

INSIDE/OUTSIDE: GETTING TO THE CENTER OF THE MUSLIM CONTEXTUALIZATION DEBATES

By J. S. William¹

1 Introduction

In 1998, John Travis wrote a short article seeking to describe the status of missions among Muslims as well as to promote a “myriad of approaches” to reach the Muslim world.² The article provided a spectrum of Muslim background communities that considered themselves followers of Jesus. The spectrum included communities that adopted foreign languages and forms (C1-C3 communities) as well as communities that called themselves “Muslim” but sought to live by faith in Jesus under the authority of the Old and New Testament (C5 communities).

This article lit a firestorm of controversy that has only intensified to this day. Travis and others wrote articles defending professed believers who lived under the rubric of a Muslim identity, utilized Muslim rituals, and remained tied to their socio-cultural communities.³ Others described these communities, and particularly foreign workers who promoted such an approach, as syncretistic and potentially heretical. The intensity of disagreement has little abated over the years. Indeed, the debates have expanded to a variety of issues, including the use of the Qur’an in evangelism and how to appropriately translate key terms such as “Son of God” into Muslim idiom.

Strikingly, most of those writing in the current debate come from Western, evangelical backgrounds. Missionary and researcher, Phil Bourne, points out that conservative evangelical and Reformed writers tend to be critical of the new approaches to contextualization while advocates tend to come from more charismatic back-

¹ J. S. William (penname) has nearly 10 years of experience in Muslim Central Asia where he currently works and lives with his family. He is a PhD Candidate in Intercultural Studies at an American University

² Travis (1998a).

³ Travis (1998b); Travis & Travis (2005).

grounds.⁴ But even this spectrum serves as only a generalization. According to my experience, proponents and critics both come from a variety of evangelical backgrounds. The disagreement, then, begs the question: if those disagreeing over appropriate contextualization come from largely common backgrounds, what are they disagreeing over and why do they disagree?

This paper can in no way unravel every aspect of those two questions, but by looking primarily at the articles in three evangelical missions journals, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (EMQ), *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*⁵ (IJFM), and *St Francis Magazine* (SFM), the paper will seek to outline three areas of the discussion: (1) the summary positions of those who advocate and/or defend C5 communities,⁶ (2) areas of miscommunication and misunderstanding within the debate, and (3) the areas of remaining tension that would productively serve as the focus of future discussions. In the concluding section, I will propose a set of seven affirmations that I believe advocates and critics alike should agree to in making common cause in the Muslim world.

2 Basic Positions on the Debate

As with any debate and methodology, practitioners and theoreticians vary considerably. Evaluating every missionary's methodology and theory is certainly impossible. Even the public journal discussions on the issue of Muslim contextualization are numerous, far more than anyone can reasonably keep up with. That said, a sampling from key proponents of the contextualization position ex-

⁴ Bourne (2009), p. 58.

⁵ Prior to IJFM 24:1, (Winter 2007), the journal was named *International Journal of Frontier Missions*.

⁶ Other topics tangentially related to this debate are the "Common Word" inter-faith discussions and the "Common Ground" method of evangelism (Volf, 2011, Chapter 1). This paper addresses none of the former topic and only touches on the Common Ground movement through one writer's critique of a conference they hosted (Smith, 2009). Common Ground, however, provided no articles in the journals surveyed and so its positions may or may not be reflected by the Insider advocates presented.

plained below allows us to outline some of the key positions on the debate.

In John Travis's initial article, he describes six different examples of "Christ-centered communities". One end of the scale (C1) indicates foreign-culture, foreign language expressions of Christ-centered communities. On the other end of the scale, secret believers are listed as C6 believers. C6 believers are often silent about their faith and may not gather with other believers. C2 to C5, however, represents the various ways of relating to foreign culture and religious identity. The debates have roared over the distinctions between C4 and C5 primarily, though some writers lean more heavily towards a C3 approach. C3, in short-hand, indicates a community that has a clear "Christian" identity and utilizes forms that would be seen as distinctly "Christian." C4 entails what outsiders might perceive as "Muslim" forms, but with members who self-identify not as "Muslims" but as some newly termed community, such as "Jesus followers." C5 communities, however, self-identify as "Muslims" and keep previously- practiced Muslim rituals that they do not feel violate their faithfulness to Jesus.

John Travis defines the scenario in this way:

Community of Muslims who follow Jesus yet remain culturally and officially Muslim. C5 believers remain legally and socially within the community of Islam. Somewhat similar to the Messianic Jewish movement, aspects of Islamic theology which are incompatible with the Bible are rejected or reinterpreted if possible. Participation in corporate Islamic worship varies from person to person and group to group. C5 believers meet regularly with other C5 believers and share their faith with unsaved Muslims. Unsaved Muslims may see C5 believers as theologically deviant and may eventually expel them from the community of Islam. C5 believers are viewed as Muslims by the Muslim community and think of themselves as Muslims who follow Isa the Messiah.⁷

Significant aspects of Travis's C5 definition are that the believers "remain culturally and officially Muslim". They are socially connected to their Muslim community, and yet they reject or reinter-

⁷ Quoted in Richard (2009), p. 176.

pret incompatible aspects of Islamic theology. The believers meet together and also share about their faith with unbelieving family members. Finally, they can face the threat of expulsion from their community.

Travis's term "C5" has come to be used interchangeably with a second term, "Insider Movement" (IM). Some debate over this loose use of terms continues.⁸ Yet, because most articles use the terms interchangeably, I will define them both. Two definitions of this term have been published recently.

In one case, Rebecca Lewis, former professor of History and Islamics at William Carey International University, explains an "insider movement" in this way:

An insider movement is any movement to faith in Christ where the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where believing families, as valid expressions of faith in Christ, remain inside their socio-religious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.⁹

Distinctive about Lewis' definition is the emphasis on the gospel's flow "through pre-existing communities and social networks." She also points out that the members retain "their identity as members of that community". Lewis has argued that an "insider movement" can actually happen anywhere along the "C-scale".¹⁰ If the community identity is retained, then one may have other identities or forms, even foreign ones, and still be called an "insider". Finally, Lewis also notes that the believers are to live "under the lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible".

A second definition of "insider movement" comes from Kevin Higgins, Executive Director of *Global Teams* and another frequent contributor on the contextualization debates. In a 2009 article on the issue he defines it this way:

⁸Insider advocates, for instance, have recently begun calling these movements "Jesus Movements" instead of "Insider Movements" (Wood, 2011:4). This paper retains the former term.

⁹ Quoted in Richard (2009), p. 176; cf. Lewis (2007).

¹⁰ Lewis (2007), p.76; cf. Richard (2009), p. 177.

A growing number of families, individuals, clans, and/or friendship-webs becoming faithful disciples of Jesus within the culture of their people group, including their religious culture. This faithful discipleship will express itself in culturally appropriate communities of believers who will also continue to live within as much of their culture, including the religious life of the culture, as is biblically faithful. The Holy Spirit, through the Word and through His people will also begin to transform His people and their culture, religious life, and world-view.¹¹

With Lewis, Higgins emphasizes social networks (“webs”) and faithful discipleship of Jesus “within the culture of their people group, including their religious culture.” He spells out further how this looks in terms of the believers’ transformation by the Spirit through the Scriptures.

All of the statements above are descriptive, not prescriptive. Yet, all of those above would also advocate for these examples to be a legitimate option for new believers in new communities of Gospel witness.

As seen in the above, different proponents of IM/C5 offer different points of emphasis. The variety of foci can often make the debates particularly difficult to follow and lead to some confused discussions. That said, they generally share these primary convictions:

- 1) Social networks are the primary focus of Gospel expansion. Efforts to avoid social extraction are important.
- 2) Believers retain a community identity as “Muslims.”
- 3) Believers talk about their faith.
- 4) Believers live in submission to Jesus as Lord and to the Old and New Testament as God’s authority over them.
- 5) Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, believers engage in the difficult process of discerning what from their past should be retained, reinterpreted, and abandoned.

