

**MISSION AND SACRAMENT
PART III:**

**A PALEO-ORTHODOX¹ APPROACH TO
CONTEXTUALIZATION IN THE MUSLIM WORLD**

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1 Introduction

In my previous two articles I have argued that a successful missionary effort in the Muslim world must deal with the question of *sacramentality*. In the first paper³ I argued that an adequate program for MBB discipleship should have as a primary concern Baptism (as in Patristic Christianity) and its content should be the Apostles' Creed. In my second paper⁴ I delved into ways of defining sacraments and sacramentality, proposing that there is nothing inherently un-evangelical about the concepts, which are inherently Biblical and very important to the Islamic mind. I also made some further comments on Communion, baptism, and the appointment of leaders (ordination). In this article I address how this approach (of Paleo-Orthodoxy) affects our understanding of contextualization.

¹ The main figure in paleo-orthodoxy is Thomas Oden, who is particularly interested in Scriptural hermeneutics. My primary interest is missiology. For a synopsis of Oden's work and bibliography see Eric Landstrom, 'Thomas Oden's Paleo-Orthodoxy' at www.ovrln.com/GeneralInformation/Oden_Method.html [accessed Jan 7, 2009].

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³ 'Sacrament and Mission Go Together like Bread and Wine, Part I: Baptism, Discipleship, and the Apostles' Creed' in *St Francis Magazine (SFM)* 4:1, June 2008.

⁴ 'Mission and Sacrament, Part II' in *SFM* 4:3, Dec. 2008.

2 Culture, History and Contextualization

In terms of Christian mission in the Muslim world, contextualization has become a very important theme. Through the great process of the Great Experiment of empowering local Christians (Orthodox, Armenian, Coptic, Maronite) to evangelize Muslims rather than engage in direct evangelization. That effort was, substantially, a failure. In the late 70's⁵ and early 80's⁶ there was a concentrated effort among evangelicals to discern why the church's evangelistic efforts among Muslims had been so unsuccessful, one of the proposed answers was that the Gospel had been presented to Muslims in Western clothing. In other words, missionaries had not presented the Gospel to the people in a manner that connected to the, in their heart language, in a form and shape that respected and took into account the historical background and cultural context of the various Muslim people. This is the topic of this paper: the question of the relation to cultural and historical context and the church's mission in the Muslim world.

First we must make some observations about the very concept of contextualization: it is curious that the idea that there exist multiple cultures is in itself a cultural idea. That is, at other times in history and in most other 'cultures' it was accepted that their common meanings and practices were normative, that is, that there was one normative context that was correct. Any group that did not operate according to those meanings and practices was considered to be deficient or uncivilized. The very fact that our own culture today considers that the person who is 'historically-minded' or 'culturally-sensitive' is the one who can interpret things from a superior viewpoint clearly demonstrates that we are

⁵ For example the North American Conference on Muslim Evangelization in Glen Eyrie, Colorado in October, 1978. It was sponsored jointly by the North American Lausanne Committee and World Vision Intl.

⁶ Phil Parshall's influential book *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* was published in 1980 (Grand Rapids: Baker House). Note its subtitle: *Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization*.

not so different than the ancient missionaries who exported their civilization along with their religion.

What I am saying is that the idea of being historically-minded is part of our own cultural matrix of ethos-symbol-mythos. When we stand to judge the language of the Church Fathers or the Alexandrian Jews we should not assume from the outset that we have wisdom or knowledge that they did not have, we simply have different words and 'historically minded' and 'cultural context' are as expendable as 'hypostasis' and 'persona - if indeed these words are expendable. We must all play by those rules: if we are willing to dispense with the language of Nicea then we must be consider that our own matrix of meanings is also dispensable.

