TOWARDS A CONTEXTUALISED MINISTRY AMONG MUSLIMS
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INTRODUCTION

Imagine, if you will, that it is Friday, and, today, the whole community prays at one of the hundreds of mosques in your area (Goble and Munayer, 1989, pp. 169-173). You are going to an ordinary house in a secluded place at the edge of town. Your older brother visited here last week, and has invited you along. He says they have found blessing through the prophet Isa, yet are unlike the Christians. You walk through the front door. On your right is the washroom for you to wash after taking off your shoes. The first room is decorated as a place of preaching and prayer. Following your brother down the hallway, you come to the dining room, where guests are gathering. There are no Western furnishings nor images of any kind on the walls, so it is not like church. Instead, there are various hangings of Arabic calligraphy that quote messianic passages from the Qur'an. And there is the prominent clock to signal prayer times. You wonder where your brother has brought you, but feel comfortable with the setting.

After a time of informal social fellowship, the call to prayer is made. All of you assemble in a prayer circle, and the group chants a confession before filing into the prayer room for a time of teaching and prayer. You notice the Arabic scriptures opened on a low book stand raised off the floor. Sitting together on the floor (on bamboo mats), the imam teaches

about Isa, as the Word of God. The fellowship meal is then served. Guests seated on the floor seem quite at home, and do not hurry to move on from eating and talking together. They ask you whether you would like to come again to their fellowship meetings. Although comfortable with their approach, you have doubts about the meaning of the imam's teaching, and so, ask some questions, and talk around the table. You determine that you will not betray your Islamic upbringing, and yet your brother and the others – many of whom you know – seem similarly determined to stay with their heritage, while following this new teaching. You wonder what effect this group will have on your community.

The Christian church has to critically consider the whole subject of Muslim evangelism (Parshall, 1980, p.16). Muslims have almost always been expected to leave their culture behind in "converting" to Christianity. What will be argued here, instead, is that Muslims can change their allegiance, to follow Jesus, whilst remaining in their culture. Is it possible to be a child of God, and fall under the broad national and cultural category of being a Muslim? (Anderson, 1977; Parshall, 1980, 1985, 2000; Travis, 1998a, 1998b). What will "church" then be like in a context that is culturally Muslim? How far should it be contextualised? These are the sort of broad questions that need to be answered for each context, particularly where Islam is a majority religion, and where people are Muslim by background. Reaching Muslims in Indonesia, for example, where people may come from families that have been Muslim for generations, is different than sharing the gospel with Papua New Guineans, who have recently converted to Islam. Where seekers of Christ have been Muslim by cultural background, it is a big challenge to help them find and express faith in Jesus Christ (*Isa Almasih*), in a culturally-appropriate way. This article seeks to help the process, by arguing the necessity for, and proposing principles for, working toward a contextualised ministry among Muslims.

THE NECESSITY AND RISK OF CONTEXTUALISATION

Two major challenges face anyone working towards a contextualised ministry among Muslims (Anderson, 1977, p. 9). The first stems from a

failure to separate the universal purpose of "church" from the cultural container in which it operates. New believers should not have to become Westerners, or first-century Greeks, to feel at home in a Christian fellowship. Communities of God's people must display their universal appeal by functioning, relevantly, in their context. A second challenge arises from so accommodating "church" to Muslim worship forms, values, and theology that a syncretistic mixture results, lacking the power of a true kingdom community. The truth should not have to be compromised, for converts to feel at home. The risk of syncretism needs to be avoided, but so does the risk of failing to contextualise. Without contextualisation, how will the people see the relevance of Jesus? How will they meet together with understanding as His people? This first major section of the article argues contextualisation must not be neglected by God's messengers, because it is necessary, biblically and strategically.

1. THE BIBLICAL NECESSITY

The Bible abounds with precedents for contextualisation (cf. Ariarajah, 1994; Davies, 1997). In the Old Testament, God communicated with people, using forms they understood, according to their context. Moses gave the Ten Commandments at Sinai, but recontextualised them at Shechem, one generation later.[1] God's people were entering the land from the desert – facing a new situation that demanded some new and some modified forms. Worship forms had to be further adapted, with the building of the temple, and, again, years later, with its destruction. During the exile, Israel had to recontextualise their worship forms, to be relevant in that context, and yet maintain their distinctive beliefs (e.g., monotheism).

