

**A CALL TO FAITHFUL WITNESS**

**- PART TWO -**

**THEOLOGY, GOSPEL MISSIONS, AND INSIDER MOVEMENTS**

**A PARTIAL REPORT (PART TWO OF TWO PARTS)  
OF THE AD INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON INSIDER MOVEMENTS  
TO THE FORTY-SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

**MARCH 19, 2014**

PCA AD INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON INSIDER MOVEMENTS (SCIM)

Signatories of the Committee Report (CR)

TE David B. Garner, Chairman

RE Robert Berman, Secretary

RE Jonathan Mitchell

TE Bill Nikides

TE Guy Prentiss Waters

Signatories of the Minority Report (MR)

TE Nabeel T. Jabbour

RE Tom Seelinger

*The missionary must carefully take into account the specific situation and circumstances of the people with whom he is dealing... It might be held further that theology can contribute nothing with regard to the manner of approach, since it is anthropology, ethnology, and psychology that are here the experts... But such a solution is too simple... No matter how well-intentioned they may have been, those who ignored theological principles have in fact run into great difficulty. Missionaries may adopt the way of life of a people, speak their language, associate themselves with their religious concepts, utilize sayings derived from their religious literature, and from the standpoint of ethnology or psychology all this may be excellent. And yet it still may be necessary for theology to issue a warning that such efforts which seek to draw so close to a people must proceed with caution lest they sacrifice the purity of the gospel. On the other hand, it is also possible to have the best intentions and to ignore the cultural possessions of a people, and to preach the gospel pure and simple, without any application to their specific characteristics. History has shown that such a procedure is also questionable, for in such instances the missionary supposes that he is simply preaching the gospel in its purity, whereas he is unconsciously propagating his own Western way of thought. Here again theology can offer a corrective criticism, since such a method does not take seriously enough the people to whom one speaks. God, in contrast, takes us, and those to whom we speak, very seriously, and as his ministers we ought to do the same...*

*It is then impossible that psychology and ethnology should speak the last and decisive word with respect to the missionary approach. The latter involves so many theological points that theology must have an important voice, or rather – the decisive voice. Other sciences can indeed render a most valuable service, and in particular concrete situations they can even be absolutely essential, but the principles of the missionary approach must still be derived from Scripture.*

– J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*

*“If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” – John 15:19*

“...[L]et your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” – Matthew 5:16

*“Brothers and sisters, each person, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation they were in when God called them.” – 1 Corinthians 7:24*

# Study Committee on Insider Movements (SCIM) Report 2014

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## ABBREVIATIONS

1		
2		
3	A's & D's	The Declarations: Affirmations and Denials
4	<i>BCO</i>	<i>Book of Church Order</i>
5	CGC	Common Ground Conference
6	CR	Committee Report 2014
7	CR 2013	Committee Report 2013 (Revised) – <i>located in Attachment 1</i>
8	CIP	Covenant Identity Paradigm
9	CMB	Christian of Muslim Background (cf. MBB)
10	GA	General Assembly
11	<i>EWCW</i>	<i>Eternal Word, Changing Worlds</i>
12	IM	Insider Movement
13	IMP(s)	Insider Movement Paradigm(s)
14	<i>IJFM</i>	<i>International Journal of Frontier Missions/Missiology</i>
15	ISFM	International Society of Frontier Missiology
16	<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
17	<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
18	<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement</i>
19	MBB	Muslim Background Believer (cf. CMB)
20	MR 2013	Minority Report 2013 – <i>located in the GA 2013 Minutes</i>
21		( <a href="http://www.cepbookstore.com/p-9209-2013-minutes-of-41st-ga.aspx">http://www.cepbookstore.com/p-9209-2013-minutes-of-41st-ga.aspx</a> )
22	MR 2014	Minority Report 2014
23	NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
24	<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
25	PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
26	SCIM	Study Committee on Insider Movements
27	<i>SFM</i>	<i>St. Francis Magazine</i>
28	SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
29	WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
30	<i>WCF</i>	<i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>
31	<i>WLC</i>	<i>Westminster Larger Catechism</i>
32	<i>WSC</i>	<i>Westminster Shorter Catechism</i>
33		

## **OVERTURE #9 – “A Call to Faithful Witness”**

Approved by the 39th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, June 10, 2011

**Whereas:** the Church is called to take the gospel to all peoples, including those who have historically been resistant to the gospel;

**Whereas:** contextualizing the language and forms of the gospel, while remaining faithful to the truths of Scripture, is good and necessary for the advancement of the gospel;

**Whereas:** the Church must exercise wisdom in discerning appropriate expressions of contextualization, reserving its public corrections for genuine and substantive threats to the gospel;

**Whereas:** in recent initiatives known as “Insider Movements”, some groups have produced Bible translations that have replaced references to Jesus as “Son” (*huios*) with terms such as “Messiah” in order to be more acceptable to Muslims;

**Whereas:** some Bible translations of Insider Movements have replaced references to God as “Father” (*pater*) with terms such as “Guardian” and “Lord”;

**Whereas:** these Bible translations are harmful to the doctrines of the authority of Scripture and the deity of Christ, bringing confusion to people in need of Christ—concerns that are held by many national leaders and Bible societies;

**Whereas:** some PCA churches have knowingly or unknowingly financially supported these Bible translations;

**Whereas:** Muslims should not be denied a full and faithful witness;

**Therefore be it resolved** that the 39th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America:

- Affirms that biblical motivations of all those who seek the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have never heard or responded to the gospel should be encouraged;
- Repents of complacency or comfort that keeps us from a faithful witness;
- Declares as unfaithful to God’s revealed Word, Insider Movement or any other translations of the Bible that remove from the text references to God as “Father” (*pater*) or Jesus as “Son” (*huios*), because such removals compromise doctrines of the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Scripture;

- 1       • Encourages PCA congregations to assess whether the missionaries and agencies they
- 2       support use or promote Bible translations that remove familial language in reference
- 3       to persons of the Trinity, and if so, to pursue correction, and failing that, to withdraw
- 4       their support;
- 5       • Encourages PCA congregations to support biblically sound and appropriately
- 6       contextualized efforts to see Christ's Church established among resistant peoples;
- 7       • Calls PCA churches and agencies to collaborate with each other and the broader
- 8       Church to discern and implement biblical authority in gospel contextualization.
- 9       • Authorizes the Moderator, as an aid to greater gospel faithfulness throughout the
- 10      PCA and the broader Church, to appoint a study committee to report to the 40th
- 11      General Assembly concerning Insider Movements, including but not limited to:
- 12          ○ A summary and biblical assessment of Insider Movements' histories,
- 13          philosophies, and practices;
- 14          ○ A biblical response to interpretations of Scripture used in defense of Insider
- 15          Movements;
- 16          ○ An examination of the theological impact of removing familial language for
- 17          the Trinity from Bible translations;
- 18          ○ An assessment of PCA missions partners regarding the influence of Insider
- 19          Movement within them, including assessment of their theology of religion,
- 20          ecclesiology, Scripture, and relationship to the Emergent Church;
- 21          ○ An explanation of the relevance and importance of this issue for the PCA;
- 22          ○ Suggestions for identifying and assessing the influence of Insider Movements
- 23          among mission agencies, missionaries and organizations;
- 24          ○ Recommended resources for faithfully training and equipping congregations
- 25          to reach Muslims locally and internationally.
- 26      • Set the budget for the study committee at \$15,000/year and that funds be derived
- 27      from gifts to the AC designated for that purpose.
- 28

## **PREFACE**

### **The Study Committee's History, Approach, and Product**

The 39th General Assembly (June 2011) instructed its moderator, Ruling Elder Dan Carrell, to appoint members to an ad interim study committee, the Study Committee on Insider Movements (SCIM). The 2011 General Assembly instructed the SCIM, among other things, to undertake “an examination of the theological impact of removing familial language for the Trinity from Bible translations” and to provide a biblical assessment of “Insider Movements’ histories, philosophies, and practices.” The SCIM met in December 2011 and recognizing the scope of its task, divided the mandate of Overture 9, “A Call to Faithful Witness,” between matters of biblical translation and issues related to Insider Movements.

It should be noted that the 2011 General Assembly also authorized the SCIM to make “an assessment of PCA missions partners regarding the influence of Insider Movements within them” in a variety of theological categories. The SCIM understands the value of such assessments and presents this Report as its principal contribution to understanding and evaluating Insider Movement (IM) thinking and methodology. Individual evaluation of every PCA mission partner and/or reported Insider Movement around the world exceeds the capacity of this Committee to perform. As a step towards the fulfillment of that assessment, we advise individual churches to use this report as a resource in evaluating relationships with mission partners, for the greater advance of the gospel.

The SCIM has now presented materials at three General Assemblies: the 40<sup>th</sup> (2012), the 41<sup>st</sup> (2013), and the 42<sup>nd</sup> (2014).

#### **1. 40<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2012)**

Following the appointment of the committee in 2011, the SCIM produced Part One of the SCIM report, “A Call to Faithful Witness: Like Father, Like Son.” Its recommendations were adopted by the 40th General Assembly (June 2012). This report critiqued a group of recent Bible translations that avoided applying the titles “Son of God” and “Father” to persons of the Godhead, and put forth the doctrinal rationale for preserving the historic divine familial terms.

As part of the approved recommendations, the 40th General Assembly granted a year’s extension to the ad interim committee for it to work on Part Two of its Report on Insider Movements.



## 2. 41st General Assembly (2013)

Part Two of the SCIM report provided a biblical, theological, and confessional analysis of the IM paradigm, including a series of affirmations and denials to apply in contexts around the world. The report included recommendations, including “2. that the 42nd General Assembly make available and recommend for study ‘A Call to Faithful Witness, Part Two: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements’ to its presbyteries, sessions, and missions committees.” At the same assembly, TE Nabeel Jabbour presented Minority Report 2013, which he claimed was “supplemental” to the Committee Report 2013. Since the committee did not and does not share this opinion of the Minority Report’s compatibility, a lengthy debated ensued over a Minority Report motion to recommend *both* the Committee Report 2013 and the Minority Report 2013 to churches and presbyteries in the PCA. The debate concluded by a vote to recommit both reports to the SCIM without instruction for delivery of its report(s) at the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (2014).

Having studied carefully the floor debate at the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly, having witnessed the confusion about the alleged compatibility of the Minority Report with the Committee Report 2013, and having interacted with numbers of assembly commissioners, the Committee received the clarion call to provide greater accessibility to the key problems within the IM-paradigm *and* to explain why the paradigms at work within the Committee Reports and the Minority Reports are irreconcilable.

Accordingly, the SCIM determined to provide a selection of resources to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly – including an Abridged Committee Report and careful Analyses of Minority Report 2013 and Minority Report 2014, in which we elucidate the Minority Reports’ *incompatibility* with the Committee Report.

## 3. 42nd General Assembly 2014

Each component of this 2014 committee report, “Part 2: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements,” seeks to foster faithful biblical, theological, and methodological reflection on the issues IM poses. For efficiency reasons, this report also centers on Insider Movement Paradigms (IMPs) in the Muslim world, though IM extends into other people groups as well, including those who are Hindu or Buddhist. Focused in its analysis, this report does not say everything that could be said. Neither is it intended to provide the final word in addressing and analyzing these issues. It does, however, expose critical problems shared by IM-paradigms, none of which should be taken lightly.

The sections of this 2014 report are organized in a way to provide an initial cursory and accessible analysis followed by more detailed study:

- **Section A. Abridged Committee Report.** Drawn from the Committee Report 2013, the brief and accessible Abridged Committee Report surveys key theological/methodological approaches common to IM paradigms, and offers a concise critique. We encourage Abridged Committee Report readers to receive its contents as a partial, but pointed analysis of salient IM-paradigm defects.
- **Section B. Declarations: Affirmations and Denials.** The Affirmations and Denials (collectively, “Declarations”) are in two ways tethered explicitly to the Abridged Committee Report and to the Committee Report 2013 (Revised) in **Attachment 1**: (1) the Abridged Committee Report references the Affirmations/Denials relevant to each of its sections, and (2) the Declarations themselves reference sections of the Committee Report 2013 (Revised) which undergird their summary statements. We encourage Abridged Committee Report readers to study the Affirmations and Denials in view of their vital dependence upon the theology developed in the respective rationale sections of the full Committee Report in Attachment 1. The Declarations are principal in nature and identify the ideals toward which missionaries, evangelists, and churches should aspire, while exercising pastoral discernment as to the best path toward those goals in a particular ministry context. Any variety of local circumstances may delay or hinder the realization of certain ideals, but biblical principles should always determine and shape all missiological consideration. The Declarations should also be digested as a whole, since any one of them in isolation may present an unbalanced idea.
- **Section C. Analysis of the Minority Report 2014.** The Analysis of Minority Report 2014 provides an important, though brief, studied analysis of the Minority Report 2014. Because of the interrelationship between the two minority reports, this analysis should be considered in combination with the Analysis of the Minority Report (2013) in **Attachment 2**.
- **Attachment 1. Committee Report 2013 (Revised).** The Committee Report 2013 (Revised) includes an Executive Summary and provides the most robust analysis of the IM-paradigm. All components of the 2014 report depend on the theological, hermeneutical, and methodological analysis contained in this extended report.
- **Attachment 2. Analysis of the Minority Report 2013.** The Minority Report 2013 is critical because key features of its theological paradigm continue to operate in the 2014 Minority Report. The content of this Minority Report Analysis 2013 parallels the structure and theological reasoning of the Abridged Committee Report (**Section A**), but exposes IM-sympathetic theological and methodological problems at work in

the 2013 Minority Report (MR2013) itself. For fullest analysis, we encourage Analysis of the Minority Report 2013 readers to read the Abridged Committee Report (**Section A**), and to study the whole Committee Report 2013 (Revised) (**Attachment 1**) and the **Minority Report 2013** itself, which begins on p. 2333 of this document. (Please note that the page references in Attachment 2 are to the 2013 Commissioner Handbook page numbers, which are found at the bottom right of the MR 2013 pages in this document.)

- **Attachment 3. Christians of Muslim Background (CMB) Input.** This brief list of comments from Muslim converts to Christ, though hardly exhaustive, clearly illustrates how some believers in Muslim countries perceive the practice and effects of the IM paradigm.
- **Attachment 4. History of Modern Evangelicalism as Related to Missions.** This brief treatment of the history of missions in the United States supplements the Committee Report 2013 (Revised) in its consideration of the historical background to the IM paradigm.
- **Attachment 5. God and Allah.** This brief analysis exposes the components involved in discerning the way in which we must think about the relationship between the triune God of Scripture and the term *Allah*.

To locate each these documents, see the **Table of Contents** at the beginning of this 2014 report.

### **Conclusion and Thanks**

Finally, some words of gratitude are in order. First, we thank the commissioners of the PCA for their ongoing support and encouragement in the tasks given us by the 2011 Overture #9. Second, we are grateful to staff of the Administrative Committee for its assistance in preparing these documents for publication. Third, we are grateful to interviewees, whose input helped the SCIM grapple with key issues. We appreciate the competent care and input provided by numerous readers outside of the committee (both advocates and opponents of the IM paradigms we discuss), who provided useful feedback and helped shape this report into its final form. Finally, we appreciate the input from many Christians of Muslim background (CMBs), whose background in Islam and first-hand exposure to IM practices provide compelling evidence of the seriousness of the theological and missiological stakes. Their own sacrifices in ministry and the risks they take for gospel faithfulness are as convicting as they are humbling. Having heard their plea, we urge our fellow commissioners to give ear to the alarm and consternation expressed by these brothers in Christ concerning the effects of Western IM paradigms, advocacy, and funding.

**Study Committee Recommendations to the 42nd General Assembly**

1. That “A Call to Faithful Witness, Part Two: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements” serve as a Partial Report (Part Two of Two Parts).
2. That the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly make available and recommend for study “A Call to Faithful Witness, Part Two: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements” to its presbyteries, sessions, and missions committees.
3. That the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly dismiss the ad interim Study Committee on Insider Movements with thanks.

## Section A. Abridged Committee Report<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction to Insider Movement Paradigms (IMPs)

In the recent controversy over "Insider Movements," an "Insider" is a person accepted as a true member of his culture, and a "movement" is a trend in which groups of people (as opposed to scattered individuals) profess faith in Christ, often without missionary influence. Insider Movement believers in Jesus perceive "Christianity" as a foreign culture. They continue to self-identify as part of the broader Muslim, Hindu, or other community, because they have not changed their name, style of dress and speech, or country of residence. They feel little need, and sometimes substantial reluctance, to affiliate with a national Church which may pressure new converts to adopt attitudes and practices which antagonize their previous social circle, such as the cultural practices mentioned above.

Western apologists for Insider Movement paradigms (IMPs) have sometimes encouraged new believers to continue to think of themselves as Muslims, Hindus, etc., rather than joining with established national churches, or thinking of themselves as Christians. IMP proponents insist on their intention to approach missiology from Scripture, without compromise. Do they succeed? Are religion and culture so tightly linked that a Christ-follower can only stay within his birth culture by also staying within his birth religion? This report evaluates the approaches of numerous prominent IMP apologists and draws two large-scale conclusions which characterize the mainstream of IMP thought. (1) *IMP concepts of "religion" and "identity" functionally exalt sociology over Scripture.* (2) *IMPs separate the Church from the Kingdom of God, and the work of the Church from the work of the Holy Spirit in making disciples.*

### 1. IMP concepts of "religion" and "identity" functionally exalt sociology over Scripture.

#### 1.1 Religion

From ancient times through the Renaissance up to today, some have suggested that the General Revelation flowing from the natural world gives men sufficient testimony to know that which is important to know about God. This is not correct. The tools of human learning by themselves could never provide sufficient knowledge for salvation, let alone to change men's rebellious hearts. (*WCF* 1:1) They can contribute reliably to our understanding only to the extent that they submit to scriptural authority. For instance, anthropology cautions us to distinguish universal

<sup>1</sup> All quotations in the Abridged Committee Report come from the body of the full report in *Attachment 1*. Full footnote and bibliographical reference information can be found there.

values from our own culturally determined biases. Yet anthropology itself, like any scholarly community, forms a subculture from those trained in its habits, a subculture not itself immune to bias, not immune to critique by Scripture. The reverse is not true: Scripture is not open to critique by anthropology or any other human endeavor, and tenets clearly derived from Scripture should not be questioned based on human experience (for instance, human interpretation of the world around us) which seems to the contrary.

**[See A&D 2 and 3]**

The interpretations of Acts 15 offered in IMP literature provide an opportunity to see these abstract ideas applied to a test case. In that text, the leaders of the early Church instructed the Gentile-predominant church in Antioch that they need not undergo the Jewish rite of circumcision to win acceptance as part of Christ's Church. This "Jerusalem Council" was part of the unique, divinely planned transition between the Old and New Covenants, opening a door into the people of God for Gentiles. Discussion of this transition gets much attention throughout the New Testament. (Acts 10-11; Rom. 4; Gal. 2-4; Eph. 2; etc.)

IMP proponent Rebecca Lewis finds an additional ongoing implication: One should not add to this unchanging gospel "additional requirements such as adherence to Christian religious traditions." To do so will "cloud or encumber the gospel." "A religious framework drawn from historical Christianity," which she distinguishes from faith in Christ, is simply not necessary. Like the zealous but mistaken Judaizers who troubled the early church, "if we demand that all believers adopt our own religious traditions and identity, then we are actually undermining the integrity of the gospel." Jewish is to Gentile then, as Christian is to Muslim now.

Granted that not all the trappings of modern Western Christianity have biblical merit, is the Muslim/Christian contrast truly comparable to the New Testament's Jewish/Gentile contrast? When the New Testament articulates the reasons that Gentile Christians are not bound to observe peculiarly Old Covenant forms and practices, it pursues two very different courses than Lewis's arguments. The first argument is *redemptive-historical*. Galatians 3-4 and the entire book of Hebrews argue for the unique, planned obsolescence of the Old Covenant. Circumcision of Gentiles would obscure that plan. The second argument is *soteriological*. Paul's opponents in Galatia (the "Judaizers") were pressing circumcision and the other ordinances of the Mosaic Law (see Gal. 4:10, 5:3) as grounds of the Christian's justification (Gal. 2:15-16; cf. Acts 15:1, 5). Paul argues in both Galatians 3 and Romans 4 that such a "faith plus works" teaching was contrary to the Old Testament itself. It is therefore mistaken to understand the

Council primarily in terms of the retention or exchange of social and religious identity. IM readings pose questions to Acts 15 that Luke was not concerned to answer, and derive principles from the Council that lack sufficient exegetical warrant.

[See A&D 1]

## 1.2 Identity

Similarly, an IM-related question such as, "How does a believer's identity in Christ relate to his identity within his social network?" should not be approached without first carefully and *biblically* considering what "identity" is in the first place. What does it mean to retain a Muslim identity, as some IM proponents propose? If cultural identity truly cannot be separated from religious identity, then how can a faithful convert be said to retain his cultural identity without promoting false religion? Popular discussions of "identity" often focus on self-awareness of identity or sense of identity, rather than on identity as an objective reality in terms of (1) man as the image of God, and (2) God as interacting with man by means of covenant, with Christ as the ultimate and perfect example of man in each case. Any horizontal consideration of identity drawn from inter-human relationships must consciously subordinate to the vertical relationship between man and God.

Romans 1:18-2:17 grounds the necessity of Christ's redemptive work for all of Adam's descendants—Jews and Gentiles alike—in the pervasive problem of disobedience and corruption. Adam's descendants willfully, actively, and persistently seek to suppress the voice of God. Substitute deities and substitute religious practices supplant the truth, and indeed the idolaters who practice these false religions do so to their own condemnation. "He who is not for me is against me," claims Jesus (Matt. 12:30). Any nonchristian religion, including Old Testament worship practiced in rebellion against Christ, is "elemental principles" (NEV) or "elemental things" (NASB)—*ta stoicheia* (Galatians 4; cf. Heb. 5:12; Col. 2:8, 20), demonically prompted vain religious or philosophical means for seeking self-redemption. Paul places Gentile religions and the corrupted version of Jewish religion—typified by a rejection of Judaism's Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth—under one rubric: "in slavery to powers utterly beyond their control."

Every human is in covenant with God—as either covenant keeper or covenant breaker. As descendants of Adam, all (before saving grace takes hold) are covenant breakers, making the covenant relationship one of curse rather than blessing. Covenantal participation is not culturally or ethnically restrictive, as no human culture or person is understood properly apart from this primary covenantal character of human identity. Scripture's Covenant Identity Paradigm (CIP) lays out

two parallel yet mutually exclusive options (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15): Adam is the head of all unbelieving humanity, whereas Jesus Christ is the head of his church—those who trust in him by faith (cf. Ephesians 1-2). Everyone is defined by one of these two heads. Faith in Christ transfers a person from one covenantal identity to another (Rom. 5:12-21; cf. Eph. 2:1-10) and therefore from one covenant allegiance to another.

In biblical categories, there exists no grey, middle kingdom. Everyone is linked to one covenant head (Adam or Christ) and to one kingdom (darkness or light), though one's understanding of God's redemptive and gracious transfer grows in the conscious experience. Scripture portrays salvation in terms that are categorical, paradigmatic, ultimate, and wholly redefining: from darkness to light, death to life. The biblical core of redemptive grace is union with Christ in his resurrection (cf. Eph. 1:16-23; 1 Corinthians 15) or, as described in John's Gospel, new birth from above (John 1:12; John 3:1ff).

In Christ alone is true religion. Thus the biblical CIP combats any accommodation to all false religions, including Islam as a religion. Islam as a faith system, despite its leeching upon certain features of God's truth in general revelation, is shaped by fallen humanity and is a stronghold of Satan. It deceives those whom it touches. Islamic religious beliefs and practice cannot be treated with neutrality, any more than believers in the West should treat their background in secular humanism as spiritually neutral. Association with Islamic religion, therefore, carries serious risks for any professing followers of Christ, whether nationals or missionaries. Scripture presents false religion as both false and deceiving, and no faithful missiology will ever minimize the antithesis between biblical revelation and any other religion, religious system, or faith system. It is inconceivable how a person who identifies as "Muslim" can escape problematic associations with the false teachings and practices of Islam.

**[See A&D 12]**

Citing 1 Cor. 7:17-20, Rebecca Lewis contends "that no one should consider one religious form of faith in Christ to be superior to another." Elsewhere she proposes, "if well-meaning Christians tell seekers that they must come to God not just through Christ but also through Christianity, [we ought to] help the Christians understand this requirement is 'not in line with the truth of the Gospel (*sic*).'" Similarly, John Ridgway understands 1 Cor. 7 to teach that the Insider has a "spiritual identity" distinct from an allegedly physical "cultural and religious identity."



Truly enough, Paul in 1 Cor. 7 does teach is that a new believer should remain in and serve the Lord in the context of his family, community, and vocation (1 Cor. 7:20). Paul emphasizes (1) the obligation of both the circumcised and the uncircumcised concerning “keeping the commandments of God” (v.19), and (2) the obligation of both the slave and the freedman to serve Christ as Lord. In each case, Paul is not concerned to address issues specifically relating to a “religious form of faith” or “religious culture.” Rather, Paul emphasizes the believer’s fundamental allegiance and obligation to Christ, precisely in the circumstances of family, community, and vocation in which the believer finds himself. So strong is this commitment that Paul can even envision a situation in which a believer would need to alter his circumstances in order to be obedient to Christ (see 1 Cor. 7:36). Paul, unlike Ridgeway, sees no distinction between “religious” and “spiritual” identity, and has no hesitation in deeming “one religious form of faith in Christ to be superior to another,” as Lewis has argued.

IMP proponents also appeal to 1 Corinthians 8-10. Woodberry, for example, speaks of both Jesus and Paul as “incarnating the gospel among people whose worldview was similar to that of most Muslims,” and Paul in particular as “liv[ing] out . . . that model . . . in different religio-cultural contexts.” Woodberry relates 1 Cor. 9:19-23 to Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 11:1 (“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”) and to Paul’s actions in circumcising Timothy (Acts 16:3) and taking “converts with him into the Temple to be purified” (Acts 21:26). Because Woodberry understands “Islamic Law [to be] based on the Law of Judaism,” and because Paul is said to “teach adaptability even to a pagan culture like Corinth as long as one is guided by conscience and by the desire to glorify God and see people be saved (1 Cor. 10:23-33),” he believes that both Paul’s principles and actions have direct bearing on Insider paradigm methods and practices.

However, any direct application of 1 Cor. 8-10 to Muslim circumstances must account for the redemptive historical particularities of the text, as discussed in the section “Religion” above. An alleged connection between the Mosaic Law and subsequent Islamic Law does not leave one at liberty simply to substitute the word “Jew” in this text with the word “Muslim.” Indeed, Paul takes pains to compare the Corinthian church’s situation to that of syncretistic Israel in the wilderness (10:1-13). Against that background, Paul expressly prohibits idolatry (10:7a, 14) and warns against “desir[ing] evil as they did” (10:6), and “indulg[ing] in sexual immorality as some of them did” (10:8a). Such sins would “put Christ to the test” and subject the people of God to divine displeasure (10:9a, 10:9b-10). Paul develops this analogy between the New Covenant church and Old Covenant Israel precisely because the

1 sins Israel committed in the wilderness also were tempting and threatening the  
 2 church in Corinth—evil desire, sexual immorality, and idolatry. Just as Israel sinned  
 3 by compromising with the immorality and idolatry of the Moabites (Num. 25:9, cited  
 4 at 10:8b), so the Corinthians are subject to compromise with the immorality and  
 5 idolatry of the pagan culture around them (1 Cor. 5:1-2, 6:12-20; 10:14-22; cf. 8:1-  
 6 13, 10:23-11:1). Paul fears a spiritually destructive complacency among the  
 7 Corinthians with respect to these issues, and urges their continued vigilance against  
 8 sin (1 Cor. 10:12-13).

9  
 10 Paul appeals to the believer’s union and communion with Christ as guiding  
 11 principles for negotiating the moral questions arising from Christian living in a  
 12 pagan culture. Because we partake of the Lord’s Table and the Lord’s cup—which is  
 13 participation in Christ’s body and blood—we therefore cannot “drink . . . the cup of  
 14 demons” or “partake of . . . the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10:16, 21-22). We are  
 15 united to Christ and commune not only with him, but also with one another as  
 16 members of his body (1 Cor. 10:17). Paul directly appeals to this reality as he  
 17 counsels believers about buying meat previously offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1-13).

18  
 19 In short, Paul acknowledges in 1 Corinthians 8-10 the complexities of  
 20 Christians living within a culture hostile to the faith. He does not counsel a  
 21 categorical extraction and separation from the world around us (cf. 1 Cor. 4:10).  
 22 Neither is he unaware of or indifferent to the genuine spiritual threats posed to the  
 23 Christian attempting to live in the context of the culture in which the Lord has called  
 24 him to live (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17-24). Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians return to a  
 25 fundamental guiding principle—the believer’s identity in Christ (CIP) is the identity  
 26 by which all other decisions about relationships, partnerships, networks, and  
 27 practices are to be made. That identity requires one to pursue holiness, whether  
 28 within or outside of the social networks of which he was part when he became a  
 29 believer (1 Cor. 7:17-24, 36; 9:19-23; 10:1-22), and to exercise Christian freedom  
 30 with the interests of the gospel in view, especially the spiritual welfare of both  
 31 outsiders and weaker brethren (1 Cor. 10:23-11:1; 8:1-13). It is in this sense,  
 32 therefore, that Paul became “all things to all men”—“he is willing to deny himself  
 33 and do anything for the sake of the Gospel (*sic*) . . . as long as it does not violate  
 34 Christ’s law.”