How then shall we live? How then shall we make converts in all places and among all peoples? How then shall we make disciples and teach them to obey all that Jesus taught us? The answer I think lies is in the story. It is in the story of the man Jesus who, 'though rich was made poor for us' and 'gave himself up to death, even death on a cross' for the salvation of the world. This story of love is really a rock that cannot be shaken because it touches on something catholic or universal, both in terms of time and space:

Love is itself unmoving,
Only the cause and the end of movement,
Timeless, and undesiring
Except in the aspect of time
Caught in the form of limitation
Between un-being and being.⁷

Every attempt to do theology that is divorced from this story has failed before it has started. This is the story of love, suffering, and the giving of a gift of such value that we are stunned. Once we decide to receive that gift we have the beginning of a vocabulary wherefrom we can discuss what God is or is not:

⁷ From 'Four Quartets' in T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* (Harcourt and Brace 1963, 1991), p. 181.

The Christian believer looks at the same data [of Scripture, culture, and history], but he or she brings to the interpretation of them the presupposition that the point of the whole human story has been revealed here; that in Jesus the whole meaning of the story is disclosed; that everything else, including all the axioms and presuppositions and models developed in all cultures of humanity, are relativized by and must be judged in the light of this presupposition.⁸

Since this is true, conversion informs cultural interpretation. If 'cultural context' ever firmly sets itself up against the physicality of the story about Jesus we should not hesitate to cut it down like Gideon chopped down the Asherah pole. Rather, the need for cultural context is simply this: we need the right words to tell the story about Jesus. If our telling does not elicit passion, conversion, fury, sorrow, shame, or joy, then we are not telling it well. So cultural context is most needed in what has been called evangelism.

After evangelism the believers who know the meanings and practices of that 'culture' best will begin to talk about God. We can share with them how we and other Christians have talked about God, as well, and this will help them and us to ask new questions and explore paths that had perhaps been forgotten or obscured previously. In light of this we should always remember that 'cultural context' is not a trump card: it is just a word we use, and the church should use that sort of language as long as it helps us to tell the story. Ironically in some parts of the church the 'awareness' of different 'cultural contexts' has hampered the telling of the story of Jesus as an historical and physical reality which really is the trump card. In their situation they should hold their tongue and refrain from recklessly using language that they have failed to master⁹.

⁸ Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Eerdman's 1978, 1995), p. 88.

⁹ History provides many such examples, but at heart of the issue we find that there is always a give and take between context and the Gospel: the Gospel co-

3 Context and Historical Background of Patristic Christology

The claim that all the words are expendable may alarm some. What is the role for the Great Tradition of the church? Do we have license to toss out their words and thoughts? Am I arguing for some form of cultural relativism? Quite the opposite: the reason for this is that the narrative-shaped story about the advent of Jesus, ‘when the old world started dying, and the new world started coming’, is the hinge on which all history swings, is continuing today. For this reason the entire history of the church is somehow sanctified. As Newbegin points out, if the story about Jesus is true, then the Acts of God did not end with the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁰

Because this is true, and because they (the Fathers) are part of who we are as a church, we should try to appropriate and understand their language through scholarship, preparing us to responsibly evaluate its relevance to the church’s mission work in the world today. We will first proceed to examine how Platonic philosophy influenced the language and meanings that were influential during the Christological debate in the first centuries and even prior to that in the selection of language found in Johannine corpus of the NT. Following are some ‘basic tenets’ of Plato and Philo that influenced the language of the councils. Second, I will argue that the early Nicene appropriation, interpretation and communication of the Jesus narrative should be taught to and, initially at least, used in MBC’s (Muslim Background Congregations¹¹).

opts many aspects of local culture while it must challenge other aspects of that culture.

¹⁰ Newbegin, *The Open Secret*, p. 90.

¹¹ Also called Muslim Background Believer Churches (MBB Churches). I much prefer MBC for two reasons: some MBB’s don’t use the word *church* and the word congregation is much more neutral; also, to call them MBB churches seems to theologically assume that first come individual believers, and only then is a

Plato taught that the identity of things was in the realm of the forms, though what exactly forms are is not clear as the idea developed over time. True knowledge was to be understood as contact with the immaterial realm of forms. Because of this, perfection came to be understood in terms of knowledge. The pre-existent human soul had lost knowledge in being united with a body and thus had to 'learn' by remembering what it had once known. Thus humans can actually move beyond opinions to knowledge by contact with material reality which may help us to remember the forms that provide it with identity and real knowledge can be obtained.

