

FROM THE ISSUE EDITOR: AND WHAT HAPPENS AFTER CONVERSION?

When Dr. John Stringer and the editorial team of *St Francis Magazine* asked me edit the August issue of SFM, and told me the specific topic was on religious conversion and MBB's, I was eager to tackle the project. As I was thinking about what sort of material is most needed I came to the conclusion that there are already many studies of why Muslims have put their faith in Christ. But what happens after that? This is a question that very few researchers have addressed, and in this issue we have two key articles that explore different aspects of post-conversion MBB life.

Roy Oksnevad, director of the Muslim Ministry Center at Wheaton College, has written on aspects of leadership difficulties that have surfaced in Iranian Christian congregations in the American diaspora. Having done some research on Iranian Christian churches myself, I have seen first-hand the pain and tension that can emerge from leadership problems in such a context. I believe that our Iranian Christian brothers and those who work with them will find a lot in this article to help them form new habits more conducive displaying the life and hope they have found in Messiah.

Tim Green has tackled another key issue related to the life of the convert, namely the question of marriage. Based on his research in a Muslim-majority environment in South Asia, Green explores questions of identity and marriage. What are the results of a convert keeping her faith secret from her spouse? Or should converts marry each other? Or what about a convert marrying a believer whose family is Christian? These long-term issues of church governance (Oksnevad) and marriage (Green) require our attention like never before.

Dr. Matthew Sleeman of Oakhill College in London has composed a very helpful genealogy of the concept of contextualization. Where did it originate and how did it develop

over the years? And how did we get to where we are now? He proposes some key issues which call for further discussion. Mina Fouad of Alexandria School of Theology has contributed an article defending the historical continuity of the New Testament Church with that of Nicea. It has become common nowadays to hear that the Apostolic Church and the 4th Century Church have little to do with each other, and that the 4th Century Church had bought into Greek patterns of thought that represented a fundamental move away from the Bible. Mr. Fouad argues that this is false.

Also included is an interview with Mr. C**** M*****, a veteran missionary in India. In this interview he answers my questions about his experience in helping local MBB's engage in church planting in the villages around his city of residence, Lucknow. Finally, Azar Ajaj of Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary has written a timely review of Emir Rishawi's apologetic *A Struggle that Led to Conversion*. Rishawi, an Egyptian Christian and ex-Muslim, took on the political thought of the Muslim Brotherhood in his book (available in both Arabic and English). Egypt's new president was formerly a leader of the Brotherhood, so this is an opportune time to revisit Rishawi's critique of Islamism and his defense of the Christian faith.

Peace be with you,

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BMB DISCIPLESHIP: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE FACTORS LEADING TO DISHARMONY WITHIN THE IRANIAN CHURCHES IN THE DIASPORA

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1 Introduction

Iranians may well be the largest ethnic group coming out of an Islamic background that has responded to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the last thirty years. Spellman's research indicates that there are at least "forty-five (above ground) Iranian churches that have developed around the world since the 1979 revolution" (Spellman 2004, 169). Iranian Christians International (ICI) reports that "by 2002, ICI estimated the number of Iranian Christians worldwide to be over 60,000, half being Muslim converts and the other half from various religious minorities".² Operation World indicates,

From only 500 Muslim-background believers in 1979, conservative estimates now suggest over 100,000 MBBs in Iran, a number rapidly increasing. Some, more optimistic, place this number as high as a million. Never since the 7th Century has the Church in Persia grown so fast as post-1979, and the most recent years are the most fruitful (Mandryk 2010, 465).

Mohabat News³, an Iranian Christian News Agency reported,

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² <http://www.iranchristians.org/whoarethey2.shtml> (accessed April 6, 2012 112:45 AM) Iranian Christians International, Inc.

³ Mohabat New Agency, the news agency of Iranian Christians, is not affiliated with any Christian or non-Christian organizations. Mohabat News acts as a cultural and social bridge between the world community and the peoples of Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan and to better inform the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ and Christian ministries around the world about the life and the welfare of Christian minorities in these Farsi-speaking countries.

The rapid growth of the Christian faith in Iran seems to have caused significant concern and even fear in the hearts of the leadership of the Islamic regime which has sparked increased suppression of Christians especially in the last year. After the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's speech regarding the need to oppose and silence the home-based churches, a brutal and inhumane crackdown along with numerous arrests of Christians inside Iran has been witnessed.⁴

Iranian believers from a Muslim background (BMBs) carry with them their cultural heritage, patterns of behavior, and values that are uniquely shaped by their religion, culture and family. As is common with most first generation churches, the Iranian church is very active in evangelism and the worship experience is passionate and enthusiastic. The church exhibits the deep Iranian cultural traits of loyalty, pride and cohesiveness towards family, along with altruistic, friendly, generous, caring and kindness to others expressed in their commitment to hospitality (Dastmalchain, Javidan, Alam 2001, 540-541). Fellowship reflects the deep core value of family and friendship found within traditional Iranian culture. BMBs often interact with each other more than just once a week, as members are intensely involved in the lives of each other throughout the week.

Iranian Christians have developed a Worldwide Directory of Iranian/Persian Christian Churches at www.farsinet.com/icc/⁵. At the time of this writing, the three areas of California, United Kingdom and Canada have a total of 45 churches indicated at [farsinet.com](http://www.farsinet.com). Christian Freedom International estimates between 1-2 million Christians in Iran⁶. More conservative estimates call into

⁴http://www.mohabatnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3102:iranian-religious-authorities-acknowledge-the-spread-of-gospels-in-iran&catid=36:iranian-christians (accessed April 6, 2012 12:00 PM)

⁵ For the month of 2/11 this website served 4,407,290 requests, with 990,137 pages viewed, and had 403,075 unique visits to the site.

⁶ <http://www.christianfreedom.org/iran/> Since 1998, Christian Freedom International has been on the forefront in the battle for the rights of persecuted Christians around the world. Over the years, CFI has consistently remained active

question the commonly assumed numbers of approximately 300,000 Christians in 1979, and place that number somewhere between 80,000 and 200,000 Christians.

Elam Ministries (n.d.c), however, claims on its website that the number of clandestine house congregations has increased strongly, but that the exact number of secret Christians remains unknown, even though at least ten networks are in operation. It is further reported that most of these house congregations grow because the Gospel is spread through extended families, and that there is evidence of secret followers all over Iran. The website describes how a house church is established in Iran, by speaking of Jesus to family and friends, by gathering new believers to weekly studies of the Bible and Christian community, and encouraging them to share their faith with friends and family members (Elam Ministries n.d.d) (Landinfo 2011, 12).

Hiebert indicates that values are not immediately transformed upon conversion. Cultural beliefs shape the understanding of each individual's Christian faith.

Leading individuals to faith in Jesus Christ is the evangelistic dimension of mission. People come as they are, with their histories and cultures. We cannot expect an instant transformation of their behavior, beliefs, and worldviews. It is important, therefore, to disciple them into Christian maturity. This includes a transformation not only in the way people think and behave but also in their worldviews. (Hiebert 2008, 12)

My work among Iranians in the diaspora, along with personal interaction with Iranian Christian leaders, has raised concerns that emerging Iranian fellowships struggle with internal conflicts which often end in church splits. Concern over disharmony within the Iranian BMB community was raised as a research topic with the end result of desiring to sustain healthy long-term relationships and ministry. Plueddemann wrote, "From my experience, the greatest difficulties in multicultural leadership arise from tensions growing out of internal values". (Plueddemann 2009, 71) Recent research

as a "voice for the voiceless" in Washington, DC, providing political advocacy for the millions of Christians who routinely suffer for their faith.

has focused on conversion theory,⁷ but little, if any research has been committed to understand the dynamics and tensions expressed in the nascent Christian community as Iranians seek to live out the Christian life. Could it be that discipleship of the traditional Western churches does not address the core issues that contribute to the conflicts found within Iranian BMB churches?

The purpose of this paper is to initially investigate, describe and explore the nature of these conflicts and examine the factors that lead to tensions within the nascent Iranian Christian churches. The research question which will be investigated is: What promotes disharmony in Iranian churches or fellowships living in the Diaspora? Cultural characteristics and values found in Iran and Islamic societies make up part of the context into which the new faith is birthed. Power structures, interpersonal communication, trust, and conflict resolution will be areas of cultural context that will be examined. But first, a summary of my methodology will be presented, and then some historical and political background without which Iranian Christianity cannot be understood.

2 Research Methodology

This research paper is qualitative field research based upon up to fifty-one interviews of primarily second wave BMB Iranians. It uses open-ended questions in guided conversations based on key areas that explore the relationships that led up to disharmony and the results of that disharmony. I have applied honor and shame theory, conflict and resolution theory, based cross-cultural research. The purpose for using these theories is based on two factors. First, Iran is not high on the individualism-collectivism scale as Middle Eastern countries (Hofstede 1980). Second, there is little if any knowledge of fieldwork done on post-conversion life in community (Miller 2012). Therefore, I sought to let the BMBs determine the

⁷ For books dealing with conversion see Gaudeul, (1999); Greenlee (2005); Greenlee and Love (2006); Miller (1969); Woodberry (1998), (2005), (2008).

fields and categories they understood as important in explaining the post-conversion experience of life in Christian community.

Thirty-one of the respondents were male and twenty of the respondents were female. The age range was a) 15-25 (4); b) 25-35 (7); c) 35-45 (10); d) 45-65 (29; e) 65+ (1). Forty-two or eighty-two percent came from a Muslim background, while seven or fourteen percent came from a Christian background. The range of those who left Iran is as follows: 1960s (1); 1970s (9); 1980s (17); 1990s (31); 2000s (10). These numbers do not reflect the actual number of people attending Farsi-speaking churches. Since my research was limited to those whose language proficiency was adequate to understand and respond in English, my interviews reflect those who have left Iran and have had enough time to learn English. The years that they have been Christians also reflect this variable.

The purpose of the research is to consider BMB Iranian fellowships and special note was taken when considering Christian Iranian churches that have a majority of Westerners, Armenians, or other Christian background believers. Two Iranian churches that have achieved stability were also considered in the interview process. Interviews were conducted in English. However, several of the interviewees were not comfortable with their competency to adequately understand or respond to the interview in English, so a helper was present in these cases.

Years of being a Christian

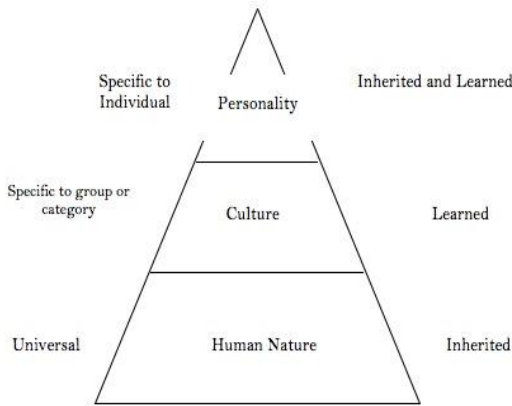


3 Foundations Shaping BMBs

Different cultures have different leadership styles. BMB's have their own cultural heritage, patterns of behavior, and values that are uniquely shaped by their religion, culture, history, language and family. These patterns of behavior, values and cultural way of expressing leadership will often be different from what is found in the

Western church. As BMBs are mentored by Western leaders, they may try to emulate Western cultural patterns of leadership, thinking them to be uniquely Biblical and thus superior. This paper shall clarify cultural patterns to better understand BMBs.

Each individual is a combination of personality, culture and human nature. The person's gifting is based on their personality. Their personality is both inherited and learned.



inherited and from a Christian perspective this human nature is fallen or sinful. Culture is specific to a group of people and is learned. The main concern of this paper is the third topic—culture—and how Iranian culture may introduce harmful leadership habits into the lives of Iranian Christian churches.

(Hofstede 1991, 6).

Harris and Morgan define culture as

...a distinctly human capacity for adapting to circumstances and transmitting this coping skill and knowledge to subsequent generations. Culture gives people a sense of who they are, of belonging, of how they should behave, and of what they should be doing. Culture impacts behavior, morale, and productivity at work and includes values and patterns that influence company attitudes and actions (Harris and Moran 1979, 10).

Cultural values influence our options and behavior and how we react to challenges in life. These cultural values are developed early in life and are very resistant to change. Even throughout the pro-

cess of religious conversion the cultural values of the BMB may not change. Religion, education and culture are variables which will help us better understand where the Iranian BMB is coming from and how certain aspects of Iranian culture can influence leadership practices, both positively and negatively, in different diaspora Iranian churches.

4 Human Nature Shaping the BMBs

Human nature is something that is innate and not learned. The Bible has much to say about the state of human nature and what God has done to address man's basic need in transforming that nature and so make a people of God. According to the Biblical worldview, mankind became sinful in his core being, though he was not so created. This is not learned behavior (as much behavioral science proposes) or a lack of knowledge of God's laws (the Islamic perception) but is a stain inherited from the first human, Adam. Societies are made up of individuals who are sinful and therefore cultural values will be shaped by sinful human nature. Roland Muller proposes that sin has three basic influences upon man. The three emotional responses to sin are guilt, shame and fear. Different cultures tend to emphasize one of these responses more than the other two. This shapes their cultural worldviews: guilt-based, shame-based, and fear-based cultures.⁸ The cultural responses that shape a person's worldview are powerful factors that affect all aspects of Christian life, including leadership.

The context in which the individual lives is not neutral. There are three influences that shape the individual: Satan (the enemy of all mankind who is a liar and deceiver John 8:44), self (old sinful nature that plagues all mankind until death - Romans 7), and society (sinful world which seeks to conform everyone to its image - Romans 12). The Christian leader in each culture needs to understand that the Kingdom of God, sooner or later, confronts sins and unjust structures in every human society and culture. In response to Satan

⁸ Roland Muller in chapter one in his book Honor & Shame introduces these three great worldviews. They are further developed in the ensuing chapters.

who is a liar and deceiver God has given his truth in the Holy Scriptures. The more the BMB is shaped by the Bible the better he is to recognize Satan's deceptive schemes (II Timothy 3:16-17). To counter our old sinful nature, God has given us a new self, the Holy Spirit. He enlivens and revives our consciences, which were made unreliable and damaged by Adam's sin; he is the very presence of God who leads and guides us in all truth (John 14:27). God has given us a new community, the Church, to offset the sinful world or community we live in. The Church is a group of people who live out God's truth as examples to follow, a new peer group or an in-group made up of transformed individuals (II Peter 2:1-12); it is the visible manifestation of the invisible Kingdom of God. Should the BMB fail to give proper attention to each of these three areas—the Word of God, listening to the Holy Spirit and submitting to the church—it is doubtful that he will continue in the Christian faith, much less become a mature, fruitful disciple of Messiah.

Discipleship from an evangelical Christian perspective centers on Islamic doctrines that affect the BMB's worldview.⁹ They are: Theology (God); Christology (Christ); Anthropology (man); Soteriology (salvation); Hamartiology (sin); Pneumatology (Holy Spirit); Eschatology (end times); and Bibliology (Biblical revelation). In discipling BMBs, not only do we have to consider the theological issues, we need to consider the deep cultural, social, and religious roots that shape their values.

5 Historical Overview of Religion in Iran

Religion plays an important part in the identity of Iran. Prior to the Islamic invasion in the seventh century A.D., Zoroastrianism was the religion of Persia which has shaped part of the Iranian cultural identity. Historically, the ancient myth of the fifty kings is encapsulated in the Epic of the Kings (*Shahnama*). The site of Persepolis (*Pârsâ*), constructed under Darius, has acquired a sacred character.

⁹ A foundational book on discipleship is Schlorff's *Discipleship in Islamic society*. In it he lays out the key Christian doctrines with which Islam disagrees and then suggests possible ways of discipling.

This site is called Throne of Jamshid (*Takht-e Jamshid*). The fourth king, Jamshid, improved civilization. Forbis quotes from Ferdowsi's Shahnama:

With the aid of the royal Farr, he fashioned a marvelous throne, which at his bidding was lifted by demons into the air. He sat upon that throne like the sun in the firmament. To celebrate, that day was called a new day—the festival of Now-Ruz—the first day of the new year (Forbis 1981, 23).

Forbis suggests that the tales of these mythical kings with their heroic deeds and tragic failings, along with the Zoroastrian history of Persepolis, melded in the creative consciousness of the Persian people. An often repeated theme of Iran's heroic tales is vengeance for the unjust death of an Iranian king or warrior.

In attempting to understand the revolution of 1978-79, it helps, I think, to know something of the heritage of heroic mythology that may have been, subconsciously or not, on the minds of those rioters in the streets (Forbis 1981, 22).

The Zoroastrian understanding of vengeance for the unjust death of the Iranian king is one element that shapes the Iranian perception and reaction to injustice.

The newly formed religion of Muhammad exploded into the Persian Empire under the expansionist rightly guided caliph, Umar. Persia and Byzantium were conquered by 652 A.D. At first the Arabs did not press the Persians to become Muslims, but under the heavy hand of the poll tax (*jizyah*) used to subjugate non-Muslims, based upon Qur'anic Surah 9:29, Iranian Persians adopted Islam to escape the poll tax levied on infidels (Forbis 1981, 31). Persian culture and its centers of learning influenced the Islamic Empire into its golden age (750-1258 AD) (Mackey 1996, 41).

Iranians eventually converted to Shi'ism as an integral part of Iranian identity because it spoke to Persian culture and the Iranian experience. Shi'ism, like Sunni Islam, shares common beliefs in the Oneness of God, the prophethood of Muhammad, and the belief in the resurrection. To this Shi'ite belief were added two others during the lifetime of Imam Jaafar Ibn Muhammad (702-765 AD):

1. *Adalah* (justice) meaning that men should strive to fulfill God's will in this world rather than wait for divine justice in the hereafter.
2. *Imamah* (imamate) meaning that the world needs the presence of an infallible guide who represents divine power. (Taheri 2008, 24).

The long standing quarrel between the two major sects of Islam stems from the very beginning of Islam. The familial line of Muhammad felt that the pious and simple life embodied the teaching of Muhammad. They felt that Hussein, the second son of Ali and grandson of Muhammad, stood in opposition to the growing wealth and power of the Islamic elites. Hussein called for social justice and standing against the darkness of evil, represented in the Umayyad dynasty (661-750 A.D.). In 680 Hussein, along with 70 men, stood against the Umayyads at Karbala, south of Baghdad, saying that, "Death is preferable to compromise between right and wrong" (Mackey 1998, 55). The Umayyad army which numbered in the thousands butchered Hussein along with the rest of his companions, severing the heads in a battle known as the "Plain of Sorrow and Misfortune" (Mackey 1998, 55). Shi'ism claims that Muhammad's three immediate caliph successors were usurpers who had come to Islam with hidden agendas to destroy it from within.

From the first century of Islam, the martyrdom of Ali and Hussein held particular meaning for Iranians. With the recesses of their minds and souls, Iranians saw in the Shia martyrs shadows of themselves. For they too were a defeated and humiliated people whose rights and deepest convictions had been trampled (Mackey 1996, 85).

But it was not until 1490 that the young thirteen year old Safavid Shah Ismail converted everyone in Iran to Shi'ah Islam "on pain of death" (Forbis 1981, 34).

In particular, the life and death of Ali, the cousin of Muhammad, profoundly mold Iranian morality, values, and character (Mackey 1998, 53). Karbala stands as a tragic moment when piety sacrificed itself for justice. Every year Shi'ites commemorate the slaughter of Hussein on Ashura, the tenth of Muharram. Iranians and Shi'ites

re-enact the death with knives, barbed chains, and swords, while onlookers participate vicariously by pounding their chests rhythmically. This theme of martyrdom replays itself from one year to the next as professionals (*rowzeh-khans*) give recitals recounting the sufferings of sacred figures in Shi'ism. The Shi'a passion play (*ta-zieh*) is preformed regularly across Iran, much like the Christmas pageants in the Christian West (Mackey 1998, 106). The life and death of Ali and the slaughter of Hussein on Ashura are part of the metanarrative that has shaped the morality, values, and character of Iranians.

In modern times, religion was relegated to a lesser position during the Pahlavi dynasty (1924-1979), in which Reza Shah implemented modernization along with secularization, which "required religion to be practiced at home" (Spellman 2004, 18). What ensued was an adjustment to a double life of public secularism and private religiosity. The religious scholars (*ulama*) have held an important position in Iranian society since the establishment of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722). The modernization and secularization of the Pahlavi government took much of the power and authority away from the *ulama*, thus severing the alliance between the *ulama* and the rich merchants and traders (*bâzâri*) in the market (*bazaar*) (Spellman 2004, 20). This dismantling of the religious power base led to two important Shia thinkers stepping onto the political stage in the 1960s and 1979. They were a layman, Ali Shariati, and a cleric, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Shariati popularized the idea of returning to Islam as a way of life and establishing an Islamic government. Later, Khomeini developed the doctrine of rule of the jurisprudent (*Velâyat-e Faqih*), which advocates that in the absence of the 'Hidden Imam' (from 'Twelver Shia' belief) it is important to appoint a supreme ruler who has complete knowledge of Islamic law and total justice (Spellman 2004, 21). Religious symbols and ideas, whether martyrdom and sacrifice or referring back to the utopian Golden years of Islam, were used to draw strong communal boundaries and create social insulation. *Velâyat-e faqih* was defended by Ayatollah Beheshti, "In the present system leadership and legislation cannot be left to the majority at any given moment. This

would contradict the ideological character of the Islamic Republic.” (Afshari 2001, 16) The result is, “The regime has codified the primordial societal prejudices into the state’s legal system.” (Afshari 2001, 290) The Islamic regime of Iran has tapped into long-standing prejudice found within Islam that categorizes Self/Other through identifications like *najes*, which define others as emitting ritual and physical impurity. Both the secularization of Iranian society and the manipulation of religious symbols are key factors influencing the worldview of the modern Iranian.

6 History of Post Khomeini Iran

The history of post-Khomeini Iran is an important part of Iranian history. This history is the context which shapes the background of Iranians who make up the church in the diaspora. Understanding this context will inform this research as I seek to uncover sources that further entrench survival behavior into the general populace in Iran. On January 16, 1979, the Shah fled Iran. On February 1, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini landed on the tarmac of Mehrabad Airport in Tehran. The twenty-second of Bahman on the Iranian calendar (February 12, 1979) is celebrated as the day the revolution was “victorious”. It is deeply marked in the psyche of Iranians. Ebadi describes that day,

That day, a feeling of pride washed over me that in hindsight makes me laugh. I felt that I too had won, alongside this victorious revolution. It took scarcely a month for me to realize that, in fact, I had willingly and enthusiastically participated in my own demise. I was a woman, and this revolution’s victory demanded my defeat (Ebadi 2007, 38).

The French Islamic scholar Maxime Rodinson was the first to describe the Khomeinist regime as fascist. The acclaimed Iranian journalist Taheri describes twelve characteristics of generic fascism and applies them to the Khomeini regime:

1. Total control. The Khomeini totalitarian form of government seeks to control all aspects of individual and community life. He considers this control to extend to the past as well as the present and the future, accusing the government

of stopping history at points it deems suitable to its own designs.

2. Anti-religious. Though Iranians have an exterior of deep religiosity, Taheri believes in practice Iran is deeply anti-religious. For proof, he sites that more than three hundred mullahs and students of theology have been executed and thousands are in prison, while many others have fled into exile.
3. Superstition. Taheri believes a cult of tradition and old superstitions were introduced, resulting in all sorts of fortunetellers, charm-makers, soothsayers, magicians, and astrologers selling their wares in the market.
4. Rejection of modernity. Concepts of the intrinsic worth of the individual, freedom of conscience, and the rule of law are spurned as “Western” or “Colonial” and are to be resisted on all levels.
5. Personality cult. This is seen in what he describes as “a cult of the chief” in which Khomeini became an iconic figure. This was exemplified with his image being carved into giant rocks. His fatwas remain valid forever, and slogans such as “*Khoda, Koran, Khomeini*” (“God, Koran, Khomeini”) remain war cries of the Hezbollah.
6. Exploitation. There was an exploitation of social and economic grievances. Hatred, envy, jealousy, and suspicion are major themes in the discourse. The dispossessed are told that while they are suffering, others live fantastic lives of luxury. In contrast, Iranians are told that they must not flaunt their wealth.
7. Xenophobia. The “other” is blamed for all the shortcomings and failure. The focus of those to blame in the new regime are women, the United States of America, and Jews.
8. A cult of death. This is seen in a passion for martyrdom. Muslims believe that martyrs instantly go to paradise. Khomeini’s most favored dictum was, “To kill and be killed are the supreme duties of Muslims.” (Taheri 2008, 88) In 1981, a fatwa ordered children to spy on their parents and

report their anti-Islamic activities, while parents were told that their religious duty required them to denounce their offspring if they engaged in anti-regime schemes.

Ashura, which commemorates the slaughter of Imam Hussein, is an important day in the life of Shi'ites everywhere. In Iran, this cult of death is not limited to Ashura. The ninth day of the month of Rabi al-Awwal on the Arab lunar calendar is considered by Shi'ites the "Sweetest Day" for Omar (Umar), the second rightly guided caliph according to Sunni Muslims (634-644 A.D.). He was murdered by an Iranian war prisoner near the central Iranian city of Kashan (Taheri 2008, 28). An article in The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees states,

It is important to note that while the Islamic Republic's propaganda is rooted in death rather than life, it is death itself that is idealised, not the act of killing.

Key dates on the Iranian calendar commemorate the deaths of religious figures centuries ago, and also of people who have died since the 1979 revolution. Reminders of those killed in the eight-year war with Iraq are everywhere.

The general impression all this creates is that death, not life, is the main event – so you'd better make it count.¹⁰

Ebadi's testimony is,

How to begin describing the gradual infusion of martyrdom into our lives? How to convey the slow process by which everything—public space, rituals, resumes, newspapers, television—became dominated by death, mourning, and grief? At the time, it didn't feel alien or excessive, this engorged enthusiasm for martyrdom and the aesthetic of death (Ebadi 2006, 62).

9. Fear and hatred of freedom. Taheri quotes Tabatabai saying that Islam relies on "nothing but monotheism, prophecy, and resurrection. If there is freedom, it is within that circle.

¹⁰ <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4d4a5285c.html> accessed 2 May 2012

If we accept freedom outside that circle we have undermined the foundations of our faith.” (Taheri 2008, 90) The argument advanced by Mernissi is that the real issue is not that democracy is foreign to Islam, rather that it “does not seem to agree with their interests” for there are many foreign things in Muslim societies that are fully accepted (Mernissi 2007, 52). The charge modernists such as Mernissi level against some Muslim regimes is that they

find their interests better protected if they base their legitimacy on cultural and symbolic grounds other than on democratic principles. The sacred, the past, ancestor worship seem to be the chosen grounds in most cases. This category groups together regimes as different as the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Iranian regime of Iman Khomeini or his caliph (successor), the military regime of Zia al-Haq in Pakistan, and the Sudanese regime that terrorizes its people in the name of the shari’a. (Mernissi 2007, 54)

10. A love of uniforms. Uniforms came in many ways, depending on the group. For the mullahs, it is their turbans. *Ansar Hezballah* (Friends of the Party of Allah) wore battle fatigues, and the Palestinian checkered *kufiyah* around their necks terrorized their opponents. Women were made to wear the *hijab*. Men were to wear beards.
11. A cult of war. The war is against “World Ignorance” and its aim is to defeat the Americans, liberate Palestine, and wipe Israel off the map. The result was that over one million people, the vast majority of them Iranians, have been killed. Since 1979, there has been a low-intensity war against Baluch and Kurdish rebels. In the 1990s, intellectuals, along with spiritual leaders of Sunni Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Baha’is, were murdered by official death squads and thrown by the roadside. Taheri goes so far as to suggest that terrorism is in the DNA of the country and the Khomeini experiment has exploited this terrorism (Taheri 2008, 96).

12. Rejection of the normal language of society. An attempt was made to make the Persian language closer to Arabic. The largest Iranian government department is the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and Culture in charge of censorship. Every imaginable writer and poet of importance in any language is either totally banned or heavily censored in the Islamic Republic. Even classics of Persian literature are “edited” to remove ideas that might undermine the regime (Taheri 2008, 79-105).

The fascist regime instituted by Khomeini and its legacy have shaped the version of Islam found within Iran and also has resonated with the Shi'ite traditions. These factors give us the immediate background shaping the culture values of Iranians found in the diaspora.

7 History of the Iranian Diaspora in the West

A review of the history of Iranian emigration to the West places the Iranians in their historical setting; it informs us of the circumstances of the emigration and the creation of the Iranian Diaspora. Research to date recognizes two waves of Iranians migrating to the United States. The first phase of Iranian migration was from 1950-1977, consisting of mostly students and visitors. Behjati-Sabet and Chambers indicate that before 1979 only a small number of Iranians, mostly professionals and business people, who migrated to the West for higher education remained in these countries (Behjati-Sabet and Chambers 2005, 130). The second phase was from 1978-1995, and is largely made up of refugees or exiles of the post-Iranian revolution (Bozorgmehr 1998, 6-8). The major exodus from Iran took place after the Islamic fundamentalist government took over after 1979.

By the 1990s about 5,000 immigrants from Iran were arriving in Canada annually. In addition, by 2000 about 1,500 Iranian refugees a year were also coming making Iran the fourth - or fifth - largest source of refugees to Canada. Today most adult Iranians in Canada are first-generation immigrants who share many of the beliefs, values, and char-

acteristics of their compatriots in Iran (Behjati-Sabet and Chambers 2005, 128).

The new refugees at the time of the writing were not numerous enough to constitute a third wave (Bozorgmehr 1998, 6). However, the economic and human rights situation in Iran continues to deteriorate, fueling a steady exodus of Iranians. A significant date within recent Iranian history is post- Khatami 1999. Muhammad Khatami was Iran's first reformist president, from 1997-2005, who brought high expectations to Iran for political change. July 1999 marked a change in policy with the student riots. It became apparent that the greatly anticipated reforms were not to be, for a significant increase of "human rights violations took place after Khatami became president." (Afshari, 2001, 31)

Taheri notes that Khomeinism "has driven more than five million Iranians into exile and has turned a further four million into displaced persons inside the country. Khomeinism has provoked what the World Bank calls 'the biggest brain drain in history.'" (Taheri 2008, 293)

The countries of destination are: the U.S.A., Canada, West Germany, Sweden, Great Britain, France, Norway, Australia, Israel, and Japan (Bozorgmehr 1998, 5). The largest Iranian community is found in the United States, with 285,000 in the 1990 U.S. census - 45 percent of the ten countries of destination. The vast majority of U.S. Iranians are located in California, with the highest concentration found in the greater Los Angeles area. McIntosh reports that the actual number of Iranian-Americans may top 691,000¹¹, more than twice as many as indicated in the 2000 U.S. census. Other estimates list the top ten countries of the Iranian diaspora as: 1) United States (1,560,000); 2) Turkey (800,000); 3) United Arab Emirates

¹¹ Based on Ali Mostashari's work at the Iranian Studies Group, an independent academic organization at Massachusetts institute of Technology (MIT) see <http://isgmit.org/>. The ISG arrived at its population estimate by conducting a computer analysis of U.S. white page telephone directories, then multiplying that total by 2.83, the average number of individuals per Iranian-American household as reported in the 2000 census.

