Terry C. Muck

The Third Moment of Muslim Witness: John Wesley Had It Right
A Theta Phi Lecture

The following is a lecture delivered on 8 October 2005 as part of the Theta Phi Lecture Series at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky. The author suggests that the mission task can be helpfully seen as comprising four moments: the moments of (1) difference, (2) identity, (3) relationship, and (4) witness. Although Christian witnesses have performed admirably well on moments one, two, and four, the reason the Muslim world remains Muslim can be traced to our failures in regard to the third, the Moment of Relationship. Using two sermons by John Wesley, Sermon 63, “The General Spread of the Gospel” and Sermon 92, “On Zeal,” the essay suggests some reasons for the Christian failures with the Muslim world. The weaknesses Wesley detected in the Christian mission effort in the 18th century, have remarkable resonances with the weaknesses of the Christian mission effort to Muslims today. Recognizing this weakness seems especially important today when seen in the context of increasingly aggressive Muslim mission efforts to Christians, and the general trend toward mistrust and violence in the realm of inter-religious relationships. The argument ends with some suggestions for what it might take to improve Christian performance in the area of relationships with Muslims.

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Terry C. Muck is a professor of mission and world religion at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky.
Mission to Muslims is both simple and complex. At its simplest, it is telling the story of Jesus to Muslims who have not heard or understood the Story. This simple way of looking at Christian evangelization is valuable. It keeps us focused. It is like taping the four or five word subject of a paper you are writing to the wall behind your desk to make sure that you don’t get distracted with other interesting and valuable ideas you run across in the course of your research. Focus is important in both paper writing and mission. In carrying out one of the two or three greatest challenges of Christian mission today—Muslim evangelization—we need to keep on task.

Mission to Muslims, however, is also complex. For whatever reason, we have been notably unsuccessful in penetrating cultures that have a Muslim component with the gospel. The world’s one billion plus people living in such cultures have resisted Christian mission efforts. Perhaps it is time to take a look at what we are doing and how we are doing it, to try to discover why witness to Muslim populations is not working. We know one thing: the Story itself is not defective; it does not need to be changed. Perhaps it is something about the way we are telling it that needs to be changed? Or something about ourselves?

The Four Moments

I would like to suggest that there are four moments of witness to Muslims. I call them moments to distinguish them from tasks and from stages, although the moments sometimes look like both tasks and stages. Calling them moments, though, implies something important: It implies that although all four are equally important, each unique circumstance determines one moment more appropriate as a focus than the others.

My thesis is that all four of the moments of Muslim witness to people living in Muslim cultures are important, but that our failure with these populations is due primarily to our failure with the Third Moment. But I am getting ahead of myself. You don’t even know what the Third Moment is. So let me briefly describe each of the four moments, before I go on to spend the bulk of our time with the problematic third.

The First Moment

The first moment we might call the Moment of Difference. It is important when doing mission to recognize that we as Christians have something new and different to tell to the peoples of the world. And in
order to know for sure that we have something new and different to tell, we need to see and understand how our Story is different from the other stories. So we must study cultures and religions different from our own in order to discern the differences.

The Moment of Difference is a time for the tireless use of reason. A good first step is to read an introductory textbook on the world’s religions where you learn about the history, beliefs, and practices of the other world religions, Islam included. You discover that the other religions of the world have many similarities with Christianity, important truths to admire, but you also discover that they have many differences.

I suggest that as Christian mission-workers we are doing pretty well with the Moment of Difference. With just a modicum of diligent study, the differences among the religions become clear. As I like to tell my students in my world religion class, if you spend a semester studying the other religions of the world and at the end of that time you cannot see that the religions of the world teach and ask us to do something different than Christianity does, then you are just not paying attention.

The Second Moment

The second moment is the Moment of Identity. It is at this moment that we assure and reassure ourselves that Christianity is not only different from the other religions, but that it is right and true and the salvation of the world. The great secular teaching of our age is that difference is neutral, that difference is simply an occasion for appreciation and celebration. What we should be teaching is that difference is indeed often an occasion for wonder, even awe, but that it is also an occasion for discernment.