Philo (20 BC-50 AD), an Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, uses this theory to posit that God has access to all the forms and selected certain ones and, by his thought (*logos*) God selects certain forms that should come into existence and this results in our material world. Because God creates with or by means of the *logos* it is also eternal and is not a created thing. Philo goes so far as to describe the *Logos* as 'God's first-born', which governs Creation 'like some viceroy of a great king'.¹²

The use of *logos* as a philosophical/metaphysical term actually dates all the way back to Heraclitus (6th century BC) who, in his typical and difficult verse, described it as a cosmological principle that governs the eternal flux of rarefaction and condensation. Philo picks up this language, and his use of *logos* was quite possibly influential in the Johannine corpus which moves beyond the more Hebrew personification of *sophia* (Greek: wisdom) as God's creative agent. Unlike the *sophia* the *logos* seems to have a more metaphysical and ontological role in Creation, even in sustaining its integrity. (Of course *Sophia* is a feminine figure, which also may have led to its becoming only a minor Christological type.)

church formed by them, as a secondary entity. This position is, I think, difficult to defend theologically or Biblically and certainly historically.

¹² *On Husbandry*, online on www.ecmarsh.com/crl/philos/book11.htm.

These three Platonic/Philonic ideas were influential in the thought of several of the lead characters in the Christological debate¹³. We might even go so far as to say that Platonic thought was one of the key issues that the early councils addressed. Since Plato/Philo put so much emphasis on knowledge as perfection, contemplation was the highest good. Since matter was not perfect it was difficult to understand how God (who is perfect) could take on a truly material (human) body. So the question is posed: how can perfect God become imperfect human and still remain God? Platonic/Philonic language was used in multiple ways to discuss the question.

Athanasius for one linked the Creative role of the Word (*logos* again) with the redemptive role of the Word made incarnate. Since the Word was active in Creation, it must be true that in the new redemptive Creation happening in the lives of Christians that the same word is active. Therefore, it is true that Jesus is the pre-existent Word that was active in Creation. It is significant to mention here in our discussion of the creative *logos* that Plato himself never teaches a *creatio ex nihilo*, it is probable that he believed that space and perhaps matter were sempiternal, but that the interaction of the limit and the unbounded (Greek: *apeiron*, picked up from the pre-Socratic Anaximander) influenced or caused the fashioning of the material world. This point is made because it is important to understand that very significant differences exist between Plato and Philo. In any case, Philo and Athanasius both posited a central role for the Word in the creation.

Irenaeus similarly argued that if Jesus Christ is really the image (*icon* in Greek) of God (Pauline language, 2 Cor. 4:4), and this is the highest revelation of God, then it must be true that Jesus Christ is fully divine: 'No other being had the power of revealing to us the things of the Father, except his own proper Word'.¹⁴

¹³ And obviously the language influenced John, who focuses so much on the *logos* Christology.

¹⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies Book V*, Ch 1.

Nevertheless, he argued against Marcion and Gnostics that the Word had been truly made flesh and incarnate: 'Vain indeed are those who allege that He appeared in mere seeming. For these things were not done in appearance only, but in actual reality'.¹⁵ (Note his insistence on the physicality and historicity of the person of Jesus—a key theme in this paper.)

It was also clear that for our salvation to be effected truly (as Leo the Great argued¹⁶), then Jesus Christ must really be truly and fully human. Tertullian likewise argued against the modalists and Sabellians that Christ was truly human and lived a human life. He appeals, among other things, to the virgin birth, which is

...a certain proof that His flesh was human, if He derived its substance from His mother's womb, although we are at once furnished with clear evidences of the human character of His flesh, from its name and description as that of a man, and from the nature of its constitution, and from the system of its sensations, and from its suffering of death.¹⁷

Also, using Latin instead of Greek he introduced the term trinitas in arguing against his opponents. He also anticipated later heresies by insisting the Christ's divinity and humanity did not mix to combine a third 'thing', while insisting that Jesus Christ was really one person. It should also be pointed out that in the spirit of the first section of this paper, our language is expanded when we incorporate and learn about how others speak; this leads us to a place where we must understand that the English word person does not connect to the same meaning that the Latin word persona does. Indeed, the lack of specificity in defining words has led to the typical accusation by Muslims that Christians are tri-theists.

