

**¹THE LYRICS OF CARL MEDEARIS:
A POST-MODERN CROONS –
A SONG OF CULTURAL IMPERIALISM**

By Jeff Morton

Abstract:

This essay explores the problematic foundations and ramifications of Carl Medearis' musings about Jesus, Muslims, the Bible, Church, and God. Medearis is an example of the Western missionary who appears to be compassionate and biblical, but in reality expresses a form of post-modern cultural imperialism. His stories and writings are filled with false dichotomies, straw man arguments, fallacies of informal logic, and poor theological conclusions. This essay concludes that Medearis' notions are less beneficial than they are confused, less theologically based than culturally biased; and they are not novel, but neocolonial.

1 Introduction

Carl Medearis is the master conductor and composer of both one-liners and storytelling. He consistently turns out phrases that are catchy and provocative. He is a superb storyteller who captures his reader/audience, transporting us into his story, experiencing what he experienced, making us ask, "I wonder if I could do that?"

Missions provocateur and rabble-rouser, this is how I initially categorize the affable Medearis. His latest book, *Speaking of Jesus: the art of not-evangelism*, is a great example of just that. The phrase *not-evangelism* is enticing and avant-garde, making you want to pick up the book. There are other one-liners that will grab your attention, make you sit up, and say, "Yeah, I think you're on to something there, Carl." There are phrases such as, "the gospel of terminology," "owning Christianity," "God is who he is," and "Jesus never intended to start a religion." These statements are disarming in that they express truths to which most evangelicals ascribe; simultaneously they

raise serious questions about Medearis' theology. And that's what this essay is about.

It is not my purpose to review the books that Carl Medearis has written although much that I cite obviously comes from them. Neither is it my purpose to demonize my brother, nor call him to repentance (this is, to quote a president, "above my pay grade"). The reason for my examination of the Carl Medearis' statements is to make a public statement to the church at large, asking this question: Does Medearis' theology provide a solid foundation from which we can do missions with Muslims?

2 The Crooner of Colorado²

There is a song I often catch myself humming or singing in my mind: "Imagine." No, not the Christian version about heaven (though I do hum that one), but I mean John Lennon's version.

Imagine there's no heaven.
It's easy if you try .
No hell below us .
Above us only sky .

I catch myself humming the song because, frankly, I like the tune. I know the words are bad for me—the lyrics are the equivalent of a constant diet of fried Twinkies—but the tune is catchy. I wonder if this doesn't describe the phenomenon that is Carl Medearis. He is a wordsmith who slings catchy phrases as easily as a short order cook slings hash browns. You might find yourself humming a few bars of a Medearis melody, but I hope you catch yourself in mid tune, because there are some serious problems with the lyrics.

In the parlance of early twenty-first century evangelicalism, Carl Medearis is a rock star. I know Carl would not describe himself this way—though I think he's grinning at the provocative-ness of

² Throughout the essay, I make vague musical references that may or may not make sense, but I thought them clever at the time. I apologize for some obtuse notations; however, in this case it does make sense as Colorado is home for Medearis.

it—but this is the affect he has on some folks, especially on college campuses.

It's not my purpose to bring Medearis down or to see his life and ministry crumble before our eyes. I don't have that power—and God forbid! In fact, in sections three and four are the minor chords of our disagreement. I propose a *live and let live* treaty. I believe the issues discussed in these sections are important, but not so important to lose perspective of the big picture—the entire symphony. I even offer the olive branch in hinting that I may not have read Medearis correctly at times.

My attitude is different for sections five through seven for the simple reason that these are the serious issues that divide us. Sections three and four are a matter of opinion and interpretation of the *artiste*, whereas the last three sections are less interpretation than the reality of what Medearis has said.

3 Owning Christianity: “Religion done me wrong”

The first song I want to consider is the notion of *owning Christianity*.³ Pretty catchy lyric, I think. Medearis encourages and cajoles us to preach only Jesus. He believes too many of us are trying to defend Christianity, trying to convert Muslims to be like us instead of pointing them to Jesus.

When we preach Christianity, we find all these things on our plate [the Crusades, Protestants vs. Catholics, persecution of scientists, etc.]. . . . I believe that the gospel and the religion of Christianity can be two different messages. Even opposed on some points. When we preach Christianity, we have to own it. When we preach Jesus, we don't have to own anything. Jesus owns us.⁴

Perhaps the most egregious thing we Christians do, according to Medearis, is that we may be preaching the wrong message. “We're busy trying to find the boundary line that separates the sa-

³ Throughout chapter three of *Speaking of Jesus: the art of not-evangelism*.

⁴ *SJ* 47.

ved from the unsaved and trying to bring people across that boundary by convincing them to think like we do.”⁵

At the heart of Medearis’ statement is the bounded and centered set theory. Let me review quickly the notion of bounded sets vs. centered sets, a concept taken from mathematics, applied to conversion by Paul Hiebert, and often misapplied by both the advocates of the insider movements⁶ and the emergent church. The bounded set (Figure 1) is simply the idea that a boundary exists between those who are in the set and everyone else.

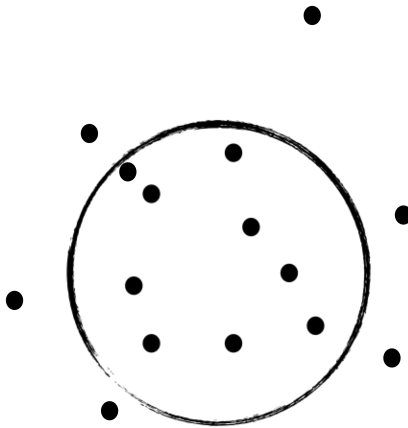


Figure 1. Bounded set

The bounded set is thought to be static rather than dynamic, exclusive as opposed to inclusive, and most important for Medearis, represents the vast majority of evangelicals’ understanding of salvation, the Gospel, Church, and Christianity. He writes,

This diagram represents the idea of salvation many of us have. We live in the circle and, to bring others inside of it, we have to convince them to adopt our beliefs. We typically use the word confession to describe the act when someone self-narrates his or her change of heart. . . .

⁵ *SJ* 48.

⁶ I didn’t mention Medearis is an advocate of insider movements (IM)? Sorry, he is; I discuss this below.

When we point at the boundary, we're trying to define it. But if Jesus is lifted up, *He* draws people to Himself. It isn't our job to lose sleep trying to decide if so-and-so is "in" or "out."⁷

So, Medearis is not enamored with the bounded set though he sees its value ("I'm not saying there isn't a point at which people genuinely come into the kingdom."⁸), but he does advise, "Throw the circle away!"⁹ Why? "If we're saved into the boundaries of a circle, we owe our allegiance to that boundary, and we're going to try to bring others inside it."¹⁰

There is another approach: the centered set. This is simply a dot representing Jesus (Figure 2), surrounded by many other dots—those are us—in movement either toward or away from Jesus. There is no *in* or *out* to worry about, no boundary, and no lost sleep (not to be confused with lost sheep).