In the New Testament, contextualisation is similarly seen in preaching. Jesus preached, using different forms with different people. He talked about the new birth with Nicodemus, and the water of life with the

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[1] E.g., The rationale given for observing the Sabbath was God's deliverance from Egypt in the Exodus, rather than because of God resting from Creation, Deut 5:15; cf. Exod 20:11 (M. Weinfield, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic Tradition*, Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1972).

Samaritan woman (John 3:1-7; 4:7-15). A time was coming, He told the same woman, when worship would not be restricted to geographical locations, but would be in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24). Jesus Himself was the incarnational communication of God's love and commitment to His people (Heb 2:10-18). Peter and Paul adapted preaching material to their audiences, with profound insight.[2] Paul, for example, readily communicated with forms from the context of his audience – such as the "unknown god" of the Athenians (Acts 17:23). Without betraying its given fundamentals, New Testament communicators demonstrated a remarkable variation in their presentation of the gospel (cf. Hesselgrave, 1981, 1988; Parshall, 1980).

Worship forms in the New Testament were also freely contextualised. Church was a worshipping community, with forms of worship free to develop indigenously (Acts 2:1-42, 6:1-7). Witness and service were common elements, but evangelistic methods and social involvement varied (Acts 2:4-7, 8:4-8). Fellowships were designed to have leaders, but their style and organisation were not restricted to one model (Acts 6:1-7, 20:28; LCWE, 1978). Kraft claims that Acts shows no single leadership pattern, but, rather, a series of experiments, as the church develops (1979c). God did not preordain a particular set of sacred forms, for His people to express their relationship with Him and each other. A Christian fellowship was made up of believers in Jesus Christ, who gathered together, and worshipped God, to serve and grow together. Once this concept was established, God's people were free to meet together and express the meaning of their beliefs, using forms appropriate to their culture.

Gentile believers did not have to adopt Jewish forms of worship (Acts 8:26-39; 10:28-11:18). When Gentiles started coming to Christ, certain

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[2] Peter, at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36), and in the house of Cornelius (10:34-43), and Paul, in the synagogue at Antioch (Acts 13:16-41), and in Athens (17:22-31), contextualised their messages for their target audience, whether Jewish, God-fearing, or polytheistic, and heathen (D. Hesselgrave, "Worldview and Contextualisation", in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, R. D. Winter, and S. C. Hawthorne, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1981, pp. 401, 404).

Jewish Christians demanded Gentiles adopt Jewish customs, including circumcision (Acts 15:1, 5). This demand was understandably unpopular, both with the Gentiles, and those seeking to lead them to Jesus, notably Paul and Barnabas (15:2). The Council of Jerusalem assembled and decided Gentiles would not have to become Jews to be Christians. Gentiles were free to adopt their own worship forms, as long as that freedom did not impinge on the culture of other Christians.[3] God was bringing Gentiles to faith, and the church leaders did not wish to erect cultural barriers against this movement. James made this conclusion at the Council, "it is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles, who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19).

Biblical communication and mission is culturally flexible. Sometimes the gospel will challenge certain forms of behaviour in a culture, but, where cultural forms do not disagree with the Bible, they are free to remain (cf. 1 Cor 8:10). If Christianity had the same cultural aims as Islam, Christians today would be living as Jews. However, Christian ways are never to be culturally bound, but are free to be contextualised. It is arguable, in fact, that contextualisation is necessary for both the biblical message, and its model for communication.

2.   THE STRATEGIC NECESSITY

Contextualisation is not only biblical, but also strategic. In seeking to relevantly communicate the gospel – taking seriously the context of the people – it encourages them to respond to Jesus with understanding (cf. Accad, 1997; Parshall, 1980; Taber, 1979). Wagner argues its case with the following definition:

> to the degree possible, without violating supracultural biblical principles, aspects of Christian life and ministry – such as life-style, theological formulations, worship patterns, music, ethics,

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[3] The Council added a restriction to abstain from certain things that would only offend their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ (Acts 15;20; cf. 21:25; 1 Cor 5:6-8; 8:1-10; 9:19-23).

leadership structure, and others – should be free to take on the forms of the new culture which Christianity enters (1983, p. 147).

