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THEME: Insider Movements – Bridging the Divide

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

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GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

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Editorial

Last summer I had the privilege of attending the second Bridging the Divide Conference (BtD), an event dedicated to discussing the issues surrounding 'Insider Movements' (IM). BtD is made up of a committed group of missiologists, theologians and church leaders from those who promote Insider Movements and also from those who are critical of them. Discussions with WEA TC Chairman, Dr Thomas Schirrmacher, suggested it would be a good idea to present some of the thoughts and dynamics of this group for a wider audience, and so was born the plan for this edition. I turned to Don Little of Houghton College for his expertise both as a missiologist and BtD organizer, and together we present you with these articles.

In the first article D. L. Waterman (pen name) introduces the main areas of discussion and disagreement concerning IMs. The current situation arises from an increased interest in contextualizing the gospel for Muslims, where response to the Good News has increased significantly in recent decades. The core questions wrestle with how much of Muslim religion and culture can be retained in scripture translation, evangelism, discipleship and church planting.

Then we move, appropriately, into dialogues between BtD participants; these are representative but do not come directly from the conference itself. Jeff Morton and Harley Talman (pen name) talk about the relevance of the 'Jerusalem council' in Acts 15: does the decision narrated in this passage provide a biblical precursor for IM practices? Harley thinks it does because of the social and cultural implications of the event, but Jeff sees it as a theological decision only. In the next article Kevin Higgins and Sasan Tavasolli consider the often discussed question as to whether some IM uses of the Qur'an might be unethical. Is it really legitimate, asks Sasan, to get Christian doctrine from Muslim Scriptures? Kevin argues that at least in some cases it is legitimate.

Then we come to two articles that discuss some of the challenges in translating the Scriptures for Muslim audiences. George King argues for the importance of Muslim Idiom Translations that pay special attention to both cultural and religious issues. Tom McCormick responds with important questions about how this type of project affects the transfer of biblical meaning. Then two Egyptian theologians, Drs Lamie and Mikhail, discuss the merits and dangers of accommodating to Muslim perspectives when translating the Scriptures into the language of the Qur'an-Arabic.

In our final article, Tim Green brings expertise from the social sciences to suggest a more nuanced understanding of identity and conversion in Muslim contexts.

We invite you to join these conversations and to pray along with us for continued understanding and wisdom in this very important area of today's global mission.

Rob Haskell, Guest Editor, with Don Little

Thomas Schirrmacher, General Editor

David Parker, Executive Editor

ERT (2013) 37:4, 292-307

Insider Movements: Current Issues in Discussion

L. D. Waterman

Keywords: *Muslims, contextualization, culture, syncretism, translation, orthodox*

I Background of the Issues

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

L. D. Waterman *(MDiv, TEDS) (pen name) is a leader of church planting teams with Pioneers, where he has worked among Muslims in Southeast Asia since 1993, and is involved in church planting, Bible teaching and training national church planters.*

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

1. Five Important Factors

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> But what about the concept of syncretism? Is this something that can be avoided or is it a factor of human limitations and sinfulness? I vote for the latter and suggest that there is no way to avoid it….That syncretism exists in all churches is not the problem…. Our advice to national leaders (and to missionaries), then, is to stop fearing syncretism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20 Mt. 28:19.

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

2. Pushing the Boundaries

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

22 Parshall, 'How Much Muslim Context?'.

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

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

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

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

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

> I know of no generally accepted definition for an 'Insider Movement,' so I will try to define how I use the term….*Insider Movement: A growing number of families, individuals, clans, and/or friendship-webs becoming faithful disciples of Jesus within the culture of their people group, including their religious culture. This faithful discipleship will express itself in culturally appropriate communities of believers who will also continue to live within as much of their culture, including the religious life of the culture, as is biblically faithful. The Holy Spirit, through the Word and through His people will also begin to transform His people and their culture, religious life, and worldview*.[24]

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

> I believe that the debate about Insider Movements actually is a debate about the gospel, one as potentially earth-shaking as the Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Anabaptist reform movements of the 16th century. Those movements…. forced church leaders to re-evaluate church practice and doctrine.
>
> Similarly, I see Insider Movements as fueling (and being fueled by) a rediscovery of the Incarnation, of a thoroughly biblical approach to culture and religion, of the role of the Holy Spirit in leading God's people to 'work out' the gospel in new ways, and of an understanding of how God works in the world within and beyond His covenant people. And we may be forced to re-evaluate

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

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

Three years later, Rebecca Lewis offered a similar definition:

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

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

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

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

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

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

25 Higgins, 'The Key', 155.

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

27 Higgins, 'The Key', 156.

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

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

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

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

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

II Current Issues in the Insider Movement Discussion

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

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

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

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

30 http://biblicalmissiology.org

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For about a decade, most of this dispute focused on the choices of 'Christian' (C1-3) vs. 'Muslim' (C5) vs. avoiding the labels as much as possible (C4). Discussion and understanding of this topic has moved forward considerably in just the past few years, with publication of papers and books[44] opening fresh and vital insights into the nature of identity. We believe the article in this issue by Tim Green moves us even further toward a helpful understanding of the dynamics at work in the multifaceted identity struggle of most Muslims who begin and continue to follow Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The MIT approach to translation was prominently described and encouraged by Rick Brown, a consultant with SIL, in numerous articles.[46] Brown's proposed approach was questioned or opposed by a number of writers, particularly with reference to divine familial terms.[47] In 2011, discussions and critiques which had been taking place in a variety of Muslim ministry contexts came to much wider attention among evangelicals with the publication of more popular level articles.[48] Previous critiques became much more public in early 2012 with the posting of an on-line petition and related information concerning a number of MITs.[49] This brought the response: 'SIL International Commentary on the Best Practices for Bible Translation of Divine Familial Terms'.[50]

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

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

Some groups and writers believe that certain practices are inherently infused

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

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

48 Collin Hansen, 'The Son and the Crescent', *Christianity Today* 55 (2) (February 2011). Collin Hansen, 'Wycliffe, SIL Issue Guidelines on Translating "Son of God" Among Muslims', *Christianity Today* 55 (10) (13 Oct. 2011). Emily Belz, 'Inside out', *World* (7 May 2011); Emily Belz, 'Holding translators accountable', *World* (8 October 2011); Emily Belz, 'The battle for accurate Bible translation in Asia' *World* (25 Feb. 2012).

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

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

51 SIL Website, 'SIL Executive Director describes changes in response to WEA Panel Report', <http://www.sil.org/about/news/sil-executive-director-describes-changes-response-wea-panel-report> (2013, cited10 May 2013).

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

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

(1) recite the Muslim creed (Shahada): "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger";
(2) continue to participate in the ritual prayers (Salat) in the mosque;
(3) identify themselves as Muslims in terms of faith commitment.'[53]

A more open approach is reflected, for example, in Rick Brown's statement: 'Personally I think the second half of the *shahāda* should be avoided whenever possible and said only under duress with an interpretation that is compatible with the Bible….I know godly, biblical Muslims, highly blessed in their ministry, with 24 to 42 years of experience, who think saying the *shahāda* has no negative consequence. Until I see a compelling argument to the contrary, I am inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt, especially when occasions that require the *shahāda* arise only rarely.'[54]

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

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

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

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

52 Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity,* 96.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

> Understanding *theos* (God) as triune was surely common among Gentile Christians in the fourth century, but only after, in Walls' terms, the gospel had penetrated and permeated a rather arrogant Greek system of thought which applied its traditions of codification and organization to theology, culminating in the development of Chalcedonian orthodoxy….the New Testament provides little evidence to suggest this understanding of *theos* was widespread or common in earliest Christianity ….
>
> Is it possible that thousands of Jewish followers of Jesus in earliest Christianity might not have defined the one God of Israel as three coeternal Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Given that no verse of the New Testament comes close to explicitly describing God in this way, it is not only possible but probable.

Rebecca Lewis stated:

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

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

57 Rebecca Lewis, 'The Integrity of the Gos-

David Garner responded to this claim:

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

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

> Contemporary evangelism or missions calling people to Christ, but not to the church of the Grand Tradition would have been seen as outright heresy by any prior age…. Nothing better captures the biblical understanding of the essence of the church than the Nicene Creed. Though it did not emerge until the doctrinal struggles of the fourth century, it faithfully captured the mind of the apostolic witness…. Far from being a statement of imperial power wedded to Greek philosophy, it really depicted the triumph of the church as martyr-witness.[59]

8. What are the Appropriate Biblical Relationships?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

J. S. William observes:

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

III Conclusion

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

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

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

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

63 Mt. 24:14.

ERT (2013) 37:4, 308-320

Does the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 Support Insider Movement Practices?

Jeffery Morton and Harley Talman

Keywords: *Acts 15, Insider Movements, Islam, Mission to Muslims, Bridging the Divide, discipleship, religions, culture, justification*

I Jeffery Morton: Questions and Concerns

1 Why Acts 15, and why now?

This article is a conversation between a proponent of insider movements (IM) and myself, a sceptic. The two of us disagree about most of the issues that comprise the IM (Insider Movement) position, which should make for an interesting article.

The essential element in our disagreement is whether or not Scripture supports IM's principles. Both Talman and I are biblical Christians and understand the Bible to be the inerrant and inspired word of God. However, it seems IM proponents and its sceptics approach Scripture differently. IM is a set of observations in search of a biblical foundation, and since they approach the Scriptures with observations about what God is doing—or allegedly doing—the IM proponent's *a posteriori* conclusion inevitably finds support in the Bible.

The burden of the case rests on IM proponents, since IM offers a new understanding and application of certain passages. It is my contention that there is no scriptural support for the IM understandings of what God is doing among Muslims.[1] I believe it can be shown that IM does not have any biblical legs to stand on, let alone to run.

With this all too brief, biased, and inadequate introduction let me begin to take a careful first step toward explain-

1 For a discussion of these passages in relation to IM, see my *Insider Movements: Biblically Incredible or Incredibly Brilliant?* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

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ing why I believe it can be shown that IM has no biblical support, and why its advocates should stop considering it a biblical movement.

2 Sifting and weighing

The book of Acts is historical narrative rather than gospel or apocalyptic. This shapes how Luke's stories are to be understood. Every historical event is unique and non-reproducible; the story from Acts 15 is *sui generis*. While the reader may develop principles from such a recorded event, it is vital not to make the text mean more than it does.

I believe the proponents of IM who have written about this text have done exactly that—they have taken the text to mean more than it does. The interpreter must allow the story to be the lesson. Whatever the story means, that meaning is not dependent upon the reader's context. The nature of historical narrative demands caution: care when creating analogies from the story to the present, and prudence when developing principles. Ben Witherington says it well: 'Luke does not encourage us simply to play first-century "bible land" and assume that all the early church did and said should be replicated today. This means that the text must be sifted and narratives must be weighed before they are used or applied.'[2]

Not only is the text historical, it is narrative. Therefore, we expect to encounter a setting, characters, plot and resolution, and literary devices. These structures must guide our hermeneutic, and for this essay it means observing the wider biblical context, and subsequently asking narrative-based questions of the text.[3] The result should be an interpretation that

a) appreciates the historical uniqueness of the event(s);
b) and cautiously elicits principles from the text for application in a manner that maintains the storyline as the lesson to be learned.

3 What is the plot of Acts 15?

The events of our text provide the crystallization of a longstanding divine purpose: creating a people who call upon the name of the Lord. The group called the *people of the Lord* began with Seth, though arguably with Abel (Gen. 4:25–26), was then developed by God among the Jews, finally coming to fruition with believing Jews and Gentiles.

To appreciate the plot of Acts 15, a quick survey is in order. Beginning in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus' first sermon included two Gentiles (Lk. 4:25–27). Later Luke mentioned the faith of a centurion (7:9), Jesus' experiences with the Samaritans (9:51–56; 10:25–37; 17:11–19), and the reminder of Jonah's mission to the Gentile Ninevites (11:29–32).

Luke continued the thread in Acts by addressing his work to Theophilus (Acts 1:1), arguably a Gentile. At his ascension, Jesus told the disci-

2 Ben Witherington, *The Book of Acts: a Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 102. Cf. David Garner, 'Messianic Muslims and Muslim Evangelicals', *Themelios* 37 (2), 259.

3 Cf. J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative* (Knoxville, Tennessee: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 206–210. Space does not allow me to include an analysis of the characters and rhetorical devices of the story.

ples they would be his witnesses in Gentile regions (1:8). Philip preached to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch (8:4-40). Cornelius heard the good news of Jesus' resurrection from Peter (10:24–48), and Luke followed this with the adventures of Barnabas and Paul among the Gentiles of Galatia (chs. 13–14). Not all were happy with the inclusion of Gentiles into the church. A party of believing Pharisees taught, 'Unless you are circumcised … you cannot be saved' (15:1b).[4] The plot thickens.

4 Questions for the text

a) Who was the hero of Acts 15?

Neither the apostles, the missionaries, nor James were the heroes; it was God. He was credited with working through the missionaries (vv. 4, 7), and it was the Lord who accepted the Gentiles (v.8). Peter argued that God no longer distinguished between Jew and Gentile (v.9), concluding, 'It is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are' (v.11).

b) How was the plot resolved?

God rose to the challenge, creating a *people* (laos) *for himself* (v.14c) that included the Gentiles—transforming them from *ethnos*, the LXX term for Gentiles—to *laos,* the term for the Jews. He sent Peter to witness to the Gentiles (v. 7b) resulting in the Gentiles being filled with his Spirit (v. 8b), erasing the dividing line between believing Jew and believing Gentile.

c) What was achieved by the resolution of the plot?

The plot of Acts 15 was resolved because the protagonist accepted the Gentiles in the same manner as the Jews. Faith in Jesus saved the Jews just as it did the Gentiles. Jew and Gentile were purified by faith—circumcision and uncircumcision played no part in salvation—and this by the means of the grace of Jesus (vv. 6—11). The tent of David was restored (v.16).

5 Implications from the questions

What analogies can be made between insider movements and Acts 15?

a) Theology

Acts 15 presents a theological question, not one about cultural identity. Some proponents of IM make the question of identity a major issue in Acts 15, but the story is not oriented to the question of whether Gentiles can retain their identity?[5] This question is peripheral at best.

Muslims are coming to know Jesus, just as the Gentiles were, but the text is silent on the matter of Gentiles/Muslims changing their identity. The story deals with the matter of salvation by Jesus alone, not the importance of remaining a Gentile/Muslim. To see

4 All Scripture citations are from the NIV.

5 Cf. Kevin Higgins, 'Identity, Integrity and Insider Movements', *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 23 (3) (2006), 117–123; Rebecca Lewis, 'Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community', *IJFM* 26 (1) (2009), 16-19; John Travis, 'Messianic Followers of Isa: a Closer Look at C5 Believers and Congregations', *IJFM* 17 (1) (2000), 53–59.

the question of identity in the story is anachronistic eisegesis. The terms *Gentile* and *Muslim* are categorically different. *Gentile* is an ethnic, linguistic identity[6] whereas *Muslim* is a socio-religious identity.[7] The IM inference of identity from Acts 15 distorts the uniquely historic storyline.

b) Religion

Some proponents of IM suggest the text teaches that a change of religion is not necessary for salvation.[8] The parallel is easily made to the situation today: do not expect Muslims-following-Jesus-as-Muslims (my term) to take on the forms of Christianity.

Most critics of IM do not expect Muslims-following-Jesus-as-Muslims to resemble the Christians around them, but do advocate biblical discipleship and the necessary inclusion into local congregations where possible or at least Muslim convert congregations. The Body of Christ is essential to every believer. The person who is born again immediately becomes part of the *ekklesia* (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:19–22; 4:4–6; 5:29–30).

Suggesting Acts 15 focuses on *not* changing one's religion misses the reality that Gentiles who followed Jesus by faith *did* give up their former religions—whatever idol-based or animistic religion that was. If there is a principle from Acts 15 for application to Muslims-who-follow-Jesus-as-Muslims, the principle is just that: trusting Jesus for forgiveness of sin entails turning from one's former religion, a religion that did not trust Jesus.

II Harley Talman: Acts 15—an inside look

The Holy Spirit is doing the unexpected: multiplying disciples of Jesus within non-Christian religious traditions, in movements often designated 'insider movements' (IMs). Are there solid biblical and theological foundations that support IMs? Some who are critical or sceptical of IMs, deny that there is *any* scripture that can be cited to validate these movements. An upcoming book that I am co-editing provides significant scriptural perspectives and theological foundations on this question. However, I have been asked in this article to focus solely on the contribution of Acts chapter 15 to this issue.[9] I will argue that the author of Acts 15 provides God's people with a model of a theological process and principles that can guide us in addressing missiological controversies, such as IMs.

6 Hans M. Weestra, 'Mission to the Nations: a Biblical Word Study of Ethnos', *IJFM* 9 (3) (1992), 101.

7 Whether or not the term *Muslim* is primarily a socio-religious identity is not relevant here. Many proponents of IM believe that it is socio-religious, thus making the Acts 15 text a story that focuses on issues of identity. Cf. Rick Brown, 'Biblical Muslims', *IJFM* 24 (2) (2007), 65–74; Lewis, 'Insider Movements'; Kevin Higgins, 'Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective', *St Francis Magazine* 5 (4) (2009), 74–91.

