Evangelical Review of Theology

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Volume 37 · Number 4 · October 2013

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by

Insider Movements: Current Issues in Discussion

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1 Background of the Issues

For many years there has been frustration at the meagre number of Muslims coming to faith in Christ. Even the ministries of some of the most godly and diligent proclaimers of the gospel among Muslims saw relatively little fruit. As Phil Parshall described Bangladesh in the 1960s, 'We were living in a country of tens of millions of Muslims—but only 100 had come to Christ over the past 50 years. Most of these believers were extracted from their community and financially dependent on the small national church, heavily subsidized by foreigners'.[1]

The heroes of Muslim ministry in the early twentieth century were men like Samuel Zwemer whose converts numbered 'probably less than a dozen during his nearly forty years of service'[2] and William Miller, whose *Ten Muslims Meet Christ*[3] told the stories of ten Iranian converts (at a time when Persia was the Presbyterians' *most* fruitful field with Muslims). Over 150 years into the era of modern missions, the statistics on Muslims coming to faith in Christ globally still numbered merely in double digits. Many of those paying attention to the state of the gospel in the Muslim world longed for more.

In 1938, as the Near East Christian Council (NECC) wrestled with the paucity of fruit in the Muslim world, Henry Riggs presented a report entitled: 'Shall We Try Unbeaten Paths in Working for Moslems?'[4] in which he encouraged 'the development of groups of

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1 Phil Parshall, 'How Much Muslim Context Is Too Much for the Gospel?', *Christianity Today,* (16 Jan 2013). Available online: www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/too-much-context-may-harm.html (accessed 21 Jan 2013).

2 Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 241.

3 William Miller, *Ten Muslims Meet Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969, 1987).

4 Henry Riggs, 'Shall We Try Unbeaten Paths in Working for Moslems?' <http://isa4all.blogspot.com/2009/12/idea-of-jesus-muslims-is-not-new.html> (2009, cited 27 Feb 2013).

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followers of Jesus who are active in making Him known to others while remaining loyally a part of the social and political groups to which they belong in Islam'. A few sentences later, Riggs clarified that he was describing secret believers (not the current model of Insider Movements [IM]): 'we lovingly encourage secret believers to go forward in the Christian life without publicly professing themselves as Christians in the sense of separation from the fellowship of their own people'. Yet many of Riggs' suggestions have resonated with modern proponents of IM, such as, 'The aspiration here expressed is that the church of Christ might take root within the social-political body called Islam, and not as an alien body encroaching from without'.

1. Five Important Factors

In the 1970s and 1980s, at least five significant factors gave fresh hope that experimentation with more culturally contextualised presentations of the gospel might bring greater response than had been seen previously.

a) First, Donald McGavran's seminal observation (first enunciated in his earlier book, *The Bridges of God*) that 'Folks join these cells by conversion without social dislocation'[5] came to greater light with the 1970 publication of his book, *Understanding Church Growth.* 'McGavran believed that the biblical and ethical means of global evangelization was to occur *not* by extracting people from their social contexts but rather by discipling them among their "kith and kin"'.[6] McGavran laid the foundations of church growth theory and groundwork for what is now the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. Both the theory and the school have contributed significantly to the development and nurture of concepts underlying Insider Movements.

b) A second factor was a consultation attended by roughly 150 Christian missionary leaders in 1978, resulting in the compendium, *The Gospel and Islam,*[7] which contained research papers detailing relevant strategies for reaching Muslims with the gospel. This compendium represented a major step ahead in shared understanding of creative approaches with potential to present the gospel in ways more relevant to Muslims.[8] In 1989, J. Dudley Woodberry published a similar work[9] and a pivotal article[10] showing the sim-

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5 Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1955), 111.

6 George Kurian, James Smith III, (eds.), 'Donald Anderson McGavran', *The Encyclopedia of Christian Literature* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 458.

7 Don McCurry (ed.), *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium* (Monrovia: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1979).

8 Among pivotal articles in this compendium were: Harvie Conn, 'The Muslim Convert and His Culture', 97-113 and Charles Kraft: 'Dynamic Equivalence Churches in Muslim Society', 114-22.

9 J. Dudley Woodberry, (ed.), *Muslims And Christians On The Emmaus Road: Crucial Issues in Witness Among Muslims* (Monrovia: MARC, 1989).