The more controversial elements of Muslim contextualization, particularly the recitation of the Qur’an and the Muslim confession,

¹¹ Higgins (2009a), p. 75.

are not listed because these practices are not stated prescriptions of a C5 approach.

In addition to the above points, some IM proponents argue that Insider Movements can be encouraged by having Muslim-idiom translations of the Old and New Testament available to Muslim communities. Rick Brown and John Travis, for instance, have argued that accurate and clear translations of key terms, such as “Son of God”, need to be evaluated so that a greater number of Muslims can access the Scriptures within their communities.¹²

Critics of the above approach vary as well. In particular, they vary in experience, expertise, and conviction. That said, the level of one’s criticism does not depend on missiological training or experience in the Muslim world. Those with little experience and much can equally criticize the approach; likewise, academic credentials stack up equally on both sides of the debate. There remains a general spectrum, however, among the critics that ranges from absolute rejection to critical engagement. An example of the former, recently published in SFM, is Basil Grafas’s description of a conference held to critique the insider approach. He writes, after surveying the lecture of Roger Dixon,

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.¹³

On the other hand, some writers probably agree more than disagree and yet feel the dangers of syncretism more intensely than IM

¹² Brown (2005a); Brown (2005b); Travis (2006).

¹³ Grafas (2010), p. 936.

advocates. With this, they offer cautions. Phil Parshall writes in his article, “Lifting the Fatwa”,

I do not want to end my life (now sixty-five years into it) known as a heresy hunter. Yes, I will continue (with greater sensitivity, I trust) to voice my concerns. But if I am to err toward imbalance, I want it to be on the side of love, affirmation and lifting up my colleagues as better than myself. Even at this late stage in life, I am not prepared to profess personal infallibility. As for who is right or wrong, and to what degree, let us lean heavily on the Judge of our hearts.¹⁴

In the spirit of Parshall’s gentle admonition, we turn to different aspects of the debate.

3 Points of Confusion

In the following, we will seek to outline areas in which miscommunication over central concepts are being debated. Each section is headed with the primary accusation against IM proponents. In every case, IM proponents explicitly deny the accusation.

3.1 C5 means Christian missionaries saying they are Muslims

One of the most basic confusions in the debate has persisted since Parshall’s first critique until this past year: proponents advocate Western missionaries “becoming Muslim” in order to win Muslims. Throughout Parshall’s initial article, he shows particular concern, not for transitioning believers, but for missionaries who adapt a Muslim identity and enact Muslim rituals. Dick Brogden, in 2010, similarly cites a couple he knows acting “as Muslims” and eventually abandoning their belief in Jesus’ divinity.¹⁵

These writers express imply that the C5 advocates are on a “slippery slope”. For example, missionaries relate sympathetically to Islam. They begin to adopt Muslim forms and identity in order to win Muslims. In the end, however, they abandon the distinctives of their faith in Christ. This type of process may happen, but it is not being advocated by the authors surveyed. In response to this accusation, Rebecca Lewis notes, “It is important to clarify no in-

¹⁴ Parshall (2004), p. 16.

¹⁵ Brogden (2010), p.37.

sider movement that I know of involves any Western Christians becoming Muslims, nor has ever recommended such practices.”¹⁶

Even John and Anna Travis describe themselves as using a “C4 lifestyle” to help birth a “C5 movement”.¹⁷ Put another way, they personally have used some Muslim forms but have not self-identified as Muslims.

Though this charge persists in the debates, it should be an area of common ground. Advocates and critics both agree that the truth about Jesus is miscommunicated when a Christian-background believer says he has become a Muslim. Muslims generally interpret this as a complete rejection of Christian truth claims.

Though unpublished, some practitioners have distinguished the issues of the identity and form that the missionary adopts from the identity and forms that a native community of believers adopts. Some have called the former the “W-scale”, referring to “workers.” The scale parallels the C-Scale with, for example, W-3 referring to self-identification as “Christian” and usage of foreign Christian forms, W-4 involving a new term for self-identification and W-5 referring to a foreign believer adopting a “Muslim” identity. Though some may advocate the latter, their positions are not represented in any of the literature surveyed.

3.2 C5 is about avoiding the persecution Jesus promised

Critics also charge that the insider approach and insider movements are simply a creative, but biblically unfaithful, means of avoiding persecution. This charge can take multiple forms. Insiders are accused of deception and refusal to identify with Jesus. They are accused of hiding their fundamental convictions. The general impetus of the charge is the same, however: C5 believers are one thing but they pretend to be another. They do this as an ill-advised effort at evangelism or as a way of avoiding biblically-sanctioned persecution. With reference to an insider group in Bangladesh, Edward

¹⁶ See Lewis’ running commentary in Brogden (2010), p.37.

¹⁷ Travis & Travis (2005).

Ayub judges, “The avoidance of persecution and repression is the principal logic driving this group.”¹⁸

The debate actually centers on whether or not types of persecution can and should be separated. Nik Ripkin, who works in the Muslim world and has done extensive research on persecution of believers, notes that premature persecution usually serves to prevent the Gospel from expansion. He distinguishes, then, between persecution brought onto believers because of their association with foreigners and persecution that is ascribed particularly to their faith in Jesus.¹⁹ Both happen, and the latter, according to Ripkin, is inevitable.²⁰ Though the lines are certainly fuzzy, IM proponents, apparently, wish to avoid the former kind of persecution, not the latter. Critics may argue that the two cannot be distinguished, but that is a distinct debate. No IM advocate surveyed indicated that persecution should be completely avoided nor that it was possible for a disciple of Jesus.

An example of an advocate’s perspective on the issue comes from Rick Brown’s story of a Muslim imam who put his faith in Jesus and started to preach about Christ at his mosque. The imam read from the Old and New Testament and put his faith in Jesus. He then started teaching from the Scriptures rather openly, including teachings on Jesus’ atoning death for sins and subsequent resurrection. His congregation accepted it. The imam was under local scrutiny but still accepted. He went so far as to put a cross up in his mosque. But then, one day, a guest found a book produced by a known Christian publisher in his house and denounced him. The imam was chased out of town and not allowed to return. Brown concludes,

So you see, he could preach the Bible, he could preach Christ, he could put a cross on his mosque, but he could not have a link to a traditional

¹⁸ Ayub (2009), p.28; cf. Span (2009), pp.134-135

¹⁹ Unpublished interview, 2007.

²⁰ Ripkin provides an example from Somalia. 1991, there were 150 known believers in Somalia. By 1997, after some years of war and intentional persecution, only four remained. According to Ripkin’s research, however, the believers were killed *not for sharing with others about Christ*, but because of their association with foreigners in employment, public worship, and reading materials. Ripkin himself does not make statements for or against a C5/IM approach.

Christian mission, because of all of the geopolitical things that that implies, all of the associations with ethnic and global rivalries.²¹

Insider believers describe experiences of persecution. The biography of Mazhar Mallouhi, *Pilgrim of Christ on the Muslim Road*, who describes himself as a “Muslim follower of Jesus”, details Mallouhi’s experience of severe persecution for his faith. Mazhar has not avoided all suffering by calling himself a “Muslim”. Abdul Asad, a Christian worker among Muslims, points out that as a group of believers grows in community, it becomes increasingly inevitable that they will face community opposition.²² Even a critic such as Jay Smith admits that IM proponents deny this charge of persecution avoidance.²³

Mallouhi’s example pushes this issue even further. If Mazhar Mallouhi has not avoided persecution by calling himself a “Muslim”, why does he retain this identity? His auto-biographical statements on the issue help to shed more light into an area of anthropological complexity, namely, how socio-religious identity relates to one’s own self understanding. Mallouhi writes concerning his own relationship to Islam:

I was born into a confessional home. Islam is the blanket with which my mother wrapped me up when she nursed me and sang to me and prayed over me. I imbibed aspects of Islam with my mother’s milk. I inherited Islam from my parents and it was the cradle which held me until I found Christ. Islam is my mother.²⁴

Mallouhi was not an Islamic fundamentalist, but a poet and conscripted soldier who rejected his Islamic training and found Jesus in the midst of his own drunkenness.²⁵ But Mallouhi feels Muslim, even after 40 years of following Jesus. This aspect of personal dynamic is important in distinguishing between “deception” and honest attempts to create new sociological paradigms.