8 Cf. John J. Travis, 'Jesus Saves, Religion Doesn't', *Christianity Today* (January/February 2013), 30; Lewis, 'Insider Movements', especially p. 18 in her discussion of Kingdom Circles.

9 Harley Talman and John Jay Travis are editing a textbook on insider movements, to be published by William Carey Library, Pasadena, CA, in late 2013.

1. Acts and Paradigms for Cultural Diversity

A highly-regarded study by NT scholar Dean Flemming maintains that Luke wrote Acts not just to promote mission to the Gentiles, but to provide paradigms for how Spirit-guided believers are to deal with cultural diversity: Palestinian Jews, Hellenist Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and a eunuch. The crescendo builds through the book as God demolishes these sociological and religious barriers and climaxes in Acts 15. The rest of Acts fleshes out the implications of the Jerusalem Council's decision.[10]

Brian Rosner avers: 'The book of Acts without chapter 15 would be like a wedding ceremony without the crucial pronouncement.'[11] Flemming regards Acts 15 as 'a decisive moment in the encounter between faith in Christ and culture within the life of the early church, which helps to give the task of incarnating the gospel a historical and theological basis'. The crisis precipitating the Council concerned entrance requirements to the messianic community: Must Gentiles who believe in Jesus conform to the social identity and religious traditions of the Jewish believers, following the example of Jesus and his disciples?[12]

The Council's proceedings are relevant to IMs, because the key concerns in both are the same: Is justification solely through faith in Christ and purification by the Spirit, or is proselytism required? Can communities of believers multiply and grow to maturity as disciples of Christ Jesus within a Gentile (or Muslim) society, or do they need to abandon their native society to become proselytes in a traditionally Jewish (or Christian) church and subculture?

Jews recognized two types of proselytes: (1) 'proselytes of the gate' (*ger toshav*) were resident aliens who followed some of the Jewish customs, but not circumcision and Torah observance; (2) 'proselytes of righteousness' (*ger tzedek)* were full-fledged Jews, who adhered to all Jewish doctrines and religious requirements, including circumcision and ritual immersion.[13] The latter was demanded by the Pharisee party.

The Pharisees based their theological position both on Scripture (e.g., Gen. 17:9-14) and on ancient tradition. For them, Flemming explains, 'circumcision was not simply an optional cultural form; it was a matter of religious life and death—the indispensable symbol of the covenant relationship. If Jewish…law observance and the Jewish way of life, were divinely sanctioned, how could they possibly be negotiable?'[14] Had they prevailed, the progress of mission to non-Jewish peo-

10 Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2005), 43.

11 Brian Rosner, 'The Progress of the Word', in I. Howard Marshall and D. Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998), 227. Cited by Flemming, *Contextualization*, 43.

12 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 43-44. While he does not directly address insider movements, I find his study offers tacit support.

13 Josephus describes the latter as one who adopts the Jewish customs, adheres to Jewish laws and ways of worship of God, i.e., one who has become a Jew. See Wikipedia 'Proselyte' <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proselyte>, cited 1 June 2013.

14 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 45.

ples would have been greatly hindered. 'Theologically it would declare that God's grace and the gift of the Spirit were not fully sufficient for salvation.'[15]

In Acts 15:17 James cites Amos 9:12 because it validates Peter's witness to God's activity of including Gentiles in his messianic Kingdom, not as proselytes, but as 'Gentiles who are called by my name' (Acts 15:17 ESV). 'Sharply put', says Flemming, 'God's present activity among the Gentiles becomes the hermeneutical key for understanding the biblical text.… Amos, rightly interpreted, gives Scripture's grounding for the theological principle of salvation for the Gentiles by faith apart from circumcision' and adherence to the Mosaic Law.[16] The gospel renders proselyte conversion unnecessary because it gives all peoples and cultures equal standing before God.[17] Kevin Higgins observes:

> While the Pharisee believers have already argued their case from the Torah, James, in effect, is looking at the whole canon … the inclusion of the Gentiles was akin to the Holy Spirit's action in forming Israel itself.… James does not say that God was adding the Gentiles to his people Israel, but that he was forming a people for himself from among the Gentiles.[18]

David Peterson concurs. 'They constitute a new people of God and not simply a large addition to the existing people known as Israel. The critical question is therefore how these two peoples relate to each other'[19] in expressing their belonging to the one Body of Christ.

The Council's decree allowed Jews to fellowship with Gentile believers without incurring a perceived defilement that could hinder their outreach to fellow Jews who heard Moses read every Sabbath (Acts 15:21).[20] Although these prohibitions had scriptural precedent, they seem to have been a contextual compromise[21] to provide a *modus vivendi* for Gentile believers living among Jewish believers.[22]

2. Acts 15 and the Intercultural Context

How is Acts 15 relevant to IMs? Flemming understands Luke as presenting a 'paradigmatic narrative' of 'God's people articulating their faith within an intercultural context, which carries implications for the church in any generation'. Luke's concern is not merely the Council's theological conclusions,

15 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 45.

16 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 46.

17 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 49.

18 Kevin Higgins, 'Acts 15 and Insider Movements among Muslims: Questions, Process, and Conclusions', *IJFM* 24 (1) (Spring 2007): 29-40. Available on line <http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/24_1_PDFs/Higgins.pdf>.

19 David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 432.

20 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 47. See also Becky Lewis 'The Integrity of the Gospel and Insider Movements', *IJFM* 27 (1) (Spring 2010), 44. Available online: <http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/27_1_PDFs/27_1_Lewis.pdf>.

21 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 50. With Gentiles living in pagan contexts, Paul permits believers to eat food offered to idols in certain situations (see 1 Cor. 8-10).

22 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 557.

but its theological process, which can guide us in addressing missiological questions that emerge when the gospel crosses cultural barriers. Two important criteria appear: (1) the testimony of field workers that Gentiles have received the Holy Spirit apart from circumcision (which seemed to conflict with the theological understanding of many Jewish believers); and (2) a fresh look at Scripture to see if the observed phenomenon harmonizes with it.[23]

Dudley Woodberry delineates seven criteria that were utilized to resolve the crisis that resulted from Gentiles coming to faith in Christ: how God is working, the call of God, reason, theology, scripture, the guidance of the Spirit, and essentials for fellowship.[24] If we apply these criteria to IMs, we get the following results:

- Case studies reveal astounding growth of movements of Muslims who believe fully in Christ Jesus while remaining inside their Muslim communities.
- As God called Peter to give the gospel to Gentiles (Cornelius' household), so many Muslim disciples feel led to remove historic barriers by incarnating the gospel within the Muslim community, and the Spirit confirms this by their transformed lives.
- Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, not by proselyte conversion to a new religion. (Muslim disciples remain in their communities, but meet in homes for Bible study and worship).
- The inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God in a non-traditional way was in accord with Scripture (Acts 15:15–17)—so also with insider movements.
- Just as the work of the Spirit was evident among the Gentiles, so, too, Muslim insiders manifest spiritual fruit, wisdom, and devotion. Due to limited formal training options, they rely more heavily on the Holy Spirit to teach and guide.
- Peter thought it unreasonable to burden Gentile disciples with a yoke of Law (v.10). Similarly, adopting Christianity (as a culture, civilization and religion) puts an unnecessary burden of cultural baggage and misunderstanding upon Muslims, who can express their discipleship to Christ in different, but biblical, ways.
- The Council's addition of some 'essentials' (15:28-29) to facilitate fellowship and ethics.[25] Likewise, for Muslim believers 'there is freedom to observe the Law or not to do so, since salvation does not come through the Law. But because relationships and fellowship are so important, these disciples of Christ should not use their freedom in a way that might unnecessarily hinder their relationships with Mus-

23 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 48. He describes these two criteria as 'the appeal to the church's experience of God's activity' and 'the work of the Spirit in the community as the context for creative theologizing'.

24 J. Dudley Woodberry, 'To the Muslim I Became a Muslim', in Gailyn Van Rheenen (ed) *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents*, EMS Series (William Carey Library, 2006). Access a reprint in the *IJFM* 24 (1) (Winter 2007): 23-28. http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/24_1_PDFs/Woodberry.pdf Higgins, 'Acts 15', article builds upon Woodberry.

25 Woodberry, 'To the Muslim', 27.

lims or traditional Christians.'[26]

- The Gentiles, says David Peterson, 'constitute a new people of God and not simply a large addition to the existing people known as Israel. The critical question is therefore how these two peoples relate to each other.'[27] They retained their distinct identities, but adjustments were required to facilitate fellowship as a demonstration that Christ had demolished the barrier between Jew and Gentile (1 Cor. 12:12–27), as Woodberry affirms:

  > So with the insider movements, there is much freedom for them to retain their identity but over time some adjustments will need to be made for the sake of fellowship in the broader Church….In like manner traditional Christian and Muslim Christ-centered communities should have the same freedom to retain their own identity, but must express the unity of the Body of Christ by their love one for another.[28]

Thus, we see the relevance of the Jerusalem Council's deliberations and decision with regard to how we reflect on insider movements. The essence of its significance is expressed by Flemming:

> Acts 15 describes a church on a journey to a deeper understanding of its identity as the one people of God comprised of two distinct cultural groups who believe in Jesus. Neither group must surrender its cultural identity, and Jews may continue to observe their ancestral traditions…. The resolution of the Council allows for theological diversity regarding the way of life and approach to missionary outreach of the two cultural groups. By the same token, not even the original, divinely-sanctioned culture of God's elect nation has the right to universalize its particular expression [of faith in Christ].[29]

Because of Acts 15, Jewish Christ-followers accept western Christians whose manner of discipleship has departed from the divinely mandated practices of the OT (followed by Jesus and his disciples) so they could remain insiders to the western cultural tradition, in spite of its pagan roots.[30] Mark Kinzer has called for a bilateral ecclesiology between Jews and Gentiles in the one Body of Messiah.[31]

But this is still too limiting, because the Gentiles are nations. As Gavriel Gefen argues, 'There is no one monolithic Gentile ecclesia. As Jews, it is easy for us to see everyone else as lumped into the one category of Gentile…the one body we speak of is meant to consist of a multilateral ecclesia.'[32] He believes that it was largely Hellenized

26 Woodberry, 'To the Muslim', 25-27.

27 Marshall and Peterson, *Witness*, 432.

28 Woodberry, 'To the Muslim', 28.

29 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 52. Bock concurs. 'As long as the gospel is not compromised, then diversity of expression can be tolerated.' In Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007, 508).

30 See Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity? Exploring the Roots of our Church Practices* (Barna Books, 2008), 9-104.

31 Mark Kinzer, *Postmissionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement with the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005).

32 Gavriel Gefen, personal correspondence, April 17, 2013.

Jews in Antioch who worked with Paul to develop the first 'Greco-Roman expression beyond Judaism', but rightly asserts that 'to consider their locally appropriate adaptations of following Jesus as being "the" expression of new covenant faith for every kind of Gentile, at all times and in all places, would serve to distort the Gospel for so many peoples'.[33]

Acts 15 required that Jewish believers recognize the freedom of Gentile believers 'to live a life that is determined by Christ and his Spirit'.[34] Christians must give that same liberty to believers from non-Christian religious traditions.

I pray that all followers of Christ will adopt this perspective—but if not, that they will agree to disagree amicably. As Woodberry observes, 'Acts 15 ends with Paul and Barnabas separating in their missionary work because they could not agree on whether to take John Mark (vss. 36–41). Here we see that when we cannot agree, we can nevertheless carry on God's work in separate spheres until we can reach agreement.'[35]

III Jeff Morton—Response to 'Acts 15, an Inside Look'

Talman frequently cited from Flemming's *Contextualization in the New Testament*. It is true that one of Flemming's goals is 'to provide a stronger biblical foundation for the church's efforts to contextualize the gospel',[36] but it is not the case that Flemming supports anything resembling the insider movements (IM). Most advocates of IM do not generally speak of IM in terms of contextualization—and Flemming does not even hint at IM—yet the essay leaves the reader with the impression that Flemming provides a foundation for IM.[37]

It seems to me that the principles of IM are assumed to be present in Acts 15. My first essay mentioned that IM advocates use an *a posteriori* approach to the Bible; Talman's essay illustrated this at several points.

'The Council's proceedings are relevant to IMs, because the key concerns in both are the same: Is justification solely through faith in Christ or purification by the Spirit, or is proselytism required?'

Acts 15 is a story focused on the theological question of what is necessary for salvation. Acts 15:1 and 5 reveal one flavour of Jewish-Christian understanding that salvation was Jesus plus circumcision. There is no mention in the story that the Jewish-Christians required Gentiles to become culturally Jewish—that converts should take on existing church culture—only that they should become religiously and ceremonially Jewish for the sake of salvation. The Judaizers did not insist the Gentiles move to Judea, speak Aramaic, change their Greek names to Aramaic names, or wear Jewish clothing. Talman's essay makes no differentiation between the religious requirement of Judaism and the cultural aspects of

33 Gefen, personal correspondence, April 18, 2013.

34 Marshall and Peterson, *Witness*, 433.

35 Woodberry, 'To the Muslims', 27.

36 Flemming, *Contextualization*, 16.

37 Flemming characterizes contextualization as 'the gospel's interaction with all kinds of contexts, including social, political, economic, religious and ecclesial settings', *Contextualization*, 18.

being a Jew. The Jewish-Christian complaint was not primarily cultural, but theological.

While Talman's essay makes an effort to parallel the Gentiles with Muslims, it neglects the contrast between them—a contrast that is fatal to his argument. *Muslim*, unlike its alleged counterpart, *Gentile*, is an identity derived predominantly from religious values and practices. Pakistan and Malaysia, while two very different societies, are both Islamic and can be said to have Islamic cultures. But they are Islamic cultures because of the religion of Islam, not because of the local, indigenous cultures. We hear many voices saying Islam is both religion and culture; Islam is a way of life.[38]

The Muslim way of life is influenced by the religious practices of Islam, but there is no such flavour to *Gentile*. *Gentile* is the Jewish name for the non-covenantal peoples. While Gentiles are identified by means of religion—that is, they are not of Judaism—Gentiles share no identifiably common trait known as *Gentilism* derived from their religious practices or worldviews. It is, therefore, inappropriate to substitute Gentiles with Muslims in Acts 15 as if they were equivalent terms.

Talman's next parallel between Acts 15 and IM is Flemming's criteria, 'the testimony of field workers' and 'a fresh look at Scripture to see if the observed phenomenon harmonizes with it'. I understand the necessity of the reports from workers, but it is the second criterion that makes me nervous.

A fresh look at Scripture is a good thing, but not if it takes us away from the text itself. The story leading up to the Jerusalem council concerned the Gentiles repenting and entering the Kingdom of God as preached by Barnabas and Paul. Acts 14:15 has Paul pleading for the Lystrans 'to turn from vain things to the living God' *(apo toutôn tôn mataiôn epistrepsein epi theon zônta)*. This 'turning to' was also a 'turning from'. What were the vain things from which the Gentiles should turn? These would necessarily include some cultural practices, values, and religious activities. Certainly Paul and Barnabas never encouraged Gentiles to turn from being Gentiles—'Your Greekness has got to stop!'—but the Gentiles did turn from their evil practices (see 1 Cor. 6:9–11 for a partial list of those practices). They turned to Jesus; they turned to the living God. It is not unbiblical to expect believers to turn to God while also turning from evil practices, including Islam, a religion that is the antithesis of biblical Christianity.

Neither of our two essays dealt with a definition of *Muslim* or *Islam*, but how one understands these terms is pivotal. Some advocates of IM speak of Christian converts from Islam as members of cultural Islam—neo-Islam?—yet these believers may still hold to some of the religious practices and values of theological Islam:

> [S]ome Jesus-following Muslims … continue to recite the confession: Muhammad called his people

38 Cf. Imad ad-Din Ahmad, 'Islamic Religion and American Culture', <http://www.minaret.org/islamic%20religion%20and% 20western%20culture.pdf> (accessed April 21, 2013) in which he consistently speaks of Muslim culture. For a different perspective, see Michael Cooperson, 'Culture', in Jamal J. Elias (ed.) *Key Themes for the Study of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2010).

> to turn from polytheism to the God of Abraham; he commended … the Holy Books of the Jew and Christians, and he warned of an impending day of God's judgment … For these reasons, he is honored… . some Jesus-followers explained that they do not repeat the second part of the Islamic confession, choosing instead to substitute something that is both biblically and qur'anically correct such as 'Jesus is the Word of God'.[39]

Reciting the *shahada* is a not a cultural value, but a religious activity.

Despite this religious practice, according to Travis and Woodberry, a Muslim-following-Jesus-as-Muslim is a cultural Muslim, though he remains identified as a religious, albeit somewhat confused, Muslim. In other words, the authors describe Muslims who are following Jesus but remain essentially Muslim. Reciting the *shahada* is a not a cultural value, but a religious activity.

Talman's final parallel is to understand that 'Acts 15 required that Jewish believers recognize the freedom of Gentile believers "to live life that is determined by Christ and his Spirit"'.

I agree Gentiles must live their lives in the freedom Christ gives, but what neither Barnabas and Paul nor the Jerusalem council proclaimed was that Gentiles ought to attend temple sacrifice, confess their submission to Diana, and remain Pagans-following-Jesus-as-Pagans. Had the missionaries preached such a message, this would have been equivalent to a first century insider movement; however, the text nowhere hints at such a message. It is the advocate of IM who brings such insider ideas to the text.