& Bahrain (560,000); 4) Iraq (250,000); 5) Germany (110,000); 6) Central & South America & Other Parts of the World (100,000); 7) United Kingdom (80,000); 8) Canada (75,000); 9) France (62,000); 10) Australia (60,000).¹²

Behjati-Sabet and Chambers further explain that Iranians, who migrated in the 1980s, did so under unbearable living conditions, religious and political persecution, against their will, and under tremendous pressure. These conditions typically make the process of adjustment and integration slow. However, the majority of Iranians residing in Canada came from large urban areas and belong to upper and middle-class families who are relatively familiar with Western education and values (Behjati-Sabet and Chambers 2005, 128). Many Iranians in the United States came for social, political or religious reasons; therefore, they are unlike many immigrants in search of economic opportunities. These Iranians did not isolate themselves and have excelled in business and education.

Contrary to theory of exiles, which identifies exiles from lower educational and occupational backgrounds, “Iranian exiles are among the elite compared to other recent refugees” (Bozorgmehr 1998, 17). Iranians tend to be relatively economically well-adjusted and preoccupied with their homeland, as exemplified with their media production that is beamed into Iran, as opposed to ethnic groups that import media programming from the country of origin. This same preoccupation is also found within the churches that produce programming destined for Iran.

The ethnic diversity of Iranians has caused sociological researchers to coin a new term, “*internal ethnicity*” (Bozorgmehr 1998, 17), which is the diversity of Iranians which includes Muslims, Armenians, Assyrians, Bahais, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Research has noted that “Armenian, Bahai, Jewish, and Muslim Iranians in Los Angeles associate with their Iranian co-religionists more than they do with other Iranians” (Bozorgmehr 1998, 18).

¹² The Persian Diaspora of Worldwide Persian Outreach found at <http://www.farsinet.com/pwo/diaspora.html>.

Bozorgmehr's research reveals that business characteristics of Iranians do not conform to the norm in immigration literature. In contrast to other new refugees or exiles, such as the Koreans who are mostly immigrant entrepreneurs, Iranians consist mostly of entrepreneurs and professionals (Bozorgmehr 1998, 19). They are more likely to hire Iranian co-religionist partners/co-owners or relatives. Their preferences for hiring are: "reliance on family members, previous business ties (often forged in Iran), trust of each other, and conversely mistrust of outsiders" (Bozorgmehr 1998, 20). In other words, Iranian entrepreneurs are not dependent upon their ethnic community for success.

Assimilation does not seem to be a major area of concern. Iranians are less segregated from native whites than the Koreans, though at the same time Iranians do not readily assimilate (Bozorgmehr 1998, 23). However, organizationally there is a significant difference. The Korean community has more than 150 active alumni associations in Los Angeles, whereas Iranians have few alumni associations, which are mostly dormant. A significant note for voluntary church organizations is, "that Iranians had very little, if any, experience of participation in voluntary organizations in Iran, which could be carried over to the United States" (Min and Bozorgmehr 2000, 720).

The 1.5 generation of Iranians has raised concern in the area of assimilation.

The problem mostly concerned around these students' lack of respect for rules and regulations of the school. Iranians resisted the implicit educational mission of the school, i.e., to inculcate a commitment to American culture, and maintained steadfastly their affiliation with Iran. They devised various modes of resistance to overcome what they perceived as the school's preoccupation with rules and regulations. The teachers, in turn, perceived these actions as bypassing the rules. (Bozorgmehr 1998, 25)

More than one in four Iranian-Americans holds a master's or doctoral degree, the highest rate among 67 ethnic groups studied (McIntosh, 2004). Iranians are a very class-conscious people, so socioeconomic class distinctions are important in the identity of

Iranians, both in Iran and in the diaspora. In Canada, for instance, “The majority of Iranians [...] belong to the more modern, educated, and affluent urban classes. A smaller group who arrived later, mainly in the 1990s, are from working-class, sometimes rural, backgrounds” (Behjati-Sabet and Chambers 2005, 133). The differences found between the modern and educated Iranians and the working-class rural Iranians in the diaspora is substantial. My interviews have revealed that later arrivals who have not known pre-Khomeini Iran but survived in the continuing deterioration of post-Khomeini Iran are significantly different. Interactions between the two groups are strained.

8 Characteristics of Iranians in the Western Diaspora

There is a growing body of literature on the Iranian community in the diaspora. This literature informs this research topic by documenting characteristics found in the medical and mental health field which is foundational to understanding sources of disharmony within the Iranian Christian community. Iranian exiles or refugees suffer from drastic downward occupational mobility, but they were less likely to be dissatisfied with their current jobs and incomes than immigrants (Bozorgmehr 1998, 17). Besides the trying social and economic adjustments immigrants face, exiles face cultural and psychological problems. Good, Good, and Moradi in their study of depression make the following statement: “Dysphoria—sadness, grief, despair—is central to the Iranian ethos, an emotion charged with symbolic meaning” (1985, 384). They see this in poetry, preaching and secular literature; both classical poetry and modern novels are filled with melancholy and despair.

Iran has suffered for centuries at the hands of unjust and venal rulers they have no power to resist. This pain and grief are part of the Iranian identity rooted in a sense of communal pain.

Perhaps this is why Iranian culture bears a palpable if not quite definable burden of grief. It is as if the precarious social-political milieu in which Iranians have so often lived has preconditioned them to always perceive the negative, the sad, and the tragic. This weariness of misfortune is clearly voiced as a common theme in Persian poetry, which of-

ten speaks of the futility of all human desires in the face of inevitable death...Together Ashura, the *rowzeh-khans*, and the *tazieh* draw forth emotions never far below the surface. These feelings of pain and suffering Iranians hold within themselves are collective as well as personal. For as the individual has suffered, so has the nation (Mackey 1998, 105-106).

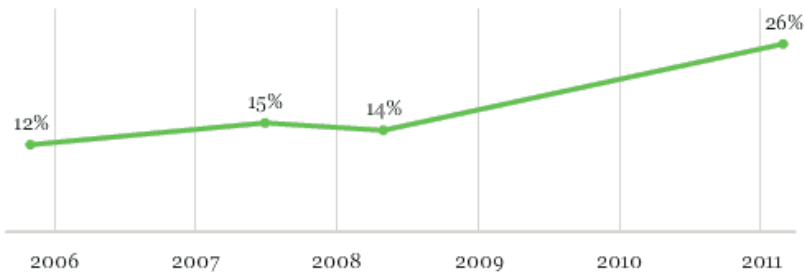
Nearly all Iranians share in the emotions of despair and the tragic, as represented in secular literature, poetry and the arts.

These secular literary works treat cultural themes prominent in the discourse of Iranian patients—pathological grief, feelings of entrapment in repressive social relations, the desire to maintain self-integrity unsullied by demeaning social conditions, and despair at the awareness of the disjunction of the idealized inner self and outward social actions. These issues have special poignance for Iranian immigrants (Good, Good, and Moradi 1985, 390).

Their study reveals that sadness, sensitivity and mistrust are a distinctively Iranian depressive syndrome (ibid, 420). This propensity to suffering may help explain the results of the study done by Kousha and Mohseni on the happiness of Iranians. “This study showed that at the macro level, Iranians (who live in a large city such as Tehran) are not a very happy people” (Kousha and Mohseni 2000, 286). The study further indicates that attitudinal variables,

Percentage "Suffering" in Iran

Among those aged 15 and older



"Suffering" means respondents rate their current and future lives 4 or lower on a scale from 0 to 10.

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such as satisfaction with marriage, give only a partial picture. “For Iranians, this measurement is even lower. Demographic variables (such as gender, age, and even class over which individuals have no control) do not have much effect on one’s happiness” (Kousha and Mohseni 2000, 287). A Gallup poll indicates that “Suffering in Iran has nearly doubled, up from 14% in 2008 to 26% in 2011” (Clifton 2/24/2012).¹³

A sense of the tragic in life is associated with depth of the inner self, as opposed to shallowness of the outer self. One who expresses happiness too readily is often considered to be a simple (*sâdeh*) or socially incompetent person. Indeed, the ability to express sadness appropriately and in a culturally proscribed manner is a mark of social competence as well as personal depth (Good, Good, and Moradi 1985, 385).

The Khomeinist regime expects Iranians to wear black on no fewer than sixty days each year. Fereidun Tonkaboni describes the Iranian culture as, “an inhuman culture, a culture of sadness and mourning, a culture of death and nihilism. This is a culture that forbids happiness and joy...The only thing not forbidden in the Islamic Republic is death and shedding tears at funerals for the dead” (Taheri 2008, 89).

This evidence supports the conclusion that mental health plays an important role in how Iranians interact within the Christian community. The negative and depressed state will shape how a person interacts with others.¹⁴ Interviewees have shared that what attracted them to Christianity was the happiness of Christian worship, the love they saw among each other and the positive messages of the church.

¹³ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/149756/suffering-iran-nearly-doubles.aspx>

¹⁴ Indeed, the sadness, grief, and despair which are prevalent among Iranians may be an indication that a ministry of inner healing needs to be part of the discipleship process.

9 The Emotional Component¹⁵

The emotional component includes variables in shame/honor, the exploration of normative responses of denial, cover-ups, and shifting blame which may help to explain the dynamics of conflict found within the Iranian Church in the diaspora. Other components will probe trust and fear, which includes boundaries, view of “others,” and failure.

9.1 *High Power Distance*

Iranians come from a society that is highly relational. They come from a tight social framework in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups. Hofstede defines collectivism as “societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive ingroups, which throughout people’s lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty” (Hofstede 1991, 51). The greatest insult is to go against the lifelong loyalty to the in-group. The extended family secures protection against hardships in life and a practical and psychological dependency develops that is hard to break. Large power distance countries¹⁶ tend to be more collectivist.

Iran scores high on this dimension (score of 58) which means that people accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. Hierarchy in an organization is seen as reflecting inherent inequalities, centralization is popular, subordinates expect to be told what to do and the ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat.¹⁷

¹⁵ This paper is based on an ongoing research for my PhD. I deal only in part with the emotional component in this article but will deal more extensively with interpersonal, family, power and religious/theological components in the dissertation.

¹⁶ Power distance is a dimension that relates to the degree of equality/inequality between people in a particular society.

¹⁷ <http://geert-hofstede.com/iran.html> (accessed 1:15 May 2, 2012)

Hofstede states,

In cultures in which people are dependent on ingroups these people are usually also dependent on power figures. Most extended families have patriarchal structures with the head of the family exercising strong moral authority. In cultures in which people are relatively independent from ingroups these people are usually also less dependent on powerful others (Hofstede, 1991, 55).

Hierarchy of a high power distant culture shapes the perceived roles within the organization of the Persian church. Iranian power structures tend to be authoritarian; however Iranians are most interested in reducing the power distance and increasing the future orientation aspects of the societal culture (Dastmalchian, Javidan, and Alam 2001, 548). Though the church may take the structure of the dominant low power distant Western church with a board of elders with equal authority, old patterns may often surface. My interviews with pastors and lay leaders of the Farsi-speaking church indicate that form and functionality often did not match. Pastors who desire to share power with the elders often found that the elders didn't understand fully the role they were to play. The elders took a passive role on the elder board consenting to anything the pastor proposed. On the other side, elders wanting to share in the decision-making process of the church often found that the pastor was the sole authority, never sharing power with the elders. This misunderstanding of power sharing may be explained in that there is no collective memory of how an egalitarian rule functions. This misunderstanding on both sides concerning the decision process of the church is another element leading to disharmony within the Iranian church in the diaspora.¹⁸

9.2 Shame and Morality

Shame is a cultural value that deeply shapes Iranians: it may give insight into some of the common reactions indicated in interviews concerning personal interaction of Iranians in the Farsi-speaking

¹⁸ Discipleship from pastors and church leaders of the host culture may need to take a proactive role when partnering with an Iranian church plant.

church in the diaspora. Benedict points out that, “there are two broadly different kinds of cultures throughout the world, shame cultures and guilt cultures” (Pattison 2000, 54). Shame cultures are structured around shame, honor and esteem. They promote social conformity by external sanctions for good behavior. “The emphasis is upon appearance and conformity in response to an external social view” (Pattison 2000, 54). Offenses are perceived as against social mores and punishable through public shame, ostracization and rejection by their social reference group. Pattison contrasts guilt cultures as those where the individual has an internalized sense of wrongdoing and a sense of conscience. Punishment is forensic and not dependent upon the loss of honor or of global stigmatization of the person.

Pattison makes a distinction between acute, reactive shame which is temporary and limited in its effects which are by no means all negative, and chronic shame that is extended in time and influence. Chronic shame, “can cast a permanent shadow over a person’s life, character, and personality” (Pattison 2000, 83). Most of the body of literature on chronic shame and its clinical importance is written by Americans (ibid, 95). However his conclusion is, “Any experiences that induce a sense of persistent inferiority, worthlessness, abandonment, weakness, abjection, unwantedness, violation, defilement, stigmatization, unlovability and social exclusion are likely to be generative of chronic shame” (ibid, 108). He goes on to say, “Perhaps the lowest common denominator in all the factors outlined here is the experience of human individuals being dishonoured, disrespected or objectified” (ibid).

Reactions to chronic shame are:

1. Withdrawal. Pattison suggests that withdrawal can be literal and physical and /or psychological and internal. The defense mechanism is withdrawal to safety. The withdrawal response is often accompanied by distress and fear which is interpreted as depression. My interviews reveal this propensity of withdrawal in conflict or perceived conflict.
2. Attack self. “The person constantly seeks to be in the position of suffering victim; you are never powerless, alone and

abandoned so long as you are a victim, the unconscious script runs” (ibid, 112). Pattison suggests the means used to attack self include self-ridicule, putting oneself down all the time, and being perpetually angry with oneself. Should this reaction be found within the church, the person needs to give up the inner hostility or shame-related feelings of abandonment, powerlessness, unlovability or emptiness may result.

3. Avoidance. Strategies of avoidance can include self-aggrandizement and seeking perfection. This may in part be reflected in the high achievement both in business and education found within the Iranian community, particularly in North America. Self deception is another strategy. “These are...people whose very identity is a lie, who live with a sense of self so false that they may be seen as imposters” (ibid, 113). Other strategies are flight, often into addictive substances, and caring for others from which they get their self-worth. Tension between the pastor’s identity and their personal life which does not match reality may be a factor of disharmony found within the church.
4. Attack others. The strategy is directing rage onto a scapegoat, projecting self-contempt on others, or blaming others is a way of avoiding, confronting, and owning shame in the unsatisfactory self. Strong negative feelings towards authority figures such as the pastor will result (ibid, 116). He concludes by saying,

This selective account of some of the ways in which people react to shame shows just how pervasive and varied are the implications of this condition. From laughter to despair, from hiding to grandiosity, shame has enormous implications for the way in which people think about themselves and others. It also affects their behavior. One must beware of associating all the woes and defensive reactions of humans everywhere with chronic shame (ibid, 119).

Shame is often associated with morality. Chronic shame may create a strong reaction to other people’s opinions and may cause

the individual to be supersensitive about the effect of other people's attitudes and actions upon themselves (ibid, 124). He indicates that a general problem for shame-prone people is that they may radically over- or underestimate their place in relationships and events. "A person may be as mortified over a small or trivial offence as they are over a major offence" (ibid 128). In the moral dimension Pattison believes shame is a more primitive, a-social condition than guilt. He even states that, "Chronically shamed people are pre-social and pre-moral" (ibid, 124). The majority of Iranians I interviewed remarked that "Iranians are sensitive". This sensitivity expressed itself in "dramas" over seemingly everything. Iranians can get offended if they believe that someone didn't greet them in a proper way. A glance, a raised eyebrow, or the intonation of the voice all become major signals of communication that can be easily misread. If two people of the opposite sex are seen together in public, this becomes a subject of rumors. A visitor from New Zealand came to visit family and visited the church. Two weeks later she left for New Zealand and the pastor left the city to speak at a conference for a week. Their absence which coincided roughly the same time was fodder for speculation that they had run off together. Chronic shame theory seems to give meaning to the hypersensitivity over perceived offenses that were often overlooked in Western churches.

9.3 Discipleship and Shame

Pattison suggests that shame needs to be superseded by guilt if people are to live together in a way that enhances mutual life and well-being. "What is required for society to be more moral, in the sense of being more respectful and other-regarding, is more guilt and less shame." (ibid, 129) He goes on to suggest that self-preoccupying chronic shame might be minimized so that other-regarding guilt might have a more prominent place (ibid, 129). Discipleship within a chronic shame based culture may need to introduce the concept of guilt within a redemptive, Christian worldview. One place to begin is the recognition of the "other", allowing individuals to be part of society and respected. Islam has systemically and foundationally inscribed into the primary documentation of

their religion by defining the “other” with isolation, humiliation and even death. Stigmatized groups are Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans, who ultimately have been defined as infidels (*kafir*) to be subjugated through the poll tax (*jizyah*) or to be killed.

9.4 Fear and Distrust

Among Iranians a culture of fear and distrust is endemic. Bar-Tal identifies two types of fear reaction: results of cues, which directly imply threat and danger, and conditional stimuli that are non-threatening in their nature (Bal-Tal 2001, 603). Fear is stored in memory and dominates and controls thinking and prolonged experience of fear causes overestimation of dangers and threats. His research reveals a tendency “to cause adherence to known situations and avoidance of risk, uncertainty, and novel situations; it tends to cause cognitive freezing, which prevents openness to new ideas.” (ibid, 604) He also suggests that societies may develop collective emotional orientations. Intractable conflict tends to dominate the collective fear orientation, and thus becomes embedded into the collective memory over time. Fear often becomes contagious.

Oversensitized by fear, a society tends to misinterpret cues and information as signs of threat and danger, searching for the smallest indication in this direction, even in situations that signal good intentions. The fear also leads to great mistrust and delegitimization of the adversary because of its harmful acts and threats. (ibid, 609)

The culture of fear and distrust appears to be an underlying reason for the disharmony and conflict so prevalent in Iranian fellowships. Cultural anthropologist Patai states that discord in the Arab world has always been present since pre-Islamic days. At the slightest provocation, violent verbal abuse and threats erupt, which easily degenerate into physical violence.

The situation is complicated by the fact that “unity” is merely a very abstract and remote ideal, while strife has its historical antecedent and underpinning in the age-old Arab virtues of manliness, aggressiveness, bravery, heroism, courage, and vengefulness, which have been extolled by poets for more than thirteen centuries and survive in the Arab’s con-

sciousness, predisposing him to conflict even though he believes in Arab unity and brotherhood (Patai 2007, 239).

Donna Hicks explains one of the dimensions to protracted ethnic conflicts in quoting Herbert Kelman:

Threats to identity create a zero-sum view of the conflict, where one's very existence seems inextricably linked to the negation of the other. An acknowledgment of the identity of the other is perceived as an act of self-destruction, as recognizing the experiences of the other fundamentally brings into question one's own interpretation of history, the conflict, and of the responsibility one holds for the past, present, and future shared realities (Hicks 2001, 129).

Donna Hicks has noted that tolerance to uncertainty and ambivalence is a way of measuring egocentrism. "The more one steadfastly holds onto beliefs, especially when there may be disconfirming evidence, the more egocentric (embedded in one's own perspective) is one's understanding of the world." (ibid, 135) Added to the equation is that Iran ranks on the lower range in the GLOBE sample for assertiveness. "That is, Iranians are less confrontational and aggressive in social relationships." (Dastmalchian, Javidan, and Alam 2001, 540) When someone suffers from a history of traumatic threats, an overload to the senses takes place. Hicks believes that the assimilation/accommodation process shuts down in an effort to stabilize core beliefs. The process causes the beliefs to become, 'rigid and extremely resistant to change, complexity is lost, certainty of our assessment of what is "right" rises, and the feeling of ambivalence about what we "know" is lost.' (Hicks 2001, 137) She describes the defense mechanism of self-preserving/other-annihilating as being revenge and violence threatening the other. The survival mechanism under perceived threats of trauma and humiliation are: (a) closing down of the learning process; (b) certainty about one's beliefs solidifies and becomes rigid; (c) the need to place blame or deflection of responsibility; (d) breakdown in social interaction through retreat; (e) breakdown in trust; and (f) reaction of revenge as a survival mechanism. (ibid, 137-141)

Leaders with the Iranian community are held in high regard. Iranians are known to ascribe devotion to people in authority. Ebadi describes to what extent Iranians have a cult of leaders.

Unfortunately, Iranians are at heart hero worshippers....they cling to the notion that one lofty, iconic figure can sweep through their lives, slay their enemies, and turn their world around. Perhaps other cultures also believe in heroes, but Iranians do so with a unique devotion. Not only do they fall in love with heroes, but they are in love with their love for them (Ebadi 2007, 147).

Patron-client relationships and power structures of fellowships are another dimension. The Islamic view of power is often viewed as guardian leader (Beekun and Badawi 1999, 2). King recognizes that most of the literature on patron-client social structures emanates from within the Middle East. "Iran is clientelistic and is composed of many autonomous parallel groups formed in patron-client bounds". (Alamdari 2005, 1298) Clerics function as glorified social welfare agents who gather money and dispense it. This gives the cleric independent power (Mackey 1996, 118).

Despite the hierarchical nature of Iran it is difficult to determine where a leader leads and the follower follows.

Lay men look to their leader for guidance and pattern their behavior accordingly. At the same time, the cleric from his position of authority seeks to understand the will of his followers and then to shape his policies to reflect that will. As a result, religious leadership, unlike kingship, is circular rather than vertical. The leader both leads and follows and the followers both follow and lead (ibid, 118).

Even in the diaspora, new patron-client relationships are sought to replace the old ones. "Hope is a key component of patronage and clientage." (King 2005, 321) Patron-client relationships influence normative ideas about migration and resettlement processes (ibid, 324). It is possible that this repositioning influences relationships in the church.

Church structure is also an area of concern. Tracing how the new community shapes its structures of power to its own ideas and interest is important to understand (Geller 2008, 2). Geller sug-

gests a type of neo-patrimonialism may develop in which the leader (in this case the Iranian pastor) assumes power through patrimonial power. He suggests that this power is based on “authority, suppressed subjects and paid military organizations, by virtue of which the extent of a ruler’s arbitrary power, as well as grace and mercy increases.” (ibid, 2)

There is a strong emotional dimension in hierarchical societies. People either adore or despise the leader with equal intensity. Hofstede states that countries with higher power distance have more domestic political violence (politically-inspired riots) than lower power distance countries; and that large power distance countries are characterized by strong right and left wings with a weak center, which he calls a reflection of the polarization between dependence and counter-dependence (Hofstede 1991, 38). The center position (which is considered the ideal in Western societies) is seen as a position of weakness. There will be a power struggle of opinions and the pattern of leadership that can quickly develop reverts to old patterns of overpowering the others to keep strong opinions in check. Iran scores 59 in uncertainty avoidance, meaning they like to maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas.¹⁹ Many Iranians are reluctant to compromise or to recognize the validity of others’ points of view and instead tried hard to convert others to their opinion. It is often difficult for an Iranian, especially a man, to admit that he may be wrong (Behjati-Sabet and Chambers 2005, 135).

A significant note for voluntary church organizations is “that Iranians had very little, if any, experience of participation in voluntary organizations in Iran, which could be carried over to the United States.” (Min and Bozorgmehr 2000, 720)

Compared to other new immigrant groups, Iranians have very few ethnic associations or organizations. The main explanation for this pattern is cultural. Voluntary associations were uncommon in Iran, and as such Iranians do not have the requisite experience to establish them.

¹⁹ <http://geert-hofstede.com/iran.html> (accessed 1:15 5/2/12)

Even when they are formed, many of these associations fail in their infancy (Bozorgmehr 1998, 24).

Ebadi affirms this inclination of Iranian organizations failing. “As has been the tendency of organized Iranian political groups from the beginning of time, is to splinter, and then its splinters splintered.” (Ebadi 2007, 155) This was the experience of the political groups in July 1999, after then President Khatami’s government cracked down on any voice in opposition or critical of the government. No one could agree anymore on tactics, let alone strategy. Iran ranks 20th from the lowest in the GLOBE sample, indicating that planning, investing, and future oriented behaviors are not highly emphasized (Dastmalchian, Javidan, and Alam 2001, 541). In 1953 Donald Wilber wrote, “Given the recognized incapacity of Iranians to plan or act in a thoroughly logical manner, we would never expect such a plan to be executed in the local atmosphere in a Western staff operation.” (Taheri 2008, 178) The first years of the Iranian Revolution from 1979–1981 were dominated by power struggles. “Many of the groups went through radical changes and schisms as they defined and redefined their range of political and ideological views, particularly their position on the future of Islamic leadership.” (Spellman 2004, 24) The way the hardline clergy secured their power base was by eliminating the opposition forces. Schisms followed them into the diaspora: “The political divisions that existed between the leftist groups have continued in exile and there have been many schisms within the parties.” (Spellman 2004:29) Yet Iranians seek to change these cultural traits. The top of the list of “should be” cultural traits is a desire to transform their two weakest orientations. “In terms of the desires to change the culture, the data showed that Iranians are most interested in reducing the power distance and increasing the future orientation aspects of the societal culture.” (Dastmalchian, Javidan, and Alam 2001, 548). This too has followed Iran into the diaspora.

My interviews with Iranians indicate that when they find new life in Christ, the culture of fear and distrust is not easily shed. All too often the certainty about one’s beliefs solidifies and becomes rigid. This is often exemplified by pastors or people in authority who

blame others when problems arise. When members ask questions beyond the scope and understanding of the pastor or teacher, the assimilation and accommodation process shuts down in an effort to stabilize core beliefs. This rigidity reflects a defense mechanism in light of perceived threats of trauma and humiliation.

10 Conclusion

We discovered that self-centered shame and its dominance in the collective mind of Iranians (and some other BMBs) help to explain the inability to differentiate between a minor offense to be overlooked or a major offense that needs to be addressed. Introducing other-centered guilt as an element of the discipleship process is more easily said than done. Fear stored in the memory dominates and controls thinking. Deeply embedded cultural distrust can explain the process of self-preserving and other-annihilating behavior as a survival mechanism under perceived threats of trauma and humiliation. Discipleship will have to address fears, real or perceived, and help the Iranian Christians work through the emotional element of distrust so they do not become rigid and extremely resistant to change, losing complexity, becoming entrenched in what is 'right', and avoiding humiliation. Structures, though they may have the correct form, may not reflect the operational paradigm dominant within their culture. Discipleship will need to understand and evaluate functional paradigms of power and help the nascent community grow in responsibility and participation. None of these core cultural values will change immediately. Patience, love, wisdom and a long-term commitment to see maturity through the discipleship process is what is needed.

The purpose of this article has been to investigate aspects of Iranian culture and worldview that influence relations within the Iranian churches. Specifically I have tried to identify some key areas of concern in relation to the category of emotion that I believe are sources of tension and strife within the churches. Therefore, any adequate discipleship program offered to/by Iranian Christians must in some form address these issues. All cultures have experienced the corrupting influence of sin in different manners; this is

true for Iranians. The Church, equipped with the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and wisdom accrued through centuries of witness and worship, has the resources to see salvation come not only to Iranians, but to Iranian culture as a whole.

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MUSLIM-BACKGROUND CONGREGATIONS IN THE VILLAGES AROUND LUCKNOW, INDIA: AN INTERVIEW WITH C**** M*****

By Duane Alexander Miller and C**** M*****

*Abstract: Lucknow is about 71% Hindu and 26% Muslim, which tiny minorities of Christians, Jains, and Sikhs. The population of the city with the surrounding areas is around three million. The M*****s are veteran missionaries and serve under a large American evangelical missionary board. I had the pleasure of meeting C**** in 2007 and we have enjoyed staying in touch via Skype and e-mail since then. I proposed that he write something for this issue of SFM on the topic of church planting in Muslim India and he proposed an e-mail interview, which follows.*

Keywords: India, Lucknow, Mission, missionary, Evangelicalism, religious conversion

1 Initial Questions¹

1) *Give us an idea of roughly when you arrived in your region and what was the state of Muslim outreach at that point?*

We arrived on 25 September in 2004. There was one other American focused on Muslims in our city, but his security was so high we did not meet very often. There was one Indian man who had a team but his outreach tended to be (and still is) with low-caste Hindus and not as much with Muslims. He also had a very high security level. I do not really know what methods these men used.

2) *What are the main things that are happening today that you know about?*

Within the last year, a 'large' group of foreigners has come to Lucknow, the capital city, and to smaller cities around the state of Uttar Pradesh. Most of these people isolate themselves within their own

¹ Minor editions and corrections have been made throughout the entire text.

Where a person's name has been removed the editor has used brackets to indicate this.

ministry organization so interaction is minimal. There was a large indigenous ministry (sponsored by the West) that was reporting huge numbers in the western part of the state but one to two years ago something happened which brought most of the reports into question. During the same time a main contributor withdrew his support (related or not, I do not know). Currently they have either stopped their work with Muslims or cut back dramatically.

As for the work that God allows me to do, we have not been able to get anything started in the major cities but we have seen success in villages. Through one main national, we have 19 leaders and 500+ MBB's². This is not a perfect work. Both the leaders and the 500 others need a lot more Bible training, but it is something. Of this group approximately 150 are baptized. For the most part, this is a work among families, where both the wife and the children are also believing.

3) What do you feel are the main strengths and weaknesses among the workers there?

Because there are so many people without the Gospel in North India, it becomes a target of many mission agencies. The Middle East is perceived as dangerous, but not so much India. There is a lot of territorialism, especially among Indians. People do not like to work together. Foreigners often maintain too high a security level.

4) What do you feel are the main strengths and weaknesses among the indigenous Christians there?

New believers are very dedicated to godly living and the task of sharing [their faith]. Weaknesses are presumed fear of the religion of Islam that keeps people from sharing; *another one* is trying to promote a personal agenda and trying to outdo a 'rival' worker so that an individual is seen as better than others

5) What is your main role in helping the MBC's (Muslim-background congregations) emerge, develop, and grow?

² MBB stands for Muslim-background believers, and refers to individuals who have accepted the basic teachings of the Christian faith, though they may or may not identify themselves as Christians (see question 6).

First, I work through nationals, trying to encourage them to do the work. I teach on how to reach Muslims and how to start groups. These teachings are done for people who express interest in learning. Secondly, I work with one national who takes some of what we share back out to the people he works with. Sometimes I meet the 19 leaders in their homes, and sometimes I teach some of the 500 in the villages but I do not do that too often. I would like to work more closely with the 19 but they insist it be done at a fancy meeting center at my expense. So at maximum, I do that one time a year.

6) What do the MBB's there call themselves when asked about their religion?

True Muslims, true believers.

7) What sort of persecution do they face, and how much does that persecution influence their decisions and outlook on life?

Usually persecution lasts less than a year, if there is any. Many keep quiet until they think that it is safe. One very good MBB keeps quiet around his house but is much more outspoken outside of his village. There are quite a few people who can lead by example, including our main worker. Knowing this, others are encouraged by his testimony. Those who do not come to faith or have not come yet often imagine the most extreme things happening all at the same time, like loss of job, family, death, loss of future marriage partner, beatings, etc.

8) Have you been able to raise up some MBB leaders? If so, tell us about the process and the training involved.

My main Indian worker and I have a different definition of leader. He considers a person a leader if they are consistent in their faith and active in the work. At this point we have 19 leaders. Usually they gather one or two times a month for a prayer meeting at someone's house. Within that group, there are about five that meet every week for prayer and fellowship. I never attend these meetings.

9) Would you classify the MBC's there as insider movements? Why or why not?