²¹ Richard (2009), p. 179.

²² Asad (2009), p. 145; cf. Corwin et al. (2007), p.13.

²³ Smith (2009), p. 45.

²⁴ Mallouhi (2009), p. 8.

²⁵ Chandler (2007).

So, for instance, when Ayub accuses a group of believers in Bangladesh of hiding the fact that they have become “Isai” (the Bangali term for “Christians”), he may be referring to C6 believers (who are hiding their faith in Jesus) or he may be describing a sociological phenomenon with which he is personally uncomfortable.²⁶ In other words, these believers may truly separate in their minds and hearts faith in Jesus with social categories such as “Christian”. They do not see themselves as part of the social group of ethnic Christians in their communities (to what degree they should will be discussed in the next section).

The subtle distinction between “identity” and “allegiance” contributes to this confusion. Though all do not agree that a wedge can be driven between these two concepts, IM proponents repeatedly assert that new believers should have ultimate allegiance to Jesus as Lord. This position is clear in the definitions provided above, but also in further statements. For instance, John and Anna Travis cite Fuller Seminary professor Charles Kraft, “With respect to allegiance, we must maintain that people are saved or lost on the basis of whether or not their primary commitment is to the true God in Christ.”²⁷ Fundamentally, this argument assumes that external religious identities can be separated from fundamental heart allegiances. Kraft has advocated this distinction for decades. In this respect, a theology of “religions” is under dispute, as we will note in the next section.

3.3 Like the Emergent Church, IM waters down doctrine and/or redefines orthodoxy to the extent of subsuming orthodox Christian doctrine to orthodox Islamic doctrine

In multiple articles, critics accuse IM of borrowing from, depending on, or being influenced by the Emergent Church.²⁸ Nikides, for instance, provides a half-page quotation of Brian McLaren’s *Generous Orthodoxy* that includes McLaren’s controversial advocacy of inclusivism. He then ascribes these positions to Kevin Higgins. Higgins

²⁶ Ayub (2009), p. 27.

²⁷ Travis & Travis (2005).

²⁸ Smith (2009), p. 35; Nikides (2009), p. 95; Piper et al., (2006), p. 16; Bourne (2009), p. 69; Span (2009).

flatly rejects the association and notes he has never even read any books by McLaren.²⁹ Critiques of the emergent church in the midst of Muslim contextualization debates muddy the waters. Higgins cannot be expected to defend the ideas of Brian McLaren or Rob Bell as he tries to explain his exclusivist views on Insider Movements.³⁰ The real tie between the Emergent camp and Muslim contextualization is that both groups are trying to ask similar questions, “How do we reach a resistant sector of the global society with the Gospel? Is it perhaps our methods that are flawed?” Assuming, however, that both groups reach the same conclusion is specious logic.

The more fundamental charge, and the reason the association arises, is because insider proponents are seen as adapting the Gospel to the Muslim context, rather than appropriately contextualizing it. For instance, Roger Dixon, commenting on a blog post, accuses IM proponents of “adjust[ing] the gospel to an [irreconcilable] religious structure.”³¹

The issue of incompatible religious structures will arise again in the next section. For now, it should be noted here that Travis, Lewis, Brown, and Higgins see insider believers as submitting to Christ’s lordship in the Gospel. They are advocating a right understanding of the Gospel’s meaning within the Muslim context. Every article surveyed in this paper advocates teaching the Scriptures, discipling people away from false allegiances, and leading believers into full transformation under the lordship of Jesus. Application of these aims may differ significantly, but the charge that insider proponents accept the subordination of biblical convictions to Islamic teaching is misplaced.³²

²⁹ Higgins (2009b), p. 62.

³⁰ Higgins (2009b), p.75. Higgins explains clearly that he believes conscious faith in Jesus is necessary for salvation, an exclusivist theological position by most accounts (2009a).

³¹ Esler (2010).

³² Travis (1998b) outlines seven guidelines to avoid syncretism. Asad (2009) provides his own guidelines as well (pp. 155-156).

3.4 IM does not encourage believers to gather as a “Church”

A fourth misunderstanding seems to have its roots in linguistic confusion. In Travis’s initial description of C5 movements, he noted that some C5 believers attend the mosque. By logical extension, some presumed that the believers only went to the mosque and did not meet for specifically Christ-centered fellowship. Timothy Tennent infers, for instance, that the C5 approach is primarily individualistic without any corporate gatherings.³³ Nikides argues that C5 believers do not baptize or practice the Lord’s Supper.³⁴ Higgins flatly denies that C5 believers ignore baptism and the Lord’s Supper³⁵ and the statements at the beginning of this paper showed that gathering of believers through the local family networks was crucial to insider thinking. Some significant conflicts exist over how these new gatherings of believers should be associated with the global church and whether or not “extraction” is a fundamental part of discipleship.³⁶ Insofar as “doing church” refers to multiple believers gathering for prayer, worship, and reading of the Christian Scriptures, insider proponents clearly advocate it and see it happening.

3.5 All Muslims believe and practice the same thing, so to be an Insider is to believe and pPractice those same things.

A number of the critics of C-5 assume that identifying as a “Muslim” requires adherence to x, y, and z. Jeff Morton, adjunct professor at Biola University, implies that it means saying Mohamed is a prophet of God 17 times a day.³⁷ Nikides and Smith presume that it cannot include belief in the crucifixion.³⁸ Assumed here is that all Muslims adhere to a certain set of doctrines and universally uphold a certain set of practices. Yet anthropologists and proponents of an insider approach alike have demonstrated that there is a great diver-

³³ Tennent (2006), pp. 110–112.

³⁴ Nikides (2009), p. 97–98.

³⁵ Higgins (2009b), p.67; cf. Travis (1998b).

³⁶ See Smith (2009), pp. 25–26.

³⁷ Morton (2011).

³⁸ Nikides (2009), p. 100; Smith (2009), p. 34.

sity in Islamic thinking and aberrant views exist within “Islam.”³⁹ Indeed, some atheists continue to call themselves Muslim.⁴⁰

Dixon’s article pits Christianity and Islam in fundamental opposition to one another because he implies that it is impossible for a person calling himself “Muslim” to have an aberrant theology with respect to the rest of his community. If one understands all Muslims as having a certain set of unchangeable convictions, including a denial of Jesus’ crucifixion, then it is impossible that a true follower of Jesus could be a Muslim. But if variation is possible, especially in light of education, economic, urban or rural context, social status, and national context, then it is difficult to assign universal convictions or practices to all Muslims and by implication, all insiders.

Insiders, according to their advocates, uphold particularly Christian beliefs that the majority of Muslims do not believe, such as faith in Jesus’ deity and the crucifixion.⁴¹ Additionally, they vary in their utilization of Muslim rituals. Brother Yusuf, a self-professed Muslim follower of Jesus, says, “Some people in our movement say the *shahada* and some do not; some of them pray in mosques and some do not (and never did). This is an individual choice.”⁴² More nuance and field study is required to outline what Muslims actually do, say, and believe. Blanket statements about Muslims and insider believers fail to recognize the great variance between communities and contexts.

3.6 Only one approach is necessary.

Though some critics perceive the C-5 model is a one-size-fits-all approach to Muslim ministry,⁴³ none of the articles surveyed for this paper state this. Indeed, writers like the Travises, Higgins, Lewis, and Brown explicitly deny that C-5 is the only valid or successful

³⁹ Sufism is a prime example, Asad (2009); cf. Higgins (2009 b), pp. 72-73; Hassan (2007); Marranci (2009).

⁴⁰ Sultan (2010).

⁴¹ Higgins (2009b), pp. 72-73.

⁴² Corwin (2007), p. 13; cf. Travis & Travis (2005).

