

Contextualization Among Muslims: A Focus on “Insider Movements”

By
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Much has been written over the past twenty-five years on the application of contextualization in ministry among Muslims. In 1998, I (John), wrote an article for EMQ in which I presented a model for comparing six different types of *ekklesia* or congregations (which I refer to as “Christ-centered communities”) found in the Muslim world today (Travis 1998). These six types of Christ-centered communities are differentiated in terms of three factors: language, cultural forms, and religious identity. This model, referred to as the C1-C6 spectrum (or continuum), has generated much discussion, especially around the issue of fellowships of “Muslim followers of Jesus” (the C5 position on the scale). Parshall (1998), an advocate of contextualization, feels that C5 crosses the line and falls into dangerous syncretism. In subsequent writings many of Parshall’s concerns have been addressed (see Massey 2000, Gilliland 1998, Winter 1999, Travis 1998 and 2000). *Yet in spite of concerns that some may have on this issue, the fact remains that in a number of countries today, there are groups of Muslims who have genuinely come to faith in Jesus Christ, yet have remained legally and socio-religiously within the local Muslim community.* The purpose of this chapter is to note some key literature on contextualization among Muslims, describe and discuss the C1-C6 Continuum, and focus on key theoretical and practical dynamics of C5 “insider movements” within Islam. We will close the chapter with a brief look at insider movements presently taking place in contexts other than Islam.

Throughout this chapter we will not be contending that C5 is the best or only thing God is doing in the Muslim world today; indeed God is bringing Muslims to Himself in a great diversity of ways, some of which we may only understand in eternity. What we will argue, however, is that one way God is moving at this point in salvation history, is by sovereignly drawing Muslims to Himself, revolutionizing them spiritually, yet calling them to remain as salt and light in the religious community of their birth.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Recent literature applying contextualization theory to outreach among Muslims began to appear in the 1970s. Early important articles came from Anderson (1975), Wilder (1976), Kraft (1979), and Conn (1979). Four landmark books concerning contextualization among Muslims came out prior to 1990: The Gospel and Islam (ed. McCurry 1979), New Paths in Muslim Evangelism (Parshall 1980), Beyond the Mosque (Parshall 1985) and Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road (ed. Woodberry 1989). These books and articles, along with the advent of new classes and seminars taught at colleges and churches, meant that by the 1990s, cross-cultural sensitivity and some level of contextualization was fairly widely accepted in regards to outreach to Muslims.

Toward the mid-1990s, much of the discussion involving contextualization among Muslims focused on the issue of what many today refer to as “insider movements” (C5 on the continuum). The concept of insider movements, however, had already been broached earlier by Anderson, Wilder, Kraft and Conn (see articles mentioned above). A landmark paper by Woodberry (1989) pushed our thinking ahead in this area by showing that most Islamic religious forms, even those involving the Five Pillars, are actually

borrowed from the practices of seventh century Middle Eastern Jews and Christians. Woodberry's message is that when we contextualize to so-called "Islamic forms" we are actually "reusing" many of the forms formerly found in the faith of our antecessors. This article also gives an excellent case study of a C5 movement in one predominately Muslim nation. As mentioned above, articles on the C1-C6 continuum in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Parshall 1998, Gilliland 1998 and Travis 1998) brought the discussion on C5 to a wider audience, and helped prompt the publishing of an entire edition of the *International Journal of Frontier Missions* (Wiert and Massey 2000) devoted to the C5 question. While missiologists and field workers continue to discuss this phenomenon, in a number of locations around the world there are thousands of Muslims who have put their faith in Christ, yet have seen their path clear to remain legally and culturally Muslim. We will now turn to how the C1 – C6 Continuum was developed.

THE C1-C6 CONTINUUM

When we first arrived in the Muslim world 15 years ago, our goal was to plant contextualized churches. We had read most of the above mentioned literature, and our aim was to declare "Al-Masih (Christ) only and Him crucified" (I Cor. 2:2), stripping the Gospel of its foreign veneer and elements as best we could.

During our first three months on the field, we lived with two different Muslim families: one in a city and one in a village. We attempted to see the world through their eyes. Living under Muslim roofs, we were struck with how far their world was from the Christian world. During early discussions about Christianity we heard the same answers repeatedly: "There are many roads to the capital city" (in other words, "All religions are the same"). "Your religion for you; mine for me" (in other words, "Don't expect me to

change my religion”). “Our people group is a Muslim people group” (in other words, “Christianity is not welcome here”).

After these months living with families, we rented our own home in a close-knit middle class Muslim neighborhood. Here we raised our children and experienced warm and close relationships with our neighbors. Yet we picked up even stronger messages concerning the local Christian minority (made up almost entirely of people from non-Muslim ethnic groups). According to our neighbors, Christians dressed immodestly, ate forbidden food that turned their stomachs, liked to get drunk on Christmas, were impolite and worshipped statues, among other offenses. To encourage a member of the neighborhood to consider Christianity was an evil act.

