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GOD'S BLESSING TO ISHMAEL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ISLAM

By Chris Flint¹

Introduction

The difficulty of Christian mission to the Islamic world continues to prompt much missiological discussion into new and more effective ways of reaching Muslims with the Gospel.² Proponents of new methodologies are keen to demonstrate that the Bible supports their particular approach to engaging with Islam.³ While the Bible does not discuss Islam directly, it is frequently assumed that Muslims are in some sense descended from Ishmael.⁴ If so, then God's blessing to Ishmael may be directly relevant to developing missionary strategy.

Historically, missionaries like Samuel Zwemer, who have given their lives to sharing the gospel with Muslims, have often drawn encouragement from Biblical prophesises about Ishmael's descendants.⁵ Commentator Gordon Wenham, however, considers

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² See, e.g., *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (ed. J. Dudley Woodberry; Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 2008).

³ See, e.g. *The International Journal of Frontier Missions* (online: <http://www.ijfm.org>); *The St. Francis Magazine* (online: <http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja>); and *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (online: <http://www.emisdirect.com>) for robust discussions of the current trends and methodologies in Christian mission to Muslims.

⁴ E.g., Anne Cooper, *Ishmael my Brother: A Christian Introduction to Islam* (rev. and enl. ed.; Tunbridge Wells: MARC, 1993), 9, quotes God's promise to bless Ishmael in Genesis 17:20-21 and then continues: "The children of Ishmael have certainly been fruitful and their numbers have greatly increased. There are now some billion Muslims and they continue to increase rapidly in many parts of the world."

⁵ Samuel M. Zwemer, "Hagar and Ishmael," *EQ* 22 (1950): 35, writes of Isaiah 60:6-7, "this gem of missionary prophecy leaves no room for doubt that the sons of Ishmael have a large place in this coming glory of the Lord and the brightness of His

God's blessing to Ishmael to have been fulfilled within the book of Genesis.⁶ This interpretation may undermine suggestions that Muslims have a special place in God's plans today.⁷

A study of the content and scope of God's blessing to Ishmael is thus highly relevant to current missiological discussion.

Chapter one of this dissertation investigates Genesis' presentation of God's blessing to Ishmael, and shows that this blessing is tied to the complex theological role of Ishmael and his descendants.

Chapter two demonstrates that wider Old Testament evidence is consistent with, but falls short of proving, the hypothesis that God's blessing to Ishmael was perpetuated to the Arabs.

Chapter three observes that, nevertheless, in the New Testament, Ishmael's theological significance turns, in part, on an assumed genetic link between Ishmael and the Arabs.

Chapter four investigates the significance of Ishmael within Islam, and finds that Ishmael's paternity of the Arabs was a key assumption in the development of Islam.

The conclusion then synthesises these findings and suggests implications for current missiology.

Abbreviations

AB = Anchor Bible

Ant. = Jewish Antiquities (Josephus)

ASV = American Standard Version

ESV = English Standard Version

LXX = Septuagint

NET = New English Translation

NIV = New International Version

NKJV = New King James Version

NRSV = New Revised Standard Version

rising." As cited in Jonathan Culver, "The Ishmael Promise and Contextualization Among Muslims," *IJFM* 17 (2000): 66.

⁶ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (WBC 2; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1994), 165-66.

⁷ Sam Schlorff, *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims* (Upper Darby, Pa.: Middle East Resources, 2006), 113-14.

Chapter 1: How does Genesis Present God's Blessing to Ishmael?

In this chapter I shall demonstrate that Genesis consistently presents God's blessing to Ishmael as two-edged. This ambiguity, which perpetuates to future generations of Ishmaelites, is rooted in the pre-natal circumstances which define Ishmael's theological role.

Genesis 17:20

Our study begins with Genesis 17:20, the only Bible verse where God is explicitly said to "bless" (*brk*) Ishmael. This verse comes within a divine speech,¹ delivered in response to Abraham's request in verse 18, "If only Ishmael may live before you!" Wenham shows that this speech exhibits semantic chiasm:²

- A Sarah will bear a son ... Isaac (19a)
- B I shall confirm my covenant with him (19b)
- C Ishmael (20)
- B' I shall confirm my covenant with Isaac (21a)
- A' Sarah will bear next year (21b)

This structure suggests both positive and negative theological significance to God's blessing to Ishmael. Positively, Ishmael is the speech's central focus: he will indeed be blessed, as Abraham requested. Negatively, however, verse 20 is flanked on both sides by God's plans for Isaac: Ishmael is overshadowed by Isaac, through whom alone God will perpetuate the Abrahamic covenant.³

¹ Genesis 17:19-21 is the fifth divine speech in Genesis 17. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 16.

² Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 26.

³ The *l* with which verse 21 begins is prefixed to the direct object, making the clause disjunctive. Cf. *IBHS* §39.2.3(c). William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and creation - an Old Testament covenantal theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1984), 26, explains that *qwm* in the *hifil* form is used to signify the perpetuation of a covenant. Thus, Genesis 17:19 (*zhqmtý 't-bryty 'tv*) and 17:21 (*v't-bryty 'qym 't-yshq*) announce that through Isaac's line alone will the covenant already established with Abraham continue.

To determine the content of God's blessing to Ishmael, the disputed temporal sense of the Hebrew clause in verse 20, *hnh brkty 'tv*, must first be determined.⁴

The first significant observation is that the verb, *brkty*, takes the *qatal* tense-form.⁵ In Hebrew narrative, the *qatal* regularly signifies past actions.⁶ However, there are examples of the *qatal* being used to convey future actions,⁷ especially in divine promissory contexts.⁸ A future sense, then, is possible in Genesis 17:20.

Second, the verb is immediately preceded and emphasised by the particle *hnh*.⁹ This construction suggests that God here intends to

⁴ Translations differ on how to translate verse 20. The NIV, NET and NRSV have God announcing a future blessing, which is implicitly identified with God's accompanying promises for Ishmael's future (e.g. NIV: "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: *I will surely bless him*; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation" [emphasis added]). By contrast, the ESV, ASV and NKJV put God's blessing to Ishmael prior Genesis 17, so making the promises in verse 20 additional to a blessing already given (e.g. ESV: "As for Ishmael, I have heard you; *behold, I have blessed him* and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation" [emphasis added]).

⁵ Fully located, *brkty* is a 1st person common singular *piel* perfect of *brk*, "to bless."

⁶ When translated into English, the *qatal* often conveys the simple past, perfect or pluperfect tenses (GKC §106b-i). Since the *qatal* tense-form encodes the perfective aspect, and the perfective aspect envisages actions as a whole, it is unsurprising to find the *qatal* commonly used in this way.

⁷ Gesenius describes the Hebrew perfect tense as expressing "actions, events, or states, which the speaker wishes to represent from the point of view of completion, whether they belong to a determinate past time, or extend into the present, or, while still future, as pictured in their completed state." GKC §106a. In the categories of modern linguistics, this is because the *qatal* tense-form encodes only the perfective aspect as a non-cancellable *semantic* value; the associated time reference, by contrast, is a variable, context-determined *pragmatic* value. There are parallels here with New Testament Greek: see Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

⁸ GKC §106m. E.g. Genesis 15:18 and Judges 1:2. Judges 1:2 is a particularly close parallel, because here, as in Genesis 17:20, the verb follows the particle *hnh*.

⁹ A Bibleworks search reveals 135 biblical examples of *hnh* immediately preceding a *qatal*, in many of which cases *hnh* serves to emphasise the finite verb. On only two other occasions is the verb *brk* (Numbers 23:11; 24:10), but on both of these occasions, *hnh* clearly functions to emphasise the verb.

emphasise the certainty of the blessing: precisely the illocutionary force expressed when a future event is portrayed using the perfective aspect.¹⁰

Genesis 17:20, then, should be understood as God promising a *future* blessing for Ishmael, the content of which is delineated by the following parallel *weqatal* clauses:¹¹

<i>hnh brkty 'tv</i>	<i>Qatal</i> clause	“I will surely bless him”
<i>vhpryty 'tv</i>	<i>Weqatal</i> clause	“I will make him fruitful”
<i>vhrybyty 'tv bm'd m'd</i>	<i>Weqatal</i> clause	“I will greatly increase his numbers”

God will bless Ishmael by making him fruitful and greatly increase,¹² two verbs which are then themselves given concrete expression: Ishmael will sire twelve rulers,¹³ and God will make him a great nation.¹⁴

This blessing echoes God’s promise in Genesis 16:10 to multiply Hagar’s offspring. The wordplay on Ishmael’s name in Genesis 17:20 also recalls a similar wordplay in Genesis 16:11.¹⁵ This

¹⁰ *IBHS* §30.5.1(e) describes this as a “perfective of confidence,” or “prophetic perfect,” by which “a speaker vividly and dramatically represents a future situation both as complete and as independent.” E.g. Genesis 30:13; Numbers 24:17. Note also that the LXX translates *brkty* with the aorist *eulogēsa*, which may be functioning like the “Proleptic Aorist” which in New Testament Greek is used rhetorically to stress the certainty of a future event. Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 564.

¹¹ When an independent *qatal* clause is followed by a *weqatal* clause in a simple consequential situation, the *qatal* clause is the logical basis for what follows. *IBHS* §32.2.3(c).

¹² Both *weqatals* are in the causative *hifil binyan*, showing that God is the agent who will bring about this blessing on Ishmael’s behalf. Note that in Genesis, the two verbs *prh* (“to be fruitful”) and *rbh* (“to multiply”) are regularly paired in contexts of blessing (cf. Genesis 1:22, 28; 9:1, 7; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4).

¹³ *šnym-šr nšy'm vylyd*. Note the word order: the direct object, “twelve rulers,” precedes the verb, and so is emphatic. Cf. GKC §142e.

¹⁴ *vhhtyv lgvv ydvl*.

¹⁵ Cf. Genesis 17:20, “As for Ishmael, I have heard you” (*vlyšm 'l šm'tyk*) and Genesis 16:11, “You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened” (*vqr't šmv yšm 'l ky-šm' yhv'h*). Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 27.

intertextuality signals that God's blessing to Ishmael should be understood against the background of Genesis 16.¹⁶ To this we now turn.

Genesis 16

In Genesis 16, the angel of the LORD finds Hagar in the desert and speaks to her concerning her unborn child.¹⁷ His words, however, are consistently ambiguous. In verse 10, he promises:

hrbh 'rbh 't-zr'k I will surely multiply your offspring
vl' yspr mrb so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.¹⁸

Positively, the reader recalls God's promises to give Abram innumerable descendants.¹⁹ Negatively, however, the expression *hrbh 'rbh*, "I will surely multiply," echoes its only other Biblical occurrence: Genesis 3:16, the curse upon Eve.²⁰ In verse 12, the angel makes three statements about Ishmael:

vhv' yhyh pr' 'dm He shall be a wild donkey of a man,
ydv bkl vyd kl bv his hand against everyone
and everyone's hand against him,
v'l-pny kl- 'hyv yškn and he shall dwell over against
all his kinsmen.

While the construction *pr' 'dm*, "wild donkey of a man,"²¹ is unique, Old Testament references to *pr'* depict a wild donkey

¹⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 17, sees further parallels between Genesis 16 and 17: time references form an *inclusio* around both chapters; and structurally, Genesis 16 has four angelic speeches with two comments by Hagar whereas Genesis 17 has five divine speeches with two questions by Abraham.

¹⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 4, entitles Genesis 16:7-14 "Hagar's encounter with the angel," which contains four angelic speeches, verse 10 being the third speech, and verses 11-13 the fourth.

¹⁸ Here, and throughout the dissertation, Bible translations come from the ESV unless otherwise stated.

¹⁹ Genesis 13:16; 15:5.

²⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 10.

²¹ Grammars agree that *'dm* functions here as a "genitive of genus." Joüon §129f; GKC §128l.

roaming independently through deserted lands.²² Bar-Efrat thus construes *pr' 'dm* positively: Ishmael will be “a free man, independent like the nomadic tribes of the desert, not a slave like his mother.”²³ Leupold, by contrast, sees here a forewarning of Ishmael’s “wild and lawless” nature.²⁴

The image is developed by the following asyndetic clause,²⁵ which is circumstantially subordinate.²⁶ Idiomatically, *yd* (“hand”) can be metonymic for “power.”²⁷ Already in Genesis 16, Hagar has been twice described as “in” and “under” the *yd* of her mistress.²⁸ Positively, then, the “donkey-man” will be strong and free, the reverse of subjugated Hagar.²⁹ Negatively, his hand will be “against everyone,” and vice-versa.³⁰ As Gispén puts it, “Ishmael’s love of freedom will bring him into mutual conflict in his dealings with all other men.”³¹

In the third statement, the phrase *’l-pny* is triply ambiguous. Neutrally, it could be translated “opposite” or “facing.”³² A positive nuance might be conveyed by the translation “before, in the sight of”:³³ unlike Hagar, who was forced to flee “from before” Sarai,³⁴ her

²² The *pr'* is associated with *mdbr* (Job 24:5; Isa 32:15; Jer 2:24) and *’rbh* (Job 24:5; 39:6).

²³ Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 207.

²⁴ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (London: Evangelical Press, 1972), 504.

²⁵ GKC §154a, n.1, suggests that an asyndeton can function “to produce a hurried and so an impassioned description.” Joüon §137f, notes that omission of the article is characteristic of archaic Hebrew poetry.

²⁶ GKC §156b.

²⁷ HALOT 338a.

²⁸ In verse 6, Abram tells Sarai that Hagar is “in your hand” (*bydk*); and in verse 9, the angel of the LORD commands Hagar to return to her mistress and humble herself “beneath her hand” (*tht ydyh*).

²⁹ Tony Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel: The Unfolding of God’s Prophetic Plan for Ishmael’s Line* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 72.

³⁰ The *b* preposition carries here an adversative sense. *IBHS* §11.2.5(d).

³¹ As cited in Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 11.

³² Cf. HALOT 944a. E.g. Genesis 23:19; 25:18; Numbers 21:11; Joshua 15:8.

³³ Cf. HALOT 944a. So NKJV: “And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.”

descendants will live near their brothers.³⁵ Negatively, though, *ʾl-pny* could be translated “against,” with the nuance “aggressively” or “at the expense of, to the disadvantage of.”³⁶

The immediate literary context favours resolving these ambiguities positively. Genesis 16:7-14 forms a unit,³⁷ immediately preceding which Hagar is fleeing,³⁸ yet immediately after which she has returned. This intervening pericope, then, narrates how Hagar’s course is changed. First, the angel of the LORD “finds” (*mš*’) her: a verb which, when predicated of God and taking a human object, can connote divine election.³⁹ The angel addresses Hagar by name,⁴⁰ commands her to return, and, between the ambiguous verses 10 and 12, gives the Bible’s first heavenly birth announcement:⁴¹

<i>hnk hrh</i>	Behold, you are pregnant
<i>vylkt bn</i>	and shall bear a son.
<i>vqr’t šmv yšm’l</i>	You shall call his name Ishmael, ⁴²
<i>ky šm’ yhv’h ’l-nyk</i>	because the LORD has listened to your affliction.

³⁴ In Genesis 16:6, Hagar fled “from before” (*mphyh*) Sarai’s oppression; and in 16:8, Hagar admits to fleeing “from before” (*mpny*) her mistress. Thus, that *pnh* occurs again in 16:12 is surely of significance.

³⁵ Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel*, 77.

³⁶ HALOT 944a. So NIV: “and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers.”

³⁷ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 9, notes the *inclusio* formed by references to a well.

³⁸ David C. Stancil, “Genesis 16:1-16; 21:8-21 – The Uncherished Child: A ‘Modern’ Wilderness of the Heart,” *R&E* 91 (1994): 394, argues that Hagar was attempting to reach her Egyptian homeland: “Hagar was courageous and resourceful, however, for by the next verse she had travelled nearly half-way home, to the ‘Oasis of the Desert of Shur,’ not far from the northeast border of Egypt.”

³⁹ E.g. Psalm 89:21. See Sean E. McEvenue, “A Comparison of Narrative Styles in the Hagar Stories,” *Semeia* 3 (1975): 69. S. Wagner, “*māšā*,” *TDOT* 8:478-79, notes that the expression *mš’ bmdbr* is used in the “discovery tradition” which “speaks of Yahweh’s election of Israel in the wilderness” (cf. Hosea 9:10; 13:5; Deuteronomy 32:10; Jeremiah 31:2).

⁴⁰ By contrast, there is no Old Testament record of any human character addressing Hagar by name.

⁴¹ Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel*, 66.

⁴² Note the wordplay: *yšm’l* means “God has heard.” Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 10.

Hagar then names God *ʾl r'ʾy*, “a God of seeing,”⁴³ and willingly returns to Sarai and the oppression from which she had fled.⁴⁴ Hagar’s change of direction indicates that she interpreted the angel’s words positively.⁴⁵

The wider context, however, brings another perspective. The chapter as a whole is framed by the verb *yld*, “to bear.”⁴⁶ Genesis 16 opens with the theme of Sarai’s barrenness,⁴⁷ and her plan to gain a son for herself through a surrogate mother.⁴⁸ The chapter’s main focus, then, is Abram and Sarai’s quest for a son. How does Genesis assess their actions?

Some commentators interpret Abram and Sarai’s actions positively.⁴⁹ Surrogate motherhood was entirely consistent with contemporary cultural morality.⁵⁰ Moreover, despite repeatedly promising Abram offspring,⁵¹ God had not yet explicitly identified the mother.⁵² Abram may, therefore, have interpreted Sarai’s

⁴³ Cf. the similar words of Leah (Gen 29:32) and Hannah (1 Sam 1:11). Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 10.

⁴⁴ Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel*, 64, notes that the angel’s command to return and submit to Sarai (verse 9) repeats the same verb, *nh*, which was used to describe her former oppression (verse 6).

⁴⁵ Jonathan Culver, “The Ishmael Promise and Contextualization Among Muslims,” *IJFM* 17 (2000): 63, argues that “[i]t would be strange indeed for the covenant angel to try and motivate Hagar to return to Abraham’s tent by pronouncing a curse on her child!”

⁴⁶ *yld* occurs twice in verses 1–2 and three times in verses 15–16.

⁴⁷ Sarai’s barrenness is a theme first introduced in Genesis 11:30.

⁴⁸ Literally, Sarai hopes in Genesis 16:2 to “build myself” (*ʾbnh*) through Hagar, but E.A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1964), 117 notes that this is “an obvious wordplay” between the verb “to build” (*bnh*) and the noun “son” (*bn*).

⁴⁹ E.g., Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion S.J.; London: SPCK, 1986), 250, states that “Sarah’s action was justified.”

⁵⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 7, explains that “surrogate motherhood is attested throughout the ancient Orient from the third to the first millennium B.C., from Babylon to Egypt. ... Given the social mores of the ancient Near East, Sarai’s suggestion was a perfectly proper and respectable course of action.”

⁵¹ Genesis 12:2, 7; 13:15–16; 15:4–5, 13–16, 18.

⁵² Not until Genesis 17:16 does God explicitly clarify that Sarah will be the mother.

prolonged barrenness as a sign that God wished another woman to bear his promised son.⁵³

The way Sarai announces her plan,⁵⁴ however, suggests a defiant attempt to circumvent the LORD's purposes.⁵⁵ This view is confirmed by the deliberate allusions to Genesis 3 in the way her scheme is narrated.⁵⁶ In verse 2, Abram "listened to the voice" of his wife Sarai,⁵⁷ and verse 3 recapitulates a sequence of verbs and nouns from Genesis 3:6:⁵⁸

<p>"Sarai, Abram's <u>wife</u>, <u>took</u> Hagar ... and <u>gave</u> her to Abram, <u>her</u> <u>husband</u>" (Gen 16:3).</p>	<p>"The woman [<u>wife</u>] ... <u>took</u> ... <u>gave</u> it to <u>her husband</u>" (Gen 3:6).</p>
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These allusions invite the reader to expect divine condemnation to follow. Verse 4 connects this expectation with Hagar, who is said to "despise" her mistress, a wordplay on the verb "to curse."⁵⁹

⁵³ In the worldview of Genesis, the LORD is the one who closes and opens wombs, a perspective which Abraham clearly shares. See e.g. Genesis 20:18; 25:21; 30:2.

⁵⁴ "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her."

