

**SPEAKING THE TRUTH ABOUT INSIDER MOVEMENTS
ADDRESSING THE CRITICISMS OF BILL NIKIDES AND ‘PHIL’
RELATIVE TO THE ARTICLE ‘INSIDE WHAT?’¹**

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1 Introduction

The August 2009 edition of St. Francis Magazine was devoted to a number of papers focused on varying aspects of the “insider movement” discussion. I was given the opportunity to write as a proponent of such movements, and two authors (Bill Nikides, and “Phil”)² were asked to respond to my article. In this edition of the magazine, I have been given the opportunity to reply.

I have selected my title as an intentional reference to a verse from Ephesians in which the Apostle Paul exhorts us to “speak the truth in love”. In addition to framing my own prayer and preparation for this paper, I select this verse as a plea to all those engaged in the current and ongoing discussion of insider movements. That plea has two elements.

First, it is a plea for truth. It is vital in our discourse that we represent the positions of those who differ from us honestly and fairly.

¹ Kevin Higgins, “Inside What?”, St. Francis Magazine, August 2009; in the same magazine, the responses by Mr. Nikides begin on page 92, and Phil’s on page 114. Unless otherwise noted all page numbers used in citing their articles will refer to the August 2009 edition of the St. Francis Magazine.

² I think it is an important point that Phil does not give his last name, nor a specific country for his work. Presumably, and understandably, this would be for reasons of security. However, as careful as he may be for his own safety, I wish he would have exercised the same caution for the safety of others. This would be an example of the respect for others that I believe should inform our dialogue if we seek to speak the truth in love. Instead he cites by name a believer in one country, by full name a foreigner involved in work in the same place, the language group, a city name, and the name of an organization. See page 118 in the main text and also footnote 11.

It is vital that we not misquote or misrepresent one another. It is imperative that we not paint over the positions presented in a particular individual's work using color drawn from broad generalizations or our own pre-conceived notions of what someone's position might be.

Second, it is a plea for mutual respect. This includes not only the tone of our writing and conversation, but also sensitivity to the safety and security of other ministries and individuals.

So, in this paper I plan to speak the truth clearly, and in love. I hope I will succeed in the effort, and invite the reader to evaluate my work in accord with my own stated values and agenda, just presented.

2 Initial Comments and a Place to Start

Though the two responses to my paper raised a number of specific points that are worthy of comment, both authors also frequently seem to be addressing various positions they have gathered from generalizations, their own experiences, and in some cases authors that have no connection to insider movements or my article.³ It appears to me that to some extent both authors took this as a chance to critique various viewpoints which they have determined represent "insider proponents" at large, and subsequently they have read my article through that pre-determined lens. This will be a point to which I return several times in the course of this paper.

In and of itself, addressing insider thinking in general and not just my article is not an inappropriate approach, though strictly speaking this would then imply that their articles are not responses to my article but rather to insider thinking at large. Also, if they are doing so it does not mean that Mr. Nikides and Phil do not raise

³ Mr. Nikides' discussion of Brian McLaren is an example of my last point. Though I have neither read that author nor cite him Mr. Nikides uses an extended quotation from one of his books and then proceeds to disagree with it as if it represented my views. See page 95.

important and valid questions, or that their concerns do not merit careful reply. It does, however, make it extremely difficult to respond in detail.

Indeed, addressing in just one article two authors who have both widened their purview beyond the scope of just my paper renders my attempt to present a full discussion of their work simply impossible. I found myself wishing that I could simply respond “in line” by inserting comments within their articles. While such an approach would allow a detailed, point-by-point reply, the result would be far too long.

Since it is impossible to respond to every point that Mr. Nikides and Phil raise, I have had to determine some criteria for deciding what I will address and what I can not. After considerable reflection I have narrowed my focus to what seem to be certain foundational questions. In fact, I will focus on just three issues, which I will outline below. I have used Mr. Nikides’ own assessment of what is foundational to my thinking as a starting point for this article, and the issues I will address find the roots of my answers imbedded in that foundation.

3 Definitions as Starting Points

Mr. Nikides suggests that it is my definition of insider movements which should be taken as the starting point for understanding my position. I agree with him. The definition to which he refers is the fruit of my thinking and reflection and as such now serves also as a launching point for discussion. On page 93 Mr. Nikides writes,

Higgins, usefully, provides basic definitions and descriptions from the outset. These describe what ‘insider movements’ mean of course, but also include more basic terms such as ‘church.’ This is most helpful since the rest of his proposals rest on this foundation.

I begin by outlining the key points in that definition, and then proceed to compare those to the positions that Mr. Nikides and Phil accuse me of holding. Here, again, is my definition of insider movements, with the key phrases I will proceed to discuss underlined:

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.⁴

There are several major themes addressed in that definition, and especially in the underlined sections. I will outline only three, selected because of the assertions made by Mr. Nikides and Phil. The two themes are: Individualism, and Pluralism, and the role and place of Scripture.

