MUSLIM BACKGROUND BELIEVERS IN BANGLADESH: THE MAINLINE CHURCH SCENE WITH THESE NEW ‘CHURCH’ MEMBERS FROM MUSLIM BACKGROUNDS

Richard Craft

This article aims to discuss the missiological challenges related to Muslim Background Believers in general and especially in the context of Bangladesh. It gives a brief historical background to Bangladesh and to trends in missiology. It discusses post-colonial theology, the Emergent Church and the Insider Movement methodology. It further draws upon Jorgensen’s published qualitative survey research on Jesus Imanders in Bangladesh. It draws upon the writer’s own experiences of working with MBBs in Bangladesh. Especially key doctrinal aspects to the MBB worldview are discussed. There had been for decades little written openly about the MBB phenomenon because of the fear of persecution of these new believers, but in recent years there has been an open discussion because it is part of modern trends affecting the global Church. This article further utilizes some of these recent articles, both those for Insider Movement methodology and those against it. The article concludes a cautious support for this trend in theology.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally religions such as Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity have been viewed as socio-religious groups, with their own behaviour, knowledge, and art. The socio-religious groups have often maintained and spread their religious culture by means of power: political force, educational superiority and financial sponsorship. In this, they have, knowingly or indirectly, frequently sponsored cultural conquest with often a superior colonial attitude. Historically, Western Christianity has traditionally utilised Greco-Roman pagan philosophy and developments in European/Western philosophy to express its doctrine and teaching. Christianity also has used the European pagan calendar and practices to set its own practices. Essentially, the Church has contextualised/syncretised itself well to the West.

Nevertheless, the world is changing and it is increasingly becoming smaller by the forces of globalisation. Christianity, like other religions, has become under these forces and by their own successes in missions de-territorialised and because of new different forms appearing through local symbols and elements it has become de-traditionalised. Europe and North America, the historical geographical location of Christianity, are now religiously pluralistic societies, under the dominant influence of liberal secularism. Christianity has in recent decades increasingly become a minor influence upon Western society. It is having to take non-institutionalised forms. These changes are affecting its global identity.1 Furthermore, Christianity has grown in Asia, Africa and Latin America, to the extent that these regions now hold the largest percentage of Christians. Arguably, the future of Christian identity lies in these regions rather than in past cultural connections.

The connection between Christianity and European political powers has been firmly established in the mind of Muslims, especially through the Crusades, colonialism, and present day “peace” deployments. Western missionary efforts are considered part of colonialism, and Westernising and Christianizing are seen as synonyms. Furthermore, many Western Christians often assume their cultural and religious identity to be essentially the same.2 Therefore, to be a ‘Christian’ is not understood by a Muslim as being a follower of Christ, in a heart-faith relationship to God or even as a community that seeks God’s instruction, love and social justice. Rather, a Christian, to a Muslim, is just part of the immoral West’s socio-political identity. Therefore, Muslims have cultural barriers in identify themselves with Christianity.

This article aims to discuss the missiological challenges related to Muslim Background Believers (MBB) in general and especially in the context of Bangladesh. It gives a brief historical background to Bangladesh and to trends in missiology. It discusses post-colonial theology, the Emergent Church and the Insider Movement methodology. It further draws upon Jorgensen’s published qualitative survey research on Jesus Imanders in Bangladesh, as well as my own experiences of working with MBBs in Bangladesh.

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1 Jorgensen 2008, 1f.
2 Although it is not true that the Church can be bound only to Europe or the West, just as it was not true that the Church could be bound only by Judaism.
A BRIEF RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF BANGLADESH

By the 13th century when the Afghan Muslims expanded across India to Bengal, they came at a time of social unrest as the local aboriginal Bangladeshs were resenting the invading Aryan’s Hindu social and religious caste system. Initially, the Bangladeshs looked to their Buddhist roots to resist Hinduism but with Islamic political control, Islam came to be the main method to resist the injustices of the Hindu caste system. Muslims were aggressive, extinguishing the influence of any other religious centres by, for example, massacring Buddhist monks. Conversions also happened because of the advantage of being Muslim in a Muslim society and because over time Hindu and Muslim neighbours positively affected each other. Sufi mystics became attracted by Hindu yogic mystical practices and Hindus became engaged with Muslim philosophy. Therefore, a form of mixed Hindu Muslim culture developed. Even to the present, it is not uncommon for some Muslims to attend Hindu festivals as part of their Bengali culture. Subsequently, to other Muslims from other countries they may consider Bangladeshis as ‘lax’, ‘spurious’ and ‘deviant’.

The Sufi tradition was historically the vehicle in which Islam came to Bangladesh. The religious pirs, guru-type Muslim holy men, wandered the country establishing Mosques and religious literacy. The religious mind-set of the people, therefore, is such that they are willing to follow holy men even into unorthodox Islam, especially if these saintly leaders enable ways to fulfil the community’s needs.

During the latter part of the 15th century in the Mughal (post-Afghan rule) period, European traders came to Bangladesh. The Portuguese set up trading centres and at each place established churches. They consisted of a large percentage of Portuguese penal settlers. They engaged in pirating and often captured slaves. These slaves they often forced to convert to Christianity. In the 17th century, an Augustinian Friar bought one such Hindu slave. This slave came from a prominent Hindu family and made a genuine conversion to Christianity through a vision. Subsequently, he became instrumental in converting some 20,000 low caste Hindus to Christianity in the Dhaka district. The descendents of these converts are the majority of the present Roman Catholic Church in Dhaka district. Hence, the Roman Catholic Church in Bangladesh has a strong Hindu influence.

In the late 17th century, the British ruled Bangladesh through the British East India Company. The company initially resisted Christian missionary activities, in order to conduct business peacefully. The British formed close relationships with high caste Hindus and these Hindus became a powerful educated upper class over the Bangladeshis. The Muslims resisted British rule and education, and so became mostly illiterate and uneducated. Therefore, the ruling Hindu classes easily exploited them, and consequently the Muslims developed resentment towards the Hindu ruling class and the British. However, liberal British ways affected both Hindu and Muslim thought, and caused some reforms. In the 19th century, the British parliament passed an act allowing missionaries into Bangladesh. Therefore, because missionaries came through the British colonial power, Muslims viewed missionaries as friends of their enemy. As a result Christian missionaries

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3 McNee 1976, 165-178. From the time of Ashoka (304–292 BC), Bihar and Bengal became strongholds for Buddhism. Up until the 12th century CE, Buddhism had a major influence upon the whole population of Bengal and spread eastward until Indonesia. Nevertheless, Brahmanic Hinduism started to wield influence from the 4th century CE through Aryan political kingdoms of northern India. Eventually, in the 12th century the Hindu Sens overthrew the Buddhist Bengali Pala Kingdom. Subsequently, Hinduism was actively encouraged and Buddhists persecuted. This increased with further waves of Aryan settlers and subsequent enforcing of a caste system upon the population, with the lighter skinned Aryans becoming higher castes and the darker skinned indigenous people becoming the lower castes.

4 McNee 1976, 170.


6 Jørgensen 2008, 134f.

7 McNee 1976, 172f.
mostly gained converts from lower caste Hindus and marginal tribal peoples. These conversions brought about heightened religious tensions, especially during the build-up to independence from Britain. It was a third element, in the religious political turmoil among Hindus and Muslims.8

On the other hand, Christian missions and NGOs brought skills and knowledge to help Bangladesh develop. This has been an effective witness and has enabled Christian missions to mostly function in a Muslim dominated country. Several Christian missions and NGOs, before independence and afterwards, have focused on the marginalised tribal peoples (especially Garo and Santal). The tribal peoples have been drawn to Christianity by the attraction of social improvement, such as having a school and health clinic.

During independence from Britain, some Muslims looked to pan-Islamic unity, through Saudi Arabian Wahhabi influences. As a result, they formed a caste system based on ethnic purity degrees– devaluing Muslims with pure Bangladeshi ethnic roots and elevating those with Persian and Arabic roots (Ashraf Muslims).9 This fed into the pure land thinking of the Muslims, who massacred millions of Hindu, inferior Muslims and pro-independence Bangladeshis during the events to independence from Pakistan.10

In summary, we can note that Bangladesh has a very complex situation. It has a complex mix of ethnicity– tribal, local Bangladeshis, Biharis, descendants of Hindustan Aryans, Europeans, Persians, Afghans and Arabs. There are tensions between them, especially Bangladeshis settlers and tribal peoples, because of a high population density and limited resources.

In terms of religion, there is a small community and influence of Buddhism, but some tribes have a strong connection to it. Some tribes near Myanmar have converted to it in recent decades. Hindus comprise about 9–16% of the population of Bangladesh, although many tribes hold to similar beliefs.11 Muslims, are about 83–90% of the population, and vary across the country. In some parts, there is a strong Wahhabi adherence where attempts are made at local enforced shariah law. However, traditionally, Bangladesh has a strong Sufi tradition and influence, which tends to be more liberal and flexible than Wahhabism. It has a historical openness to encounter other religions. So, in other parts of the country, Islam may just take nominal surface adherence.

Furthermore, some modern Muslim Bangladeshis, especially among the educated middle class, are increasingly aware of the outside world. They have internet and TV access, to understand the global economy and entertainment culture. They are increasingly being exposed to the information age, which is driving desires for the prosperity of modernity. There are trends to seek for another religion that is more compatible with modern secular democracy, and so Buddhism, Christianity or atheism have been attractive to some.

Christianity has historically taken root among Hindus and tribal peoples. There are natural bridges between Greco-Roman culture and Hindu culture. Therefore, the forms of Western Christianity, which have a strong Greco-Roman influence, have been adaptable to Hindus, for example, the use of special consecrated buildings, in order to receive divine blessings/service from a priest. Church services have been less focused on learning from Scriptures but more focused on partaking in very elaborate religious service/experience. The community has also functioned in a similar way to Hindu communities, such as in language using Hindu Bangla in contrast to Mussalmani Bangla.12 For example, in the way they refer to relatives; in greeting each other– giving respect and worship to the divine spirit in each other; and referring to God by the name of a Hindu deity, Issor. Protestants initially did not provide a strong alternative to Greco-Roman/Hindu culture, as Carey’s translation of the Bible used high Bangla, which is heavily Sanskrit influenced.