⁵⁵ Phyllis Trible, "The Other Woman: A Literary and Theological Study of the Hagar Story," in *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honour of Bernard W. Anderson* (ed. James T. Butler, Edgar W. Conrad and Ben C. Ollenburger; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 222-23, comments: "[Sarai] attributes her barren plight to Yhwh and thus seeks to counter divine action with human initiative. What the deity has prevented, Sarai can accomplish through [Hagar]."

⁵⁶ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 153, considers this account to have "been intentionally shaped with reference to the account of the Fall in Genesis 3."

⁵⁷ The phrase *šm' lqwl* occurs only here and in Genesis 3:17. Wenham, *Genesis* 16-50, 7.

⁵⁸ Wenham, *Genesis* 16-50, 7-8.

⁵⁹ In Genesis 16:4, *qll* is in the *qal binyan*, and so is correctly translated "to despise." However, in this context, it is hard not to see a wordplay on its *piel* form "to curse" (as used in Genesis 12:3) and the related noun *qllh*, "a curse." Cf. Leonard J. Coppes, "*qālal*," *TWOT* 2:800. In verse 5, Sarai's description of Hagar as *hms* may contribute further to a divine retribution motif, since the only prior occurrences of *hms* in Genesis both come in Genesis 6, describing the reason for the flood.

The Hagar flight-narrative opens, then, with the reader suspecting Hagar of being God's instrument of divine curse.⁶⁰ But, upon whom will this curse fall? Sarai's words to Abram in verse 5, "May the LORD judge between you and me,"⁶¹ prime the reader to expect vindication of one party and judgment of the other. In this light, the chapter's conclusion is striking:⁶² Abram is blessed with a son, and Hagar is repeatedly declared the mother.⁶³ By contrast, Sarai, so prominent when the chapter began, goes unmentioned.⁶⁴ Her scheme has failed: Ishmael is not considered her own.

Genesis 16 thus provides an ambiguous backdrop to God's blessing to Ishmael: God intends Ishmael to simultaneously be a blessing to Abraham and a curse to Sarah,⁶⁵ so bringing comfort to Hagar.⁶⁶ This complex dynamic unfolds in Genesis 21.

⁶⁰ In this light, Hagar's Egyptian background, mentioned in verses 1 and 3, may also carry ominous overtones, coming as it does immediately after Genesis 15, where God asserted that Abram's descendants would be enslaved and mistreated in a foreign land.

⁶¹ The expression calls upon God to vindicate the innocent and condemn the guilty. Cf. 1 Sam 24:12, 15.

⁶² "And *Hagar* bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom *Hagar* bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when *Hagar* bore Ishmael to Abram." (Genesis 16:15-16, emphasis added).

⁶³ Ray Porter, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing?" *Faith to Faith Newsletter* (Summer 2009): 2, observes here that "[t]hree times... it is emphasised that this is Abraham's son."

⁶⁴ Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel*, 50, observes that Sarai is given prominence in Genesis 16:1 by virtue of the Hebrew word order (the subject, Sarai, precedes the verb). Moreover, in verse 2 she speaks for the first time in the Genesis narrative, even issuing commands to her husband.

⁶⁵ While Abram and Sarai were complicit in the same actions, it seems that God evaluated their motives very differently: Abram was sincerely, albeit misguidedly, attempting to fulfil God's promise via accepted contemporary social conventions. Sarai, however, crafted her scheme in defiance. The contrasting outcome here to Genesis 3, where *both* Eve *and* Adam were punished, thus suggests that in Eden, Adam shared with Eve not only the forbidden fruit but also her sinful intentions.

⁶⁶ Given the animosity between Hagar and Sarai mentioned in Genesis 16:4, it is possible that Hagar may have derived some comfort from the thought of her son growing up to bring suffering to her mistress.

Genesis 21

In Genesis 21, Ishmael, at Sarah's instigation, is expelled from the family home. Once again, however, Sarah's scheme does not frustrate God's plans. Rather, the events are so narrated as to emphasise that the aftermath is precisely the outworking of God's purpose for Ishmael revealed in Genesis 16 and 17.

Genesis 21:11-13 echoes Genesis 17. In another divine speech to Abraham about Ishmael, God again underscores his greater plans for Isaac,⁶⁷ but concedes that, for Abraham's sake, he will also make Ishmael into a nation.⁶⁸

Genesis 21:14-21 echoes Genesis 16. Once again, an angel addresses Hagar by name at a well in the desert.⁶⁹ Puns on the name "Ishmael" continue,⁷⁰ the description of Ishmael's future wilderness and hunting lifestyle recall the earlier "donkey-man" prophecy,⁷¹ and God's former promise to multiply Hagar's seed finds its focus in Ishmael, whom God shall make into "a great nation," as already disclosed to Abraham.⁷²

That "God was with the boy" indicates that God's blessing to Ishmael has already begun, as might also the reference to "Paran."⁷³ However, as in Genesis 16, Genesis 21:14-21 also alludes to the theme of divine curse: it concludes with the word "Egypt," and hints

⁶⁷ "through Isaac shall your offspring be named."

⁶⁸ Genesis 21:13, "I will make him a nation" (*lgvy 'šmnv*), echoes Genesis 17:20, "I will make him into a great nation" (*vnttyv lgvy gdl*).

⁶⁹ Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," *JBL* 117 (1998): 24, n. 4, notes that four of the seven occurrences of *mdbr* ("wilderness") in Genesis occur in the Hagar story: Genesis 16:7; 21:14, 20, 21.

⁷⁰ Compare Genesis 16:11, "You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction" (*vqr't šmv yšm 'l ky-šm' yhv'h 'l-'nyk*), and Genesis 21:17, "And God heard the voice of the boy... for God has heard the voice of the boy" (*vyšm' 'lhy'm 't-qvl hn'r ... ky-šm' 'lhy'm 'l-qvl hn'r*).

⁷¹ "He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow" (Genesis 21:20).

⁷² *lgvy gdl* is the same phrase used in Genesis 17:20.

⁷³ Dozeman, "Wilderness and Salvation History," 36, n. 44, observes that ancient Hebrew poetry sometimes portrays Paran as God's desert home (see especially Deuteronomy 33:2. Cf. Habakkuk 3:3).

at divine judgment by suggesting a recapitulation of Genesis 4. Cain, like Ishmael, was also “driven out”⁷⁴ to be a wanderer in the east.⁷⁵ Both faced death, yet received divine protection. Both also had younger brothers who received greater divine favour than they themselves did.

Significantly, Ishmael’s expulsion is triggered in Genesis 21:9 when Sarah sees him “*mšhq*.”⁷⁶ The sense of this word is disputed.⁷⁷ Classical *midrashim* posit criminal activity,⁷⁸ including sexual immorality,⁷⁹ idolatry,⁸⁰ murder,⁸¹ and mockery.⁸² Earlier documents, however, are more positive: Jubilees has Ishmael “playing and dancing,”⁸³ and the Septuagint, “playing with Isaac.”⁸⁴

⁷⁴ The verb *grš*, which describes how Ishmael was “driven out,” has occurred twice previously in the book of Genesis: in chapter 3, when Adam and Eve were “driven out” of Eden, and in chapter 4, where Cain was “driven out” of his family home.

⁷⁵ In Genesis 25:6 Abraham will also sent his concubines’ sons away from Isaac “to the land of the east.”

⁷⁶ Genesis 21:9. *mšhq* is the *piel* masculine singular participle of the verb *šhq*.

⁷⁷ In the Old Testament, *šhq* only occurs in *piel* form seven times: Genesis 19:14; 21:9; 26:8; 39:14, 17; Exodus 32:6; and Judges 16:25.

⁷⁸ See e.g. the interpretations given by Rabbi Akiba, Rabbi Ishmael, Rabbi Eleazar, Rabbi ‘Azariah and Rabbi Simeon, recorded in *Genesis* (vol. 1 of *The Midrash Rabbah*; trans. H. Freedman; New York: Soncino, 1977), 470. Moshe Reiss, “Ishmael, Son of Abraham,” *JBQ* 30 (2002): 256, argues that the negative Jewish perception of Ishmael arose as a reaction to political events, and observes that until the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem, “Ishmael” remained an acceptable Jewish name (e.g. the influential “Rabbi Ishmael,” born in the 1st century).

⁷⁹ The only other occurrence of *šhq* as a *piel* participle comes in Genesis 26:8, where King Abimelech sees Isaac “*mšhq* Rebecca his wife.” Cf. the *piel* infinitive constructs in Genesis 39:14, 17, where Potiphar’s wife accuses Joseph in of coming to “*lšhq* at me/us.”

⁸⁰ Cf. Exodus 32:6, in the golden calf pericope (*piel* infinitive construct of *šhq*).

⁸¹ Cf. 2 Samuel 2:14 and the bloodshed orchestrated by Abner and Joab (*piel* imperfect of *šhq*.) Note that *šhq* and *šhq* may be alternative forms, and are used as interchangeably in Judges 16:25. J. Barton Payne, “*šāḥaq*,” *TWOT* 2:762.

⁸² Cf. 2 Chronicles 30:10 (*hifil* participle of *šhq*).

⁸³ Jubilees 17:4, dated circa 2nd century BC.

⁸⁴ The LXX renders *mšhq* with the participle *paizonta*, and adds the words “*meta Isaak tou huiou autēs*.” BDAG 750a, drawing on references from as early as Homer (8th Century BC), defines *paizō*: “to engage in some activity for the sake of amusement,” and offers the English gloss “play, amuse oneself,” citing Genesis 21:9

Ascribing wickedness to Ishmael, however, is unnecessary, for in verse 10 Sarah makes her motives explicit:⁸⁵ she takes action merely to safeguard Isaac's inheritance and identity, topics which would likely be on Sarah's mind at Isaac's weaning ceremony,⁸⁶ not to punish Ishmael for any misdemeanour.⁸⁷

The significance of *mšhq*, then, probably derives from its wordplay on the name "Isaac."⁸⁸ Twice in Genesis 21,⁸⁹ and also in earlier chapters,⁹⁰ the name "Isaac" (*yšhq*) has been emphatically associated with its etymological root, *šhq*. What disturbs Sarah in verse 9, then, is *Ishmael* "Isaacking."⁹¹ Sarah sees him encroaching upon Isaac's identity: a significant theme in Genesis 21, where Ishmael is nowhere named,⁹² and where *mšhq* comes as the final word in verse 9, which verse falls within a wider sequence of verses all concluding with alternating references to Abraham's sons.⁹³

as an example of the phrase "*paizō meta tinos*" meaning "to play with someone." Apart from the LXX textual variant, however, it is not clear that Isaac was even present.

⁸⁵ "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac" (Genesis 21:10).

⁸⁶ 2 Maccabees 7:27 indicates that children were weaned aged three. Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel*, 85, suggests that at this rite of passage, by when the dangers of infant mortality would mostly have passed, the mother's concerns would naturally turn to her child's future.

⁸⁷ Cf. Genesis 25:6, where Keturah's children are similarly expelled for reasons of inheritance, with no indication of prior bad behaviour on their part.

⁸⁸ *yšhq*, like *mšhq*, is derived from the verb *šhq* (see Genesis 17:17-19).

⁸⁹ In Genesis 21:6, Sarah said, "God has made laughter (*šhq*) for me; everyone who hears will laugh (*yšhq*) over me."

⁹⁰ The thought of Sarah bearing a son in her old age moved both Abraham (Genesis 17:17) and Sarah (Genesis 18:12-15) to laughter (*šhq*).

⁹¹ So Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 87.

⁹² Ed Noort, "Created in the Image of the Son: Ishmael and Hagar," in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham* (ed. Martin Goodman, George H. Van Kooten and Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 42.

⁹³ Larry L. Lyke, "Where Does 'the Boy' Belong? Compositional Strategy in Genesis 21:14," *CBQ* 56 (1994): 644, observes an alternating sequence in verse 8 ending with *yšhq* (Isaac); verse 9 with *mšhq*; verse 10 with *yšhq* (Isaac); verse 11 with *bnv*

Genesis 21, then, reveals how Ishmael brings God's judgment upon Sarah. Just as Hagar blurred Sarah's relationship as Abraham's unique wife,⁹⁴ so also Ishmael will ape the identity of her unique Abrahamic son. Sarah rightly perceives that, in order to preserve Isaac's inheritance, his distinct identity must be preserved.⁹⁵ In accordance, therefore, with contemporary cultural practices,⁹⁶ Sarah demands Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion.⁹⁷

On the one hand, then, Genesis 21 develops Ishmael's blessing, given for Abraham's sake. Yet, on the other hand, the narrative shows that, just as Ishmael was a curse to Sarah, so also in the next generation, Ishmael will be a threat to Isaac, endangering his inheritance by mimicking his identity.⁹⁸

Genesis 25

When Genesis 25 concludes narrative interest in the relationship between Isaac and Ishmael, their relationship, surprisingly, seems entirely amicable. Verse 9 notes Isaac and Ishmael's joint burial of

("his son" – Ishmael); verse 12 with *lk zr'* ("your seed" – Isaac); and verse 13 with *zr'k hv'* ("he is your seed" – Ishmael).

⁹⁴ Ishmael was conceived as a consequence of Hagar being given to Abram in Genesis 16:3 "as a wife" (*l'h*). Prior to Genesis 16, this identity was predicated unambiguously and exclusively of Sarai.

⁹⁵ Notice Sarah's sharp distinction between the boys' identities: "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac" (Genesis 21:10).

⁹⁶ For example, the 19th century B.C. Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode, §25, states: "If a man marries a wife and she bears him a child and the child lives, and a slave woman also bears a child to her master, the father shall free the slave woman and her children; the children of the slave woman will not divide the estate with the children of the master." See Martha Roth, "The Laws of Lipit-Ishtar," COS 2:154; and S. N. Kramer, "Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode," *ANET* 160. Similar provisions are made in the Hammurabi Code, §171 (see COS 2.131 and *ANET* 173). Cf. also Genesis 25:6 and Judges 11:1-3.

⁹⁷ Sarah employs in her demand the imperative of *grš*, which may carry the technical meaning of "divorce" (this usage is clearly attested in the passive form: see BDB 176b).

⁹⁸ The parallels to the Genesis 27 Jacob and Esau narrative are striking.

their father,⁹⁹ and verse 11 records that Isaac lived near Beer Lahai Roi, the well Hagar had named.

This absence of conflict between the two brothers in later life is an impression shared also by early Jewish writings¹⁰⁰ and lectionaries,¹⁰¹ and strengthened by the observation that Esau would presently marry Ishmael's daughter, specifically to appease his father Isaac.¹⁰²

The relationship between Isaac and Ishmael's descendants, however, is portrayed in a way suggestive of the same relational tensions observed above.

In Genesis 25:12-18, the *toledot* of Ishmael immediately precedes the *toledot* of Isaac, beginning in verse 19.¹⁰³ Given Genesis' wider pattern of recording the non-elect line before proceeding to the elect line,¹⁰⁴ this literary arrangement affirms that the theological priority of Isaac over Ishmael similarly extends to their descendants.

Within this *toledot* come allusions to God's promises for Ishmael's future. As promised in Genesis 17:20, Ishmael's twelve

⁹⁹ Similarly, a reconciled Esau and Jacob would together bury their own father, Isaac, in Genesis 35:29.

¹⁰⁰ Jubilees 22 (2nd century B.C.) describes the occasion of Abraham's death and burial, and presents Isaac and Ishmael as sharing a harmonious, even joyful brotherly relationship.

¹⁰¹ David J. Zucker, "Conflicting Conclusions: The Hatred of Isaac and Ishmael," *Judaism* 39 (1990): 44, contemplates that "[although] the divisions into *parshiyot* (weekly readings from the Torah) were made much after the Biblical period, it is instructive that the place where the brothers are pictured together (reconciled?) is found at the end of that section known as *Hayyei Sarah*, which begins with the *death* of Sarah and ends with the *death* of Abraham. The old era has ended, and the old tensions can now be put away."

¹⁰² Genesis 28:8-9, cf. Genesis 36:3.

¹⁰³ The *toledot* is a key structural marker in the book of Genesis, used to indicate the start of a new narrative section. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC 1; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1987), 55.

¹⁰⁴ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 162, writes: "From Gen 11 onwards, short genealogies of Shem, of Ishmael, and of Esau (11:10-26; 25:12-18; 36:1-43) alternate with the much fuller family histories of Terah, Isaac, and Jacob (11:27-25:11; 25:19-35:29; 37:1-50:26). As is customary in Genesis, the story of the non-elect line, here Ishmael, is dealt with before the history of the chosen line, here Isaac, is described."

sons become twelve rulers,¹⁰⁵ and they settle “from Havilah to Shur,” recalling God’s promise to multiply Hagar’s descendants,¹⁰⁶ and make Ishmael a “great nation.”¹⁰⁷

However, the threat which Ishmael’s blessing posed to Isaac is also presented as propagating to the subsequent generations. The section is framed by references to Egypt,¹⁰⁸ and concludes with Ishmael’s descendants settling “*l-pny* all his brothers.”¹⁰⁹ The syntax indicates that this is a direct quotation of the angelic pronouncement in Genesis 16:12 that Ishmael would live “*l-pny* all his brothers.”¹¹⁰ In that context, and confirmed by the plot developments of Genesis 21, the phrase carried the connotations “at the expense of, to the disadvantage of.”¹¹¹ Now this description is reapplied to Ishmael’s descendants.¹¹² Will they similarly jeopardise Isaac’s descendants, imperilling their inheritance by mimicking their identity? That Ishmael has twelve sons, each a tribal ruler, seems to suggest so.¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ Genesis 25:16 uses the same phrase, “twelve rulers” (*šnym-šr nšy’m*), as in Genesis 17:20.

¹⁰⁶ Genesis 16:10.

¹⁰⁷ Genesis 21:18.

¹⁰⁸ In verse 12 the reader is reminded that Hagar was an Egyptian, and in verse 18, that Ishmael’s descendants settled “from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria.”

¹⁰⁹ Genesis 21:18.

¹¹⁰ That these words should be read as a direct quotation is made explicit by the retention of the singular form, “all *his* brothers” (*kl-’hyv*), which jars with the immediate context, where the phrase “all *their* brothers” (*kl-’hyhm*) might have instead been expected. In this light, the change of subsequent verb from *yškn* (Genesis 16:12) to *nfl* (Genesis 21:18) may well go beyond mere synonymy. Thus Speiser, *Genesis*, 188, translates this clause: “each made forays against his various kinsmen.”

¹¹¹ Cf. HALOT 944a. Recall that, given Hagar’s dislike of Sarai (Genesis 16:4), a hostile reading of *l-pny* would likely have contributed to Hagar’s encouragement to return.

¹¹² Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 165, thinks this “direct quote... probably hints at the later antagonism between the Bedouin-like Ishmaelites and the more settled Israelites.” So NIV: “And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.”

¹¹³ Genesis 25:16. Cf. the general biblical pattern observed by Seth D. Kunin, “Israel and the Nations: A Structuralist Survey,” *JSOT* 82 (1999): 19, that “those na-

Other relevant passages

Within Genesis, subsequent interaction between Isaac's covenant line and the Ishmaelites is limited to two brief references: Genesis 37:25-28 describes how Joseph was purchased by an Ishmaelite trade caravan and taken to Egypt, and Genesis 39:1 mentions that Potiphar then purchased Joseph "from the hand (*yā*) of the Ishmaelites."¹¹⁴

These verses may suggest that, in line with God's promise to make Ishmael a great nation, the Ishmaelites have already become wealthy merchants.¹¹⁵ Conversely, the allusion to Genesis 16:10,¹¹⁶ and connection with "Egypt," hints at the Ishmaelites' as an instrument of divine curse. Then again, in the context of Genesis as a whole, the actions of the Ishmaelites ultimately prove a blessing to Abraham's covenant line.¹¹⁷

Summary

Genesis 16 introduces Ishmael as God's instrument to simultaneously vindicate Abraham and bring judgment upon Sarah, thereby comforting Hagar. Genesis 17 then announces God's blessing to Ishmael which facilitates him in this complex role. As the narrative progresses, it becomes clear that Ishmael's function will later be shared by his descendants.

On the one hand, then, Ishmael and the Ishmaelites, despite being outside the Abrahamic covenant, nevertheless become a credit

tions which are most closely related to the Israelites are presented as being the most ideologically negative."

¹¹⁴ *myd hyšm''lym*.