IV Harley Talman: An Inside View of the Issues

Jeff, I appreciate your summary of Acts 15. The clear statement of your concerns gives us opportunity to clear up major misconceptions. Your assertions (in italics) are followed by my response under four categories: church, scripture, identity and religion & discipleship.

1 Church

'Most proponents of IM believe a follower of Jesus may remain in his socio-cultural-religious context…with little to no connection with the church that is not of the believer's context.'

Since we are talking about IMs as movements of the gospel inside social structures and networks, these believers' primary connection is naturally with other believers inside their own social network. However, your comment begs the question, 'How much contact does the average American evangelical church have with "the church that is not of its context"'? Do Baptist churches have close connections with Pentecostal churches in the same city?

Building of relationships with the broader body of Christ often occurs

39 John J. Travis and Dudley Woodberry, 'When God's Kingdom Grows Like Yeast', *Mission Frontiers* (July-August 2010): 29. The characterization of Jesus as the 'Word of God' being qur'anically correct is misguided at best. Jesus as *kalimatullah* means that Jesus is a message from Allah. He is a word *from* Allah, not the word *of* Allah (cf. Qur'an 3:45). This is hardly the meaning of *logos* in the New Testament.

when a church engages in mission and is forced to think beyond its local context. One of the most encouraging aspects of the growing IM movements is the way that they move across ethnic and national boundaries into new contexts. Connections between believers from other cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious backgrounds more commonly occur at the leadership level. Leaders of these movements also interact with the western Christians and Christ-followers from other religious traditions. If they were not interacting in these ways, we would know very little about what is happening.

2 Scripture

My chief objection is your assertion that IM proponents impose preordained conclusions on Scripture. Unfortunately, your article seems to completely miss the way Acts 15 is used by most proponents of IMs. We maintain that Luke is concerned not just with the Council's theological conclusions, but its theological process, as I noted above, and that field reports are to be included in that process.

3 Identity

'Acts 15 presents a theological question, not one about cultural identity.'

Is the theological question, 'Is salvation available to both Jew and Gentile apart from circumcision?' If so, then the theological question is about identity, for cultural identity is a part of who a Gentile and a Jew were (circumcised = Jew; uncircumcised = Gentile). Bock and other scholars recognize this.[40] These two issues are inseparable. The story emphasizes that salvation is by faith in Jesus alone, and therefore it allows a Gentile to remain a Gentile who follows Jesus, without becoming a Jew marked by circumcision.

'*Gentile is an ethnic, linguistic identity whereas Muslim is socio-religious identity.'*

This distinction is unconvincing. Circumcision was a religious, social, ethnic marker. Therefore, it encompassed socio-religious identity. Circumcision of a Gentile would often cut off his social relationships, his religious relationships, and could even result in death. Consequently, circumcision was at the heart of each group's identity.

'The text is silent on the matter of Gentiles/Muslims changing their identity.'

This may not be explicit, but it was certainly involved in the decision not to make it difficult for the Gentiles who were turning to Jesus, and for the sake of unity asking them to do these minimum things that were deeply offensive to Jews. The text respects each group's identity, recognizes the differences, and seeks to promote their unity in Christ.

4 Religion and Discipleship

Some proponents of IM suggest the text teaches that a change of religion is not necessary for salvation.

40 Bock, *Acts*, 502 observes, 'Even a committed Jewish believer such as James can see and affirm that Gentiles can be included among believers directly without having to become Jews. This is an innovation of the new era that Jesus and the distribution of the Spirit on Gentiles have brought.'

Is changing religion necessary for salvation? If we use an essentialist[41] definition, which assumes a single set of religious beliefs and practices, then a change of religion is needed. However, the essentialist concept of religions has been widely discredited by the academy—there is simply no monolithic set of beliefs and practices held by all who hold any 'religious' identity.[42]

If Islam is defined in a non-essentialist manner, where it is seen primarily as a cultural or sociological phenomenon, then there is no need for a 'change of religion' because what we are talking about is *not a religion, but a socio-religious community.*

Most critics of IM…advocate biblical discipleship and the necessary inclusion into local congregations where possible or at least Muslim convert congregations. The Body of Christ is essential to every believer.

Absolutely! Every IM proponent that I know of believes in the importance of every believer being part of a congregation of Spirit-led, Bible-obeying, Christ-followers. If however, you mean that Muslims must reject their community and become proselytes of a religion called 'Christianity' or change their legal, political or socio-religious status to become like those who are born into a socio-religious community of 'Christians', then we disagree.

Gentiles who followed Jesus by faith did *give up their former religions—whatever idol-based or animistic religion that was.*

We agree. New Muslim Christ-followers do turn away from folk Islamic, idol-based and animistic practices in order to serve the one true God. They trust Christ for forgiveness of sins and are delivered from their fears and bondage to fortune tellers, shamans, and healers. Gentiles were expected to turn from idolatry and from idolatrous practices, but they were not expected to turn from being Gentiles to Judaism.

Believers of all cultures are free to retain any and all elements, values, beliefs and practices of their culture (which includes their religious culture and traditions) that are compatible with the Bible. Those which are not must either be rejected or else reinterpreted (just as we have done with Christmas trees and Easter eggs).

'Trusting Jesus for forgiveness of sin entails turning from one's former religion, a religion that did not trust Jesus'.

It is ironic that you accuse IM proponents of eisegesis and yet anachronistically impose your concept of 'religion' onto this passage. Where in the text of Acts 15 is this statement made or even inferred? The New Testament speaks loudly concerning turning from idolatry and shifting one's total allegiance to Jesus, etc. But religion as a conceptual category is not in view in the text.

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41 See the section of 'The essentialist view and the cultural view of world religions' in the article in Wikipedia, 'Insider Movements' <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insider_movement> (cited 1 June 2013).

42 See Dietrich Jung, *Orientalists*, *Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Essentialist Image of Islam* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishing, 2011). Ronald Lukens-Bull, 'Between Text and Practice: Considerations in the Anthropological Study of Islam', *Marburg Journal of Religion* 4 (2) (December 1999), 1-10.

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The Ethics of Qur'an Interpretation in Muslim Evangelism and Insider Movements

Sasan Tavasolli and Kevin Higgins

Keywords: Muslims, contextualization, ethics, Qur'an, evangelism, apologetics

I Sasan: Christians cannot accept the Qur'an or the prophethood of Mohamed

Dear Kevin,

I consider it a great honour and privilege to have been asked by the *Evangelical Review of Theology* to dialogue with you about *Insider Movements (IM)*, an important controversy that is facing the evangelical church. This is a topic that generates a great deal of emotion and heat, especially for those who are passionate about seeing the gospel of Christ lifted up among Muslims. I trust that our exchanges will contribute to shedding more light on this controversy than heat! I not only consider you a dear brother in Christ, but also a friend and a co-labourer in the spread of the gospel in the Muslim world. I know that you and I are both passionate and committed to seeing Muslims come to a saving faith in Christ and yet we also have profound disagreements about the legitimacy and validity of certain aspects of IM, especially what is known as the C5 aspect of this movement.

I acknowledge that there are a variety of views within IM. Even within the C5 position there is a spectrum in terms of the identity of converts and how they ought to view the Qur'an and the prophet of Islam. In our exchanges I am mostly concerned with those followers of Christ who not only call themselves Muslims (as people who have truly submitted to God) but also view Muhammad as a genuine prophet from God and the Qur'an as God's revelation.[1]

My red lines in this controversy have always been two things: Can a Christian acknowledge the prophethood of Muhammad? And can a Chris-

1 See Kevin Higgins, 'Identity, Integrity and Insider Movements', *IJFM* 23 (3) (Fall 2006), 32-38.

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tian acknowledge the Qur'an as God's revelation? I believe that a biblical response to the above two questions is a resounding 'No'.

In our dialogue together I want to focus my critique of C5 on one particular concern and that has to do with the honesty and integrity of how such C5 advocates approach the *text of the Qur'an* and *Islamic faith and practice*. Now let me point out that having grown up as an Iranian Shi'ite Muslim in a Sufi home, I fully believe that Islam is not one giant monolithic faith. I do acknowledge that throughout its history and to this day, 'Islam' has not been understood, interpreted and practised in the same way by all its adherents. There is a tremendous variety in the faith and practice of Muslims around the world.

Nevertheless, in all this multifaceted variety, Muslims have never understood that the Qur'an teaches or supports such foundational Christian doctrines as the divine Lordship of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, and Jesus' death on the cross as the atonement for human sin. In fact, Muslims have been almost unanimous that the Qur'an and Islamic theology have quite categorically refuted the above Christian affirmations as false and a corruption of the teachings of the prophet Jesus.

When C5 advocates use of the Qur'an to affirm the deity of Christ (thus attempting to demonstrate the basic harmony and compatibility between the Qur'an and the Bible), it seems to me that they are twisting certain passages out of the total Qur'anic context. Just as we don't like it when members of various cults or other religions take the Bible out of context, we should not take things out of context in the Qur'an or any other text for that matter in order to build a bridge for our evangelistic outreach.

When C5 advocates promote the practice of *shahada*, which acknowledges that Muhammad is God's prophet, it seems to me that they are redefining the role and function of Muhammad as a 'prophet' in a way which goes against how Islam has understood Muhammad's prophethood.[2]

Christians do not have a *shahada* like Islam per se, but I think if we wanted to choose a candidate for a good biblical passage it would be 1 John 5:10-12,

> Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe in God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (NIV)[3]

On the other hand we encounter in the Qur'an the following verdict on Christian convictions about Jesus. Sura 9:30 states,

> …and the Christians call Christ the Son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (In this) they but

2 According to C5 advocates, Muhammad can be viewed as a 'prophet' who ultimately pointed people to Jesus. In the Islamic view based on the Qur'an, it is actually Jesus that points to Muhammad as the ultimate and final prophet.

3 The terms *shahada* and 'testimony' (or 'witness') function very similarly in Arabic and Greek.

> imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!

Acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God is either the key to having eternal life (the Bible) or puts us under the curse of God (the Qur'an). Both cannot be true.

So ultimately, I believe that the Qur'an contradicts and opposes the Bible on some of the most important issues that have to do with our convictions about God, Christ and salvation. One cannot claim to follow the Jesus of the Bible and at the same time accept the Qur'an as God's revelation or accept the prophet of Islam as someone commissioned and sent by God for the guidance of humanity.

II Kevin: The question is different for an Insider

Dear Sasan,

Thank you for your gracious words in your opening comments. I share the same sense of respect and have enjoyed and appreciated the face to face discussions we were able to have in June 2012. I also appreciate your sensitivity to the variety of expressions and opinions within what have come to be called 'insider movements', and the advocates of such movements (including myself). I think it bears mentioning that I know the same is true of those who hold strong reservations about such movements: not everyone would agree on each point nor express their views in quite the same way.

You raise two crucial questions: Can a Christian acknowledge the prophethood of Muhammad? And can a Christian acknowledge the Qur'an as God's revelation? You rightly link the two issues as two sides of the same coin. I will respond in a similar way rather than taking each one separately.

Sasan, I know your answer to this is 'no', and I would say that my view probably agrees with yours, at least as you have framed the question. But then, what is all the heat about? As you point out, I and others have suggested that there may be ways of speaking of Muhammad having a prophetic role, and the Qur'an containing truths that find their ultimate source in God, and hence our conversation.

In clarifying the concerns expressed in your paper it seems to me that one particularly critical issue is at play: is it appropriate to hold a view of Muhammad and the Qur'an that would be at odds with the vast majority of Muslims in the past and today (while claiming to still be Muslim, or claiming that such a different viewpoint could fit within Islam.) Some insiders prefer not to speak of Muhammad as a prophet at all, while others see him much more positively. None thinks of him the same way as the majority of Muslims around them do.

Before I respond to the questions themselves, I want to clarify something. The questions are both framed in terms of what a Christian might believe or hold, and also seem to be particularly concerned about what IM advocates believe regarding these questions. If I am correct two comments follow.

First, I agree with you that non-Muslim voices trying to articulate positions relative to the Qur'an and Muhammad would be offensive to Muslims. But you raise a second side of this question which is critical: can 'insiders' hold

views of Muhammad at odds with other Muslims and do so with integrity? Perhaps our discussions would best be served if we focus on that question. Thus, I want to highlight the fact that by definition people in IMs are, by their own self-identification, *Muslims* who believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. As such they seek to be a voice in the Muslim community, participating in reflection on these issues. It is a Muslim discussion about the Bible and the relative place for the Qur'an or Muhammad. The question emerges from that reflection in the light of the Bible and the new (for a Muslim believer) revelation of the Person and Work of Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Of course, the vast majority of Muslims may well reject such a self-identification on the part of Muslim Followers of Christ, as well as the re-interpretations such believers suggest relative to Muhammad and the Qur'an. The point is that such a discussion is a Muslim discussion. In my experience Muslim 'insiders' who have come to believe in Jesus as Lord, in the Bible as God's inspired Word, and who gather regularly in fellowship with others who believe the same for ongoing study of the scriptures, will in fact find that their beliefs are at odds with Muslim orthodoxy. The response of the majority community to this has varied in different contexts.

Now I will comment on your point about using the Qur'an in a way that is at odds with what Muslims understand, while at the same time failing to address the fact that parts of the Qur'an are in direct contradiction to the biblical message (or, in some passages, seem to be). It seems obvious to me that exactly such an approach is what Paul uses with the poets and philosophers in his speech in Athens (Acts 17). He cites a hymn dedicated to Zeus, for example, and yet redirects it in a way that I am sure would be at odds with how the text was originally intended, and with how most non-believing contemporaries of Paul would naturally have understood the text. In so doing Paul does not endorse everything those poets and philosophers he cites may have written. But he does acknowledge the truth in what he cites.

The Acts 17 text is *descriptive*, and not necessarily *prescriptive*. One may read it and conclude that Paul was wrong to do what he did, or that it is not an example that we should follow. I know some IM critics do see it that way. I take it as a Spirit-inspired example, though not one that *must* be followed in every circumstance, and also I do not see it as the only approach for work in Muslim contexts.

So, your concern about using a text in a way that our Muslim friends would not recognize as valid is an important point and concern. However, there is biblical precedent for such an approach. My own take on this is that I believe that other interpretations of the Qur'an which differ from the norm are possible and in some cases even probable, and I would add that there are Muslims who are holding these divergent views. However, we are wise to be sensitive to how these are presented. Perhaps a future exchange between us could outline some parameters?

Finally, I want to close by emphasizing some of what the insiders I know do believe: Jesus as Lord and Saviour, salvation by grace through faith via the merit of his death and resurrection, the Bible as the final Word and authority.

III Sasan: A Christian reading of the Qur'an is not credible to Muslims

Dear Kevin,

Thank you, as always, for your thoughtful responses. In my interactions with you over these past few months and even in our current conversation, I have learned a great deal about various issues surrounding this topic. But I am still struggling profoundly with the same concerns about certain C5 positions and practices that I raised with you in my first letter.

Kevin, before interacting directly with a number of points that you raised, let me first tell you how I was drawn into this controversy. My first encounter with an IM advocate was in the summer of 2006. I was teaching a course on Islam to a dozen Iranian Christian converts from Islam. An evangelical missionary came to lecture these Iranian students for one morning. He told us that in their work in a particular Asian country believers in Christ profess the *shahada*, do all the daily rituals in the mosque, celebrate all the Islamic feasts (and no Christian events on the calendar like Christmas, Easter, Pentecost), read the Qur'an on a regular basis, etc. He also claimed that 99% of the Qur'an was just fine and compatible with the Christian faith and he could actually demonstrate the deity of Christ from the Qur'an (for example, only God can create, Jesus created a bird, thus Jesus must be divine). He also recommended that as Iranians we should be open to this approach and experiment with it among our own people.

I believe the above approach is not an honest way of reading the Qur'an or practising Islam. My fundamental objection is this: Throughout its history Islamic theology, the teachings and traditions of Muhammad and the text of the Qur'an have been understood by Muslims and non-Muslims to explicitly repudiate the core of the Christian faith in regard to such truths as the Triune identity of God, the deity of Christ and his atoning death on the cross. From Rumi to Ayatollah Khomeini, from Ibn Taymiyya to Abdol Karim Soroush, regardless of whether one is a medieval mystic or an ultra-orthodox theologian, or whether one is a radical anti-western cleric or a very westernized liberal philosopher, these Muslims are in complete agreement in their rejection of the above Christian doctrines and their acceptance that the Qur'an in its totality is God's final revelation and Muhammad is the seal of the prophets.

Therefore, it is very natural to become suspicious when all of a sudden, after 1400 years in the encounters between Islam and Christianity, we are hearing from various individuals (both 'Insiders' and 'Along-siders'), that the Qur'an can actually be re-interpreted as a text that points its readers to faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour and Muhammad could be viewed as some kind of a prophet with a similar mission of pointing people to the gospel. From the medieval theologian, Ibn Taymiyya to the contemporary apologist, Jamal Badawi, Muslims have also 're-interpreted' the Gospels from an Islamic perspective in order to demonstrate that Christians have misunderstood or distorted the teachings of Jesus and to make the Gospels compatible with the orthodox Islamic understanding of Jesus. I am afraid that much of our Christian or Insider 're-interpretation'

of the Qur'an treats that text the same way that these Muslims have treated the Gospels.