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8 McNee 1976, 175.
9 McNee 1976, 2-5, 175f.
10 The massacres were desperate attempts to keep Bangladesh under Pakistan rule. These massacres caused many Bangladeshis to question the value of Islam and hence enhanced a process to seek secularism or a modern liberal re-evaluation of Islam. The two strands of tension can be observed in modern politics, where BNP represent a pro-traditional Islamic direction and the Awami League represents a modern liberal democratic secular direction.
12 Mussalmani Bangla (Muslim Bangla) is Indian Bangla mixed with Arabic, Persian and Urdu.
So, this enabled Hindu background people to more readily access the Gospel and Scriptures, but at the same time it maintained a barrier to Muslims. Therefore, for Muslims, Christianity has not only been seen as foreign, i.e. European, but deficient in form due to Greco-Roman/Hindu influences and language. Consequently, a new contextualised form of Christianity has been needed so that Muslims can feel more at home, and for them to understand the message. The need for a Muslim form of Christianity was further felt as the result of Muslims converting to Christianity, and being in effect ‘extracted’ from their community. Their conversion often broke their ties to family, community and identity. This resulted in a loss of witness and physiological stress. Sometimes even their spouse(s) and children were taken away from them. Furthermore, the Muslim convert was often not fully accepted and loved by the Christian community, where they were still treated as an outsider and threat to their community. They often had to change their name and learn a completely new cultural lifestyle. This often caused a barrier to being a believer and was a reason to fall away from Christianity. Therefore, there was a strong need to form a community of similar background and like-minded believers.

GLOBAL MISSIONARY SOLUTIONS

After World War II, there began serious efforts to take Christianity outside of the normal cultural boundaries of Christianity: to use contextualization, to form new church cultures, in order to gain conversions. This soon gained momentum and Protestant theologians talked about ‘indigenization’ and ‘contextualisation’. Roman Catholics talked of ‘inculturation’. These ideas became stronger with new nations becoming independent from colonial powers. Subsequently, more humble, local-culture-appreciating approaches developed.

Adding to the new humbler line of thought towards contextualisation were liberal scholarly works looking at the development of Christian dogma and practice from the influence of Greek thought. Adolf von Harnack’s works are a good example. Many scholars have questioned the historical process in traditional Western Christianity as to whether the process is actually too syncretistic with European paganism. Therefore, theologians, especially non-European theologians, have increasingly criticised traditional Euro-centric Christianity. Consequently, new hybrid forms of religious identities have been forming. Perhaps in the present, it is best to perceive the centre of polycentric Christianity as Christo-centricism in a multitude of different cultural forms.

In the 1960s, several Jews studying the Bible came to accept Jesus as the Messiah. However, they did not accept the Christian institutions or religious culture. Subsequently, Messianic Judaism formed as a movement in the midst of Evangelical Protestantism. These Messianic Jews participate in traditional synagogue liturgy, but interpret their traditions in the light of the NT. This movement provided the initiative to form other Messianic religions/cultures, even though other religions have different gods and lack Messianic hope.

In the late 1960s, Virginia Cobb, a Southern Baptist, voiced ideas typical of a post-modern trend in the Church. To Cobb, religion does not save—i.e. affiliation to group, cult, ethic, dogma and structure of authority—only having Jesus in one’s heart is necessary for salvation. Cobb mirrors trends among Evangelicals which emphasise freedom of individual decision but hold loosely the concept of Church. Cobb can express it this way because postmodernism has a radical distrust of

13 Corwin 2007, 6; Houssney 2010, 2. The problem of ‘extractionism’, and how to avoid it, is a foundation for the IM vision for the IM incarnational ministry.
14 Higgins 2007, 35.
15 His work was translated into English and published at the turn of the century. His works continued to effect the following century. Such works logically imply possible endeavours to express true doctrine in other cultural ways and expressions, and even ways free of the traditional Greco-Roman influences. For example, the creeds are good biblical articulations of faith within the context of the culture and time they were composed, and so, perhaps in other cultures they can find a different way to be expressed.
16 There is a noticeable overlap between the Islamic religious outlook, structure, jurisprudence and practice with Jewish Halacha, Agadah, Mishnah, Talmud, Targum and Midrash (Zeidan 2007). However, there is an enormous gulf between the content of Messianic Judaism and Messianic Islam (Corwin 2007, 8).
17 It is interesting to hear MBBs directly voice these same ideas—my faith “it is just like a relationship—it is not like a religion” (Jørgensen 2008, 231).
history, tradition, structure, standards and constraints. So, in postmodernism, the idea developed that missionaries should not seek to change Muslims from their religion but rather introduce them to Jesus in their present cultural situation. This became part of neo-evangelicalism’s approach to a happy engagement with the world. However, this approach tends to separate in different directions the heart faith and outward formulation of faith. It renders faith in Christ, in doctrinal formulation, to be only valid in the private personal sphere but not in public. Although of course it may produce outward behaviour such as acts of love, compassion and prayer, but it would struggle to formulate an explanation of its basis.

In the 1970s, contextualisation was officially inaugurated into missions. In 1976, the School of World Missions at Fuller Theological Seminary devoted a year to the subject of Muslim evangelism. One of the results was that John Wilder, a Presbyterian missionary, suggested applying the Messianic Jewish model to Muslims. His ideas then fed into the North American Conference for Muslim Evangelism held in 1978. Subsequently, the idea developed that to be Christ centred is to be in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the new missionary approach should be flexible with socio-religious boundaries but nonetheless, find a way to be Christ centred in another socio-religious boundary.

In the 1980s, significant developments in the theories behind contextualisation occurred, such as developments in linguistic contextualisation, through the theory of dynamic equivalence. This theory once established for translation, was then applied to cultural and religious aspects of Christianity to try to form dynamic equivalent churches. Hence, the ‘insider’ phenomena among other non-Christian religious cultures was developed and observed, especially among Muslims and Hindus. Phil Parshall was instrumental in such churches among Muslims.

In 1989, Dudley Woodberry demonstrated strong links between Muslim practice and Jewish and early Christianity. He revealed the Christian Jewish origins in the pillars of Islam and then brought that to bear in possible practices of new MBBS.

Furthermore, in the second half of the 20th century, there developed new Christian ways of reading the Qur’an. Instead of reading it through the traditional Islamic commentary, new Christian interpretations were explored. Such writers as Bishop Kenneth Cragg, reviewed Islam and the Qur’an in a positive Christian light. However, some have argued that Christians are deceiving people by putting their interpretation upon the Qur’an. That is even though Muslims value the Qur’an as a universal book for all of humanity, and therefore, it should then be able to deal with universal differing hermeneutics, it restricts itself only to the understanding in its own traditional commentaries upon the Qur’an. The Christian understandings do not correspond to the Islamic.

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18 Coleman & Verster 2006, 97. In 1974, the Lausanne Movement was launched bringing a worldwide revolution in innovated approaches to missions. In particular, new mission and parachurch agencies emerged for the exclusive purpose of reaching Muslims. Christian seminaries also offered new degrees in Islamic studies and missiology (Houssney 2010, 1).


20 To biblically support this approach, I Cor 7:20 (a verse referring to marriage status) has been used as a basis for a doctrine that new believers should remain ‘as you were’ culturally when called to Christ.

21 Coleman & Verster 2006, 98ff. Phil Parshall wrote in 1980 New Paths in Muslim Evangelism: Evangelical Approaches to Contextualisation, and five years later Beyond the Mosque Christians in Muslim Community, to explain what is happening in the dynamic equivalent churches among Muslims, especially in Bangladesh.

22 Kenneth Cragg wrote The Call of the Minaret his first well known book in 1956 and since has written many more over the following 50 years.

23 For example, Sura 4:171, describes Jesus as a “Word of God” and “Spirit of Go”, and so a Christian hermeneutic believes this to be a hint of the incarnation of God in Christ. The Islamic interpretation is far from concluding that, as their understanding is that this verse is a description concerning Jesus’ prophethood.

24 Hoxha 2010.

25 In addition, there were radical directions from missiologists such as Fuller Theological Seminary missiologist Charles Kraft, a previous Brethren missionary. He equated Muhammad with the Apostle Paul. In Kraft’s opinion, Paul took Hebrew Christianity to the Greeks and Muhammad took it to the Arabs. Hence, Islam is perceived as needing reform rather than abandonment. His approach implies some equivalence of Muhammad and the Qur’an to Paul and Scripture. In this line of thought, Islam is viewed as a contextualized form of monotheistic biblical faith system to the Arabs. The basis for this idea is actually a concession to a verse from the Qur’an (Sura 16:103), in which the Qur’an sees itself as an Arabic Book confirming the earlier revelations (Sura 46:12). Coleman & Verster 2006, 101; Houssney 2010, 7.
POST-COLONIAL THEOLOGY AND THE EMERGING CHURCH

Post-colonial (post-modern) theology, one of the three main trends in Christian theology during the 20th century,²⁰ formed the idea to allow the Gospel to proceed with faith in Jesus as essential and church-culture to be in a dynamic dialogue. Hence, post-colonial theology has a positive view of the potential of syncretism, because it offers new ways forward for Christianity with modern individuals and traditional cultures. It mixes elements from exclusivism (to be centred on Christ) and inclusivism (taking flexible cultural forms, even hybrid religious forms).

The post-colonial theological trend enabled Christians to repent of treating Muslims with prejudice, and to appreciate that Muslim religious practice has many positive and biblically acceptable customs.²⁷ That is to appreciate that Muslims strive to practice customs of modesty, sobriety, chastity, hospitality, generosity, cleanliness, frequent mention of dependence upon God, frequent thanks to God, frequent prayer, etc.²⁸ Also, that Muslims have a deep reverence and longing for God. Therefore, Christians could acknowledge these positive aspects of Muslims, without denying Christian faith.