According to several people steeped in insider movement, they do not like the term MBB and think it is better to call people MB

[Muslim believers]. My sending group disagrees with the MB title. On one hand, it is terminology which changes meaning with each different person who uses it. The question becomes, 'What does God see/What does God want?' What is culture and what is religion? It does not look like a Sunday morning worship service but it is a worship event. So are hajj and *wazud*. Christians can say the Lord's Prayer with deep-felt emotion or without any thought at all. Muslims can do the same with *namaz*. Worship is a heart issue and therefore, is hard to judge on the outside. Many Muslims will shy away from traditional practices because it brings back memories of a past belief set; one they have left.

10) *Tell me about baptisms--when you baptize new believers, who does the baptism? What sort of confession of faith do they make? Who is present? Where and how often do these take place? What does baptism mean for them as best you can discern?*

Most of the baptisms are done by our main man although some have been done by the 19 leaders. A few have been done by me. Almost always, two people are doing the baptism. It is always done with a group of ten or more. Although the people should already know the facts, we teach about baptism once again, emphasizing faith. Their confession is that they are only trusting in Jesus for their salvation. If anyone is wearing a charm, he or she must take it off. There are about three baptism events a year; each one is planned and postponed many times before it actually happens (it's India).

11) *If all the foreign workers had to leave, what do you think would happen to these Muslim-background congregations (MBC's)?*

I think they would keep on but have a potential to not grow any more. We don't make them grow but we always talk about reaching out.

12) *Is there anything else you feel is important to say that I have not asked about?*

We have not seen the need to do security at all. We do speak with wisdom around Muslims and withhold information that is not relevant for an aggravated Muslim or a police official to know at the time. Otherwise, we want people to know where they can come to learn the truth of God's Word.

2 Follow up Questions

13) *I am interested in not having charms at baptism. Who made that rule?*
I enforced it because it is very common for both Hindus and Muslims to wear 'protection' from birth. Some will say it has no power or influence. However, I want people to trust in God for their strength. I have been at the train station while a man was breathing into a small item to be worn. People paid 10 rs for it. I also know parents put various items on a child for protection.

14) *Can you tell me about the history of how this work came about? How did your main local worker come to faith, and how did the two of you start working together?*

He had a tough beginning, bouncing around from ministry to ministry for several years. He was put out of house and still (~20 yrs latter) does not often visit his home city; much less his family. Ultimately he attended Bible college in Africa with Assemblies of God. According to him, he was struggling a lot before he and I met in 2006. He has five children, none of whom attended school the year prior to our meeting. (Since that time my wife and I pay for his children to attend a [missionary] school near his home). Initially, a national who leads a large ministry in the state brought us together. I think it was a man named [person name] (a Hindu-background believers) but it could have been [person name] (a Muslim-background believer). Because we had several tough times with other nations who wanted to work with us, we started very slowly in the beginning. This might not have been his choice but I did not leave that topic up for discussion.

Slowly we began to meet each other more often and do small projects together. I usually did not teach or disciple him directly but I did encourage him in ministry. As we trusted each other more and more, I introduced him to local people who have an established ministry so he can learn from them. In addition, I found many different ministry projects over the years. The combination of meeting together, introducing like-minded friends, and doing various ministry projects together led to our current state.

Currently there are some good things and bad things about our relationship. Due to language and cultural differences, expectations

on both sides sometimes go unmet. He relies on my money too much. I rely on his outreach and gift of evangelism too much (as opposed to my own). He is not delegating to his other leaders so they rely on him beyond what he is capable to handle.

With this said, I am praying about letting him go to work on his own so I can spend more time in another area outside of the city. I think he can handle it, but both of us would have to be convinced that it is the best thing to do.

15) How do your believers relate to traditional Christians in the region, if they do at all, and if they are in contact at all?

Almost all of them do not. The main leader can make the switch between traditional people and true believers without a problem. However, not many others would even make the attempt. The people of the city (where most traditional Christians live) look down on people from the village.

16) Have you had any believers go back to traditional Islam?

Very few.

17) Have you had any believers join or try to join one of the established churches? Were they successful?

No. One man who became a believer wanted to be buried at a local church and the church said no because he was not a member (probably was an anti-Muslim thing also). Almost all established churches are in the city and our people are in the villages anyway.

18) Why do you think you've seen growth in villages but not in the city?
People have more time to listen. They also are generally much more trusting of others. They are a people in need.

19) Are there any bible verses or stories which the believers there seem to really resonate with or cherish?

The sacrifice of Abraham's son is one we use a lot. Several have come to faith via that story. I hope that they will learn more stories in the next year. At the moment they do not know that many.

20) You mention that other workers are very concerned about security, but you seem to think that they are emphasizing this too much. Why do you think they are so concerned with this issue?

I think they listen to their leadership who has either never visited the area or has listened to someone else. Either way, the advice

comes out of perception and not actual events. The police of India have the ability to do all kinds of things to track a person. My assumption (interesting choice of words?!?) is that very few workers are careful enough to avoid detection if they are being watched. So the key is not to get on their bad side. The best advice I have is to network with people from all walks of life, help the society, and stand up for justice. If the people know you make a positive difference in the country, they will more likely return the favor when it is necessary.

The simple fact of the matter is, we do something we are not supposed to do (according to security levels) and nothing bad happens. And then we do the same thing again and again just to make sure it is not a fluke, and we are still ok. Indian Christians love to tell a story of someone who had a problem in a different place, at a different time, and say 'it might happen here, so be careful.'

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTOLOGY IS NICENE CHRISTOLOGY: AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE

By Mina Fouad Tawfik¹
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Abstract: In his book The Jesus Papers: Exposing the Greatest Cover-Up in History, Michael Baigent states that the aim of the Council of Nicaea 'was to get support for the idea that Jesus Christ was "of one being" with God the Father, a claim that Arius and others disputed; for them, Jesus was not divine' (p. 83). Princeton's Elaine Pagels dryly observes: "Those who opposed this phrase pointed out that it occurs neither in the Scriptures nor in Christian tradition" (Beyond Belief, p.173). In this paper I will argue that such ideas, which argue that Christ was deified in the Council of Nicaea, are incoherent and indefensible. They completely ignore three centuries of written tradition (writings of the Fathers, the New Testament, tombstones and songs of praise) and oral tradition (which is shown in the liturgical practices), of both which completely support Nicaea.

1 Jesus Christ: A Deified Man, Or An Incarnate God?

Baigent, Pagels and others suggest that Christ's so-called Nicene deification was due to the direct effect of the Greco-Roman civilization, especially on the Jewish culture in Palestine. The evidences provided for this idea are the characteristics or properties given to the Roman emperors, like "the god", "the lord", and "the giver". For instance, in an inscription dating back to the third century BC we read, "Ptolemy the savior and god: Πτολεμαίου του σωτηρος και θεου." We may see various inscriptions and texts that give the same meaning and the first question we pose is, could these ideas

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about divinity be related to the godhead of Christ? Or, more specifically, was it this sort of concept that led to the Nicene doctrine of the Word being “of one substance” with the Father, as authors like Pagels and Baignet have suggested?

2 The Theology Of Christ’s Incarnation

Against Pagels and other like-minded thinkers, I argue that the theology of God Incarnate goes far beyond the idea of an “incarnated god”. In biblical thought, the key concept is related to salvation and redemption, i.e. its main purpose is redeeming and saving humanity. This theological theme is seen in the Old Testament and the Jewish rabbinic writings. It completely and fundamentally differs from the idea of gods’ incarnations in mystery cults and the Greco-Roman thought. This Biblical presentation, which implies a soteriological dimension, contrasts with the idea of Christ being deified in the sense that Greek and Roman humans could be deified; indeed a doctrine of the “deification of Christ” could not serve the Christian doctrine of salvation presented by the New Testament and as understood in the Orthodox Tradition.

Christianity is considered a compound philosophy in the shape of coordinated systems of dogma and liturgical rituals that communicate the Word of God and his death on the cross as recorded in the Holy Bible. The rituals are nothing without these dogmatic bases. On the contrary, the bases of the Greco-roman cults are totally the opposite. Their rituals do not express written texts or even oral ones, or dogmas or any philosophical justifications². In fact the Greco-Roman religions are related to rites more than faith. This is totally different from Christianity, which identifies a communal, ecclesiastical relationship with God in Christ, made known graciously by God and appropriated by faith in this message. The dogmas are lived out and experienced in the rituals of the Church, which in Orthodoxy are called mysteries (Arabic, *asraar*).

²Ittai Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford Classical Monographs), Oxford University Press 2002, p. 3

Incarnation was not an aim itself, but it was a means of fulfilling an aim. This aim was humanity. It shows how incarnation expresses the deepest relationship between God and man. Because God, who is Spirit, became flesh for us, so his salvation did not remain purely theoretical—only to be believed in the heart and assented to in the mind—but physical, to be participated *in*. Because of this, Orthodoxy, like Jesus and St Paul, sees no tension between a strong affirmation of the real, physical rituals of the sacraments as salvific participations in the Trinitarian fellowship, while also affirming that salvation is purely gift and grace. Greco-Roman cults had no way of bringing together these aspects of the human experience—ritual and faith—because they did not have a way of bringing together the human and the divine in a man. Orthodox Christianity does.

3 Patristic Testimony And Ante-Nicene Christology

Ante-Nicene Christology³ was not any different from that of Nicaea, which is what Pagels suggests. Both are the same and are based on the Biblical Christology. Two important concepts of this Christology can be found in the Bible: the concept of Logos (the Word Incarnate) and the concept of the Son of God.

Here are some relevant verses on the Logos, the Word Incarnate: Mt 5:37, 28:15, Mk 4:15, Lk4:32, 4:36, 5:15, Jn.1:1, 4:37, Ac 6:5, 11:22, Rom 6:6, 9:9, 1Cor1:18, 2:4, 2Cor 1:18, 10:10, Eph 4:29, 6:19, Co. 3:16, 4:6, 1Thes1:8, 2Thes 1:8, 3:1, 1Tim 1:15, 2Tim 2:9, Ti 2:5, Heb 2:2, 4:2, 1Jn 1:10, 2:7, and Rev 19:13.

Son of God: the cries of the unclean spirits, and those with evil spirits, “You are the son of God,” (Mr 3:11, 5:7, Lk4:41) cannot be considered a pagan influence, but this title reminds us of the texts of Qumran. For example, codec 4Q246 which is known as *Aramaic Apocalypse* (dating back to 25 BC) is of a Jewish origin, and much older than the NT. The text speaks about a man entitled “son of God” or “son of the High” and “*his rule will be an eternal kingdom.*” The text sees that person as a universal savior, so this apocalypse

³ That is, Christology prior to the Council of Nicaea, which was convoked in 325 AD by the Saint and Emperor Constantine.

affirms that the concept of “son of god” in the New Testament is not derived from some pagan origins.

The Biblical theological vision closely identifies God and his Christ, the Word Incarnate. This is the faith we find among the Apostolic Fathers and the Ante-Nicene era.

The Epistle of Barnabas (likely written after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and before rebuilding the city by Hadrian – 132-135 AD) refers to Christ as the Son of God who will execute the final judgment: “he will execute judgment...he revealed himself to be God’s Son.” (5.7-9) Barnabas repeats this idea in several places: in 7.2 he says:

If, therefore, the Son of God, who is Lord and is destined to judge the living and the dead, suffered in order that his wounds might give us life, let us believe that the Son of God could not suffer except for our sake.

The Didache is a catechism written in Greek and is dated around 60-80 AD⁴. This manual quotes from Matthew, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Thessalonians, and 1 Peter. It quotes more than 22 times from the book of Matthew⁵. Concerning baptism, the Didache says:

As regards baptism, baptize in this manner, having first given all the preceding instruction baptize in the name of the father, and of the son and of the Holy Spirit and immerse 3 times in running water.

The second epistle of Clement is the oldest complete Greek homily⁶ still existent outside the New Testament; it is likely that the epistle was written between 100 and 120 AD: “Brothers and sisters, we

⁴ Randy Nelson, The Jesus Seminar's Quest for the Historical Jesus, Evangelical Theological Society Regional Conference (3/17/96), p.13; O'Loughlin, T. (2010). *The Didache: A Window on the Earliest Christians* (26). London; Grand Rapids, MI: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Baker Academic.

⁵ Did. 1:2 vs Mat 22:37ff & 7:12; Did.1:3 vs Mat 5:44ff; Did. 1:4 vs Mat 5:39ff;

Did.1:5 vs Mat 5:26; Did. 10:5 vs Mat 24:31; Did. 10:6 vs Mat 21:9, 15 ...etc.

Aaron Milavec, Synoptic Tradition in the Didache Revisited, Center for the Study of Religion and Society, University of Victoria, p.4

⁶ Holmes M.W., The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations, 2nd ed., Baker Books, Grand Rapids 2004, p. 102

ought to think of Jesus Christ as we do of God, as judge of the living and the dead. And we ought not to belittle the one who is our salvation" (2 Clement 1.1).

Ignatius of Antioch (martyred 110), says: "There is one only physician, of flesh and of spirit, generate and ingenerate, God in man, true Life in death, Son of Mary and Son of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:2). He clarifies this further in one of his epistles to the church in Ephesus: "...God Himself appearing in the form of a man, for the renewal of eternal life" (Epistle to the Ephesians 4:13). And: "For our God Jesus Christ was, according to the appointment of God, conceived in the womb by Mary, of the seed of David, but by the Holy Ghost" (ibid 4:9).

Irenaeus (died 202), in *Ad. Her. 2.17.4*, says: "The Father is God revealing himself, the Son is God revealed (the appearing revelation)"... "But he, Jesus, is himself in his own right, beyond all men who ever lived, God, Lord, and king eternal, and the incarnate word, proclaimed by all the prophets, the apostles ...The Scriptures would not have borne witness to these things concerning him, if, like everyone else, he were mere man" *Ad. Her. 3:19.1-2*.

Irenaeus even went on to present a clear belief in the Triune God:

The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: ...one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father 'to gather all things in one,' and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, 'every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess, to him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all...' (*Ad. Her. 10.1*)

Melito of Sardis identified Jesus Christ as fully God and fully man in his writings around 177 AD: "Being God and likewise perfect man, he gave positive indications of his two natures: of his deity, by the miracles during the three years following after his baptism... he concealed the signs of his deity, although he was the true God existing before the ages" *Anastasius of Sinai's, The Guide* 13.

Athenagoras wrote in 160 AD: "...they [the Christians] hold the Father to be God, and the Son God, and the Holy Spirit, and declare their union and their distinction in order." *A Plea for the Christians* 10.3.

Clement of Alexandria in 190 AD makes a strong case for Christ's deity and the Trinity in several writings: "I understand nothing else than the Holy Trinity to be meant; for the third is the Holy Spirit, and the Son is the second, by whom all things were made according to the will of the Father." *Stromata*, Book 5, ch. 14. "This Word, then, the Christ, the cause of both our being at first (for He was in God) and of our well-being, this very Word has now appeared as man, He alone being both, both God and man." *Exhortation to the Heathen*, ch 2

Alexander of Alexandria (died 326 AD) wrote:

Thus concerning this, we believe--as it seems best to the apostolic church--in one unbegotten Father, who of his being has no cause, who is immutable and unchangeable, always according to the same things in the same state, neither receiving progress nor diminution, who is giver of the Law, Prophets, and Gospels, who is Lord of patriarchs, apostles, and all the saints; and in one Lord Jesus Christ the only-begotten Son of God, begotten not from nothing but from the Father who is, not according to the likenesses of bodies by dissections or emanations from divisions, as it appears to Sabellius and Valentinus, but inexplicably and indescribably, according to him who said, as we set forth above, 'Who will describe his generation?' (Isa. 53:8). *Letter to Alexander of Thessalonica*, 46

Those confessions of faith were never mere theoretical writings, but were also repeated and recited throughout the liturgies for baptism and the Eucharist. The oldest Coptic baptismal formula says:

“I believe in One God, the Father, Almighty, Jesus Christ our Lord.” There is also a Roman baptismal formula that dates back to 125-135 AD: “I believe in God, Almighty, (the Father), and in Jesus Christ His only Son, who dominates us, born of the Holy Spirit and Virgin Mary, who is crucified in the time of Pilate of Pontus and buried and raised in the third day.”

This Orthodox faith is supported by the testimony of history and theology. It is supported also by the geographical spread of the faith, especially in the first centuries of Christianity, when the church was strongly oppressed.

In conclusion, these ante-Nicene, Patristic texts demonstrate that the confession of the faith of Nicaea did not promulgate any new teaching. The concepts and vocabulary used there were already in wide circulation among the teachers and elders of the churches throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe.

4 The Story Of Nicaea: What Really Happened There?

Let us examine the historical facts. The beginning of the controversy was when Arius (a cleric in Alexandria) offered his heretical ideas. This was during the divine war. Constantine saw that this Arian controversy was dividing the bishops of his empire, so in 323 AD he appointed Hosius of Cordova (Spain) to assist in resolving this conflict. Hosius delivered a letter from the Emperor, though it might have been written by Hosius himself, to Alexander bishop of Alexandria and to Arius, but the letter had no effect.

So by an invitation from the emperor himself, a council was held in 325 AD in the town of Nicaea, in Bithynia, which was a vital city near Nicomedia. The council consisted of 318 bishops (we get this figure from Athanasius' writings. Some other sources claim that the number was 300 or 270). In addition, there was a great number of priests (presbyters), deacons, and assistants present, most of them from the East, to settle the Arian debate and fix the Passover date. Another concern was to discuss the subject of re-baptizing heretics.

There are evidences that the title “pope” or “patriarch” did not exist in the ante-Nicene era, or even in Nicene time. We have primary materials from the Council of Nicaea, like a letter from Euse-

bishop of Caesarea to his church there. (It was kept in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates, and in Athanasius' *Apology of Nicaea*.) The description of the council sessions is kept in Eusebius' book *Life of Constantine*, and letters from Constantine and letters from the council to the churches are also present there. Also, we still have the twenty canons issued by the council. Also, the historical writings of Socrates, Sozomen, Rufinus and Eusebius of Caesarea contain many details about the council.

In fact, there is no reference to the subject of fixing the number and identity of the books of the New Testament or the deification of Christ in either of these ancient primary sources (like Socrates, *chapter 8*, Sozomen, *chapters 17 to 21*, and Eusebius).

The Available historical sources on the council of Nicaea:

Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesia*, Book I, ch. 6 .13

Socrates, *Historia Ecclesia*, Book I, ch. 8 ch 21

Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, Book III, ch 6 ff

Eusebius, *On the Feast of Easter / De solemnitate paschalis*.

Athanasius, *Ep. Ad episcopos Africae*, 5. ff

Athanasius, *de decretis synodis*.

Epinphanus, *Haereses or Panarion*, 69

Philostorgius, *HE I*, 7, 7a

Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 10.1-6

Geasius of Cyzicus, *Historia Concilii Nicaeni*

Jerome, *Prologue to Judith*

When the Council Fathers endorsed the ante-Nicene hermeneutical tradition regarding the correct, Orthodox interpretation of Holy Scripture, they denounced Arius' contention that the Logos had been at some point in time created, and that his essence was not the same as the divine essence. This they did with the memorable words: "We believe [...] in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father..."

It's clear now that the Christology of Nicaea was the same faith of the New Testament and the early centuries before Nicaea; it's "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). Claims by authors like Pagels that Nicaea somehow produced the

doctrine of the full divinity of Christ by borrowing from Greco-Roman thought are empty and indefensible.

THE ORIGINS, DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE OF THE C5 / INSIDER MOVEMENT DEBATE

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Abstract: This article provides a comprehensive literature review of the C5 / insider movement debate, with particular focus on writings between 1998 and 2010. The review analyses the literature within four chronological periods (1998; 1999-2002, 2003-2007, 2008-2010), examining both proponents and critics of the C-Scale articulated by Travis (1998a). In looking beyond these publications to the ongoing debate and deepening controversies, this article identifies eight areas where the issues need to advance in the future. It concludes with a call for more careful consideration of the C-Scale, both with regard to what built its original claims and in what its reception or non-reception means for missiology and ecclesiology.

Key Words: Contextualization, Insider Movement, Islam, missionary, MBB, C-scale, C5

1 Introduction

The debates surrounding C5 contextualization and “insider movements” within Islamic settings are now well over a decade old. Given Acts 2:11, though, arguably these matters predate Islam and extend back to the Day of Pentecost (Medearis 2008: 62) and, even, into the earlier Jewish Diaspora’s relations with host cultures. More recent discussions within the missiological sphere, however,

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have generated as many questions as answers (Tee 2007), and there remains a lack of an easily-available overarching survey of the literature informing these discussions.²

Covering the period 1998-2010, this article provides such a survey and makes an assessment of these opening years in what is very much an ongoing development within mission practice and theorisation. This, together with its bibliography, will help us to understand and locate these debates, especially for readers unfamiliar with the topic. Indeed, to anticipate one of my conclusions, this contested area of theory and practice will benefit from ongoing and more sophisticated cross-disciplinary interactions, which will require an introductory survey such as this. This is important since, at the time of writing (in 2012), there is no sign of any resolution or consensus among evangelicals in the debates surrounding the reception of C5 and insider movements. Instead, “Evangelicals are increasingly divided over how to conduct ministries among Muslims.” (Johnson 2011: 50) Also, if anything, the geopolitical challenges and restructuring within the 2011 ‘Arab Spring’ heighten the need for ongoing and maturing debate (cf. Herrera and Bayat 2010).

Even if it is not exhaustive, this literature review is intended to be comprehensive, at least regarding the differing sides of the debate.³ I have focused on published written material, deliberately omitting blogs and unpublished conference papers with their surrounding conversations; nor do I examine the policy statements drawn up by particular mission agencies.⁴

² In the final stages of preparing this manuscript for publication, I came across an unpublished PhD thesis which addresses the period here under review and reaches similar conclusions to mine, and advances the debate in a number of significant ways (Wolfe 2011). Although not making a formal literature review, Wolfe engages with the same body of literature addressed here: see, especially, pp.29-97 regarding the development of insider movement methodology and pp.98-169 regarding its biblical and theological foundations.

³ If anyone feels some important literature or perspective has been omitted from the period here under review, please inform me via matthews@oakhill.ac.uk.

⁴ The exception is a statement by Arab World Ministries (2007), since it was published in *St. Francis Magazine* [*SFM*] and discussed by Corwin (2007: 53-54).

Given the previous absence of a published literature review,⁵ there is a useful purpose to be gained from a concise but nevertheless wide-ranging account of the progression of discussions surrounding these issues to date.

I come to these debates as a disciplinary outsider, no pun intended. I have no experience of missionary work in Islamic contexts and, until 2010, I had never read any literature regarding C5 or insider movements. Rather than these disclaimers discounting my contribution, I think that my outsider position, informed by wide and recent reading, provides a fresh perspective on the progress of, and prospects for, such approaches among Islamic peoples and a portal for others coming to these debates from beyond the missiological discipline.

I come to the matters as a New Testament scholar with a particular interest in the book of Acts and a supplementary background in social-scientific research. I hold doctorates in the fields of human geography and biblical studies. My first PhD, examining strategies for engaging with the Australian state adopted by Aboriginal people, considered questions of cross-cultural personal and group identity.⁶ In part, it examined one Christian mission to Aboriginal peoples during the mid-twentieth-century. My second PhD, recently

In this review, I am taking 'published' in a wide sense, to include webzines such as *SFM*. (Note: the early volumes of *SFM*, while numbered, do not cumulatively paginate their constitutive articles. Thus, citations provide only internal numbering within the particular article, hence the disproportionate number of early *SFM* articles listed here with a pagination of 1ff.) While it is invidious to mention only one blog from the many, www.biblicalmissiology.org has been dedicated to this topic since December 2009, albeit adopting an avowedly negative stance towards C5 / insider movement praxis. This survey also largely ignores literature relating to Muslim evangelism within western contexts (cf., e.g., Oksnevad and Welliver 2001).

⁵ In his otherwise excellent historical review, Schlorff (2006) lacks sufficient attention to C5. See for instance, his partial coverage of what he terms 'the EMQ debate' (Schlorff 2006: 86-88). For wider coverage about that period, see the literature gathered together in Parshall (2000).

⁶ Sleeman, Matthew (1996) 'The Geography of Citizenship Strategies in a Rural South Australian Aboriginal Community, 1940-1993'. PhD Dissertation, University of Cambridge.

published by Cambridge University Press (Sleeman 2009), explores the productions of space and place undertaken in the Acts narrative generated by Jesus' ascension into heaven. It covers Acts 1:1-11:18 and, in my next work, I am extending this scope into the later chapters of Acts. This new area of study has brought the C5 / insider movement debates to my attention, initially via conversations with students on the *Theology for Crossing Cultures* course at Oak Hill College, London, the college at which I teach.⁷ In due course, I intend to provide a more focused assessment of C5 / insider movements as viewed through an exegetical and hermeneutical lens which consists of the whole of Acts. This present survey prepares the ground for such work, as well as standing in its own right. To that end, as well as narrating the development of these debates, it offers some prospective comments which will inform my own next steps which also, I hope, will assist others engaging in these matters.

Important terms need clarifying, especially in a debate where there are frequent intimations of people talking past each other (see, e.g., Higgins 2006: 120; Brogden 2010).

Given the frequent summaries of the C1-C6 spectrum within the literature (e.g. Travis 1998a; Tennent 2010: 303-305), I will not reiterate it at length here. Travis, who devised the spectrum, outlines well its six constitutive postures, establishing the 'C' as indicating Christ-centred communities – not, as Tennent (2006: 113n2) makes clear, 'Cross-Cultural Church Planting Spectrums'. Position on the spectrum varies according to the language adopted for worship services, the cultural and religious forms employed in both public life and within explicit worship settings, and the believers' self-identity as Muslims or Christians. Tennent (2010: 303) describes Travis' model as having become "the standard reference point for discussing contextualization in the Islamic context." It has also been applied to other religious contexts (e.g. DeNeui 2005).

⁷ In this regard, I am particularly thankful to Nick Jones, Ruth Markham (née Rotter) and Chris Flint, as well as to their tutor, Ray Porter. I am also very grateful to the Oak Hill College librarian, Wendy Bell, for her tireless help in tracing the literature.

To varying degrees and via a variety of strategies, C5 believers in Jesus might continue to attend the mosque, might participate in its *salat*/prayers and the reciting of the *shahada* (albeit with varying strategies towards such involvement), adopt or retain patterns of diet and dress befitting their local Islamic culture, give alms, observe Ramadan, and may even undertake the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca. In such diverse ways, C5 believers would identify themselves as social and legal members of Muslim family and society, and continue to offer respect to the tenets of Islamic faith. This question of self-identity forms C5's important but contested boundary with C4, which exists as an explicitly 'Christian' 'church', albeit making use of certain Islamic forms (see, e.g. Lewis 2009a). Whereas C6 indicates 'private' or 'secret' believers in Christ, a strategy often adopted out of fear of persecution or martyrdom resulting from a more public confession, C5 is characterised by small groups of gathered believers typically meeting together within the community of Islam. For alleged descriptions of C5 lived experience – with suitable recognition of its diverse expressions – see, e.g., Travis and Travis (2005); Brother Yusuf in Corwin *et al.* (2007); Brown (2007a); Ali and Woodberry (1999); S. Kim (2010).

For definitions of insider movements, Garrison (2009) and McGavran (2009) provide wider introductions to, and overviews of, people-movement approaches to mission. For more focussed discussion with regard to specifically Islamic situations, see (e.g.) Higgins (2004: 156), and Lewis (2006, 2007, 2009b). I am aware that the terms 'C5' and 'insider movement' mean different things to different people, sometimes being treated as synonymous, and sometimes being distinguished from each another (Corwin 2007: 54, 55n2; Brown and Hawthorne 2009). Furthermore, recently at least one former proponent has rejected the 'insider movement' label (Higgins 2010: 132nn9, 13). Here, for ease of clarity but with recognition for these diverse opinions, I will treat the terms as broadly equivalent to each other. For further definitional discussions, see the fourth edition of *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Winter and Hawthorne 2009).

Likewise, I will make use of the term ‘Muslim-background believer’ (MBB) in a descriptive sense. Others on varying sides of the debate have suggested or use alternative terms such as ‘Muslim background congregation’ (Miller 2009: 4), or ‘believers from a Muslim background’ (Smith 2009). ‘Muslim believer’ is frequently used (see, e.g., Travis and Travis 2008: 196n127) or – even – simply ‘Muslim’, since this forms a primary, not a background, aspect of their identity. This latter ascription raises important questions of whether ‘Muslim’ is a religious, ethnic, communal or cultural marker (see, variously, e.g., Higgins 2006: 117–118; Brown 2006d: 132; Brown, in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 10; Brown 2007b: 65; Hoefer 2008: 28; Lewis 2009a; Dixon 2009: 5; Smith 2009: 36–37; n.n. 2010a: 406). Across my reading, however, MBB has been frequently used and appears to be widely accepted without excessive controversy. See, e.g., Kraft (2010: 956n4) and n.n. (2010a: 404n1) for further discussion.

Finally, I will not explain differences between Christian and Islamic worldviews. For such comparisons, see Caner and Caner (2003), and Brown (2006a, b, c). For a succinct introduction to the complexities within Islam itself, see Ruthven (1997) or, more briefly, Corwin (2004). Regarding contextualisation, see Kraft (2005a) and, for a historic perspective on the development of contextualization, see Miller (2011: 229–239), who draws on the work of Coe (1973, 1974).

2 The Genealogy of the Contextualization Controversy

2.1 1998: The Origins of C5

As is widely acknowledged, the ground zero for the present debates surrounding contextualisation within Muslim settings is John Travis’ 1998 crystallisation of the C1–C6 spectrum (Travis 1998a).⁸

⁸ In varying ways, Eenigenburg (1997) and Chastain (1999) typify the pre-Travis situation: that is, the advances achieved by, and constraints facing, what was to become known as the C4 position. Compare, also, with Miller (2011: 233–240) concerning differing ‘organic’ and ‘directed’ understandings of contextualization, and their impact on the debates surveyed here.

Since then, others have highlighted that this spectrum was already subject to discussion and refinement amongst missiologists and practitioners of mission, suggesting that its ultimate origins lie in West Java, around 1990 (Dixon 2009: 40). Furthermore, “By the late 1970s, all the positions along what may now be described as the C-scale had been articulated in seminal articles,” (Travis and Travis 2008: 194n122; cf. Schlörff 2006: 79-89)⁹ and Schlörff (2006: 9-10, 14-17) identifies precursors to C5 in the 1920s. Likewise, the concept of insider movements was already in circulation in 1985, although nothing was published at that time (Brown, in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 7), and it has precedents earlier in mission history (Higgins, in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 7). Others have seen precursors to it in new ‘Christian’ villages formed by MBBs in nineteenth-century Java (Tee 2007: 5 cf. Asad 2009b: 142-149). Nevertheless, Travis (1998a) brought the matter to publication and, thus, into visible and formal debate.

