the Gospel. And this increased opportunity for the Gospel requires increased discernment. While some conversions to Christianity could be falsely motivated, we cannot judge hearts. Our responsibility is to faithfully share the message as the door of opportunity is open.

We see the refugee influx through the limited perspective of our own ministry. As opportunities with refugees have presented themselves—from cooking, playing with children, offering housing, distributing food, or translating—several of our church people have jumped into action. Now several refugees faithfully attend our church and are growing in grace and in their knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Regarding reaching the displaced people groups, our refugees have a rather matter-of-fact perspective: the country where they live is irrelevant, unless the Spirit draws them. They could be equally open or closed to the Gospel in their home country or their new country. Possibly in their new land, the risks would be fewer, but if a conversion depends upon risks, perhaps it is not a true conversion. Two of our refugees are a testimony to this.

Josef was raised in a family of extremists. Contrary to popular opinion, the “extremists” are not simply uneducated thugs. They are the doctors and political leaders of his country. As Josef began his first job after university training, he met a young man who secretly shared some thoughts about the Bible and Jesus. Because of restrictions, Josef was not able to explore many of these questions. However, in his own words, “The Bible was like a straight arrow to my heart.” He was especially close to his aunt, and at one point, the two of them began secretly discussing the Bible, the Gospel, and Jesus. Josef’s aunt was in a situation of severe abuse. After one extreme incident, she removed her veil and rejected a religion of such injustice and instead said she was turning to Christianity. According to the Quran, she was then considered “Kafer” or “Mortad”—deserving death because of her rejection of Allah. Her head was shaved. Her face was cruelly beaten. She was locked up to await her death. As Josef heard these things, he realized that his own life could be in great danger for also believing in the Bible and introducing it to her. However, he could not allow his aunt to be killed. He contrived a plan to help her escape. Miraculously, by God’s mercy, the escape plan worked – including separate travels and a rendezvous in Istanbul on a specific date. They then joined the floods of refugees that

ended up in our country. Again, God worked in miraculous ways and put them in contact with our ministry.

“THE BIBLE WAS LIKE A STRAIGHT ARROW TO MY HEART.”

After entering our country, Josef and his aunt were herded into a stadium where they could “camp” or register for housing. While there they saw two people from our ministry. Sitting in the midst of a large group of fellow refugees who were mostly Muslims, the last thing on Josef’s mind was professing Christianity. He and his aunt had already suffered enough, so his goal was

a peaceful transition. However, as a woman from our church approached them, speaking their language,

Josef’s aunt suddenly asked her,

“Are you a Christian?” Josef was stunned by his aunt’s

boldness since she had not mentioned Christianity to any of the other workers.

His aunt told him later that she had felt in her spirit that there was something different—that this woman would be a tool to help

them. Certainly God was at work. Through the help of this woman from church, the

aunt was able to get medical attention for the injuries to her

head (her skull had been broken in several places, and wounds were still swollen around her eye). Furthermore, they

were able to get spiritual attention through the outreach of our church. We were able to give them Bibles in their own language and

discuss with them in depth the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Both have been overwhelmed in

the contrast between the message of oppression that they had known in Islam and the message of

love that they have understood in the Gospel. During their first Sunday at our church, Josef looked around with wide eyes and commented, “So many people are smiling!”

“JESUS IS EVERYTHING.... HE’S MY FATHER. HE’S MY FRIEND. HE’S MY GOD.”

Since then, Josef and his aunt have transitioned from a simple turning from Islam to a clear understanding of the Gospel message. As Josef’s aunt recently told me, “Jesus is everything. He helps me. He lives in my heart. He’s my Father. He’s my friend. He’s my God. Thank my God, because He helps me in all things.”



Josef’s drawing shows that the key to true freedom from sin, hatred, and bitterness is found only through the Holy Spirit’s power. The bird represents the Holy Spirit and the arms are his aunt’s.