35  
 36 **[See A&D 13]**

## 2. IMPs divorce the Church from the Kingdom of God and the work of the Church from the work of the Holy Spirit in making disciples.

### 2.1 The Holy Spirit and the Church

Apart from the conclusions of the Jerusalem Council, IMP proponents see in Acts 15 a method of resolving theological controversy which gives controlling weight to missionary field reports. Woodberry places the modern IMP proponent in the shoes of Paul and Barnabas, reporting the surprising works of the Holy Spirit (e.g. reported conversions and dreams about Jesus) to an initially skeptical church. Acts 15 does show missionaries interacting profitably with the Church, but should the claims of missionaries control the discussion, or simply contribute? To assess the proper approach, one must consider the roles of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures and the Church in guiding the faith and practice of God's people.

The Scriptures are the Word of God, the product of the Holy Spirit. As God, the Spirit is wholly sovereign and has the right and ability to work as he wills (John 3:8), convicting men of sin (John 14) and sealing redemptive truths in the heart of believers (Eph. 1). Normatively, the Spirit works through the Word, effecting regeneration, enabling men and women to see Jesus Christ for who he is—dead, buried and resurrected for the forgiveness of their sins. John Calvin captured the inseparability of the Word and the Spirit. “Therefore the Spirit, promised to us, has not the task of inventing new and unheard-of revelations, or of forging a new kind of doctrine, to lead us away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but of sealing our minds with that very doctrine which is commended by the gospel.” As Richard Gaffin puts it so well, “The Bible is the living voice of the Holy Spirit today. This is the structure or pattern of working which the Spirit has set for himself in his sovereign freedom.”

IMP advocates on the whole hold three questionable beliefs with respect to the work of the Holy Spirit. *First*, field reports, often interpreted through a continuationist charismatic theology, seem over-eager to interpret dreams and other surprising events as instances of the direct work of the Holy Spirit. This approach disregards the unique historic-redemptive role of the "signs and wonders" in the book of Acts to authenticate the apostolic office, an office which has ceased in the church. We surely would affirm with continuationists, IM advocates and others, that the Spirit *can and does* act in extraordinary ways, and eagerly assert his sovereign right to do so. Yet the historico-redemptively unrepeatable period that characterized the first century AD frames the Holy Spirit's work then as historically inimitable.

*Second*, these alleged works of the Spirit are taken as evidence of divine approval of the IM approach overall. This seems problematic. Even when the Holy Spirit is working in a person's life (or seems to be; see Matt. 7:22-23), that does not automatically justify every belief and practice of that person. For instance, the true conversion of an Insider does not speak one way or the other to whether the Insider paradigm itself is good. Rather, God has given us the Old and New Testaments, which provide the only reliable grid for assessing the Spirit's work of applying redemption and building the church of Jesus Christ. In practice, IMP advocates tend to give more weight to experiential reports than to the testimony of Scripture, sometimes appealing to Acts 15 as supposed justification for this approach.

*Third*, the work of the Spirit as described in the Bible serves to unite God's people in the body of Christ, the Church. IMPs, on the other hand, tend to promote isolation of new believers from the established church, on the premises that (1) sociological models of religion and culture justify excluding the Insider institutionally and practically from the Church, and (2) the direct work of the Holy Spirit obviates the need for believers to seek discipleship within an existing church. The implications of these ideas are considered below.

[See A&D 7 and 9]

## 2.2 The Kingdom of God and the Church

IMPs often make a strong distinction between "Christianity" or "the Church," understood as social constructs within Western civilization, and a spiritual "Kingdom of God" which includes individuals from cultures around the world, including those who identify with sociologically-defined "Islam" or "Hinduism" rather than "Christianity." This mingling of theological and sociological terms promotes confusion which may be dispelled by considering the Biblical doctrine of the church.

The Westminster Standards, following Scripture (*WCF* 25.1, 2; see Rom. 9:6; 2:25-29), distinguish between the "Invisible Church" as seen by God, and the "Visible Church" as seen by individual persons in the finitude of time and space. Although the memberships of the Invisible Church and Visible Church overlap, Scripture knows no separate category for an individual who professes membership in the Invisible Church but not in the Visible Church.

The Church grows primarily through the bold, authoritative public preaching of the Word of God (Matt. 7:28-29; Acts 9:27-28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; Eph. 6:19-20). Individuals who respond to the preached Word in faith and repentance gather into distinct, local communities (churches) of professing believers and their children.

1 Their life together is ordered by the Word of God, through officers whom they have  
2 chosen to serve them. Reformed confessions and teachers typically identify the  
3 preaching of the gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise  
4 of church discipline as identifying marks of a true church.

5  
6 The *WCF* identifies the “visible church” with “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus  
7 Christ” (25.2). This reign particularly concerns human beings as they are sinners,  
8 redeemed by the blood of Christ, and indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. The New  
9 Testament consistently directs us to the Visible Church—and to no other—as *the*  
10 place where, in this era of redemptive history, we may behold the Kingdom of God.  
11 The Visible Church and the Kingdom are distinguishable, to be sure, but they are  
12 inseparable. One may not claim membership in the Kingdom without also claiming  
13 membership in the Visible Church.

14  
15 IMP proponents are reticent in using classical theological terminology and  
16 categories to reflect upon the church. Explicit discussions of such ecclesiological  
17 matters as an ordained ministry, the administration of the sacraments, and the  
18 exercise of church discipline are rare. IMP prefer terms such as “community” or  
19 “movement” rather than “church.”

20  
21 Some may say that that new believers must work out the structure of  
22 government, discipline, and worship in their own culturally appropriate way,  
23 drawing from the Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To propose any  
24 robust exposition on these topics on our part, the argument continues, would impose  
25 our culturally determined beliefs and practices on these believers. Such a rationale,  
26 however, presupposes that these topics are culturally determined rather than  
27 biblically legislated. Because the Scripture sets forth normative principles regulating  
28 the church’s government, discipline and worship, it is not a cultural imposition to  
29 encourage believers in Muslim countries to order their lives according to these  
30 principles.

31  
32 These preliminary observations underscore the need to understand IM  
33 reflections on the Kingdom and the church on their own terms, before attempting to  
34 evaluate IM claims biblically and confessionally. Three IM proponents in particular,  
35 Rick Brown, Rebecca Lewis, and Kevin Higgins, have focused attention on  
36 Kingdom and Church in their writings.

37  
38 **[See A&D 4, 5, 6, and 8]**  
39

### 2.2.1 Rick Brown

Rick Brown, translation consultant for Wycliffe/SIL, articulates sound definitions of the Church and the Kingdom of God but employs an additional category, “religion,” which includes not only non-Christian religions but also specific Christian denominations and Christian religious traditions. “Religion” promotes social conflict and struggle with other religions in order to “persuade . . . people of other religions . . . to convert to one’s own.” Instead, Brown prefers a kingdom struggle which does not seek “to promote one religious tradition over all others,” but “to advance the Kingdom of God in all social groups.” Jesus did not “condemn [Gentiles’] religious traditions and institutions but revealed to them something far better: the Kingdom of God and the surpassing grace of the King.” Brown argues that what is necessary for “spiritual growth is that people (1) belong to the invisible ecclesia of God’s Kingdom and (2) be a part of a local ecclesia of fellow members of the Kingdom.” It is not necessary that they leave “denominations” or “socioreligious groups” in order to affiliate with others. “Kingdom assemblies” need not “identify with a form of Christian religion;” rather, “the Gospel of the Kingdom” will “spread throughout [the] social networks” of which these Kingdom disciples are already part.

Brown’s distinct category of “religion” presents significant problems for his reflections on the Kingdom and the church. *First*, his negative definition of “religion” encompasses both Christian denominations and non-Christian religions, suggesting that Christian maturation may be stunted by the Church’s historical and substantial ecclesiological reflections upon theology, polity, or worship. On the contrary, the Scripture’s teaching on these subjects is an indispensable part of the biblical doctrine by which Christian disciples mature. *Second*, the New Testament does not support Brown’s contention that the Kingdom’s advancement does not entail confrontation of false religion. (John 4:22; Acts 14:15, 17:29-30, 19:21; 1 Thess. 1:9).

[See A&D 14]

### 2.2.2 Rebecca Lewis

Rebecca Lewis critiques the allegedly Western “aggregate-church model”—the “gathering together [of] individual believers . . . into new ‘communities’ of faith.” This model, she says, is ineffective and even counterproductive in “most of the world,” where people “live in cultures that have strong family and community structures.” The model of the New Testament, rather, is the “*oikos* or household-based church, where families and their pre-existing relational networks *become* the church as the gospel spreads in their midst.” Thus, “the movement to Christ has . . . remained

inside the fabric of the society and community” to “remain in and transform” those “networks” with “minimal disrupt[ion].” As the gospel infiltrated and permeated *oikos*-networks in Acts—Lewis cites the examples of Cornelius, Lydia, and Crispus—so also the gospel spreads today. “Jesus movements within any culture or religious structure, no matter how fallen, will be able to transform it.”

One must question her insistence, however, that these examples in Acts are meant to supply the kind of biblical norm for which Lewis pleads. Acts affords as many, if not more, examples of individuals coming to faith in Christ through the public preaching of the word by the apostles (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 8:13; 8:26; 13:12; 17:14; 17:34), without the mediating presence of the pre-existing social network that Lewis describes. Even more to the point, Acts not infrequently depicts the disrupting effects of the gospel within pre-existing social networks (e.g., Acts 13:42-52; 17:1-9; 17:10-14; 18:1-2; 19:9). Although Lewis dismisses what she terms an allegedly Western “aggregate-church model” as ineffective in non-Western settings, she does not give adequate consideration to the biblical precedents for just such an approach. Furthermore, Scripture insists that those who profess faith form a household (*oikos*) broader than the familial household (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 10:21; 1 Pet. 4:17).

A more basic methodological objection may be raised against Lewis’ paradigm. Lewis has chosen one biblical metaphor for the church (‘household’), but has failed to consider and to give comparable weight to other New Testament metaphors for the church, including “flock,” “temple,” “bride,” “assembly,” “chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, a people belonging to God,” “vine,” “saints,” and “field.” From the standpoint of New Testament theology, to privilege the single metaphor of *oikos*, to the exclusion of other metaphors, appears arbitrary.

### 2.2.3 Kevin Higgins

Like Lewis, IMP proponent Kevin Higgins argues that “pre-existing social structures can become the church.” He allows that “the Church is made up of believers who have been saved by grace through faith.” He argues that “the Kingdom of God includes the Church, but is bigger than the Church. The Kingdom refers to the whole range of God’s exercise of His reign and rule in the universe. This includes religions.” Higgins understands the Kingdom to be broader or more extensive than the Church, including a specifically religious area in the Kingdom but outside the Church. This formulation is problematic for at least two reasons. First, while, for Higgins, the church may be *a* manifestation of the Kingdom, nothing in his definition requires that the church be *the* single place to which the New Testament directs us to behold

the Kingdom of God. Indeed, his definition appears to be crafted specifically to avoid such an implication.

Second and more importantly, Higgins's understanding of the Kingdom cannot sustain the exclusivity of the Christian religion. He rightly wishes to "reaffirm . . . that Jesus is the only way of salvation." But how may one reconcile that affirmation with his subsequent statement that, "If God is active in other religions, then to at least some degree His truth can be found and responded to within the context of those other religions"?

#### **2.2.4 Six general concerns about IMP discussions of church and Kingdom**

*First*, IMP proponents offer statements about the Kingdom of God that may be read as antithetically relating the Kingdom and the church. J. S. William favorably cites John and Anna Travis: "Jesus' primary concern was the establishment of the Kingdom of God, not the founding a new religion." If they intend to exclude the Church—its government, discipline, and worship—from what they term "a new religion" it is not evident from these statements. Rebecca Lewis similarly disparages "institutional forms of Christianity." Other IMP proponents define the Kingdom in decidedly, even exclusively, inward and invisible terms, pitting "the Kingdom" against "organized religion," in what John Span calls a "problematic . . . dualism." In all situations concerning the selected terms for believers in Christ, clear and conscious identification with the historic, global church should always remain the goal.

**[See A&D 10 and 11]**

*Second*, IMP proponents Travis and Woodberry plead for a Kingdom whose unity is invisible and Spiritual but does not necessarily have ecclesiastical dimensions. Similarly, the intentional, physical observation of baptism and the Lord's Supper is omitted in some Insider communities.

*Third*, this discomfort with church, form, and order within IMP literature accompanies an emphasis on the secret, inward, leaven-like spread of the Kingdom through pre-existing social networks, until the totality of the network or culture has been influenced and captured by the gospel. IMP paradigms do not give public preaching of God's Word the primacy warranted by Scripture. This is a startling omission given the way in which Jesus' words and deeds identified preaching as the primary means by which the Kingdom would expand (Matt 4:23; 10:5-15, 28:18-20; Mark 4:1-20; John 20:19-23; similarly in Acts and the Epistles).



1                   *Fourth*, by de-emphasizing preaching of the Word, formal church  
2 disciplinary structure, and administration of the sacraments, IMP  
3 understandings of the church risk stunting the growth and maturity of real  
4 believers present in these “Jesus-based communities.”

5  
6                   *Fifth*, IMP understandings of the church place outsiders in a particular  
7 quandary with respect to identifying the “Jesus-based communities” in question.  
8 On what basis might we recognize these bodies as churches, particularly in  
9 the absence of the marks of true churches mentioned just above?

10  
11                   *Sixth*, IM understandings of the church fail to evidence serious  
12 interaction with historical Christian reflection on the doctrine of the church  
13 and, back of that, the biblical testimony to the church. Discussions of such  
14 basic or fundamental matters as the marks of the church, the invisible and  
15 visible church, and the means of grace require considerably more attention  
16 than IMP proponents have generally afforded in their writings.

## 17 **Conclusion**

18  
19  
20                   Common IMPs promote inadequate views of the natures and roles of the church and  
21 the Kingdom of God, the relationships between identity, religion and culture, and the  
22 relative roles of anthropology of Scripture in forming a missionary worldview. Samuel  
23 Zwemer urged a more biblically discerning approach: “We must become Moslems to the  
24 Moslem if we would gain them for Christ. We must do this in the Pauline sense, without  
25 compromise, but with self-sacrificing sympathy and unselfish love.” Such statements by  
26 Zwemer have been frequently misunderstood and misapplied, leading to a blurring of culture  
27 and religion, and to indiscretion in apologetic and missionary methods.

28  
29                   But the abuses on one side (degrees of syncretism) have often been met with  
30 countering abuses—misunderstanding, fear, and apathy. Just as success in Muslim missions  
31 will not occur by syncretism, it will never occur by ignorance and apathy. Only by the  
32 obedient pursuit of the millions of people blinded by untruth of Islam, who desperately need  
33 the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, will such people enter  
34 into the promises of God’s covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, to every Muslim  
35 inquirer, Zwemer urges us to present Christ according to Scripture and, trusting the Spirit of  
36 God working mightily through Word of God, to lead the inquirer to consider the person and  
37 work of Jesus. His approach is as simple as it is compelling: “We should press home the  
38 question Jesus Christ put to His disciples and to the world, ‘What think ye of the Christ?’”

39  
40                   The Muslim world needs the gospel. We must deliver that pure gospel and deliver it  
41 faithfully. May the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ enable us to that end.

## Section B. The Declarations: Affirmations and Denials

### Why Affirmations and Denials?

Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (WSC 1). Christian disciple making, including evangelism, is a necessary prerequisite both to that end and to living an abundant life in Christ.

All people, including Muslims, stand in need of the salvation that comes exclusively through Christ. While evangelism is not the sum total of the purpose of the Church—"Evangelism exists because worship doesn't,"<sup>2</sup> the Church is indeed called to faithful biblical witness and must not live in isolation from the world. As has been oft expressed, followers of Jesus Christ are to live *in* the world but not *of* it. Disciple-making in any context requires engagement with unbelief and unbelievers, and the Church of Jesus Christ must remain committed to the task entrusted to it—knowing Jesus Christ and making Him known.

The twenty-first century is a compelling and dynamic time in which to live. There is an urgent need for Christian resources directed toward the 1.6 billion Muslims currently living around the world. Yet the recent history of East/West relations has generated a fear of Muslims in some quarters, which discourages Christian witness. Despite this, the underlying issues in Muslim evangelism are similar to those in other settings.<sup>3</sup> Because many Muslims live without a church in their community to stand as a local witness, the need for cross-cultural witness is great, though the increasing presence of Muslims in Western countries also presents an opportunity for western Christians to engage in direct personal witness in their own contexts.

As a means of expressing faithful witness to the Muslim world and as a means of addressing the biblical, theological, and methodological issues raised by IM, the SCIM presents these Affirmations and Denials (A's & D's). These A's & D's provide principles. Because IM thinking and methods are broad and varied, the only practical way to engage IM scope in a biblically faithful manner is to present categorical statements as a means of application to the varied settings. Each of the A's & D's has in view particular theological and/or methodological issues associated with the broad range of missiological questions under the IM umbrella.

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<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, *The Gospel for Muslims: An Encouragement to Share Christ with Confidence* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), pp. 13-15.

1           It is imperative that the reader of these A's & D's employ them properly. None of the  
 2 A's & D's exists in isolation from the others. This means that none of the A's & D's should  
 3 ever be treated atomistically. To apply one set of A's & D's without a view to the clarifying  
 4 role of the other A's & D's is to misapply them and to risk drawing faulty conclusions. The  
 5 SCIM therefore urges the reader and practitioner to view these A's & D's holistically,  
 6 synthetically, and in a fashion that honors their cross-pollinating intention. To isolate an A  
 7 & D is to misunderstand and misappropriate it. To implement an A & D with self-conscious  
 8 attention to the other A's & D's that clarify and qualify it is to honor the intention of this  
 9 report.

10  
 11           Coordinately, the SCIM recognizes that, due to the broad scope of issues raised by  
 12 IM, this set of A's & D's will not answer *every* methodological question. However, properly  
 13 understood, these Affirmations and Denials *do* provide vital principles for addressing other  
 14 features of IM (and even the thinking of the emergent church movement), which are not  
 15 named explicitly. With a goal to biblical faithfulness in thought and method in the task of  
 16 missions worldwide, the SCIM presents these A's & D's with the express desire that the  
 17 lordship of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, receive the full honor, glory, and blessing  
 18 due him. Missions belongs to Jesus Christ, and is to be carried out under the comprehensive  
 19 implications of his resurrected status as Son of God in power (Rom. 1:1-7; Mt 28:18-20).

20  
 21           The following A's & D's seek to encourage faithful pioneering in gospel ministry  
 22 throughout Muslim contexts. Because Jesus Christ is head of his Church and came to give  
 23 his life for her, the Great Commission cannot be fulfilled apart from the planting of local  
 24 churches, each of which is to be a faithful expression of the Church universal. The SCIM  
 25 thus submits these A's and D's with the express desire of bearing faithful witness to Jesus  
 26 Christ to Muslims around the world. "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples  
 27 praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity  
 28 and guide the nations upon earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples  
 29 praise you!" (Psa. 67:3-5)

### 30 31 **Biblical Interpretation and Redemptive History**

32  
 33 **1a) We affirm** that Scripture reveals, describes, and explains the meaning of the redemptive  
 34 work of God in history, centering in and accomplished by Jesus Christ, and provides  
 35 authoritative practical instruction and models for missions.

36  
 37 **1b) We deny** that Scripture presents these authoritative missions principles without  
 38 comprehensive attention to the once-for-all, inimitable, and substitutionary work of God in

1 Christ Jesus and the historically, theologically, and eschatologically unique factors which  
2 dominate the first century AD.

3  
4 **1c) We deny** that the Christian and Muslim context of faith, religion, and culture today  
5 replicates<sup>4</sup> the historical, cultural, and theological situation characterizing Jews and Gentiles  
6 in the first century.

7  
8 **Rationale:** See “**Hermeneutics and Exegesis**” in Attachment 1: CR 2013 (Revised)

9  
10 **Scripture, Social Sciences, Cultural Anthropology**

11  
12 **2a) We affirm** that the Bible is the ultimate authority of mankind to which all human  
13 disciplines, such as anthropology and other social sciences, must be subject.

14  
15 **2b) We deny** that the Bible’s norming role obviates the need for diligent study of human  
16 circumstances, such as the details of Islam and its people.

17  
18 **3a) We affirm** that God has gifted the church with many tools, such as social science, which  
19 aid in understanding societies and human relationships.

20  
21 **3b) We deny** that any tool should supplant the Bible, either explicitly or functionally, as the  
22 determinative authority for defining human relationships.

23  
24 **Rationale:** See “**God, His Revelation, and Human Reply**” in Attachment 1: CR 2013  
25 (Revised)

26  
27 **Missions and Ecclesiology**

28  
29 **4a) We affirm** that the church of Jesus Christ is one body, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and  
30 that a local expression of the biblical church exists where the true marks of the church are  
31 present.

32  
33 **4b) We deny** that a biblical church exists where any of these marks, which manifest the vital  
34 connection to the universal church, are absent.

35  

---

<sup>4</sup> There are indeed parallels between the two situations, but they are not exactly analogous. Any consideration of parallels must wholly yield to the unique redemptive historical factors which govern the interpretation of the biblical text.

1 **4c) We deny** any possibility of salvation outside of a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, who  
2 is the Head of the church.<sup>5</sup>

3  
4 **5a) We affirm** that the visible church<sup>6</sup> is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ (*WCF* 25:2).

5  
6 **5b) We deny** that membership in the kingdom allows one to intentionally and permanently  
7 disassociate from the visible church.

8  
9 **6a) We affirm** that the local church is part of and should understand itself to be part of the  
10 global church.

11  
12 **6b) We deny that** any local church may think of itself as unrelated to or unconnected with  
13 fellow believers in the global church.

14  
15 **Rationale:** See “**The Scripture's Teaching on the Church**,” particularly concerning the  
16 confessional meaning of “the visible church” in Attachment 1: CR 2013 (Revised)

## 17 18 **The Holy Spirit, Scripture, and the Church**

19  
20 **7a) We affirm** that the Holy Spirit always works in accordance with the Scripture, and may  
21 work in persons outside the personal reach of the visible church, bringing them to a saving  
22 knowledge of Christ.

23  
24 **7b) We deny** that such works of the Holy Spirit ever occur without a view to participation in  
25 the visible church or that such works ever render unnecessary the regular, vital, and personal  
26 connection with the visible church.

27  
28 **8a) We affirm** that throughout history the Holy Spirit has led the global church into  
29 understanding the truth of Scripture. This leading into truth is evident in the historic creeds  
30 and confessions of the church by which the church has affirmed biblical truth and denied  
31 error, and facilitates diverse yet unifying expressions of biblically faithful worship in  
32 individual contexts.

---

<sup>5</sup> *WLC* 60 states, “They who, having never heard the gospel, know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in him, cannot be saved, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, or the laws of that religion which they profess; neither is there salvation in any other, but in Christ alone, who is the Savior only of his body the church.” Cf. *WCF* 10:3.

<sup>6</sup> For the distinction between the visible and invisible church, see *WLC* 60-65. This distinction stands apart from the issue of “underground” churches in persecuted areas, which are still part of the visible church as defined in the *WLC*.

1 **8b) We deny** that the historical church’s creeds, doctrinal formulations, and biblically-  
2 grounded practices reflect enculturation in a way that renders them an obstacle for the  
3 extension and building of the church in Muslim contexts, and their own work of theology.

4  
5 **9a) We affirm** that the Holy Spirit, working according to the Holy Scriptures, illumines  
6 believers who faithfully partake of the biblically expressed means of grace (the Word of  
7 God, sacraments, and prayer) in their growing sanctification.

8  
9 **9b) We deny** that this work of the Holy Spirit obviates the role of the church and  
10 particularly its teaching office in the ongoing discipleship of believers.

11  
12 **Rationale:** See “**The Ministry of the Holy Spirit**” in Attachment 1: CR 2013 (Revised)

13  
14 ***In Christ Identity and Discipleship***

15  
16 **10a) We affirm** that the biblical label “Christian” has great historical significance and  
17 generally should be pursued and accepted in order to manifest a universal and consistent  
18 witness for Christ.

19  
20 **10b) We deny** that “Christian” is a mandatory label for followers of Christ in all times and  
21 places, since contexts exist where the term has been corrupted by associations foreign to its  
22 biblical and historic usage.

23  
24 **10c) We affirm** that persistent effort should be made by all believers everywhere to  
25 understand and teach the term “Christian” and similar terms in ways that extricate them  
26 from any faulty associations and fills them with their biblically-informed, historic meanings.

27  
28 **11a) We affirm** that a new believer’s grasp of his new unique and covenantal identity in  
29 Christ and of the implications of his new allegiance to Christ is an ongoing process of  
30 growth and maturity; and that the articulation of this identity is subject to refinement in  
31 keeping with Scripture even across generations of believers.

32  
33 **11b) We deny** that a believer prior to Christ’s return ever reaches a terminal point where his  
34 sense of identity and his understanding of his allegiance to Christ is no longer subject to this  
35 process of refinement.

36  
37 **12a) We affirm** that true conversion to Jesus Christ involves a radical change of mind and  
38 heart, though discipleship is a Spirit-wrought process of growing in grace and truth.

1 **12b) We affirm** that Christ ordinarily calls each believer to serve him in the context of  
2 family, birth community, and vocation.

3  
4 **12c) We deny** that individuals may disregard Scripture’s teaching about idolatry of heart  
5 and practice, may misrepresent or compromise their new allegiance to Christ, or in any other  
6 way may dissimulate or disobey biblical teaching, in order to remain in their social context.

7  
8 **Rationale:** See “**Covenant Identity**” in Attachment 1: CR 2013 (Revised)

9  
10 **13a) We affirm** that the gospel can spread through pre-existing social networks, so that  
11 believers faithfully live out their commitment to Christ and conform their lives to will of  
12 God as revealed in Scripture, with the goal of presenting Jesus Christ to their communities.

13  
14 **13b) We deny** that believers must adopt particular patterns of behavior beyond those  
15 explicitly or by good and necessary consequence mandated by Scripture.

16  
17 **Rationale:** See “**Identity and 1 Corinthians**” in Attachment 1: CR 2013 (Revised)

18  
19 **14a) We affirm** that mature believers ought to perform a servant role in assisting younger  
20 believers to understand and apply Scripture in living out their new faith.

21  
22 **14b) We deny** that this role absolves the younger believer of his own moral responsibility to  
23 understand and apply Scripture.

24  
25 **Rationale:** See “**Identity and 1 Corinthians,**” and “**Conclusion: The Advance of the**  
26 **Gospel**” in Attachment 1: CR 2013 (Revised)

## Section C. Analysis of Minority Report 2014

**NOTE:** The Analysis of Minority Report 2014 interacts with the latest version of Minority Report 2014 that was made available to the committee. The final version of Minority Report 2014 made minor changes of wording and style to the version in the committee's possession. In the judgment of the authors of the Minority Report, these changes do not touch on matters of substance. We, the committee, therefore present this Analysis of Minority Report 2014 as a faithful interaction with the contents of Minority Report 2014."

### ABBREVIATIONS IN SECTION C

CMB Christians of Muslim Background (cf. MBB, Muslim Background Believers). *The SCIM has chosen CMB rather than MBB because numerous Muslim converts to Christ prefer CMB to MBB. The groups referenced by the phrases are identical. When quoting other documents that use 'MBB' we have retained it to maintain accuracy.*"

CR 2013 Committee Report 2013 (Revised) – located in Attachment 1

CR 2014 Committee Report 2014

MR 2014 Minority Report 2014

MR 2013 Minority Report 2013

### INTRODUCTION

TE Nabeel Jabbour and RE Tom Seelinger have submitted to the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly a Minority Report (MR 2014). Like the Minority Report submitted to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly (MR 2013), MR 2014 intends to be supplementary. The committee lauds this intent of MR 2014. It also recognizes that MR 2014 represents a sincere effort to improve and to refine MR 2013.

The committee, however, is not prepared to agree with MR 2014's self-designation as supplementary to CR 2014. It has two leading reservations about MR 2014. First, in critical areas where MR 2014 claims to supplement CR 2014, MR 2014 is unclear and ambiguous. MR 2014 dilutes the clarity and incisiveness of CR 2014. Second and relatedly, in those areas where MR 2014 demonstrates lack of clarity and ambiguity, it is subject to friendly appropriation by IM proponents. And it is precisely in these areas that CR 2014 has raised significant concerns about IM methods and practices. In this respect, MR 2014 works at cross-purposes with CR 2014 in attempting to provide a biblical and confessional analysis of Insider Movements (IM). These two concerns surface together in three areas: MR 2014's discussion of identity, its discussion of the church, and its exegesis of Scripture.