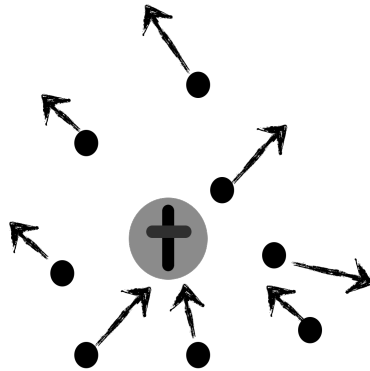


Figure 2. Centered set

Sounds good doesn't it? It's nice to get out from under the restrictions of boundaries and borders, the artificial lines drawn in the sand of a beach we do not even own. Catchy and emotionally satisfying, yes; but is it biblically accurate?

⁷ *SJ* 63, 67.

⁸ *SJ* 69.

⁹ *SJ* 71.

¹⁰ *SJ* 74.

There is a more integrated, holistic way of looking at salvation, the Gospel, Church and Christianity (Figure 3).

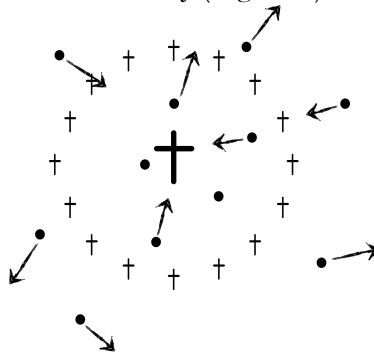


Figure 3. The centered-bounded sets: both are true

Here the boundary is actually Jesus himself. Jesus as a boundary is, believe it or not, biblical (“I am the way, the truth, the life” Jn 14:6; cf. Acts 4:12, Rom 10:9-10). He is a line drawn in the sand and in fact, even the beach is his! This bounded set has as its boundary, a necessity for identification, the covenantal relationship Jesus offers. The boundary is Jesus, not Christianity or something manmade—as Medearis thinks many of us think. There does come a time when the follower of Jesus admits, confesses, prays, cries out, weeps, states (or all the above): “Jesus is Lord.” There is content to knowing Jesus; that is, there is knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Here the confusion of Carl Medearis is easy to spot: he makes a straw man argument. He has given us an argument that is a caricature (setting up a boundary that is not Christ himself) so that he can knock it over. I have to assume Carl knows what he has done, so my question is this: is he being dishonest or does he really believe missionaries set up these boundaries that are something other than Jesus? If the former is true, his statements are untrustworthy; if the latter is true, he is uninformed and should be set on the shelf with other composers that have lost their relevance.

Conversely there is nothing biblical about following Jesus without the revelation/understanding of who he is (I am not suggesting Medearis believes otherwise). Some of us call our “border cross-

sing” being born again; others speak of confession; some speak of being a follower of Jesus; still others might say a formal prayer of a promise to obey him in addition to their baptism. All this is indicative of the bounded set, a necessary component of knowing and following Jesus. Once the Ethiopian eunuch understood what the prophet Isaiah wrote, he made a run for the border by asking for baptism: he understood the Messiah to be Jesus himself! He became part of the bounded set, although he didn’t know it.

But Jesus is more than just a boundary; he is also the focus and the goal of entering the bounded set. This too is biblical (“Follow me” Mt 4:19; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:59; Jn 1:43). Now notice that some within the centered-bounded set (of Figure 3) are not moving toward Christ—they are not maturing—while others are moving away from Jesus—we call this backsliding—or toward him, which is maturing, sanctification, and discipleship. Others outside the set are moving to or away. Both the bounded and the centered sets are true; neither is a complete picture of what is happening in our lives because of Jesus. Ironically, missiologists already know that both are of equal value, but those who wish to be edgy shine their light on one set or the other. This is a mistake. Consider Roger Chapman’s wise observation:

The hard work for the missionary begins after baptizing the converts, i.e., they must be instructed in all the teachings of Christianity. Applying to missions the centered set method for categorization would shift the emphasis from baptizing to discipling, from the converting of individuals to the nurturing of corporate bodies. The bounded set fits conversion but not maturation. The centered set fits maturation but not conversion. Church planting, not just the converting of individuals, was the method of the apostle Paul (Allen 1962:81); *in other words, the bounded set should be accompanied by the centered set.*¹¹ (emphasis mine)

So my concern with Medearis’ picture is not that he’s wrong, because he’s right! I mean that if we make artificial boundaries in order to distinguish who’s in or out, we are certainly not preaching

¹¹ Roger Chapman, “Cognitive Categories and Our Mission Approach.” *Journal of Applied Missiology* 6:2 (October 1995).
http://www.bible.acu.edu/ministry/centers_institutes/missions/page.asp?ID=461

the gospel. But when we point to Jesus, he is *both the focus and the boundary*. I know Medearis agrees; I just wish he would have said it.

One last word as to why both perspectives of salvation, the Gospel, Church, and Christianity are necessary. What is the Church? Is it an organization of people or is it an organism that is headed by Jesus? The answer is, of course, yes and yes.

It is an organization. Many of the words used to describe the Church connote some type of organization: elders, deacons, apostles, prophets, prophetesses and so on. Paul tells us to pray for the leaders of the local church; this is part of the organizational dimension of the Church; therefore it seems quite likely that the bounded set works well with this perspective.

On the other hand, the Church is also an organism whose head is Christ. The New Testament uses terms that speak of the relationship the Church has to Christ as an organism: the Bride of Christ, the Body of Christ, living stones, and the list continues. This fits well with the unbounded or centered set, which speaks of discipleship and movement toward Jesus as one's Savior and friend.

Why does Medearis separate Jesus from his Church? Why does he force his American cultural perspective of individualism on believers who know that Jesus and His church are organically joined in marriage? Why the divorce, Carl? Well, I am guessing Medearis is playing *stir-up-a-stink* here. He has over generalized one dynamic at the expense of the other. If he sees the necessity of both views, why doesn't he say so instead of stirring the pot? In good Western fashion, he has dichotomized a situation—essentially offering us a false dichotomy—playing one off the other in a misguided attempt to make us think we need a paradigm shift, a worldview change, a new perspective, a new chord, if you will. I believe this is unnecessary—and very American.

4 Medearis' top five hits

One of the things that really seems to tie up Medearis' shirt into knots is the *Christianese* we speak. He's right to warn us that using a foreign language around people who don't understand us is arro-

gant and not very good for communication. For instance, he writes about the word we use as our primary identifier:

Christian, which appears only three times in the entire Bible and is so commonly misunderstood today. . . is so common and so easy to use that it's almost ludicrous to suggest we get rid of it. . . I never refer to myself as a Christian although I have to use the word occasionally in reference so people will know what I'm talking about.¹²

These statements are quite revealing. Medearis has a list of words he wants us to reconsider how and why we use them. This is his hit list. *Christian* is the first. Let's review why.

- It is used "only three times in the entire Bible."

This is a fair observation. My concern is that this is a poor reason not to use *Christian*. Granted it is only the first of his three reasons, but it is the weakest reason. *Follower of Jesus*, the term Medearis likes, is found how many times in the Bible, Carl?¹³

- *Christian* is "commonly misunderstood today."

Yes, *Christian* is misunderstood, but so is the name *Jesus*. There are so many Jesuses it can be confusing to tell a Muslim you follow Jesus because he thinks you mean the prophet who was born under a palm tree and spoke from the cradle. Unless that's what you believe.

