

## MAKING MUSLIMS: FRAMING ISLAM IN THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, SOUTH<sup>1</sup>

CHRISTOPHER J. ANDERSON

On the afternoon of June 23, 1919, Samuel M. Zwemer, missionary to North Africa and editor of *The Moslem World*, stood before an attentive audience of American Protestants at the Centenary Celebration of American Methodist Missions in Columbus, Ohio. The Celebration exposition, a twenty-four day “Methodist World’s Fair,” attracted over one million visitors and featured international pavilions, ethnographically-themed exhibits, the latest church media technologies, and a Midway complete with a Ferris wheel, lemonade stand, and church-sponsored restaurant. The fair was a carefully crafted extravaganza planned and organized by the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the two largest Methodist denominations in the United States. At the exposition, several decorated pavilions dedicated to Methodist missionary activities spotlighted historical and contemporary interactions between American Protestants and Muslims. The event functioned as a location staged to showcase the global reach of U.S.-based missionary efforts overseas, and in particular, the religious and cultural exchanges between Christian missionaries and Muslims. At the fair, Zwemer was in his element, speaking to an audience curious to know more about Islam and its several million followers throughout the world.

Zwemer was an editor of a reputable periodical on missionary work with Muslims and was considered an intercultural specialist on Islam. He had been asked by organizers of the Centenary exposition to speak of his work with Muslims on “African Day” at the fair.<sup>2</sup> Zwemer was introduced to the audience by the Reverend Joseph Crane Hartzell, a Bishop and missionary

---

<sup>1</sup> Portions of this essay were presented at the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies in 2013. This essay examines the framing of Islam and Muslims through the lens of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Additional scholarship is needed to investigate this same topic through the publications and activities of other Methodist traditions including the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Free Methodist Church, and the Wesleyan Church, among others.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Marinus Zwemer (1867-1952) was an American Protestant missionary sponsored by the Reformed Church of America. He was educated at Hope Academy and College (Michigan) and New Brunswick Theological Seminary in New Jersey. Zwemer spent over thirty years working with Muslims in North Africa and editing the periodical *The Moslem World*. In 1929 Zwemer was appointed as a professor of Christian missions at Princeton Theological Seminary. He later taught at the Biblical Seminary of New York and Nyack Missionary Training Institute (now Nyack College) in Nyack, New York. For additional information on Zwemer see Alan Neely, “Zwemer, Samuel Marinus,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, Gerald H. Anderson, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 763.

for the Methodist Episcopal Church based in Liberia, Africa. Bishop Hartzell helped authenticate Zwemer's credibility to Methodist listeners and claimed the speaker was "the best posted man on Mohammedanism we have in the Protestant world."<sup>3</sup> Zwemer opened his address with a series of emphatic "battle cry" calls and presented several religious and cultural dichotomies between Christianity and Islam. He was careful to shape the representation of this global religious movement for members of his audience. In language familiar to early twentieth-century Protestants he compared and contrasted tensions between Christianity and Islam and proclaimed: "Shall it be Christ's or Mohammed's? Would you like your girls and your boys to be brought up to the measure of the stature of fullness of the camel driver of Mecca, or of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World?" He went on to locate the work of Methodist missionaries in several mission outposts around the world, confirming, "In the first place, your church is challenging Islam in India. In the second place, your church is challenging Islam in Malaysia; and in the third place, your church has challenged Islam in Africa." His carefully-nuanced rhetoric attempted to motivate his audience to contemplate how their local Methodist churches in the United States were making missiologic strides toward converting Muslims to Christianity overseas.

In 1907, Zwemer published a book entitled, *Islam: A Challenge to Faith*, a treatise on the history, growth, tenets, and Christian concerns over the practice of Islam. That same year, Zwemer was Secretary for the Student Volunteer Movement and a missionary in modern day Saudi Arabia. Zwemer wrote:

The churches of Christendom are at last awakening to the fact that one of the great unsolved missionary problems of the Twentieth Century is the evangelization of the Mohammedan world . . . . [T]he purpose of the book is to present Islam as a challenge to the faith and enterprise of the church. It has a message for those who believe the Gospel and believe that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth—to the Mohammedan no less than to the heathen.<sup>4</sup>

For audiences at the Methodist fair, the comments and writings of Zwemer presented particular representations of Islam and of its several million Muslim adherents. This framing of Islam before American Protestants helped to shape how Methodists perceived and interpreted a faith system that had originated in the sixth century, was practiced primarily in distant countries far from the Ohio setting of the exposition, and was largely unfamiliar to many Methodists attending Zwemer's lecture that day. Zwemer reinforced a centuries-old process that framed Islam into a monolithic and threatening religious system of misinformed and misguided religious adherents.

---

<sup>3</sup> Christopher J. Anderson, compiler, *Voices from the Fair: Race, Gender, and the American Nation at a Methodist Missionary Exposition* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2012), 26-30.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, *Islam, a Challenge to Faith: Studies on the Mohammedan Religion and the Needs and Opportunities of the Mohammedan World from the Standpoint of Christian Missions* (New York: Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1907), vii-viii.

This essay explores how American Methodists purposefully framed Islam during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by examining the ways in which American Methodist newspaper editors and missionaries positioned certain representations of Islam for readers of the U.S.-based periodicals *The Methodist Magazine* and *The Christian Advocate and Journal*. The essay also demonstrates how organizers from the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, used the Centenary Celebration fair as a public stage to showcase Islam before American audiences. Organizers of the exposition dedicated space for exhibits, lectures, and “life plays” in order to present “the Mohammedan” in particular ways before curious fair-goers. Ultimately, the fair exemplified how American Methodists were busy around the world converting Muslims to the Christian faith.