One result of post-colonial theology is the Emerging Church, which seeks to do missions without imperialism or power claims. Rather, they seek to communicate essential truth in humility and respect. They place the cultural and some church culture aspects to the margins and instead engage in a process of dialogue to find new expressions. Subsequently, part of the post-colonial thinking is to allow Christians to be Muslims. Essentially, in this line of thought Muslims are understood to be part of a culture that ranges from being religiously observant to being secularly nominal. That is to say, being a Muslim is a cultural badge defining self-identity, background, family, community, cultural heritage regardless of belief about God.²⁹ Therefore, the proponents of Insider Movement (IM) have defined ‘Muslim’ culture distinct from ‘Islamic’ religion. In this way, faith in Jesus is the essential truth and reality, and Islamic culture, traditions, are in a process of dialogue to find a new cultural application for the Church. Part of this redemption process is to go back to the early influences of the Syriac language and culture, that were used by Jews and Christians before Islam and which Islam borrowed from.³⁰ Therefore, IM can be seen as an applied result of the Emerging Church in missions.³¹

Understandably, however, some have argued, that this is a dangerous practice, which could destabilize the Church globally. It could cause confusion or compromise. This is because the post-modernist approach to missions leaves issues in a process of dialogue so that it is not always clear what is an essential belief. It has the danger of choosing what is pleasing to the individuals rather than what is revealed in Scripture. There is also a danger of being overly positive in the potential of

²⁰ The other two trends were liberal and dialectical theology (Jørgensen 2008, 70ff). Liberal theology formed as a defence against the attacks from science and from ideas coming from the history of religions and comparative religions studies. Liberal Christian theologians developed a view of syncretism that is neutral and descriptive, in which they view positively the potential of humanity to aspire to become one in Christianity. They tend to have an inclusive attitude regarding Jews and Muslims as children of Abraham. The response of dialectical/conservative theology to the liberal trend in theology was to retreat either behind strong historical traditions or for Evangelicals behind a suspicion of the world and a Biblical worldview. Dialectical theology has a negative view of human potential and understands syncretism to be a bridge back to heathenism/paganism. The dialectical theologians tend to be exclusivists– maintaining the uniqueness of Christ as saviour and of the Church’s role in society. In reaction to both previous theological trends post-colonial theology developed, where it seeks not to whole-heartedly accept academic findings or to reject them, but rather to be in dialogue with them. An additional factor in these theological trends is the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements which helped to provide a pneumatological dynamic. Some MBBs have been drawn to Charismatic churches because they offer an open approach to seeking God for answers, rather than being dictated at by foreign experts. In Dhaka, the senior pastor of the Assemblies of God church is an MBB.

²⁷ Mission Frontiers, 2008a, 18.

²⁸ Corwin 2007, 7.


³⁰ Muhammad appears to have drawn upon Talmudic Judaism and to have been influenced by at least Syriac and Ethiopian Christianity.

³¹ Nikides 2011, 46ff.
man to solve the issues, which would ignore the fallen state of man, and satanic influence upon ungodly imitations of truth.32

A further dilemma in assessing these new processes in the Church is that in a post-modern pluralistic world it is hard to criticise modern phenomena without falling back to a traditional framework to find a reference point to critique, hence, many modern theologians do not criticise anything and can receive anything new as a move of God’s Spirit. Furthermore, it is hard to criticise, as it is still in process. However, as these phenomena are affecting the global church, analysis has to be done.

Moreover, post-modernism is not so easy to dismiss as it mirrors modern trends in pedagogy, preferring to provide information or guide research, so that the students can engage the questions and find their own answers. This modern pedagogy may be needed in theological education, as much of mission churches have fallen into dependency, especially for finances and initiative. At some point, the local Christians, even MBBs, have to be trusted that they can understand biblical theology, missiology and Islamic doctrine, and so think for themselves, even at the risk of going somewhere new. Furthermore, this follows trends in modern philosophy, where individuals are given their free choice to decide their own destiny.

Therefore, IM can be seen as a brave project to allow the Muslims to seek and pray in Christ, to find local solutions themselves. The steering by missionaries, if any, would be to ask the right questions and explain concepts to aid their processes. At the end of the day, however, it will be their answers and so the church will be an expression of their personal identity, not an awkward colonial/foreign identity. The church initiatives would then come from national leaders, who can think, critique, develop and maintain biblically founded and culturally relevant faith and praxis.

So in summary IM is to some extent birthed in trends in Western academia and theology. It is connected to trends in the Emergent Church. Nevertheless, as missions always involve one culture influencing another, this particular format could have the potential to nurture a true Bangladeshi form of church, compared to the result of other mission approaches.

INSIDER MOVEMENT
The following will discuss the Insider Movement (IM)33, which technically refers to just C5 in the Travis C1-C6 spectrum below but many of the features can be seen across the C4 to C6 part of the spectrum, and indeed, have an influence upon the lower end of the spectrum as well. IM is essentially extreme contextualization. It is both a movement towards Christ and a movement in Christ. It is by no means a uniform movement, nor is it a united one. Many Jamaats may have little or no connection with each other.34

A controversy has developed among missiologists as IM is being proposed as the best format to reach Muslims by IM proponents. They propose that MBBs should remain inside the Muslim socio-religious community, retaining identity as members of the community while at the same time living under the Lordship of Christ and the Bible. That is to say, they remain relationally, culturally and socially part of a religious community but at the same time embracing the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. That is in the words of an MBB “Islam is my heritage. Christ is my inheritance.”35 The main arguments for it are that it prevents extraction of the MBBs from the Muslim community and so maintains the possibility of witness, and thus enables many Muslims to become MBBs. Also, two barriers are overcome for a Muslim to become an MBB: the unthinkable of leaving the Muslim community and the sense of being a traitor by changing cultures to Christianity.

32 For example, some new processes are so radically different that we can observe the phenomenon of hybrid religious identities such as Isa-Muslims and Christ bhakta Hindus. Such processes have a global impact upon Christianity--affecting the theological understanding of the nature and mission of the Church and how truth can be viewed in other religious traditions.

33 Travis 2000, 54ff. For articles supporting IM, Mission Frontiers 2011 has many articles discussing the IM approach.

34 Jørgensen 2008, 192. Jørgensen observes the divisions among MBBs. I can verify that many of the Jamaats have had connections to Western missionary denominations and are influenced by those denominational lines. They may also differ according to convictions on the C1-C6 spectrum.

35 Mission Frontiers July-Aug 2008, 12. This must have been said by an English speaker as it sounds almost a poetic slogan. It would be interesting to hear if this slogan works in other languages.
In Bangladesh, IM is an understandable approach to sharing the Gospel but it brings up questions of identity. It is understandable because large parts of the population are illiterate and live a simple hand-to-mouth existence. The luxury of individual choice to change religion and learn a new faith system is often not available, exceedingly difficult or just unimaginable. To change religion threatens their status and relations in their family and local community, and so their core identity and survival. Therefore, fellowships that run alongside the Mosque and that are culturally not too different are more accessible and have potential to slowly disciple into a biblical worldview. That is if those leading the discipleship have clear perception of the goal. However, without effective accountability such groups could just be in effect Muslims who discuss Jesus. In the past, accountability has been ineffective or minimal because of a lack of healthy transparent checks due to the shroud of secrecy that has been placed to protect secret believers. The attempts to protect from persecution may in turn have hindered the ways to protect against doctrinal error.

Another group and most likely the initial group to start IM are those believers, who attended church but had negative experiences in church because of their Muslim background. Some churches have imposed conditions on new believers such as changing their name, disowning natural family, stopping them socializing with Muslims, requiring them to change greeting expressions, to hate Islam, to hate their religious and cultural background, and even to pray for the success of the state of Israel. Some churches openly doubt MBBs could be Christians and have publically denied them communion. Therefore, it is logical for MBBs to form communities of believers in Christ from a Muslim background. It is also logical for MBBs to explore what their faith in Christ means in a Muslim context, because of their shared background. At times, many MBBs in Bangladesh make reactionary remarks about the church that reveals wounds and dissatisfaction. However, some MBBs attend both Jamaats and mainline churches.

Concerns arise with IM when some MBBs boast in their Muslim identity. They see that being a ‘Messianic Muslim’ is to be a true or better Muslim. From the Islamic understanding that a Muslim is one who is in ‘submission to God’, therefore, as an MBB, they are now in better submission to God. This is because they now have all of God’s books and prophets and they are submitting to the Messiah whom God sent to guide and save them. So, some may consider themselves both a Christian as they read Christian devotion books and follow Christ, and also as a Muslim.

Further, concerns arise because many MBBs in IM do not see themselves as Christian or part of the universal Church. They often have a low view of the church and high view of the Mosque. Subsequently, there are clear needs to develop greater ties with the historic visible Church—especially among leaders and scholars. MBBs need to develop and work at the reality of the unity of the body of Christ. Nevertheless, it is also important that traditional Christians would overcome their condemnation of MBBs as ‘heretics’ and develop understanding and offer them love.

Further alarm has arisen as some IM proponents have proposed that IM is the only way to reach Muslims. Traditional methods have even been mocked. So what started as description of a process among some MBBs, has been developed by some Western missionaries into the ‘main missionary approach’ to Muslims. Therefore, within this movement, there are reports that MBBS who have left Islam to join churches are now being asked to reconvert back to Islam to witness Jesus among Muslims. There are even reports of some missionaries becoming Muslims, taking Muslim names and adopting Muslim customs. The suspicion is that IM is bringing Christians into Islam and not enabling MBBs to make an effective break from the unbiblical Islamic faith system.

