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

Paternoster:
thinking faith

WEA
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

for
WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

ERT (2013) 37:4, 361-380

Beyond the C-Spectrum? A Search for New Models

Tim Green

Key words: *Conversion, identity, ethnicity, believers from Muslim background (BMB), Insider Movement, Islam*

For the last fifteen years the 'C Spectrum'[1] has framed discussion about believers from Muslim background. More recently 'Insider Movements' terminology has also entered the fray alongside the C Spectrum, but without replacing it since 'insiders' are taken as equivalent to the 'C5' position in an otherwise unaltered model.

This framework for discussion has proved helpful in some respects and limiting in others. Growing numbers of missiologists, including John Travis himself who authored the spectrum, note its limitations and would encourage the development of additional models based on field realities.[2] Perhaps such models would help us better to understand the intertwined issues at stake, and thereby move the debate forward from its present position entrenched around C4 versus C5. This paper offers a modest contribution to this search for new models, in the hope that others may build on its ideas and improve them further.

1 Limitations of the C Spectrum

The 'C Spectrum', originally offered as a descriptive analysis, instead became an instrument of prescriptive policy for those favouring or opposing a C5/Insider approach. It is important to remember that, according to Travis' original definitions, the key difference between C4 and C5 is not *contextualization* but

1 John Travis, 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of 'Christ Centered Communities' ('C') Found in the Muslim Context', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 34,4 (October 1998), 407–408.

2 I requested Travis to critique this present paper and I appreciate his careful and gracious responses.

Rev. ***Tim Green*** *is an Interserve mission worker who has been involved in theological education by extension (TEE) for 25 years, mostly in Pakistan and Jordan He has written training materials including the* Friendship First *DVD (2011) and* Come Follow Me *(2013) specifically for believers for Muslim background. his doctoral research focuses on issues of identity faced by these people. This article is adapted from his chapters in David Greenlee, (ed.)* Longing for Community: Church, 'Ummah or Somewhere in Between? *(2013) and his article 'Identity Issues for ex-Muslim Christians, with particular reference to Marriage', in* St. Francis Magazine*, Vol 8 No 4, August 2012, 435-481, with permission in both cases.*

identity. Both categories are highly contextualized, but the key difference is that C4 groups are 'not seen as Muslim by the Muslim community' while C5 groups remain 'legally and socially within the community of Islam'. Often, however, public discussion of the spectrum has conflated issues of identity with issues of contextualization, leading to a lack of clarity in the debate.

Moreover, many believe that the spectrum itself is too limited in its scope to cope with all the weight placed upon it. They ask how a static, one-dimensional diagram can depict the fluid, multi-dimensional issues of theology, culture, identity and community. The model depicts neither the subtle variations between one context and another, nor contexts which evolve over a period of time.

A further limitation of the C Spectrum, argues Jens Barnett, is that it portrays '*Muslim* and *Christian* religio-cultural identities as monolithic and mutually exclusive'. Therefore:

> On this continuum, there is no space for a believer… who expresses belonging to both Christian and Muslim cultural traditions simultaneously, or even for one who has a piecemeal approach of fully belonging in some aspects that do not conflict with his or her faith, while totally rejecting others.[3]

Barnett's critique stimulates reflection on what it means to be 'Christian' or 'Muslim' at different levels of identity. He draws on broader theories of identity and culture, showing that the situation of Christ's followers from Muslim background is not unique in our modern world of multiple and shifting identities.

However, it is important to distinguish between the identity of *individuals*, which Barnett describes in his writing and in the two dimensional models[4] he proposes as alternatives to the C Spectrum, from the identity of *communities*. Travis is clear that the C Spectrum was originally intended only to describe communities and community labels, not the identity dilemmas of individual believers.[5] A nuanced exploration of 'identity' in its individual and communal aspects would enable us to move beyond the limitations of the C Spectrum and to compare it with other possible models. This paper seeks to lay an initial foundation for this work.

Its theoretical roots are drawn from the social sciences, without apology since they have much to offer by way of analysis, but recognizing that a theological perspective is complementary and indeed normative. The overarching identity of all Christ's followers, whatever their background, is individually as children of God and corporately as members of Christ's body, his one global community with its wonderfully diverse local expressions. To be 'in' Christ does not obliterate cultural differences but it does relativize them. It

3 Jens Barnett, 'Refusing to Choose: Multiple Belonging among Arab Followers of Christ', in David Greenlee (editor), *Longing for Community: Church, 'Ummah or Somewhere in Between?* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2013), 20.

4 See Barnett's articles and outlines in http://muslimministry.blogspot.co.uk/. He welcomes correspondence on these matters at jensbarnett@gmail.com. I appreciate his stimulating help to my thinking.

5 Personal correspondence with Travis, May 2013.

is at times necessary to distinguish between different groups of Jesus-followers according to their background, but it should always be remembered that where we come 'from' matters less than where we are heading 'to'.

II A Quest for Identity

Just as it takes decades for physical migrants to adjust to their new identity, so it is with spiritual migrants. Many Muslims have found that, after finding Christ, their identity quest is resolved in one sense but intensified in other respects. They begin a long search to negotiate a place for themselves between the Muslim community which is theirs by birth and the Christian community to which they now belong. '*Who are we* in Christ?' was how a group of Afghans put it to me. Mazhar Mallouhi, after converting to Christianity as a young man, entered 'a deep internal struggle' and 'a profound crisis of identity' as he sought to integrate his faith in Jesus with his Muslim cultural heritage.[6] This longing for identity has been noted in doctoral research on believers from Muslim backgrounds.[7]

For these believers the question of contextualization, while of some importance, is less urgent than the question of identity. More pressing than whether to use a guitar or sitar in worship are such dilemmas as:

- How can I grow strong in Christ while still relating to my Muslim family?
- What label shall I use to describe myself to Muslims?
- How will I find a believing spouse?
- What will be written on the 'religion' section of my children's birth certificate?
- With which community will they identify as they grow up?
- Will I be buried in a Muslim or Christian graveyard?