Like many Muslim countries around the world, ours has a longstanding minority Christian population with its own particular subculture in terms of language, music, architecture, etc. – all forms which largely came from or are identified with the “Christian West.” In light of our neighbors’ sentiments, we assessed what options existed for Muslims who would decide to follow Jesus. The first was to simply join one of the traditional national churches. In our city, we saw two types of such churches: the first used the national *lingua franca* of the area; the second (the minority by far) used the ethnic language of the surrounding Muslim population (in this area Muslims are bilingual; for most, their “heart language” is the ethnic language).

There was another type of fellowship emerging as well – one where a number of principles of contextualization were being applied. This type, meeting either in a home or church fellowship hall (not the sanctuary), incorporated into worship not just the ethnic language of the surrounding Muslim population, but local non-Islamic music and cultural

forms as well. They incorporated ways of greeting, congregating and discipling more in keeping with the local culture than ways used by traditional national churches.

If seen on a continuum moving in a contextualized direction, each of these types of Christ-centered communities could be placed at a given point. We labeled the national church using the *lingua franca* or a foreign language as “C1” (i.e. Christ-centered Community type 1). The national church using an ethnic language we labeled “C2”. The contextualized fellowship using non-Islamic ethnic forms we labeled “C3” (see figure 1).

Moving beyond these first three types (C1-C3), we, along with a number of national and expatriate coworkers, felt compelled to apply contextualization theory further. We looked for religious forms commonly used by local Muslims which were either expressly Biblical, or at least neutral, so that Muslims coming to Christ would need to change outward forms as little as possible. When we actually analyzed Muslim religious forms and practices, we saw much that was usable (this is partially due to the heavy influence of early Christianity and Judaism on Islamic socio-religious forms as Woodberry has pointed out). Along with a group of national Christians burdened for lost Muslims, some of whom were MBBs (Muslim Background Believers), we experimented with “Islamic” forms of dress, terminology and prayer forms, in sharing the Gospel with Muslim friends and relatives. Other groups were carrying on similar experiments in nearby areas. What developed over time was a contextualized expression of faith in Christ, in which the believers called themselves “followers of Isa” rather than “Christians” (the term “Christian” bears much unnecessary, mostly Western, baggage). Within a few years there were several hundred believers. The communities of faith they formed are at the

“C4” point on the continuum and closely resemble the types of congregations described and commended by Parshall (1980).

This C4 lifestyle greatly helped the new follower of Christ remain a part of his family and neighborhood. Yet in time (usually about three months to one year), the community would realize the C4 believers were in fact no longer Muslims. Although they would still keep the fast, wear Islamic clothing, use Islamic terminology, keep Muslim dietary practices, and not change their names, they would generally not pray in the mosque and no longer referred to themselves as Muslims. Rejection would eventually come (though it was postponed and less severe), and the flow of the Gospel stopped. Gradually the distance between C4 believers and their Muslim communities widened.

However there was strength in these C4 communities: since outward forms were similar to what was familiar to the community, Muslim friends were forced to look beyond forms to meanings. Some from the community realized this new faith was not just a change of religion, but rather a change of heart. This was especially evident when God healed the sick in the Messiah’s name, when impoverished believers began to find better work (due to new Biblical character traits as well as answered prayer), and when those oppressed by demons were set free in Isa’s name.

Incidentally, over a period of several years now, the C4 expression of faith in Christ has been found to be very fitting for CBBs (Christian Background Believers) who reach out to and live among Muslims. The C4 lifestyle requires sacrifice, rigorous changes and the adoption of some Muslim forms on the part of the CBB, but does not involve identifying oneself as a Muslim.

During the time we were beginning C4 experiments (the late 1980s) we also began hearing about some cases of Muslims, many of them leaders, who had come to faith in Isa (both in our area and in other countries) and who chose to remain in the Muslim community, much like Jews of today's Messianic Jewish movement remain culturally and officially Jewish. Whereas some Muslims upon salvation want to get as far away from anything Islamic as possible, some feel just the opposite. They say something like this: "My father is a Muslim, my mother is a Muslim. The foreign and/or minority Christians near me are not my people. I have now made Isa my Lord and Savior, yet I desire to remain with my own people." These Muslim believers are able to set aside certain Islamic beliefs, interpretations and practices, yet remain a part of the Islamic community as they follow Isa. They do not change their name or legal religious affiliation. They continue to identify with the religion of their birth and participate in things Islamic in so far as their conscience and growing sensitivity to Scripture allows. This point on the continuum – a community of Muslims who follow Christ yet remain culturally and officially Muslim – is referred to as C5. Others refer to emerging networks of C5 congregations as "insider movements", since the evangelism, discipling, congregating and organizing of C5 believers happens within the Muslim community, by Muslims with Muslims.

In recent years we have had the privilege of meeting a number of C5 Muslims, and although our religious backgrounds and forms of worship are quite different, we have experienced sweet fellowship in Isa the Messiah. There is no question in our minds that these C5 Muslims are born again members of the Kingdom of God, called to live out the Gospel inside the religious borders of their birth. As we have continued to see the limits

of C4 in our context, and as our burden for lost Muslims only grows heavier, we have become convinced that a C5 expression of faith could actually be viable for our precious Muslim neighbors and probably large blocks of the Muslim world. We ourselves, being CBBs, maintain a C4 lifestyle, but we believe God has called us to help “birth a C5 movement” in our context (this will be discussed later in this chapter).