⁴³ Corwin et al. (2007).

approach in the Muslim world.⁴⁴ Travis says clearly, “If advocates of insider movements have given the impression that this is the only way to reach Muslims, this is wrong.”⁴⁵ Massey might be legitimately accused of such an opinion in his criticism of C-4 identities, but this can only be inferred from his article on the issue.⁴⁶

Anecdotally, however, I have heard practitioners express concern that IM advocates claim others’ practices are instinctively extractionsist and out-dated, thus communicating an attitude of dismissal and negation towards past methods. In private conversations, some have expressed that others negated their twenty years of ministry because they had not followed insider principles. We will address this issue further in the section on the implications of this paper.

In contrast, some of those critiquing C-5 ministries consider them outside the purview of legitimate approaches. Additionally, they point to the success of the C4 model as an indication that the syncretistic risks of C5 are unnecessary.⁴⁷ Finally, others charge that many Muslim converts do not want to remain insiders,⁴⁸ so the Western insider proponents are forcing an insider approach by financial and colonialistic pressures.⁴⁹ Rick Brown responds at length to this point,

C5 is not the only approach or even the ideal approach. In some families and communities there is tolerance of Muslims moving to C4 and C3, and that is probably an appropriate thing for them to do. For many Iranians the Messianic Muslim option is not appealing, because they are disaffected with their Muslim identity and want a different one. In many sub-Saharan countries in which the cultures are only superficially Muslim, there is little Muslim identity. There is subsequently more freedom and more acceptance of conversion, and it is reported that large numbers of “Muslims” convert each year to a Christian identity, presumably C3. And in any community there are some binary thinkers

⁴⁴ Corwin et al. (2007), p. 14; Higgins (2006), p. 121; Travis, Travis & Parshall (2008).

⁴⁵ Corwin et al. (2007), p.14.

⁴⁶ Massey (2004).

⁴⁷ Madany (2009); Tennent (2006), p. 113.

⁴⁸ Madany (2009).

⁴⁹ Ayub (2009), p.24; Phil (2009), p. 118.

for whom the C4 and C5 positions are too complicated to handle, unless there is a mature fellowship to which they can assimilate. But in communities where renunciation of one's Muslim identity leads to execution or expulsion, it is hard to see how the C4 or C3 approaches can lead to sustained church-planting movements.⁵⁰

Brown makes clear not only that multiple approaches are possible, but that multiple approaches are bearing fruit in the Muslim world.

3.7 IM advocates manipulative language in order to sneak in Muslim accommodation and undermine Christian orthodoxy

Some critics of insider principles display an underlying suspicion towards fellow believers. These accusations pertain particularly to the motives and intentions of IM advocates. John Span, for instance, provides a critique of Abdul Asad's article in the December, 2009 edition of SFM. He writes, "As much as Abdul Asad's questions seem to be innocuous, they are used strategically to disarm the reader. They are positioned to set the reader up to accept the next dogmatic statement that comes after the question."⁵¹ Ironically, Asad's article is one of the more moderate positions among those defending insider movements, largely affirming, with Timothy Tennent, that it is appropriate as a transitional, rather than long-term, model of contextualization.

Other statements indicated that insider advocates intentionally compromise biblical teaching for the sake of Muslim converts. Dixon writes concerning the translation products IM proponents sponsor,

These new translations reinterpret the person and work of Jesus in various ways so that members of other religions do not need to assent to the full meaning of the person and work of Jesus. The Trinitarian theology of Jesus as Son of God and Lord of life is minimized so that it does not become a stumbling block to people of other faiths.⁵²

⁵⁰ Corwin et al. (2007), p. 14.

⁵¹ Span (2009), p. 137.

⁵² Dixon (2009), p. 18.

If such charges were true, they would be of grievous concern. But Brown and others flatly deny that the translation projects they promote have such an intent.⁵³ Are the charges against other, unpublished proponents? The answer is not clear. It may be, for instance, that the public statements about IM are different than the private opinions of its proponents. Jay Smith indicates such suspicion in his assessment of a “Common Ground” conference in Atlanta. He describes the presenters as “moving the goalposts” by stating one thing during the conference and then moderating their statements for publication.⁵⁴ This is possible, but the charge proves difficult to assess.

4 Areas of remaining tension and discussion

Putting aside these issues, we turn now to what appear to be substantive debates on the issue of Muslim contextualization. As this article aims not to solve the debate but narrow its focus, each section will be opened with the central question being disputed. Necessarily, critics and proponents do not dispute all of these issues. Issues under greater dispute, however, have been listed towards the end.

4.1 Can meaning and form be separated from one another? Moreover, is it appropriate and necessary to translate words and forms based on “meaning units” (dynamic equivalency) rather than “word-for-word” or “form-for-form” conversion of terms?

This question mainly applies to translation, but since Kraft⁵⁵ and Walls⁵⁶ introduced the “idea of translation” to the contextualization process, it impacts one’s position on the C-scale. If one rejects the idea that meanings must be explained and lived out primarily through previously existing forms (be they language or rituals), then an insider approach to ministry will offend one’s sense of Christianity.

⁵³ Al Kalima (2009) ; Brown, Penny & Gray (2009).

⁵⁴ Smith (2009), p. 28.

⁵⁵ Kraft (2005).

⁵⁶ Walls (1996).

Edward Ayub, a Bangladeshi believer of a Muslim background, finds the insider believers in his country to be deeply offensive. He writes, “They fast, but their oaths and methods are different. They sacrifice, but with a purpose different from what Muslims suppose. Their religious activities make them look like Muslims, but in private they claim that they are different theologically.”⁵⁷ Ayub considers it deceitful to utilize other religious forms and inject them with new Christ-centered meaning. The form, in his view, cannot be separated from the locally-ascribed meaning.

Roger Dixon takes aim particularly at the “dynamic equivalent” philosophy of translation. Though Dixon leaves open the possibility that the approach is acceptable, he is concerned that it allows too much personal interpretation to creep into the text.⁵⁸ Dixon’s concerns are valid. In particular, debate over key terms like Jesus as the “Son of God” prove crucial and complex. But the principle of dynamic equivalency for translators and church-planters is largely within mainstream evangelical thinking. In his own critique of non-filial translations of the terms “Father” and “Son”, Scott Horrell, a professor of Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary, recognizes this point:

Three decades of discussion follow with significant changes in translation methodology that are widely affirmed by Bible translators around the world. Two principles are embraced unanimously: 1) accuracy to the meaning of the text, rather than mere duplication of lexical equivalents, and 2) clarity of meaning or naturalness of expression within a given dialect (termed “communicativeness”). Rick Brown and Martin Parsons are well known for their work regarding the contextualized translation of Sonship passages in different Muslim idioms. Numerous other writers also address Christian and Islamic understandings of Jesus. Seeking to safeguard traditional testimony that the “Son of God” is “God the Son”, Roger Dixon, David Abernathy, and others have recently raised counter-arguments that call word-for-word translation of Son-of-God texts. Among published works, the academic weight is de-

⁵⁷ Ayub (2009), p. 26; cf. Smith (2009), pp. 36-37.

⁵⁸ Dixon (2009), p. 15.

cidedly on the side of translation specialists and current translation theory.⁵⁹

The danger is painting insider proponents and translators as being outside of the mainstream, when, on this issue, their theoretical basis is largely inside it.⁶⁰ Application of those principles, which touch more on subsequent questions, is admittedly up for debate.

Of course, “mainstream” does not mean “right”. Hence, this issue has been placed in the “disputed” section of the paper in the hopes that critics would make their case more clearly in addressing dominant translation and missiological thinking.⁶¹

4.2 Are meaning-based translations that seek alternative terms from those that have historically offended and distracted Muslim audiences able to maintain accuracy and faithfulness to the intended-meanings of the text?

