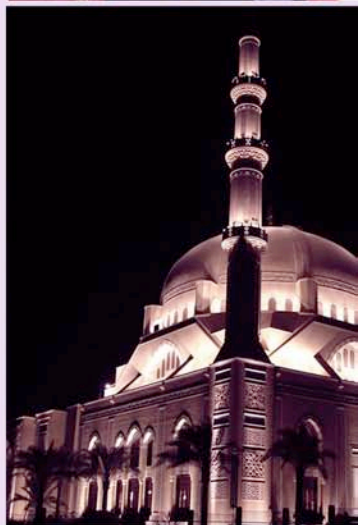




CONTENT

- ii Introduction, *John Stringer*
- 890 What are the advantages of Church Planting Movements over against Insider Movements? *Chris Flint*
- 911 Some questions about Bradford Greer's principles of exegesis, *Roger Dixon*
- 915 Incarnation, atonement and suffering: a note from I Peter, *Salaam Corniche*
- 934 A view from the bridge: Insider Movement critics speak out, *Basil Grafas*
- 939 Incarnational Missions? *Bassam Madany*
- 954 Faith is lived out in community: Questions of new community for Arab Muslims who have embraced a Christian faith, *Kathryn Kraft*



Arab World, December 2010

Dear friends

This is the month of Christmas; all over the world, Christians are reminded of the incarnation of the Word of God. God revealed himself in Jesus Christ. This is the heart of our Christian message to Islam.

In this St Francis Magazine 6:6 (December 2010), some articles deal with this issue of the incarnation. Salaam Corniche shows the importance of the incarnation in the letter of I Peter, and how this relates to our mission in the Muslim world. Bassam Madany argues that the incarnation of God was so unique that we should not use the term for a missiological approach.

Chris Flint compares the CPM (Church Planting Movement) approach with the views of those who support the Insider Movement concept. Basil Grafas describes a conference of i2 Ministries (1-3 October) where the Insider Movement concept was debated.

Roger Dixon responds to Bradford Greer, who in an earlier issue of our magazine argued that the primitive church did not believe yet that in Jesus Christ, they had met the ontological Son of God.

Kathryn Kraft treats us to part of her doctoral research in an article in which she focuses on the needs of converts from Islam; they need community.

Enjoy reading all this at www.stfrancismagazine.info.

May the Lord give you joyful Christmas days!

Rev Dr John Stringer
St Francis Magazine
editor@stfrancismagazine.info

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF CHURCH PLANTING MOVEMENTS OVER AGAINST INSIDER MOVEMENTS?

By Chris Flint¹

1 Introduction

Since the late 20th century, Church Planting Movements (CPM) and Insider Movements (IM) have been observed by missionaries around the world. Many missiologists believe these movements to be sovereign works of God, and advocate strategies to facilitate their extension so that more Christians might align themselves “*with the ways God has chosen to work*.”²

This paper begins from the premise that the Bible alone is God’s complete, authenticated and authoritative revelation to humanity, and thus these movements must be evaluated biblically before Christians are enjoined upon to support them. To this end, CPMs and IMs will be described, and the advantages of CPMs over IMs identified.³

It shall be seen that the two movements share potential for considerable overlap. In many areas, therefore, distinctions are blurred and comparison becomes difficult. Their approaches to other religions, however, *are* sharply contrastive and, at this definitive juncture, it is submitted, CPMs take the more biblical path.

¹ Chris Flint has had two years’ experience of Christian ministry in a Muslim-majority country, and is now studying for an MTh in ‘Theology and World Mission’ at Oak Hill Theological College, London.

² David and Seneca Garrison, ‘Factors That Facilitate Fellowships Becoming Movements’, in J. Dudley Woodberry Ed), *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2008), p. 207. Emphasis original.

³ In line with the premise of this paper, an “advantage” is here understood as shorthand for “a demonstrated coherence with biblical teaching.” The observations which missiologists *describe* are no less open to biblical evaluation than are the strategies which missiologists *prescribe* on the basis of them.

2 Church Planting Movements

2.1 Dr David Garrison

Dr. David Garrison is a significant proponent of CPMs. In his widely translated booklet, he writes:

God has shown us that He is indeed doing something in our days among the peoples of the earth – something so amazing we would not have believed it had we not seen it with our own eyes (see Hab. 1:5). We are calling this amazing thing Church Planting Movements.⁴

Garrison has subsequently written a book,⁵ and launched a website,⁶ to propagate CPMs worldwide. It is with his presentation of CPMs that this paper will interact.

2.2 Definitions

Garrison defines a CPM as “a rapid multiplication of indigenous churches planting churches that sweeps through a people group or population segment.”⁷ In this definition

Rapid signifies “[f]aster than you think possible,”⁸ and “always outstrip[ping] the population growth rate.”⁹

Multiplication, as opposed to mere addition, describes how “virtually every church is engaged in starting multiple new churches.”¹⁰

⁴ David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, Va: IMB, 1999), p. 47.

⁵ David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, Va.: WIGTake Resources, 2004).

⁶ David Garrison, ‘Church Planting Movements: Best Practices from Across the Globe’, see www.churchplantingmovements.com (28 Oct 2010).

⁷ Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 21.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Indigenous means “generated from within, as opposed to started by outsiders.”¹¹

Churches planting churches occurs when the “tipping point” is passed,¹² and “the momentum of reproducing churches outstrips the ability of the planters to control it.”¹³

People groups or *population segments* refer to the “shared language and ethnic boundaries” within which “communication of the gospel message ... naturally occur[s].”¹⁴

2.3 Description of CPMs

Garrison describes ten characteristics common to all CPMs:

2.3.1 Extraordinary Prayer

A strong awareness of the spiritual dimension makes prayer “the first priority of every Church Planting Movement strategist.”¹⁵ Intercession is made for the lost people group, for new believers and unbelievers, for more workers, for and between the missionaries, and for and by the new believers.¹⁶ The missionary’s responsibility to model prayer is emphasised.¹⁷

2.3.2 Abundant Evangelism

The “principle of over-sowing” is “essential” to every CPM.¹⁸ In contrast to what Garrison calls the “traditional model,” in which Christians seek to build friendships before sharing the gospel, CPMs see “hundreds and thousands of people hearing the gospel every day.”¹⁹ “Effective communication,” moreover, “requires understand-

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 173.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 173-76.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁹ Ibid.

ding the language and worldview of the people you are trying to reach.”²⁰ “[T]he primary evangelizers are always the new believers themselves,” who “contextualise the gospel better than anyone.”²¹

2.3.3 Intentional Planting of Reproducing Churches

The aim is not merely to plant churches, but “to plant *reproducing* churches.”²² “If a fellowship is to be reproduced, then it must be both reproducible and reproducing.”²³ To this end, “[a]ll the elements that are foreign to the church – and not easily reproduced – [are] eliminated.”²⁴

2.3.4 The Authority of God’s Word

The missionary must demonstrate that it is the Bible which is “authoritative for the new believers and the emerging church, not the wisdom of the missionary nor some foreign creed nor even the local church authorities.”²⁵ Where the populace is illiterate, “Memorization,”²⁶ “Audio-visual,”²⁷ “Bible Storying,”²⁸ “Songs,”²⁹ and “Using Educated Youth,”³⁰ are strategies employed for communicating God’s word.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 179.

²¹ Ibid., p. 181. Cf. “For outsiders, contextualization can help. Insiders will contextualize more naturally, particularly if they have recently turned in faith to Jesus.” Garrison and Garrison, ‘Factors That Facilitate Fellowships Becoming Movements’, p. 212.

²² Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 181. Emphasis original.

²³ Garrison and Garrison, ‘Factors That Facilitate Fellowships Becoming Movements’, p. 216.

²⁴ Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, p. 196.

²⁵ Ibid., p.183.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 184.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 184.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 185.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 185.

2.3.5 Local Leadership

Unlike what Garrison calls the “colonial model” which “stays to rule over the conquered territory,” CPMs “[transfer] the responsibility, vision, and momentum to new Christians.”³¹ While “outsiders” may have a “vital” role to play in the introductory stages,³² CPMs do not “[rely] on the leadership of outsiders.”³³ Their “axiom” is: “The resources are in the harvest.”³⁴

2.3.6 Lay Leadership

In CPMs it is “the laity who are leading the way.”³⁵ Paid leaders would “have a disincentive to start new groups as this would tend to erode the financial basis for their own ministry.”³⁶ The impracticalities of sending part-time pastors for residential seminary education require “innovative ways to make theological education available,” such as “distance learning.”³⁷ On-the-job leadership training is “vital.”³⁸

2.3.7 House Churches

Churches meet in homes, not dedicated church buildings.³⁹ This keeps gatherings “*small enough* ... for a layperson to lead without leaving their secular employment.”⁴⁰ Departing from the “[c]onventional wisdom ... that one should always work through the local church” is justified because “[i]n too many instances the local

³¹ Ibid., p. 268.

³² Ibid., p. 224.

³³ Ibid., p. 188.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 186.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

³⁶ Garrison and Garrison, ‘Factors That Facilitate Fellowships Becoming Movements’, p. 216.

³⁷ Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, 270.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 234.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 192.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 191. Emphasis original.

church is the major stumbling block that is preventing the unreached from coming to Christ.”⁴¹

2.3.8 Churches Planting Churches

It is the role of the churches, not the missionaries, to plant new churches. Missionaries must relocate as soon as “their protégés” have begun “to effectively reproduce what they have learned and experienced.”⁴² This conscious “bias toward new church starts over against enlarging older works is in sharp contrast with conventional practice.”⁴³

2.3.9 Rapid Reproduction

Whereas “the more traditional view” is “that a church must first grow large enough and mature enough to ... begin a new work,”⁴⁴ CPMs may “see a new church start every three to four months.”⁴⁵ One African CPM, for example, deemed a church “unhealthy” if it “didn’t reproduce itself after six months,” and “many” CPMs “will not allow a home cell church to continue if it is unable to grow and multiply after a year of existence.”⁴⁶

2.3.10 Healthy Churches

CPM churches display Rick Warren’s “five purposes in a healthy church:” Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Evangelism and Missions, and Worship.⁴⁷ The “central elements” of “baptism” and “the Lord’s Supper” are also present, and “other elements have been contextualised, informed by Scripture, then adapted to each unique environment.”⁴⁸ New believers are grounded “in the fundamentals of the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 246.

⁴² Ibid., p. 194.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 231.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 195.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 195.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 195.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 260.

faith,” taught “how to feed themselves from the Bible,” and prepared “to expect persecution” as they “share their faith with friends and family.”⁴⁹

3 Insider Movements

3.1 Rebecca Lewis

Rebecca Lewis is a firm advocate of IMs, which she calls “amazing works of God!”⁵⁰ Since first encountering IMs during her 15 years’ missionary experience in the Muslim world, Lewis has written several important articles about them. It is her conception of IMs which this paper will appraise.

3.2 Definition

Based on a discussion sponsored by the International Journal of Frontier Missiology (IJFM), Lewis formulated the following definition of IMs:

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 socioreligious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.⁵¹

Lewis clarifies two points. First, in her view, IMs do not ‘attempt to form neo-communities of “believers only” that compete with the family network.’⁵² Unlike so-called “aggregate churches,” which

⁴⁹ Garrison and Garrison, ‘Factors That Facilitate Fellowships Becoming Movements’, p. 213.

⁵⁰ Rebecca Lewis, ‘Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community’, *IJFM* 26.1 (2009), p.16.

⁵¹ Rebecca Lewis, ‘Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities’, *IJFM* 24.2 (2007), p. 75.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

“extract individual believers from their families and pre-existing networks of relationships” to gather with “former strangers” in “new ‘communities’ of faith, “IMs see God-given family and clan structures transformed from unbelieving communities into largely believing communities” as “the gospel continues to flow along preserved relational pathways.”⁵³

Secondly, In IMs, people groups are freed “from the counter-productive burden of socioreligious conversion,” in particular, from “the constraints of affiliation with the term “Christianity,” and instead “remain inside their socioreligious communities by retaining their given birth identity.”⁵⁴

Lewis carefully distinguishes IMs from the “C5” position on John Travis’ spectrum of “Christ-Centred Communities,”⁵⁵ with which they are often associated.⁵⁶ For Lewis, a C5 community which “requires a change in one’s identity to a new network would *not* be considered an insider movement, no matter how ‘contextualized.’”⁵⁷ By contrast, IMs may reflect *any* point along the C-scale: ‘all that matters is that no *new* communities (no “aggregate churches”) are formed to extract believers from their pre-existing families and networks.’⁵⁸

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 75-6.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

⁵⁵ Travis describes “C5” as a “Community of Muslims who follow Isa yet remain culturally and officially Muslim.” John and Anna Travis, ‘Factors Affecting the Identity that Jesus-followers Choose’, in J. Dudley Woodberry (ed), *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2008), p. 194.

⁵⁶ See e.g. Gary Corwin, ‘A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocates to Consider Ten Questions’, *IJFM* 24.1 (2007), pp. 5-21.

⁵⁷ As cited in Corwin, ‘A Humble Appeal’, p. 18. Emphasis original.

⁵⁸ Lewis, ‘Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities’, p. 76. Emphasis original.

3.3 Case study

The Lewises describe how, at the start of their Muslim ministry, they tried to establish a “contextualized, multi-cultural fellowship.”⁵⁹ Sadly, this fellowship soon collapsed because the “believers came from all over the city and had nothing in common.”⁶⁰ Their next attempt, to plant a “contextualized, mono-cultural group,” also failed.⁶¹ Then, “God showed us a different way.”⁶² A team member was invited to meet two brothers who had completed a Bible correspondence course. Upon arrival,

Hassan and his brother rushed forward to welcome him into their household. They had gathered all their relatives and close friends to hear their honored guest explain what they had learned in their course. They eagerly received the gospel and pledged as a group to follow Jesus.⁶³

Their pledge proved genuine:

This new church, consisting of an extended family and friends, continues strong to this day. Decades later, they are still spreading the Gospel from town to town through their natural networks. They study the Word together, pray, baptize, and fellowship in ways they have determined best fit their community. No outsiders have ever tried to contextualize what has taken place. They have never had a leader or funding from outside their relational network. They do not feel any need for them.⁶⁴

The Lewises labelled this community an IM. What most intrigued them was its matrix of relationships:

The believers encouraged each other *within* their natural community. Their commitment to each other preceded their faith. Members could no

⁵⁹ Tim and Rebecca Lewis, ‘Planting Churches: Learning the Hard Way’, *MF* (Jan-Feb 2009), pp.16-18.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

more easily leave the church than they could leave their family. We provided occasional Biblical input, such as translated Scriptures, but little else. We were truly outsiders.⁶⁵

These observations triggered a paradigm shift for the Lewises. They wondered how missionaries might best facilitate similar IMs in the future, and concluded:

We can begin by telling our Muslim friends that worshiping God in spirit and truth does not require them to change religious systems... Instead of trying to get believers from different communities to form a lasting new group, we could, like Jesus, establish a church *inside* their natural community.⁶⁶

In practice, then, if not in theory, Lewis ties IMs in Islamic contexts to C5 methodology, for the feature which distinguishes C5 from C4 is the believers' retention of both cultural *and religious* Islamic identity.⁶⁷

4 Comparison of CPMs and IMs

4.1 The basis difference

Evidently, CPMs and IMs are in many ways complementary. Common to both, for example, are indigenous leaders, house-churches, and contextualised worship. Moreover, many of CPMs' other emphases, such as "extraordinary prayer," could also be reproduced within IMs. Such overlap precludes a simple, point-for-point comparison of CPMs and IMs.

Garrison and Lewis have, however, interacted with one another's work, and agree upon where the fundamental difference between the two movements lies: in direct contradistinction to IMs, CPMs "make

⁶⁵ Ibid. Emphasis original.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 18. Emphasis original.

⁶⁷ Timothy C. Tennent, 'Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques', in *IJFM* 23.3 (2006), p. 112.

a clean break with their former religion and redefine themselves with a distinctly Christian identity.”⁶⁸ That is, CPMs reject C5 contextualisation; IMs require it.⁶⁹

If, as will now be argued, C5 contextualisation is incompatible with both a biblical theology of religions and a biblical ecclesiology, then CPMs’ rejection of C5 becomes *the* definitive advantage of CPMs over IMs.

4.2 How does the Bible portray religions?

If religions are merely value-neutral sociological constructs, then the retention of an Islamic identity is, as C5 implies, a matter of indifference.⁷⁰ This view of religion is popular in contemporary anthropology. It is not, however, a perspective found in the Bible.

The Bible consistently advocates a binary view of religions: true and acceptable, or false and blasphemous. The first two commandments in the Decalogue presuppose this, equally classifying as idolatrous the worship of any other gods⁷¹ and images.⁷²

The second commandment, the Israelites soon discovered, applies even when images are used to worship the *true* God. In constructing the golden calf, Aaron’s explicit intention was not to lead the people back to pagan Egyptian gods, but to facilitate worship of YHWH.⁷³

⁶⁸ David Garrison, ‘Church Planting Movements vs. Insider Movements: Missiological Realities vs. Mythological Speculations’, in *IJFM* 21.4 (2004), p. 154. As cited in Lewis, ‘Insider Movements’, p. 16.