The final point on the continuum, C6, is in one way quite different from the other five points – these Muslim believers in Jesus have no regular fellowship with other believers. C6 believers often come to the Messiah through a miracle (dream, vision or healing), a radio broadcast, reading Christian literature, or through the witness of a Christian they may have known at some point in their lives. Either due to social pressure, fear of death and persecution, geographical isolation, or simply not wanting to be expelled from their community, these believers, for at least the time being, worship God and intercede for their lost family members alone and are generally silent about their faith. (As Wilder points out, there are many such believers scattered throughout Muslim lands.) We have met a few C6 believers, and heard of many more. We have included C6 in the continuum because these MBBs are born again, and are part of the Body of Christ.

We close this section with a perspective on C5 movements. We have attended many Muslim funerals. We grieve every time we see another Muslim friend buried, having passed into eternity without salvation in Christ. As we have seen the resistance toward changing religions and the huge gap between the Muslim and Christian communities, we feel that fighting the religion-changing battle is the wrong battle. We have little hope in our lifetime to believe for a major enough cultural, political and religious change to occur

in our context such that Muslims would become open to entering Christianity on a wide scale. But we do have great hope, as great as the promises of God, to believe that an “insider movement” could get off the ground – that vast numbers could discover that salvation in Isa the Messiah is waiting for every Muslim who will believe. We sense the desire of Jesus Himself to take the “yeast” of His Gospel to the inner chambers of Muslim communities, calling men, women and children to walk with Him as Lord and Savior, remaining vital members of their families and Muslim communities. The following section will deal with some of the theological and theoretical dimensions of C5.

THEORETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ISSUES REGARDING C5

The purpose of this section will be to look at C5 or insider movements from a number of theoretical and theological perspectives. The intent is not to *prove* if C5 *can* happen, as case studies already indicate that it *is* happening. Rather, we hope to help build a framework from which to understand this phenomena and to answer some of the questions which have arisen such as: From a Biblical perspective can a person be truly saved and continue to be a Muslim? Doesn't a follower of Christ need to identify himself as a Christian and officially join the Christian faith? Can a Muslim follower of Christ retain all Muslims practices, in particular praying in the mosque toward Mecca and continuing to repeat the Muslim creed? This section will be framed around ten premises.

Premise 1: For Muslims, culture, politics and religion are nearly inseparable, making changing religions a total break with society. Our discussion of C5 must begin here. Goldsmith states:

Islam is within the whole warp and woof of society – in the family, in politics, in social relationships. To leave the Muslim faith is to break with

one's whole society. Many a modern educated Muslim is not all that religiously minded; but he must, nevertheless, remain a Muslim for social reasons, and also because it is the basis for his political belief. This makes it almost unthinkable for most Muslims even to consider the possibility of becoming a follower of some other religion.

This fact is at the heart of our discussion: in a Muslim society, changing religions is not just a spiritual rebirth. It is generally a clean break with family, culture and society as a whole. Contextualization is the attempt to maintain continuity between a people's culture and their faith in Christ. But what are we to do when religion has become an inseparable, permeating fixture of the culture? One logical conclusion would be to do what Kraft suggests: view religion as an integral part of one's culture, allowing God to work through it rather than against it (1996: 210-214). Although elements of Islam (like culture) must be evaluated in light of the Word of God (see Premise 8 below), we work through the totality of who Muslims are, focusing on issues of the heart and allegiance to Christ rather than social, religious or cultural changes.

Premise 2: Salvation is by grace alone through relationship / allegiance to Jesus Christ. Changing religions is not a prerequisite for nor a guarantee of salvation. The New Testament teaches clearly that salvation is found only through Christ alone (e.g. John 17:3; Acts 4:12, 15:11, 16:31). It is not through membership in a church nor affiliation with a particular religious group. In the words of Gruden, "Saving faith is trust in Jesus Christ as a living person for forgiveness of sins and for eternal life with God" (Gruden 1994:710). Kraft uses the terms "allegiance" and "commitment" in describing this saving relationship we have in Jesus: "With respect to *allegiance*, we must maintain that people are saved or lost on the basis of whether or not their *primary commitment* is to the true God in Christ" (1996:210). Kraft goes on to explain that since our salvation is

through Christ and not religion, a non-Christian could be saved through relationship with Jesus while still being a part of his original non-Christian religious community of birth.

Premise 3: Jesus' primary concern was the establishment of the Kingdom of God, not the founding a new religion. The predominant theme of the teaching and ministry of Jesus was the Kingdom of God (Matt 4:23). His parables describe the Kingdom (Mat. 13, 18, 20, 25, Mark 4, Luke 13) and when He healed, Jesus said, "the Kingdom of God is near you" (Luke 10:9). The Twelve were instructed to "preach the kingdom of God" (Luke 9: 2), and throughout Acts we find the early believers following in their Master's footsteps, preaching the good news of God's Kingdom (Acts 8:12; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

Toward religion, Jesus had primarily words of criticism. His constant concern was for issues of the heart rather than outward religious categories and rituals (Matt. 23:22-28). With the woman at the well in John 4 we see it was the condition of her heart, not the inadequacies of her syncretized Samaritan religion, which concerned Jesus.