The issue of pluralism is closely tied to assumptions that insider movements promote syncretism. In the interests of space I will allow my discussions of pluralism to suffice as a counter to the concerns raised about syncretism in insider movements.

While much of my article will address ways in which my own thinking was misunderstood by my respondents, I will also seek to respond on behalf of other insider proponents as a whole. I have asked a number of insider proponents to review this piece and I am confident that what is said here represents the main thrust of insider thinking *within the circle of missiologists and practitioners with whom I am in communication*. I can not presume to speak on behalf of every person who claims the term “insider” for their ap-

⁴ See my article in St. Francis Magazine 2009, p. 75 and citations there.

proach, nor indeed can I speak on behalf of every “insider.” But what I present here has the approval of many of those who write on behalf of, and in support of, the insider paradigm.

4 Truth: Insider Proponents Do Not Advocate Individualistic Conversion Or Discipleship

The accusation of individualism is woven throughout not only the articles by Mr. Nikides and Phil but even in the opening remarks by the Editor, John Stringer. In his introduction to the issue he writes by way of framing the questions that the magazine seeks to raise about insider thinking:

Is the heart of the Christian faith a matter of making an individual choice? Is it fundamentally just a matter of having a personal love for Jesus? Or is the Church, organized and visible, at the heart of God's plan for the world? The subject sounds alarm bells.⁵

When read in context, Mr. Stringer is paralleling insider movement thinking with this characterization of Christian faith as an individual choice. This theme continues, as this statement from Mr. Nikides makes clear:

It seems possible only if the definition of discipling is reduced to the private, interior life and some sort of generic external affability.⁶

He combines this with the idea that I have promoted a truncated discipleship void of concern for maturity (see the article by Mr. Nikides, page 93). The same criticism is leveled against Rick Brown.

There is also an example from Phil who sums up what he considers to be representative of insider thinking, and assumes that this representation reflects my own view, though he does not cite my

⁵ St. Francis Magazine August 2009, p. 2.

⁶ Page 94.

work to indicate where he feels I have stated this. In Phil's words my position would be stated thus:

...that Christ can be offered without Christian community; that Jesus can be loved and the Church despised; that salvation is a private affair. The aim of evangelism is to identify and cross some minimal threshold while salvation in all its grandeur must remain hidden from view.⁷

This is not my position. Further, none of the insider proponents who interacted with me in preparing this paper hold to the view Phil describes as the insider viewpoint. Since Phil and Mr. Nikides are responding to my paper, I will proceed by comparing the quotes above to the key statements in my definition of insider movements:

...families, individuals, clans, and/or friendship-webs...
...faithful disciples of Jesus...
...discipleship will express itself in culturally appropriate communities of believers...

I must confess that when I read the characterizations of my thinking offered by Mr. Nikides and Phil, and compare those with what I have actually written, I find very little in common. Throughout my work I have argued for a strong affirmation of a biblical understanding of church. That position is not individualistic, or private, or minimalist.

In another example, Nikides states on page 97, referring to me:

...he conceives of Church as essentially excluding baptism and the Lord's Supper.

And on page 98,

I cannot say this strongly enough. McGavran and Higgins' view is neither biblical nor orthodox. The visible church has always been characterized by baptism and the Lord's Supper period.

⁷ Page 121.

This begs a number of questions about the nature of those sacraments, and proponents of a variety of missiological approaches would differ in this area. However, nowhere in any of my articles have I ever so much as hinted that baptism and the Lord's Supper were not a part of life in an insider movement.⁸ In fact, in the country where I have been most involved, the insider movement that has emerged focuses very distinctly upon creating communities of believers who worship, share the sacraments, feed upon the Word, develop leaders with a biblically determined selection process, and multiply more disciples and more communities of believers. There are regular gatherings of leaders at various levels of the work, leaders who spend those gatherings in the ongoing study of the Scriptures. We have also incorporated study of the credal developments and some of the confessions which have emerged in Church history.⁹

A crucial point often overlooked in the insider discussion is the fact that for insider proponents one of the most foundational principles is that insiders themselves can be taught by God through the

⁸ Interestingly, Mr Nikides' argument regarding my view of sacraments is based on a link he makes with Donald McGavran, not a quote from my paper. He makes reference to my comment that churches might go through stages of development in a process of learning all that it means to be the church. That is a simple, descriptive fact to which I am sure any missionary with field experience in church planting would also bear witness. However, I do not thereby prescribe that churches should not practice the sacraments, nor should the fact that some churches do not do so be taken to imply that I do not see that as an incomplete stage in the process.