It is assumed that, while the gospel is, in essence, supracultural, it must, to have maximum impact, be contextualised (Douglas, 1994). This is as true for forming fellowships as it is for the communication of the message. A contextualised ministry among Muslims seeks to offer them worship forms they can understand. The forms will not appear foreign, but will feel at home in the local culture.

Islamic Christian fellowships, formed in this way, could also be a valid witness to the Muslim community, of which they would hopefully remain a part. The worship and service of a congregation, expressing the reality of new life socially, can be a potent evangelistic force. Too often, recent "converts" from Islam have either recanted, or been extracted from their cultural context, because of the ostracism they received from their community. The gospel is rejected because "Christianity" is perceived as a cultural threat (Anderson, 1977; Packer, 1991; Stott, 1981). There may be offence at the essence of the message, but the cultural offence of the messengers ought to be minimised. The aim is not to compromise the gospel, but to demonstrate it properly, so Muslims can understand its relevance.

3.   THE RISK OF SYNCRETISM

Syncretism occurs when the essence of the gospel is compromised by mixing with the old forms of a culture. This is a very real risk of contextualisation. Mission history gives numerous examples of contextualisation leading to syncretism. Hesselgrave concedes a number of heresies, identified by early church councils, probably represented attempts at contextualisation (1988, p. 151). Both Protestant and Catholic missions have started churches that allowed temples, idols, and animistic practices to coexist with Christian teaching (Forman, 1985, p. 13). There are practices and beliefs of Islam that challenge the biblical gospel, and which cannot be adopted without syncretism. The Qur'an, for example, denies the divinity of Jesus:

> O people of the book, exceed not the limits of your religion, nor speak anything about Allah, but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only a messenger of Allah (4:171).

Syncretism is a possible miscommunication of undiscerning contextualisation, but it can be prevented by properly communicating the meaning of the gospel, and its fellowship implications.

Those who label contextualisation as syncretism may be slow to concede that miscommunication can also arise from failing to contextualise. Hesselgrave contends, "If Christian meaning is not to be lost in the communication process, contextualisation is required" (1981, p. 409). Contextualisation has been criticised by Christians, who have propagated their very own cultural forms as Christianity. They have instructed new believers to discard their own culture, and to adopt Western forms. Consequently, they tended to be foreign, irrelevant, and easily misunderstood (Taber, 1979). Contextualisation can go too far and become syncretism, but an equally as great risk is miscommunicating, by failing to contextualise.

As fellowships are started in different contexts, and even as those contexts change with time, the forms used for meeting together will need constant recontextualisation (Connor, 1991, pp. 21-22). But what will ensure contextualisation communicates the essence of biblical Christianity, without becoming syncretistic?[4] How can the appropriate extent of contextualisation be determined? The next major section

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[4] For discussion on possibilities and risks of syncretism, cf. W. C. Chastain, "Should Christians Pray the Muslim Salat?", in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12-3 (1995) , pp. 161-164; J. Culver, "The Ishmael Promise and Contextualisation among Muslims", in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17-1 (2000), pp. 61-70; R. Jameson, and N. Scalevich, "First-Century Jews and Twentieth-Century Muslims", in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17-1 (2000), pp. 33-39; J, Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ", in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17-1 (2000), pp. 5-14; P. Parshall, "Danger! New Directions in Contextualisation", in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34-4 (1998), pp. 404-406, 409-410; S. Schlorff, "The Translational Model for Mission in Resistant Muslim Society: A Critique and an Alternative", in *Missiology: An International Review* XXVIII-3 (July, 2000), pp. 305-328.

discusses four proposed principles to help answer these questions, so that a fellowship can move toward a contextualised ministry among Muslims.