You write: 'there may be ways of speaking of Muhammad having a prophetic role, and the Qur'an containing truths that find their ultimate source in God'. For me this is the crux of the matter in our debate. I don't know how a follower of Christ can make room for understanding Muhammad as having a 'prophetic role' and more than that, define that role in a way that has been accepted by any Muslim in the past 1400 years of Islamic history. For example, Miroslav Volf urges his readers to consider that one can be 100 percent Christian and 100 percent Muslim, as in the case of Ann Redding, the Episcopal priest, who also professed faith in Islam. He also thinks that a Christian can 'believe that Muhammad was a prophet (not the "Seal of Prophets", but a prophet the way in which we might designate Martin Luther King Jr. a "prophet").'[4]

The problem is that no Muslim has ever claimed that Muhammad was a prophet in the same way that some consider Martin Luther King was a prophet! Or to say that the Qur'an can contain certain truths that find their ultimate source in God, in addition to being very vague and ambiguous to begin with, is still a far cry from how Muslims have viewed the issue of Qur'anic inspiration throughout their history.

You ask whether it is appropriate to hold a view of Muhammad and the Qur'an that would be at odds with the vast majority of Muslims in the past and today. This is a great question. As Christians we might not be in a position to judge the internal debates of orthodoxy in Islam. We don't involve ourselves in the debates that Sunnis have with the Shi'ites or Alawites, or Ahmadiyyas or the Ismaeilis or the Baha'is, etc. But when the question touches on whether it is possible to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour and at the same time Muhammad as God's apostle (or submit to the Bible and the Qur'an at the same time), then this is no longer just 'a Muslim discussion about the Bible, and the relative place for the Qur'an or Muhammad'. As Christians we have every right and duty to be involved in this debate if we care about not getting the gospel caught up in religious syncretism.

Finally, let me say that I don't believe that what Paul is doing in Acts 17 relates to my concerns in these discussions. At most what we can justify, based on Paul's example, is the practice of citing a few passages in the Qur'an in our *evangelism* as bridges and pointers to Christ. This is a far cry from the *regular* and *religious* use of the Qur'an and acknowledging it as having come from God.

Thank you, Kevin for taking time to engage with me on these issues. I am looking forward to our continued conversation on these important topics.

IV Kevin: Christian truths in the Qur'an?

Dear Sasan,

I thank you again as well. I understand why your 'profound struggle' continues, and appreciate how you are engaging the issues. My response will work

4 Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (NY: HarperOne, 2011), 199.

through your last contribution as I go.

One of your first queries arose from your 2006 encounter with a missionary. One of the points that seems most pertinent for our discussion is the view of the Qur'an that the missionary was endorsing:

> …that 99% of the Qur'an was just fine and compatible with the Christian faith…he could…demonstrate the deity of Christ from the Qur'an…' and, as you cite later, '… the Qur'an as a book can actually be re-interpreted as a text that points its readers to faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour and Muhammad could be viewed as some kind of a prophet with a similar mission of pointing people to the gospel.

Perhaps a foundational question we should surface would be whether this view reflects the view of others who espouse IM approaches and whether there is general agreement on this matter. I will speak for the two insider movements I am most familiar with.

The leaders of one such movement would not agree at all with what you heard from the missionary: they see the Qur'an as a false book overall and they do not consider Muhammad as a prophet. They see their role as insiders to be a pragmatic one, remaining in the community as yeast in the dough to bring change and transformation.

The leaders of another movement take an almost opposite view. They do in fact claim that Islamic tradition has not rightly understood the Qur'an because the majority of Muslims paid only lip service to the previous Books and thus missed the key to a right reading of the Qur'an.

Your concern, as I read it, is that such an approach, whether it comes from a Muslim believer in Jesus ('insider') or not, is dishonest and flies in the face of how Muslims have historically interpreted the Qur'an. Both groups of insiders I have just referred to would agree with you that this flies in the face of historic Islam. The second group would take exception to the claim that they are not being honest. It is quite appropriate to look at their views and state where you would agree and disagree. In fact, I do not completely agree with either set of leaders on these issues. What I do defend is their integrity in thinking through the position they have come to, and their right as believers to seek the Lord's wisdom as they search the Bible on these matters.

Later in your communication with me you cite my statement that 'there may be ways of speaking of Muhammad having a prophetic role, and the Qur'an containing truths that find their ultimate source in God'. You rightly point out that this statement is 'still a far cry from how Muslims have viewed the issue of Qur'anic inspiration throughout their history'.

I agree with you. However, I am not trying to describe what Muslims think nor what I think they would agree with, but rather what I think, as well as trying to represent what some of the views of insiders whom I know might be on these issues.

I am fully aware that both Muslims and Christians will disagree with some, even many, of my views and the views of my insider friends. I have been labelled a heretic from both sides. And in at least one occasion that I am aware of this put my life in immediate danger (just to be clear, the danger was not from Christians!).

Since I have touched upon my own thinking, let me move to another place where you quote me. I asked whether it is appropriate to hold a view of Muhammad and the Qur'an that would be at odds with the vast majority of Muslims in the past and today,[5] and I replied that this is in many ways a Muslim discussion. To that you replied,

> …when the question touches on whether it is possible to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour and at the same time Muhammad as God's Apostle (or submit to the Bible and the Qur'an at the same time), then this is no longer just a Muslim discussion about the Bible…as Christians we have every right and duty to be involved in this debate…

I actually agree with you. But the way you have framed the debate here is not what I actually said. What I have said in various ways is that I can see a way of understanding Muhammad as having some sort of prophetic role, and that there are true things in the Qur'an. By extension, since I believe truth is ultimately from God, those true things find their ultimate source in him. But that is not the same as accepting submission to both books. However, to reiterate, these are my views, not the views of Muslim insiders.

Finally, you mentioned that you don't believe that what Paul is doing in Acts 17 relates to your concerns and that at most what we see in Paul's example is the practice of citing a few passages from the Qur'an in evangelism. I believe Paul's theology in Acts 17 is more far reaching than just the citation of those hymns and philosophers. His way of incorporating the altar, the citations of pagan writers, and his portrayal of how God has sovereignly chosen the places and times for the habitations of all peoples precisely so that they may seek him, feel after him, and, indeed, find him all adds up to a way of seeing how God is at work in this world.

Thus, Acts 17 leads me to expect two things. First, the 'finding him' culminates in a call to faith in Jesus. Paul is exclusivist here, and so am I. Second, the 'finding him' may involve discovering clues that God himself has left for men and women to discover, including such clues as may be found in other religious traditions and worldviews. I believe some of those clues are in the Qur'an. I don't think they got there accidently or without God's involvement in some way. But in so saying I am not claiming that the entire book is full of such clues, nor that there are not passages that may indeed lead away. Nor am I saying this is akin to biblical inspiration.

I continue to pray for ongoing clarity.

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5 In fact there are a variety of views among Muslims regarding Muhammad as prophet. In South Asia at least three very different views include the Barelvi's (Muhammad is God's noor/light, he is present and available, not only as an intercessor but personally); Deobandis (deny much of Barelvi beliefs but accept access to Allah through Muhammad's intercession on the last day); the Wahhabis (deny all of the above and see Barelvi's as polytheists). Some Muslims in South Asia have said that in theory there can be prophets after Muhammad, though not of his stature. There is vigorous and even violent debate on these differences. I agree that what 'insiders' say about Muhammad is unlikely to find wide acceptance among other Muslims. But in this they are not alone.

V Sasan: Impropriety in reinterpreting the Qur'an as supporting Christianity

Dear Kevin,

Greetings again my dear brother! And thank you for your patience with me in these discussions as I am trying to understand where some of our Insider friends are coming from. I think your responses have provided some clarity for me and I believe there are also issues that we should recognize as currently at an impasse in our discussions.

From the very beginning, the focus of my critique has been on the Insiders who believe a follower of Christ can also genuinely, albeit in a qualified way, acknowledge the Qur'an as God's word and Muhammad as a prophet. These are the followers of Christ that as you put it claim:

> I can say I am a Muslim because the word Islam means submission and a Muslim is one who submits. So, I have submitted to God ultimately in His Word, Isa, and the Word of God in the Taurat, Zabur, and Injil which the Quran confirms. In addition I can accept and affirm all of the teaching of Muhammad as I find it in the Quran, and can say honestly that he had a prophetic role in calling Arab, Christian, and Jewish people of his time to repent. I can call him a prophet. I can say the shahadah with integrity because I believe Muhammad was called by God to a prophetic role. I read the Quran through the interpretive key of the Gospel and the previous books. When I read the Quran through that lense and filter I find that it agrees with the Bible and that perceived contradictions are due to misunderstandings of the Quran (and in some cases there has been misunderstanding of the Bible as well by Christians).[6]

When I claim that I do not find this position 'honest', I do not mean that folks with this perspective are involved in fraud or deception. What I mean is that this is not a legitimate or genuine understanding of what the Qur'an claims for itself, what the Qur'an says about Jesus or the claims that Muslims have made in regard to the person and message and mission of their prophet. The above position is very different from your claim that 'there are true things in the Qur'an' or that God has left certain 'clues' about himself in the Qu'ran, but not that 'the entire book is full of such clues, nor that there are not passages that may indeed lead away'.

I for one do not deny that there are 'true things in the Qur'an' (in the same way that there are true things in many books on history, poetry, philosophy, science and maths) or the fact that some Muslims have come to faith in Christ as a result of reading the Qur'anic descriptions concerning the uniqueness of Jesus. But I don't see how one can then conclude from such observations that Muhammad was a prophet or that the Qur'an agrees with the Bible in what it teaches.

Let me give a couple of hypothetical illustrations to clarify my concerns. Suppose a group of people who believe that Genesis teaches young earth creationism began to interpret Darwin's *Origin of Species* as actually teaching or supporting young earth creationism.

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6 Higgins, 'Identity', 36.

This group then starts using Darwin as a witnessing tool to tell others that one of the great scientific minds of the 19th century actually gives scientific credence to the accuracy of the Genesis account and thus that is one more proof that the Bible is the inspired word of God. And let's assume this group convinces others in their evangelistic approach and people come to faith in Christ. Although as a Christian I would rejoice that people are coming to faith in Christ through this evangelistic approach, I would still insist that this is not an honest reading of Darwin. We cannot read Darwin 'through the interpretive key of the Gospel' and come up with an interpretation of Darwin at odds with how Darwin has been understood by his friends and foes alike within the scientific community for the past 150 years.

Or suppose that an American Christian who attends church regularly, converts to Shi'ite Islam but decides to stay in the church. He decides to reinterpret the Bible 'through the interpretive key of the Qur'an'. He also decides to partake of the Lord's Supper but interprets that as a commemoration of Hussein's martyrdom at Karbala instead of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Once again, I would say that this individual has every right to convert to Islam but his 'reinterpretation' of the Bible or his 'reinterpretation' of the Lord's Supper is not an honest or legitimate way of understanding the Bible or Christian sacraments.

You might not accept my analogies but as far as I am concerned that is how I view what the above Insiders are doing when they reinterpret the Qur'an to make its message compatible with the Gospel or profess *shahada* as followers of Christ.[7] If we disapprove of the reinterpretive activities in my above two examples, as Christians we should also disapprove of the Insiders' reinterpretation of the Qur'an and *shahada*.

VI—Kevin: The case for a Christian reading of the Qur'an is not so unreasonable as to be dishonest

Dear Sasan,

I thank you also for your patience with me in these discussions as I am trying to understand where some of our Insider friends are coming from. This last response and input from you is helping sharpen our focus, and will hopefully clarify where we understand each other better, as well as (in your words) where the real impasses might remain.

When we originally began this discussion, it was framed as a question of integrity: is such a position 'honest'? I took that to mean we were discussing the integrity, the honesty, of Muslims who follow Jesus when they say that Muhammad is a prophet, but express it with different ideas than most Muslims would accept. This is why I used the fact that Muslims in general have many divergent views regarding Muhammad, and that they disagree vehemently in some cases.

But you have made clear in this exchange, that you 'do not mean that folks with this perspective are involved in fraud or deception but that this is not

7 I see my analogies as a lot closer to what these Insiders are doing than your reference to Christians reinterpreting pagan festivals, practices, trees, objects or the terms for God throughout the history of the church.

a legitimate or genuine understanding of what the Qur'an claims for itself'. So in my mind we are not discussing integrity after all, but whether such a view is correct or not. Perhaps we are at an impasse as to our views on that question, but could we agree that this is not a question of whether Muslim followers of Jesus are being honest in their views?

As to the question, then, of accuracy, there are several points to make. Your Darwin example is a starting point. You ask whether Darwin could be re-interpreted to promote creationism. Of course one question I would ask your hypothetical evangelists would be to show where in Darwin they find evidence of creationist views? There will be none, as we both know. So surely this is a question of apples (what some believers are saying about the Qur'an) and oranges (the Darwin case).

In the case of the Qur'an, the verses which point to confirming previous books (2:89 and 91), the fact Muhammad is told to resolve questions by turning to those who know the books (10:94), and the various ways Jesus is talked about that do seem far beyond normal Muslim beliefs[8] could all suggest the sort of reading that some of our Muslim friends are suggesting. In the Darwin case, there is nothing in his books to suggest any sort of alternative reading whatsoever.

You also cite the example of an American Christian who attends church regularly, converts to Shi'ite Islam but decides to stay in the church and decides to reinterpret the Bible through the interpretive key of the Qur'an. My question would be what has he found in the Bible that suggests using the Qur'an as a key for interpretation? Muslims who follow Jesus, whether you agree with them or not, *have* argued that the Qur'an suggests that the Bible in fact is seen as the key to a right understanding of the Qur'an.

This is a good place to re-emphasize something, and I will use a quote from you, taking a quote from me, to do so. You cite my summarization, the sort of thing I have heard some Muslim followers of Jesus say about how they see the Bible and the Qur'an:

> …I read the Quran through the interpretive key of the Gospel and the previous books. When I read the Quran through that lens and filter I find that it agrees with the Bible…

This statement is fundamentally different from your two examples. I would actually agree with your conclusion, regarding the two examples you cited: those two could represent positions that, although they might be honestly held, are impossible to sustain from the texts in question. The way that some Muslims who follow Jesus view the Qur'an and use it to sustain their views is very different. As such, while you, as well as other Muslims, may disagree with their interpretation, I would argue it is a position that can be held with integrity and conviction.

Whether this is a statement that can be sustained, or not, is an important discussion. You and I will probably never see it eye to eye. But our discussion seems at least to have allowed us to agree that it is not a question of integrity. This still leaves, certainly, a

8 Verses which seem pregnant with deeper hints of Jesus' nature when read by 'insider believers' in the light of the New Testament could include 3:45, 5:110 as many others.

question of whether such a view is correct or not. This leads me to conclude by restating my previous point that whether Muslim followers of Jesus are correct in their views of Muhammad and the Qur'an or not is a matter for Muslims to determine.

VII Sasan: The IM approach is not legitimate or truthful

Dear Kevin,

Greetings my dear friend. As we are wrapping up our conversation, let me end with some clarifications and restatements of the convictions that I have tried to communicate.

I don't think our fundamental disagreements come down to our different understandings of the word 'honest'. According to my Merriam-Webster electronic dictionary, the first definition of the adjective 'honest' is, 'free from fraud or deception: legitimate, truthful'. I have never intended to judge the hearts and motives of all IM advocates or declare them deceitful people. But I still believe the IM approach to the Qur'an and the acknowledgement of *shahada* is not a legitimate or truthful interpretation of those texts as those texts have been understood by Muslims for 1400 years.

As Kevin Vanhoozer points out, there are ethical dimensions involved in interpreting texts (what he calls 'the morality of literary knowledge') and there are times when we can be guilty of 'interpretive violence'. Vanhoozer asks, 'Is it possible that some interpretive methods legitimate misunderstanding?'[9] So I maintain that IM interpretive methods promote a misunderstanding of these texts and thus should not be held by followers of Jesus.

I truly appreciate your clear response to my hypothetical analogies. It put my mind at ease that our IM brothers had not given up on all distinctions between 'exegesis' and 'eisegesis'! You agree that it is not legitimate to get an interpretation in support of young earth creationism out of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. But you go on to say, 'In the case of the Qur'an, the verses which point to confirming previous books (2:89 and 91), the fact Muhammad is told to resolve questions by turning to those who know the books (10:94), and the various ways Jesus is talked about that do seem far beyond normal Muslim beliefs could all suggest the sort of reading that some of our Muslim friends are suggesting'.

I maintain that such IM interpretations are based on highly selective readings of the Qur'an that take certain passages of the Qur'an out of the entire Qur'anic context and thus distort the totality of the Qur'anic message as it has been understood by Muslims throughout their history.

It also seems that you are fine with followers of Jesus reading the Qur'an through the interpretive key of the gospel but do not see any legitimacy in a Muslim reading the Bible through the interpretive key of the Qur'an. You ask, 'What has he [my hypothetical convert to Islam] found in the Bible that suggests using the Qur'an as a key for interpretation?' I would say that just as

9 Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 161.

you used Acts 17 in earlier parts of our discussion to justify your approach to the Qur'an, a Muslim can find plenty of resources within the Qur'an to justify looking at the Bible from the interpretive key of the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an indicates that the Torah and Jesus predicted the coming of Muhammad.