Moreover, unease arises when it is evident that the effectiveness of this approach has exaggerated numbers, in order to gain Western financial support. There are claims of large numbers of converts;

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30 Brown 2007, 66. This is especially done slowly through studying the OT.
37 Mission Frontiers 2008a, 13.
38 Jørgensen 2008, 240f.
39 Houssney 2010, 3.
41 Houssney 2010, 11.
42 Houssney 2011, 3ff.
some say they are as many as 500,000. It is hard to verify numbers because converts from Islam demand levels of secrecy. However, there are reports of Bangladeshi being hired to give false accounts to visiting supporters. When visitors have questioned showcase converts, and have found ignorance of the Bible and Christianity in general.\textsuperscript{43}

The opponents of IM state that C5 fellowships fail to match the boundary criteria for Christian socio-religious categories. The blending of religious beliefs in the cause of developing a Christian contextualized Muslim cultural form is syncretistic, and because of the conflicting theological basis of both faiths, it is untenable. The resulting theology is heretical and incompatible to the historical establishment of true Christian doctrine. The problem in following Islamic form (Muslim culture) with Christian meaning is that in Islam form is meaning and Islam defines that meaning. As much as we may want to make positive bridges to Islam, at the end of the day, it has a different description of God; it values unbiblical prophets, and teaches unbiblical customs and truths. Moreover, it is not a passive faith system but is also proactive in propagating and bringing people, even the people of the Book–Jews and Christians into its religious system. Therefore, any elevation of the Qur’an, Muhammad and Islam will lead into an unbiblical faith system.\textsuperscript{44}

Essentially the question arises, whether love of cultural identity or community can be more than love for Christ, i.e. do we just try to fit Christ into our cultural values or do we love Christ first and are willing to surrender our cultural values before Christ. Without humble devotion to Christ, there is a limited possibility of Christianizing Islam and Muslims but rather a greater possibility of Islamising Christianity.\textsuperscript{45}

C1–C6 SPECTRUM
In 1998, in the \textit{Evangelical Missions Quarterly}, Phil Parshall and J. Travis, wrote papers on their research among MBBs. The missiologist John Travis (pseudonym) observed a spectrum of six levels of Muslim Background Believers (MBB) in Christ-centred (C1-C6) communities. These have become a standard way to view MBBs among missiologists, although they are a foreigner’s perspective and not an MBB’s perspective. In reality, there is mobility and variation in the spectrum due to the way convictions vary at different times and under different circumstances and influences.\textsuperscript{46}

C1 – MBBs become part of a traditional church and so change their socio-religious identity. Often this involves moving from being part of the majority population to becoming part of an ethnic/religious minority. Therefore, there may be problems for some MBBs to be fully accepted. As they come from the majority community, which may have historically persecuted Christians. Then the Christians may treat the new believer with suspicion and possible rejection. Furthermore, the first few converts are often thrown out of their families and often lose their former identity, such as job and social status. The Muslim community may perceive them as a traitor to their community, nation and family, and they could even lose their family. Nevertheless, when there are significant numbers of MBBs like in Iran, and when like in Iran individuals want to find something very different from Islam, this can be a desired form of church life.\textsuperscript{47} There are advantages to C1 in that the MBBs learn the new language of the Christian community, without mixing it with Islam. Moreover, when the Bible is translated to vernacular the Bible and theological concepts may be more readily available to them than when they read the Qur’an in Arabic, because Arabic may have just been a religious language rather than a language of understanding. Furthermore, one aspect of the MBBs who have undergone the suffering of ostracism and persecution to C1, is they may resent that others avoid it by what they see as compromises.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{43} Lingel 2010; i2 Ministries 2010; Stephan 2011b, 6.
\textsuperscript{44} Travis 2000, 53ff.
\textsuperscript{45} Stephan 2011a, 5.
\textsuperscript{46} This spectrum is discussed in detail in Massey 2000; Coleman & Verster 2006; Corwin 2007; Houssney 2010; Brown 2007, and referred to in much of the other literature. Noticeably Jørgensen does not refer to it. This is perhaps because many of the \textit{Jamaats} are comprised of a mixture of the spectrum, together with a variety of different seekers.
\textsuperscript{47} Corwin 2007, 14. In addition, in sub-Saharan Africa, the Muslim identity may be superficial, and subsequently there may be more mobility to change religious identity to C1 Christianity.
\textsuperscript{48} Corwin 2007, 21. This is actual a response to Corwin by Herbert Hoefer.
C2 – MBBs become part of fellowships using Muslim language in a traditional church. Since the 1980’s the Bangladesh Bible Society has produced a simplified Muslim Bangla Bible. This has enabled the Scriptures to be accessed by Muslims, and many have received Christ through understanding the significance of the message. Many mainline Protestant denominations such as Presbyterians have fellowships using Muslim Bangla. They are gaining fruit from traditional preaching of the good news of God’s love and forgiveness, operating within Reformed doctrine, and by bringing the message holistically. For example, of this type of fellowship, Isai Jamaat, has a standard Western Church service—confessing sins, Apostles Creed, etc. expressed in a strong Muslim cultured form. Moreover, they have invited the moderator of Church of Bangladesh as a theological advisor. In C2, Jesus may be referred to as Isa, Christians as Ima Imanders (believers), churches as Jamaats and pastors as imans, etc. It is not without its dangers of using Muslims words in Christian services and publications. The government of Malaysia forbid the use of Allah and other Islamic terms by Christians to stop confusion and offence. Moreover, some consider it deceptive of Christians to use Islamic language and form. Nonetheless, it appears to be effective in communicating the Gospel and in attracting Muslims.

C3 – tends to be more of a house-church movement or C2 with more Islamic elements. This is where individuals break from Islam but still there is a lot of Islamic culture and form, such as dress and style of worship. They appear outwardly as Muslims. Their fellowships may use Muslim practices, which are not common among Christians but are compatible with the Bible. For example, they may take shoes off, sit and kneel on mats, and chant prayers. They may read the Bible as Muslims would the Qur’an i.e. to sit on the floor with the Bible propped up on a wooden stand, etc.

C4 – has been termed ‘Chrislam’. That is the MBBs who practice Islam with Christian understanding or Christianity with Islamic form. They may use the Bible and the Qur’an as equal authorities. They do not consider themselves Muslims any more, or if they do, it is as a true Muslim – one who submits to God properly (although this definition of Muslim can be found across the spectrum). They do not consider themselves Christian either, were they see Christianity as foreign and/or deficient. They have developed their own distinct socio-religious identity. Therefore, they believe in Jesus independent of the historical church. In Nigeria, some Muslims have formed a sect on this format. The Isara (Ifeoluwa - The Will of God Mission) are followers of Jesus based upon the Qur’an. Some missiologists view all Insider Movements as Chrislam, a new syncretistic sect. In a way, it is a logical outcome when literature, like the The Way of the Sevenfold Secret, explains concepts from Torah, Zabor, Injil and Qur’an to enlighten Sufi mystics to the Gospel. The controversy with this methodology of Common Ground, Common Word and the Camel Method, which refer to the Qur’an to communicate Christian truths, is that the Qur’an remains for many MBBs as an authority. That is to say that after the first successes of leading an MBB to accept Christian truth from the Qur’an, the Qur’an will often remain in the long run as an authority in the MBBs’ worldview because of its role in their conversion.

C5 – MBBs who believe in Jesus personally, but who remain in the socio-religious identity of the Muslim community. These are what are termed as the Insider Movement, Messianic Muslims or Messianic Mosques. Therefore, they follow the outward form of Islam. They give authority to the Qur’an and consider Muhammad a prophet or a form of prophet.

C6 – These are secret/underground MBBs who may not express their faith in Christ, due to isolation or extreme hostility.

KEY ASPECTS OF MBB WORLDVIEW

Before we look at key aspects of the MBB worldview and their impact on key Christian doctrines, it has to be noted that MBBs have not developed firm structures yet. They are a ‘movement’ that is in


50 Woodberry 1996, 175.

process, which has been in process for several decades and most likely it will take several decades before it rests in its identity/identities.\textsuperscript{52}

**CONVERSION**

Conversion is not an easy matter for Muslims in an Islamic environment. It can be costly and immediately put one’s survival at risk. Finding an excuse not to believe is often a way to deal with the fear of converting to Christianity. Avoiding reading the Bible, talking to Christians, and listening to the Gospel are common defences.\textsuperscript{53} MBB jamaats and materials offer an alternative option, and enable some fears to be overcome, and enable biblical thought to be processed in a familiar unthreatening realm.

The factors that helped Muslims come to faith in Jesus are:

- Crisis— discovering the extent of one’s sinfulness; the lack of assurance of salvation in Islam; experiencing God as a hard taskmaster; revulsion at the excesses of Islamism; theological, ethical challenges.
- Reading the Bible or other religious materials— exposure to some form of Christian media; hearing the Gospel in the mother tongue. However, usually with MBBs there is not a strict division between intellectual and mystical motives, but rather a mix of factors are playing in conversion.
- Meeting an advocate of faithfulness towards Jesus— impact of friendly loving believers; Christian friends; Christian pastors when seeking answers and knowledge; Christian foreigners, as they provide in the eyes of Bangladeshis, access to superior technology and knowledge.
- Ritual confirmation of faith in Jesus Christ— attraction to impromptu prayers; experiencing God answering prayer; for some women to have the freedom to pray even during menstruation.
- Dreams and visions that cause a seeking or revealing of Jesus. Dreams and visions, are common in different cultures, including some Christian cultures, but they are particularly crucial in mystical Sufi Islam and hence, the reason why they have been received as a direct message to seek Christ.

Some observers only consider that conversion is genuine when the MBBs have repented of sin, received the Holy Spirit, and believe Jesus has died and rose again. The MBBs understand conversion to have happened inwardly, when an inner relationship of faithfulness to Jesus has occurred in their soul. They expect the conversion to result in moral and ethical changes, so that they will follow Jesus’ instructions: to have a passionate heart, loving one’s neighbours, one’s enemies, loving all without being afraid, forgiving people, caring for the sick, to give alms, to be hard working, self-denying, self-sacrificing, to accept suffering, to not talk badly of others, to not get angry and to serve others. Their expected results mirror the aims of Islamic morality. MBBs use two techniques to bring about genuine change and a relationship to God: prayer and reading the Bible.\textsuperscript{54}

**SCRIPTURE**

Some MBBs highly value the Bible and through it, they edit the Qur’an to only use that which is compatible with the Bible. Other MBBs have varying opinions; some consider the Qur’an partially or entirely inspired. Therefore, on one hand, by affirming the Qur’an with its common Islamic interpretations there will be contradictions in basic Christian doctrines about Jesus, as it is a revelation that obscures Christ. On the other hand, interpreting the Qur’an according to a biblical framework leads to bridges to biblical revelation of Jesus. Consequently maintaining a high view of the Bible is vital in this process.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{52} Higgins 2007, 83f.