PRINCIPLES OF CONTEXTUALISATION

1.   ADAPT MUSLIM FORMS

Cultural forms are observable objects, practices, or customs. Meanings lie behind, and are expressed by, the forms. A traditional approach to communication slavishly imitated linguistic forms to produce a literal translation (formal correspondence), for example, of the Bible. Unfortunately, imitating forms can cause meaning to be misunderstood, because the same forms are not likely to convey equivalent meaning cross-culturally. An alternative approach is to be flexible with forms, so as to communicate a similar meaning, and stimulate an equivalent response (dynamic equivalence). Fortunately this approach has been increasingly adopted in Bible translations, which have thus become more meaningful to contemporary readers (Kraft, 1979c, 1979b; Nida and Taber, 1969; Parshall, 1980; LCWE, 1978). Fellowships that are "dynamically equivalent", by adapting Muslim forms, may also become widespread.

The first principle, therefore, for appropriate contextualisation, is to uphold both the gospel and the culture, by adapting Muslim forms. The meaning of the Christian gospel needs to be, at all times, maintained. By adopting Muslim forms in the new fellowship, the culture can also be upheld. It must be understood that the forms are only important for the meaning which they convey. There is nothing implicitly biblical in any particular form of church furnishings or music, timing or regularity. In a Muslim land, there is nothing unbiblical about a follower of Jesus praying five times a day. It is ethnocentric to ensure that no cultural habits of Muslims are used in Christian worship. The biblical authenticity of any form lies with the functions served, and the meanings conveyed, rather than the forms themselves (Kraft, 1979a, p. 66).

This article seeks to do without linguistic forms that carry unnecessary connotations to Muslims. Such traditional terminology, despite a new approach, could unconsciously perpetuate traditional methods.

"Conversion", for example, is a change of allegiance to Jesus. It includes a new dynamic of relationship with God, made real by the Holy Spirit. To Muslims, however, it implies a break with the community, and identification with the "Christian" social group. Language forms, such as "ex-Muslim", "convert", and "Abdul becoming a Christian", will thus be omitted. Alternative forms may include "believers", "people of God", "lovers of Jesus", "the Jesus one" (*Isayi*), "Muslims who follow Jesus", "Muslim-background believers" (MBBs), or "Islamic Christians". "Islamic Christians" appropriately describes Christians (the noun), who do things in ways that are Islamic (the adjective). This is more appropriate than "Christian Muslims", or "New Creation Muslims" (*Khalq Jadeed*), which (grammatically) describes Muslims (the noun) modified by a Christian label. Fellowships might be called "Islamic Christian fellowships", "House *Masjids*", "Mosques for Jesus" (*Masjid Isawi*), or "Jesus fellowships" (*Issawi*); or they may be referred to as part of a "Jesus movement" (*Haraka Isawiyya*) (Conn, 1979, p. 97; Cragg, 1956, p. 51; Dutch, 2000; Gilliland, 2000; Goble and Munayer, 1989, p. 134, Travis, 2000). These terms uphold both the gospel and the culture, by identifying believers with Jesus, and adapting Muslim forms.

While external forms are biblically flexible, they are very important in Islam. Islam is built on legalistic observances, meant to prepare a person for heaven (Parshall, 1980, p. 57). Performing the five pillars of Islam (whether or not the meaning is understood) is very much a part of being Muslim:

1. *Shahada* – reciting the declaration of faith "there is one God and Muhammad is his Prophet".

2. *Salat* – prayer, five times per day.

3. *Saum* – fasting during the daylight hours of the month of Ramadan.

4. *Zakat* – almsgiving (2.5% tax on assets).

5. *Hajj* – pilgrimage to Mecca, once a lifetime, if possible (cf. Cragg, 1956; Parshall, 1980; Robinson, 2003).

The pillars have basic similarity in form with biblical practices, though the meaning sometimes differs.