The debate got off to an immediate and lively start. In the same issue of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* [EMQ] that published Travis’ initial article, Phil Parshall – an earlier pioneer and advocate for C4 ministries – issued several warnings concerning C5 as a missionary strategy, thus demarcating some of the ensuing discussions (Parshall 1998b). First, while allowing for C5 as a transitional stage towards C4, Parshall feared C5 also risked forming a slippery slope towards syncretism and, also, that it was open to charges of deception. In many ways Parshall’s comments were moderate, but they sparked further questioning and reiteration of C5 as a missionary methodology, which was not Travis’ intention. Travis (1998b: 412-413) subsequently distanced himself from Parshall’s suggestion that C5 ministries included conversion (or reconversion) to official Islam, something which Parshall saw as “high syncretism... regardless of motivation” (Parshall 1998b: 405; ellipsis original), thus largely sharing Parshall’s rejection of Christians becoming Muslims to

⁹ Cf. Travis and Travis (2008: 203n136): “The earliest articles alluding to the need for a C5 orientation came from Anderson (1976), Wilder (1977), Kraft (1979), and Conn (1979).”

reach Muslims. For another, later, response to Parshall (1998b), see also Winter (2009).

Still in this same issue of *EMQ*, Gilliland (1998: 415) took issue with “a tone of defensiveness” he sensed in Parshall’s comments, even while conceding some of Parshall’s concerns as being justified. In particular, Gilliland questioned Parshall’s conclusions drawn from the results of the unpublished ‘Islampur’ research, which had examined the theological beliefs and priorities held by some MBBs.¹⁰ Gilliland stressed “the critical issue of context” and called for more time in interpreting C5 ministries, since they were still in progressive development (Gilliland 1998: 416; similarly Travis 1998b: 412).¹¹ Travis also took issue with Parshall’s interpretation, most notably Parshall’s claim that “45 per cent [of MBBs in the study] do not affirm God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit” forms part of “the down side” of C5 (Parshall 1998b: 406). For Travis (1999: 660) it was “actually astounding” that “over half” affirm the Trinity.¹²

This particular statistic, drawn from the ‘Islampur’ study, subsequently became a football for both sides of the debate. Woods (2003: 194–195) interpreted the 55% figure in a negative light, whereas Massey (2004c: 297–298) and Brown (2006d: 131) drew

¹⁰ Details of the ‘Islampur’ study need to be pieced together from the glimpses available in different commentaries upon it. Parshall (2003: 69–70) provides perhaps the most comprehensive description of it.

¹¹ Schlorff (2006: 87) identifies Gilliland as the “research director” of the Islampur study.

¹² Travis (1999) states that it is Travis (1998b), ‘used by permission’ from the original publisher (p.660). However, a close reading of the two texts indicates a differing introduction to the section entitled ‘The Islampur case study’, with the variation running for over a paragraph in length (compare Travis 1998b: 411 with Travis 1999: 660). It is impossible to tell in which order the two versions were written, or the rationale for the changes, but it is interesting to note the varying versions, especially at this crucial juncture where – in both instances – the writing is in response to Parshall’s criticisms and is concerned with the assessment of the Islampur study. I have not made wider parallel readings of the two versions of Travis’ article, nor of other documents claiming to be reproduced from elsewhere in the 1999 volume. Thus, I cannot assess the extent to which such revisions occur elsewhere.

positive encouragement from it, albeit while Brown noted that the question itself had been poorly construed. Brown also commended the figure of 66% of MBBs in 'Islampur' reading the Gospels every day as being "far higher than most traditional Christians, and so their ways of talking about God are shaped more by scripture than by ecclesiastical tradition" (Brown 2006d: 132). Furthermore although not cited by name, the 'Islampur' study is probably that referred to by Higgins (2007: 34) as having been quoted in a negative and typically "modern western" fashion as "cognition-centred measurement" of salvation.

Thus, even at this initial stage, certain characteristics of the debate were already apparent. For those seeking to assess these ministries, discernment was made harder by writers' frequent use of pseudonyms¹³ and assertions of the need for anonymity mixing uneasily with interpretation of unpublished research and anecdotal reportage while simultaneously appealing to the importance of local context. Brown (2006d: 131), for example, asserted that the design and interpretation of the 'Islampur' study was lacking but, to my knowledge, the study has never been available for public scrutiny. Second, biblical precedents for C5 phenomena were quickly asserted, including the earliest Jerusalem church in Acts (Travis 1998b: 482). Third, and related, proponents claimed that C5 groups should expect to be led by the Holy Spirit in their contextualization (Travis 1998b: 412). Fourth, and recognising that this was possibly "the most challenging task of C5," Travis saw that the longer term viability of C5 *as* C5 (as opposed to moving towards C4 or C6) required a reinterpretation of "certain aspects of the role of Muhammad and the Qur'an," citing Accad (1997: 34-46, 138-141) as a starting position for this process (Travis 1998b: 413-414). Finally, Travis

¹³ Apart from the obvious 'n.n.', the following also declare themselves to be writing under pseudonyms or partial names: Travis; Massey; McNeal; Dutch; Herald; 'Phil'; Waterman; Abdul Asad; Smythe; and Smythe, PhD. In the latter instance, it is unclear whether the doctorate forms part of the pseudonym; elsewhere, doctorates are claimed without specifying the area of research in which the doctorate was awarded. The existence of other pseudonyms cannot be excluded; also, at least one author changes name, Caldwell becoming Higgins (see Higgins 2004: 158n5).

(1998b: 414) proposed ‘guidelines for avoiding syncretism in a C5 movement.’ Thus across Travis’ two 1998 articles there was a notable shift from an apparently descriptive typology to a more direct advocacy of C5 ministries.

2.2 1999-2002: Refining and Defining C5

Advocates for C5 approaches within Muslim ministries rapidly appeared in print. These early presentations are illuminating since, in print at least, there was little if any criticism of C5 at that time. Proponents, therefore, were relatively free to publish the movement on their own terms, albeit in a manner that was, like the ministries themselves, still developing. To this extent, while agreeing with Tennent’s assessment that C5 literature “is decidedly ad hoc,” at least at this early stage I question his accompanying suggestion that it has “developed as a reaction against criticism which has been posed, rather than [as] an independent case which biblically, theologically, historically and contextually sets forth the necessary arguments.” (Tennent 2006: 104) Instead, the *ad hoc* quality of argumentation at this stage in the debate, I would suggest, also reflects a significant degree of field experience and experimentation with C5 prior to any theorisation or responding to significant criticisms of it.

In an article entitled ‘His Ways are not Our Ways’ Massey (1999) claimed a theological space for C5, announcing in his opening sentence, “Scripture shows that God has never been entirely predictable.” With an eye to Parshall’s earlier criticisms and seeking to position the emergence of C5 as paralleling the earlier origin of C4 approaches, Massey (1999: 189-191) sought to position C5 as an authentic progression from C4, just as – a generation earlier – C4 had itself been required to establish itself as a valid step on from C3: “C5 does not claim to go any further [than C4], except in the area of self-definition.” Multiple and wide-ranging appeals to biblical texts followed, both by assertion and analogy, in a manner which often verged on proof-texting. Used in various ways, Massey’s key texts were Acts 10:13; 15:8, 11, 19; Romans 12:15; 14:4, 19, 22; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Galatians 5:12; 2 Peter 3:9 (cf. 2 Peter 2:1). Several of these verses and passages have, in various ways, been

picked up by others within the debate; certainly, as later writers would demonstrate, there remained much exegetical work to be done beyond simple collection and assertion of texts.

Two important theoretical distinctions underpinned Massey's argument. First, he distinguished conversion from discipleship, seeing the call of Jesus as requiring the latter but not the former (Massey 1999: 191), arguing for a parallel with Paul's opposition to 'Judaisers' demanding gentile conversion to Judaism in order to follow Jesus. Second, since identity is not based solely on one's theological position, there remains room for followers of Jesus to continue identifying as 'Muslim' in name, in sharp contrast to the strategic stance adopted by C1-C2 believers.¹⁴ Recognising the controversial nature of this proposal, Massey sought a moratorium on "missiological gossip," whereby believers further up the spectrum are accused of diluting the gospel via "compromise, syncretism and heresy" to render it more palatable, even while believers further down the spectrum are charged with "obstructing the flow of the gospel with a culturally insensitive, extractionist approach" (Massey 1999: 193).¹⁵ In a similar vein, 'early adopters' of C5 should resist pride, and avoid considering their approach is for everyone.

Instead, Massey submitted, the Acts 15 Council (specifically, 15:19) provides a better, third response which would accommodate C5 ministry, one which models an acceptance of God's diversity in mission infused with praying for God's blessing upon those with a different approach to ministry (Massey 1999: 194). Continuing this emphasis on diversity, Massey also stressed the variegated nature of the Muslim world and the commensurate need for diversity in bringing the gospel to it (Massey 1999: 194-196), as had Travis in

¹⁴ A C1 church operates in an outsider language and cultural setting, with no concession to the local situation. By way of illustration, the Armenian churches in Iran would be classed as C1 (Richard 2009), whereas a C2 ministry would consist of "traditional church using insider language" (Tennent 2010: 303). C1-C3 would identify themselves as 'Christians' (Travis 1998a).

¹⁵ 'Extraction' here indicates converts withdrawing from their familial and society setting, and becoming inserted into new and alien church cultures, either at their own instigation or under the direction of a missionary.

his original presentation of the spectrum. In a subsequent article Massey developed this further, proposing a M1-M9 spectrum, addressing diverse Muslim attitudes about Islam (Massey 2000b: 11-12), but this has not been adopted by later writers.

Picking up on Parshall's earlier call for dialogue on these matters (and, possibly, on Parshall's letter to the *EMQ* editor, reproduced in Parshall 2000: 112-113), a themed edition of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* [*IJFM*] in 2000, edited by Massey, announced some clarification had been reached, and that 'Parshall's conclusion about C5 was unfortunately based on erroneous descriptions from alleged "C5 advocates" (Massey 2000a).' Certainly this *IJFM* issue clarified the C5 agenda, even if it demonstrated that Parshall's criticisms were not fully resolved (cf. Parshall 2003: 59-75).

For example, Massey asserted that C5 does not lead to C6 (Massey 2000b: 9), a claim later contradicted by subsequent C5 advocates seeing very fluid distinctions among C4-C6 (Brown, in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 13-14). Also, Massey reiterated his call for a recognition of God's not entirely predictable diversity, and argued that C5 adherents identifying themselves as 'Muslim followers of Jesus,' was analogous to the identity asserted by Messianic Jews (Massey 2000b: 7; cf. Brother Yusuf, in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 8-9). Identity involves "both theology and culture," (Massey 2000b: 9) but the relationship and the balance of power between these two aspects remained unclear.

It is important to note a significant biographical, self-reflective dimension among those writing about C5 ministries. Thus, Bernard Dutch picking up this identity question, reflected on his own experiences as an American in the Middle East, not least during the first Gulf War in 1991 and – from this position – judged self-identity among MBBs to be "multi-faceted," defying simple explanations and thus frequently frustrating external expectations, such that cultural outsiders "often see the issue in false clarity." (Dutch 2000: 15) Conversely, Dutch saw the term 'Christian' as not "a God-ordained

label for followers of Jesus” required by any biblical mandate.¹⁶ Instead, he proposed that more effective communication is possible within Muslim settings by referring to ‘followers of the way’ or, simply, to ‘believers’. In this pragmatic approach, Dutch appealed to Acts 15:19 (albeit cited as 15:19ff) as indicating that unnecessary cultural requirements should not be imposed on MBBs (Dutch 2000: 18). Occasional (but not habitual) mosque or *eid* prayers are acceptable “as a sign of belonging to Muslim society”, but experience suggests that proper discipleship and a good understanding of Scriptures provide the best prevention against syncretism (Dutch 2000: 20).¹⁷ Low-profile ministry, relevant and “sensitive to local culture and sentiment” was judged to reflect a NT model, providing “time for maturity to develop, and for quiet growth to gradually spread through their community.” (Dutch 2000: 21, 20) For Dutch, questions concerning outcomes remain unanswered at this stage, but outsiders cannot and should not simply impose solutions or constraints.

Such questioning regarding identity ran more widely through this *IJFM* themed edition and formed a *leitmotif* across its articles. As well as Dutch, Travis (2000) also raised the contested meaning of ‘Christian’ as reason for not using this term in his own ministry. It nevertheless remained important that C5 ministries should be connected with practices found within the Christian scriptures and practices. Thus, responding to Parshall’s concerns about the dangers involved in longer-term mosque attendance (“the mosque is pregnant with Islamic theology” Parshall 1998b: 409), Travis likened those parts of C5 who still attend the mosque to the earliest believers in Acts who met in both temple and home, a mindset

¹⁶ Indeed, the word ‘Christian(s)’ occurs only in Acts 11:26; 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16, and the term ‘Christianity’ does not occur anywhere in scripture. Nevertheless, the criteria required to constitute a ‘God-ordained’ mandate for terminology remained an unaddressed question.

¹⁷ With this in mind, Brown (2006d: 130) suggested a category C5.5 designation for those whose “culture and worldview have not changed very much.” Given the confusion this introduces into Travis’ scale, it is unsurprising that others have not adopted this suggestion.

which he also saw in Naaman in 2 Kings 5:18, and among evangelical Roman Catholics who still attend the mass. Accordingly, MBBs “must... never stray from the core components of the Gospel,” but through Bible study and with the Spirit’s guidance they will determine “[h]ow much of orthodox Islam they can affirm.” (Travis 2000: 55, 56) In this way, Travis asserted, MBBs remain members of the Muslim community and, thus, are able to reach out effectively with the gospel within it. Next, Travis discussed various strategies some MBBs adopt regarding recital of the *shahada*,¹⁸ giving four case studies of individual MBBs. In his conclusion Travis allowed for C5 to be a temporary option, given the few cases which have been documented and the lack of available and critically considered longitudinal, through-time observations.

Judging the word ‘church’ to frequently reflect Western habitual assumptions, Caldwell also proposed a notion of ‘kingdom’ needed to be recovered, such that the church can be understood as “not so much a congregation as it is a movement, a life, an organism, a seed,” as “yeast” and, to avoid institutional and organisational overtones, Caldwell suggested a corrective metaphor of ‘kingdom sowing’, ‘to refill the time-honored term “church planting” with the fresh biblical content.’ (Caldwell 2000: 30) This will be, he concluded, “incarnational” regarding cultural forms (Caldwell 2000: 31).

In the ongoing search for biblical precedents for C5 ministry already evident in this issue of *IJFM*, Caldwell (2000: 26) cited Jesus’ words in John 4:21-23 and the apostles’ Temple attendance in Acts 3:1 as indicating that ‘place’ is secondary to the issue of ‘heart’, a distinction which he unpacked at greater length with regard to Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman and her fellow villagers in John 4. This in turn underpinned the aversion to extractionism

¹⁸ Discussion of this particular performative encounter with Islam has remained a primary arena for debate regarding C5. See, e.g., Travis and Travis (2005: 407); Corwin *et al.* (2007: 11-12, 15); Woodberry (2007: 27); Smith (2009: 33-35); n.n. (2010a: 406). Brown (2007b: 71-73) provides a helpful layered analysis of what recital or non-recital might communicate.

which characterises C5 ministries.¹⁹ Later Caldwell, writing under the name Higgins, supplemented these analogies by appealing to what he suggested was a Pharisee-based movement evident in Acts 15:5; 21:17ff (Higgins 2004: 158–159; 2007: 37). This paralleled Massey’s earlier alignment of C5 alongside Paul’s ministry in contrast to that of the Galatian Judaizers, seeing a parallel between the Judaizers and any requirement that MBBs need to convert to ‘Christianity;’ this, Massey claimed, many in the Islamic world viewed as a “godless Western institution” (Massey 1999: 191).

Simultaneously seeking biblical precedents for C5 back across on the other side of the NT ethnic divide – that is, from within majority Judaism – Jameson and Scalevich (2000) suggested that the first-century negotiation by Jewish believers of their self-identity within wider Judaism holds out a model for C5 ministries. He cites Acts 2:46; 3:1; 10:9; 21:20 and 24:14 in support of their claim. Seeing Peter’s appeals to the Old Testament in Acts 2 and 3 as paralleling MBBs making use of the Qur’an, they extrapolated from Acts 21:20 that “[s]imilarly, many twentieth-century Muslim believers are finding it necessary to maintain their distance from the traditional Christian community in order to stay within their Muslim context... to freely worship with them... would destroy their credibility in their own community, as it would have for first-century Jewish believers.” (Jameson and Scalevich 2000: 36)

This issue of *IJFM* closed²⁰ with Culver projecting ‘the Ishmael promise’ through the OT as far as the *magoi* in Matthew 2 (Culver

¹⁹ Lewis (2007: 75) judged extractionism to typify Western paradigms of church formation, in contrast to more communal approaches characterising insider movements.

²⁰ Also in this *IJFM* themed edition, Brown (2000a) raised important and long-standing questions surrounding Bible translation and interpretation, highlighting the phrase normally rendered in English as ‘son of God’. This, and other such matters are not specific to C5 or insider movements, and so are not pursued further within this review. Parshall (2004: 64) described the translational issues surrounding ‘Son’ and ‘Messiah’ as simply “the newest contextual controversy to come down the pike.” Cf., elsewhere and variously on related translational questions, e.g., Massey (1998a; 2004b); Madany (2006); Nikides (2006a); Greer (2010), responding to Abernathy 2010).

2000). Clearly there were great hopes, and prospects, for discipling Muslim peoples in the new century (Love 2000), even if methods for such evangelism were not clear (Brown 2000b; Steinhaus 2000) and the results of the search for biblical precedents was mixed, even contrary.

This state of missiological flux - combined with the sustained sea changes in mission practice and sensibilities perceived as arising after 9/11 (Richard 2001; Woodberry 2002; Love 2008a) and debates surrounding field-governed mission structures in subsequent issues of *IFJM* (issues 18(2) and 18(3)) - created further conditions to sustain ferment concerning C5 as a strategy. On the one hand, there was the claim that “more Muslims have come to Christ in the last 25 years than in the entire history of Muslim missions combined” (Love 2000: 5) but, nevertheless, many felt that, in the face of ongoing pressing need for a gospel impact amongst Muslim peoples, “[i]t would be naive to expect these churches [C1 and C2] to make any significant breakthrough among Muslims.” (Tennent 2006: 103)

These early articulations of C5 ministries amongst Muslims were further fed by parallel developments in other, non-Muslim mission fields. In particular, Hoefer’s book-length discussion of ‘Churchless Christianity’ claimed that, in Madras, 200,000 nonbaptised *Jesu bhakta*, Hindu devotees of Jesus, continued to live within, and identify themselves with, Hindu society (Hoefer 2001; cf. Hoefer 2002). In a parallel development, Richard (2004: 316-320) proposed a seven-point ‘H-Scale for Hindu Contextualization.’ Clearly, the debate was set to continue.

2.3 2003-2007: Development and Dispute

As C5 praxis developed, so too did its literature and, with it, reactions against its proposals and underlying rationale.

At this juncture, it is helpful to introduce the parallel concept of ‘insider movements’ into this discussion of C5 developments. Garrison (2004) was among the first to make use of this terminology in print, although the categories of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ underpinned Travis’ C1-C6 spectrum and the concept was broached in 1970s lit-

erature concerning contextualization theory (see, e.g. Wilder 1977, regarding self-supporting groups of insiders in two or three Turkish cities which had existed for 45 years, cited by Travis and Travis 2005: 398, 405) and claims still earlier roots (cf. McGavran 2005). Yet the phenomena itself, and the terminology used for it, was not unambiguous. Preferring an indigenous church-planting model, Garrison (2004: 153) characterised Insider Movements (the capitalisation is his) as: “difficult to define, confirm or characterize” and noted that “[t]hey range from the real to the ambiguous to the illusory. Where one has been well documented, it raises questions of whether it is unusual or typical.”

In contrast, other claims regarding insider movements were far less reserved. Higgins (2004: 155, 156, 163) paralleled their “earth-shaking” potential with the C16th Reformation, and considered that, as “an emerging reformation,” insider movements would “be fuelled by the rediscovery of culture and religion.” Higgins was not alone: Kim (2006) drew similar comparisons with the Reformation. Seeing any movement to Jesus as an insider movement in the sense that it is culturally located, Higgins located their rationale within the church of Acts, and supplemented the case for MBBs staying in mosques via appeal to 2 Kings 5 and the Samaritan mission in John 4, Luke 10 and Acts 1:8. Judging the gospel to fulfil cultures, Higgins implicitly drew on the critical contextualisation advanced by Hiebert (1985: 195-196) when anticipating that such movements would become self-theologizing such that their local critical contextualization would include, but not be limited to, ‘a new “Jesus” reading of the Quran.’ (Higgins 2004: 163) Later Higgins went further, suggesting the possibility of a no longer extant ‘original Islam’ within the Qur’an’s origins, which “may well be in closer (if not complete) harmony with biblical truth.” (Higgins 2007: 38, 40n27)

Massey, another advocate of C5, continued his earlier strident defence, arguing “His ways are not our orthodoxy.” (Massey 2004c) Several dichotomies followed, including that between “Greco-Roman categories of orthodoxy” and “a Jewish understanding of Christ’s mandate;” (p.296) viewing C5 from a distance as opposed to experiencing it from within personal relationships (p.296); and mis-

siology which is “church-centered rather than Christ-centered.” (p.300) Again, Acts 15 was presented as opening up freedom of forms, with C5 presented as a work of the Holy Spirit rather than a human strategy, and – citing John 16:13 – as best undertaken without the confusing influence of “centuries of Gentile interpretations of Scripture through a Greco-Roman filter,(p.301) Additionally, Massey judged the existing Muslim culture of most C5 believers to be more ‘Jewish’ than the ‘Christian culture’ evident in most contemporary gentile churches. Concerning the often-quoted findings of the Islampur study, Massey considered that “more than half” (p.297) affirmed the Trinity – after only 15 years of discipleship – pitching Islampur “to be well ahead of our Greco-Roman church fathers, given the length of time it took them to draw such conclusions.” (p.303) Simultaneously, Massey anticipated that C5 theology might become as different from western theology as he judged fourth-century orthodoxy to have varied from its Jewish Palestinian roots. Although Massey concluded with an appeal “against the kind of dogmatic judgmentalism that fuelled the agendas of Judaizers,” (p.303) there remained a strident dogmatism in his own presentation. Nikides (2006b) criticised Massey for leading people away from biblical orthodoxy, not least in his differentiating of ‘Christ-centred’ from ‘church-centred’.

Nevertheless, Massey was not alone in continuing to problematise the term ‘Christian’ (see also, e.g., Tennent 2006: 103-104; Winter 2009: 671). Lewis (2007: 76) also differentiated ‘Christian’ (Acts 11:26) from ‘Christianity’, paralleling the latter with the need to convert to Judaism which was abrogated in Acts 15. He claimed ‘we should likewise free people groups from the counter-productive burden of socioreligious conversion and the constraints of affiliation with the term “Christianity” and with various religious institutions and traditions of Christendom.’ The unresolved problem is, of course, whether one can parse out ‘religious’ and ‘cultural’ life – or, even the ‘at least three “insides”’ of an insider movement: that is, “social structure, religious life (including terminology and practices), and the wider cultural milieu,” according to Higgins (2007: 37). Ridgway (2007: 78) considered this impossible, and instead saw the

gospel as bringing a *spiritual identity* which in time affects and transforms society as a whole. In some parts of the world, however, 'religious' and 'cultural' are excessively differentiated, as Petersen (2007a) highlighted within the Indian constitution.

Others continued to commend 'kingdom (of God)' as the fundamental paradigm governing earthly believers. This concept, it was claimed, could even facilitate a "kingdom lifestyle... independent of any religious structure" (Ridgway 2007: 79). This, too, was open to criticism as being too dichotomous to function in this manner (e.g. Grafas 2007a). This did not deter, however, later claims that a Muslim can enter into the kingdom of God without any need to change his or her 'shape and identity' by entering "directly into *the wide gate of the kingdom, rather than through our narrow gate of twenty centuries of Christian identity and tradition*," (Jabbur 2008: 240-241, emphasis original), the irony of Matthew 7:13-14 notwithstanding. Lewis likewise differentiated 'kingdom' from 'Christianity', the former claimed as allowing the nations to enjoy "direct access to God through Jesus Christ." (Lewis 2009b: 19) In Lewis' view, to think otherwise is "not in line with the truth of the Gospel," citing, among other texts, Acts 10 and Acts 15 in support of this assertion.

Such claims invite a review of the literature to shade over into an assessment of it. Apart from the risk of exegetical over-extension (what, for example, of Paul's appeals to his Pharisee identity in Acts 23:6; 26:5?) the danger here is one of reifying 'religion' as an undifferentiated 'thing' which never actually occurs in pure form within empirical reality. Both "Gentileism" (the term is from Massey 1999) and 'monotheism' (cf. Higgins 2007: 39n16) run this risk. In the latter instance, Temple attendance in early Acts comes to be seen too easily as "very much parallel to ongoing attendance at mosques for Muslim followers of Jesus." (Higgins 2007: 37)

What this reifying tendency lacks is any sense of particularistic historic fulfilment of prior OT promises from God regarding a renewed Israel (as demonstrated in Acts 1-7; cf. also Schlorff 2006: 118-119), as qualitatively different from the subversive fulfilment of

other, non-scripturated religious desires elsewhere among the nations.²¹ Care is required lest any “fallacy” arising from “a deduction from the assumption that Jesus could have become incarnate in *any* culture” leads to the suggestion that ‘we should seek to “incarnate” the gospel in Islamic culture.’ (Waterman 2007: 61) Clearly the gospel can grow in different and alien cultural settings (see, e.g., Gefen (2007) regarding the origins of the Easter festival and Massey (2004b) concerning the etymology of ‘God’), but terms such as ‘incarnational’ provide a slippery basis for argumentation if they are loosed from salvation-historical moorings (Grafas 2007b).

Increasingly in this period, C5 proposals were also being criticised for lacking a robust biblical basis. Part of the problem was the level of biblical exegesis being employed at this stage in the debate. Often it was isolated and shallow, and still open to the charge of proof-texting.

A survey of the various appeals made to texts in 1 Corinthians demonstrates the diversity of appeals to sections of the letter, and the relative isolation of resultant argumentation from other appeals to elsewhere in the epistle. Perhaps most appeal has been made to 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Massey cited it as evidence of God’s unpredictability (1999) and as supporting converts staying in their community for as long as possible (2000b: 8-9). Caldwell (2000: 28) saw it as justifying a clear differentiation of culture from religion as analytic categories, and as implying a flexibility regarding matters of purity. DeNeui (2005: 416) made similar use of this passage in his defence of C5. Woods (2003) demurred from such conclusions, noting that Paul did not adopt anti-Christian practices from Judaism, nor did he cease to be ethnically a Jew.²² For Woods, Paul’s stance contrasts with that of C5 in that his beliefs were not concealed, whereas C5 has the potential to lead towards C6. Woods also raised

²¹ Schlorff does not refer to ‘subversive fulfilment’, but this term chimes with Schlorff’s overall thesis (2006: 103-136).

²² Both these points raise further questions concerning the essential nature of Judaism, and the degree of fixity and flex within categories of ethnicity, questions beyond the span of this review.

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 as clearly supporting a more extractionist stance towards the believers' setting, and Parshall (2004: 288) noted that both C4 and C5 arguments appealed to 1 Corinthians 9:19–22, suggesting that it was not a decisive text for a C5 stance. Such appeals in defence of C5 were opposed by Waterman (2007: 61) on the grounds that being 'under Christ's law' (v.23) negates the C5 claim and that there is "a major difference between becoming *like* a group and becoming fully part of that group."

1 Corinthians 7:20 is the other major text in 1 Corinthians to which C5 advocates make appeal, such that Parshall (2004: 288) called it "the new hermeneutic on the block." Thus Talman (2004: 8) cited vv.20 and 24 as supporting continuing identification with wider culture. Taking this further, Lewis (2004b:146–147) proposed that "women win people to Christ by marrying non-Christians," citing 1 Corinthians 7:13–14 and 1 Peter 3:1–2 in defence of her claim. Lewis (2007: 76) further appealed to 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 as indicating the gospel's appeal to whole networks, even whole towns, within an alternative and avowedly non-extractionist *oikos* model for church (for a summary and critical assessment of which, see Wolfe 2011: 40–49).

With regard to such appeals to 1 Corinthians 7, Woods (2003) saw instances of C5 eisegesis, and Tennent (2006: 107) understood the passage as opposing the use of the old proselyte model of conversion and, as such, is opposed to the C5 project. Smith (2009: 25) claimed that 1 Corinthians 6:14–18 supported extraction for the sake of Christ, and saw C5 appeals to 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 as problematic because "Islam is both a religion and a culture." Such a conclusion sits entirely counter to the differentiation of religion and culture made by Lewis in Brogden (2010: 34). For Dixon (2009: 18) 1 Corinthians 7:24 had achieved the status of being a C5 proof text, and for Span (2009a: 46) 1 Corinthians 4:13 taught the believer's position was, instead, that of becoming the scum of the earth. Clearly the 'new hermeneutic' is far from consensual.

Other texts in 1 Corinthians have also been claimed in support of C5. 1 Corinthians 8:10 has been suggested as possibly allowing 'insider' eating (Higgins 2007: 37). Likewise, 1 Corinthians 10:23–33

has been read as indicating “adaptability even to a pagan culture like Corinth as long as one is guided by conscience and by the desire to glorify God and see people be saved,” (Woodberry 2007: 25) and 1 Corinthians 11:1 has been read as supporting an embrace of Muslims and Islam (Woodberry 2007: 24, also appealing to Acts 16:3; 21:26). Such claims need to engage with the wider context of 1 Corinthians 8-10 and its assertions of an anti-idolatry reading which Witherington (1998: 466) succinctly summarises as being concerned with “venue rather than menu.” Such a reading would problematise claims for C5 in a manner not yet recognised within the debate. It will also provide important contextual considerations for performative utterances such as the *shahada*.²³

The same need for more integrated appeals to scripture is also evident in relation to the use of Acts in defending C5. For example, too many appeals to Acts 15:19 have not taken v.20 into account, with its four elements which qualify the preceding verse. Remarkably, among the literature reviewed here, Tennent (2006: 105-107) was the first, and a rare, exception in considering *both* these verses. Further, he did seek to address the practical difficulties of parsing ‘culture’ from ‘religion’ within actual lived experience via his hypothetical musing about a ‘Cairo Council’ mirroring his reading of Acts 15 (Tennent 2006: 107). Yet Tennent’s exegesis remained narrow and detached from the wider context of Acts 15. Corniche (2010a) has provided the most detailed and persuasive exegesis of Acts 15 within the literature reviewed here, but he is no advocate

²³ Waterman (2007: 58-59) called for attention to the theologically ‘untrue’ dimensions of such confessions, especially when made regularly rather than *in extremis* as a last resort. He questioned whether the *shahada* confession can be made simply as a cultural marker, akin to an unbeliever in England participating in a toast declaring ‘God save the Queen.’ (Brown, in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 15) Waterman demurred on two grounds: first, that it risks taking God’s name in vain (Exodus 20:7) and, second, that early believers did not follow such an approach to the confession ‘Caesar is Lord.’ Waterman judged this latter confession to be more analogous to the *shadada* than ‘God save the Queen.’ Brown (2007b: 71-73) has responded to Waterman and Corwin: while not always convincing, his response does demonstrate the spatial and performative complexities of the question.

for C5. Where Acts 15:20, 29 have been considered by C5 advocates, these verses have been understood narrowly and simply as communicating a non-enduring legacy of Levitical regulations which does not outlast even the New Testament period (see, e.g., Higgins 2007: 37; Lewis 2010: 44). Alternative and more compelling readings of Acts 15, such as the Council declaring against idolatry influencing the churches (see, e.g., Witherington 1998: 461-464), have not been considered for their impact on C5 strategies.