### Representation and the Framing of Islam

Recent scholarship presents and defines “representation” and “framing” as rhetorical tools to assist with interpreting how American Methodist publications and the Methodist World’s Fair used forms of media as tools to represent and frame Islam and Muslims. Jamal J. Elias’ volume *Aisha’s Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (2012) posits that “A representation is superior (or perhaps more powerful) to that which it represents in some important aspects. A representation is present when its prototype is absent, or it is accessible while the prototype is inaccessible, with presence and accessibility being better than absence and inaccessibility in all respects but for some philosophical notions of human behavior.” Elizabeth Poole also notes in *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (2012) that representation on the part of mass media outlets presents “the social process of combining signs to produce meanings” and demonstrates how media ultimately construct their own versions of meaning (norms and values) where “an event is filtered through interpretive frameworks and acquires ideological significance.”<sup>5</sup>

The process of “framing” groups of people also needs explanation. Joan Hemels’ essay, “Faith and Journalism under Strain: Some Observations with Relation to Printed Media in the Netherlands” (2009) notes framing involves negotiating subtle differences into a topic resulting in how that topic is presented by the media. She points out that framing by media outlets “refers to the way in which news content is typically shaped and contextualized by journalists within some familiar frame of reference and according to some latent structure of meaning.” She also states that framing a subject has certain effects on the audience, who “adopt the frames of reference offered by

---

<sup>5</sup> Jamal J. Elias, *Aisha’s Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2012), 28; Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims* (London and New York: I. B. Taurus, 2002), 23.

journalists . . . to see the world in a similar way.”<sup>6</sup> These images and representations had been shaped by newspaper editors and missionaries who used these forms of mass media to frame Islam and Muslim adherents in certain ways.

Studying the research of Elias, Poole, and Hemels helps us to investigate how American Methodist newspaper editors and missionaries, all commissioned by the Methodist Episcopal Church, and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, felt obligated to present to readers and fair-goers a prototype of a religious system and its followers, since most American Methodists were not able to see and interact with Muslims living in North Africa, India, and Malaysia. These images located Muslims as uninformed, nomadic, non-Protestants in need of the civilizing influence of American Methodists to convert them to Christianity. The editors of Methodist newspapers as well as the planners and missionaries asked to speak at the Centenary exposition were purposeful in how they layered meaning into Islamic faith through the published columns of *The Methodist Magazine*, *The Christian Advocate and Journal*, and through the exhibits, speeches, and life plays of the Methodist World’s Fair. Creatively filtered through written and spoken word, a particular construction of Islam shaped through the lenses of Methodist media gave U.S. Christians, and in particular American Methodists, a powerfully mediated position, one of ideological significance used to create presuppositions about Muslims and the tenets of Islam.

### Early American Methodist Accounts of Islam

The representation and framing of Islam has a long, though largely understudied, history in American Methodism. From the early nineteenth century until the present, Methodist authors, editors, missionaries, and denominational executives have presented Methodists with media resources ranging from published Board of Mission reports to glass lantern photograph slides to motion pictures. More recently the Internet and Social Media have been used to paint pictures of Islam and Muslim adherents throughout the world. For purposes of this essay I will focus specifically on early American Methodist periodical accounts and the events that took place at the 1919 fair. Much additional research needs to be done using these and other sources of information.

In *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, Edward Said notes: “Nineteenth-century American contacts with Islam were very restricted; one thinks of occasional travelers like Mark Twain and Herman Melville, or of missionaries here and there, or of short-lived military expeditions to North Africa . . . [A]cademic experts did their work on Islam usually in quiet corners of schools of divinity,

---

<sup>6</sup> Joan Hemels, “Faith and Journalism under Strain: Some Observations with Relation to Printed Media in the Netherlands,” in *Faith and Media: Analysis of Faith and Media: Representation and Communication*, Hans Geysels, Sara Mels, and Michel Walrave, eds. (Brussels, Belgium: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009), 114.

not in the glamorous limelight of Orientalism nor in the pages of leading journals.”<sup>7</sup> For Said, nineteenth-century conversations about Orientalism occurred in reports from American travelers published in books and newspapers and through the correspondence and presentations of missionaries from the United States reporting on their work from around the world. The use of forms of media by American Methodists, in this case newspapers and exhibits and presentations at the 1919 exposition, provided particular pictures of Islam for readers and fair-goers. Said confirms, these media sources provided “a communal core of interpretations providing a certain picture of Islam and, of course, reflecting powerful interests in the society served by the media.”<sup>8</sup>

Ghazi-Walid Falah’s essay, “The Visual Representation of Muslim/Arab Women in Daily Newspapers in the United States,” confirms that “the ways in which editorial decisions regarding the arrangement and presentation of images and other materials relating to Muslims and Arabs impart certain meanings to newspaper readers and, by doing so, lend support to specific geopolitical discourses.”<sup>9</sup> For Falah, the multiple presentations and representations of people groups in print (and photographs) underscore and shape a particular political (and religious) encoding of individuals and religious systems. Editors, artists, and photographers employed by newspaper companies and religious organizations positioned faith practitioners in certain ways that informed readers and brought unfamiliar peoples into their homes through the ink and paper of periodicals.

American Methodists did not initiate work in Muslim countries until the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, yet reports on Muslims or “Mohammedans” were presented to American readers through several periodicals, including *The Methodist Magazine* and *The Christian Advocate and Journal*. The reports were often re-published from other media sources and were provided by British Methodist missionaries or by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), an interdenominational mission organization with activity in Turkey and other parts of Asia. John Hubers argues that Protestant missionaries for the ABCFM presented an “appreciative assessment” of Islamic faith while carefully qualifying the necessity of an American Protestant missionary message. Rather than objectify Islam as a dangerous and unintelligent religious movement, these early missionaries presented American audiences with Muslims who had names, faces, and embraced their faith as much as if not more than readers in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Edward W. Said. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Said, *Covering Islam*, 43-46.