One fundamental difference is that Islamic forms are meant to gain merit for the devotee, which is incompatible with the biblical message of grace (Parrinder, 1965). Rather than changing the forms, however, the meaning of some or all of them may be able to be reinterpreted. If a Melanesian churchgoer, faithful in good works to gain favour with God, was later converted to true allegiance to Jesus, should they give up their old forms of good works? They continue in the forms (as long as they are not prohibited by scripture), but need them reinterpreted. Similarly, Muslims, who want to follow Jesus, do not necessarily need to forsake their worship forms. Rather than relinquishing daily prayers, they can be exhorted to pray with meaning through Jesus. Rather than forsaking *wudu* (washing) before *salat*, they can be encouraged to use the practice to prepare their hearts (Surah 29:45, cf. Cragg, 1956, p. 98; Goble and Munayer, 1989, pp. 70-72; Uddin, 1989; Woodberry, 1989).

Like a good Bible translation, fellowships should recombine biblical meanings with cultural structures. Forms will be adapted to make the biblical impact of a kingdom community. The alternative traditional approach would be to imitate the forms of the first century, or foreign church, but this can create a less-than-desirable impact (misunderstanding, alienation, and rejection). The ideal forms are faithful to the original, but at home in the culture, not requiring followers of Jesus to learn new structures, to get the message (Kraft, 1979c). Structures of worship, prayer, leadership, education, and social service will all be geared to be culturally relevant. The people of God, for example, are to meet together regularly for mutual encouragement (Heb 10:25). There is no reason why Islamic Christians should not meet on Fridays, when their whole community prays. The aim is to produce an impact on the people, dynamically equivalent to the impact produced upon, and intended by, the New Testament church (Kraft, 1979b).

2.   MAINTAIN *UMMAH*

The second principle in contextualising ministry among Muslims is the need to consider *ummah*, the world community of Islam (Parshall, 1985). *Ummah* gives Muslims a strong solidarity, from which it is very hard to break.   As part of the *ummah*, Muslims all around the world identify with Islam; some claim the brotherhood is the real force behind Islam. Ayatollah Khomeini declared: "We Muslims are one family, even though we live under different governments, and in various regions" (Anonymous, 1979, p. 40).   It is difficult to discern how much a Christian can remain Islamic culturally, when Islam is so thoroughly pervasive.   Nevertheless, contextualisation will seek to encourage new believers to remain in their Islamic *ummah* culturally, as well as to support them with a new Christian *ummah*.

Muslims experience *ummah* religiously through the five pillars of Islam, and by the nature of local mosques. All members of the *ummah* are obligated to practice the pillars of Islam. The solidarity of *ummah* is strengthened at *salat*, as rich and poor, liberal and conservative, stand together towards Mecca in apparent equality (Parshall, 1985, pp. 39-41). Bowing together towards Mecca, they are not merely praying locally, but engaging in a form used around the world by millions of fellow devotees. Similarly *saum*, *zakat*, *hajj*, and *shahada* are undertaken all around the world, by people with common aspirations that go beyond racial and linguistic differences (Anonymous, 1979; Parshall, 1985).   Locally, Muslims experience *ummah* in the informal organisation of the mosque. Mosques have a minimal hierarchy, with no priesthood, and all are welcome and equal (Ansari, pp. 133-137; Cragg, 1956, p. 298).   The building sometimes functions as a shelter for travellers, and a school *kuttab* for children (Parshall, 1985, pp. 41-42). Outside of prayer times, locals will be seen relaxing on the steps, and discussing various matters. Mosques serve as an informal centre for the local *ummah*.

Contextualised fellowships will need to maintain *ummah* for believers. Religious involvement for Muslims, Parshall argues, must be in the context of a community of interacting people (1985, p. 175). Although community is perhaps devalued in many Western church patterns, the

religious side of *ummah* is closely aligned with the biblical ideal of community. Acts shows the potential of biblical community to form a new *ummah*, to which Islamic Christians could aspire:

> All the believers were together, and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone, as he had need. Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes, and ate together, with glad and sincere hearts, praising God, and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (2:44-47).

The believers were committed to fellowship, and to living out their new-found faith, in the context of their traditions. They met regularly, both in the Jewish temple, and in each other's homes.

Modelling on a home fellowship, or cell system, is a viable option for an *ummah* of Jesus. Consistent with Mosque patterns, home churches can involve lay people, and minimise the need for raising building finance (either from the nationals themselves, or from the West) (Parshall, 1985, pp. 219-219). A home fellowship can be a community for close fellowship and pastoral care, which new believers need for some time. Meeting in a home allows for caution and privacy; it may not be expedient for the community to be aware of new believers.