¹¹⁵ Cf. John Calvin, *A Commentary on Genesis* (trans. John King; London: Banner of Truth, 1965), 271: "This passage, however, teaches us how far the sons of Abraham, after the flesh, were preferred to the elect offspring; in which, nevertheless, the hope of the future Church was included. We see that, of the two sons of Abraham, a posterity so great was propagated, that from both proceeded merchants in various places: while that part of his seed which the Lord had chosen to himself was yet small."

¹¹⁶ "... his hand (*yā*) against all his brothers."

¹¹⁷ Had Joseph not been taken down to Egypt, Jacob's family may well have perished in the later famine.

to Abraham: a great nation, powerful, nomadic and independent, the very reverse of Hagar. On the other hand, precisely as this great nation, they threaten, by imitation, to subvert the distinct identity of the genuine covenant heirs, implicitly imperilling their receipt of the promised inheritance.¹¹⁸

Chapter 2: Does this Blessing Extend to the Arabs?

Chapter one showed how Genesis presents God's blessing to Ishmael as tied to his role with respect to the covenant line. Since this role is inherited genetically, it would follow that the Arabs, from whom the first Muslims came, would share in God's blessing to Ishmael, if they were in fact Ishmael's descendants. The Old Testament, however, as this chapter will show, is not concerned to make this link.

Who were the Arabs?

Etymologically, "Arab" refers to nomadic desert dwellers without reference to ethnicity or nationality.¹¹⁹ The first extrabiblical occurrence appears in an Assyrian text referring "Gindibu the Arabian" and his "1,000 camels," an enemy defeated by Shalmaneser III in 853 BC.¹²⁰

The Old Testament portrays Arabs as living in tents¹²¹ in the desert.¹²² Their relationship with Israel varies across history.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 153, "the very child who discloses the *passion* of God for the outsider is no small *threat* to the insider" (italics original).

¹¹⁹ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (10th ed.; London: Macmillan, 1970), 41.

¹²⁰ Tony Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel: The Unfolding of God's Prophetic Plan for Ishmael's Line* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 111.

¹²¹ Isaiah 13:20.

¹²² Jeremiah 25:24.

¹²³ Solomon and Jehoshaphat received tribute from them (1 Kings 10:15; 2 Chronicles 17:11); Jehoram was defeated by them (2 Chronicles 21:16; 22:1); Uzziah defeated them (2 Chronicles 26:7); and Nehemiah was opposed by them (Nehemiah 2:19; 4:7; 6:1). Jeremiah 9:25-26 may also refer to them negatively.

The prophets sometimes link Arabia with the Dedanites,¹²⁴ descendants of Keturah.¹²⁵

What happened to the Ishmaelites?

Extrabiblical traditions claim that descendants of Ishmael and Keturah lived in the desert, intermarried, “and their name was called Arabs, and Ishmaelites.”¹²⁶ The Old Testament confirms this Ishmaelite tendency to intermarry with different tribes, recording Ishmaelite marriages to Edomites,¹²⁷ Midianites¹²⁸ and Israelites;¹²⁹ indeed, it appears that two whole Ishmaelite tribes merged with the southern Israelite tribe of Simeon.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Isaiah 21:13 (though NRSV here is less specific); Jeremiah 25:23-24; Ezekiel 27:20-21.

¹²⁵ Genesis 25:3; 1 Chronicles 1:32.

¹²⁶ Jubilees 20:12-13: “And Ishmael and his sons, and the sons of Keturah and their sons, went together and dwelt from Paran to the entering in of Babylon in all the land which is towards the East facing the desert. And these mingled with each other, and their name was called Arabs, and Ishmaelites.” F. Millar, “Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam,” *JJS* 44 (1993), 37, cautions, however, that although the Greek text of Jubilees is probably based on a Hebrew original composed in the 2nd century B.C., this particular passage is absent from “the quite numerous Hebrew fragments” of Jubilees found at Qumran.

¹²⁷ It has already been noted that Esau married Ishmael’s daughter (Genesis 28:9; 36:2-3).

¹²⁸ This would explain why in both Genesis 37:25-28, 36 and Judges 8:22-24 the terms “Ishmaelite” and “Midianite” seem to be used synonymously.” Another possibility, suggested by Rabbi Judah in *Genesis* (vol. 1 of *The Midrash Rabbah*; trans. H. Freedman; New York: Soncino, 1977), 542-543, is that Keturah should actually be identified with Hagar, taking the name “Keturah” figuratively, and reading *hpylgšym* in Genesis 25:6 defectively. His argument, however, lacks corroborative manuscript evidence.

¹²⁹ Amasa was born to an Israelite mother and an Ishmaelite father (1 Chronicles 2:17, although cf. the textual variant in the MT of 2 Samuel 17:25).

¹³⁰ 1 Chronicles 4:25 records Mibsam and Mishma as sons of Simeon. This perhaps foreshadows the Arab “genealogising” process whereby one tribe unites with another and adopts their ancestry. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), 5-6, describes how, just as in the Old Testament tribes were united by a “blood-relationship, real or supposed,” so also a newcomer may be “genealogized” into an Arab tribe and “considered as being of the same blood” when he “acknowledges the tribe’s ancestor as his own, that he will marry within the tribe and raise up his family inside it.” When multiple tribes

Like the Arabs, the Ishmaelites' relationship with Israel also varies throughout history. At one time, Asaph lists them among Israel's foes.¹³¹ At another, "Obil the Ishmaelite" is in charge of Solomon's camels.¹³²

Can the Ishmaelites be linked to the Nabatean Arabs?

By the end of the Old Testament period, the Nabateans had become the dominant Arab tribe,¹³³ and Josephus thought they were descended from Ishmael.¹³⁴ Modern scholarship has attempted to link the Nabateans with two Ishmaelite tribes in particular: Nebaioth, and Kedar, Ishmael's first and second sons.¹³⁵

Graf thinks that linguistic and historical evidence suggests the identification of Nebaioth with the Nabatean Arabs.¹³⁶ This prospect, however, seems unlikely.¹³⁷

coalesce in this way, "[t]his procedure leads to the invention of eponymous ancestors."

¹³¹ Psalm 83:6.

¹³² 1 Chronicles 27:30. Lewis R. Scudder Jr., "Ishmael and Isaac and Muslim-Christian Dialogue." *Dialog* 29 (1990): 30, also believes that Ishmaelites authored Proverbs 30-31.

¹³³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (2 vols.; Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 2: 1033, comments that at this time "[m]ost of the inhabitants of Arabia were Nabateans, whose language was a precursor of modern Arabic. ... Strabo, who provides the most extensive description of the Nabateans, speaks of "Arabia of the Nabateans" (16.4.21)." Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 43, agrees, and suggests that "[t]he Arabs in Acts 2:11 were also in all probability Nabataeans."

¹³⁴ *Ant.* 1.12.4. In *Ant.* 1.12.2., Josephus also explicitly assumes that the Arabs in general descended from Ishmael, commenting on Genesis 25:1-5 that, whereas the Jews circumcise their sons on the 8th day, "Arabs defer the ceremony to the thirteenth year, because Ishmael, the founder of their race, born of Abraham's concubine, was circumcised at that age."

¹³⁵ Genesis 25:13.

¹³⁶ David F. Graf, "Nabateans," *OEANE* 4:82, notes that "linguistic and historical evidence suggest the identification is not without some basis."

¹³⁷ Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 61, n.1, writes: "Heb. Nēbāyōth, Assy. Nabaitai, Nabaitu, are apparently not the Nabataeans," and David F. Graf, "Nabateans," *ABD* 4:970, concedes that linguistically, "[t]he absence of the *yod* and presence of the emphatic *tet* (rather than *taw*) makes it difficult to assume any relationship between [Nabayōt and Nabatū]." On the other hand, E.C. Broome, "Nabaiat, Nebaioth and the Nabataeans: the Linguistic Problem," *JSS* 18 (1973), 1, cited in Millar, "Hagar,

A stronger case can be made for Kedar, of whom, Knauf argues, the Nabataens are a sub-clan.¹³⁸ In Old Testament prophetic literature, “Kedar” is associated with Nebaioth,¹³⁹ and can also be used as shorthand for all the North Arabian tribes.¹⁴⁰ Kedar is portrayed similarly to the Arabs: far from Israel,¹⁴¹ and known for camels,¹⁴² tents,¹⁴³ trade,¹⁴⁴ military power,¹⁴⁵ and aggression.¹⁴⁶ The Nabatean Arabs arose between the demise of Kedar and the rise of Islam.¹⁴⁷

Intriguingly, a 5th century B.C. Kedar dynastic house has been discovered two hundred miles north of Medina.¹⁴⁸ Moreover, the Qur’anic script was derived from the Nabataens.¹⁴⁹ If the Nabatean Arabs were, as some current theories posit, descended from Ishmael, then, in turn, the first Muslims may have inherited from them God’s blessing to Ishmael.¹⁵⁰

Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam,” 34, n. 29, argues that, since the crucial factor would have been pronunciation rather than spelling, a possible shift in written form from *t* to *ʃ* should not be ruled out.

¹³⁸ Ernst A. Knauf, “Nabataean Origins,” in *Arabian Studies in Memory of Mohamed Ghul: Symposium at Yarmuk University December 8-11, 1984* (ed. Moawiyah Ibrahim; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989), as cited in Culver, “The Ishmael Promise,” 68.

¹³⁹ Isaiah 60:7.

¹⁴⁰ J. Ridderbos, *Isaiah* (trans. John Vriend; BSC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 185.

¹⁴¹ Jeremiah 2:10.

¹⁴² Jeremiah 49:28-29.

¹⁴³ Song of Solomon 1:5.

¹⁴⁴ Ezekiel 27:21.

¹⁴⁵ Isaiah 21:16-17.

¹⁴⁶ Psalm 120:5-7.

¹⁴⁷ Jonathan Culver, “The Ishmael Promise and Contextualization Among Muslims,” *IJFM* 17 (2000): 68.

¹⁴⁸ Culver, “The Ishmael Promise,” 68.

¹⁴⁹ Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 70, writes: “This Nabataean cursive script ... developed in the third century of our era into the script of the North Arabic tongue, the Arabic of the Koran and the present day.”

¹⁵⁰ So Culver, “The Ishmael Promise,” 6, who argues “that the rise of the Muslim world stands as a corollary expression of God’s faithfulness to Abraham.”

Summary

The Old Testament suggests some affinity between the later Ishmaelites and the Arabs, but falls short of equating them.¹⁵¹ A significant counter-argument, albeit from silence, is that Arabs are nowhere presented as subverting Israel's identity or challenging their inheritance.

An Ishmaelite origin for the Arabs, then, remains unproven. Nevertheless, this link was commonly accepted amongst first century Jews,¹⁵² who considered the Nabateans their closest gentile relations.¹⁵³ This context is significant to the New Testament portrayal of Ishmael, to which we now turn.

Chapter 3: The Hagar-Sarah “Allegory” in Galatians

Galatians 4:21-31 is the only New Testament passage to refer to Ishmael. There, Paul relates Ishmael to the first century Judaizers.¹⁵⁴ In this chapter, I will show that Paul's argument builds upon Genesis' presentation of God's blessing to Ishmael,

¹⁵¹ Millar, “Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam,” 32, carefully notes that “no explicit identification of ‘Ishmaelites’ and ‘Arabs’ is offered anywhere in the biblical text.”

¹⁵² Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (London: SCM, 1997), 111, note that Targum Isa. 60.6 speaks in general terms of the Arabs, 60.7 in synonymous parallelism with the Nabataeans.”

¹⁵³ Hengel and Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch*, 110, write: “The Jews regarded the ‘Arabs,’ embodied by what was then politically the most powerful Arab people in the immediate environment of Eretz Israel, the Nabataeans, as descendants of Ishmael the son of Abraham, i.e., as kindred tribes. Another more closely related people, the Idumaeans and ‘descendants of Esau,’ had been converted to Judaism by John Hyrcanus I (135/4–104 BCE). So the Arab Nabataeans appeared to be the closest ‘kinsfolk’ of the Jews who were still Gentiles.” These comments align with 1 Maccabees 5:25 and 9:35, which show instances of friendly relations between Jews and Nabateans.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (ECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 39–52, gives a robust defence of the Patristic and Reformation view that the false teachers Paul was confronting in Galatians were Judaizers: Jewish Christians who demanded, *inter alia*, that the Galatian Christians submit to circumcision as a prerequisite to gaining God's full acceptance.

discussed in chapter one, by drawing on first century beliefs in an Ishmaelite-Arab connection, discussed in chapter two.

Literary context

Galatians 4:21-31 concludes a major epistolary section running from 3:1 to 4:31.¹⁵⁵ As its “bookend” verses indicate,¹⁵⁶ Paul in this section is refuting false teaching that has undermined the Galatians’ sense of identity.¹⁵⁷ Judging from the frequent mentions of “Abraham,”¹⁵⁸ the Judaizers likely contested the Galatians’ claim to Abrahamic heritage.¹⁵⁹ Barrett, yet more precisely, thinks the Judaizers pejoratively identified the Galatian Christians as Hagar’s

¹⁵⁵ Timothy George, *Galatians* (NAC 30; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 352, n.10, following Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990), 223-24, argues that in Galatians 5:1 “the lack of a transitional phrase or particle, together with the prominent placement of the watchword *eleutheria*, suggests that this verse properly marks a new beginning in the epistle.” So also Ernest de Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921), 269; and Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 255. *Contra* Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1982), 226; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 216; R. Alan Cole, *The Letter of Paul to the Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; rev. ed.; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 185, who follow Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (10th ed.; London: Macmillan, 1890), 202, in treating 5:1 as concluding the argument of Galatians 4 rather than introducing a new section.

¹⁵⁶ “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” (Gal 3:1); cf. “Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.” (Gal 4:31).

¹⁵⁷ George, *Galatians*, 348, comments: “[Galatians 4:31] provides an answer to the central question of Gal 3-4: Who are the true members of the family of Abraham? Somehow the Galatians had become confused, ‘bewitched,’ about their own spiritual identity despite the fact that the Spirit had been abundantly poured out upon them when they were first converted to Christ (3:1-5).”

¹⁵⁸ Abraham is mentioned eight times in Galatians, all in chapters 3-4 (3:6, 7, 8, 9, 14, 16, 18; 4:22).

¹⁵⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians* (REC; Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2005), 181.

offspring,¹⁶⁰ prompting Paul to pen Galatians 4:21-31 as the subversive conclusion to his counterargument.¹⁶¹

Literary structure

Grammatical and semantic parallelism delineates three paragraphs within Galatians 4:21-31.¹⁶²

The first paragraph, verses 21-23, begins with a rhetorical question:¹⁶³ “Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?”¹⁶⁴ Paul then reviews the “law”:¹⁶⁵ Abraham had two sons, one “born to the slave woman, according to the flesh,”¹⁶⁶ the other “to the free woman, through the promise.”¹⁶⁷

In the second paragraph, verses 24-27, Paul interprets these data so as to identify Ishmael with the unbelieving Jews and Isaac with the Christians.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁰ Charles Kingsley Barrett, “The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians,” in *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), 158-65 argues that Paul in Galatians 4:21-31 is doing what he has already done in Galatians 3:6, 10, and 16: “taking up passages that had been used by his opponents, correcting their exegesis, and showing that their Old Testament prooftexts were on his side rather than on theirs.”

¹⁶¹ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 112, describes this as “hermeneutical jujitsu. [Paul] not only deflects the force of the charge but also turns it to his own advantage.”

¹⁶² See Appendix 1, “Structure of Galatians 4:21-31,” for a flow diagram. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 294, observes that “most commentators agree that the text is divided into at least three sections that begin with 4:21, 4:24, and 4:28.”

¹⁶³ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 294.

¹⁶⁴ *Legete moi, hoi hupo nomon thelontes einai, ton nomon ouk akouete;*

¹⁶⁵ Note Paul’s wordplay here from *nomos* as the Mosaic “law” in particular to the “Torah” in general.

¹⁶⁶ *ek tēs paidiskēs kata sarka gegennētai.*

¹⁶⁷ *ek tēs eleutheras di’ epangelias.*

¹⁶⁸ Both textual options for Galatians 4:26, “*mētēr hēmōn*” (“our mother”), and the less well attested “*mētēr pantōn hēmōn*” (“mother of all of us”), affirm “Sarah” as the mother of all Christians in general, not merely of the Galatian Christians in particular. Correspondingly, and also in view of Paul’s former argument in Galatians about the Sinai covenant, “Hagar” should be seen as the mother of all the unbelieving Jews in general, not merely of the Judaizers in particular.

In the third paragraph, verses 28-31, Paul draws on these Ishmael/Isaac identities to respond to his initial rhetorical question.

Paul's hermeneutic in 4:24-27

Paul's hermeneutic in 4:24-27 is hotly debated.¹⁶⁹ The section begins: "Now these may be interpreted allegorically."¹⁷⁰ The verb *allēgoreō*, a New Testament and Septuagint *hapax legomenon*, means "to speak allegorically,"¹⁷¹ and was used semi-technically in literature from the 5th century B.C. onwards to describe interpretations of Greek myths,¹⁷² particularly Homer's works.¹⁷³ In the first century, Philo advocated similarly nonhistorical interpretations of the Old Testament.¹⁷⁴ Paul, however, differs from standard allegorising by assuming the historicity of the Old Testament narrative.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Scholars identifying Galatians 4:24-27 as an allegory include Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 321-27, and Steven Di Mattei, "Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21-31) in Light of the First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics," *NTS* 52 (2006): 102-22. E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), 130, prefers a typological reading. Anne Davis, "Allegorically Speaking in Galatians 4:21-5:1," *BBR* 14 (2004): 161-74; Charles H. Cosgrove, "The Law Has Given Sarah No Children (Gal 4:21-30)," *NovT* 29 (1987): 221, n. 12; and K. H. Jobes, "Jerusalem, Our Mother: Metalepsis and Intertextuality in Galatians 4:21-31," *WTJ* 55 (1993): 299, think that neither "allegory" nor "typology" accurately describes Paul's hermeneutical method here.

¹⁷⁰ *Contra* ESV, "Now *this* may be interpreted allegorically" (emphasis added). The ESV translation team seems to have overlooked that the Greek construction *hatina estin allēgoroumena* exemplifies the tendency of neuter plural subjects to take a singular verb. Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 399.

¹⁷¹ BDAG 46A defines "*allēgoreō*": "to use analogy or likeness to express someth.," with the gloss: "speak allegorically."

¹⁷² BDAG 46A.

¹⁷³ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 300.

¹⁷⁴ Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 159. Origen and Clement of Alexandria would later adopt this same practice.

¹⁷⁵ Moisés Silva, "Galatians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G.K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 808, right-

Silva suggests that Paul, in making “a correspondence between two historical realities,” comes closer here to “typology” than “allegory.”¹⁷⁶ Yet, while Galatians 4:24–27 may fulfil loose definitions of “typology,”¹⁷⁷ it falls short of tighter definitions:¹⁷⁸ there is, for example, no obvious historical continuity between Hagar and the Sinai Covenant.¹⁷⁹

Actually, “Hagar” and “Sarah” here function symbolically. Paul indicates this in verse 25, qualifying “Hagar” with the neuter article, *to*, to show that he has the “word” or “concept” of “Hagar” primarily in view,¹⁸⁰ not the historical figure directly, who would require the feminine article, *hē*.¹⁸¹ As symbols, “Sarah” and “Hagar” are one step removed from the historical figures, facilitating Paul’s description of them in verse 27 by Isaiah 54:1, a verse that cannot be directly depicting the historical characters.¹⁸²

ly observes that Galatians 4:22 and 4:29 are “clear affirmations of factual events upon which the apostle builds his argument.”

¹⁷⁶ Silva, “Galatians,” 808.

¹⁷⁷ E.g. George, *Galatians*, 340, defines typology as “a narrative from Old Testament history interpreted in terms of new covenant realities.”

¹⁷⁸ E.g. D. S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 33, explains that “[t]ypological exegesis seeks to discover a correspondence between people and events of the past and of the present or future. ... Typological exegesis then is based on the conviction that certain events in the history of Israel prefigure a future time when God’s purposes will be revealed in their fullness.”

¹⁷⁹ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 300.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. the similar *to de*... constructions in Ephesians 4:9 and Hebrews 12:27. Betz, *Galatians*, 245, suggests that Paul is here alluding to the Arabic word for “rock,” *ḥaḍjar*, but Schreiner, *Galatians*, 302, questions whether the Galatians would have perceived this similarity.