⁶⁹ Strictly speaking, this statement is true only in the special case of CPMs and IMs *in an Islamic context*. The underlying principle, however, holds universally. In a Buddhist context, for example, CPM believers *reject* their former Buddhist religious identity; IM believers *retain* it.

⁷⁰ Bill Nikides, ‘Lost in Translation: Insider Movements and Biblical Interpretation’, (Unpublished conference paper from the 2010 i2 Insider Movement Conference), p. 16.

⁷¹ Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7.

⁷² Exodus 20:4-6; Deuteronomy 5:8-10.

⁷³ Exodus 32:4-6.

Nevertheless, YHWH's righteous jealousy was kindled by what he perceived as idolatrous worship.⁷⁴

Throughout the Old Testament, idolatry is consistently denounced and has terrible consequences, yet is almost impossible to eradicate. For example, Jeroboam's reintroduction of golden calves into Israelite worship is repeatedly condemned,⁷⁵ and the crushing Assyrian exile is portrayed as the inevitable consequence of the syncretism he instigated.⁷⁶ When the Samaritans later resettled the land, they "worshipped the LORD, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they had been brought," so perpetuating Israelite idolatry.⁷⁷

The New Testament explains the Bible's antithetical view of religions: behind every religion stands either God or demons,⁷⁸ between whom there can be no harmony.⁷⁹ To advocate or practise syncretism is to invite spiritual disaster: those espousing joint allegiance to the Lord *and* to demons are liable both to arouse his jealousy,⁸⁰ and to lead other believers into sin.⁸¹ There is but one safe response to idolatry: flee.⁸²

4.3 What is Islam?

If no spectrum exists between true and false religions, then Islam is neither a valid, albeit incomplete, way to worship the true God, nor a neutral cultural construct: it is either true or false. To determine which, we must consider its beliefs and practices.

⁷⁴ Exodus 32:7-8.

⁷⁵ See e.g. 1 Kings 12:28-30; 15:30; 22:52; 2 Kings 10:29.

⁷⁶ 2 Kings 17:21-23.

⁷⁷ Cf. 2 Kings 17:33-41.

⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 10:20-22.

⁷⁹ 2 Corinthians 6:16.

⁸⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:19-22.

⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 8:11-13.

⁸² 1 Corinthians 10:14; 2 Corinthians 6:15-18; 1 John 5:21; Revelation 9:20-21; 14:9-12.

Stringer comments: “Islam is defined by its own holy books, shari’a and theologians, and does not accept a Muslim who believes in the Trinity, in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁸³ The Bible, however, insists these beliefs are necessary for salvation.⁸⁴

The mosque is no mere social structure;⁸⁵ it is, Parshall warns, “pregnant with Islamic theology. There, Muhammad is affirmed as a prophet of God and the divinity of Christ is consistently denied.”⁸⁶ Moreover, the ritualistic “salat” prayers performed within, which are “as sacramental to Muslims as is partaking of the Lord’s supper for Christians,”⁸⁷ were originally devised by Muhammad as an explicit anti-Trinitarian rejection of Christian worship.⁸⁸ Clearly, then, Islam is a false religion.

4.4 What power does Islam have?

Idolatrous religions have spiritual power to provoke the wrath of God and imprison their adherents under demonic dominion. Islam demonstrates this spiritual power in several ways.

First, and most obviously, Islam blinds Muslims to gospel.⁸⁹ Second, Islam inhibits Christian discipleship. Parshall reports a survey of MBBs:⁹⁰ after 12 years in an IM, 66% of leaders still believed the Qur’an to be a superior revelation to the Bible, and 45% did “not af-

⁸³ John Stringer, “Of Straw Men and Stereotypes: Reacting to Rick Wood of Mission Frontiers,” *SFM* 6:2 (2010), p. 590.

⁸⁴ Cf. John 3:16; Romans 10:9.

⁸⁵ Bill Nikides, ‘A Response to Kevin Higgins’, in *SFM* 5:4 (2009), p. 94.

⁸⁶ Phil Parshall, ‘Danger! New Directions in Contextualization’, *EMQ* 34:4 (1998), p. 409.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Warren C. Chastain, ‘Should Christians Pray the Muslim Salat?’, in *IJFM* 12:3 (1995), pp. 161-164.

⁸⁹ Jay Smith, ‘An Assessment of the Insider Principle Paradigms’, in *SFM* 5:4 (2009), pp. 37-38.

⁹⁰ MBB is shorthand for *Muslim Background Believer*.

firm God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁹¹ “One has to hypothesize about how the lay people would respond to the same queries,” muses Parshall.⁹²

Third, Islam has a proven capacity to undermine Christian community. For example, Smith draws attention to Christian groups which, in the 7th-8th centuries, formally converted as “insiders” to Islam. Their communities soon disappeared, as Imams systematically indoctrinated subsequent generations.⁹³

4.5 How can Islam’s power be overcome?

Spiritual forces of evil can be withstood and overcome only in the power of Christ’s salvation.⁹⁴ This salvation is more comprehensive than a merely privatised experience. By justifying sinners at the cross,⁹⁵ Jesus broke Satan’s power over them,⁹⁶ that they might be rescued from the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light.⁹⁷ This spiritual reality generates correlating visible evidence:⁹⁸ where God’s kingdom exists, Satan’s house is plundered,⁹⁹ and a new family is created.¹⁰⁰

A holistic, biblical understanding of salvation, then, means Christian conversion introduces the believer into the visible Christian community,¹⁰¹ united in Christ to all other believers.¹⁰² The local

⁹¹ Parshall, ‘Danger! New Directions’, p. 408.

⁹² Ibid., p. 407.

⁹³ Smith, ‘An Assessment of the Insider Principle Paradigms’, p. 41.

⁹⁴ Ephesians 6:10-20; 1 John 3:8.

⁹⁵ Romans 3:21-26.

⁹⁶ Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14.

⁹⁷ Colossians 1:12-13.

⁹⁸ Matthew 12:28.

⁹⁹ Mark 3:23-30.

¹⁰⁰ Mark 3:31-34.

¹⁰¹ Smith, ‘An Assessment of the Insider Principle Paradigms’, p. 43.

¹⁰² Ephesians 2:14-18.

church is not an insubstantial sociological construct,¹⁰³ but the body and fullness of Christ.¹⁰⁴ Within it God's saints persevere unto final salvation,¹⁰⁵ and against it even the gates of hell cannot stand.¹⁰⁶ No sheep which comes to the Good Shepherd and joins his flock needs ever fear the ravaging wolves outside.¹⁰⁷

4.6 What does the Bible teach about "extraction"?

Sadly, for many MBBs, associating with local Christians imperils relationships with their former community. As reflected by their distinctive use of "insider/outsider" categories, IMs prioritise sociological categories, and avoid "aggregate churches" and the "extraction" which they may entail.

The New Testament, however, teaches that one's primary identity is located, not sociologically,¹⁰⁸ but spiritually: the true "insider" is the one united to Christ and his people,¹⁰⁹ whereas "outsider" is a term reserved for unbelievers.¹¹⁰ Indeed, Jesus is emphatic that loyalty to him must take priority over sociological continuity. When demanding public allegiance from his followers,¹¹¹ Jesus foresaw that this new commitment would provoke opposition from family members.¹¹² Nevertheless, he insisted that one's public spiritual identity must always take priority: to compromise here imperils salvation.¹¹³

¹⁰³ Nikides, 'A Response to Kevin Higgins', pp. 94, 97.

¹⁰⁴ Ephesians 1:22-23.

¹⁰⁵ Hebrews 10:25.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew 16:18.

¹⁰⁷ John 10:11-18.

¹⁰⁸ Galatians 3:28

¹⁰⁹ Note the regularly employed ἐν Χριστῷ (in Christ) formula, which appears nearly 100 times in the New Testament, and the portrayal of the *Christian community* as a family, e.g. Galatians 6:10; 1 Peter 2:17; Hebrews 13:1.

¹¹⁰ E.g. Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; 1 Timothy 3:7.

¹¹¹ Matthew 10:32-33.

¹¹² Matthew 10:34-36.

¹¹³ Matthew 10:37-39.

This indicates that “extraction” language, whilst rhetorically powerful, must be carefully qualified in order to preserve the nuanced, Biblical position.

Spiritual/religious extraction *always* occurs in genuine Christian salvation, as repentance reorients a believer’s fundamental allegiance from idols to Christ. This allegiance is expressed by exclusive inward and outward reverence,¹¹⁴ an integrity stipulated by the psalmist,¹¹⁵ and characterising God’s faithful remnant.¹¹⁶ Inward belief and outward expression can be divided only by recapitulating the gnostic denial of God’s lordship over both the spiritual and the physical realm.¹¹⁷

Sociological extraction *may* follow spiritual extraction: it depends on the response of the local community to the believer’s public confession of faith.

Cultural extraction, however, *is not necessary* for salvation. That many Arab believers today identify themselves as both Arabs *and* Christians belies the assumption that Islam and culture are completely inextricable.¹¹⁸ This suggests, in turn, an alternative to C5 contextualisation: by working closely with local churches, missionaries may find that indigenous believers have already discovered acceptable, non-Islamic cultural forms that can be used appropriately to contextualise the gospel.¹¹⁹

When evaluated against these categories, the disadvantage of IMs becomes clear. *Sociological* extraction may well be minimised, but at the cost of *spiritual* extraction from the saved community. MBBs who remain “inside” the Muslim community position themselves

¹¹⁴ Nikides, ‘Lost in Translation’, p. 10.

¹¹⁵ Psalm 15; 24:3-4; 86:11.

¹¹⁶ 1 Kings 19:18.

¹¹⁷ Nikides, ‘A Response to Kevin Higgins’, p. 96.

¹¹⁸ To be exact, “Masihiyin,” the common Arabic term for “Christians.” Stringer, ‘Of Straw Men and Stereotypes’, p. 591.

¹¹⁹ Smith, ‘An Assessment of the Insider Principle Paradigms’, p. 48.

“outside” the sphere within which Christ’s full salvation blessing is experienced – the local church.

5 Conclusion

The distinguishing factor between CPMs, as described by Garrison, and IMs, described by Lewis, is their approach to non-Christian religions. CPMs break free:¹²⁰ IMs remain inside.¹²¹

This makes IMs biblically impermissible. By excluding visible Christian fellowship, IMs withdraw vital spiritual support from young believers struggling against evil, demonic forces which would snatch away the gospel seed, cripple their walk with Christ and snuff out their Christian witness. By reducing faith to a merely private inner expression, IMs hamper believers from living lives of integrity, expressing their distinctive faith in distinctively Christian works of love before their watching community and their Lord. Worst of all, by dabbling with false religions, IMs implicate themselves in idolatry, and provoke God’s righteous indignation.

Perhaps Lewis does not see these problems because she, self-confessedly, bases her missiology on observation, not the Bible.¹²² Methodologically, Garrison is the same.¹²³ Nevertheless, CPMs

¹²⁰ Garrison, ‘Church Planting Movements vs. Insider Movements’, p. 154.

¹²¹ Lewis, ‘Insider Movements’, p. 16.

¹²² “My opinion is that missiology must be based on seeing what God seems to be doing and evaluating that in the light of scripture (copying the apostolic process in Acts 15).” Lewis in Dick Brogden, ‘Inside Out: Probing Presuppositions among Insider Movements’, in *IJFM* 27:1 (2010), p. 36.

Cf: ‘The earliest insider movements out there did not start because someone had a great missiological idea and said “Let’s try starting an insider movement.” As usual, theory is following observation. As in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts, God is moving this way and we are trying to catch up by analysing the phenomenon.’ Lewis in Corwin, ‘A Humble Appeal’, p. 8.

¹²³ Garrison begins from the assumption that CPMs are a ‘divinely produced phenomenon’ and then attempts to ‘reverse engineer’ them to discover ‘the Creator’s de-

avoid the gravest problems of IMs by adhering to a simple biblical injunction: flee idolatry.¹²⁴

signs, desires, and methods of operation'. This is equivalent to giving CPMs a revelatory function. Garrison, *Church Planting Movements*, p. 11.

¹²⁴ "Therefore, my dear friends flee from idolatry. I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say." 1 Corinthians 10:14-15.

Bibliography

- Brogden, Dick, 'Inside Out: Probing Presuppositions among Insider Movements' in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27:1 (2010), pp. 33-40.
- Chastain, Warren C., 'Should Christians Pray the Muslim Salat?' in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 12:3 (1995), pp. 161-164.
- Corwin, Gary, 'A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocates to Consider Ten Questions', in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24:1 (2007), pp. 5-21.
- Elliott, Scott A., 'Survey on Quran, Allah, and CPM', Unpublished Project Paper (Dhaka: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006)
- Garrison, David, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, Va: International Mission Board, 1999),
- Garrison, David, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Midlothian, Va.: WIGTake Resources, 2004)
- Garrison, David, 'Church Planting Movements vs. Insider Movements: Missiological Realities vs. Mythological Speculations', in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 21:4 (2004), pp. 151-154.
- Garrison, David, 'Church Planting Movements: Best Practices from Across the Globe', Cited 29 October 2010. Online: <http://www.churchplantingmovements.com>.
- Garrison, David and Seneca, 'Factors That Facilitate Fellowships Becoming Movements' in J. Dudley Woodberry Ed), *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2008), pp. 207-218.
- Gilbert, Greg, 'Book Review: Where Do We Go From Here? by Ralph Neighbour', online on www.9marks.org/books/book-review-where-do-we-go-here-ralph-neighbour (25 Oct 2010)

- Gilbert, Greg, 'Book Review: Church Planting Movements by David Garrison', online on www.9marks.org/books/book-review-church-planting-movements-david-garrison (25 Oct 2010)
- Gilliland, Dean S., 'Context is Critical in "Islampur" Case', in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34:4 (1998), pp. 415-17.
- Johnson, Andy, 'Pragmatism, Pragmatism Everywhere!' Online: www.9marks.org/ejournal/pragmatism-pragmatism-everywhere (25 oct 2010)
- Lewis, Rebecca, 'Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities', in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24:2 (2007), pp. 75-6.
- Lewis, Rebecca, 'Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community', *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26:1 (2009), pp. 16-19.
- Lewis, Tim and Rebecca, 'Planting Churches: Learning the Hard Way', *Mission Frontiers* (Jan-Feb 2009), pp.16-18.
- Nikides, Bill, 'A Response to Kevin Higgins' "Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective"', in *St. Francis Magazine* 5:4 (2009), pp. 92-113.
- Nikides, Bill, 'Lost in Translation: Insider Movements and Biblical Interpretation', Unpublished Paper from the 2010 i2 Insider Movement Conference.
- Parshall, Phil, 'Danger! New Directions in Contextualization', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34:4 (1998), pp. 404-414.
- Smith, Jay, 'An Assessment of the Insider Principle Paradigms', in *St. Francis Magazine* 5:4 (2009), pp. 20-51.
- Stringer, John, 'Of Straw Men and Stereotypes: Reacting to Rick Wood of Mission Frontiers', in *St. Francis Magazine* 6:3 (2010), pp. 583-594.
- Tennent, Timothy C, 'Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 "High Spectrum" Contextualization', in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 23:3 (2006), pp. 101-115.

- Travis, John and Anna, 'Factors Affecting the Identity that Jesus-followers Choose', in J. Dudley Woodberry Ed), *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2008), pp. 193-205.
- Woodberry, J. Dudley., 'To the Muslim I Became a Muslim?', in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24.1 (2007), pp. 23-28.

SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT BRADFORD GREER'S PRINCIPLES OF EXEGESIS

By Roger Dixon¹

It is a bit off putting to discuss Bradford Greer's article, '*Son of God*' in *Biblical Perspective* (St Francis Magazine, June, 2010), because the writer seems to think that anyone else's opinion is 'an emotional reaction' (his expression). However, Greer's own exegesis is highly speculative and for those of you who may be interested in the Bible terms, 'Messiah' and 'Son of God', I offer the following.

There are various opinions among scholars as to the meaning of Messiah in the Old Testament but it is generally thought to be a term indicating a human son of David who would be the king of a restored Davidic Kingdom. (J.Y. Campbell, 'Christ', in Alan Richardson, *A Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1957)

Without recounting extensive verses from the gospel of Luke, I would encourage you to read through Luke with an eye to the numerous passages that deal with this issue. Some are the announcement to Zechariah, the announcement to Mary, Zechariah's prophetic statement at the birth of John, the recognition of Simeon and Anna and the statement of Jesus as he began his ministry in Nazareth. All of these come in the first four chapters of Luke. These passages require word study to appreciate their depth of meaning.