Although a reason for contextualising Islamic Christian fellowships is to establish viable witnesses within their communities, new believers would be best to share their faith discreetly at first, and with close contacts (Cragg, 1956, p. 315; Goble and Munayer, 1989, p. 140; Parshall, 1985, p. 186). Establishing credibility for witness with initial contacts should not be thrown away by parading before the whole community. The *Qur'an* is sceptical of Christians: "O ye who have believed, do not choose Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends to each other; whoever makes friends with them is one of them" (Surah 5:51). Those developing a contextualised ministry, which will inevitably take time and patience, can pray with Archbishop Temple: "Grant us to know when, by patience, and when, by impatience, we can serve Thee best" (Cragg,

1956, p. 303). Such caution is not to be ashamed of the gospel, but to be culturally sensible, in a community committed to solidarity. In the early stages of a movement, it is important that the expectations placed on new converts not be made impossible for their social context.

Similarly, baptism ought to be carefully considered. Persecution usually intensifies following baptism, because fellow-Muslims see it as a betrayal.[5] Some authorities have suggested that baptism is open to such misunderstandings that dynamic equivalences ought to at least be explored (Anderson, 1977; Parshall, 1983; LCWE, 1980). Others maintain baptism has a clear biblical mandate, and is useful as a definitive sign of conversion. Parshall suggests waiting till the fellowship is strong and mature, and then leaving the baptisms to a mature national leader.[6] Baptism is an initiatory rite (the form was derived from Judaism), whereby one turns their allegiance over to the name into which they are baptised. Is it possible to use another form that is faithful to the Bible, and fulfils the intention of baptism, yet avoids the cultural ostracism? (LCWE, 1980, p. 18). Admittedly this is a bold question, but may deserve consideration. The big picture of reaching communities with the gospel needs to be kept in mind. This may mean experimenting with new forms, or at least coaching believers to consider delaying baptism.

A contextualised ministry will, as much as possible, use forms shared by the wider community. Islamic prayer forms may be maintained. Believers may sit on the floor on oriental carpets, shoes off, with the

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[5] For an example of persecution following baptism, see I. W. Mastra, "Contextualisation of the Church in Bali: A Case Study from Indonesia", in *Gospel and Culture*, J. Stott, and R. T. Coote, eds, Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1979, p. 361. P. Goble, and S. Munayer suggest Muslims, who undergo the baptism of God (*sibghat Allah*), do not cease to be Muslims (submitters to God). Rather they are more in submission ("islam") to Him (*New Creation Book for Muslims*, Pasadena CA: Mandate, 1989, pp. 138-139; cf. James 4:7).

[6] P. Parshall also suggests baptising male leaders first, and cautions definitely not to start with women and children (*Beyond the Mosque: Christians within Muslim Community* Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1985, pp. 187-188; cf. Goble and Munayer, *New Creation*, pp. 140-141).

Arabic scriptures lying open on a low book stand. Men and (appropriately covered) women would necessarily sit separately. Beyond the actual posture, prayers could be formulated, similar to Islamic prayers, but communicating the new truths of the Bible, and salvation, through faith in Jesus (Goble and Munayer, 1989). Islamic Christians could also feel a part of the wider Christian community by participating in common rituals, such as, the Lord's Supper, and the days of Lent (as redeeming equivalents to regular worship and the Ramadan fast). Common rituals help to maintain a sense of *ummah* (Parshall, 1985). The local believers, themselves, will need to determine which rituals they use, with the missionary functioning as their coach.

3.   COACH NEW BELIEVERS

The third principle in contextualised ministry among Muslims is that the missionary's role is not as a director, but a coach. As a coach, their asset will be their experience, knowledge of the scriptures, and perspective, as an outsider. They can help the local believers to search the scriptures, to relate the biblical concept of a fellowship (*ekklesia*) to their task. According to *The Willowbank Report*, the task of interpreting the scriptures belongs to the whole Christian community, historical and contemporary (LCWE, 1978; cf. Hiebert, 1987). Believers' understanding of scripture throughout history, and around the world, needs to be taken into account. The coach can help the nationals with how the wider Christian community has interpreted core meanings, and, perhaps, suggest local forms. The local believers, themselves, will then interpret fellowship forms for their context.