\textsuperscript{53} Brown 2007, 68; Corwin 2007, 14.

\textsuperscript{54} Jørgensen 2008, 201-226.

\textsuperscript{55} Colman & Verster 2006, 110.
The interplay between Judaism, Christianity and Islam is interesting as Judaism rejects Jesus, and Islam accepts Jesus but rejects Christianity. It is perhaps fruitful to explore what Muslims accept in the light of Jewish teaching, so they understand the significance and implications of what they affirm.56

Missionaries, evangelists and MBBs have quoted the Qur’an assuming that they are following Paul in the way he quoted Greek poets (Acts 17). However, Paul quotes Greek poetry to make a point that Greeks have been living in sin and rebellion and need to repent of their old pagan life to live a new life in Christ. Paul does not build or include Greek thought into his theology.57 However, IMers have quoted the Qur’an and given it authority in the formation of their theology. This has given the Qur’an equal authority to Scripture and enabled it to become a foundation. Among some MBBs, the biblical image of Christ is surrendered to the Qur’anic, in order to be winsome and non-offensive to Muslims.

Nonetheless, the Qur’an brings a circular logic, as even though Islam considers the previous Scriptures holy but now corrupted, the Qur’an states that the Taurat, Zabur and Injil have special value and authority.58 The Qur’an even implies that parts of the Qur’an cannot be understood without consulting the ‘previous’ Scriptures. For example, Sura 38:42; 21:83-84 states the imperative “remember Job” but the Qur’an has no story of Job. The Qur’an is obviously assuming that its audience is familiar with the Bible. Moreover, it states that when Muslims have doubts they should consult the people of the Book (Sura 10:94). Therefore, some Muslims are interested in studying the Bible based on their understanding of the implications of the Qur’an. The MBB fellowships then serve in this regard to enable Bible study. From the studies, Muslims receive new insights, into God’s goodness and holiness, fallen state of humanity, promises of the Saviour-King, the Messiah and the eternal Kingdom that He has established. Studies on the OT with NT understanding and Islamic language are particularly well received and effective at persuading Muslims to the biblical worldview. Therefore, some in the fellowships are in a process to faith and others are in a process to work out their faith. The Qur’an, nevertheless, plays a significant role among many MBBs to enable this process.

The most troubling concern with IM, in addition to the formation of a new religious sect of Chrislam, is the rewording of Bible translations to make the Scriptures inoffensive to Muslims: to remove in particular filial language such as the title ‘Son of God’; to give Jesus Islamic titles, referring to Him as an Islamic prophet and saying ‘peace be upon Him’ after His name.59 This rewording of the Bible plays into the commonly held view by Muslims that Christians are constantly corrupting the Scriptures and so constantly forming their own conjecture to be based upon. In the eyes of Muslims, this would be a present day proof. Further, to translate the Bible, by stretched dynamic equivalence into Muslim-idioms is very problematic. It results in a form of Scripture that will give authority to promoting an Islamised Gospel and rework the Bible into an Islamic worldview. It would stall any process that is happening among the MBBs towards a biblical Christian worldview. Many Bangladeshi Christians and MBBs are alarmed, and so they are resisting this type of translation. They feel it is being driven by Westerners, in particular financiers and proponents of IM. Besides, there is a great work done by Bangladesh Bible Society in providing Muszalmavi Bangla word for word accurate translation.

Usually, as part of the conversion process, many MBBs have come to have a high view of the Bible. This has had a powerful effect on the direction of the process and movement. They generally

56 Zeidan 2007.
57 Corwin 2007, 10; Houssney 2010, 8f. Other places in the Bible where extra-biblical material is quoted are Paul quoting Aratus and Cleanthes (Acts 17:28), Epimenides (Titus 1:12), and Meander (1 Cor 15:38); Jude quoting 1 Enoch (Jude 14-15) and Assumption of Moses (Jude 9); the writer of Hebrews quoting the Ascension of Isaiah (Heb 11:37).
58 Islam has four holy books but apart from the Qur’an, they usually have no knowledge of the content of the other books, and some Muslims due to illiteracy and/or limited Arabic skills may have limited access even to the Qur’an. The three other books refer to parts of the Bible: Taurat, the books of Moses although Muslims often expect one compilation of law, not the five books containing narratives; Zabur, the psalms of David; and the Injil, the Gospel, in which they expect a book of Moses’ law revised by Jesus. Muslims commonly consider the Qur’an the greatest of the books, and the others to have been corrupted.
59 Madany 2012, 5; Stephan 2011a,1ff; 2011c,2. This controversy has been in the news in respect to parachurch organisations involved in dynamic equivalent translations.
have a high degree of awareness of the Bible, where they read, recite and meditate often upon it regularly. MBBS study the Bible in more intimate ways than most churchmen and missionaries. MBBS study the Bible to know God’s ways, obey his commands and follow the examples of Jesus and the Apostles, rather than using the Bible to debate on doctrinal differences, although they often use the Bible and discuss the Qur’an to settle disputes. They are in a regular pattern of engaging God’s Word in Scripture and they expect it to bring change and transformation in the personality of the believers. Most MBBS believe the Bible over the Qur’an and that faithfulness to the Bible is essential. That is, even though they may discuss Qur’anic passages, they do not go as far as giving it the authority of absolute revelation. They will modify or reject unbiblical Islamic teachings. They essentially distinguish between ‘believing’ the Qur’an, which they do and ‘following’ the Qur’an, which most do not. The Qur’an in my opinion has become to them something like a prominent theological treaty that they discuss and engage with from time to time, but has no binding influence upon them.

The Bible has become in an ontological sense as well as in the text, an ayat, a sign from God. That is to say that the way that they used to use the Qur’an as Muslims, is now the way that they use the Bible. They apply Tajfsir hermeneutics to the Bible, which results in them considering the text as divine truth or word, because the text has a special nature. For example, they can read the Bible, without necessarily understanding it, and assume that it will still have the power to affect those around. Therefore, the Bible is used to evoke a sacred reality, as well as develop personal intellect and ethical guidance. Also, it is not uncommon for them to handle the Bible with extreme reverence, e.g. to kiss it, elevate it off the floor, etc. However, concerns arise with IM proponents’ use of unorthodox hermeneutics and anachronistic interpretations of isolated biblical texts. Educating biblical scholars among IMers is needed to give the movement understanding of the dynamics and developments in hermeneutics. Many MBBS have the academic background, aptitude and passion to learn the biblical languages and scholarship needed to serve their community.

SHAHADA– ALLAH & MUHAMMAD

Can a Christian say the Muslim confession, the Shahada– ‘There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God’? There are similarities in the first clause, in the rejection of polytheism, to the first part of the Shema– ‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!’ (Deut 6:4; Mark 12:28–30). The potential difficulty in the Muslim confession of monotheism is whether Yahweh/Jehovah (the God of the Bible) can be equated with Allah (the God of the Qur’an)? In the Syriac origins of the word ‘Allah’, definitely ‘Allah’ can be understood as the God of the universe, and so ‘Allah’ is as appropriate to use as ‘Jumula’, ‘Issor’, ‘God’, ‘Theos’ or even ‘Elohim’. On the other hand, Allah is also mixed with Arab pagan concepts, but then do all the other names for Yahweh have possible pagan connections. The dilemma really concerns whether the Islamic Allah is a divine king who moves along with mercy or wrath dependent on our actions, or whether God is the biblical concept of the divine loving Father reaching out to humanity. Therefore, confessing the first part of the Shahada is not necessarily lying or giving false witness to God, as it depends on one’s personal hermeneutics of it.

The biggest stumbling block in the Shahada is the reference to Muhammad as the messenger of God, which is clearly an addition to any Jewish or Christian doctrine. If Muhammad were accepted as the last universal prophet or even if a last universal prophet is expected, then it would mean that the revelation that came through Muhammad has the authority to correct/reject the previous Scriptures and correct/reject Muhammad’s perception of Jewish and Christian ‘false’ doctrines. For example, he rejects the Trinity but understandably, as he conceives it as three gods—God, Jesus and Mary. He rejects Jesus as the ‘Son of God’ but then he understands it to mean that God had sexual intercourse with Mary, and Jesus is their biological son; rather than Jesus being the only one born out from God, the Word. He clearly struggles to understand and rejects Christ’s incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection; hence he has not understood the significance of the cross in his own life.

60 Corwin 2007, 16.
62 Lingel 2010.
but rather looks to a system of law/instruction to improve Muslims’ potential of salvation in God’s mercy from God’s wrath (which is methodologically similar to Talmudic Judaism). Furthermore, he subtly has changed the identity and work of Christ. Hence, he has formed a heresy. Therefore to confess Muhammad as an apostle sincerely from a Christian point of view would be to deny true biblical doctrine about Christ (John 5:23; 2 Cor 6:14–17). It would be tantamount to declaring a false testimony of God.

Interestingly, the MBBs point out contradictions in Islamic thought concerning Muhammad. For example, Muhammad is believed by Muslims to intercede on the Last Day for his followers and yet Muhammad’s own salvation/blessings/peace depends on Muslims’ prayers of petition. Moreover, in the Qur’an there are verses that reveal that Muhammad is uncertain of his own pure state and yet there are verses that emphasize Jesus’ sinlessness. Therefore, to many MBBs this means logically Jesus is the only mediator approved by God (Sura 19:87; 20:109; 53:26; Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; 1 Tim 2:5).