I didn't think so.

One final word on Carl's attempt to remove *Christian* from our vocabulary: there are many thousands of Christians who have been martyred because they refused to become something else. I'm not sure if Carl does this deliberately, but if we use his reasoning and

¹² *SJ* 120.

¹³ It is not present in the Greek or Hebrew, nor is it found in the NASB, NIV, ASV, and most other versions. It does show up three times in The Message (Rom 16:3, the Greek is "the first in Asia in Christ;" Phil 4:21, the Greek says, "all the saints in Christ Jesus;" and Col 3:22 is a complete translator insertion with no basis in the Greek) and three times in the New Century Version (Mt 27:57 and Jn 19:38, both have the word *mathêtês* [*disciple*]; and Acts 9:10, *martus* [*witness*]). The point is that the term, *follower of Jesus*, while accurate and worthy of our use, is not biblical whereas *Christian* is.

follow his advice to remove *Christian*, we have seriously insulted those men and women who bravely died at the hands of Muslim jihadists, not to mention the Nazi and Communist murderers. Western post-modern cultural imperialism demands a changing of the metanarrative, a new song, a new melody; but such thinking is shortsighted and an insult of the worst kind to our faithful, martyred brothers and sisters in Christ.

But *Christian* is not the only word on Medearis' hit list. He sings a similar tune about *church*:

Another doozy is the word *church*. . . . the word *church* is an English translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which is a much more complex noun than plain old *church*. . . . Most of the references [from Medearis' research] to *ekklesia* define it as an assembly or a congregation of people. . . . somehow all the language barriers push us into referring to *ekklesia* as some type of building.¹⁴

First, I'm very impressed to see the word *doozy* in a book—it's a great word! Second, he goes on to blame Constantine for the transmutation (another great word, if I do say so myself) of *ekklesia* from congregation to building (seems unfair to blame one person for such a huge change when he is not around to defend himself). Medearis summarizes it this way: "I don't believe that is what Jesus intended for His *ekklesia* after he ascended."¹⁵ For the most part I agree with him—the word *church* has come to mean a building; however, is the solution to slap an iron mask on *church*, and then throw it into a dungeon never to see the light of day? Why not use the word properly? In fact, Medearis offers this partial solution: when you want to invite a friend to *church*, do not use *church*, but simply describe what you do there. I would amend his idea to this: describe

¹⁴ *SJ* 122.

¹⁵ *SJ* 123. Rather than chastise Carl in the article, this seemed worthy of a footnote. It appears Medearis is rather unfamiliar with Church history if he truly believes the movement of the Church from the *called out* to a *building* can be blamed on Constantine. All Constantine did was to allow Christianity to be a legal religion of the empire. He did not make it the single religion of the empire. Why doesn't Carl know this? Where does he get his information? Is this some type of Western missionary guilt?

what you do there and tell them it is church.¹⁶ How will Muslims learn what the church is if we don't tell them and show them?

Next on the most wanted list are *Bible*, *evangelism*, and *missionary*. "I think we should do what Jesus would do with these terms, Carl," Jeff pretended to say.

"What would Jesus do, Jeff?" Carl pretended to ask.

Reaching into the frozen-word section of Wordmart, Jeff pulled out the frosty words and said, "Well, I believe he'd forgive and rehabilitate."

Use the words but explain them. Do not be afraid to use these words. They are not bombs that will prematurely explode in our mouths. There are no three-strike felons among these words that demand immediate execution by the Christian hit squad. These words are a means to an end: sharing Jesus.

5 The song of Islam

The previous sections on understanding salvation, the Church, and the use of Christianese are minor chords in Medearis' symphony. I don't agree with Medearis on the issues—and they are important—but in the context of today, they are things we can agree to disagree about. But now I come to what I believe are the most critical areas of our disagreement.

5.1 *Muhammad and Allah in stereo*

When you are around Muslims, you are inevitably asked for your opinion about Muhammad. Medearis has an opinion, but gives us some background first:

It is important to consider that Muhammad was, at least, in the beginning, a man with a desire to discover God. As he circuited Arabia, discussing God with the Christians and the Jews and the pantheistic and

¹⁶ Acts 2:42-47 mentions four things the church does—devoting themselves to the apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer—so telling non church people what we do in church seems to be a good idea. Luke did.

idoltrous Arabs, he grew disillusioned with the likenesses of God that were available to him.¹⁷

Medearis believes Muhammad desired to know God (or stated another way, Muhammad was sincere). If Medearis wants to give Muhammad the benefit of the doubt, certainly that is an option, but there are implications. Here are the stanzas of possibilities as I understand them, beginning with Medearis' assumption that Muhammad desired to know the God of the universe:

- a. Muhammad desired to know God.
 - a'. So God fulfilled his desire and met him.
 - a". An implication is the Qur'an is a revelation of God
- b. Muhammad desired to know God.
 - b'. But God did not fulfill his desire and did not meet him.
 - b". An implication is the Qur'an is not a revelation of God.
- c. Muhammad did not desire to know God.
 - c'. But God met him despite his desire.
 - c". An implication is the Qur'an is a revelation of God.
- d. Muhammad did not desire to know God.
 - d'. So God fulfilled his desire and did not meet him.
 - d". An implication is the Qur'an is not a revelation of God.

Let me speak about the first stanza. If Muhammad was sincere about knowing God and knew God, the Qur'an must be some level

¹⁷ Carl Medearis (2008). *Muslims, Christians and Jesus: gaining understanding and building relationships* (24). Bethany House: Minneapolis, MN. There is no real evidence Muhammad knew Christians other than Waraqa bin Nawfal—and what type of Christian he was is unknown. That is not to say that Islam was not influenced early on by Christianity, but for Medearis to make the broadcloth statement that Muhammad knew Christians, as if he mingled with them quite regularly, is simply not historically accurate.

of Scripture. I don't see any way around this conclusion except to say offer these two possibilities:

- 1) Muhammad knew God but misunderstood God's communication, which resulted in a semi-inspired Qur'an. I do not believe Medearis thinks of the Qur'an as Scripture at any level. I believe it has truths that parallel the Bible—but it is not the revealed word of Yahweh. There are too many unsolved mysteries surrounding the collection of the Qur'an and too many contradictions between the Bible and the Qur'an. So I have to wonder about why Medearis thinks Muhammad was sincere when the ramifications are discordant (*theologically untenable* for the non musician).
- 2) Muhammad knew God but choose to be deceived by Gabriel, a supposed angel, in order to secure the opportunity of power and status in the Arabian Peninsula. If this scenario is true, Muhammad was a power-hungry maniac and the Qur'an stands as a testament to that fact.

If Muhammad was sincere, but God did not reveal himself (option b), Yahweh failed to answer a sincere prayer. Why would God not meet him? Why would God act in such a petulant manner? This scenario calls into question the character of the God of the Bible. I refuse to believe the notion that God would not hear the prayer of a sincere seeker because that is not the character of Yahweh.¹⁸

That leaves options c. and d. Here the common denominator is that Muhammad did not desire to know God (this was not Medearis' starting point, but it is mine). In option c., God meets Muhammad against the latter's wishes, but the implications for the Qur'an are the same as option a.: the Qur'an is a revelation of God. Again, I'm confident Medearis does not believe that. I certainly don't.