#### 1. MR 2014 and Identity

MR 2014 claims to build upon and supplement CR 2014's discussion of identity. In fact, MR 2014's discussion of identity lacks clarity and precision, and it is this very lack of



1 clarity and precision that lends MR 2014 to friendly appropriation by IM proponents. MR 2014  
 2 notes the difficulties inherent in defining Muslim identity, owing partly to the fragmented  
 3 character of many Muslim societies. Such fragmentation allows Christians of Muslim  
 4 Background (CMBs) to follow Christ faithfully within “Muslim society.” MR 2014 rejects  
 5 the idea of a “voluntary, indefinite retention of Islamic religious identity.” It is unclear, however,  
 6 what an “Islamic religious identity” is. It is furthermore unclear why MR 2014 limits its  
 7 prohibition to “indefinite” retention of this identity. Neither is it evident that MR 2014 means  
 8 to proscribe *definite* retention of this identity, whatever MR 2014 intends by this “identity.”  
 9

10 MR 2014 laudably urges CMBs to “remain connected to family and friends” and is  
 11 aware of the danger of “syncretism” that such CMBs face. MR 2014 urges CMBs to pursue  
 12 discipleship “*in the birth communities but not inside the Islamic institutions,*” particularly  
 13 mosques. At the same time, MR 2014 notes that “transition from the Islamic institutions”  
 14 may be a “process that could take time.” Such a CMB could in no case “retain false Islamic  
 15 belief.” He must change “theologically” even while he remains connected to his family and  
 16 friends “socially and *relationally*” (emphasis original).  
 17

18 These statements raise more questions than they answer. May “birth communities”  
 19 and “Islamic institutions” be as neatly separated as MR 2014 suggests? In a Muslim context,  
 20 is MR 2014’s distinction drawn between inner, personal theological change and external  
 21 socio-relational ties as firm and as clear as MR 2014 suggests? MR 2014’s own unanswered  
 22 “key questions” suggest not, and the testimony of many CMBs and Muslims themselves  
 23 firmly indicates not. Furthermore, in saying that a “transition from the Islamic institutions”  
 24 may take time, how much time is envisioned? One could easily see IM proponents appealing  
 25 to these distinctions and formulations to warrant or permit unbiblical engagement with  
 26 Muslim culture. As the preponderance of IM literature evidences, IM approaches capitalize  
 27 on such ambiguity concerning identity and transitions. With its lack of clarity about the  
 28 meaning of key terms, MR 2014 actually aligns itself with the very IM paradigm which CR  
 29 2014 critiques.  
 30

31 MR 2014 demonstrates three such affinities with the IM paradigm that CR 2014  
 32 critiques. *First*, MR 2014 leaves the impression that the CMB is the chief architect of his  
 33 own identity. Absent from MR 2014 is any discussion how the historic, visible church and  
 34 the creeds and confessions of the visible church play any meaningful role in shaping the  
 35 identity of the CMB. *Second*, MR 2014 overwhelmingly discusses identity in terms of the  
 36 interior, psychological life of the individual – how the individual thinks of himself. Absent  
 37 is a corresponding emphasis in discussing how Christian identity determines the way in  
 38 which one conducts himself with integrity in his family and within Muslim society. This  
 39 individualistic approach to identity flatly contradicts the CIP (Covenant Identity Paradigm)  
 40 of CR 2014. *Third*, MR 2014 provides no mechanism for deciding whether one may call  
 41 himself or a Muslim or call himself a Christian. It remains open to the possibility that a  
 42 CMB may legitimately identify himself both as a Muslim and as a Christian.

## 2. MR 2014 and the Church

MR 2014 lacks clarity and precision in its discussion of the church. It does so in part by introducing categories and distinctions that are neither adequately defined nor biblically justified. This lack of clarity and precision lends its discussion to friendly appropriation by IM proponents. Note the following four examples.

*First*, MR 2014 proposes a taxonomy of churches (“obvious,” “hidden,” and “semi-hidden”) that is neither clearly articulated nor expressly grounded in Scripture or in the Westminster Standards. MR 2014 mistakenly believes that CR 2013 (and CR 2014) lend support to what MR 2014 terms the “hidden” or “semi-hidden” church.

*Second*, MR 2014 shows awareness of some of the ways in which Reformed confessions have spoken of the marks of the church. But MR 2014 proceeds to discuss what it alternately labels “essentials,” “aspir[ations],” or “standards,” and does so without any clear connection with its discussion of the marks of the church. These seven “essentials” are, furthermore, so broad that they could easily define societies of believers other than congregations of the visible church. It is these “essentials” that functionally determine the way in which MR 2014 thinks of the visible church.

*Third*, MR 2014’s efforts to explain the phrase of WCF 25.2 (“out of [the visible church] there is no ordinary possibility of salvation”) leave the reader uncertain what MR 2014’s views are with respect to this phrase. It certainly is clear in cautioning against what is alleged to be a “formal or exclusive ecclesiasticism.” It suggests that the CMB need not pursue membership in an existing historic church in the locale where he resides. It furthermore mistakenly believes that a “credible profession of faith” is to be identified with an individual’s sincere and heart-felt conviction that he believes in Jesus. Neither of these two views, however, finds any support in the material that MR 2014 cites from the WCF, Macpherson, or Hodge.

*Fourth*, MR 2014 furthermore notes that baptism “*should be done*, but at the *right time* and for the *right reasons* (WCF 28.5, 7).” MR 2014, however, offers no explanation of what it means by the qualification “at the right time and for the right reasons.” It raises but does not answer the question whether baptism, for circumstantial reasons, may be indefinitely delayed. The references to WCF 28.5, 7 offer no support for these contentions in MR 2014 concerning baptism.

These statements about the church could readily be appropriated by an IM proponent to justify IM methods and practices touching upon the CMB’s relation to the visible church. As the preponderance of IM literature evidences, IM approaches do in fact capitalize on

1 such ambiguity concerning the doctrines of the church and its sacraments. With its  
2 qualifications and ambiguous statements, MR 2014 actually aligns itself with the very IM  
3 paradigm which CR 2014 critiques.

4  
5 One particular area where MR 2014 demonstrates affinity with IM approaches is MR  
6 2014's posture toward existing churches in Muslim nations. To be sure, MR 2014 addresses  
7 legitimate concerns with respect to existing churches in the Muslim world. Historic  
8 churches, having experienced centuries of persecution by Islam, particularly in the Middle  
9 East and Pakistan, are at times unwelcoming of Muslim inquirers. In addressing those  
10 concerns, however, MR 2014 fails to acknowledge any positive and constructive role for  
11 those existing churches in the Muslim world. When MR 2014 does speak of historic,  
12 national churches, it frequently does so in ways that are prejudicial to those particular  
13 churches. More significantly, it ignores the rapid emergence and presence of CMB churches  
14 in the Muslim world. MR 2014 leaves readers with the impression that only two options  
15 exist: a "second class" existence within an historic church or what MR 2014 terms "hidden"  
16 or "semi-hidden" churches. That these are the only two options is factually incorrect.

17  
18 MR 2014 expresses a clear and decided preference for what are called "hidden" or  
19 "semi-hidden" churches. In company with IM writings, MR 2014 claims that these bodies  
20 are better poised than historic, national churches to leaven Muslim society with the gospel –  
21 "like yeast spreading through dough" (likely the most common metaphor employed by IM  
22 writings concerning the growth of insider movements). Also in company with IM writings,  
23 MR 2014 offers no clear criteria by which these bodies are to be defined and recognized as  
24 Christian churches. Neither is attention is given to the possibility, much less the desirability,  
25 of these bodies entering into either formal or informal ecclesiastical fellowship with existing  
26 churches. For all intents and purposes, these bodies appear not only autonomous by design  
27 but also independent of the accountability and oversight of the broader church.

### 28 29 **3. MR 2014 and the Exegesis of Scripture**

30  
31 MR 2014 offers extended readings of Acts 15, 1 Cor. 7, and 1 Cor. 10. In company  
32 with IM readings of these texts, MR 2014 understands these texts in primarily sociological  
33 terms. That is to say, MR 2014's readings of these passages mute the primary redemptive-  
34 historical, epochal interest of these passages. They understand these passages primarily in  
35 terms of the gospel's intersection with socio-cultural practices generally. The committee  
36 surely does not disagree that these texts apply to cross-cultural missions, not least in Muslim  
37 contexts. In fact, it is CR 2014's exegesis of these passages that provides the proper  
38 framework for cross-cultural missions. The committee does disagree that first century  
39 Judaism and contemporary Islamic practice are as closely and as analogously related as MR

2014 claims. The committee is concerned that such readings are subject to friendly appropriation by proponents of IM practices and methods. A comparison of CR 2014's survey of IM readings of these texts with MR 2014's readings of these texts will demonstrate a striking similarity in both the ways in which these texts are read and in the conclusions that their readings yield. As the preponderance of IM literature evidences, IM approaches in overt and subtle ways capitalize on such a culturally hegemonic hermeneutic. With its affinities to this hermeneutical approach, MR 2014 actually aligns itself with the very IM paradigm which CR 2014 critiques.

## CONCLUSION

In the areas that MR 2014 claims to supplement CR 2014, MR 2014 is frequently ambiguous and unclear. One casualty of MR 2014's ambiguity and lack of clarity is that, while claiming to address the "realities on the ground," MR 2014 actually fails to provide clear, concrete, practical counsel to CMBs. It fails in any discernible way to distinguish the descriptive (what is) from the prescriptive (what Scripture says ought to be). Unlike CR 2014, MR 2014 provides readers with insufficient tools to answer important, practical questions. It also introduces ideas incompatible with CR 2014 - ideas that profoundly shape the way in which one would answer numerous, practical questions. Such questions include the following –

- Should Muslims who claim Christ as Savior and Lord remain within Islam and refer to themselves as Muslims?
- How should believers living in Muslim areas distinguish themselves from Islam?
- Can "cultural" Muslims be separated from Islam?
- Should followers of Christ choose to associate with the visible church upon the condition of secrecy?
- Can Islam and its associated structures and practices be reformed from the inside as "yeast in the dough"?
- Can one follow Christ faithfully and maintain a Muslim identity with integrity?
- Which is more important – following Christ and associating with his visible church openly or maintaining a dual religious identity so as to keep channels of witness open?

MR 2014 lacks both the biblical and conceptual clarity to enable a CMB to answer these questions satisfactorily. In the way that MR 2014 attempts to do so, it is amenable to friendly appropriation by IM proponents. By way of contrast, CR 2014 provides clear biblical and confessional categories and principles that equip Christian workers and CMBs to answer these questions on a firm, biblical basis and with practical concreteness.

# Attachment 1: Committee Report 2013 (Revised)

## **IMPORTANT NOTE:**

*This attachment (CR 2013 Revised) is an amended version of the full committee report submitted to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly in June 2013. The content, argumentation and structure of the report remain unchanged, but there are minor changes to wording, and a few grammatical, citation, and spelling corrections.*

*For clarity and organization, the following parts have been moved to the main body of the 2014 Committee Report to GA:*

- *Overture 9 (2011)*
- *2013 Preface (expanded for 2014)*
- *Declarations (Affirmations and Denials –expanded and updated for 2014))*
- *Recommendations to GA (revised for 2014)*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Christian missionaries seeking gospel progress regularly explore innovative tactics for expressing the gospel in various cultural settings. In addition to the life-changing effects of the transition “from darkness to light,” converts also face pressures, from a variety of sources, to reorder their habits in some ways that exceed the demands of Scripture. These pressures, which pose an unnecessary obstacle to evangelism, can include wardrobe, speech patterns, physical appearance, social ties, daily habits, and more. Missionaries have long discussed ways to sharpen gospel focus to avoid these obstacles, and throughout the twentieth century, anthropology came to play a more and more prominent role in this and other missiological discussions, with a comparative de-emphasis on the role of theology, one example of a general move toward the compartmentalization of specialties across-the-board in seminary training. Scholars such as Samuel Zwemer, J.H. Bavinck, and Harvie Conn figured strongly in Reformed missiology, calling the Church to explore mission through the lens of Scripture.

In some areas of the world, groups have arisen which study the Bible and identify with Jesus, while continuing also to identify as members of their birth religion—Muslim, Hindu, and so on. These individuals can avoid the excommunication from their families and communities which has often occurred when individuals begin to identify as “Christian,” especially in societies in which terms such as “Christian” have acquired a spectrum of unchristian implications. Awareness of these groups, dubbed “Insider Movements” (IMs) by Western missiologists, has led some to conclude that certain elements of historical Western missionary emphasis fall into the “unnecessary obstacle” category rather than being essential for either evangelism or the discipling of a mature church. The debated elements have included identification as “Christian” and rejection of other religious labels such as “Muslim” or “Hindu.” These western analyses of Insider Movement paradigms have been promoted through articles in missiology periodicals (e.g. *International Journal of Frontier Missions*; *Mission Frontiers*) and conferences (e.g. the Common Ground series).

Scripture authoritatively speaks to all peoples, all cultures, and all contexts. As the Word of God, biblical revelation must shape the way in which we think about all matters, including missiology. IM advocates do appeal to Scripture, and seek to employ biblical passages and themes in defense of their missiological analyses. It is imperative, however, to assess IM paradigms based upon a refreshed consideration of functional biblical authority, the precedent of Scripture’s own self-interpretation (WCF 1.9), and the systematized teaching of Scripture as expressed in such documents as the Westminster Standards.



1 Missiologists defending Insider Movement paradigms often appeal to the Jerusalem  
2 Council (Acts 15) as an example of the Church's need to adapt its theology based on field  
3 reports. Though the field reports surely played a significant subordinate role in Acts 15 as  
4 they should in missiology today, treatments of such passages must recognize the *sui generis*  
5 features of the first century, along with the associated points of discontinuity between the  
6 first century and the twenty-first century. The Christ-centered work of the Holy Spirit in the  
7 early church, in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, underscores the  
8 historically unique character of the events in Acts. Contemporary analogy between the  
9 biblical and contemporary contexts surely exists, but it will flow properly only when the  
10 theological, eschatological, and redemptive-historical uniqueness of Acts gains proper  
11 interpretive traction. Ensuring this hermeneutical care is as difficult as it is important.  
12 Sociology and cultural anthropology have at points influenced IM advocates to interpret  
13 features of the biblical record as culturally relative, rather than in their fuller biblical context  
14 of promise/fulfillment. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise in Jesus Christ makes the  
15 central feature of Jew/Gentile relations a matter of redemptive historical/ecclesiological  
16 realization not cultural diversity.

17  
18 Acts 15 is also alleged by Insider paradigm proponents to demonstrate that just as  
19 Gentile believers in Jesus were not expected to convert to Judaism, so also Muslims who  
20 come to faith in Jesus should not be expected to identify as Christian, but may continue to  
21 identify as something like, "Muslim followers of Jesus." As with the issue of field reports,  
22 this interpretation of Acts 15 overgeneralizes the unique circumstances of the New Covenant  
23 transition from a Church centered in Judaism to a Church among the nations. While Gentile  
24 believers were not required to adopt Jewish practices, neither were they exhorted to continue  
25 in their previous religious practices and identification. Rather, Scripture provides numerous  
26 examples of Christians necessarily coming into intractable ideological conflict with pagan  
27 religion in Samaria, Athens, Ephesus, Thessalonica, and elsewhere.

28  
29 IM paradigms emphasize the diversity of peoples and cultures, and seek to appreciate  
30 the richness of cultural multiformity, with 1 Corinthians 7-10 in particular seen as endorsing  
31 continued participation in one's previous "socio-religious culture." Prevalent within IM  
32 publications is treatment of various types of self-identity, familial identity, social identity,  
33 and religious identity. All questions of identity, however, must begin with the biblical  
34 revelation, which exposes a bi-covenantal paradigm. All mankind is either in Adam or in  
35 Christ, the respective covenant heads of humanity. Actual identity and the sense of identity  
36 must give this covenant identity paradigm (CIP) categorical and functional prominence. In  
37 consideration of these *identity* questions, the diverse expressions of faith and practice raise  
38 biblical questions about the nature of the church, its worship, and the practice of the means  
39 of grace such as the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer.

Christ-followers around the world should understand and describe themselves first and foremost as followers of Jesus Christ, and therefore members of the Visible Church, the body of Christ. Even “hidden Christians” in persecuted circumstances are still part of the Visible Church as defined in the Westminster Standards. This Church comprises a Mediatorial body constituted by God himself, with Christ as its head, growing through the ordinary means of grace appointed by God. Biblical preaching calls its audience to respond in faith and repentance concerning the atoning death and life-giving resurrection of Jesus Christ. True churches are marked by biblical preaching, right administration of the sacraments, and proper administration of discipline. These functions assume a duly constituted church government, organized appropriately according to the size and circumstances of the local church.

The “kingdom circle” model of the Kingdom of God in many IM paradigms *envisions* a body of biblically faithful persons composed variously of Christians who follow Jesus, Muslims who follow Jesus, Buddhists who follow Jesus, and so on. In this interpretive approach, soteriological, ecclesiological and heuristic problems mushroom. The model obfuscates the close scriptural connection between the Kingdom of God and the Church, downplaying the distinctions between Christianity, Islam, and other religions, particularly the strong historic association between Christianity and the Church. This de-emphasis on institutions, religion, and the role of the Church in Christ’s plan for his people has affinity with themes in writings associated with the Emergent Church, though Insider paradigm proponents rarely reference Emergent writers directly. Missionaries may properly recognize situations in which specific terms (e.g. Christian, Church, or their common equivalents in other languages) may be misunderstood and thus unhelpful, but the concepts represented by those terms should nonetheless be preserved as a part of biblical discipleship.

Some Insider paradigm authors appeal to biblical accounts of *oikos* (household) conversions (e.g. the families of Lydia and Cornelius in the book of Acts) as justification for avoiding the gathering of Christ-followers into allegedly artificial “aggregate churches” distinct from the pre-existing familial or social network (e.g., birth community, religious community). But the New Testament concept of “the household of God” envisions a fellowship which crosses not only family boundaries but also social strata and racial lines. One may acknowledge that Christian fellowships began in individual households without assuming that they persisted in that state either indefinitely or exclusively, as some IM proponents claim.

The concerns raised above are not with the ideas or practices of immature believers and fellowships in Muslim or other contexts; one expects understanding of complex issues of self, society and faith to come gradually, even over the course of generations, through biblical study and practice illumined by the Holy Spirit. Such proper understanding also

1 requires that the mature church engage with new believers and new movements in such a  
2 way that upholds biblical integrity, the universality of the church in faith and practice, and in  
3 a way that also appreciates the biblically informed diversity of the people of God.  
4 Missionaries must humbly pray, study, preach, teach, and engage new believers ("Insider" or  
5 otherwise) in ways that encourage them toward greater biblical, Christ-honoring fidelity.

6  
7       At stake are the underlying assumptions guiding missionary evaluations, particularly  
8 in the areas of hermeneutics, ecclesiology, and covenant identity. Sub-biblical understanding  
9 in any of these areas will skew interpretation of field data as well as recommendations for  
10 the proper course of missionary action. Deeper biblical and theological reflection on these  
11 areas must therefore precede and shape field analysis.

12  
13       These circumstances suggest an important direction for multidisciplinary scholarship  
14 bringing missiologists, anthropologists, and theologians into the "trialogue" previously  
15 propounded by Harvie Conn. Such inter-disciplinary considerations, however, must operate  
16 in such a way that Scripture and its good and necessary consequential teaching function  
17 authoritatively in all missiological analysis and method. A host of related questions  
18 concerning specific practices and beliefs can then be given individual attention. In the  
19 meantime, missionaries should encourage Insiders toward ever-increasing biblical fidelity,  
20 and churches should ensure that their supported missionaries approach these issues from  
21 biblical presuppositions.

## **PREAMBLE: The Command To Go**

What more glorious experience of corporate worship is described in the Scriptures than the following verses from chapter 7 of the Apostle John's Book of Revelation?

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10)<sup>1</sup>

God's people find this celebration glorious on account of both the numbers of people involved and the rich diversity of that assembly. By the blood of Christ, people from every tribe, language, people and nation are present, all of them purchased for God. This diversity does not simply and sentimentally affirm the harmony among men who ought to be able to get along with one another. Rather, God wills that the heavenly realms will resound in unified praise to God by the body of Christ from every tribe, language, people and nation. In Christ, human differences, which now appear to contribute to so much discord and sin, will be not homogenized, but completely purified and perfected from their fallen expressions. Elements in our present lives that seem so prone to division and discord must be seen before the light of God's redeeming plan. These differences ultimately will neither obstruct nor diminish witness to God's glory, but rather increase it—not only on earth but throughout the heavenly realms.

The Church<sup>2</sup> in missions strives not to become one in the sense of sameness; rather it encourages every tribe, language, people and nation to take its rightful, distinct and full place in the worship of the ages. Contrary to opinion in some circles, "It is simply not true that the Reformation had nothing or little to do with mission."<sup>3</sup> The Westminster Directory for Public Worship (1645) exhorts ministers of the gospel "to pray for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations; for the conversion of the Jews, the fulness of the Gentiles, the fall of Antichrist, and the hastening of the second coming of our Lord." The Westminster Confession of Faith implicitly affirms this vision and addresses the Great Commission command to "Go" by appreciating the need to translate the Bible into other languages:

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the report, "Church" (with a capital "C") refers to the entirety of the body of Christ, whereas "church" refers to a particular local church.

<sup>3</sup> Wes Bredenhof, *For the Cause of the Son of God: The Missionary Significance of the Belgic Confession* (Fellsmere, FL: Reformation Media and Press, 2011), p. vii.

1 ...[B]ecause these original tongues are not known to all the people of God,  
 2 who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in  
 3 the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated  
 4 into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the  
 5 Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an  
 6 acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may  
 7 have hope. (*WCF* 1.8)

8  
 9 The command to “Go” also is a command to imitate God’s gracious pursuit,  
 10 exemplified in the sending of his Son,

11  
 12 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God  
 13 something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of  
 14 a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a  
 15 man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a  
 16 cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name  
 17 that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in  
 18 heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus  
 19 Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:6-11)

20  
 21 This humble pursuit, in which Jesus traversed the chasm between God and man, is  
 22 exemplary for his people, for the Apostle Paul wrote in the verse immediately preceding this  
 23 passage, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...” (Phil. 2:6). Thus the  
 24 humble and pursuing posture adopted by the One to whom was given all authority in heaven  
 25 and on earth (Matt. 28:18), indeed, the One through whom all things were made (Col. 1:16),  
 26 is likewise incumbent on the disciples of Jesus Christ in the spread of the message of  
 27 redemption.

28  
 29 Further, we see in the very creation of man as male and female in God’s image that  
 30 God did not intend that mankind would exercise autonomous dominion on earth, but that  
 31 God’s very nature would be reflected in the covenantally shaped exercise of that derived  
 32 dominion. With the post-fall context of Revelation 7 in view and the gospel of grace front  
 33 and center, mankind’s mandate now involves the spread of God’s redemptive grace to the  
 34 peoples of the earth. By the work of God’s Spirit through history, the final Day will manifest  
 35 the grand gathering of all tribes, languages, peoples and nations under the headship of Christ  
 36 (Eph. 1:10). Viewed from this perspective, God’s covenant of grace obliges believers to  
 37 proclaim the message of the redemption found alone in Jesus Christ to *all the nations*, and  
 38 by doing so, adorn the profession of the gospel (*WCF* 16.2) through faithful obedience to the  
 39 Great Commission.

40  
 41 As Revelation 5-7 attests, the Church of Jesus Christ is to be composed of a thorough  
 42 and grand diversity--ALL tribes, tongues, and nations—and in this diversity the glorious

splendour of redemption attains its unified expression in shared worship and shared confession. Yet, as Scripture, history and contemporary settings attest, the nations resist the gospel of Jesus Christ. Clearly, such resistance is an attempted theft of God's glory, but the Spirit of Christ will not be thwarted. Just as Christ's work of redemption was complete, so too will the Spirit-wrought gathering of the nations for the glorious manifestation of the sons/daughters of God on the last Day (Rom 8:18-30) perfectly accomplish divine purpose. The culturally, linguistically, and historically diverse body of believers will appear with the One Lord Jesus when he returns. "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). Among that number are converted Jews and Gentiles alike – Greeks, Romans, Europeans, Americans and those from the Muslim world – united to the same Lord Jesus Christ.

Diversity before God's throne adds to, rather than detracts from, the coming eschatological celebration. At the same time, the difficulties and spiritual risks in human culture are not to be minimized because, as J. H. Bavinck has put it, "Culture is religion made visible."<sup>4</sup> Scripture is replete with exhortations to the people of God to be separated from all sorts of evil, and Jesus' own high priestly prayer recorded in John chapter 17 recognizes that being "in the world" and "not of it" is fraught with difficulty. All human cultural forms must be approached with biblical discernment. What now in the world's cultures remains difficult to navigate will one day be entirely freed from the permeating effects of sin. The gracious promises of God assure us so.

By the advance of the gospel around the world then, God's glory will one day be on full display in the divinely accomplished unifying under Christ of all the believing peoples through the ages. Since the promise given in Genesis 3:15, God has shown himself to be a God of redeeming grace. Jesus' delivery of the Great Commission, the apostolic writings of John and Paul, and even the documents penned by the Westminster Assembly all portray the people of God on the same trajectory—that of willing departure from the comforts of home in order to reach other tribes, language, peoples and nations with the gospel, that they may also worship and bring glory to God through confessing that Jesus is Lord.

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<sup>4</sup> J. H. Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 57. Bavinck states elsewhere, "The practices dominating social life can never be detached or even thought of apart from their religious basis," *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, trans. David Hugh Freeman (Philadelphia: P&R, 1960), p. 175. Paul Tillich similarly writes, "Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. In abbreviation: religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion," *Theology of Culture*, ed. R. C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 42. Cf. Harvie Conn, "Conversion and Culture: A Theological Perspective with Reference to Korea," in *Down To Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture*, ed. John Stott and Robert Coote (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 149-50; Richard L. Pratt, Jr., *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1990), pp. 361-81.

1           Thus, the command of the Church is to “Go,” and the attendant attitude of humility  
2   which Christ’s disciples are commanded to exhibit, propel the Church into Holy Spirit  
3   empowered, self-spending Gospel ministry in which the Church goes to others, doing all  
4   possible that others might know and follow Christ in community in their spheres of  
5   influence; the places and networks in which they will continue in obedient fulfillment of the  
6   Great Commission instead of requiring them to leave their birth culture in order to hear and  
7   live out the gospel. Gospel bearers are responsible for faithful gospel communication that is  
8   sensitive without compromise, respectful without capitulation. In other words, faithful  
9   ministry of the Good News within other tribes, languages, peoples and nations promotes full  
10   and diverse obedience of faith (Rom. 1:5) while pursuing the plan and purposes of God  
11   expressed in Eph. 3:10-11 and Rev. 7:9-10.

12  
13           With a view to pursuing and implementing faithful witness and to expressing  
14   repentance where such witness is compromised, the 39<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian  
15   Church in America called for the creation of a study committee (the SCIM) to investigate  
16   methods of missions bearing the rubric, “Insider Movements.” In order to provide a “biblical  
17   assessment of Insider Movements’ histories, philosophies and practices” and to render “a  
18   biblical response to interpretations of Scripture used in Insider Movements,” we turn first to  
19   defining Insider Movements and exploring their history.

## PART 1 – HISTORY AND DEFINITION

### 1. Defining Insider Movements

An "Insider" is simply a person operating within his own social milieu. "Inside-ness" comes in degrees; to whatever extent a person is received as a true member by other members of his community, he is an insider in that community. That same person may move to another community in which he is not an Insider. Foreign missionaries thus are not Insiders, though through persevering ministry, their degree of "outside-ness" may decline. All other things being equal, most observers consider Insiders more effective than outsiders in reaching a given culture with the gospel.

The nineteenth century sociologist Lorenz von Stein coined the term "movement" in his descriptions of popular upheavals often culminating in national revolutions.<sup>5</sup> More contemporary definitions of such "social movements" often emphasize the confrontational character of a group's activity; e.g., "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities."<sup>6</sup> In American history, one might think of the slavery abolition movement, the alcohol temperance movement, pro- and anti-abortion movements, and so on.

The term "movement" in missionary parlance describes a less confrontational social phenomenon in which members of a non-Western society come to perceive themselves in relationship to Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Donald McGavran, influential mid-twentieth century scholar of missions and church growth strategies, proffered a "People Movement" missions strategy as an alternative to the then-popular "mission station" strategy. Rather than enclaves of missionaries focused on individual conversions, McGavran envisioned a more broad-based approach in which groups of people come gradually to near-simultaneous faith in Christ. Unlike people-group conversions earlier in church history, which started with a king or chieftain who instructed his people to convert *en masse*, McGavran described a phenomenon which began with the grass roots:

Peoples become Christian as a wave of decisions for Christ sweeps through the group mind, involving many individual decisions but being far more than merely their sum... Each decision sets off others and the sum total powerfully

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<sup>5</sup> Lorenz von Stein, *Die sozialistischen und kommunistischen Bewegungen seit der dritten französischen Revolution* (Leipzig, 1848).

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Collective Action, Social Movements and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., Bishop J. Wascom Pickett, *Christian Mass Movements in India: A Study with Recommendations* (New York: Abingdon, 1933).



affects every individual. When conditions are right, not merely each subgroup but the entire group concerned decides together. We call this process a “People Movement.”<sup>8</sup>

Rebecca Lewis uses “movement” to specify the absence of missionary participation in the events described: “‘Movement’: Any situation where the Kingdom of God is growing rapidly without dependence on direct outside involvement.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, David Garrison: “Church Planting Movements are defined as movements of indigenous churches planting churches that sweep across a people group or population segment. They are characterized by small house or cell groups with local, lay leaders.”<sup>10</sup> The term “Insider Movement” has appeared in recent missiological articles and conferences to describe a particular type of People Movement in which followers of Christ remain strongly associated with their birth communities. Estimates of the sum total size of all these movements worldwide range from hundreds of thousands to over one million persons; reports on such a scale make Insider Movements an important object of study for our denomination and other Christian groups.<sup>11</sup> The missiological literature most frequently discusses Muslim settings, but similar groups have been noted in Hinduism<sup>12</sup> and other world religions. Kevin Higgins, John Travis, and Rebecca Lewis offer representative definitions of this phenomenon:

**Higgins:** A growing number of families, individuals, clans, and/or friendship-webs becoming faithful disciples of Jesus within the culture of their people group, including their religious culture. This faithful discipleship will express itself in culturally appropriate communities of believers who will also continue to live within as much of their culture, including the religious life of the culture, as is biblically faithful. The Holy Spirit, through the Word and through His people will also begin to transform His people and their culture, religious life, and worldview.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (1955; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), pp. 12-13.