<sup>9</sup> Ghazi-Walid Falah, “The Visual Representation of Muslim/Arab Women in Daily Newspapers in the United States,” in *Geographies of Muslim Women: Gender, Religion, and Space*, Ghazi-Walid Falah and Caroline Nagel, eds. (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2005), 301.

<sup>10</sup> John Hubers, “Making Friends with Locusts: Early ABCFM Missionary Perceptions of Muslims and Islam, 1818-1850. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 33:3 (July 2009): 151-154.

Two of the earliest examples of reports on Islam by American Methodist publishers were printed in the periodical *The Methodist Magazine*. In June, 1819, and April, 1821, essays appeared in the publication under the title "On the Study of Divinity." The author discussed the "Darkness of Heathen Philosophy," noting, "Thus I would without distinction, at once reject the religion of Mahomet, or of the Chinese, of ancient Egypt or Rome, upon this single reason; because not one of them being able to produce more signs of truth than another, reason cannot in justice prefer one mode to another." The author specified, "The religion of Mahomet debases human nature so low, gives us so mean and puerile an idea of the Deity; and so foul a prospect of the celestial enjoyments; that reason unprejudiced, cannot hesitate to reject it; and nothing, but the want of a true exertion of reason, can prevent a general rejection of it."<sup>11</sup> Reporting on the state of British Methodist mission work in Sierra Leone, Africa, the writer confirms, "It is another consideration equally rousing to every feeling of Christian zeal, that among all the pagan nations of Africa, the emissaries of Mahometanism are spreading the imposture, principally by the aid of charms and incantations, in which the ignorance of the African leads him to place entire reliance." The author goes on to note, "Thus among the negroes of the colony of the Cape of Good-Hope, Mahometan priests are teaching their faith; and among the independent tribes of the interior, the same imposture is occupying the hearts of the natives with a hatred for Christians unfelt by them in their purely pagan state."<sup>12</sup>

The New York City-based *Christian Advocate and Journal* also provided early snapshots of Islam for American readers. On July 20, 1827, the newspaper published a sermon by the Reverend Nathan Bangs on the American Colonization Society. In his discourse, Bangs declared Africa "was soon overrun by the superstitions of Mohammed, and to this day, the greater portion of the people are believers in Mohammedanism. And although many yet remain Pagans, in Abyssinia and some other parts of Africa there are nations who have embraced the Christian religion."<sup>13</sup> The following year the same publication produced an article entitled "Heathen Cruelty," which provided a somewhat more favorable view on Islam as a means of assisting to eliminate certain cultural practices in some countries, such as requiring the widow of a deceased man to be burnt alive alongside his deceased body. The writer declared, "Mohammedanism has, indeed, removed some of its grosser features, but what has this imposture introduced in their place?"<sup>14</sup>

The representation and framing of Islam in early nineteenth-century Methodist periodicals informed readers of a faith system that challenged Christianity, beckoned for a missionary force to convert Muslims, and yet

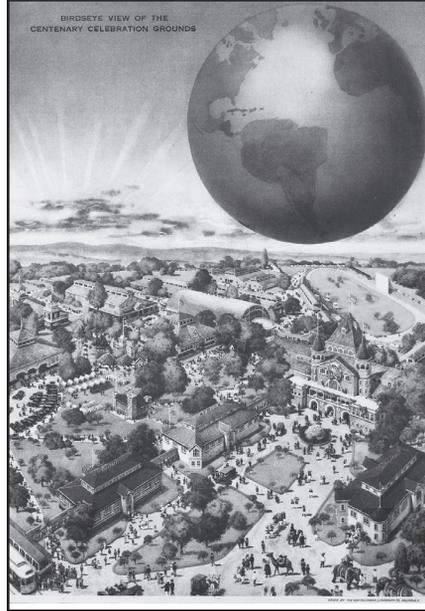
---

<sup>11</sup> "On the Study of Divinity, Chapter II, The Darkness of the Heathen Philosophy," *The Methodist Magazine* (June, 1819), 201-202.

<sup>12</sup> "State of Religion in Africa," *The Methodist Magazine* (April, 1821), 149.

<sup>13</sup> Nathan Bangs, "Advocate and Journal," *Christian Advocate and Journal* (July 20, 1827), 1.

<sup>14</sup> "Heathen Cruelty," *Christian Advocate and Journal* (June 20, 1828), 1.



Drawing of birdseye view of Centenary Celebration from the back cover of *The Call of the People* (Columbus, OH: Stoneman Press, 1919).

provided a window into the lives of real human beings embracing a faith in ways that gave evidence of loyalty and concern for others. In some ways the distant Muslim was broadcast as a devout believer in Islam, and, one might argue, an example of a faithful follower of a religious system for American Methodists. As Methodist missionaries took the message of Christianity to mission stations around the world, they were acutely aware from these publications that other religious traditions were also helping to eliminate questionable cultural practices such as the burning of widows. American Methodists could look at Muslims with a watchful eye but could not debate the fact that this religion and its followers were as devout as they were toward their religion and were helping people around the world.