Throughout the New Testament we find that being clean or unclean is a matter of relationship with Jesus rather than following a particular brand of religion (Mark 3:23-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-23; John 4:19-26; Acts 10:28-29, 44-48; Heb. 9:12-14).

This emphasis on the heart and the Kingdom rather than religion has led some to ask if Jesus came to earth with the intention of establishing a new religion. Theologian David Bosch made the bold assertion that "Jesus had no intention of founding a new religion." He contended that the early "Jesus community" was intended to be a "movement" rather than an "institution" (a religion) – a movement which would cross frontiers, emphasize new "life" rather than "doctrine" and serve as a model of submission to the reign of God

for all peoples to emulate. Bosch points out that over time the “Jesus community simply became a new religion” (1991:50). Yet it is important to bear in mind that religion *per se* was not a part of the core message of Jesus. One implication of Bosch’s paradigm (movement verses religion, life verses doctrine, and modeling of the Kingdom of God), is that evangelism to unreached peoples should aim to plant the seed of the Gospel in the very heart of another’s religion, allowing it to permeate the whole as yeast, rather than simply “winning converts” who leave their former religion and join Christianity. In the words of Anderson (1975:288), by pulling new believers out of the “culture in which God has placed them” we are in effect “robbing Islam” of one of the few ways its members will ever experience the Kingdom, namely through intimate interaction with their own people who have tasted of new life in Christ.

Premise 4: The very term “Christian” is often misleading – not all called Christian are in Christ and not all in Christ are called Christian. When an evangelical asks if someone is a Christian, he is using the term in a *spiritual* sense (i.e., Is the person “born again”, “converted” or “saved”?). For many European “state church” people, the term has a *religious* or *ethnic* connotation, referring to one’s community rather than personal faith, whereas for the Muslim the term often refers to Europeans and/or attitudes and practices associated with “the West”. The term Christian can be misleading and not helpful.

It is instructive to note that the earliest followers of Christ did not refer to themselves as “Christians” (Greek: *christianos*) but rather as followers of “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 24:15). Muslim followers of Christ likewise should not feel under compulsion to refer to themselves as “Christians” due to the negative baggage of Western culture (not to

mention the crusades!) associated with that term. We say this, however, with the following understanding: while a Muslim follower of Jesus may with integrity deny being a “Christian convert”, neither he nor any true believer may ever deny being a follower of Christ (Luke 12:8-9; Matt. 26:69-75).

Premise 5: Often gaps exist between what people actually believe and what their religion or group officially teaches. Many Westerners refer to themselves as “Christian” yet adhere to personal beliefs akin to Hinduism, Buddhism, secular humanism or even atheism (see Gibbs 1989 on Western Christians). Likewise many Muslims hold to personal beliefs religiously at odds with Islam (see Bowen 1998:21-27, 38-40; Massey 2000:11-12; Bernard 2000: 18-19). Referring to the world’s largest Muslim nation, Indonesia, Marantika, estimates that thirty percent of the nation’s Muslim community observes “the rituals of Islam, but are not personally committed to its teachings” (1989:218). This gap between personal commitment and official theology is one of the things that allows for some Muslims to remain a part of their community and still follow Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Wilder states that Christian workers often encounter such Muslim followers of Christ (1976:306). He mentions two Muslim men he has known personally who speak openly of their faith in Jesus, considering themselves to be “true believers in Christ and at the same time members of the Muslim community.” From the Turkish context, Wilder reports on “self-sustaining groups of followers of Jesus remaining within the fold of Islam” (1976:306). (In 1976 these Turkish groups had been existence for forty-five years and were meeting in two or three different cities.) Teeter working among Arabs, has seen the same phenomena of “Muslim followers of Jesus” (1990) A more recent example

comes from the United States National Prayer Breakfast, held in February, 2002, where a Muslim follower of Jesus from the Middle East actually shared publicly. Below is an excerpt of his testimony (transcript provided by personal friend who attended the prayer breakfast):

This is an actual conversation between a friend and myself. My friend asked me, "What is your religion?" I said, "I am a Muslim and a follower of Jesus." He asked, "How can that be when you are not a Christian?" I answered, "Jesus did not come to save only the Christians... He came for all the world." My friend asked, "Is this written in your book?" I said, "Of course... All the stories and teaching of the Old Testament are written in the Qur'an with the same content from Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc." The Qur'an confirms much of what is written in the New Testament about Jesus' life and mission. His immaculate conception is beautifully described in the Qur'an: ..."Behold!" The angels said, 'Oh Mary! God gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Messiah Jesus...' (3:45). He also performed many miracles in God's name, for example: "...I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by God's leave" (3:49). The Qur'an confirms that Jesus preached the Gospel [*Injil*], confirming the Law of Moses which preceded him: "... We sent Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him. We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him; a guidance and admonition to those who fear God" (5:46).

I read about Jesus and I love what I learned of him, and I wanted to know more of him. So I read the New Testament, which according to the Qur'an, is a holy book that I have to read and respect as a Muslim. I love his principles, his teachings, his way of life. I came to love him more and more and I decided to put him in my heart and to follow him. My friend said, "So you are a good Christian now." I said, "That is your point of view. From my point of view, I am a good Muslim because I surrender to one God and because I follow Jesus." He asked, "What did you like in Jesus?" I said, "Everything."

