

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska
9-10 May 2009

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH

In a troubled and fallen world, it is often difficult to be optimistic and positive. I believe, therefore, we must keep our focus on Jesus and what He is doing. Matthew 16:18, “I will build my church. . . .” must resonate across history and our lives. That is what Jesus is doing now! In this first *Perspective*, using some summary statements of what Jesus is doing in the Muslim world, I want to focus on just that. Recently I read Joel Rosenberg’s new book, *Inside the Revolution*, in which he presents the three “faces” of Islam and the Middle East—the jihadists, the moderates and the revivalists. By the latter term, he means those who are turning to Jesus Christ. Permit me a summary of his argument about this third group, the “revivalists.”

Rosenberg cites examples, both personal and documented, of huge numbers of Muslims converting to Jesus Christ. For example, he cites Muslim clerical sermons: one from a Saudi Sheikh Salman Al-Odeh (1993) lamenting the disturbing number of Muslims converting from Islam to Christianity and another from Sheikh Ahmad Al Qatanni (2001) who laments that “every day, 16,000 Muslims convert to Christianity. Every year, 6 million Muslims convert to Christianity.” Rosenberg writes:

“I cannot confirm these precise numbers. I can, however, confirm the trend lines. During the course of interviewing more than 150 Christian leaders in the epicenter [i.e., the Middle East] over the past several years, I have been able to assemble enough data and anecdotal evidence to paint a picture—albeit an imperfect and incomplete one—that provides a sense of how powerfully the God of the Bible is moving to draw Muslims into His family. Given the threat of jail or death facing all believers in the region, it is simply not possible to take a complete Christian census or conduct accurate polling to know for certain how many Muslims and nominal Christians have come to faith in Jesus Christ in a given year or even over the last few decades. But again, there is no question that so many people are becoming Christians in the region that Muslim leaders are becoming nervous and angry” (pp. 381-382).

Rosenberg cites the following anecdotal evidence of what God is doing in the Middle East:

1. A genuine revival of Christianity in Iran. Based on research from an Iranian Christian, there are believed to be 4.5 million converts to Christianity in Iran. Ahmadinejad’s persecution of Christian leaders is enhancing the growth of Christians, not suppressing it.
2. He also documents Iranians who are having visions of Jesus or of angels directing them to read the Bible.

3. Senior pastors and ministry leaders in Egypt estimate that there are more than 2.5 million followers of Jesus Christ in their country.
4. More than 80,000 Muslims have become Christians in Algeria.
5. In Morocco, over 30,000 Muslims have become Christians in the last few years.
6. In the troubled and devastated nation of Sudan, there are now more than 5.5 million believers.
7. Rosenberg cites a conference he attended in Iraq where over 640 Christian pastors, worship leaders and youth workers participated in in-depth Bible study, prayer and worship.
8. He cites anecdotal evidence of believers in Jordan, Lebanon and even Saudi Arabia.
9. There is now estimated to be between 20,000 and 30,000 believers in Afghanistan today.

Rosenberg admits that some of his evidence is anecdotal and cannot all be documented with absolute certainty, but nonetheless there is no question that God is working mightily in the Middle East bringing huge numbers of Muslims to faith in Jesus Christ. That truth must strengthen our faith that what is really important is not what is happening in Washington or Beijing or London. What really matters is what is happening in the church. Jesus promised that He would build His church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it. We are seeing this occurring before our eyes in 2009. God is still doing the miraculous; so let's praise Him. Perhaps the headlines in our papers or the top stories on our TV newscasts are but distractions from what is truly and eternally significant—people in large numbers coming to faith in Christ.

See Joel C. Rosenberg, *Inside the Revolution*, pp. 363-510.

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

AMERICA AND THE FUTURE: WHERE IS PRESIDENT OBAMA TAKING US?

Over the last 100 days, I have heard some of the most radical proposals and ideas coming out of Washington. Yet, virtually every poll I read sees Americans satisfied about where the president is taking this nation and are satisfied with his overall performance as president. How is it that Americans are embracing some of the most radical ideas ever articulated in our history?