These passages identify the messianic hope with the birth of Jesus. And this Jesus is proclaimed as the Son of God (Lk 1:32). It is clear that from the time of the gospels Jesus has been thought of as the divine Son of God as well as Messiah. The testimony of the gos-

¹ Roger Dixon was a missionary for thirty-four years in Asia, mostly among the Muslim Sundanese of West Java, Indonesia. He received his doctorate from Biola's School of Intercultural Studies. He is currently a consultant with Pioneers.

pels to the divine Son of God cannot easily be separated from that of the divine nature. This can be shown in the epistles as well since most of them were written before AD 70.

Even though, as Greer states, ‘divine Sonship would not necessarily denote divine nature to first century Jews and the first Jewish followers of Jesus’, how is that proof that they did not believe he was, in fact, divine? From many references in the gospels we see that Jesus equated himself with the Father. Even though first century Jews would not easily accept this, how is that any indication that the disciples did not? When Peter says that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus responds by saying that Peter is blessed in this understanding because flesh and blood (that is, cultural expectations) had not revealed it to him ‘but my Father who is in heaven’. It is clear to the reader that the Father would not have to “reveal” anything that first century Jews already believed. In fact, this identification of Jesus with God was the reason he was constantly attacked and eventually crucified.

Bradford Greer both sympathizes with and criticizes David Abernathy's position, at the same time covering his retreat area by asserting that he is not questioning the divinity of Jesus. Rather, he just feels that Rick Brown has a strong argument that the early church did not believe it. Greer writes, ‘The issue in question is: How did the primitive church (from 33CE to 45CE) conceptualize and speak of the divinity of Jesus? Did the primitive church use the term “Son of God” to do this, or did this title gradually take on this meaning as time passed? By primitive church I refer to the church from the time of Pentecost (30CE) to about 45CE. After 45CE I refer to the church as the early church.’

I submit that Greer's own arguments negate a possibility of arriving at a definite conclusion. His arguments are useless by his own presuppositions. In order to develop a thesis in this regard, Greer arbitrarily separates the time of the ‘early church’ from that of the ‘primitive church’. According to him, the ‘primitive church’ existed

from 'the time of Pentecost (30CE) to about 45CE' while the 'early church was after 45CE'.

1. Greer is grasping at straws when he makes an artificial separation between 'primitive church' and 'early church', so that he can use Acts as a reference for 'primitive church' to show that the 'primitive' church did not use the term 'Son of God' as a primary designation for Jesus.

I can find no references from scholars that distinguish the term 'early church' from 'primitive church', either in chronology or in activity. Greer arbitrarily dates the 'primitive church' from 33CE to 45CE (he uses Common Era dating rather than the Christian dating - BC & AD). And he dates the 'early church' after 45. However, I can find no justification for this dating except to enable him to use Acts as the sole reference for the use of the term 'Son of God' in what he defines as the 'primitive' church.

2. Since all the epistles were written after AD 45, Greer does not have to deal with any of them. However, Acts was also written after AD 45 and thus it is not legitimate for him to use it to buttress his argument. So any of us are free to express whatever opinion we may have about what the 'primitive church' believed between AD 33 and AD 45 since there is no evidence to disprove it. Our opinion is as valid as his.

3. Greer's view of Acts is also the only example I have ever heard that isolates Acts within the Canon in a specific way so that the theology of Acts could be considered different from the theology of the Epistles. Even in Acts we see the quote from Psalm 110:1 about the Lordship of Christ (Acts 2:34). Some manuscripts give the confession of the Ethiopian (Acts 8:37). Paul's quote from Psalm 2:7 (Acts 13:33) indicates his belief in Jesus as the divine Son of God who has God's divine nature. Verses such as these show that even Acts has indicators that Jesus was believed to have a divine nature.

4. Another point to consider is that Acts is primarily a history of events and not a compilation of theological explanations. Luke sends his letter to Theophilus as a record of events. It is not an exposition of the divine nature of the Son of God or of any other theological subject.

5. Even if Acts does not contain absolute evidence of the use of Son of God as an indicator of divinity, all Bible scholars agree that many of the epistles were written during the historical time covered by Acts. And these epistles certainly do contain the foundational statements that teach us that the Sonship of Jesus is synonymous with divine nature. It is not necessary to recount all these many references that make up the theological basis of the entire Christian movement. We all know them.

However, Greer has set up the parameters of AD 33- AD45. If we follow those guidelines, we cannot prove or disprove anything. As for me, I continue to view the early church as the primitive church, making no distinction between them, and use all the sources in the New Testament to do as the Bereans did. Thank God for the New Testament. Where would we be without the record?

INCARNATION, ATONEMENT AND SUFFERING: A NOTE FROM I PETER

*By Salaam Corniche*¹

1 Introduction

At the recent Insider Movement Conference II [October 2010] it was suggested that much more work needs to be done in understanding the commonalities of the social contexts of I Peter, the book of Hebrews and the Apocalypse. Scholars of the Graeco-Roman milieu are finding increasing evidence of the social pressure that Christians in the early church faced, and have observed that each of these writings addresses such pressures. In each book as well, the glories of Christ's redemptive work on the cross, themes of suffering for His sake, and the glorious inheritance for the saints all come into play. At the conference it was suggested that these almost two-millennia-old documents have much to say for Christians who feel the social pressures of Islam.

This pressure is well illustrated by the words of a young man who lives in Lebanon, in Beirut's largely Muslim Hamra district. In the October 17, 2010 'Voice of America' issue, Ziyad Haijar stated:

[Muslim] people have the power here in the Middle East and we cannot say anything. We cannot talk about our religion because here it is dangerous. Here, [Muslims] can easily make problems for you if they found out you are Christian.²

¹ Rev. Salaam serves with a denominational mission agency in a Muslim-majority African country.

² Reported by Edward Yeranian, 'Vatican Bishops Ponder Middle East Christians', www.voanews.com/english/news/Vatican-Bishops-Ponder-Middle-East-Christians-105140644.html (Accessed 2010/10/18)

In this paper, we will examine a “golden chain” that extends from Christ’s eternal existence with the Father to his incarnation, to the atonement, to His exaltation, and how that can influence everyday life in the here and now. We will use the letter of I Peter, which normally is not known for its teaching on the incarnation, yet as we examine its sub-theme of Christ suffering “in his own body” we will note that it is presupposed. It is the Incarnate and Chosen Christ who is the ultimate “alien and stranger” in a world he created, that gives the moral courage to do good to His chosen, harassed and battered flock who live in between the times of his visitations.³ We will observe that for good reason it has been reported that in the former Yugoslavia and in Muslim Indonesia, the book of I Peter has been a vital source of encouragement for Christians.⁴ We would expect no less the same for Ziyad Hajjar.

2 The Social Context of I Peter.

Like dense rye bread, the letter is compact, chewy, nutritious and delicious. Ceslaus Spicq thus described 1 Peter as “the most conden-

³ J. De Waal Dryden states that the author’s overarching concern for the young churches is neither consolation in suffering nor Christian identity as important as they are, but “the formation of Christian character, which is chiefly evidenced in growing active dependence upon God and growing moral integrity” in the face of persecution. He thus ascribes the genre of a “paraenetic epistle” to I Peter in *Theology and Ethics in 1 Peter Paraenetic Strategies for Christian Character Formation*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament / 02, 209. (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), p. 317. Lauri Thuren defines such an oral or written word as “consisting of exhortation and admonition aimed at affecting the attitudes and behavior” of its addressees in *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter: The Origins of Christian Paraenesis*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 114 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p.18 cited by Ernst Wendland, ‘Stand Fast in the True Grace of God! A Study of 1 Peter’ in *Journal of Translation and Text Linguistics* 13 (2000), p. 9, fn 15.

⁴ Scott McKnight. *1 Peter: The NIV Application Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1996), p. 35.

sed New Testament résumé of the Christian faith and of the conduct that it inspires.”⁵ Martin Luther believed that this letter did not “forget anything... that is necessary for a Christian to know”⁶ and he described it as “one of the noblest books in the New Testament”⁷ and a “paragon of excellence” on par with Romans and the Gospel of John.⁸

The letter, like the book of Hebrews and the Apocalypse, addresses those believers who are facing increasing social pressures due to their faith.⁹ In a word he is addressing non-conforming Christian communities who are under immense pressure to conform religiously and socially to the society around them. As those who had ‘suffered grief in various [literally “multicolored”] kinds of trials’ (1:6) they are desperately in need of “standing fast” in “the true grace of God” (5:12) - also described as ‘multicolored’ in 4:10 - as a foundation to keep on “walking in His steps” (2:21).¹⁰ Peter thus addresses “the

⁵ Ceslaus Spicq, *Les Épîtres Pastorales*. Études bibliques. (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1969), p. 11 and quoted by Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross* The Bible speaks today. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1994), p. 15.

⁶ Martin Luther, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude: Preached and Explained*. Tr. E.H. Gillett (New York: A. D. F. Randolph, 1858), p. 11.

⁷ Cited by Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 64, fn 666. Luther wrote: “The one who understands this letter has without doubt enough so as not to need more...because the apostle did not forget anything in this letter that is necessary for a Christian to know.”

⁸ Cited by Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p. 1.

⁹ See Boris A. Paschke ‘The Roman “ad bestias” execution’ as a possible historical background for 1 Peter in the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 28 no 4 (Je 2006), pp. 489-500. He also has some comments on date and authorship. Re the authorship of 1 Peter, we will adopt the stance taken by J. Ramsey Michaels who stated, “The burden of proof is still on those who reject the letter’s claim to come from Peter the apostle” in ‘1 Peter’ in R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (eds), *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), p. 916.

¹⁰ Similarly Wendland (p. 1 of abstract) states that the purpose of the epistle is ‘to encourage believers to remain steadfast in faith and hope while manifesting purity of

flock” (2:25 cf. 5:2), described as “wandering sojourners” (1:1), in the diaspora of Asia Minor with words of encouragement, largely based on knowing who Christ is, what He has done and their true identity in Him as their reason for being. As Scott McKnight said, “Peter intends his readers to understand who they are before God so that they can be who they are in society.”¹¹ The epistle, thus, is designed to help its audience, as De Waal Dryden notes, in the “venture of conforming one's life to one's convictions” as they are pulled “by temptations to cultural isolation and assimilation” and to the dangers of “retaliation and despondency.”¹²

As the Christians - and that is what they proudly called themselves (4:16) - began to live a life that exemplified their rejection of the “futile ways inherited from their fathers” (1:18), albeit with a disposition of “honoring the emperor” (2:13, 17) who ironically was said to be an incarnation of the gods, along with declaring the hope within them with “gentleness and respect” (3:15), the ire of their neighbors was aroused.¹³ They no longer joined in their neighbors’ “flood of

life as the “called and elect” of God in the face of some strong opposition, temptation, and persecution (5:8-11).’ Compare this with James R. Slaughter who sees the overall message as inspiring ‘the behavior of believers when they encounter unfair circumstances [in order to] reflect... a spirit of deference in all relationships as they follow Christ's example and anticipate future glory’ in ‘The Importance of Literary Argument for Understanding 1 Peter’, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 152 no 605 (Ja-Mr 1995), p 80.

¹¹ McKnight, p. 36.

¹² J. De Waal Dryden, p. 194. Similarly Wendland (p. 2) states that I Peter is an ‘urgent epistolary homily in circular letter form, one aimed at encouraging a dispersed and presumably demoralized Christian (Gentile-Jewish) readership.’

¹³ See David Horrell, ‘The label “Christianos”: 1 Peter 4:16 and the formation of Christian identity’ for a description of how this stigmatic term was transformed by the followers of Christ to be a badge of honor, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 126 no. 2 (Sum 2007), pp. 361-381. A historical example comes from 177 AD in the town of Lyons where it was told of a Christian called Sanctus: ‘He nobly endured with surpassing and superhuman courage all the torments that human hands could inflict...he would not state even his own name, or the people or the city and race

debauchery” (4:4) and so were maligned (2:12; 3:9, 16; 4:14). Rather than declaring the excellencies of Rome and their attachment to it, the Christians were singing the praises of One who had rescued them in an Exodus-like fashion, out of darkness (2:9), and had made them a new nation. By implication, then, the presence of the Christians served as an indictment against paganism and veneration of things Roman. Paul Achtemeier describes the low grade hostility that this engendered as:

due more to unofficial harassment than to official policy, more local than regional, and more at the initiation of the general populace as the result of a reaction against the lifestyle of the Christians than at the initiation of Roman officials because of some general policy of seeking out and punishing Christians. That does not rule out the possibility that persecutions occurred over large areas of the empire; they surely did, but they were spasmodic and broke out at different times in different places, the result of the flare-up of local hatreds rather than because Roman officials were engaged in the regular discharge of official policy.¹⁴

David Horrell, however, sees the attitudes towards Christians as being much more hostile than does Achtemeier and suggests that the notion of a “fiery trial”(4:12) coming with an element of surprise/shock/bewilderment would indicate the potential for suffering “up to and including execution.”¹⁵ It follows that the rhetorical question, “Who can [permanently] harm you?”(3:13) is not for nothing.¹⁶ Additionally, Horrell details how the term Christian was used as a slur to stigmatize the followers foolish enough to believe in a dead man now alive. Considering that the verb translated “suffering” is used 12x for the audience and the similar noun is used 4x in the epis-

whence he came, or whether he was slave or free. But to every question he replied in Latin: “I am a Christian.”

¹⁴ Achtemeier, pp. 35–36. Also Jobes, pp. 9–10.

¹⁵ Horrell, p. 373.

¹⁶ Additionally, note the use of the optative mood in 3:14 (cf 3:17) – ‘but even if you should suffer...’ This suggests a strong possibility or likelihood of occurrence.

tle it is little wonder that Horrell calls suffering the “prominent theme” or *Leitmotif* of the text.¹⁷

Peter is not advocating a hostile reaction from his “dear friends/loved ones” (2:11; 4:12) against the surrounding society. He frequently calls them to live exemplary lives of excellence “among the pagans” (2:12) or as slaves who respect their masters (2:18). He calls them to live lives of meekness (3:4), good deeds (2:15; 3:17; 4:19) and righteousness (2:24) following the steps of Jesus, as they show a willingness to waive their own rights even in the face of abuse. Horrell describes their posture as ‘polite resistance.’¹⁸ Another refers to their posture as “a proper attitude that results in behavior characterized by respect”,¹⁹ in a word: deference. Still Peter draws clear lines in the sand between their former vices and their present virtues and is quick to use strong verb tenses to keep them keeping on. Five imperatives thus come in quick succession: hope (1:13), be holy (1:15), live in fear (1:17), love one another (1:22) and desire the word (2:2). This letter goes beyond mere consolation in suffering as DeWaal Dryden notes. Peter is encouraging his readers to demonstrate that their ultimate allegiances are elsewhere, and that their ultimate hope is elsewhere (1:3) while their growing faith, expressed in their deeds and dispositions, makes a positive contribution to the church community and then to the society in which they are found.

As we observe the list of seven challenges that Wendland observes in I Peter, we cannot help but notice the parallels among the present day “wandering sojourners” like Ziyad Haijar who have also

¹⁷ David Horrell, *I Peter* New Testament Guides (New York: T & T Clark Ltd, 2008), p. 53.

¹⁸ David Horrell, ‘Between Conformity and Resistance: Beyond the Balch-Elliott Debate Towards a Postcolonial Reading of First Peter’ in Robert L. Webb, Betsy Bauman-Martin (eds), *Reading First Peter with new eyes: methodological reassessments of the letter of first Peter* (London, T & T Clark, 2007), p. 143.

¹⁹ Slaughter, p. 78.

“come out of the darkness [of Islam] into his marvelous light” (2:9). The question that this list will encourage us to ask is: Just how can the book of I Peter be of help, and are the facts of the incarnation and the atonement just good doctrines far away from the realities of suffering?

Specifically, Wendland notes the following problems that the “chosen and elect ones” (1:1-2, 15; 2:21; 3:9; 5:10) are facing due to social pressures:

- 1) Physical and psychological pressure
(1:6-7; 2:15; 4:12, 16-17, 19; 5:10)
- 2) Social ostracism and exclusion
(1:17; 3:16; 4:4)
- 3) Potential pull from the former pagan way of life (1:14,18)
- 4) A surrounding, seductive non-Christian worldview (2:11; 4:2-4)
- 5) Tensions and inconsistent behavior within the fellowship (1:22; 4:8-11; 5:2-3,5)
- 6) Spiritual doubts about the reliability of God’s promises and the future (1:3-5; 5:10)
- 7) Satan’s constant, deadly temptations and trials
(1:3-5; 5:10).²⁰

We would propose that I Peter posits antidotes for each of the above pressures, all of which are benefits from the incarnation.