Instead, it has been more typical to find ‘principles’ being abstracted from the Acts 15 narrative in a vague and uncontrolled manner (e.g. Hoefer 2005; Tiénou and Hiebert 2005; Woodberry 2007: 25-27). Thus Brown (2006d: 128) saw Acts 15 as allowing cultural freedom, but then added in parentheses “although they would need to shun some bad practices.” On this latter point, however, Brown failed to specify what was intended in Acts as constituting ‘bad practice’, or how elsewhere the Acts narrative might help to apply such intentions. Also, since he assumed that cultural diversity equates to maintaining a church’s native culture, he drew dichotomous conclusions from Acts 15 by assuming cultural homogeneity *within* its congregations, an assertion which ignores the Antioch church and the congregations it planted. At the same time, however, Brown helpfully identified philosophical and psychological foundations such as ethnocentricity which underpin refusals to contextualise, and obstacles such as denominationalism and the expectations of financial supporters which can frustrate contextualisation (Brown 2006d: 129).

Alongside the abstraction of principles from Acts 15, there is also an abstraction of process. Thus Lewis, in Corwin *et al.* (2007: 10) commented, “I believe one of the most instructive aspects of Acts 15 is not their conclusions, but the process they followed.” Lewis (2009b: 18) judged Acts 15 to pivot on two criteria, the giving of the Spirit and the guidance of Scripture, such that these criteria can be applied to insider movements. Such a separation of process from result is problematic, and masks deeper questions and divisions. Even Waterman (2007: 60), a strident critic of C5, saw Acts 15 as supplying a “pattern” for us to “seek to emulate.” Not all would

agree, however, without **reminder**, that “[t]he decision of that council was to leave Gentiles in their culture.” (Hoefler 2007b: 131) Also, just as within Acts the question of what the apostles were doing in the Temple can raise multiple possible answers (Sleeman 2009: 105), a lot of interpretive scope lies within the relative degree of freedom and connection between ‘movements’ (cf. Higgins 2009: 79-80).

Within and beyond such exegetical considerations, the debate’s predominantly and increasingly dichotomous nature risked denying that C1 and C5 are not the only options for ministry in Muslim settings. Tennent (2006: 110-113) took exception to various false dichotomies inherent within Massey (2004c) and Hoefler (2005), and objected to the individualistic stance he identified in Brown (2000b). Tennent also observed that many defences offered for C5 were equally applicable to C4 ministries, and thus achieved insufficient traction regarding the pivotal C5 issue of identity, especially self-identity. At the close of his consideration of Acts 15:19-20, for example, he concluded: “while I find Acts 15 a compelling defence for C-4, I am less convinced that it provides a sufficient basis for justifying C-5.” (Tennent 2006: 107) He drew similar conclusions regarding two other passages frequently used to underpin C5 arguments, namely 1 Corinthians 7:20 and 9:19-22, and saw 2 Kings 5:18-19 as too ambiguous to contribute substantially to the contextualisation discussion. Conversely, he judged Hebrews 10:25 to argue *against* a C5 stance among first-century Jewish believers. Others shared these concerns (e.g. Waterman 2007: 61).

Dichotomies thrive on loosely defined terms. Higgins (2006: 117-119) judged that Tennent had assumed, but not clearly defined, the categories ‘Muslim’ and ‘church’ in both their historical and contemporary expressions, but he also noted that this was also characteristic of both sides of the wider C5 debate. Within C5 itself, Higgins (2006: 121-123) went on to outline three possible stances depending on one’s prior conclusions regarding Islam’s origins, early history and subsequent development. Beyond this, even the term ‘Muslim’ can have very different connotations between localities and among different ethnic groups (Tee 2007: 1-2). Simultaneously,

however, globalisation – manifested, for instance, in a ‘google-ized’ world which reconfigures notions of both public and private spheres (categories alien to a Qur’anic worldview, but integral to C5 lived experience²⁴) – was meaning that “we can no longer present a different message or persona for each different audience.” (Love 2008a: 33) Tensions, both internal and external to the debate, clearly abound.

Other responses to Tennent confirm this observation. Both Parshall and Hoefler agreed with the likelihood of C5 serving a transitional function (Travis et al. 2006: 125–126). Travis, however, saw four weaknesses within Tennent’s writing (Travis et al. 2006: 124–125), but none of them addressed the substance of Tennent’s disagreement with C5. First, Travis saw it as largely theoretical and without any first-hand fieldwork and, second, that Tennent’s “theological considerations” led him to generalise from only short sections of the literature. Also, he dismissed Tennent’s claim that deceitfulness within C5 renders it unethical as “an extremely biased statement, spoken by an outsider.” Finally, Tennent, in Travis’ view “does not take account of the changing world we are living in.” Regarding Tennent’s exegesis, Travis simply appealed to a generalised empirical observation that C5 ministries have happened, and are happening around the world.

Criticisms almost naturally followed, fearing a minimising of the Bible akin to North American seeker-driven ministries (Corwin 2006, Piper 2006; cf. Corwin and Winter 2006, and the response from Travis and Travis 2006). While the search continued for ‘appropriate hermeneutics’ for coping with cultural diversity (Redford 2005), others countered what they saw as an excessive appropriation of similarities without a commensurate assessment of dissimilarities (Waterman 2007, esp. 60), or an absence of wider theological reflection informing C5’s developments of local theologies (Corwin 2007:54–55). For many, the question that was expressed in the Sep-

²⁴ Regarding Islam’s legal construals of public and private, see Ruthven (1997: 83–90). These constructions of identity within space and place are very different from those envisaged within the USA and other western democratic systems of law.

tember-October 2005 edition of *Mission Frontiers* remained: 'Can we trust insider movements?'

Some observers raised wider concerns regarding the balance between theological principle and functional pragmatism within C5 writings. Questions arose, for example, concerning the homogeneous unit principle and extractionism, generating calls for further missiological study on these matters (Williams 2003). Furthermore, if extractionism stood as one pole within contextualisation, then the risk of syncretism still lay in the other direction (Tennent 2006: 103) as Parshall's initial concerns regarding C5 continued to circulate. Asking 'how far is too far in contextualization?' Woods (2003) questioned C5 appeals to 1 Corinthians 7:20, 9:19-22; 2 Kings 5:18-19, and 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, and the strength of parallels claimed between Islam and first-century Judaism more generally. Tennent's examination of the arguments mounted for C5 saw them as more a defence of C4, and thus as failing to address the central and more contentious issue of identity (Tennent 2006: 105-109). He also feared an Arian Christology within Massey's argumentation (Tennent 2006: 115n39), and asserted the importance of keeping soteriology related with ecclesiology (Tennent 2006: 111). Like Tennent, Woods (2003) also sought a clearer line between culture and religion.

By contrast, this period also saw further advances (or, at least, clarifications) regarding C5 practices. These included stronger advocacies for "stylistically Islamic" Bible translation into Arabic, and shifts away from Western patterns of worship. These were matched with a theology for Muslims which is more theocentric than Christocentric, centred around biblical theology rather than systematic theology, a 'de-Hellenizing theology' less concerned with "abstract intellectual issues." (Talman 2004: 10) Under this schema, scripture would function as a prism through which Muslim followers of Jesus, reflecting upon their life experience, could promote social and ethical transformation, even "an alternative political/economic ideology to the Islamic mode of *shar'ia*." (Talman 2004: 11)

Other writers issued parallel calls for visionary cultural transformation. Massey (2004a, 2004b), appealed in part to a perceived

freedom of lifestyle which he saw Acts 15 as confirming. He proposed that missionaries and MBBs could adopt elements of Muslim lifestyle in an 'incarnational' manner which he viewed as analogous to Jesus and the apostles remaining Torah-observant Jews. This proposal also built upon claims that most Islamic forms, including those involved within the Five Pillars, were originally acquired from seventh-century Middle Eastern Jews and Christians (Woodberry 1989, cited by Travis and Travis 2005: 398).

This sense of a comparative cultural continuity which characterises C5 has been apparent in other proposals for it. Lewis (2004a), drew on Rodney Stark's sociological analysis of early church growth (Stark 1996). He stressed cultural continuity, community involvement and open networks as factors facilitating rapid spread of the gospel before later Constantinian regulation allegedly slowed such growth. The perceived danger with C4, despite its apparent avowal of cultural conformity, was that it would – over time – lead to distancing from the surrounding mosque-based culture. C5, however, utilising the gaps between personal commitment and official theology, would allow some Muslims to remain within this culture (Travis and Travis 2005: 400-401, 405). Furthermore, C4 was assessed to have its own potential problems. These ranged from apostasy within congregations to negative responses from the society surrounding the congregation which might preclude C4 contextualisation from serving as a feasible way to plant new congregations (Brown 2006d: 132). Several made use of Hiebert's (1994) distinction between 'bounded' and 'centred' sets and, judging salvation to involve a process, saw 'directional' faith within a process towards Christ as more significant than a static or binary 'positional' religion (Travis and Travis 2005: 407-408; cf. also DeNeui 2005; Kraft 2005b; Brown 2007b: 69). However, it would be inadequate to characterise C5 as only emphasising cultural continuity: simultaneously, it can also incorporate an understanding that growth in Christ might well include, and even require, decisive release and separation from spiritual bondage (Travis and Travis 2005: 408-409).

In sum, then, the underlying and intensifying question in this period was whether C5 was legitimate and sufficient *in itself* as a

form of ministry. Regarding C5, Parshall (2004) questioned whether new believers could survive without teaching, and suggested an adjectival rather than nominative use of ‘Muslim’ when applied to MBBs. Still questioning whether C5 ministries could be more than a transitional stage towards C4, particularly given his longstanding reservations about MBBs joining in with the *shahada* in the mosque (Parshall 1985: 180-184), Parshall queried what constituted the distinguishing mark of believers in such a setting. On balance, however, Parshall declared he would rather err towards love and affirmation of those practicing C5 ministries. Nevertheless, in the light of these reservations, and those expressed earlier (Parshall 2003: 59-75), Travis and Travis (2005: 397) were somewhat premature to see Parshall’s concerns about the risk of syncretism as having been addressed by subsequent writings. Instead, as has been noted earlier, C5 writings remained *ad hoc*, frequently arising as fragmented output from people who were primarily field-based activists. Typically, in such circumstances, “missiological reflection concerning an issue arises about ten to twenty years after the field missionaries first start encountering the problem.” (Tennent 2006: 104) Additionally, however, both sides of the C5 debate were becoming increasingly reactionary.

2.4 2008-2010: Polarisation and Polemic?

As is evident above, the underlying rationale presented by C5 proponents remained contested during the middle years of the decade. The subsequent years have seen an intensifying of differences between advocates and critics of C5, and the usage of the term ‘C5’ decreased as the term ‘Insider Movement’ became more prevalent.

A particularly significant impetus in this direction came with *A Common Word Between Us and You* [ACW], an initiative made first by 138 leading Muslim scholars and intellectuals in October 2007, inviting ‘Leaders of Christian Churches everywhere’ to engage with them in further dialogue.²⁵ Among the many Christian responses to

²⁵ See the official website, www.acommonword.com for the statement, and the various developments and responses surrounding it.

ACW, the ‘Yale Response’²⁶ stands out in that its list of signatories and the subsequent responses to it – both informally within the blogosphere and more formally in individual and institutional statements – demonstrate the manner in which evangelical Christians have been split in their assessments of *ACW* and thus in their responses to it (see, e.g., Lewis 2008; Love 2008b; Reitsma 2008; Poston 2010).²⁷ These differences have articulated and exposed existing differences concerning ministry to Muslims in a more intense interaction than was previously the case.²⁸

With regard to C5 and insider movement practices, some responses to *ACW* reasserted existing arguments to fit the new situation. Thus, Lewis (2008) presented the Samaritans in John 4 and Luke 10 as the ‘Muslims’ of Jesus’ day, and saw Peter in Acts 10 as reaching out, in a Jesus-like manner, which commends itself for believers today. In this regard, Lewis continued earlier assertions regarding a non-extractionist *oikos* model for ministry (Lewis 2004a; cf. Caldwell 2000). As well as appeals to 1 Corinthians 7 outlined earlier in this review, Lewis (2007) had also appealed to John 4:39–41 as supporting such a model. Lewis (2009b: 17) later added Acts 8:14–17 as evidence of Samaritan believers remaining in their own communities and retaining their Samaritan identity. Ridgway (2007: 79) saw such a Samaritan insider movement as paralleling a Judean Jewish insider movement earlier in John, and also proposed a Galilean Jewish insider movement in Mark 1–4 and subsequent gentile insider movements starting around Legion and then the Syro-Phoenician woman later in Mark.

²⁶ The ‘Yale Response’, written by four scholars from the Yale Divinity School, has been published in various settings, and has attracted a diverse list of signatories. For its text, see Attridge *et al.* (2007).

²⁷ In comparison, *Grace and Truth*, a consensus statement by a global network of Christians concerning Christlike relations with Muslims (Love 2009; Various 2009) was not nearly as divisive.

²⁸ See, for example, the comments made by Colin Chapman, one signatory to the Yale Response, published in April 2008 as a ‘Featured Article’ entitled *Christian Responses to “A Common Word”: Why I Signed the Yale Response* at www.globalmissiology.org 3(5).

Increasingly, such claims came under closer scrutiny and sustained criticism. Smith (2009: 23-26; 43-44) saw them as lacking any consideration of the Christocentric reworking of believers' identity in passages such as Matthew 12:46-50 and as making an *a priori* rejection of extraction despite biblical evidence to the contrary (cf. Mark 8:34-38 and 1 Corinthians 6:14-18).²⁹ This was just one part of Smith's wide-ranging and strident critique of C5 ministries, reflective of his own long-held views on how Christians should engage with Islam (cf. Smith 1998). Conversely, the pragmatic assertion of *oikos* strategies was continued by Gray *et al.* (2010: 94). They commended seeking to reach "whole networks intact" via people of local influence and, following Patterson and Scoggins (2002: 102) 'men and women of peace', a term drawn from Luke 10:3-7 (cf. also Lewis and Lewis 2009a, 2009b; Lewis 2010).

Another area of debate which intensified concerned the use or non-use of traditional 'Christian' language and terminology. Hoefer (2008: 29), for example, seeing 'Christian', 'Christianity', 'church', 'baptism' and 'conversion' as conveying the taxing legacy of past baggage from which people should be released, urged a rethinking of "the burdensome and confusing terminology with which the Good news has been wrapped. Once we take off these distracting and confusing wrappings, the beauty of the pure Gospel can be seen and enjoyed and considered by all." Yet this risks reifying an abstract, even Gnostic, 'pure Gospel'. For critics such as Smith (2009: 41), this is to be rejected as bypassing Christianity and leading towards a false hybrid, 'Chrislam,' which is neither authentic Islam nor real Christianity (cf., similarly, Span 2009c: 132-133). At the same time, however, Winter (2008: 671) is correct to warn against being more tolerant of deficient theological understanding among

²⁹ Smith (2009) does not list the passages paralleling these Gospel texts. For example, Matthew 12:46-50 has synoptic parallels in Mark 3:19b-21, 31-35 and Luke 8:19-21 (cf. also John 15:14) and Mark 8:34-35 finds Lukan parallels in Luke 9:23-24 (with the intensifying Lukan insertion of 'daily' in v.23); 14:25-27; and 17:33. Such parallels suggest a widespread influence of such teaching within early Christian discipleship.

those whom we habitually call Christians, simply because of such terminology.

Winter (2008) also challenged both Hoefer and Love (2008a) on other grounds, namely that the meanings of words in cultural contexts cannot be controlled, legislated or mandated. Changes in such markers occur slowly and that realignment cannot be achieved by simple or idiosyncratic fiat (Smith 2009: 36-37); nor can the social linguistic dimensions within particular contexts be always or completely controlled. The etymology of 'Christian' matters (e.g. Flint 2010a), but it is not everything. Greer (2009) made the same point concerning terminology for 'sin' in Islamic contexts, asserting the need for flexible communication. Nor can words be treated as neutral markers: referring to Jesus by his Islamic name '*Isa*', for example, misses "the significant allusion in the name '*Yasu*' to the one who saves us" and this in turn connects with Father-Son language deeply and inextricably embedded in the gospel (Bourne 2009: 64). Likewise, there is the risk of losing biblical eschatological specificity in the course of such communication (Span 2010c: 627). Thus words are unavoidable, and unavoidably positioning. What is needed, therefore, is a more sophisticated consideration of the variable connections between form and meaning, something begun by n.n (2010a: 412).

More frequently, however, exchanges of views have become acrimonious with different sides talking across one another. Examples of this kind of limited exchange can be seen in the response of Higgins (2009b) to Nikides (2009) and Phil (2009), both responding to Higgins (2009), and the exchange between Lewis (2009b) and Brogden (2010). If earlier years had engaged in some wishful thinking that criticisms could be answered, later interchanges such as these would not be from hardened existing positions.

Within and beyond such disputes, C5 has continued to develop in various ways. Directions of thought have been raised and sharpened, such as whether the *Shar'ia* of God can function as a contextual bridge within Islamic contexts (Greer 2008; 2009: 20, 22n10). Previous theorisation has been enhanced e.g. Lewis (2004a), Gray and Gray (2009b: 65) have drawn from the work of Stark (1996) in

continuing to stress the importance of maintaining existing social networks, on the grounds that cultural continuity enhances gospel growth. They also looked to Hiebert's (1994) categories, and shared a critique of Constantinian Christendom, projecting a 'transformational' model for church growth, rather than the more traditional 'attractional' model (Gray and Gray 2009b: 69-70).

Others have demonstrated new directions for further debate. Thus, whereas Travis (2000) appealed to the precedent of Roman Catholic evangelicals still participating in the Roman mass, Nikides (2008) looked back to Calvin's interactions with the 'Nicodemites' of his own day. Rotter (2010) has extended this further, also examining the arguments on similar matters made by the sixteenth-century Protestant English bishop John Bradford concerning 'the hurt of hearing mass.' Such voices from church history add a rich dimension to contemporary debate, especially where such debate is becoming entrenched. Additionally, Span has suggested, Jesus models a stance for his followers to imitate which transcends insider and outside dualisms (Span 2009a). Ultimately such a third position is to be established via Jesus' bodily ascension and session (Span 2009a; cf. Sleeman 2009), something which has not been considered previously in relation to insider movement developments.

These and other recent contributions to C5 questions and directions provide a platform from which to consider the future of these debates.

3 Prospects: Looking towards the Future of C5 / Insider Movement Debates

Looking towards the future, this survey suggests that there are eight areas where debates concerning C5 and insider movements need to advance.

First, there is *a need for the publication of better field studies*. Anonymity, pseudonyms and undisclosed bases for claims and counter-claims are unhelpful for assessing claim and counter-claim (Dixon 2009: 7). Utterly untraceable assertions (e.g. Higgins 2009b) also generate a lack of accountability within the wider church (Smith 2009: 46; Ayub 2009: 25-26, 29-30). It is insufficient to claim that

criticism of an individualistic slant within insider movements reflects a misunderstanding of the “proponents of the so-called insider movement,” then to appeal only to (undocumented) personal experience to repudiate the claim (Higgins 2010a: 132n13). Brown (2006d: 133n19) suggests the use of control groups and more exploratory questions, but control groups might well be nearly impossible to implement. Instead, carefully designed longitudinal (through-time) studies, which will become easier with the passing of time, will help address concerns regarding the effectiveness of inter-generational discipleship and transmission of faith within insider movements (questioned by Nikides 2009), and the extent to which they foster an individualised and privatised faith (a matter raised by Phil 2009). Some initial steps in this direction are very interesting (e.g. J. Kim 2010), but will benefit from more rigorous method and/or disclosure of method. In all likelihood, the time-scale needed for this kind of assessment might well be decades (Asad 2009b: 140). In the meantime, there is certainly a need for maximal disclosure regarding methods and claims, by both proponents and critics of insider movements.³⁰ In turn, this will help develop better practices within local lived experience (for which see, helpfully, Hoefer 2009; Gray and Gray 2009; cf. the insightful comments made by Schlorff 2006: 87-89). It will, doubtlessly, require humble ethics and Christ-like power relations within research (Travis, in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 14-15; cf. Korkmüz 2009). Helpful, too, are historical studies, where these are possible (see, e.g., Wolfe 2011: 238-306 regarding Sadrach Surapranata’s community of faith in Central Java).

For some recent moves towards better field studies, see Brown *et al.* (2009); Gray and Gray (2009); Gray *et al.* (2010). In some instances, insider strategies might be rejected as “a western, hegemonistic construct,” (Madany 2009: 56) but the reasons *why* this happens need to be uncovered. Likewise, better fieldwork will

³⁰ The frequently cited and debated percentage figures drawn from the ‘Islampur’ study, for instance, are somewhat limited in usefulness if the research was based on interviews with only 72 people, which appears to be the case according to Parshall (2003: 69).

expose more helpfully the multi-scaled and simultaneous complexities within the lived experiences of MBBs. Kraft (2010: 970-978), for example, is very informative regarding the search by MBBs for a marriage partner, and their strategies for negotiating relationships within wider society. I do not think it is coincidental that Kraft's work arises out of the rigours of having conducted advanced-level research within the confines of a mainstream secular university. Such contexts will sharpen the need for rigorous and critically-sustained investigations and, responsibly used in the service of missiology, should negate dualistic dismissals of 'academia' expressed by (e.g.) Grafas (2010: 937). While valuing the accounts of the origins of individual insider movements cited earlier, and while agreeing with Gill's candid observation that "[i]t's hard to argue with a testimony," (Gill 2008: 9) biographical reportage benefits from the best public analyses of both it and "the treacherous landscape of... religious rituals, notions and allegiances" (Gill 2008: 7) in which it is forged. Theory and lived experience should not be set in opposition against each other. Carefully designed and implemented studies can even probe the veracity of claims such as that C5 accommodates a deep-seated fear of persecution (cf. Smith 2009: 45), and assess the impact of satellite television on the facilitation of C5 ministries (cf. Stringer 2005).

Second, and related to the above observations, there is *a need for more open exchanges and visits* (Corwin in Corwin *et al.* (2007: 8). This does not negate a recognition that security issues might well make it difficult or inappropriate to define 'unity' according to visible mixed gatherings (Higgins 2007:36). There still remains scope, alongside better field research and diffusion of findings, for responsible and traceable interactions which will help address accusations made by some (e.g. Phil 2009: 118n8; Grafas 2010: 935) of MBBs being coerced by certain C5 practitioners to maintain a C5 form of discipleship. Addressing the minimal information flows and fellowship between C4 and C5 proponents within some local mission circles (Tee 2007: 2) will help this process. Where this can find its way into print, it will help negate what might only be the appearance of a North American predominance among those advancing C5

(Smith 2009: 21). As Tee (2007: 5) comments, “[i]t is unusual for anyone to condemn the Christian founding fathers of the USA for not staying in Europe as insiders, but instead beginning a new community with religious freedom in the New [sic] World.”

Although the interchange is limited, Brogden (2010) allowing Lewis to interact directly with his argument is a helpful example of more open exchanges in print. It is to be hoped that this kind of communication can help heal the past regarding the abuse of confidential field studies (cf. Massey 2004c: 303), and enable new engagement and disclosure. Perhaps third-party-governed and cross-disciplinary exchanges will be even more useful. It might well be that such exchanges are already happening at conferences: seeing more of them appearing in published form would be more widely beneficial, especially for cross-disciplinary interactions.

Third, and again following on from previous observations there is *a need for better theorisation*: Some already wish to set aside the C-spectrum as being frequently misunderstood and misapplied (e.g. Stringer 2007). Dixon (2009: 8-18) raises serious concerns about ‘the illusion of the spectrum,’ asking whether the C-spectrum is over-worked and not appropriate for the tasks and claims asked of it. Its “purpose”, according to Travis (1998a: 407) was “to assist church planters and Muslim background believers to ascertain which type of Christ-centered communities [sic] may draw the most people from the target group to Christ and best fit in a given context.” As such, however, it claims to offer a comparative and even critical function but, in and of itself, does not move beyond the descriptive. This is evident both internally and externally.

Internally, the spectrum has long struggled with C6. C6 has been the soft underbelly for C5 proponents: does it, or does it not, constitute a range of strategies / motivations in and of itself? Tennent considered that C6 should be understood as an exceptional and tragic circumstance which – one day, with the decline of persecution – should become a thing of the past and, as such, should not be viewed as an extension to the contextualisation scale (Tennent 2006: 102, 114n10). This cannot be assumed, however; C6 is a strategy which might be adopted by any individual within any cul-

ture or situation for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it cannot be excluded except on an *a priori* basis, unless there is some unstated but underlying presupposition as to what constitutes a 'legitimate' stance within the spectrum. There is fluidity surrounding C5, between C4 and C6 (Brown, in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 13), which remains unexamined. By its nature, C6 will be very hard to research, but this will be important in order to try and assess its connections, if any, with C5.

At the same time, too, the problematic of culture remains within the spectrum and is indeed inscribed within it, not least with regard to how one separates culture from religion, or theorises their interactions. Lewis (2009a) demonstrates this issue, and its tensions. This requires further consideration, unless the spectrum is to fragment and provide no analytic purchase whatsoever: "[n]o template can be applied to every situation in the same way" (Higgins 2009: 88, cf. 81-88). What fullness of expression of church should we expect "when C5 is practiced properly," (Asad 2009b: 141) and at what stage and by what criteria within a processual development of ecclesial identity and practice? Terms such as 'extractionism' can mask a combination of dimensions which need careful analytical separation (Flint 2010b), as well as consideration of their interactions. Historical analyses provide another form of cross-cultural comparative criticism, whether it be via consideration of the Reformation insider movements such as the Nicodemites (Rotter 2010) or in relation to nineteenth-century Java (Asad 2009b: 142-49).

Also insider movement theorisation will benefit from more careful use of sociological theory, e.g. Kraft (2010) making use of the sociology of deviant behaviour and of new religious movements. This will help prevent shorthand description becoming straitjacketed prescription. Given the breadth of both biblical reflection and contemporary lived experiences, it is unlikely that one form of ministry alone will suit every situation (cf. Smith 1998, and the measured responses by Anonymous 1998 and Parshall 1998a, with Winter 2008). Externally, however, the spectrum's "most serious" and "fatal" weakness is, according to Dixon (2009: 10), its lack of a theo-

logical base, compounded by a continuing use of proof texting (Dixon 2009: 18; Span and Span 2009: 59).

There remains, therefore *a need for better exegesis* within C5 and insider movement debates. Too often superficial appeals to scripture are made to buttress claims which are greater than can be defended from the text under consideration. Greater exegetical care will benefit defences of C5, as well as exposing its arguments to wider scrutiny, as called for by Smith (2009: 31-33). In part, this will involve deeper and broader engagement with biblical scholarship: Teague (2008), for example engages positively with Richard Bauckham, in a manner which guards against reifying monotheism away from a biblical metanarrative. It will also require engagement with the context of individual Bible verses and sections within their wider literary setting. Thus Acts read as a whole provides a relatively unexplored frame for controlling appeals to particular elements within its span, both for and against C5. Likewise, John's Gospel, with its broader dualisms of light and darkness, is a necessary horizon for discussions of (for example) John 4, just as the broader span of John's 'father-son' language will inform helpfully questions concerning use and non-use of such terminology. Similarly, 1 Corinthians as an epistolary whole informs any appeal to one verse or one section of its argument: for example, appeals to 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 (e.g. Lewis 2007: 76) need also consider 1 Corinthians 6:10-11.

Both literary and wider canonical contexts are especially important for positioning any appeal to Old Testament texts. In this light, Waterman (2007: 60, 62n27) provides some informative initial consideration of Deuteronomy 12:4, and Nikides (2009:102-107) makes several telling observations regarding biblical exclusivism. Such a wider frame of reference, together with 2 Kings 17:15 (cf. Flint 2010b: 901), is important for positioning Naaman in 2 Kings 5, another biblical text frequently discussed within C5 debates (see, variously, Parshall 1998b: 404; Travis 2000: 55; Higgins 2004: 157; Woods 2003: 192; DeNeui 2005: 416; Travis and Travis 2005: 407; Tennent 2006: 108; Hoefer 2007a; Dixon 2009: 11; Higgins 2009: 90-91; and, especially, Baeq 2010). The same can be said for appeals

to figures such as Melchizedek and Jethro as justifying insider movements (Higgins 2007:33; 2009a: 85-86; cf. Nikides 2009: 102-111; Phil 2009: 118)

If the October 2010 Insider Movement Conference II recognised “much more work needs to be done in understanding the commonalities of the social contexts of I Peter, the book of Hebrews and the Apocalypse,” as Corniche (2010b) claims, then there is much existing scholarship on such matters within biblical studies. Such exchanges can and should be mutual, transcending disciplinary divisions: as Higgins (2007: 33) highlights regarding the Acts 15 council, “[m]ore missiologists need to be engaged in thorough exegetical work, and more exegetes need to grow in the disciplines of missiology.” Likewise Tee (2007: 3), commenting about tendencies towards pragmatic means and assessments of outcomes, helpfully observes “we should not be afraid to have more biblical scholars among those giving input to our work. Too quickly theologians are waved off by saying they don’t know the reality of the work.” It is unhelpful when critics of C5 make blanket statements about ‘academia’ (e.g. Grafas 2010: 937; cf. Madany 2007, who rehearses an unhelpful dichotomy between theorising and dialogue), as it is also when advocates of contextualisation downplay the critical contributions of biblical scholars. Regarding the latter point, see Stetzer (2010a), responding to Köstenberger (2010).

Fifth, the literature reviewed here exhibits *a characteristic need for a more developed biblical theology*. To state the obvious, Jesus’ earthly ministry predates the rise of Islam: can, then, something be meaningfully fulfilled before it itself is manifest? This question overshadows claims to see Islamic law as open to an interpretation as having been “fulfilled in Christ” (Woodberry 2007: 24), or that the Qur’an can come to hold a place akin to that of the Apocrypha (Winter 2008: 671). Instead, the whole Christ-event needs to be considered, including inaugurated eschatology. Greer (2009: 20) begins such an exploration, but lacks consideration of Jesus’ continuing incarnation, his heavenly session and restoring return. Having addressed this matter elsewhere (Sleeman 2009), it is possible to identify in C5 debates an attenuated sense of Jesus’ incarnation, one

which fails to take into account his continuing heavenly incarnation: this weakens appeals to the incarnation as a basis for such ministries and dilutes critical consideration of Islamic claims regarding Mohammed's 'heavenly' ministry. Span (2010d) has advanced this need for more attention to be given to the heavenly Christ, advocating the need for 'outsider movements' which, on the basis of Hebrews 13:12-14, are comprised of "Heaven Foreground Believers (HFB)". His rhetoric has a clear polemical edge, but the context and content of Span's argument is important for the ongoing debate regarding C5, especially in relation to possible strategies of subversive fulfilment, discussed below.

Also, within such a biblical theology, there is a need to recognise that the church in Acts and elsewhere in the NT constitutes the fulfilment and renewal of Israel as a particular salvation historical event (cf. Chris 2009: 160). This has, at times, caused significant contention within C5 discussions (Corwin 2007: 54). In this sense, apologists for C5 are accused of lacking a sufficient covenantal understanding of the church (Nikides 2009: 97-101; cf., similarly, Watterman 2007: 57-58). Responses are weakened, however, where Biblical "narrative" is set against "clear didactic" sections of Scripture (Nikides 2009: 102) in a manner which a cohesive biblical theology would preclude.