⁹ In an earlier article I referred to a tool we use in my organization for tracking the health of movements to Jesus. One measurement we use refers to the development of an ongoing process of biblical theology that includes the whole canon and also reference to the theological developments of the wider Body in history and in contemporary Christian movements. See Higgins, Kevin, 'The Key To Insider Movements: The Devoteds' of Acts', in *IJFM* 21:4; Winter 2004, pp. 155 ff. I also address the connection to the wider Body of Christ in Higgins, Kevin, *Acts 15 and Insider Movements Among Muslims: Questions, Process, and Conclusions*, *IJFM*, 24:1, Spring 2007.

Bible and be led by Him in their discipleship and life as a community of believers. In our case many of the practices I just described were in fact arrived at by the insiders themselves as they engaged the Bible. In one people group the first disciples discovered 1 Corinthians 11 on their own before our course of Bible study together brought us there. As a result I arrived for a study session one day and found them ready to share the Lord's Supper, not because I or another missionary had introduced it (though we would have come to it in the course of working through the scriptures together) but they had found it themselves. The manner of keeping that action has changed since that first day, but I relate this to highlight a key point: the Bible in the hands of insiders is used of God to guide and teach His people. I trust God to use His Word to teach and correct His people.

I will return to the features of Bible study and leadership development later when addressing the question about syncretism. For now I would like to simply highlight that the suggestion made by Mr. Stringer, Mr. Nikides, and Phil that I advocate an individualistic, anti-church viewpoint is entirely wide of the facts. Perhaps their perception in this regard is due to weaknesses in my writing. I hope this article can assist in clarifying things somewhat.

Elsewhere my views of church are critiqued from another angle. Nikides, page 94, takes issue with the fact that I refer to the church as a social structure, assuming apparently that I think it to be no more than that.¹⁰ My description of the church as a spiritual reality seems appropriate here, from page 77 of my article. I would have

¹⁰ In fact, both Mr. Nikides and Phil seem very worried about the place that anthropology and the social sciences take in my thinking or in that of other insider proponents. Phil states that my entire conception is rooted in a man-centered reliance on such disciplines. This is another place in which I have trouble recognizing myself in the representations of my respondents. I do make reference to those disciplines. And I would assert we can learn much from them. But they sit beneath the authority of scripture.

thought this statement to be more than sufficient in demonstrating that I do not see the church as a merely human social structure:

First, the Church is made up of believers who have been saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-10). In one sense it is true to say that no one can join the Church. People are spiritually born into it by God. Every believer is a member of the Church and, as such, is called to live out their membership in the Body of Christ, the Church, as a full time lifestyle in every venue of life.

I will add another quote from Phil at this stage, as it sheds further light on a misunderstanding about my thinking. On page 123 he states:

Higgins' 'salvation' is individualized and privatized in the paradigm of modern anthropology and revivalistic evangelicalism.

I am sure that those who know me well would have a good laugh seeing me equated with "revivalistic evangelicalism." I would simply ask the reader to compare the passage from my article, cited above, with the critiques put forth by Mr. Nikides and Phil. Setting the quotes from my article and Phil's side by side would, I hope, help the reader see that my position has been misunderstood.¹¹

Further, Phil's argument that I do not have a concept of the visible church seems to paint my article with a brush he has dipped in paint from another bucket. On page 125 he writes:

How does one measure a 'movement' that is by definition unidentifiable? The answer is, of course, anecdotal evidence – which no-one

¹¹ The same is true of Phil's extended critique of my view of the Gospel. He argues that my position is minimalist, and reductionist, as well as individualistic. However the bulk of his evidence is drawn, not from my words directly, but from what he holds to be the position of insiders generally. In fact I find nothing where I differ from Phil in his descriptions of the Gospel as he outlines it in his article (except for his characterizations of what insiders think, which I would argue he has misread).

can either deny or affirm. Success attracts American donors and money purchases more anecdotes. It is symbiosis at its worst. In contrast, there is the visible church...

I must ask where Phil finds these ideas in my article? In fact as Mr. Nikides affirms, I open my article with a definition of an insider movement, a definition which does not in any sense claim they are un-identifiable. More serious, Phil's accusation that insider proponents are engaged in merely passing on anecdotal evidence to get money borders on slander. But my main point is that reference to church, visible church, is found in the bulk of my writing and Phil is not reacting to my thinking, but to his perception of insider movements here.

On this point, although I have cited my own articles and thinking, no insider proponent of whom I am aware actually takes the positions that Mr. Nikides and Phil portray to be that of insider advocates. Insider proponents do not belittle the church, nor do we despise it or encourage others to do so (as suggested by Phil).

However, it is very likely true that the concept of church in the thinking of Mr. Nikides and Phil may well be very different from my own. Indeed, this seems to be the key issue: insider proponents do believe in and promote the visible church, but it is clear that it is not the same idea of visible church as that held by Phil, and Mr. Nikides. Therefore I will restate what I believe.