10 J. Dudley Woodberry, 'Contextualization among Muslims: Reusing Common Pillars', in Dean S. Gilliland (ed.), *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 282- 312.

ilarities of many Jewish, Christian, or biblical precedents with Muslim beliefs and practices, including the five pillars. This article also contained the first published (albeit discretely described) mention of what would later be called an 'Insider Movement'.

c) A third influence was the publication of *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism,*[11] describing a fresh approach to contextualization that Phil Parshall and his team were using in Bangladesh—seeking to free the gospel message from the added trappings of western Christendom.

d) A fourth factor was the influence of Ralph Winter and the USCWM (founded in 1976) with its related institutions, including William Carey Library, founded in 1969, and *Mission Frontiers* magazine, which began publication in 1979. *Mission Frontiers* has served since then as a popular-level presentation of Winter's ideas on a variety of subjects, including Insider Movements. *The International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (IJFM) has been an important resource for articles presenting a positive perspective on 'C5' (see below), Insider Movements and related topics, devoting an entire issue to the topic in 2000.[12]

The first edition of Winter's *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*[13] included articles proposing the concept of more culturally sensitive gospel approaches to Muslims. For example, in a section entitled 'Muslims for Jesus' Strategy Explored', Winter reported,

> Some evangelical evangelists to Islam are saying that Muslims might truly become believers in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord without calling themselves Christian, even as the 'Messianic Jews' did. What is needed is the encouragement of new Christian congregations with a Muslim cultural orientation, churches centered on Jesus Christ but with Islamic cultural forms.[14]

Later editions of the *Perspectives* reader included more reports and descriptions of 'C5' and 'Insider Movements', as Winter himself became a more vocal advocate of Insider Movements. His later encouragement is reflected in two sample editorials from *Mission Frontiers*:

> Followers of Christ in the New Testament did not call themselves Christians; some in the Semitic sphere, I am guessing, may have called themselves 'muslims' (surrendered to God).[15]

> Dear Reader, This time you must learn a new phrase: Insider Movements. This idea as a mission strategy was so shockingly new in Paul's day that almost no one (either then or now) gets the point. That's why we are devoting this entire issue to 'Insider Movements'. That's why

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11 Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1980).

12 *IJFM*, 17 (1) (2000).

13 Ralph Winter and Steven Hawthorne (eds), *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Pasadena, William Carey Library, 1981).

14 Ralph Winter and David Fraser, 'World Mission Survey', in Winter, *Perspectives,* 333,334.

15 Ralph Winter, *Mission Frontiers,* (01 Jan. 2005).

the 2005 annual meeting of the International Society for Frontier Missiology is devoted to the same subject.[16]

e) A fifth source of influence was the proposal by Charles Kraft of Fuller Theological Seminary to apply the concept of dynamic equivalence[17] to planting of the gospel among the unreached. Kraft wrote:

> a 'dynamic equivalence' church.... would look in its culture as a good Bible translation looks in its language. It could preserve the essential meanings and functions which the New Testament predicated of the church, but would seek to express these in forms equivalent to the originals but appropriate to the local culture.[18]

Decades later, in his book, *Appropriate Christianity*,[19] Kraft sought to help his readers feel more comfortable with the 'inevitability' of syncretism:

> But what about the concept of syncretism? Is this something that can be avoided or is it a factor of human limitations and sinfulness? I vote for the latter and suggest that there is no way to avoid it....That syncretism exists in all churches is not the

problem.... Our advice to national leaders (and to missionaries), then, is to stop fearing syncretism.

Up to the present, there is a vast divide between those who agree with Kraft on this point and those who consider syncretism as an avoidable evil to be fought against. Kraft's perspective opened the door to a variety of experiments with maintaining worldview assumptions and reinterpreting the meanings of various doctrines. Kraft continued,

> For religion is a facet of culture. And, just as the non-religious forms of a culture are available for the expression of Christian faith, so the religious forms of that culture can also be used—on condition that the satanic power in them is broken and the meanings are Christian. Almost any cultural forms can be captured for Christ.

Thus was launched a wave of exploration in using the religious forms of various Islamic cultures—seeking to capture them for Christ. As one example, Kraft encouraged searching for alternatives to water baptism as a marker of conversion, pointing to cultural factors without mentioning the command of Jesus:[20]

> The Early Church, in adopting baptism, chose a culturally appropriate form, currently in use in several religious contexts to signify the change in allegiance we call conversion. It would seem appropriate that a truly contextualized church in one culture would develop different initiation rituals from one in another

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16 Ralph Winter, *Mission Frontiers,* (01 Sept. 2005).

17 First introduced by Eugene Nida in his book, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964), 159-60.

18 Charles Kraft, 'Christianity in Culture : a Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross Cultural Perspective' in Robert Coote and John Stott (eds.) *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 330.

19 Charles Kraft (ed.), *Appropriate Christianity* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005), 77.

20 Mt. 28:19.

culture….When the Church decided to use it to signify initiation into the Church, they were largely following John's lead, since the early Christians assumed that Christianity was to remain within Judaism.[21]

2. Pushing the Boundaries

These five factors were among the influences stirring many missionaries to consider afresh the subject of 'contextualizing' the presentation of the gospel to Muslims. Some of these approaches intentionally explored beyond the boundaries of what had previously been considered appropriate missiology. Phil Parshall recently commented,

> By the early 1980s, other committed evangelicals felt they should push further into a new evangelism effort: the insider movements. Actually, we have always considered our approach as insider, but we have strived to remain within biblical boundaries. I have significant concerns about these newer attempts in contextualization.[22]

In the same 1998 issue of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* in which Parshall published his concerns, John Travis published 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of "Christ-centered Communities" ("C") Found in the Muslim Context'.[23]

The C Spectrum found wide use as a simple tool for describing the extent to which a gathering of believers maintained connection with and similarity to local Islamic culture. It was criticized by some as being one-dimensional and/or as presenting Islam as the primary focus in issues of contextualization. Yet it found wide usage as a point of reference both in field conversations and articles on contextualization in the Muslim world (and to a lesser degree, the Hindu and Buddhist worlds). The C spectrum was presented as a descriptive tool, not a prescriptive one. But it found wide currency as a shorthand standard for the kind of contextual ministry being done by western missionaries in the Muslim world (and among national co-workers connected with those western missionaries).