### **The 1919 Centenary Celebration: A Methodist World's Fair**

In addition to print periodicals, Protestant missionary expositions were seen as a method to help motivate American Methodists not only to think about world missions, but also to view actual Christian converts from around the world on display in recreated villages and homes. These venues would not only show visitors the world activities of missionaries but would also point fair-goers forward, intending to convince them to imagine how Christian missionaries and missions organizations might help reconstruct the world both physically and spiritually. The Centenary Celebration, a "Methodist World's Fair," was seen as one such event which would give the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, a

platform from which to broadcast their current work and future hopes concerning global missions.

The three-week fair featured reenacted dogfights between World War I warplanes in the skies above Columbus and the first “sermon in the air” preached by a Methodist seminary professor from the gondola of a blimp anchored above the racetrack grandstands. Entertainment was a significant component of the missionary exposition as “Methodist cowboys” performed in a Wild West exhibit, audiences watched silent films on a ten-story motion picture screen, and thousands of Protestants packed the coliseum to enjoy a theatrical performance called *The Wayfarer: A Pageant of the Kingdom*.

The fair also presented attendees with dozens of interactive exhibits showcasing the recipients of foreign and domestic missions who acted out their daily lives and performed “native” tasks while on display before curious American viewers. Visitors to the exposition could tour eight international pavilions and watch foreigners at work on indigenous industries or observe Asian and African families eating dinner or cleaning their homes. The fair functioned as a venue of exchange between the viewers and those viewed. On one level the exposition educated visitors on the history and current progress of Methodist world missions. In this way organizers created exhibits, dispersed information through lectures, and handed out booklets and pamphlets describing the work of Methodist missionaries. The fair also functioned on another level, providing visitors with opportunities to learn about themselves as Americans while at the same time watching “foreigners” practice “strange” religions and perform domestic responsibilities within the recreated “native homes” of the fairgrounds pavilions.<sup>15</sup>

Fair organizers located Methodist missionary work with Muslims in three internationally-themed pavilions identified as the Africa Building, the India Building, and the Korea-Japan-Malaysia-Philippines Building. Planners placed exhibits in sections of each building, including representations of two mosques alongside curios filled with material culture and exhibit walls adorned with wall charts, literature, and dozens of photographs. Missionaries functioned as cultural and religious experts and gave illustrated lectures using glass lantern slides projected from several stereopticon machines. Live plays and demonstrations were also presented using peoples converted to Christianity by missionaries as well as actors who played the part of the “foreigner” in certain presentations. Author Fred B. Smith described the atmosphere of the fair in the magazine *Association Men*, noting:

The buildings represented native life in India, Africa, China, Korea, the South Sea Islands, the Philippine Islands and the nations of the Near East. These were filled with charts, maps, photographs and every form of exhibit . . . [T]he place gave an opportunity for enjoying what was best in a circus, a country fair, a picnic, grand opera, the drama and the Church, all at one time.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Christopher J. Anderson, *The Centenary Celebration of American Methodist Missions: The 1919 World's Fair of Evangelical Americanism* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2012), 5.

<sup>16</sup> Alonzo E. Wilson, compiler, *Methodist Centenary Celebration, State Fair Grounds, Columbus, Ohio, June 20-July 13, 1919* (Columbus, OH: s.n., 1919), 39-40.

### Islam at the Methodist World's Fair

In his book *Islam Obscured: The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representation*, Daniel Martin Varisco confirms, "Who can fault the goal of going beyond mere description, avoiding another catalog of useless facts, anal-analytical stamp collecting and the like? The issue not addressed is how it would ever be possible to only describe, and not at the same time impose, meaning."<sup>17</sup> For planners of the Centenary Celebration of American Methodist Missions, a central purpose for holding such an extravagant event was to avoid presenting American audiences with yet another illustrated lecture, slide show, or missionary sermon on the reach of Methodist missionary endeavors. The exposition brought "useless facts" to life through the in-person representation of missionaries and those being evangelized. Going beyond mere description, the fair included materials from Methodist fields of mission taken down, packaged, shipped to the United States, and repurposed inside the pavilions of the State Fairgrounds. The exhibits included pageants, parades, sample clothing, cooking utensils, and curios of weaponry.<sup>18</sup> The global representatives and three-dimensional exhibitions infused life and activity into missionary work around the world. These exhibits exemplified the work of missionaries, with the additional intention of recruiting more missionaries and raising funds for current and future missionary endeavors both in the United States and overseas.

Representing Islam at the fair in a meaningful way was crucial to secure the needed missionary personnel and funding for intercultural work. Exposition organizers decided to stage three exhibits in three separate pavilions to showcase the cultural and religious practices of Muslims and to broadcast the current progress of Methodist missionaries at work around the world, converting the peoples of Africa, India, and Malaysia from Islam to Christianity. The next section of this essay investigates the buildings, exhibits, demonstrations, and activities used by American Methodists to promote their mission work.

---

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Martin Varisco, *Islam Obscured: The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 28.

<sup>18</sup> An example of a parade was "The Victory Processional" held at 6:00 p.m. on the Fourth of July. Dubbed the "Most Significant Religious Pageant in Modern History" the parade took place in the racetrack oval of the State Fairgrounds. The event "epitomized in a spectacular panorama of unexcelled beauty, historical import, and international personnel, the spiritual message of the entire Methodist Centenary Celebration." The event was produced by Boston-based pageant master Percy Jewett Burrell, and the entire event was filmed by the motion picture crew of David Wark Griffith studios based in Hollywood, California. Over 10,000 participants from several dozen countries participated in the pageant. "Islam was represented on floats for the Africa Building and depicted the reconquest of North Africa for Christianity. Dr. J. T.C. Blackmore and Mrs. Ella Bates Freese sat on floats, and African music was performed; several animals including camels, donkeys, and horses were led along the parade path. Islam in India was represented by a procession of missionaries working in India, a portrayal of a Muslim wedding party, and three elephants. A float presenting Islam in Malaysia included "Four Buddhist priests, an equal number of Hindoo priests and two followers of Mohammed, as well as local missionaries and natives in costume" (*Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 223).