3 The incarnation in I Peter

The book of I Peter gives its audience a wide horizon in taking them from the planning, willingness and ability to execute, even before the foundation of the world (1:19-20), God’s rescue plan for humanity, to the final, God-ensured inheritance of the saints (1:4; 4:13b). In a word, it is all about God. This helps to situate the corporate audience

²⁰ Wendland, p. 66. Also Jobes, p. 43.

in a much larger macro-context and puts their temporary sufferings in perspective. Peter is thus helping his audience, in the words of J.N.D. Kelly, to see that they can have present hope because the “End, i.e. the decisive act of God which gives history its meaning has already been realized in the incarnation.”²¹ Compare this with those who advocate contextualization by spending much time with the micro and temporary context where the audience is found, and only later looking at the macro-context. In addition, when one realizes that in the incarnation the Immortal Chosen One took on the flesh of mortals, in order that His chosen ones might have immortality, the prospects of sufferings - i.e. dying a little bit at a time - or death for the faith are put in perspective.

Within three verses of beginning his epistle, Peter tips us off to the incarnation. He mentions that all of this glorious salvation history (1:3-21) is tied up in “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3). Richard Lenski explains the relationship between Jesus and the two titles given to God and the incarnation:

For Jesus according to his human nature, God is his God, and for Jesus in his deity God is his Father; his God since the incarnation, his Father from all eternity.”²²

This description resonates with the early church fathers who described Christ as Him “Who was from eternity with the Father and was made manifest at the end of time.”²³

Peter affirms the identity of his audience, who can collectively say “our Lord Jesus Christ” by describing them as “chosen/hand-

²¹ J. N. D Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* Black's New Testament commentaries (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1977), p. 356.

²² Richard C. Lenski, *Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, The Three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude* (Minneapolis, Mn: Augsburg Fortress, 1945, 2008), p. 30.

²³ Ignatius, *Magn.* 6:1; *II Clem.* 14:2 cited by Leonhard Goppelt, Ferdinand Hahn, and John E. Alsup. *A Commentary on I Peter.* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1993), p. 119.

picked” by God (1:1) in his fore-loving and “bought with the precious blood of Christ” (1:19).²⁴ Thus he tells them that for their “sakes”/“because of you” Christ “was revealed at the end of the ages” (1:20).²⁵ This “revelation” or “manifestation” refers to the incarnation which inaugurated the end of salvation history. Leonhard Goppelt suggests that v. 20 declares that “what was predetermined has been made manifest and thereby realized historically” more so than just a fulfillment of a promise or making an appearance.²⁶ The incarnation, thus, is the vehicle of the “grace” that opens and closes the epistle (1:2 and 5:12) and this grace recalls the classic passage about the incarnation, namely John 1:14, where we see that Christ as the eternal Logos “became flesh and dwelt among” humans while manifesting the glory of the only Son from the Father, “full of grace and truth.” It will be beyond the scope of this paper to examine how Christ who “tabernacled” among humans, is the incarnation of the new temple of God, and how 1 Peter details how the new humanity in Him is an organic temple who display the glories of God.

Thus we will examine God’s rescue plan under the headings of the humiliation of Christ in the incarnation, his vicarious suffering and his subsequent exaltation.

²⁴ One cannot help but be struck by the overarching corporate nature of the epistle. As a group which is a subset of the larger Body of Christ the audience is designated as being “elected,” “sojourners” (1:1), “sprinkled” by Christ’s “blood” (1:2), “regenerated” (1:3), “obedient children” (1:14), “redeemed” (1:18), “newborn babes” (2:2), “living stones built into a spiritual house” (2:5), a “holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices” (2:5), “a royal priesthood” (2:9), “the people of God” (2:10), “aliens” (2:11), “free folk” (2:16), “sheep” in the flock of the divine “Shepherd” (2:25), “blessed” (4:14), “the household of God” (4:17), “elders” and “juniors” in the local congregation (5:1, 5), and members of a divinely established “brotherhood” (2:17; 5:9). (cf. Wendland p. 6)

²⁵ Note a similar use of the word “sake” in the context of incarnation in 2 Cor. 8:9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”

²⁶ Ibid.

4 Incarnation and its meaning

4.1 *The willingness to embrace humiliation*

Although I Peter does not use the exact words of the book of Philipians about Christ's emptying of himself (2:5-11), the theme of the Suffering Servant permeates the book. As Peter pastorally addresses his shamed and suffering servants, he takes them by the hand to look at the Shamed and Suffering Servant. Much of the letter presupposes knowledge of Isaiah 52/53 where the Servant willingly submits to abuse "as a lamb led to the slaughter." This willing submission to the Divine plan was a key to the incarnation, and also a key to the ability of the audience to embrace humiliation.²⁷ In a word, it helps them to wrestle with God's place in their lives in the world of unjust suffering. Peter points them to the One who suffered radical injustice and yet maintained His walk as the obedient Son. This inspires them in their walk as "children of obedience" (1:14) who can entrust themselves fully to their "faithful Creator" (4:19). For as slaves (2:18-20), wives (3:1-6) and even husbands they can look to the exemplar of Jesus and thus continue in the process of character formation likened to precious metals "being refined by fire" (1:7). The end result will be that they can show patient, unwavering steadfastness even in the midst of suffering (1:6-7; 3:14).

The rejection that both Christ and the audience faced is put in graphic terms by Peter. Jesus, who is "Christ the Lord" (3:15), is very God and thus the cornerstone of the universe is relegated to a "stone rejected by the builders" (2:7b). Literally they subjected Him to their examination and then discarded him as unfit for their building project. "He came to His own and His own received Him not" (John 1:11). These similarly rejected "stones" that are precious to Christ are then given dignity as living, vital, and valuable building

²⁷ Submission to the divine plan is described as: "though you do not see him...yet" (1:8); "live...for the will of God" (4:2); "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good" (4:19).

blocks in a Divine construction project (2:4, 7a, 3:18-22) which Origen referred to as a “single living edifice.”

John Brown of Edinburgh [1784-1858], one of Spurgeon’s favorite commentators, thus unpacks the area of verbal rejection in (3:9): “Render not evil for evil, nor railing for railing, but contrariwise bless.”

This injunction plainly goes on the assumption that they to whom it was addressed were exposed to injurious treatment and contumelious reproach. Their Lord and Master, when he was on earth, was most injuriously and unkindly treated and his character and conduct were the objects of the most malignant misrepresentation and cruel obloquy. He was denied not only what - as an immaculately innocent, an absolutely perfect man, the greatest, the most disinterested, the most unwearied, the most successful of all philanthropists and public benefactors, a fully accredited divine messenger, an Incarnation of the Divinity - he had the strongest claims to be, yet he was denied the common rights of humanity, and was represented as a demoniac and blasphemer, as teacher of error, and a stirrer up of sedition, “a glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”²⁸

Brown, in effect, describes Jesus as the ultimate “transient stranger” and “resident alien” in his incarnation. This too would be a source of comfort and challenge to the audience of I Peter, as doubtless they chaffed at the discomfort of their “exile” position (c.f. 1:17; 2:11).²⁹

In the act of becoming lower than the lowliest members of society in his incarnation, the Son of God lets them stand on His shoulders. This undoubtedly was good news for the addressees who were sys-

²⁸ John Brown, *Expository discourses on the first epistle of the Apostle Peter* (First published 1848, Edinburgh in 3 Vols., New York: R. Carter & brothers, 1855), p. 424.

²⁹ This “resident alien” state is found in a description of Christians in the anonymous Epistle to Diognetus, likely from the 2nd century: “They inhabit their own country, but as sojourners: they take part in all things as citizens, and endure all things as aliens: every foreign country is theirs, and every country is foreign.”

tematically being marginalized in a society that did not quite know what to do with them other than malign them as “haters of the human race” and followers of a “new and mischievous superstition.”³⁰ This was even better news for the slaves and wives that Peter addressed who, although treated with servility, could look to Jesus who had washed others’ feet (John 13:1-5) and had shown the ultimate example of what it was to “clothe [oneself] with humility toward[s] ...another” (5:5).

4.2 Incarnation for atonement and bodily suffering

It was James Denney [1856-1917] in his classic work on the atonement, *The Death of Christ*, who insisted that incarnation and atonement must go together. Thus he states, “The New Testament knows nothing of an incarnation which can be defined apart from its relation to atonement.”³¹ This is most obvious in I Peter where references to Christ’s suffering always include an aspect of his physicality, and his physicality is the vehicle for the atonement. Simply put: atonement presupposes incarnation.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. (2:24)

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit. (3:18)

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. (4:1-2)

³⁰ Goppelt, pp. 40-41 quoting Tacitus, *Annales* 15.44.2,4 and Suetonius, *Nero* 16

³¹ James Denney, *The Death of Christ: Its Place and Interpretation in the New Testament*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), p. 325.

Each of the verses underline the fact that Christ's rescue plan, "to bring us to God" (3:18), could only be done by the ugliness of penal [=bearing punishment], substitutionary [=the just taking the place of the unjust (3:18)] atonement [=a sacrifice to satisfy Divine justice].³² This was done especially in 2:24 by stressing Christ's personal commitment, by the prominent placement of the words "He Himself" juxtaposed with "in his body." The pronouns are pregnant with meaning. This was not the sacrifice of a scratched finger, but the words "he bore" recall all of the gore of Isaiah 53:4 ("He bears ours sins"), 53:11 ("He will bear their sins"), and 53:12 ("He bore the sins of many").³³

Cyril of Alexandria [c. 376–444] connects a few dots in linking the bodily sufferings of Christ and the believer's 'appropriation of the incarnation' in the above passages. He states:

In order that Christ might be believed to be the Savior of all, according to their appropriation of his incarnation, he assumed the sufferings of His own flesh, as was foretold in Isaiah [50:6]: "I gave my back to

³² Two definitions of penal substitution are found in Paul W. Felix, "Penal substitution in the New Testament: a focused look at First Peter," *Master's Seminary Journal*, 20 no. 2 (Fall 2009), pp 171-2, fn 1,2 "Penal substitution indicates that the Messiah died in the sinner's place and took upon himself the sinner's just punishment" in Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, Ill., 1997), p. 171, and "The Father, because of his love for human beings, sent his Son (who offered himself willingly and gladly) to satisfy his justice, so that Christ took the place of sinners. The punishment and penalty we deserved were laid on Jesus Christ instead of us, so that in the cross both God's holiness and love are manifested." in Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," in *The Nature of the Atonement*, James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy eds. (Downers Grove, Ill. IVP Academic, 2006), p. 67.

³³ The words of John R. W. Stott reiterate the same truth: 'It is clear from OT usage that to "bear sin" means neither to sympathize with sinners, nor to identify with their pain, not to express their penitence, nor to be persecuted on account of human sinfulness (as others have argued), nor even to suffer the consequences of sin in personal or social terms, but specifically to endure its penal consequences, to undergo its penalty.' *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1986), p. 143.

lashes, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard; I did not turn away my face from the disgrace of their spitting.”³⁴

James Denney adds the important aspect of obedience unto the point of death in linking the incarnation and the atonement. It was not obedience for obedience’s sake, but for a greater purpose.

It is the Atonement which explains the Incarnation: the Incarnation takes place in order that the sin of the world may be put away by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ. The obedience of the Incarnate One, like all obedience, has moral value: that is, it has a value for Himself; but its redemptive value, i.e. its value for us, belongs to it not simply as obedience, but as obedience to a will of God which requires the Redeemer to take upon Himself in death the responsibility of the sin of the world.³⁵

It should be added, however that the application of the salutatory effects of the atonement linked to the incarnation is not only given to believers, but also that they might identify with the sufferings of Christ. In 4:1 he uses a strong military metaphor, akin to preparing oneself mentally for a combat mission (cf. Jer 52:25), to describe how Christians are to prepare their minds with the same resolve/way of thinking as Christ did when he faced unjust suffering and death. Thus Peter can say to his fellow sufferers, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (4:12-13).

³⁴ *Letters 39* in Thomas C. Oden, *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament XI. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), p. 111.

³⁵ Denney, pp. 234-5.

4.3 Incarnation and exaltation

Just as we have observed that the Incarnation is a God-centered solution to a human created problem, so we see that I Peter is a thoroughly Theocentric and Christocentric epistle. Joel Green has commented on this nature of I Peter when he observes that, “I Peter is an invitation to adopt God’s way of seeing things and to live accordingly; perhaps better” and is “about God and the ramifications of orienting life wholly around Him.”³⁶ To an audience fixated on its temporal sufferings and to contemporary audiences undergoing the same, this letter presents both a challenge and a solution. As long as one has their eyes fixed on themselves and their present creature comforts or lack thereof, as the horizon of the Christian life, one will never rise to seize the benefits of suffering.

In a fashion similar to the books of Hebrews and the Apocalypse which use the creation of another reality, namely a better city, or a New Jerusalem to temper the harshness of the present day realities of the believers, so Peter does the same.³⁷ He suggests to his readers that they follow the same trajectory of Jesus, namely that of humiliation, suffering and future exaltation/glory. Logically, then, for Peter to describe Christ as “gone into heaven, He is at God’s right hand, with angels, authorities, and powers subjected to Him” (3:22), he presupposes that he had come from earth. The theme of incarnation is never far away.

It has been noted that I Peter has one of the highest word for word occurrences in the NT of words pertaining to suffering, and also to those pertaining to glory. On the latter, we can observe just a few examples: “joy inexpressible and filled with glory” (1:8); “sufferings

³⁶ Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*. [The two horizons New Testament commentary] (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2007), p. 3.

³⁷ Joel Green describes this process of allowing the solid reality of the future to cast an encouraging shadow back onto the present as “backshadowing.” In “Narrating the gospel in 1 and 2 Peter” *Interpretation*, 60 no. 3 (Jl 2006), p. 268.

of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1:11); “that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (4:11); “you may rejoice when his [Christ’s] glory is revealed” (4:13); “the spirit of glory...rests upon you” (4:14); “as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed” (5:1); “you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (5:4); “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, strengthen, confirm and establish you” (5:10). [Recall that we saw the phrase “He Himself” in 2:24 and now again in 5:10 as we see once again the level of personal commitment on God’s part]

In this vein then, Peter suggests that they have an inheritance/victor’s crown (1:4; 5:4) which is a blood-bought one (1:2, 18-19) by the Incarnate Paschal Lamb. The glories of this future pool of wealth of salvation in all its completeness, of which the audience can already “taste and see” (2:3), are described as an “imperishable, unspoiled, and unfading” inheritance (1:4).³⁸ This is everything that Rome cannot offer. Rome can only offer things that perish, are stained with evil and fade in a thoroughly transitory manner. Whereas their neighbors can abuse their reputations, their careers, and their material goods, these “homeless pilgrims” have something that is “kept in heaven” (1:4) for them. It is for good reason that the word group joy/rejoice/ blessed characterizes and should characterize these people (1:6; 2: 19, 20; 3:14; 4:13). This perspective translates into moral character that even the surrounding society can observe.

Logically, then Achtemeier makes the observation that the epistle represents a continual oscillation between the past and the present, as it will certainly influence the future. He notes:

That is why there is such emphasis on the contrast between past and present; it serves to buttress the main intention of the letter, which is to strengthen the readers in the “now” of their suffering and persecution by

³⁸ Beare describes the inheritance as “untouched by death, unstained by evil, unimpaired by time”.

assuring them that the future glory will transform their present condition as surely as their present situation represents a transformation from their past (e.g. 3:14).³⁹

Just in case this is all taken as good theory put out by a non-suffering Peter, observe how *I Clement*, written about 95 AD, describes the relationship between suffering and glory in the life of the author of the epistle.

Because of jealousy and envy the greatest and most righteous pillars were persecuted, and they fought to the death. Let us set before our eyes the good apostles: Peter, who because of unrighteous jealousy bore not one or two but many trials and, having thus given his testimony, went to the place of glory due to him.⁴⁰

5 Conclusion

The Incarnation is a demonstration of God's willingness to "Himself" intervene decisively, directly, intimately and in spite of human demerit, to solve the sin issue between Him and humans. It demonstrates a resolve to go to extreme lengths of humiliation and suffering to rescue elect humanity and to create a new people for Himself. It demonstrates the planning, the willingness and power of God to intervene in human history, and cannot help but build the trust of this "chosen" and "royal priesthood" in 1 Peter who might be wondering about His willingness and power to intervene "Himself" in their lives in the present and in the future.

The epistle of I Peter does not give a formula for suffering avoidance. Rather, it gives a perspective that allows one to be an overcomer in the face of suffering. This too is a sub-theme in the books of Hebrews and Revelation. The incarnation, with its humiliation and backdrop for the physicality of atonement, is the precursor of exaltation. The believer does not suffer for atonement but, with re-

³⁹ Achtemeier, p. 68.

⁴⁰ *I Clem.* 5:2-4 cited by Goppelt, p. 10.

spect to unjust suffering, can emulate the same attitudes as the One who came in the flesh, the innocent One who endured the ultimate unjust suffering. As it has been said, "The example of Christ made/[makes] the sufferings of Christians plausible, predictable and even tolerable."⁴¹ The believer, too, like the Lebanese Christian, Ziyad Haijar, with the pressures of the surrounding Islamic society of which all seven described by Wendland apply, can derive comfort from the words from the beginning and end of I Peter,

[...to the ones] in the power of God being guarded. (1:5)

The God of all grace, the one who called you [past] unto his eternal glory in Christ [future], after you have suffered for a while [past-present-future] will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you [future]. To him be the power unto the ages of ages" [past-present-future]. (5:10-11).