Even prior to publication of the C Spectrum article, some missionaries in the city where the model originated were describing their ministry strategy as 'C4 birthing C5'. This meant that they (and even more so, their national co-workers) were adopting a 'C4' lifestyle, but the goal of their ministry was to reach Muslims who would remain within Islam as followers of Jesus. A variety of other sloppy uses of the spectrum became common, so that on some fields it was not uncommon to hear descriptions such as 'We're doing C5'. Questions such as 'Where are you on the C Scale?' became a convenient way to reduce complex issues to a simple method of pigeonholing others and determining: 'Are you with me or against me?' The handy tool had taken on a life of its own, beyond the original description put forth by Travis.

For the next few years, and to some extent up to the present, 'C5' became the focal point of debate about the appropriate limits and dynamics of

21 Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity,* 112, 371.

22 Parshall, 'How Much Muslim Context?'.

23 John Travis, 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of Christ-centered Communities ("C") Found in the Muslim Context', *EMQ* 34 (4) (1998), 407-408.

contextualization among Muslims. Because of the diversity of teachings and field practices, 'C5' became something of a catch-all phrase for a wide range of beliefs and practices having some connection with biblical concepts and some connection with or similarity to Islam.

The danger of suspicious and alarmed Christians exposing the new contextual work, or Muslims being offended or attacking, tended to encourage practitioners to shroud the new approaches in secrecy. Questions from those outside a circle of trust tended to be given vague answers which in turn tended to increase suspicion. This tension is still a major factor in the discussion of these issues: the desire to protect new believers and contextual workers vs. the desire to evaluate theology and accuracy of reporting, and to include a wider group of Christians in discussion of these issues.

In the early 2000s, some proponents of C5 began to use (and prefer) the term, 'Insider Movement'. For a few years, there was some confusion about whether the term was intended to connote: a) Muslims who followed Jesus and still remained culturally 'inside' their ethnic group (including C3 or C4—assuming a Christian or non-specific religious identity) or b) Muslims who followed Jesus and still remained culturally and religiously 'inside' their ethnic group (C5). Within a few years, articles by Kevin Higgins and Rebecca Lewis presented clear definitions of what they meant by the term.

In 2004, Higgins presented the first published definition of Insider Movements known to this author.

> I know of no generally accepted definition for an 'Insider Movement,'

so I will try to define how I use the term….*Insider Movement: A growing number of families, individuals, clans, and/or friendship-webs becoming faithful disciples of Jesus within the culture of their people group, including their religious culture. This faithful discipleship will express itself in culturally appropriate communities of believers who will also continue to live within as much of their culture, including the religious life of the culture, as is biblically faithful. The Holy Spirit, through the Word and through His people will also begin to transform His people and their culture, religious life, and worldview.*[24]

Higgins underlined the importance of the missiological concept with these words:

> I believe that the debate about Insider Movements actually is a debate about the gospel, one as potentially earth-shaking as the Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Anabaptist reform movements of the 16th century. Those movements…. forced church leaders to re-evaluate church practice and doctrine.

> Similarly, I see Insider Movements as fueling (and being fueled by) a rediscovery of the Incarnation, of a thoroughly biblical approach to culture and religion, of the role of the Holy Spirit in leading God's people to 'work out' the gospel in new ways, and of an understanding of how God works in the world within and beyond His covenant people. And we may be forced to re-evaluate

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24 Kevin Higgins, 'The Key to Insider Movements: The "Devoted's" of Acts', *IJFM* 24 (1) (2004): 156.

some widely held ideas and practices of our own.[25]

Three years later, Rebecca Lewis offered a similar definition:

> An 'insider movement' is any movement to faith in Christ where a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identities as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.[26]

Notably, neither Higgins nor Lewis claimed their presentation to be merely descriptive. Both wrote in favour of a role they hoped missionaries would take in *promoting* Insider Movements. 'Promoting' was the first word of Lewis' title, and Higgins wrote of 'two basic issues that must be addressed in the discussion of whether catalysing "Insider Movements" is an appropriate aim of mission effort in the first place'.[27]

In a sidebar of Lewis' article, she also presented 'A Note about the C-scale',[28] a useful clarification that not all C5 ministry is or should claim to be an Insider Movement. But are all Insider Movements C5? John Travis had written a few months earlier:

> For several years, as far as I know, this term ['insider'] has been used

interchangeably with C5. This has been due to the perception that to really be seen as 'one of us' in cultures that are close to 100% Muslim, one would need to be a Muslim. For the past two years, however, I have begun to see people use the term 'insider' in a broader sense. In this broader sense, one may change religions, but through a concerted effort to remain culturally and socially a part of the predominant Islamic culture, one can still remain a part of the community from which one heralds. By definition, C3 and C4 Christ-centred communities are attempts to stay and witness within one's community of birth: in other words, to remain an 'insider'. Therefore, perhaps we need to find a better term like 'cultural insider' (for C3 and C4) and 'religious' or 'socio-religious' insider to describe C5.[29]

Travis' clarification appeared to fall on deaf ears, and the term 'Insider Movement' continued to be understood by most to refer exclusively to *socio-religious* insiders (C5). In the minds of many, 'Insider Movement' became another catch-all term for the fuzzy catch-all category that had previously attached itself to 'C5'.

Perhaps partly because of this accretion of baggage, both Higgins and Lewis have made a shift and now prefer other descriptions of the movements with which they are familiar. Yet the term, 'Insider Movement', lives

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25 Higgins, 'The Key', 155.

26 Rebecca Lewis, 'Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities', *IJFM*, 24 (2) (2007), 75.

27 Higgins, 'The Key', 156.

28 Rebecca Lewis, 'A Note about the C-scale', *IJFM*, 24/2 (2007), 76.

29 John Travis, 'Letters to the Editor', 01 Sept 2006, *Mission Frontiers,* <www.mission-frontiers.org/issue/article/letters-to-the-editor> (cited 25 Feb. 2013).

on, with one major difference in understanding that tends to fuel perennial *mis*understanding. Many writers on the subject use the phrase, 'Insider Movements' (plural), essentially as defined by Higgins and Lewis. However, others, including a number of authors posting on the website 'Biblical Missiology',[30] prefer to speak and write of 'The Insider Movement' (singular). Perhaps the clearest example of this usage and its intended meaning is Georges Houssney's 'Position Paper on the Insider Movement', in which he wrote:

> 'What is the Insider Movement? Insider Movement is a fairly recent term used to describe a variety of approaches such as Common Ground, Common Word, Camel Method, and the C1-C6 scale of contextualization. Although leaders of these movements do not all agree on details, they share common convictions….an examination of each approach reveals that they hold in common similar views of Islam, Muhammad, and the Qur'an. Consequently, their views of God, Christ, and the gospel are impacted.[31]

Whatever one's view of the relevant phenomena, one must discern whether any given writer or speaker has in mind the Higgins/Lewis definition or the 'Biblical Missiology' definition. The two meanings differ widely.

II Current Issues in the Insider Movement Discussion

A small handful of issues continues to be discussed and debated in a variety of forums. Sometimes the issues are clearly seen and fruitfully discussed; at other times hidden assumptions or unrealized connections muddy the waters of discussion. A host of straw men, over-generalizations and misunderstandings continue to challenge attempts at effective interaction. Significant progress has been made toward better understanding of these issues, yet major disagreements still remain.

Differing perspectives on these issues are sometime framed as two distinct and mutually exclusive positions or as two distinct 'camps' battling against one another. However, in reality, effective discussion of a given issue often shows that the 'two positions' are better seen as poles or ends of a spectrum of views on the issue. Many of those wrestling deeply with these issues resist attempts to characterize themselves as falling into one or the other of two warring 'camps'. The network and ongoing discussion, 'Bridging the Divide', was launched to bring together scholar-practitioners from across the spectrum of views on these subjects into a context where personal relationships can be built, issues can be openly and respectfully aired, and differing views can be discussed, with 'iron sharpening iron'.

1. Is the Allah of the Qur'an the same as the Father of the Biblical Jesus?

This foundational question has been discussed and debated since the time of Muhammad. The Qur'an claims

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30 http://biblicalmissiology.org
31 Georges Houssney, 'Position Paper on the Insider Movement', <http://biblicalmissiology.org/2010/05/03/position-paper-on-the-insider-movement> (2003, accessed 25 Feb. 2013).

that Muhammad was bringing a fresh revelation from the God of Abraham, Moses, David and Jesus. Yet the deity described in Muhammad's messages differs at numerous vital points from the teaching of the Bible. Similarities abound, but so do differences. Thus a wide spectrum of answers to this question remains, even among evangelicals.

At one end of the spectrum is the poorly supported but still-published claim that 'Islam is nothing more than a revival of the ancient moon god cult….it is sheer idolatry'.[32] This view founders not only on the weakness of evidence but even more on the fact that 'Allah' was the term being used by Arabs for the God of the Bible well before Muhammad's birth.[33] Yet many who reject this argument would still resonate with the claim that 'Ali Imran 3:54 has a description of the Islamic Allah, "And the unbelievers plotted and deceived, and Allah too deceived, and the best deceiver is Allah". This is the god of Islam from their book….. Jn. 8:44 says "the Devil is the father of lies".'[34]

At the other end of the spectrum is the view that the God of Christianity and Islam are the same God. Rick Love stated it most strikingly: '*I believe that Muslims worship the true God*. But I also believe that their view of God falls short of His perfections and beauty as described in the Bible.'[35]