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Lewis, “Promoting Movements to Christ within Natural Communities,” *IJFM* 24:2 (Summer 2007): p. 76, fn. 1.

<sup>10</sup> David Garrison, “Church Planting Movements vs. Insider Movements: Missiological Realities vs. Mythological Speculations,” *IJFM* 21.4 (Winter 2004): p. 153.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Timothy Tennent reports 160,000 “*Jesus bhakta*—devotees of Jesus” among the Hindus and in Islamic cultures, “200,000 or more Muslims who worship Jesus.” Timothy Tennent, “The Hidden History of Insider Movements,” *Christianity Today* 57.1, January-February 2013, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, Garrison (*Ibid.*, p. 152) describes Herbert Hoefer’s report in the 1990s concerning unchurched Tamils in south India as an important spur toward Insider paradigm thinking. See Herbert Hoefer, *Churchless Christianity* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Higgins, “The Key to Insider Movements: The ‘Devoted’s’ of Acts,” *IJFM* 21.4 (Winter 2004): p. 156, <http://strategiconetwork.org/pdf/kb20132.pdf> (accessed September 13, 2012).

**Travis:** 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 insofar 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.<sup>14</sup>

**Lewis:** [A]ny movement to faith in Christ where a) the gospel flows through pre-existing communities and social networks, and where b) believing families, as valid expressions of the Body of Christ, remain inside their socioreligious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.<sup>15</sup>

Two important points should be drawn from these definitions for a start. *First*, Insider Movements are not considered to be the work of Westerners. They are phenomena occurring among national peoples overseas. In choosing to name ourselves the "Study Committee on Insider Movements," we have not as a group journeyed to the parts of the parts of the world in which Insider Movements are found, due to time, budget, and other practical issues attendant to travel to areas in which the presence of foreigners might disrupt local gospel efforts.<sup>16</sup> However, our committee does include field-experienced personnel who are well informed about and have hands-on experience with Insider Movements. In addition, through interviews with key mission leaders and literature review, we have studied what Doug Coleman has called "Insider Movement Paradigm":<sup>17</sup> the analyses of Insider Movements undertaken and influenced by Western missions workers. Such analyses typically feature both descriptive elements (i.e., observation of events in Insider contexts, as interpreted through some particular explicit or implicit hermeneutical grid) and prescriptive elements (i.e., recommendations for how Western missionaries, missions agencies, academics, and churches ought to behave in response to Insider Movements). Some have

<sup>14</sup> John and Anna Travis, "Appropriate Responses in Muslim Contexts," in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2005), p. 401. Travis' "C-scale" is discussed in greater detail below in Part 1: 2.d(3).

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, "Promoting Movements," p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> Some members of this committee have first-hand experience observing Insider Movements. However, we did not gather field data as a group.

<sup>17</sup> Doug Coleman, *A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives: Theology of Religions, Revelation, Soteriology, and Ecclesiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2011).

questioned the value of IM paradigm evaluations not accompanied by case studies from the field,<sup>18</sup> but we believe that sufficient literature about the IM paradigm(s) exists to justify its evaluation even apart from direct fieldwork. Moreover, as will be expressed later, the SCIM analysis is concerned with the biblical and theological suppositions that drive IM-type missiology.

*Second*, Higgins and Lewis frame discussion in such a way that Insider Movements are seen necessarily as positive. Higgins says that Insider believers are “becoming faithful disciples of Jesus.” Lewis defines Insider groups to be “faithful expressions of the Body of Christ... living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.”

#### **a. A Representative Insider Movement Proponent Argument<sup>19</sup>**

A typical argument by a moderate IM proponent might read as follows:

*Islam remains a major, rapidly growing bloc of the world's unreached population, with 1.7 billion<sup>20</sup> people who face eternity apart from Christ. The proportions of this tragedy-in-process require that the Church not only further prioritize mission effort among Muslims, but also evaluate the missionary methods we use. Are current strategies and methods getting in the way of fruitfulness? What would best help believers within Muslim communities to spread the gospel among their peoples? Such Christ-followers who are known and accepted in those communities will have a unique opportunity to share the gospel broadly. Strategic advance of the gospel requires that ways be found that enable new believers to live within their existing relational networks.*

*Muslim societies are tied to Islam in a way similar to that of Jewish society being tied to the Jewish faith. That is, in those societies, membership in the society and the religion are bound up together in a way which is not ordinarily so in the West. This is the case even though many Muslims are secular in their thinking; even those who are agnostic or atheistic regarding formal religious belief can be considered Muslims. Further, there is a long-*

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Bradford Greer, review of *A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives: Theology of Religions, Revelation, Soteriology, and Ecclesiology*, by Doug Coleman, *IJFM* 28.4 (Winter 2011): pp. 204-209. See also Bradford Greer, “The Necessity of Field Research,” *IJFM* 29:2 (Summer 2012): pp. 104-5.

<sup>19</sup> The following text is a synthesis of Insider proponent concepts. For representative articles by Insider paradigm proponents, see Part 4, the bibliography.

<sup>20</sup> Projected to reach 2.5 billion by the year 2050. See Patrick Johnstone, *The Future of the Global Church* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), pp. 75-78.

term distrust of Christians and their faith (reinforced socially and religiously over time), which means that identification as “Christian” is equated with betrayal of one’s family and community—even if the Muslim was known to have been an atheist previously! Also, this long-term distrust often runs two-ways; Christians have often been reluctant to accept a Muslim who comes to faith in Christ unless he completely sheds his ‘Muslimness’ and joins in with the local expression of Christian culture. And for those from the individualistic West, such a conversion seems natural; Western families and communities don’t necessarily rupture as easily over an individual’s religious decisions. The bottom line: often, conversion to “Christianity” (to be considered distinct from following Jesus), ordinarily results in social rupture which is more about social betrayal than heart-level faith.

*This need not, indeed, should not, be so.*

Christians need a mindset that permits new followers of Jesus to remain in their existing communities, even their religious communities, much as believing Jews and Gentiles did in the first century A.D. Jesus did not come to found a new religion, but a community that worships in Spirit and in Truth. Just as Jesus did not require the Samaritan woman at the well to leave her existing socio-religious community, neither should we. For the sake of the spread of the gospel we should not require Muslims who come to faith in Christ to leave their relational networks. Instead, we should encourage them to give their supreme allegiance to Christ and live under the authority of the Bible without compromise, while yet remaining in their present circumstances, even continuing to identify themselves as members of the Muslim community. Certainly faith in Christ will involve rejection of false Islamic teaching, but will also allow them to bring culturally meaningful forms of faith and practice (such things as prayer and fasting) to conformity with the teaching of the Bible, resulting in an expression of Christian faith that is understandable and less offensive to Muslim society.

The point here is that we have no right to require cultural conversion on the part of Muslims or anyone else. Salvation is by grace alone through faith, not by adopting a particular cultural expression of Christianity. Where the Bible is believed and obeyed, cultures are transformed. Don’t we have faith that this can happen within Muslim cultures as well?

**b. Broad analysis of Insider Paradigm Thought**

Overture 9 of the PCA GA 2011 “affirms that biblical motivations of all those who seek to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have never heard or responded to the gospel should be encouraged.” Appreciating certain critical concerns raised by IM advocates, and in the spirit of Overture 9, we affirm the call of the church to faithful witness to Muslims and other unreached peoples around the world. This call to faithful witness surely encourages new believers ordinarily to remain in their familial and social networks as a means to gospel witness, and always in a way that upholds biblical fidelity for the peace and the purity of the church. It is true that certain mission approaches and even local churches have wrongly encouraged separation from family and social networks for reasons beyond scriptural warrant, and insisted upon cultural changes that are not biblical ones. Advancing the gospel in ways that uphold biblically defined diversity should shape worldwide missional approaches, and requires careful self-critical reflection by all involved in gospel outreach to Muslims and others.

However salutary these general ideas, some suggested and attempted applications by Insider Movement proponents have raised questions. For instance, some attempts to facilitate the growth of Insider Movements have drawn attention for compromising central elements of Christianity, such as the divine familial language in Bible translations, which Part One of this committee's report discussed.<sup>21</sup> Those "Muslim Idiom Translations" have made inroads in some Insider settings, but the two issues are by no means identical, with Insider proponents divided on the merits of Muslim Idiom Translations, and vice versa.

Other bones of contention involve the terminology used to describe these Jesus-followers, both by themselves and by Westerners. Are they part of the Church? The Kingdom of God? Are they Christians and/or an unusual kind of Muslim? Are terms such as “Christian” and “Muslim” religious markers, faith markers, social markers, or some combination? Are such terminological debates a meaningless argument over arbitrary definitions, or do they reveal warring conceptions of the interplay between a man's self-described identity and his objective identity in the mind of God?

Another set of Insider-related discussions specifically orbits beliefs and practices of Insider groups in Muslim societies. Should they go to the mosque, and if

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<sup>21</sup> “A Call to Faithful Witness, Part One – Like Father, Like Son: Divine Familial Language in Bible Translation,” A Partial Report by the Ad Interim Committee on Insider Movements to the Fortieth PCA General Assembly, May 14, 2012.

so for what purpose, and in what context, and with what behavior? What authority do they ascribe to the Qur'an and Muhammad? What relationships should they adopt with existing, more traditional churches in their area? What expectations for belief or practice qualify as unnecessarily “adding to the gospel”?

Yet another area of dispute concerns evolving perceptions of Western activities overseas. Some see Insider Movements by definition as outside the pale of missionary impact: “The term ‘movement’ implies rapid growth in the number of believers, beyond the influence or control of the ones who introduced the gospel.”<sup>22</sup> Is this assessment justified? What is the role of the foreign missionary? Is his purpose best served as a consultant, to be utilized as much or as little as the nationals feel the need for him? Is theological imperialism or cultural insensitivity at work if he attempts to guide a local group in a direction it wasn't already headed? Does spiritual growth occur mainly through the Spirit-led study of the Scriptures in groups whose members have roughly equivalent levels of spiritual maturity, or is the teaching office of the Church indispensable for the long-term well being of local congregations? What are the roles of anthropology and theology in the preparation of missionaries for their work?

This report will not attempt to answer all these questions directly, as if a single answer would sufficiently address all contexts around the world and across the ages. Discussion of each of these issues deserves extensive careful commentary and suggests a field wide open for further theological research. In [Attachment 5](#), we provide a brief sample discussion of the question of whether Arabic *Allah* should be translated into English as “God.” Rather than serially discuss all the important particular questions laid out above, we shall lay out high-level biblical principles whose discussion, in our review of IM literature, we believe have been relatively neglected. These principles should play a formative role in developing the interpretive grid through which field reports should be assessed, and from which recommendations for missionaries should flow. Churches and mission agencies alike should weigh the theological arguments and consider their applications through the Affirmations and Denials, as an aid to advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ as faithful witnesses.

Originally, the term “Insider Movement” applied primarily to “C-5”<sup>23</sup> groups primarily in Muslim settings, who professed faith in Jesus while remaining in their

<sup>22</sup> Bob Goodmann, “Are We Accelerating or Inhibiting Movements to Christ?” *Mission Frontiers*, September-October 2006, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> For discussion of this term, see “The C-Scale” section of this report, Part 1: 2.d(3).

1 social networks through continued self-identification as Muslim. Some have used the  
 2 term more broadly, for other sorts of “cultural insiders”<sup>24</sup> who would not identify  
 3 themselves simply as Muslim. Some writers associated with “Insider” paradigms  
 4 have concluded that “perhaps it is time we look for a new set of terms.”<sup>25</sup>  
 5 Accordingly, terminology has shifted more recently to “Jesus Movements.”<sup>26</sup> In the  
 6 representative words of Global Teams international director Kevin Higgins, “[M]any  
 7 of us would like to see the missions community move away from the term “insider  
 8 movement” as it does not connote accurately what we are seeking to describe.  
 9 Instead we are seeking to use language such as ‘movements to Jesus within Islam (or  
 10 Buddhism, etc.)’, or ‘biblically faithful movements to Jesus within Hinduism  
 11 (etc.).’”<sup>27</sup> Such terms highlight a general authorial intent not to endorse unbiblical  
 12 movements, coupled with a conviction that unbiblical distinctives do not in fact  
 13 characterize the specific movements cited.

14  
 15 It must be stressed that writers on IM topics do not have monolithic answers  
 16 to any of these questions, just as the practices of Insider believers (hereafter simply  
 17 “Insiders”) themselves vary widely on almost every imaginable point. The varied  
 18 answers Westerners give to these questions reflect longstanding divergent opinions  
 19 in Protestantism regarding the Holy Spirit, the Church, the nature of fallen man and  
 20 his institutions, General and Special Revelation, and more. The fault lines run down  
 21 the center of that disputed entity known as American evangelicalism, with its  
 22 fundamentalist, ecumenical, Reformed, pietistic, and charismatic branches. This  
 23 report surveys key points of debate in Western analysis of Insider Movements:

24  
 25 **(1) Church and Kingdom:** How do the Church and the Kingdom of God relate?  
 26 Can followers of Jesus meaningfully be said to be a part of one but not the other?  
 27 What do those terms even mean, and from where do such definitions arise?  
 28

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<sup>24</sup> Thus Phil Parshall, while concerned about believers who participate in Mosque worship or identify as simply “Muslim,” states, “[W]e have always considered our approach as insider, but we have strived to remain within biblical boundaries.” Phil Parshall, “How Much Muslim Context is Too Much for the Gospel?” *Christianity Today* 57.1, January-February 2013, p. 31. Parshall elsewhere clarifies what he means by those who identify themselves as Muslim: “The communicator is saying he or she is totally within the Islamic ummah.” Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization* (Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Publications, 2003), p. 72.

<sup>25</sup> John Travis, “Letters to the editor,” *Mission Frontiers*, September-October 2006, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., *Mission Frontiers*, May-June 2011 issue, entitled as a whole, “Jesus Movements: Discovering Biblical Faith in the Most Unexpected Places,” <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/archive/issue-jesus-movements> (accessed September 23, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Kevin Higgins, “Missiology and the Measurement of Engagement: Personal Reflections of Tokyo,” *IJFM* 27:3 (Fall 2010): p. 132, fn. 9.

1       **(2) Bible and Hermeneutics:** By what method should anecdotes from the mission  
2       field and Biblical exegesis interact to generate a reliable framework for  
3       practicing missionaries to analyze and act? To what extent should perceptions of  
4       missionary realities guide the exegesis of Scripture? Does the Bible provide  
5       examples of theology being appropriately re-oriented upon the receipt of new  
6       information from the field?

7  
8       **(3) Covenant Identity:** Is identity primarily a matter of self-determination or of  
9       God's revealed decree? How does conversion to Christ affect how God sees us,  
10      and how we should see ourselves? What sorts of guidelines should govern the  
11      labels which God's people apply to themselves either intramurally or in witness  
12      to an unbelieving world?

## 14   **2. History of Modern Insider Movement Paradigms**

15       Every generation of Christians recapitulates the same missiological quest for the safe  
16      passage between syncretism and a pastorally tone-deaf cultural imperialism. The history of  
17      Western involvement in Insider Movements intertwines intimately with multiple historical  
18      streams, including evangelical missions in interface with anthropology, Reformed  
19      missiology, and especially missions to Muslim communities, leading to specific discussion  
20      of Insider Movement analysis.

### 22   **a. Modern Missions and Anthropology**

23       The nineteenth century saw the nascent field of anthropology learning to  
24      evaluate non-Western cultures, documenting habits and beliefs in an attempt to  
25      reconstruct historical developments. Anthropologists saw missionaries as “spoilers”  
26      who muddied the waters of national cultures by injecting Western practices and  
27      beliefs. Missionaries, for their part, largely rejected anthropology as a godless  
28      endeavor that relativized truth and opposed gospel ministry.<sup>28</sup>

29  
30       Twentieth century anthropologists refocused their efforts from forensic cultural  
31      spelunking which initially abetted colonialism but later critiqued it. Delegates to the  
32      1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh began to see value in such  
33      anthropological insights:

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<sup>28</sup> For more detail on the nineteenth through mid-twentieth century interplay of anthropology and missiology, see Darrell Whiteman, “Anthropology and Mission,” in *Paradigm Shifts in Christian Witness: Insights from Anthropology, Communication, and Spiritual Power: Essays in Honor of Charles H. Kraft*, edited by Charles E. Van Engen, Darrell Whiteman, and J. Dudley Woodberry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), pp. 3-12.



[T]he missionary needs to know far more than the mere manners and customs of the race to which he is sent; he ought to be versed in the genius of the people, that which has made them the people they are; and to sympathise so truly with the good which they have evolved, that he may be able to aid the national leaders reverently to build up a Christian civilization after their own kind, not after the European kind.<sup>29</sup>

Missions in the early twentieth century fell under the sway of mainline denominations that de-emphasized soul winning in favor of social projects which were thought to make Christ's kingdom rule concrete in underprivileged nations. Nelson Rockefeller's foundation underwrote a lengthy report which concluded that the universal presence of God in all religions rendered evangelism unnecessary.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, over time, mainline missions efforts dwindled, so that today PC(USA) has only "nearly 200 mission co-workers"<sup>31</sup> (1 per 10,000 denominational members), compared to over 600 missionaries<sup>32</sup> serving under the PCA's Mission to the World arm (1 per 500 denominational members).

Evangelicals, noting the pernicious influence of liberal theology in developments such as the Rockefeller report, organized a series of world mission conferences in the mid-twentieth century which emphasized the participation of active missionaries as opposed to academic theoreticians. Billy Graham's address at the Lausanne Congress in 1974 expressed the desire that missions retain a soteriological focus:

The delegates to New York and Edinburgh [the conservative missions conferences of the early twentieth century] were chosen very largely from leaders in evangelism and mission. Leaders of churches, as *churches*, were not predominantly there. Hence participants could single-mindedly consider world evangelism rather than '*everything*' the Church ought to do. The succeeding world missionary gatherings at Jerusalem, Tambaram, Mexico City, and Bangkok were made up not only of evangelists and missionaries, but more and more of eminent leaders of the churches who

<sup>29</sup> Report from the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, 1910, quoted in Whiteman, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Re-Thinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry After One Hundred Years*, by The Commission of Appraisal, chaired by William Earnest Hocking (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932), <http://archive.org/stream/rethinkingmissions011901mbp> (accessed September 18, 2012). Discussion of the impact of this report can be found in Harold Lindsell, *A Christian Philosophy of Missions* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, 1949), pp. 28-33.

<sup>31</sup> Hunter Farrell, "World Mission," Presbyterian Mission Agency, <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/world-mission/>, (accessed November 29, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> "Our Missionaries," Mission to the World, [http://www.mtw.org/Pages/MISS\\_List.aspx](http://www.mtw.org/Pages/MISS_List.aspx) (accessed February 21, 2013).

were there in their capacity as *churchmen* – not as evangelists or missionaries... Thus the spotlight gradually shifted from evangelism to social and political action. Finally, guidelines were drawn up which called almost entirely for humanization – the reconciliation of man with man, rather than of man with God.<sup>33</sup>

The exclusion of liberal churchmen from missiology conversations led to a “Great Reversal”<sup>34</sup> in the mid-twentieth century from a missiology with broad social concerns to a missiology more focused on evangelism. In the process, “American missiology... has made anthropology central to missiology.”<sup>35</sup> The call for missionaries to receive anthropological training had begun as early as the 1910 World Missionary Conference to which Graham (B.A., Anthropology, Wheaton College, 1943) had alluded above. Over the course of the twentieth century, the influence of anthropology upon missiology blossomed,<sup>36</sup> with formal anthropology training incorporated into the missiology curricula at the Kennedy School of Missions (now defunct), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Asbury Theological Seminary, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Wheaton College, Fuller Seminary's School of World Missions (now the School of Intercultural Studies), Bethel University, and, most recently, Biola University and Reformed Theological Seminary. Covenant Theological Seminary offers a Master of Arts in Religion and Culture. These efforts enriched missionaries' understanding of the diverse ways which Christian truth finds expression in cultures around the world.

As missionary interest in anthropology increased, Wheaton College developed a program of study under Russian anthropologist Alexander Grigolia, whose alumni included Billy Graham and Charles Kraft. Wheaton anthropologist Robert B. Taylor founded the journal *Practical Anthropology*, which grew to 3,000 subscribers before merging with the journal *Missiology* in 1973. American Bible Society linguist/ anthropologist Eugene Nida's book *Customs and Cultures: Anthropology for Christian Missions* (1954) also widely stimulated anthropological reflection on missions.

However, as missiology gained steam as a discrete field and justly increased its appreciation for the insights of anthropology, it also successively became more

<sup>33</sup> Billy Graham, "Why Lausanne?" in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J.D. Douglas (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975), pp. 26-27, <http://www.lausanne.org/docs/lau1docs/0022.pdf> (accessed September 19, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> David Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism Versus Social Concern* (1972; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Robert J. Priest, "Anthropology and Missiology: Reflections on the Relationship," in *Paradigm Shifts in Christian Witness*, p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> For surveys of the phenomenon, see Whiteman, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-12; Priest, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-32.

isolated from interactions with other branches of Christian study, most notably systematic and biblical theology, especially systematic reflection on prolegomena, soteriology, ecclesiology and sacramentology. “Studies in practical theology, Christian education, counseling and missions have become increasingly occupied with social science materials. In some cases those materials have not been well integrated with Scripture. In some cases they have even preempted the proper place of Scripture.”<sup>37</sup> This trend parallels the impact of increasing academic specialization across all fields of Christian study. For instance, Don Carson recently noted the lack of integration between biblical and systematic theology in seminary training:

More commonly, those who teach exegesis warn against imposing the categories of systematic theology onto the biblical texts. Reciprocating in kind, many a systematician teaches theology with minimal dependence on first-hand study of the biblical texts... The danger, on the one hand, is succumbing to the mindless biblicism that interprets texts, and translates them, without wrestling with the syntheses that actually preserve biblical fidelity, and, on the other hand, relying on confessional formulas while no longer being able to explain in some detail how they emerge from reflection on what the Bible actually says.<sup>38</sup>

A similar dynamic played out between missiology and systematic theology, with each finding less reason to talk to the other. Today, perusal of published missiology works and faculties reveals far more scholars with terminal degrees in anthropology than in theology. A swath of theologians, including James Packer, J. Robertson McQuilkin, and Harvie Conn, have urged theologians and missiologists not to lose sight of the necessary interdependence of their fields,<sup>39</sup> but, for more than a generation, sustained interaction between the two fields has remained spotty at best. Even when interaction has occurred, functional biblical authority has frequently suffered loss.

Within the context of an increased and disproportional trust in anthropology upon the missionary enterprise, over the course of the twentieth century the missiology community vigorously discussed contextualization, which Charles Kraft defined for purposes of missions as, “a process by which people are able to express their faith in

<sup>37</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, “Third Millennium Missiology and the Use of Egyptian Gold,” *JETS* 42.4 (December 1999): p. 577. Cf. Edward Rommen, “The De-Theologizing of Missiology,” *Trinity World Forum* 19.1 (Fall 1993): pp. 1-4.

<sup>38</sup> D.A. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God: A Christological Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), pp. 76, 80.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Hiebert and Tite Tienou, “Missions and the Doing of Theology” in *The Urban Face of Missions: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World*, edited by Manuel Ortiz and Susan S. Baker, ed. Manuel Ortiz and Susan S. Baker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), pp. 85-96.

familiar cultural terms without the necessity of converting to another culture.”<sup>40</sup>  
 Delegates to the ten-day international evangelism conference in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974 repeatedly circled back to this concern in their papers, conferences, and lectures. This gathering proved to be the seed that germinated into dozens of meetings and a flurry of influential missiological publications over the following decades. Though the overall mood at Lausanne sought ways to ingrain the gospel into diverse cultures around the world, a few voices urged caution of an overcorrecting pendulum swing into saltless, lightless syncretism without any power to confound the satanic systems operating through non-Christian religions. The working group tasked with responding to this viewpoint received its discussion of non-Christian religions as strongholds of Satan coolly, instead reaffirming the overall Lausanne narrative concerning the benefits of teaching Christianity without disrupting national cultures.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, the pendulum of missiology swung from near-total avoidance of anthropology in the late nineteenth century, to a whole-hearted embrace of the insights of anthropology, which, by crowding out adequate theological reflection, produced a different sort of imbalance. Reformed voices in particular raised concerns that cultural anthropology and theology find a better balance in the missionary endeavor. Yet any voice in the wilderness crying for missions to come from the Church, its theology and church-centered faithful witness, seems to have been overwhelmed by the cries of the social sciences.

## **b. Brief Consideration of Reformed Approaches to Mission**

In response to these widely recognized challenges of the Balkanization of theological scholarship noted above, three missiologists have exerted special influence in conservative Reformed circles: the Dutch missiologist and professor Johann Herman Bavinck; and the Americans Samuel Zwemer of Princeton Seminary, and Harvie Conn of Westminster Seminary. Some of their notable respective contributions are summarized below.

### **(1) Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952)<sup>42</sup>**

Zwemer, a Michigan native, was ordained in the Reformed Church and served as a missionary to Bahrein, Arabia, for fourteen years, and to Egypt for

<sup>40</sup> Charles Kraft, “Contextualization of Essential Christianity: Three Points,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 48.1 (January 2012): pp. 80-96, <http://www.emisdirect.com/emq/issue-318/2641> (accessed September 27, 2012; subscription required).

<sup>41</sup> *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, pp. 841-842.

<sup>42</sup> For an overview, see J. Christy Wilson, Jr., “The Apostle to Islam: The Legacy of Samuel Zwemer,” *IJFM* 13:4 (October-December 1996): pp. 163-168.

sixteen years. He wrote extensively about Muslim thought and cast a vision for funds and manpower devoted to missions, editing the quarterly journal *The Muslim World* for over thirty years, but according to some he saw few conversions to Christianity under his direct ministry.<sup>43</sup> He taught missiology at Princeton Theological Seminary from 1929-1937, arriving in the year in which the seminary's denominationally enforced reorganization saw J. Gresham Machen's departure. Zwemer saw the systems of Islam and Christianity as implacable foes:

Islam is proud to write on its banner, "the Unity of God;" but it is, after all, a banner to the Unknown God. Christianity enters every land under the standard of the Holy Trinity – the Godhead of Revelation. These two banners represent two armies. There is no peace between them. No parliament of religions can reconcile such fundamental and deep-rooted differences. We must conquer or be vanquished. In its origin, history, present attitude, and by the very first article of its brief creed, Islam is anti-Christian.<sup>44</sup>

Zwemer contributed to missions both as a seminarian and as a popular convention speaker until the months just before his death. He wrote extensively concerning popular folk Islam, mainstream historic Islamic scholarship, and fringe Islamic practices, contrasting each with Biblical norms.<sup>45</sup> “Zwemer more than anyone else put the Muslim world on the map.”<sup>46</sup> In Harvie Conn's assessment, Zwemer began with an overly "monolithic" focus on Islam as a theoretical system but “added increasingly a growing sensitivity to the Muslim as a man and to the effect of 'popular Islam' on theological constructs.”<sup>47</sup>

## **(2) J. H. Bavinck (1895-1964)**

J. H. Bavinck, nephew of theologian Herman Bavinck, served in Indonesia first as a pastor in a Dutch church and then as a missionary before returning to the Netherlands to teach theology as Chair of Missions in Amsterdam. His

<sup>43</sup> Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p. 241.

<sup>44</sup> *The Moslem Doctrine of God: An Essay on the Character and Attributes of Allah According to the Koran and Orthodox Tradition* (originally New York: American Tract Society, 1905; reprinted Charlottesville, VA: ANM Press, 2010), p. 132.

<sup>45</sup> e.g., *The Moslem Doctrine of Christ: An Essay on the Life, Character, and Teachings of Jesus Christ According to the Koran and Orthodox Tradition* (London: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1913).

<sup>46</sup> Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

<sup>47</sup> Harvie Conn, "The Muslim Convert and His Culture," in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, ed. Don McCurry (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1979), p. 98. Conn cites on this point Lyle L. Vander Werff, *Christian Mission to Muslims: The Record* (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1977), p. 235.

missiological works have stimulated discussion and serves as textbooks in Reformed training curricula.<sup>48</sup> Bavinck borrowed Voetius' description of three aspects of the coming and extension of the kingdom of God: the conversion of the heathen, the establishment of the church, and the glorification and manifestation of divine grace.<sup>49</sup> In unpacking these purposes further, he addresses the cultural accommodation of the biblical message: "To what extent must a new church which has developed within a specific national community accommodate and adjust itself to the customs, practices, and mores current among a people?"<sup>50</sup> In his nuanced response to this concern, he displays uncommon commitment to the comprehensive reign of Christ in his people:

...[T]he term "accommodation" is really not appropriate as a description of what actually ought to take place. It points to an adaptation to customs and practices essentially foreign to the gospel. Such an adaptation can scarcely lead to anything other than a syncretistic entity, a conglomeration of customs that can never form an essential unity. "Accommodation" connotes something of a denial, of a mutilation. We would, therefore prefer to use the term *possessio*, to take in possession. The Christian life does not accommodate or adapt itself to heathen forms of life, but it takes the latter in possession and thereby makes them new. Whoever is in Christ is a new creature. Within the framework of the non-Christian life, customs and practices serve idolatrous tendencies and drive a person away from God. The Christian life takes them in hand and turns them in an entirely different direction; they acquire an entirely different content. Even though in external form there is much that resembles past practices, in reality everything has become new, the old has in essence passed away and the new has come. Christ takes the life of a people in his hands, he renews and re-establishes the distorted and deteriorated; he fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning and gives it a new direction. Such is neither "adaptation," nor accommodation; it is in essence the legitimate taking possession of something by him to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> E.g., *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, *op. cit.* Originally published as *Inleiding in de Zendingswetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1954); *The Church Between Temple and Mosque: A Study of the Relationship between the Christian Faith and Other Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), published posthumously.