Muslim contextualization is coming into the public purview over the issue of Bible translation. World Magazine, the largest evangelical bi-weekly in the United States, and Christianity Today both featured articles on the issue in the last few months.⁶² On the whole, the journalists are to be commended for accurately detailing some of the tensions. And yet, highly technical translation issues prove difficult to debate among large, uninformed audiences. One Bible translator and linguist noted to the author, “When the question is ‘Son of God’ vs. not ‘Son of God,’ the question sounds terrible and skews the complex translation process of finding appropriate terms”.⁶³

The central question is whether or not some terms leave out essential meanings in their efforts to avoid inaccuracy. Muslims largely associate sex with the biological term son, a meaning that is foreign to the New Testament’s declaration of Jesus as the “Son of

⁵⁹ Horrell (2010), pp. 640–642.

⁶⁰ Cf. Higgins (2009b), p. 84.

⁶¹ Cf. Smith (2009), p. 30. Smith likewise sees dynamic equivalency as a legitimate method, but he then accuses Muslim-idiom translators of “changing the text.” They respond to this in a subsequent article, Al Kalima (2009).

⁶² Belz (2011); Hansen (2011).

⁶³ Personal communication, May 5 2011.

God.” Translators do not want to encourage an inaccurate understanding among Muslim audiences. Moreover, Brown and others point out that “Son of God” serves primarily as a Messianic title in the Old and New Testament, though it has come to have more divine connotations for Westerners since the Nicene Creed. In light of this, he argues that translators should pursue alternative but accurate ways to communicate the original meaning of the term.⁶⁴ He does not believe that the use of an alternative term undermines orthodox evidence of Jesus’ divinity in the New Testament.⁶⁵

Critics, however, argue that non-filial translations of “son” are simply unable to carry the necessary theological weight of the original terms.⁶⁶ Non-filial terms undercut the intimate triune relationship between God the Father and God the Son and so, even if the term offends, it should be retained. No other term will do. The complexity of this debate is sure to tax theologians, exegetes, linguists, and missiologists to their utmost.

4.3 Are there significant numbers of true followers of Jesus who continue to identify themselves as Muslims? Is it important that Western outsiders verify and evaluate this?

One of the fundamental arguments for insider movements among Muslims is that they exist.⁶⁷ Their very occurrence sparks an Acts 15-kind of consultation: If God is doing this kind of work in the world, should we hinder it or encourage it? Insider advocates argue that we should learn from what God is doing in the world, search the Scriptures in light of them (as James did, Acts 15:9-21), and join with God in this mission.

Some critics, however, question the numbers and particularly whether or not they are inspired by the Holy Spirit or just Western money. Since an essential premise of the insider approach, however, is that these movements are happening and have often started apart

⁶⁴ Brown (2005a).

⁶⁵ Brown et al. (2009), pp. 92-93.

⁶⁶ Horrell (2010), pp. 666i-666j; Dixon (2007).

⁶⁷ Travis & Travis (2005); Corwin et al. (2007); Massey (2000); Massey (2004).

from foreign influence, the question is legitimate. If they are fabricated or exaggerated, then the argument for them falls apart.⁶⁸

But the situation is more complicated than just taking an accurate census. Travis, for instance, raises two issues. On the one hand, it is simply hard to get accurate information on these movements.⁶⁹ One of the reasons these movements exist at all is because they often exist in highly xenophobic societies that resist foreign interference. Gathering statistics in such a context causes significant security risks to believers. Any information gathered may not be accessible to the general public.

Travis's second point may be the more pressing one. He questions to what degree Western outsiders should be privileged to judge and critique these movements. Rebecca Lewis notes, for instance, that Westerners like to set themselves up as "watch dogs" against syncretism, but often remain blind to their own forms of it.⁷⁰ In a world of mass media, Westerners are prone to think they should be privy to all information. Hence, while some critics complain that they cannot access direct information about the movements,⁷¹ it is unlikely that the information will soon become widely available.

The nature of the situation ensures that only some people will be privileged enough to see and judge what exactly is going on in these communities. Indeed, the outsiders with access are likely to be the ones who have gained trust through their sympathy to the movements.⁷² Still, as outsiders, we need to discuss specifically who can and should evaluate these movements.

4.4 Is following Jesus a "religion"? If so or if not, what does this mean for our understanding of a religion such as "Islam"?

Most insider proponents build their understanding of insider movements on the fundamental assumption that Christianity is not first and foremost a "religion". The Travises make this explicit

⁶⁸ Corwin et al. (2007), p. 13; Smith (2009), pp. 50-51.

⁶⁹ Corwin et al. (2007), p. 24.

⁷⁰ See Lewis' running commentary in Brogden (2010), p. 36.

⁷¹ Dixon (2007), p. 7; Corwin et al. (2007), p. 13.

⁷² Corwin et al. (2007), p. 17.

within their list of ten premises about insider movements. Their first three premises are:

Premise 1: For Muslims, culture, politics and religion are nearly inseparable, making changing religions a total break with society.
Premise 2: Salvation is by grace alone through relationship/allegiance to Jesus Christ. Changing religions is not a prerequisite for nor a guarantee of salvation.

Premise 3: Jesus' primary concern was the establishment of the Kingdom of God, not the founding a new religion.⁷³

Though each writer has his or her own nuance to this point, each assumes that culture and religion in Muslim societies intertwine in such a way to make it nearly impossible to separate them.⁷⁴ More importantly, the gospel of Jesus Christ is intended to transform people from the inside out by means of the Holy Spirit, not primarily by the imposition of external cultural or "religious" standards.

Not all agree on this construction of the facts. Phil Bourne, for instance, accurately states the position of insider advocates by noting, "[Religion for them] is only a set of rituals/cultural activities and in practicing them one is not giving assent to another 'Lord'." But then he adds, "Put this way, such activity does not seem to square with the perspective of scripture, which is hostile to any other organized religion that denies the Lordship of YHWH alone".⁷⁵

Jeff Morton sees this as one of the more crucial issues informing one's perspective on insider movements. He diagrams two axes that tend to define the debate. One axis line has "kerygmaticism" and "pragmatism" at each pole. The former indicates total unconcern for results and singular focus on the "proclamation of the Gospel" without regard for the listener's understanding. "Pragmatism" indicates over-concern for results even at the expense of biblical faithfulness. Morton notes repeatedly that he does not expect there to be missionaries at either extreme. On the other axis, and to the point of this discussion, is "pessimism" and "optimism". Each pole

⁷³ Travis & Travis (2005).

⁷⁴ Cf. Higgins (2009a), pp. 81-88.

⁷⁵ Bourne (2009), p.61.

indicates one's perspective on other religions. Pessimists tend to see Islam as having no intrinsic value and in need of complete dismissal by the follower of Christ. Optimists see Islam, or elements of it, as redeemable or at least having elements that might point one to truth in their search for God. Morton argues that, on the whole, IM proponents tend to be more pragmatic and optimistic in their view of Muslim contextualization, while critics (whom he calls those with an "Historical Approach") tend to be more kerygmatic and pessimistic about Islam (2011; cf. Higgins, 2006, 120).⁷⁶

Morton's graph touches on the tendencies of the debate. Higgins, for instance, closes his article, "Inside What?" with the statement, "What is truly at the heart of the insider movement paradigm is the God Who is at work directly among the nations, including their religions, to make in each a people for Himself."⁷⁷ Even as Higgins affirms that conscious faith in Jesus is necessary for salvation, he holds that God uses elements of all religions to lead someone to that faith. This position resembles Don Richardson's claims in 1981 that all cultures hold redemptive-analogies which cross cultural workers should tap into in explaining the Gospel. Islam, Higgins indicates, also holds these redemptive elements.

Morton, on the other hand, admits there may be "bridgeable" elements in Islam but rejects an inferred notion that Islam may be redeemable. He writes,

The Historical practitioner understands the dark and Satanic nature of Islam; that it has a hold on its adherents; that there is a spiritual battle that must be waged in order to bring people out of Islam. And if all this is true about Islam, how can we ask new believers to "remain" in it?⁷⁸

It is not clear, however, that all IM practitioners believe Islam is "redeemable". In a comment posted in response to Morton's internet article, Rebecca Lewis notes,

⁷⁶ Morton (2011); cf. Higgins (2006), p. 120.

⁷⁷ Higgins (2009b), p. 91.

⁷⁸ Morton (2011).