I believe in the visible church, that is, in a church made up of believers who meet and can be seen, touched, and heard. My definition refers to these as communities. The whole focus of the work I do and the training I have developed over the years is to see the extension and establishment of such communities of disciples, such churches. My view of insider movements is not inconsistent with the development of forms of church community and forms of church leadership that are biblical, and also fit the context of the culture.

I do not see that the scriptures leave us with the ability to articulate a single polity or model of church that, once discerned, can be labeled ‘the’ only possible form that can be claimed to be biblical. There are biblical *forms*, plural, and there are certainly principles of community life, behaviors that are described, descriptions of what believers do when gathered as the church, and principles for the selection and training of leadership. Thus, the visible church and its visible forms are biblical concepts. Insider proponents believe in the visible church.

This leads me to one final example of my thinking on church with which Mr. Nikides takes issue: the relationship of insider movements and the wider Body of Christ.

Mr. Nikides critiques my description of one insider movement that reached out in fellowship to a denomination and was in turn given the right hand of fellowship. Though Mr. Nikides does not know any of the people involved he claims to know the motives and intentions of people. He also makes a number of assumptions about what was decided and why (see his description, p. 99ff.). Referring, for example, to the ordinations that had taken place within the insider movement and subsequently recognized by the denomination in question, Mr. Nikides states (page 100):

Calls are accepted not simply on the basis of someone’s internal testimony but by the visible church as well. To put it another way, it is not a legitimate call or ordination unless the visible church recognizes it. What church could accept the ordination of people who did not completely acknowledge the unsubordinated deity of Christ, the exclusive authority of the Bible, the uncontested fact of the crucifixion and resurrection, the unambiguous identity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the centrality of the visible Church? Accepting anything less is certainly to swallow the poison pill.

There are two assertions in this passage. First, Mr. Nikides asserts that only the visible church can affirm a call. He faults the denomination’s recognition of the calling of these leaders because

a call is not merely an internal thing but must be recognized by the visible church. The denomination is quite firmly a part of the visible church and thus I included this example in my article in the hopes that it might serve as an instance of a possible way forward in linking insider movements with the wider Body of Christ.¹² For further discussion concerning insider movements and the wider Body I refer the reader to my IJFM article on Acts 15.¹³

The fact that a branch of the visible Body of Christ recognized what was taking place within the insider movement renders Mr. Nikides' first assertion a moot point. The instance I cited was a case of one branch of the visible church recognizing another.¹⁴ In as much as the event itself *was* an expression of the visible church, and resulted from the fact that insiders themselves felt a desire to be connected in a meaningful way to the wider Body of Christ, I can only surmise that Mr. Nikides must be referring to a particular visible church or particular concept he holds regarding that church. His concern seems to be that these men did not link with the "right" part of the visible church.

The second assertion made by Mr. Nikides is that the men ordained in this instance did not believe in a number of particular doctrinal statements, which are listed in the quote above. Let me set the record straight and offer a correction of Mr. Nikides' inaccurate statements. The leaders ordained were men who have been involved in the work and known to me for an extended time, some

¹² This action was in keeping with my earlier point about the initiative being taken by insiders themselves as they wrestle with scripture and what it means to follow the Lord as disciples; in this case the desire to link in this way to the Body was initiated by the insiders themselves.

¹³ Higgins, Kevin, *Acts 15 and Insider Movements Among Muslims: Questions, Process, and Conclusions*, IJFM, 24:1, Spring 2007.

¹⁴ I have come to the opinion that the difficulty for both Phil and Mr. Nikides relative to my view of the church could possibly be rooted in their own denominational convictions. It would be worth a further conversation to evaluate that thesis further.

as long as 15 years. Their views of Jesus' death, resurrection, return, and divine nature are fully based upon biblical teaching and do not reflect the characterization of Islamic faith as outlined in Mr. Nikides' article.

The above discussion also seems to indicate that my respondents assume that I do not see any theological differences between Islam and biblical faith. In fact I frequently argued otherwise, and also tied my discussions of identity to statements that should make it clear that I see biblical truth as the standard for faith, worldview, life, and practice.¹⁵ This topic begins to touch upon the next theme.

5 Truth: Insider Proponents Do Not Promote Or Accommodate Pluralism

I begin again by citing from my definition of insider movements, in keeping with the agreement Mr. Nikides and I share that this be seen as foundational for understanding my thinking. Here are the appropriate phrases for this section:

...believers who will also continue to live within as much of their culture, including the religious life of the culture, as is biblically faithful.