The field of 'identity studies' is highly relevant to believers from Muslim background, and to this we now turn. The concepts sketched below are in a condensed form, and for more detail please see my other publications[8] and my forthcoming PhD dissertation on issues of identity facing first generation believers in Pakistan.

III Making Sense of Identity

1. A complex Minefield

Making sense of 'identity' can be difficult. This is partly because different academic disciplines define identity in different ways. Psychologists focus on the private self-awareness of individuals, while anthropologists and some

6 Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road* (Lanham, Md.: Cowley Publications, 2007), 105.

7 E.g. Seppo Syrjänen, *In Search of Meaning and Identity: Conversion to Christianity in Pakistani Muslim Culture* (Vammala: Annals of the Finnish Society for Missiology and Ecumenics, 45, 1984); Kathryn Kraft, 'Community and Identity among Arabs of a Muslim Background who Choose to Follow a Christian Faith', PhD dissertation (Bristol: University of Bristol, 2008).

8 i.e. my two chapters on identity and conversion in ed. Greenlee, *Longing for Community*, 2013, and my article, 'Identity issues for ex-Muslim Christians, with particular reference to Marriage', in *St. Francis Magazine*, Vol 8 No 4, (August 2012), 435-481.

sociologists view identity as a collective label marking out different groups. Social psychologists describe 'identity negotiation' between individuals and groups.[9] So there is no universally agreed definition, even before taking theological perspectives into account.

Moreover, under the impact of globalization, 'waves of transformation crash across virtually the whole of the earth's surface',[10] breaking up the old certainties. Travel and the internet expose people to new worldviews. Migration and intermarriage create new hybrid identities, especially in the second generation. Pluralizing societies challenge fused notions of religion, ethnicity and nationality. 'The days of closed, homogeneous, unchanging societies are rapidly going and they will not come back', comments Jean-Marie Gaudeul.[11] Yet, alongside this globalizing juggernaut and often in opposition to it, collectivist understandings of identity ('we are, therefore I am') are still important especially in non-western societies.

For all these reasons, the field of 'identity studies' resembles a minefield. Nevertheless, we need to make a start somewhere, for this minefield is also a goldmine. To the persevering, it yields treasures of insight on identity issues facing Christ's followers from Muslim background.

2. A simplified Framework

To grapple with this slippery concept of 'identity', we must clarify some concepts and discern overall patterns. This provides us with a basic conceptual framework. Inevitably such a framework will be over-simplified, but clarity must precede nuance, which can be reintroduced afterwards.

The model I propose takes its starting-point from the work of Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, who conceptualized 'identity' as functioning at three levels. I have adapted[12] Beit-Hallahmi's scheme into a simple diagram, with his three layers of identity stacked above each other (see next page).

The following points about this model are worth highlighting:

Firstly, 'collective identity' concerns the way a whole group is labelled and distinguished from other groups by its identity markers. Collective identity refers to '*our*' identity as a whole tribe or class or nation, not to the identity of individuals.

Secondly and by contrast, '*my* core identity' and '*my* social identity' are both held by the individual. Therefore these two levels are shown as a pair in the diagram, separated from the collec-

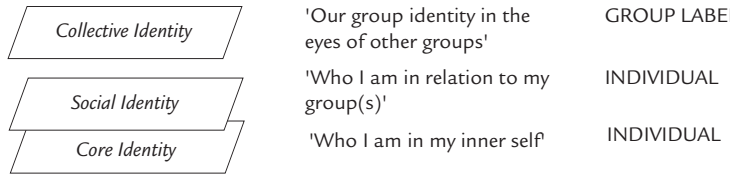
9 Sample writers in these fields would include Peter Berger, Pierre Bordieu, Erik Erikson, James Fowler, Anthony Giddens, Stuart Hall, William James, George Herbert Mead, Tariq Modood, Galen Strawson, Henri Tafjel and Victor Turner, but the list is almost endless.

10 Anthony Giddens 1990, cited in Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', *Modernity and its Future,* Hall et al, eds. (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 275-316.

11 Jean-Marie Gaudeul, *Called from Islam to Christ: Why Muslims become Christians* (translated from the French), (Crowborough: Monarch Books, 1999), 225-6.

12 See Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *Prolegomena to the Psychological Study of Religion* (London: Associated University Press, 1989), 96-97. My scheme differs slightly from his in that I developed the diagram, slightly changed the definitions and substituted 'core identity' for his term 'ego-identity'.

Figure 1. Identity at three levels: a simplified model



tive identity. A person's social identity concerns his or her actual social relationships, while the collective identity is a label for the whole group. This is an important but often forgotten distinction.

Thirdly, a person's core identity and social identity develop throughout life through a close and constant dialectic between these two levels, which we can see in this way:

This interplay between the internal and external aspects of a person's identity means that we should not think of the private 'self' as immune from whatever happens at the social level. The inner is affected by the outer through internalization, and in turn contributes to the outer through externalization.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann explain how this interaction begins in early childhood through 'primary socialization', whereby 'the child takes on the significant others' roles and attitudes, that is, internalizes them and makes them his own… the individual becomes what he is addressed as by his significant others'.[13] Normally by adulthood this identity is well consolidated, which explains why for an adult, 'it takes severe biographical shocks to disintegrate the massive reality internalized in early childhood':[14] shocks such as religious conversion.

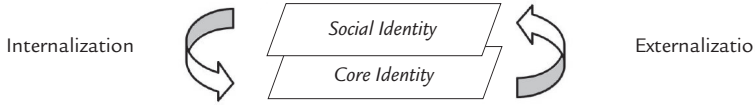
3. Making the model more sophisticated

In outlining this three-layer model I again stress that it is only a very simple starting point. Each layer is merely the setting for a great deal of further sub-division, movement and complexity. We might choose to elaborate the model by depicting the 'core identity'

13 Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 121.