<sup>49</sup> Bavinck, *Introduction*, p. 155.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.169.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178-179.

Again, Bavinck proceeded to the application of principle (in this case, *possessio*) with sensitive appreciation of contextual complexities in both daily life and communal worship, recognizing that the attempt to apply this value “...leads to the greatest problems throughout the entire world.”<sup>52</sup> He took seriously a variety of questions of biblical teaching, careful understanding of the local context and avoidance of syncretism while concluding, “It will be of immeasurable significance if the new churches can increasingly find forms to express something of their old cultural heritage, without in any way denying their faith in Jesus Christ.”<sup>53</sup>

Bavinck encouraged, for the sake of the spread of the gospel, the practice of *possessio* by churches where they can do so. Churches do not form and then either accommodate or cower in the presence of a majority culture. Rather, they rejoice in the knowledge the reign and power of Christ and take possession of culture for his glory. This is rightly seen as part of what it means to obey all that Jesus commanded; it is the power of Christ which redeems. The activity of *possessio* is the obedient outworking of faith in and love for Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This approach affirmed active pursuit of believers who work out biblical faith in the midst of their communities of birth. But such faith is not passive; it adopts a faith posture that recognizes that the gates of hell will not prevail against the advance of the *ekklēsia* of Christ. Idolatry and sin of every kind are shunned in faithfulness to Christ and his Word while his covenantal demands on all of life are affirmed. And thus as God in Christ brings salvation and the transforming power of the Spirit, God’s people, in union with Christ, take possession of everyday forms of life in obedient submission to his Kingship. Nothing is neutral; all things are either rejected or transformed and thereby brought under the rule of Christ.

### (3) Harvie Conn (1933-1999)

Perhaps the most influential American Reformed and Presbyterian missiologist of the late twentieth century was Harvie Conn of Westminster Theological Seminary. His overview of “God’s Plan for Church Growth” stands as a concise summary of the scriptural themes of covenantally aware evangelism.<sup>54</sup> A former

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.190.

<sup>54</sup> See Harvie Conn, ed., *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth* (N.p.: Den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1976). Conn wrote the opening chapter of this anthology, whose remainder comprised a series of lectures given

missionary to Korea, Conn may best be known today for his contributions to urban missiological thinking,<sup>55</sup> but his *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds* (EWCW),<sup>56</sup> adapted from a series of lectures at Fuller Theological Seminary, directly anticipated the need for ongoing "trialogue" among the disciplines of theology, missions and anthropology. Conn outlined the benefits he saw in such interactions, but nearly thirty years later, his vision remains incompletely realized.

Conn acknowledged how secular anthropology had historically minimized the place of religion in culture: "I feel that we need a new critique of theoretical thought, in this case of anthropology."<sup>57</sup> And while asserting biblical priority in the triaologue, Conn exhorted theologians to remember their own human fallibility. "Theology, after all, is one more scientific discipline. And like any other, it too, misreads."<sup>58</sup> Having voiced these reservations, Conn enthusiastically encouraged ongoing triaologue as necessary for the advance of all three disciplines involved. While showing gratitude for the insights of then-contemporary missionary thinkers such as Kenneth Pike, Eugene Nida and Charles Kraft, he also expressed concerns, usually framed as questions. Conn envisioned Christians drawn forward from all the various disciplines in a conscious, ongoing process of "theologizing," the construction of theology.

This theologizing process, subservient to the Scriptures and mindful of the historical theological formulations of the Church, sought to self-consciously relate scriptural truth to a particular context. In short, theologizing requires an evangelistic eye and concern for process as well as product, and to be pastoral as well as prophetic,<sup>59</sup> guided by an understanding not only of Scripture but also of the changing world, for instance the challenges accompanying the spread of the gospel in the global South. Conn advocated both steadfast scriptural vision, combined with flexibility in applying the gospel within nonwestern cultures, as the only viable option for the future of missions, to encourage and participate in bringing about the faithful and diverse worship we anticipate from the Book of Revelation.

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at Westminster Seminary by James Packer, Edmund Clowney, *et al.*, analyzing Donald McGavran's pragmatically driven "Church Growth" models.

<sup>55</sup> See the *Festschrift*, Manuel Ortiz and Susan S. Baker, eds., *The Urban Face of Mission: Ministering the Gospel in a Diverse and Changing World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002).

<sup>56</sup> Harvie Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology, and Mission in Triaologue* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1984).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, ch. 6.



1 Conn showed the value of anthropology in identifying elements of Muslim  
 2 culture of which missionaries should be aware in order to minister successfully.<sup>60</sup>  
 3 He argued that individualism was a Western cultural artifact which could lead  
 4 one to think of conversion simply at the level of individual response, whereas  
 5 both the Scriptures and anthropology show the potential role of group solidarity  
 6 in conversion.<sup>61</sup> Conn nevertheless recognized that the gospel of Jesus always  
 7 stands as a stumbling block, requiring the work of the Holy Spirit to bring men to  
 8 faith. "We are under no illusion in all of this that a new sensitivity to... the  
 9 cultural condition of Muslim responses to Christ will obliterate the 'stumbling  
 10 block' that the gospel will always be. Even when Christ came to 'his own' they  
 11 received him not. His entrance into any culture always brings crisis. We are  
 12 simply insisting that it must be Christ who is the stumbling block."<sup>62</sup>  
 13

14 Many authors have commented on a lack of clarity in Conn's prose,<sup>63</sup> finding  
 15 for instance his coining of non-descriptive terminology (e.g., the mindsets of  
 16 "Consciousness One," "Consciousness Two," and "Consciousness Three" in  
 17 *EWCW*) as a thwart to the easy digestion of his ideas. But his teaching career at  
 18 Westminster gave him a mediatory role between the worlds of missiology and  
 19 Reformed academia, and his influence continues upon those who sympathize and  
 20 those who contend with his frequently elusive approaches.  
 21

### 22 c. Missions to Muslims

23 The political and military struggles between Islamic and Christian forces  
 24 throughout medieval and Renaissance history<sup>64</sup> ensured that "the Turks," meaning  
 25 the Ottoman Muslims whose armies once ranged as far west as Vienna, often occupied  
 26 the thoughts of Christian scholars.<sup>65</sup> Nineteenth century Englishmen debated the  
 27 relative benefits of a "confrontational" stance toward Islam that highlighted its

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<sup>60</sup> Conn, "The Muslim Convert and His Culture."

<sup>61</sup> Conn, *EWCW*, pp. 103-106.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>63</sup> One representative unattributed quip, responding to Conn's "The Muslim Convert and His Culture," commented, "I wish I could understand this. It sounds very important." Don McCurry, ed., *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1979), p. 112.

<sup>64</sup> See Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement, Vol. II: Modern Christianity from 1454 to 1800* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), pp. 125-140, 296-308.

<sup>65</sup> E.g., Martin Luther, *Vom Kriege wider die Türken*, 1529. Translated in English as "On War Against the Turk," in *The Works of Martin Luther*, ed. Eyster Jacobs Henry and Adolph Spaeth (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman, 1915-32), 5:75-123; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Library of Christian Classics (London: SCM, 1960), 2.6.4; *idem.*, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1855), section on 1 John 2:22-23.

differences with Christianity, and a "conciliatory" stance that emphasized common ground.<sup>66</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Samuel Zwemer surveyed the results of the "great century of evangelism" preceding him. Although few Christian communities had arisen in Muslim-dominated areas, Zwemer noted that eighty-five percent of Muslims lived under British rule. He predicted the imminent and utter Christianization of Muslim lands: "Islam is a dying religion."<sup>67</sup> Instead, colonialism itself collapsed, and the international thirst for oil funneled Western resources into impoverished Muslim areas, funding a reinvigorated Islamic movement that found political unity in opposition to encroachment from both Moscow and Washington. For the following fifty years, Christianity gained minimal traction in Muslim countries so long as it was viewed as another product of Western imperialism, imposed by outsiders. The small number of converts often found themselves cast out from their societies, forced into the community of Western expatriates.

W.R.W. Gardner (1873-1928),<sup>68</sup> a missionary in India, appealed to Muslims on the basis of their claim to submit to God and their perceived continuity with the religion of Jesus. He argued that Muslims bore a burden of proof to show that modern Christianity was not in fact the faith of Jesus and his disciples; otherwise, the Muslim must practice true "submission" (for which the Arabic word is *Islam*, with the "one who submits" known by the related word *Muslim*) to God as revealed in Christianity. This would naturally lead one to realize that the Qur'an (and, by extension, Muhammad) is incorrect about the nature and purpose of Jesus. As Gardner put it:

For we maintain that what we hold, and try in spite of all the failings inherent in poor human nature to practise, is simply Christianity as Jesus taught it—in fact the true Islam, which Muhammad and the Qur'an both witnessed to as being the Religion of God.<sup>69</sup>

Writing in advance of the 1978 North American Conference on Muslim Evangelization at Glen Eyrie, CO, John Stott linked the issue of culture with that of self-identification: "Is it possible to conceive of converts becoming followers of Jesus without so forsaking their Islamic culture that they are regarded as traitors?"

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<sup>66</sup> Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Zwemer, *The Disintegration of Islam* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell, 1916), p. 7, <http://archive.org/details/disintegrationi00zwemgoog> (accessed November 15, 2012). The book comprises a set of lectures delivered at several seminaries.

<sup>68</sup> W. R. W. Gardner, *Christianity and Muhammadanism* (London: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1910).

<sup>69</sup> Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

Can we even contemplate Jesus mosques instead of churches and Jesus Muslims instead of Christians? It is with radical questions like these that the October conference [in Glen Eyrie] was to grapple.”<sup>70</sup> At that conference, Harvie Conn proposed<sup>71</sup> that missionaries seek a “*Muslimun* ‘Issawiyun movement”—a movement of those who identify themselves as “submitted to Jesus.” The context of Conn’s comments leave unclear whether, like Gardner, he was simply making a play on the etymology of *Muslim*, or whether Conn was suggesting that those who submitted to God in Christ might legitimately continue to identify within their communities as *Muslim*. But the next generation of missiologists would clearly propose the latter—sometimes as part of a larger term, e.g., “Muslim follower of Christ,” and sometimes not.

Also in 1978, the Lausanne Committee’s Theology and Education Group convened in Willowbank, Bermuda, with a mixture of invited anthropologists as well as theologians including James Packer and John Stott. This body published a consensus statement that aspired to repurpose and redeem elements of Islam:

Although there are in Islam elements which are incompatible with the gospel, there are also elements with a degree of what has been called “convertibility.” For instance, our Christian understanding of God, expressed in Luther’s great cry related to justification, “Let God be God,” might well serve as an inclusive definition of Islam. The Islamic faith in divine unity, the emphasis on man’s obligation to render God a right worship, and the utter rejection of idolatry could also be regarded as being in line with God’s purpose for human life as revealed in Jesus Christ. Contemporary Christian witnesses should learn humbly and expectantly to identify, appreciate and illuminate these and other values. They should also wrestle for the transformation—and, where possible, integration—of all that is relevant in Islamic worship, prayer, fasting, art, architecture, and calligraphy.<sup>72</sup>

#### d. Insider Movements Proper

Not until very recently have overviews of Insider Movement literature (under that name) seen publication.<sup>73</sup> Before surveying the recent literature that specifically uses an “insider” label, a survey of older related missiology literature will provide context.

<sup>70</sup> John Stott, “Christians and Muslims,” *Christianity Today* 23.5, December 1, 1978, pp. 35-36.

<sup>71</sup> Conn, “The Muslim Convert and His Culture,” p. 97.

<sup>72</sup> “The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture,” Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978, Section 5.E., <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/73-lop-2.html> (accessed September 18, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> Such as Matthew Sleeman, “The Origins, Development, and Future of the C5/Insider Movement Debate,” *SFM* 8.4, August 2012, pp. 498-566; J. S. William, “Inside/Outside: Getting to the Center of the Muslim Contextualization Debates,” *SFM* 7.3, August 2011, pp. 58-95.

## (1) Charles Kraft and Fuller Seminary

Due to its size and reputation as the educational epicenter for evangelical missiology, Fuller Seminary has played prominently in shaping the direction of twentieth century American mission work. In 1961 Donald McGavran, a third-generation missionary to India, founded the Institute for Church Growth, which merged into Fuller Seminary in 1965 as the "School of World Mission and Institute for Church Growth" when McGavran was installed as that school's first dean. Though schooled in the more liberal traditions of the Disciples of Christ and Yale University, McGavran came to accept conservative views of Scripture as inerrant and evangelism as the *sine qua non* of Christian missions. However, he critiqued the idea of a "gathered church" which targeted specific individuals to join an institution distinct from their tribe. McGavran instead favored building "bridges" which more generally and gradually influenced a whole tribe, without upsetting kinship bonds by asking individuals to believe something different than the rest of the tribe. He set a low doctrinal standard for successful conversion, but he still expected evangelized peoples to identify with Christ, the worldwide Church, and the unique authority of the Bible, and also to explicitly reject their former religion.<sup>74</sup>

McGavran's work formed the foundation for the "Church Growth" movement in the United States and elsewhere, and in essence the Western approach to Insider Movements is the application with varying degrees of intensity of the so-called seeker-sensitive "do what seems to work" values to missionary endeavors. McGavran's pragmatic approach received both emulation and critique widely<sup>75</sup> and was the subject of an analytic conference at Westminster Seminary in 1975.<sup>76</sup>

To teach Missionary Anthropology, McGavran recruited Charles "Chuck" Kraft, a pivotal (and thus controversial) figure in missiology. Likening Kraft's impact to the historical turning point from B.C. to A.D. marked by the birth of Christ, his Fuller colleague Charles Van Engen quipped, "One might say that there is missiology before Kraft (BK) and missiology after Kraft (AK)."<sup>77</sup> And indeed Kraft's influence upon missiology as a field and upon individual missionaries personally over the last forty years would be difficult to overstate.

Kraft studied anthropology and linguistics at Wheaton College, completed a B.D. at the Brethren Church's Ashland Seminary, and after a fruitful yet controversial missionary stint among Nigerian polygamists, "[T]here is no question

<sup>74</sup> McGavran, *The Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Missions* (London: World Dominion, 1955).

<sup>75</sup> For instance in *Evaluating the Church Growth Movement: Five Views*, ed. Gary L. McIntosh (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

<sup>76</sup> The papers presented at this conference by James Packer, Edmund Clowney, and others were published as *Theological Perspectives on Church Growth*, ed. Harvie Conn (N.p.: den Dulk Foundation, 1976).

<sup>77</sup> Charles Van Engen, preface to *Paradigm Shifts in Christian Witness*, p. xiv. This volume contains extensive exploration of Kraft's many and varied contributions to missiology.

that Chuck was seen as a maverick by Mission leaders, not without some reason.”<sup>78</sup> Ph.D. studies at what is now the Hartford Seminary Foundation led to a teaching position at UCLA, and then at Fuller. Kraft found inspiration in McGavran’s *The Bridges of God* as well as Eugene Nida’s *Customs and Cultures*. Due to his extensive training as an anthropologist, rather than examining anthropology through the lens of theology, “anthropology itself tended to be taken as a given—as an autonomous scientific discipline—to which, according to Kraft at least, evangelical theology ought to adjust.”<sup>79</sup> Kraft polarized the missiology community with his application of Nida’s linguistic concept of dynamic equivalence<sup>80</sup> to the broader field of missionary endeavor.

Nida saw the missionary task as one of communication across languages and cultures. It was a process of translational equivalence, of communicating messages in appropriately reconstructed formal and semantic structures. Kraft has extended the model beyond translation into realms of transculturation and theology. The significance of that broadening cannot be overemphasized.<sup>81</sup>

When applied to Bible translation, “dynamic equivalence” translated a Greek or Hebrew word into a word in the target language felt to affect the mind of the reader similarly. When applied to missions, dynamic equivalence meant that missionaries might not seek for nationals to accept specific beliefs associated with Western Christianity, but rather to encourage them to develop a theology for their own culture. True theology would be known by identifying those elements of belief which arose spontaneously and independently in multiple cultures. Even Biblical categories such as “Son of God” or belief in the death of Jesus might be sidelined if too difficult to swallow or prone to misunderstanding:

A Muslim asks us, “Was Jesus ‘the Son of God’”? How do we answer? We cannot answer, “yes” unless we are blind to, or unconcerned about, the impact of our answer on our Muslim hearer. Note the fact that sonship is an analogy—it’s an example—there’s nothing sacred in either that term or that concept, except insofar as it communicates some kind of truth. We have learned to understand and agreed among ourselves to refer to precious Scriptural truth by employing this word form to describe Christ. But the word form is only valuable when it signals that meaning. If this word form, this medium of communication, signals anything other than that Scriptural meaning, it loses its usefulness and must be replaced...<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Paul E. Pierson, “Sketching the Life of Charles H. Kraft,” in *Paradigm Shifts in Christian Witness*, p. xxiii.

<sup>79</sup> George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 239.

<sup>80</sup> See our “A Call to Faithful Witness, Part One: Like Father, Like Son,” pp. 21-22.

<sup>81</sup> Conn, *EWCV*, p. 156.

<sup>82</sup> Charles Kraft, “Distinctive Religious Barriers to Outside Penetration,” in the Report on Consultation on Islamic Communication (Marseille, 1974), pp. 67-68. Part One of our report (pp. 55-56) critiqued the idea that “Son of God” is a term of analogy or metaphor.

The issues that we deal with, even the so-called religious issues, are primarily cultural, and only secondarily religious... [The Muslim] doesn't have to be convinced of the death of Christ. He simply has to pledge allegiance and faith to the God who worked out the details to make it possible for his faith response to take the place of a righteousness requirement. He may not, in fact, be able to believe in the death of Christ, especially if he knowingly places his faith in God through Christ, for within his frame of reference, if Christ died, God was defeated by men, and this, of course is unthinkable.<sup>83</sup>

Nor was frank ignorance an obstacle to redemption: "Can people who are chronologically A.D. but knowledge wise B.C. (i.e., have not heard of Christ), or those who are indoctrinated with a wrong understanding of Christ, be saved by committing themselves to faith in God as Abraham and the rest of those who were chronologically B.C. did? ... I personally believe that they can and many have."<sup>84</sup> Kraft also held a positive view of doctrinal controversies which have troubled church history: "*It is likely that most of the 'heresies' can validly be classed as cultural adaptations rather than as theological aberrations.* They, therefore, show *what ought to be done today* rather than what ought to be feared."<sup>85</sup> It must be noted that the aforementioned sentiments do not comprise an explicitly recurring theme in Kraft's work and are not cited approvingly (or indeed at all) by typical proponents of Insider paradigms today.<sup>86</sup> However, these serve as examples of the potential for anthropo-logical relativism to overly inform missiological analysis of national practices and beliefs, an error at least as serious as the contrary mistake of ignoring anthropo-logical insights altogether. Repeatedly Kraft appealed to the "behavioral insights" of anthropology in his critique of the "closed" and "static" (both meant as pejorative) inerrantist positions of Francis Schaeffer and founding Fuller professor Harold Lindsell.

Kraft's later work turned from anthropology to spiritual warfare topics of demonic activity and "deep healing," areas which he saw as neglected in Western theology but deeply relevant to the daily concerns of other countries. Such a brief survey of a long career (one not yet concluded) risks distorting its subject's contributions by focusing most heavily upon the moments of controversy rather than the long stretches of calm, constructive labor. Even Kraft's detractors acknowledge his godly character and tireless efforts to train and minister to the missionary population. Kraft helped missionaries to identify and avoid the

<sup>83</sup> Kraft, "Distinctive Religious Barriers to Outside Penetration," pp. 65, 71.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 296. Italics present in the original.

<sup>86</sup> With the notable exception of the divine familial language debate reviewed in "A Call To Faithful Witness: Part One: Like Father, Like Son," though Insider proponents are divided on this topic as well.

pitfalls of their own cultural blind spots, legitimizing anthropology as an indispensable adjunct to cross-cultural evangelism.

## (2) Responses to Kraft

Founding Fuller professor Carl F. H. Henry, who had left the seminary to become founding editor of *Christianity Today*, swiftly published a lengthy critical review of Kraft's *Christianity and Culture*, focusing on Kraft's view of the Bible, his perceived usage of anthropology to trump theology, his resulting cultural relativism, and his conflation of the doctrines of the inspiration and illumination of Scripture:

Kraft assumes that special divine revelation continues beyond the Bible, and that communicators enlightened by behavioral concessions especially enjoy it. Scriptural teachings are devalued as culturally conditioned while modern communication theories are assimilated to the revelation of the Spirit... To accommodate cultural-relative meaning in the biblical texts Kraft shifts from grammatico-historical interpretation to ethno-linguistic interpretation (p. 134ff.) and then reads into the texts the culture-relativism that humanistic behavioral science requires... Kraft rejects the view that God's transcendent relation to culture requires the Christian to prescribe a system of theology valid for all cultures (ibid. 117).<sup>86</sup>

Harvie Conn assessed Kraft more approvingly in a series of Fuller Seminary lectures,<sup>87</sup> later expanded into a book-length treatment of “theology, anthropology, and mission in dialogue,”<sup>88</sup> which cited Kraft twice as often as any other author. Conn consigned mention of Kraft's inclusivism to a footnote, calling the view “controversial” without debating its merits,<sup>89</sup> and overall praising “the richness of Kraft's contributions.”<sup>90</sup> Conn defended Kraft against Henry's accusations of neo-orthodoxy, expressing appreciation for Kraft's recognition that not only the message, but also the speaker and the audience, shape the process of communication. “The heart of Kraft's approach lies in his penetrating understanding of God as being in constant interaction with human

<sup>86</sup> Carl F.H. Henry, “The Cultural Relativizing of Revelation,” *Trinity Journal* 1.2 (Fall 1980): pp. ,157. Henry notes of Kraft that, “Theologians whose views he specifically approves include Jack Rogers, David Hubbard, Eugene Nida, Daniel Fuller, Harvey Cox, Bruce Vawter, and later emphases by Bernard Ramm and G.C. Berkouwer. Those he criticizes are B.B. Warfield, Francis Schaeffer, Geerhardus Vos, Carl Henry, J.W. Montgomery, and Harold Lindsell.” (p. 154). See also B.3.d “The Ministry of the Holy Spirit” in this report.

<sup>87</sup> Mark R. Gornik, “The Legacy of Harvie M. Conn,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35.4 (October 2011): p. 214.

<sup>88</sup> The subtitle to *EWCW*.

<sup>89</sup> Conn, *EWCW*, p. 170.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

culture.”<sup>91</sup> Conn also suggested that Kraft’s “dynamic equivalence”<sup>92</sup> approach to culture focused so heavily on the human aspects of divine/human interactions that Kraft was “in danger of minimizing the predominately Godward dimension” of the nature of Scripture.<sup>93</sup>

### (3) Ralph Winter and the Muslim Frontier

Dan Fuller’s childhood friend Ralph Winter<sup>94</sup> established a distance-learning program for pastors in Guatemala during his missionary work there from 1956-1966. The son of an engineer who designed the Los Angeles freeway system, Winter grew up at Lake Avenue Congregational Church, which hosted the first classes of Fuller Seminary. An inquisitive polymath, he studied civil engineering at Cal Tech, theology at Princeton and Fuller seminaries,<sup>95</sup> and language at the Summer Institute of Linguistics, achieving a Masters’ degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (Columbia University Teachers College) and a PhD in linguistics (Cornell University). At each institution he was known for analyzing the curriculum and teaching method, suggesting improvements, and offering to author textbooks or teach classes while still a student himself, often to the discomfiture of his instructors.

McGavran invited Winter to join the Fuller School of Mission faculty, where he taught from 1966-1976, leaving to establish three related institutions: the U.S. Center for World Mission; William Carey International University (WCIU)<sup>96</sup> (of which he was president, and at which his daughter Rebecca Lewis (BA History) has taught Islamics and Church History); and the William Carey Library publishing house, all operating on the former campus of Nazarene University several blocks from Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, CA.

Winter won wide acclaim for a speech delivered at the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. The prevailing wisdom of the day taught that each country should have a single national church that crossed all racial, cultural, and even language boundaries within that country. Thus, a country that had a national

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. “A Call to Faithful Witness, Part One: Like Father, Like Son,” pp. 21ff.

<sup>93</sup> Conn, *EWCW*, p.173.

<sup>94</sup> For an overview of Winter’s life and work, see Harold Fickett, *The Ralph D. Winter Story: How One Man Dared to Shake Up World Missions* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012).

<sup>95</sup> Winter first began seminary after his undergraduate work and eventually obtained a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Princeton, following his M.A. and Ph.D. studies.

<sup>96</sup> An unaccredited institution, not to be confused with the Baptist school William Carey University in Hattiesburg, MS. See [http://www.wciu.edu/docs/resources/catalog\\_april2012\\_april2013.pdf](http://www.wciu.edu/docs/resources/catalog_april2012_april2013.pdf), p. 13, retrieved March 18, 2013.



church was deemed no longer appropriate as an evangelistic target for Western missionaries.<sup>97</sup> By redefining the missionary challenge in terms of cultural groups rather than political boundaries, “Winter's speech accomplished nothing less than fixing Lausanne's attention on more than 2 billion 'unreached peoples,' reigniting cross-cultural evangelism while restoring to many of the delegates and their organizations a reason for being.”<sup>98</sup> Winter also founded *Mission Frontiers Magazine*<sup>99</sup> in 1979 and served as longtime editor for that publication.

As the contextualization debate continued to evolve, John Travis (pseudonym) described a variety of expressions of Christian faith in Muslim cultures along a “C-scale,” with the “C” standing for “Christ-centered Communities.”<sup>100</sup> Rick Brown would later generalize this scale to include non-Muslim situations, as follows:<sup>101</sup>

C1	Believers are open about their new spiritual identity as disciples of Jesus Christ and citizens of God's eternal Kingdom. They also have a new socioreligious identity as converts to a Christian social group. They follow primarily outsider religious practices. They use an outsider language and terminology in their meetings.
C2	They are much like C1, except that they use insider language, usually with outsider terminology.
C3	They are much like C2, except that they use many insider terms and many religious practices that seem compatible with the Bible, although not ones that are particular to the socioreligious community of their birth.
C4	They are like C3, except that they seek a distinct socioreligious identity that is neither the insider identity of their birth nor the identity of a convert to Christianity.
C5	They are like C4, except that they retain the socioreligious identity of their birth and might use insider terms and practices particular to the community of their birth, as long as they seem compatible with the Bible.
C6	They are usually like C5, except that they are secretive about their new spiritual identity.

<sup>97</sup> Ralph Winter, “The Highest Priority: Cross-Cultural Evangelism” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, Edited by J.D. Douglas, World Wide Publications: Minneapolis, MN, 1975, pp. 213-225. Also available at <http://www.lausanne.org/docs/lau1docs/0213.pdf>, retrieved September 18, 2012.

<sup>98</sup> Fickett, op.cit., p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> All issues are available at <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/>.

<sup>100</sup> John Travis, “Must all Muslims Leave Islam to Follow Jesus?” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34.4 (October 1998): pp. 411-415.

<sup>101</sup> Rick Brown, “Biblical Muslims,” *IJFM* 24.2 (Summer 2007): p. 72.

Thus, a C1 church might operate as an American church transplanted *in toto* to a foreign land without any changes whatsoever. C2 through C4 show increasing degrees of contextual accommodation to local styles. C5, controversially, adds continued self-identification with the religion of one's birth, justified on the basis of the intercalated nature of culture and religion, hence the term "socioreligious" in Travis' scale. C6 describes secret churches in heavily persecuted areas. Despite the well-discussed limitations of such a one-dimensional assessment of church/culture dynamics, the simplicity of the C-scale made it appealing, as evidenced by the frequency with which subsequent literature used it. Travis indicates that the C-scale is a descriptive rather than prescriptive tool. That distinction in the end dissatisfies. First, many others have applied Travis' C-Scale prescriptively, in both their active and their passive affirmations of IM missiological methods. Second, when description lacks critique, it renders its own internal affirmation of that which it presents. Moreover, though leaving room for missionary approaches at other points along the C-scale, Travis would later *advocate* wide adoption of the "C-5" approach:

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 blocs of the Muslim world.<sup>102</sup>

Winter edited *IJFM*<sup>103</sup> beginning in 2001, with many subsequent articles discussing Insider Movements. *IJFM*'s first issue on Muslim contextualization in January 2000 had already featured articles such as Bernard Dutch's "Should Muslims become 'Christians?'" and the John Travis/Andrew Workman contribution, "Messianic Muslim Followers of *Isa*: A Closer Look at C5 Believers and Congregations."<sup>104</sup> That same issue contained an early article by Rick Brown advocating replacement of "Son of God" in Muslim-aimed Bible translations with another phrase such as "righteous servants of God."<sup>105</sup> Brown

<sup>102</sup> John Travis and Anna Travis, "Contextualization Among Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists: A Focus on Insider Movements," *Mission Frontiers* (September-October 2005), p. 12. A larger version of this article is published as John Travis and Anna Travis, "Appropriate Approaches in Muslim Context," in *Appropriate Christianity*, pp. 397-414.

<sup>103</sup> All issues are available at <http://www.IJFM.org>.