¹⁵ Ibid., *Book V, Ch 2*.

¹⁶ See *Sermon 21, On the Mystery of the Incarnation*.

¹⁷ *On the flesh of Christ*, Ch. 16.

Following Philo's teaching that the Word was not created, Origen insisted that Christ was not made, nor was Jesus merely chosen and then made divine, but that he was indeed equal in divinity to the Father. He did clarify that the Son is subordinate to the Father, but this is to be understood in terms of his role as mediator and revealer: 'As Logos, the Son brings about creation, and as Word and Wisdom reveals the divine mysteries.¹⁸ Origen even agreed with the Platonic doctrine of the pre-existence of souls that we mentioned above, namely that Jesus' human soul pre-existed his conception along with other human souls! (While Plato's theory of the pre-existence of the soul may seem silly to us today it should be pointed out that it was linked to an influential and important philosophy of education.)

Arius did not interpret subordination like Origen, and insisted that the Logos was not eternal, for at the heart of the Arian heresy¹⁹ is an error that is related to the Platonic insistence that what is most real and good is not material. Thus the Logos took the place of the human soul of Jesus, meaning that the Logos did not ultimately become entirely human. Rather it was allied with, so to speak, or in control of, the human body of Jesus. Nicaea (325) pointedly rebuffed Arius' teaching, insisting that Jesus Christ is *deo de deum, lumen de lumine, deo vero de deum verum*, and that the Son was 'begotten, not made'. This is, of course, an appeal to the same Johannine language that resorted to the logos.

In sum, when Philo interpreted Judaism by using Plato's philosophy, a rich theology of the Word emerged. This was picked up by the Christian Scriptures and the question of how, if at all, that eternal, creative, Word of God, could become truly and fully human in the person of Jesus Christ was a central question for the Church for at least her first five centuries of life. The early coun-

¹⁸ Gerald O'Collins, *Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (2004, Continuum), p. 111.

¹⁹ I highly recommend on the topic of the Arian Controversy Rowan Williams' *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (SCM Press, 2001).

cils affirmed that the Word was indeed creative, co-eternal, and fully divine, agreeing with Philo. The Fathers' experience of Jesus Christ and the efficacy of the salvation and revelation that was made available through him convinced them that the same eternal Word became fully and completely mortal man like us in every way, except without sin, at the same time resisting to some extent Plato's devaluation of the material. In keeping with this line of thought, it was confirmed that Jesus had a divine and a human nature while remaining one person at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The key documents outlining this doctrine are the Nicene Creed (325) including the added section on the Holy Spirit (381, First Council of Constantinople), and the Definition of Chalcedon.

4 Application and the Islamic Context

These words are so ancient and formative that they should not be forgotten, and each new generation of Christians must carefully inspect them to ascertain how these words and meanings can add to our own ability today to tell the story about Jesus Christ and his great love for us. And with that in mind, to this point I have argued several things, which I will now bring together and apply to the church's mission in the Muslim world today. I began by discussing the question of context and culture and argued that the central message of Christianity cannot be disconnected from the physically and historically real narrative regarding the person and deeds of Jesus Christ²⁰. That is, we start by telling the story of Jesus and what he did and how he did it. Jesus preached almost exclusively about the Kingdom of God, early Christians came to see the Kingdom of God as being more or less co-extensive with Jesus Christ himself and his presence with them. The core of the Christian faith is un-systematized and narrative. It is, like the es-

²⁰ Recall my strong support of the Apostles' Creed as a baptismal formula in Part I of this series; that creed is supremely narrative, physical, and historically situated.

sence of the triune God, relational above all things. Thus something like the Four Spiritual Laws or five-point Calvinism or Anselm's theory of penal substitution must be seen as attempts to systematize what is fundamentally relational. They are clothing we place upon the contours of the historical person of Jesus to order in our minds—and indeed our collective mind—his *kerygma*.