14 Berger & Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 131.

Figure 2. Interaction between core and social identity



level as a stage on which different worldviews raise their voices like actors, each clamouring to be heard and obeyed. At the 'social identity' level we might draw a series of circles, some overlapping and some rigidly discrete, to illustrate an individual's multiple belongings. We could sub-divide the 'collective identity' level into a composite set of layers labelled 'ethnic', 'national', 'religious' and so on, but bonded together like plywood.

Elaborating further still, we might re-draw our three layer diagram as a three-floor department store, with each floor having inter-connecting and re-arrangeable departments, and with escalators to move ideas continually up and down between the 'core' and 'social' floors.

No model can adequately depict identity in all its complexity of identity. But so long as we recognize its limitations, our tripartite conceptualization of identity can carry us quite a long way in understanding, at each level, what it is to be 'Muslim' and therefore what it means to convert.

IV Muslim Identity at Each Level

Let us consider each identity layer in turn, as it relates to Muslim people and societies.

1. Muslim 'Collective identity'

Nationality, ethnicity, and often religion are entered on people's birth certificates before they have any chance to decide for themselves. These collective labels are ascribed by others, at least initially. To shift later from one collective identity to another is possible in certain cases (nationality, for example) and not in others (ethnicity). But should a change of *religious* collective identity be allowed? On that question, traditional Islamic law collides head-on with the United Nations' definition of human rights.

In traditional societies, collective identities of religion, ethnicity and nationality are often fused. To change religion is perceived as betraying one's ethnic or national identity, which helps to explain why it is so hard for a Malay or Turk or Saudi to become a 'Christian'. In some pluralistic cultures too, such as India, the religious collective identity label remains a powerful loyalty test. Even in the secular West, a British-born Pakistani friend of mine was told by her relative, 'Don't you realize that by becoming a Christian you have abandoned your roots, your heritage and your family name?'

2. Muslim 'Social identity'

Religious social identity is initially internalized, like other social identities, within the boundaries of the family. Most people are simply born into a religion, rather than choosing one. Islam as a social identity is more often assumed than chosen, at least in traditional Muslim societies, for it is woven into the fabric of daily life and provides a secure framework from cradle to grave. The Muslim creed is whispered into one's ears at birth and recited over one's corpse in death.

As Kenneth Cragg points out,[15] an endless interpenetration of religion and society confirms the young in their

15 Kenneth Cragg, *The Dome and the Rock* (London: SPCK, 1964), 148.

Islam, and as they grow into adulthood they pass through no ceremony to mark their full, personal, convinced allegiance to the faith. To be Muslim is automatic unless deliberate apostasy is chosen. Arguably it is this 'glue' of Muslim social identity which marks one of the biggest barriers to conversion out of Islam, and the sharpest cost for those who leave.

3. Muslim 'Core identity'

Muslims who live in a non-Islamic context, where their cultural assumptions are not taken for granted by the majority, are more likely to distinguish between social and core identities. For them it is no longer so easy just to 'go with the flow' of a Muslim social identity; fasting in Ramadan takes more effort when society makes no concession for it. This prompts migrants (or their children) critically to examine their assumptions and to make choices at the core identity level. Some decide to follow Islam in a committed, conscious way, some turn from Islam to another faith or atheism, and some continue to live with the unresolved cognitive dissonance of clashing world-views.

We have seen that collective identity, social identity and core identity all have a religious element. Since Islam lays claim to all these areas in a holistic way, believers from Muslim background (BMBs)[16] face a daunting task of renegotiating their identity at each level.

V Conversion: a Transformed Identity at Each Level

Our understanding of Muslims turning to Christ is assisted by conversion studies, which incorporate insights from psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, missiology and of course theology. The influential scholar, Lewis Rambo, and many others view religious conversion as a profound and radical transformation of identity. Let us consider how this applies at each identity level.

1. Conversion at the 'Core identity' level

One formerly Muslim friend from Uganda described to me the excitement he felt at his baptism:

> I felt 'I have died to my old sinful way, I have given myself to God and am now a new person. I am not the Firaz my friends knew, not the one whom Satan knew, but a new Firaz—forgiven, born again, controlled by the Spirit. The old Firaz is dead, the new one is alive in Christ'. I came out of the water feeling I am a new person!

However, this exhilarating sense of newness does not instantly obliterate the previous values and way of thinking. It takes a prolonged internal struggle for a person's worldview to change: to value humility above honour for example, or forgiveness above revenge. The claims of old and new worldviews compete to be heard and obeyed at the 'core identity' level. As Rudolf Heredia wrote of converts in India, 'their old identity is not erased; rather, the new

16 The term 'believer from Muslim background' is generally preferred these days to 'Muslim background believer' because it emphasises the present identity in Christ over the background identity in Islam.

one is overwritten on it.'[17] Viewed theologically, this is the lifelong struggle between old and new natures.

Deep level discipleship includes deliberately choosing the new worldview to win out over the old one each time they conflict. Eleven years after choosing Christ, Firaz still struggles at times with this. But this transformation can and will happen, so long as he keeps feeding his new core identity day by day and year by year.

2. Conversion at the 'Social identity' level

The social sciences insist, as does biblical theology, that the community of fellow-believers is vital. This new social identity offers believers a new *family* (especially if rejected by their blood relatives), affirmation of their new *worldview*, a new *role model* of what it means to be Christ's follower, and a new *pattern* of Christian discipleship.

This much is uncontroversial. What, however, is to become of their *old* social identity, the community in which they were born and raised? Must all links with that community be cut off? In other words, is it necessary to have only one social identity, or can two be combined at the same time? This is a burning question for the Insider Movements debate, and is considered further below.