- First, a comment about Obama's style. I have observed the president in his speeches, his three news conferences and in several other settings over the last three months. He is suave, articulate and evidences a command of information and authority. He also exudes pragmatism and moderation. Columnist Peggy Noonan writes of his third news conference: "His presentation was low-key, authoritative, and had the look and feel of moderation. When you can give this impression while some of your decisions—for instance, on the legitimate cost and reach of government—are not, actually, moderate, you are demonstrating a singular political talent. He is subtle and likes to kill softly." Furthermore, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, in a book soon to be published, tells of congratulating freshman Senator Obama on a phenomenal speech. Columnist Daniel Henninger writes: "Without a hint of conceit, Mr. Obama replied, 'Harry, I have a gift.'" In the same essay, Henninger also sites a most revealing report on Obama's tenure as president of the *Harvard Law Review*. "Obama cast himself as an eager listener, sometimes giving warring class mates the impression that he

agreed with all of them at once.” Also: “People had a way of hearing what they wanted in Mr. Obama’s words.” Harvard Law Professor Charles Ogletree told how Mr. Obama spoke on one contentious issue at the law school, and each side thought he was endorsing their view. Ogletree said: “Everyone was nodding, Oh, he agrees with me.” I cite all of these various quotations and incidents to make one key point: Barack Obama does have a gift, an extraordinary gift at articulate communication. He is so effective in communicating that he has a keen grasp of the issue, whatever that might be, and has an articulate, well-thought through solution to solve the problem. He builds confidence and trust and one then concludes that his pragmatic, moderate language will translate into pragmatic, moderate policy. The problem is that his pragmatic, moderate tone is actually translating into some rather radical policy proposals.

- Second, Gene Edward Veith, educator, theologian and Christian apologist, argues that Obama is actually taking America down the path toward “social democracy.” For most Americans, that is not a familiar term, but it is well-known and basically is the system of western Europe. It is a new governmental principle for America and it is the best concept to summarize the direction the US is going under President Obama. Social democracy rejects revolution as a means to fundamentally changing a culture’s society and economy. Instead, social democracy seeks change through elections and then seeks to preserve certain elements of capitalism, though under strict state control. This philosophy of government seeks to pit the rich against the poor and views the state as the principle means for redistributing the wealth of society. Further, this philosophy of government also is willing to use the power of the state to seize control of private property and promote an all-encompassing secularism that eschews religious convictions, while embracing a materialistic progress as the chief end of the state. What is occurring under our new president is an abandonment of our historic and deep-seated commitment to limited government in favor of a far more radical social democracy based on the European model. Amazingly, all of this is being done with little debate, no resistance from Congress and, if the poll numbers are to be believed, with the approval of the vast majority of Americans. I find this development rather frightening and truly incredible, in the actual meaning of that overused word. Led by one of the most gifted orators and articulate presidents in recent memory, America is being lulled into accepting the most radical reorientation of its destiny in the history of this Republic! I find that nothing short of amazing.
- Finally, columnist George Will helps us understand the consequences of this new experiment in social democracy. To view this we only need to look to California. For four consecutive years, more Americans have moved out of California than have moved in. California’s business costs are more than 20% higher than the average state’s. In the past decade, net out-migration has been 1.4 million. Will writes: “California is exporting talent while importing Mexico’s poverty.” California represents a model of where the Obama vision may be taking America. Will argues that “liberal orthodoxy has made the state dependent on a volatile source of revenue—high income tax rates on the wealthy. In 2006, the top 1% of earners paid 48% of the income taxes. California’s income and sales taxes are among the nation’s highest and its business conditions among the worst, as measured by 16 variables directly influenced by the Legislature. Unemployment, the nation’s fourth-highest, is 11.2 percent.” California is the laboratory for social democracy. Its ever expanding public sector suffocates

the private sector. It long ago bought the policy lie of taxing the rich and redistributing the wealth through social policy initiatives such as free college education, an incredibly generous state employee benefits system and a framework for state welfare. It now has a \$42 billion budget deficit and, Will maintains, the “national economic revival is being impeded because one-eighth of the nation’s population lives in a state that is driving itself into permanent stagnation.” If America truly wants what president Obama wants, they need look no further than California.