Although the phrase just cited is brief, the key term for me is “biblically faithful.” By that my intention was for the definition to articulate that the rule of faith and life is the canon of scripture, the

¹⁵ My discussion of identity in IJFM, though admittedly presenting a controversial view of dual identity, is very clear that worldview, understanding of the nature of God, understanding of Islam, and understanding of the place of the “books” all come under the authority of the Bible as the interpretive key and measure of truth. As such, the worldview of a Muslim who follows Jesus under the authority of the Bible will have his or her prior views of Islam, mankind, and God, and many other topics transformed by the Bible. See Higgins, Kevin, ‘Identity, Integrity, and Insider Movements: A brief Paper Inspired by Timothy C. Tennent’s Critique of C-5 Thinking’, in IJFM (23:6, Fall 2006).

Bible. I have sought to found all of my thinking on this basis. I will return later to what that means for me in practice.

For now, let me turn to the claim that I espouse pluralism. Mr. Nikides, seeking to summarize his characterization of the insider view, summarizes his evaluation of my position as follows:

Sin and truth exist in every religion, so all religions must be of roughly the same value.” (page 94).

In context, Mr. Nikides suggests this is my view. He also suggests that I dismiss any idea that the Christian faith is exclusively true (see page 102). Elsewhere, Mr. Nikides writes (page 11):

Higgins exhorts us to maintain the centrality of the gospel, but he does so by stating that God uses many things to bring people to Jesus, even things in other religions. At the same time, he tries to cover all of his bases by stating that the Gospel alone is unique. How could the Gospel be unique if God uses means outside of the Gospel to bring people to himself?

I will clarify what I mean by the fact that the Gospel is unique but that God uses many things to bring people to Himself with reference to Matthew 2. The Magi are lead truly and accurately by a star that they interpret and discover within the framework of their pagan astrological religion. However, apart from the additional light of the scriptures they would not have had the specific guidance to look in Bethlehem. The star is certainly used by God in this process of bringing the Magi to Jesus. But that obvious fact does nothing to diminish the necessity of the revealed scriptures, the uniqueness of the Gospel, or the utter centrality of Jesus Himself, in all the fullness of the biblical revelation relating to Him.

I and my fellow insider proponents all agree with this. The revelation of God through the Scriptures, and the uniqueness of the Gospel, in no way preclude the fact that He uses many things to bring people to Himself.

The fact that Mr. Nikides finds in my thinking evidence of pluralism is another example in which I have difficulty recognizing myself as I am portrayed in the words of my respondents. I see in this instance an example of something to which I alluded earlier. There are instances in this discussion in which the respondents seem to be reading me through a set of preconceived lenses.

In this case, they seem to have assumed that I, and other insider proponents, advocate pluralism. I ask the reader to examine my work for themselves and assess whether this is true. In addition, I would offer an example indicating that not all readers find indications of pluralism in my work.

Joseph Howard has carefully read all of my published articles, and some of my unpublished work, as well as the growing body of literature on insider movements. He has come to an entirely different conclusion from that of Phil and Mr. Nikides.

It is important to note that Howard, like Nikides and Phil, does not agree with the insider approach. Indeed all three differ profoundly with the theological and biblical arguments insider proponents such as I put forth. At the same time, after reading my work, he concludes that I and most other insider proponents belong in the exclusivist camp, theologically.¹⁶ This suggests to me that Phil and Mr. Nikides find pluralism in my work because they thought they would find it before they read what I actually wrote. They do this, it seems to me, because they have a pre-conceived idea of what insider proponents think.

To be as clear as I can be, I will restate this point. Insider proponents do not promote or accommodate pluralism.

¹⁶ I am referring to unpublished doctoral research by Joseph Howard, and specifically a paper he has written entitled, "An Examination of Three Critical Sociological Issues Raised By The 'Insider Movement'". Though unpublished, I would be happy to put readers in touch with Mr. Howard should they so desire.

6 Truth: Insider Proponents Do Not Promote Or Encourage The Misuse of Scripture

I have stated that for me the key plank in my definition of insider movements and the avoidance of pluralism and syncretism is that I presume such movements will be governed by biblical faithfulness. However, Mr. Nikides in particular has taken issue with my use of scripture on at least two fronts.

First, Mr. Nikides states that he feels my way of handling the scriptures is defective. Second, he makes a much broader accusation about the way that insider proponents go about the task of bible translation. On this latter point, Phil agrees with Mr. Nikides.

I will begin by addressing the critique of my own use of scripture. Mr. Nikides states that I rely too much on the narrative sections and not on the didactic material and that I do not adequately make room for the traditional teaching of the church through history in interpreting scripture.

On page 102 Mr. Nikides makes his statement that I have relied on narrative texts and not didactic passages. In fact I have referenced Paul's letters in my article and elsewhere. Further, I make use of the sermon in Acts 17 which is, though set within a narrative text, a clearly didactic piece. His assertion then is not exactly accurate.

There is an aspect to Mr. Nikides' critique that touches on what I see to be a more important issue. I am referring to his apparent assumption that within the canon we should give narrative passages a lesser place of importance. However, by far the greater preponderance of the canon consists precisely in narrative. The Gospels are entirely narrative, with the exception of the teaching of Jesus, of course. Narrative would thus seem to factor heavily in God's method and message of revelation.