So from the earliest times, Muslims have 'found' many prophecies in the OT and the NT concerning the coming of Muhammad. I believe that in the same way that you and I believe those Muslim interpretations of such biblical 'prophecies' are not legitimate exegesis of our Scriptures, Muslims also believe that the IM approach to interpret the Qur'an through the Gospels is an illegitimate approach to their text.

So a book that has been consistently understood and interpreted by almost every Muslim and non-Muslim alike (up until our modern IM controversy) as a text that explicitly repudiates the core of the Christian faith in regard to such foundational truths as the Triune identity of God, the deity of Christ and his atoning death on the cross, cannot be all of a sudden interpreted as a text that supports the Christian views of Jesus, God and salvation. Because of such foundational contradictions with the Bible, we as Christians should not view this as a work inspired by God and the man who brought this message claiming to have received it directly from God could not be viewed by Christians as in any way having been commissioned by God. This is not just a question for Muslims to decide on. This is an issue that should engage all who care about the truth.

VIII—Kevin: Not a question of dishonesty, but of exegesis

Dear Sasan,

Thank you again for this series of discussions. While I think we might get further doing this over coffee, at least in this format others have been able to listen in.

I appreciate your clarification about referring to IM opinions as dishonest. Though you are not questioning 'the hearts and motives of all IM advocates' and you do not intend to 'declare them as deceitful people', you do not see their views as honest: you do not believe their interpretations of the Qur'an are 'a legitimate and truthful interpretation of those texts as those texts have been understood by Muslims for 1400 years'. It seems fair to say that you believe they are dishonest, but not deceitful.

You are then using the word 'dishonest' in the way I would use the word 'incorrect'. I think this is a rare use of the word. Most readers seeing 'dishonest' will assume you mean, well, deceitful.

Now, whether IM positions are correct or not is a perfectly acceptable and important conversation. But to be frank, when you critique my friends as being dishonest it takes the conversation to a very different place. I felt it was important to clear that point before proceeding. But having done so, and assuming we agree my friends are sincere, let us proceed to talk about whether or not their position is correct.

You state that, 'IM interpretations are based on highly selective readings of the Qur'an that take certain passages of the Qur'an out of the entire Qur'anic context'. We are still faced

with space limits, but let me say a few things.

First, there is much more than a few isolated verses to the argument that the Qur'an took expression as a confirmation and interpretation of the previous books, and is best read and interpreted in their light. Further, when read with a prior assumption that the Bible interprets the Qur'an, many of the verses in the Qur'an that seem to disagree with the biblical message are seen in a different light. Third, I am not suggesting that every verse or idea in the Qur'an *does* match the Bible, even when it is read in the Bible's light.

However, my own opinion is that there is more truth in the Qur'an than many of its critics think. My IM friends would give you very different answers, from each other, if they could enter the discussion here. Some of them would agree with you that there are things wrong in the Qur'an. Others would argue that those things that seem wrong are not wrong once they are interpreted in the light of the Bible.

That brings me to your important question about reading the Bible through the eyes of the Qur'an, and your point that Muslims have long found 'many prophecies in the OT and the NT concerning the coming of Muhammad'. You point out that this is a faulty reading of our Bible, and draw a parallel to IM readings of the Qur'an.

I agree with you of course that the Muslim reading of the Bible you mention is at fault. However, is it at fault because it differs from Christian interpretation, or is it at fault because when one goes to the supposed prophetic references in the Bible that Muslims take to refer to Muhammad, and when one studies those in their original context, etc., one finds that the exegesis does not hold up? That exegesis is not right simply because Christians say it is. It is right because it is right, exegetically.

That is what I would suggest should be the test of IM interpretations of the Qur'an. Their reading of the Qur'an is right or wrong, in the end, not based upon whether it agrees with standard Muslim opinion, but with thoughtful exegesis of the passages in question.

Such exegesis may well prove that standard understanding of some texts has been wrong. That is at least a possibility. And likewise, it may prove that in at least some cases my IM friends are wrong. That is also possible.

In conclusion, to return to where we began this last set of exchanges, being wrong is not the same as being dishonest. And, I would argue, the exegetical discussions about what the verses in question in the Qur'an really mean are in fact discussions for the Muslim community to wrestle with, including those Muslims who have come to believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

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Muslim Idiom Translations in Bangladesh

George King and Tom McCormick

Keywords: *Translation, vocabulary, context, revelation, communication, Gospel, familial terms, prophet, Scripture, dictionary*

I George King: The Nature of and Need for Muslim Idiom Translations:

1. History of Muslim Idiom Translations (MIT) in Bangladesh

There has been a storm raging in recent times over Muslim Idiom Translations (MIT), that is, translations of the Bible for Muslim readers. In the beginning, it centred on the 2005 edition of the New Testament in Bengali entitled *Injil Sharif*. Controversy arose when it became known that this particular translation exchanged the terms, *Father* and *Son* as descriptions of God and Jesus, for other words deemed less offensive to Muslims. One example was to translate 'Son of God' as 'God's Messiah'. Since then, other language translations using similar non-literal renderings of familial terms have come to light.[1]

One outcome of all the negative publicity surrounding this discovery is that the general Christian populace is now more aware of Muslim Idiom Translations than ever before. However, for many people, all they know about MITs may be the errors that have been pointed out in a handful of Bible translations. Any Bible that bears the name *Injil Sharif* may now be viewed with suspicion.

Those who don't read and write Bengali may wrongly assume that there is only one Bengali *Injil Sharif*, when in fact there are at least five different

1 See Adam Simonwitz, 'Translation Chart for Muslim Idiom Translations of the Bible' <http://biblicalmissiology.org/2013/03/04/translation-chart-for-muslim-idiom-translations-of-the-bible> (2013, cited 27 May 2013) for more examples.

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***Tom McCormick**, MA (Westminster Seminary) PhD (Texas), PhD (ICS, Toronto) worked with Wycliffe among the Quechua in Peru and has also served with SIL/Wycliffe in other parts of the world, focusing on various hermeneutical theories, with special attention to continental philosophy as well as psychological (experimental and educational) theories of reading.*

published versions. The title, *Injil Sharif*, simply means *Glorious Gospel* and is an alternative title for the New Testament. *Injil Sharif* is well-recognized by Bengali Muslims as the name of the divine revelation brought to mankind through Jesus Christ. It is the same book which we know in the English-speaking world as the *New Testament*. Just as in English there are various versions of the *New Testament* (KJV, ESV, NIV, etc.), so in Bengali there are several editions of the *Injil Sharif*.

As a person with experience in Bengali language and culture, I am personally aware of the following *Injil Sharif* versions.

a) In 1920-22 Australian Baptist William Goldsack translated the four gospels into Bengali for Muslim readers, making it a very early Muslim Idiom Translation. Printed as four booklets, this was published in Calcutta by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Goldsack's work has been out of print for a long time, and it has been years since I have seen a copy with my own eyes. It may or may not have been entitled *Injil Sharif* in Bengali. According to one online source, even Goldsack's work was not actually the first Muslim Idiom Translation in Bengali. Beginning with a translation of Luke's Gospel in 1854, there were a whole string of Bible portions translated into Muslim Bengali by British Baptist missionaries. These missionaries followed William Carey, 'the father of modern missions', who had translated the Bible into the Bengali for Hindus in 1832.[2]
b) In the 1970s the 'William Carey Bible' was adapted by Christian workers for use among Muslims. It was done without the blessing of the Bangladesh Bible Society (publisher of the Carey Bible). The New Testament portion was entitled *Injil Sharif*. The Bengali in this adaptation was at university-level and therefore difficult for many readers. It was partly a stop-gap measure to fill a need while Christian workers anticipated the forthcoming release of (c) below.
c) In 1980 the Bangladesh Bible Society released the *Injil Sharif*. It quickly became the all-time best-seller in the history of the Bengali language.
d) In 2000 the Bangladesh Bible Society published the *Kitabul Mokaddos* (Holy Bible), containing a significant revision of the above 1980 *Injil Sharif*. The New Testament portion is also printed separately and called simply, the *Injil Sharif*.
e) In 2005 Global Partners published a new *Injil Sharif,* which is the translation that caused all the uproar in recent days. Of all the Bengali New Testaments that bear the name *Injil Sharif,* it is the only one to remove 'Father' and 'Son' and replace them with substitute titles having different meanings.

Since *Injil Sharif* is a generic title for the New Testament, all of the above translations rightly use the name. However, the waves of controversy that began with one version of the *Injil Sharif* may threaten to wash over all Bibles bearing that name, and

2 *Bengali Bible History*, <http://gochristianhelps.com/iccm/bengali/benghist.htm> (2012, cited 8 June 2013).

people ask, 'Why should we even have Muslim Idiom Translations? Why can't Muslims read from the same Bibles as their non-Muslim countrymen?' This is a valid question and one that I will seek to answer.

2. What is a Muslim Idiom Translation?

For our purposes here, a Muslim Idiom Translation will be defined as *a translation of the Bible into the vernacular of Muslims in a given culture*. By 'vernacular' I mean the everyday language spoken by ordinary Muslims, including the religious terminology they commonly use. At first glance, it might seem as if this is carrying things too far, something akin to translating the Bible specifically for factory workers. However, we will see that Muslims have a large religious vocabulary that significantly impacts their everyday language and therefore, is important for translators to consider. To ignore this vocabulary can hinder clear communication of the biblical message.

In 1923 the same William Goldsack who first translated the gospels for Muslim Bengalis also compiled the 'Mussalmani Bengali-English Dictionary: containing nearly six thousand Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Hindi words commonly used by the Muslims of Bengal'. The implication is that most of the 6,000 words are spoken only by Muslim Bengalis. This specialized dictionary is still in print and available from Amazon.com!

It is my contention that, almost without exception, Muslim language in any given culture is so different from that of the non-Muslim community that it merits a Bible translation specifically geared for the Muslim audience. This is because wherever Islam has gone, it has taken Middle Eastern language, culture and values with it. As a result, Islam forever leaves its unique and sizeable footprint on the language of that place, a footprint that manifests itself in the everyday speech of ordinary Muslims.

3. Names of God

There are literally hundreds of languages spoken by Muslims in the world today. In fact, it is true that '[m]ore than twice as many Muslims speak Indonesian, Bengali, or Urdu as speak Arabic'.[3] Yet wherever Islam is found, Muslims describe the Creator God using the Arabic word *Allah,* no matter what the local language may be. This uniformity is partly driven by the requirement to perform prayers in Arabic, even though Arabic may not be well understood by the worshipper.

Following on from this situation, someone might assume that a defining characteristic of a Muslim Idiom Translation is its choice of *Allah* as the normal rendering of the Greek *theos* or the Hebrew *elohim* to reference the one true creator God. Normally, that may well be the case, but not always.

For example, the 1980 Bengali *Injil Sharif* (#(c) in the list above) used the Farsi-based *Khoda* to refer to God and not *Allah* as one might naturally suppose. It may be worth noting here that Bengali has no religiously-neutral word for God. Since William Carey's time, most Bengali Bibles had used the Hindu word *Ishwar* for God, which

3 Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

was unacceptable for Muslim readers. *Khoda* was considered an Islamic word, but it did not carry the same negative connotations as *Allah* did among the primarily Hindu-background Christian community. Many Bangladeshi Hindus and Christians had suffered as part of a persecuted minority and tended to associate the word *Allah* with their persecutors.

However, by the time the entire Bible was translated and ready for publication 20 years later, a sizeable community of Muslim-background believers in Jesus had been raised up. I was part of a special meeting to which Muslim-background believers from all over Bangladesh were invited to discuss the forthcoming translation. In that meeting, those believers requested a specific word change to be made in the new Bible: change *Khoda* to *Allah*. And so it happened that the new *Kitabul Mokaddos* (Holy Bible) published in 2000 used the word *Allah* to describe God.

Although these believers had come to faith in Christ as the Son of *Khoda* (God), as translated in the 1980 *Injil Sharif*, their normal way of referring to God continued to be *Allah*. In their minds *Khoda* and *Allah* were the same, but *Allah* was their most common way to speak about God. They prayed to *Allah* as their heavenly Father and worshipped Jesus Christ as the Son of *Allah*, so it was desirable for them to have a Bible that called God by that same name.

Most Muslim Idiom Translations follow the same pattern, using *Allah* as the normal way of referencing the God of the Bible.

4. Names of the Prophets

In Islam, it is the custom (*sunna*) for a person who converts to Islam to take on a new Muslim name. Generally, the new name will be one of the 99 names of God, or the name of a prophet. The custom is similar for Muslim parents of a new child. This explains why there are so many men named *Mohamed* in the world! But it also helps us understand why names such as *Ibrahim, Ayyub, Yusuf, Musa, Harun, Yunus, Ilyas, Zakariyya, Yahya,* and *'Isa* are so common in the Muslim world. They are all considered prophets of Islam and therefore worthy names for a child.

However, some of the above-mentioned prophets of Islam are also famous Bible characters. It is astonishing to think that there are literally millions of men scattered throughout Muslim society with names like *Abraham, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Jonah, Elijah, Zechariah, John* (i.e. the Baptist) and *Jesus*! All of them are nominal witnesses to the message of the Bible, and that's just the beginning.

Some 25 Islamic variations of Bible characters are mentioned by name in the Qur'an. More are recounted in traditional 'stories of the prophets' taught to Muslim children in the same way that Bible stories are read to children in Christian homes. A classic manual of Islamic law called *The Reliance of the Traveller* states that out of all the multitude of messengers God has sent to mankind, it is *obligatory* for Muslims to know 25 of them in particular.[4] The list of 25 names ends with *Muhammad*.

4 Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller,* trans. Nuh Ha Mim Keller, (Beltsville, Amana, 1994), 811.

Two others on the list are *Hud* and *Salih*, who are mentioned in the Qur'an but otherwise almost unknown. The remaining 22 on the list are all Bible characters! It is the joy of the MIT Bible translator to identify these people (and others) in the pages of the Bible so that Muslims may come to know and understand the truth about them.

5. The Lesser of Two Evils?

The English-speaking world enjoys the benefit of a largely non-sectarian religious vocabulary. Words like *scripture*, *prayer, faith, repentance,* and *worship* are not exclusively Christian terms. Religious words like these are part of the vernacular, even for English-speaking Muslims. People from almost any religious background can and do use such words with a clear conscience to describe their own religious ideas and practices.

However, when you look at religious vocabulary in other languages, it can sometimes be tied to a particular religious tradition with no suitable non-sectarian equivalent. One example is the Sanskrit-based Bengali word, *shastra.* In English it literally means *scripture,* but that doesn't tell the whole story. *Shastra* is also a technical term referring particularly to *Hindu* scripture.[5] William Carey once made reference to this fact when he wrote to his sisters about his Bengali Bible translation work that was then in process:

> The work of translation is going on, and I hope the whole New Testament and the five books of Moses may be completed before this reaches you. It is a pleasant work and a rich reward, and I trust, whenever it is published, it will soon prevail, and put down all the *Shastras* of the Hindus.[6]

Yet when Carey translated the Bible into Bengali, he chose *shastra* to describe the biblical scriptures in verses such as the following…

> All Scripture (*shastra*) *is* God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).
>
> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture (*shastra*) came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things (2 Pet. 1:20).

Based on the above verses, one could be forgiven for concluding that the 'Carey Bible' teaches that the Hindu *Shastras* are as inspired as the Bible! That is, if not for other statements like the following:

> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures (*shastra*) concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

The above verse makes clear that the *shastra*, or scripture, being referred to is not the Hindu scriptures but the Old Testament. Hindus reading Carey's Bible would be comfortable with the terminology, but also learn the truth of the gospel.

By way of contrast, *shastra* is prob-

5 Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Moniruzzaman and Jahangir Tareque, *Bangla Academy Bengali-English Dictionary* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994), 750.

6 W. Pakenham Walsh, *William Carey: India, 1793-1834*, <http://www.wholesomewords.org/missions/bcarey9.html> (n. d., cited 15 April 2013).

lematic for a Muslim Bengali reader because of what he sees as repulsive and idolatrous Hindu terminology. So what do you do? There is no suitable non-sectarian word available, and so you use the word for *scripture* commonly known by Muslim Bengalis – *kitab*. By the way, *kitab* is a very 'biblical' word. Derived from Arabic, it is related to the Hebrew *kethab* (book, writing; see Dan. 10:21; 1 Chr. 28:19).

6. Muslim Language is not just about Religion

To further complicate a Bible translator's task, there are many words with no religious connotations that are used only by people within a particular religious community. I already made reference to Goldsack's dictionary of 6,000 Muslim-Bengali words. Hindu-background Bengalis know water as *jol*, but Muslims call the same thing *pani*. To reply 'yes', a Hindu will say *ha,* while a Muslim says *ji*. The two communities greet each other differently. There is a multitude of specific designations for the various kinds of aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins, and they are markedly different between Hindu and Muslim families. Yet they are all speaking the same language!

But where do the local Bangladeshi followers of Christ fit into this situation? Which terms do they use? Well, it depends on which religious community they were converted from. In the past, most Christians had a Hindu family heritage, but in recent years, the number of Christ-followers with a Muslim family heritage has increased dramatically. All of this impacts Bible translation, making Muslim Idiom Translations not just important, but essential.