The Moment of Identity is an exercise in discernment. Its primary tool is faith. Reason, the primary tool of the First Moment, will not get us all the way when it comes to our Christian identity. Acknowledging the great redemptive activities of God requires more than reason, it requires faith: “We have been justified through faith,” Paul tells us (Romans 5:1). Of course reason is important to the moment of Identity. The great Christian apologetic tradition leads us down the road toward assurance and reassurance. But at some point argument ceases and faith takes over.

Christian mission-workers are doing well with the Moment of Identity. Never have more books on what we believe and how we should live been written. We are obsessed with who we are, with our own identity. Is it possible we are too focused on this?

Perhaps. The danger of the Second Moment, the Moment of Identity lies with over-functioning in this area. We are tempted to think that by solving the problem of our own identity in Christ, we have solved the problem of mission. In our self-centeredness we can be led to believe that
once we fully and clearly define who we are, the world will sit up and take notice. And the louder we say it the more attention we will be paid. I have news for you. Muslims do not care how precise our theology is; Muslims do not care that we have completely and fully identified ourselves. Having the faith (and the arguments) that we are correct and right and true, does little to bring the gospel to others. To be sure, this moment, the Moment of Identity is crucial—for us. But it will not save Muslims. Muslims are not argued into the Kingdom, they are loved into the Kingdom. Which brings us to the Third Moment.

**The Third Moment**

The third moment is the Moment of Relationship. Note that this is the first of the four moments where we are actually dealing primarily with Muslims. Since the moments are not stages, that is, where one moment must precede the next, this does not mean that one cannot meet, talk, and witness to Muslims until both knowledge (of difference) and identity (of ourselves as Christians) are achieved. Of course not. We meet Muslims when and where God ordains it. Discovery of difference and identity and the development of relationships can occur simultaneously. But the Moment of Relationship is crucial. It is as indispensable as the other three moments; evangelization will not take place without it.

The Third Moment is motivated by love, that is to say, by God’s grace. The relationship that it refers to is not relationship with other mission workers, Christians, denominational officials, converts, or other officials. It refers to relationship with Muslims, unconverted, committed-to-their-faith Muslims who are themselves usually extolling the virtues of their faith even as we are trumpeting ours.

We are not doing very well with the Third Moment. It is our Achilles heel. Our weaknesses here are, I contend, the reason for the paucity of success with our Muslim brothers and sisters. That is why the rest of our time together (after I finish describing the Fourth Moment) I will be speaking to this Moment, analyzing why it is such a problem for us and making some suggestions as to its solution.

**The Fourth Moment**

The fourth moment is the Moment of Witness. This is the moment that refers to the techniques and methods one might use in witnessing effectively to Muslims. In this moment we might survey various ways of talking to Muslims about the gospel, ways that take into account the way the gospel interfaces and doesn’t interface with Muslim teachings in the Koran. Dale requires that all students in that class purchase a CD-ROM, *The World of Islam: Resources for Understanding*, that contains many books on Islam by
Christians, books that give very helpful advice on how the gospel might most effectively be expressed to Muslims.

The word speech might be used to describe this moment, if we use speech in its broadest sense. “Speech” in this sense refers to non-verbal as well as verbal ways of communicating. It can include witness by lifestyle, witness by addressing the needs of the poor, witness by tireless efforts on behalf of those most subject to injustice. This “speech” is also a witness to the Story.

There is no shortage of materials on how to approach Muslims with the gospel. They range from musings by scholars, to firsthand experiential accounts of faithful mission workers who have done it for years. One can find many inspiring and informative success stories of Muslims who have come to Christ. These stories are often followed by analyses of what methods were used in that particular situation and why those methods might work, with some modifications, in other situations. If literary output were the only signs of success, we are succeeding with the Fourth Moment.