3. Conversion at the 'Collective identity' level

Fatima al-Mutairi of Saudi Arabia expressed on a website her longing to retain her Saudi 'label' while being a follower of Christ:

> Truly, we love our homeland, and we are not traitors
> We take pride that we are Saudi citizens
> How could we betray our homeland, our dear people?
> How could we, when for death—for Saudi Arabia—we stand ready?
> The homeland of my grandfathers, their glories, and odes—for it I am writing
> And we say, 'We are proud, proud, proud to be Saudis'
> …
> We chose our way, the way of the rightly guided
> And every man is free to choose any religion
> Be content to leave us to ourselves to be believers in Jesus…

Her plea was made in vain. In August 2008, her father and brother discovered her allegiance to Christ and killed her. In response to news of her martyrdom a Saudi woman wrote. 'thousand, thousand congratulations for her death. . .and a special thanks to her brother who carried out God's law… curse upon the apostate Fatima, curse upon the apostate Fatima.'[18]

Fourteen centuries of Islamic history and jurisprudence have equated apostasy with betrayal, as Saudis or

17 Rudolf Heredia, *Changing Gods: Rethinking Conversion in India.* London: Penguin Books (2007), 127.

18 Mariam al Hakeem, 'Saudi Man Kills Daughter for Converting to Christianity', *Gulf News*, <archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/08/12/10236558.html>, August 12, 2008. The poem is available on many websites including <www.strateias.org/fatima.pdf>. The blog was posted originally at <muslmah.blogspot.com/2008/08/blog-post.html>.

Malays find to their cost. However, this attitude is not held with equal vehemence in all Muslim societies. In cultures which retain even a distant memory of not being Muslim (Iran for example, or the Berbers of North Africa), apostasy may be seen as less of a betrayal. Moreover, some Muslim scholars in the West are re-examining traditional laws of apostasy.[19] Attitudes are also affected a great deal by the reputation of any pre-existing Christian communities within a country, as well as by the international policies and military campaigns of nations perceived to be 'Christian'.

VI Identity Implications for individual BMBs

1. Dual or Multiple belonging at the Social level

In modern life, nearly everyone learns to juggle several social identities. We adopt one role in the workplace and another at home. We learn to move in different social circles, adjusting our vocabulary and dress to blend in with each. Twenty-first century people in pluralist societies are actually quite successful at coping with multiple social identities.

In western societies, people who turn to Christ are not expected to cut off all links with their families and friends (except in the most separatist of sects). Likewise, in Muslim societies, new followers of Christ would often like to maintain links with their old communities while simultaneously joining their new community of fellow-believers. This requires dual belonging, and they seek strategies to combine both social identities. Equal loyalty to both groups may not be realistic, especially when either group opposes it. But to be a *member* of one community and simultaneously an *affiliate* of the other is often possible to a greater or lesser extent.

a) In Contexts where Communities are distinct

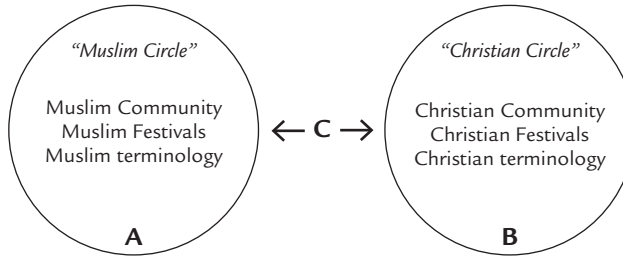
My own doctoral research is on believers from Muslim background (BMBs) in Pakistan, where the Punjabi Christian community is rather distinct from Punjabi Muslims and even more distinct from other Muslim ethnic groups. The 'Christian' community has its own identity markers and opposes intermarriage with Muslims. Defection of Christians to Islam is deplored while Muslims seeking to enter the Christian circle are often (not always) treated with suspicion.

In such a context of two distinct communities it is appropriate to depict them as two closed circles. In my 2009 interviews of believers from Muslim background in Pakistan, I showed them this simple diagram and asked, 'in which position do you find yourself: A, B, C or what?' They readily identified with the diagram.

Of my interviewees, some lived in the Muslim circle (A) and came out to the Christian one for fellowship. Others had moved or married into the Christian circle (B) but kept some contact with their Muslim families. Others

19 For a partial survey of reformist discussion on apostasy, see for example my chapter in Steve Bell and Colin Chapman (eds.), *Between Naivety and Hostility: Uncovering the Best Christian Responses to Islam in Britain* (UK: Authentic, 2011).

Figure 3. Social identity options for individual BMBs in Pakistan



oscillated between the two circles (C), switching behaviour and terminology in order to fit with one group or the other.

At the social identity level, is it possible to maintain this 'switching' strategy long term? It may or may not be, depending on including the closeness of one's relationships with each group and the extent to which both groups tolerate dual belonging (especially after marriage). It also depends, crucially, on the extent to which dual social identity induces schizophrenic stress at the core identity level, as discussed below.

b) In Contexts where Communities overlap

In some regions such as western Africa, the boundary lines between Muslims and Christians have traditionally been rather permeable and include intermarriage (though inter-religious tensions are now on the rise). In such a setting the two social circles could be drawn with dotted boundaries and perhaps touching each other, so that at the point where they meet, Christ's follower from Muslim background could simultaneously belong to both communities. This could in principle create an option (D) on the diagram where a believer belongs in an integrated way to both groups and is accepted as such by both.

I have not personally researched this option as it rarely arises in Pakistan. Nor have I researched first hand the options for 'insider' believers whose social belonging to their fellow believers is a subset of their wider belonging to the Muslim community from which they all derive. Presumably this would be represented by a circle within a circle. As John Travis points out,[20] for such believers the question of 'switching' does not arise. Nevertheless, in my opinion such believers do still have a dual belonging, since they belong *both* to their wider Muslim community *and also* to the inner community of Jesus-followers. When it comes to marriage arrangements, for them or their children, they will face a clear choice between marrying inside or outside the group of fellow-believers.