For further reflection:

The following poem was written by Amy Carmichael [1867-1951], missionary to India:

Hast thou no scar?
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land;
I hear them hail thy bright, ascendant star.
Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?
Yet I was wounded by the archers; spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent
By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned.
Hast thou no wound?

⁴¹ Slaughter, p. 78 quoting Norbert Brox, "Situation und Sprache der Minderheit in ersten Petrusbrief", in *Kairos* 19 (1977), pp. 1-13.

No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And pierced are the feet that follow Me.
But thine are whole; can he have followed far
Who hast no wound or scar?

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE: INSIDER MOVEMENT CRITICS SPEAK OUT

By Basil Grafas¹

The Insider Movement Conference, "A Critical Assessment", was organized by i2 Ministries² and held 1-3 October 2010 at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Given the seeming relentless juggernaut of conferences, journal articles, magazine spreads, blogs, training courses and the like extolling the virtues of insider movements, finding a conference critical of its ideology and methodology is rare indeed. Even rarer is to see one so very diverse. Presenters included two noted apologists (Dr. Jay Smith and Prof Joshua Lingel), a pastor (Rev Brian Lenney), a professor of theology (Dr David Talley), another professor who is a world authority in Islam (Dr David Cook), a professor of missiology (Dr Jeffrey Morton), a professor of apologetics from a Muslim background (Dr Ergun Caner), a Christian college president also from a Muslim background (Dr Emir Caner), several other Muslim converts who are now members of the visible church, Middle Eastern Christians and several other missiologists, all extensively experienced in field work and personally informed with regard to insider movements. It was the broad cross-section of Christian vocations, experiences and perspectives, all critical of insider movements that made it such a notable event. I know of nothing else like it.

Some of the presentations really stood out among the eminently useful, practical and varied fare. The interview of Rev Anwar Hos-sain, a Bangladeshi Baptist church planter and former head of the Bengali Bible Society, by Bill Nikides, really stood out. Pastor Anwar, a humble, unassuming man, was simply allowed to tell his story, and what a story it was. You see, Anwar has a singular perspective,

¹ Basil Grafas is a longterm mission leader in the Muslim World.

² www.i2ministries.org.

not revealed in all of the positive press surrounding this phenomenon. First, he comes from a Muslim background himself. Second, he was part of the insider movement and remains in contact with “insiders”. His calm recounting of his relationship to insider movements in his country was positively devastating - from his disbelief of the vast numbers of converts reported, to his citing of endemic ethical impropriety and the doctrinal unsoundness of insiders. Perhaps most arresting was his recounting of how Westerners helped create Bible translations that removed part of the Book of John and replaced key components of Trinitarian theology such as passages including “Son of God”, “Son”, and “Father”. To make matters worse, these people then endeavored to force these translations on Bengali Christians who openly opposed their circulation. Fortunately, they were stopped by the courts since the translations were being illegally produced and circulated. What made the interview so potent was the very evident colonial heavy-handedness at work on the part of insider proponents to “force” unwanted Bible translations on national churches.

For the first time in such a meeting the story of national church leaders was told and it flatly contradicted the rosy anecdotes of insiders. We could see in this the coercive and corrosive presence of Western ideas, money and pressure. Based on the happy pictures painted by Westerners and their insider partners, one could be forgiven for assuming that what they were experiencing with insider movements in Asia was, to borrow from the name of a dish on Chinese-American restaurant menus, a “happy family”. This was emphatically not the message conveyed at the conference. Nor was that message dependent on one single interview. Roger Dixon, a field worker with 33 years of field experience in one key insider location, also made devastating criticism based on his having predated a noted movement in one such place and been present throughout its genesis and supposed successes. His analysis was careful, balanced and detailed. He summarized his negative findings of insider movements in

his own locale by suggesting three reasons why missionaries are seduced into resorting to these approaches: Dhimmitude (resignation on the part of missionaries to the dominance of Islam), the Stockholm Syndrome (the captives' psychological identification with their captors), and Muslim replacement theology (the Islamization of the gospel).

Perhaps most important, Dixon identified Islam as a false religion, not simply a cultural expression as distinct from Christianity or another such cultural expression. His point was powerful. If Islam is a false religion, then it is not characterized fundamentally by truth, however imperfectly, but by fallenness. That being the case, immersing people, whether they are national insiders or missionary workers, to false religion reaps terrible consequences for them. This darkness is not neutral. It has the characteristics of acid or poison, eating away and contaminating the soul. As for me, this address did more than any other to alter my own perspective of the matter. This can never be a simple matter of tactics and approaches; a matter of wisdom and personal preference with regard to missiological approaches. Rather, it is the unconscionable exposure of human beings to a world of evil. I know that the proponents do not feel that way at all, but the fact remains that in order for them to continue to do what they do, they must view Islam as either a positive or benign presence; certainly no worse than Christianity.

I am reminded of another conference I attended years ago. A Middle Eastern Christian convert from Islam rose to speak to the large crowd of nationals and missionaries. As he too addressed contextualized approaches such as IM, he said, "I know that you missionaries like to treat our countries like laboratories. It would be nice, however, if you would consult the lab rats once in a while."

My third favorite seminar was conducted by Adam Simnowitz and it concentrated on the use of aberrant translation techniques that I noted in the interview. He compiled and presented extensive examples from a variety of languages that in his view fatally compromised

both the translation and the prospects for using the Bible to develop valid theology. These changes completely distort and redirect the focus of the text, altering its intended theological meaning. The specter here is of a new translation that is created to expedite evangelism at the expense of long-term discipleship and theological development. Insider translations serve as wave amplifiers when coupled to insider methodology. The results move everyone further away from biblical truth.

In my view, this was a game-changing conference. It was such a departure from anything I had experienced and, I must say, it bears the marks of authenticity. We heard direct and detailed Bible exposition; the church spoke, translation experts weighed in, theologians gave their perspectives as did church historians, apologists, and experts in Islam. The meeting was not dominated by academia. This was a decidedly practical conference dominated by those with first-hand experience. It was also a truly international forum with Middle Eastern Christians and Muslim Background Christians given a full opportunity to address the issues.

I must say, however, not everyone present shared my enthusiasm for the weekend. A good number of insider proponents were present, representing a number of different evangelical organizations. An insider leader from one of the key insider areas showed up as well. All spoke up actively in the question and answer sessions and none appeared to agree with the critiques. The nature of criticism ranged widely however, between carefully worded challenges to basic theological premises to *ad hominem* charges of slander and bribery.

I mention that latter in the hope that, as we struggle with these ideas, we do so in a way that relies on demonstrable facts, first-hand knowledge and, above all, the Scripture itself. I do not deny the passion, however. Many of those who love the approach and defend it do so because they believe that God favors it and they have the conviction that one's religion should not be a barrier of any kind to fully knowing Jesus. Opponents, and that includes me, see in this an un-

scriptural and irresponsible dilution, distortion or fabrication that propels people eager to know of Jesus into the heart of darkness. Passion should be expected, albeit with genuine Christian compassion.

All in all, it was a noteworthy addition to missiological conferences and one that should not be missed next year.

INCARNATIONAL MISSIONS?

By Rev Bassam M. Madany¹

In missions work today, across a broad spectrum of evangelicalism, a new term has gained coinage: “Incarnational Missions”. Just what should we, who have been active in mission work, and those just beginning their journeys in the field, think about the appearance of new missiological jargon or terminology such as that under discussion? One can certainly appreciate new terms that appear in any language which refer to new realities and concepts. But perhaps it might be the better part of virtue to stop for a moment and reflect on this particular one. What is behind the desire to define missions as “incarnational” when the simple adjective “Christian” was enough to define mission work in the past? It almost seems right from the starting point that those desiring to use this word are hesitating to use the adjective “Christian” for the vocation they have chosen – that of confronting unbelievers with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Is “Christian” just too confrontational these days?

The term “Incarnational Missions” springs from the whole contextualization movement that began in the second half of the last century. It is another “buzz” word especially appealing to the confident young people, who have no serious background in missions, but yet are sent off by many local churches for short-term forays into foreign fields. However, the word “incarnational” should not be taken up by mere humans in such a facile way to explain what they do “for the Lord”. This theological and doctrinal word should be reserved for the person of Christ alone. As the Nicene Creed put it, “Who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incar-

¹ The Rev Bassam Madany has been a lifelong radio minister for the Arab World with Back to God Hour; since his ‘retirement’ he has continued to be a prolific writer on Islam and the Arab World.

nate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man”. The use of it adjectivally is arguably a trivialization of God’s work of redemption. Might its use among many today have some connection to the utter lack of truly biblical and theological understanding among Christians?

None other than the prominent Christian leader Rev John Stott made some serious criticisms of past missionary efforts in the Foreword of *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*. He claimed that “the meager results of missions among 600 million Hindus of India and the 700 million Muslims of the world,” can be explained:

Although different answers are given to these questions, they are basically cultural. The major challenge to the worldwide Christian mission today is whether we are willing to pay the cost of following in the footsteps of our incarnate Lord in order to contextualize the Gospel. Our failure of communication is a failure of contextualization.²

In Chapter 5, ‘Hermeneutics and Culture: A Theological Perspective’, C. René Padilla, director of Ediciones Cereteza, Buenos Aires, Argentina, in commenting on ‘The Interpreter’s Historical Situation’, wrote:

Interpreters do not live in a vacuum. They live in concrete historical situations, in particular cultures. If God’s word is to reach them it must do so in terms of their own culture or not at all. This is clear from the Incarnation itself. God did not reveal himself by shouting from heaven but by speaking from within a concrete human situation: he became present as a man among men, in Jesus, a first-century Jew. Because of the very nature of God’s Word, we can only know the Word as a message contextualized in a particular situation.³

² John R. W. Stott and Robert T. Coote (eds), *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture* (W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980), p. viii.

³ Ibid., p. 68

While it is true that interpreters don't live in a vacuum, the importance of the Word of God, the Bible, in bringing Christ to the nations is their paramount tool of witness. It confronts all cultures with its truth claims. And God's word in any translation does not produce saving results until and unless the Holy Spirit has touched the heart of the listener/reader. Not all Scripture came to us through the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God, the Logos, who pre-existed before the world. His Incarnation was a unique event in salvation history; it was intended to secure the salvation of mankind. This is the clear teaching of the Bible.

As mentioned above, Rev Stott maintained that in the past, mission work produced "meager results" because missionaries had a "communication" problem in the cultures in which they ministered. They failed to contextualize the Gospel. Was Stott correct in suggesting that past missionaries did not "pay the cost" of following in the footsteps of the "incarnate" Christ? The book he edited in 1980 was a precursor to later statements of Stott that further explained his intent for "Incarnational Missions". It has not met with universal acceptance among evangelicals.

Stott delivered his "final" sermon at the Keswick Convention on 17 July 2007, where he expanded on his claim that Christians needed to "be like Christ in his Incarnation". He actually recognized that some would "recoil in horror" from such an idea.⁴ What Christian could disagree with the aim he stresses – that of being holy as God demands – and this part of his sermon is completely acceptable. But to connect our obedience and walk with the Lord to being like him in his Incarnation seems an unnecessary accretion to the plain intent of the Bible. It would not have occurred to the missionary giants of the past to speak in such terms.

⁴ John Stott, 'The model – becoming more like Christ', can be found online at http://www.sthugh.net/St_hugh_web/dr-stott-keswick-talk-07.pdf

David J. Hesselgrave has written many books about Christian missions and cross-cultural engagement. His 2005 book *Paradigms in Conflict*⁵ is full of insight and instruction. One chapter entitled “Incarnationalism and Representationalism” in particular has much to commend it. He gives a short history of Christians modeling their lives after Christ’s, and mission work after his ministry. Liberation theology and concern for the poor was a type of incarnationalist missiology, especially among Catholics, but increasingly among Protestants as well. Evangelicals continued to hold evangelization as a high priority, but after John Stott came to advocate an understanding of the Great Commission where “Jesus and his mission became the model for the church’s mission”⁶ (p. 144) things began to change. Besides liberation incarnationalists there were now holism-incarnationalists (Christ transforming individuals and societies) and conversion-incarnationalists (Christ is redeemer but also as model in how missions is done). Hesselgrave believes in the representationalist model for missions. According to Andreas Köstenberger⁷ there is a discontinuity between Jesus and his followers in the way missions are done. Jesus followers are witnesses to him, not emulators as such, and the apostle Paul is the model missionary.

Hesselgrave is in the line of the great missiologists I refer to in this paper. They would agree with him to the three questions he poses: “what are missionaries to be, to say and to do”. Are they to be “incarnations” of Christ or “disciples, witnesses, representatives, and ambassadors of Christ?”⁸ They are not, as incarnationalists claim, just a “continuation of Christ’s own personal mission” but God’s rep-

⁵ David J. Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict; 10 Key Questions in Christian Missions Today* (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 2005)

⁶ Stott and Coote (eds), *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, p. 144.

⁷ Andreas Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel’s Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1998)

⁸ Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, p. 152.

representatives who, through history, go out witnessing under God's plan of redemption, as the Apostle Paul did. What they say is the Good News of salvation in Christ alone whose incarnation, life and atoning work is unique to him for the saving of his elect from all the nations. And they do as Paul did, preach the obedience of faith, build up the churches and seek believers to grow up unto Christ. This is the representational model in witnessing to Christ.

I have been engaged in missions to Muslims since 1953, and by the mid-1970s, I became increasingly concerned about these new trends in missions. In 1985, I called a meeting for concerned missionary leaders to discuss the spread of the Contextualization movement. We met at *Four Brooks Conference Center*, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in July of that year. I read a paper on "Re-Thinking Missions Today: Neo-Evangelical Missiology and the Christian Mission to Islam."⁹

Dr Frederick W. Evans, Jr, an authority on contemporary American church history, read a paper on "Neo-Evangelicalism and Its Impact on Missions: An Historical Overview." The following are excerpts from his informative and valuable essay:

Summing up our discussion, the debate narrows down to the question as to whether eternal issues or this-worldly concerns are primary. The Neo-evangelical has ever increasingly been tending to major on the affairs of this life. How revealing is the title given to the published papers of the Willowbank Consultation, "Down to Earth!" with John Stott acknowledging that the answers given "are all basically cultural".¹⁰ Then, too, the Neo-evangelical joins his Liberal counter-parts in rejecting any dichotomy between body and soul. One missions professor, a veteran of many conferences and consultations, has asked, "Does the bugaboo of dichotomizing, the one great, unforgivable missiological sin of the 80's, keep us from

⁹ www.unashamedofthegospel.org/rethinking_missions_today.cfm.

¹⁰ Stott and Coote, *Down to Earth*, p. viii.

distinguishing between the relative importance of the body and material things and the eternal value of the soul?"¹¹ Wherever we have turned a hard heart to man's physical and material needs, we stand reproved by God's Word. But wherever we have turned a blind eye to the spiritual needs of men, we stand doubly condemned. May God grant us the sight and insight of F.W.H. Myers "St Paul":

Only like souls I see the folk thereunder,
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings,
Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder,
Sadly contented with a show of things.
Then with a rush the intolerable craving
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call:
O to save these, to perish for their saving,
Die for their life, be offered for them all!¹²

Some of those who advocate "Incarnational Missions" suggest, but rarely substantiate, that past mission work was basically a failure. I suppose it depends on what one believes is success. This is not always easy to determine. Some faithful missionaries could point to little success in numbers of converts. Yet from its earliest days, Christianity spread and took hold, from the Mediterranean world into Europe, and then to the entire world, because of the total dedication of missionaries to the cause of Christ and the salvation of souls. They believed in the importance of mastering the languages of the peoples among whom they lived and worked. They studied their cultures in order to understand those with whom they dealt. Their models for missions were St Paul, Timothy, Titus, and the countless "lay" missionaries who spread the faith. They were living examples of the Holy Spirit's activity in human lives. For them the "imperative" of

¹¹ John A. Gration, "Key Issues in Missiology," in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, (January 1984), p. 77.

¹² www.unashamedofthegospel.org/impact_missions.cfm.

the Great Commission was transformed into an ‘indicative’, thus making their mission work, a spontaneous and joyful activity.

I will mention just a few of those faithful workers in past mission work. I knew them as fellow laborers in the vineyards of *Daru’l Islam* (House of Islam). It was the general rule among mission agencies in the early years that the native languages must be learned. These people mastered the local languages so that they could be fully equipped to give a clear testimony about the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Romans 12, they offered themselves as living sacrifices in the service of the Lord of missions.