Premise 6: Some Islamic beliefs and practices are in keeping with the Word of

God; some are not. Wilder states that "probably 80% of Muslim doctrine and ethics, and 60% of Muslim prayer and worship is parallel to or compatible with Christian doctrine

and worship” (1977:314). Woodberry explains one of the reasons why so many parallels exist between Muslim and Christian beliefs and practices:

Islam may be viewed as originally a contextualization for the Arabs of the monotheism inherited directly from the Jews and Christians, or indirectly through Arab monotheists...[t]he pillars of faith along with associated vocabulary were largely the precious possessions of Jews and Christians. Any reusing of them then is but the repossession of what originally belonged to these communities (1989:285-286).

Muslims, like Christians, therefore, are monotheists who trace their spiritual heritage through Abraham. They recognize as Scripture the Torah (*Taurat*), the Psalms (*Zabur*) and the New Testament (*Injil*); they believe in the divine birth and ministry of Jesus and the role of His disciples (the *Hawariyun*); they acknowledge as prophets most of the major Biblical figures (including John the Baptist!) and they believe in the Day of Judgment and the second coming of Christ. Yet in spite of many similarities, there are also fundamental differences. Although Jesus is referred to as the Word of God (*Kalimat Allah*), the Spirit of God (*Ruh Allah*) and the Messiah (*al-Masih*), Muslim theology proper teaches that Jesus is not divine nor the Savior of humanity. Islamic doctrine allows for a man to have up to four wives and for Muslims to engage in Holy War (*jihad*). For issues such as these, where Muslim doctrine contradicts the clear teachings of Scripture (particularly the New Testament), we need a Biblically and culturally informed framework with which to evaluate these doctrines in light of God’s Word.

Hiebert’s model of *critical contextualization* (1987) offers such a framework. This model calls for a careful examination of the practices and beliefs of the “context” (i.e. religion or culture), combined with a fresh study of corresponding Biblical beliefs and practices, in order to see what aspects of the context under study can be maintained, what elements need to be modified and what parts need to be rejected outright. Often in

ministry with C4 and C5 believers, we have applied Heibert's model in order to understand and evaluate local Islamic beliefs and practices in light of Scripture. Our tentative conclusion is that most Islamic forms are Biblically sound, that several ceremonies can be modified, and that a number of Islamic teachings must be rejected in order to avoid harmful syncretism.

Kraft states (as mentioned above) that although salvation comes about through having a "primary allegiance" to Christ as Lord, one could still have a number of "secondary" allegiances, rituals, beliefs, and practices that would not necessarily interfere with their primary allegiance to Jesus (1996:210). C5 believers are likely to have a number of these secondary factors such as the *ritual* of praying five times a day and the *practice* of keeping the annual fast of *Ramadan*. They will also have an allegiance to their Muslim family and community that C1-C4 believers would likely not have (what secondary allegiances, rituals and practices are permissible for C5 believers would depend upon the leading of the Holy Spirit on a case by case basis as the new believers apply the principles of critical contextualization described).

Some C5 Muslims we have known still pray in the mosque facing Mecca; some do not. This brings to mind what the Lord spoke to Naaman through Elisha, granting him permission to follow his master into even a pagan temple (II Kings 5:17-19), though Naaman declared he would never make a sacrifice to other gods. Recalling that Jesus focuses on the heart and personal relationship with His followers, it seems that from a Biblical standpoint it matters little *where* or *how* one prays (John 4:21). What matters is that the prayer is to the Father through virtue of one's relationship with Jesus (Luke 10, John 4:23-24). As we see in Rom. 14:1-6, on disputable matters, God deals with us as

individuals. Only He knows the heart motives of Muslim believers who still pray in the mosque.

Some C5 believers still repeat the creed (“there is no god but God and Mohammed is His prophet”); some do not. Others have modified it to exalt the name of Jesus. We have heard some C5 believers say that they can accept Mohammed as a “prophet” in that he pointed his people to the one true God and spoke highly of Jesus in the Qur’an (they are quick to add that Mohammed is neither divine nor a savior).

In our work, what seems to most hinder the new Muslim believer’s relationship with Christ is not so much wrong theology or even allegiance to Mohammed, but instead it is bondage due to former occult involvement and heart wounds. From these he must be freed and healed (see Premise 8 below).

Premise 7: Salvation involves a process. Often the exact point of transfer from the Kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of light is not known. Direction and process are crucial dynamics in understanding C5 or other insider movements. Models by Kraft and Hiebert are helpful in illustrating these dynamics.

In the *starting-point-plus-process* model, Kraft states that “God starts working with human beings where they are, solely on the basis of their faith commitment to Him” (Kraft 1979:239). The only unacceptable starting point in the process of growth toward Christ is a primary allegiance to a god or deity other than the God of the Bible. Like the thief on the cross and the Philippian jailor, when people call out to Jesus, they are saved. That means that the newly born again Muslim, the recently born again Jew, the just born again Methodist or Catholic and the just saved agnostic, are all now in the Kingdom, beginning the process of sanctification. As they follow Christ day by day, they are being

transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory (II Cor. 3:18), though this fact may not be immediately apparent to the outside observer who would have trouble differentiating the “wheat” from the “tares” (Mat. 13:24-29).