¹⁸¹ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (3d rev. and enl. ed.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 759, notes that Paul here “purposely uses the grammatical gender of the word rather than the natural feminine.”

¹⁸² Silva, “Galatians,” 809, notes that not only does Isaiah 54:1 in its original context refer to Israel, “the implicit comparison between Sarah and a sterile, abandoned woman who had numerous children is fraught with complications, as is the correspondence between Hagar and the woman who was married.”

In verse 24 Paul associates these symbolic women with two covenants,¹⁸³ which are then contrasted through a *men... de* construction.¹⁸⁴ Syntactic parallelism indicates that the clauses within each part should be compared.¹⁸⁵ One covenant is from Mount Sinai, bears children for slavery, and is “Hagar”; the other covenant is from the Jerusalem above, is free (so, implicitly, bears free children), and is “our mother” (implicitly, “Sarah”). Significantly, the parallelism then breaks, with the first section including two additional clauses which link “Hagar” via “Mount Sinai in Arabia” to “the present Jerusalem.” The parallelism then resumes, *gar* clauses bringing each section to its conclusion: the “Hagar” symbolism is justified by the statement “she is in slavery with her children”; the “Sarah” symbolism by Isaiah 54:1.

For Paul, “Hagar” symbolises the old covenant, consisting of Mount Sinai, slave children, and the present Jerusalem; “Sarah” symbolises the new covenant, consisting of the Jerusalem above, free children, and Christians. On what basis does Paul draw these parallels?

The “Sarah” symbolism can be fully explained with reference to Paul’s argument in Galatians so far, and connections already present within the Old Testament. Psalm 87:5 personifies Zion as a woman, called, in the LXX, “mother Zion”;¹⁸⁶ Jeremiah 31 associates eschatological Zion with the Israelite return from exile to receive the new covenant; and Isaiah 51, the only Old Testament passage outside Genesis where “Sarah” is named, characterises her, in the context of eschatological Zion, as the mother of those who “pursue

¹⁸³ Silva, “Galatians,” 808.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 672.

¹⁸⁵ See the flow diagram in Appendix 1, “Structure of Galatians 4:21–31.” Both parts of the *men... de* construction begin with three statements, and both parts conclude with an explanatory section introduced by “*gar*.” The first section, however, includes two clauses that are not mirrored in the second.

¹⁸⁶ “*mētēr Sion*” (Psalm 86:5, LXX). Zion is also described as “our mother” in 4 Esdras 10:7, and 2 Baruch 4:3 distinguishes the earthly Jerusalem from its heavenly antitype. George, *Galatians*, 343, thus contends that “[t]he concept of the heavenly Jerusalem, or the New Jerusalem, is deeply rooted in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition that forms the background of Paul’s entire theological outlook.”

righteousness” and “seek the LORD.”¹⁸⁷ Thus, in view of the connections between Isaiah 54:1 and the Suffering servant song,¹⁸⁸ already alluded to in Galatians,¹⁸⁹ it is natural for Paul to identify Christians as Sarah’s free, eschatological children.

The Old Testament also inspires some of Paul’s first group of associations. The slave children of the present Jerusalem image probably draws on Isaiah’s “cursed” Jerusalem motif,¹⁹⁰ particularly, Jobes suggests, given the Isaianic language echoed in Galatians 3:10-13.¹⁹¹ In view of Paul’s salvation-historical argument in Galatians 3:15-4:11,¹⁹² it is natural for Paul to identify these slave children with the unbelieving Jews, still slaves under the Mosaic covenant given at Sinai.¹⁹³

The introduction of “Hagar” into this matrix, however, is without Old Testament precedent. It is probable, then, that the two clauses in verse 25 without parallel in verses 26-27 are explicative of Paul’s innovation here.

*to de Hagar Sina oros estin en tē Arabia;*¹⁹⁴ Now “Hagar” is Mount Sinai in Arabia;

¹⁸⁷ Silva, “Galatians,” 809.

¹⁸⁸ Silva, “Galatians,” 809, following F. Wilk, *Die Bedeutung des Jesajabuches für Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 235, observes that Isaiah 53:12-54:1 is framed by the word “*klēronomēsei*,” “he will inherit,” which appears in Paul only in Galatians 4:30.

¹⁸⁹ Silva, “Galatians,” 809, has “no doubt” that the Suffering Servant song is “alluded to in Galatians 2:20-21; 3:1, 13.”

¹⁹⁰ Isaiah 64:10, cf. the children born “for a curse” (*eis kataran*) in Isaiah 65:23.

¹⁹¹ Jobes, “Jerusalem, Our Mother,” 313. Galatians 3:10-13 contains three of the six New Testament uses of *katara* (“curse”), the same word that appears in Isaiah 64:10 and 65:23.

¹⁹² Schreiner, *Galatians*, 223.

¹⁹³ Exodus 19-24.

¹⁹⁴ The Greek text of this clause is uncertain, with various early witnesses swapping *de* for *gar*, and/or omitting *Hagar*. If *gar* were original, the sense would be unaltered, as *de* here takes an explanatory sense. If *Hagar* were merely dittography from verse 24, the original clause would read “now/for Sinai is a mountain in Arabia,” with the relevance of this otherwise prosaic statement to the “Hagar” allegory less explicit and needing to be inferred. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2002),

*sustoiķei*¹⁹⁵ *de tē nun Ierousalēm* she corresponds to the present Jerusalem

The neuter article, discussed above, and the use of *sustoiķeō*,¹⁹⁶ indicate that Paul is drawing a symbolic connection.¹⁹⁷ The plausibility for equating “Hagar” with Mount Sinai is derived, not now from the Old Testament alone, but from Paul’s immediate cultural context. As demonstrated in chapter two, first century Jews considered the Arabs Hagar’s descendants, and when Paul wrote, Mount Sinai lay within Arabian territory.¹⁹⁸ Paul identifies “Hagar” with Mount Sinai, then, on genealogical and geographic grounds.¹⁹⁹ Given Paul’s earlier argument about the Mosaic law,²⁰⁰

526, is probably right to prefer the above reading. The syntactic parallels observed earlier favour *de* over *gar*, and the inclusion of *gar* could account for the exclusion of *Hagar*, which, in view of the undisputed neuter article, is the *lectio difficilior*.

¹⁹⁵ Cosgrove, “The Law Has Given Sarah No Children,” 228-29, demonstrates that Hagar should be seen as the subject of *sustoiķei* if the longer reading, argued for above, is assumed.

¹⁹⁶ BDAG 979A, noting that *sustoiķeō* is the verb used to refer to “members of the same categories” in grammatical and Pythagorean tables, glosses this New Testament *hapax* “correspond.”

¹⁹⁷ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 302.

¹⁹⁸ Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs: From the Earliest Times to the Present* (10th ed.; London: Macmillan, 1970), 43, notes that “[a]t the time of Paul the Nabataean kingdom extended as far north as Damascus. The Arabia to which Paul retired (Gal. 1:17) was undoubtedly some desert tract in the Nabataean district.” That the land of “Arabia” in the first century differs from the territory so designated today counts against readings of Galatians 4:25 which oppose the traditional location of Mount Sinai, such as argued by Dieter Lührmann, *Galatians: A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 92. For a map of the 1st century Nabatean borders, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 62.

¹⁹⁹ Ryken, *Galatians*, 185, summarises: “The reason [Hagar] is associated with Sinai probably has to do with geography. Hagar’s children, the Ishmaelites, were the Arabs who lived in and around the Sinai Peninsula. So it was natural to associate her with the covenant God gave there. The old covenant came from Hagar’s territory.” Cf. Lührmann, *Galatians*, 90-91, and George, *Galatians*, 341, who suggests that Paul’s “geographical orientation” may have been “acquired during his earlier sojourn in Arabia,” mentioned in Galatians 1:17.

²⁰⁰ Galatians 4:1-7.

a striking conceptual parallel suddenly emerges: the Sinai covenant is like Hagar; both give birth to slaves.

The Theological implications

Paul's argument in Galatians 4:24–27 enables him in verses 28–31 to culminate his refutation of the Judaizers with three theological parallels drawn from the Genesis Isaac-Ishmael narrative.

Ishmael and Isaac's births

The Judaizers claimed Abrahamic heritage on the basis of Torah obedience, a stance which Paul has characterised as “by flesh.”²⁰¹ The Judaizers thus mirror Ishmael, who was born “according to flesh.”²⁰² Christians, by contrast, like Isaac, are children of promise,²⁰³ born “according to the Spirit.”²⁰⁴ Since the Abrahamic inheritance comes not by law but by promise,²⁰⁵ it is the Christians, not the Judaizers, who are Abraham's legitimate heirs.²⁰⁶

Ishmael's “persecution” of Isaac

According to Paul, Ishmael “persecuted” Isaac.²⁰⁷ As seen in chapter one above, Genesis gives no evidence that Ishmael persecuted Isaac physically, and it would be anachronistic to read Rabbinic exegesis to this effect back into Paul.²⁰⁸ However, it would also be

²⁰¹ Galatians 3:3, “Having begun by the Spirit (*pneumati*), are you now being perfected by the flesh (*sarki*)?”

²⁰² Galatians 4:29: “*kata sarka*.”

²⁰³ Galatians 4:28: “Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise (*epangelias tekna*).”

²⁰⁴ Galatians 4:29: “*kata pneuma*.” Ryken, *Galatians*, 183, explains that this phrase “is what distinguished Isaac from Ishmael: Isaac's birth was the result of God's supernatural intervention.”

²⁰⁵ Galatians 3:18: “For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise (*epangelias*); but God gave it to Abraham by a promise (*epangelias*).”

²⁰⁶ Cf. Galatians 3:29, “And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise (*kat' epangelian*).”

²⁰⁷ Galatians 4:29. BDAG 254a glosses the verb *diōkhō* in this verse as “to persecute someone.”

²⁰⁸ Bruce, *Galatians*, 224, comments that these rabbinic views “are all later than Paul's day.”

unnecessary, for neither did the Judaizers physically persecute the Galatian Christians.²⁰⁹ Paul, then, is speaking figuratively of Judaizers' false teaching,²¹⁰ which "persecutes" the Galatians in precisely the same way that Ishmael "persecuted" Isaac: subverting his identity, and so imperilling his inheritance.²¹¹

Ishmael's expulsion

Just as Ishmael and Isaac could not live together, so neither can legalism coexist with gospel freedom.²¹² Paul quotes Genesis 21:10,²¹³ the practical application of which, in the light of Paul's rhetorical question in verse 21, the conclusion in verse 31, and the developing argument of chapters 5-6, is not for the Galatians to expel the Judaizers,²¹⁴ but to live consistently as the free heirs of Abraham.²¹⁵

Summary

Paul argues in Galatians 4:21-31 that, symbolically, the Judaizers are the descendants of Ishmael. Like Ishmael, they are physically descended from Abraham, excluded from the Abrahamic covenant, and are "persecuting" the true Abrahamic heirs by attempting to subvert their identity, so endangering their promised inheritance. Thus, to accept circumcision and submit to Mosaic law is,

²⁰⁹ Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 58; Betz, *Galatians*, 134, n. 64; and Longenecker, *Galatians*, 104, agree that there is no evidence that the Judaizers were the source of any external persecution.

²¹⁰ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 305, says "the evangelistic work of the Judaizers in Galatia was nothing less than persecution (cf. 3:4)."

²¹¹ Cf. Galatians 3:4, "Did you suffer so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?" and Galatians 4:11, "I am afraid I may have laboured over you in vain."

²¹² F.F. Bruce, "'Abraham Had Two Sons': A Study in Pauline Hermeneutics," in *New Testament Studies: Essays in Honor of Ray Summers* (ed. H. L. Drumwright and C. Vaughan; Waco: Baylor University Press, 1975), 79, as cited in George, *Galatians*, 347.

²¹³ Galatians 4:30.

²¹⁴ *Contra* Longenecker, *Galatians*, 217; and Witherington, *Galatians*, 338-39.

²¹⁵ So Schreiner, *Galatians*, 306, and George, *Galatians*, 347, given Paul's continuing argument.

effectively, to put oneself into Ishmael's family,²¹⁶ outside the Abrahamic covenant.²¹⁷ The Galatians must resist the heresy, and stand firm in their Christian identity.

Paul supports this reasoning by drawing a correspondence between the Judaizers and the Ishmaelites, based on his observation that Sinai, where the Old Covenant was instituted, was now, by virtue of contemporary geography, the possession of Hagar's descendants: a rhetorical argument drawing on the first century cultural context.

Chapter 4: Ishmael in Islam

In this chapter I will review the Qur'an and subsequent Islamic traditions about Ishmael, and argue that, although originally a relatively minor figure within Islam, Ishmael's prominence grew significantly after Arab Muslims encountered others who proclaimed Ishmael as the Arabs' eponymous ancestor.

Ishmael in the Qur'an

Ishmael is mentioned infrequently in the Qur'an,²¹⁸ usually within lists. The Qur'anic Ishmael, considered a prophet and an apostle,²¹⁹ is named alongside Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, as a recipient of divine revelations.²²⁰ Like these other prophets, Ishmael was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but Muslim,²²¹ following the true faith of Abraham.²²² Ishmael is also listed among good men who received divine mercy and favour,²²³ and is remembered for encouraging his people's prayer and almsgiving.²²⁴

²¹⁶ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 307.

²¹⁷ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 300.

²¹⁸ Ishmael is named in the Qur'an only 12 times. This is fewer than his brother Isaac, named 16 times. By contrast, Abraham is named 76 times, Moses 62 times, Noah 48 times, and Jesus 29 times.

²¹⁹ *Maryam* (19):54.

²²⁰ *An-Nisā'* (4):163.

²²¹ *Al-Baqarah* (2):135-36, 140.

²²² *Al-Baqarah* (2):133. Cf. *Ā'lay Imrān* (3):67-71.

²²³ *Suād* (38):48; *Al-An'ām* (6):86; *Al-Anbiyā'* (21):85.

²²⁴ *Maryam* (19):55.

Ishmael's distinguishing feature is his relationship to Abraham. Born in Abraham's old age,²²⁵ Ishmael and Abraham together cleansed and built the Ka'bah,²²⁶ and prayed that from their descendants would come a Muslim people.²²⁷ Still, the Qur'an credits Ishmael no greater or lesser standing than any of its other prophets.²²⁸ The Qur'an holds no notion of a special divine blessing for Ishmael and his descendants,²²⁹ and Ishmael's genealogy goes unmentioned.²³⁰

Ishmael in Islam today

Today, however, Islam makes claims for Ishmael which go beyond the Qur'an. These beliefs stem from Islamic traditions.

Father of the Arabs

Kamaruzaman says Abraham "produce[d] great nations through his two sons, and indeed, from his first-born, Prophet Is'mail, came

²²⁵ *Ibrāhīm* (14):39.

²²⁶ *Al-Baqarah* (2):125, 127. However, Gerald Hawting, "The Religion of Abraham and Islam," in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham* (ed. Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten and Jacques T. A. G. M. van Ruiten; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 497-98, n. 41, thinks "the rather strange grammar of the allusion to Ishmael's participation in the building of the house at Sura 2:125 could indicate an interpolation."

²²⁷ *Al-Baqarah* (2):128.

²²⁸ *Ā'lay Imrān* (3):84.

²²⁹ Indeed, the Qur'anic prohibition of merit transfer (e.g. *Fātir* (35):18; *Az-Zumar* (39):7) would presumably rule out any such inter-generational blessing.

²³⁰ Reuven Firestone, "Abraham's Son as the Intended Sacrifice (*Al-Dhabī*, Qur'ān 37:99-113): Issues in Qur'ānic Exegesis," *JSS* 34 (1989): 99, notes that "[u]nlike the Bible, the Qur'an is not interested in sacred genealogy, and makes no effort to preserve a holy biological *isnād* from Abraham."

the Arab people and from Prophet Ishak the Jewish people.”²³¹ This view today is prevalent among Muslims and non-Muslims alike.²³²

Arab Muslims probably first heard the idea of their Ishmaelite descent from Christians and Jews.²³³ From the late eighth century onwards,²³⁴ correlating Islamic traditions appeared:²³⁵ the Ka’ba, constructed in Mecca during Adam’s lifetime, had fallen into disrepair, so Allah had sent Abraham and Ishmael to restore it and re-establish proper worship. Ishmael settled there and married local tribeswomen. One of their descendants, ‘Adnān, was allegedly the ancestor of the North Arabian tribes.²³⁶ ‘Adnān’s descendants later fell away from pure monotheism, and Muhammad was sent to call them back.

Muslims today typically claim that Muhammad was descended directly from Ishmael.²³⁷ Muslim historians, following Islamic tra-

²³¹ Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Understanding Islam: Contemporary Discourse* (2d ed.; Kuala Lumpur: Saba Islamic Media, 2009), 117. Cf. “Ishmael,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (ed. John L. Esposito; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 143: “Today Ishmael is considered the father of the Arab nation, and the Isaac/Ishmael conflict is often used as a paradigm for the Jewish/Arab conflict.”

²³² Hawting, “The Religion of Abraham and Islam,” 477, observes: “The idea that the Arabs are the physical descendants of Abraham through Ishmael is indeed taken by many, non-Muslims as well as Muslims, as a genealogical and historical fact.”

²³³ Hawting, “The Religion of Abraham and Islam,” 500-01, argues that this probably happened after the Arab conquests: “the Arabs derived the ideas of their Abrahamic ancestry from the peoples they ruled over, who had been calling them Ishmaelites and Hagarenes for centuries. ... The evidence that the Arabs who came out of Arabia with the conquering armies of the 630s and 640s already had a self-identification as Ishmaelites and followed a religion that they identified as Abraham’s is not compelling.”

²³⁴ Hawting, “The Religion of Abraham and Islam,” 477.

²³⁵ See Hawting, “The Religion of Abraham and Islam,” 486-88, for more details of these traditions.

²³⁶ “ISMĀ’ĪL,” in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (ed. H.A.R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers; Leiden: Brill, 1974), 178-79, however, notes that in these traditions, “[t]he chain between Ismā’īl and ‘Adnān is given in very divergent forms.”

²³⁷ E.g. Abdus Sattar Ghauri and Ihsanur Rahman Ghauri, *The Only Son Offered for Sacrifice, Isaac or Ishmael? With Zamzam, al-Marwah and Makkah in the Bible and a Brief Account of the History of Solomon’s Temple and Jerusalem* (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2010), 15.

dition,²³⁸ unanimously trace Muhammad's descent to 'Adnān,²³⁹ though the lines listed between Ishmael and Adnān are equivocal.²⁴⁰

The Son of Sacrifice

Although the Qur'an does not name the son whom Abraham was commanded to sacrifice,²⁴¹ most Muslims today,²⁴² including their scholars,²⁴³ identify him as Ishmael.²⁴⁴ Alī, for example, says the son is, "according to Muslim tradition, (which however is not unanimous on this point), the first-born son of Abraham, *viz.*, Ismā'īl."²⁴⁵

Exegetes favouring Ishmael argue that, in verses 110-111, Allah speaks of rewarding Abraham's obedience.²⁴⁶ The passage then continues: "And We gave him the good news of Isaac - a prophet - one of the Righteous. We blessed him and Isaac."²⁴⁷ Since, it is argued, Isaac was Abraham's reward, the son of sacrifice must have been Ishmael.²⁴⁸

²³⁸ E.g. Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad's earliest biographer, who traces Muhammad's genealogy to Ishmael through Nebaioth: see Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 3-4.

²³⁹ Thomas Patrick Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam: being a cyclopaedia of the doctrines, rites, ceremonies, and customs, together with the technical and theological terms of the Muhammadan religion* (Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1988), 217.

²⁴⁰ Some traditions trace the line through Nebaioth, others through Kedar. The number of generations between Ishmael and 'Adnān is also disputed, varying between four and forty. See Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 217.

²⁴¹ *As Ṣāffāt* (37):99-113.

²⁴² Hawting, "The Religion of Abraham and Islam," 488.

²⁴³ Ghauri and Ghauri, *The Only Son Offered for Sacrifice*, 45.

²⁴⁴ *Contra* Genesis 22:2; James 2:21 and Hebrews 11:17-18, all of which affirm the son was Isaac.

²⁴⁵ 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Holy Qur'ān: Text, Translation and Commentary* (rev. ed.; Brentwood, Md.: Amana, 1989), 1149, commenting on *As Ṣāffāt* (37):101.