Let me make clear (since you interpret my position) that I think Islam is every bit as demonic as any worldview or religion that promises salvation apart from Christ..

I take the position I do out of kerygmatic concerns, not pragmatic, and out of pessimism about Islam but a great optimism about the power of the Gospel to bring light, whether in cannibalistic tribes, Christopagan religions, the Greek pantheon, or our own mammon-steeped American culture (without having to remove believers from their families or community context).⁷⁹

Lewis criticizes false religion and insists that God redeems people and communities, not religions. With this, she emphasizes that believers should be encouraged to stay within their social networks rather than be extracted into new aggregate groups that break all previous ties.⁸⁰

This question requires significant clarification of terms. Some IM proponents likely sympathize with and appreciate Islam more than others. Is anyone claiming, however, that Islam as a religion can be redeemed? If so, what do they mean by the term “redeemed”? Is the focus solely on communities and individuals in regards to their social identity? Further discussion is needed.

4.5 What are the elements of genuine Christ-centered discipleship? What role do tradition, historical Christian confessions, foreign missionaries, and the Holy Spirit’s leading have in bringing someone into genuine conformity to Christ-likeness?

Another central debate in the insider discussion is the nature of discipleship. One might stereotype insider proponents as encouraging a “hands-off” approach to discipleship while critics are painted as imposing Western paradigms on new believers. Both may have some truth in it, but largely depend on the practitioner and his or her individual style and personality.

Indeed, paradigms are probably shattered as each individual case is examined. Higgins, for instance, says that he has used ancient creeds in his discipleship of insider believers and expects Muslims who follow Jesus to have their views of Islam, mankind, God and

⁷⁹ Morton (2011); See responses below main article.

⁸⁰ Lewis (2007).

many other topics challenged and transformed in the process.⁸¹ Lewis points out that she's met insider believers who have gone through 10 systematic biblical training sessions with outsiders.⁸²

Yet, there is a sense in the discussion that those advocating an insider approach expect the process of discipleship to be less "head-oriented" according to Western systematic categories, more gradual, and less influenced by foreigners.

Moreover, insider advocates are perhaps more comfortable with the lack of full trinitarian confessionalism among insider believers, though they expect this confession to develop eventually from within the insider paradigm.⁸³ They expect the Holy Spirit to guide the process. The Travises note that insider movements must have a "high reliance on the Spirit and the Word".⁸⁴ Higgins says simply, "I trust God to use His Word to teach and correct His people".⁸⁵

It would be wrong to caricature critics as not relying on the Spirit and the Word. Yet the two groups differ on the timeframe necessary for this process. Jay Smith, for instance, criticizes the Common Ground training for lacking specific instructions on how a believer should view Mohamed and what remaining in his family and religious context look like.⁸⁶ One suspects that insider proponents do not have a quick answer to this question. They indicate that the Spirit will lead the believer towards orthodoxy, whereas Smith implies that proper discipleship will provide a template or paradigm for the new believer to follow. In broad strokes, one group sees extraction as the greater danger to undermining God's long-range work in a community; the other sees false belief to be the greater danger. Getting to the root of how those convictions intersect requires further discussion.

⁸¹ Higgins (2009b), p. 75-77.

⁸² See Lewis' running commentary in Brogden (2010), p. 40.

⁸³ Massey (2004).

⁸⁴ Travis & Travis (2005), p. 409.

⁸⁵ Higgins (2009b), p. 68.

⁸⁶ Smith (2009).

4.6 To what extent does a follower of Jesus need to visibly relate to the global body of Christ and traditional churches in their regional area but outside of their typical community?

In the previous section, we addressed how insider proponents clearly encourage believers to gather as followers of Jesus. They encourage believers to utilize existing social networks, but in this sense they advocate the formation of “churches”.

With this clarification, however, the question lingers about the degree to which insider believers should associate with the global body of Christ and, should there be one, with the geographically proximate church. Critics suggest that for long-term maturity, this should certainly be an aim. Timothy Tennent, president of Asbury Seminary, argues, for instance, “To encourage Muslim believers to retain their self-identity as Muslims and to not find practical ways to identify themselves with the larger community of those who worship Jesus Christ reveals a view of the church that is clearly sub-Christian.”⁸⁷ As previously mentioned, Edward Ayub finds the Bangladeshi insider members to be deeply offensive and even duplicitous for not adopting a Christian identity in their pursuit of Christ.⁸⁸

Ayub’s objections, however, indicate some of the problems at stake in this question. One of the tensions throughout Christian expansion has been “ownership” of Christian tradition and identity. One can legitimately argue that this was a central issue in Acts 15 and Galatians: the judaizing believers wanted to make sure that the new Gentile believers were one of them. Ayub expresses concern that the decisions insider believers make negatively impact Christianity on a broad level:

Are the people who do these things a sect of Islam like Wahabis or Sunni’s, or are they Christians? They never clarify their position. They perform namaz at the mosques. Which surahs do they use? I certainly know that, though they are standing in the namaz with the Muslims, they secretly use different oaths, recitations and surahs... Taking an oath in the name of Christ to worship Allah, reciting surahs

⁸⁷ Tennent (2006), p. 111.

⁸⁸ Ayub (2009)

from the Bible, the Torah and most portions from Psalms, they muddy the water between Christianity and Islam.⁸⁹

Insider believers, then, face major challenges on these issues. As noted earlier, persecution can be triggered, not by professing Christ, but by association with foreigners. Xenophobia dominates portions of the Muslim world and invites accusations of foreign accommodation or greed when one's faith is mentioned. The greater the connection to foreigners, the more a believer's ability to testify first and foremost to Christ may be challenged. Moreover, they face the continual criticism from Christian-identity churches that they have an inferior faith that has failed to reach the maturity level of the other believers.

For now, critics indicate that persecution for the sake of Christ's body, including association with national church believers, might be part and parcel to persecution for Jesus' sake. Phil Bourne asks if Jesus is worth even the cost of ostracism for the believer's association with the broader church⁹⁰

In Hebrews 10, the author commends the Hebrew believers for suffering pain for their association with other believers (vv. 32-34). The text begs the question of the global church and of insider believers? How can love for one another reign in light of the Gospel's expansion and the threat of persecution for our associations?

Most likely, this debate has more to do with the question of "when" not "if". A number of writers, critics included, show a certain level of comfortability with an insider approach as a transitional model.⁹¹ As insider groups gain momentum, they will likely discern for themselves a need to connect with the global body of believers. For now the main question is whether or not this is a necessary sign of their legitimacy and maturity.

4.7 How should Insiders view and talk about Mohamed?

Views of Mohamed are probably the central debate in the insider discussions. Monolithic views of Islam, for instance, are often tied

⁸⁹ Ayub (2009), p. 26.

⁹⁰ Bourne (2009), p. 69.

⁹¹ Tennent (2006); Asad (2009); Parshall (2004); Corwin (2008).

to assumptions about a Muslim's understanding and devotion to Mohamed as God's final prophet.

The central identity marker for a Muslim is his or her recitation of the Muslim creed (*shahada*): "There is no god but Allah, and Mohamed is his prophet". As noted earlier, not all insiders say the creed and context determines whether or not a believer would be required to say it with any regularity. Brown argues, based on conversations with two insider believers, that Muslims are rarely asked to say the creed out loud.⁹² He offers four reasons why an insider believer might say the creed: (1) because he believes Mohamed is a prophet, (2) as a sign of social solidarity without any conviction, (3) as an affirmation of Mohamed's mission to turn the Arabs from idolatry, or (4) as a statement made under duress.⁹³ Brown does not suggest that any of these are optimal, but he, Higgins, and others express flexibility with insider believers sorting these issues out as the Holy Spirit works in them. An example of this process is Brother Yusuf's assessment: "What one believes about Muhammad is of little consequence. Affirming Muhammad does not in fact affirm a body of doctrine."⁹⁴

Critics find this approach deeply troubling. Waterman sympathizes with believers forced to say the creed under duress, but he expresses pastoral concern that stated allegiance to Mohamed will hinder believers from maturing in Christ.⁹⁵ Corwin expects that external participation in the Muslim prayer rituals at the mosque, even if one avoids saying the creed in the process, will communicate full adherence to Islamic doctrine to those around the believer. This leads the believer to either live a life of deceit in relationship to his community (professing belief in Islam by his actions, while not in fact believing in Islam) or syncretism (intertwining false Islamic convictions with Christian ones). In the literature, most critics express continued sympathy for new believers as they initially grow in

⁹² Brown (2007), p. 70.