The desire to systematize everything is itself part of the heritage of Western Christianity born as it was from the *über*-system of the Roman Empire. That is why you will not find much in the way of systematic theology in Orthodox Christianity. The act of systematization is not negative or bad, but it should be seen for what it is: a contextualization, something relative, a superstructure built on a narrative; what systematization gains in specificity and clarity, it loses in relationality.²¹ As different people in different cultures approach it and appropriate it through faith and obedience, it takes on the cultural clothing of that group of people. There is no naked Gospel, no pure Gospel: 'There is no such thing as the gospel pure and simple. Every statement of the Gospel, and every exercise in the living out of the gospel, is culturally conditioned. And yet the gospel exercises and will always exercise a critical function within any culture in which it plays a part.'²²

After examining some aspects of culture we proceeded to survey early Christian efforts to, largely in reaction to criticism and heresy, clothe the Gospel—something that is an anthropological

²¹ We run into some fascinating similarities and contrasts with Islam here. The *Umma*, like the Roman Empire, is a profoundly imperialistic form of organizing society, and Christianity always had the baffling mysteries of the incarnation and the Trinity to keep it humble, even in its moments of greatest systematization. Such is not the case with Islam, which has substantially dispensed with the need for theology and philosophy to focus solely on questions of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). A decisive moment was the failure of *mu'tazila* and the success of Al Ghazali's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*.

²² Newbigin, Leslie. *Signs amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History* ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (Eerdmans, 2003), p. 81.

necessity.²³ They did it in the language that was at hand, clothing the narrative non-systematized teaching of Jesus, who himself is ‘the Kingdom of God in the form of concealment, lowliness, and poverty’.²⁴ Thus they drew on Philo, who drew on Plato and the Torah; we can not charge them with being ‘unbiblical’ because the NT authors drew on non-inspired works and authors as well, quoting them explicitly at times.²⁵ When we, in our own culture—be it Western or Arab or Persian—try to systematize and harmonize the various elements of belief and practice we encounter in the story about Jesus we must clothe it, we must be the church and give God, whose body (that of Jesus) is ascended and gone, a body in our gathering. Christ’s physical body which is ascended is absent, but the church qua body of Christ is present. And any attempt to live out the message of Jesus, whether it be in how we go about baptizing people (rite) or clothing the naked and feeding the sick (ethics) or spreading the message to others (proclamation) will be informed by three things: our Scriptural sources (containing of course the four Gospels, but broader than that, and indeed broader than the Bible), the ethos and praxis of those who proclaimed the Gospel to us initially, and thirdly our own culture—however one chooses to define that word.²⁶

I have outlined this theoretical construct to counter one particular idea I have seen again and again in missiological literature regarding the Muslim world and which strikes me as particularly dangerous. The idea is so common that I will not even provide references, but the heart of it is this: teaching Nicene Christianity

²³ Some prefer language of ‘incarnating the Gospel’ but such language is so overused that it has become nearly meaningless, in my opinion.

²⁴ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* (Paulist, 1976), p. 111. Kasper traces the idea that Jesus is in himself the Kingdom all the way back to Origen.

²⁵ Jude 14, 15, Acts 17 when Paul preaches in Athens, and Matthew’s reference to a mysterious prophecy fulfilled in Jesus’ being raised in Nazareth (Mat 2:23) all come to mind.

²⁶ The three poles are based on Peter Schineller, SJ, in his article ‘Inculturation: A Difficult and Delicate Task’ in *IBMR* Vol. 20:3, July 1996, p. 109.

to Muslims who convert to Christianity (all three of those words being understood very broadly) is not helpful because it is a specific contextualization that is incidental to the Gospel.