While studying at the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1950-1953) and later at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan (1957-1958), I got acquainted with the writings of some great missionaries whose works impacted my own fifty-year ministry. For example, Roland Allen’s books emphasized the relevance of Pauline missiology to missions in our times, such as his “Missionary Methods: St Paul’s or Ours?”¹³ and “The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church: and the Causes which Hinder it.”¹⁴ Hesselgrave points to Allen as a prime example of the “Pauline Model” of missions. His central focus was on “Paul’s missionary message and methods of evangelizing people and planting churches as he was directed and energized by the Holy Spirit”.¹⁵

Another missionary expert was Dr Harry Boer, who labored in Northern Nigeria, and authored “Pentecost and Missions”.¹⁶ I was impressed by his zeal and commitment to the cause of missions in

¹³ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St Paul’s Or Ours?* (World Dominion Press, London, 1953)

¹⁴ Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church, and the Causes which Hinder it* (World Dominion Press, London, 1956)

¹⁵ Hesselgrave, *Paradigms in Conflict*, p. 157

¹⁶ Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*, with Foreword by Dr. W. A. Visser’t Hooft (W. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1961)

Africa. In none of Allen's or Boer's works, was there any reference to a model similar to "Incarnational Missions".

When surveying the lives of William Carey, Reginald Heber, Henry Martyn, Samuel Zwemer, and William Temple Gairdner, it matters little what "label" is used to describe their work. Their legacies witness to the fruits of their labors in Muslim lands. Take for example the life of the Rev Henry Harris Jessup, the author of "Kamil Abdul Massih: A Syrian convert from Islam to Christianity."¹⁷ He kept copies of the correspondence between Kamil and his father, and translated it into English, to tell us the gripping story of one of the early Muslim converts and martyrs in the Levant. Dr Jessup's autobiography, "Fifty three years in Syria,"¹⁸ is a mine of information about the beginning of Protestant missions in the Middle East. He was one of the founders of the American University of Beirut, and a close friend of Cornelius Van Dyck, whose translation of the Bible into Arabic is a classic. Both Henry Jessup and Dr Van Dyck became multicultural persons in the best meaning of the term. The story of the Rev James Dennis, professor of theology at the Presbyterian Seminary in Beirut illustrates the keen sense of how an American missionary-scholar even changed his name to avoid a serious misunderstanding that would have occurred were his English name used. His two-volume book on Dogmatics was published in 1890, under the title of "Kitab Nidham al-Ta'leem Fi 'l Allahut Al-Qaweem".¹⁹ In Arabic, his name appeared as "Rev James Ennes, al-Amercani". He did that because "Dennis", if transliterated into Arabic, meant "unclean". So by dropping the letter "D" he became Rev. James "Ennes", which in Arabic meant "human".

¹⁷ Rev Henry Harris Jessup, *Kamil Abdul Messih: A Syrian Convert from Islam to Christianity* (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1898), found on Middle East Resources, www.unashamedofthegospel.org (2008)

¹⁸ www.arabicbible.com/christian/53yearsinsyria/contents.html

¹⁹ Rev James Ennes, *Kitab Nidham al-Ta'leem Fi 'l Allahut Al-Qaweem* (American Press, Beirut, 1890 A.D., 1305 A. H.)

In 1964, I met retired missionary Helen Noordewier in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She had a fruitful ministry serving as a missionary nurse at the United Presbyterian Hospital in Al-Mahallah al-Kubra, in the Delta of Egypt, from 1924 to 1964. She studied Arabic for five years in preparation for her work of mercy, and read her Bible in Arabic. The last time I visited her at a home for the aged, she gave me her copy of the Qur'an, printed in Cairo, in 1371 A.H., 1952 A.D. I'll never forget her parting words: "Rev. Madany, I would like to tell you that I still have my devotions in Arabic!" She went to be with the Lord in February, 1987, at the age of 94!

Then, near our home in South Holland, Illinois, lived a retired missionary, Cornelia Dalenberg (1893-1988). She was recruited by Dr Samuel Zwemer to serve as a Missionary Nurse in Arabia (Kuwait, Bahrain, and Oman). Upon her retirement, she came regularly to our home and tutored my wife Shirley in Classical Arabic. I inherited her pocketsize Arabic Qur'an, with some statistical notes on certain Qur'anic *Surahs* and *Ayahs* written by her in the inside back cover. She identified so fully with the Arab population of the area, that they gave her an honorary name, *Sharifa* (the Noble Woman).

Another reference to a giant in the faith was the late Rev Dr Harvey Staal, a friend of Cornelia. He labored as a Reformed Church missionary in the Persian Gulf area for many years. He had mastered Arabic to such an extent, that when living in Kuwait, he won an Arabic-language prize offered on Kuwaiti Television. His lasting accomplishment was his work on transcribing, keying, and publishing Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151, perhaps one of the earliest translations of the Bible into Arabic, circa 867 A.D., 253 A.H. This translation was done in Damascus, by a Christian layman, Bishr ibn Al-Sirri, from Syriac into Arabic. Dr Staal published his English translation of Codex 151, to enable students of Eastern Christianity to become aware of this important work that included comments on some crucial New Testament texts.

The late Professor J. Windrow Sweetman, a giant missionary scholar of the last century, labored among the Muslims of India before the Partition of 1947. He devoted his life to the study of Islam, and authored several books on historical-theological subjects, that pointed to his fervent love for reaching Muslims with the Gospel of salvation.²⁰

To illustrate what genuine scholarship joined to fervent faith can accomplish in missions to Muslims, I urge the reader to read the Appendix to this paper, which is an article about Professor Sweetman that my dear wife Shirley wrote for the February, 2001 issue of the *Missionary Monthly*, a journal published in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Finally, I would like to endorse two recent works by Professor Rodney Stark of Baylor University in Texas, which throw light on the spread of early Christianity throughout the Mediterranean world. He summarized the astonishing spread of the Christian faith during the second half of the first century, in these pithy words: “Within twenty years of the crucifixion, Christianity was transformed from a faith based in rural Galilee, to an urban movement reaching far beyond Palestine. In the beginning it was borne by nameless itinerant preachers and by rank-and-file Christians who shared their faith with relatives and friends.”²¹

How True! It was the deep faith of those “itinerant preachers” coupled with the spontaneity of their proclamation of the Good News

²⁰ J. Windrow Sweetman, *The Bible in Islam* (The British and Foreign Bible Society, London 1954). J. Windrow Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology: A Study of the Interpretation of Theological Ideas in the Two Religions Part II Volume I* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955). J. Windrow Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology Part II Volume II* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967).

²¹ Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became An Urban Movement and Conquered Rome* (HarperOne, An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2006), p. 25. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (HarperOne, An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 1996).

that secured the conversion of countless men and women within the Roman Empire. No trendy missiological clichés encumbered their joyful teaching and sharing of the message of Christ with neighbors and friends. This spirit of utter devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ enabled the early Christians, to accomplish marvels. Many have since followed in their footsteps. They may not always have known success as some modern missiologists define it, but whatever failures they are judged to have been a part of, should not be blamed on their inability to incarnationalize the Gospel. They knew the incarnation was unique to our Lord and not something that could be conceptualized into a pattern easily imitated and continued. They were more interested in holding to a high view of Scripture, its translation into the languages of the cultures in which they ministered, and the sovereignty of God over its success in converting souls to the Glory of God.

Appendix

J. W. Sweetman: Pioneer Missionary Scholar

We have written a great deal about the late Samuel Zwemer, and have recently promoted the work of the late Harvey Staal. It is time to do homage to the late J. Windrow Sweetman, surely a giant scholar of the last century whose work, is rapidly gathering dust and being forgotten, and yet remains a veritable treasure.

James Windrow Sweetman was Vice-Principal of the Henry Martyn School of Islamics, at Aligarh, India, and then Professor of Islamics at the Selly Oak College, Birmingham, England. He died in 1966 while the second volume of Part II of his masterly work on “Islam and Christian Theology” was going through the press. We can be thankful for what has been preserved of Dr Sweetman's great work on the subject. It consists of an historical survey covering the relation between the Eastern Christian Church and Islam, the Middle Ages in Europe and the era of the Crusades, the Preaching Orders of the Church versus Islam, and the “polemical climax” personified in the champions of their respective faiths whose weapon was the pen, not the sword: Ricoldo of Montecroce and Nicholas of Cusa on the Christian side, Ibn Hazm and Al Ghazzali for Islam.

Professor Sweetman shows that the modern dialogue between the two great faiths is not to be accomplished by easy, popular methods, but demands rigorous and dedicated intellects on both sides. His own contribution sets an example of the fine scholarship, which the Christian/Islamic debate requires. Following are some choice paragraphs from the first chapter of that important booklet, *The Bible in Islam*.

Six hundred years had passed since Christ walked the earth and yet no one had put His words into the tongue of the Arab. [...] The characteristic name by which both Jews and Christians were known among the Arabs was the *People of the Book*, which meant the people of the Bible. Yet that by which they were famous was kept as a hidden treasure, hoarded and not cast abroad like seed to bring forth fruit. (Pp. 9-10)

Here is the tragedy of the Church at the time of the rise of Islam. All truth demanded that, when Muhammad's spirit was stirred with the needs of his people and when he was groping after Him who could save and unify, he should have had in his hands the true Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Instead it was left for him to learn by hearsay from the lips of uninstructed or imperfectly instructed Christians what those Scriptures contained. It seems quite evident to me that initially Muhammad considered that he was putting Biblical truth into language which could be understood by his own countrymen. It was to be an "Arabic Quran" to be recited in a familiar tongue. And if it had been a translation of the Christian Scripture he might have been like a Luther giving the living Word to the "raw Saxon" or a Tyndale who unlocked the treasures of Scripture for the man of common speech. (P. 11)

What is important, and to our mind a tragedy, is that the translation of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments had to wait till more than a century at least after the experience of Muhammad on Mount Hira. The first was perhaps a translation from the Latin made in Spain by John of Seville in the early eighth century, and probably from the Vulgate. The second, if we are to believe the reporters, was by a Muslim who made his translation in the latter part of the same century at the command of the Caliph Harun Ar Rashid. Then the renowned translator of the Greek philosophers into Arabic, the Syrian Christian physician Hunayn son of Isaac, tried his hand in the ninth century. The earliest translation of the New Testament I have ever read and handled is one made in the eleventh century by a Christian of Baghdad, a piece of work marked by devotion and ability. But oh! The pity of this long delay.²²ⁱ (P. 12)

Now, after a lapse of time in which the Christian Scriptures has remained still unknown to them, Muslims came from a newly fixed point of view to the Old Testament and the New Testament, placed in their hands by tardy Christians. It is at first a source of gratification to them,

²² J.W. Sweetman was unaware of the 1953 discovery of Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151. It is one of the oldest Arabic translations of the New Testament done by a Syrian Christian in the latter part of the ninth century. Most likely, due to the Mongolian invasion of the Middle East in the thirteenth century, the manuscript was smuggled to the safety of the Monastery of St. Catherine at Mt. Sinai.

for the Quran commends the earlier Scripture. But when they come to examine the newly discovered book they find that it does not agree at all with that to which they have gradually become accustomed. This Gospel tells how Jesus really died and so it cannot be the Injil which Muhammad commended. That was a revelation which God gave to Jesus, a book which marked His prophethood; but this consists of several books by disciples called Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and letters written by Paul and John, James and Peter. And so they conclude that these writings are not the original Gospel but that the Jews and the Christians have corrupted the primitive revelation. (Pp.17-18)

Sweetman advocated a loving approach to the Muslim. In chapter IV under the title “The Missions of Penitence and Love” he wrote:

Should not therefore the missionary as the representative of the Church of Christ as well as the ambassador of Christ Himself be penitent when, through an initial fault, the Arabs were not given the Scripture in their own tongue? Francis of Assisi went with the message of love into the armed camp of the Saracens, counting not his dear life dear unto him if only he might commend the love of Christ; and Raymond Lull, whose all absorbing theme was the Love of the Beloved, came at last to martyrdom for Christ’s sake. These and many others sought victory for the love of Christ and tried to break down the barriers which centuries of estrangement and violence had strengthened; but it was given to Henry Martyn to dedicate all his great intellectual powers, the qualities of his loving and gentle spirit, the passion of his soul, to make restitution for what was withheld from Islam in the past, to see that the Word of God was not only translated but made into an instrument whereby the truth of Christ might speak to all who followed the Islamic path. (P. 24)

So now the cross which is presented to the Muslim’s gaze is the cross of sacrifice and passion. The story of Abdullah and Sabat seems to be prophetic. They had been friends and then Abdullah heard the voice of God and found peace in Christ. He fled from his native place but was recognized in the streets of Bukhara by Sabat, his one-time friend, who denounced him. He was mutilated and martyred by a mob, Sabat standing by the while and consenting to the deed, like Paul at the death of Stephen. Fiery-tempered and uncontrolled as he remained even to the very

end, something came into the life of Sabat at that hour of his friend's death. He tells us himself, 'He looked at me...but not with anger. He looked at me...but it was with compassion and the countenance of forgiveness...and when he bowed his head to take the fatal stroke, it was as if all Bukhara exclaimed, "What new thing is this?"'

Brought by God's hand and with the vision of the face of his dying friend, it was this fierce Sabat who joined with the gentle Martyn to give back the word of reconciling love to the Muslims of India and Persia. Henry Martyn himself died, with the sacrifice of all that he so richly was and with a most willing surrender of his loving heart to his task, in a lonely village in Asia Minor about the age when 'the young Prince of Glory died'.

Such is the true way to commend the Gospel to Islam, the way of penitence and sacrifice. It was William Temple who said cogently: 'You can never say to men, Go to the Cross; you can only say Come! We must stand under the shadow of the Cross where our tears of penitence flow when we beckon to our brothers in Islam to come and 'see whether there was any sorrow like unto His sorrow'. It is not to be done with violence, whether of arms or conceit and superiority, but with a sense of standing ourselves under judgment of a task undone, a task to which Christ's love would fain have constrained us, and of ourselves as sinners saved by the grace which we commend to men. (P. 25)

In the last chapter titled, "*The Living Word*", J.W. Sweetman closes with these final words: Listen to a final testimony from the lips of an Arab:

For by His Word He cleft the rock of my heart and opened it as a grave. So I see He does to the hearts of other men as evil and as wicked as I was. Verily it is His Word which makes of a wolf a meek and willing lamb, and of a ravenous beast a mild and docile creature... Thus was I led to Jesus Christ and to salvation. (P. 44)

FAITH IS LIVED OUT IN COMMUNITY: QUESTIONS OF NEW COMMUNITY FOR ARAB MUSLIMS WHO HAVE EMBRACED A CHRISTIAN FAITH

By Kathryn Kraft¹

1 Introduction

An increasing number of Muslims in the Arab world are being exposed to new ideas and are questioning the beliefs of the community into which they were born. Several of these individuals are choosing to embrace a Christian faith, a decision which can affect every aspect of their lives. Religious conversion usually entails a rejection of one's past (Iannaccone 1995:291), and conversion out of Islam into a Christian faith can be construed by fellow Muslims as a betrayal not only of their religion, but also of family and of community. This article investigates the social considerations faced by converts from a Muslim background to a Christian faith, in the light of the strong social forces opposed to that decision and their own strong desire to live in community.

Following a faith decision, converts often work hard and face deep levels of frustration as they seek to develop new communities and redefine their existing communities. This

¹ Kathryn Kraft (katiek@worksmail.net) has lived and worked in the Middle East since 2001. She has a MA in Middle Eastern Studies from the American University of Beirut, and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Bristol, England. She has worked in a variety of fields including research, human rights, emergency relief and social development. Currently she manages programming and advises on social development issues for an international humanitarian agency, and is pursuing publication of her first full-length novel, a coming-of-age love story set in Damascus, Syria.

includes their search for, and relation to, a church or other Christian community, as well as the dangers that they face as they seek to live their new lives. An essential element of this process is the choice of a life partner, especially since many converts are single when they make their decision and their marriage choice is inevitably affected by their faith choice.

These questions were investigated as a part of my doctoral research in Sociology during 2004-2008, including in-depth interviews with Arabs of a Muslim background who have converted to a Christian faith in the Middle East, mostly but not uniquely Lebanon and Egypt, and participant observation in their circles of friends and places of worship. The definition of convert that I use in this paper is broad and refers to a self-defined community of people born into a Muslim family who now profess a faith that is both different from what they were taught at home and somehow tied to Christian beliefs, regardless of how they reached the decision of professing a new faith.²

² Conversion in sociological writings refers to any turning, changing or redirecting of faith or of thinking. One of the more stringent definitions I have referenced is “a definite break with one's former identity such that the past and the present are antithetical in some important respects” (Barker and Currie 1985:305; see also Travisano 1970). Other theorists emphasise that it is difficult to define an individual as a convert, as anyone who has undergone any change may be defined as such (Snow and Machalek 1984, Staples and Mauss 1987, Carrothers 2004:104). Based on this understanding, while I am aware of the sensitivities of the term in many circles, I use it throughout this paper, in recognition of its academic meaning, to refer to people who have broken with, or weakened, their loyalty to former beliefs and developed an allegiance to Christ.