Finally Muhammad had no desire to meet God, and in fact, he did not. Therefore, the Qur'an could not be a revelation of God. If all this is true, it similarly follows that the Allah of the Qur'an cannot be the Yahweh of the Bible. This seems to be the only logical, biblically-oriented scenario.

¹⁸ Jesus spoke of answered prayer based on the goodness of God (Lk 11:9-13).

5.2 Allah (to the tune “I don’t know whether to kill myself or go bowling”)

What reasons does Medearis give for understanding Allah and Yahweh are identical?¹⁹ First is the linguistic jingle, second, there is the soulful melody, “There is only one God,” and finally the bluesy “frustrated God.”

To begin I want to plant a thought: think of words as boxes.

5.2.1 The linguistic argument (to the tune of “Tradition” from Fiddler on the Roof)

Do similarity and relationship of Allah to the Aramaic *Alahi* and Hebrew *Elohim* provide solid evidence that Allah is Yahweh? Apparently for Medearis it does, since Arab Christians call the God of the Bible Allah.

You are a Coptic Orthodox Christian and have a box that says Allah on the outside. Suzie is a Protestant whose box says Yahweh. There is a third person, Ali, a Muslim whose box also has Allah on the outside. Go up and look inside Suzie’s box with Yahweh written on it. What do you see? You see the God who has revealed himself in the Jesus who died on the cross, rose from the dead and is coming again to finally establish his kingdom in which every knee will bow to him.

But you knew that about Yahweh, because when look down into your own box, the box with Allah written on it, you see exactly the same God. You come to the conclusion that Allah for you is indeed the Yahweh of the Bible.

Now go to Ali whose box has Allah on the outside, just like your box. What do you see in the box? You see a deity who is a monad, unknowable, and noncommunicative of his essence. You see a deity who has no son, never became flesh, and who did not permit Jesus, his servant, to die on the cross.²⁰ What do you conclude about the Allah in your box and the Allah in this other box?

¹⁹ For a similar view with similar problems, see Miroslav Volf, *Allah: a Christian response* (2011). HarperOne: NY. Medearis heartily endorses the book (personal conversation).

²⁰ For an interesting comparison of Allah and Yahweh, see Abu Daoud, “Sacrament

We have to make honest comparisons. We cannot simply gauge identification by name or by surface similarities. When we fail to go beyond the surface level—that is, the outside of the box—to discover the real personality of the one whose name is written on the box, we fail to discover the truth.

I have no problem with Arab speaking Christians calling the Almighty *Allah*, of course. How could I? These brothers and sisters recognize the Creator of the universe, the one who clothed himself in humanity, the one who fills the believer's heart with power to overcome sin, and the one who calls himself Father. Muhammad's Allah does none of these things. Arab speaking Christians moved beyond the surface level.

Words have meanings; and to discover them we go below the surface level. If we do not go deeper, these words can get in the way and become a hindrance to showing Jesus to our Muslim friends.

5.2.2 There's only one God (a soulful melody)

This lyric is fairly uncomplicated and is tied to how Medearis shares with Muslims early in a conversation and relationship.

Christians, when they first encounter the differences between the Muslim and Christian perceptions of God, are often tempted to begin introducing the “Christian God.” I believe this is an unnecessary step—even a mistake? Why?

God is who he is. . . .

By attacking the Muslim understanding of God, we may endanger or delay the possibility that the fullness of God, to be found in Christ, can be revealed to our Muslim friends by the Holy Spirit.²¹

and Mission Go Together Like Bread and Wine” Parts i, ii, iii in *SFM* 4:3, 4:4, and 5:2. Daoud writes about the deficiencies of Allah: “Forgiveness in Islam is not the reconciliation of mercy and justice as it is in Christianity: it tends more towards a sort of randomness and, some might say, capriciousness on the part of Allah (4:4, p. 3), and, “The concept of love is built around sacrifice. In fact, a willingness to sacrifice one's own comfort or good for another *is* love (Jn 15:13). That is why Allah does not and, in fact, is metaphysically incapable of loving. Because he has nothing to sacrifice there is nothing he can give or anything that he can do that would subtract from his own greatness and self-sufficiency” (p. 4).

²¹ *MCJ* 39.

From here Medearis points out a study—a study in which the researchers wish to remain anonymous—that few Muslims came to Jesus as the result of apologetics, but the overwhelming number came to Jesus through dreams and visions.²²

Actually I do not have problems with most of this. Certainly the fullness of God is found in Christ. I agree that visions and dreams are legitimate means by which God calls Muslims into his kingdom. I do not necessarily agree with the all strategies Medearis is encouraging, but I am certainly willing to learn from a brother. My problems are not with strategies and tactics, whether apologetics is valid or not, but his theology.

“God is who he is.” This is not a profound statement, but a confusing statement. I am not sure I know its significance and Medearis doesn’t explain it. Does it mean no matter what we think, that for all our thinking we will not change who God is? Does it mean it doesn’t matter if I think Yahweh and Allah are the same, because God is God and we are not? Or does it mean I cannot know who God is because he is so much greater than me?

Imagine saying the same thing to a Mormon: God is who he is. What have I just communicated to my Latter-Day Saint friend? God is too unknowable to talk about? We both are right *and* wrong in our perceptions of God? Let’s go eat ice cream and not talk about it? The line, *God is who he is*, is not a deeply theological statement (though it is theological); it is more like a sidestep, or perhaps a head fake, a juke, a move by a basketball player made to get around the opponent in order to move to the basket. The end result of both a head fake and the phrase, *God is who he is*, is confusion.

Second, is the real difference between the Muslim and Christian understanding of the Divine to be finally understood as a matter of

²² That the study is nameless is it’s own problem, but that Medearis’ conclusion is the same as the study is one we cannot know since he does not provide the reference for us to check. It is possible Medearis’ conclusion—that apologetics is not a major player in the conversion process of Muslims—may not be the conclusion of the study. Finally, in an ironic twist, I am very happy that God is giving Muslims dreams and visions for I believe this is God himself offering *direct apologetic* reasons for Muslims to become Christians. Dreams and visions are Yahweh’s apologetic to the unbeliever.

perception? When we “first encounter the differences between the Muslim and Christian perceptions of God” is how Medearis describes what the Bible says about Yahweh and what the Quran says about Allah. How God has revealed himself in the Bible is now a matter of perception? This is either sloppy wording or slopping theologizing. I’m not sure which, but again, Medearis fails to go on and explain very much.

Two things about perception need to be said. First, perception is oriented not to the thing perceived, the object, but toward the perceiver, the one observing. Perceptions are what a person believes he sees or understands based on culture, religion, interests, etc. Perceptions are individually based ideas and notions that reside in the mind of the perceiver, not in the essence of the thing perceived. Perceptions may or may not reflect reality, but if our *perception* of God is what we are sharing with Muslims, I agree: don’t do it. If we are sharing our theological differences about God, how can we not do it? We must point our Muslim friends to the Father who sent his Son through whom the Spirit now resides in both the Church and individual. If that is a perception, Medearis has slipped into post-modern relativism where everything moves from the world of the knowable to the misty maze of *me-ism*: the individual determines what is true, real, genuine, and authentic. If this is not his meaning, the sentence needs to be rewritten or explained.