But the statistics tell us otherwise. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. David Barrett in his *World Christian Encyclopedia* reminds us that in 1900, 34.5 percent of the world’s population was Christian. In that same year, 12.3 percent of the world’s population was Muslim. One hundred years later, in the year 2000, 33 percent of the world’s population was Christian, about the same as in 1900. But now, 20 percent of the world’s population was Muslim, a 40 percent growth. Islamic cultures and governments seem to grow stronger and more dominant, not weaker. For every Moment of Witness book published by Christians, one is published by Muslims—on how to witness to Christians. There is wisdom in the Fourth Moment books published by Christians, to be sure. They express the hope of the Holy Spirit working in the world, all the world, the Muslim world included. It shows that we are indeed attempting to be wise as serpents, gentle as doves when it comes to our witnessing efforts.

But one must believe that it is the failure of the Third Moment of Muslim evangelization that is hamstringing the effective work being done at the other three levels. Our knowledge of Islam has never been higher. There are more committed Christians witnessing to Muslims than ever before. And they are using gospel honoring techniques, methods, and resources to do so. So what is missing?

**The Problematic Third Moment**

In April 1783, John Wesley preached a sermon in Dublin, Ireland called “The General Spread of the Gospel.” His text was Isaiah 11:9: “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” This had been a favorite text of Wesley during an earlier period of his
ministry, from 1747 to 1755—he preached no less than seven sermons on it. Now, in Ireland some twenty years later, he apparently decided it was time to survey the world’s mission scene. An appropriate theme in the home of St. Patrick, one of the mission heroes of the spreading church.

Wesley began his sermon with a description of the challenge of mission. Using language that would embarrass our politically correct preachers of today, he paints a picture of a world in darkness. If the world were to be divided into 30 parts, he says, barely five of those parts are even nominally Christian. Nineteen are heathen, never having heard the name of Jesus, and the remaining six are Muslim. By Wesley’s estimate (supposedly based on the best estimates of the day), Muslims out-numbered Christians by a ratio of 6 to 5.

What might be the solution to this problem? How could all humans be made holy? Wesley said that of course God could, if he so wished, simply act irresistibly and the thing would be done. But then humans would no longer be human, able to freely choose the gospel. For Wesley the problem was not just that humans become holy. They must do so, aided by grace, by freely, in faith, choosing the gospel. In Wesley’s words, they “must be made holy and happy and still enjoy the understandings, affections, and the liberty which are essential to a moral agent” (489).

What then is “God’s general manner of working?” By working through ourselves, converting us and others without destroying our liberty. God has always worked that way, and even in the darkness in which we find ourselves now, God is working that way still. To prove this, Wesley details how the gospel has spread in his day, from Oxford to all of England to the United Kingdom to North America, and he expresses confidence that this rippling effect could continue to Europe, then Asia, and then Africa, indeed to the whole world were it not for one thing, and it is that one thing that is the problem of the Third Moment of Christian witness.

The Grand Stumbling Block, as Wesley called it, is Christians themselves. We could save the whole world were it not for Christians messing it up. All human beings could be made holy were it not for our unholy behavior. It is not lack of knowledge, identity, technique, or resources that prevent us from evangelizing the whole world successfully. It is “the lives of the Christians.”

I am suggesting here today that as it was in Wesley’s day with the Muslims, so it is today. We still have not solved what I call the Moment of Relationship with Muslims.

Wesley said that Muslims in his day often referred to Christians as “Christian dogs”—the force of this epithet can only be understood in the context of Muslims’ hatred of dogs. They would never think of having one as a pet and often kill stray dogs. What do Muslims today call Christians? Materialistic. Immoral. Uncivilized. War-mongers. We have not
made much progress in the 222 years since Wesley delivered his sermon. On how many days of the 81,194 days since Wesley leveled this charge against all of us who are Christians have we seriously considered the possibility that it is still our own unholy behavior that is the grand stumbling block to mission with Muslims? Perhaps a look at some of the historical factors that have led to the animosity between Christians and Muslims will give us some insights on how to remove the stumbling block. Let me suggest four:

The first reason may be Muslims themselves. If a Muslim jihadist were giving this same lecture to an audience of Muslims interested in winning Christians to the teachings of the Koran, he might very well begin by saying that Muslim behavior toward Christians is a contributing cause of the paucity of Christians converting to Islam.