²⁴⁶ "Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. For he was one of our believing Servants." *As Ṣāffāt* (37):110-111 (translation by Yūsuf 'Alī).

²⁴⁷ *As Ṣāffāt* (37):112-113a (translation by Yūsuf 'Alī).

²⁴⁸ George Sale, *The Koran: Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohammed*, (5th ed.; Philadelphia: J. W. Moore: 1856), 368 comments: "It is the most received opinion among the Mohammedans, that the son whom Abraham offered was Ismael and not

It is not clear, however, that verse 112 refers to a later time.²⁴⁹ Moreover, to identify Isaac as God's reward seems to contradict Allah's own explanation in verses 108-110: "And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times: 'Peace and salutation to Abraham!' Thus indeed do We reward those who do right."²⁵⁰

A much stronger case can be made that the Qur'an presents Isaac as the son intended for sacrifice.²⁵¹ The "good news of Isaac" in verse 112 echoes the "good news of a boy ready to suffer and forebear" in verse 101.²⁵² Elsewhere in the Qur'an, "good news" is also associated with promised birth of Isaac, but not Ishmael.²⁵³ Moreover, verse 113 speaks of Allah blessing Isaac. If Ishmael were, in fact, the son obedient unto death,²⁵⁴ this would appear theologically inconsistent with Islam's prohibition of merit transfer.²⁵⁵

Firestone has investigated medieval Islamic sources,²⁵⁶ and demonstrated that among early Muslims "Isaac was originally understood to have been the intended victim, but that this view was eclipsed by a new perspective which held Ishmael to have been

Isaac; Ismael being his only son at that time; for the promise of Isaac's birth is mentioned lower, as subsequent in time to this transaction."

²⁴⁹ There is no temporal marker which would indicate this in the Qur'anic text.

²⁵⁰ *As Ṣāffāt* (37):108-110, (translation by Yūsuf 'Alī).

²⁵¹ Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 219, says: "there can be no doubt in any candid mind that, as far as the Qur'ān is concerned, Isaac and not Ishmael is intended."

²⁵² Cf. *As Ṣāffāt* (37):112 and 101 (translation by Yūsuf 'Alī).

²⁵³ See *Hūd* (11):71, "And his wife was standing (there), and she laughed: But we gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after him, of Jacob," (translation by Yūsuf 'Alī) and the parallel in *Az-Zārīyāt* (51):28-29.

²⁵⁴ *As Ṣāffāt* (37):101-103 stresses that both Abraham and his son were here obedient to Allah, apparently following in the tradition of Rabbinic Judaism, in whose literature, notes G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 1:539, "the voluntariness of the sacrifice on Isaac's part is strongly emphasised." So also 4 Maccabees 13:12; 16:20.

²⁵⁵ Cf. e.g., *Al-Baqarah* (2):286, "Everyone will enjoy the credit of his deeds and suffer the debits of his evil-doings."

²⁵⁶ Firestone, "Abraham's Son as the Intended Sacrifice," 99, introduces his study as covering "a full range of traditional medieval Islamic exegesis on the specific issue of which of Abraham's sons was intended to be the sacrifice."

intended.”²⁵⁷ This shift, he finds, began “during the early second Islamic century and became almost universally accepted by the end of the third.”²⁵⁸ It remains the dominant Muslim view today.

Central to the Hajj

The experiences of Abraham and Ishmael,²⁵⁹ considered paragons of submission,²⁶⁰ are recapitulated by the hajj rituals.²⁶¹ Pilgrims circumambulate the Ka’bah,²⁶² which Ishmael is believed to have helped construct,²⁶³ and beside which he is thought to be buried.²⁶⁴ Then pilgrims perform *al-sa’ie*,²⁶⁵ commemorating Hagar’s search

²⁵⁷ Firestone, “Abraham’s Son as the Intended Sacrifice,” 115.

²⁵⁸ Firestone, “Abraham’s Son as the Intended Sacrifice,” 129.

²⁵⁹ “Hajj,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (ed. John L. Esposito; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 103.

²⁶⁰ Kamaruzaman, *Understanding Islam*, 174, explains that the pilgrim: “re-liv[es] the overwhelming histories of Prophet Ibrahim and his son, Prophet Isma’il (peace be upon them) comparing his own faith *al-īmān* (الإيمان) to theirs, his own level of dedication to theirs, his level of trust in the Lord Almighty to theirs, and surely he is humbled.”

²⁶¹ The Hajj (Arabic: الحج) is the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam.

²⁶² Kamaruzaman, *Understanding Islam*, 172.

²⁶³ Kamaruzaman, *Understanding Islam*, 171. Alleged Qur’anic support for this practice comes from *Al-Baqarah* (2):125. Hawting, “The Religion of Abraham and Islam,” 497-98, n. 41, however, thinks “the rather strange grammar of the allusion to Ishmael’s participation in the building of the house at Sura 2:125 could indicate an interpolation.”

²⁶⁴ Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Islam* (rev. ed.; London: Stacey International, 2001), 221.

²⁶⁵ *Al-sa’ie* (Arabic: السعي) means, literally, “the run,” and takes place between two mountains, al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa. Alleged Qur’anic support for this practice comes from *Al-Baqarah* (2):158. Fred Leemhuis, “Hājar in the Qur’ān and its Early Commentaries,” in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham* (ed. Martin Goodman, George H. van Kooten and Jacques T. A. G. M van Ruiten; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 503, however, thinks it “strange that the single reference in the *Qur’ān* to the circumambulation of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa as part of the *hajj* rites in *Sūrat al-Baqara* (2):158 does not refer to Hājar or Ismā’il at all.” It is also “striking that the verse uses the verb *tawwafa* (‘to circumambulate’) and not *sa’ā* (‘to run’),” and odd to see that, in early Islamic commentaries, there is no “mention or allusion that the verse has any connection

for water for Ishmael,²⁶⁶ before drinking from Zamzam well, which appeared miraculously to save Ishmael's life.²⁶⁷ Then comes the "stoning of Satan," re-enacting Abraham's rejection of Satan's temptations to disobey Allah's command to kill Ishmael.²⁶⁸ Finally, each pilgrim offers an animal sacrifice, commemorating the sheep slaughtered in Ishmael's place.²⁶⁹

Remembered at Id al-Adha

Muslims worldwide perform this sacrifice simultaneous with the pilgrims during the annual "Id al-Adha" feast,²⁷⁰ commemorating Abraham and Ishmael's submission.²⁷¹ This appears to be a deliberate subversion of the Jewish "Akedah" ritual,²⁷² which was also enacted annually, but at Passover, as a redemptive sacrifice.²⁷³

with Hājar's frantic search for water for her son." He traces the origins of *al-sa'ie* to a tradition by al-Bukhārī, and concludes that, over time, Hagar "was more and more written into Islamic tradition."

²⁶⁶ Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Understanding Islam: Contemporary Discourse* (2d ed.; Kuala Lumpur: Saba Islamic Media, 2009), 171. Hagar is not mentioned in the Qur'an, even by allusion.

²⁶⁷ William L. Holladay, "Outcasts and Forebears," *CC* 113 (1996): 613.

²⁶⁸ Kamar Oniah Kamaruzaman, *Understanding Islam: Contemporary Discourse* (2d ed.; Kuala Lumpur: Saba Islamic Media, 2009), 172.

²⁶⁹ "Hajj," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, 104. Cf. As Ṣāffāt (37):107.

²⁷⁰ "Id al-Adha," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (ed. John L. Esposito; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 131.

²⁷¹ Though Qur'anic support for this is sometimes claimed from *Al-Hajj* (22):33-38, Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, 192-93, observes that "[t]here is nothing in the Qur'an to connect this sacrifice with the history of Ishmael."

²⁷² Cecil Roth, ed., *The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, (London: W. H. Allen, 1959), 61, explains that the "Akedah" (Hebrew: "binding") is the traditional name given to Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac.

²⁷³ G. Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 219-20, notes that for the Jews, "[t]he Akedah was considered a sacrifice of Redemption, the source of pardon, salvation, and eternal life, through the merits of Abraham who loved God so greatly as to offer Him his only son, but principally through the merits of Isaac, who offered his life voluntarily to his Creator."

Summary

For Muslims today, Ishmael is the “father of the Arabs” and ancestor of Muhammad, commemorated as the son of sacrifice at Eid al-Adha and on the hajj. Non-Arab Muslims count Ishmael their “theological” ancestor: a paragon of Islamic submission.²⁷⁴

Ishmael’s prominence within Islam originated in post-Qur’anic traditions which invested him with extra significance,²⁷⁵ thereby bolstering Islamic identity,²⁷⁶ and subverting Jewish and Christian scriptures, beliefs and traditions.²⁷⁷

Conclusion

The proposition that Muslims have inherited God’s blessing to Ishmael, mediated through their Arab ancestry, has too shaky a Biblical foundation to provide a solid base for a missiological approach to Muslims.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Jonathan Culver, “The Ishmael Promise and Contextualization Among Muslims,” *IJFM* 17 (2000): 62, cites an Indonesian former-Muslim who explains: “Indonesian Muslims regard Ishmael as an enduring symbol of what it means to be a true Muslim because of his submission to God’s command to become the sacrificial son (Qur’an 37:102). This concept is perpetuated in their consciousness when they perform the *Hajj* or the annual Festival of Sacrifice.”

²⁷⁵ Though cf. Hawting, “The Religion of Abraham and Islam,” 478, who suggests that “inconsistencies between the Qur’ān and classical Islamic ideas and practices” might be better explained by the view that the Qur’an is not “a text closed and fixed in a *ne varietur* form around 650 CE (as the tradition holds)” but “the end result of a relatively gradual process” which “continued for decades at least after the first Arab conquests in the Middle East.” On this view, the Qur’an is “an important part of the development of Islam but not the source from which all else came.”

²⁷⁶ Firestone, “Abraham’s Son as the Intended Sacrifice,” 98, comments: “the Islamic understanding of the near-sacrifice evolved in the first two Islamic centuries... the Sacrifice came to serve as a proof in Islam for the exclusive relationship between God and the Arab Muslim people.”

²⁷⁷ E.g. *contra* ideas of atonement or substitution, Ghauri and Ghauri, *The Only Son Offered for Sacrifice*, 37, contend that “[t]he essential message of the ACT OF OFFERING is total submission to God which has been indicated in the scriptures of all the Abrahamic religions – Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.”

²⁷⁸ *Contra* Jonathan Culver, “The Ishmael Promise and Contextualization Among Muslims,” *IJFM* 17 (2000): 61-70. As seen above, Paul’s utility, for the sake of his

Nevertheless, God's purpose for Ishmael is not without significance for Christian mission to Muslims. In stark opposition to literal genealogical descent, Paul symbolically identified Ishmaelites with first century Judaizers,²⁷⁹ based on extra-biblical parallels. So today, a similar case can be made for symbolically identifying Ishmaelites with Muslims.²⁸⁰ The common (albeit unproven) twenty-first century assumption that Muslims are descended from Ishmael mirrors the equally common (albeit unproven) first century assumption that Arabs were descended from Ishmael.²⁸¹

Reapplying Paul's paradigm thus suggests that, theologically, Islam today relates to Christianity simultaneously as curse and blessing. The missiological implications of this may be cast in categories reflecting Paul's approach to unbelieving Jews.²⁸²

Muslims are enemies of the Gospel for our sake

Islam's chief threat to Christians consists in blurring their distinct identity. Just as Ishmael "persecuted" Isaac, so also Islam apes Christianity,²⁸³ claiming to be the true Abrahamic faith, and subverting biblical scriptures, beliefs and traditions.

symbolic argument, of the culturally plausible first century view that Arabs were descended from Ishmael, neither requires this genealogical connection to be historically true, nor, even if it were, for God's blessing to Ishmael to have been communicated to the Arabs through it.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Sam Schlorff, *Missiological Models in Ministry to Muslims* (Upper Darby, Pa.: Middle East Resources, 2006), 114, who considers Galatians 4:21-31 "basic to any Christian theological evaluation of Islam."

²⁸⁰ Medieval Christians such as John of Damascus interpreted Islam in a similar way, speaking of it as the 'heresy of the Ishmaelites' or the 'religion of the Hagarenes.'" See Peter J. Leithart, "Mirror of Christendom" (Resource essay, Mars Hill Audio, 2005), 7, Online: www.marshillaudio.org/resources/pdf/Leithart.pdf [cited 2nd October 2011].

²⁸¹ If anything, this Ishmael-Muslim parallel seems *stronger* than Paul's Ishmael-Judaizer parallel, as it relies only on the genealogical connection, without recourse to a supporting geographical argument.

²⁸² Cf. Romans 11:28, "As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers."

²⁸³ Cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: HarperCollins, 2004). In "The Last Battle," the arch-enemy is, quite literally, an ape, who advances the syncretis-

In first century Galatia, Christians were commanded to break completely from the Judaizers' legalism. Similarly, in Islamic contexts, Christians must reject all practices associated with Islamic legalism, such as circumcision,²⁸⁴ and observance of Islamic days and seasons.²⁸⁵ Missiological approaches like "Insider Movements," which encourage believers to retain their Islamic religious culture,²⁸⁶ unacceptably imperil Christian identity and inheritance,²⁸⁷ and must be ceased.²⁸⁸

Positively, however, Leithart argues that "[t]he Lord raised up Islam as a parody or mirror of Christianity, which is designed to expose our failings and to call us to faithfulness."²⁸⁹ Islam's threat, then, is ultimately "for our sake," since uncompromising rejection of this parody will purify the church.

tic "Tashlan" heresy, and commands armies of Calormene warriors who closely resemble Muslim Saracens.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Galatians 5:11-12.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Galatians 4:8-11.

²⁸⁶ E.g. Rebecca Lewis, "Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities," *IJFM* 24.2 (2007): 75, defines an "insider movement" as "any movement to faith in Christ where a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, *remain inside their socioreligious communities*, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible" [emphasis added].

²⁸⁷ Jay Smith, "An Assessment of the Insider's Principle Paradigms," *SFM* 5:4 (2009): 41, fears that Insider Movements are really promoting what he calls "Christianism."

²⁸⁸ Although Christians who are well-established in the Bible may have greater license in these matters (cf. Acts 16:3; Romans 5-6), it is doubtful that Timothy and the Roman church are representative of "Followers of Jesus" in typical "Insider-Movements." Phil Parshall, "Danger! New Directions in Contextualization," *EMQ* 34:4 (1998): 408, reveals the results of a survey of Muslim Background Believers. After twelve years in an Insider Movement, 66% of the leaders still believed the Qur'an to be a superior revelation to the Bible, and 45% did "not affirm God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

²⁸⁹ Leithart, "Mirror of Christendom," 4.

Muslims are loved for Abraham's sake

Islam teaches that good works have salvific value.²⁹⁰ Hence Muslims, like Ishmael, are “born of the flesh,” and outside the Abrahamic covenant. Thus, even were an Ishmaelite-Arab genetic link to be proved, God’s blessing to Ishmael would not overturn this fundamental theological asymmetry between Isaac’s covenantal and Ishmael’s non-covenantal lines.²⁹¹

However, finally, and somewhat speculatively, we might consider whether an Ishmaelite ancestry for Muslims, even if only widely assumed, gives Muslims an evangelistic priority over other unbelieving gentiles,²⁹² just as the early church evangelised Jews before gentiles.²⁹³ For intriguingly, the first evangelistic campaign conducted by the apostle to the gentiles was to none other than the Arabs,²⁹⁴ who were then widely considered Ishmael’s descendants.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁰ E.g. *Ā'lāy Imrān* (3):92: “By no means shall ye attain righteousness unless ye give (freely) of that which ye love; and whatever ye give, of a truth Allah knoweth it well” (translation by Yūsuf ‘Alī).

²⁹¹ *Contra* e.g. “The Common Path Alliance,” whose presentation of Christianity and Islam conceals this asymmetry. Online: www.commonpathalliance.org [cited 3rd October 2011].

²⁹² As Tony Maalouf, *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel: The Unfolding of God's Prophetic Plan for Ishmael's Line* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 179, puts it: “to the Jews first, to the rest of Abraham’s children next, then to the Gentiles.”

²⁹³ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (2 vols.; Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 2: 1294, writes: “Paul understood his missionary task as being directed first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, both from a ‘theoretical’ theological point of view and from a concrete evangelistic point of view.

²⁹⁴ Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary*, 60, contends that “Paul did not go to Arabia to work through the theological and practical consequences of his conversion. He went to Arabia in order to engage in missionary work.” Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2: 1476, adds that “the available evidence suggests that this first phase of Paul’s missionary work was rather successful: the ethnarch of the Nabatean king Aretas IV wanted to arrest Paul, forcing him to leave Arabia and travel via Damascus to Jerusalem. An unsuccessful ministry would not have caused the kind of upheaval that prompted the Nabatean king to act.”

²⁹⁵ Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (London: SCM, 1997), 118, write: “Paul’s motive for beginning his first missionary activity among the ‘Gentiles’ in Arabia, i.e. in the Nabataean kingdom, seems to me to be clear. First there was the geographical proximity to

Appendix: Structure of Galatians 4:21-31

- ²¹ *Legete moi, hoi hupo nomon thelontes einai, ton nomon ouk akouete;*
²² [gar] gegraptai ~~gar~~ hoti
 Abraam duo huiou esken,
 hena ek tēs paidiskēs kai
 hena ek tēs eleutheras.
²³ all'
 ho men ek tēs paidiskēs
 kata sarka gegennētai,
 ho de ek tēs eleutheras
 di' epangelias [gegennētai].
²⁴ *hatina estin allēgoroumena·*
 [gar] hautai ~~gar~~ eisin duo diathēkai,
 mia men apo orous Sina
 eis douleian gennōsa,
 hētis estin Hagar.
²⁵ [de] to ~~de~~ Hagar Sina oros estin en tē Arabia·
 [de] sustoiķei ~~de~~ tē nun Ierousalēm,
 [gar] douleuei ~~gar~~ meta tōn teknōn autēs.
²⁶ de [hē] anō Ierousalēm
 eleuthera estin,
 hētis estin meter hēmōn·
²⁷ [gar] gegraptai ~~gar~~
 euphranthēti, steira hē ou tiktousa,
 rhēxon kai boson, hē ouk ōdinousa·
 hoti polla ta tekna tēs erēmou
 mallon hē tēs ekousēs ton andra.
²⁸ [de] humeis ~~de~~, adelphoi, kata Isaak epangelias tekna este.
²⁹ all' hōsper tote
 ho kata sarka gennētheis ediōken ton kata pneuma,
 houtōs kai nun.
³⁰ alla ti legei hē graphē;
 ekbale tēn paidiskēn kai ton huion autēs·
 [gar] ou ~~gar~~ mē klēronomēsei ho huios tēs paidiskēs
 meta tou huiou tēs eleutheras.
³¹ dio, adelphoi, ~~ouk~~ esmen
 [ouk] paidiskēs tekna
 alla tēs eleutheras [tekna].

Damascus and Eretz Israel, and secondly the fact that the 'Arabs' were also real sons of Abraham. In addition there was the prophetic promise and the nearness to the exodus and journey through the wilderness, and to Sinai."

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

By Jeff Morton

Abstract:

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

1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

2 The Crooner of Colorado²

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 Owning Christianity: “Religion done me wrong”

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

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

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

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

⁴ *SJ* 47.

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

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

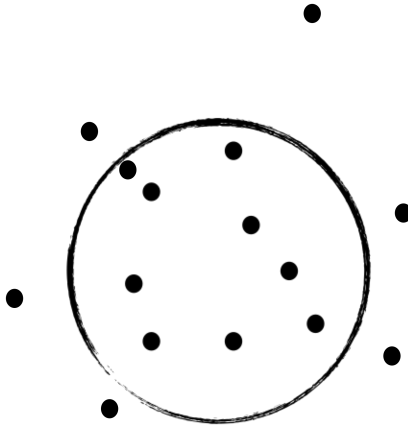


Figure 1. Bounded set

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

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

⁵ *SJ* 48.

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

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

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

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

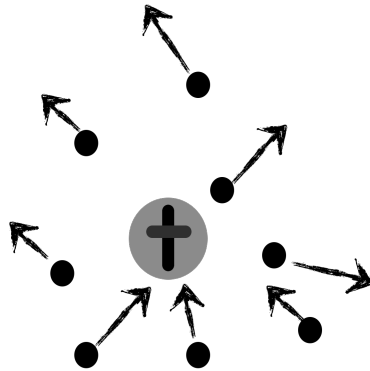


Figure 2. Centered set

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

⁷ *SJ* 63, 67.