Between these two views can be found a whole spectrum of descriptions of the issue. One clear yet nuanced middle position is that of Timothy Tennent: 'There is an important difference between asking the question from a philosophical/ontological perspective, "Are Allah and God references to the same *being*?" (clearly, yes) [and posing] the question, "Is the Allah as revealed in the Qur'an identical to the Allah as revealed in an Arabic Bible?" [to which] the answer is obviously "no"'.[36]

We might hope that appeal to mature Christians from a Muslim background would settle the issue, but even there we find disagreement. The majority of Christians from a Muslim background tend to stress the differences between the God of the Bible and the deity of Islam. But others say that through Christ and biblical revelation they came to know personally the God they had known something *about* through Islam. One Muslim-background leader of a significant movement in Africa summarized it as 'Same God, different understanding'.[37]

32 Robert Morey, *The Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World's Fastest Growing Religion* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1992), 218.

33 Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London: Longman, 1979), 74.

34 Scott Woods, 'A Biblical Look at C5 Muslim Evangelism,' *EMQ* (2003). Available online: www.emisdirect.com/emq/issue-281/1813.

35 Cited by Justin Taylor in, 'Do Muslims Worship the True God? A Bridge Too Far', <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/2008/02/28/do-muslims-worship-true-god-bridge-too> (2008, accessed 26 Feb. 2013).

36 Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 35.

37 Private conversation with the author; name and location withheld for security reasons.

2. What is an Appropriate Role for Non-Muslim-Background People in Contextualization for Muslims?

Field workers on all sides of the issues tend to see the ways that those with whom they disagree are influencing Muslims who come to faith in Christ—in the direction of views on culture and contextualization similar to their own. Even the choice of Scripture texts used to disciple someone reflects the views of the chooser. In many cultures, new believers are astute at sensing and following the preferences of western 'patrons', despite any attempts of those westerners to avoid imposing their own preferences on new believers. And many missionaries hold such strong convictions on contextual issues that they consider it simply biblical obedience to help guide new believers in 'the best path'.

On a closely related subject, Bradford Greer asks, 'What authority do outsiders actually have as they assess and evaluate what insider believing communities do? Where do outsider theological concerns cross the line and actually exemplify a form of theological imperialism—a theolonialism?'[38] Doug Coleman responds: 'Insofar as Scripture speaks to issues of authority for faith and practice, I suggest this is a conversation in which all believers can rightly participate, both insiders and outsiders.'[39]

Meanwhile, David Watson[40] aims to bypass much of this issue by disallowing contextualization as a function for outsiders:

The role of the cross-cultural worker is to *deculturalize* the Gospel—presenting the Gospel without commentary, but with the question, 'How will we obey what God has said?' If it's not in the Bible, we don't introduce it to the culture. The role of the cultural worker is to *contextualize* the Gospel—presenting the Gospel and asking, 'What must we change in our lives and culture in order to be obedient to all the commands of Christ?'[41]

3. What Identity is Appropriate for a Muslim-Background Disciple of Jesus?

At one end of the spectrum are those who argue that any true follower of Christ should be willing to embrace the name (identity) found in the Bible (1 Pet. 4:6). Toward the other end of the spectrum, many paint a scenario like this:

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38 Bradford Greer, Book Review of Doug Coleman, *A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives: Theology of Religions, Revelation, Soteriology and Ecclesiology* (Pasadena: EMS Dissertation Series, William Carey International University Press, 2011), in *IJFM*, 28/4 (2011), 206.

39 Doug Coleman, 'Doug Coleman Responds to Bradford Greer's Critique', *IJFM,* 29 (1) (2012), 50.

40 Joined by others following the Disciple-Making Movement approach to church planting, as described by Jerry Trousdale, *Miraculous Movements: How Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims Are Falling in Love with Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012).

41 David Watson, 'Church Planting Essentials—Exploring Contextualization and Deculturalization' <http://www.davidlwatson.org/2010/02/12/church-planting-essentials-%E2%80%93-exploring-contextualization-and-deculturalization> (2010, cited 27 Feb 2013). Italics added.

Many Muslims today are attracted to Jesus but turned off by Christianity, which for them conjures up negative images of the Crusades, colonialism, a foreign religion, and the 'Christian' West where we eat pork, drink alcohol, and watch R-rated movies. No wonder they don't want to be identified as 'Christians', but they certainly want to follow Jesus and make Him Lord of their lives.[42]

Both sides agree that salvation is not found in a religious system (Christianity) but in a personal relationship with Jesus. Yet Travis carries the argument further: 'We affirmed that people are saved by faith in Christ, not by religious affiliation. Muslim followers of Christ (i.e. "C5 believers") are our brothers and sisters in the Lord, even though they do not "change religions".'[43]