Mr. Nikides' position that the didactic passages are to be given preference is one possible interpretive principle. But it is a principle arrived at prior to coming to the text, and as such shapes one's

reading. This is not to say that interpretive principles are not important to discuss, and Mr. Nikides and I certainly seem to differ in our principles of approaching the text. However, addressing those principles would take us back to an examination of our prior assumptions.

I want to emphasize here that I strongly affirm that the Bible is to be the supreme authority for faith and life. Further discussion about how to use the canon is in order, but beyond the scope of what can be accomplished in this paper.¹⁷

As for the contention that I do not make enough room for the traditions as developed in the church, I addressed this to some extent above. In my work we do introduce leaders to the major creedal statements and some of the main confessional statements of the historic church (including the fathers and material from the several reformation movements). My published work has largely focused on seeking to make a simple point relative to the comparative place of scripture and tradition relative to each other: scripture must always be seen as primary. However, there is great value in studying the traditions as well.

Several of the insider proponents who reviewed this article encouraged me to state clearly their affirmations of the creeds of the church. Rick Brown (who has been cited by Mr. Nikides in particular in ways that misrepresent his thinking) is a particular case in point.

At the same time, I have had the impression that critics of insider movements and insider proponents seem to think that tradi-

¹⁷ I also wish to add that the dialogue on how I and Mr. Nikides each interpret specific texts is important as well. I appreciate that he took the time to examine each text individually. There are a number of places where I feel he has made cogent remarks and raised questions with which I need to wrestle further. In other cases I did not make my meaning sufficiently clear and thus he has assumed an interpretation I did not intend. The specific discussion of those texts is a case in point where I feel a line by line format of responses inserted into the texts of each other's articles would be helpful.

tion should always be the lens through which we read the scripture, thereby rendering in practice a secondary place to the canon relative to church tradition. This seems very odd coming from two men who espouse reformed theology.

Similarly, I had cited Mr. Nikides' work in my first St. Francis article, because it seemed to me that tradition was being placed above scripture in one of his earlier pieces. I am grateful that Mr. Nikides, near the opening of his response to me, clarified the place he does give to scripture. That was not clear from his prior work and I am very happy to have my perception of his views corrected.

Since this is a point of apparent misunderstanding, it seems important to take some space here to address the point. I will state my position relative to scripture and subsequent tradition, especially creedal and confessional statements, as clearly as I can.

There are of course very brief and compact creedal formulae found within the New Testament itself. These are part of the canon and so of course I include them as revealed truth. However every other development of creed, confession, and statement of faith subsequent to the canon has been a godly and sincere attempt to put biblical truth into expression for a particular context and in the face of a particular set of questions and challenges. That this record of formulations should be treated with respect and honor and as a source of learning and input is beyond question in both my theory and in my practice of mission.

In fact, I have spent great blocks of time pouring over such formulations with leaders in the insider movement with which I am most involved. As I prepared this article and shared it with other insider proponents for their input, it became even clearer than ever that the use of and respect for the creeds is unanimous among us. The criticism that insider proponents deny the creeds or the historic teachings of the nature of Jesus is simply false. We do advocate the re-expression and clearer explanation of these teachings, and in so doing we have much in common with many who do not align with the insider approach.

At the same time such formulations need continued biblical reflection by believers of every place and epoch. The major creeds, for example, do not answer all of the questions that arise. In some cases the terminology used for the answers provided by the creeds was language required by the age in which the church fathers worked and lived and defended their faith. This process of explaining biblical thinking in non-biblical terminology is very appropriate and necessary, given the purpose of creedal formulations to summarize and articulate biblical faith in a given culture, epoch, and context.

However, such language frequently, in other contexts, either fails to communicate without tremendous amounts of explanation and definition being added, or even mis-communicates when compared with the original intention of the fathers. Therefore, I see the attempt to communicate and articulate biblical truth as an ongoing process. This process needs to be continually revisiting the canonical scriptures and searching afresh for the right ways to summarize and articulate what the Bible teaches; it stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before and upon whose thinking we still depend and rely.

So, *in the sense just described*, the canon is always over the creeds and confessions we develop to explain and summarize the teaching of the canon. If we reverse the priority, we are in danger of elevating man made instruments of doctrine over the canon itself. This does not denigrate the importance of the historic creeds and confessions, but we should keep the canon and the creeds in proper relationship.