Related to Kraft’s model is Hiebert’s model of “bounded” and “centered” sets (1994). A “bounded” set is one which has clear cut, black and white boundaries. One is either inside or outside the set (e.g. one is either a Christian or a non-Christian). On the other hand, a centered set is one where *direction* is more important than *current position*. A center point is pictured with arrows scattered around it. Some arrows near the center (Jesus) are pointed away from it; others far from the center are pointed toward it. A person with little Biblical knowledge yet pointed and moving toward Christ may be closer to the Kingdom than one with correct theology yet pointed and moving away from Christ (e.g. a Muslim seeker of Christ may be closer to Him than a person who was born and raised to know correct theology yet who does not pursue a personal relationship with Jesus). In a centered set view, we let God worry about exactly when our Muslim friend enters the Kingdom of Christ, and we focus instead on encouraging him to keep heading toward Christ.

Premise 8: A follower of Christ needs to be set free by Jesus from spiritual bondages in order to thrive in his/her life with Him. An estimated seventy percent of the world’s Muslims are what many call “Folk Muslims” (Parshall 1983:16). Cutting across Islamic sects and divisions, this type of Muslim is one who incorporates magic, animism, shamanism and other such practices into his daily spiritual experience. Due to the overtly demonic nature of most of these folk Islamic practices, unless a new believer

renounces them and is set free by Jesus, he is likely to fall back into the occult, becoming hamstrung in his spiritual growth.

In our field experience, the need for deliverance from occult bondage was obvious from the start. We have watched with joy as new believers destroy occult objects, renounce (and lose) former occult abilities, and receive deliverance from demons invited in by repeated occult rituals. However, we were puzzled by an ongoing lack of joy in their walk with the Lord, especially in regards to relationships with others.

Misunderstandings and hurt feelings between believers and others caused some to fall away from the faith. In recent years we have begun to discover the role of healing prayer for heart issues in the discipleship of new Muslim believers. In an atmosphere of prayer, the Holy Spirit reminds the new believer of a particular heart wound, usually caused by childhood experiences. The believer is encouraged to pour out all his pain to the Lord, instead of attempting to forget and deny it. We have been amazed at how Jesus makes Himself very real in these moments, and removes the sting of childhood rejection, sexual abuse, and deep shame. It often naturally follows to order out any demons which have found their home in these heart wounds. The fruit of Jesus' heart healing is tangible.

Conflict in marriages, friendships between believers, and relationships between believers and others is reduced, and the ability to obey the commands of Scripture is increased.

We have become convinced that a mix of Scripture study and healing prayer is necessary over a period of time to see a new disciple become grounded in the love of Christ, able to survive in his Muslim community and thrive in his walk with Christ. It is very helpful to have a simple method for healing prayer which can be easily passed on to new believers as they rely on Jesus Himself to heal and deliver.

It is also likely that there are powers and principalities inherent in aspects of Islam as well. While we do not know to what extent powers over whole institutions can be bound as they are in individuals, we must at least give careful attention to seeing each new believer personally set free from demonic strongholds which affect his group. This is especially important in the case of C5, since the believer will continue to have close contact with the community which is still bound by these powers. We have seen first hand in recent years that as the believer is set free in these three areas: occult involvement, heart wounds, and Islamic bondage, he is able to remain a part of the Muslim community of his birth without giving the enemy a place in his life (John 8:14).

Premise 9: Due to the lack of Church structure and organization, C5 movements must have an exceptionally high reliance on the Spirit and the Word as their primary source of instruction. There is no substitute for reliance upon both the Spirit and the Word in the life of a believer. However in one sense, this reliance is perhaps more obviously needed in a C5 movement than it is in the normal C1 or C2 church. Whereas the rather isolated C5 believers must rely upon personal or small group Bible study with very direct guidance by the Spirit of truth, churches have Sunday schools, worship services, seminars, Bible studies, Bible colleges, and prayer meetings, to facilitate the growth of the believer. Two things are implied here. First, C5 believers must have access to comprehensible translations of the Bible which incorporate religious vocabulary appropriate for Muslim readers. Second, the simple home-based C5 fellowships must be able to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit in a manner reminiscent of New Testament narratives (Acts 10:19-20; 13:2; 16:6-10). This would mean wide use of New Testament gifts (*charisma*) as well.

Premise 10: A contextual theology can only properly be developed through a dynamic interaction of actual ministry experience, the specific leading of the Spirit and the study of the Word of God. It is instructive to see in Acts 15 how the early church determined God's will regarding Gentile believers and what they must do in order to "be saved" (Acts 15:1). One group of born-again Pharisees, based upon their interpretation of Scripture, contended that Gentiles "must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). By describing the events leading up to the council as well as its actual proceedings, Luke informs us as to how the early church settled this most crucial matter. As we shall see, it was an interaction based upon experiences from the field, the leading of the Spirit and an understanding of Scripture.