## Descriptions of the International Pavilions

At the Methodist World's Fair, the Department of Mohammedan Lands hosted its exhibits in the Africa Building, the India Building, and the Korea-Japan-Malaysia-Philippine Building. Dr. William G. Shellabear served as chairperson for the design, organization, and implementation of the various exhibitions in the three buildings. Shellabear, born in England, was hired as a missionary for the Methodist Episcopal Church; he was considered a foremost expert on Islam after spending many years as a missionary in Malaysia.<sup>19</sup> Representations of Islamic religious and cultural practices were seen through a variety of live "demonstrations" organized by Dr. H. E. Philips of the United Presbyterian Mission in Egypt. The demonstrations included such activities as: the "Koran School"; "The Argument: Christian vs. Moslem"; the "Mohammedan Funeral"; the "Mohammedan Wedding"; the "Mohammedan Divorce"; the "Mohammedan Betrothal"; and the "Call to Prayer." The average attendance at these demonstrations ranged from 100-200 visitors per event. Total attendance estimated for exhibits directly related to the exchanges between Islam and Christianity for the three-week fair was 100,000-120,000 people.<sup>20</sup>

The Official Report of the Centenary Celebration, compiled after the exposition, claimed, "Great interest was taken in all the demonstrations, and many people went away with a new conception of what the Mohammedan religion is, and of the effect it has upon its followers." The report specified, "The attractions which were the most effective were: The Argument between a Moslem and a Christian, the Mohammedan Funeral, and Dr. Philips' addresses on the subject." Several criticisms emerged regarding the exhibits. The Report also verified: "Any kind of a noise would immediately draw a crowd and would often draw people from a demonstration to which they would otherwise have given their attention. The noisy demonstrations should therefore be limited in future for the sake of those being held in contiguous buildings." In addition, "The maps and charts to illustrate Mohammedanism were not hung in the places where they could be used effectively, and their value was therefore almost nullified. In this respect utility was sacrificed for the sake of scenic effect."<sup>21</sup>

Three exhibits at the fair staged Islam for American Methodist visitors. For the half-dollar entrance fee into the fairgrounds, visitors could view on display the people, culture, and material objects of lands many had only seen in published periodicals such as *National Geographic Magazine* and

---

<sup>19</sup> William Girdlestone Shellabear (1862-1947). Shellabear was a missionary to the Malay Peninsula region for the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was also later hired as professor of missions at Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, New Jersey, USA. He taught the Malay language and was the first professor at Drew to teach courses on Islam. He later taught at Hartford Theological Seminary in Connecticut. For additional information on Shellabear see Robert A. Hunt, *William Shellabear: A Biography* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: U of Malaysia P, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> *Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 113.

<sup>21</sup> *Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 113-114.

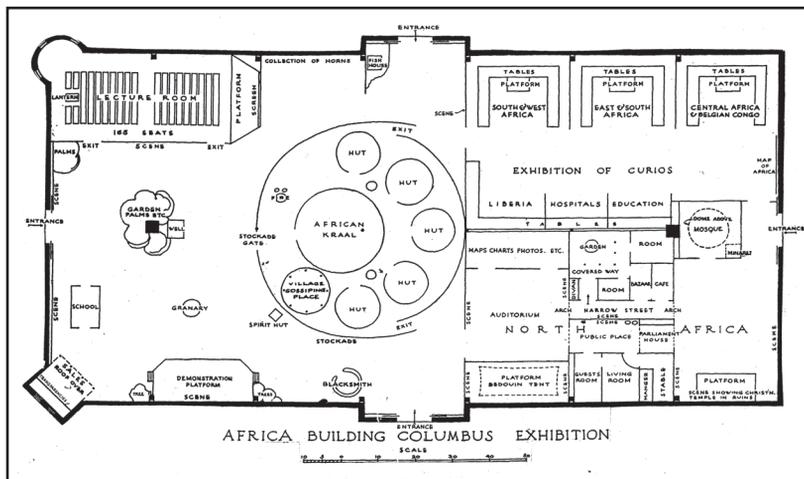


Diagram of “Africa Building” compiled by Alonza E. Wilson in *Methodist Centenary Celebration, State Fair Grounds, Columbus, Ohio, June 20 - July 13, 1919, Official Reports and Records* (Columbus, OH: [Publisher not identified], 1919), 128.

*Missionary Review of the World.* The Official Report stated:

In the eight large buildings, representing the features of the Methodist work at home and abroad, there was presented to the eye the real atmosphere and environment of the foreign cities where our missionaries are doing heroic service. The home work was also visualized in the most remarkable manner . . . [H]ere, for the first time, three hundred thousand people saw the actual life of the people represented in the streets, temples, and masques [*sic*] which were visualized to the people by actual buildings from the Orient.<sup>22</sup>

### The Africa Building

The Africa Building measured 20,000 square feet and included eight auditoriums representing “North Africa,” “South and West Africa,” “East and South Africa,” “Central Africa,” and the “Belgian Congo.” A section on Liberia demonstrated the work of Methodist missionaries in hospital care and education. During the three-week fair, 576 meetings were held in the pavilion with approximately 180,000 in attendance. The building’s interior space included a “Kraal Exhibit,” furnished with a stockade of live animals, and six homes made of mud and straw to represent the “authentic” dwelling places of an “African Chief” and his five wives. The exhibit featured several lectures each day and included demonstrations of the preparation and cooking of foods from Africa. The building also included a lecture hall that seated 165 persons, complete with a stereopticon lantern slide, projection screen, and several hundred glass lantern slides.