⁸ *SJ* 69.

⁹ *SJ* 71.

¹⁰ *SJ* 74.

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

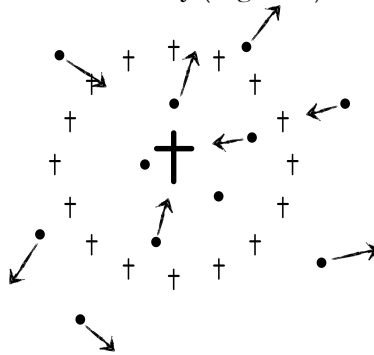


Figure 3. The centered-bounded sets: both are true

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4 Medearis' top five hits

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

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

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

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

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

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

- *Christian* is "commonly misunderstood today."

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

I didn't think so.

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

¹² *SJ* 120.

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁴ *SJ* 122.

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 The song of Islam

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

5.1 *Muhammad and Allah in stereo*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

God is who he is. . . .

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

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

²¹ *MCJ* 39.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²³ Cf. *MCJ* 30.

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

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

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

5.3 Islam, the musical

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6 FAQ (based on the musical *Grease*)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁷ MCJ 102.

²⁸ MCJ 102.

²⁹ MCJ 102-103.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³² *MCJ* 102.

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

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

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

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

So, “What is a prophet anyway?”

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

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

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

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

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

³³ *MCJ* 103-104.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁵ *MCJ* 108.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7 The song of the insider movement (B#)

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

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

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

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

³⁸ *MCJ* 134.

³⁹ *MCJ* 135.

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

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

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

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

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

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

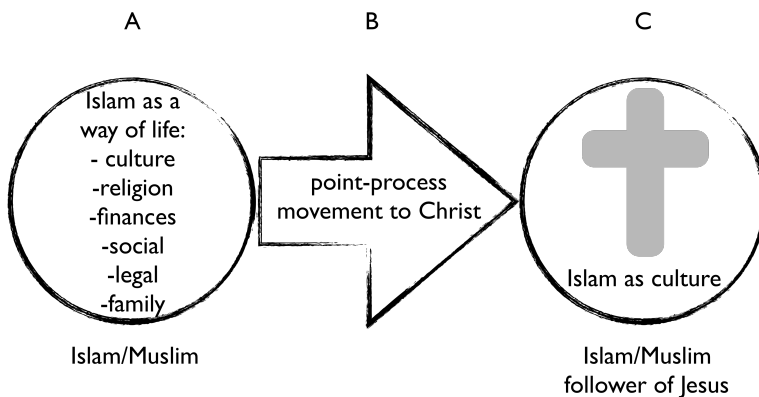


Figure 4. IM advocate's understanding of Islam as religion and culture

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. The prophet of Islam defines Islam/Muslim:

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

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

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

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

⁴⁴ Al-Nawawi, *Forty Hadiths*.

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

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

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

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

⁴⁵ *MCJ* 135.

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

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

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

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

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

8 Coda

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

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

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

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GRAND CANYON: THE WIDENING GAP IN EVANGELICAL MISSIONARY BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

By Bill Nikides

1 Inside Insiders

In a separate article I have engaged with the recent writing of missiologist and insider enthusiast Rebecca Lewis.¹ My approach was to examine her exegesis and hermeneutics underpinning her claim that insider movements expressed an authentic gospel (“gospel integrity”) but that opponents were standing in its way. It is my opinion that her biblical treatment is seriously deficient, failing to consider biblical texts within their historic, redemptive framework. On a number of occasions I have analyzed the insider proponents’ use of scripture and always found it weighing almost exclusively in favor of seeing every issue as a matter of cultural contextualization, generally to the detriment of the greater thrust of God’s redemptive plan. Additionally, it seems that the disagreements between supporters and critics of insider movements disagree about what is essential to the biblical message we convey as the gospel goes into Muslim cultures. Insiders tend to see a core gospel as essential information, but other biblical instruction and information as of secondary or tertiary importance; things that are meant only for believers from a Muslim background well after they come to Christ.

What I would like to do here is to explore where the insiders gain that perspective of an essential gospel that must be separated from the surrounding biblical material and especially from religious forms, practices and traditions that are considered detrimental to the “integrity” of the gospel. In other words, they posit a compact ‘gospel’ within the surrounding gospels and epistles; and it is this ‘pure’ gospel that must be conveyed, undiluted or unadulterated by

¹ Rebecca Lewis, “The Integrity of the Gospel and Insider Movements” IJFM 27.1 (Spring 2010) 41–48.

religious tradition, or even biblical material deemed as dealing with ethics or doctrine.

Where does this idea of a core *kerygma*, or preached message come from? Since it deals with the Bible, we can give a short answer; it is biblical. This answer is inadequate, however. Those such as Lewis, who seek to radically separate the gospel as a very limited list of six or seven events in the life of Christ from the rest of the surrounding biblical testimony, are not doing what is intuitively correct. They are actually following in the footsteps of others who developed this way of looking at the relationship between the life of Jesus and the entire biblical testimony. In short, the approach Lewis takes radically separates the events associated with Christ's redemptive work and words used to describe them from the rest of the Bible. It is this "core" that must be communicated to those in need of Christ's redemption. Other material is either not important for the purpose of either evangelism or basic discipleship (and can be communicated at some undisclosed time in the future) or it is culturally bound and not relevant for the contemporary context. The question remains, however, where did that way of dividing scripture come from? How did the idea develop and what are alternative approaches to scripture that insiders do not use? This paper seeks to get beneath the surface of insider rhetoric and expose some of the presuppositions that drive the way they see and use the Bible.

2 The modernist gospel makeover

Lewis apparently views the situation in the early church as one of a single gospel expressed in two "radically different religions." As she notes, one is characterized by Jewish traditions and expressions, all of which formed and manifested Hebraic culture. Similarly, a radically different religious culture is formed on a Gentile Greco-Roman base.

2.1 F.C. Bauer

Lewis expresses an understanding of the early church and Jesus that I believe may have been built, consciously or subconsciously, on a foundation represented by three men, F.C. Bauer, Adolf Harnack,

and C.H. Dodd. Presumably, she would concur with the opinions of scholars such as F.C. Bauer and Adolf Harnack. Bauer, father of the Tübingen School, identified three circles of influence that clashed in the early church. The inner circle was closest to Jesus and retained the most accurate memories about him. Beyond them was the circle of Diasporan Jews that retained a Jewish identity, but were exposed to outside influence. Finally, there were the Hellenistic Gentiles, the outsiders that eventually subverted the original Jewish church.

2.2 Adolf Harnack

Harnack deserves our attention.² Like the ghost of Jacob Marley haunting Ebenezer Scrooge, he continues to show up in our histories, particularly those of the history of the early church, or as he saw it in its origin, “churches”. Religion, according to Harnack, is not supposed to be an outer expression of intellectual edifices dealing with hoary philosophies and rituals. It is meant to be practical matter, lived out in a godly life. It finds its origin and inspiration in the historical revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Although essential faith is practical, human beings tend to make their beliefs about God more and more explicit. This led to a disaster within the faith, the rise of dogma. John Macquarrie captured Harnack’s voice with perfection on this:

The wells of true religion have become choked with theological and metaphysical garbage, and the history of the church’s thinking has in the main been the story of the obscuration and deterioration of Christian truth, rather than of its development and unfolding. The process is accentuated with the spread of Christianity into the Hellenistic world,

² I have no idea whether insider proponents such as Rebecca Lewis have ever heard of people such as Bauer or Harnack let alone read them. I dwell on them because the insiders’ views with regard to Church history, theology, and culture all reflect modes of thought that originate somewhere. In this case, Lewis’s opinions about the nature of the relationships between Jewish and Gentile believers are expressed in a way that strongly echoes these earlier roots. I have already explored in another paper the proven connections between the insider movement and the Emergent Church. I have been accused by insider boosters of not critically engaging their methodology. To the contrary, what I discover repeatedly is that these critics repeatedly fail to critically engage their own ideas.

and its absorption of Greek ideas. The dogmas of the early church are regarded as the work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel.³

2.3 C.H. Dodd

C.H. Dodd is another one of our modernist muses; albeit a silent partner. A liberal theologian in the first half of the twentieth century, Dodd drew a clear distinction between preaching and teaching.⁴ As he explained, “Teaching (*didaskein*) is in a large majority of cases ethical instruction. Occasionally it seems to include what we should call apologetics. Sometimes, especially in the Johannine writings, it includes the exposition of theological doctrine.” “Dodd maintained that the original disciples who heard Jesus speak and who later became disciples did so with the anticipation of an immediate return of Jesus while they lived. When Jesus did not immediately return, they began to memorize the sayings of Jesus and formed a primitive catechism. Later, disciples incorporated these catechisms into their writing.”⁵

These original sayings formed Dodd’s kerygma.⁶ Though he explained things with greater nuance than many of those who were inspired by his explanation, Dodd did attempt to clearly separate preaching the gospel from primarily moral teaching. His reasons for such a strong separation are connected to his identity as a twentieth century theologian attempting to be faithful to the Bible while still retaining his own core identity as a theological liberal. Building on the form critical ideas of Rudolph Bultmann, Dodd attempted to distinguish the authentic thoughts and activities connected to

³ John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-century Religious Thought* (London: SCM, 1988) 88.

⁴ C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964) www.religion-online.org.

⁵ Tom Roberts, “Preaching the Cross” *Issues and Answers* 2 www.foresthillschurch.us.

⁶ Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* Third Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000) 543. *kerygma*—an official announcement, a proclamation; the content of a herald’s proclamation. Classical use: A call to assemble by a proclamation. NT: 12:41; Lk 11:32; Ro 16:25; 1Co 1:21; 1Co 2:4; 1Co 15:14; 2Ti4:17; Tit 1:3. Most of the passages refer to the act of preaching. 1Co 2:4 and 2Ti 4:17 consider the content of the proclamation.

Jesus the Messiah from the later ideas of his followers.⁷ Only the former could save, not simply because it articulated the process of salvation, but also because it was the one part of the New Testament that could be reliably traced back to Jesus. “While we should not lightly dismiss any theological propositions or dogmatic beliefs found in the Bible, we must realize that in morals and religion no purely objective evidence is obtainable.”⁸ Didache, or teaching, did, according to Dodd (*The Authority of the Bible*), have value in echoing genuine faith that could inspire other believers to live for Christ.

This sort of differentiation inspired others such as Bill Love, the author of the idea of the “Core Gospel”. Karl Ketcherside distinguished between the gospel of Christ and apostolic doctrine. “The apostolic doctrine was not to lead men to believe and be baptized but to tell them “how to behave themselves in the house of God (2Ti 3:15).”⁹ It is important to see where this all led. Liberal biblical criticism led to a radical differentiation between types of information found in the Bible. It was not an accurate criticism in the sense that it was premised on a diluted revelation. I am not suggesting that insiders are not inerrant-ists. I have no idea whether they are or not. I also do not know if they are familiar with any of this. I do, however, suggest that their own ideas concerning speech acts and discourse in the New Testament did not spring spontaneously from their thoughts. These are ideas with a long provenance. People like Dodd influenced several generations of biblical scholars and theologians. Later theologians such as Greg Boyd, Stanley Grenz, James Dunn and many others modeled their views on men such as Dodd. His views also filtered into mainstream seminary curricula. It should be no surprise therefore that missiologists would learn from and lean on scholarship such as this.

⁷ Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996) 434.

⁸ Ron Halbrook, “At Last...Now...an Open Confession: Dodd and Ketcherside: Kerygma and Didache” *Truth Magazine*.

⁹ W. Carl Ketcherside, *The Twisted Scriptures* (DeFuniak Springs: Diversity, 1992).

Let's take a closer look at kerygma and its associated concepts. Those that argue for the integrity of the gospel echo the call for kerygma as opposed to didache. The parallels are close. But what do more intense studies of the Word disclose about *kerygma*? *Kerygma* is associated with *keryx*, a herald, commonly employed in the classical Greek world. In the New Testament, however, both terms are seldom employed. The associated verb *kerysso*, "preaching", occurs far more frequently. The sorts of understanding of kerygma that equate it, as Lewis does, with a "core" gospel, came by way of theological reflection as the twentieth century liberal theologian Rudolph Bultmann attempted to distinguish between the "risen Christ" and biographical detail about his life. "It takes up the language of the New Testament, but uses the word (*kerygma*) in a sense which is at most marginally present in the New Testament."¹⁰ A greater meaning is associated with it in the 4th century by Athanasius who, given the claims of Lewis, ironically equated it with Christian or church doctrine.¹¹

Attending to the so-called division of kerygma and didache, Brown notes that the two were, in practice, very intertwined. He postulates that it may be that the sort of formulaic missionary proclamation Lewis equates to the gospel that was originally part of a baptismal profession by initiates (Cf. 1Co 12:3; Ro 10:9; with Acts 11:17, 20; 16:31; Col 2:16; Act 8:16; 19:5; 1Co 6:11). He also notes that the context for the proclamations was teaching. This accords well with the statements in the Didache, written no later than the first decade of the second century. 'See that no one makes thee to err from this way of the teaching, for he teaches thee without God. For if thou canst bear the whole yoke of the Lord, thou wilt be perfect, but if thou canst not, do what thou canst. And concerning food, bear what thou canst, but keep strictly from that which is offered to idols, for it is the worship of dead gods. Concerning bap-

¹⁰ Colin Brown, "Proclamation, Preach, Kerygma" *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Vol. 3. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 44-68.

¹¹ Colin Brown, 53. Refers to Athanasius' *De Decretis Nicaenae Synodi*, 26,7.

tism, baptize thus: Having first rehearsed all these things, “baptize, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”¹²

The sort of radical distinction between kerygma and didache evidenced an understanding that is also being steadily undermined by more recent scholarship. Robert Mounce, for example, challenged the sort of bifurcation that had salvific proclamation radically separated from ethical instruction. In Mounce’s view, it was often entirely artificial to make preaching a “first order” business as opposed to “second order” doctrinal teaching.¹³ Heiko Oberman, the legendary church historian, examining the pre-Augustinian church, concluded that “there is in our time a striking convergence of scholarly opinion that Scripture and tradition are for the early Church in no sense mutually exclusive: kerygma, Scripture and Tradition coincide entirely. The Church preaches the kerygma which is to be found in toto in written form in the canonical books.”¹⁴

The great historian of the early church, J.N.D. Kelly admired Dodd and found fault with little in his approach. He identified only one deficiency in his work, the too-limited focus on preaching. “Preaching was only one of the spheres in which the faith of first-century Christians found an outlet; and in preaching, the necessary emphasis tends to be almost exclusively christological. Yet the Church carried over from its Jewish antecedents a settled belief in God the Father, the maker of heaven and earth, the one God of the whole world; and the teaching of Jesus had assigned special prominence to the Fatherhood of God. If attention is concentrated on the kerygma as it appears in sermons alone, it is easy to overlook this important item. Similarly the profoundly Trinitarian strain in early Christianity is liable to be ignored in the kind of approach which we are examining. The Trinitarianism of the New Testament is rarely

¹² Kirsopp Lake, trans., “The Didache” *The Apostolic Fathers* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1912) 319–321.

¹³ Halbrook. See too John Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 33. Stott saw value in Dodd attempting to understand the nature of the message preached particularly in Acts, but he considered Dodd’s hard distinctions “certainly overdrawn.”

¹⁴ Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1963) 366.

explicit; but the frequency with which the triadic schema recurs suggests that this pattern was implicit in Christian theology from the start.”¹⁵ In other words, Kelly points out that the focus on a preaching christological formula tends to unbalance our assessment of Jesus’ and the apostles’ emphases. The covenantal context within which he and the others preached led to a far greater emphasis on doctrinal distinctions such as the Fatherhood of God and the Trinity, as first-order knowledge, important for every recipient of the gospel message. Therefore, in that case, people did not just have to know a list of six or seven things to be part of the redeemed community.

Lewis would have you and me believe that authentic biblical faith is essentially nothing more than lowest common denominator statements concerning Christ. She would have you believe that this is the true faith and that the rest of us are nothing more than poor, corrupt, culturally bound creatures. Take a closer look. What she advocates for is nothing that the church throughout its history, from the New Testament onward, would have recognized as authentic. It is sheer reductionism that attempts to rip Jesus away from his redemptive, covenantal roots. This is not the gospel. Do not be fooled. It is a modernist counterfeit. Look around; check out the web. So-called evangelicals with the finest credentials are vacating the side of Jesus, in his name, and moving back to the nations. They would have you believe that the religions of the nations are where you find Jesus. They are polite people. They count on a moderate tone to woo a corrupted generation, weaned off deep biblical knowledge and doctrine, infiltrated by a theology of religions that homogenizes faith systems. Stand up. Be the first perhaps in your circle to recognize that this is not the gospel at all. It is a counterfeit world religion and it has precious little to do with Christ. There are better voices to which we should listen.

¹⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* Third Edition (London: Continuum, 1972) 12.

3 The integrity of Christianity

J. Gresham Machen once asked, in an essay, a question related to, “What is the gospel.” Writing in the first half of the Twentieth Century and dealing with the rising tide of theological liberalism that was invading Western Christian churches, he asked: “What is Christianity?” He found himself forced by liberalism’s discouragement of controversy and its acceptance of diversity, to ask whether it was to be found inside the Bible or not. As a Princeton Theological Seminary professor, he was personally experiencing a tidal wave of theological heterodoxy that was sweeping through his school and which would, in time, sweep him aside. He hoped, by asking the question, to be used by God to stimulate what he called a “great spiritual advance.”¹⁶ It appeared to Machen that the great distinctive essence of Christianity was being diluted beyond recognition, so he wrote in hope of bringing Christians’ attention back to the basics of their identity.

He asked the question, “What then was Christianity at that time when it began?” This is a good place to start. If we can discover the answer, we can know how faithful we are to that identity now. It is also an integrity question as well, similar to that asked by Lewis of the gospel. Both questions seem to be foundational for us. Machen set up the possible contrast in understanding by bringing up what he considered to be a “fashionable, modern answer.” To the moderns of his day, Christianity “is a life and not a doctrine. It is a life or an experience that has doctrine merely as its symbolic intellectual expression, so that while the life abides the doctrine must necessarily change from age to age.” In our own context, considering the manifestation of insider movements around the Muslim world, perhaps we could add “from place to place” to “from age to age.” This “life” as he called it, seems very similar to Lewis’s “gospel”. Both are seen as necessary and irreducible. On the other hand, in both formulas, doctrine is seen in a contingent light, not immediate and not constant.

¹⁶ J. Gresham Machen, “What is Christianity?” Appeared in *Historic Christianity* (Philadelphia: Skilton House Ministries, 1997) www.reformedaudio.org.

Before he made his real point, Machen wanted to reassure us that he too saw Christianity, in its origins, as life. Going further, he wants us to know that this was not a life like any other. To be a Christian meant living differently from the world. Likewise, living in accord with the world was unacceptable to the church. So, Christianity at the beginning was not just a message; it was a new life, lived alongside, but in contrast to the rest of the world. But, he asked, “How was that Christian type of life produced?” It was produced as early Christians remembered and rehearsed their transformed identity in Christ; that is, the facts about who God is and what he did redemptively for us. We call that doctrine. Like Wright, Machen erased the gaps between proclamation, faith, doctrine and ethics. Again, one has to look at the testimonies of early heretics to find the segregation rather than the integration of these.

His predecessor at Princeton, B.B. Warfield, made the point that Christians are a people apart. They are different because God made them to be that way.

‘Call them “Christians”, or call them what you please, they are of a specifically different religion from those who know no such experience. It may be within the rights of those who feel no need of such a redemption and have never experienced its transforming power to contend that their religion is a better religion than the Christianity of the Cross. It is distinctly not within their rights to maintain that it is the same religion as the Christianity of the Cross. On their own showing it is not that.’¹⁷

We are the people of the Way; the way of Abraham, yes; but of the entire covenantal plan of God. We are a newly constituted part of one family. Our relatives circle the world, but what makes them and us so very significant is that we are that one new people in Christ. It is in that newness that we are very much extracted. Thank God for that.

¹⁷Benjamin B. Warfield, “The Essence of Christianity and the Cross of Christ” *The Person and Work of Christ* 1914 (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1950) 530.