7. A Trip to the Village

One day I visited a Bangladeshi village just one mile from the busy highway running between the capital city and the nation's main seaport. My Bengali companion struck up a conversation with a local shopkeeper who couldn't take his eyes off my pale white skin. He didn't get to see many 'foreigners' and so I was quite a novelty. As they continued to chat, my friend spoke to the villager about Christian faith, to which the shopkeeper responded that in all his life up to that point he had never met a Christian.

A man like that would have been lost trying to read a non-MIT Bengali Bible. So much of what he read would have been utterly foreign—almost like another language. And yet it would have been Bengali.

That man's story is not unusual in the majority Muslim world. Muslims are born and die, never having met a follower of Christ. Their main knowledge of Christianity might be what they learn at school or at the mosque. They don't know the Christian *lingo* of the culturally-distant church and their Bible. They need a Bible in their own mother tongue—they need a Bible in Muslim language.

George King

II Tom McCormick: Agreements and Questions

George King has rightly noted that a storm has been raging in recent times over Muslim Idiom Translations (MITs). I am grateful for his comments, which help illustrate some of the difficulties we all face coming to terms with MITs. For George, 'a Muslim Id-

iom Translation [is] defined as a translation of the Bible into the vernacular of the Muslims within a given culture'.

One wonders: How else might a translation be a translation if not into the vernacular of a given people? Perhaps more to the point, though, how might such a definition distinguish an idiomatic translation (like the NIV or NLB) from an 'essentially literal' translation (like the ESV)? Are not all such translations 'into the vernacular of … a given culture'? However, 'the MIT storm' was provoked by something other than simply using 'the vernacular', by which George means 'the everyday language spoken by ordinary Muslims, including the religious terminology they commonly use'. Can we sort out what is an 'MIT issue' per se, and what might be 'optional'?

I begin with appreciation for the clarification of the 5-versions of the Bengali *Injil Sharif*. George presents us with a case study based on his experience as head of the translation team for the *Injil Sharif* (d), an admittedly MIT translation. But then, so is the controversial 2005 *Injil Sharif* (#5), an important example of an offending MIT translation. George notes: 'Of all the Bengali New Testaments that bear the name *Injil Sharif,* [the 2005 Bengali *Injil Sharif*] is the only one to remove "Father" and "Son" and replace them with substitute titles having different meanings.'

Evidently what George means by an MIT translation (e.g. d) is contrary to what so many others characterize as a 'MIT (excess or error?)'. So inflammatory has this perceived excess been that the Divine Familial Term (DFT) issue has been taken by many to epitomize the MIT paradigm per se. But is that fair? Evidently George is both decidedly for MITs and perhaps also against the DFT strategy of the controversial 2005 Bengali *Injil Sharif* (#5). What is going on here, and how might it help us consider what is and what is not an MIT, a difficult task based on one case study? Regardless, 'MIT' apparently means different things to different folk.

Let me raise questions with the help of George's paper.

As noted, 'a Muslim Idiom Translation will be defined as *a translation of the Bible into the vernacular of the Muslims within a given culture*'. Again: aren't all Bible translations an attempt to use the everyday, vernacular of whatever culture is the host? If that culture is 'Muslim', how would MITs be an exception? There is, apparently, something unique about the Muslim situation, distinguishing it from, e.g., George's reference to factory workers. There are two points I consider:

(i) Often the everyday 'vernacular' spoken by ordinary Muslims includes much commonly used religious terminology which if ignored 'can hinder clear communication of the biblical message'. And further, much of this (Bengali) vernacular is 'spoken only by Muslim Bengalis and not by non-Muslims'.

(ii) 'Islam forever leaves its unique and sizeable footprint on the language of that place, a footprint that manifests itself in the everyday speech of ordinary Muslims.'

1. Communication

The first point: This is a serious point, indeed, for no one wants to hinder communication of the biblical message; on

the contrary! And yet, many who resist MITs also claim they hinder communication of the biblical *message*, and that on essential matters. For example, to call God the Father simply 'Protector/Helper' or the Son of God 'God's representative', though biblical truths, hinders clear communication of the divine familial relations essential to the biblical message. But are these Divine Familial Term (DFT)-cases fair representatives of MITs? Evidently, King thinks not.

For support George mentions the 1923 'Mussalmani Bengali-English Dictionary' by Goldsack. Surely a valuable resource, though it is unclear how a 90-year old compilation of words of Arabic, Hindi, Persian, and Turkish origin incorporated in Bengali offers definitive assistance.

George's point is: 'The implication is that most of the 6,000 words are spoken only by Muslim Bengalis and not by non-Muslims.' How relevant is this? It's hard to say; thus my concerns are general, not Bengali specific.

First, I suppose it depends on how many of those words could naturally be used in a translation today. Second, I say 'could' because there may be alternative words (or phrases) suitably understood by both Muslims and non-Muslims. (We all know and can use infrequent words peculiar to 'non-native' subcultures.) Third, are there key words (like the DFTs) among the exceptions ('most' is not 'all'). For example, many claim that 'father' and 'son' are ordinary, everyday, shared terms for familial relationships as understood and used by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Since the terms are understood by both groups, they are available for use in the translation of the Bible, even if the Bible translation is specifically geared for a Muslim audience. If this is true for DFTs, what about *other* lexical items and linguistic features?

Fourth, George similarly contends that 'almost without exception, Muslim language in any given culture is so different from that of the non-Muslim community that it merits a Bible translation specifically geared for the Muslim audience.' Turning the tables, how understandable might an MIT be to non-Muslims? Would any points of difference be linguistic or religious-worldview preferences? Could compromises be reached? That is, fifth, how might any of this hinder or help the 'clear communication of the biblical message'? Finally, is not sorting this situation required regardless of any MIT-specific concerns? Are these not general matters of communication rather than specifically MIT distinctives?

Further, George claims that Muslim-audience Bible translations are warranted because 'wherever Islam has gone, it has taken Middle Eastern language, culture and values with it'. No doubt this is true, but is it true in a sense that always clearly distinguishes Muslims from non-Muslims? Are not some of the Middle Eastern cultural values shared by other cultures? Further, might there be Middle Eastern cultural values resonant with Kingdom values (perhaps present locally), for instance, 'hospitality'? If so, then there would be sharable, if not already shared, Middle Eastern cultural values, regardless of religion. Again, is not sorting out this situation required regardless of MIT-specific concerns?

Now, for sake of argument, consider: If it were true that the Bengali case

recommends a unique MIT, how is that different from the not uncommon challenge of multiple dialects of 'the same language'? It is true, as in the situation in which I worked, that decisions are made for different translations for different dialects; and so perhaps MITs and HITs (Hindu) might be recommended. I say 'might' since there are strategies for producing multi-dialectical translations.

2. Language Footprint

Now for our second consideration; George states: 'Islam forever leaves its unique and sizeable footprint on the language of that place, a footprint that manifests itself in the everyday speech of ordinary Muslims.' No doubt every culture or religion leaves a 'unique and sizeable footprint on the language of [its] place', Christianity and 'the West' included. That is not controversial.

However, do we not always find (a) remnants of the good creation and the image of God of its producers, (b) distortions due to the Fall, and (c) signs of God already at work redeeming and bringing all into unity in Christ (Ephesians 1:10)? This is the Creation-Fall-Redemption, and Consummation (thus no 'footprint' remains 'forever') motif applied to translations. If this is valid, then George's defence of MITs is (i) not unique to the 'M', and (ii) perhaps more a defence of 'vernacular' translations into the everyday language as spoken by ordinary people. But again, I do not know anyone, either pro- or con-MITs, who is opposed to that.

Might George's examples help us? Consider first, 'names' (Prophets and God); second, the case of other vocabulary; and finally, the 'Trip to the Village' story.

First, I appreciate George's discussion of the names of God. For one, listening carefully to the local believers is acknowledged. And yet, it is worth noting that the MBBs 'prayed to *Allah* as their heavenly Father and worshiped Jesus Christ as the Son of *Allah*'. That is, the association of the DFTs with the alleged 'Muslim word-name' Allah evidently did not provoke problems…for the MBBs. And yet, the common claim of many MIT advocates has been that associating Allah with 'Father' and 'Son' is anathema to Muslims, and so provocative of the worst misunderstandings that the DFTs must be modified if not eliminated from the biblical text.

Regarding the names of the prophets: If I understand George, he is recommending the 'Qur'anic' versions of these names, thus connecting with the 'idiomatic-vernacular expectations' of the audience, 'so that Muslims may come to know and understand the truth about them' from the biblical contexts. I join George in the joy of helping Muslims come to know and understand the truth about the names of the prophets.

My question, though is whether the paratext (footnotes) might provide that identification just as well as using the Qur'anic names directly in the text. Generally (local phonology allowing), MIT advocates have preferred the (dynamic equivalent) Muslim spelling in the text, while non-MIT advocates have favoured the formal equivalent in the text. Regardless, context is clearly a key. And yet, is there a conflict of contexts? The Islamic pattern of changing names upon conversion is also a context. Might that cultural-pattern recommend a personal and perhaps textual change to Abraham rather than

Ibrahim? Should an MIT follow the linguistic or cultural idiomatic pattern?

Second, what about the other vocabulary? Such vocabulary is religious and non-religious. George's religious examples are cases of using the common and preferred 'pre-Christian' local language term (the 'Hindu' *shastra* and the Muslim *kitab*) for the closest equivalent to the biblical term, and 'recharging' the word with biblical meaning from the biblical contexts. Thus we agree that biblical contexts are (potentially) very influential. Where, then, is the line between the work of contexts (linguistic and non-linguistic) and the work of words? Might this line be a distinguishing mark between MITs and non-MITs? Regarding the non-religious examples, I ask again: Are these simply (religiously-charged) multi-dialect situations?

Finally, the intriguing, yet not unusual, story of a trip to the village. George claims, 'A man like that would have been lost trying to read a non-MIT Bengali Bible', and he may be right, depending of course on the artfulness and style of that Bible. The situation, though, is illustrative of three further points. First, I don't think that George's solution necessarily follows. He says, 'They need a Bible in their own mother tongue—they need a Bible in Muslim language.' I would agree that they need language which they understand, but that may, yet need not be (i) 'in Muslim language' per se, nor (ii) only a Bible per se.

Regarding (i): I don't doubt that the way one might converse with Muslims is different from conversing with non-Muslims, nor that these ways of speaking include many ordinary, everyday-language differences. In itself, this is not unusual. For instance, male versus female styles of speech, even in English, are recognizably different. And yet, such differences have not recommended different translations for men and women. Further, how 'foreign' sounding might a legitimate translation of a foreign document be? And who decides? And on what basis?

Regarding (ii): Other materials might complement a non-MIT Bible. And regardless, such a man as described by George would probably need Christian friends to talk with, both for normal, nuanced personal communications, and also because such folk often are not literate. Second, is the Bible meant to be a 'stand-alone' document? Many say, no, not primarily. On what basis do we decide? Third, who, primarily, is the intended audience and readership for the Bible? Is it designed primarily as an evangelistic means, or is it for believers? Are these questions not prior to any MIT discussion? Apparently different understandings of a 'vernacular translation' depend on the answer.

I have raised a lot of questions…the easy part. May our on-going discussions help bring peace amongst God's family, and advance His glorious purposes and good pleasure.

Tom McCormick

III George King—Response

I want to express my appreciation to Dr. McCormick for a respectful and thoughtful response to my opening piece. His reply reveals an inquiring mind, as demonstrated by the more than 40 questions posed therein. I will plan to focus on just a couple of matters that seem paramount in our discussion.

1. What exactly is meant by 'Muslim Idiom Translation' (MIT)?

Why revisit this basic matter of definitions? The recent controversy surrounding MITs has been emotive and polarizing for many. The MIT definition given in the opening piece was broad in scope so as to try to embrace all Bible translations intended for a Muslim audience, not just those that have made the headlines.

Unfortunately, some readers of this article may think that all MITs are somehow connected to *Wycliffe Bible Translators*. Let us remind ourselves that MITs have been around a lot longer than the recent storm regarding Wycliffe would indicate. It was previously noted that as early as 1854, British Baptists in Indian Bengal published a Muslim Idiom Translation of the Gospel of Luke. *Wycliffe* on the other hand, was not founded until 1942, nearly 90 years later.

Similarly, some readers may believe that a MIT should be defined as a Bible translation for Muslims that *tampers with divine familial terms* (DFTs) by removing the words *Father* and *Son* when used in reference to God and Jesus. Even in Tom's remarks, his concerns about MIT excesses surface repeatedly, as if to say that failure to properly translate the *divine familial terms* is somehow intrinsic to the definition of a Muslim Idiom Translation. Tom himself makes the following cogent observation: *'So inflammatory has this perceived excess been that the DFT issue has been taken by many to epitomize the MIT paradigm per se.'*

The controversy over DFTs may well have poisoned many people into thinking that all MIT translation work should be abandoned. But imagine for a moment that a general movement is raised up to lobby against all English Bibles, simply because one, the *New World Translation*, mistranslates John 1:1 (*the Word became a god*) to suit the theological predilections of the *Jehovah's Witnesses*. All of us would view such a movement as uninformed and reactionary. It would be heading towards a fulfilment of the proverb, 'to throw the baby out with the bath water'. It is my fear that certain elements of the Christian community want to do just that in regard to Muslim Idiom Translations.

Returning to definition of MIT as *a translation of the Bible into the vernacular of the Muslims within a given culture*, is there any sense in which the offending MITs have failed to adhere to this definition? Absolutely. In Mark 14:36, Jesus prays to God as 'Abba, Father'. Rather than translate those words into Bengali, the 2005 Global Partners edition of the *Injil Sharif* completely avoids having Jesus refer to God as Father and renders those words instead as 'Rabbul Alamin'.[7] *Rabbul Alamin* is a divine title commonly uttered by Bengali Muslims in prayer. It comes originally from Arabic and means *Lord of the worlds,*[8] but has no hint of the meaning of *Father*. The 2005 *Injil Sharif* does not even bother to translate the Greek NT

7 See footnote 1.

8 One could consider using *Rabbul Alamin* as a functional equivalent to *Yahweh Sabaoth* (*LORD of Hosts* in the KJV, *LORD Almighty* in NIV) in the Old Testament, immediately understood and embraced by Muslim readers as referring to the God who is Lord over all creation.

phrase *Abba ho pater,* choosing to replace it with something more acceptable to Muslims. But a Bible translation is first and foremost, a *translation*. *Rabbul Alamin* is not a translation of *Abba, Father* at all, but a deliberate choice to not translate.

By way of contrast, the 2000 Bangladesh Bible Society *Injil Sharif,* says in Mark 14:36, 'Abba, Pita', literally, 'Abba, Father'.[9] Despite that clean literal translation of a Divine Familial Term, I do appreciate the dilemma MIT translators face regarding Divine Familial Term. The defining belief of Muslims is *Tawhid*, the *Oneness* of God, as stated in Surah 112:

> Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him.[10]

Intrinsic to belief in *Tawhid* is the notion that Allah 'begets not, nor is He begotten'. If *Tawhid* is the most important belief for Muslims, then to deny *Tawhid* would logically be the greatest sin one could commit—and that is the case. *Shirk* is the sin of ascribing partners to God, including the belief that God has a son. This is the worst blasphemy and a Muslim is in danger of hellfire for just reading about it and considering the possibility that God could have a son. It is no wonder that MIT translators have searched for alternatives to a literal translation of the Divine Familial Terms.

2. 'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver' (Prov. 25:11)

I personally struggled with the Divine Familial Terms issue, looking for suitable non-offensive options that would communicate the biblical truth of the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of Jesus. In retrospect, I would give more consideration to an alternate rendering of 'Our Father in heaven' that our translation team discussed. In Matthew 6:9 our 2000 translation currently reads *amader behesti pita,* literally, *our heavenly father.* The team talked briefly about modifying that to *amader asmani abba,* which also means *our heavenly father*, but I hesitated because it seemed a bit radical to address God the Father, using anything other than *Pita* (a formal and traditional word for *father*).

Later, I heard some Muslim-background believers pray to God as *asmani abba*, and it struck me as beautiful and natural. Bengali Muslims already use the couplet *asmani kitab* as a well-known technical term to describe the four 'heavenly books' they believe Allah has revealed to mankind–the *Taurat* (Torah), the *Zabur* (Psalms), the *Injil* (Gospel), and the *Qur'an*. It is not a big stretch for a Muslim to utter *asmani abba*, since he is accustomed to saying *asmani kitab*.

In all this, I am theorizing that *a well-turned phrase may help to mitigate a theological offence*. It is bad enough if a theological concept is repugnant to your listener, but it is even worse if the unwelcome concept is also stated in a crass, disrespectful way. Unfortunately, the Divine Familial Terms in particular can easily sound vulgar to a Muslim ear because of the perceived

9 *Abba* is also a Muslim-Bengali word similar in meaning to *daddy*, implying both intimacy and respect. *Pita* on the other hand, is a more formal term used on official documents requesting the name of one's 'father.'

10 *The Holy Quran,* trans. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (New Delhi: Goodword, 2005).

sexual connections. In a roundabout way, it is like the challenge translators of the English Bible have in translating the Greek of Mt. 1:25 (*ouk eginosken auten;* 'knew her not') clearly without being sexually explicit.