Note that as the delegation of Paul and Barnabas traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria on the way to Jerusalem, they told the believers along the way "how the Gentiles had been converted" (Acts 15:3). Their case studies / testimonies of God's work among the Gentiles made all the believers "very glad". Upon arrival in Jerusalem, the case studies continued as Paul and Barnabas told the elders "everything God had done through them" in their Gentile ministry (Acts 15:4). Next to speak was Peter, who offered his case study of Gentile work (Acts 10). Peter related how, to the utter astonishment of his born-again Jewish companions, the Holy Spirit was "poured out" in front of them upon Gentiles who began "speaking in tongues and praising God" (Acts 10:46). This, along with the vision he had received from God (Acts 10:9-16) was all the apostle Peter needed to declare, "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water?" (Acts 10:47).

At this point in the Acts narrative the entire Jerusalem council became quiet as the floor was handed back to Paul and Barnabas to offer more case studies on the “miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles” through their ministry (Acts 15:12). Only at this point does the council leader James arise, affirm the value of case studies, and state that what has miraculously already *happened* experientially on the field among Gentiles is in fact *supported* by Old Testament Scripture (Acts 15:13-18). The Scriptural basis was there all along for the acceptance of Gentiles, but it took first hand experience and the unmistakable work of the Holy Spirit, for the early church to properly interpret Scripture in light of their present day context.

In the first century Paul and the early church sought God for a contextual theology to undergird and understand the ministry God was thrusting them into among the Gentiles (Acts 15:19-29, Gal 2:2, I Cor 9:19-23, Rom 3:28-30, Eph 3:6). Initially many could not conceive of how a Gentile could be saved or of how certain theological positions would have to be scrapped in order to be obedient to the new thing God was doing. We are presently in a similar situation today as we attempt to bring the love of Jesus in an incarnational manner to the world’s one billion Muslims. We desperately need a contextual theology of ministry and church to apply in today’s Islamic milieu (Gilliland 1989 on contextual theologies). In order to not miss what God wants to do (as the Jerusalem church could have done), our theology for Muslim ministry must be Biblically based, Spirit led and informed by real life case studies from the field.

A LOOK BEYOND THE ISLAMIC MILIEAU

As of the year 2000, Christianity in all of its many branches and expressions, is by far the world's largest faith (see Johnstone 1993:20). Yet one of the most striking features of this phenomenal growth is that in 2000 years, the Gospel *has only been established among animistic and certain polytheist peoples!* Whether among pre-Christian pagan Greeks and Europeans, or African and Asian tribal peoples, the Gospel has only taken root in social environments where "ethnic" or "folk" or "national" religions are embraced (what anthropologists often pejoratively call "low" or "primitive" religions). Of the world's "mega" faiths, that is the numerically huge, ancient, international religions – primarily Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism – the Gospel has yet to find a home (Buddhist Korea in the 20th century being an exception). What is the reason for this? Why has this wonderful news of the Gospel been stopped outside the gates of each of these "mega" religions?

Using the term "high" religion for what we are calling "mega" faiths, and "primitive" religions for the smaller animistic and tribal faiths, Church historian Kenneth Latourette discusses what happened when medieval Christian Europe was attacked by peoples that followed a "high" religion and peoples that followed a "primitive" religion:

In contrast with the East where the major incursion, that of the Moslem Arabs, brought with it a "high" religion, Islam, all invasions of the West were either by "barbarians" who were already in part converts of Christianity or who had more nearly "primitive" religions. *It is a generalization borne out by universal human experience that a "primitive" religion yields more readily to "high" religion than does a "high" religion to another "high" religion* (author's emphasis). Christianity won back none of the ground lost by it in the East to Islam, but, in contrast, it not only regained all of the territory in the West which it lost but pressed out beyond its former frontiers and gathered into its fold pagan peoples of "primitive" faiths and cultures (1975:328).

What is it in these “high” or “mega” religions that makes them so much less open to the Gospel than the animistic or local religions? One reason is the increased group sense of “we must be right” due to sheer numbers (“How could one billion people and all my ancestors be wrong?”). A second reason is an increased sense of power and prestige that the mega-faiths have due to social, political, and economic clout in the world arena. A third reason is the presence in the mega-faiths of formalized clergy, holidays, theologies, pilgrimages, Holy Books, places of worship, training centers, etc., all of which give a sense of permanence and at least outward forms of holiness. But perhaps the chief reason is simply the high fusion which seems to exist in ethnic groups where mega-faiths are followed, making the separation of culture and religion nearly impossible. Our understanding of the place of culture and religion will inform the type of contextualization we engage in as we approach people of mega-faith backgrounds.