Second, *perception* does not adequately describe how the Church has theologized about God for the last 2000 years. If perception is perceiver-oriented, then a Christian’s perceptions about God can be virtually any observation: “I think God is happy today because the Dodgers will not be in the World Series.” But if what we share with a Muslim is biblically based, is oriented toward the text, the truths of the apostolic teaching for the previous 2000 years, then this is not perception, but biblical theology. Medearis never speaks this way. He does not deal with theology in his writings. He speaks about *perceptions*, strategy (what I hope to accomplish), and tactics (I will do it *this* way not *that* way). I appreciate tactics and strategies. I also appreciate solid biblical theologizing. Without the latter, our tactics and strategies become our perceptions rather than effective means to share the Good News.

5.2.3 A frustrated God (sung to the “blues”)

I was unaware that certain actions by missionaries frustrate the will of God! Medearis believes that when we attack the Muslim perception of God, we actually hinder what God is doing in that person's life. I wonder if he means *attacks* that sound like this: “Allah is not the God of the Bible” or maybe even, “Your view of God is not the Bible's view”?²³ Why is it that if I disagree with Medearis I am attacking Muslims? This is really just another false dichotomy. Do statements such as these *endanger* or *delay* God from moving in a Muslim's life? Only if that God is too small!

It seems Medearis has the wrong *perception* of God (irony intended).

Again, Medearis writes, “By *attacking* the Muslim understanding of God, we may endanger or delay the possibility that the fullness of God, to be found in Christ, can be revealed to our Muslim friends by the Holy Spirit” (emphasis mine). *Attack* is a very strong word connoting violence and forcing the attacker's will on the victim. There is a rhetorical tactic called *poisoning the well*. The use of *attack* poisons the well or sets up the reader to immediately reject the argument based on the emotional tone of the word. The word *attack* is rarely employed to connote something pleasant! *I attacked the hamburger* does not mean I sat by and lovingly adored it. The word denotes forcing one's will upon another—or upon a hamburger. Therefore, the use of *attack* sets up the reader to automatically accept the premise without analyzing the argument itself.

I agree we should be prudent in speaking with Muslims. We do not verbally attack their beliefs just because we can. On the other hand, if an outstretched hand offers a key (Jesus) that releases the prisoner from his shackles (Islam), but the prisoner refuses it, should I not insist he take it? Should I not do everything in my power to help him understand his condition and the solution that lies before him?

Finally, how does one endanger the possibility of something not happening? What is a possibility? It is something that has not occurred. It's possible a piano could fall from the sky and land on top

²³ Cf. *MCJ* 30.

of my wife's tomato plants (actually I pray for this every day as I loathe tomatoes). But how do I stop that from happening without finding every piano in the universe and destroying it—no small task!

Anything is possible; however, possibilities are potentialities, not realities. To make the argument that my actions can endanger, harm, delay, obstruct, and otherwise hinder a certain possibility is pure nonsense; it's improvable and indefensible.

Suppose I told you, "To eat that banana endangers the possibility that God will help Muslims know the fullness of himself in Christ." What do you think? You might think I'm wrong, and you would certainly be right to think it illogical. What does eating a banana have to do with Muslims knowing Christ? How does pointing out (*not attacking*) the differences between the Allah of the Qur'an and the Yahweh of the Bible hinder the work of the Holy Spirit? How can I endanger, hinder or otherwise obstruct a possibility, a non-event? How can any human hinder the move of the Holy Spirit of God to reveal Christ to a Muslim? This is not just unsound thinking, it is not biblically sound theology.

5.3 Islam, the musical

Medearis provides some solid information about Islam. He accurately describes the five pillars and the six tenets, but I was struck by what he forgot: the darkness and evil origin of Islam.²⁴ It seems, based on the description of the religion, Islam is nothing more than an aberration of biblical theology. It comes up short of the truths of Scripture, though it comes close. Medearis never writes a note about the chains of Islam:

²⁴ Here I am referring to material from *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* (chapter 2, pp. 37-64). Medearis' book is not about the nature of Islam, but strategies for sharing Jesus with Muslims, yet he takes the time to speak to core of Islamic beliefs and practices, simultaneously remaining silent about the spiritual nature of the religion. Shouldn't our strategy include suiting up for spiritual engagement with the demonic elements of Islam? More than likely, Medearis agrees with my assessment of Islam—for the most part—but he simply doesn't state it (he made no comments about this section in his response to me).

- adherence to a code of conduct inspired by a man who lived in Arabia of the seventh century;
- a religion that is tribal by nature, demanding worship be performed in the language of its founder and its book be read in an archaic form of that language;
- a religion that prescribes how one ought to put on one's shoes, make love to one's wife, and enter or leave the toilet;
- a religion that understands the Deity as unknowable, utterly transcendent, and completely unrelated to the human condition.

Where is the discussion of the prison we call Islam?²⁵ It's as if Islam is simply the next religion on the shelf. After reading the label, the shopper decides it sounds good, and off she goes to the check-out. Medearis points out the label, but never gives us chance to read the ingredients of the concoction. He doesn't read the warning label to us either: "This product will cause the user to trust in a Jesus who does not save, in a Father who does not exist, and in an unknown spirit who brought a false message to a false prophet."

Finally, and perhaps most persuasively, although Medearis never addresses the issue, there are the beliefs of those who come out of Islam themselves. What do the converts say about their former religion. Let me be brief and to the point: Muslim background believers understand the insidious nature of Islam and desire to break with their former religion, generally through the rite of baptism.²⁶ Islam is not a light-hearted musical we can enjoy and then go home. Engaging with Islam is spiritual warfare. There is no hint of this from Medearis.

²⁵ Cf. Cragg, Kenneth. 1956. *The Call of the Minaret*, Third Edition. Oxford: One World Press.

²⁶ Cf. Duane Alexander Miller, "Your Swords Do Not Concern Me at All: The Liberation Theology of Islamic Christianity." *SFM* 7(2):228-260. Miller explores what he calls "Islamic Christianity," that is, the background of converts to Jesus out of Islam.

6 FAQ (based on the musical *Grease*)

One of Carl Medearis' real strengths is in the practical area of relationship building. I like a lot his music in this genre.

But . . . you could hear that but a mile away, couldn't you? You knew it was coming. Yes, I have some problems. Here are frequently asked questions and his answers, then my comments and questions about his lyrics.

6.1 “*Do you believe the Qur'an is God's inspired book?*”(sotto voce)

“I always encourage Muslim friends to read the Qur'an.”²⁷

“Really? Why Carl?” I asked of the book as I shook my head in despair.