For about a decade, most of this dispute focused on the choices of 'Christian' (C1-3) vs. 'Muslim' (C5) vs. avoiding the labels as much as possible (C4). Discussion and understanding of this topic has moved forward considerably in just the past few years, with publication of papers and books[44] opening

fresh and vital insights into the nature of identity. We believe the article in this issue by Tim Green moves us even further toward a helpful understanding of the dynamics at work in the multifaceted identity struggle of most Muslims who begin and continue to follow Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

4. What are Appropriate Translations of Some Key Biblical Terms in Muslim Idiom Translations?

The phrase, 'Muslim Idiom Translation' (MIT),[45] was used for a time within Wycliffe and SIL to describe translations done with an Islamic readership in mind. In such translations, a special effort is made to choose terms that will communicate the biblical message without causing unnecessary offence or putting needless stumbling blocks in the path of Muslim readers. Critics object that some MITs do not adequately present God as Father and Son. The term MIT is no longer used by Wycliffe or SIL, but to this writer's knowledge no comparably descrip-

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42 Warrick Farah, 'No sacred forms, only sacred meanings' <http://muslimministry. blogspot.com/2013/02/no-sacred-forms-only-sacred-meanings.html> (2013, accessed 27 Feb. 2013). The text is quoted from Darrell Whiteman, 'Response to Paul Heibert' in Stetzer and Hesselgrave (eds.), *MissionShift* (Nashville, B&H Academic 2010), 122.

43 John Travis, 'Must All Muslims Leave Islam to Follow Jesus?' *EMQ* <http://www. emisdirect.com/emq/issue-230/1253> (1998, accessed 14 Dec. 2011).

44 Most notably, Kathryn Kraft, *Searching for Heaven in the Real World: A Sociological Discussion of Conversion in the Arab World* (Oxford:

Regnum Books International, 2012) and David Greenlee (ed.) *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between*? (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013), containing vital articles on identity by Tim Green and Jens Barnett. A preview of one of Barnett's articles was described by Warrick Farah as 'Another nail in the C Spectrum's coffin?' (10 Feb. 2013) <http://muslimministry.blogspot.com> (2013, cited 15 Feb. 2013).

45 Rick Brown, John Penny, and Leith Gray, 'Muslim-Idiom Bible Translations: Claims and Facts', *St Francis Magazine* 5 (6) (2009), 87-105. Technically IM and MIT are separate issues, though there is some overlap in issues connected with both.

tive phrase has replaced it. Thus it is used here as a non-derogatory, simply-named category of translations around which controversy continues to swirl.

The MIT approach to translation was prominently described and encouraged by Rick Brown, a consultant with SIL, in numerous articles.[46] Brown's proposed approach was questioned or opposed by a number of writers, particularly with reference to divine familial terms.[47] In 2011, discussions and critiques which had been taking place in a variety of Muslim ministry contexts came to much wider attention among evangelicals with the publication of more popular level articles.[48]

Previous critiques became much more public in early 2012 with the posting of an on-line petition and related information concerning a number of MITs.[49] This brought the response: 'SIL International Commentary on the Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms'.[50]

In spring of 2012, the World Evangelical Alliance accepted a request by Wycliffe and SIL for an independent review of policies and practices relating to the translation of 'God the Father' and the 'Son of God'. This review was completed and its recommendations posted in late April 2013, and Wycliffe and SIL have agreed to follow the recommendations. This process and outcome constitute a significant step forward in the global church's consideration of the issues involved. Responses seen at present range from optimism to scepticism.[51]

5. Are There Some Islamic Practices that Every Follower of Jesus Should Forsake?

Some groups and writers believe that certain practices are inherently infused

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46 In addition to the above article, see for example Rick Brown's articles in the *IJFM*: 'The Son of God—Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus', *IJFM* 17 (1) (2000), 41-52; 'Explaining the Biblical Term "Son(s) of God" in Muslim Contexts' *IJFM* 22 (3) (2005), 91-96; 'Translating the Biblical Term "Son(s) of God" in Muslim Contexts' *IJFM* 22 (4) (2005), 135-145; Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray, 'A Brief Analysis of Filial and Paternal Terms in the Bible', *IJFM* 28 (3) (2011), 121-125.

47 Among them, J. Scott Horrell, 'Cautions Regarding "Son of God" in Muslim-Idiom Translations of the Bible: Seeking Sensible Balance', *St Francis Magazine* 6 (4) (2010), 638-666. Donald Fairbairn, 'Translating "Son of God": Insights from the Early Church', *St Francis Magazine,* 8 (6) (2012), 176-203; David Abernathy, 'Translating "Son of God" in Missionary Bible Translation: A Critique of "Muslim-Idiom Bible Translations: Claims and Facts", by Rick Brown, John Penny and Leith Gray', *St Francis Magazine* 6 (1) (2010), 749-775.

48 Collin Hansen, 'The Son and the Crescent', *Christianity Today* 55 (2) (February 2011). Collin Hansen, 'Wycliffe, SIL Issue Guidelines on Translating "Son of God" Among Muslims', *Christianity Today* 55 (10) (13 Oct. 2011). Emily Belz, 'Inside out', *World* (7 May 2011);

Emily Belz, 'Holding translators accountable', *World* (8 October 2011); Emily Belz, 'The battle for accurate Bible translation in Asia' *World* (25 Feb. 2012).