Actually I hesitated about making this the first possibility because it feeds into our self-centered prejudices about how good we are and how evil everyone else is. Yet I knew that this reason had entered your mind already, and I knew that I would have a better chance of you listening to my other three suggestions if I started with this one. And I believe there is truth in it. So here it is.

When Muslims acting in the name of their faith fly airliners filled with people into New York skyscrapers filled with people, they dramatically lessen the chance that many Christians in New York or in the United States will consider Islam as a viable alternative to their indigenous Christian faith. It is not a good evangelistic technique, and I pray that none of you are considering it as a possible way of appealing to Muslims.

(It is unfortunate, isn’t it, that that is precisely the way our current behavior in Iraq is viewed by Muslims in much of the world. That is, as a Christian evangelistic technique. I wonder if we shouldn’t be clearer about telling the world that it isn’t?)

Anyway, to keep the focus on Muslims, it is a widely held view in Muslim societies that the Muslim mandate is to provide the political conditions that will allow every human being the freedom to choose their religion, hopefully Islam. Not all Muslims interpret their mandate this way, but millions do, so it must be considered a serious stumbling block to the Third Moment. It is hard to build relationships with Muslims who hate you, who want to take over by force the governments under which one lives in order to establish Muslim governments ruled by Sharia or Muslim law.

Those Muslims who do view their mandate this way often use as their source the Koran as interpreted by a man named Sayyid Qutb who wrote a book called Milestones. Milestones is a clarion call for Muslims to dominate the world politically and spiritually. I quote: “It is in the very nature of Islam to take initiative for freeing the human beings throughout the earth
from servitude to anyone other than God (73). There are many practical obstacles in establishing God’s rule on earth, such as the power of the state, the social system and traditions and, in general, the whole human environment. Islam [must use] force to remove these obstacles” (72).

Christian witnesses have a tough row to hoe when faced with this kind of active resistance. Two comments: First, the fact that some of the people we come into contact with hate us and refuse to talk to us, is not a good enough reason to ignore the biblical command to love our neighbors as ourselves. I don’t think God will accept as an adequate excuse for not loving our neighbors as ourselves the reason that it was hard to do. And second, not all Muslims are followers of teachers like Sayyid Qutb. Many resist this kind of philosophy and sincerely desire that the mellifluous teachings of their faith become the ones that characterize it in the eyes of the world. You will be unable to have a Moment of Relationship with a terrorist. But the vast majority of Muslims are not terrorists, and relationships are possible with them.

The second reason for our failure with the Moment of Relationship is our long, contentious history with Muslims. The Abrahamic faiths — Jews, Christians, and Muslims, have had a rocky history. Early in his career, Muhammad saw himself as a prophet in the line of the biblical prophets in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek Gospels. It does not appear that he intended to start a new religion, but to provide a capstone teaching for these two existing ones. He acknowledged that much of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek Gospels were genuine revelations from God, and that although they had been corrupted through translation and emendation, they were still helpful information about what God desires.

A strong signal of Muhammad’s early intentions was his acknowledgement of Jerusalem as the Holy City. Muhammad first taught his followers to pray five times a day facing Jerusalem rather than Mecca. He frequently referred to Judeo-Christian history as his own and as a model for how he thought faithful religious people should live.

It as only after the Jews and Christians of his political constituencies rejected him as a prophet of God (let alone his being the seal of the prophets) that Muhammad began to see his teaching as more than a continuation of a tradition. He began to teach that the oral revelations he regularly received from God’s messengers, both critiqued and replaced all the other revelations sent from God over the centuries, including the Hebrew and Greek texts. Mecca became the center of this new revelation, faith in only one God became the theological sine qua non of the movement, and the seal of the prophets, Muhammad himself, became its spokesperson.