Throughout the pavilion material artifacts adorned the walls and were

<sup>22</sup> John T. Brabner Smith, “A Unique Exhibition with a Spiritual Significance,” in Alonzo E. Wilson, compiler, *Methodist Centenary Celebration, State Fair Grounds, Columbus, Ohio, June 20-July 13, 1919* (Columbus, OH: s.n., 1919), 42.

placed in glass cabinets. Exhibits included food products and weaponry from each region, including shields and spears representing “tribes who have little culture.” Indigenous products made “with bark blankets demonstrated the versatility and good craftsmanship which are almost inated in every community, be it civilized or uncivilized, according to our American standards.” To represent missionary work with Muslims, a mosque with minaret where “the religion of Mohammedan prevails” was prominently displayed within the reconstructed village court. A “Bedouin Tent” was also exhibited, and visitors were informed that the African dwelling place was made from “authentic wool of sheep native to Africa.” The building also included a street scene complete with a bazaar, café, and stables for additional animals. The walls of the building were painted with murals depicting landscapes from Africa, and palm trees were added to complete the scene.<sup>23</sup>

The Director of Exhibits and Programs for the Africa Building was Erwin H. Richards, missionary for the Methodist Episcopal Church to Inhambane, East Africa. The Associate Director of Exhibits and Programs was Daniel Leeper Mumpower, missionary to Congo for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Additional speakers in the Africa Building included J. T. C. Blackmore; Mary J. Richards from Inhambane, East Africa; John M. and Helen Emily Springer, missionaries to the Belgian Congo; Arthur L. and Maude G. Piper, missionaries to Congo; and Bishop Joseph C. Hartzell; W. B. Geebey; and C. E. DeWalt. The building opened at 8:00 a.m. each day and included daily prayer meetings. A “Negro Quartette” sang three times daily, drawing large crowds by singing “native African songs in original languages.” The various “Demonstrations” included an assortment of lectures and presentations. These included a Call to Prayer and several lectures on topics including “Christianity vs. Islam” and “The Cross and Crescent in North Africa.” Additional activities were “A Peep into a Harem,” “Koran School,” “Balmer’s Kaffir Choir,” and “Dinah, Queen of the Barbarians.”

The Official Report verified that “more people visited the Africa Building” than any other facility during the three week fair. In particular, “the Kaffir Kraal won more admiration and thought than any other item in the building” while the “most used [demonstrations] were the “Slave-Chain Gang,” the “Buying of a Wife,” the “Medical Clinic,” and the “Call for Missionaries.” The Report confirmed that “discussions on polygamy proved very interesting inasmuch as most listeners never heard but one side of the argument.”<sup>24</sup>

Not everyone was pleased with respect to the exhibits and activities in the Africa Building. The Report verified that the training of stewards who worked inside the building should have been done by the actual missionaries in charge of the exhibits, rather than by professional trainers not connected to or familiar with missionary work. In a most interesting assessment, the evaluator of the pavilion argued that “The question as to whether black folk or white should operate the native Kraal Exhibit was liable to changes as of-

---

<sup>23</sup> *Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 129.

<sup>24</sup> *Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 98.

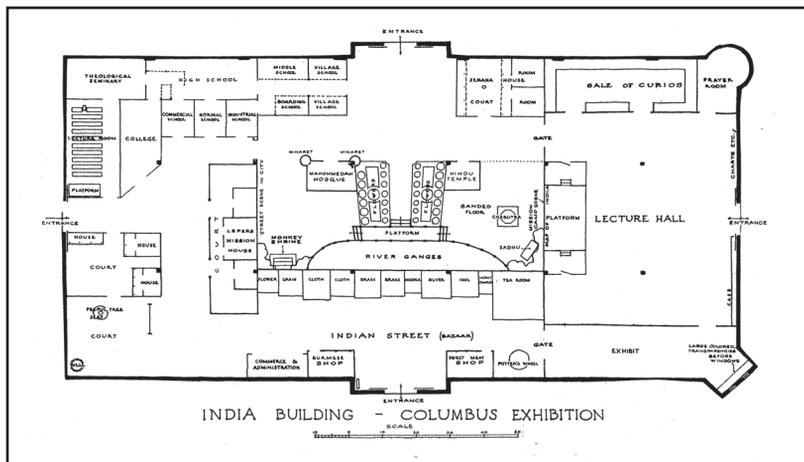


Diagram of “India Building” compiled by Alonza E. Wilson in *Methodist Centenary Celebration, State Fair Grounds, Columbus, Ohio, June 20 - July 13, 1919, Official Reports and Records* (Columbus, OH: [Publisher not identified], 1919), 132.

ten as it was settled by anyone,” and decisions about white or black actors by “proper authority should have decided that point in January [1919] and kept it decided.” For exhibits on Islam the Report confirmed that “The mosque in the North Africa Building was large enough to be used effectively” as compared to the mosque in the India Building, which was too small for purposes of allowing people to enter the exhibit.