2 Pursuit of Unity

Considering both the diversity of Christian groups and ideological inclinations, as well as the diversity among Muslim-background followers of Christianity themselves, converts often expect to find complete unity and cohesiveness among Christians and are soon disappointed. The diversity among converts³ means that they themselves often do not understand each other very well. Fenggang Yang reported in his presentation of different types of identity integration among Chinese converts to Christianity in the United States that it was hard for people to work out their identities, and that people found it especially difficult to interact with people of a similar background who experienced Christianity in a different way from themselves (Yang 1999:186).

Nonetheless, the members of the Chinese church he studied, where most people were converts, found unity in prioritizing their chosen identity as Christians over their ascribed identity as Chinese (Yang 1999:173). Similarly, many MBB's⁴ interviewed in this study expressed that it was very important to them to be united as believers in the community of converts. One couple told of how they were among the first converts known in their region and so they worked with missi-

³ This is an issue investigated in depth in my thesis, and in other academic works on conversion in the Muslim world. For more detail, see: Kraft, K. 2008. "Community and Identity Among Arabs of Muslim Background who Choose to Follow a Christian Faith" in *Department of Sociology*, Bristol: University of Bristol)

⁴ MBB stands for Muslim Background Believer, and is a common term used to refer to people born into a Muslim background who have embraced some form of Christian faith or believe in Jesus. Various other terms are also suggested among practitioners in the Arab world (Believer of a Muslim Background (BMB), Followers of 'Isa (Jesus), etc.); in this paper I use MBB because it is a widespread term which, though controversial, seems less controversial than other identifications that have been recommended.

onaries to start their own church. The husband explains how any hint of division has been problematic for him:

The Bible I have not really had trouble with, have always felt that it was pretty much good, but also I've felt that the church is hard to adjust to. It's hard to accept what the church is, what it does. There's so much denominationalism.

His wife continued, explaining how division is why they want to avoid affiliating with any one denomination:

For example, the pentecostals come in and want to do their thing, but we don't want there to be separate pentecostals in the church. We are very determined as the [national] church to avoid denominationalism, and so we do this by fighting against any missionaries that try to instil this. Also, for example, we have had people in our groups speaking in tongues without translation, and we feel that this just brings division, because the Bible is very clear that tongues should only be accompanied by translation, so we don't allow it. So far, there are not divided groups of believers in our country.

As this couple increases its exposure to more diverse groups of Christians, meets more missionaries, and meets Christians from other Arab countries who have different ways of defining their own faith and adhere to different missiological theories, they become more and more determined to avoid such division in their new church. While other people who have spent time with their church have reported that there are divisions developing, the couple continues to express a strong desire to preserve unity if at all possible.

In the same way that this woman is opposed to pentecostalism, which she sees bringing division, others spoke harshly against the Catholic churches, and yet others against people who choose not to attend a mainstream or established church, and so on and so forth. Those who expressed both that they value unity and that they are supportive of all types of Christi-

ans often did not actually have any regular contact with different Christians, so were speaking from a theoretical perspective, not from experience. So while unity among Christians and among converts was expressed as an important value to converts, it proved an elusive goal for most.

3 Gathering MBBs together

As people join Christian groups, they find their new identities reinforced in community. People who have close regular contact with other converts find this to be especially true, and they work hard to reinforce their identity by seeking opportunities to be with people who share both their background and their faith. As Howard Becker argued, deviance⁵ is reinforced by companionship with others of the same mindset: “From a sense of common fate, from having to face the same problems, grows a deviant subculture: a set of perspectives and understandings of what the world is like and how to deal with it, and a set of routine activities based on these perspective identities. Membership in such a group solidifies a deviant identity” (Becker 1991:38).

Group membership, especially membership in a minority group, has often been found to reinforce self-esteem and provide a stronger sense of identity (Spinner-Halev and Theiss-Morse 2003:517). Therefore it is a strong desire among members of disadvantaged groups to be a part of a group, but a group that distinguishes itself from others. “People feel better about themselves if they believe their group is different from

⁵ Deviance is a sociological concept of diversion from social norms; religious conversion is often referred to as religious deviance (see, for example, Stark and Finke 2000), a term especially suited when considering the strong pressures against leaving Islam.

other groups in ways that demonstrate their group is the best” (Spinner-Halev and Theiss-Morse 2003:519).

Based on this argument, we might expect those converts who have regular contact with other converts to be more sure of themselves and stronger in developing their convert identities. This may be true, but my research sample was too small to confirm or disprove this hypothesis. Most fellowship groups I met had both convert and born-Christian members. Those groups that were comprised primarily of converts were new groups; few of their members had been converted for more than a year or two.

Sociological research indicates that is not unusual for deviants to actually not have very close contact with their fellow deviants (Downes and Rock 2003:26), and this seems to be true among many new Christian believers. Many participants reported struggling frequently with loneliness, as they found it was hard to find co-religionists with whom to spend time, and when they did, they often did not feel the intimacy they hoped for.

Several participants also reported practical obstacles to developing a community with other converts. For example, one woman lives on the ground floor of her building and so her door is open to the neighbourhood, which makes her feel uncomfortable hosting Christians or Christian meetings in her home. While she would like to take the initiative in building a community, she feels dependent on others' interest and availability. Another couple told me that in their group of converts, for a few years they always met in the home of missionaries, because all the converts were single and living with their families. Since their families were not interested in Christianity, it was not practicable to hold Bible studies or Christian meetings in their homes. However, as groups grow and converts marry, these obstacles tend to become less significant.

As the number of converts in a region grows and the group also grows, a different set of challenges presents itself, and enthusiasm and commitment can decrease as people become more anonymous. There is often a subsequent loss of cohesiveness (Pitchford, Bader and Stark 2001:385-386). One man, who is one of the most experienced known converts in the city where he lives, has seen the number of converts grow from almost none to a group that is too large to keep together. He sees that there is good in having different groups for different types of people, but also misses the cohesiveness that he felt when there were few converts:

About five years ago, we were all together, but back then there were more or less no families, we were all single, although we came from different socio-economic backgrounds. But we all knew each other, and when we were all seeing each other regularly, we were sharing our lives with each other, sharing things. Not anymore, now there are lots of different groups and each group has its own ideas about things. I know this is because there are more of us now, and it is safer to be in smaller groups, but it's also because we have divided into groups where we feel more comfortable. It's very very important for us to meet and spend time together.

Even when groups become differentiated and diffuse, there are still benefits reported in regular contact with other converts. Susan Rothbaum discussed the importance for leavers of New Religious Movements (NRM)⁶ to spend time with other leavers talking through their experiences. It is helpful

⁶ NRM is a term used in sociology of religion to refer to religious movements that appear, often sprouting out of existing religious institutions, and attract a large number of followers in a relatively short period of time. The term can refer to any religious group that fits that description, but most NRMs are also characterised by requiring a high degree of unquestioning loyalty from its members.

for them to share a sense of what they left behind and the frustrations that they felt with their former identity (Rothbaum 1988:217).

Such groups help people as they take the time they need to place distance between themselves and their pasts, to evaluate their change and begin to adjust. Rothbaum also found, though, that support groups of leavers sometimes also fostered bitterness. Similarly, although communities of converts often helped each other a great deal in processing their pasts and their change, they also occasionally became a setting in which anger and fierce attitudes against Islam and unappreciative Christian groups could grow.

Anne Sofie Roald, in her study of Scandinavian women converts to Islam, found that having contact with other converts was important, and helped people as they learned to distinguish between what they eventually discovered was “cultural” Islam and “true” Islam. Many converts do not see a distinction at first, but they eventually reach a point of working to reshape Islamic ideas to their own context (Roald 2006:50).

Some participants in this study went through a similar process, eventually discovering that they had more choices in shaping Christianity to their situation than they had originally realised. Having experienced converts around who can share about their experiences and give advice to newer converts is helpful to this process. ‘The “new” converts jump directly into the “old” converts’ cultural sphere and internalize convert reconceptualizations directly, without having to go through the culturalization process into the Muslim immigrant community’ (Roald 2006:52). When such a community and older converts are around to help work through contextualization of their new faith, they find they are able to start living it without expending as much effort on working out for themselves how to adhere their identities.

In particular, they are able to avoid imprudent adaptations to Arab Christian culture that they later on decide are not necessary to their faith, such as eating pork or praying certain ritual prayers. In addition, relationships with other converts help them to think through their stories, or how they develop their discourses of change. They also help young converts learn how to defend their new faith; they find that that too can be a shared experience with others like them (Bourque 2006:242-244).

There is an assumed hierarchy of respect among the members of the community of Muslim-background Christians. This hierarchy reflects the social hierarchy of many Arab communities which is usually according to gender and age. For example, women are often expected to follow the lead of men in their lives, and a convert who is older by age generally assumes the respect of a younger convert, often regardless of who has been a Christian believer for longer.

One woman who had been a convert for about ten years and was in her mid-forties at the time of our interview told me about a young convert girl she had recently met at a Christian church conference. The girl was from her hometown and was only 20 years old, but had believed in a Christian faith for five years. The older woman told me that as soon as she met her, she sat down with the younger woman and told her that she should not confront her family, that that would only make problems in the house and was not necessary. She told her not to do anything which would entail her leaving her home, as she is too young and should not do anything rash. Instead, she should be patient and not tell anyone, "I became a Christian."

As the older woman told me this, she indicated that as soon as she met the younger woman she saw her as someone who needed her mentoring and so, regardless of what the younger woman's needs might be, she took it upon herself to give advi-

ce. From younger converts who have been mentored and advised by older converts, I never heard a complaint about such treatment; indeed, some wished they had been more cared for by older believers, converts or not.

There is a problematic element in this, too, which is a resulting in-group bias. While belonging to a group of similar people helps build self-esteem and a stronger sense of belonging, it can also lead to members of the group failing to acknowledge criticism, principally to seeing one's group as superior to other groups, especially those groups that may be perceived as dominant (Spinner-Halev and Theiss-Morse 2003:520-521). Some participants, particularly those who were at the forefront of efforts to gather converts together, demonstrated such a tendency towards defensiveness which created the space for them to describe themselves, the community of converts, as superior to other Christian groups.

4 Relating to Christians

Most people from a Muslim background who choose to embrace a Christian faith desire a connection with the historical religion of Christianity. Those who have no previous contact with other people who share their faith look first to Christian churches to find a community. Others come to belief through the influence of a Christian, whether Arab or foreign, and therefore connect their faith with Christianity. While it is true that some Arab and foreign Christians, especially missionaries, encourage converts to stay away from Christian churches because of cultural polarization, many others bring them to church. The few MBBs who do not automatically consider attending church are usually those who make a decision influenced by a fellow convert who avoids introducing the new believer to church. As the number of converts is gradually incre-

asing, we can see the number of people converting due to the influence of a convert increasing, too, so perhaps fewer converts will choose to associate with Christian churches.

However, among the participants in this study, most sought out a relationship with a church, though many expressed deep frustration with their chosen congregations. Gaudeul documented similar frustrations among the MBBs in his research. He found that many of them were not welcomed into churches and that many churches deliberately delayed granting baptism to converts from Islam. He suggests that this is largely due to church members' fear of repercussions, the sense of historical antipathy between Christians and Muslims, and mistrust of Muslims (Gaudeul 1999:268-270). However, he found that a Christian community was essential in helping a convert through the process of changing, in understanding his/her conversion and developing a theology by which to live (Gaudeul 1999:245).

In the literature about conversion to Islam, we read of similar dynamics about the relationship between born Muslims and converts. For example, Nicole Bourque writes that many of the women converts to Islam she studied felt that the born Muslims they met imposed much of their culture on the converts. She suggests that the born Muslims assumed that they could teach the converts to be just like them because they were the more authentic Muslims (Bourque 2006:244).

Many participants in this study had a similar experience. One woman told me that, after she had made her decision, which for her was connected to the sense of freedom that she sensed in Christian doctrine, she told some Christian co-workers about her change. This was their response:

Some of them gave me a written prayer to Mary and said I should read it before I went to sleep at night. It had some things that I really couldn't say, and still couldn't to this day, such as "Ya Um-

Allah” (oh, mother of God). So I wondered, what's the difference, Christianity and Islam are the same: all these traditions/rituals that I have to do!

This led her to question her new faith, but after she met with another Christian friend who explained that those rituals were not necessary, and that she could live her new faith according to her own conscience and sense of what God wanted, she was reaffirmed in her decision.

Meanwhile, in other instances, converts may be welcomed and honoured in churches because of their choice. Yvonne Haddad writes that woman converts to Islam in the United States are often empowered and respected, becoming leaders in Muslim circles. This is partially because they become well-versed in Islamic teachings, but also because their conversion contributes to the credibility of the religion (Haddad 2006:38-39). Many Christian converts out of Islam who leave their Arab homes and move to the West experience this, becoming pastors, public speakers, or even missionaries sent by Western churches back to the Middle East.

Converts who remain in the Middle East tell a very different story, though. They feel they are not respected by born Christians, especially not within the Christian churches that they begin to attend. One man explained that he would very much like to help with the church ministries, to study and learn and become a leader, but he has never felt as if the Christians want to listen to him:

That's the big issue with us: it is that the church does not care for us like it should. They would never think of having us serve in the church, but they really do love us and we feel very loved by church people who come over and visit and look after us. But they don't ever really involve us, and they try to keep their distance.

He emphasised that he had felt very welcomed by the church, and very loved by members of the church, but that that has not translated to trust; he does not feel that they trust him or could respect him.

Another woman told a story of an experience that she had which taught her not to expect to have any real intimate relationship with a born Christian. She realised that they wanted to help her but were not willing to accept her help in return. She became friends with a Christian woman who is her age, and whose daughter was the same age as her own. The Christian woman helped her new friend quite a bit, often having her and her daughter stay over when her husband was travelling, and calling up frequently to see how they were doing. One day the Christian woman told her convert friend a personal secret in confidence, but then phoned her a day or two later to say that the information had been wrong. When the convert woman learned later that the secret had been true, she felt betrayed because she understood from this that the Christian woman did not trust her; she wanted to be the convert's confidant but did not want to depend on her in return. Many people spoke of their relationship to born Christians as being one-way, and expressed concern that true friendship was not possible.

Outsiders in a group often try very hard to do what they need to do to be accepted (Barker and Currie 1985:312). As people seek to play a role well and are confirmed in their performance by members of the in-group, there is increased trust and commitment to the relationship, and a sense of belonging in the group (Burke and Stets 1999:352). The converse is seen in situations where people do not feel trusted by the members of the in-group. For example, the young man who was disappointed by Christians, because no Christian family would consent to allowing him to marry their daughters, feels like an outsider among born Christians. Instead of establishing trust,

interactions like these reinforce mutual suspicion between born Christians and Muslim-background converts, so the young man now prefers not to spend time with Arab Christians at all.

On the other hand, other participants who reported a lack of trust in Christian churches when they first converted, enjoyed improved relations as they proved their loyalty. A number of participants told of visiting different churches, sometimes literally knocking on doors and at other times by the recommendation of friends, looking for someone who would be willing to baptise them. They usually quickly learned that only a few churches were willing to baptise Muslims, because of suspicion and the fear of government reprisal, but those churches also wanted assurances that the person was sincere about his/her conversion.

One participant recounted that when he first converted, he and a friend went to a church to ask the pastor to mentor them and oversee them as they evangelized other Muslims:

He saw that we were young but very motivated. But he also saw that we were only 18-19 years old, and there were lots of 18-19 year olds that he worked with, so he saw us as among the teenagers. He didn't think we could handle the responsibility of such a ministry, nor the pressure: we might turn back, change our minds about it. So we left, but one year after I believed – we were living in a village far from the city then – there were 10 believers! We had gone from 2 to 10 in a year!... Then we went back to the church and the pastor welcomed us in, and now he was ready to work with us. We were baptised in the church, disciplined by him, and he and the church introduced us to other converts that we hadn't known before.

Although this participant has maintained good relations with the church for years since the pastor finally baptised him, and he still helps in the ministry of the church, he too expres-

sed a sense that he is not trusted by Christians, and that they seem to keep their distance from him and his MBB group:

People in church don't see any of this (our economic and legal struggles), there is NOTHING there. They give us nothing. We are treated like beggars, distanced. When we need something or want to communicate something, we are told to go through a friend of ours who is a Christian-born Arab, not to talk to them directly. They don't like having us around. Finally they gave us our own floor in the church to meet. That was good, but it also was a way of staying separate from them.

Therefore, the emotional distance that Christian-born church members maintain from their Muslim-born co-religionists may never be completely eradicated, even by those converts who continue to actively interact with Christians.

This is related to a lack of confidence in the validity of people's faith decision: some participants told me that not even they have the confidence that other converts will not return to Islam, so it is not surprising that some people who were born Christian would share that suspicion. It is also reflective of the history of polarity between Christians and Muslims; it is not easy for many Christians who have lived for centuries as a minority in a Muslim-majority region, to accept into their circle someone from an ethnic group that has long been seen as dominant and antagonistic. After all, in both Lebanon and Egypt, where I conducted the majority of my interviews, there has been a great deal of violent tension between Christians and Muslims, including in the participants' own lifetimes.