In various other ways a more robust sense of biblical theology will both strengthen and challenge the basis for C5 ministries. As Reitsma (2005) demonstrates in a nuanced discussion of the Jewishness of Jesus, considerations of C5 need to maintain a clearer analytical distinction between first-century and twenty-first-century Judaism. A more developed biblical theology will also highlight the question of differences in biblical and Qur'anic metanarratives, given their divergences at the fall of Adam (see Miller 2010a; n.n. 2010b: 487-491). At a more micro level, a developed biblical theology combined with the exegetical contextualisation outlined earlier will also temper appeals to biblical metaphors abstracted from the overall wider symbolic matrix of scripture. Thus 'yeast' as frequently appealed to as a positive metaphor for insider movements (e.g. Caldwell 2000: 30; Kraft 2005b: 92; Lewis 2009b: 19) presently

lacks any recognition or consideration of the symbol's negative metaphorical aspect within scripture, particularly in relation to kings and kingdoms (cf., e.g., Mark 8:15). Likewise, the category of 'kingdom' is not simple "fresh biblical content" (cf. Caldwell 2000: 30) which will resolve all terminological difficulties. In turn, cohesive biblical theology will also critique the subsequent overplayed claims for a kingdom paradigm made by Higgins (2009a: 85-88),³¹ as Schlorff (2006: 146-147) anticipates. As such, a nuanced understanding of the specificities and limitations of 'kingdom' for C5 ministries forms part of a wider, parallel but connected missiological debate (cf., e.g., Buenting 2009).

These considerations of biblical theology blur into a sixth observation. Debates surrounding C5 and insider movements will be enhanced by *more culturally sensitive but nevertheless rigorous attention to systematic theology*. It is not that systematic considerations are completely lacking within the construction of arguments concerning C5, but some of the reifying and dichotomous tendencies within C5 will benefit from closer attention to such matters. Arguments for C5 are not advanced by *a priori* rejection of systematic theology as 'western' or 'propositional' and therefore illegitimate or irrelevant (cf. variously, addressed from different sides of the debate, Massey 2004c; Talman 2004: 10-11; Tennent 2006: 110-115; Brother Yusuf in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 12; Higgins 2007: 40n21; Hiebert 2010; Miller 2010b; Stetzer 2010b: 159; Tennent 2010: 498-505). The alternative to 'western' theologising is *not* a rejection of systematic inquiry *per se*, since some form of such thinking is inevitable in any cultural setting. Indeed, one of the biggest outstanding questions regarding C5 ministry concerns their relationships with the wider earthly church(es) within the 'current, messy form' of the Body of Christ on earth (Higgins 2007: 35). While it is true that we should "not let our theological formulations outrank the Word of God" (Winter 2009: 671, reflecting on Acts 15:8) the latter must generate and control the former, and actively delimit common theological founda-

³¹ As noted earlier, Caldwell and Higgins are names for the same writer.

tions. For instance, it is hard to conceive of Christian mission which is not Trinitarian in its essence (cf., e.g., Taylor 2000: 179-256).

Instead, too often, systematic questions concerning C5 praxis are mounting. Thus Span and Span (2009: 59) rightly attend to the doctrinal assumptions within language surrounding the notions of 'sin' and 'sins' within the conference of Common Ground Consultants. They also engage in wider systematic assessment of the conference and seek to position it in relation to other developments such as the emergent church and seeker-sensitive movements (Span and Span 2009: 55, 60). Like Smith (2009), they raise many important and telling questions concerning C5. Elsewhere, Nikides (2009:111-112) is alert to the Gnostic overtones to ecclesiology and other religions and to perceived related oppositional separation of the church and the Holy Spirit. Tennent (2010: 501) also comments how "the two doctrines [of soteriology and ecclesiology] often seem to stand in conflict with one another" within C5 (cf. Hoefer 2007c). Systematic analyses are also inevitable in comparing Christian and Muslim Christologies (e.g. Bridger 2009; Kaltner 2009) and will, in turn, inform analyses of Christian Christotelic and ecclesiotelic trajectories for space and time which will – eventually – diverge from that of the Qur'an (cf., e.g., Stringer 2009, who sees history as an integral aspect of the Muslim mind). Furthermore, terms like 'incarnational', when applied to Christian ministries, require increasingly careful deliberation and delineation (cf., e.g., Corniche 2010b; Madany 2010).

A seventh observation focuses on a particular need arising out of what has gone before. There is a startling need for more work regarding *God's nature, and the consequent nature of idolatry* (Span 2009b: 120; Flint 2010b: 900-907; cf. Corwin *et al.* 2007: 16-17) *and syncretism*. This will become particularly important if texts such as 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Acts 15: 19-20 introduce idolatry as an analytical category for assessing insider culture and religion.

So far, C5 debates have made only limited use of idolatry as an analytic category. Opponents of C5 have been charged, somewhat emotively, with "following the idol of ecclesiastical tradition" (Lewis in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 14), whereas the suggestion of idolatry within

C5 has been immediately rebuffed (Travis and Travis 2005: 413; Higgins in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 17). Elsewhere, without explaining his reasoning, Higgins (2007: 28) equates idolatry with syncretism, and differentiates insider movements from the situation in Acts 15, precisely *because* the latter instance calls for repentance from idolatry (2007: 37).

Existing work examining idolatry from perspectives beyond missiology (e.g. Halbertal and Margalit 1992; Barton 2007) would inform a more helpful engagement with idolatry categories for both proponents and critics of insider movements. Higgins remains too vulnerable to charges of anthropological reductionism, even Gnosticism (Nikides 2009: 94-96, cf. Higgins 2009a: 81-83), and his assertion of the extension of the kingdom of God beyond the church is weak (Higgins 2009a: 85-88; cf. Nikides 2009: 102-111).

Like idolatry, syncretism offers a multi-level analytical category (cf. Leopold and Jensen 2004) which is under-employed or used as an emotive term within the insider movement debate. Used well, these terms will better inform issues such as whether Christians should use the Qur'an for clarification of an existing argument or for finding within it the gospel (Smith 2009: 29). Such employment of idolatry and syncretism will also open up new exegetical issues: would Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14 have instituted an insider movement within the Zeus cult in Lystra, and how does the answer to such a question inform our assessments of insider movements in our contemporary settings?

Whereas idolatry and syncretism might initially appear to be unexpected categories to introduce into an increasingly polarised and emotionally-charged debate such as that surrounding C5 and insider movements, they do offer surprising potential for moving beyond dichotomous and polarising options. In particular, they enable engagement with the dual notion of subversive fulfilment (cf. Schlorff 2006: 17-19, 108-136), whereby Islam is both subverted and fulfilled – in its deepest longings – by the gospel. Under this schema, both similarities and differences can be held in the productive tension sought by Waterman (2007: 58), as can the uneasy distinction between the believer's 'primary' and 'secondary' allegiances presented

by Travis and Travis (2005: 407). Higgins (in Corwin *et al.* 2007: 10) hints at such an approach when noting how the Psalms utilise non-Jewish forms and concepts and ‘Yahweh-ise’ them, but sees it as a work external to the canon and the church.

What, though, if subversive fulfilment is kept *within* the church – indeed, what if it is seen as an inherent and unavoidable aspect of being church, at least as church is understood in any localised, earthly sense? The result will ‘provincialise’ churches, to adopt Chakrabarty’s postcolonial reading of ‘Europe’ (here meaning the categories and concepts of political modernity), such that “[n]o concrete example of an abstract can claim to be an embodiment of the abstract alone.” (Chakrabarty 2007: xii) Two qualifiers are required. First, the church of Jesus Christ is an embodied heavenly and earthly reality, not an abstract concept, albeit with its locus at this present time around its heavenly Lord. Second, the word ‘alone’ in the above quotation has to do a dual work, referring both to the mixed nature of any church as it continually struggles with its own local idolatrous syncretism prior to the eschaton *and* to the need for every group of believers to relate in a real manner with other believers – *all* other believers – and not to see themselves as self-contained. Both Corwin (2007: 54–55) and Waterman (2007: 59) question rightly the sufficiency of expecting new believers simply to figure out Christian discipleship and maturity for themselves. This challenges churches across the C-spectrum and in any setting, Muslim or otherwise, to seek subversive fulfilment in and of its own locality. Such strategies would fit better with the NT primary emphasis on believers’ identity in Christ, with ‘insider’ language reserved for this status, and notions (plural) of extraction seen primarily in that light (Flint 2010b: 904–906). Churches – plural – together as well as alone are called to exhibit a catholicity, albeit a heavenly catholicity. There are encouraging signs of plural and reflexive perspectives entering C5 debates, developments from the wider churches which will enhance and advance insight beyond stagnant binary oppositions (e.g. Hofer 2009; Diaz 2010). Other binary-breaking advances from realms such as glocalisation (Andrews

2009) and early church history (Smither 2009) are also informing these debates.

Eighth and, again, related to what has gone before, there is *a need for more thinking about mosques per se and other settings within Muslim lived experience*. Parshall's claim that "the mosque is pregnant with Islamic theology" (Parshall 1998b: 409) remains remarkably unexamined in any detail within the literature reviewed here (cf., similarly, the charge made by Smith 2009: 37). Brother Yusuf (in Corwin et al. 2007: 8-9) and n.n. (2010a: 407) provide examples of some initial considerations of what functions the mosque serves, and the pragmatics and ambiguities that it both enables and constrains. These considerations will in turn variously inform and position notions of sincere and insincere questioning (cf. n.n. 2010b, who does not consider location as a factor within such considerations?). Ridgway's comments regarding Buddhist temples in Gill (2009: 185) point to the richness of such lived experience, although with reservations about the degree of distinction of the physical and spiritual planes of existence.

In each particular setting, a mosque performs a variety of roles and provides a number of constructed (and, possibly, contested and/or conflicting) significances. It functions as a relational hub in different ways, influenced by factors such as age, proximity and gender. Taking up the influence of gender, sustained consideration of the lived experience of MBB women has only recently started to appear in the literature (McNeal 2007, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Smythe 2010; S. Kim 2010; Lee 2010), and needs stronger connection with issues surrounding C5 and insider movements. As such, there is need for variegated strategies of subversive fulfilment, and for a much richer consideration of the poetics and politics of such places than those that are evident in the existing literature both for and against C5.³² Where, when and why (and how) should gendered

³² This will, in turn, feed from and into subversive exegesis of scripture. See, e.g., the suggestive readings of Acts 17 by Godawa (2007) noting, however, the limited explicit and developed connection with a missiological base for such subversive strategies.

cultural norms be accommodated (Lewis 2004b) or broken (McNeal 2007)?

Such consideration also needs to extend to lived experience around and beyond the local mosque. The recent literature concerning women's lived experience, cited above, has enriched consideration of other sites such as Sufi shrines (S. Kim 2010) and, of course, within the domestic sphere (cf., also, Asad 2009a). Simultaneously, Islam needs to be considered as a religion, and as a political-spatial ideology (cf., e.g., Schlorff 2006: 97-98, 143-146).

Taken together, these observations will help expose some of the debate's dichotomies as false, and others will be found to be valid under more rigorous examination. Is it true, for example, as Asad (2009b: 139) proposes, that '[o]nly when we rid ourselves of the notions of "Church" and "Christian" as "bounded" sets can we begin to appreciate God's sovereign, albeit confusing work among Muslims today?' Clearly a spectrum of strategies is better analytically and critically than a polarity of extractionism or remaining a Muslim (cf. Schlorff 2006: 141-143, 149-188; n.n. 2010a: 405). Any communication of the faith requires explanation of, and contention for, the meaning of the content of the faith (Stringer 2010: 592).

But not everything is falsely dichotomous. Western Christians need also to practice self-reflective repentance and maturation. For instance, each of us needs to consider whether 'the "measurement" of salvation' via "cognition-centered measurement... articulated primarily in specific belief statements" is, at least in part of, even possibly "typical" of our "modern western Christianity." (Higgins 2007: 34) If we can see something of ourselves in this description, or if some of the other related critiques C5 issues regarding western Christianity reveal something lacking or idolatrous within our own appreciation of salvation, then do we need to be gently critiqued? Do we also need to be corrected, even rebuked, by others so that we might be more biblically complete and pure – in a word, *holy*? Also, in the spirit of Acts 15, Higgins (2007: 35) raises the issue of 'christian'-background believers making concessions in lifestyle for the sake of unity among believers. Nikides (2009: 113) also proposes

interdependence as facilitating local enculturation: the question, of course, in any localised instance, remains ‘How?’

4 Closing Comments

The C5 debate continues to run, and extends beyond the confines of missiological specialists and missional practitioners, impacting the wider Christian media (e.g. Cumming 2009). As well as its inherent connections with the lived experience of many people, this is another reason justifying the need for a clear and reasoned review and debate.

One major benefit arising from this debate is a renewed desire not to fear engagement with Islam, nor simply to engage with it but, rather, to engage with it well (cf. Hegeman 2007; also, Various 2009). In differing ways, both sides of the debate share this commitment, despite periodic accusations that their opponents do not.

There is some truth in the observation and interpretation by Lewis in Corwin *et al.* (2007: 8): “[a]s usual, theory is following observation. As in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts, God is moving this way and we are trying to catch up by analysing the phenomenon.” Yet this increases the need for serious and sensitive missiological research, rather than diminishing its importance. While Travis, also in Corwin *et al.* (2007: 14–15), alerts us to the danger and difficulty of a ‘researcher’ trying to uncover numbers, and that counting could appear to be patronising, “giving the impression that we somehow have the right to examine, count them, and pass judgment on them,” this problematises a need; it does not remove it. Nor do large numbers of conversions automatically indicate that a strategy is biblically warranted, or sustainable (cf. Flint 2010b: 890; n.n. 2010a: 404–405), despite Travis’ original claim that the C-spectrum would “assist church planters and Muslim background believers to ascertain which type of Christ-centered community may draw the most people from the target group to Christ and best fit in a given context.” (Travis 1998a: 407) Furthermore, no ministry – C5 included – will be problem-free (Shaw 2009: 216–217). Thus, as Span and Span (2009) recognise, discernment will be harder than many people, in print at least, have appreciated. Like-

wise, the future remains unknown (Stetzer 2010c: 252). Different forms of contextualisation might well be appropriated more by second-generation believers (JdO 2010). At the same time, indigenous Christians need to be able to (and enabled to) critique past and present ways in which Christian mission has engaged their culture, as Priest observes in Gill (2009: 184).

In closing, therefore, the reception or non-reception of C5 and insider movements will tell us important things about not just others, but also ourselves. We also need to reflect critically on our situated point of view: from a distance, contextualisation or syncretism in others might appear very clear, dualistically so, whereas from within a locale, the same issues might be more blurred, sophisticated, ambiguous, complex, or messy (Ridgway, in Gill 2009: 181; cf. also Gill 2008: 6; and, differently, Ajaj 2010). And so, proximity does not in and of itself confer clarity. Ridgway suggests that scriptures in an indigenous language are an essential precursor to contextualisation; so, too, is a willingness on the part of Western Christians to not expect unfairly or xenophobically more of MBBs than is expected culturally of converts in their own secular, materialist cultural settings (Mallouhi 2009: 7-10; Richard 2009: 179-180). Nor should any church anywhere remain unchanged by its contact with Muslim peoples (Hoefler 2009). We begin an analysis of insider movements from a different position if we assume that any denomination or congregation is syncretistic in its worldview to some degree, such that syncretism is the norm to be confronted also in ourselves, not the simply aberrant exception, the Other (cf. Kim 2006: 24). Even this assumption, however, is never neutrally held (cf. Winter 2008). Likewise, some degree of extraction – and of insertion – is similarly unavoidable in following Jesus. These issues need to be faced among different Muslim ministries, especially between higher- and lower-spectrum individuals, ministries and congregations living in close proximity to each other (cf. Ayub 2009: 31-32).

Given vast diversities of local lived experience within insider movements, the C-scale helps describe and compare, but does not in itself legitimate or critique. Nor does it adjudicate on how high a tolerance for apparent contradiction is appropriate within frontier

missiology (cf. Gill 2008: 7). But, then, it was intended initially as a “simple chart.” (Travis 2000: 53) As such, it can help describe gatherings and fellowships, but is less equipped in itself to determine ministry goals or the parameters and meanings of *ekklesia* (Waterman 2007: 60; 63n29). This observation alone has important implications for the development and reception of its fruit.

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IDENTITY ISSUES FOR EX-MUSLIM CHRISTIANS, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO MARRIAGE

By Tim Green⁶⁰

Abstract: This article summarizes a framework for understanding identity in terms of “core identity”, “social identity” and “collective identity”, and relates these to the identity struggles of Christ-followers from Muslim background. These issues unfold over many years following conversion. The author describes his doctoral research among a group of such believers in a South Asian city, and illustrates their identity dilemmas with particular reference to marriage.

1 Identity, a Critical Issue

1.1 Seeking a new Identity

‘Thank you for your presentation and it was like a bullet right in the heart’, wrote an Afghan diaspora Christian to me last month. He meant it in a positive way! The issues of identity for believers from Muslim background worldwide, which I had just described in my conference presentation, connected directly with his own experience. He in fact has had to make a double identity migration: from Islam to Christ and from Afghanistan to the West.

Thirty years of friendship with ex-Muslim Christians from twenty countries has convinced me that their search for “identity” is widespread, deep-seated and at times painful. The pain need not be acute; more often it throbs quietly in the background as a dull heartache, a barely articulated longing to “find where I belong”. It lasts for years, or decades. It may lead ultimately to a place of resolution, or of sup-

⁶⁰ Tim Green has enjoyed the friendship of Christ’s followers from Muslim background since 1979. He worked in a Muslim region of South Asia 1988-2003, and the Middle East 2003-5, with national in-context programs for discipleship and training. These days from a base in Britain, through the Increase network, he assists indigenous programs in different parts of Asia which equip and empower believers through church-based learning groups.

pression, or of return to the Muslim community (for the sake of comfort sake if not from conviction). In some unresolved cases, it leads to schizophrenia.

In Search of Meaning and Identity is the title of Seppo Syrjänen's classic study on Pakistani Muslims turning to Christ.⁶¹ *Longing for Community* is a forthcoming edited collection of studies on former Muslims in a range of countries. 'Community and Identity among Arabs of a Muslim background who choose to follow a Christian faith' is Kathryn Kraft's PhD title.⁶² As more and more Muslims worldwide put their faith in Christ, they find that their search for identity and community has only just begun.

Certainly "identity" and "community" are linked. The former is formed in the womb of the latter and sustained by its umbilical cord. Thus the question facing former Muslims is not only "who am I?", but also "who are *we*?" - as a group of Afghan Christians in Canada put it to me. Both questions are critically important for this generation's new believers, and for the health of next generation's churches.

1.2 Terminology

It will have been noted that I use interchangeably the terms "believer from Muslim background", "former Muslim", "convert" and "ex-Muslim Christian". A mix is needed, for no one term is favoured by all. In particular the term "convert", though shunned these days in missiological circles, is normal parlance for sociologists. They in turn would look askance at the missiological label "believer from Muslim background", for in their terms of reference are not Muslims already "believers"?

Is it perhaps time for missiologists too to reclaim the short and simple word "convert", dust off its negative associations, and accept that a person turning from Islam to Christ is indeed "converting"?

⁶¹ Seppo Syrjänen, *In Search of Meaning and Identity: Conversion to Christianity in Pakistani Muslim Culture* (Vammala: Finnish Society for Missiology and Ecumenics, 1984).

⁶² Kathryn Kraft, 'Community and Identity among Arabs of a Muslim background who choose to follow a Christian Faith', (PhD diss., Bristol: University of Bristol, 2008).

Or is the term so laden on the one hand with hints of *extractionism* (seeking to extract a convert from his or her former community), and on the other hand of *superficiality* (seeking mere conversion not discipleship) that it must be abandoned forever?

Be that as it may, in sociological writings the word “convert” goes unchallenged, and as my own doctoral research is in a secular university I will continue to use it alongside other terms.

1.3. Personal Background & Perspective

I vividly recall the first time I met an ex-Muslim Christian. The year was 1979. “Hussein” (for I use pseudonyms throughout this article) was a gentle, educated man who had previously held a good government job. I was a mere 18 year old on an overseas placement.

Hussein, by the time I met him, had lost his job, his home and his family. The church where he and I both worked had given him a job of sorts (as a lowly gardener) and a home of sorts (in the servants’ accommodation). But it had not offered him any new “family”.

So he lived all on his own. The other servants on the church compound were nice enough people, but they had their own families and their own support structures. They were busy with their own concerns. Hussein had no one. Lost in the gap between the Muslim and Christian communities, he was lonely and longing for friendship.

That made a deep impression on me as a teenager. Over the years since then, it has been my privilege to meet many who, like Hussein, have left Islam to follow Christ. When they first embarked on this path of discipleship it seemed to them a path of flowers. Only with time did they realize that it was also a path of thorns. So they needed friends to help pick the thorns out of their feet and walk with them on the path.

Friendship with scores of such disciples has taught me a great deal. It impressed on me the cost of their calling, and it alerted me to the common convert issues which bridge their differences of nationality, age and gender.

However, it also showed me that too much generalization is dangerous. In particular, the “insider movements” debate has greatly oversimplified and thereby obscured some extremely important dif-

ferences between different regions of the Muslim world. As one moves from Ghana to Algeria to Saudi Arabia to Central Asia to Pakistan to Bangladesh to Java, not only does the expression of Islam vary a great deal, but so too does the local relationship between Muslim and Christian communities.

2 Making Sense of Identity

2.1 *A complex Minefield*⁶³

Making sense of “identity” can be difficult. This is partly because different academic disciplines define identity in different ways. Psychologists focus on the private self-awareness of individuals, while anthropologists and some sociologists view identity as a collective label marking out different groups. Social psychologists describe “identity negotiation” between individuals and groups.⁶⁴ So there is no universally agreed definition, and that is before taking theological perspectives into account!

Moreover, under the impact of globalization, “waves of transformation crash across virtually the whole of the earth’s surface”,⁶⁵ breaking up the old certainties. Travel and the internet expose people to new worldviews; migration and intermarriage create new hybrid identities; pluralizing societies challenge fused notions of religion, ethnicity and nationality.

‘The days of closed, homogeneous, unchanging societies are rapidly going and they will not come back’, comments Jean-Marie

⁶³ Some material in sections 2.1, 2.2, 2.4 and 3.1 summarizes my more extensive treatment of the topic in two chapters I contributed to a forthcoming multi-author book entitled *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between?* Edited by David Greenlee, it comprises research studies from different parts of the world on identity of Ex-Muslim Christians. It is due for publication by William Carey Library in late 2012.

⁶⁴ Psychologists writing on identity include William James, Erik Erikson, Galen Strawson; sociologists include Lewin and Zerbavel; social psychologists include Henri Tajfel, George Herbert Mead and Sheldon Stryker; sociologists of religion include Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann; but the list is almost endless.

⁶⁵ Anthony Giddens 1990, cited in Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” *Modernity and its Future*, Hall et al, eds. (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 275-316.

Gaudeul.⁶⁶ Yet, alongside this globalizing juggernaut and often in opposition to it, collectivist understandings of identity ('We are, therefore I am') are still important especially in non-Western societies.

For all these reasons, the field of "identity studies" resembles a minefield. Nevertheless, we need to make a start somewhere, for this minefield is also a goldmine. To the persevering, it yields treasures of insight on identity issues facing Christ's followers from Muslim background.

2.2 A simplified Framework

To grapple with this slippery concept of "identity", we must clarify some concepts and discern overall patterns. This provides us with a basic conceptual framework. Inevitably such a framework will be over-simplified, but clarity must precede nuance, which can be reintroduced afterwards.

My simplified framework takes its starting-point from the work of a psychologist Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi. After surveying definitions of identity from several academic fields he proposes this three-level conceptualization:

At the top I would place *collective identity*, i.e., identity as defined by the group... In the middle I would place *social identity* labels, as used by the individual and by others to identify him(self). At the bottom or deepest level I would place *ego-identity*, which is privately or even unconsciously experienced by the individual.⁶⁷

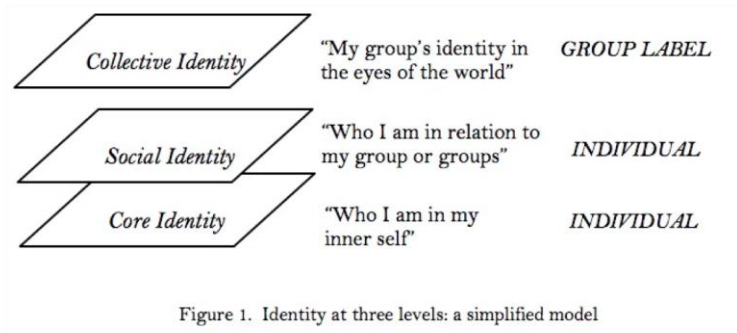
The term "ego-identity" is drawn from Freudian psychology. Although it has been widely used by Erikson, Beit-Hallahmi and others, I prefer to use the more readily grasped term "core identity".⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Jean-Marie Gaudeul, *Called from Islam to Christ: Why Muslims become Christians* (translated from the French), (Crowborough: Monarch Books, 1999), 225-6.

⁶⁷ Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *Prolegomena to the Psychological Study of Religion* (London: Associated University Press, 1989), 96-97

⁶⁸ This term 'core identity' was agreed between Kathryn Kraft and myself in June 2012, when we compared and combined our similar tripartite models of identity theory, for presentation at the 'Bridging the Divide' consultation in the USA. This gathering of proponents and opponents of 'insider movements' accepted the tripar-

I have turned Beit-Hallahmi's scheme into a simple diagram, with his three layers of identity stacked above each other:



The following points about this model are worth highlighting:

a) "Collective identity" concerns the way a whole symbolic group is labelled and distinguished from other groups by its identity markers. Collective identity refers to "*our*" identity as a whole tribe or class or nation.

b) By contrast, "*my* core identity" and "*my* social identity" are both held by the individual.⁶⁹ This is why they are shown as a pair in the diagram, separated from the collective identity. A person's social

tite model as a potentially useful framework for discussing issues of identity, but work on this has only just begun and it remains to be seen whether this model or the terminology will stand the test of time.

⁶⁹ I do recognise that to define core identity as "who I am in my inner self" this is an over-simplified way of expressing it. Is Self an intrinsic entity or is it always developed and defined in relation to the Other? Is there, as psychologists debate, both an 'I' sense of self and a 'Me' sense? What is the relation between self and worldview? And what perspective does a biblical theology of humanness bring to the understanding of self? These are all important questions, but outside the scope of this article. Jens Barnett has done more work on this area, see his chapter in the forthcoming book *Longing for Identity*, ed. David Greenlee.

identity concerns his or her actual social relationships, while the collective identity is a label for the whole group.

c) A person's core identity and social identity are developed throughout life through a constant dialectic between these levels, thus:

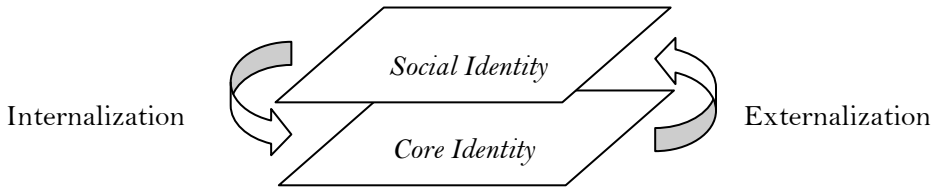


Figure 2. Interaction between core and social identity

Berger and Luckmann explain how this process begins in early childhood through “primary socialization”, in which a child becomes emotionally attached to “significant others” (initially adults in the immediate family circle). Thereby

the child takes on the significant others’ roles and attitudes, that is, internalizes them and makes them his own... the individual becomes what he is addressed as by his significant others.⁷⁰

Erik Erikson traces stages of life throughout which individuals continually develop their core identity, including the stage of adolescence when they typically question their absorbed values and consciously construct their own achieved identity. James Fowler, in his influential but not universally accepted work *Stages of Faith*, draws on Erikson and Piaget to argue that a person’s faith development keeps step with their identity development.

All these theories were developed in western individualistic societies. While they make a valuable contribution to our understanding of identity, they do not cover all aspects of identity in more collectiv-

⁷⁰ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 121

ist cultures, where “I” is less clearly distinguished from “we” than in the West.

2.3. Making the model more sophisticated

In outlining this three-layer model I again stress that it is only a very simple starting point. Each layer is merely the setting for a great deal of further sub-division, movement and complexity. We might elaborate the model to make the “core identity” level a stage whereon different worldviews raise their voices like actors, each clamouring to be heard and obeyed.⁷¹ At the “social identity” layer we might draw a series of circles, some overlapping and some rigidly separate, to illustrate an individual’s multiple identities and/or roles. We might change the “collective identity” layer into a composite set of layers bonded together like plywood, with the different layers labeled “ethnic”, “national”, “religious”, “socio-economic” and so on.

Elaborating further still, we might change our three layers into a three-floor department store, with each floor having inter-connecting and rearrangeable departments, and with escalators to move ideas continually up and down between the “core” and “social” floors.

Buildings, however, don’t move. People move and develop and change throughout life. They leave home, marry, change roles, juggle multiple identities and bring up children in a different environment from the one in which they grew up. Identity change takes place with ever-growing speed in a world where migration and hybrid identities are more and more common.

Therefore no model can adequately depict identity in all its complexity of identity. Even so, models have their place. So long as we recognize its limitations, our tripartite conceptualization of identity will still carry us quite a long way in understanding what it is to be Muslim and what it is to convert.

⁷¹ See Jens Barnett’s chapter in the forthcoming book *Longing for Community* (ed. David Greenlee). I have enjoyed learning from Jens as we interacted on models of identity.

2.4. Muslim Identity at each level

Let us consider each identity layer in turn, as they apply to Muslim people and societies.

2.4.1 The “Collective Identity” layer

Nationality, ethnicity, and sometimes religion are entered on their birth certificates before they have a chance to make any choice for themselves. We call these collective identities and they are ascribed by others, at least initially. In individualistic cultures it is easier to shift from one collectivist identity to another. Of course many Islamic cultures are collectivist, rather than individualist. In many Islamic cultures the ethnic and religious identities are merged—to be a Turk is to be a Muslim, for example. Even in pluralistic cultures the religious collective identity label remains a powerful loyalty test, especially at times of tension between different religious groups.

2.4.2 The “Social Identity” layer

Religious *social* identity is internalized by the Muslim or Muslima from birth on, especially within the family setting. The *shahada* is recited at birth and burial as well, and as Kenneth Cragg points out,⁷² an endless inter-penetration of religion and society indoctrinates the young in that identity. Growing up, they pass through no ceremony corresponding to a Christian’s public vocalization of family faith at, say Confirmation. Rather, Islam is assumed as the natural religion, the *diin al fitr*, and to be Muslim is part of belonging to their family and society and, in many instances, nation.

In such ways, at the social identity level, does Islam provide a secure and comforting framework from cradle to grave. It acts as a “sacred canopy” and “shield against terror”, to use Peter Berger’s famous phrase.⁷³

2.4.3 The “Core Identity” layer

Evangelicals commonly use the term “nominal Christians” to refer to people who, on a social or communal level only, have a social identity

⁷² Kenneth Cragg, *The Dome and the Rock* (London: SPCK, 1964), 148.