In my opinion, a 'well-turned phrase' may lessen the initial offence, and hopefully, help Muslims to move on to embracing God as heavenly Father and confessing that Jesus indeed, is the Son of God.

George King

IV Tom McCormick Final Response

I do appreciate George's concern to clarify what is meant by 'Muslim Idiom Translation' (MIT). We have made some progress, at least with regard to what an MIT need not be. According to George, an MIT need not tamper with 'Divine Familial Term (DFTs) by removing the words *Father* and *Son* when used in reference to God and Jesus'. To decouple MITs from Divine Familial Terms as two separate, though sometimes overlapping, issues is important to note. In George's assessment, to render the Greek NT phrase *Abba ho pater* with words having 'no hint of the meaning of *Father'* is simply 'not a translation … at all, but a deliberate choice to not translate'. This does help us sort out what is an MIT issue per se and what might be optional. And for that, we can be grateful. I am also appreciative of the governing role of biblical meaning noted.

I am not sure, though, how this helps define or clarify more positively what an MIT per se might be. The earlier definition proposed by George still, evidently, stands: 'a Muslim Idiom Translation will be defined as a translation of the Bible into the vernacular of the Muslims within a given culture'. But then so too do my earlier questions: how might such a definition distinguish an idiomatic translation from an 'essentially literal' translation? Are not all such translations 'into the vernacular of … a given culture'? I do think there is a baby in this bath water. How, though, might we rescue our little friend?

George's example of Matthew 6:9 in the 2000 Bangladesh Bible Society's *Injil Sharif* does shed further light. The point I infer is that the prayer life of Bengali former Muslim Christians (MBBs) offered a better solution than what was previously taken as a sensitive and accurate MIT rendering.

This example perhaps answers some of my previous inquiries, though I admit these are my own inferences: (i) an MIT Bible can be (is always?) primarily for believers, with special attention due to Muslim Background Belivers, (ii) from whose maturing lives together in the Christian community can emerge 'translation solutions'. Further, (iii) the 'vernacular of the Muslims within a given culture' is not simply an inherited and fixed standard but may be creatively modified by 'a well-turned phrase' which had not previously existed.

I am not surprised by this 'solution', as we are after all dealing with divine revelation and the on-going transformation of cultures. And yet, this also modifies, or at least clarifies, George's understanding of the vernacular in his definition of MITs. In particular, an MIT that included the new phrase *asmani abba* (patterned on *asmani*

kitab) is introducing a 'new idiom' (an oxymoron, I know), which is *not* 'religious terminology they commonly use.' Indeed, the suggested adjustment is not just terminological, but has much to do with culture and values as well. And if this is true for Divine Familial Terms as in this example, what about *other* lexical items like names, as well as other linguistic and sociolinguistic features like prayer languages?

As I suspect we all know and believe, the coming of the king leaves its own footprint, and from this example we see a glimpse of how a Christian community and a Bible translation can 'manifest itself in the everyday speech of [Muslim Background Believers, and thus perhaps also] ordinary Muslims.' Maranatha.

V George King Conclusion

Many thanks to Tom for his insightful comments and questions, which leads me to highlight the following:

> id·i·om noun \'i-dē-əm\ 1 a: the language peculiar to a people or to a district, community, or class : dialect.[11]

Muslim *Idiom* Translation means Muslim *Dialect* Translation. Some MITs are 'essentially literal', similar to the ESV. Other MITs are idiomatic translations not unlike the NIV. The Bengali *Injil Sharif* I worked on is an example of the latter, while the one adapted from the 'William Carey' Bible is the former. Both are Muslim *Idiom* Translations because they are translations into Muslim vernacular.

Asmani abba is a 'new idiom' because it represents a 'new theology'. Islam has no *heavenly father*. The individual words themselves are part of Muslim idiom, and that is crucial. It is easier to introduce new or unwelcome concepts if you 'speak the language'.

The issue of names is foundational to a true MIT. When an MIT identifies Moses as *Musa,* it is not because Arabic is better than Hebrew, but because Muslims know *Musa* as the prophet who led the people out of Egypt and gave them the Torah. Why insist on adherence to Hebrew forms, only to have a reader ask, 'Who is this *Moses*? Is it possible that he is Prophet *Musa*?' Both *Moses* and *Musa* reference the same prophet, so use the name Muslims actually know. Let us give God's Word to Muslims in their mother tongue.

11 *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/idiom> (2003, cited 8 June 2013).

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The Philosophy behind the Arabic Translation *The True Meaning of the Gospel of the Messiah*

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Emad Azmi Mikhail

Keywords: *Crusades, missions, culture, context, linguistics, evangelism, liturgy, Christological controversies, Byzantines, Chalcedon*

Introduction

As part of our discussion of the theme of this issue, we present a discussion of a translation of part of the Bible (Matthew to Acts) into Arabic The True Meaning of the Gospel of the Messiah (2008), *which has become controversial. Here we present a discussion by two Arabic native speakers from Egypt. They are professors of theology who have previously worked in the same theological seminary and have known each other for decades. One of them, Professor Lamie, serves on the committee that oversaw the creation of the* True Meaning *translation.*

I Ekram Lamie: The Need for *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ*

In this article, I will address four aspects of the *True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ* translation project: first, the historical background; secondly, the philosophy; thirdly, the principles of the project; and finally, the technical details of the project.

1. Historical Background

The early apostles of Christ had the flexibility to adapt to the cultures of the peoples they evangelized, and the flexibility to set aside customs and traditions of their own Jewish culture. After Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, some of the Jewish Christians followed the Mediterranean littoral from Judea until they reached

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Alexandria, where they adopted the Greek and Coptic languages and allowed for the reinterpretation of native Egyptian symbols and customs. For example, the Pharaonic 'key of life' was transformed at their hands into a form of the cross of Christ. A similar phenomenon happened in the Phoenician, Babylonian and Persian cultures. This flexibility was combined with theological depth, in large part due to the influence of the scholars of the Alexandrian school of Christianity.

Unfortunately, with time, the church struggled with divisions and became too weak to present its message in a way that made sense to the Arab Muslims arriving in North Africa and the Middle East. Therefore the first impression the Arabs had of the rituals and incense and worship that took place inside churches was that they were just like paganism, with the images and statues being no more than idols. Their impression was confirmed by the theological terms employed, such as 'Mother of God', 'Son of God', 'Holy Triad', and so on. The church failed to correct this impression throughout the following decades and centuries, and also failed to use a version of Arabic that was understandable to Muslims.

In the 19th century missionaries came to the Arab world trying to reform the Arab church from within. However, these missionaries failed to rectify the image of the church among non-Christians. In some respects, they did try to do something for Arab Muslims. For example, they were the first in the modern era to translate the entire Holy Bible into Arabic in one volume (though separate translations of the Old Testament and New Testament had existed for several centuries), and they translated hymns and sermons into language understandable to the Egyptian man on the street. If it were not for having the Bible and other Christian materials in Arabic, Christianity in Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon would have disappeared, as happened in North Africa, where the local language was not adopted.

Even though those first missionaries encouraged the use of the Arabic language in worship and Bible study, it is unfortunate that they did not go further in their adoption of Arab culture. Most of the key terms used in translations of the Bible were borrowed from Greek and Syriac or were Arabic words that looked like Syriac terms but had different meanings. For example, *kahen* means priest in Syriac, so it was translated into Arabic as *kahin*, but this means soothsayer or sorcerer. Even the sentence constructions and style were foreign.

All this resulted in an ecclesiastical form of Arabic that was not the mother tongue of Muslim Arabs and was not understood by them in the ways intended. Although hymns and sermons were now in the Arabic language, they were expressed in the theological terms and expressions of foreign theologians and commentators. No effort was made to encourage Arabs to develop theological expressions and styles of worship that fit the Arab language and cultures, as opposed to Greek, Coptic, or western cultures.

This gave the impression that Christianity was unsuitable for the language and culture of the Arabs. Therefore, neither the modern Protestant churches nor the ancient historical churches have interacted effectively with Arab Islamic culture. So they continue to be

alienated from the surrounding society and have little impact on it.

In this religious and cultural context, some Arabs today welcome the opportunity to express their Arab identity in the fields of worship, theology and Bible translation. *The True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ* is one such opportunity. So let us now turn to the philosophy behind this translation project.

2. Philosophy

Many of us have been asking ourselves some important questions related to our Arab identity and our identity as Christians, just a few of which include:

- Why has the message of Christ lost ground before the Islamic tide? Is the problem in the gospel or in the proclamation of the gospel?
- Is the church's mission addressed to a whole community (*umma*), or just to individuals?
- Is it essential to use the vocabulary, customs and traditions of one community in order to introduce the church's message to another community, or can the message be expressed within the language and culture of other communities?
- Can we find a single, identical expression of Christianity appropriate for all the different national churches all over the world? Or can every community have its own expressions of the kingdom of God?
- How can Christian minorities take on real responsibility towards their community without sacrificing either their mission or principles?

As we sought to answer these questions, a vision started to emerge, and finally the mission was clear to us. What was needed was a translation of the Gospels that not only engages the Arabic language in its native form but also the whole heritage of Arab civilization, history and culture.

Such a translation would appeal to Arab readers as a text springing from their land and would not be seen as something imported from outside or something that comes from ancient pagan practices. Such a translation would belong to the Arab community, respecting Arab thought, language, history and culture, allowing readers to feel at ease and engaged with the text, rather than feeling detached, bewildered, and out of place.

3. Principles

When Christian scholars in the 9th century began to translate the New Testament into the Arabic language, they used the expressions that were in use at the time by both Muslims and Christians, writing with complete naturalness at the beginning of the New Testament 'In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate' and then 'The Noble *Injeel* according to the evangelist Matthew'. Both Muslims and Christians at this time used the same vocabulary.

As time went on, and because of many political, economic and social circumstances, among them the Crusades, the linguistic and cultural gulf widened between Arabic-speaking Muslims and Christians. So it happened that each side had a variety of language that differed from the other. For example, the word 'noble' was characteristic of Islam, since this title was given to any Christian person converting to Islam, and so this term was rejected by Christian society. In the

same way the greeting of Islam, 'peace be upon you', which was originally a greeting of the Lord Christ, ended up being used exclusively by Muslims, while Christians developed a different greeting, 'good day'. And so, little by little, Christians spoke in a jargon that was not understood except by those brought up in the church.

Due to this complex linguistic history, the translators of the *True Meaning of the Gospel of Christ* felt it was important to try to help readers understand the gospel message even if they do not know ecclesiastical jargon. Some of the principles that make this volume distinct include:

- We work with Christian theologians and consultants and refer to evangelical commentaries to ensure that the translation is accurate to the original message.
- We attempt to present the biblical ideas themselves, thought for thought, in good Arabic style, rather than trying to represent the Greek text word for word. We try to give the translation the power and the spirit of the original inspired Greek text rather than imprisoning them in the forms of the Greek language, so that the reader can see beyond the words and grasp the ideas that apply to his daily life and thought.
- We use notes and articles to introduce the reader to the cultural and conceptual background of the gospel. We provide introductions and footnotes for every book in the New Testament, and various articles addressing topics relevant to modern readers of the Bible.
- We aim for a translation that is easy to understand, in familiar language and eloquent style that helps the reader to positively grapple with the challenge of the gospel message. We avoid using terms and phrases that are unknown or that communicate the wrong meaning.

4. Details of the Project

Our core team includes theologians, scholars and those involved in sharing the biblical message. Some are from an Arab Christian background and some are from an Arab Muslim background. There is also a non-Arab linguist who helps with technical issues. The leader of the team is an Arab writer, editor and novelist from a Muslim background who is an expert in communicating the biblical message to Muslims. In addition, there are experts from various Arab countries who help out from time to time in their particular fields of expertise.

The team meets once a year to read out loud and review the latest drafts together, to discuss the translation of key terminology, to decide on the content of articles and other reader aids, and to make other stylistic and logistical decisions. These meetings are valuable, but much of the work we do takes place in between, when each team member works on assigned tasks, such as writing articles or revising footnotes.

These are the steps we went through as a team as we worked on this translation:

- Surveys were conducted among 1000 Arabic speakers in North Africa and the Middle East. The respondents (Muslims with no exposure to the Bible) were given Scripture portions to read from five major existing translations. They

were then questioned about the passages, to measure their understanding of the meaning, their assessment of the literary style, and their attitudes concerning what they had read.

- Arabic Speakers' Workshop. The survey results were analysed at a workshop of native Arabic speakers, both Muslim background believers and Christians. Participants identified words and concepts that were not understood and proposed tentative solutions.
- Draft Translation. Each of the Gospels and the Book of Acts was drafted by a Muslim with a background in translation and Islamic theology, working with input from a Christian linguist-exegetical expert. The authority is the Greek text as understood by major biblical scholars. Full use is made of existing translations and scholarly commentaries.
- Review and revision

The first draft is reviewed by Muslim native Arabic speakers to test elegance of style and clarity of meaning. The draft is reviewed and revised by Arab Christian theologians and Muslim background believers to assure adherence to the meaning of the original biblical text. The new text is tested with a smaller group of Muslims with no exposure to the Bible from a cross segment of society, using the same survey tool as in step one. Final changes are made and approved by the core team.

Members of the project team knew from previous work on commentaries on Scripture that explanatory articles are very important. These articles explain biblical concepts that have been shown to be troublesome for non-Christian readers, such as the Kingdom of God, the reliability of the Scriptures, the meaning of the term 'Son of God', the incarnation, and so on.

By working with Muslims throughout the process of translation, the translation team hopes to ensure the gospel is presented in a way that overcomes the barriers of language, culture and prejudice. Initial reader feedback has been enthusiastic and positive.

II Emad Azmi Mikhail's first Response

1. Historical Background

First of all I would like to express my appreciation for the stated purpose of this translation project. As Christians we are called upon to communicate our faith as clearly as we can. I agree with Professor Lamie that the church in the Arab world has generally not been concerned to explain the gospel to Muslims. When it does speak to them on matters of faith it often does so in ecclesiastical jargon that is not understood. Moreover, the overall image it projects is of an antiquated or isolated body that intrigues Arab Muslims but in many cases repels them. Rightfully or wrongfully, the impression is given that it is foreign to the Arab world.

The reasons behind this gap are both complex and old. While a full explanation is beyond the scope of this article, it is important for those not familiar with the history of the Middle East to understand something of this complexity. When Christianity spread in the area now known as the Arab world, it encountered a variety of local cultures such as Coptic, Syriac and Berber as well as a widespread use of Greek in the east and Latin further

west. As Professor Lamie points out, the new faith was fairly successful in 'translating' and transporting itself across these and other cultural barriers.

However, the progress of Christianity began to suffer major obstacles beginning in the fourth century. With the end of Roman persecution, the institutionalization of the church and its incorporation into the Byzantine Empire weakened its missionary thrust. Its entanglement with the politics of the Empire intensified rivalry between various ecclesiastical 'sees'; it also introduced corruption and needless theological controversies. These dynamics led to a serious rift in the fifth century, ostensibly over the debates concerning the nature(s) of Christ. Instead of settling the matter, the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) created intense animosity between those churches that adopted its formulation and those that did not.

The rift and politicization of the church greatly weakened both it and the Empire in the decades and centuries following Chalcedon. The Empire attempted to secure the compliance of non-Chalcedonian churches in Egypt and Syria, using both peaceful and violent means. By the seventh century church and Empire seemed too exhausted and divided to notice developments in the Arabian Peninsula. Coptic Christians felt persecuted in their country by the imperial Byzantine Church! In fact, the Coptic patriarch went into hiding before the Arab invasion of Egypt only to emerge after the defeat of Roman armies.

Unsurprisingly, observers both then and in the centuries following have remarked that the Arab invasion was a result of the church's division and weakness. John of Nikiu, a Coptic bishop writing a few decades after the Arab conquest of the Middle East, ascribes the fall of Egypt to the sins of the Chalcedonians (*Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu* 117.1). In fact, he believes that Chalcedon caused the 'undoing of all Christians in the world' (120.56). Regardless of one's view of Chalcedon, Cragg believes that the Christological debates contributed to the *inception* as well as spread of Islam.[1]

So the situation in the 7th century was already quite complex. Christians found themselves in a politicized and divided church, caught in the struggle between the centuries old Roman Empire and the new Arab rulers. Though the earliest years of the new regime seemed positive for local Christians, over time discrimination took its toll on both the Christian population and its very psyche. Arabization and Islamization proceeded during subsequent centuries without abatement. As Professor Lamie points out, Christian icons and documents from the early Arab centuries in Egypt reveal the church's slow attempt to 'translate' itself—at least partially—from its Greek/Coptic heritage into Arabic. By the ninth century the Bible had been translated into Arabic. But while some Christian scholars made attempts to communicate with Muslims on matters of faith, no evidence exists that they or others made a major impact.

The crusades of the 11th-13th centuries further marred the Middle East.

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1 Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian: A History in the Middle East* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 15.

Catholic armies from Europe sought to regain the 'holy land' from the 'Saracens' by force of arms. In a region with a long collective memory fed by school curricula and the media, the 'wars of the Cross' (literal translation of 'crusade' in Arabic) still impact the Arab world hundreds of years later. Suspicion of the 'Christian' West was intensified as a result of the colonial period as well as by the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Though Arab Christians were themselves negatively impacted by these western incursions into their region, there is a lingering feeling among many Muslims that they were (or are!) allied with the West. Hearing a mass in Coptic or Syriac does not dispel the suspicion.