<sup>104</sup> Bernard Dutch, "Should Muslims Become 'Christians?'" *IJFM* 17:1 (Spring 2000): pp. 15-24; John Travis and Andrew Workman, "Messianic Muslim Followers of *Isa*: A Closer Look at C5 Believers and Congregations," *IJFM* 17.1 (Spring 2000): pp. 53-59, [http://www.IJFM.org/PDFs\\_IJFM/17\\_1\\_PDFs/IJFM\\_17\\_1.pdf](http://www.IJFM.org/PDFs_IJFM/17_1_PDFs/IJFM_17_1.pdf) (accessed September 24, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> Rick Brown, "The 'Son of God': Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus," *IJFM* 17:1 (Spring 2000): pp. 41-52. Brown subsequently retracted this particular translation formula. See our "A Call to Faithful

1 applied contextualization to Bible translation, while Travis applied it to  
 2 ecclesiology. Many further related articles on both topics would appear in *IJFM*  
 3 subsequently.

4  
 5 Dutch spoke of the need for Muslims to reject Islamic doctrines in favor of  
 6 Jesus, while retaining Muslim cultural elements and community relationships. "I  
 7 believe that our best hope for reaching the vast Muslim populations of the world  
 8 is to plant flourishing churches of Muslim background believers who remain  
 9 culturally relevant to Muslim society... [W]e should not impose unnecessary  
 10 changes to the cultural identity of Muslim background believers."<sup>106</sup> While Dutch  
 11 emphasized the need for such Christ-followers to hold to recognizably Christian  
 12 doctrine in their own hearts and private fellowships, he also sought justification  
 13 for them to present themselves as Muslims when challenged about their lives:

14  
 15 Like believers in the West who are effective in sharing their faith,  
 16 they tailor their identity according to the openness of their audience.  
 17 People who ask questions in a belligerent or ridiculing manner are  
 18 usually shown a mainstream, God-fearing Muslim identity with few  
 19 differences. This avoids wasting precious opportunities to bear  
 20 witness on people not ready to hear (Matt. 7:6).<sup>107</sup>

21  
 22 Dutch's subsequent anecdotes clarify his concern that Christ-followers come  
 23 under persecution when they make their faith commitments clear to their  
 24 community—partly due to the false negative connotations of Americanism and  
 25 immorality accompanying identification as "Christian," but partly due to correct  
 26 recognition that the Christians do not in fact accept Muhammad as a prophet, or  
 27 the Qur'an as a divine message. Stuart Caldwell's contribution to that same *IJFM*  
 28 issue more explicitly recognized that such Christ-followers may forever remain  
 29 inside Islam in a religious sense as well as a cultural one. He saw any future  
 30 breakaway from Islam as something that Westerners may desire but should not  
 31 attempt to effect:

32  
 33 [W]e seek and expect a believing community to form and remain  
 34 within the religio-cultural world of the Muslim community, at least  
 35 for some time. As in the early Church's eventual break from Judaism,  
 36 so too believers may eventually break away from the Muslim  
 37 religious community. However, I believe this should be instigated

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Witness, Part One: Like Father, Like Son," pp. 25-27, for discussion of Brown's evolving view on this issue since authoring the aforementioned article.

<sup>106</sup> Dutch, "Should Muslims Become Christians?" pp. 15, 18.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

from the Muslim side, as it was in the first century from the Jewish side. Forming a community of believers within the religio-cultural world of Muslims will include Islamic places and patterns of worship... [N]o confrontational effort to replace the Qur'an with the Bible is needed, at least not at the beginning... God's Spirit will lead his people into all truth.<sup>108</sup>

#### e. The “Insider” label

J. Henry Wolfe dates the wide use of the phrase “Insider Movement” (IM) to the 2004 gathering of the International Society of Frontier Missiology (ISFM), the parent organization of *International Journal of Frontier Missions (IJFM)*.<sup>109</sup> Editor Ralph Winter devoted the September-October 2005 issue of *Mission Frontiers* to the topic, “Can We Trust Insider Movements?” with the overall answer, “Yes.”

In 2007, *IJFM* featured one of the few published back-and-forth interchanges about IM, beginning with a series of ten questions from Gary Corwin about IM practices, accompanied by lengthy answers from several IM proponents.<sup>110</sup> Corwin, the associate editor of *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* and missiologist for SIM-USA and Arab World Ministries, and his pseudonymous colleague L.D. Waterman responded to the answers in the following issue,<sup>111</sup> and Rick Brown reacted to Corwin and Waterman.<sup>112</sup> The interaction highlighted both the agreements and the diversity between various IM proponents, and between proponents and critics. Brown's response laid out what he saw as the Reformed approach to missions, which he defined in terms of pragmatic anthropological observation anointed as "God's work," notably omitting the idea of doctrine derived from Scripture:

Being Reformed in theology, for me the important question is not “What works and does not work in Muslim evangelism?” or “Does this have adequate precedent in church history?” For me the important questions

<sup>108</sup> Stuart Caldwell, "Jesus in Samaria: A Paradigm for Church Planting Among Muslims," *IJFM* 17:1 (Spring 2000): p. 31.

<sup>109</sup> J. Henry Wolfe, *Insider Movements: An Assessment of the Viability of Retaining Socio-Religious Insider Identity in High-Religious Contexts*, PhD dissertation for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2011. Retrieved from [http://digital.library.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/2851/Withheld\\_sbts\\_0207D\\_10021.pdf](http://digital.library.sbts.edu/bitstream/handle/10392/2851/Withheld_sbts_0207D_10021.pdf) on September 23, 2012.

<sup>110</sup> Gary Corwin, “A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocates to Consider Ten Questions,” *IJFM* 24.1 (Spring 2007), pp. 5-21.

<sup>111</sup> Gary Corwin, “A Response to My Respondents,” *IJFM* 24.2 (Summer 2007), pp. 53-55; L.D. Waterman, “Do The Roots Affect the Fruits?” *IJFM* 24.2 (Summer 2007), pp. 57-63.

<sup>112</sup> Brown, “Biblical Muslims,” pp. 65-74.

are “What is God doing in this community?” and “Am I in harmony with what God is doing or am I resisting it?”<sup>113</sup>

Since Winter's death in 2009, Brad Gill, husband of Winter's daughter Beth, former missionary to Muslims, and coordinator of the 1980 International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions in Edinburgh, which birthed *IJFM*, now serves again as *IJFM* editor, with editorial assistance from Winter's daughter Rebecca Lewis and others.

#### f. Common Ground Consultants and the Emergent Church

Kim Gustafson, a former missionary to Jordan, returned to the United States in 1995 and organized Common Ground Consultants, sponsoring an ongoing series of stateside and international invitation-only seminars which have become a vehicle for Insider Movement Paradigm philosophy and practice of ministry. These seminars included a concept of “kingdom circles” which emphasizes a membership in Jesus' kingdom that could be equally enjoyed by sociologically defined “Christians” and “Muslims.” Attendees are instructed not to share information about the seminars with non-attendees,<sup>114</sup> and the training materials are not publicly available. Pastors associated with Common Ground, either as instructors or hosts, promulgate Insider methodologies through Internet presentations<sup>115</sup> and a continuing series of nationwide “Jesus and the Qur'an” seminars.<sup>116</sup>

Several authors have expressed similar concern with the orthodoxy of Common Ground philosophy, exegesis, and methods.<sup>117</sup> In his analysis of the Common Ground Conference, Don Little commented,

Sitting through the sessions, I often felt as if the CGC people have largely disowned any form of the institutional church, that is, the actual established way that most Christians worldwide are nurtured and taught, and involved in worship and fellowship. In their efforts to distance themselves from the weaknesses and flaws of the church around the

<sup>113</sup> In Corwin, “A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocates to Consider Ten Questions,” p. 14.

<sup>114</sup> John Span and Anne Span, “Report on the Common Ground Consultants Meeting, Snelville [sic] (Georgia),” *SFM* 5.4, August 2009, p. 52.

<sup>115</sup> e.g., Buddy Hoffman, “Kingdom Circles,” <http://www.buddyhoffman.com/kingdom-circles> (accessed March 4, 2013).

<sup>116</sup> Jesus and the Qur'an, <http://jaq.org> (accessed March 4, 2013). Also known as “Jesus in the Qur'an.”

<sup>117</sup> John Span, “The Confusion of Kingdom Circles: A Clarification,” in *Chrislam: How Missionaries Are Promoting an Islamized Gospel*, edited by Joshua Lingel, Jeff Morton and Bill Nikides (Garden Grove, CA: i2 Ministries, 2011), p. 82; Jay Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-51.

world, as these flaws appear in local churches, denominations and groups,  
I felt as if they were undervaluing the universal church itself.<sup>118</sup>

Common Ground instructor Jim Nelson confirmed Little's assessment: "The institutional church contains believers in varying proportions, but its denominations, buildings, ordination, clergy, etc. are creations of men. See *Pagan Christianity* by Frank Viola and George Barna. I am very much against exporting man-made systems."<sup>119</sup> And indeed, Viola and Barna hold that, "There is not a single verse in the entire New Testament that supports the existence of the modern-day pastor! He simply did not exist in the early church... it is the role that [pastors] fill that both Scripture and church history are opposed to."<sup>120</sup> Viola is associated with the Emergent Church movement,<sup>121</sup> a loose coalition of post-evangelicals whose prominent authors include Brian McLaren, Rob Bell, Jim Wallis, and Michael Frost.

As seen in Viola's sentiment above, Emergent thinkers tend to share the conviction of some Insider proponents that much in evangelical theology and practice exceeds or even violates a Scripture. "There is a growing desire in Western Christianity to move away from the traditions of the church and return to a purer Biblical paradigm. The Emergent church is reflective of this move, and I recognize the attraction. The Insider paradigm seems to borrow from this new tradition, and certainly owes much to it."<sup>122</sup> Though certain IM conclusions resonate with those of Emergent church advocates, such affinities between IM and Emergent thinking do not necessarily indicate a dependent or inter-dependent relationship between them. Nonetheless the zeitgeist and methods share certain features.

McLaren, first an English professor who became the founding and now former pastor of Cedar Ridge Church in Spencerville, Maryland, is known for wordplay intended to challenge preconceived categories, as evidenced by the lengthy subtitle of his manifesto *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic,*

<sup>118</sup> Don Little, "Understanding and Assessing the Teachings of Common Ground Consultants," *Seedbed* 24:1, August 2010, p. 37.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 43, footnote 17, in which Nelson interacts with Little.

<sup>120</sup> Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices*, BarnaBooks, 2008, p.106.

<sup>121</sup> For representative Emergent writings, see <http://emergentvillage.org/> and the "Beyond Evangelical" blog at <http://frankviola.org/>; for an analytical overview of the movement, see D.A. Carson, "Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church," Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005.

<sup>122</sup> Jay Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

1 *Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN.*<sup>123</sup>

2 This overlapping of categories resonates with Insider paradigm thoughts concerning  
3 overlapping religious terms. McLaren's *The Secret Message of Jesus* focuses on  
4 Jesus' kingdom language in a way which recalls the Common Ground "kingdom  
5 circles": "What if the message of Jesus was good news – not just for Christians, but  
6 also for Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, New Agers, agnostics, and atheists?...  
7 Wouldn't it be interesting if the people who started discovering and believing the  
8 hidden message of Jesus were people who aren't even identified as Christians...?"<sup>124</sup>  
9

10 One might allow that evangelicals, too, believe that those who *currently*  
11 identify as agnostic can start believing Jesus, and then are no longer agnostics but  
12 Christians. As is typical in his writing style, McLaren's wording leaves options such  
13 as this open to the reader, but also open by apparent design is the possibility that  
14 such Christ-believers retain their previous religious designation, if they so choose.  
15 This latter interpretation is more likely, since there seems little reason for McLaren  
16 to suggest so tentatively that the message of Jesus would be good news for agnostics  
17 who have become Christians.  
18

#### 19 **g. Recent Developments**

20  
21 As discussed in "A Call to Faithful Witness: Part One: Like Father, Like  
22 Son," concern over Muslim Idiom Translations waxed over several years, resulting  
23 in various articles in the lay press as well as simultaneous formal study of the issue  
24 by at least three Christian denominations – the Assemblies of God, the Evangelical  
25 Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Church in America. Insider Movements,  
26 although a prominent issue in some national churches such as that of Bangladesh,  
27 have seen a relatively lower stateside profile, until the magazine *Christianity Today*  
28 (CT)<sup>125</sup> presented IM in a cover story, "Worshipping Jesus in the Mosque." Gene  
29 Daniels (pseudonym) interviewed a mature East African Insider about his faith and  
30 his thoughts on culture and religion.<sup>126</sup> In a subsequent clarification added to the  
31 Internet version of the article, the interviewee disavowed the article's title: "The  
32 'people of the Gospel' are not Muslims theologically. They are not worshipping Jesus

<sup>123</sup> Brian McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.

<sup>124</sup> Brian McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006, p. 4, 8.

<sup>125</sup> *Christianity Today*, January-February 2013 issue, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/> (accessed February 5, 2013).

<sup>126</sup> Gene Daniels, "Worshipping Jesus in the Mosque: What It's Like to Follow Jesus Embedded in Muslim Culture. An Interview with a Follower of Isa," *Christianity Today* 57.1, January-February 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/insider-movement-islam-where-jesus.html> (accessed January 21, 2013).



1 in the Mosque. They have no right to practice worship in the mosque in our legal and  
2 theological context. The ‘people of the Gospel’ are an assembly which has their own  
3 identity.”<sup>127</sup>  
4

5 An accompanying article by Timothy Tennent spoke of "churchless"  
6 Christianity growing among Hindu and Muslim peoples who "do not belong to any  
7 visible, formal, church, and do not call themselves Christians."<sup>128</sup> It also outlined  
8 Travis' C-scale and the debates surrounding it, concluding that, "Christ-loving  
9 movements are growing in countries where a traditional church has been absent or  
10 long-gone."<sup>129</sup> In another article, John Travis<sup>130</sup> affirmed that Insiders are, and  
11 consider themselves to be, part of "the church universal." He proposed that  
12 evangelicals should consider Insider Movements to be biblical because, "They, just  
13 as we, are saved by grace through faith in Jesus alone, not by religious affiliation."<sup>131</sup>  
14 Phil Parshall, known for his gently yet firmly expressed concerns about C-5  
15 approaches,<sup>132</sup> laid out the controversial elements seen in some Insider Movements,  
16 such as recitation of the Muslim *shahada* creed, participation in mosque rituals, and  
17 unqualified identification as "Muslim." Parshall urged "prayerful respect" among  
18 missionaries debating these issues.<sup>133</sup>  
19

20 An unsigned CT editorial emphasized the "messy" realities of missionary  
21 work and encouraged "cautious optimism" toward Insider strategies, seeing it as  
22 potentially "right and true" for a follower of Christ to honor Muhammad as "a  
23 prophet of God" as long as Muhammad was not "*the* prophet" (italics original), while  
24 affirming the role of the global church in helping local groups of believers to  
25 gradually shed syncretistic ideas and practices.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., addendum labeled "Clarification From the Interviewer," <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2013/january-february/insider-movement-islam-where-jesus.html> (accessed March 6, 2013).

<sup>128</sup> Timothy Tennant [sic], "The Hidden History of Insider Movements," *Christianity Today* 57.1, January-February 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/hidden-history-of-insider-movements.html> (accessed March 6, 2013).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> John Travis, "Why Evangelicals Should be Thankful for Muslim Insiders," *Christianity Today* 57.1, January-February 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/jesus-saves-religion-doesnt.html> (accessed March 6, 2013)

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> For instance in Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization* (Waynesboro, GA: Gabriel Publications, 2003), pp. 59-75.

<sup>133</sup> Phil Parshall, "How Much Muslim Context is Too Much for the Gospel?" *Christianity Today* 57.1, January-February 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/too-much-context-may-harm.html> (accessed March 6, 2013).

<sup>134</sup> "Discipleship is Messy," *Christianity Today*, 57. 1, January-February 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/discipleship-is-messy.html> (accessed March 6, 2013). The interpretation of Muhammad *in some measure* as a prophet of God has found a level of sanction in



1           A responding article by Kevin DeYoung at The Gospel Coalition website  
 2           noted that the East African Insider interviewed in *Christianity Today* described a  
 3           situation in which the traditional church was not absent, but simply culturally strange  
 4           to those of Muslim background. "Shouldn't some things be strange when we are  
 5           called out of darkness into light?" DeYoung cited concerns with Insider paradigms,  
 6           including naïveté toward the permeating nature of culture, a casual attitude toward  
 7           theology, and an eccentric doctrine of the Holy Spirit's teaching role. "The early  
 8           church was certainly Spirit-filled, but it was also devoted to the apostles' teaching.  
 9           To expect the Spirit to teach what we won't does not honor the Spirit. Instead, it  
 10          dishonors the work he has already done in leading the once-for-all apostolic band  
 11          into all truth we need to know."<sup>135</sup> It is this very teaching preserved in Scripture as  
 12          the Old and New Testaments that serves as calibration point for all things, including  
 13          missions.

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IM writings. See, for example, Rick Brown, "Biblical Muslims," *IJFM* 24.2 (Summer 2007): pp. 70-73; Dutch, "Should Muslims Become Christians?" pp. 15-24; J. Dudley Woodberry. "To The Muslim I Became A Muslim?" *IJFM* 24.1 (Winter 2007): pp. 23-28.

<sup>135</sup> Kevin DeYoung, "CT's 'Insider' Interview Prompts Questions and Concerns," The Gospel Coalition, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2013/02/05/cts-insider-interview-prompts-questions-and-concerns/> (accessed February 5, 2013).

## PART 2 – SCRIPTURE AND THEOLOGY

### 1. The Scriptural and Confessional Basis of our Approach

Proper investigation of any theological, missiological, and ecclesiological paradigm must derive from Scripture. Only such ultimate divine governance pervasively employed will guide us properly. In examining IM, the SCIM therefore seeks to rely wholly on biblical authority, with a view to an analysis that faithfully engages the matters at hand according to divine revelation. The Presbyterian Church in America's confessional standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Larger Catechism, and Westminster Shorter Catechism) aid this process, serving as subordinate authoritative guides, not in addition to Scripture but as a reliable summary of it.

"The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in Scripture."<sup>136</sup> Scripture is the *norma normans* (norming norm); the subordinate confessional standards are the *norma normata* (normed norm). The SCIM's commitment to these subordinate standards is neither blind nor uncritical, but as elders in the Presbyterian Church in America, we enthusiastically address the matters of IM according to the eminently valuable expression of the Christian faith<sup>137</sup> contained in these documents.<sup>138</sup> This analysis thereby self-consciously reflects the teaching of Scripture through the careful theological exposition contained in the PCA's confessional standards.

The port of entry for our consideration of IM is therefore a brief but important consideration of revelation. This initial explication is not intended as an exhaustive treatment of the subject of biblical revelation, but rather serves as a narrowly focused examination with a view to its implications for biblically faithful missiology. The remainder

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<sup>136</sup> WCF 1.10.

<sup>137</sup> "Now disguise it as we may, truth is dogma. Let men sneer at catechisms and creeds, as bondages and shackles, let them call them skeletons, or bones, or something more offensive still, these formularies are meant to be compilations of *truth*. In so far as they can be shewn to contain error, let them be amended or flung aside, but in so far as they embody *truth*, let them be accepted and honoured as most helpful to the Christlike life; not simply sustaining it, but also giving it stability and force; preventing it being weakened or injured by change, caprice, love of novelty, or individual self-will." Horatius Bonar, "Religion Without Theology," *Banner of Truth* 93, June 1971, pp. 38-39.

<sup>138</sup> For those reading this document unfamiliar with the Westminster Standards, we highly recommend reading them (Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Shorter Catechism, and Westminster Larger Catechism) as a starting point for working through this analysis of IM.

of this report will rely upon the substance and implications of this articulation of general and special revelation with a view to the way in which the biblical data ought to shape missions (and missiology) and the way in which the biblical data address IM.

The decision of *how* to embark upon this examination of IM is not arbitrary. We begin with Scripture and end with Scripture because, despite the pressure from many to focus primarily (and even solely) on the phenomena of worldwide movements, only through biblical and confessional lenses will IM paradigms and related matters receive helpful analysis. Other tools serve good purposes when the interpretive analysis begins and ends with Scripture and the extra-biblical tools submit wholly to scriptural authority. This report will not engage vast numbers of cases and case studies, because the key to discerning IM paradigms and methods is to address the biblical and theological understanding which drive them. The task then is not an examination of the phenomena, but rather a summary exposition of biblical and theological categories that facilitate doing so properly.

The surfeit of anecdotes and reports of phenomena abound from around the Muslim world and must be interpreted with attention to meticulous, gracious, and humble biblical scrutiny. We expressly desire to engage the issues with theological wisdom and gospel grace, incumbent upon leaders of the church, and intend that the provided biblical/theological reflection facilitate more careful analysis of the phenomena.

## 2. God, His Revelation, and Human Reply

Revelation is at the heart of historic Christianity. The *principium* of the Christian faith, divine revelation serves as the living spring of theology, the singular source of the gospel and all it embraces.<sup>139</sup> Such vital redemptive revelation has come, as Scripture indicates, in a progressive fashion. Revelation “constitutes a part of the formation of the new world of redemption, and this new world does not come into being suddenly and all at once, but is realized in a long historical process. This could not be otherwise, since at every point its formation proceeds on the basis of, and in contact with, the natural development of this world in the form of history.”<sup>140</sup> At various times and in various ways, God has spoken to

<sup>139</sup> The *principium essendi* (principle, source of Being) and the *principium cognoscendi* (principle, source of knowing) are, respectively, the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Scripture. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520- ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1987, 2003): 1:431-36.

<sup>140</sup> Geerhardus Vos, “The Nature and Aims of Biblical Theology,” *The Union Seminary Magazine* 13.1, February-March, 1902, p. 195. The entire article is reprinted in *Kerux* 14.1 (May 1999): pp. 3-8, and available at <http://www.kerux.com/documents/keruxv14n1a1.htm> (accessed March 6, 2013).

his people, with the culmination of his redemptive speech arriving in his Son (Heb. 1:1-2): the Savior, Redeemer, Prophet, Priest, and King.

The Westminster Confession of Faith commences its rigorous summation of Christian truth with a full-orbed expression of this Christ-centered *principium cognescendi*, preserved in Scripture for the redemption of God’s people. Asserting Scripture’s necessity, authority, sufficiency, and clarity (WCF 1.1-10), the Confession expressly identifies the substance of Scripture as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Redeemer and Lord, the Word of God incarnate (WCF 7.5; 8.6). In this revelation centered on Jesus Christ, “‘*God has spoken.*’ This initial affirmation is . . . basic to Christian faith”<sup>141</sup> and to its promulgation.

### a. The Divine Speech

Antecedent to human history and the redemptive revelation given in it is the eternal God, who determined to create, to redeem his church, and to bring history to an eternally predetermined end—the glorifying of his church in his Son (Revelation 21-22). The Bible takes us from the beginning, the creation of all things, including the culminating creative act wherein God specially made man— male and female— in his image (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:20-24; WCF 4.1-2) to the end of all things (Revelation 21-22; WCF 32-33). Creation was not designed for perpetuation, but eventuation and attainment of divine purpose;<sup>142</sup> thus, Scripture explicitly presents an inspired biblical record of redemptive acts in history according to divinely ordained consummate goal (cf. Acts 2:22-24).

Therefore, protology (first things) and eschatology (last things) converge in divine providence, a Personal engagement that not merely holds things together, but delivers them to their purposed end (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3).<sup>143</sup> God sovereignly ordains all things (WCF 3), governs all things (WCF 5), and has determined from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1) by his redemptive work on the stage of history (WCF 5.7) to call people to himself—people from every tribe, tongue, and nation— whom he makes not only a nation, but his own family (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3-4; cf. WCF

<sup>141</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 45.

<sup>142</sup> So Geerhardus Vos writes, “There is an absolute end posited for the universe before and apart from sin. The universe, as created, was only a beginning, the meaning of which was not perpetuation, but attainment. The principle of God’s relation to the world from the outset was a principle of action or eventuation. The goal was not comparative (i.e., evolution); it was superlative (i.e., the final goal).” *The Eschatology of the OT*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 73.

<sup>143</sup> See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 316.

3.6; 8.1, 5, 8; 10.1). In all these dimensions of revelation, the Son of God remains central as Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer and Consummator of all things (Col. 1:15-20). Jesus Christ “is the Logos in an utterly unique sense: Revealer and the revelation at the same time.”<sup>144</sup>

## **b. General and Special Revelation**

This redemptive revelation, however, must not be understood in a vacuum. All created things “derive their origin from God, are to a great or lesser extent related to him, and so also have the capacity to display his perfections before the eyes of his creatures. Because the universe is God’s creation, it is also his revelation and self-manifestation. There is not an atom of the world that does not reflect his deity.”<sup>145</sup> Put otherwise, “There is no thing that does not exist by his creation. All things take their meaning from him. Every witness to him is a ‘prejudiced’ witness. For any fact to be a fact at all, it must be a revelational fact.”<sup>146</sup> And again, succinctly, “all reality reveals God.”<sup>147</sup> In other words, because the personal God has created all things, these things point uniformly to him in his glorious unity and diversity. As it relates to the realm of human thought, Paul puts it more particularly in view of the Son of God, in whom *all* wisdom is hidden (Col. 2:3).

General revelation and special revelation exist in direct continuity with one another, and function in mutually dependent fashion. To be sure, special revelation (Scripture) takes precedence over general revelation, and serves properly as the “spectacles” (John Calvin) with which we are to interpret the world around us. That being said, this special revelation occurs in the context and employs the tools of the created world (the realm of general revelation) in order to deliver the truth of the gospel and to open the eyes of the spiritually blind (1 Corinthians 1-2).

When God speaks redemptively into the human context, he employs the tools of human language, and by his Spirit conveys his special redemptive grace in a way accessible to human cognitive and communicative capacity. In fact, the culmination

<sup>144</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003-2008), 1.402.

<sup>145</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.209.

<sup>146</sup> Cornelius Van Til, “Nature and Scripture,” in *Infallible Word: A Symposium by the Members of the Faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse and Paul Woolley, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), pp. 279-80.

<sup>147</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), 20.

of his speech is a Man (John 1:14). And because of its Source, all revelation places its hearers in a place of incumbent submission. “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author therefore: *and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.*”<sup>148</sup>

Sourced in the Triune God, revelation then comes purposefully and particularly. It also comes exclusively from the one true God. He speaks because he purposes to speak, and he communicates effectively what he wants to communicate (Isa. 55:10-11). In former days, God spoke through his prophets, and in the last days delivers his culminating revelation (Heb. 1:1-2): the Lord Jesus Christ in his efficacious suffering and glory (1 Pet. 1:10-12). The God of Scripture speaks with intentionality, and his explanation of redemption arrives wholly of divine disclosure – not out of human analysis. Without the special revelation of God, redemption would remain hidden, unknown, and unattainable (Eph. 1:3-23; Rom. 16:25-27).<sup>149</sup>

Divine grace comes by divine redemptive acts interpreted by God’s revelatory word. “Scripture cannot conceive of pure religion without supernatural revelation.”<sup>150</sup> The meaning of redemption, while shaped by its historical context, cannot be reduced to human reflection on divine acts.<sup>151</sup> Scripture comes not as mere human witness and testimony to divine redemptive activity, but as a Spirit-given word to God’s people (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21), explaining the *meaning* of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—anticipated, accomplished, and applied.<sup>152</sup> Scripture is God’s word.

### c. Life as Religious Reply

Scripture unequivocally affirms one God as the single Source for necessary, sufficient, and authoritative speech. God the Creator and God the Redeemer is God

<sup>148</sup> WCF 1.4, emphasis added.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. “A Call to Faithful Witness: Part One: Like Father Like Son” on Scripture and the people of God.

<sup>150</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1.308.

<sup>151</sup> As per Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1: *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, ed. by Thomas Torrance, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956): pp. 111-140.

<sup>152</sup> For insight into the nature of biblical authority as *divine Word* see, for example, B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), pp. 71-102, 131-66, 245-96; Sinclair B. Ferguson, “How Does the Bible Look at Itself?” in Harvie Conn, ed., *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), pp. 47-66; Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *God’s Word in Servant-Form: Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck on the Doctrine of Scripture* (Jackson, MS: Reformed Academic Press, 2008); Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word*, New Studies in Biblical Theology; ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

1 the *Speaker*. This God, the triune God of Scripture, has spoken redemptively; this  
 2 same God has spoken unceasingly in all that he has made (Psa. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-21),  
 3 and the external testifying voice of creation itself joins the internal voice of God  
 4 inside mankind to establish comprehensive accountability for all peoples of all times.  
 5 In other words, humans converse with the God of creation, the very one who is also  
 6 the redeeming God of Scripture. The extraordinary, redemptive revelation of God  
 7 enters an environment of perpetual general revelatory speech and providence of God,  
 8 and in a world in which every human lives in inescapable dialogue with the Creator  
 9 (Psa. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:18-32).

10  
 11 In short, God speaks; humans hear and listen. And as will be more fully  
 12 expounded below, *trust* in his perspicuous and authoritative revelation distinguishes  
 13 belief from unbelief, true worship from false worship, true religion from false  
 14 religion, and the regenerate from the unregenerate. Human life functions *coram Deo*,  
 15 making *all of life a reply to revelation*.<sup>153</sup> Worship then is not an optional or  
 16 additional feature of human life; rather, human life itself is an act of worship. Man is  
 17 an irreducibly religious creature.

18  
 19 To put it otherwise, all of life is religious because all of life is lived *before* the  
 20 Sovereign Lord (*coram Deo*) and is to be lived *for* the Sovereign Lord (*pro Deo*).  
 21 There is no aspect of human thought, word, or action that exists outside of the sphere  
 22 of covenantal/religious obligation, making all human experience—priorities and  
 23 practices, customs and mores, language and community—matters of personal  
 24 account before the Triune God. “And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are  
 25 naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13).