CORNELIUS. LEGITIMATE INCLUSIVIST OR INSIDER HERO? ANOTHER LOOK

By Salaam Corniche¹

1 Introduction

The book of Acts has been referred to as a 'legitimization document.'² It justifies the notion that God has given his blessing to the formation of the early church and thus helps its readers, both then and now, to consolidate their identity as a group. Thus a Jewish background reader in the early church might look to the story of Cornelius and see that inclusion of Gentiles into the church was a God-orchestrated and ordained idea. Some present day readers, under the guise of Divine warrant and blessing, however, try to force the text to fit their agenda and declare it to be legitimate.

In this paper I will examine the ways that both inclusivists and proponents of the insider movement have taken the story of Cornelius and used it to legitimize their theology and subsequent methodologies. Cornelius is portrayed as the "patron saint" of inclusivist thinking which suggests that "anyone who does good"—regardless of religion - is accepted by God, and insiders tell us that their methods are "as old as James of the Jews and Cornelius of the Gentiles."³

Yet a closer examination of the text will show that both groups, for all their noble intentions to make the gospel accessible to all, have diverted attention away from the One who makes the Gospel accessible in the first place. In light of the larger context of Acts and the life and times of centurions in the Mediterranean, I will show that the story is designed to put Jesus on center stage as the Ultimate Centurion.

¹ Salaam Corniche is an ordained minister who loves "theology on fire" and has worked with his family in a predominantly Muslim country.

² Alternate spelling is legitimization. See fn #4

³ Rebecca Lewis, "Sharing the Gospel Through Open Networks", in *Mission Frontiers* (January-February 2006), p. 23.

2 Background to Acts as a Legitimization Document

In his helpful discussion of distinguishing between the genre of the Gospels and Acts, Darrel Bock suggests that the Gospels are *bios* and Acts is a *legitimization document*. He writes that Acts serves to:

..explain and legitimate the early church and its roots. This was necessary because in the ancient world what counted in religion was its age and time-tested quality. Since Christianity was new, it needed to explain how it could be new and still be of merit. The answer was that, although the form of Christianity was new, the faith itself was old, rooted in promises and commitments made to Israel. In fact, the new movement did not seek to make itself into a new entity but was moved in a new direction only when official Judaism rejected it and expelled it from the synagogue, with the result that (in accord with God's plan, as Acts clarifies) the gospel was taken to the Gentiles also. Acts tells this story as it presents how the promise of God expanded as far as Rome.⁴

Similarly, in the words of Ben Witherington III, Luke accomplished many things in his Luke-Acts, but primarily provides “early Christianity with a sense of definition, identity, and legitimization, things Theophilus presumably needed.”⁵

Bock understands *bios* as “the key events that surround a person and his teaching” and he suggests that they are the dominant theme of the Gospels.⁶ In Acts, the document that legitimizes the Church’s authenticity, there is the *bios* of Cornelius, Peter and Jesus. Thus these two genre work together.

⁴ Bock, “Reading the Gospels and Acts” in the ESV Study Bible notes

⁵ Witherington III, Ben: *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI : Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p.76 —Philip Esler, drawing on the sociological work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, speaks of Luke-Acts as a work of legitimization, an attempt ‘to explain and justify, to “legitimate” Christianity to his Christian contemporaries.’ In his *Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lucan Theology* (SNTSMS 57: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 16, and Marshall notes: “.....a particular theme in Acts is to show that the church, composed of Jews and Gentiles, stands in continuity with the saving plan of God, as revealed in the Jewish Scriptures, that the church is the legitimate fulfillment of the hopes of Israel...” *NT. Guide*, p. 45

⁶ Bock, *ibid*

3 Legitimization of inclusivism

As the emotionally charged questions, “What about the unevangelized who have never heard?” and “Doesn’t God want all people to be saved?” swirl around the evangelical world, various authors have wrestled with the question. The spectrum of answers include:

- Exclusivism: “One Mountain—the only true and Living God with One Way—Jesus - and One Guide—the Bible”
- Inclusivism: “One Mountain—to the more or less only true and living God with One way, Jesus, but you don’t have to have explicit knowledge about him - and many guides — all religions have some truth after all, and you can learn about him through creation and conscience”
- Pluralism: “One or more mountains—take your pick—to the god as you define it with many ways—buffet style, with many guides” ⁷

3.1 Clark Pinnock and Terrance Tiessen

Clark Pinnock falls in the radical inclusivist region of the spectrum. His work has been closely examined by evangelical scholars of a conservative nature and exegetically has been found to be wanting.⁸ This is especially true of Pinnock’s *rallying cry* or *theme* song of Acts 10:35-36, two verses Daniel Strange suggests are “seminal to Pinnock’s whole position on the unevangelised.”⁹ Pinnock is a proponent of what is called a “wider hope,” believing that well-meaning people of other religions, with or without explicit faith in Christ—he allows for implicit faith—with or without accurate

⁷ According to Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson. *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*. “Inclusivism is the view that, although Jesus is the only Savior of the world, one does not have to believe in the gospel to be saved.” (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2008), p.12.

⁸ Daniel Strange, “The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised: An Analysis of Inclusivism in Recent Evangelical Theology” (PhD. Thesis: University of Bristol, 1999)

⁹ Strange, p. 68.

knowledge of who Christ is, may be saved.¹⁰ All they need is a nebulous entity he calls a “faith principle” and “doing right.”¹¹ He takes a small sampling of what he calls “pagan saints” or “holy pagans” and expands this to a general rule about the unevangelized.¹² He states:

Abel, Noah, Enoch, Job, Jethro, the queen of Sheba, the centurion, Cornelius—all stand as positive proof that the grace of God touches people all over the world and that faith, without which it is impossible to please God, can and does occur outside as well as inside the formal covenant communities.¹³

Elsewhere Pinnock describes Cornelius as “the pagan saint par excellence of the New Testament, a believer in God before he became a Christian.”¹⁴ The potential double-talk of both of these statements is highly characteristic of the inclusivist position, adding a high degree of difficulty to know what is meant.

Terrance Tiessen repeats Pinnock almost verbatim: “Some people are saved who have not yet become Christians”¹⁵ Again, the foggiess in this statement demands elucidation, but Tiessen compounds the confusion: “We dare not assume to know what a

¹⁰ Clark H. Pinnock, *Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

¹¹ Ibid, p. 157

¹² Ramesh Richard (p. 92) calls this the ‘fallacy of the general rule’ where “a few cases of non-Israelite salvation become a case for the general availability of salvation without an exclusive content condition” in his “Soteriological Inclusivism and Dispensationalism” *Bibliotheca sacra*, 151 no 601(Ja-Mr 1994).

¹³ Pinnock, *Wideness*, p. 162. The parallels with lists by IM proponents are obvious. See for instance, Kevin Higgins who cites Melchizedek, Balaam, Naaman (although elsewhere), the Ninevites and the Magi in his “Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective,” *St Francis Magazine* 5:4 (August 2009) pp. 85-86.

¹⁴ Pinnock, *Wideness*, p. 165.

¹⁵ Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), p. 25. Tiessen (pp.175-178) selectively interacts with a number of authors over time, including Thomas Aquinas, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, G. Campbell Morgan to cull out their views on Cornelius. Cf. a helpful review of this work by James M. Hamilton, in the *Trinity Journal* 28 NS (2007), pp. 89-112.

particular individual believes because he or she is a Muslim, a Jew, a Hindu, or a Buddhist”¹⁶ He also believes, “We must contextualize the faith so that converts and potential converts are able to follow Christ in all areas of their lives but without disrupting their cultural background in ways not necessitated by their new Christian faith.”¹⁷ Those familiar with the writings of proponents of the insider movements (IM) will instantly recognize the *déjà vu* in Tiessen’s last statement.¹⁸

In this vein Nabil Jabbur confidently uses the example of Cornelius as an example of someone who “did not need to change [his] shape . . . in order to enter the kingdom of God.” Jabbur extrapolates that “the Muslim does not have to change his shape and identity” in order to enter the same.¹⁹

In both Tiessen and Pinnock’s statements, we see a tendency to downplay accurate knowledge, making an appeal to agnosticism. They both stand on the shoulders of Charles Kraft, who in 1974, echoed a similar sentiment concerning how Muslims come to faith:

He doesn’t have to be convinced of the death of Christ. He simply has to pledge allegiance and faith to God who worked out the details to make it possible for his faith response to take the place of a righteousness requirement. . . . He doesn’t have to know the details, for knowledge does not save. He simply has to pledge in faith as much of himself as he can to as much of God as he understands, even the Muslim ‘Allah.’²⁰

Ramesh Richard’s critique of inclusivism distills Tiessen and Pinnock’s arguments into 4 propositions. He shows that “explicit

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 354.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 356.

¹⁸ Peterson lists a number of distinctives of inclusivism with the third item in his list: “Some inclusivists, not all, have argued that adherents of the world’s non-Christian religions may be saved apart from believing the gospel. . . . God in his grace accepts those who sincerely repent and seek him within the confines of their religions.” p. 15.

¹⁹ *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross: Insights from an Arab Christian*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NAV Press, 2008). p. 240.

²⁰ Charles Kraft, “Distinctive Religious Barriers to Outside Penetration,” *Report on Consultation on Islamic Communication Held at Marseille* (1974), pp. 71-73.

knowledge” is their conundrum. He demonstrates this by exposing their chain of logic which, he suggests, flows as follows:

1. Pre-Christ individuals have been saved without explicit knowledge of Christ.
2. People, then, can be saved without explicit knowledge of Christ.
3. There are many post-Christ individuals without explicit knowledge of Christ now.
4. Therefore these too can be saved without explicit knowledge of Christ as were their pre-Christ counterparts.²¹

Richard demonstrates that only proposition #3 is true, but that the others are false, thus a house of cards is easily demolished. Yet the appeal of inclusivism is strong, mostly with an appeal to sentimentalism. This *dumbing down* of cognitive element has infiltrated IM. Rick Brown suggests that subjects like the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus are not prerequisites for salvation, as long as one says “Yes” to Jesus and puts one faith in Him.²²

What can be observed in both inclusivist and insider movement writings is a tendency to fudge areas of doctrine with somewhat ambiguous statements that could be read in multiple ways, ranging from orthodox to heterodox. An example of this is the statement by Rebecca Lewis that “insider movements are as old as James of the Jews and Cornelius of the Gentiles.” Lewis uses the same strategy

²¹ Richard, p. 107.

²² He states: “There is no statement that one must believe Jesus is the Lamb of God or Image or Word or Wisdom of God incarnate or even that he is God himself incarnate. There is no requirement for belief in the virgin birth nor the Trinity or other such teachings. These other doctrines although true and important can make the Gospel more appealing in many cases, but we should not confuse importance with necessity.” Rick Brown, “What Must One Believe About Jesus for Salvation?” *IJFM* 17:4 (Winter, 2000) No pagination. Compare this with a statement made by Carl Medearis in his recent *Speaking of Jesus: The Art of Not-Evangelism* (p. 26): “There is a place for doctrines and dogma and science and history and apologetics, but these things are not Jesus -- they are humanly manufactured attempts to make people think having the right ideas is the same thing as loving and following Jesus.” (David C. Cook, 2011). As much as these statements are superficially innocuous, the authors arbitrarily pit knowledge against relationship.

as Luke: appealing to history to legitimate early Christianity.²³ Luke appealed to Christianity's Old Testament antecedents of the previous two millennia. Lewis appeals to the church's last two millennia. The former has a solid footing; the later is revisionist at best and manipulative at worst. A closer look at Acts 10 and 11 is in order.

4 Acts 10:1-11:18 general overview

4.1 *Examining the Cornelius story*

Luke may have been a proselyte to Judaism, perhaps providing the reason for including centurions and other Roman officers interacting with Jesus (Luke 7:3; 23:47; Acts 10; 13:12; 16:34). Cornelius, the pro-consul Sergius Paulus, and the keeper of the Roman jail are all portrayed in a respectable light.²⁴ It is easy to overemphasize the positive aspects of these Gentiles; even Sergius Paul is thought to be a "shining example of unprejudiced openness to the gospel."²⁵ How could we not think that these are men who are totally accepted by God based on their good deeds in the community and their seemingly righteous acts? Over 170 years ago, the German

²³ To her own defense, Lewis would point out the larger context of her article and cry foul as she would assert that she is advocating "pre-existing networks." The fact remains, that she has opted for a term which is rather loaded, i.e., "insider-movements" and since this occurs in the context of her wider writings, and of a journal which is highly supportive of all that is entailed in such, namely justifications for Christians to remain a part of the Muslim *ummah*, her assertion must be called into question.

²⁴ We must be careful here to keep in mind that Luke portrays the Roman Empire, however, in much more ambivalent, and some would say, in subtly subversive terms. Kevin Rowe insightfully notes: "No matter how positive Luke's portrayal of the virtues of the Roman Empire and people, there is at bottom a rival claim to universal Lordship. Thus in Acts 10, for example, the piety of Cornelius, the setting in Caesarea and so forth actually highlight the contrast in the claim. The simple question, 'Who is the Lord of all?' is answered by Luke one way and by Rome another" p. 298. We will expand this theme in our comparison of Cornelius and Jesus.

²⁵ Ulrich Mauser, *The Gospel of Peace: A Scriptural Message for Today's World*. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), pp. 93-94.

theologian Fredrick Krummacher debunked a prevalent sentiment in his day which asserted:

It matters not of what faith thou art, whether Jew, Heathen, or Mohammedan, if thou only honor and fear God, or whatever thou regardest as thy God—do nothing unjust towards thy neighbor—and lead a blameless life before the world—then thou requirest nothing more for thy salvation!”²⁶

If the story of Cornelius is a proof-text, as it is for many inclusivists and pro-IMers, his overt deeds of piety translate into a model for others who exhibit the same. In fact, in a recent conversation with me, a missionary suggested the “Muslims in Indonesia that I worked with had more fruits of the Spirit than did the local Christians.”

Examining the Cornelius story through two lenses will minimize the charge of proof-texting—a charge leveled against Geivett and Phillips in their exposition of exclusivism.²⁷ First, there is the examination of its situation in the book of Acts, and second, how it might have been used in the Graeco-Roman context to declare a message about the Ultimate Centurion.

4.2 The situation in the book of Acts

Between the bookends of Acts 1:18 (the description of the geographical expansion of the Gospel given by Holy Spirit empowered witnesses) and Paul’s final summation of this proclamative ministry in Acts 28:28, we find the story of Cornelius. Ronald Witherup observes that the story of Peter and Cornelius is retold 4 times in the book of Acts, each time with a slight variation. He suggests that this goes far beyond simple repetition for repetition’s sake, but serves to provide a deeply textured three dimensional picture of the events from multiple angles and to move Cornelius from center

²⁶ Fredrick. A. Krummacher, *Cornelius The Centurion*, (New York: John S. Taylor, 1841), p. 76.

²⁷ In Dennis L. Okholm ed. *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996)

stage to God's plan and initiative taking center stage.²⁸ Thus to understand the story, we will start with last things first.

At the Jerusalem Council Peter gives a short description and justification of his interaction with Cornelius and company in rather generic terms with Cornelius not even being mentioned by name. Yet the conclusion of the assembly is unanimous:

a. Acts 15:7-9

Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

Four observations from these verses:

1. Peter receives orders based on a Divine prerogative to deliver the gospel message verbally.
2. The Gentile hearers respond to the proclamation in faith.
3. The all-knowing God shows his acceptance of their response by showing that they were no longer intrinsically unclean and thus unholy, but sends His Holy Spirit to them.
4. Gentiles receive equal treatment with Jews in being potential recipients of the gospel message, its purification and the Holy Spirit.

b. Acts 11:1, 14, 17, 18

The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. Cornelius related that the angel told him concerning Peter: *He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.* Peter compared the Gentiles

²⁸Ronald Witherup, "Functional Redundancy in the Acts of the Apostles: A Case Study," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 48 (1992), pp. 67-86. Also William S Kurz, "Effects of Variant Narrators in Acts 10-11," *New Testament Studies*, 43 no 4 (O 1997), pp. 570-586.

of Cornelius' household who received the Holy Spirit with those assembled—might we say who started out as the inquisition—as those *who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ*. The assembly responds with giving glory to God—a sub-theme of the book of Acts—whenever the person and presence of God are manifested and they state, *Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life* (NASB).²⁹ Four observations:

1. Receiving the word of God is a technical term by Luke equivalent to salvation. (cf. Lk 8:11; Acts 6:7; 8:14). This accords with the OT view of hearing with a heart of obedience, not just auditory function.
2. The angel communicated that a verbal proclamation leading to salvation would be delivered by Peter. The angel did not say that Cornelius was already saved, but that he would be saved in the future.
3. The Gentiles are believers not just in a generic God, but in “the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. 9:42).
4. Praise for the mighty acts of God occurs, and affirms that repentance was part of the salvation package (cf. 2:38). Literally the verse reads, “*God has given the Gentiles the repentance which leads to life* (emphasis mine) as rendered by the NASB above. Others render it *granted life-giving repentance*.

c. Acts 10: 34-43

During Peter's sermon, a summary of apostolic teaching on the person and work of Christ, the gospel is laid in explicit detail. He condenses the Gospel of Mark into a few verses, and as we observed earlier, this falls within the genre of a *bios* or a recounting of the “key events that surrounded a person and his teaching.” Thus he obediently declares, as Cornelius had requested, *everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us* (10:33). It is noteworthy that Peter does not say, “I am here to announce to you that those of you

²⁹ Lake-Cadbury translates this as an exclamation: *Why, to the Gentiles too did God give repentance unto life!*

who fear God and do right are already forgiven.” Rather he presupposes that his audience needs to know certain facts to come to salvation. His sermon outline reads as follows:

1. The Gospel of Peace by Jesus Christ: *preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ* (v. 36).
2. The Universal Lordship of Jesus Christ: 'he is Lord of all ' (vs.36b).
3. The Repentance of Sins through Jesus Christ: *the baptism which John preached* (v. 37b).
4. The Humanity of Jesus Christ: *Jesus of Nazareth* (v. 38a).
5. The Deity of Jesus Christ: *God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power* (v. 38).
6. The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ: *whom also they slew, hanging him on a tree* (v. 39b)
7. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: *Him God raised up the third day* (v. 40a).
8. The Appearances of Jesus Christ: *and gave him to be made manifest* (v. 40b).
9. The Universal Judgeship of Jesus Christ: *this is he who is ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead* (v.42b).
10. The impartial Remission of Sins through Jesus Christ: *through his name everyone that believeth on him shall have remission of sins* (v.43b).³⁰

The conclusion of the sermon, which was abruptly cut off by the giving of the Holy Spirit reads:

d. Acts 10:43

All the prophets testify [Gk: to this One] *about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.* Through the instrumentality of the Person of Jesus Christ, any who puts full confidence in Jesus' completed work, will receive forgiveness of sins;

³⁰ Charlotte J. Hunt, Harold Greenlee, David Blood, John Beekman, and Grace E. Sherman. *Exegetical Helps on Acts*. (Institute of Linguistics, 1978), p. 258 citing Charles W. Carter and Ralph Earle, *The Acts of the Apostles*. [The Evangelical Commentary] (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), n.p.

this is an old message. (cf 2:31,38; 3:6). Lenski gives a more literal rendition of the verse and uses it to show the enormity of the discharge of the penalty of sins. He states, "All the prophets unite in saying that remission of sins received through his name everyone believing in him."³¹

e. Acts 10:33

Now, therefore, we all on our part are here present before God to hear all things, that have been commanded to thee by the Lord. (Lenski) The military man Cornelius, who knows the authority of words spoken, declares his intention to submit unreservedly to the orders that Peter will declare from the Commander in Chief.

4.3 Summary

As much as inclusivists would like to say that Cornelius and other "pagan saints" were somehow saved before they became Christians, this seems to be an effort at verbal gymnastics to skirt the issue. Cornelius had to hear verbal proclamation of a message that had explicit content about the person and work of Christ to which he could respond in faith. At a deeper level as well, is the issue of hermeneutics. Inclusivists strain to make the text say something that they want it to say and then hold it up high as their trophy. A cogent observation was made by Geivett and Phillips who said:

It is characteristic of inclusivist hermeneutics that once a logically possible "wideness" interpretation of Scripture is conceived, it comes to term as a probability and is born and celebrated as a virtual certainty.³²

An objection could be offered that the issue of Cornelius' piety and good works has not been dealt with. This is a valid objection and needs to be examined. In order to do so, I will take an approach that rabbis, even including Jesus, used in their argumentation: to show that as much as Cornelius was of laudable character, when compared to Jesus, he was not.

