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'Offensive' Sign Initiates Press Coverage of Gospel Message

Chad Groening and Jody Brown
Agape Press

An Iranian-born Christian who heads a ministry dedicated to winning Muslims to Christ says the American media goes out of its way to protect other religions at the expense of evangelical Christianity.

Rev. Donald Fareed, pastor of San Jose, California-based organization called Persian Ministries International, says he came to that conclusion after witnessing a media uproar over a church sign.

The sign in question, which was posted outside a Nazarene church in Sunnyvale, read simply: "Why I Am Not a Muslim." That phrase appears in a brochure distributed by Fareed's ministry.

But two individuals - one an American and the other an Iranian - took offense at the sign. Jay Keller, who lives around the corner from the Nazarene church, told the *San Jose Mercury News* that he works with "a lot of Muslims" and that he did not know why someone would "put up a sign like that. They can't possibly be oblivious to the fact that it might be offensive to some people," he added. And Waheed Siddiquee, who also lives near the church, told the newspaper he was "disappointed" at the tone of the sign and saw it as a challenge to his Muslim faith.

But Fareed, whose ministry has a vision of reaching more than 100 million Persian-speaking Muslims around the world, says he had hoped the sign would encourage people to hear his sermon. He adds that he did not realize the complaints of two people would create such a media reaction.

"Over here [in America], somehow the media is kind of protecting other religions more than evangelical Christianity," Fareed observes. "Only two people ... objected to this sign. [The] media used that to really make a huge controversy out of it -- we were on CBS, NBC. But thanks be to God that we got good report. They taped the whole service; I preached the gospel."

Fareed is founding pastor of the Bay Area Persian Churches of San Mateo and Santa Clara. He explains that his goal is not to offend Muslims, but to communicate why he converted to Christianity. According to an Associated Press report, his conversion occurred about 14 years ago - and as a result, he now has a closer bond to God and a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

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Islam, he says, does not allow a personal relationship with God.

It is that conversion experience that Fareed now shares via a weekly television show in the Bay Area and a global satellite broadcast (in Farsi) that he estimates permit him to reach about 30 million people each week. He says an objective of his ministry is to bridge the gap between Christians and Muslims that has widened in the post-9/11 world.

He told the *Mercury News* that because of his ministry, "large numbers of Iranians and other Muslims" have begun to consider other religious options in the face of harsh Islamist governments.

Persian Ministries International (www.persianministries.org)

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