26  
 27 Accordingly, true religion is not properly a human *creation*, but a divinely  
 28 prescribed, covenantal response to the one true God.<sup>154</sup> “All peoples either  
 29 pantheistically pull God down into what is creaturely, or deistically elevate him  
 30 endlessly above it. In neither case does one arrive at true fellowship, at covenant, at  
 31 *genuine religion*.”<sup>155</sup> As revealed by the God of Scripture, genuine religion comes by  
 32 unqualified allegiance to the God of the covenant, by wholehearted reliance upon and  
 33 application of his Word (cf. Dan. 3:1-18). God’s speech is necessary to explain the

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<sup>153</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, “General and Special Divine Revelation,” in *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought*, ed. Carl F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), p. 17.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.4.3.

<sup>155</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.569-70.

appropriate response (*WCF* 1.1), and dependence on any other source constitutes idolatry.

True religion is characterized not only by intellectual or verbal allegiance to the one God of revelation but also by a functioning moral and religious trust in his Word. The first commandment compels worship of the true God; the second commandment compels submissive religious practice according the revelation of the one true God. “The enduring moral norm of the second commandment necessitates that true worship conform to the regulative principle.”<sup>156</sup> True faith and true religion prove themselves by demonstrably “sympathetic absorption”<sup>157</sup> in the revelation of God. Full receptivity and obedience to the speaking God evidence proper dependence.

Christians must not only confess the foundational role of Scripture. They must also actually engage in the systematic study of Scripture to ensure that biblical truth permeates and adequately informs academic endeavors, including cultural anthropology, sociology, and other social sciences which analyze peoples and societies. Biblical categories, definitions, directives and insights should comprehensively shape all missions. Social sciences and the biblically informed interpretation of them play a valuable role in support of the teaching of Scripture. Employed under the authority of Scripture, sociological analyses and cultural anthropological studies can serve as important, even mandatory supplements to missions. They ought never become the center of missions.

To conclude our concerns here, we affirm that Scripture speaks authoritatively into all cultures, all peoples, at all times. While the Bible speaks *to* all things, it does not speak *about* all things. Analyzing general revelation, academic endeavors can enhance the work of the church in the proclamation of the gospel around the world. Because of the noetic effects of sin, theological neutrality of academic constructs is impossible, and all analysis, including that of the social sciences, must submit to the functional interpretive authority of Scripture. In view of

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<sup>156</sup> J. Ligon Duncan III, “Does God Care How We Worship?” in *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), p. 55. Duncan continues helpfully, “[T]he *elements* of worship must be instituted by God himself, the *forms* in which those elements are performed must not be inimical to the nature of content of the element or draw attention away from the substance and goal of worship, and the *circumstances* of worship must never overshadow or detract from the elements, but rather discreetly foster the work of the means of grace.” Ibid., pp. 55-56.

<sup>157</sup> Geerhardus Vos, “The Wonderful Tree,” in *Grace and Glory: Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary* (1922; reprint, Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), p. 32.



that all-important Scriptural revelation, it is incumbent upon the Church to receive that divine revelation according to the interpretive guides of Scripture itself. “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”<sup>158</sup> With an eye to the whole counsel of God, we turn now to matters of faithful and consistent biblical interpretation.

### 3. Hermeneutics & Exegesis

#### a. Introduction

In no small measure, discussions concerning IM paradigms are fundamentally hermeneutical in character. That is to say, they inevitably turn one to the question, “What are the principles by which we interpret the Bible?” While one must take care not to draw unfounded generalizations, certain patterns emerge in IM readings and applications of the Scripture. After reflecting on the hermeneutical principles of one leading IM proponent, we will consider one text whose interpretation surfaces frequently in IM literature—the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.

#### b. IM and Hermeneutics

IM proponents typically recognize that the events of the first century represent “a unique point in history” and that “such events will never be repeated.”<sup>159</sup> Rebecca Lewis, for instance, correctly perceives the gospel as a realization of the Hebrew Scriptures:

Since circumcision was the sign of the covenant God had made with Abraham, and Pentecost was the celebration of the giving of the law on stone tablets to Moses, the gospel as a new covenant, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, were the fulfillment, not the abrogation, of all God’s covenant promises in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>160</sup>

IM proponents therefore appreciate both the organic and the redemptive-historical character of biblical revelation. However, that perspective finds at best an incomplete application when prominent IM proponents put forward their

<sup>158</sup> WCF 1.9.

<sup>159</sup> John Ridgeway, “Insider Movements in the Gospels and Acts,” *IJFM* 24.2 (Summer 2007): p. 78.

<sup>160</sup> Rebecca Lewis, “The Integrity of the Gospel and Insider Movements,” *IJFM* 27.1 (Spring 2010): p. 43. Compare the similar statements of Higgins, “The Key to Insider Movements,” pp. 161, 163.

1 interpretations of the Bible. This point is evident in the hermeneutical reflections of  
 2 Rebecca Lewis.<sup>161</sup> Lewis argues that the “gospel message” itself has “unchanging  
 3 content” that the church must “proclaim in all contexts.”<sup>162</sup> She acknowledges that  
 4 the gospel was “proclaimed ... to Abraham,” and presumably to generations of  
 5 Jewish persons thereafter.<sup>163</sup> She expresses concern, however, that one not add to  
 6 this unchanging gospel “additional requirements such as adherence to Christian  
 7 religious traditions.”<sup>164</sup> To do so will “cloud or encumber the gospel.”<sup>165</sup> Such a  
 8 generalization, while containing truth in the abstract, must ultimately be assessed in  
 9 terms of what are alleged to be the Christian religious traditions said to encumber the  
 10 gospel.

11  
 12 Lewis’ distinction between the gospel and the accretion of religious tradition  
 13 helps us to understand her analysis of the progress of the gospel during the New  
 14 Testament period. Jewish believers in Christ during the first century were “saved by  
 15 faith in Christ and disciplined through the God-given Jewish religious framework  
 16 within which all the disciples lived.”<sup>166</sup> In the NT age, the gospel’s unchanging  
 17 content came to these Jewish people in their context first, a context of religious  
 18 practice that was ethnically their own.

19  
 20 What happened when the gospel went to non-Jews? Jesus, Lewis argues, did  
 21 not “require [Samaritans] to become proselytes or to come to the Jewish temple or  
 22 synagogues.”<sup>167</sup> In fact, she claims, “Jesus affirms this non-Jewish version of faith in  
 23 himself as ‘the kind of worshippers the Father seeks’ (John 4:24).” The Samaritans  
 24 embraced the gospel but Jesus did not require them to “enter the Jewish religious  
 25 framework,” a pattern repeated in the subsequent ministries of Peter and Philip in  
 26 Samaria (Acts 8).<sup>168</sup>

27  
 28 This pattern continued as the gospel extended beyond Samaria to Gentiles.  
 29 Peter learned that God did not require Cornelius or other Gentile believers to “adopt  
 30 Jewish identity” or to “accept [a Jewish] religious framework” or “the religious

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<sup>161</sup> Lewis is hardly singular or unrepresentative in her approach to the New Testament. See, for example, Ridgeway, “Insider Movements.”

<sup>162</sup> Lewis, “Integrity,” p. 42.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

traditions of the church in Jerusalem.”<sup>169</sup> The church ratified this understanding of the gospel’s relation to Jewish identity at the Jerusalem Council, to which we will give further attention below. Lewis understands Paul’s statements on circumcision along these very lines. Paul’s argument in Romans 4, she argues, makes the case that “God ... want[s] Gentile believers to set aside the religious framework He had established for the Jews.”<sup>170</sup> In fact the epistle to the Romans as a whole shows that “the gospel itself, apart from all the God-given traditions of the Jews, ... brings the transformation of obedient faith into the life of believers from any background.”<sup>171</sup> This understanding of the gospel—a gospel for the Gentiles and shed of its accompanying Jewish form—is precisely what Paul has in mind when he speaks of the “mystery” that he proclaims (Eph. 3:6-9).<sup>172</sup> Lewis applies these principles to the contemporary church:

Likewise, it is disturbing today for Christians who value their religious traditions, to see believers arising in other cultural contexts set these aside as optional or inappropriate for their context. The message of inclusion is good news to us also as long as we are the Gentiles getting included. It starts to get more difficult to accept when we recognize that we are now in the position of these Jewish believers, with 2000 years of our own valuable teachings and traditions that we want everyone to build on.<sup>173</sup>

The application is plain. Twenty-first century Western Christians are *in loco Judaeorum*—in the very place and situation that Jews, and potentially, Judaizers—occupied in the first century. Paul’s arguments against imposing Jewish practices upon Gentile believers mean that “a simple gospel” and “a simple faith” in that gospel are sufficient for all believers to provide “guidance for mature discipleship.”<sup>174</sup> “A religious framework drawn from historical Christianity” is simply not necessary.<sup>175</sup> Put more strongly, “if we demand that all believers adopt our own religious traditions and identity, then we are actually undermining the integrity of the gospel.”<sup>176</sup>

Just as in the first century “there were in existence at least two radically different religions based on Jesus Christ,” the “Jewish version” and the “Greco-

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., pp. 43, 44.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

Roman version,” so today believers may “belong to Muslim or Hindu cultures and ... not adopt the religious forms and traditions we have constructed over time and ... not even take on a ‘Christian’ identity.”<sup>177</sup> People may truly believe in Christ “while preserving distinct cultural identities” and evidence “radically different expressions of faith in Christ.”<sup>178</sup>

These principles help us to understand the Judaizing heresy. Lewis agrees that “the Judaizers were not preaching a gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.”<sup>179</sup> She does not identify their teaching in terms of a system of meritorious works *simpliciter*. Rather, “they were adding the requirement of religious conversion (change of outward forms and religious identity) to the inner transformation, implying that the work of the Holy Spirit is not sufficient by itself.”<sup>180</sup> The Galatian heresy, therefore, was heretical in no small measure because it sought to impose a specific and finite religious form and identity upon individuals from an altogether different culture.

What are we to make of Lewis’s account of the New Testament and of the application of her findings to the contemporary church? Lewis recognizes that the Old Covenant system was “God-given” and therefore theological in its origin and nature. Her prevailing and working understanding of that system, however, is sociological. She understands that system in parity with other cultural or religious systems, whether they are Greco-Roman from the first century, or Muslim or Hindu from the twenty-first century.

When the New Testament articulates the reasons that Gentile Christians are not bound to observe peculiarly Old Covenant forms and practices, it pursues two very different courses than Lewis’ arguments. The first course of argument is redemptive-historical in nature. In Galatians 3-4, Paul argues that the incarnation of Christ, and the era of the Spirit inaugurated in him, ends the Old Covenant era (Gal. 3:22,23,25). The Old Covenant had inherent, intended obsolescence. It had a beginning point (Gal. 3:17,19), a terminal point (Gal. 3:19), and specific redemptive-historical purposes for its limited duration (Gal. 3:19-22). Hebrews advances a similar and lengthier case. The New Covenant is “better” and “more excellent” than the Old Covenant (Heb. 8:6). In the dawn of the New, writes the author to his first

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

1 century audience, the Old is “becoming obsolete and growing old ... ready to vanish  
2 away” (Heb. 8:8).

3  
4 The other argument is soteriological. Paul’s opponents in Galatia (the  
5 ‘Judaizers’) were pressing circumcision and the other ordinances of the Mosaic Law  
6 (see Gal. 4:10, 5:3) as grounds of the Christian’s justification (Gal. 2:15-16; cf. Acts  
7 15:1, 5). In other words, the believer was to be justified not by faith alone, but by  
8 faith *plus* obedience to the Mosaic Law. Paul vehemently resists such a teaching and  
9 argues at length in both Galatians and Romans (Gal. 3, Rom. 4) that such a teaching  
10 was contrary to the Old Testament itself. The observance of circumcision for  
11 justification, then, had no sanction whatsoever from Old Covenant revelation.

12  
13 Two implications follow from these arguments. First, the New Testament  
14 does not object to the imposition of the Mosaic ordinances upon Gentiles on the  
15 grounds that such an action illegitimately requires Gentiles to adopt foreign or non-  
16 native cultural forms. The New Testament’s concern, rather, is redemptive-historical  
17 and soteriological. To be sure, Lewis acknowledges that Acts 15 addresses  
18 soteriological questions. The New Testament, however, does not articulate the kind  
19 of cultural arguments that Lewis has advanced from this passage.

20  
21 Second, one may not legitimately establish a direct link between the  
22 imposition of some Jewish forms on Gentiles in the first century and the imposition  
23 of what are said to be Western Christian forms on non-Western Christians in the  
24 twenty-first century. There are undoubtedly instances of such improper imposition in  
25 the church and world today, but the first century and twenty-first century situations  
26 described by Lewis are not analogous in the manner that she suggests. The New  
27 Testament documents a unique, unrepeatable, and non-episodic period in redemptive  
28 history—the overlap between the dawn of the New Covenant at the resurrection of  
29 Jesus and at Pentecost, and the continuation of the Mosaic system among the Jews  
30 (formally ended at the resurrection) until the Roman destruction of the Temple in AD  
31 70. By definition, the precise circumstances addressed by the apostles in Acts and in  
32 such letters as Galatians and Romans are peculiar to the first century, and therefore  
33 are *sui generis*. This is not to say that New Testament principles, properly  
34 understood and articulated, are without meaning and application to the contemporary  
35 church. It is to say that one must fully and consistently appreciate the redemptive-  
36 historical significance of the first century context before attempting to determine that  
37 meaning and to draw those applications. Such appreciation is not easy to find in the  
38 writings of IM proponents, a fact that is not without consequence for their exegesis  
39 of Scripture.

### c. An Exegetical Example – Acts 15

One can see these hermeneutical principles at work exegetically in a passage widely regarded by IM proponents as important to their understanding of the New Testament and of IM methodology—Acts 15.<sup>181</sup> Acts 15 affords what Dudley Woodberry has termed an “incarnational model”—an exemplar of handling a “missiological problem that resulted from the gospel crossing a cultural barrier.”<sup>182</sup> What are some of the ways in which IM proponents understand this passage to guide the contemporary church?

Woodberry argues that Paul and Barnabas’ reports of their missionary endeavors (15:3-4, 8-9, 12, cf. v. 14) legitimate the appropriation of current “case studies of insider movements in a number of regions in Asia and Africa that demonstrate how God is working...”<sup>183</sup> Peter’s speech (15:7,10) is said to warrant a call to “incarnate the gospel in the Muslim community.”<sup>184</sup> The criteria of the Council to adjudicate the question—“their own reasoning along with the guidance of God’s Spirit”—means that today we may “apply reason to the present discussion [and therefore] see reasons for and reasons against insider movements of disciples of Christ within the Muslim community.”<sup>185</sup> Scripture also plays an important role, as in the quotation from Amos 9 in Acts 15:15-17, and Woodberry understands both the Old and New Testaments to afford examples of Insider Movements, even as the New Testament “gives some warnings to some believers who have remained under the umbrella of their original faith.”<sup>186</sup>

Most critically, Woodberry directly applies the decision of the Council to professing Christians in Muslim contexts. The Council determined that “circumcision was not necessary [for] salvation,” and then proceeded to address questions of “fellowship and morality.”<sup>187</sup> For the contemporary situation, this means that, “There is freedom to observe the Law or not to do so, since salvation does not come through the Law. But because relationships and fellowship are so

<sup>181</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 43-44; J. Dudley Woodberry, “To the Muslim,” pp.23-28; Ridgeway, “Insider Movements,” p. 85. Note the analyses of Tennent, “Followers of Jesus (Isa),” pp. 105-6; and Sleeman, “Origins,” pp. 519-20.

<sup>182</sup> Woodberry, “To the Muslim,” p. 25.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.* What follows in Woodberry’s discussion is a largely sympathetic assessment of insider movements within the Muslim world.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27.

important, the disciples of Christ should not use their freedom in a way that might unnecessarily hinder their relationships with Muslims or traditional Christians.”<sup>188</sup>

Lewis argues that the Council's chief concern was, “Is conversion to the identity and religious traditions of the Jewish believers necessary for salvation for those coming out of Greek pagan background?”<sup>189</sup> Peter’s words in Acts 15:8-11 show us the Council’s conclusion that “the gospel ... save[s] believers who retain their Gentile culture and integrity.”<sup>190</sup> Therefore, since God by his Spirit demonstrated that he had “accept[ed] the Gentile believers,” the church could not “add on to [the Gentiles’] faith in Christ a requirement of conversion to the Jewish religious forms.”<sup>191</sup> The four commands of Acts 15:20 were given “to promote a peaceful co-existence between Jewish and Greek believers,” but “all of these laws, except the last one, were removed before the end of the New Testament by Paul, who reduced them to a matter of conscience.”<sup>192</sup> Thus, Ridgeway concludes, “the Gentiles were free to remain insiders in their own ethnic communities and as a consequence the gospel could freely travel along natural ethnic lines.”<sup>193</sup>

What are we to make of these readings of Acts 15? In keeping with the hermeneutical principles surveyed above, they equate first century Jewish practices with contemporary, non-Jewish cultural forms. This approach misses the redemptive-historical and soteriological import both of the Mosaic practices in question and of the proceedings of the Council itself. The Council takes up two distinct questions, one soteriological and one redemptive-historical. The first question is whether circumcision is a necessary requirement for salvation (15:1, 5). In answer to this question, the Council decisively answers in the negative (cf. 15:24, 25-26). The second question concerns the terms of fellowship for Jewish and Gentile Christians within the church, and particularly within the same congregations. It is too strong to call the Council’s four provisions “laws,” as Lewis does. To term these “laws” suggests either that the ceremonies of the Mosaic legislation are partially or completely normative in the New Covenant period (something the New Testament disavows—Gal. 3:23-25), or that church councils have a legislative power to determine matters of the church’s faith and practice (something that the New Testament also disavows

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Lewis, “Integrity,” p. 43.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ridgeway, “Insider Movements,” p. 85.

– I Pet. 5:3; 2 Cor. 1:24). Paul’s counsel in Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, therefore, is not at all inconsistent with the Council’s decision.

In summary, Acts 15 documents a decisive moment in redemptive history. In doing so, it reflects Luke’s broader redemptive historical concerns in Acts. In Acts, Luke is charting the epochal progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). As Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. has observed of Acts 1:8, “[this text] is not addressed indiscriminately to all believers, regardless of time and place, but directly only to the *apostles* ... and concerns the foundational task of bringing the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome *completed* by them (cf. Col. 1:6,23).”<sup>194</sup>

How does Acts 15 fit into Luke’s account of the redemptive-historical advance of the gospel? The account of the Council follows the conclusion of the first round of Paul and Barnabas’ Gentile mission (13:1-14:28), and precedes the continued penetration of the gospel to Gentile territories (16:1-5). The significance of the Council is fundamentally redemptive-historical and soteriological. It is redemptive-historical in that the church is coming to terms with the implications of the conclusion of the former Mosaic era and the regulations peculiar to it, and of the dawn of the new era marked by the exaltation of the risen Christ and the consequent outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh. It is soteriological in that the church brings clarity to the gospel that she proclaims—is the sinner justified by faith alone or by faith plus works done in obedience to the Law?<sup>195</sup>

It is therefore mistaken to understand the Council primarily in terms of the retention or exchange of social and religious identity. Such an understanding conceives too close a relationship between the redemptive-historical circumstances that occasioned the Council and the sorts of contemporary cultural issues and concerns that IM proponents bring to Acts 15. The result is that IM readings pose questions to Acts 15 that Luke was not concerned to ask, and derive principles from the Council that lack sufficient exegetical warrant. Cultural presuppositions of many IM interpreters blind them to hegemonic hermeneutical and theological factors;

<sup>194</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979), pp. 23-4, emphasis in original. Gaffin helpfully goes on to speak of the way in which this verse (and Acts as a whole) relates to the mission of the contemporary church, “[Acts 1:8] does apply today, but only derivatively, as we build on the apostolic foundation and hold fast to their foundational gospel witness. Where this is not grasped, one result is an unintentional, but common, misuse of the verse. Most assuredly the local congregation, or any other larger or smaller locale in the Western world serving as a base for contemporary missionary activity, is not ‘Jerusalem’! Rather we today are part of the ‘ends of the earth’ reached by the gospel in the period beyond its foundational spread,” *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>195</sup> Here is an important point of application of Acts 15 to the contemporary church.



reading cultural relativism *into* a biblical context, they unavoidably draw contemporary cultural relativism *out* of it.

#### d. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

A seminal feature of IM argumentation is its analysis of field phenomena. Analysts assess reports of movements on the field, interpreting both Scripture and the contemporary missional context to determine how these reportedly spontaneous movements parallel the events of the New Testament age. It is important to note that reports of dreams and visions and other phenomena have a long history in missions to Muslims, predating the advent of IM. Though anecdotes do travel through informal viral networks, the reports which IM advocates and other missiologists attend consist of more sophisticated statistical research and analysis.

[Dudley] Woodberry et al. have collected approximately 750 questionnaires from Muslim background believers (MBBs) from thirty countries and fifty ethnic groups focusing on their reasons for following Christ. The findings indicated that dreams and visions were an important factor in their decision to follow Jesus with 27 percent having a dream or vision before they accepted Jesus, 40 percent at the time of accepting Jesus and 45 percent after they had accepted Jesus.<sup>196</sup>

Missiologists, including those sympathetic to IM, have assimilated, examined, and quantified such reports of dreams, signs and wonders, and have discerned particular patterns from their interpretation of the data. Having just considered the hermeneutical approach which manifests itself in IM writings, we turn now to consider IM interpretations of these field phenomena—a matter which directly concerns the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Among dozens of other biblical texts, the two key passages in the New Testament concerning the nature of the Bible emphatically build an inextricable tie between the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. In 2 Tim. 3:16, Paul commends Timothy to trust in the Scriptures because of what they are—the *theopneustos* writings. Using this *hapax legomenon*,<sup>197</sup> Paul commends Holy Scripture as that which is literally *breathed (spirited) out by God*. The words of Scripture are divine,

<sup>196</sup> John Travis and Anna Travis, “Factors Affecting the Identity That Jesus-Followers Choose,” in *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry, 2nd ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011), p. 186, fn. 179.

<sup>197</sup> A *hapax legomenon* is a word, like *theopneustos*, which appears only once in the New Testament (2 Tim 3:16). For further discussion of *theopneustos*, see Edwin A. Blum, “The Apostles’ View of Scripture,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), pp. 44-48.

1 as they come directly by the Spirit of God. “To say that Scripture is spirated, to say  
2 that it is the Word of God, means that God has spoken it. All of it.”<sup>198</sup>

3 Similarly, the apostle Peter (2 Pet. 1:19-21) contends for the supreme reliability  
4 of the inscripturated Word of God precisely because it is the product of the Holy  
5 Spirit:

6  
7 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will  
8 do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day  
9 dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all,  
10 that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For  
11 no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from  
12 God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

13  
14 In short, the prophetic Word—the Scriptures—are the Word of God, the  
15 product of the Holy Spirit. To speak of the Word of God is to speak of the Word of  
16 the Spirit, and to speak of this Spirit of truth (e.g., John 14; 16) is to speak of the  
17 Spirit's inseparability from the Scriptures.

18  
19 In addition, Scripture proclaims its own Christ-centeredness. From start to  
20 finish, the Bible in the Old and New Testaments, is about the Son of God—  
21 humiliated and exalted (cf. 1 Pet. 1:10-12). It is these Spirit-Authored Scriptures that  
22 point singularly to Jesus Christ, and for this reason, Jesus said of the Helper, the  
23 Spirit, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John  
24 16:14; cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 15:45; John 14:26). “The Holy Spirit . . . follows Christ  
25 in his journey through history. He binds himself to the word of Christ and works  
26 only in the name, and in accordance with the command, of Christ.”<sup>199</sup> Of course, as  
27 God, the Spirit is wholly sovereign and has the right and ability to work as he wills  
28 (John 3:8). Yet the Spirit's work never strays from this explicit Christ-disclosing  
29 function, convicting of sin (John 14), sealing redemptive truths in the heart of  
30 believers (Ephesians 1).

31  
32 The Spirit of God *is* the Spirit of Christ. Him alone the Spirit exalts and by  
33 work with his Word, he effects regeneration, enabling men and women to see Jesus  
34 Christ for who he is—dead, buried and resurrected for the forgiveness of their sins.  
35 The Spirit unceasingly shines his light upon the Son of God, and taking his own  
36 Word (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21), “removes the veil of misunderstanding

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<sup>198</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), p. 529.

<sup>199</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4.460.

1 and enables a man to understand the Scriptures (2 Cor. 3:14-18).”<sup>200</sup> As Scripture  
 2 itself reveals, this self-effacing and Christ-exalting ministry of the Holy Spirit bears  
 3 directly on his application of redemption in the contemporary contexts around the  
 4 world. The sweeping implications of these Scriptural features bear directly, as we  
 5 will see, upon the analysis of the contemporary field phenomena.  
 6

7 The Westminster Standards richly describe the biblical contours of God’s  
 8 work in history. As he works in the world, “God, in His ordinary providence maketh  
 9 use of means” (WCF 5.3). The notion of “ordinary” surely implies the possibility of  
 10 that which is *extraordinary*, and WCF 5.3 makes that point overtly: “yet [God] is  
 11 free to work without, above, and against [ordinary means], at His pleasure.” At the  
 12 center of God’s work is redeeming people for himself. Inviting and drawing people  
 13 to Jesus Christ, God employs “his Word and Spirit” (WLC 67; cf. WLC 72) to bring  
 14 them to faith and repentance, “savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and  
 15 powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin)  
 16 are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and  
 17 embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein” (WLC 67). In other words, God’s  
 18 “outward and ordinary means” (WLC 154) for conferring the redeeming work of  
 19 Christ upon sinners is by his Spirit, who “maketh the reading, but especially the  
 20 preaching of the Word, an effectual means” (WLC 155) of conversion.  
 21

22 John Calvin, “preeminently the theologian of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>201</sup> captured the  
 23 Word/Spirit inseparability with pastoral poignancy. “Therefore the Spirit, promised  
 24 to us, has not the task of inventing new and unheard-of revelations, or of forging a  
 25 new kind of doctrine, to lead us away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but of  
 26 sealing our minds with that very doctrine which is commended by the gospel.”<sup>202</sup> Far  
 27 from restricting the Spirit’s ministry, the self-binding of the Spirit frees him to work  
 28 according to divine purpose—that redemption-applying, Christ-centered purpose  
 29 revealed in Scripture. So Calvin admonishes, “It is no ignominy for the Spirit to be in  
 30 conformity with himself.”<sup>203</sup> Or again, as Richard Gaffin puts it so well, “The Bible  
 31 is the living voice of the Holy Spirit today. This is the structure or pattern of working  
 32 which the Spirit has set for himself in his sovereign freedom.”<sup>204</sup>  
 33

<sup>200</sup> Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1988), 82.

<sup>201</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “Calvin as Theologian and Calvinism Today,” (1909; reprint, London: Evangelical Press, 1969), [www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/bb\\_warfield/Warfield.Calvin.pdf](http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/bb_warfield/Warfield.Calvin.pdf) (accessed January 21, 2013).

<sup>202</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.9.1.

<sup>203</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.9.2.

<sup>204</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “The Holy Spirit,” *WTJ* 43.1 (Fall 1980): p. 63.

Some still cry foul—that such a view of the Spirit rigidly defies the freedom of the Spirit to work sovereignly, unexpectedly, and extraordinarily. But as the Author of Scripture, the Spirit himself reveals his own functioning and perspicuously (and intentionally!) establishes the parameters of his own work. Ironically, it is those who interpret as divine other extra-biblical or even at times non-biblical manifestations of the Spirit that constrain him in their own theological trappings. The Spirit’s freedom is divine, and divine revelation is the free manifestation of the Spirit of God about the work of God in redemption; the riches of grace in the application of Christ’s redemptive work could hardly be described properly as constraint. Concerning this Spirit’s self-bounded freedom, Gaffin also winsomely and artfully addresses oft-articulated rebuttals:

People sometimes tell me, “You’re putting the Holy Spirit in a box.” At least two responses come to mind. First, I do take this charge to heart. It is by no means an imaginary danger that we might unduly limit our expectations of the Spirit’s work by our theologizing. We must always remember the incalculability factor that Jesus notes in John 3:8 (the Spirit is like an unpredictable wind). Any sound doctrine of the Spirit’s work will be content with an unaccounted-for remainder, an area of mystery.

Secondly ... the Holy Spirit himself, “speaking in the Scripture” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1.10), puts his activity “in a box,” if you will—a box of his own sovereign making. The Bible knows nothing of a pure whimsy of the Spirit.”<sup>205</sup>

IM advocates seem to view matters according to a different theological construction. While a continuationist<sup>206</sup> theology of the Holy Spirit is not always explicit, written documents by IM advocates, SCIM interviews, and anecdotes attest to the IM patterns of interpreting the phenomena as the *extra*-ordinary ministry of the Holy Spirit. “Over the past half century, many Hindus, Muslims, and other peoples of the major religions have put their faith in Jesus, often as a result of miraculous

<sup>205</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “What About Prophecy and Tongues Today?” *New Horizons*, [www.opc.org/new\\_horizons/NH02/01d.html](http://www.opc.org/new_horizons/NH02/01d.html) (accessed February 21, 2013). The continuation of this argument is well worth attending.