⁷³ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

of a Christian but not the core identity. That is, in their own world-view and self-awareness, their Christianity is only tangential; it is not at the core of who they are.

Can we speak of “nominal Muslims” in the same way? Is this a valid comparison when Islam and Christianity (or evangelical Christianity at any rate) have such different emphases on the relative importance of orthopraxis and orthodoxy? Perhaps a better way of putting it would be to speak of “cultural” Muslims, embedded in Muslim majority communities and going with the flow of a religiously legitimated society without necessarily being deeply committed to Islam at a “core identity” level.

However Muslims who live in a non-Islamic context, where their cultural assumptions are not taken for granted by wider society, are thereby prompted to distinguish between social and core identities. It is no longer so easy just to go with the flow of a Muslim social identity. This prompts migrants (or their children) critically to examine their assumptions and to make choices at the core identity level. Some decide to follow Islam in a committed, conscious way, some turn from Islam to another faith or atheism, and some continue to live with the unresolved cognitive dissonance of clashing world-views.

Thus all three identity levels have a religious element. Since Islam lays claim to all these areas in a holistic way, those who leave it face a daunting task of renegotiating each aspect of their identity.

3 Conversion and Identity

3.1. A transformed identity at each level

Our understanding of Muslim conversion to Christianity is assisted by conversion studies, which incorporates insights from such fields as psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, missiology and of course theology. Perhaps the most influential scholar in recent years to write on the topic is the American Lewis Rambo.⁷⁴ He sought to

⁷⁴ Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

integrate insights from all these disciplines except for theology, whose methodology he judged to be incompatible with the rest. Rambo and others interpret religious conversion as a profound and radical transformation of identity at all three levels. We will now turn to an exploration, with examples, of what that identity transformation may look like in different instances.

3.1.1 Conversion at the “Core Identity” level

One formerly Muslim friend from Uganda described to me the excitement he felt at his baptism:

I felt I have died to my old sinful way, I have given myself to God and am now a new person. I am not the Firaz my friends knew, not the one whom Satan knew, but a new Firaz—forgiven, born again, controlled by the Spirit. The old Firaz is dead, the new one is alive in Christ. I came out of the water feeling I am a new person!

To talk of a “new identity” does not mean that that the previous values and way of thinking are instantly obliterated. “Their old identity is not erased; rather, the new one is overwritten on it.”⁷⁵

Complications emerge at this point, for it often takes a prolonged internal struggle as one's worldview is transformed. An example of this is to value humility above honor, or forgiveness above revenge. The claims of old and new world views compete to be heard and obeyed. This conflict or struggle takes places at the “core identity” level.

Firaz still struggles at times with this. For him and others like him, deep level discipleship means choosing for the new worldview to win out over the old one whenever they conflict. This transformation at the core of his being will take years. But it can and will happen, so long as he has a clear and united core identity as Christ's follower, and keeps feeding that identity day by day and year by year.

3.1.2 Conversion at the “Social Identity” Level

One friend of mine from a Muslim background put “sheepalone” in his email address, and this seemed to me to symbolize his sense of

⁷⁵ Rudolf Heredia, *Changing Gods: Rethinking Conversion in India*. London: Penguin Books (2007), 127.

isolation. Can a believer in Christ survive without joining the flock? Is it only through incorporation into a congregation of believers that a new social identity can emerge—one which will complement and complete the transformation in core identity?

Converts from Islam seek a new social identity, a new “family” to substitute for the old (especially if rejected by their own loved ones), a new role model of what it means to be Christ's follower, and a new pattern of Christian discipleship.

Biblical theology and the social sciences alike assert that the new community is essential for providing converts with the social identity they crave. What, however, is to come of their old social identity, the community in which they were born and raised? Will all links with that be cut off? Is it necessary to have only one social identity, or can two be combined at the same time?

In fact many converts from Islam, to the extent that they want to or are allowed to, maintain links of some kind with their Muslim families while simultaneously joining their new Christian “family”. Dual belonging is a reality for them, and they seek strategies to combine both social identities. So what circumstances allow coexistence and where is conflict inevitable? When can twin loyalties be held side by side and when do they tear a heart apart? What local contextual variations bear on this, and what theological insights help to chart a way through?

These questions are of urgent relevance to many thousands of Christians from Muslim background today. It is over these questions that converts, national Christian leaders, missiologists and theologians should pool their perspectives, not the old polarized Insider Movements debate which can never move forward until it recognizes the reality of dual social identity. I address this further in section 6.2 below.

3.1.3 Conversion at the "Collective Identity" Level

Collective identities of religion, ethnicity and nationality tend to get fused in traditional societies. So a person changing their religion is seen as betraying their family and their nation as well. Islamic histo-

ry and jurisprudence has confirmed this attitude to apostasy which is traditionally equated with treason

Fatima al-Mutairi of Saudi Arabia, who was martyred at the age of 26, expressed on a website her desire to be accepted as a real Saudi but also a follower of Christ:

Truly, we love our homeland, and we are not traitors
We take pride that we are Saudi citizens
How could we betray our homeland, our dear people?
How could we, when for death—for Saudi Arabia—we stand ready?
The homeland of my grandfathers, their glories, and odes—for it I am writing
And we say, "We are proud, proud, proud to be Saudis"
...
We chose our way, the way of the rightly guided
And every man is free to choose any religion
Be content to leave us to ourselves to be believers in Jesus

Her plea was in vain and in August 2008, her father and brother discovered her Christian allegiance and killed her. In response to news of her martyrdom a Saudi woman wrote ‘thousand, thousand congratulations for her death. . .and a special thanks to her brother who carried out God's law. . .curse upon the apostate Fatima, curse upon the apostate Fatima.’⁷⁶

Even in the secular West, apostasy from Islam is most always interpreted as a betrayal of collective identity. ‘Don't you realize,’ a British-born Pakistani friend of mine was told by her relative, ‘that by becoming a Christian you have abandoned your roots, your heritage and your family name?’

So to overcome these deep-seated assumptions about collective identity remains a major challenge for converts. It is made somewhat easier in globalizing societies, or in cultures which retain even a

⁷⁶ Mariam al Hakeem, “Saudi Man Kills Daughter for Converting to Christianity,” *Gulf News*, [SFMAugust2012.doc](#)

<[archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/08/12/10236558.html](#)>, August 12, 2008. The poem is available on many websites including <[www.strateias.org/fatima.pdf](#)>. The blog was posted originally at <[muslmah.blogspot.com/2008/08/blog-post.html](#)>.

distant memory of not being Muslim (Iran for example, or the Berbers of North Africa). It is also affected a great deal by the reputation of traditional Christian communities within a country, as well as by the political machinations and military adventures of western “Christendom”.

3.2. Life’s Unfolding Journey

For converts from Islam, the issues of identity never really go away. This is not only because they are so intractable, but also because the issues themselves unfold during the course of a lifetime.

Suppose you are born under Islam and later choose to follow Christ. Your life might unfold something like the following hypothetical scenario.

3.2.1 In infancy

Within minutes of your birth your proud father recites in your ear the words of the *shahada*, ‘There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his apostle’. Later, in the “religion” column of your birth certificate, he enters the word “Muslim”. Thus is your collective religious identity *assumed* and *ascribed* before you have any choice in the matter at all.

3.2.2 Growing up

From your parents and your “significant others” you internalize a Muslim worldview and way of life which you don’t at first question. Imbibed on your mother’s lap and reinforced by your daily routine, you “know” that it’s wrong to put your left foot first when stepping into the bathroom, or for a woman to walk outside with her head uncovered. Your social religious identity is *absorbed* as you grow through childhood.

3.2.3 As a teenager

Later, you begin to choose or *achieve* your identity in a more self-conscious way. You go through a phase of Islamic zeal, no longer slacking your way through Qur’an classes but genuinely trying to live by its teachings. Your core religious identity is being formed in a more self-conscious way than before.

But this very process prompts questions in your mind about Islam. You bring them to the *imam* but he frowns on your daring to

ask. You stumble across a Christian website; this arouses your curiosity, and you start reading the Bible secretly online. You are opening up to change at the core identity level.

3.2.4 At the age of twenty

You are attracted by the Bible's teaching, meet Christians, pray to receive Christ and are born again into a brand new core identity as a child of God. As your concept of God changes, will you continue to pray to "Allah" but filling the word with new meaning? Or will you call him by another name to express your new identity? Meanwhile, are your core values and worldview beginning to be realigned, and if so is this yet making any difference in your speech and behaviour?

Meanwhile at a social identity level you are still embedded in the Muslim community. For two years you continue to read your Bible in secret and visit Christians in secret. You realize that you can't live an identity contradiction forever, but you are not yet ready to tell your family.

3.2.5 First crisis point: your family finds out

But before you are ready to "come out", you are "outed" by someone else, who tells your parents. (I'm using this phrase deliberately, for it recalls the shock and shame some families feel when they learn their son or daughter is gay).

When they ask 'have you become a Christian?' you have to admit you are following Christ. Your father erupts with rage, your mother weeps 'now how will your sisters find good husbands?' and your uncles want to beat you. What worries them most is the fear that the news will get out. So they urge you to keep it secret and to show yourself as a Muslim.

3.2.6 Life at the Borderzone

So now the real dilemma begins. While hanging on to your core identity as Christ's follower, what will you do at the social identity level? Should you leave your Muslim circle, or cut off contact with your Christian circle, or somehow oscillate between both? The options will depend partly on whether you can keep your Muslim social circle physically separated from your Christian one. But then which Christian group will you link up with: an ethnic church or denomina-

tion (of which there may well be a choice), the wealthy foreigners, or a group of believers from Muslim background? All these are social identity questions.

If you decide to stay in the Muslim circle, will you pray at the mosque regularly, or as infrequently as you can get away with, or not at all? During the prayers will you whisper new Christian words under your breath and are you comfortable with that? Do you tell others you are a “Muslim”, redefine its meaning for yourself privately while letting your hearers assume its normal public meaning, or does that feel deceitful? Well, what will you do?

Whichever provisional option you choose, it is not yet final. But five years later the crunch comes. Your parents insist ‘now it’s time for you to get married! We have arranged your marriage with your Muslim cousin.’

3.2.7 Second crisis point: Your Marriage

Will you agree to marry your cousin? If so, will you tell her⁷⁷ of your core identity in Christ before the wedding day, or leave it till later, or never tell her? Or will you instead leave home and seek a bride from the Christian community, or from the convert community if such exists in your country?

This crucial decision will affect the rest of your life, and we discuss it in more detail below. The choice of whom you marry has huge identity ramifications.

Let’s fast-forward twenty years in your life’s journey.

3.2.8 Middle age

If you married a Muslim, has she turned to Christ, or divorced you, or are you living together in an uneasy truce? And if you married a Christian, have you by now lost touch with your Muslim relatives and been assimilated into a Christian social identity? Do you have a nagging sense of regret at losing your Muslim culture?

Meanwhile, at the core identity level you are still firm as Christ’s follower but you realize that swapping your old worldview for His

⁷⁷ In Islampur most unmarried converts are male. In some countries this is the case, while in others (like Britain) more are female.

new one wasn't as simple as you originally thought. After all these years you still find the old values sometimes rear their head, as when you started thinking the other day about taking a second wife. So there is still a tussle in your core identity level.

Meanwhile at the collective level are your children labelled by society as "Christians", "Muslims", "converts" or what? Are they secure or confused in their core identity?

This brings us to the next crisis point in your life journey:

3.2.9 Third crisis point: Your Children's Marriage

Into which community will they marry? They cannot keep a transitional identity generation after generation. Certainly the collective identity of your future family line, and most of their social identity, will depend on this decision. As for their core identity, you can't do much about that now they are adults, but you just keep praying for Christ to work in their lives.

3.2.10 And now in your Old Age

You are approaching the end of your life. In which graveyard will you be buried, Muslim or Christian? It matters to you more than the foreign missionaries realize.

When you started out on the journey of faith, half a century ago, it all looked so simple, and you never realized the long term implications.

4 Conversion and Christianity in Islampur

We transition now from the theoretical to the empirical and from the general to the specific. The rest of this article explores issues of identity faced by converts from Islam in a South Asian city I will call "Islampur". My research into these identity issues comprises my PhD, to be completed in 2013.

The name Islampur is fictitious and to protect my interviewees from the prying eyes of "private investigator Google", I have had to give less specific detail than I would wish.⁷⁸ However, all the indi-

⁷⁸ All key incidents are as described by my interviewees, and all quotations are exactly as in their own words, though translated into English. However, interviewees'

viduals described are real people whom I interviewed in 2009. I knew several of them before then and have kept in contact since (till 2012), so there is a longitudinal aspect to this study which traces their evolving trajectory of identity.

Before proceeding to the empirical research on marriage and identity, a description of Islampur's religious context is needed, and of religious conversion within that context.

4.1 Islampur's religious context

4.1.1 Islampur's communities

Islampur lies in a predominantly Muslim region of the Indian sub-continent. Its population of around one million includes the usual socioeconomic mix of older aristocratic families, up-and-coming businessmen, technicians of all kinds, teachers, factory workers, day-labourers and beggars. All urban facilities are at full stretch as more and more landless poor migrate to Islampur; public servants supplement their small salaries through bribes where available; crime is growing; but the city continues to throb with a warm-hearted vibrancy that welcomes foreigners like myself.

Islampur, like many cities in the region, has a mix of religious communities. Muslims range from Sunni to Shia, Brelwi to Deobandi, Islamist to non-practising. Christians form a minority, concentrated in particular areas of the city, where Catholic and mainline Protestant denominations once predominated but now face competition from a variety of newer groupings. Small Hindu, Sikh and Parsi communities complete the mix, though Islampur lives up to its name as a Muslim city overall.

Each day before dawn the Muslim call to prayer penetrates one's consciousness: first from one mosque loudspeaker, then another and another, until the air pulsates with a discordant but confident crescendo of praise to Allah. "God is greater" asserts not only a reli-

names have been changed, their locations masked, and a few non-important details of their stories adjusted. The description of Islampur is also somewhat disguised. My PhD thesis will include far more details, more quotes and richer biographical detail than in this article. Note that the terms 'thesis' and 'dissertation' in British usage are swapped in American terminology.

gious conviction but also a political declaration that minority religions may be tolerated but Islam takes precedence.

It was not always thus. This region gave birth to Hinduism and Buddhism long before the Muslim armies arrived. For hundreds of years after that the context remained pluralist, with a mix of faiths and with Muslims as a ruling minority. Later under British rule, a people movement to Christ began among outcaste tribes on (or more accurately, below) the bottom rung of the Hindu caste system.

4.1.2 Attitude to Christians

These groups were perceived as untouchable due to the polluting nature of their occupations: skinning hides, cleaning sewers etc. Even after leaving those occupations and/or converting to Christianity, they were unable to shake off this stigma as “sweepers” which persists to this day.

In rural settings discrimination often remains as strong as ever (“Christians are the ones who remove our buffalo dung”, I was told), and some Muslims refuse to use the same cups or saucers as Christians. Moreover, some urban Christian neighbourhoods have a reputation for supplying alcohol, drugs or prostitutes.

By no means do all Islampur’s Christian families derive from this “sweeper” background. Some trace their ancestry to higher-class converts or Anglo-Indians, while others have gained several rungs on the social ladder through education or hard work. Social discrimination has lessened somewhat in those places where Christians are urbanized, educated, and rubbing shoulders with Muslims in religiously mixed residential areas or workplaces. Even there, however, the two communities lead largely parallel lives with their own community structures, festivals and religious terminology.

Against this general background of mixed *social* attitudes, specifically *religious* intolerance has certainly grown since the 1970s, fuelled by the rise of Islamism. Alongside and even eclipsing the old epithet of “sweeper” is the more recent one of *kafir* (“infidel”). Accounts of specifically religious discrimination, or of coerced conversion to Islam, are growing in frequency. And the wars in Iraq and Afghani-

stan have further complicated matters by causing resentment against the “Christian” West and, by association, against local Christians.

Christians in the region may thus be tarred with a triple brush: as sweepers, as infidels and as traitors. This collective identity has an important bearing on conversion.

4.2 Conversion from Christianity to Islam

Christian literature celebrates conversion *from* Islam but rarely mentions conversion *to* Islam. In Muslim writings, the same is true in reverse.⁷⁹

Yet historically far more people from Christian communities have converted to Islam than vice-versa. This fact is not only honest to acknowledge, but of missiological relevance in places like Islampur where historic Christian communities survive in Muslim contexts. Furthermore, evangelists now planting first-generation churches in Muslim countries would do well to heed lessons of history which are liable to played out in their context too in future generations.

4.2.1 An historical perspective

Why did Christians⁸⁰ under centuries of Muslim rule convert to Islam? Factors varied from period to period and from region to region, which is why specific historical studies in specific contexts are important.⁸¹ Different factors held sway to different extents and in different combinations, according to the specific context.

⁷⁹ There are occasional exceptions. Among Christian researchers there is Andreas Maurer, who compared the conversion narratives of ten converts from Christianity to Islam with ten in the other direction. See ‘In Search of a New Life: conversion motives of Christians and Muslims’, in David Greenlee (ed.), *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way*, (Milton Keynes, UK: Authentic, 2005), 93-108. A rare example from Muslim authors is Mohammad Khalil & Bilici Mucahit, ‘Conversion out of Islam: A Study of Conversion Narratives of Former Muslims’. *The Muslim World* (2007) 97:11-124.

⁸⁰ I use the term “Christian” here as a descriptive label for any individual born into a community which calls itself Christian. Only some of those, whether today or in times past, are active followers of Jesus.

⁸¹ Philip Jenkins has shown how conversion to Islam, emigration and occasional ethnic cleansing left the once-predominant Eastern churches a mere remnant of their former glory. See Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, (New York:

On rare occasions, usually triggered by some prevailing political conflict, forced conversion took place at the point of a sword. More systematic under the Ottomans was the practice of turning Christian child-slaves into Muslims to become troops for the imperial army.

But when does force become coercion, or coercion become mere pressure? The burden of the *jizya* tax varied under different rulers, but in some periods became an oppressive burden, from which the only means of escape was to convert to Islam and pay *zakat* instead. Muslim family law also pervasively fostered a one-way expansion of Islam, in that it permitted people to marry into the Muslim community but not out of it. Thus, even if those wives themselves did not convert, their offspring were automatically counted as Muslim.

Personal conviction certainly played a part in some Christians converting to Islam. Some were attracted by Islamic apologetics,⁸² some by Muslims' lifestyle and some by the Sufis' claim to offer blessings and access to God. It seems that Christian populations turned to Islam more quickly in regions where their faith was not firmly rooted in local language and culture; this is one likely reason why the Berber Christians in North Africa, compelled to follow Latin rites under Roman priests, switched to Islam more quickly than did the Egyptian Copts with their indigenous leadership and liturgy.

The "stick" of social discrimination for Christians, combined with the "carrot" of social advancement for converts, was another factor in some contexts. Although the so-called "Covenant of Umar" with its heavy discriminatory burden on non-Muslims was not applied uniformly, yet it reinforced a general sense of *dhimmi* status. Richard Fletcher writes of Christians under Arab rule in Spain,

HarperCollins, 2008); also Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979); N. Levtzion, (ed) *Conversion to Islam*. (New York and London: Holmes and Meier, 1979); works by Bat Ye'or, etc.

⁸² Thus it has been argued that some of the Christian apologetics towards Islam in the early Abbasid period was motivated by a desire not so much to draw Muslims to Christianity as to stem the growing haemorrhage of Christians to Islam.

these humdrum pressures to follow Islam, then, might be those of neighbourhood, marriage, the need for patronage or employment, the peer pressure of youth... Conformity with an establishment is comfortable and advantageous.⁸³

Last but certainly not least is the gradual Islamization of culture. This all-embracing way of life, with its routines, rituals and relationships, gradually works its influence from the outside inwards, from society through to the individual.⁸⁴ Fletcher describes Christian civil servants who

found themselves little by little adopting features of Islamic culture – most obviously, the Arabic language – and becoming assimilated into its routines, customs, dress, diet and entertainments. Bit by bit such people, at any rate very many among them, would slip over the religious divide and embrace the faith as well as the culture of Islam.⁸⁵

Perhaps over the centuries this gradual penetration of society and culture has proved to be Islam's trump card.

4.2.2 Christians converting to Islam in Islampur

To review these historical factors is no digression, for most of them are in evidence today in Islampur and its surrounding region. There, Muslim threats to Christians to “convert or die” are rare but not unknown (if aggravated by other factors). More common is the “stick and carrot” combination of social disdain for Christians and socioeconomic advantage for converts, along with the Islamization of culture which those who lack a firm core identity as Christians may find it hard to resist.

One interviewee Nasim told me how his landless and very poor tribal group was swayed by all these influences:

⁸³ Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent: Christianity and Islam from Muhammad to the Reformation*, (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 46

⁸⁴ This model of transforming a society “*from the outside inward*” stands in contrast to the “*from the inside outward*” approach favoured by evangelicals. The question arises; which strategy has proved more successful in history?

⁸⁵ Richard Fletcher, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 37

There was pressure on them from Muslims, and persecution from Muslim leaders, and for this reason they gradually became Muslim. And they didn't get the seed of the Bible on time, and this was a reason why they kept on becoming Muslims. And now they have gone on so much [in Islam], that in our tribe there are now about five people who have made the *hajj*. Muslim leaders are sending them on *hajj* from their own money. Also, where they live they are under compulsion, because they don't have a place to live and they are lacking amenities, so to gain those amenities they choose the Muslim religion.

A Christian pastor gave me his perspective on converts to Islam:

It's not that they've seen anything in Islam, it's because of a girl for marriage or for a job or for money. Not for anything else. No other reason.

He included inter-religious marriage as a factor. Whereas in the past young men and women had little opportunity for unsupervised social contact across the sexes, let alone across the religious divide, modern urban life lowers both barriers. Muslim and Christian young people meet each other at college, in the workplace and on the internet.

Where romance flourishes the question inevitably arises 'can we have a religiously mixed marriage or must one of us convert first?' If the boy is a Muslim and the girl a Christian, she could in principle retain her core faith, though most of her future social identity will be among the Muslim family she marries into. However, it is out of the question for a Muslim girl either to marry a Christian boy or to convert to his faith. He must convert to Islam, not her to Christianity. And in either case, the children will grow up with a Muslim identity. Thus, when it comes to inter-religious marriage in Islampur, the playing field is decidedly tipped in one direction.

In light of all these factors, it is rather surprising that only a very small percentage of Islampur's Christians have till now converted to Islam. But it seems to be a slowly growing trend. My interviewees informed me that every year in Islampur many Christians embrace Islam, by reciting the Muslim creed in front of an *imam*. These conversions are often reported in the local press, and at a guess might amount to several hundred a year.

It seems ironic indeed that in this article I have to disguise the identities of a small number of former Muslims for their protection, while the larger number of former Christians is celebrated openly in Islampur's newspapers.

4.3 Conversion from Islam to Christianity

In view of the unequal social factors in Islampur and history's verdict in other regions, it is hardly surprising that some Christians are converting to Islam. More remarkable, because humanly counterintuitive, is that some Muslims convert to Christianity.

Yet at least some conversions to Christ have been taking place for over 100 years, and these days in slightly greater numbers than before.⁸⁶ I am struck by four trends in particular.

Firstly, conversion to Christianity is taking place not in the hope of gain, but despite heavy loss. Those turning to Christ in Islampur, instead of gaining money or friends or status in so doing, are likely to lose all three. They disprove sociological theory on conversion, as well as the persistent Muslim myth that conversion is achieved through the offer of girls or overseas visas.

Secondly, accounts of divine intervention occur quite frequently in conversion accounts to Christianity. Some of my interviewees in Islampur described dreams and visions, or more rarely a healing, as forming part of their conversion experience. Others however, rather than reporting anything miraculous, found in Christianity an answer to their search for truth or salvation.

Thirdly, compared with 20-30 years ago when converts in Islampur were single young men, now there is a growing proportion of convert families. This trend should not be exaggerated, since there always were a few families and there are still now plenty of single men, but nevertheless there may be the beginnings of a more stable

⁸⁶ It is beyond the remit of this paper to investigate reasons for this. One factor among others is probably growing discontent with the excesses of Islamism. Compare a similar rise in conversions during a previous Islamizing period in Warren Larson, *Islamic Ideology and Fundamentalism in Pakistan: Climate for Conversion to Christianity?* (Lanham, USA: University Press of America, 1998), and compare with another region in Abu Daoud "Apostates from Islam" in SFM 3(4) March 2008.

convert community than previously. Perhaps “network” is a better word, as they all do not live in one location or have tightly-knit relationships.

Finally, it is truly noteworthy that almost all of the Muslims finding Christ in Islampur are doing through local Christians, despite the very negative image of Christians described earlier. Of the 32 converts I interviewed, it seems that only two had been guided in their conversion by a foreign missionary, both in the 1960s. All of the converts since then, without exception, had found Christ with the help of local Christians.

This finding, if typical of a wider trend, is surprising. One would expect such a despised group to have little influence on Muslims, and that their very reputation would discourage Muslims from joining them. It was for this very reason that nineteenth century missionaries in Islampur had initially sought to reach the influential classes first, and to avoid baptizing outcastes, until the weight of numbers made them change that strategy.

Yet, contrary to expectation, at least *some* of Islampur’s local Christians are clearly being effective in reaching at least *some* Muslims. I realize that the “some” on both sides are not typical, and that exceptions do not prove rules, but nevertheless it does at least throw a challenge to those missiological strategies which seek to bypass the national church altogether.

4.4 My Research in Islampur

4.4.1 Research Setting

For my doctoral research I sought to investigate what issues of identity are faced by ex-Muslim Christians in Islampur, how they seek to resolve those issues, and the relevance of my findings to wider identity theory.

Most converts in Islampur relate to a greater or lesser extent with members of the local Christian community. They may be regular or irregular in church attendance but they are likely to have some Christian friends, and usually one or two particular Christian mentors. Some have also married into the Christian community.

There is not yet a definable convert community, but there are several loose networks or groupings of converts who gather on a regular or irregular basis to pray, study the Bible and discuss issues of concern. Once or twice a year a larger gathering draws several dozen of them together for a celebration and meal, e.g. at Christmas time and perhaps at Easter. This might represent up to half the total number of converts in the city, but no precise statistics are known.

A few of those who at one time were known converts later announced their return to Islam, for a variety of reasons. Some had married back into the Muslim community, some turned bitter against Christians, some could no longer bear the long-term psychological stress of being misfits in society. They are now Muslim so far as their collective identity is concerned, and mostly in their social identity, while maintaining covert relationships with a few Christians. In their core identity it seems that few of them are convinced Muslims; most retain a secret nostalgia for Christianity or endeavour to cling on however precariously to their faith in Christ.

4.4.2 Research Sample

I conducted interviews with 22 individual converts and four convert couples or families⁸⁷. This made a total of 32 adult “first generation” converts. I greatly appreciate their willingness to trust me with their stories. I also interviewed two Christian spouses of converts, seven Christians with experience in mentoring converts, and one each of the second and third generation convert community. Interviews were supported by prior acquaintance in many cases and was supplemented by informal conversations with nearly twenty other converts from Islampur and other cities.

My sample of “first generation Christians” included mostly those who had converted as adults. Four of them were adults who had in childhood followed a parent in converting but who could still remember a time when they self-identified as Muslim. I did not count

⁸⁷ I only interviewed adult family members of families. Additionally children were present in some interviews but were neither interviewed themselves nor included in the data.

as “first generation” those who were born after one or both parents converted.

The 32 first generation believers were from a mix of social backgrounds, mostly lower middle class or working class, though with a sprinkling of professionals. Correspondingly their educational background varied from illiterate (in one case) to high school (the majority) to masters (a few), though many of them evidenced powers of critical reflection much higher than their formal education. In my sample 75% were men and 25% were women, which I estimate as fairly close to the overall proportion of men and women converts in Islampur, though perhaps my sample slightly over-represents women.

4.4.3 Research Methodology

I used anthropological research methods, not in any way to devalue a theological perspective, but to explore additional insights inaccessible to theology alone. The two approaches use different methods to ask complementary questions.

My field research employed a triangulated mix of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and life histories with individuals, group interviews with adult convert families, and further interviews with Christian spouses or mentors of converts, to gain complementary information and perspective on convert issues.

I seized any opportunity to interview converts in their home settings. This added an extra richness of interpretation, allowing me to observe their apparent socio-economic level, the nature of their neighbourhood, their intra-family relationships and whether they openly displayed any Christian identity symbols.

4.4.4 Interview technique

In the interviews I wanted to hear believers express their own insights and concerns about identity. However, notions of identity are complex, abstract and largely subconscious. They do not simply open up to a direct question like ‘what is your core identity, social identity and collective identity?’ Other keys are required to elucidate such deeply-held realities.

Such keys include concrete examples, analogies, case-studies, pictures, and life histories. They yielded much more fruitful results than abstract questions would have done. In addition to my planned questions, a good deal of unanticipated material emerged as interviewees opened up with their joys and sorrows.

4.4.5 Research Significance

My study seeks to make a modest contribution to the under-researched field of convert identity, in the following ways:

- to *hear the voices* of Christian converts from Islam on issues of identity, for this has rarely been done before in academic studies;
- to provide an *ethnographic sketch* (not a full ethnography) of a community of Christian converts from Islam in an urban setting;
- to *apply identity theory* to the field of religious conversion, drawing comparisons with studies on converts to Islam, and on issues of migrant identity;
- to offer to the current missiological debate on “*insider movements*” an alternative framework which may assist progress.

4.4.6 Research Findings

Analysis of the interview data is currently underway and will be written up over the next few months. In this present article I describe a few tentative and interim findings on just one topic, the topic of marriage. This and other topics will be explored in much more depth in my forthcoming PhD thesis.

5 Marriage: a critical Identity Issue

5.1 Dilemmas for believers from Muslim background

I described earlier how the first convert I met, Hussein, lost his wife and children when he turned to Christ. He faced growing old alone. Since then I have met many like him who faced tough dilemmas in the area of marriage.

Some were *already married to Muslims* at the time of their conversion. In some such cases their spouse subsequently joined them in their new faith, in others they divorced, and in others they continued to live together but with a long-term tussle between their different

faiths, priorities and values. And which path would their children follow?

Others were single young people (almost all men) when they converted. In a society where to stay unmarried is almost unheard of, they faced the dilemma of *whom to marry*. Would it be a fellow-convert, a local Christian, a foreign missionary or a Muslim bride arranged by their parents? The first three possibilities depended on availability; if they didn't work out, or if parental pressure was too great, the fourth would become the default option. That too, however, would create a string of long-term problems.

These very dilemmas faced by Islampur's converts are in fact widespread across the Muslim world. Converts and their mentors alike cite these issues as critical ones affecting both themselves in the first generation and their children in the second.

5.2. Summary of converts' marriage situations

The table below shows the 32 first generation Christians whom I interviewed, in relation to their marital circumstances.