The reader might ask: wait, you wrote in the first section about how cultural context is simply a matter of ‘using the right words to tell the story about Jesus,’ so how then can you defend your preference for Patristic Christianity? It is precisely because the other options are less desirable; because there is no naked Gospel to preach, and Patristic Christianity is dressed more beautifully and fittingly than anything that has surfaced in the West in centuries. I believe that the following statements are all reconcilable and indeed support each other:

1. Contextualization must not be concerned with revising dogmas or doctrines²⁷.
2. Contextualization is concerned with reformulating how dogma and doctrine is communicated.²⁸
3. Patristic Christianity is a superior formulation of the shape of Jesus’ message and deeds than anything offered by the West today; therefore
4. The Nicene Creed should be taught to and used by MBC’s presently.

5 Patristic (Nicene) Christianity is a closer match to the Muslim context today than western evangelicalism

One reads all the time of the desire to use ‘biblical’ methods of discipleship, or return to ‘New Testament’ teachings about this or

²⁷ I am indebted to Bernard Lonergan for his helpful systematization of theological method. I commend his book *Method in Theology*.

²⁸ In essence I agree with Roy Oksnevad’s definition of contextualization: ‘taking the unchanging truth of the gospel and making it understandable in a given context.’ This definition is found in his article ‘Contextualization in the Islamic Context’ in *Lausanne World Pulse* April 2007.

that. It is a form of romanticism - living in a fairy tale land. When evangelicals speak of biblical or New Testament faith they almost invariably mean their own custom-made version of Christianity for white, Western evangelicalism. Every Christian community throughout history has tried to be - in its own contextualized manner - a biblical, New Testament church. Catholics practice biblical faith by saying the Rosary, Orthodox practice biblical faith by visiting the relics of saints, and evangelicals practice biblical Christianity by modeling their worship around secular concerts and self-help talks.²⁹ All this talk of biblical or New Testament practice is little more than a thirst for an imaginary pure Gospel, untainted by the impiety of the this nefarious world (recalling for us the neo-Platonic influence on Arianism). Indeed, 'none of us can read the Scriptures without cultural blinkers of some sort'.³⁰

In other words, any form of the Gospel preached to Muslims is already contextualized. Patristic Christianity is obviously a form of contextualized Christianity, but it is superior to anything we find in Western evangelicalism today for the work of mission on most of the Muslim world. Superior is a relative word of course, and I have stated that the purpose of contextualization is to find the right words and rhythm so that the un-systematized narrative of Jesus can be communicated effectively, perhaps in a systematic manner if that is called for, with the goal of making disciples and progressing the Kingdom. Moreover, Patristic Christianity has stood the test of time in a way that Western evangelicalism has not. It has proved its ability to take root in many different places at different times and flourish - at times producing lively and

²⁹ None of this need lead to Scriptural relativism, by the way. The hermeneutical implication certainly is that the prerogative of interpreting Scripture, like the prerogative of contextualizing Jesus' message, does not belong to the individual but to the whole church. Thomas Oden's work on Paleo-Orthodox hermeneutics here is excellent and was my introduction to this school of thought.

³⁰ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Orbis, 1996), p. 15.

growing communities. Second, unlike any form of evangelicalism it survived and flourished in circumstances that were often adversarial. Third, it is indigenous to the region: when we look at the church leaders who promulgated the acts of the first ecumenical councils where the language of trinity, persons, natures, and so on, were adapted we find that they were mostly from what is today called MENA. For example, the Council of Chalcedon had only a handful of Europeans (Papal legates) and Africans, and the remainder (500+) were from different parts of Asia. While these people were not of the same ethnicity as the new believers today (Turk, Arab, Berber, etc.), there is something to be said about them having come from the same lands.

The Church Fathers came from the same places where exciting things are happening today: Tertullian and Cyprian from Carthage (present-day Tunisia), Athanasius was from Alexandria in Egypt, Justin Martyr was from Neapolis (Nablus), the Cappadocian fathers who were so instrumental in formulating the doctrine of the Trinity were from a region in what is now Turkey, and Augustine was bishop in Hippo Regius in present day Algeria, Ignatius was from Antioch, just a stone's throw from Syria, and Arius, the great heresiarch was probably from what is today Libya! That is only a small selection. What is the alternative? To offer a Christianity contextualized by 16th Century Germans and 19th Century English and 21st Century Americans?