2. Schizophrenic stress at the Core level

We recall that a person's identity is formed through mutual interaction

20 Personal correspondence, May 2013.

between his or her 'core' and 'social' identity layers, and that this process continues throughout life. What therefore is the impact on the core identity of a believer from Muslim background of the different social identity options outlined above?

a) In Contexts where Communities are distinct

Based on his experience in the Arab world where Christians and Muslims form distinct communities (as in Pakistan), Roland Muller writes:

When a person accepts the Lord, he is immediately put in a place of tension. On one side is his new Christian faith, and on the other side are his old religion, family and community. Who should the convert relate to? The obvious quick solution is to develop two faces. With one face they welcome Christianity, meeting with other Christians… With the other face, they live and relate to their family and community… So the tension builds.[21]

Muller believes that in such a situation 'one of five things will happen'. The believer may 'abandon his new faith and go back to what is familiar to him… because he feels he cannot exist in a two-faced situation'; or may 'completely identify with the Christian face and reject his old one', or may become a secret believer 'filled with fear' of being discovered, or may be 'so distraught with the two faces that they eventually become mentally unstable'; or may 'learn to unite the two faces… living freely as a follower of Jesus in his family setting'. The actual outcome will depend both on the circumstances and on the choices made.

b) In Insider Contexts

In settings where a believer has no need to 'switch' between communities, the schizophrenic stress is reduced. Advocates of Insider Movements believe that this is a benefit of their model where Jesus-followers are all drawn from within the Muslim community.

This is doubtless true, yet in these contexts a different kind of inner stress can still arise. Insiders who tell their Muslim friends, 'I am a Muslim and I believe Muhammad is God's prophet', do so by maintaining a private counter-definition of 'Muslim' and 'prophet' which is not shared by their hearers. Similarly, their participation in mosque prayers may be interpreted differently by themselves than by their Muslim communities.[22]

Personally I suspect that such dissonance between 'the person I appear to be on the outside' and 'the person I know I am on the inside' may be hard to sustain in the long term. Moreover, one's core identity is not totally immune from being affected by one's social identity, because of the internalization process described earlier. This may affect BMBs' children if not themselves. However, these personal comments are not based on field research and need to be empirically tested.

21 Roland Muller, *The Messenger, The Message, The Community* (Canada: Canbooks), 108-109.

22 Lack of space prevents me from expounding this viewpoint in more detail, and those of my friends who advocate Insider Movements will dispute it vigorously. These questions have been exhaustively discussed in the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* and *St. Francis Magazine*.

c) Questions to investigate

What factors and circumstances assist integration at the core identity level? When can twin loyalties be held side by side and when do they tear a heart apart? What local contextual variations bear on this, and what theological insights help to chart a way through? These questions are of urgent relevance to many thousands of believers from Muslim background today. Out of pastoral compassion as well as missiological strategy, it would be helpful for supporters and opponents of 'Insider Movements' to pool their resources and research these questions in depth.

VII Emerging Collective Identities for BMB groups

1. New Groups and Labels at the Collective Level

For groups as for individuals, identities change over time. New combinations emerge and create an impetus for new collective identities to be recognized. This impetus has to push against inertia in the host society, which prefers to keep the identity labels static, stereotyped and simple. Many an incipient new movement has been pushed back into standardized boxes of social prejudice.

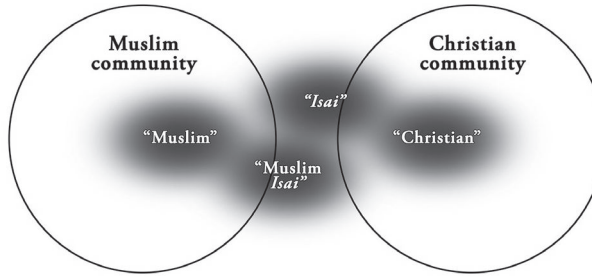
Eventually, however, once a critical mass is achieved in terms of numbers or visibility, society grudgingly makes room for the new reality and creates a new label. This can happen when mass *migration* alters the ethnic landscape, or when *intermarriage* creates new hybrid ethnicities. Both these trends are very evident in our pluralizing world.

A third, less common way is through large scale *religious conversion*. It was by this route that in the first century AD an initially insignificant group of believers, functioning at first as an insider movement within Judaism and known as 'followers of the Way', outgrew its parent community. Following a creative new trajectory, this group challenged old taboos, grafted in Gentile believers and adopted new identity markers. Eventually it could no longer be contained within Judaism and was ejected by it. It emerged as a new collective category reshaping the religious landscape. It acquired the new label of 'Christian', a label at first ascribed by others and then adopted by themselves, as has happened quite often in the history of emergent collective groups.

Similarly within Islam, sects and reform movements have emerged from time to time. Some, like the Sufi orders, sanctioned by the centuries and secure in their large numbers, are unquestionably counted as 'Muslim'. Others, like the Ismailis, are viewed as deviant but tolerated. Other groups over time have been reabsorbed back into Islam. Still others, such as the Ahmadiya or the Baha'i, have been forcibly ejected or even persecuted by mainline Muslim communities.

This raises two important questions. Firstly, what explains these different long term outcomes when these groups all began life as insider movements within Islam? To investigate this is of more than merely historic interest because it bears crucially on the second question, namely, what will become of the exciting but tentative 'insider movements' presently reported of Muslims following Jesus? Will they be tolerated, ejected or reabsorbed within Islam? The past may offer guidelines

Figure 4. Collective identity of some BMB groups in Bangladesh



for the present which in turn will affect future outcomes. That's why it matters.

2. 'Hybrid' identities

New options are created at the 'border zone' where cultures meet. Migrant communities borrow elements from two worlds, but recombine them to form a third and distinctively different identity. 'Third culture kids' do the same. This is also why hybrid languages (e.g. Urdu or Swahili) develop a life and literature of their own, and why Islamic cultures have been at their most innovative when rubbing shoulders with other worlds (e.g. Abbasid Iraq or Moorish Spain).