Therefore, some MBBs do not say the Shahada. If they go to the Mosque, they are rarely carefully observed as the prayers are usually verbally lead by one imam, and the Muslims around do not expect any at the Mosque to not confess it. They would rarely be tested to confess it and perhaps they would only be tested if they were publically outspoken in proclaiming the Messianic message. To many MBBs in IM this is really a question posed by Christians to test them, because for many Christians to say this, no matter the motivation, is an action that declares to all around that one is in adherence to the doctrines of Islam. However, there are biblical grounds for the practice of dissimulation, that is to publically do or say one thing and then to secretly do something else (1 Sam 16:1-3; 21:12-15; Ps 34; John 7:1-10).

For example, some MBBs confess the Shahada but without giving it meaning, because they consider the confession as a result of social coercion. They use the Islamic idea that there should be no compulsion in religion. So, by feeling forced to confess it they feel it therefore carries no intention and so no meaning. Furthermore, some feel that it makes no difference because even if they stay away from the Mosque and so not say the creed, the community around will still consider them nominally Muslim.

Additional, some MBBs say the Shahada as a sign of social solidarity rather than conviction. They mutter the words often not thinking of the content, as Arabic is not a language of understanding to many of them. They perform it just to communicate piety and subsequently to have the social status to speak on spiritual matters. This is controversial, as an MBB who performs this to meet the standards of Islamic righteousness will ultimately undermine the Islamic standard of righteousness by preaching the Gospel. Moreover, some consider that this is a form of deceit, although those who do it claim that it opens doors to share the Gospel.

Some others approach the Shahada, with changed wording. They replace the Muhammad focus with ‘Isa is the straight path’, ‘Isa ruhu’allah’ (Jesus is the Spirit of God), or ‘Isa Kalimat-Allah’ (Jesus is the Word of God). That is they confess from a biblical framework, truths that are in the Qur’an about Jesus. So they have changed the confession to give Jesus pre-eminence but they still limit that confession to an Islamic framework i.e. they are not likely to confess ‘Jesus is the Son of God’ as it does not comply with the Qur’an.

Nevertheless, some sincerely confess Muhammad as a prophet, as they believe Muhammad had in some sense a biblical mission from God and he was in many ways a good religious leader. They may refer to non-biblical prophets like Melchizedek, Jethro or the ‘appointed’ Babylonian Emperors (Is

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64 Stephan 2011, 3f.
65 Although, the heresy in the Qur’an however is not so systematically formed, as Sura 4:157 can deny the crucifixion but Sura 3:55 & 19:33 can indicate it.
66 Stephan 2011c, 2.
67 Corwin 2007, 12.
68 Just like many Englishmen would say “God save the Queen” even if they are an atheist (Corwin 2007, 15).
69 Brown 2007, 70ff.
70 Sura 4:171
They see that Muhammad called people to God, he called people to repentance, and so he was like an OT prophet. They see that Muhammad also echoes the monk Bahira’s calls for reform in the churches. Indeed, Muhammad could in some ways be equated with the reformer theologian, Martin Luther. I think there is perhaps value in treating Muhammad as a world changing prominent theologian and the Qur’an as a theological treaty. In this way, the genealogy of his ideas can be traced and his writings/sayings critiqued. There is also value in relating Muhammad with Luther because both start their prominent religious ministries voicing a good message that turns people’s hearts towards God’s ways, and against abuses of religion and culture. Further, they both similarly became caught up in politics. Muhammad’s violence can be treated in the light of Luther’s violence. Luther calls for violent persecution of the Jews and shipping them off to the Levant. He also favours violence to instil law and order over rebelling peasants. Therefore, if Luther, or any religious leader, would be brought into a position of unquestionable authority, where all their works are accepted as speaking divine truth, then following Luther would have little difference to the dynamics of Islam. Consequently, a comparison of Muhammad to Luther would enable a use of Muhammad’s works but also a healthy limitation upon the divine significance of his recorded recitations. However, to perform a systematic theological analysis of Muhammad’s message is not easy, as he wrote strands of biblical truth about Christ, as well as error. The strands of truth could make Muhammad, appear like a prophet such as ‘John the Baptist’, in preparing a way to Christ. Therefore, because of these strands of truth many MBBs still value Muhammad and the Islamic system, even though their new faith in Jesus implies that the Islamic system is not complete. This MBB attitude to Islam may change with time. Those that grow in love and obedience of Christ, and who discount error will assumingly see Muhammad and Islam take a less significant role in their lives.

Furthermore, when considering Muhammad, it has to be noted, that modern Muslims have a variety of views about him. He is a cultural icon; just like Plato and Aristotle have a defining role in Western culture or George Washington and the American constitution in US culture. To attack or dismiss Muhammad is to hit one of the core elements in their culture and so it would feel like they are personally being insulted. It would be like asking a Finn to convert fully to Christianity by removing or destroying Kalevala. To impose such a condition is effectively stating that to belong to one’s culture implies one cannot become really a Christian. So in order to be a Christian, one would need to deny one’s personal identity and to be a traitor to one’s culture. Subsequently many MBBs need a way to follow Christ that does not abandon Muhammad.

JESUS

Many of the MBBs have initially got their understanding of Jesus from the Qur’an or from religious material that challenged them to think about the revealed image of Jesus in the Qur’an. The way that Isa al-Masih has such a unique role in the Qur’an, such as being sinless and being able to work miracles, has drawn them to seek more about Jesus. They value the Qur’an because it started in them the path to become a believer in Jesus. They see from the Qur’an that Jesus has a lot of spiritual power. He has living power because he is still alive in heaven. He has power before God because He is innocent, sinless and untouched by the devil. Jesus is holy and sinless because God’s Spirit dwells within Him. They are willing to accept, even from a Qur’anic viewpoint that Jesus is the incarnation of the ‘divine message’. Notably, that is short of confessing unity of Jesus and God, but a step towards it. MBBs have come to conclude that Muhammad only brought an outward message and an outward religion, but Jesus has power to bring an inward faith. Jesus personally is the giver of salvation to them i.e. Jesus is personally real to them. The fact that Jesus is alive and that he is innocent and powerful, gives him greater hierarchical superiority over Muhammad. Jesus’

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71 Higgins 2007, 33.
72 Zebiri 1997, 196.
73 Brown 2007, 71f.
ethical and spiritual qualities exceed Muhammad’s. Therefore, MBBs believe all the Islamic prophets but they are won over to Jesus.  

MBBs are centred on Jesus. They know that their holiness before God comes from the blood of Jesus. The qurban (sacrifice/offering) of Jesus has a profound effect upon MBBs. His willingness to sacrifice himself is a model for them to follow. The way Jesus suffered unjustly is also a way for MBBs to relate with Jesus. The display of Jesus’ love through suffering touches them. Therefore, Jesus’ innocence and sacrifice, transcends Islamic concepts and places MBBs within a Christian theological sphere, although they may still have an element of Sufism in their theology. However, the fact that MBBs consider union with God only really possible through Jesus is a step away from Sufism.

MBBs seek to be faithful towards Jesus, and so faithfully participate in Christ’s innocence and sacrificial nature. In this emphasis on faithfulness, they follow some Sufi Islamic ideas about nurturing oneself into slavery of God through ascetic practices, to obtain union with God. Therefore, MBBs often mention the need to prioritize Jesus, love him, fix one’s mind on him, become centred on Jesus or essentially to make Jesus one’s iman (faith). That is their iman, the centre of their personal totality—heart, mind and thought—should become fixed upon Jesus, in order to be ‘faithful’ to Jesus. Jesus therefore is being approached in an Islamic way, but Jesus has replaced the Qur’an as the centre of their iman. Furthermore, there are clear Islamic Sufi elements in that their personal faithfulness to Jesus, as it is considered meritorious. On the other hand, they also move away from Islamic thinking in that faith in Jesus takes on a real relationship in prayer and is less of an obligation to be performed.

Sin is considered unfaithfulness to Jesus. The most severe sins are drinking alcohol, sexual sins, stealing and lying, which are thought to cause a disconnection and punishment from God. Therefore, faithfulness to Jesus removes sinfulness. Consequently, there is a strong emphasis on personal actions in salvation rather than trusting only in God’s actions towards us. This mirrors some Baptist, or more specifically Arminian theology. That is even though salvation is by God’s grace, through Christ’s blood, and applied by faith, there is also an element where personal actions affect the effect of the Gospel. In particular, for MBBs daily inward personal prayer and prayers for forgiveness are needed to apply salvation in the believer’s life. To MBBs a personal dimension of prayer and Bible reading are signs of having a good relationship with God.

**SALAT AND PILGRIMAGE**

The word ‘Salat’ has its roots in Syriac and was used in both synagogues and churches as the act to ‘bow down’ and pray. The MBBs pride themselves on observing the significance of taking shoes off (Ex 3:5), standing (1 Kings 8:14, 22; Mark 11:25), forehead to the ground (Gen 22:5; Matt 26:39); kneeling (Ps 95:6; Acts 20:36; 21:5) and lifting hands up (Ps 28:2; 1 Tim 2:8), as better at observing biblical patterns, than present Christian practices.

The Muslim ritual prayer contains elements that can mostly be found in the Bible, except for the course on Muhammad and praying for the dead. Also, Islamic ablutions are borrowed from some Jewish practices. The Islamic conception of ablution resembles the potential to spiritually and bodily purify from sin, like some Christian views on baptism. The biblical basis for ablutions comes from the Levite priests’ practices before entering the presence of the Lord (Ex 30:17–21; 40:30–32).

The five Islamic daily prayers have no basis in the Bible or Qur’an but rather derive from Hadith. The Qur’an, and some Shia traditions, follow Jewish traditions and biblical passages of three daily

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76 Jørgensen 2008, 151ff, 168.
79 Moreover, in the Muslim ritual prayer there is witness (Deut 6:4), petition for God’s mercy (Ps 86:5), praise of God (Hallelujah), acknowledging God’s sovereignty and command of judgement day (Matt 25:34; John 5:22; Rom 2:2–3), refuge and guidance in God (Ps 31:3; 46:1; 119:1), giving God’s greatness worship, glory and exaltation (Ex 24:1; Ps 48:1; 83:18), and to make petition and intercession (1 Tim 2:1). Of course, elements like seeking guidance from God can have different content and may vary according to ‘folk’ practices.
prayers (Ps 55:17; Dan 6:11), so some of the MBBs tend to be less observant of the five daily prayer times. Some will attend the Mosque occasionally. Some MBBs pride themselves on being able to pray as many times as they need and anywhere. The weekly day of gathering for Muslims is Friday and is traditionally based on the convenience of gathering on a market day in Medina. In modern Muslim states, Fridays are a day off, although in Bangladesh much market activities continue. Trading only slows during the main prayer time. Therefore, in Muslim states, many churches and MBB jamaats have their main gathering on Friday.