Ultimately, the purpose of the pavilion, including the representation and framing of Islam, created a positive impression that gave people a particular perspective about and appreciation for that religious tradition, when compared with the success of Methodist missionaries converting the people of Africa to Christianity. The Report noted: “The masses of people were greatly moved in the interest for missions . . . There were also individual pledges for support of special work and fresh consecration to mission work anywhere on earth.”<sup>25</sup>

### The India Building

The India Building measured 20,000 square feet with three auditoriums hosting 160 meetings over the three weeks of the fair. Approximately 70,000 people visited the pavilion. The India Building featured a lecture hall “which was darkened and cool [and] gave a place for tired visitors to rest while they watched pictures and pageants which told the stories of India.” Exhibitors of the hall projected a series of stereopticon illustrated lectures and silent films, including a motion picture presenting the conversion of an Indian preacher named Magan Lal, who converted from Hinduism to Christianity onscreen. The Official Report from the fair proclaimed, “The film was of thrilling in-

<sup>25</sup> *Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 98.

terest and told the pathetic story of a young man wondering [*sic*] from temple to temple until at last he met with the Christians. No such story as this was ever before presented in the history of the movie.”

The pavilion also echoed the architectural skyline of a location in India and included a mosque with two minarets from which missionaries and stewards would call people to prayer throughout the day. The building also included a street bazaar with a magician and several shops for purchasing cloth, silks, brass, costumes, tea, and sweet meats. Perhaps most intriguing was a model of the Ganges River, complete with flowing water and a mural depicting throngs of people at water’s edge. The home life of the lower and higher castes was presented, as well as the various educational facilities in India. “Holy Men” walked throughout the building, “torturing their bodies that their souls might be purified.”<sup>26</sup>

The Chairman of the building was Fred B. Fisher. Demonstrations cluded the “Koran School,” the “Call to Prayer,” the “Mohammedan Funeral,” and “a wedding scene with all its pomp passed through the street and the child-wife was brought into momentary prominence.” A typical schedule of events in the India building included several illustrations and representations of Islam. A day’s schedule in the North Africa section of the building included:

10:00 a.m.	Call to Prayer; Argument, Mohammedanism vs. Christianity
11:00 a.m.	Moslem Boys’ School in the Mosque, Lecture by Dr. E. F. Frease, Supt. Of North Africa Missions
11:30 a.m.	Colored Quartet
12:00 p.m.	Moslem Funeral by Dr. Phillips ( <i>sic</i> ), of Egyptian Presbyterian Mission
1:00 p.m.	Call to Prayer; Lecture by Haboush, “The Galilean Shepherd”
2:00 p.m.	Nature Music and Life Demonstrations
2:30 p.m.	Colored Quartet
4:00 p.m.	Moslem Wedding
5:00 p.m.	Life Play “The Betrothal” and Lecture by Mrs. E. F. Frease of North Africa

The Official Report indicated, “The daily life of India, with its joys and sadness, was represented” and India’s political and commercial activities were “made real through the agency of the missionary, who explained verbally and by charts.” The exhibition was criticized due to the inadequacy of the model mosque. The Report noted, “The India mosque was altogether too small and was almost useless. The raised floor deterred people from entering whereas there was always a group of visitors inside the North Africa mosque listening to explanations by a steward.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Korea-Japan-Malaysia-Philippines Building**

The pavilion with the longest and most inclusive name was the Korea-Japan-Malaysia-Philippines Building. The pavilion was 20,000 square feet

<sup>26</sup> *Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 133-134.

<sup>27</sup> *Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 133-134.

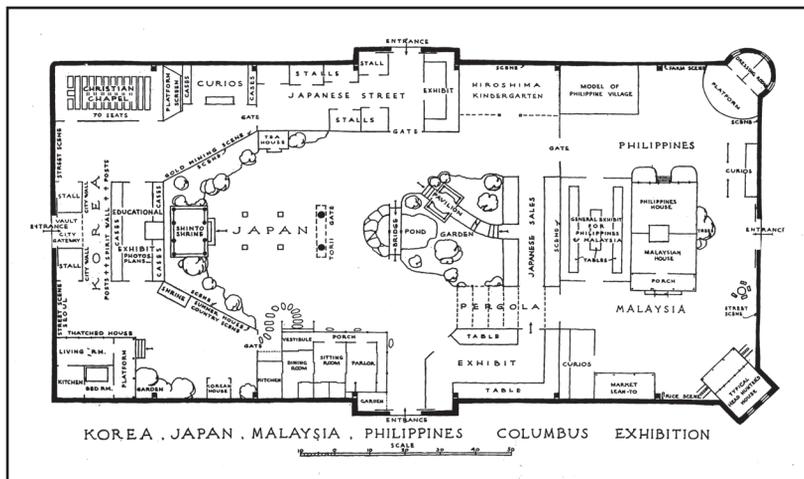


Diagram of "Korea/Japan/Malaysia/Philippines Building" compiled by Alonza E. Wilson in *Methodist Centenary Celebration, State Fair Grounds, Columbus, Ohio, June 20 - July 13, 1919, Official Reports and Records* (Columbus, OH: [Publisher not identified], 1919), 134.

and included four auditoriums, hosted 420 meetings, and was visited by approximately 94,000 people. The exhibits included the representation of a Korean home in the demonstration, "Preparing and Eating a Korean Meal." This "Life Play" staged a family from Korea who had been converted to Christianity by Methodist missionaries acting as if they were residents in a living room, kitchen, and bedroom. A home from Japan was also represented, as fair-goers could watch actors in indigenous costumes portray a Japanese Christian family eating dinner while the wife cooked, cleaned, and made the bed before curious visitors. A Malaysian home was represented by a "typical Head Hunter's House" during a Life Play called "Wild Man from Borneo." Homes from the Philippines were recreated in an electronic model of a village run by belts, chains, and electricity. Visitors wishing to relax could walk along a "Japan Garden Scene" in the midst of a small pond, trees, and flowers, or shop at a street bazaar with a tea shop where "one sipped a cup of refreshing beverage at the tea house."<sup>28</sup>

Religion and religious adherents were represented by a model of a Shinto Temple. Islam in particular was presented though a Life Play called "Breaking Mohammedan Ice," several lectures by Bishop Joseph C. Hartzell on "Mohammedanism," and demonstrations including a "Koran School" and a "Moslem Funeral." A sample day's schedule in the building included a program specific to Malaysia:

- 10:30 a.m. Singing of Malay Hymns
- 11:30 a.m. Malay Wedding
- 1:30 p.m. Woman's Club Meeting
- 2:30 p.m. Moslem Funeral

<sup>28</sup> *Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 135.