³¹ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*. (Minneapolis, Minn: Augsburg, 1961), p. 429. also cited by *Exegetical Helps*, p. 266

³² R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips "A Particularist View" (p. 243) in Okholm ed. *Four Views*

Among conservative evangelicals there is a divergence of opinion on whether Cornelius' good deeds, probably the result of following Jewish law, were somehow a prerequisite to hear the gospel. Even the Puritan Matthew Henry seems to suggest something that borders on the meritorious in Cornelius:

God never did, nor ever will, reject or refuse an honest gentile, who, though he has not the privileges or advantages that the Jews have, yet, like Cornelius, fears God, and worships him, and works righteousness; that is, is just and charitable towards all men, who lives up to the light he has, both in a sincere devotion and in regular conversation.³³

The well-known New Testament scholar, C.K. Barrett says, "God is about to take action on behalf of Cornelius by bringing him within reach of the Gospel. He does this, one might say because Cornelius has shown by his devotion and his charity that he deserves it."³⁴ Others observe that as much as Cornelius might have had exposure to special revelation by his synagogue attendance, acquaintance with the Scriptures and even his commendation by the angel, he still required concrete knowledge of the Christ and a resultant commitment to him. Cornelius was not saved prior to Peter's coming. John Piper straddles both opinions:

My suggestion is that Cornelius represents a kind of unsaved person among an unreached people group who is seeking God in an extraordinary way. And Peter is saying that God accepts this search as genuine . . . and works wonders to bring that person the gospel of Jesus Christ the way he did through the visions both to Peter on the housetop and Cornelius in the hour of prayer.

So the fear of God that is acceptable to God in verse 35 is a true sense that there is a holy God, that we have to meet him some day as desperate sinners, that we cannot save ourselves and need to know God's way of salvation, and that we pray for it day and night

³³ Matthew Henry, *An exposition of all the books of the Old and New Testaments*, [Vol 5)] (Baynes, London, 1806), p. 80.

³⁴ Charles K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles: In Two Volumes. 1. Preliminary Introduction and Commentary on Acts I - XIV.* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994), p. 503.

and seek to act on the light we have. This is what Cornelius was doing. And God accepted his prayer and his groping for truth in his life (Acts 17: 27), and worked wonders to bring the saving message of the gospel to him. Cornelius would not have been saved if no one had taken him the gospel. And no one who can apprehend revelation will be saved today without the gospel.³⁵

In a nutshell, Piper sees general revelation as a preparation of the special revelation that Cornelius needed, without which he would and could not be saved. This is the conclusion of the texts, as well, that we have just examined.

5 From lesser to greater

Robert Tannehill collated common themes and distinctions of Peter's speeches and sermons. He asks, "Why should the meeting with Cornelius call forth a summary of the Lukan story of Jesus, and why should preaching to Gentiles put such emphasis on the Jewish setting of Jesus' life?"³⁶ This section will attempt to provide an answer to the first part of his question.

In Luke 12:5-7, Jesus makes an argument along typical Rabbinic lines using the principle of lesser to greater or *Qal wachomer* to show that if something is true for the lesser, how much more it will be of the greater. In mathematic terms one could say, "if X is true, then how much more will Y be certainly true?" (cf Heb. 2:2-4).³⁷

But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

³⁵ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Leicester, 1994), pp. 140, 142.

³⁶ Robert Tannehill, "The Functions of Peter's Mission Speeches in the Narrative of Acts" p. 410.

³⁷ *Qal wachomer* which can also be rendered *qal wa-chomer* literally means "light and heavy" and this aligns well with the Cornelius story as the contrast is not between nothing and something, but between good (Cornelius) and best (Jesus).

Thus Jesus compares the value of his followers with sparrows and the great care that the Father has for them (the lesser); how much more would they (the greater) be able to trust in the Father's care for them.

Acts 10 presents clues that this same principle is occurring. There are the benefactions or good deeds of Cornelius (vv 2,4,31) and those of Jesus (v. 31). As worthy as Cornelius' good deeds are, Jesus' are greater: *healing people and setting free those who were oppressed by the devil*. Luke also provides an indirect comparison. Centurions were known for their judicial functions; Peter cites the fact that Jesus will be the Ultimate Judge (v. 42b).

It might be argued that this is simply a case of parallelomania—where the scantiest evidence is manipulated to press into service a certain agenda. To accomplish this, a few select items from the Ancient Near East or the Graeco-Roman world— obscure or in context or not— are highlighted as parallels to the Biblical text because of similar wording, and a so-called iron clad argument is put forward.³⁸ The information revolution has accelerated this tendency in Biblical studies as key-word searches make this abuse very easy. Yet, in the case of Cornelius, this charge is anticipated and speculative comparisons avoided.

There is material in the text describing Cornelius compared with Jesus in Luke-Acts:³⁹

1a. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing v. 2, v. 22.⁴⁰

³⁸ Gavin Rowe, "Luke—Acts and the Imperial Cult: A Way Through the Conundrum?" *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27.3 (2005), p. 285. Samuel Sandmel defines parallelomania as "that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction" in his "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962), p.1.

³⁹ Line 'a' describes Cornelius and 'b' Jesus

⁴⁰ 'Devout' [Gk. *eulabēs*] also describes the men of Acts 2:5 to whom Peter declared that they had to repent if they were to receive the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; see also 3:19; 13:38–39). God-fearing describes the Gentiles in the synagogue audience in Acts 13:16, 26 to whom Paul said, [assuming they were not yet in

b. The church (household)—which will become universal in scope—over which Christ is the head, was said to be devoted (2:42) and God-fearing (9:31).⁴¹

2a. He gave generously to those in need (v.2) and his *gifts to the poor have come up . . . before God* (v. 4), and that God had “remembered” his gifts to the poor (v. 31). He is a model benefactor (cf Luke 22:25).⁴²

b. Jesus⁴³ *went around doing good* [Gk. benefacting] *and healing all who were under the power* [Lenski-tyrannized by the devil] *of the devil* (v. 38) and it was said of him that *with authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!* (Luke 4:36). Additionally in Luke 9:11 and 11:20, there is a direct linkage between Jesus’ acts of healing and exorcism and the coming of the Kingdom of God, which Luke frequently places in opposition to the Empire of Rome. As well Jesus was God’s authorized agent to *bring good news to the poor* (Luke 4:18).

3a. He *prayed to God regularly* (v. 2), and *his prayers* were part of the memorial offering (v.4 c.f Lev 2: 1-2, 9)⁴⁴ and the angel told him that *God has heard your prayer* (v. 31).

Christ] “I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (v. 38).

⁴¹ ‘Devoted’ [Gk. *proskartereō*]—Although not the same word as *eulabēs* above it is used metaphorically to denote steadfastness and faithfulness in the Christian walk (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2).

⁴² See Justin Howell (pp. 31-32) on the role of patrons and benefactors by centurions in his “The Imperial Authority and Benefaction of Centurions and Acts 10.34-43: A Response to C. Kavin Rowe,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 31 no 1 (S 2008).

⁴³ Lenski (p. 423) shows that v. 39 starts with a construction that makes it emphatic Jesus is prominent with the words “he who”.

⁴⁴ According to John Hartley, “the offering stirs God’s memory so that he will act graciously toward the one whom he remembers in light of his past commitments” in the *Word Biblical Commentary: Leviticus*. Dallas : Word, Incorporated, 2002 (Word Biblical Commentary 4), S. 30 and he references B. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, SBT series 1, 37 (1962), pp. 31–34.

b. It was Jesus who taught the disciples to pray (Lk 11.1 ff), who himself was the ultimate memorial offering in whom God was pleased (Luke 3:22). God was *with* Jesus (v. 38) on earth and Jesus is now in heaven with God (Luke 22:69; Acts 7:55-56)

4a. It was reported of Cornelius that *He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people* (v.22). Peter likely alludes to this in v. 36 when he says that *he who does what is right*, is acceptable (Gk *dektos*, received, welcomed—implying non-discriminatory acceptability as a welcoming host) to God. Commentators have noted that the NIV performs a disservice by rendering *dektos* as “God accepts,” connoting an unconditional reception. Pinnock ‘et al’ are quick to latch right onto this.⁴⁵ *Righteous* should be understood in the OT sense as blameless (cf.Gen 6:9; Job 1:1; Luke 1:6; 2:25)

b. Jesus was described by Peter as the *Holy and Righteous One* (3:14) and by Stephen and Ananias as *the Righteous One* (7:42; 22:14).⁴⁶ Jesus is the ultimate example of a God-fearer, one who walked in perfect obedience and perfect respect for His Father. In contrast to Cornelius, there was no universal respect by the Jewish people of Jesus, yet universally “everyone who believes in him receives...” (v.43).

5a. He was described as a host to Peter (v. 48), likely providing food and shelter and possibly even gifts—although not mentioned in the

⁴⁵ D.A. Carson in his *Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (pp. 306-307) notes that the Greek term translated "acceptable" (*dektos*) "is never used in reference to whether or not a person is accepted by God in some saving sense." (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002). Ramesh Richard in his "The Population of Heaven" prefers to link verses 36 and 43 and so renders them "in every nation the man who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him. When he believes in Jesus he receives forgiveness of sins and is accepted by God." (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 63.

⁴⁶ The definite article stands in contrast to the indefinite article applied to Cornelius.

text—as someone of means in that culture would do.⁴⁷ The extension and receiving of hospitality spoke volumes about Cornelius and Peter.

b. Yet Jesus is the ultimate host who gives the gift of God's internal cleansing (10:14-16; 11:7-10), the gift of the Holy Spirit (v.45; 11:17), and the gift of God's acceptance (15:8).

Here follows material in the text describing Jesus compared with Cornelius:⁴⁸

1a. *the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*" (v. 36)

b. Cornelius was a Roman civil servant. Part of his job was to uphold the imperial cult, and with that came the job of upholding the reputation of the Caesar, who was known variously, as "the Lord and benefactor of all" and whose exploits were said to be "the good news" of the *Pax Romana*.⁴⁹

2a. *"Jesus . . . this one is Lord of all"* (v.36) i.e., each and everyone without exception.⁵⁰

b. Cornelius was the lord over the Italian cohort (v.1), consisting of between the 600 men which constituted a Roman cohort, or as many as 1000 men who were volunteers based in Syria.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Andrew E. Arterbury, "Breaking the betrothal bonds: hospitality in John 4," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 72 no 1 (Ja 2010), pp. 63-83 and also his "Entertaining Angels: Hospitality in Luke and Acts," (The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2007.)

<http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/53378.pdf> (Accessed 2011/4/18)

⁴⁸ Line 'a' describes Jesus and 'b' Cornelius

⁴⁹ Howell, pp. 33-36.

⁵⁰ Translation by Rowe, pp. 290-291.

⁵¹ Robert James Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*. [Study Guide Commentary Series Volume 3B], (Marshall, Texas : Bible Lessons International, 2003), S. 133.

3a. *“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power”* (v. 38)

b. Just as Jesus was commissioned for service, so was Cornelius. He was invested with power—to uphold the Roman Empire and all it stood for, whereas Jesus was invested with power to usher in the Kingdom of God.

4a. *“They also put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross”* (v. 39)

b. In Luke 22:25-27 Jesus describes the contrast between authority for humble service and authority for the sake of power: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors.” As much as Cornelius might have been an exception to the rule, Jesus took service to its most extreme conclusion, namely being willing to die as an accursed slave by crucifixion.

5a. *“God appointed [Jesus] as judge of the living and the dead.”* (v. 42)

b. Centurions were asked to intervene in judging cases, especially where civilians thought they were getting unjust treatment at the hands of the Romans. Howell cites an example from Roman Egypt where 31 CE “a certain Hermon complains to a centurion that a soldier and his partners in crime were stealing fish from his pond and requests that the perpetrators make recompense for what they had taken (P. Oxy. XIX 2234).”⁵³

The idea of lesser to greater elucidates that whereas Cornelius had a few nice people who testified about him, Jesus had a witness list that included God-appointed prophets (v. 43) and hand-picked eyewitnesses (vv. 39, 41). The same trajectory continues to where Jesus completely eclipses Cornelius as the all-powerful Risen one who will sit in judgment over all.

⁵³ Howell, p. 37

6 Conclusion

By direct comparison and inference, Luke helped the reader see Cornelius as the model of a righteous Gentile, yet who, contrary to popular opinion, did not merit the salvation he received. Cornelius needed to hear the message of salvation; faith must come by hearing. In light of the exploits of Jesus, he fades into the background.

The centurion's story also aids the reader to form a Biblical anthropology when it comes to placing in proper perspective those people who appear zealous, pious, and doing good things.

The story of Cornelius is a legitimization story. It legitimated the inclusion of Gentiles into the early church because God is the ultimate host in Christ who accepts people of any ethnic group, but does so on His terms. The inclusivist movement, however, desires to push open the narrow gate—some slightly, others even more, but on whose terms? The insider movement looks to the story and looks for legitimization on historical terms of its strategy for staying inside one's former religion while declaring oneself a Christian. Just how this is derived from the Cornelius story is shrouded in mystery and both positions are, as Ramesh Richard asserts: although “emotionally appealing...not biblically plausible, theologically sustainable or evangelically permissible.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ramesh Richard, *The Population of Heaven*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 116.

ST FRANCIS MAGAZINE: A COMPLETE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE FIRST FIVE YEARS (2005-2009)

By Abu Daoud

Recently I was looking over some old articles from *St Francis Magazine* and I realized how much good, but older material we have published over the years. That led me to the idea that I should put together in one clear document an entire bibliography of our first five years. After some prevarication and thought I finally got down to work one night, after the kids were in bed and my wife was asleep. But before we get to the bibliography I wanted to make some preliminary clarifications and remarks as one of the members of the editorial board of the journal.

First: in some of our earliest issues, there were problems related to enumeration which need to be clarified. For example, the March 2007 issue, which properly belongs to volume three, says that it is volume 2:4—a typo. I have followed the lead of John Stringer, the senior editor, in classifying everything by year, and thus March 2007 is located correctly as part of Volume 3.

Regarding format: the journal has come a long way over the years. If you take a look at volume one you will see that SFM was, at that point, little more than an on-line clearing house for documents related to Christian witness to Muslims, broadly understood. By volume two and especially by volume three though we find a journal with a more uniform format for all (or most) articles. By volume five (2009) the format had become uniform and stabilized, with the volume and number being expressed as year:number (5:2, for example). It was also in 2009 that we decided to enumerate entire issues with pagination, which is the fancy way to say that each article in each issue has individual page numbers, and also that one can, if interested, read the issue from beginning to end with a sense of continuity. This also allowed our senior editor, the Rev. Dr. John Stringer, greater expressiveness by ordering articles—placing some first, and some later. Prior to that every article started with page one, and so page numbers are omitted in this bibliography. (For

what it's worth, it was also in this year that I became part of the illustrious editorial team of the journal.)

Final notes: for authors who published more than one article in a given volume (year) I opted for alphabetical order by article name unless it was a two- or three- part series of articles. Also, names like Abu Daoud and Abu Banaat are under 'a' as these names are patronyms, and not a given name and then a surname.

But retuning to the main point, my intention is, again, really to bring some of our older material to our newer readers. A lot has happened since 2005. We are living in a globalized world and the shape, texture, and context of Christian witness to Muslims has shifted and, I think, become more contested and contentious than ever. But I don't think that is bad, per se. In the pages of SFM and similar publications, especially IJFM, and to a lesser extent EMQ and IBMR, a vigorous and some-times vicious debate about contextualization has been taking place. I have voiced my own opinion on the topic for those interested in knowing it, in my three-article series on mission and sacrament, but that is not the point. The point is, rather, that there is a place for the debate to take place. The shift in mission has occupied many of our pages—issues related to Business as Mission, the increasing role of the Korean and Latin American churches in this endeavor, topics related to the safety and recruitment of missionaries, have all been explored in this journal.

It is true that, on the balance, the articles in SFM have endorsed the great missiological tradition, which envisions no possible separation between the label of Jesus-follower, Christian, and member of the Church. But we have also been happy to include material from those arguing in favor of the new approaches, as well as strategies somewhere in-between (Abd al-Asad, or instance). Nonetheless, the traditional model which is suspicious of discarding terms like 'Christian', 'church' and 'Son of God', has worked across seven continents over 18 or so centuries. But we are living in a time of challenge that requires (perhaps) new ways of addressing old issues. And so, the question of contextualization, and the related, but not identical, question of Insider Movements, have risen to the fore in the last few volumes. Perhaps sometimes the language has been less than entirely diplomatic, but the editorial staff of SFM work with no

pay and out of a sense of mission and vocation and we hope that our readers will be charitable in evaluating our selection and edition of articles. And in the end, if you dislike what you have read, then rather than complain, write something original and new, or ancient and new, if you prefer. The task of the Church is to draw on treasures old and new, like the owner of the household mentioned in that obscure Matthean saying: The Scribe who is informed regarding the Kingdom of God is like the owner of a household who draws forth from his storehouse both treasures old and new.

But please don't let the post-modern (and passing, I suspect) debates regarding IM and 'contextualization' distract you from some of the more enduring contribution of the Journal in its first five years of existence. As a lover of Orthodoxy and Catholic faith, I have to highlight some of our non-evangelical contributions. It is these articles that set us apart from publications like the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* and *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* and the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* which, to their detriment, in my opinion, do not often publish such literature. The articles of authors like Lahham, Jackson, Samir and Veronis and some of the material by Teague come to mind here, among others. Also to be appreciated is the concern with Church history. It is true that not every issue contains material on how the history of our Church and witness to Islam are related, but nonetheless, there are a few articles here and there which represent a genuine contribution. I hope that we can continue to provide articles like this in the coming years.

There are some weaknesses in our publication though. While we have published some significant articles by disciples of Jesus who have come from an Islamic context (Ayub, Mallouhi), we could certainly use more. Western missionaries writing about what they think a Jesus-centered faith *should* look like cannot compare with genuine first-hand reflections of Jesus' disciples who have had to tackle these issues not in a theoretical manner, but as a matter of life or death at times.

Another notable weakness (in my mind, at least) related to the one I just mentioned, is a relative lack of case studies of indigenous Christians living in the Muslim world. This is all the more

important as Christianity in the Muslim world continues to decline. That old Baptist church by the *suuq* or the Anglican one in the suburb—they both have a history, and one which has probably not been documented, much less published. When were those churches founded? By whom? What missionary agencies, if any, were involved? What were the struggles and victories the congregation experienced over the years? How do the Christians there relate to the foreign missionaries today? When and how (if ever) was control of the church handed over to local Christians? Are the folks there converts from other types of Christianity (Orthodoxy, for example) or actually from other religions like Judaism or Islam or Zoroastrianism? In the Middle East history is much respected, but it is often handed down orally rather than textually. As the Christian communities in the Muslim world continue to decline and, in some cases, go completely extinct, those histories may be lost forever. Perhaps some of our readers will decide to take up this challenge. I certainly hope so.⁵⁵

At the end of the day, my intention in composing this bibliography and introductory article is to further the present conversations. I hope that some of our new readers will recognize some of our previous articles as valuable and check them out. I also have a technological motive, namely to make some of our material available to persons using the internet, and especially scholar.google.com. In the end we must recognize that more and more new scholars use the internet rather than the library to find material related to their research. Fair enough. We will meet them where they are because being available to the world is part of the DNA of SFM, and has been, since the beginning.

All of that having been said, I hope you will read with care the following bibliography. Find some articles you have not read. Meet some authors you do not know. Challenge yourself. Read something

⁵⁵ To see some examples of what I'm talking about check out Bultema, James. 2010. 'Muslims Coming to Christ in Turkey' in *IJFM*, Vol 27:1, Spring, pp 27-31, or Miller, Duane Alexander. 2010. 'The Episcopal Church in Jordan: Identity, Liturgy, and Mission' in *Journal of Anglican Studies*. Both articles can be found online in PDF form I believe.

outside of your traditional area of interest. And if you come to the conclusion that we are missing something essential, something that no one else has mentioned or argued, then write something for us. In the service of our Lord,

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