But Islam as Muhammad envisioned it was not just a teaching, it was a political movement, and he set about securing a geographical location for
the people of God. He brought most of what is now Saudia Arabia under his control during his lifetime and his early followers extended this dominion across North Africa and north into the rest of the Middle East. The religions dominant in North Africa and the Middle East, of course, were Judaism and Christianity.

The history of Muslim and Judeo-Christian relationships is a relationship of conflict and war. Bernard Lewis, the Princeton historian of the Middle East, tells the story well in a book, *What Went Wrong?* After the initial Muslim conquests, Christians fought back, sending armies to the Middle East under the banner of their religion to recapture the so-called Holy Land. After some initial success in these religious crusades, Muslims, under the leadership of a Kurdish Muslim ruler named Saladin expelled the Christian armies. But the tenor of Middle East relationships was set. It was to be a relationship of animosity.

Where was the Levitical command to be hospitable to strangers, the gospel command to love one’s neighbors (including enemies), the Muslim command to spread their religion in peaceful ways, never by force in all this? Apparently washed away in the bloody sands of tribal warfare, dynastic expansion, religious crusades, militant nationalism, and economic plundering from all sides in this sad and contentious history.

The third reason is current events. It was this bloody history that set the stage for current events, which in many ways are just a continuation of the past. Perhaps the only things that have changed are the labels we put on the conflict. Instead of warfare, expansion, crusades, and nationalism, we now call this activity imperialism and terrorism. In an economic world, the occasion for fighting is now more often access to oil rather than national or religious principles, but the effect on Christian witness is the same. Bernard Lewis brings the story up to date in *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror.* But it sounds dishearteningly similar to the rest of the history. One has only to read the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* and the *London Observer* and the *International Herald Tribune* and the *Economist* and *Foreign Affairs* to see what is happening today. I won’t bore you with details you already know and probably would just as soon forget.

The fourth reason we have failed at the Moment of Relationship is sin. What is it that keeps us from throwing all our efforts and all our enormous resources into developing better relationships with Muslims? Can we make a list of reasons without mentioning sin? Don’t our pride and arrogance and triumphalistic superiority have something to do with it? Can you really have a relationship of love with someone you consider inferior? It does not excuse us to point to Muslims and say that they seem to have similar feelings toward us.

This is the most powerful accusation made by Muslims toward us. They
point to us and accuse us of debauchery and immorality. They say we are materialistic to the point of exclusion of our own proclaimed ideals. Do you want to argue the point? They call us the Great Satan. It is important to recognize that in Islamic theology, Satan is not primarily an imperialist, nor an exploiter. Satan is a seducer for Muslims. Can the great stumbling block that Wesley spoke of so passionately, be that we are attempting to seduce Muslims with the materialistic benefits of the gospel? That we too often use methods more appropriate to a Madison Avenue advertising firm than gospel witness? If we could change one thing, if we could change the relationships we have with the Islamic world, with Muslim countries, with individual Muslims, the Great Stumbling Block would be removed and “the holy lives of the Christians will be an argument they will not know how to resist; seeing the Christians steadily and uniformly practice what is agreeable to the law written in their own hearts, their prejudices will quickly die away, and they will gladly receive the truth as it is in Jesus.”

So how do we go about doing that?

**The Solution**

I raise the important *how* question, because what we are asking is a difficult thing. It is difficult to speak the truth in love, to be committed to the truth wholeheartedly, to have the courage to “speak” that truth even in dangerous situations, and to love without reservation those to whom we are called to speak truth. We might call this the Problem of Mission.