3:30 p.m. Malay School Scene  
 4:30 p.m. Malay Divorce  
 5:30 p.m. Malay Wedding  
 7:30 p.m. Street Preaching

The Report of the Centenary Celebration voiced both curiosity about and success for the work of pavilion planners. Exhibits were successful in shaping a more complicated perspective of the inhabitants of the Philippines, for, as the Report noted, “The curios were not to give the idea that most Filipinos carry spears and head axes, but to show that many of them can do fine hand work, needle work and lace work, and make fine hats and baskets.” Commentary on the Malaysia exhibit emphasized the work of Methodist missionaries, particularly William C. Shellabear with Muslims. The Report noted that

The Malaysia Exhibit sought to tell the story of that group of tropical islands lying southeast of Asia, their great size, their vast natural wealth, their fifty millions of people and their religious, social and political future . . . . [H]ardy and intelligent they have yielded to the faith of Islam, which puts its dead hand upon progress. They are, however feeling the stirrings of new life, and thirty thousand already can testify to the saving power of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

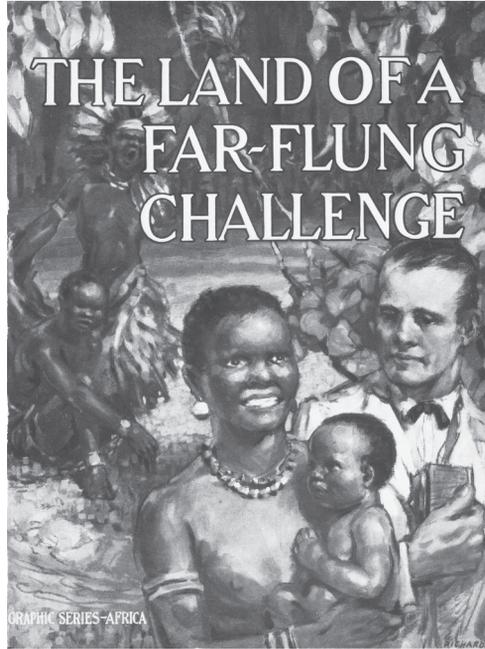
## Conclusions

To promote the Centenary Celebration, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church produced several publications entitled *Graphic Series*, highlighting the work of missionaries around the world. The series functioned as a fundraiser for Methodist missionary endeavors and helped to build anticipation leading to the fair. In a publication entitled *The Land of a Far-Flung Challenge*, the cover page presents an African woman with a child in her arms, being led away from two men in indigenous clothing. The men, including one who appears to be angry or calling out in anger, watch as the white missionary (most likely a representation of an American Methodist missionary) holding a Bible leads the smiling woman into the distance (future).

The *Far-Flung Challenge* presented a particular framing of the civilized and uncivilized, the Christian and the Muslim. The African men do not join the smiling woman being led away by the missionary; readers can assume they did not receive the offering (Christianity) of the missionary. The volume on Africa included a dire framing of Islam for American Methodists preparing themselves for the exposition. Language in the article presented Muslims as “a drab blanket that smothers progress” and “teaches fatalism, no atonement for sin, no redemption by sacrifice.” Echoing the cover of the magazine, the essay claims, “Mohammedanism does not lift the negro out of ignorance,” and, “polygamy, slavery and the slave-trade are religious

---

<sup>29</sup> *Methodist Centenary Celebration*, 135-136.



Cover page illustration from the promotional publication called *The Land of Far-Flung Challenge* from a group of publications called the *Graphic Series*, prepared by World Outlook for the Centenary Commission of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: The Commission, 1918).

institutions.”<sup>30</sup>

Echoing early nineteenth-century American Methodist writings on Islam, the fair and literature produced for the fair presented Muslims in certain ways, as examples of a people needing Christian faith alongside financial and cultural revitalization from American Methodists. The pavilions in Ohio attempted to recreate the living conditions of the people of Africa, India, and Malaysia and presented Protestant fair-goers with representations of a religious faith system that beckoned the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to provide medical and education facilities.

As he concluded his speech at the Centenary Samuel Zwemer declared, “I beg of you when Dr. Shelleber [*sic*] goes back to lift high that royal banner, that you will stand by them, and I prophesy that the Methodist Church will see mass movements and revivals, and a great ingathering, not only in Africa, but in Malaysia for the word of God. And there you have the mandatory for India, too.”<sup>31</sup> The hopeful Zwemer, and the idealistic audience in

<sup>30</sup> *The Land of a Far-Flung Challenge: Graphic Series, Africa* (New York: World Outlook for the Centenary Commission of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1918), 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> *Voices from the Fair*, 29.

attendance, had seen the work of Methodist missionaries and had heard the arguments for and against Islam in the fairgrounds pavilions. Methodists who walked the grounds of the Centenary Celebration witnessed particular representations and framings of Islam and Muslims that their denominational ancestors had read about over a century earlier. Little had changed. After the fair, the decorated pavilions were disassembled, and the missionaries and those converted to Christianity returned to their countries of placement and origin. American Methodists moved into the 1920s with the hope that Islam might be brought to an end and that Muslim adherents might be converted to Christianity by the growing forces of Christian workers and their denominational sponsors.