Name	Gender	Marriage situation
Abdallah	male	married Christian after conversion
Abd ul Masih	male	married Christian after conversion
Abd ur Rahim	male	married Christian after conversion
Ahmad	male	married Muslim before conversion
Aisha	female	not married (till time of interview)
Ameen	male	married Muslim after conversion
Amjad	male	married Muslim before conversion
Bashir	male	married Christian after conversion
Fatima	female	not married (till time of interview)
Iftikhar	male	married Muslim before conversion

Imran	male	married Christian after conversion
Khadija	female	married Muslim before conversion
Khadim	male	married Christian after conversion
Mazhar	male	married Christian after conversion
Mona	female	husband converted first, then she did
Mubashir	male	married Muslim before conversion
Mahmood	male	married Christian after conversion
Munir	male	not married (till time of interview)
Mushtaq	male	married Muslim before conversion
Nabila	female	married Muslim before conversion
Nasim	male	married Muslim after conversion
Nazir	male	married Muslim before conversion
Parveen	female	already divorced before conversion
Pervaiz	male	married Muslim after conversion
Qasim	male	already divorced before conversion
Riffat	female	husband converted first, then she did
Ruhama	female	married Christian after conversion
Sajaad	male	married Muslim before conversion
Salma	female	married Christian after conversion
Shabbir	male	married Muslim after conversion
Shafiq	male	not married (till time of interview)
Yusuf	male	married Muslim after conversion

Table 1. Marital circumstances of interviewees

It is tempting to provide an additional column showing the outcomes to these marriages: no change, divorce or the spouse's conversion. However, such a bald summary would be misleading. It would mask the individual factors, marriage stresses, compromises and breakthroughs which continued to evolve in these marriages from their inception up till the interviews and indeed since then. Moreover, my sample is not necessarily representative, so any generalizing conclusions should be made with caution and explanation.

For now, in a preliminary and provisional way, for each identity level I will present just *one* sample issue, set against a little relevant theory from the social sciences, and illustrated with a few selective quotes from my data.

6 Marriage's Impact at each Level of Identity

6.1 Impact of marriage on converts' core identity

My chosen identity issue here is of a spouse's contribution to "reality maintenance".

6.1.1 Relevant social science theory

We saw earlier that core identity describes a person's individual sense of self, and that this is moulded by one's interaction with "significant others" in infancy and childhood.

By the stage of reaching adulthood a psychologically healthy individual will have achieved a fairly stable core worldview. However this still needs constant topping up (so to speak) through the "reality maintenance" provided by an environment which endorses those worldview assumptions. "Religiously legitimated" societies do this by reinforcing a monolithic worldview, as Peter Berger writes.⁸⁸ It is to a great degree in this manner that traditional Islamic societies maintain their members in Islam.

⁸⁸ Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, ‘it takes severe biographical shocks to disintegrate the massive reality internalized in early childhood’.⁸⁹ Berger and Luckmann argue that

to have a conversion experience is nothing much. The real thing is to be able to keep on taking it seriously; to retain a sense of its plausibility... “Reality maintenance” for a convert is only possible through continuing conversation with the new significant others in the new plausibility structure; by such procedures “backsliding” tendencies are arrested. Significant others occupy a central position in the economy of reality maintenance. They are particularly important for the ongoing confirmation of that crucial element of reality we call identity. To retain confidence that he is indeed who he thinks he is, the individual requires ... the explicit and emotionally charged confirmation that his significant others bestow upon him.⁹⁰

Conversely, continue Berger and Luckmann, a convert’s confidence in the reality of his faith may be undermined by negative comment from significant others, particularly a non-believing spouse.

In Islampur, society as a whole is indeed “religiously legitimated” in favour of Islam and against apostasy. Therefore for converts to swim against the tide, “reality maintenance” through the support of “significant others” would seem essential to bolster their core identity as Christ’s followers. To the empirical research we now turn.

6.1.2 Evidence from Islampur

6.1.2.1 *Converts who later married Christians*

As one would expect, believing Christian spouses constitute a strong source of affirmation and “reality maintenance” for converts in their core identity as Jesus-followers. Bashir had high praise for his wife:

I was sometimes disheartened, and I thought ‘rather than staying alive, it would be better for me to commit suicide, or to go back [i.e. to Islam]... When there was great pressure and no support was visible, then this wife proved to be a great source of blessing to me. With her love and care she guided me in every way... If I had married a Muslim rela-

⁸⁹ Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 131

⁹⁰ Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 131, 146

tive, my ministry would not have been effective... also I could not have made progress in Christ. So this marriage was a cause of spiritual growth for me.

Bashir (recently deceased) was bold and effective as an evangelist among Muslims and pastor of ex-Muslim Christians. He and his family paid dearly for this ministry, having to move home several times because of persecution. Bashir's wife Susan was a tower of strength in this and greatly contributed to his core identity in Christ. When I interviewed her separately she told me that

one time Bashir was angry. He had had an argument, not with me but with [a named missionary]. He threw the books and even his Bible on the floor and said 'look after your own Jesus!' Even then I was not upset... Every morning I used to open the Bible and gave Bashir a short message. In the same way after one week he came back to his old enthusiasm for the Lord.

Abdul Masih has been following and serving Christ (note his own choice of pseudonym which means 'slave of the Messiah') for more than 40 years. He told me

I thank God for giving me a wife who looks after me. The time when difficulties come is when a husband and wife prove their love... She is bold and keeps me steady, we support each other.

These and others, who decades after their conversion are still secure in their core identity and active in Christian service, owe much to their Christian spouses for providing "reality maintenance".⁹¹

6.1.2.2 Converts already married to Muslims

What, however, comes of those who were already married to Muslims before they chose to follow Christ? In such cases my interviewees had typically kept their faith hidden from their spouse for a considerable period. 'I was very afraid', said Mubashir. 'I didn't want to tell my wife because she was very rigid... I didn't tell her for one year.' In Ahmad's case it was two years, while remarkably Nabila

⁹¹ I have not given any examples of female single converts marrying into the Christian community, as there was only one such in my sample, and she was stronger than her husband.

managed to keep her faith hidden from her husband for 14 long years to allow her space to bring up the children in the faith. Her stratagem worked, for she and the children are now strong Christians.

6.1.2.3 First possible outcome: the threat of divorce

When the spouses of Mubashir, Ahmad and Nabila eventually learned of their conversion, all three threatened divorce on the grounds that in *sharia* law the marriage of an apostate is annulled. Ahmad is now divorced and Nabila is separated from her husband.

Mubashir told me that at first his wife responded in the same way:

At once my wife's reaction was very bad and she immediately asked me for a divorce. She said 'You can't touch me, you are no longer my husband; this thing [physical intimacy] is finished'... She told her parents and from there a lot of problems began for me.

For Mubashir to be told by his closest "significant other" that 'you are no longer my husband' must have deeply shaken him.

6.1.2.4 Second possible outcome: a spouse's conversion

However, in Mubashir's case it did not end in divorce:

These things all kept on happening, but thank God my wife was meanwhile influenced too... [Four months later] she agreed to listen to me, though she declared that 'I'm not becoming a Christian, it's for finding out about it'. [A week after that] she too accepted Christ.

Amjad's wife Mona was similarly upset when he told her he had received Christ. This, in her words, is what ensued between them:

I said 'are we to leave our religion and go off into another religion? Is our religion wrong, or are our parents wrong, that we should leave our religion?'

In that way every night there would be dispute... Then one day he said 'we will have a [contest]. You pray to Muhammad and I will pray to the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who is alive will himself come and give an answer'.

In this way we started to pray, and it didn't take long, 12 days. On the 13th night the Lord Jesus Christ met me... in a dream. He said, 'my daughter, get up. I have chosen you and your husband to give witness'. I got up and told [my husband] that the Lord Jesus Christ met me, and that day I received him, and from then up till now we are following him.

The two of them later had to face crushing pressure from their relatives. They lost their home and business, and nearly their lives. But Amjad, with Mona sitting beside him, said about the difficulties, 'We face them together. We daily take up our cross.' This is Berger's "reality maintenance" in action.

6.1.2.5 Third possible outcome: an uneasy truce

Nazir told me how his wife too had reacted very angrily to news of his conversion:

My wife said 'No, he has changed his religion, he is not worthy of us'.
[Later] I received permission to come home, but for many months my wife didn't speak with me.

Nazir's wife, as well as undermining his core identity with such criticisms, has also curtailed his opportunities for Christian growth. She restricts his personal prayer time, has torn up his Bible and makes it hard for him to attend church:

If I want to go to church I have to say I'm going somewhere else, because if I ever say I'm going to church she will never let me. For this reason I say my wife is a hindrance. I try to go weekly, but sometimes I can't go for 2-3 weeks if my wife needs me to go somewhere.

They remain married but, after nearly twenty years of this wearing treatment, I doubt if Nazir could have maintained the core reality of his Christian faith had he not continued to meet almost daily with Christians outside the home. They, in place of his wife, provided his "reality maintenance".

6.1.2.6 Converts who later married Muslims

Some of the male converts I married had gone on after their conversion to marry Muslims, but without telling them of their Christian faith. In such cases, her shock in discovering she had married an apostate was compounded by a sense of betrayal. 'She thought I had cheated her' said Ameen. 'Had she known she would not have married me', was Pervaiz's comment.

Yusuf, by contrast, had told his fiancée of his faith before they entered the marriage arranged by his mother. After twenty years his

wife has still not converted, but at least she does not accuse him of deceiving her.

6.2 Impact of marriage on converts' social identity

Here my sample identity issue is of “dual belonging” and how this is affected by a convert’s marriage choice.

6.2.1 Relevant sociological and missiological theory

Recall that “social identity” concerns the question ‘who am I in relation to my group or groups?’ Berger and Luckmann affirm the importance for converts of joining a new social group of those who share their new faith.

Socially, this means an intense concentration of all significant interaction within the group that embodies the plausibility structure... The plausibility structure must become the individual’s world, displacing all other worlds... This requires segregation of the individual from the “inhabitants” of other worlds, especially his “cohabitants” in the world he has left behind. Ideally this will be physical segregation.⁹²

What these authors advocate corresponds to the ‘extraction’ model of evangelism, whereby in order to strengthen a convert’s core identity in the new faith, he or she is entirely transplanted from the old social identity into a new one. By contrast, some advocates of “Insider Movements” prefer for new believers to remain entirely within their old social identities which, they believe, will gradually be transformed into communities of Jesus-followers.⁹³

Both these models, when presented in their most extreme form,⁹⁴ posit a “single social identity” for converts. One urges them to join exclusively the new social identity of *ekklesia*, the other tells them to

⁹² Berger & Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 144–146

⁹³ See for example Rebecca Lewis, ‘Insider Movements: Honoring God-given Identity & Community’, *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, 26:1, Spring 2009, 16–19

⁹⁴ I realise that not all proponents of “insider movements” would support the idea of Jesus-followers being indistinguishable from the Muslim community, nor would all opponents advocate total extraction from the community; these are but the two extremes and I do not wish to stereotype the many whose position lies between them.

remain in the old social identity of *ummah*.⁹⁵ These two options, Christ's community vs. the Muslim community, are then pitched against each other in stark dichotomy.

Theologically it is helpful to contrast *ekklesia* and *ummah*, as Chris Flint has done in a carefully-researched masters' dissertation.⁹⁶ Yet this is not and cannot be the whole story. In real life, including real life in the New Testament era, nearly all converts have to relate to the "world" as well as to the "church". Only cults completely sequester their converts from wider society, but this is not the picture we find in Acts and the Epistles.

Therefore even in terms of biblical theology, let alone sociology, it is reductionist to insist that believers must opt for only one social identity. For "witness" is the church's witness in the world. Without the community of believers there can be no witness. But without believers' involvement in the world there can be no witness either. Witnessing Christians, and especially first generation witnessing Christians, inevitably have a dual social identity. They did in the early church and they do today.

Thus converts who continue to relate to their Muslim friends and family are not in principle different from converts who continue to relate to their Hindu, atheist or postmodern friends and family. However, the extent to which dual belonging proves straightforward or problematic depends on a number of factors, including two in particular. The first is the degree to which either social group tolerates an individual belonging to the other group at the same time, and this varies a good deal from place to place in the Muslim world. The second factor is the extent to which the two social identities make conflicting claims on a person's loyalty at the core worldview level; here again membership of the *ummah* demands more in some contexts than it does in others.

⁹⁵ meaning broadly, "local and global church" and "worldwide Muslim community" respectively.

⁹⁶ Chris Flint, 'A Comparison of a Christian View of Ekklesia and a Muslim View of the Mosque as part of the Ummah and an Analysis of the Missiological Implications of these Views', Saint Francis Magazine, June 2012

Equal loyalty to both groups is not usually realistic. But to be a *member* of one group and simultaneously an *affiliate* of the other is often possible. This in fact is the solution many converts achieve: not always a comfortable solution, but survivable.

It seems clear to me that studies on social identity offer relevant insights to the dilemma of dual belonging so often faced by Muslim background Christians. It is by exploring different “dual social identity” solutions, with all their ambiguity and their variety from context to context, that both sides in the Insider Movements debate can move beyond their stereotyped insistence on either of the extreme “single identity” options.⁹⁷

In this article much must be left unsaid about the fascinating but complex issues of *multiple identity* for Christ’s followers from Muslim background, *hybrid identity* for their children and *collective identity labels* for their new communities. A good deal of research has been carried out on the analogous question of how first generation immigrants learn to fit in with their new host community while simultaneously belonging to their old ethnic one, and on why this creates “cognitive dissonance” in some circumstances and not in others. Studies also investigate how migrants’ children go on to incorporate elements of both social identities while transcending both, to form a hybrid “third culture”. Parallels with TCKs (“third culture kids”) are obvious.

6.2.1.1 A clarification

However, in a (probably unsuccessful) attempt to avoid being labelled as “for” or “against” Insider Movements, let me clarify three things about my position.

Firstly, I am not taking sides, but am simply proposing new tools to help the debate move beyond its present polarised stalemate.

⁹⁷ Indeed, some progress is already evident when Insider Movement advocates accept that “insider” believers should form a community of Jesus-followers in parallel with belonging in the Muslim community, or when their opponents clarify that they are not necessarily arguing for extraction. But neither side has yet publicly explained how “dual social identity” would work on their model.

Secondly, a dual social identity is more easily maintained than a dual core identity. The latter is called schizophrenia and is not to be recommended!

Thirdly, I do not argue that sociological approaches should replace theological ones. Rather, both are valuable and both are complementary. Theology is *normative* (“what should converts be doing?”) while the social sciences are *descriptive* (“what are converts actually doing?”).

6.2.1.2 Evidence from Islampur

I showed my interviewees a simple diagram of two circles, depicting different identity options at the social level. I asked them ‘In the diagram below, in which position do you find yourself: A, B, C or what?’

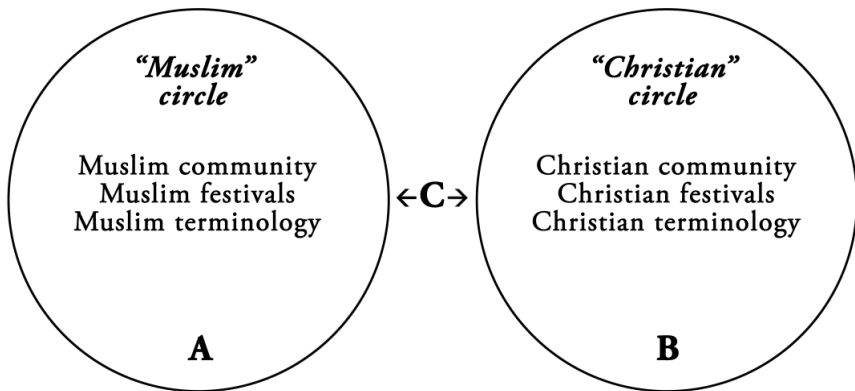


Figure 3. Two social identities

In interview after interview I noticed how readily they identified with this diagram. It made immediate, intuitive sense to them.

Interviewees described to me how their social identity had evolved over different stages of their life in Christ. This will be ana-

lyzed further in my PhD thesis, but I focus specifically on how marriage has affected their social identity options.

6.2.1.3 Those already married before their conversion

Converts who had married Muslims before conversion found themselves, by force of circumstances, in position “A”. Nazir, who despite being opposed by his wife has a strong core identity in Christ, would love to be able to express it at the social identity level also. But until his wife turns to Christ it is impossible to do so fully. Nazir felt that for someone like him,

if he is married with a family, then he has to stay in this [Muslim] circle. He can only completely enter that [Christian] circle by leaving his wife and children. But Christ never said to do that.

If I was still a Muslim I might have divorced her 12 or 15 years ago. But because Christianity does not permit this I am bound not to do that. But God can bring a time that if she is converted then I would move to [a named Christian neighbourhood]. I have often thought about that.

Therefore he has stayed with her for many years, trapped in a Muslim social identity at home. But his employment in a Christian organisation, and his freedom to visit his many Christian friends, puts him as much in position “C” as “A”. He continued,

The greatest wish in my life is for God to make my wife a Christian. The day that happens, it will be for me like celebrating Eid or a festival which makes a person happy, or celebrating a child's birth. When my wife comes to Christ I will be so happy! Everything is possible which seems impossible to me today. What seems like a mountain can become just dust.

I suspect that Nazir's passion for his wife to find Christ stems not only from his desire for her salvation, but also because he sees it as his only hope to integrate at last his core and social identities.

6.2.1.4 Those who converted before marriage

These were typically young adults who began their Christian life in position “A”, living as secret believers within their Muslim families. They also ventured out to meet with Christians at a safe distance from home, which introduced an element of position “C”. Young men working in the city, living away from their families but visiting them,

could occupy position “C” quite successfully, oscillating between Muslim and Christian social identities while never combining them.

However time marches on, and for all these single converts (nearly all male in my sample, and one female), the question of marriage eventually loomed. At this point they were typically torn between their own desire to marry a believer and their parents’ wish to marry them to a Muslim relative.

What would they decide about this critical question? They could not sit on the fence forever, in position “C”. Marrying a Christian would place them thereafter in position “B” and most of their social contact would be with Christians. Conversely, to marry a Muslim would bring them back into position “A” and their social identity would be with Muslims.

In Islampur, after marriage most of people’s socializing takes place among their relatives. Henceforth they will attend social occasions, celebrate festivals and help financially members of the family they have married into, whether Muslim on the one hand or Christian on the other.

However, although marriage determined interviewees’ main social circle it did not necessarily preclude all contact with the other circle on a permanent basis. Abdallah was one of those. His Muslim parents refused to attend his wedding to a Christian, or to meet her for another seven or eight years. He said

There was some danger, I thought, that they might give her poison...They accepted me but I wasn’t sure about their accepting her.

Eventually however his parents came to visit, drawn (as often in such cases) by their longing to see their grandchildren.

Khadim too married a Christian, but although his parents did not attend his wedding, they came to visit just a few weeks later, bearing gifts. He and his wife are totally uncompromising in their Christian stance, but they continue in social contact with his relatives. ‘They come to me, and I go to them with my children.’

Yusuf, on the other hand, married a Muslim. He is in position “A” and his social interaction is now mostly with his Muslim relatives

and friends. Though still able to go out and visit his Christian friends, he is not able to invite them home.

I conclude that marriage to a Muslim woman restricts social identity options for male converts, without curtailing them altogether. However, female converts who marry into a Muslim family will have far less opportunity to meet with believers outside the home, since their movements in public are so much more restricted.

6.2.1.5 A third social identity option

For a convert, in addition to the options of marrying a Christian or a Muslim, there is a possibility of marrying a fellow-convert. My interviewees discussed pros and cons of such a marriage, though none in my sample had done it themselves. The mentors varied in their opinion as to whether this was a good idea or not. Some felt that two converts could support each other well, as they would understand each other's background. Others thought this could leave them without family backing from either side.⁹⁸

6.3 Impact of marriage on converts' collective identity

Here my sample identity issue is of how marriage determines the collective label of the ensuing "family line".

6.3.1 Relevant social science theory

In the Indian subcontinent, collective identities matter a great deal. The Hindu caste system carries this to extremes, but in all South Asian communities people tend to introduce themselves according to their clan, religion, parentage or ethnic group. A person inherits her collective identity as "Muslim" by religion or "Punjabi" by ethnicity or "Rajput" by caste, even before drawing her first breath!

In such a society, to change one's religion as an individual is to challenge the social order itself. Rudolf Heredia explores the implications of this in the context of India where religious conversion has become a symbol of identity politics:

⁹⁸ Recall that in Islampur the convert community is not yet large enough to form its own "circle". In other countries where thousands have converted, a new convert community is a reality and marriages are taking place within it.

Conversions can destabilize the life of a people, unsettle painfully balanced boundaries, scramble carefully constructed identities...In situations of sharp and hostile religious boundaries between communities, conversion represents the ultimate betrayal.⁹⁹

Therefore, for all religious groups in South Asia (not just Muslims), for an unmarried young adult to convert to another religion marks a betrayal of his or her collective identity.

However, the situation is in principle redeemable up to the point of marriage; parents hope that their rebellious son or daughter might see the error of their ways, return to the fold, and through marriage be reabsorbed back into their original community. The collective identity will continue with the family line, and the “conversion” will have caused only temporary dishonour.

6.3.2 Evidence from Islampur

My research confirmed that marriage tends to “lock in” the collective identity of converts, either to their new Christian community or back to their old Muslim one. In discussing this topic, I was struck by how often interviewees spoke not about getting married “to” an individual but getting married “into” a community.

Those who marry back “into” Islam do not by that action change their core commitment as Christ’s followers, nor need they necessarily lose all social contact with Christians, though to keep both those identities strong in the long term is not easy. But what does definitively change on marriage is the collective identity of their “family line”, which will henceforth be set as either Christian or Muslim.

Interviewees who married “into” the Christian community thereby secured their family line as Christian, more or less.¹⁰⁰ This greatly displeased their Muslim relatives, which came as no surprise to me. But what did surprise and intrigue me was a finding which emerged unbidden from my interviews.

⁹⁹ Rudolf Heredia, *Changing Gods in India*, 2-3

¹⁰⁰ I write “more or less” because a convert, even after marrying into the Christian community, will often still be viewed as somewhat different, suspect, “not quite one of us”. Their children too, though integrated into the community, still carry a self-awareness of belonging to a “convert family”.

Take the case of Mazhar. He converted from Islam way back in 1962 and married a Christian woman, Sadia. Mazhar's parents accepted her quite well and in time even came to appreciate her more than their Muslim daughters-in-law, for she served them with kindness. Mazhar and Sadia had five daughters who, growing up, enjoyed a good relationship with their paternal grandparents. But then came the time for the eldest daughter's marriage, to a Christian man. At this Mazhar's Muslim family were furious and completely cut off all contact for the next fourteen years. I wondered why their reaction was so strong when they had tolerated Mazhar's own marriage to a Christian?

Then there was the interview with Ruhama, the only woman in my sample who had converted before marriage. Several male interviewees had gone on after conversion to marry Christians without incurring dire wrath from their parents. Why then in Ruhama's case did her marriage to a Christian man cause her parents to react in such violent fury that they sent thugs to beat him up and leave him with severe injuries?

A chance comment from a third interview showed me what lay behind this. After Nabila's Muslim husband left her, his relatives came to put pressure on her and her children. Her adult son told me,

They tried to pressurise us. They said 'No, the boy can go where he likes and get married, we won't let the girls go. Our family line will be spoiled'.

Then it all made sense. It was all about patrilineal concepts of the "family line", reinforced by *sharia*. Girls are given in marriage while boys are retained. Therefore even if a son converts and takes a Christian wife, and to all appearances they belong firmly in the Christian camp, this does not permanently rupture the blood-line in the eyes of his Muslim family. Their son retains in some sense a Muslim collective identity; and since he has probably not been able to

change his Muslim identity card,¹⁰¹ his children will inherit this “Muslim” label too.

But for a daughter or granddaughter to be taken in marriage by a Christian man is another matter altogether. She thereby is lost to the Muslim community, spoils the blood-line and brings shame on her whole extended family.

This explains not only the violent reaction of Ruhama’s parents to her marriage, as a first generation female convert, but also why the female offspring of a male convert still face problems a whole generation later. It explains therefore why Salma’s relatives were so angry when she and her sisters married Christians, even though it was her parents who had converted years before. It just shows how the ramifications of marriage can rumble on in the realm of collective identity even to the next generation.

7 Implications for the Insider Movements debate

7.1. Summary

In this paper I have sought to demonstrate that issues of identity for Christ’s followers from Muslim background are too complex to be condensed to a one-dimensional line called the C-spectrum. Reducing options still further to the stark polarity of “C4 vs. C5” or “Insider Movement vs. Historic Position” has led to an impasse which will not and cannot be broken until the model itself is changed.

I have proposed the beginnings of an alternative model which takes identity seriously and which proposes an analysis in terms of core identity, social identity and collective identity. There is nothing sacrosanct about these categories, though they are widely recognised in the social sciences and this allows for comparisons to be drawn and for helpful insights to inform the debate. Nor is there anything special about the three-layer diagram of identity, though I believe it allows for more options than the single-line C-spectrum, especially if

¹⁰¹ Identity cards are a massive issue for converts in many Muslim countries. Even if a convert manages to get by with “Muslim” on the identity card, (s)he cannot shake off the ramifications for marriage and for the children’s identity.

further complexity is added to the model to account for fluid, multiple, and hybrid identities.

I believe that understandings of identity derived from the social sciences need not conflict with those drawn from biblical theology. The Bible brings an added dimension of humans in relation to their Creator, but this links directly with their core identity, while biblical descriptions of people in their communities are compatible with notions of social and collective identity. Thus, at least so far as analysis of human phenomena is concerned, I have not till now found a clash between biblical and sociological perspectives. I do realise however, that while the social sciences aspire merely to describe and analyze, the scriptures go further by also offering instruction and guidance.

7.2. Suggestions

My studies in identity for Christ's followers from Muslim background are ongoing, and my conclusions as yet provisional. At this stage I venture the following suggestions:

- In the realm of *core identity*, true disciples of Christ will know themselves to be securely and unambiguously rooted in him (whatever terminology they use for that), will seek to prioritize his values over all rival values, and will increasingly demonstrate this in their speech and behaviour;
- In the realm of *social identity*, most believers will relate to both old and new communities simultaneously even if not equally. To expect them to retain just one social identity, whether Muslim or Christian, is neither realistic nor biblically appropriate;
- In the realm of *collective identity*, however, dual belonging is not normally possible. Whether they like it or not believers from Muslim background may be forced into one label or the other, "Muslim" or "Christian", until their numbers grow sufficiently for them to form a new collective identity of their own. They know their own available options and should be given space to try to find a way around the formidable constraints of such issues as identity cards and community labels;

- These considerations of identity, by disentangling previously fused issues and examining them from a new perspective, may perhaps provide a way for proponents and opponents of Insider Movements to step out of their dug-in positions and seek constructive ways forward;
- Crucially, both sides should examine carefully the factors that vary from one Muslim context to another, particularly with respect to the local relationship between Muslim and Christian communities, rather than assuming all situations are alike;
- Ex-Muslim Christians form a stream of growing significance in the world Christian movement and should be allowed to make their contribution to it without being patronised or “owned” by either side.

BOOK REVIEW:
REVISITING EMIR RISHAWI'S *A STRUGGLE*
THAT LED TO CONVERSION

*Reviewed by Azar Ajaj*¹⁰²

*A Struggle that Led to Conversion: Motives for a Gospel-based Faith by Emir Rishawi (Villach, Austria: Light of Life, 1993)*¹⁰³

In this three-section book Emir Rishawi addresses an issue that engaged his mind day and night for several years, which in the end resulted in his conversion from Islam to Christianity. Throughout the pages of this book, Rishawi is approaching the intellectual Muslims of his day (and ours), challenging them to build their convictions on a basis of critical thought and reason.

This project leads him to ask questions like, *Is the Shari'a relevant and applicable for our present time?* With this question the book starts, and the answer that he ultimately proposes is a firm 'no'. He argues that the Shari'a does not have any flexibility to adopt itself to the challenges of the modern age. And for those who claim the Islam and its laws are 'the solution' for the political and cultural corruption we see everywhere, he argues that the history of the Islamic countries does not give any evidence for this. Rather, in reviewing that history, all that we find is an *absence* of social justice, but we do find dictatorship of rulers, kings and caliphs. He points to the Iranian Revolution

¹⁰² Mr. Ajaj and his family live in Nazareth, Israel, where they attend Local Baptist Church. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Theology from Bethlehem Bible College, and a Master in Theology (Old Testament) from the International Baptist Theological Seminary (Prague). He lectures in biblical and pastoral studies at Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS) and be reached at azar.ajaj [at] nazarethseminary.org.

¹⁰³ Complete text available online in English at www.light-of-life.com/eng/answer/a4990efm.htm and in Arabic on www.light-of-life.com/arb/aquestion/index.htm

(1979) as an example of the violence which can grow out of Islam, rather than Islam being 'the solution'.

In pressing his argument, Rishawi takes on the thought of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), the influential Egyptian Islamist and author of *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Qur'an*—a key figure in the revival of political Islam in the 20th Century and a founding father of the Muslim Brotherhood. Qutb divides the world into two societies, the pure Islamic one that only follows the laws of God, and the pagan society of *jahiliyya*/ignorance. The only environment wherein the Shari'a can be applied is in the Islamic society. Qutb had made the shocking judgment that even the countries where almost all the people are Muslims (like Egypt) are not, in fact, Islamic societies, but they rather belong to the society of ignorance or *jahiliyya*. Since this is the case, imposing the Shari'a is out of the question an counterproductive. Rishawi agrees—there is no place for the Shari'a in the Muslim world today. (This desire to create a genuine Islamic society which then could truly live according to the Shari'a is one reason for the Brotherhood—it was to be that Islamic society or vanguard.)

In the book's second section, titled 'A New Reading of Qur'anic Verses', the author urges the Muslim reader to look at the Qur'an and its content in a critical way, daring to ask questions. What about the different recensions of the Qur'an? There were other recensions, some with more chapters and some with fewer, and certainly, he concludes, the Qur'an we have today was not the same as the one present during the time of Muhammad. Surely this is a problem.

Also, the historical event of the Qur'an is claimed to be a proof of its miraculous nature ('*ijaz*'). But this claim must be challenged by the the truth-seeker, since the Qur'an ignores the basic historical structure for the text such as time, place, etc. When speaking about the Cross, the writer points out, the Qur'anic narrative leaves the reader with unanswered questions. Then he asks, if there was a twisting of the Biblical story as it was being told in Muhammad's time, why is the Qur'an silent regarding what parts of the crucifixion story were changed, and by whom, and when? Finally he questions the 'illiteracy' of Muhammad as a sign of the miraculous nature of the

Qur'an. Perhaps we should rather conclude that he simply knew to read and write?

In the third section, Rishawi turns to the Bible and the Biblical character of Jesus. In this section he highlights two main things. First, the divinity of Christ, arguing that the Jesus we meet in the Bible is the Son of God and His last revelation. There is no shrinking away from the bold title of Sonship, either in English or Arabic, by this Egyptian ex-Muslim Christian, though that has become popular in some evangelical circles today. Second, through belief in him and his Cross, our salvation is secured. This security is the most brilliant facet of Christianity, and Islam cannot offer it.

All in all I found this to be a very good book—well-written and engaging. However, as I mentioned in the beginning, it is not written to the average Muslim, but for the intellectual Muslim. In his first section, Rishawi spends a lot of time in his discussion mainly addressing Sayyid Qutb. Within Egypt, with the recent elevation of Muhammad Morsi to the office of President, himself formerly of the Muslim Brotherhood, understanding Qutb's thinking is timely. But outside of Egypt, I wonder if he is considered a main authority in the Shari'a and political Islam.

In the second section, he outlines not only a new way of reading the Quran, but I would say a revolutionary way of reading it, and I suspect that the hermeneutic in this section could be developed in the context of a wider and deeper discussion.