Muslims observe the prayer times as a way to gain merit towards salvation or in limiting the condemnation of God’s wrath. There is no penitence in Muslims’ prayers just an aspect of forgiveness based on human merit and divine mercy. Protestant Christians view prayer as a fruit of faith leading to a good life, divine acceptance and rewards (Matt 6:5-6; Acts 10:35; Rom 2:6, 7), although in practice they are not always so pure in their position. The MBBs are somewhere in between these two positions. The struggle with legalism, formality and externalism is not just a Muslim struggle, many Christians and Jews have similar struggles.

Christians can face in any direction in prayer, although in some traditions some churches have faced east. Jews and perhaps the early Jewish Christians faced Jerusalem especially when using the synagogue. Early Muslims also initially faced towards Jerusalem. Interestingly, the Qur’an also places more emphasis on inner piety and beliefs than direction of prayer (Sura 2:177). Some Jews and Christians have used qiblas too and so Muhammad may have taken the concept from them.

The problem with Mecca as the focal point of prayer is that it is the centre of a non-biblical narrative. The account of Abraham’s maidservant Hagar and her son Ishmael are retold with significant differences. The Muslim account is a clear claim that Ishmael’s line is of greater importance than the biblical promised line of Isaac, and hence Mecca has become more important than Jerusalem. By making Mecca the focus point for prayer or pilgrimage, is to identify with a non-biblical narrative instead of the biblical account. Mecca, as well as being a pre-Islamic pagan centre, is also an Ishmaelite centre.

Additionally, several MBBs have participated at the Islamic prayers at a funeral in order to take the opportunity to share a passage from the Injil and share faith in Jesus. The situation is not without its difficulties as if the deceased was not an MBB, can prayers for the dead be said to petition God for His mercy over His wrath and shorten the stay in Hell?

Even so, one of the attractions for MBBs to Christ is the freedom to pray to Jesus at anytime, anywhere, with their own words, in their own vernacular and that anyone can pray in their gatherings.

**RAMADAN, CHARITY AND BLESSINGS**

To observe Ramadan as Muslims do, brings up theological dilemmas of attempts to achieve a level of righteousness by works. Can MBBs observe the month of Ramadan in an Islamic way? Can they show they are good obedient Muslims, when such a show implies they are seeking God’s reward by works? Perhaps they could mix aspects of lent to observe it in a ‘Christian’ way. That is, they may sincerely fast privately as many Christians do to develop spiritual disciplines, and petition God in the way the biblical concept of fasting would imply. Several MBBs do fast and pray for special reasons. However, the Islamic concepts of divine blessing and honour prevail among MBBs. Perhaps, this has remained because some Christian Reformed theology (a founding feature of the MBBs) teaches that by obedience to God’s rules one receives blessings and prosperity. In this way, the MBBs are influenced by the Protestant dialectic between law and gospel. Although the MBB content of the Gospel appears approximately the same, but their law has Qur’anic (Talmudic) elements.

Can MBBs celebrate Eid Qurban, with regards to almsgiving? This is because part of the sacrifice is given to the poor, although often in a chaotic riotous way. Can MBBs participate in the almsgiving Zakat system, when beggars and poor neighbours will still expect charity?

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80 Woodberry 1996, 177. In the theory of Islam there is no acknowledgement of original sin. Therefore, a believer just balances bad works with good works. However, much description of the effects of original sin can be found in Islam and so the concept of repentance, changing one’s mind, does practically exist. However, Islamic repentance does not have the need for the Saviour or the role of the Holy Spirit to enact it.

81 Corwin 2007,11.

82 Jørgensen 2008, 146, 158ff, 164.
participating in almsgiving is socially irresponsible in Bangladesh. It will furthermore invite curses. There is a biblical basis to give alms to the poor (Deut 15:11; Prov 19:17; Matt 6:1–4; 25:35–46). On the other hand, there are clear deficiencies in Ramadan and Islamic charity, perhaps due to the self-benefiting motivation of observing them. Muslims have developed a doctrine that almsgiving can forgive sins. This is perhaps an influence from Christians as several early Church Fathers, based on Apocrypha (e.g., Tobit 4:7; Ecclus 3:30) taught this doctrine. It has a self-serving motivation rather than motivation of serving God to show his love to the needy. Subsequently, there is still extreme poverty in most Islamic nations, so there are shortages in the present shariah economic model, especially when compared to the efficiencies and greater tax gathering potential of the modern welfare state. Moreover, communal joyous evening feasting features more than daytime spiritual restraint. Consequently, many MBBs consider it unwise to participate but then many do so for communal and family expectations.

**CHURCH, MOSQUE AND JAMAAT**

For many MBBs, they were brought up with the idea that ‘Islamic’ stands for what is sanctioned and legitimate. Therefore, MBBs may take an Islamic style in worship as it is assumed to be good.

Is it appropriate for an MBB to go to a Mosque? The Mosque plays two roles: a house of prayer to God but then also a place for only Muslims to gather. To attend the Mosque is not without its controversies, especially in communicating identity. However, in the early stages of Islam, Muslims were known to attend synagogues and churches for prayer. Many early mosques were converted church buildings; hence the adoption of Christian (Byzantine) architecture and the development of the minaret from church watchtowers or ascetic monk dwelling towers. So, there are Christian roots to the Mosque. Mosques have even become, like some churches/chapels, a building just occasionally used for religious worship and for community gatherings. For the MBBs they value more the inward personal prayer and so they are quite flexible about the location of outward prayer, even to the extent of performing namaz prayers at the mosque. It has to be noted, however, that not all MBBs have been strict Muslims observing all the daily prayers, so mosque visiting may not have been their normal habit.

The MBB Jamaats practice Christian worship in a Muslim style of liturgy, actually a milad (celebration worship devotion) style. The content of their service may vary from being like formal Western Church liturgy (Presbyterian) overlaid with Islamic style to being a very informal free style service. They often have their own meeting on Friday which members either go instead of attending the mosque or as well as attending the mosque. They have Bible readings in a style of how Muslims would read the Qur’an in their liturgy. They sit without shoes on mats on the floor and use a rehal (wooden stand) to elevate the Bible. The Bible reading is often unplanned and can vary in length according to the topic. They may even not read it directly but just discuss an issue. They engage in an informal question and answer discussion, to understand how to apply the passage into their lives. They pray personal informal prayers in vernacular Bangla and often everyone is free to pray about their needs. They distance themselves from Islamic ritual prayer, although some may use it. Living in a personal relationship to Jesus is more important to them than being a member of an institution. The inward reality of Christ in them is not just an acquisition of intellectual knowledge but a real active relationship. They sing classic Church hymns, which have been translated into Muslim Bangla, but also Bengali songs in ‘folk song’, baul gan style. These folk songs come from tantric Indian philosophy and Hindu bhakti religiosity that imbibe a personal relation and interior commitment in religious life.

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84 Waardenburg 2002, 68. Who refers to the worldview of Muslims rather than directly about MBBs.
85 Woodberry 1996, 178f.
86 Jørgensen 2008, 240.
87 Corwin 2007; 16; Jørgensen 2008, 145, 162.
88 Jørgensen 2008, 146.
89 Jørgensen 2008, 142-150.
The MBB *Jamaats* have a very simple, Brethren style, Lord’s Supper with no pomp or circumstances. They follow the pattern like many radical reformed churches in only eat bread and fruit juice, and to read 1 Cor 11. They have no candles, pictures, incense or statues. Therefore, their style is Islamic and indigenous ‘Bengali’ but at the same time, they distance themselves from Muslim practice in several areas.

With baptism the MBBs mostly follow Baptist thinking but on the other hand, they also follow the Sufi Islamic concept of *turiqa*, binding.\(^{90}\) They teach that first an inner binding, the reality of being clothed in Jesus, has to take place and then public confession, using baptism as a public sign of faithfulness to Jesus and His teaching. They make an outward binding to Jesus by the baptismal ritual. After public baptism with water, the believer is in full fellowship with other believers.

One of the strengths of the MBBs is in their ability to form close-knit communities in their small *jamaats* /house groups. Very rarely do *jamaats* take on the form of a ‘Messianic Mosque’\(^{91}\); mostly they just are small house groups in homes or work places. One of the advantages of such small communities is that they provide meaning, identity and belonging. In this way MBBs pride themselves on being different, a third option, from the religious structure of Islam and Christianity. They consider themselves superior to the Islamic religious system and to ‘Hindu’ churches. Presently, the *jamaats* tend to be spiritually inward, rather than outwardly religious.\(^{92}\) Although with due process of time, based on other similar groups in history, structure is inevitable, especially with growth in size. Therefore, there is a need for some MBBs to become suitable scholars to guide this process to structure in the right direction. Especially now, because of the emphasis to stress IM as the only way to do missions among Muslims, is also causing some to assert the *jamaats* as a separate way from the Church.

To the MBBs, the mainline churches are difficult for them as in Bangladesh the churches are full of Hindu elements and Hindu thinking. In Roman Catholic churches the ‘idols’ offend them. They are particularly offended at the lack of adoration of the Holy Books by Christians and the lack of respect by wearing shoes in the presence of God disturbs them. The MBBs, consider Christian practices as being deficient and spiritually poor. The churches do not attract them, make them feel comfortable and so they struggle to be motivated to attend. Further, to become part of the mainline churches they would have to discard and try to forget their upbringing. As this is felt to be impractical, the *jamaats* offer a format for them to reinterpret their previous religious life into faithfulness towards Jesus.\(^{93}\) Nevertheless, some MBBs may also attend a church as well or have some interaction with a church minister.