We may expect to see something of the same cultural creativity emerging from the emerging communities of Isa-followers, once they become large enough for in-group marriage and secure enough for their children to be confident in their identity. Hybridization is not to be identified with syncretism; it may lead to it but does not have to.

3. New Collective Identities in Bangladesh

New groups acquire new names and new collective identity markers. This is now being seen in Bangladesh where sizeable movements to Christ are underway, as described to me by Abu Taher Chowdhury. The diagram above is my way of depicting the different collective groups he described, while their characteristics are given in more detail elsewhere.[23]

Two different types of communities are depicted in this diagram.[24] The long-established 'Muslim' and 'Christian' communities are represented by circles with tightly defined boundaries, for in Paul Hiebert's terms they are 'bounded sets'.[25] They have their own identity markers and intermarriage is not approved. But the emerging communities of Muslim background believers have more permeable boundaries. Therefore in this diagram they are shown as 'fuzzy' groups, able to merge and overlap with each other and, to varying extents, with the traditional communities.

---

23 See my chapter, 'Identity Choices at the Borderzone' in Greenlee, *Longing for Identity*.

24 I appreciate Jens Barnett's help in conceptualizing and preparing this diagram.

25 Paul G. Hiebert, 'The Category "Christian" in the Mission Task', *International Review of Mission* 72 (July 1983), 421-27. Hiebert helpfully draws distinctions between 'bounded', 'centred', and 'fuzzy' sets.

This diagram is not claimed to be comprehensive, for there will be other BMB groupings in Bangladesh of which I am unaware. Moreover, it is not applicable in all countries, since community boundaries vary from one place to another and labels vary in their meaning (in Pakistan 'Isai' has a different sense from in Bangladesh); so the diagram should be re-drawn for each context. Even for Bangladesh it would need to be changed over time, since some of the emerging 'fuzzy' groups will, in the next generation, become more tightly defined with their own boundaries. Others will be absorbed over time into the traditional Christian bounded set, and still others will probably be re-absorbed back into the Muslim community.

VIII Relevance to the Insider Movements Debate

1. Identity and Insider Movements

More than fifty years ago, Kenneth Cragg asked what can be done 'to encourage in Islam the truth that becoming a Christian is not ceasing to belong with Muslim need, Muslim thought and Muslim kin'.[26] His question is being rephrased today in these terms:

To what extent can people individually and as a group be faithful in following Jesus Christ while maintaining social, cultural, and even legal identity as adherents of the religion into which they were born?[27]

I believe that the multifaceted concept of 'identity' could open up new space for discussion, by helping both sides in the Insider Movements debate to step out of the old binary categories and labels. I do not claim that this will magically solve all the issues but it could at least allow for fresh and more nuanced discussion. But this would happen only if both sides allow an identity perspective to probe their own assumptions instead of co-opting it to support already-entrenched positions. In fact, I believe that considerations of identity challenge proponents and opponents of Insider Movements in different ways.

2. Questions to Consider

The following questions are not perfectly worded, and are by no means exhaustive, but may be of help in stimulating reflection. My own perspective is framed by personal acquaintance with dozens of individual believers from Muslim background, in several countries and for more than thirty years, but I have not had first hand experience of an insider *movement* as such.

a) Questions addressed to Advocates of Insider Movements

At the *core identity* level, do you take into account the long-term psychological stress which can result from having to maintain a public profile as 'Muslim' even while privately knowing oneself to be a 'follower of Jesus'? Is a private counter-cultural definition of 'Muslim' sufficient to resolve this stress? Espe-

26 Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (Dublin: Collins, 2001), 318. (First published in 1956.)

27 David Greenlee, *One Cross, One Way, Many Journeys: Thinking Again about Conversion* (Atlanta: Authentic, 2007), 68.

cially, will it help the children of insider believers to have a secure core identity when they think in concrete not abstract terms, and when they want to 'fit in' at the social level?

At the *social identity* level, please consider the dynamics of 'dual belonging'. Do you see insider believers as 'people of the mosque' in a primary sense, or only in a liminal way alongside their main loyalty to the community of Jesus-followers? In what circumstances is it straightforward to belong simultaneously to a Muslim natural family and a Christ-centred spiritual family, and in what circumstances does this set up tensions? When values clash or when marriage choices have to be made, which group will they favour? And are their children being successfully socialized into the community of believers?

At the *collective* identity level, how are insider groups in different contexts viewed and labelled by their Muslim communities? Do their Muslim neighbours view them as deviant, deceitful or acceptable? What factors affect this, and how do these vary from one context to another? What are the group's identity markers and how permeable are its group boundaries? Crucially, what will happen in the second generation of the movement, and beyond? Will it be ejected by the Muslim community, reabsorbed back into it, or retain a tolerated but ambiguous identity long-term?

b) Questions addressed to Opponents of Insider Movements

At the *core identity* level, do you take into account the long-term psychological stress which can result from having to abandon one's family, heritage and rootedness? Are there acceptable ways to reduce such stress even if it cannot be avoided altogether? Is persecution always necessary and useful? Does it have a *purely* bracing effect at a core identity level or can it also sometimes crush spiritual development and psychological wellbeing, especially if too severe and too soon? And what can be done, at a core identity level, to help new believers 'own and transform' their past, including their religious vocabulary, instead of simply walking away from it?

At the *social identity* level, since most people in the world succeed in belonging to more than one group at the same time and creating new groups, could this not also be envisaged for believers from Muslim background? If Jesus-followers in humanist western cultures can be 'in the world but not of the world' is this not also desirable for Jesus-followers in Muslim cultures? How can such believers be helped to maintain a distinctive witness in their non-Christian social circles without being cut off from them?