In many ways it is a Christian theological conundrum, similar, indeed almost parallel, to the Problem of Evil. You remember from theology class the Problem of Evil: How can a totally good God, who just happens to be all-powerful, allow evil to exist. We can solve the problem of evil by relativizing one of these three elements: (1) make God less than totally good—that is locate evil in some form in God’s nature; (2) or make God less than all powerful—so God cannot be blamed for everything that goes wrong in this world; (3) or change the meaning of evil to something like unreality (the Christian Science solution) or ignorance (the Buddhist solution) or lack (the humanitarian solution). But to keep all three operative in the fullness of their meaning. That’s what Christianity teaches. It is difficult.

Similarly, the Problem of Mission is to speak the truth in love. It rolls off our tongues like a honey-flavored elixir, the solution to all our witnessing problems. But then we try to do it (at least with a doctrine like theodicy we only have to think it—the missiological curse is we have to do it), and we quickly discover that it is easier thought than said and easier said than done. It would be easier to love if we weren’t at the same time required to “speak”—and vice versa. It would be easier to both speak and love, if we didn’t define the Truth so uncompromisingly—if we could
only spell it with a small t instead of a capital T as it were. But to keep all three operative in the fullness of their meaning. That’s what Christianity teaches. And it is difficult.

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On May 6, 1781, in Haverfordwest in Wales, John Wesley preached a sermon on the subject of religious zeal. It was the first of fourteen visits that Wesley made to this important trading town in the West of Wales, and he liked the energy of the congregation he found there: “The liveliest congregation I have seen in Wales,” was the way he stated it, and if the legendary extrovert nature of the Welsh is in any sense true, perhaps it is no accident that Wesley felt called upon to put religious zeal in its proper Christian context.

He began by noting that there are “few subjects in the whole compass of religion that are of greater importance” than zeal, because without zeal no progress in religion could be made at all. Yet, he goes on, this fiery concept is as dangerous as it is important: “Nothing has done more disservice to religion or more mischief to mankind,” than pagan zeal.

“Pride, covetousness, ambition, revenge have in all parts of the world slain thousands,” he said, “but zeal its ten thousands.”

The task he says, is to “distinguish right zeal from wrong.” He acknowledges that it is difficult to make the distinction, “so skillfully do the passions justify themselves such is the deceitfulness of the human heart.” Still he takes up the challenge by (1) defining Christian zeal; (2) giving zeal’s properties; and (3) drawing some practical inferences.

Zeal, Wesley begins, occurs when “any of our passions are strongly moved on a religious account, whether for anything good, or against anything which we conceive to be evil.” For Wesley, zeal could be any “warm” emotion, including anger, indignation, or strong desire. The element that made it Christian zeal, however, and not some pagan or humanist counterfeit, was that it be joined with love. Christian zeal is the flame of Christian love.

Since it is always joined with love, Christian zeal has the properties of love: humility, meekness, patience, with all that is good in the sight of God as its object. By thus joining zeal with love, Wesley identifies those elements which are often features of secular zeal, but for the Christian simply cannot be a part of it: hatred, bitterness, contentiousness, prejudice, bigotry, and persecution. These are things often associated with zealots whose causes become so important to them. And these features often creep unawares into our zealousness to speak the gospel. Yet because they are not loving, they do not lead to God-honoring relationships, but to human aggrandizement.

Wesley uses an example to make his point: “How often do we see men fretting at the ungodly, or telling you they are out of patience with such or
such things, and terming all this their zeal! Oh spare no pains to undeceive them! If it be possible, show them what zeal is: and convince them that all murmuring, or fretting at sin, is a species of sin, and has no resemblance of, or connection with, the true zeal of the gospel” (317).

How to zealously speak the gospel in love? To maintain the zeal without which the whole edifice of religion crumbles, without letting the all-too human passions of pride and arrogance and triumphalism intrude on our mandate to love our neighbor as ourself? To truly love Muslims, to build lasting relationships with them so that we create the only soil in which the gospel of love can be planted, the soil of Christian love? Wesley says it is to have zealous humility, zealous patience, zealous kindness, zealous meekness. Those phrases sound odd, don’t they? Could this be because we don’t have a lot of practice in their use? This is the problem of the Third Moment of Christian witness. Indeed, it is the core problem of Christian witness in the world today.