He tells us it may lead to questions you can discuss, and besides, the Qur'an tells Muslims to read the Gospels. “I often see fruit in this endeavor. However, if a Muslim friend directly asks, ‘Is the Qur'an a holy book from God?’ you have a theologically heavy issue to deal with.”²⁸ He answers in this way:

- Realize that the Qur'an would never have been written unless God allowed it to be written. . . . Look at the Qur'an as a book that can propel people to become curious about Jesus.
- Another way to view this issue is to actually examine the veracity of the Qur'an, which means reading it for yourself.
- The final option is to simply deny any supernatural credence to the Qur'an right up front, which I don't recommend. There are no long-term benefits in doing so, and “winning” that point may cost in the long run.²⁹ (emphasis mine)

Medearis' answers are sour notes: to *realize* the Qur'an exists, *examine* the Qur'an for yourself, or flatly *deny* the book is divine. The first and second answer (*realize* and *examine*) are not answers we

²⁷ MCJ 102.

²⁸ MCJ 102.

²⁹ MCJ 102-103.

give to Muslims, they are activities Medearis wants Christians to perform.

The third answer is a non-starter for Medearis: *deny the Qur'an's supernaturalness*. Where does that leave us? Essentially Medearis offers but one answer to both questions: "You, my Muslim friend, should read the Qur'an."

There is another way to answer the question. Ask your Muslim friend why he wants to know your opinion of his book. If he insists on knowing without giving clear indication why (which may mean he simply wants to argue), ask him this: "I would be happy to discuss the Qur'an with you, but I'd like to first know what you think about the Bible?" Again, his answer tells you much about where the discussion is headed: possibly into an argument (I try to avoid this) or an honest discussion (this is my hope).³⁰

Why I would ever think of asking my Muslim friend to read the Qur'an—as does Medearis—is beyond me. In fact, it's theologically risky. Why should I have him read a book that is memorized in over 30,000 madrassas in Pakistan by children who do not even speak the language? They do not read it for understanding, but because it is the word of Allah, and perhaps because they search for *baraka*, blessing.

"Here, drink this poison," I say to my dying friend. "Hope you enjoy being tied to this ravenous alligator," I say to my friend on the edge of the swamp. How are these statements any different than suggesting a Muslim read the Qur'an?

If you understand the non-divine yet supernatural origin of the Qur'an, then you know the Qur'an is a false book with a false message about a false god.³¹ While I would never think of asking my

³⁰ Generally my question, "What do you think about the Bible?" elicits the typical Muslim response, "It is corrupted by men, but has the words of Allah when it agrees with the Qur'an." My response is then, "That is also my view of the Qur'an. It is a book corrupted by men, but when it agrees with the Bible, that is truth." More often than not, the conversation continues. I have rarely offended a Muslim with my statement.

³¹ I've never told a Muslim his book is Satanic. I speak this way only for the sake of clarity in this essay.

Muslim friend to read the book that put him in his spiritual condition, I would offer him the antidote: Jesus.

Along this line, Medearis writes this jingle: “the Qur’an would never have been written unless God allowed it to be written.” This is also true for L. Ron Hubbard’s *Dianetics*, Mao Tse Tung’s *The Little Red Book*, Anton LaVey’s *Satanic Bible*, the U. S. Constitution, *Winnie the Pooh*, and the owner’s manual for a 1957 Chevrolet. God is certainly sovereign and has allowed many things to be written, done, and said, but that is far different than saying God affirms and approves those things. Carl, what theology is this?

So, in the case of the Qur’an, it is agreed that God allowed it; but it is not agreed that he approved it or even caused it to be written. I cannot say this strongly enough, for if God approved the writing of the Qur’an, implying Yahweh is its author, we have at least two Scriptures allegedly written by the same Deity in direct contradiction.

Perhaps the reader thinks I am pushing Medearis’ view too far. Is he only suggesting God allowed the Qur’an to be written, not that Yahweh wrote it? It is the next statement that shows I am not making Medearis say something he is not:

Look at the Qur’an as a book that can propel people to become curious about Jesus. I stress this always, because Jesus *is* the way, and any method or way to come to him is legitimate if the seeker actually finds Christ as the answer to the soul’s burning need.³²

In his discussion of the Qur’an, Medearis fails to state the necessity to get the Muslim to transition from the holy book of Islam to the Bible. Being curious about Jesus is a good thing, but what does the reader of the Qur’an discover about Jesus in the Qur’an? Does he read about Jesus’ victory over sin, Satan and death at the Calvary? Does he read of a somber Sunday morning, of the dejected apostolic band that was reintroduced to the risen savior by a woman? Does the reader discover the multitude of witnesses that were with Jesus for forty days prior to his ascension? Does the reader marvel

³² *MCJ* 102.

at the promises of his return in the same manner of his leaving when he reads the Qur'an?

6.2 “Do you believe Muhammad is a true prophet of God?” in *F major*

Ask yourself, “What is a prophet, anyway?” I believe it’s important to verify *every* self-claimed prophet, whether they’re in your church or in a mosque. . . . Recognize that Muhammad wanted his people to return to the one true God, and demonstrate your respect for that tradition. . . . Base your position on the things Muhammad said about Jesus instead of making an opposition based on the differences.³³

This concerto fails at several levels. First how do we judge a prophet? Medearis offers no criterion. Second, I am happy Muhammad’s goal was to return people to the one true God, the problem is he turned them to Allah instead. Third, I am supposed to “base my opinion on the things Muhammad said about Jesus,” but what about the things Muhammad did not say about Jesus? He left out so much. Furthermore why would I trust another source, a different source, an antithetical source when I have the genuine article?

So, “What is a prophet anyway?”

Why would Medearis ask the question and not provide the answer? It is a deeply important theological question, but as I read Medearis, theology is not something he pursues with gusto. More often than not, deep theological questions are met with more questions that tend to deflect the inquiry into a marsh of cattails and swamp grass. Let’s get out of the goo.

In lieu of the non-answer, I want to suggest at least one criterion by which to answer Medearis’ question, “What is a prophet, anyway?”

Should a prophet know the name of the God he serves?

I don’t believe you have to think too long before an affirmative answer is reached. What kind of a prophet presumes to speak for God, but doesn’t know God’s name?

In the entire Qur’an—the book that Medearis encourages his Muslim friends to read—the name of the God of the Bible is found a

³³ *MCJ* 103-104.

total of zero times. Muhammad fancied himself to be in the line of the biblical prophets yet never uttered the name of the God for whom he allegedly prophesied. Could it be that Muhammad was a false prophet? It seems a reasonable assumption.

Perhaps Medearis would respond: Muhammad could not have known the name of Yahweh as Yahweh is not Arabic, but there is a linguistic similarity between Allah and the Aramaic *Alahi*, even to *Elohim*.

Yet *Elohim* is not the covenantal name of the God of the Bible. Yahweh is; it is the name he said was his name. It is explicitly stated in Exodus 3:14 and 15:

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM;" and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God, furthermore, said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and *this is My memorial-name to all generations*."³⁴

It isn't wrong to ask the question, "Was Muhammad a prophet?" It is wrong, however, to allow one's answer to mitigate the clear record of the authentic revealed word of God. The man believed by 1.5 billion people to be the prophet of Allah/Yahweh did not even know Yahweh's name. Did Muhammad want his people to return to the one true God? Medearis believes so. I'm not convinced. Once again we butt up against the ever-important question about the identity of Allah and Yahweh discussed earlier.