The sensitivities between genders from Islam are often carried over into MBB fellowships. In particular, either a woman’s father or husband makes decisions on her behalf. Women do not participate on an equal level in the *jamaats*, although there are some women only *jamaats* led by women. Generally, women are expected to just follow. Often according to culture, men and women sit separately and women use a head scarf in meetings. These are not necessarily Islamic, as several churches practice gender separation and head covering for women in church. On the other hand, I saw women undertake theological studies, which are empowering them to teach and take ministry roles. Therefore, the role of gender is presently in my opinion in a process.

**SYNCRETISM**

Jørgensen\(^{94}\) writes in his published PhD thesis in some depth about syncretism. In the History of Religions, syncretism denotes the process of blending and mixing of religious systems or elements, such as behaviour, knowledge and artefacts. However, as much as one would try to avoid

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\(^{90}\) Jørgensen 2008, 154, 168ff.

\(^{91}\) Corwin 2009, 9.

\(^{92}\) Jørgensen 2008, 226-236, 245f.

\(^{93}\) Jørgensen 2008, 229-234.

\(^{94}\) Jørgensen 2008, 35-114. Jørgensen has done qualitative case studies on MBBs. However, it is not clear which MBBs he has researched according to the C1-C6 categories, other than it would seem to be the non-church going categories.
syncretism, it will always arise as soon as there is translation. The ‘terms of equivalence’ from one culture to express the thought from another culture, has the danger of inviting borrowing and mixing of cultures. Therefore, taking the Gospel across cultures, and translating the Scriptures, etc. will result, in an unavoidable degree of syncretism. The Christianization of a culture, or to indigenise Christianity into a culture, will have the effect to question both social identity and the integrity of the Christian message. Some have suggested that as Christianity has a capacity to syncretise and because syncretism is the norm rather than the exception, then perhaps it should be treated as classic systematic concept in theology. Particularly in discerning where the dividing line is. Some have decided that C4–C6 is too syncretistic but apart from the obvious separation from any church the criteria for this dividing line is not clear.

Essentially, as we look at the MBBs it is not our place to dismiss them for being syncretetic, as we are syncretetic with our culture too. For example, many Western Christians have syncretised their faith with materialism. Christians should perhaps reflect upon each other as brothers in the body of the Church and learn from each other’s situation in order to see where they need revision and reform. It is not a question of whether truth only lies in Christian faith, but whether Greco-Roman or European understanding of the Christian faith is the only way to hold that truth. Clearly, Messianic Judaism, MBBs and Hindu Christ Bhaktas are revealing that other cultural ways to be Christian are possible.

Syncretism with Bangladeshi Islam is observed amongst MBBs in the jamaat liturgy, in the jamaat fellowship identity, in the ideal of being a faithful believer, in processes to conversion and in theological reflections among MBBs. Essentially, they are practicing a Bengali cultured and an Islamic style of faith in Jesus. They are like an unstructured Sufi mystical pir institution, where their pir (saintly guru) is Jesus. They gather in the presence of Jesus, like Sufis do around a saintly pir’s shrine, to partake in his power. They bind themselves to their prophet and teacher, Jesus, then follow, and learn from Him. There is a clear Islamic style of religiosity but the subject matter is Christian. Their Christology is biblical not Qur’anic, although it is also dialoguing with the Qur’an. They are clearly different from Western Christianity, although Protestant Reformed theology has influenced their basic tenants, and the Emergent Church has influenced their rhetoric and direction. They are clearly far from being Euro-centric. Their syncretism has dangers of possibly taking believers in Christ into Islam, but also conversely it can lead members of the Muslim community into faithfulness towards Jesus.

However, there are pitfalls with syncretism such as if it stagnates into a man-made form and does not continue in a process towards Christ. That is if there is no genuine Spirit filled faith in Jesus and if the MBBs do not have the Bible to lead them in adapting their faith into their cultural identity, then they are likely to deviate from true faith by putting their trust in legalism or occult religious practices. There are also dangers with trying to correct syncretism because if people are forced to act contrary to their conscience, it could destroy their faith. Similarly, if attempts are made to make ownership or pressure authority over MBBs then it may cause some to turn away.

CRITERIA FOR DISCERNING MISSION STRATEGY

In the inter-testament period, some Jewish sects formulated salvation to be obtainable by observing the deeds of the Law or to be more precise their interpretation of the Law. They became ignorant of the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own righteousness in the standards of their own traditions (c.f. Rom 10:1-4). They expressed what is at the heart of natural religion and the core of all man-made religion. The natural state of the heart of man is to be focused on his own potential and actions. Interestingly, Islam teaches that it is the very essence of natural religion. Therefore,

58 Jørgensen 2008, 250.
Islam has a very optimistic view of humanity (Pelagian) and hence, Muslims overlook the mystery of human recalcitrance and hardness of heart.\(^{100}\)

Furthermore, Islam proposes to achieve salvation by captivating culture and politics. It is an earthly kingdom, using earthly processes to achieve its aims. In contrast, Jesus shunned the opportunity to lead a world political power but preached that the Kingdom of God can come in people’s hearts. Jesus said “I am not of this world” (John 8:23). The call of the Gospel is to not be conformed to this world but the call of Islam is to be conformed to the Islamic understanding of worldly religion by following the example of a man, Muhammad. The mixing of these two kingdoms results in confusion and compromise.

So, in summary, for MBBs to bring the syncretism of natural religion to the Gospel is their greatest danger. Nevertheless, the danger is not only theirs but for many Christians, including missionaries that struggle to depend on God’s grace rather than their own actions.\(^{101}\) Biblically, true missions acknowledge that God saves and mission methods do not. Any elevation of a particular method, dogma or practice to be the way to salvation or vehicle of salvation has the danger of idolatry. Therefore, the proposal that IM is the way to bring Muslims to Christ is to push a man-made method beyond God’s dependency and election.

A danger with IM, is that there is little or no emphasis, that Muslims need to repent from the religion of Islam and to come out and reject it. Several MBBs have testified that Islam was a spiritual darkness upon them. They felt they were under a demonic spirit. Therefore, breaking away from it was the only logical way to be clear of its influence. By allowing a Christian fog, that mixes Islam and Christianity, brings dangers of mixing darkness into Christian spirituality and faith, and not just on a cultural level.\(^{102}\)

On the other hand, if the Church insists that the traditional Euro-centric ecclesiastical model is the only way to reach Muslims then that will entrench Muslim resistance to the Gospel. It would also place the ecclesiastical model as the only way the Holy Spirit can work in the world, and so place it as an idol. Essentially, missionaries and IMers have to stop trying to be the Holy Spirit to MBBs and all should listen more to the Holy Spirit together.

CONCLUSION

The MBBs in Bangladesh have formed a basis for faith in Christ that openly engages Islam and Bangladeshi religious culture. It offers them a place to reinterpret their upbringing, to rework their religious, social and cultural identity, in the light of their real inward faith in Christ.

The MBB movement in Bangladesh has started as a combination of several factors. One being that the mainline church was not ready to consider MBBs and their cultural background. The churches did not have initially, the theological education or the right attitude to handle the dilemmas arising from MBBs. Moreover, for the MBBs the Hindu ways of thinking and doing things in the church were very problematic. Therefore, MBB jamaats became a natural step to progress discipleship among MBBs.

The other clear factor in the formation of MBB movement is that it is a product of post-colonial missions. Past attempts to force the traditional Euro-centric form of Christianity upon the world, was spiritual colonialism, which burdened, abused and subverted the integrity of other cultures and faiths. It is undesired in the modern world. Therefore, the post-colonial approach offers the possibility of inter-religious hermeneutics whilst being firmly committed to Jesus. It offers a culturally inclusive approach with an exclusive Christo-centrism. The MBBs show that this is clearly possible and effective in reaching Muslims for Christ.

Orthodox Muslims do not like it, as Christianity in MBB form is not so easily to dismiss and apply the usual polemics. For Christians though, going beyond C3 up the spectrum, is problematic as a destination. Theologically there can be no such thing as a ‘Messianic Mosque’, although it might be observed in the process towards biblical Christian faith. Rather the destination is to have

\(^{100}\) Madany 2012, 3.

\(^{101}\) Stephahn 2012, 2. For example, to rely on human ways to do mission i.e. through intellectualism of academia such as social anthropology.

\(^{102}\) Houssney 2010, 13.
jamaats (gatherings) where Christ’s presence is real and the Bible is consumed, applied together and allowed to transform.

MBBs have clear Christian roots. They have clear influences from Protestantism, in particular Reformed theology and more specifically Evangelicalism. They have clearly dialogue with Presbyterianism; the Presbyterians have been active among them in providing theological education possibilities and the production of theological materials. MBBs have engaged Baptist theology, especially concerning invisible inward and visible outward Christian practices. They have had interaction with Brethren/House Church Movement, which has perhaps come through parachurch mission agencies, to influence their anti-structural form. It would be interesting to explore what eschatological theology the MBBs have to explore the extent of that influence. Further, Pentecostal/Charismatic influences can be seen in some of their spirituality i.e. seeking God to give directly answers rather than formulating answers through theological frameworks. Other Christian denominations are working among them and influencing them. It is interesting, however, that the MBB Christian doctrine is purposely expressed in an inoffensive way to Muslims. Nevertheless, their doctrine formulation is still very much in process.

Finally, because of Messianic Judaism and MBBs, etc. the church globally is changing, from being ecclesiocentric to Christocentric. The Christian Church is no longer simply identified with certain Western churches or institutions. The MBB jamaats reveal the power of such Christocentric fellowships. They offer a way to hold exclusivism to Christ but to exercise inclusivism in terms of culture. Therefore, in this increasingly individualised and globalised world, the Christocentric format appears to be an effective way that missions will increasingly be done, although with the danger of creating totally unique ways. Nevertheless, it holds great potential to realise the confession in the Apostle’s Creed of “the holy catholic Church”, that the Church would one day be really catholic i.e. ‘for all’.

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