The second fault that Mr. Nikides finds with my use of scripture concerns translation. As I stated above, Phil also takes issue with me on this point. However it is clear that they see this is a general factor within insider movements. Nikides states (page 113):

Insiders rely on “new” translations that, in their attempt to eliminate conceptual barriers with Muslims, significantly alter the language of

the Bible. “Son” and “Son of God”, “Father” and other terms are substituted for more ‘Muslim-friendly’ language. The most strained reasons are given in order to justify the changes, reflecting a reliance on far less than orthodox scholarship. All of this is kept from national believers and supporters back home who fund the projects. At times, nationals say they do the work, but often they serve as fronts for the real force behind the work - expatriates. Moreover, the expats help the fledgling insiders do so by teaching inductive study methods. In other words, so often we change the Bible in order to achieve the mis-siological ends we seek. We then inject ourselves in the process to ensure that they think the way we think will result in church planting movements (without actual churches that is).

As to the last comment relative to churches, I hope my prior discussion about this topic will be recalled by the reader. Relative to translation itself, Mr. Nikides makes three very provocative accusations:

...a reliance on far less than orthodox scholarship...

...this is kept from national believers and supporters back home who fund the projects...

... so often we change the Bible...

As to the accusation about scholarship, and resulting decisions about vocabulary and terminology, I will simply make two notes. The first is that in all of the translation projects with which I am familiar, great care is being taken to solicit the input and advice of the best minds in translation from the largest and best known translation organizations. This is true of other insider proponents who have reviewed this text.

Secondly, insider proponents involved in translation have sought out the best evangelical biblical scholarship in doing their exegetical work. This is reflected, for example, in one such effort that consulted more than 200 scholars in doing the exegetical background on the term “Son of God.” Almost all of those con-

sulted were evangelical, conservative biblical scholars. That article was shared with Mr. Nikides. He knows which authors were consulted, and thus his claim about reliance upon less than orthodox scholarship ignores the reality of the matter. It is crucial that we speak the truth.

As for the accusation of secrecy and hiding all of this from national believers and supporters: in every case known to myself and to the other insider proponents who read this paper, there is a great desire to accurately communicate in such a way that Muslim readers and hearers will be able to understand and communicate the meaning of the original authors and texts. Translation teams of insiders are very aware of other translation approaches, and are encouraged to gain training from a variety of sources. I personally have shared the results of our translation work in written form with supporters and asked for their comments and concerns so that these can be discussed and aired. Mr. Nikides is simply misinformed in this regard.

In addition, there is a great deal of thought given to explaining the translation approach to the reader as a part of the translation. Terms are discussed in glossaries and introductions, with explanations for the translation choices being made in the text. In one case, the meaning based translation (with which Phil and Mr. Nikides take exception) is presented on a facing page opposite a very literal translation with interlinear Greek. Far from seeking to hide or “accommodate” or water down the text to fit Muslim objections, this approach is aimed squarely at explaining the meaning, fully, of the original author. This sort of approach is followed in every example of insider translation of which I am aware.

Related to the claim of secrecy, the suggestion of manipulation is implied by Mr. Nikides. Indeed, both authors suggest that insider proponents use manipulative tactics to force indigenous believers, insiders, to do things in the ways we wish.

One example from Mr. Nikides is already cited above:

...this is kept from national believers and supporters back home who fund the projects. At times, nationals say they do the work, but often they serve as fronts for the real force behind the work - expatriates.

Elsewhere, though not addressing translation specifically, Phil writes about manipulation as well (page 117):

Leaders are forced by Western ideologues who pay their salaries to continue to pray in the mosque and deny affiliation with Christianity.

These are disturbing assertions. Every proponent of insider work that I know would oppose, speak against and correct this type of action if we came across it in a colleague. However, no one we know uses money in this way.

Money is certainly a major topic, and worthy of discussion. At this juncture I would simply offer the observation that using funds to support the work of national believers in efforts such as Bible translation is a practice that did not begin with insider movements. The appearance of coercion could be just as strongly asserted regarding any translation effort in which outside funds are used. This is not intended as a defense, but as a word of caution in using this charge against insider work, since it can easily backfire.

To restate my main point on this question: manipulative and deceptive practices related to translation, the use of funds, and the development of strategy should be rebuked and repented of no matter what philosophy or paradigm of mission such practices are used to support.

The third accusation, that insider proponents are changing the Bible, is a serious charge. As I mentioned, on this point both Mr. Nikides and Phil are in agreement in their critique of my thinking. I have already quoted Mr. Nikides' comment that insider proponents are changing the Bible. As Phil puts it, on page 117:

A translation of the gospels in the _____ language eliminates all reference to "Son of God" and all other filial language within the Godhead. I was told by _____ in _____ in September, 2007, that

all the older converts from Islam under his care recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. The younger generation, which is being fed Insider ideology and reads the Insider translation of the gospels, is no longer clear on the identity of Jesus.’ (NOTE: I have eliminated references to names and places here which Phil included in his piece).