6.3 "How can God have a son?"(*penseroso*)

The Qur'an *does* refer to "Isa the Messiah" and "Isa the Christ." So the question is not whether Muslims believe in Jesus. The cornerstone difficulty we face is that Muslims do not believe Jesus is the Son of God.³⁵

³⁴ It might be argued that Abraham and others after him (until Moses) did not know the name Yahweh, therefore mitigating the argument. While it is true the name *Yahweh* was not revealed prior to Moses' encounter of him at the burning bush, other unique titles/names of God in the Bible do not show up in the Qur'an. For instance, *El Shaddai* (Ge 17:1) is one of the names known to Abraham, but is not found in the Qur'an.

³⁵ *MCJ* 108.

When Muslims call Isa the Messiah, what do they mean by it? Do they believe Jesus is the anointed one promised in the Old Testament? Do they believe he was sent by the Father to redeem men and women from sin, bringing them out of exile or disfavor with God, into the kingdom of heaven? Do Muslims understand the Messiah as the second person of the Trinity? Do they see Messiah as the one who said, “I will build my church?” Muslims do not. I’m very troubled to think Isa al masih of the Qur’an is the same as Jesus the Messiah of the Bible.

6.4 “Was Jesus crucified?”(*scordatura*)

It is interesting to note that more and more Muslim scholars acknowledge that there is room in the Qur’an for interpreting several passages as allowing for the death and resurrection of Jesus.³⁶

There is no source provided for Medearis’ claim. I am unaware of the scholastic floodgates opening, unleashing a torrent of Islamic scholarship, and drenching us in a new understanding of the Qur’an’s teaching about Jesus’ death on the cross. I know the Ahmadiyyas (Qadianis), the small heretical sect of Islam, believe Jesus went to the cross and survived. Anyone else?

Perhaps Medearis is making reference to Todd Lawson’s, *The Crucifixion and the Qur’an: a Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oneworld, 2009). Lawson’s work does point out the various theories Muslim scholarship holds on the crucifixion, but Lawson hasn’t found that “more and more Muslim scholars acknowledge that there is room in the Qur’an” for a new understanding of the crucifixion. In fact, Lawson handles the tafsir of the Middle Ages, not the modern day commentators. So I’m truly in the dark to know where Medearis has come up with the idea that there are “more and more Muslim scholars” who allow the Qur’an to admit to Jesus’ death on the

³⁶ *MJC* 109. Medearis does not list what these passages are, but he is likely referring primarily to Q4:157; 3:54 (“O Jesus, I will cause you to die”); and 19:33 (“So peace is on me the day I was born, the day I die”).

cross.³⁷ It couldn't be that Medearis has found *another* study in which the researchers wish to remain anonymous, could it?

There are Christians who may wish for the Qur'an to support the crucifixion, but the principal qur'anic passage, Q4:157—ambiguous at best—is dogmatically held by the overwhelming majority of Muslim scholarship (elaborated in the *tafsir*) and the normal adherent of Islam to teach against the crucifixion. To argue for the possibility of the crucifixion from the Qur'an reveals a theologically unhealthy desire to make the Qur'an a tool for sharing Christ with Muslims. The Qur'an does not confirm the crucifixion; the crucifixion is confirmed in the Bible and even by antagonistic historians of the time. It seems there is something going on beneath the surface to make a Christian want the Qur'an to say something it does not.

7 The song of the insider movement (B#)

There is a growing number of Muslims around the world who maintain their cultural identity as “Muslim” but choose to align themselves with the spiritual and moral teachings of Jesus, becoming his disciples while becoming what “Muslim” truly means: submitted to God.³⁸

This is Medearis' definition of insider movements (IM). He then asks three questions that help flesh out his understanding of what he believes God is doing.

1. Is it *theologically* viable for a Muslim to refer to himself as a “follower of Jesus” and still be a Muslim?
2. Is it *culturally* feasible for a Muslim to remain a Muslim and follow Jesus?
3. Is there a need to become a “Christian” in *terminology* in order to follow Jesus in both theological and cultural fashion?³⁹

³⁷ A Pakistani effort to show that Jesus died, not on the cross, but of natural causes is Kamal Udar's *Deep into the Qur'an*. Perhaps Medearis is referring to Gabriel Said Reynolds who does write about the possibility (cf. “The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 72(2):237-258). This is hardly an avalanche of scholarship.

³⁸ *MCJ* 134.

³⁹ *MCJ* 135.

Rather than address the answers Medearis gives, I propose to re-ask them and offer my own answers in contradistinction to Medearis'. At a surface level, his questions are straightforward and understandable, but I believe beneath the surface, at the assumption stratum, the complexities need to be plumbed. I want to begin with some questions about his questions.

1. Why does Muslim connote at least two different meanings: religious and cultural?
2. While it is recognized that Christian has acquired some ugly baggage over the centuries, why throw it off the wagon rather than opening, examining, repacking and discarding what is unnecessary? Let the TSA (Terminology Specialist Administration) do its job on the baggage! In other words, why is it Muslims win when it comes to the word Christian?⁴⁰
3. What should be our response to those who call themselves Muslim followers of Christ?

Why do I believe pro-IMers use *Muslim* in at least two ways? Medearis himself makes the distinction in his two questions: first, the *theological* question; and second, the *cultural* question. This understanding of Islam is common for the advocates of insider movements. One way of understanding how proponents of IM view Islam is seen in Figure 4. Both sides of the IM debate accept that Islam is a way of life ("A") because this is what Muslims tell us. As a Muslim moves towards Jesus in the point-process development of faith ("B"),⁴¹ he remains theologically and culturally Islamic, but at the point of the decision to pledge allegiance to Jesus as Messiah and Lord ("C"), the disagreement between the critics and proponents of IM begins. The critics of IM do not bifurcate Islam into religion

⁴⁰ Of course my question is not about winning or losing in the sense of better or worse, right or wrong. I simply mean that Medearis is really suggesting we allow Muslims to tell us what *Christian* means, essentially categorizing and generalizing every Christian as "x" and always "x."

⁴¹ For a missiological discussion of conversion, see Alan Tippett, (1987) "Church Growth Theology and Current Debate (74-76). *Introduction to Missiology* (William Carey: Pasadena, CA).

and culture at the point of conversion, whereas the advocates of IM do. IM advocates preach that the religious aspect of Islam ends (or diminishes), but the cultural component of Islam remains.