⁹³ Also see Higgins (2006), p. 121.

⁹⁴ Corwin et al. (2007), p. 12.

⁹⁵ Waterman (2007), pp. 59-60.

their faith and prepare for potential ostracism.⁹⁶ The repeated concern is that Western workers would encourage new believers to repeat the creed against their conscience or fail to move believers towards a rejection of Mohamed's false teachings, particularly that God is not triune and that Jesus was not crucified (Smith, 2009, pp. 33-34).⁹⁷ These are legitimate and weighty concerns. One hopes that as these conversations continue, and particularly more qualitative research is done on insiders' views of Mohamed and the Qur'an, further understanding, clarity, and biblical faithfulness will be achieved.

5 Conclusion

These debates offer a crucial opportunity to apply the Gospel of peace in the midst of deep tension. Neither side seems likely to fully agree with the other. Some indeed may consider the other dangerously heretical. It is hoped, nevertheless, that both on the missiological level and on the local level Paul's admonition to trust another's conscience and accept each brother and sister in spite of tense disagreements would be followed.⁹⁸

On one level, then, practitioners must be prepared to lovingly accept the different approaches on the field. This does not require that everyone remain silent. Constructive debate serves the greater cause of Christ. But as Travis says,

Those called to C5 approaches should be free to carry out their ministries without interference from those called in a non-C5 direction, and those called to non-C5 approaches should enjoy the respect and support of those who are engaged in C5 ministries.⁹⁹

Insider practitioners in particular need to humbly honor the efforts of the many servants of Christ who faithfully preach Christ and yet reject C5 approaches. Even if they consider others' methodologies to be in error, they must affirm the sacrifice, effort, and

⁹⁶ Parshall (1998); Corwin (2007), p. 55; Waterman (2007).

⁹⁷ Smith (2009), pp. 33-34.

⁹⁸ Romans 14-15.

⁹⁹ Corwin et al. (2007), p. 17.

devotion to Christ that these men and women exhibit. Additionally, they must value the cultural insights of those with whom they disagree. Some efforts at mutual affirmation are happening. In January, EMQ published two articles calling for greater patience with one another in both the debate over contextualization and in our views of insider believers (Johnson; de Jong).¹⁰⁰ One can only hope that these types of articles and discussions will increase understanding and unity.

On the local level, however, foreign workers must encourage deeper communication and affirmation between groups. Judgment and criticism from a distance without heart-level fellowship will only reinforce cynicism and hatred. Higgins and Brother Yusuf both indicated that insider believers are willing to foster deeper fellowship and communion for the sake of Christ (Corwin et al., 2007, p. 8; Higgins, 2009a, p. 89).¹⁰¹ Foreign workers should encourage it.

In summary, this debate centers around different ways of assessing risk and exhibiting hope. IM critics see the risk of syncretism in the insider approaches. They feel that allowing the Qur'an and Mohamed to stay in the room, so to speak, through the believer's identification with Islam, undermines Christ's centrality and stints true discipleship. Moreover, they fear that endorsing these movements and incorporating their insights will undermine biblical orthodoxy and build a weak, compromised Church. Yet, with this fear, they remain confident that biblical teaching will bear long-term fruit, whether or not the numbers are high.

Insider proponents believe that true discipleship and allegiance to Jesus are being fostered through the movements. Within the movements and in their promotion of Muslim-idiom translations, they consider the risk of heterodoxy to be worthwhile. C5 groups allow churches to be rooted in the community itself and offer the possibility that more Muslims will have access to the Gospel. Moreover, they fear that closing down these movements and refusing to experiment will compromise their commitment to the Great

¹⁰⁰ Johnson (2011); de Jong (2011).

¹⁰¹ Corwin et al. (2007), p. 8; Higgins (2009a), p. 89.

Commission and salvation by faith alone (not religious identity). Concurrently, they remain confident that the Holy Spirit will sift out falsehood as believers grow nearer to God in Christ. Both groups sense legitimate fears and place their confidence in God. The aim of this paper is to stimulate fruitful conversations so that both fears would be unrealized and both hopes fulfilled.

In conclusion, I offer my own set of commitments that I believe each side of the debate should affirm. These commitments are intended to affirm common concerns about syncretism and extraction, and thereby lay a foundation for meaningful debate. Such a statement may be one way that different groups can focus discussions on real differences, while accepting one another in each one's pursuit of God's kingdom among Muslims.

- 1) We aim to see vibrant, Jesus-loving and Jesus-centered communities that are faithful to the Scriptures and living out their discipleship in their community.
- 2) We aim to see people meaningfully connected to their unbelieving social networks, without denying or diminishing Jesus' centrality, for the sake of the Gospel.
- 3) We aim to see strong, robust, transformed families.
- 4) We aim to live out the biblical calling of teaching, rebuking, warning, and loving new believers as Christ is formed in them.
- 5) We aim to be listeners and learners in the midst of that process; we know we bear cultural baggage and we want as much as possible for the Gospel to be implanted within the new culture and to avoid setting a foreign cultural standard.
- 6) We believe that those who are joined to Jesus will suffer in this fallen world and will suffer especially for their devotion to Jesus. Though some might look to avoid pre-mature persecution, we do not believe persecution can be completely avoided nor that it should be. "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2 Tim 3:16).

- 7) Though our time-frames differ for accomplishing it, we aim to see Jesus-centered communities from Muslim backgrounds connected to and embraced by the global body of Christ.

References

- Al Kalima. (2009). 'A Response to Jay Smith's Criticisms of Common Ground and of The True Meaning of the Gospel' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (5, October), pp. 15-20. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/2AlKalimaSFM5-5.pdf>.
- Asad, Abdul. (2009). 'Rethinking the Insider Movement Debate: Global Historical Insights Toward an Appropriate Transitional Model of C5' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (4, August), pp 133-159. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/AbdulAsad-Rethinking-August%202009.pdf>.
- Ayub, E. (2009). 'Observations and Reactions to Christians involved in a New Approach to Mission' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (5, October), pp. 21-40. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/3EdwardAyubSFM5-5.pdf>.
- Belz, Emily. (2011). 'Inside Out', in *World Magazine* 26 (9, May 7). Available from <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/17944> (full article by subscription).
- Bourne, Phil. (2009). 'Summary of the Contextualization Debate' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (5, October), pp. 58-80. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/6PhilBoureSFM5-5.pdf>.
- Brogden, Dick. (2010). 'Inside Out: Probing Presuppositions among Insider Movements' in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27 (1, Spring), pp. 33-40. Available free from www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/27_1_PDFs/27_1_Brogden.pdf.

- Brown, Rick. (2005a). 'Part I: Explaining the Biblical Term "Son(s) of God" in Muslim Contexts', in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 22 (3, Fall), pp. 91-96. Available free from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/22_3_PDFs/91-96Brown_SOG.pdf.
- Brown, Rick. (2005b). 'Part II: Translating the Biblical Term "Son(s) of God" in Muslim Contexts' in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 22 (4, Winter), pp. 135-145. Available free from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/22_4_PDFs/135-145%20Brown_SOG.pdf.
- Brown, Rick. (2007). 'Biblical Muslims' in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (2, Summer), pp. 65-74. Available free from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/24_2_PDFs/24_2_Brown.pdf.
- Brown, R., Penny, J., & Gray, Leith. (2009). 'Muslim-Idiom Bible Translation: Claims and Facts' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (6, December), pp. 87-105. Available free from [http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/7-1%20RickBrownTranslation\(1\).pdf](http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/7-1%20RickBrownTranslation(1).pdf).
- Chandler, Paul-Gordon. (2007). *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road*. New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. Kindle e-book.
- Corwin, Gary. (2007). 'A Response to My Respondents' in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 24 (2, Summer), pp. 53-55. Available free from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/24_2_PDFs/24_2_Corwin.pdf.
- Corwin, Gary. (2008). 'Issues of Identity in a Muslim Context: Common Ground?' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 44 (1, January), pp. 8-9. Available from <http://www.emisdirect.com> (by subscription).