See Peggy Noonan in the *Wall Street Journal* (2-3 May 2009); Daniel Henninger in the *Wall Street Journal* (30 April 2009); Gene Edward Veith in *World* (9 May 2009), p. 56; and George Will in the *Washington Post* (3 May 2009).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

IS AMERICA GUILTY OF TORTURE?

Over the last two months, the intensity of the charge that America tortured people at Guantanamo has grown. There are several in Congress who want to punish those involved in the activities and those who sanctioned it. Several thoughts:

- First, it is important to remember the nature of the enemy in this global war on terror. Columnist Tom Friedman reminds us of the nature of al Qaeda:
 1. Al Qaeda remains undeterred by normal means. Its weapon of choice is suicide. Their operatives (e.g., those of 9/11) are ready to kill themselves long before we can ever kill them. They glorify martyrdom and leave families behind.
 2. Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda did and still do seek to deliver a devastating blow to the US.
 3. Al Qaeda comes from a stream of Islam that believes that it has religious sanction for killing absolutely anyone, including fellow Muslims. It has blown up Muslim shrines, mosques and funerals.
 4. Al Qaeda’s tactics are designed to be used against the open society of America. “Al Qaeda attacks the very feature that keeps our open society open: trust. If you have to fear that the person next to you on a plane or in a theater might blow up, there can be no open society.”

The US must always act in such a manner that never forgets who we are as a nation, respecting due process of law and basic human rights, yet never forgetting who they are!

- Second, regarding the use of waterboarding, it is imperative to remember that Congress was briefed on the interrogation methods the CIA was using on leading detainees. For example Nancy Pelosi, ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee in September 2002, was one of four members of Congress who were briefed on the CIA interrogation methods. Bret Stephens, of the *Wall Street Journal*, writes that “among the techniques described was waterboarding. . . . But on that day, no objections were raised. Instead, at least two lawmakers in the room asked the CIA to push harder.” The difficult, fear-filled times right

after 9/11 caused many people, including Nancy Pelosi, to sanction the use of waterboarding. Her current political amnesia does not mesh with the facts. Certainly the CIA kept notes and records of all its meetings. Those notes would include that Nancy Pelosi was in attendance in September 2002. Perhaps in fairness to all involved, the CIA should release those notes and show that Pelosi is lying.

- Finally, the president has put the CIA in a most precarious position. He authorized an unprecedented disclosure of CIA operational methods, while promising CIA officers that they would not be prosecuted for carrying out lawful orders. The release of these memos has had just the opposite effect; the release has opened a new season on investigation and retribution. Leaders in the Democratic Congress, especially certain committee chairs, want people punished and in prison. We are in the middle of a serious war against al Qaeda which, the earlier part of this *Perspective* made clear, is out to utterly decimate the US. Obama and Pelosi are now demoralizing, under the threat of being punished by the US Congress, the very agency that is assigned the task of gathering intelligence on al Qaeda!! David Ignatius reports that one veteran counterterrorism operative says that agents in the field are already being more careful about using the legal findings that authorize covert action. They want guidance from headquarters. They need legal advice. Ignatius wisely counsels: “If Obama means what he says about protecting the CIA workforce and its operational edge, he must give up the idea that he can please everyone on this issue. He should recommend limits on any congressional inquiry and resist demands for a special prosecutor. Instead, he should push the White House’s preferred alternative—a commission that can review secret evidence behind closed doors, then report to the nation.”

President Obama is getting perilously close to harming one of our key agencies in fighting the war on terror. His penchant for trying to please everyone could be self-destructive for our nation.

See David Ignatius in the *Washington Post* (22 April 2009); William McGurn in the *Wall Street Journal* (28 April 2009); Bret Stephens in the *Wall Street Journal* (28 April 2009); and Tom Friedman in the *New York Times* (29 April 2009).