49 Editor, 'Wycliffe, SIL & Frontiers Controversy', *Biblical Missiology* (1 Feb. 2012).

50 SIL Standards for Translation of Divine Familial Terms, <http://www-01.sil.org/translation/divine_familial_terms.htm> (cited 2 Mar. 2013).

51 SIL Website, 'SIL Executive Director describes changes in response to WEA Panel Report', <http://www.sil.org/about/news/sil-executive-director-describes-changes-response-wea-panel-report> (2013, cited 10 May 2013).

with unbiblical meaning, implications and/or spiritual connections and thus should be forsaken by any mature follower of Christ. Other writers defend one or more of these practices as neutral forms capable of being filled with biblical meaning, echoing Kraft's view that 'Almost any cultural forms can be captured for Christ'.[52]

An example of the first approach can be seen in 'Contextualization of Ministry among Muslims: A Statement on the Appropriate Limits': 'We believe it is not biblically justified to teach that followers of Christ should:

(1) recite the Muslim creed (Shahada): "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger";

(2) continue to participate in the ritual prayers (Salat) in the mosque;

(3) identify themselves as Muslims in terms of faith commitment.'[53]

A more open approach is reflected, for example, in Rick Brown's statement: 'Personally I think the second half of the *shahāda* should be avoided whenever possible and said only under duress with an interpretation that is compatible with the Bible….I know godly, biblical Muslims, highly blessed in their ministry, with 24 to 42 years of experience, who think saying the *shahāda* has no negative consequence. Until I see a compelling argument to the contrary, I am inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt, especially when

occasions that require the *shahāda* arise only rarely.'[54]

6. What are Appropriate Ways for Muslim-Background Believers to View and Talk about Muhammad?

Many would say that continued allegiance to or faith in Mohammed is likely to hinder spiritual growth of Muslim-background followers of Christ. Yet many would leave room for flexibility of word choice when witnessing to Muslims who do not yet follow Christ. Joshua Massey wrote:

This tends to be almost entirely an outsider question….many (though by no means all) Muslim followers of Jesus have no trouble affirming Muhammad is a *rasul* because, they say, Muhammad was the one who taught me and my ancestors to worship the One true God when they were bowing to idols of stone and wood; Muhammad taught me that Jesus is the Word of God who brought the Good News; Muhammad taught me to believe in the Bible….We learned all this from Muhammad, not Christians. If this is not 'prophetic', what is?[55]

Many, including many believers from a Muslim background, would consider such a view dangerously optimistic about how much true theology can be gained from Muhammad's message. They would point out that Massey never addresses the question: Is this view consistent with biblical usage of

52 Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity,* 96.

53 Arab World Ministries (AWM), 'Contextualization of Ministry among Muslims: A Statement on the Appropriate Limits', *St Francis Magazine* (1) (3) (18 May 2007), 1-2.

54 Rick Brown, 'Biblical Muslims', *IJFM*, 24 (2) (2007), 73.

55 Joshua Massey, 'Misunderstanding C5: His Ways Are Not Our Orthodoxy', *EMQ,* 40 (3) (2004).

the word 'prophet', specifically 'God's prophet' or 'God's messenger'?

7. What about the impact of Greek (Western) Worldview?

The question here is: How much were the ecumenical church councils and the historical norms of orthodox Christian theology shaped by a Greek (western) worldview? How much are 'just the bible and the holy spirit' enough to guide a group into mature understanding of biblical truth?

At one end of the spectrum stand those who believe that every mature believer and church should subscribe to orthodox Christian theology as enunciated by the Ecumenical Councils of the early church. They use words such as 'heresy' and 'syncretism' of groups or individuals who prefer not to use the language of 'Trinity' or to describe Jesus as 'the eternal Son of God' or 'God the Son'.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who argue that Muslim followers of Jesus should be allowed to wrestle with the Bible for themselves and develop contextually appropriate ways to enunciate their understanding of the Bible's teaching about the nature of the godhead (as well as other subjects). They view it as theological western imperialism to demand that those from a Muslim background (eastern worldview) simply accept the historic preformulations of the western church.

In 'Misunderstanding C5',[56] Joshua Massey asserted that the wording of orthodoxy found in the fourth century councils and creeds differed from biblical teaching.

> Understanding *theos* (God) as triune was surely common among Gentile Christians in the fourth century, but only after, in Walls' terms, the gospel had penetrated and permeated a rather arrogant Greek system of thought which applied its traditions of codification and organization to theology, culminating in the development of Chalcedonian orthodoxy....the New Testament provides little evidence to suggest this understanding of *theos* was widespread or common in earliest Christianity ....

> Is it possible that thousands of Jewish followers of Jesus in earliest Christianity might not have defined the one God of Israel as three co-eternal Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Given that no verse of the New Testament comes close to explicitly describing God in this way, it is not only possible but probable.