1,256,210 REFUGEES

at Our Door



By Theo van Reijn

My wife and I didn't know what to expect when we knocked on the door. A modern looking Middle Eastern woman (we'll call her Amina) with a charming smile opened the door and invited us in. Her small room in the refugee center was furnished with only two beds, a closet, and a desk. Amina is from Syria, a country torn apart by civil war. She fled the country after her husband had been shot dead while she and her 11-year-old daughter were present. After short periods of time in numerous countries, she finally arrived in the Netherlands and was given permission to stay. We were given her name by a fellow Christian minister because Amina had been assigned an apartment by the government close to where we live. Our church helped her with basic needs such as flooring and furnishings for her apartment, all the while sharing Jesus with her. Amina was curious about our church and, in God's providence, visited on a day our sermon series in Genesis covered Jacob and his journeys through what is now modern Syria. That was the day Amina's daughter told her mother she wanted to become a Christian. Amina got quite upset, as this would pose a real threat for her daughter if she would ever return to Syria. Her daughter replied that since Jesus died for her on the cross, she was more than willing to lay down her life for Him.

Amina's story is one of many. There has been an explosive increase in the number of refugees entering Europe recently. In 2015 alone 1,256,210 refugees fled to the EU. That was up from 562,256 in 2014 and over 400,000 in 2013. Most of them came from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq; but Pakistan, Eritrea, Nigeria, and Iran were also well represented. On a color-coded map, it becomes immediately obvious that people from the entire 10/40 window (the area of North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude) are coming to Europe. This is very significant for missions

because the 10/40 window is known as a closed area for missionary enterprise. While many Europeans are fearful of terrorist infiltration among refugees, we must not fail to see the great opportunities to reach people with the Gospel who cannot be reached through traditional missions programs. What's more, these people are open. Some, to be sure, have ulterior motives, as they believe conversion to Christianity may increase their chances of staying. Others, on the other hand, finally have the freedom to openly cast off Islam, which they have come to hate.

Unfortunately, I do not speak Arabic, Kurdish, Tigrinya, or Persian (other than the word "salam" which means "hello" in seemingly all of them). I do, however, speak the universal language of love as I know what it is to be deeply loved by my Savior. Add to that, a few months ago, God brought an Iranian man to our church who was spectacularly converted as an atheist member of the Communist party of Iran. He ended up in a thoroughly contemporary charismatic church but left it for a liberal mainline church before finally discovering our church plant. Under the sponsorship and oversight of our church, he now leads multiple weekly Bible studies in Persian to groups of 10 to 25 Iranian refugees at a time. Conversions and baptisms are fairly regular, and God is at work among this people group. Through Skype he conducts discipleship and Bible study lessons with many of them who move away to other parts of the Netherlands or back to Iran. Through modern technology he now also shepherds a small church of young believers scattered throughout various parts of the world.

In many ways, this man is to me what I am to my supporters. He has capacities to reach people I cannot reach, just as I have capacities to reach people whom my supporters cannot reach. The bottom line is that we all have a circle or segment of individuals or (people) groups whom we are suited to reach or whom others cannot reach. They are our Great Commission calling. Can you identify your group? Are you reaching out to them? 



PRAYING BIBLICALLY

FOR YOUR MISSIONARY

Clarity

By Alan Patterson

What is the connection between a politician and a vacuum cleaner? Keep reading to find out! First, however, consider God's wisdom displayed in the beautiful progression of thoughts in the points we are studying.

The first matter of praying for missionaries is that God will give them opportunity, an open door for giving the Gospel. But an open door is not helpful if we do not take advantage of it. Not surprisingly, therefore, the second matter for prayer is to request boldness. How often have we passed up open doors because of our fear and timidity? But again, we may boldly open our mouths and yet have no one understand what we are saying. For example, what if I proclaim the Gospel boldly in English to a Japanese person steeped in Buddhism who understands only the word "hello" in English? Obviously, that person will not comprehend my message. Even if he understood my words, he would still not understand why Jesus had to suffer and die, for those problems are what Buddhism is supposed to answer. Some explanation will be required. Therefore, as the Lord would have it, the next great need is for the missionary to make his message clear to his hearers. This point about clarity has several aspects.