Nationals must be consulted in the contextualisation process. Cragg writes "All that Christ will be to Muslims, only Muslims can declare" (1956, p. 305). To ask Muslim followers of Jesus what is most appropriate is not only respectful, but pragmatic. What feels right, and how they want to meet together, in their context, are matters they are best able to decide. Missionary strategists may propose great contextualised forms, but the important litmus test is that Muslims can feel at home with the forms, and understand their meaning. A Muslim follower of Jesus, as a case in point, asked, after a recent conference, "Wouldn't it

be wise to see if (the thousands of converted Muslims) *want* to be called *Issawayun*"? (Conn, 1979, p. 112). Ultimately, contextualised forms will prosper, or not, depending on the feelings of identity of the national believer, particularly new believers, unexposed, as they are, to Westernised Christianity.[7]

Appropriate forms of prayer have been worked through with Sundanese Muslims,[8] using this approach. The external forms were discussed, and agreed upon. They were forms that they brought from their Muslim heritage, with which they felt they could relate to God. It was culturally appropriate for them to sit on the floor with legs crossed, hands uplifted, and eyes open. Interestingly, when the prayer forms were field tested, the young believers used Indonesian – which they spoke with less familiarity than Sundanese – whenever praying in the presence of non-believers. In review, the coach questioned them, and they agreed that Sundanese would be the better form to use. However, in their context, the most valid prayers had been those in Arabic, which they could not understand. Forms that were less understandable, thus felt more valid, as a testimony to non-believers. The Sundanese believers had the cultural insight that outsiders lacked, and thus implemented contextualisation from within.

4. ALLOW GRADUAL TRANSFORMATION

The final principle toward a contextualised ministry among Muslims is to allow gradual transformation from within. When the gospel becomes

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[7] New believers are more likely to be in the mainstream of the culture, and not have ideas of how Christianity operates (that is, based on experience with the church on a Western model). It has been argued that the development of more-effective witness to Muslims may demand at least some of the existing Christian communities amongst Muslim communities be bypassed (C. Kraft, "Dynamic Equivalence Churches in Muslim Society", in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, D. McCurry, ed., Monrovia CA: MARC, 1979c, pp. 114-128; P. Parshall, "How goes the battle over contextualisation in Muslim evangelism?: An interview with Phil Parshall by Jim Reapsome", in *Muslim World Pulse* 12-2 (1983), pp. 7-8).

[8] An unpublished anonymous paper, "How to Coach New Converts in Developing a Contextualised Ministry", discusses the ideas about coaching, explored in this paper, and outlines this experience of Sundanese followers of Jesus.

part of a culture, the culture cannot be expected to stay the same. The essence of the gospel is transformation. The Lausanne Covenant states "Churches must seek to transform and enrich culture, all for the glory of God" (LCWE, 1978). Culture is not static and dead, but dynamic and responsive. As God interacts with people of a culture, it will inevitably have at least some of its customs transformed. The new developments will be a continuation of the past, but some old patterns will be renewed, and others left behind. As far as possible, a contextualised ministry among Muslims must start where Muslims are, but should never try to keep them from changing (Kraft, 1979b, p. 310; Kraft, 1996; Mastra, 1979, p. 376).

Islamic Christians should be free to change gradually, as they are directed by the Spirit, and their study of scripture, and not have change imposed externally. Certain Islamic forms of worship will be appropriate for ministry among Muslims, and a missionary, committed to contextualisation, will not forbid using one form or another (1 Cor 7:20, 24). During the coaching process, however, Muslim-background believers may, themselves, decide certain forms are not appropriate, perhaps because they were used to gain merit with God, or to venerate Muhammad. Moreover, a fellowship might start for Muslims that is composed only of Muslims (following the homogenous unit principle as a bridge), but gradually transform into a group where there is "neither Jew nor Greek . . . (but) all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28, cf. Gnanakan, 1985; Smith, 1985). The important dynamic is that the change be Spirit-directed, and not imposed by foreign influences.