I want to address Phil’s citation first, and then return to a discussion of translation. I cite this particular passage from Phil because in this case he is referring to people with whom I am acquainted, and whose efforts I know about. I have met the man of whom he speaks. I know the translation effort to which he refers. And I know the history of the work described by the man to whom Phil refers.

There are always two sides to a story and I will let it suffice here to merely state that Phil’s depiction of the case is not the whole picture. I am not implying that Phil has been dishonest in reporting this. I can also affirm from my own knowledge of events that the man who seems to be his main source of information is in fact giving some of the story accurately. But there is an entirely different understanding of not only the current situation in that country, but indeed of the entire story of the movement in question, a story that has been meticulously researched. The research data, the purposes for which it was developed, and the progress of the movement following that research all combine to paint a very different picture from that portrayed in Phil’s article. I know, because I was involved in the design and implementation of the research.¹⁸

¹⁸ Phil makes another assertion on page 125, “*In _____ these visible convert communities are frequently being persecuted by Insiders because they are a threat to the Insiders’ reason-d’être.*” If this is in fact happening, then every insider or insider proponent I know would condemn the activity Phil describes. Sadly, all the evidence I have is of the exact opposite: members of what Phil calls the visible church seem to be actively persecuting or participating in and aiding the persecution of insider believers. As opposed to anecdotes given to Phil by local believers who are no longer employed by those they are accusing, the matter I relate has been investigated at high levels by a well-known Bible distribution society.

Now back to the issues revolving around translation. Mr. Nikides' accusation, taken at face value, suggests that translators are in fact changing the Bible and, one assumes then, the Greek or Hebrew text. Perhaps this is not what he means to say? Perhaps Phil's framing of the discussion is closer to what Mr. Nikides means, that translators are not producing literal, word for word versions of the original texts in the recipient languages? It is unclear from his article. But to be clear: *no insider proponent is suggesting that the Bible be changed, nor are they doing so.*

However, I will assume the best. If what Phil and Mr. Nikides mean is that insider translations are not literal or word for word efforts, then their accusation that insider oriented translation efforts are changing the Bible is rooted in a major disagreement about translation theory, practice, and purpose. This disagreement is not simply taking place between insider advocates and insider critics. It is a discussion taking place within the entire translation community.

I will put a complex discussion very simply. The disagreement focuses on whether the purpose of translation is to enable readers to understand the meaning of a text or whether the purpose is to use the closest possible vocabulary in the recipient language, even if such a rendering miscommunicates the text's meaning to the reader, at least initially. In other words, is translation to be approached from a meaning-based or word-based theoretical foundation?

The translation approach which aims at meaning-based translations is in no way a minority within the translation movement. Nor is it an approach limited to the insider movement advocates. This approach is an accepted, indeed mainstream approach to the discipline. To portray it as a minority, obscure, and agenda driven effort (as Mr. Nikides and Phil attempt in their writing) is to misconstrue the facts.

Mr. Nikides and Phil would both be justified if they articulated their theory of translation, sought to articulate the theory of transla-

tion espoused by some insider proponents, and then proceeded to explain why their theory was better. This is a very appropriate course of discussion and is in fact taking place in translation circles. Instead, they have resorted to accusations about the motives of insider proponents, referring to both manipulation and the intent to change or hide the meaning of the Bible.

I know many people and projects involved in translation. Their clear and consistent passion and purpose is to make the meaning of the Bible clear for their readers and audiences. They value the Bible as the Word of God. It would serve the effort of the entire mission movement far better if we were to keep the discussion of translation at the level of method, theory and purpose, rather than maligning the motives and intentions of others.

Returning to how this pertains to my essay, having generalized about these motives, Mr. Nikides and Phil both insert their conclusions into their response to my article. However, my piece says nothing about translation theory apart from a passing reference to translation. The comments then seem outside the scope of a response for two reasons: they assume motives that can not be demonstrated, and they address issues about which the article to which they are responding did not offer an opinion.

7 Conclusions

I stated previously that I think it is possible that Mr. Nikides and Phil are reading me through lenses created by prior assumptions about insider thinking. I have tried to highlight several places where this seems to be the case. In addition I have addressed specific areas of misunderstanding and misinformation where these relate to positions I have taken in my article. I have tried to speak the truth.

At the same time I have sought to do so “in love.” In the course of this article I have had to state clearly when I think something written by Mr. Nikides or Phil has been wrong, but I have tried to

do so in an atmosphere of respect, even while speaking very directly. I will conclude by suggesting that perhaps there is yet a different way to discuss these issues.

Perhaps it would be possible to hold a low-key event in which a relatively small number of people representing a variety of views on this topic could meet together. The format could allow dialogue and interaction, as opposed to the cold medium of writing articles that allow no ability to ask clarifying questions and double check intended meaning. More importantly, such a face-to-face gathering could allow time to actually pray - for the Muslims we all seek to love and reach, for our various organizations, and for one another.