The first aspect is to "make manifest" the message (Col. 4:4). That word simply means to make something visible. I illustrate this by asking people to guess what is in my left pocket. They usually do not guess correctly, but when I pull out fingernail clippers and Chapstick, they understand very well. I literally "made it manifest" to them, and they are clear on what was there. In the Colossians context, Paul is not talking about show and tell, but about speaking in a way that people understand his message. In order for that to happen, two things must occur. First, the missionary must know the language of the people well enough for the hearers to understand his words. I remember preaching a message in Japanese and referring to politicians, but instead I used the word for "vacuum cleaner." I'm not sure what the people comprehended from that mistake, but clarity was definitely lacking! Second, the missionary must know the biblical message well enough so that he himself knows what he is talking about and can explain it. So in your praying for missionaries, pray that:

- (1) they will continually be learning the Word themselves,
- (2) they will continually improve their language skills and
- (3) they will understand the host culture and people so that they can explain to them the unsearchable riches of Christ in language and concepts that those people can grasp.

The next time we pray for a missionary, let's think about the challenge of preaching Christ to a Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or atheist in French or Russian or Japanese. That should motivate us to beseech the Lord to enable him to make the message clear. We will continue this theme in the next issue.



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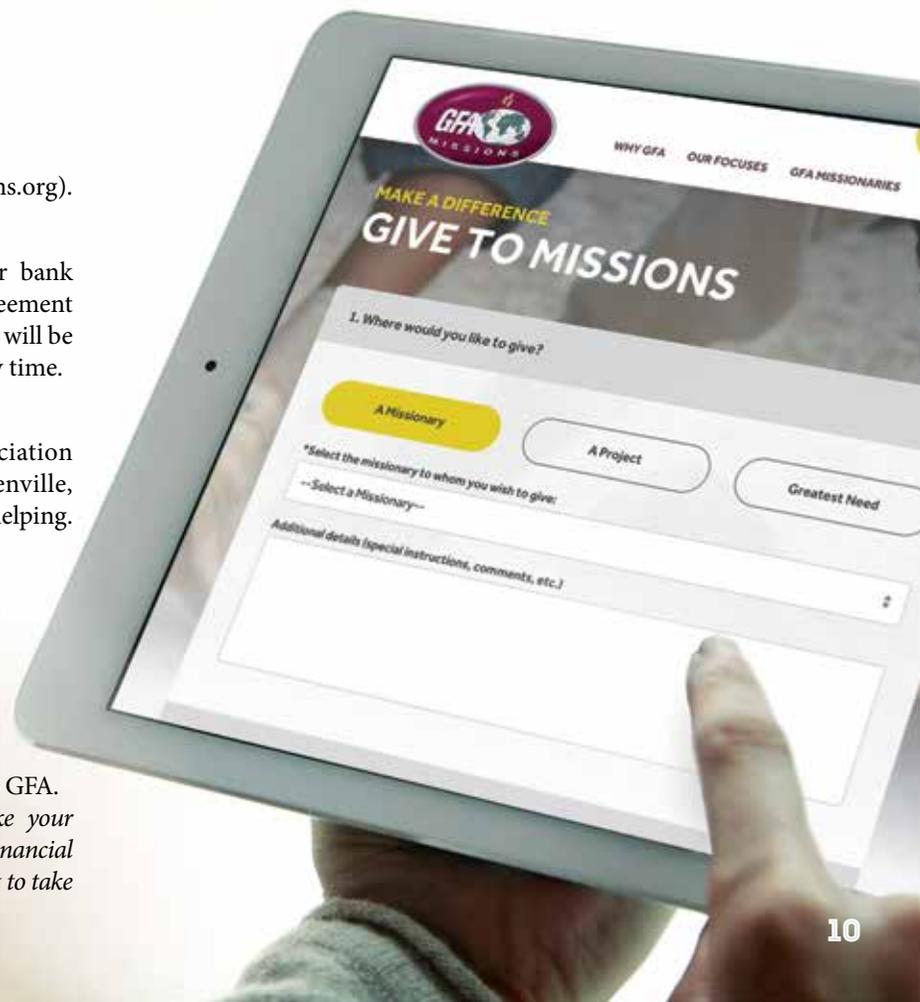
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“ **IT WAS IN WESTERN ASIA THAT HE SAID,
'ALL AUTHORITY
IS GIVEN UNTO ME;'**

AND ALTHOUGH FOR THIRTEEN CENTURIES HIS ROYAL RIGHTS
HAVE BEEN DISPUTED BY A USURPER,
THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN ABROGATED.

SHALL WE GIVE

**WESTERN ASIA TO HIM,
OR SHALL WESTERN ASIA
REMAIN THE EMPIRE OF MOHAMMED?**

Samuel Zwemer, Apostle to Islam



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