Gradual change is consistent with biblical precedents. For example, through God's interaction with the Hebrews, polygamy died out in Hebrew culture – over a period of a few thousand years (Kraft, 1979b, p. 210; cf. Gatje, 1976, pp. 248-261). The early church first accepted Christ, through their traditional faith; then gradually came out from Judaism, and developed as their own entity. Peter and Paul, for example, maintained contact with the synagogue, yet accommodated Gentiles in the church, without insisting they use Jewish forms (Acts 3:1; 15:1-21; 21:20-26). They began looking like a Jewish sect – under the umbrella

of Judaism, which Jesus fulfilled – but were inevitably transformed into an independent entity. The church left some forms behind (notably sacrifice and ceremony), while others were maintained, or reinterpreted (Jewish morality and the Passover).

What ultimately is the aim in developing a contextualised ministry among Muslims? Is it not to place Christ in the culture for all to see, experience, and believe? He will be presented with local cultural forms, and, when He becomes a part of the culture, will certainly transform parts of it. Outsiders can do the communicating, and allow the process of gradual transformation to begin under the master's hand. Taber comments:

> As (new believers) together study and obey the scriptures, and as their testimony begins to penetrate the broader context, it is, indeed, the ultimate aim of contextualisation to promote the transformation of human beings and their societies, cultures, and structures, not in the image of a Western church or society, but into a locally-appropriate, locally-revolutionary representation of the Kingdom of God in embryo, as a sign of the Kingdom yet to come (1979, p. 150).

CONCLUSION

Contextualising fellowship for Islamic Christians takes seriously the example of Jesus, who sensitively offered the gospel to each person, according to their needs (Taber, 1979, p. 146). Rather than mass-producing forms, to be exported to people everywhere, contextualisation tailor-makes approaches for each context. Forms used will be more understandable, and less threatening. The gospel is then less likely to be rejected, because of being misunderstood, or seen as extracting fellow Muslims from their community. Muslims, who want to follow Jesus, should not be expected to forget who they are, and where they come from.

Muslims need to be invited to explore how to follow Jesus, and still maintain a valid witness within their hostile context. There is a constant

tension for contextualisation between how to be faithful to scriptural truth, and yet be relevant to the modern world. This paper proposed four principles to guide such efforts toward a contextualised ministry among Muslims.

1. Adapt Muslim forms, and maintain the essence of the gospel, so that both culture and gospel are upheld.

2. Maintain the sense of *ummah* for believers with their Islamic community, and with a supportive Islamic Christian fellowship.

3. Coach new converts to appropriately contextualise ministry for themselves.

4. Allow gradual transformation from within, rather than imposing Western, or other foreign, culture from without.

This topic is controversial, but there is sometimes a need for radical experimentation to produce strategies that work. Ray Schaeffer, pioneer worker to Muslims, warned "As Christians and as missionaries, to play safe is only to play." Following Jesus, it would seem, requires new possibilities of mission to be explored. Moreover, of more critical importance, it demands Islamic Christians on the frontiers engage the options of how they will walk with Christ.

Although it needs to be further researched how much Muslims can stay a part of their cultural Muslim *ummah*, and yet faithfully follow Jesus, the extent of such continuity may determine the success of pointing whole peoples to Jesus. Further consideration of what response or impact God desires of the church would be helpful (Kraft, 1979c). This article has not answered how much the community of those who are following Jesus should be separate from their background religion. Neither has it detailed what aspects of Islamic organisation, initiation, worship, almsgiving, dress, use of the veil, view of Mohammed, and prayer and fasting are biblically appropriate. The most critical need for further work is for the actual implementation of contextualised ministry by workers who will go to the nations, be prepared to experiment, and yet

stay true to the scriptures, and to do it all according to local contexts (Guthrie, 1993). The approach presented, though, by no means, the only possibility, may have great potential for facilitating Muslim people movements to Christ (Goble and Munayer, 1989). The framework is set, waiting for creative Spirit-led harvesters to set it into motion (O, 1991, p. 27).

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