Roald found that in the community of Muslims she studied in the West, Muslim-born people were segregated from Christian-born. At first this segregation was largely because of suspicion on the part of the larger community of those born Muslim. However, as converts grew in their numbers and their understanding of Islam, the born-Muslims became more wil-

ling to welcome them in. By then the converts had developed their own sense of superiority; they saw themselves as following a less culturally-tainted Islam, and they had already formed their own groups. Therefore, the segregation continued (Roald 2006:53).

This seems to be happening among many MBBs. One convert said that a group of born Christians was hesitant to collaborate on a project with his group of converts, apparently because of a lack of trust. So, he said, he and his MBB friends would just go off and do their own ministry, which would be more effective since they understood Muslim culture better.

A common term to describe the community of Muslim-background Christian believers is a “minority within a minority.” This refers to the fact that they are a small group of Christians who are neglected for being a minority within the Christian community, which is a minority in Arab countries. Different participants saw this dynamic in different ways. One participant told me that his goal is to develop a new collective identity, with their own heritage and traditions. He is attending a Christian music school so that he can start building a unique heritage for people from a Muslim background:

I want to develop worship for my background. We are growing, raising in our numbers, but we are still a small community in a small community. It's good for us to make something for ourselves, and for the new generations.

Another participant took a slightly different view of the place of the community of converts within the larger Christian community in their country. He believes that they are presently a small, weak group within Christianity, but that they should seek to be something bigger. Instead of developing a distinct minority identity among Christians, he wants to see MBBs play a role alongside the Christian church. His argument is that as long as they are seen as a community within the

Christian community, they will never be independent of the expectations, prejudice and culture of the larger Christian minority in his country.

This is why many participants have avoided affiliating with a Christian church. Besides the cold welcome many felt when they first visited, they believe that apostatizing from their born religion was an act of freedom and that is a freedom they can only continue to exert if they do not ascribe to any label or institution. While they consider that they share the same beliefs with most practising Christians in their country, they see themselves as privileged that they do not have to fit into the label of the ethnic Christian minority. One woman explained:

Recently I was spending some time with an injili (evangelical) family and the child asked me if I am evangelical. I said no, and this led to a further discussion. I said “I am free, and more comfortable with who I am than you, because I am nothing.” Of all Christians, I can identify with evangelicals, because they focus only on the Injil (Gospel), but if an evangelical church institutes rules I don't want to be limited by that, and I am free to not follow their structures. Someone who identifies him/herself as a Christian is restricted to Christian existence and structures. I am free from those limitations.

Such people do seem to sacrifice community for freedom, though, as they have a hard time developing the community attachments that help them as they grow into a convert identity, and feel the lack of close personal attachments. This can be especially hard when they have a sense of having left the comfort of the *umma*.

5 Marriage: Choosing a Life Partner

Most of the participants I met converted before marrying, and several were still single when I met them. Finding an approp-

riate marriage partner was of paramount concern for them. Several of the young men said that not marrying was not an option for them, although some single women told me they would prefer to remain single if they could find a way to do that in their communities.

One's choice of marriage partner is an important element in a person's formation of a new community, because finding a partner who is sympathetic to one's own beliefs or, even better, shares them, makes it possible to continue with the same religious lifestyle.

In defending his theorization of religions according to the rules of economics, Laurence Iannaccone cites that empirical studies have consistently shown that when marriage partners share the same religion, their church attendance figures are higher (Iannaccone 1990:303). While there are many aspects of religious economics that are not very relevant to religious deviance, this principle holds true. Iannaccone's argument is that it is easier to be religious when both marriage partners share the same religious values, and so they are more likely to be religious.

I heard many stories of people who felt fulfilled in their new religious identity after marrying a fellow convert; in some ways it was similar to being converted a second time, especially for women, who found themselves with the freedom to participate in more Christian religious activities and welcome Christians into their homes. On the other hand, participants who married people who did not believe in Christianity often found it difficult to continue being as committed to practising their faith as they had previously, at least for a time. Marriage often seems to stabilize identity (Myers 1996:859-860), so what happens in a convert's life after marriage can have a significant effect on how s/he will live the rest of his/her life. Again the effect of this decision was often felt much more acu-

tely by women who were expected to submit to their Muslim husbands, than by men who were often able to convince their Muslim wives to follow their lead.

Hammond suggests that the stronger someone's chosen identity, the more likely s/he is to marry someone similar (Hammond 1988:4). This study was not able to fully test that assumption, especially since it is difficult to assess how dear someone's chosen identity is to him/her. However, some stories from my research indicate that this may not be true in an Arab Muslim context where, in the light of societal pressures, most marriage choices are potentially complicated and may prove problematic.

Men have more choice in marriage, as according to both local and Islamic law, they can marry a Muslim, a Christian, or even a Jew, though a non-Muslim choice of wife is frowned upon in many communities. They also generally take a leadership role in their homes, and so if they marry someone who does not share their faith, they have the freedom to continue with their Christian involvement and often lead their wives to convert as well. A few single men said that they would ideally marry a woman convert and, if not, a Christian woman, but if all else failed, they would marry a Muslim woman.

Muslim women, on the other hand, can only legally marry Muslims, so if they want to marry a Christian believer, they must marry a fellow convert. This dynamic makes adjusting to a convert identity much more difficult for women than for men. Some women get married in the West, and a few find ways to manoeuvre around the law to marry a Christian, but many look desperately for an MBB husband or concede to marry a Muslim man and almost inevitably distance themselves from Christian associations.

Most convert men told me that they find, or found, choosing a life partner extremely challenging, and that they are usually looking in the midst of strong family pressure. Many of them reported several refused proposals, and a sense of desperation that they might not find someone suitable and so be convinced to marry a cousin that their mothers have picked out. However, most stories of MBB men who married Muslim women who did not share their Christian faith have ended in relatively happy family lives and in the convert continuing to freely follow his new faith. I met a few women who converted through their convert husbands, and one man told me that after three years of marriage, his wife is very interested in his faith and is reading the Bible regularly. Even without her believing, though, she accepted that his faith was different before they were wed, and so he is still actively involved at church, and she has allowed him to make the decisions about their son's religious education. Therefore, it may be that some of the stress and pressure that single convert men feel is somewhat unfounded, as marriage to a Muslim woman may not necessarily be a threat to their faith as they worry it might be.

On the other hand, one missionary told me that the most significant difference he sees between the Muslims he knows and the converts he knows is their attitude toward marriage. There is a doctrinal tradition in Islam that marriage completes a person and building a good family is a religious obligation, essential to becoming a good Muslim. Therefore, many Muslims see marriage more as a religious rite than an act of love. However, when Muslim men in his country embrace a Christian faith, they often become more interested in developing a friendship with a woman and marrying for love. Convert men, therefore, are often looking for a woman who can both complete them religiously and with whom they are in love.

Those who marry someone who does not fulfil all of that may feel like they are settling for less, but many such marriages seem to result in a happy family life nonetheless. Because of the traditional Muslim emphasis on marriage, it may also solidify a man's position in his family, and help ease the tension that ensued from his conversion. One man also reported that, even though his family was not happy with his choice of a Christian wife, his relationship with his parents improved significantly after he was married and had children.

Women find themselves in a different situation. A number of women find themselves without an option other than to marry a Muslim man. Even if she has changed her faith in a way that has preserved her family's honour, if she marries a Christian man she may be seen as an apostate. One woman finally married a Muslim man after years of hoping to meet an MBB. Since her marriage, even though her husband had known about her faith from the beginning, she has had to start wearing the *hijab*⁷ again, and has had little opportunity to be with Christians. After hearing stories like this, many women are eager not to marry a Muslim, do not see how they can marry a Christian, and so look for an MBB as long as they can withhold family pressure to marry at an appropriately young age.

Largely because of convert men's large dreams about finding an ideal life partner, so far it has been very difficult for convert women to meet MBB men whom they could marry. However, as we have said, marriage to a man who shares her faith is a ticket to freedom, so many women are eager to meet MBB men. This in some ways complicates their hopes, though. Many male participants reported that the convert wo-

⁷ In her Middle Eastern country this is the typical Muslim woman's head-covering

men they have met have been so eager to get married and escape the restrictions of their home that they seemed little interested in building a relationship or marrying for love. In spite of this, I have encountered very few stories in which two converts marry and then later regret their decision. As religious deviants in a strongly cohesive society, a shared culture and shared faith often dim many of the potential strains on their marriage which are frequently experienced by people who marry born Christians or Muslims.

One strong motivation to marry someone who shares one's faith and culture is that people hope that their children will then face much less identity confusion, which is often even greater than the frustrations faced by first-generation converts. Those converts who have married and had children report appreciating a shared vision of how to raise their children, and unmarried participants expressed a desire for the same possibilities. While their children, who will always be considered in a Middle Eastern country – both legally and socially – as inheriting the religious identity of their fathers, will face conflicting pressures from their grandparents, schools and churches, at home they will be unified. On the other hand, a few participants do not trust the depth of the faith of their fellow converts, and so prefer to marry a Christian over a convert because they believe they can trust a Christian to be committed to raise their children with Christian values.

6 Relationship to Society

As communities of converts grow and become more visible, they often find that they face strong societal pressure and legal harassment. Those who are most visibly deviant, or seen to be the most different, are the most likely to be held back and stigmatized by the larger community (Shoham 1976:73-74).

Similarly, it seemed that people who converted in secret, or who did not draw attention to their change, rarely faced any threat by their community. One participant, for example, said that he had been following Christianity for more than ten years, but it was only recently, when he was leading groups of converts and becoming rather visible among Christians, that he faced his first government harassment. Another convert still lived as a Muslim in his community, so told me he felt no fear of his government because he had broken no laws, but he did worry that he could come under threat eventually.

One issue involved in facing threats seems to be the relationship between society's expectations as laid out by the law, and how those affect people's relationship with their families. One woman has faced official pressure for much of her Christian life, blacklisted from travel and occasionally harassed in her neighbourhood. Her father has accompanied her throughout these experiences. He himself is not interested in Christianity and, she suspects, has renewed his commitment to Islam as he has seen the changes in her life. However, the police often called on him to restrain her, or to force her to go to the mosque for lessons. When she wanted to travel or get married, it was her father who had to go through increased legal complications in order to for her to go through with her plans. At times he restricted her, beating her or keeping her imprisoned at home, but at other times, he has shown great compassion as he has witnessed the abuse she suffered at the hands of the police.

In a communal culture, where an individual's honour is his/her family's honour, it is not uncommon for families to face legal pressure on behalf of their relatives. Some families therefore pressure the apostate in order to try to avoid legal problems, while others try to defend and help him/her, and some attempt a bit of both strategies. Often, it seems, people's

families are more strict with their deviant family members not because their decision is religiously deviant, but because it is legally deviant. A few participants who at the time of the interview had no contact at all with their families told me that they think their families would accept their decision and even welcome them back into their homes if conversion were not considered illegal in their country.

Many people have had their employment affected by their decision. One participant converted before he had any professional qualifications, and told me that the only way he could make a livelihood was if he owned his own business. No one would hire him, not simply because he had no qualifications but because, in the past, new employers received a visit or phone call from the police warning them that they are employing an apostate. Others who are otherwise generally open about their faith are careful not to let their neighbours know about their conversion, because their lease is written to a Muslim, so they do not want their homes to be viewed with suspicion. Regardless of how people present their identities, many converts live with these daily pressures. While there are converts who gain from their decision to embrace Christianity, the religion of the West, many more become outcasts in their own society, often poverty-stricken and with broken relationships.

In most Muslim countries religion is an assigned collective identity. This stands in constant tension with the human rights values espoused in international law, which enshrine and defend individual choices. When religion is designated in official documentation, as it is in most Arab Muslim countries, it does help to protect minority groups, but it also makes it extremely difficult for individuals to choose their groups (Asad 2003:139).

Almost all apostates from Islam see legal religious identification as a serious deterrent to living their new lives. They report that they would prefer that religion become privatized, removed from identity cards and government regulation. Many Christian-born people are proud of the Christian identification, but would prefer for it to be changeable in both directions, not just to Islam. Converts out of Islam, on the other hand, mostly believe that they will be more able to grow into their new identities if they can approach their new lives purely on a socio-religious level, without any concern for legal designation at all.

These issues are faced in community. Being an active part of an MBB community may increase someone's visibility, and thus risk of legal pressure. However, there are important benefits in having strong ties to fellow deviants and co-religionists, as a source of emotional support and as people who can help a person to live a more cohesive life as a convert and make well-founded choices.

7 Conclusion

Issues of new community are significant to new believers in any faith context, and conversion stories all across the world inevitably include a social element. Most Arab Muslims who choose to follow a Christian faith come from a religio-social context where communal commitment is expected and collective identity is an important part of their self-identification (Mol 1978, Hammond 1988), as they endeavour to identify both with Muslims and with Christians. Therefore, social relationships play an essential role in helping them as they develop their new lives as people who have changed their faith.

Because of all these factors, it is vitally important to religious converts in the Middle East that they find a new com-

munity to which they relate. Many report difficulties in learning how to relate to other converts and to born Christians, and adjustments affect their personal relationships, such as in their search for a marriage partner, and their relationship to the larger society, as seen in the challenges they report in gaining official recognition of their conversion. However, these struggles are essential to building their identity within their new belief system, and most converts are committed to resolve these issues, needing only the encouragement and freedom to define their communities according to their conscience in their new faith.

Works Cited

- Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formulations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Barker, Irwin R., and Raymond F. Currie. 1985. "Do Converts Always Make the Most Committed Christians?" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24, pp. 305-313.
- Becker, Howard S. 1991 (originally published 1963) *Outsider: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, New York: The Free Press.
- Bourque, Nicole. 2006. "How Deborah Became Aisha: The Conversion Process and the Creation of Female Muslim Identity", in *Women Embracing Islam*, edited by Karin van Nieuwkerk, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 233-249.
- Burke, Peter J., and Jan E. Stets. 1999. "Trust and Commitment through Self-Verification", in *Social Psychology Quarterly* 62, pp. 347-366.
- Carrothers, Robert M. 2004. "Identity Consequences of Religious Conversion: Applying Identity Theory to Religious Changing", in *Department of Sociology*, Kent, OH: Kent State University, p. 109.
- Downes, David, and Paul Rock. 2003. *Understanding Deviance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gaudeul, Gean-Marie. 1999, *Called from Islam to Christ*, London: Monarch Books.
- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. 2006, "The Quest for Peace in Submission: Reflections on the Journey of American Women Converts to Islam", in *Women Embracing Islam*, edited by Karin van Nieuwkerk, Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 19-47.

Hammond, Phillip E. 1988, "Religion and the Persistence of Identity", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27, pp. 1-11.

Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1990, "Religious Capital: A Human Capital Approach", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 27, pp. 297-314.

Iannaccone, Laurence R. 1995, "Risk, Rationality, and Religious Portfolios", in *Economic Inquiry* XXXIII, pp. 285-297.

Mol, Hans. 1978, *Identity and Religion*, London: Sage Publications.

Myers, Scott M. 1996, "An Interactive Model of Religiosity Inheritance: The Importance of Family Context", in *American Sociological Review* 61, pp. 858-866.

Pitchford, Susan, Christopher Bader, and Rodney Stark. 2001, "Doing Field Studies of Religious Movements: An Agenda", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, pp. 379-392.

Roald, Anne Sofie. 2006, "The Shaping of a Scandinavian Islam", in *Women Embracing Islam*, edited by Karin van Nieuwkerk. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 48-70

Rothbaum, Susan. 1988, "Between Two Worlds: Issues of Separation and Identity After Leaving a Religious Community", in *Falling From the Faith: Causes and Consequences of Religious Apostasy*, edited by David G. Bromley. London: Sage Publications, pp. 205-228

Shoham, S. Giora. 1976, *Social Deviance*, London: Gardner Press Inc.

Snow, David A., and Richard Machalek. 1984, "The Sociology of Conversion", in *Annual Review of Sociology* 10, pp. 167-190.

Spinner-Halev, Jeff, and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2003, "National Identity and Self-Esteem", in *Perspectives on Politics* 1, pp. 515-532.

Staples, Clifford L., and Armand L. Mauss. 1987, "Conversion or Commitment? A Reassessment of the Snow and Machalek Approach to the Study of Conversion", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26, pp. 133-147.

Stark, Rodney, and Roger Finke. 2000, *Acts of Faith*, London: University of California Press.

Travisano, Richard V. 1970, "Alternation and Conversion as Qualitatively Different Transformations", in *Social Psychology Through Symbolic Interaction*, edited by G. P. Stone and H. A. Faberman. Waltham, MA: Ginn-Blaisdell.

Yang, Fenggang. 1999, *Chinese Christians in America*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.