At the *collective identity* level, since new groups constantly emerge in the world Christian movement, as they have done for the last two thousand years, will they also be allowed to do so in Muslim countries today? When your own denominational models and identity markers have arisen through a process of self-expression, will BMB groups be given the same rights? Do such groups need space to find their own collective identity in order to relate as equals to the traditional churches in their nations, rather than being prematurely absorbed into them or dictated to by them?

IX Conclusions and Suggestions

I suggest further work in three areas, though more could certainly be added.

1. Testing and improving the framework

I have proposed the beginnings of a model which uses the concepts of core identity, social identity and collective identity to reach beyond the confines of the C Spectrum. There is nothing sacrosanct about these categories, though they are widely recognized in the social sciences and this allows comparisons to be drawn and insights to inform the debate. Much more work remains to be done to test this model for usefulness in different contexts and to develop it further, especially in seeking to understand fluid, multiple, and hybrid identities in all their complexity. I welcome others' critique and contributions to take this endeavour forward.

2. Social and theological perspectives

The Bible was birthed in a social world, where collective labels were applied to religious groups and where individuals had a range of social belongings. Of course, the Bible adds further dimensions which are missing in the social sciences: of humans in relation to their Creator, and of a covenant people entrusted with a mandate for the world. Theology and the social sciences investigate different questions by different methods, so they should not be artificially forced into the same framework any more than theology and the natural sciences. Nevertheless, their findings need not be incompatible, and sociological understandings need not necessarily conflict with biblical understandings.

However, to test this assertion there needs to be a careful comparison of sociological and theological perspectives on identity at each level (core, social, collective), including the facets of multiple identity, hybrid identity and identity implications of Christian conversion. Interdisciplinary efforts should be made in this endeavour.

3. Further research

I suggest that context-specific empirical studies which listen seriously to Muslim background believers as they express their insights and struggles in the area of identity, will yield more fruit than further pronouncements based on theory alone. Kathryn Kraft's doctoral research[28] provides a good example of an empathetic approach which starts from the vantage-point of Arab BMBs themselves, rather than from missiological theory. It is important to remember that one context does not represent all contexts, nor does one believer speak for all believers, especially as 'early adopters' are not always mainstream representatives of their communities.

Several doctoral studies and other contributions are just starting to fill the gap, including some research led by BMBs themselves. But more work is needed. For instance, BMB communities face remarkably similar challenges in the second generation whether they are C3 communities in Algeria and

28 Her book based on the research is *Searching for Heaven in the Real World: A Sociological Discussion of Conversion in the Arab world* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2012).

Iran, C4 communities in Bangladesh or C5 communities in Indonesia. If we could transcend the 'great divide' that views these communities as *opposite* to each other, we would suddenly discover a whole new set of questions to ask about their *similar* concerns.

Researchers could compare across these communities their issues of identity, good practice in discipling, marriage choices, second generation concerns, relationships with the historic churches on the one hand and Muslim society on the other, factors affecting the degree of persecution… and a whole lot more. We also need to make connections with the secular academic world, where conversion *from* Islam has been researched much less than conversion *to* Islam.

Christ's disciples from Muslim background represent a new and important stream in his worldwide body! They will increasingly enrich the existing church in many countries. It is important to listen to them and learn from them humbly.

Response by Farida Saidi

I am pleased with Tim Green's attempt to move us beyond discussions shaped by the C1 to C6 spectrum. That instrument, like Richard Niebuhr's 'Christ and Culture' typology, was helpful in identifying factors that communities from a Muslim background need to address when they follow Christ. However, it has its limitations as Green so eloquently contends.

Travis designed a continuum but instead many theorists and practitioners focused only on typologies of churches (C1, C2, etc.), ignoring the complexity and lengthy process of church formation and development, especially in contexts where churches have never taken deep roots in society. Gradually, the so-called 'Christ-centered' communities were treated like 'denominations' called C1, C2, C3 and so forth. And not unlike what happened between older and younger fledging churches in history, there have been debates, divisions and 'religious wars'. I am saddened! Many churches I know in the Muslim world deserve better than accusations and criticism.

As much as I believe that we need to seriously address theological concerns, I also believe that when churches are emerging in new and difficult contexts, their brothers and sisters around the world should be sensitive in their nurturing and not create needless conflicts. Entrenched in the debate on Insider Movements, Green's piece can help us look at this issue with a new pair of glasses.

Green starts his article by making a very good inventory of the issues at stake. In his first sections, missiologists have their work cut out for years to come. So many issues are still unaddressed in the Insider Movements' Debate. Then, as a good scholar, Green sharpens, challenges and transforms the theories and concepts that have defined the Insider Movements. He proposes to refocus the discussion on 'identity'. What a good idea!

During my ministry I have met scores and scores of Muslim Background Believers who were struggling with the issue of split identity mentioned by Green. Split identities are not dual or hybrid identities but rather identities that are not integrated and compete against each other in an individual or community. Many of my MBB

friends let the Christian community define part of their identity and the Muslim community the other; most don't know how to integrate both in a healthy way: they behave like Christians when they are in the company of Christians and like Muslims when they are with Muslims.

This reminds me of Paul scolding Peter in Galatians 2:12: 'For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he [Peter] began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.' What the C1 to C6 discussion has not achieved yet is to give followers of Christ the tools to integrate their different identities.

Green takes us a step further. He acknowledges the dual, multiple and hybrid identities and presents the tripartite conceptualization of identity or the three-floor department store model to deal with the process of integration. Acknowledging the complexity of identities and the challenges that believers face when embracing multiple identities is a good first step. Most Muslim believers will recognize themselves in Green's description and feel a sense of comfort that what they experience within themselves is a natural phenomenon.

His analysis, however, lacks a thorough investigation of what are the mechanisms that can hold these identities together when someone becomes a follower of Christ. Muslim background believers all along the C1 to C6 continuum would like to know what allows them to integrate the various parts of what constitutes their identity. Although this article alludes to some attempts at integration, I think that we need many more examples of healthy integration.