2. A New Translation the Solution?

In my humble view it appears overly simplistic to think that Muslims' misunderstanding of the Christian message will be significantly impacted by a new translation of the Bible into Arabic. To be sure, translations are important and good translations are very valuable. But, as we have seen, the issues are far broader. First of all, we Arab Christians need to resist the temptation to emigrate to the West or isolate ourselves within our own religious communities in the East.

More importantly, we Arab Christians need to view ourselves and our Muslim neighbours differently. We need to recover the missionary love and fervour of the earliest Christians in our region. Instead of thinking primarily of survival we need to take our Lord's 'Great Commission' to heart. We need to overcome long centuries of inertia and fear. Moreover, we need to view our Muslim neighbours not as enemies but as those sharing a common humanity as well as a shared homeland and history.

So many of the failures Professor Lamie cites in his article are failures in Christian *praxis*, not translation. I have already cited our tendency to emigrate, isolate ourselves and avoid our God-given privilege to communicate the message of Christ. Professor Lamie writes that so much of Christian worship in the Middle East appears to Muslims to be pagan because of the presence of icons, statues and saints. Unfortunately he is correct. But none of these issues will be solved by a new Bible translation.

Professor Lamie does exaggerate the facts at more than one point. He gives the impression that without the efforts of missionaries in the 19th century, Christianity would have disappeared in the Middle East as it did in North Africa. The fact of the matter is that Christianity disappeared from North Africa centuries before the modern missionary era. At another point Professor Lamie implies that Christians are the ones that changed the Muslim greeting into a particularly Christian one ('good day') not understood by Muslims. In fact, both Muslims and Christians understand 'good day' and both used it in Egypt until the last few decades which have witnessed a resurgence of Islamism and an abandonment of prior customs.

3. Translation Philosophy

Let us now focus on the approach taken by the team that produced this partial translation of the New Testament

in 2008. One thousand Muslims *with no prior exposure to the Bible* were given portions of Scripture to read. Next, as explained by Professor Lamie, 'they were … questioned about the passages, to measure their understanding of the meaning, their assessment of the literary style, and their attitudes concerning what they had read'.

Several remarks need to be made about this approach. Non-Christians throughout history would not be expected to understand the Bible without some kind of explanation. While some portions (e.g. the Sermon on the Mount) are relatively easy to understand, many biblical passages need to be understood in light of their historical, cultural and theological background. Even those with some biblical background would find much of Scripture difficult to understand, regardless of translation. We are here reminded of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. When Philip asked him, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' the eunuch responded, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' (30-31).

The project's methodology is a very appropriate one if the intention was the production of an evangelistic tool or commentary. Assessing a target audience's level of spiritual understanding is very important for those wishing to explain the gospel. But it is doubtful as a translation methodology. For one thing, Arab Muslims represent a very large target audience, representing a variety of countries, educational levels and religious habits. Highly educated urbanites in Beirut and Cairo will understand the Bible differently from the barely educated rural Muslims. Liberals and Salafists will also have very different reactions.

To which subgroup would the translation be directed? In my view it is important in the Arab world to keep translations fairly broad and constant to avoid the charge that we are 'corrupting' our text. Explanatory material and evangelistic tools can be designed to meet the needs of various reader subgroups.

Much has been written in the last few years about translating the 'familial' language of the Bible, particularly as it relates to the Father and the Son in the Christian trinity. Theologians have long recognized the rich and complex connotations of the word 'Father' and 'Son'. No other words can possibly convey the layers of meaning behind them. Jesus' sonship has at least a messianic as well as an eternal dimension. It also relates to the sonship of those who believe in him. The word 'son' indicates oneness of nature, intimacy and authority. No other single word could possibly replace it.

Additionally, the word *ibn* ('son') in Arabic does not necessarily have a procreative meaning. In fact it is used extensively in Arab culture to signify a non-procreative relationship as in the phrase, 'son of the town', meaning someone who belongs to the town. 'Son of the Nile' means an Egyptian. *'ibn el halal'* (son of uprightness) means someone who walks uprightly. Moreover, men and women regularly use the word *ibn* to refer to those who are not their biological children. The phrase, 'my son' (*ibni*), has connotations of endearment, respect and trust.

Significantly, Qur'anic verses which deny that God can be born or give birth (e.g. 112.3) use a different word (*walad*) that *does* have strong procreative connotations. Actually Greek, unlike

English, also has two words that are translated son/child: *hios* and *teknon*. It is the former which is used of Jesus' sonship precisely because it is the broader of the two. Existing Arabic translations of the New Testament have appropriately translated *hios*, using *ibn*, thus using the broader Arabic term and avoiding the procreative connotation of *walad*.

Speakers of Arabic instinctively understand the difference between *ibn* and *walad*. When Christians explain to Muslims that Jesus Christ is God's son (*ibn*) in a non-procreative sense, Muslims generally find that understandable and reassuring. There is no need—as well as no justification—to change well-established principles of Bible translation. Explanatory notes are sufficient to explain the theological significance of 'son' and 'father'.

III Dr. Lamie's Reply to Dr. Mikhail

I first met Dr. Mikhail 20 years ago when he started to teach at the Evangelical Theological Seminary of Cairo during my tenure as president of the seminary from 1991 to 2000. I appreciate his response, and of course I agree with his historical overview, among other things looking at the Crusades and the emergence of the State of Israel. The challenges he outlines are very real, and one of our biggest problems nowadays is Christian Zionism, which dominates the thinking of many Christians in the West. I have written many books on these issues such as *The Other Face of the Church*, *Is Jesus Going To Be the King of the World?* and *The Zionist Penetration of Christianity*.

Let me briefly touch on what Dr. Mikhail considers to be exaggerations on my part. He writes that I give the impression that missionaries kept Christianity from disappearing in the Middle East, while 'Christianity disappeared from North Africa centuries before the modern missionary era'. Dear Emad, I was addressing the question 'why' and not 'when'. My point was that in places where the Scriptures were available in the mother tongue, Christianity held on. One key reason Christianity failed to survive in most of North Africa was the lack of Scripture in the mother tongue of the people.

Dr. Emad also felt I was exaggerating with regard to how greetings have changed, for he understood me to be saying that Muslims don't understand the greeting 'good day'. My point was simply to give an example of how Christians and Muslims at first spoke the same Arabic that included what we now call Islamic terminologies. In further support of this idea, there are a number of manuscripts of Arabic translations of the Gospel from the eleventh century which opened with the words: 'In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate. The Noble Gospel according to Mark'. However, because of political, social and economic changes, Christians stopped using the ordinary language (what we Christian Arabs now think of as 'Muslim' usage) and started to develop their own variety of the language, with its own terminology.

Before I explain my point of view, I just want to remind us of the principle that there is no easy answer to a difficult question. To the question, 'Is a new Bible translation a solution?', my answer is, 'Yes, to some extent'. Dr. Emad is correct that a new translation of the Bible is not the only solution to

the problems we have identified. As I mentioned earlier, there is also a need for expressions of worship and theology in the Arabic of the mainstream of society.

In addition, Emad is right that there is a need to deal with the issues of emigration and of lack of passion in sharing the gospel. Perhaps a translation that allows Christians to express their faith in a way that truly engages the Arabic language can play a role in dealing with these issues. But the first step in finding the solution is to determine which language you are going to use. We must move the linguistic obstacles out of the way and express ourselves very clearly in order to be understood. In our situation, the main obstacle is Christian ecclesiastical language.

When Dr. Emad says, 'Non-Christians throughout history would not be expected to understand the Bible without some kind of explanation'. I ask, why is this? I see this as a failure of the church, not as an indication that this is the way things should always be. In addition, as academics we need to be careful of making broad generalizations because there are examples throughout history of the Scriptures being translated in order to help non-Christians understand the message of Christ.

The Bible itself says that the Scriptures are for people from any background and that people can be saved when they believe the message of the gospel. But when readers are told they need someone to tell them what the translation is supposed to mean, as opposed to what it actually says, then they tend to distrust the translation as well as the interpreters. Their only hope is to read it in English or French, with notes to explain the unfamiliar words.

Regarding Philip and the Ethiopian: Philip brought new meaning to the words that the Ethiopian is reading. This is not a translation matter at all. Philip was providing information about the resurrected Christ that was not known when Isaiah wrote and had not yet been written down in the Gospels. However, I agree with Dr. Emad that sometimes a guide is necessary, and that is the reason that the *True Meaning* contains footnotes, articles, glossaries and other aids for the reader. This volume is also a tool for Christians as they act as guides for their neighbours.

The translation team chose to use the title, 'The True Meaning', rather than simply 'the Gospel' to make it very clear that this was not a word-for-word translation but a translation of the sentence meaning, expressed in normal Arabic language, and that our intended readers are those who live in our neighborhoods.

Regarding the charge of corruption of the Holy Bible: as we all know, there is a verse in the Qur'an that mentions this matter. At the same time, Muslims do not consider a translation of the Qur'an to be the sacred text of the Qur'an itself, so they call it a translation of the meaning of the Qur'an. Their translations of the meaning of the Qur'an are often quite free, and they differ widely among themselves in details, but Muslims do not see these translations as corrupt as long as they follow one of the interpretations found in the standard commentaries.

As for us, we know that the Holy Bible was originally written in the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek languages, and that this is the truly authoritative

text. All translations of the Bible are translations of either the word meanings or the sentence meanings of the original-language text. We find differences between them because commentators take different positions on the meaning of the original text, and because translators focus on either the word meanings or the sentence meanings, but not because the original texts of the Holy Bible were corrupted.

I wish to address what Dr. Emad says regarding divine familial terms. He says that 'Speakers of Arabic instinctively understand the difference between *ibn* and *walad'*. This depends on what we mean by 'speakers of Arabic'. Those who have grown up in the church have learned to understand the concept behind the term *ibn*, and they have become accustomed to using the term to refer to Christ. However, our audience surveys revealed that Muslims consistently understood the term *ibn allah* to be narrowly biological, and did not consider that it was any less biological in meaning than *walad*.

The Qur'an also does not differentiate between the term *walad* (an-Nisa 4:171) and *ibn* (At-Tawba 9:30) as applied to Jesus. Both are understood in a narrow biological sense. We can see this narrow understanding of the term going as far back in Arab history as the debate between the Caliph Mahdi and the Patriarch or Catholicos of the East Syrian Church Timothy I in 781 AD. The Caliph said, 'O Catholicos, a man like you who possesses all this knowledge and utters such sublime words concerning God, is not justified in saying about God that he married a woman from whom he begat a son'.

Dr. Emad also says, 'Theologians have long recognized the rich and complex connotations of the word "Father" and "Son". No other words can possibly convey the layers of meaning behind them.' This sounds more like an Islamic understanding of Scriptures than a Christian one. Christians do not believe that the forms of the words have special power in themselves. So perhaps what Dr. Emad means above is that the concept or idea of father and son is rich and complex—not that the words themselves are so rich and complex that no other word in any other language can be used. If that is what he meant, then we are in agreement. Many biblical concepts are so rich and complex that they require descriptive phrases to capture the ideas and footnotes or articles to more fully explain them. That is what we seek to do with the True Meaning translation.

In May of this year I was at a conference bringing together different Christian denominations in Beirut under the title, 'Christians in the Middle East: Presence and Witness'. While I was leading a Bible study for the attendees, the Catholic Archbishop of Baghdad said: 'We live in Islamic culture and speak the Arabic language, but we think in Greek.' When I asked him what he meant by thinking in Greek, he said, 'The background of New Testament theology and its terminology are Greek. We are badly in need of developing a Christian Arabic theology expressing itself in Islamic culture.' One of the attendees asked him, 'How can we do this?' He replied: 'I do not know, but I know that the church has been frozen since the fifth century.' Our hope is that the *True Meaning* will be part of the process of change that this Archbishop spoke about.

IV Dr. Emad's Final Response

I appreciate Professor Lamie's response. We agree on a number of issues, yet significant disagreement remains. Professor Lamie exaggerates the differences between what he calls 'normal' (ie Islamic) Arabic and 'Christian jargon'. History clearly shows that Arabism predates Islam and has been shaped in part by non-Muslim cultures and ideologies, including all the cultures it has absorbed over the centuries. It is doubtful whether we can prove that Christians changed the Islamic greeting to 'good day' as Professor Lamie claims. Both Christians and Muslims used 'good day' throughout the 20th century, and many Muslims continue to use it. It is the recent revival of Islamic ideology that has led *Muslims* to use more Islamic greetings.

Ideological issues also complicate Muslim understanding of the crucial title, 'Son of God'. Muslims easily differentiate between 'son' (*ibn*) and 'child' (*walad*) linguistically. The fact that many still view 'Son of God' biologically is a reflection of their *theological* worldview. When Muslims learn that Christ's sonship is not biological, most respond positively. The obstacle to understanding is not language but Islamic interpretation.

That is the reason I cited Philip's ministry with the Ethiopian eunuch. The problem confronting the eunuch was not a linguistic one. He understood the words of Isaiah 53 but did not know to whom they referred. Philip did not, as Professor Lamie asserts, inject new meaning into it. He simply pointed to the fulfillment of the prophecy in Jesus Christ.

I am also concerned about the implications for biblical authority and inerrancy in Professor Lamie's response. If the Holy Spirit chose to use the words 'Father' and 'Son' dozens of times in the NT to describe a vital Trinitarian relationship, then we must look for the most natural translation of the those terms, as the Arabic Bible has done for over a millennium.

My concern about Professor Lamie's view of inspiration is not allayed by his final paragraph. Firstly, it is not really accurate to say that the background of NT theology is Greek. While its terminology is Greek, most scholars have long recognized that its intellectual background is largely in the OT and in second temple Judaism. That means that the entire Bible has a Semitic orientation which greatly eases its communication to Arabs.

More problematic is the implication that NT theology needs to be *redefined* to fit Arab Muslim culture. Christians have always held the Bible and its theological propositions to be normative. I fear that the philosophy behind *True Meaning* does not properly respect the authority of Scripture and its words.

While we need translations that Arab readers can understand, it is vital that such translations respect the way Scripture has been understood throughout history. Of course we also need to develop interpretative materials that explain the Scripture to particular groups of Muslims. Most importantly we must make sure that our lives and churches are welcoming to Muslims.

Editor's note: Dr. Lamie feels that his position does not imply, as Dr. Mikhail sees it, a redefinition of theology for the Arab context. Unfortunately we did not have the space to extend the conversation any further.

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.

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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-

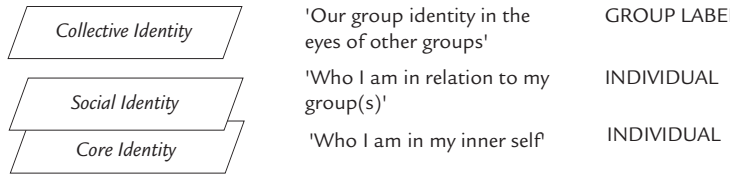
9 Sample writers in these fields would include Peter Berger, Pierre Bordieu, Erik Erikson, James Fowler, Anthony Giddens, Stuart Hall, William James, George Herbert Mead, Tariq Modood, Galen Strawson, Henri Tafjel and Victor Turner, but the list is almost endless.

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.

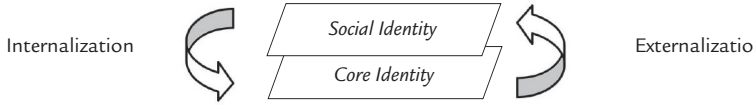
3. Making the model more sophisticated

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

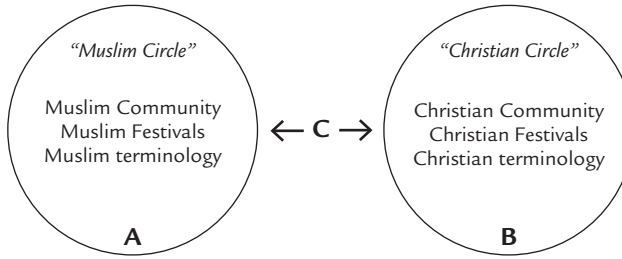
My own doctoral research is on believers from Muslim background (BMBs) in Pakistan, where the Punjabi Christian community is rather distinct from Punjabi Muslims and even more distinct from other Muslim ethnic groups. The 'Christian' community has its own identity markers and opposes intermarriage with 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.

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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.

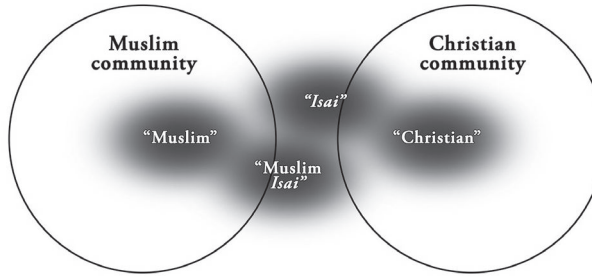
Eventually, however, once a critical mass is achieved in terms of numbers or visibility, society grudgingly makes room for the new reality and creates a new label. This can happen when mass *migration* alters the ethnic landscape, or when *intermarriage* creates new hybrid ethnicities. Both these trends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

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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.

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* We apologize that the name of this author was misspelt in some places in the review.

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