Let me remind you of the two resources we have as Christians that can be used to accomplish this difficult witnessing task facing us.

The first resource is God. Of course. How often we forget. The problem of loving our neighbors as ourselves begins with our loving God first. A number of years ago now I was traveling in Palestine in the town of Ramallah. I was visiting Palestinian Christians in that war-torn land, asking them how the spirit of God might be moving amongst them. The need, of course, was for peace to descend like a dove on the hawks who were creating so much misery in that land. Did their Christian faith, I asked, have anything to offer such a hopeless situation?

Once the people of Ramallah knew what I was about, everyone insisted I see a man whose father had been killed by Israeli forces. In the course of our conversation I asked him: “You are a Palestinian Christian working for peace. A wise man. A person who bases his political and social activism on Christian values and beliefs. Do you love the Jews?” After a pause he answered my question: “No, I can’t honestly say I love the Jews. I am afraid it would be more accurate to say that I hate them.” He paused. I wasn’t quite sure how I should follow-up. But before I could ask another question he went on: “But as a Christian I know that I am to love my neighbor as myself. I know that I am to go so far as to love my enemies. So every day I get up in the morning and offer myself to God. I tell God that I love him and that I sincerely believe that someday he will allow me to extend that love even to the Jews who killed my father. I believe it will be so.”

Loving one’s enemies is a tough nut to crack.

The second resource we all have is our own wills. God did not make us passive automatons, unable to act in the interests of the gospel as we understand those interests. As Wesley put it, we “have the liberty essential
to a moral agent.” Our wills are powerful things, and through them we are able to do things we know to be right, even when our own worst instincts scream at us to do otherwise.

My father was a professor of psychology at Bethel College. He occasionally used his psychological knowledge in raising me to be the fine, upstanding young man I am today. I remember one particular lesson especially well. After complaining one day about a chore he had given me, because “I didn’t feel like doing it,” he patiently looked at me and said, “Terry, let me tell you about the James-Lange Theory of Feelings.”

In non-technical terms, the great American psychologist William James developed a theory of emotions that turned the standard understanding of his day on its head. The standard understanding was that emotions are like untamed instincts that we have no control over and must constantly rein in with reason. James disagreed. We to a large extent, he claimed, determine our feelings by our behavior. If you want to have a particular feeling, he said, then determine what kinds of actions would be consistent with that feeling, do those actions, and the feeling will follow. My father’s point was this: If you don’t feel like being kind to your sisters, do things they will interpret as kind, and feelings of kindness will follow.

I would make the same point regarding Muslims: If you don’t want to treat them like the children of God they are, then figure out things to do that someone who did feel that way about them would do: invite them to dinner, compliment their work, listen to them, help them when they are in need. The feelings of love will follow. You can do this. You are a free agent. It is a matter of will.

I never noticed this before doing this paper, but embedded in the end of Wesley’s sermon on the “General Spread of the Gospel” is an answer of sorts to theodicy, the Christian Problem of Evil. Wanting to end his sermon on a high note, Wesley reminds his Irish audience that even though the world as he described it is currently in a state of darkness with fully two-thirds of that world had never heard the name of Jesus, “It will not always be thus.” It will not always be thus. It will not always be thus, he said, because “these things are only permitted for a season by the great Governor of the world, that he may draw immense, eternal good out of this temporary evil.” Putting the problem of evil in this temporal context and saying that “It will not always be thus,” gives us hope.

But the Problem of Mission remains. That hope is built on the assumption that we are ready to step up to the Four Moments of Witness, especially the problematic Third Moment. Are we ready to personify Wesley’s prescription for spreading the gospel? Are we ready to become dedicated and holy and zealous for the cause of Christ, so that “the holy lives of the Christians will be an argument that they cannot resist”?