At this point I wish to draw attention to point four above: The Nicene Creed³¹ should be taught to and used by MBC's presently. It is important to note the final word: presently. Of course, the ultimate goal is to see the narrative of Jesus clothed and given

³¹ I use the Nicene Creed as my prime example because it is the crown jewel of Patristic Christianity. Technically speaking we should say the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed since much of the section on the Holy Spirit was added at the Council of Constantinople. Incidentally, I favor the Eastern Orthodox (and more ancient) form of the creed without the *filioque*. I would also include in any sort of training or discipleship other Patristic documents like the Didache and the Definition of Chalcedon.

shape by these communities in their own context. But as I have also stated, the ultimate shape of that contextualized, clothed Gospel (a church) will always be informed and influenced by the ethos and praxis of the missionary, and this presents a great danger to evangelical missionaries. If Muslims are being evangelized by individualistic evangelicals who have little appreciation or knowledge of history and ritual - as is usually the case - then they will either find the message communicated in an unintelligible manner, or those who do respond positively will form communities that incorporate to some degree those elements. I believe that such communities will probably not flourish or reproduce themselves in the Muslim world today, at least over the long term.

‘Ritual is the context in which myth is related, handed down to successive generations.’³² In other words, no ritual means no successive identity. On the other hand, if there comes a day when MBC’s have ingested and considered well the formulation of the Nicene Creed and how it sought to communicate, order and give shape to the narrative of Jesus, and those MBC’s formulate a contextualized creed (or the cultural equivalent—though Islam is no stranger to succinct statements regarding history/doctrine) then that would be a genuine victory for contextualization. But to entirely cut out the conversation with Patristic Christianity is absolutely unjustified.

On the other hand, to simply say, let them do it on their own, and give them a bible and hope for the best may, by God’s grace, sometimes work. But the Bible gives precious few clues in many areas regarding order, worship and ritual. The point does not often arise on the evangelical radar because evangelicalism is in many of its forms a contextualization that reacted against what was (at times, justifiably) perceived as ossified and lifeless ritual, the search for inner contact with God and the individualization

³² Madge Karecki, ‘Discovering the Roots of Ritual’ in *Missionalia* Vol. 25:2, Aug 97. The entire article is well worth a read and outlines why missiologists should be conversant with cultural anthropologists.

and emotionalization of religion go hand in hand. Ritual was sublimated, but since humans need ritual to preserve a sense of identity, the local cultural symbols of America were drawn upon, thus arose a form of uniquely evangelical crypto-sacramentalism centered around a bizarre amalgamation of Scripture, pietism, entertainment, and consumerism.

But I digress: all this is to say that I think a successful CPM in the Muslim world (and my experience is in the Arab world) must present a properly-contextualized communication of the Gospel. Given that one of three elements that will influence how the MBC's contextualize their faith³³ is the ethos/praxis of the evangelist, it is reasonable to conclude that Patristic Christianity with its healthy respect for ritual and community is a much better ingredient for this mix than Western evangelicalism. They are both contextualizations, but not all contextualizations are equal. Patristic Christianity is closer to the Muslim world geographically, culturally, and politically than is Western evangelicalism. It cannot (probably) be imported *in toto*, the ultimate goal is indeed to have MBC's (not foreign missionaries) arrive at their own contextualization that is at once local and catholic: local in that it effectively communicates the message and life of Jesus - an unsystematized, historical, physical reality—and catholic in that it understands and interacts with other churches in their respective contexts regarding the central doctrines and dogmas of the Christian faith, which are immutable and common to the entire body of Christ.

The reappropriation of Patristic contours of faith and practice and hermeneutics are, roughly speaking, what Paleo-orthodoxy advocates. I have proposed some initial steps towards such a reappropriation and resourcement in my previous articles.

³³ It is the prerogative of congregations, or even gatherings of congregations, to contextualize, not of individuals.