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“Why I am Not a Muslim” Preached by Iranian Christian Pastor Ignites Media Controversy

SUMMARY: *Donald Fareed, an Iranian from a Shiite Muslim background who fled his homeland, and now Christian pastor and U.S. citizen, recently found himself in the middle of an explosive media controversy after being invited to give a provocative sermon entitled, “Why I am Not a Muslim,” despite years of international efforts to promote peace, understanding and dialog between Muslims and Christians.*

SAN JOSE, CA– December 13, 2004-- Donald Fareed, an ordained Christian pastor and former Shiite Muslim, recently delivered a sermon entitled “Why I am Not a Muslim,” and the provocative message stirred up a major controversy in his local San Francisco Bay Area media and in the Muslim community. Fareed, Founder & President of the San Jose-based Persian Ministries International (PMI) (www.PersianMinistries.org), was invited to deliver the message to the Sunnyvale Nazarene Church in Sunnyvale, CA on November 28, 2004. Without Fareed’s knowledge, the little church put the title of his sermon on the marquee to promote the event, and after an outcry from two members of the community—one Muslim and one not—the result was explosive.

- ✍ **The San Jose Mercury News’** article headline read, **“Sermon Subject Raise Hackles.”**
- ✍ **NBC 11** called it, **“The Message that Links the Church to a Global Debate!”**
- ✍ **NBC 11** Local News called the church’s sign, **“Sign of the Times”**
- ✍ **CBS 5** Eyewitness News reported, **“Not in a Mosque but in a Church! The Extreme Sign Got Them in the Pews!”**

Fareed is an Iranian American from a Shiite Muslim background who fled his homeland following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in the late-1970s. Rebellng against the perceived harshness of Islam’s holy laws as interpreted by its leaders, he moved to the United States. After a long spiritual journey during which he dabbled in Sufism, New Age religion, and Scientology, he converted to evangelical Christianity about 14 years ago.

“The goal of the message was not to offend Muslims, but to communicate why I changed my religion,” Fareed says. Fareed hosts a weekly television show in the San Francisco Bay Area that broadcasts the Christian Gospel globally via Muslim satellite television & the Internet to about 30 million people each week in Farsi, the Persian language. As a result of this effort, he reports that thousands of Muslims in Iran and around the world have converted from Islam to Christianity.

Fareed’s organization, Persian Ministries International (PMI), is also currently planting home churches inside Iran, where one of the largest house church movements in the Islamic world is growing among students, according to a December 4 issue of Voice of the Martyrs. “With the numbers of young people we are reaching, and growth of home churches, we are making significant strides in the Muslim world, and that is a positive sign,” Fareed says. “These young Muslim converts who are coming to Christ today are the people who will be leading Iran tomorrow. I believe Iran will someday be a model of democracy in the Middle East.”

In November, Fareed’s ministry also launched a national campaign to equip churches in North American to reach Muslims in their own communities. “Our goal is to help Christians not only understand Islam, but also communicate the Christian Gospel with Muslims in a way they can understand,” he explains.

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Unlike other Christian converts from Islam, he is not merely expressing spiritual ideas, but also core democratic ideals. "One of the main goals of PMI is to promote peace and understanding," says Fareed. "We want to help Christians and Muslims begin to dialog about faith and politics, and bridge the gap that has intensified since the September 11, 2001 attack and the resulting U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq."

Fareed's work exporting both the Christian Gospel and ideals of democracy to millions of Muslims has international implications, with the White House recently reporting President Bush as saying the U.S. has a vital interest in the spread of democracy across the Middle East.

Not surprisingly, Fareed has come under fire in his home country for his work. Iran National TV recently ran his picture and characterized his work as "anti-Islamic activities against the government of Iran [with the intent] to topple the government." Considering the fact that several Iranian evangelical pastors have been martyred by the Iranian regime, this is not to be taken lightly.

This harsh criticism stems from the fact that Fareed has been targeting the 70 percent of Iran's population who are under 30 years old, as well as the women who have been abused by the application of harsh interpretation of Islamic laws. In this manner, he has brought awareness of the atrocities being committed by Iran's radical regime to the international community and to the Iranians themselves. "We are encouraging the Iranian people to separate themselves from Islamic fundamentalists using Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s method of nonviolent/ passive resistance to avoid bloodshed, and urging them to press the Iranian government for democracy, freedom of religion and referendum," says Fareed.