Most of us have observed that an individual’s spiritual experience and convictions are often, to varying degrees, different from the standard theologies of their religion or denomination. Many mainline Protestants have had a “born again” or a “charismatic” experience, something which may not be endorsed by their church or pastor. Yet, for social and familial reasons, they often stay within their church or denomination, augmenting their spiritual life with outside Bible study and fellowship. This is certainly the case as well with many “evangelical” or “charismatic” Catholics who stay in the church yet do not believe all the church’s official teachings on certain issues such as the role of Mary in a believer’s life. The amazing phenomena of Messianic Judaism, a movement where Jews have come to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, yet have no interest in joining “Christianity” per se is another case in point. Lastly, as we have discussed

elsewhere in this chapter, there are now thousands of Muslims around the world who either in private (C6) or in small groups (C5) acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior and yet have stayed within the community of Islam. In most of these cases involving Christianity, Judaism and Islam, these Jesus followers highly esteem the religion or denomination of their birth, yet have also given full allegiance to Jesus of the Bible. Perhaps one of the reasons this can work in a mainline Protestant church, the Catholic church, a Jewish synagogue, or a mosque, is the fact that all these faiths are monotheistic and trace their lineage through Abraham. But what of other mega-faiths which are not necessarily monotheistic or do not trace their roots and holy books back to Abraham and other Jewish, Christian and Muslim prophets such as Noah, Moses, Jonah, David, and Solomon? Could any form of insider movement occur within the fold of Hinduism or Buddhism?

An amazing book has just been republished by William Carey Library entitled Churchless Christianity (Hoefler 2000). The author, while formerly teaching at a seminary in India, began hearing stories of Hindus who in fact were worshipping and following Jesus in the privacy of their own homes. Knowing that there are many Hindus who have high regard for Jesus as a teacher, he set out to find out if indeed they had accepted Him as Lord and Savior or only as an enlightened guru. His quest became the basis of a doctoral dissertation in which he interviewed 80 such Hindu and Muslim families in the area of Madras India. His conclusion is that a large number of these families, which have never been baptized or joined churches, indeed have a true relationship with Christ and pray and study His Word fervently. Hoefler says that most want baptism, but have never seen a baptism which is not one in the same with becoming

an official member of a particular church. His conclusion after a very extensive process of interviews and statistical analysis is that in Madras there are 200,000 Hindus and Muslims who worship Jesus – an amount equal to the total number of Christians in that city!

It is instructive to note that 200 years ago, William Carey referred to Hindu followers of Jesus as “Christian Hindoos.” Apparently this was due to the strong linkage in the minds of the Indians (and presumably William Carey) between being Hindu and being Indian (etymologically the word India comes from Hindia which means the land of the Hindus). Rather than Hinduism being close to monotheistic faiths, it is just the opposite: adherents can worship any number of gods and goddesses. It appears that this openness allows room to exclusively worship the God of the Bible as the one true God (note the words of Joshua in Joshua 24:14-15).

In the early 1900s, Indian evangelist Sadhu Sundar Singh ran into hidden groups of Jesus followers among Hindus. As he preached the Gospel in Benares, his listeners told him of a Hindu holy man who had been preaching the same message. Sadhu spent the night at the man’s home and heard his claim that his Hindu order had been founded long ago by the apostle Thomas, and now had up to 40,000 members. Sadhu later observed their services (including worship, prayer, baptism and communion) which were held in places which looked exactly like Hindu shrines and temples, minus the idols. “When Sundar tried to persuade them that they should openly declare themselves as Christians, they assured him that they were doing a more effective work as secret disciples, accepted as ordinary *sadhus*, but drawing men’s minds toward the true faith in readiness for the day when open discipleship became possible” (Davey 1950:80).

Recently, we met a man doing outreach among Buddhists where there is an extremely high fusion of culture and religion. To my surprise he had taken the C1-C6 Continuum and adapted it to a Buddhist context. Though it appears impossible for the Gospel to thrive inside Buddhism, might there not be millions of Buddhists who are nominal believers and who are only Buddhist due to birth and nationality? As Kraft has stated (1996:212-213), once this principle of true spiritual allegiance verses formal religion is grasped, “we begin to discover exciting possibilities for working within, say, Jewish or Islamic or Hindu or Buddhist or animistic cultures to reach people who will be culturally Jewish or Muslim or Hindu or animist to the end of their days but Christian in their faith allegiance” (note: in his book, Kraft defines Christian with a capital “C” as follower of Christ verses christian with a small “c” referring to the religious institution).

What is all of this leading to? Is there not blatant idolatry in traditional Hinduism? Yes, but not among those Hindu followers of Christ described by Hoefler and Davey. Is there not a denial by most Muslims that Jesus died on the cross? Yes, but not by those Muslims we have known who have put their faith in Christ. Is it not true that Jews teach the Messiah is yet to come? Yes, but thousands of Jews go to Messianic synagogues and believe, as did thousands of Jews in the first century, that Yeshua is indeed the long awaited Son of David.

We are tentatively coming to the conviction that God is doing a new thing to reach these remaining nations (ta etne) dominated by mega-faiths. If in these days, the world is moving toward a socio-religious “clash of cultures” as Samuel Huntington has described, and if Bosch had it right that faith in Christ wasn’t meant to be a religion, could it be that we are witnessing some of the first fruits of vast movements where Jesus is causing the

Gospel to break out of “Christianity”? Where those who know Jesus remain as a sweet fragrance inside the religion of their birth, and eventually the number of born again adherents grows so large that a reform movement from inside that religion is birthed? The process may be theologically messy, but we see no other alternative. If we view both culture and religion as a person’s own skin, we can look beyond it to the millions of human hearts longing for God yet longing to remain in community with their own people. This is in no way universalism (the belief that in the end all will be saved). Rather this is a call to take much more seriously Christ’s final words to go into all the world – Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian – and make disciples of all nations.

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