- Corwin, G., Yusuf, Brown, R., Higgins, K., Lewis, R., and Travis, John. (2007). 'A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocates to Consider Ten Questions' in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (1, Spring), pp. 5-21. Available free from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/24_1_PDFs/Corwin.pdf.
- De Jong, L. (2011). 'Insider Believers and the Empathy of God' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 47 (1, January), pp. 10-12. Available from <http://www.emisdirect.com> (by subscription).
- Dixon, Roger L. (2007). 'Identity Theft: Reteologizing the Son of God' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 43 (2, April), pp. 220-226. Available from <http://www.emisdirect.com> (by subscription).
- Dixon, Roger L. (2009). 'Moving On from the C1-C6 Spectrum' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (4, August), pp. 3-19. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/RogerDixon-MovingOn-August%202009.pdf>.
- Esler, Ted. (2010). 'Liar! Liar! The Current Missiological Debate on Contextualization Rages on', on Esler.org: Musings from Ted's Untidy Brain (March 5). Available free from <http://www.esler.org/2010/03/05/liar-liar-the-current-missiological-debate-on-contextualization-rages-on/>.
- Grafas, Basil. (2010). 'A View from the Bridge: Insider Movement Critics Speak Out' in *St Francis Magazine* 6 (6, December), pp. 934-938. Available free from <http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/4SFM6.6-934-938.pdf>.
- Hansen, C. (2011). 'The Son and the Crescent' in *Christianity Today Magazine* (February). Available free from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/february/soncrescent.html>.
- Hassan, R. (2007). 'On Being Religious: Patterns of Religious Commitment in Muslim Societies' in *The Muslim World* 97 (3, July), pp. 437-478.

- Higgins, Kevin. (2006). 'Identity, Integrity and Insider Movements: A Brief Paper Inspired by Timothy C. Tennent's Critique of C-5 Thinking', in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23 (3, Fall), pp. 117-123. Available free from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/23_3_PDFs/Higgins.pdf.
- Higgins, Kevin. (2009a). 'Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (4, August), pp. 74-91. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/KevinHiggins-InsideWhat-August%202009.pdf>.
- Higgins, K. (2009b). 'Speaking the Truth about Insider Movements: Addressing the Criticisms of Bill Nikides and 'Phil' Relative to the Article 'Inside What?'' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (6, December), pp. 61-86. Available free from <http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/7%20KevinHiggins-SpeakingTruth.pdf>.
- Horrell, J. S. (2010). 'Cautions Regarding 'Son of God' in Muslim-Idiom Translations of the Bible: Seeking Sensible Balance' in *St Francis Magazine* 6 (4, August), pp. 638-666. Available free from http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/4_%20SFM%20August%202010.pdf.
- Johnson, Robert. (2011). 'Toward a Greater Unity in Muslim Ministry' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 47 (1, January), pp. 50-56. Available from <http://www.emisdirect.com> (by subscription).
- Kraft, C. H. (Ed.). (2005). *Appropriate Christianity*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.
- Lewis, Rebecca. (2007). 'Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities' in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24 (2, Summer), pp. 75-76. Available free from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/24_2_PDFs/24_2_Lewis.pdf.

- Madany, Bassam M. (2009). 'The New Christians of North Africa and the Insider Movement' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (5, October), pp. 49-57. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/5BassamMadanySFM5-5.pdf>.
- Mallouhi, Mazhar. (2009). 'Comments on the Insider Movement', in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (5, October), pp. 3-14. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/1MazharMallouhiSFM5-5.pdf>.
- Marranci, G. (2008). *The Anthropology of Islam*. Oxford, UK: Berg Publishers. Kindle ebook.
- Massey, Joshua. (2000). 'The Amazing Diversity of God in Drawing Muslims to Christ' in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17 (1, Spring), pp. 5-14. Available free from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/17_1_PDFs/Drawing_Muslims.pdf.
- Massey, Joshua. (2004). 'Misunderstanding C-5: His Ways are not Our Orthodoxy' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40 (3, July), pp. 296-304. Available from <http://www.emisdirect.com> (by subscription).
- Morton, Jeff. (2011). 'Insider Movements and the Historical Approach' in *biblicalmissiology.org* (Feb 8). Available free from <http://biblicalmissiology.org/2011/02/08/insider-movements-and-the-historical-approach>.
- Nikides, Bill. (2009). 'A Response to Kevin Higgins' 'Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (4, August), pp. 92-113. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/BillNikides-ResponsetoHiggins-August2009.pdf>.
- Parshall, Phil. (1998). 'Danger! New Directions in Contextualization' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34(4, October), pp. 404-

417. Available from <http://www.emisdirect.com> (by subscription).

Parshall, Phil. (2004). 'Lifting the Fatwa' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 40 (3, July), pp. 288-293. Available from <http://www.emisdirect.com> (by subscription).

Phil. (2009). 'A Response to Kevin Higgins' 'Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective' in *St Francis Magazine* 5(4, August), pp. 114-126. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/Phil-ResponsetoHiggins-August2009.pdf>.

Piper, J., Corwin, G., Winter, R., Travis, J. & Travis, A. (2006). 'An Extended Conversation about 'Insider Movements'' in *Mission Frontiers* (January-February), pp. 16-23. Available for free from <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdfs/28-1-insider-movements.pdf>.

Richard, H. L. (Moderator). (2009). 'Unpacking the Insider Paradigm: An Open Discussion on Points of Diversity' in *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 26 (4, Winter), pp. 175-180. Available free from http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/26_4_PDFs/Insider%20Discussion.pdf.

Richardson, Don. (1981). *Eternity in Their Hearts: Startling Evidence of Belief in the One True God in Hundreds of Cultures Throughout the World*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.

Smith, Jay. (2009). 'An Assessment of the Insider's Principle Paradigms' in *St Francis Magazine* 5 (4, August), pp. 20-51. Available free from <http://stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/pdf/JaySmith-Assessment-August2009.pdf>.

Span, John. (2009). 'What's so bad...?: A response to Abdul Asad's Rethinking the Insider Movement Debate: Global Historical Insights Toward an Appropriate Transitional Model of C5' in

- St Francis Magazine* 5 (6, December), pp. 124-137. Available free from
<http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/9%20JohnSpan-Whatssobad.pdf>.
- Sultan, Christopher. (Translator). (2010). Interview with Political Scientist Hamed Abdel-Samad, Der Spiegel International On-line, (September 17). Available free from
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,717589-3,00.html>.
- Tennent, Timothy. (2006). 'Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 'High Spectrum' Contextualization' in *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 23(3, Fall), pp. 101-115. Available free from
http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/23_3_PDFs/Tennent.pdf.
- Travis, John. (1998a). 'The C1 to C6 Spectrum', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (4, October), pp. 407-408. Available from
<http://www.emisdirect.com> (by subscription).
- Travis, John. (1998b). 'Must All Muslims Leave Islam to Follow Jesus' in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (4, October), pp. 411-415. Available from <http://www.emisdirect.com> (by subscription).
- Travis, John. (2006). 'Producing and Using Meaningful Translations of the Taurat, Zabur, and Injil' in *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 23 (2, Summer), pp. 73-77. Available free from
http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/23_2_PDFs/Travis_MeaningfulTrans.pdf.
- Travis, John & Anna. (2005). 'Appropriate Approaches in Muslim Contexts', in C. H. Kraft (Ed.), *Appropriate Christianity*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, pp. 397-419.
- Travis, J., Travis, A., and Parshall, Phil. (2008). 'Factors Affecting the Identity that Jesus-followers Choose', in J. D. Woodberry (Ed.), *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and*