The message Pastor Fareed preaches is one of peace and reconciliation, not hatred and bitterness. Indeed, after hearing the message Pastor Fareed preached in Sunnyvale and interviewing him first hand, the follow up media changed its tune:

- ✍ **CBS 5** reported, "**His message promoted communication and understanding between Muslims and Christians after 9/11**"
- ✍ **NBC 11** reported, "**It appears that he achieved his goal of starting that dialogue...**"

The uniqueness of Fareed's message is the incorporation of the Christian Gospel with current political issues, and assisting people in dealing with Islamic fundamentalism as well as teaching them about core democratic values. He is helping to correct the many misunderstandings that exists today between Muslims and Christians, and that is impacting communities in a positive way. "We believe Muslims and Christians can live together in a loving, peaceful and respectful way in a post 9/11 world, and that can greatly impact our future here in U.S and abroad," says Fareed enthusiastically.

For more information on Donald Fareed and Persian Ministries International, please visit www.PersianMinistries.org. To arrange an interview or media appearance, please contact his publicist at (818) 994-2309.

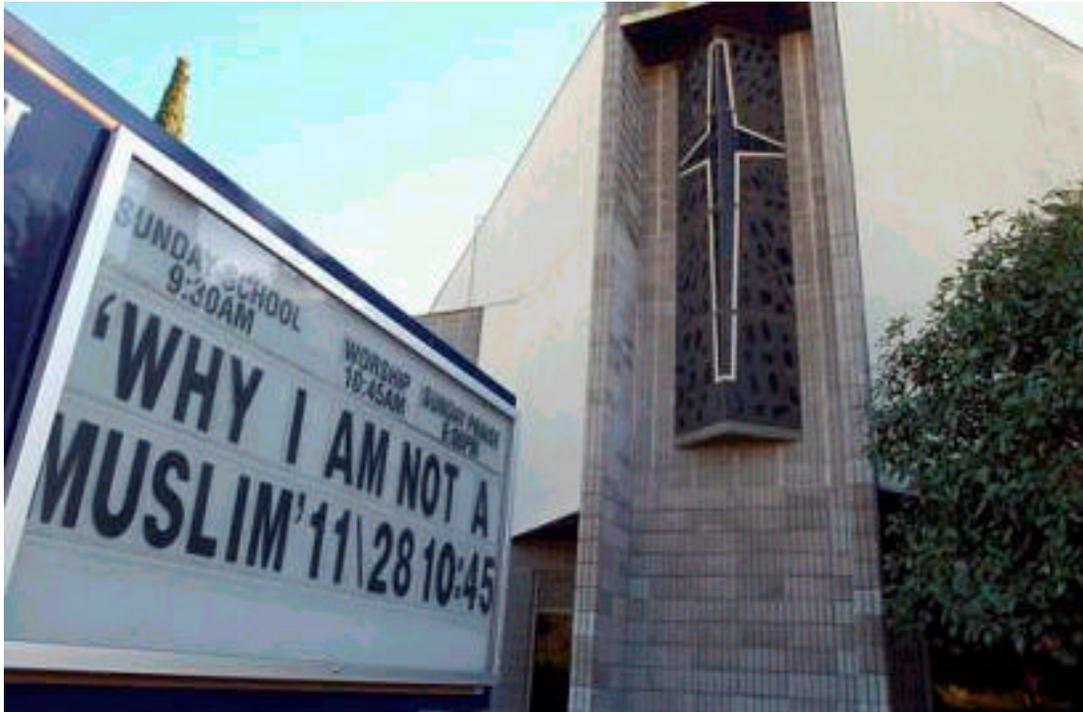
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For pictures, please see below...

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(AP Photo/ Marcio Jose Sanchez) AP - Nov 27 4:18 PM



Pastor Fareed being interviewed by San Francisco CBS Affiliate – **(CBS 5 Eyewitness News)**, who reported, **“Not in a Mosque but in a Church! The Extreme Sign Got Them in the Pews!”**

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