Green draws heavily upon sociology. I have myself benefited from the work of sociologists when studying the identity of third generation North African immigrants in France. Sociologists underlined four ways immigrants integrated being French from North African descent: ' I am only French and not North African'; 'I am French and North African'; 'I am only North African and not French'; 'I am neither French nor North African'.

These studies were helpful in the study of social factors but often ignored the religious factor because French society did not require North Africans to change their religious allegiance. Most studies did not take into account the religious conversion factor. Green attempts to include the religious layer not as a fourth layer of identity but rather he sees it as enmeshed, interpenetrated, interconnected, fused, glued to the three layers of identity. But we need more tools to evaluate whether a Muslim background believer can state: 'I am a Muslim and a Christian'.

It seems that the sociology of religion is not totally sufficient to address the question of integration of split-religious identities. These questions inevitably call for theological investigations. For example, theologians will raise the question of how pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism influence different scenarios of religious integration. While Green provided new frameworks to address the debate, he has not yet addressed in much detail the 'how to' of integration when twin religious loyalties cannot be held side by side. This is where the work of theo-

logians is crucially needed.

Finally, I would encourage Green to further develop the question of communal identity. In effect, Travis' spectrum dealt with 'Christ-Centered Communities' more than with individuals. I feel that sometimes we talk past each other because we mix up 'individuals' and 'communities' in our discussions about identity. It seems that although it is important to talk about the individual, it is even more important to talk about the identities of these communities because they in turn will shape the identity of future believers.

Response by Rashid, a Muslim follower of Jesus

Identity is a term that touches many aspects of human life such as law, philosophy, social sciences and self-perception. There are at least two reasons why one asks someone about his or her identity. First, it is to see what similarities exist between the one who is asking and the one being asked. These similarities may then be used to build a relationship between them. Second, questions about identity can be asked by the authorities of an institution of those who are trying to visit or join the institution. For example, when I try to enter a country, the authorities of the country will ask about my identity: my birthplace, my occupation or perhaps the authorities will ask about my religion. All the questions are being asked by the authorities to see whether I am worthy to enter the country or not.

To respond to this article, I will use the two typical reasons why people are asked about their identities, mentioned above, as a basis for my response. But, before I do so, I would like to note that this article is addressed primarily to the proponents and opponents of insider movements. So, they should be the ones who make a response, not someone whose identity, like mine, as a Muslim follower of Jesus, is being discussed in the article. Nevertheless, I will try to see, objectively, some points of this article that might help me to see myself from the perspective of an outsider.

First of all, dividing identity into three levels—core, social and collective—seems to be a helpful approach. Green's explanation of three levels of identity is reasonable, easily understood and more or less acceptable as valid by a simple person like me. For example, a man can be known by how he sees himself, how he is viewed by his community and how his community is seen by other communities. I do not know if every aspect of someone's identity must always be categorized by these three levels of identity or whether it is possible for these aspects to be categorized by only two levels.

For example, as an Asian, I can observe my Asian identity in the collective and social identity levels, but I wonder if I need to regard my race (Asian) as part of my core identity. My Asian identity will probably be observed by or important to only my social community or other communities who want to know me. I mention this example in response to my being categorized as a Muslim in my core identity.

On one hand, I do agree that being Muslim should be classified as an aspect of a person's core identity because one can see one's inner self religiously through one's Islamic belief. On the other hand, I do not agree that Muslim should be categorized as core identity

because the core identity of a person does not need approval from anyone other than God.

Let me give another example. An Indonesian farmer lists Islam as his religious identity on his identity card, whereas in actuality, he has more faith in the local rice goddess (Dewi Sri) than in Allah. The farmer does not care about the difference between his stated religion and his identity card because no one will ever ask him about his core identity. In other words, one does not need to prove anything about one's core identity to anyone.

The issue of conversion, as Green mentions, is an issue that can cause a lot of trouble at the level of collective and social identity in particular. However, I would say it is not a problem at the level of core identity, because conversion in the core identity level does not automatically result in or require conversion in social or collective identity. A big problem frequently arises when conversion in the core identity is immediately followed by conversion in social and collective identity. Many people appear to think that conversion at the level of social and collective identity, which leads to persecution, is a price that must be paid when a Muslim believes in Isa al-Masih as his saviour and lord/king. In fact, there is not a single example in the New Testament that suggests that conversion in one's core identity should be immediately followed by conversion at the social and/or collective identity, but rather there are differing degrees of change in these identities.

Secondly, in relation to the authority of an institution, a Muslim who accepts Isa al-Masih as his saviour and king does not need to prove his belief to anybody, either to the people in his social groups or to people of other collective identities because he is not entering a *human* authority structure when he enters the kingdom of God. Therefore, the only one who has the right to ask about his identity in all levels is Allah/God.

A few months ago, someone said to me, 'Rashid, you are not in the kingdom of God if you do not confess that you are a Christian.' I was shocked! Where I live, the collective identity of Christian is western, including the movies! I cannot limit the Kingdom of God in such a way. Though a Muslim socially and collectively, my core identity, attested by God, is that of a disciple of Sayyidina Isa (our Lord Jesus) and my beliefs in the scriptures are shown in appropriate ways within my various social identities with the hope of making disciples amongst those in my *collective* Muslim identity.

Author's brief response

I appreciate these fine contributions from two people who feel from the inside what I can describe only from the outside. I agree with Farida that theological as well as sociological perspectives are needed for helping to integrate conflicting loyalties. This is an urgent task since growing numbers of Muslims turning to Christ worldwide will predictably face this dilemma. Rashid rightly raises the question of whether a person's core identity must be defended to others, since to enter God's kingdom needs no human authorization. Nevertheless, what binds Christ's followers together at the social level is their personal allegiance to the King, so definitions of core identity cannot be avoided altogether.