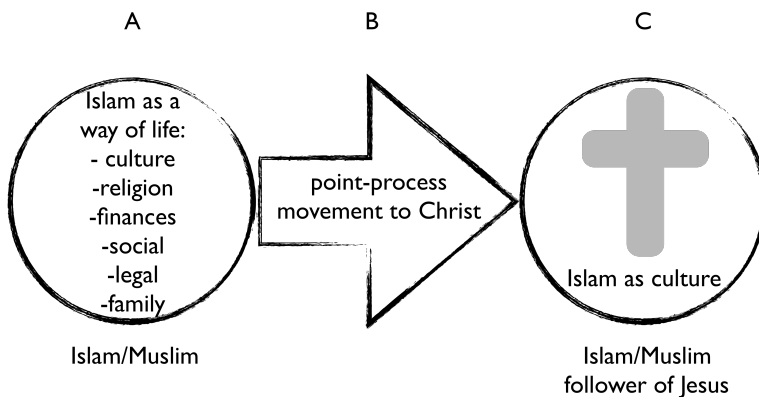


Figure 4. IM advocate's understanding of Islam as religion and culture

Is this ("C") how Muslims define themselves—or is it how the Western missionaries with an agenda want to define Islam/Muslims? What do *Muslim non followers of Jesus* hear when they listen to the *Muslim followers of Jesus* describing themselves as Muslims? Is it possible from the perspective of Islam to be a follower of Jesus (that is, born again, transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God) and still be a Muslim? And secondly, what hints from the Bible are there that address this matter?

To begin, the proper understanding of Islam and what it means to be a Muslim is a must. Here are three authoritative voices: one Western scholar and two Muslims.

1. The non-Muslim scholar, John Voll, defines Islam/Muslim:

The term *islam* comes from the Arabic word-root *s-l-m*, which has a general reference to peace and submission. Specifically, Islam means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is one who makes that submission.

This submission or act of Islam means living *a life of faith and practice* as defined in the Qur'an and participating in the life of the community of

believers. The core of this Islamic life is usually said to be the Five Pillars of Islam.⁴²

So Islam is submission to Allah as evidenced by the five pillars of Islam (shahada, sawm, zakat, hajj, and salat). It appears to be an integrated whole: “a life of faith and practice.”

2. The Muslim scholar, Mawdudi, defines Islam/Muslim:

Islam is an Arabic word that connotes submission, surrender and obedience. As a religion, Islam stands for complete submission and obedience to Allah. . . .

Like all other creatures, [man] is born Muslim, invariably obeying the injunctions of God, and is bound to remain one.⁴³

Islam is complete surrender—complete as in every aspect of a man’s soul and life is given over to Allah. The injunctions Mawdudi mentions connote both the tenets and pillars of Islam.

3. The prophet of Islam defines Islam/Muslim:

The messenger of Allah said: “Islam is to testify that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, to perform the prayers, to pay the zakat, to fast in Ramadan, and to make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to do so.”⁴⁴

In each of the definitions above, Islam cannot be separated from the five pillars. What is clear to me is the notion that Islam does not allow just anyone to make Islam what he wants it to be. Doing so is presumptuous; one pretends to know something the past 1400 years of Islamic scholarship does not. Medearis and the proponents of the IM are practicing cultural imperialism by redefining what Islam is. So the answer to my question above is that one *cannot* be a *Muslim follower of Jesus*. Such a notion uncritically and illegitimately tears apart Islam’s religious and cultural components.

⁴² John Voll, (1998). “Islam” in *Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*, 383. Robert Wuthnow (Ed.). 2 vols. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly.

⁴³ Abul A’la Mawdudi (n.d.). *Towards Understanding Islam*, (17-19). K. J. Murrad (Ed. and trans.). Idara Tarjuman-ul-Qur’an: Lahore.

⁴⁴ Al-Nawawi, *Forty Hadiths*.

Does the Bible support the notion of being a Muslim culturally while following the Jesus of the Bible? Medearis only gives us one passage: Acts 11:18. Peter was giving the report of his mission among the Gentiles. When the church heard about the conversion of the Gentiles, they said, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life.” The point Medearis draws from this is that “*God accepted the Gentiles just as they were, by their faith in Jesus.*”⁴⁵ His conclusion is that if the Gentiles came to Jesus and stayed *just as they were*, why should we expect anything different for Muslims?

Surely Medearis is not suggesting that these Gentiles would continue to be associated with the temples of Diana, Zeus or Apollos, remaining within the cult and culture of animal sacrifice and foreign spirits? It would be inappropriate to call them Diana-worshipping followers of Jesus, right? No, Medearis would not argue for this, but his assumption is that Muslims need not change their culture—meaning Islam.⁴⁶

Muslims today are found in many cultures. If a Muslim from Egypt becomes a Christian, a follower of Jesus, why is he a Muslim follower of Jesus when in reality he is an Egyptian follower of Jesus? There are Berbers who follow Christ, Pashtun followers of Jesus, Kurdish followers of Messiah, and Malay Christians. Why do the advocates of IM insist these new believers be called *Muslim followers of Jesus* when in fact they are not? A follower of Jesus is no longer a Muslim!

Therefore, Medearis is in error to believe that *Muslim follower of Jesus* is an accurate term. It is neither culturally possible nor supported by Scripture. The notion must be discontinued; *new believers who identify themselves as Muslim followers of Jesus must be disciplined and*

⁴⁵ *MCJ* 135.

⁴⁶ This is not the unspoken assumption of the advocates of the insider movements, rather it is the stated opinion of some: Twentieth-century Muslims are forging an identity for themselves within Islam. . . . They have become ‘new creations’ (Richard Jameson and Nick Scalevich, “First Century Jews and Twentieth Century Muslims” *IJFM* 17(1): 34).

encouraged to see their identity in Christ, not disciples to continue to find sanctuary in their previous prison.

Second, why are we jettisoning the biblical word *Christian*? Yes, we had this discussion previously, but Medearis brings it up again. He coins the phrase *the gospel of terminology* (133), suggesting some Christians believe it is wrong to be called anything but *Christian*. I do not argue with that. Frankly, follower of Christ is fine; being a member of the Way is good; part of the Body of Christ is excellent. I can even roll with *Jesus freak* and *Bible thumper*. I do believe, however, the notion of *the gospel of terminology* is a straw man argument; it does not exist in the real world.

My real concern with Medearis' view of *Christian* is this: why do we let others tell us what Christian means? It is ironic that the pro-IMers, while redefining Islam, do not touch their own word, *Christian*. Why not help non-Christians understand what a real Christian is? Why the double standard? If a Muslim asks if you are a Christian, do not say, "No" or deflect with "I am a follower of Jesus." Simply answer, "Yes. Perhaps you'd like to hear why I am a Christian and love Jesus so much?"

My third question is answered by thinking clearly about the first two. Our response to those who believe they are Muslim followers of Christ is to disciple them in the Scriptures, continuing to help them move toward a realization of their identity with Jesus and his Church.

8 Coda

Straw man arguments (easily torn down because they do not exist), non sequiturs (conclusions that do not follow from the evidence), informal fallacies (sloppy thinking), deflection (refusing to answer a question), false dichotomies (categorical errors) and poor theology cannot be balanced by great storytelling and snappy phrases. But if you buy into any of Medearis' principles without seriously considering and weighing what he is advocating, his lyrics will surreptitiously waft their way into your living room like music from the next apartment over. It becomes part of your environment. You

know it's there, but you can't do anything about it. You're stuck with it and soon enough, you're humming along.

The genius of Carl Medearis is that his stories effectively breathe life into the principles he offers. So, no more standing ovations for a symphony well played. No more discussions of how the string section blended so well with the reeds. Carl Medearis' tunes are wonderful, *but his lyrics are troubling*. I think I'll try humming a different tune from now on. I wish my brother would, too.

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