Rebecca Lewis stated:

> It is more accurate to recognize that in the first century there were in existence at least two radically different religions based on Jesus Christ. There was the Jewish version... and there was the Greco-Roman version, turning philosophy-loving hearts, that explored the nuances of the Trinity and the incarnation.... the crux of Paul's argument is actually that no one should consider one religious form of faith in Christ to be superior to another.[57]

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56 Massey, 'Misunderstanding'. Massey adds this disclaimer: 'This brief Christological survey in no way intends to suggest that Christ is not divine or that Trinitarian doctrine should be disregarded'.

57 Rebecca Lewis, 'The Integrity of the Gos-

David Garner responded to this claim:

> The IM paradigm … unavoidably attenuates the gospel's authority. By proffering the gospel according to cultural constraints, cultural hegemony relativizes the magisterial quality of the gospel….To Lewis, retaining Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu religious practice is not only okay; it is the only way in which the integrity of the gospel is maintained. …Lewis's expression of 'two radically different religions based on Jesus Christ', while utterly confusing in terms of how to speak of a united body of Christ in such terms (cf. Eph. 4:1–6), betrays a failure to receive the full implications of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection for a people of God who by the Holy Spirit are fully united to Christ and thereby to one another.[58]

Basil Grafas championed 'the Grand Tradition' (including the early ecumenical councils) with these words:

> Contemporary evangelism or missions calling people to Christ, but not to the church of the Grand Tradition would have been seen as outright heresy by any prior age…. Nothing better captures the biblical understanding of the essence of the church than the Nicene Creed. Though it did not emerge until the doctrinal struggles of the fourth century, it faithfully captured the mind of the apostolic witness…. Far

from being a statement of imperial power wedded to Greek philosophy, it really depicted the triumph of the church as martyr-witness.[59]

8. What are the Appropriate Biblical Relationships?

When we look at the appropriate biblical relationships between contextual fellowships of disciples from a Muslim background and those from the wider non-Muslim-background body of Christ, we can see that for many years, any Muslim who came to faith in Christ was expected to attend an existing church and learn to follow the patterns of worship and lifestyle found there. This often resulted in a sense of alienation, as if following Christ required forsaking their own culture to join a foreign (usually westernized) culture. The jarring dislocation of this experience was often a factor for those who returned to Islam.

Thus, among the newer approaches was a proposal that those coming to faith from an Islamic background learn to worship and grow in faith within a (usually small) fellowship of others from a similar social and religious background, as suggested by McGavran's homogeneous unit principle.[60] This sometimes meant minimal or no contact with existing churches.

This social/cultural distance often enabled new believers to grow in Christ with less sense of cultural al-

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pel and Insider Movements', *IJFM,* 27 (1) (2010), 45-46.

58 David Garner, 'High Stakes: Insider Movement Hermeneutics and the Gospel', *Themelios* 37 (2) (2012).

59 Basil Grafas, 'Rediscovering the Revelational Church', *Biblical Missiology* (23 Aug. 2011).

60 Originally enunciated in Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980).

ienation and allowed unbelievers to view the gospel as more relevant to their life and culture. There have also been numerous cases where influence from an existing church has destroyed the witness and/or the viability of a contextual fellowship. However, this approach sometimes raised concerns that without contact with more mature Christians in the wider body of Christ, new believers or fellowships could easily be subject to aberrant doctrine or fail to grow to full maturity. This concern was sometimes paired with accusations that western missionaries were 'fencing off' the fruit of their ministry from other Christians, in order to keep them following the brand of highly contextual religious life that the missionaries were trying to encourage.

J. S. William observes:

Most likely, this debate has more to do with the question of 'when' not 'if'. A number of writers, critics included, show a certain level of comfort with an insider approach as a transitional model. As insider groups gain momentum, they will likely discern for themselves a need to connect with the global body of believers. For now the main question is whether or not this is a necessary sign of their legitimacy and maturity.[61]

III Conclusion

Even as discussion of these and other related issues continues, we see in our day many more encouraging reports of gospel fruit in the Muslim world than were seen just fifty years ago. For example, 2012's *Miraculous Movements: How Hundreds of Thousands of Muslims Are Falling in Love with Jesus* is a far cry from 1969's *Ten Muslims Meet Christ*. And 'Fruitful Practices' research,[62] examining both Insider Movements and other church planting and gospel sowing approaches (while withholding judgment about the legitimacy of any particular approach), is giving fresh insight into ways Muslims are coming to know Christ in these days.

Much remains to be done to see the fulfilment of Jesus' promise, 'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations [*ethnē*], and then the end will come'.[63] Yet we can be encouraged that behind the IM debates are thousands of God's children with a variety of approaches, each passionate about seeing the glory of Christ made known in the Muslim world.

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61 J. S. William, 'Inside/Outside: Getting to the Center of the Muslim Contextualization Debates', *St Francis Magazine,* 7 (3) (2011), 84.

62 As exemplified, for example, by Eric Adams, Don Allan and Bob Fish, 'Seven Themes of Fruitfulness', *IJFM* 26 (2) (2009), 75-81.

63 Mt. 24:14.