<sup>206</sup> Briefly put, continuationists believe that God not only continues to do miracles today in a manner that parallels the first century, but that he also still invests men with miraculous gifts such as those seen for instance in Acts 3:1-10 and 11:28. Cessationists understand such gifts as limited to the Apostolic age. Soft cessationism recognizes these critical redemptive-historical distinctions, and simultaneously recognizes the *mysterious* nature of the Spirit’s work (John 3). For discussion of related issues, see the 2nd PCA General Assembly’s “A Pastoral Letter Concerning the Experience of the Holy Spirit in the Church Today” (1975), <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/pastoralletter.html> (accessed January 24, 2013). See also Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, *op cit*.

1 encounters with God through dreams, healings, or the reading of Scripture.”<sup>207</sup> In  
 2 such fashion, IM writings profile the vast numbers of former Muslims becoming  
 3 followers of Jesus, in conjunction with personal supernatural experiences, including  
 4 reported visions of Jesus Christ.  
 5

6 Whether the extraordinary events described spread across individual lives  
 7 with singular or multiple occurrences, the interpretive prominence and affirmation  
 8 given this data raise a few considerations. First, rendering a common place  
 9 interpretation of the phenomena fails to distinguish properly the first and twenty-first  
 10 centuries, and perpetuates the less than careful assumption that what the Holy Spirit  
 11 did in Acts is what he *is doing* now. We surely would affirm with continuationists,  
 12 IM advocates and others, that the Spirit *can and does* act in extraordinary ways, and  
 13 eagerly assert his sovereign right to do so. Yet the eschatologically unrepeatable  
 14 period that characterized the first century AD frames the Holy Spirit’s work then as  
 15 historically inimitable. “In Luke-Acts ... Pentecost is portrayed as a redemptive-  
 16 historical event. It is not primarily to be interpreted existentially and pneumatologically,  
 17 but eschatologically and Christologically. By its very nature it shares in the decisive  
 18 once-for-all character of the entire Christ-event (Jesus’ death, resurrection, and  
 19 ascension).”<sup>208</sup> The Holy Spirit is the *eschatological* Spirit whose work corresponds  
 20 uniquely to the once-for-all and cosmically significant redemptive work of Christ.  
 21 Thus, in keeping with the hermeneutical analysis above, the redemptive-historically  
 22 unique character of the first century makes any normalizing interpretation of the  
 23 Spirit’s work strained, both in the biblical and the contemporary contexts.  
 24

25 Second, such phenomenological analysis can effect a truncation (and in some  
 26 cases, even an eclipse) of the strong biblical teaching on the Spirit of Christ. Though  
 27 some IM advocates do recognize a vital connection between Scripture and the Holy

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<sup>207</sup> Travis, “Why Evangelicals Should Be Thankful,” *op. cit.* This article repeats Travis’ earlier framing of the same conclusion, “As many have noted, this call of God [to follow Jesus] often comes about in part through dreams, visions, miraculous answers to prayer, and personal study of the *Injil* (the New Testament).” Travis, “Factors,” 186. The cover article in the January-February 2013 issue of *Christianity Today* profiled a man who came to faith in *Isa al-masih* (Arabic for “Jesus the Messiah”) after an experience in his home where “macaroni multiplied” and provided sufficient food for his wife, him, and a guest. The same night he had a dream: “Isa came to me and asked me, ‘Do you know who multiplied the macaroni?’ I said, ‘I don’t know.’ He said, ‘I am Isa al Masih. If you follow me, not only the macaroni but your life will be multiplied...’ He didn’t tell me that he was God; he didn’t tell me that he died on behalf of me; he didn’t say, ‘I am the Son of God.’ He didn’t talk to me about any complicated theological issues. He only told me that if I followed him, he would multiply my life. At that time, I was very happy if he only multiplied the macaroni like he did that day. I didn’t understand what he meant when he said that my life would be multiplied. Now I understand what that means. But at that time, I accepted him simply as the ‘lord of macaroni.’” Daniels, “Worshipping Jesus in the Mosque,” *op. cit.*

<sup>208</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 82.

Spirit, and as seen already have written about the Spirit's work, the IM theology of the Holy Spirit in initial drawing and conversion can lose its explicit, biblically-framed Christological coordinates.<sup>209</sup> "The post-Pentecost activity of the Spirit ... spreads through history like concentric ripples in a pool. As in the Old Testament era, so in the New, his activity is soteriological, communal, cosmic and eschatological, and involves the transformation of the individual, the governing of the church and the world, and the bringing in of the new age."<sup>210</sup> The Spirit's work in peoples' lives is biblically descript, and as such, unwaveringly concerns union with Christ and communion with him and his people.<sup>211</sup> Both the reported phenomena themselves and the fruit of the phenomena need to be assessed before the teaching of Scripture concerning the gospel, conversion, the church, the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and the biblically-parameterized, Christ-centered work of the Holy Spirit.

Third, a risk of extrapolation also arises. When IM advocates interpret reports of dreams and visions as the work of the Holy Spirit, they become vulnerable to extending divine affirmation to IM activities and methods more broadly. Even if interpretations of certain phenomena are accurate, blanket approval is a *non sequitur*. Proper discernment about all phenomena and practices, whether IM or not, will come only by discerning, scripturally-grounded analysis. "Even when our judgment falters, God's word remains God's word, deserving reverent exposition and responsive hearing. The authority lies in the Scriptures themselves, not in our mental impressions."<sup>212</sup> Such a warning extends not only to those with private interpretations of phenomena, but even to missiologists who would interpret the reports and extrapolate from them. One's theological orientation directly affects interpretive decisions—both of Scripture and of contemporary phenomena. Of course, the Lord of the harvest alone knows those who are his and those who are not, and in our state

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<sup>209</sup> Again, redemptive history in its biblical contours carries interpretive prominence here. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the resurrected Christ, associating his ministry in the first century with the once-for-all nature of Christ's redemptive work—life, death, and resurrection. Thus, the work of the Spirit in the first century must be understood according to the once-for-all events in the life of Jesus Christ. As 1 Cor. 15:45 makes clear, Jesus Christ himself becomes life-giving Spirit—a fact which manifests the inseparability of the resurrection of the Last Adam from the historically unique eschatological work of the Holy Spirit in those historic, cosmic events in Jesus' life. Accordingly, Richard Gaffin warns of the tendency to misinterpret the primarily eschatological-Christological work of the Holy Spirit and to treat the work of the Spirit individualistically: "There has been an undeniable and persistent tendency to isolate the work of the Spirit and eschatological realities from each other. This has happened as part of a larger tendency to divorce the present life of the Church from its future. Typically the work of the Spirit has been viewed individualistically as a matter of what God is doing in 'my' life, in the inner life of the believer, without any particular reference or connection to God's eschatological purposes," Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., "'Life-Giving Spirit': Probing the Center of Paul's Pneumatology," *JETS* 41.4 (December 1998): p. 585.

<sup>210</sup> Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 93-4.

<sup>211</sup> See John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

<sup>212</sup> Donald Macleod, *The Spirit of Promise* (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1986), p. 80.

of limitation, we must be careful that we do not operate with either unfounded optimism or unfounded pessimism concerning the phenomena and their fruit.

Yet we are not left without a tool for measurement. God has given us the Old and New Testaments, which provide the only reliable grid for assessing the Spirit's work of applying redemption and building the church of Jesus Christ. Whatever the nature of the phenomena themselves, the perspicuous teaching of Scripture concerning the Spirit's ordinary work is summarized well in WCF 14.1 (cf. WCF 8.8): "The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened." This list expresses the ordinary means of God's saving grace. In celebrating the phenomena there is a danger of ignoring the ordinary means and the responsibility of the worldwide church to trust the Spirit of God's primary use of them.

For instance, *IJFM* editor Brad Gill frankly admits a conscious editorial bias within *IJFM* to attribute reports of events overseas to positive works of the Holy Spirit, even if it earns *IJFM* "a reputation for reckless missiology":<sup>213</sup>

The *IJFM* may seem to venture wildly on the edges of evangelical mission thinking. I'm convinced this venturing is more likely grounded in an *intrepid belief* in God's creative hand in the historical development of unreached peoples. This belief, this expectancy, has oriented the *IJFM* to editorially search, examine and interpret the historic shifts in religious mood among major religious blocs of humanity always with an eye for God's sovereign and surprising hand in it all. The editorial orientation seems always ready, always wanting, to see through the mind of an unreached people or a religious tradition and to discern what God may be doing.<sup>214</sup>

Thus, in IM analysis of the phenomena, the Word-bounded and Christ-centered ministry of the Holy Spirit in conversion can fade behind the compelling accounts of experiences and phenomena, and the Spirit's ordinary and extraordinary works effectively trade theological positions. As Len Bartlotti explains, "Advocates defend insider movements as a unique work of the Holy Spirit in our day. The Spirit is sovereignly using a variety of means to lead Muslims to Christ—from signs, wonders, dreams, and visions, to reference to 'Isa al-Masih' (Jesus Christ) in the

<sup>213</sup> Brad Gill, "IJFM: Born to Be Wild?" *IJFM* 25:1 (Spring 2008), p. 5.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

1        *Qur'an, sometimes complementing, other times in the absence of, outside Christian*  
 2        *witness and teaching.”*<sup>215</sup> The extraordinary is the expected and the ordinary  
 3        (unwittingly) moves effectively to the shadows.<sup>216</sup> At the very least, IM analysis of  
 4        the phenomena risks biblical imbalance.

5  
 6        So what of extraordinary dreams and visions? Their interpretation, and  
 7        interpretation of any phenomena at all, beg for biblical guidance. Whatever they may  
 8        be, visions and dreams ought not to be interpreted carelessly, naively, or stubbornly.  
 9        The phenomena must not be received as evidence that all associated with IM is  
 10        divinely blessed. Field data must rather be interpreted as the Spirit of God would  
 11        have his Church interpret phenomena—according to the Word of God. This appeal  
 12        moves bi-directionally, for those who tend toward skepticism about the phenomena  
 13        must also have their categories shaped by Scripture. J. I. Packer captures a biblical  
 14        balance well:

15  
 16        We are only open to the Spirit’s ministry so far as we are willing, as it  
 17        were, to step into the Bible, to take our stand alongside the men to whom  
 18        God spoke—Abraham listening to God in Ur, Moses listening to God at  
 19        Sinai, the Israelites listening to God’s word from the lips of Moses and  
 20        the prophets, the Jews listening to Jesus, the Romans and Corinthians and  
 21        Timothy listening to Paul, and so on—and, . . . to share joint tutorials  
 22        with them, noting what God said to them and then seeking to see, in the  
 23        light of that, what He would say to us. Such willingness is in most of us  
 24        very limited; we are prejudiced, lazy, and unprepared for the exercise of  
 25        spirit and conscience that it involves. But greater willingness and  
 26        increased receptiveness are themselves the Spirit’s gifts. Therefore we  
 27        must use the prayer, ‘teach me thy statutes’ (Ps. 119:12, and seven times  
 28        more in this Psalm), as a plea, not only for teaching but also for  
 29        teachableness; for without the latter we shall never have the former.<sup>217</sup>

30  
 31        In interpreting field phenomena of any sort, the pressing truths of Scripture  
 32        about the Spirit’s ministry must serve as the inexorable guide, and to that guide we  
 33        must remain thoroughly teachable, employing biblically shaped wisdom and  
 34        avoiding both hesitation and premature judgment. The point here is not that all  
 35        contemporary movements around the world lack real divine imprimatur or are devoid

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<sup>215</sup> Len Bartlotti, “Seeing Inside the Insider Movement,” unpublished paper, June 1, 2012, Missionexus, [http://www.missionexus.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Bartlotti\\_Seeing-Inside-the-Insider-Movement-Exploring-Our-Theological-Lenses-and-Presuppositions\\_2012-0601a-BtD.pdf](http://www.missionexus.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Bartlotti_Seeing-Inside-the-Insider-Movement-Exploring-Our-Theological-Lenses-and-Presuppositions_2012-0601a-BtD.pdf) (accessed January 21, 2013), emphasis added.

<sup>216</sup> This was precisely the concern raised by Carl F. H. Henry against Charles Kraft's doctrine of Scripture thirty years ago. See Henry, "The Cultural Relativizing of Revelation" as discussed above in the section "Charles Kraft and Fuller Seminary."

<sup>217</sup> J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), p. 133.



1 of the work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is to insist that interpretation of the field  
 2 data among people groups around the world must operate according to Scripture's  
 3 self-interpreting boundaries concerning the work of the Spirit of the risen Christ and  
 4 to urge rigorous adherence to Scripture for any and all phenomenological analysis.

5  
 6 The Holy Spirit operates freely and ordinarily by the means he as God has  
 7 graciously given to his people and defined by Scripture itself: the preaching of the  
 8 Word of God, the sacraments and prayer (WSC 88). The spread of the gospel comes  
 9 by the servants God has sent to the four corners of the earth to proclaim his Word  
 10 (WLC 159), and the Spirit ordinarily draws people to Christ through these divinely  
 11 appointed means. "The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching  
 12 of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners"  
 13 (WLC 155). While the Holy Spirit works at times in unusual ways to draw people to  
 14 Jesus Christ and while his ways remain duly mysterious, he never operates in ways  
 15 counter to his revealed Word. To align the Holy Spirit commonly or primarily with  
 16 something other than his revealed *modus operandi*—his ordinary application of  
 17 Christ's *redemptive* work, conviction of sin, and illumining of blind hearts to Christ  
 18 Jesus as Savior and Lord—inevitably leads to faulty missiological analysis.

19  
 20 In summary, the Spirit himself gladly binds himself to his Christ-centered  
 21 and scripturally defined parameters, whereby the redeeming God resurrects sinners  
 22 dead in their sins (Rom. 6:1ff; Eph. 2:1ff). In this very real sense, the ordinary work  
 23 of the Spirit is most extraordinary. The phenomena about which the Spirit is  
 24 primarily concerned are the phenomena accomplished in Christ's comprehensive  
 25 redemptive work. In illumining the darkened hearts of unbelievers, the Spirit creates  
 26 the people of God from the nations of the world; his gloriously ordinary redemptive  
 27 application ministry bears extraordinary implications. Scripture repeatedly warns  
 28 against examining phenomena, even the extraordinary, and quickly assessing the  
 29 miraculous as evidence of divine activity (cf. 2 Thess. 2:9).<sup>218</sup> The Apostle John's  
 30 exhortation to "test the spirits" means assessing them according to the Christ-  
 31 centered Word of God (1 John 4:1-6). The Holy Spirit-given biblical revelation  
 32 exposes the true nature of the phenomena, and compels contemporary analysts to  
 33 assess these phenomena according to the poignant teaching of Scripture about the  
 34 Word of Christ and the Spirit of Christ.

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<sup>218</sup> The point, of course, is not that the reported phenomena are satanic; rather, that not all that claims to be or gives the appearance of divine activity is, in fact, divine activity.

As Scripture declares, the marvels of original creation are surpassed in glory by the work of the Spirit of Christ in the resurrection-empowered accumulating people from the tribes, tongues, and nations of the world before the throne of Jesus, the Lamb of God. This Christ-exalting work of the Holy Spirit brings forth the primacy of the Church, the Body of Jesus Christ its Head: “Whether we like it or not, God has entrusted the means of grace to his church. Therefore, the church is inextricably linked to the believer’s spiritual life from start to finish.”<sup>219</sup> To that biblical doctrine of the church we now turn.

#### 4. The Scripture’s Teaching on the Church

The doctrine of the church stands at the heart of Scripture’s teaching about redemption. The Westminster Standards and the Book of Church Order provide a faithful summary of the Scripture’s teaching on the church. They not only help us to appreciate the place and role of the church in God’s saving purposes, but they also provide us categories and distinctions to articulate what the Bible says about the church.

##### a. Church, Invisible and Visible

The Standards acknowledge the biblical distinction between the “invisible church” and the “visible church” (WCF 25.1, 2; see Rom. 9:6; 2:25-29).<sup>220</sup> In doing so, the Standards do not understand the Scripture to speak of two separate churches. We speak, rather, of an ‘invisible church’ and a ‘visible church’ in order to distinguish the church as seen by God, and the church as seen by individual persons in the finitude of time and space. “The universal visible Church is therefore not a different Church from that which has just been described as invisible. It is the same body, as its successive generations pass in their order and are imperfectly discriminated from the rest of mankind by the eye of man.”<sup>221</sup> Although the memberships of the invisible church and visible church overlap, there is no category for an individual who professes membership in the invisible church but not in the visible church.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>219</sup> William M. Schweitzer, “The Insider Movement: The Answer is ‘No,’ In Reply to Timothy Tennant [sic]: ‘Can Someone Say ‘Yes’ to Jesus and ‘No’ to the Existing Local Expressions of the Church?’” The Aquila Report, January 20, 2013, <http://theaquilareport.com/the-insider-movement-the-answer-is-no-in-reply-to-timothy-tennant/> (accessed January 21, 2013).

<sup>220</sup> The distinction between the visible and invisible church stands apart from the issue of ‘underground’ churches in persecuted areas, which are still part of the visible church as defined in WCF 25.2, WLC 62-3.

<sup>221</sup> A.A. Hodge, *A Commentary on the Confession of Faith* (London: T. Nelson & Sons, Paternoster Row, 1870), p. 312.

<sup>222</sup> Persons who would seek to affiliate with the visible church are not in sin when their circumstances prevent their desire from being realized. See Affirmations and Denials 4-6.

## b. One Visible Church

The visible church is the one, redeemed people of God in every age of redemptive history.<sup>223</sup> As God has a single redemptive purpose to save sinners through the work of his Son, Jesus Christ, so he has had throughout history a single redeemed people (Rom. 11:16b-24; Heb. 3:1-6).<sup>224</sup> Thus, the Confession speaks of “the people of Israel” as “a church under age” (*WCF* 19.3), and declares that, whereas “the visible Church” had been “confined to one nation, as before under the law,” it is presently “catholic or universal under the Gospel” (*WCF* 25.2; cf. *BCO* 2-1).

Furthermore, as Stuart Robinson has noted, “it is set forth as a distinguishing feature of the purpose of redemption, that it is to save not merely myriads of men as *individual men*, but myriads of sinners, as composing a Mediatorial body, of which the Mediator shall be head.”<sup>225</sup> This point is evident when we consider the various covenantal administrations of the one covenant of grace, through which God redeems sinners in every age (*WCF* 7.3).<sup>226</sup> The Noahic Covenant serves to set apart and therefore to preserve the people of God from sinful intermarriage with “the daughters of men” (Gen. 6:4). The Abrahamic Covenant not only administers the promise of an Offspring who would bring blessing to the nations but is accompanied by a sign (circumcision) that both seals this promise to Abraham and to his offspring, and visibly distinguishes them—the people of God—from the world around them (Gen. 12, 17). The Mosaic Covenant in painstaking detail regulates and orders the life of this people as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). The Davidic Covenant looks to a king, David’s own offspring, who will reign forever over the people of God (2 Sam. 7:13), a point confirmed by the “New” Covenant that God announces through his prophets (Jer. 31:31 with Ezek. 34:24-25). The New Testament both continues and confirms this pattern. Under the New Covenant, saved persons were and are to be gathered into a society that is variously termed the people of God, the body of Christ, the household of God, the Temple of God, and the city or

<sup>223</sup> See here the important treatment of Stuart Robinson, *The Church of God as an Essential Element of the Gospel: The Idea, Structure, and Functions Thereof. A Discourse in Four Parts* (1858; reprint, Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2009). Note as well the more recent survey of Morton H. Smith, “The Church and Covenant Theology,” *JETS* 21.1 (March 1978): pp. 47-65. In this article, Smith helpfully contends that “the idea of the Church is found in ... the overall covenant structure [of Scripture] throughout the ages,” p. 47.

<sup>224</sup> For exegetical discussion of these passages, see Guy Prentiss Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: 2011), pp. 2-5.

<sup>225</sup> Robinson, *The Church of God*, p. 34.

<sup>226</sup> The following is a summary of Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church*, pp. 8-10.

commonwealth of God.<sup>227</sup> At every point in redemptive history, then, God gathers the individuals whom he redeems through his Son into a single and distinct people, divinely created and divinely preserved—the church.

The visible church will continue until the return of Christ at the end of the age (Matt. 16:18; 28:20). Thus, to her “Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, *to the end of the world...*” (WCF 25.3). At no point between now and our Lord’s return will the church disappear entirely from the world. Rather, “there shall be always a Church on earth to worship God according to his will” (WCF 25.5), and the visible church “is one and the same in all ages” (BCO 1-2).

### c. The Growth and Extension of the Church

The Spirit of Christ alone conveys life and grants growth to the church (John 6:63). The Spirit is pleased, however, to work through ordinary means (WSC 85; WLC 153-4). The New Testament is neither indifferent to nor silent about those means through which the church grows, means that are tied to the mission of the church. The church’s mission, assigned to her by Christ, is to gather and perfect the saints (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49).<sup>228</sup> Both the Gospels and the Acts highlight the public preaching of the Word of God as the primary means by which the church grows numerically.<sup>229</sup> Preaching is also the means by which the church grows in maturity, as Paul discusses at some length in Eph. 4:11-16 and, more extensively, in the Pastoral Epistles.

Since the idea of preaching has been subject to many definitions, and since individual conceptions of preaching can carry non-biblical or even un-biblical connotations, it is important to sketch a biblical definition of preaching. In content, preaching consists of what Paul calls “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). The center or core of the message preached is the atoning death and life-giving resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-3; Gal. 3:1; 1 Cor. 2:2). Biblical preaching

<sup>227</sup> For elaboration on these and other New Testament images of the church, see E. P. Clowney, “The Biblical Theology of the Church,” in *The Church in the Bible and the World: An International Study*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 13-87.

<sup>228</sup> The terminology is from BCO 1-2.

<sup>229</sup> To be sure, God may and has drawn sinners to Christ through means other than the public proclamation of the Word. The Scripture, however, directs us to the preaching of the Word as the God-appointed means through which people come to faith in Christ. Our rule or standard in this matter is not what may have happened or may be happening in the providence of God, but what God has legislated for his people in the Scripture.

is not the mere declaration of information, but summons its hearers to respond in faith and repentance (Acts 2:38; 16:31; Mark 1:15). The proper hearing of the preached word, therefore, is an active and not a passive enterprise. This preaching is authoritative (Matt. 7:28-29) and, therefore, bold (Acts 9:27-28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; Eph. 6:19-20). The authority of preaching is vested not in the person of the preacher, but in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who preach are called to preach – by the Spirit and through the church (Acts 13:1-3; 1 Tim. 4:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Preachers are therefore styled ambassadors, heralds, and stewards of the mysteries of God (2 Cor. 5:20; 2 Pet. 2:5; 1 Cor. 4:1).

The sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are also “means of grace.” Through them, the promises of the Word of God are signified and sealed to worthy recipients who, through the exercise of faith in those promises, are spiritually strengthened and nurtured. Thus, while “the grace of faith ... is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word,” it is by that same ministry “and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer,” that faith “is increased and strengthened” (*WCF* 14.1).<sup>230</sup>

The New Testament pattern, reflected throughout Acts and the Epistles, is that individuals who respond to the preached Word in faith and repentance gather into distinct, local communities of professing believers and their children. Their life together is ordered by the Word of God, through officers whom they have chosen to serve them. As the *BCO* summarizes the point, “a particular church consists of a number of professing Christians, with their children, associated together for divine worship and godly living, agreeable to the Scriptures, and submitting to the lawful government of Christ’s kingdom” (4-1). Owing to some difficult and extraordinary circumstances, Christians may find that their “lot is cast in destitute regions” (4-4). They ought “to meet regularly for the worship of God” (4-4) and to take all necessary measures to order their life in keeping with the requirements of biblical polity.

#### d. *Notae Ecclesiae*

In company with other Protestant confessions, the Standards predicate certain marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*).<sup>231</sup> These marks assist us in identifying a true

<sup>230</sup> The sacraments must always be administered with sensitivity and care. Those entrusted with their administration should labor to ensure that recipients of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are receiving the sacraments for the right reasons and the right motives.

<sup>231</sup> See here the important discussion of James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1868), 1:54-67. Note especially Bannerman’s dissent from Rome’s insistence upon unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity as defining marks of the church.

1 church, and in distinguishing churches from other societies, even societies of genuine  
2 believers.<sup>232</sup> The Confession defines the “visible Church” as “consist[ing] of all those  
3 throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children” (WCF 25.2).  
4 The single mark identified by the Confession, then, is “possessing the truth.”<sup>233</sup>

5  
6 To identify the visible church in this fashion need not exclude other, defining  
7 marks. The Belgic Confession, for instance, identifies three marks of the visible  
8 church.

9  
10 If the pure doctrine of the Gospel is preached [in the Church]; if it  
11 maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by  
12 Christ; if Church discipline is exercised in punishing sin; in short, if all  
13 things are managed according to the pure Word of God; all things  
14 contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only  
15 Head of the Church. Hereby the true Church may certainly be known,  
16 from which no man has a right to separate himself (Article 29).<sup>234</sup>

17  
18 Upon closer reflection, one may readily harmonize these confessional  
19 statements.<sup>235</sup> Both Westminster and the Belgic Confession identify the church in  
20 terms of the “true religion” (WCF 25.2) or “the pure word of God” (Article 29), and  
21 particularly as that word is purely preached. Implicit in such a mark is the right  
22 administration of the sacraments and of church discipline.<sup>236</sup> Westminster’s  
23 definitional minimalism owes, Bannerman notes, to the fact that “outward  
24 ordinances are not fundamental or essential to a Church ... they are made for the  
25 Church, and not of those for which the Church was made ... the Church was  
26 instituted for the truth, and not the truth for the Church.”<sup>237</sup> Consequently, the “pure  
27 preaching and profession of the word” belongs to the *esse* of the church, “since

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<sup>232</sup> In this respect, then, certain matters such as fellowship, mutual love and concern, and bearing gospel witness to outsiders, while characteristic of any true church, are not defining of it. This is so because these activities and traits are not unique to Christian churches but may be and often are true of other Christian societies.

<sup>233</sup> Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 1:62.

<sup>234</sup> As cited at Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, New ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 573.

<sup>235</sup> Note the diversity of opinion among Reformed theologians regarding the number of the marks of the church, *ibid.*, p. 576.

<sup>236</sup> So Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 1:62; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols. ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992-7), 3:87. Turretin notes particularly how the sacraments and church discipline “flow from the word of God and are appendages of it,” p. 87; and that “other [marks] are not excluded but included,” p. 88. He can say, therefore, commenting on Acts 2:42, “wherever the doctrine of the apostles and the legitimate use of the sacraments and of prayers are, there the true Church of Christ certainly is,” p. 89.

<sup>237</sup> Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, 1:62.

without it the church cannot exist.”<sup>238</sup> The identical kind of necessity, however, may not be predicated on either the administration of the sacraments or the exercise of church discipline.<sup>239</sup> To draw this distinction, however, in no way suggests that the right administration of the sacraments and the biblical exercise of church discipline are thereby optional, dispensable, or matters of indifference to the church. On the contrary, when they are rightly related to the pure preaching of the Word, they may, in this sense, be properly termed “marks” of the church. For this reason, the *BCO* positively identifies as “true branches of the Church of Jesus Christ” as “all of these which maintain the Word and Sacraments in their fundamental integrity” (2-2).

#### e. The Kingdom of God and the Church

The *WCF* identifies the “visible church” with “the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ” (25.2). How may we understand this identity? It is important to recall that the Scripture speaks of God’s reign or dominion in distinct senses. There is what has been termed the “essential kingdom of God.”<sup>240</sup> This phrase denotes the universal reign of God as creator over the works of his hands (Psa. 103:19). This reign concerns human beings as they are creatures, and neither increases nor diminishes. There is also the “mediatorial kingdom of God.” This phrase denotes the reign of the risen and ascended Christ over all things for the sake of his church (Eph. 1:22). This reign particularly concerns human beings as they are sinners, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. This reign is increasing until the day when “the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” (Rev. 11:15).

The Synoptic Gospels contain ample testimony to the centrality of the preaching of the (mediatorial) Kingdom of God to the earthly ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:15; Matt. 4:17,23).<sup>241</sup> The Kingdom of God, Jesus testifies, breaks into history in his person and work (Matt. 11:2-15; cf. Luke 17:21). The Kingdom of God was consummated neither in Jesus’ own day nor in our own (Matt. 13:36-43). Until the Kingdom’s King, Jesus, returns in glory, the Kingdom continues to expand as the

<sup>238</sup> Turretin, *Institutes*, 3:87.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. Berkhof, summarizing this position, states that the sacraments and discipline belong to the well-being (*bene esse*) rather than to the being (*esse*) of the church, *Systematic Theology*, p. 576.

<sup>240</sup> For this distinction, see representatively James Fisher, *the Westminster Assembly’s Shorter Catechism Explained by Way of Question and Answer*, 3d ed. (reprint, Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1925), p. 138.

<sup>241</sup> Note the extraordinarily helpful and brief treatment of Ridderbos, “The Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels,” in *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology*, pp. 9-25.

word of God is preached, and men and women respond to the Sower's Word in the way of faith and repentance (Matt. 13:1-9; 18-23).

At first glance, it is surprising to see the paucity of references to 'Kingdom' outside the Synoptic Gospels, especially in Acts and the Epistles. Some critics have even accused the apostles, and especially the apostle Paul, of departing from Jesus' kingdom message. However, as Herman Ridderbos has famously observed, "Paul does nothing but explain the eschatological reality which in Christ's teachings is called the Kingdom."<sup>242</sup> This point is underscored by the way in which references to "kingdom," especially in Acts, are of a programmatic character, virtually defining of Paul's message and ministry (Acts 14:22; 20:25; 28:23,31). While the term "kingdom" may recede verbally in Acts and the Epistles, that which 'kingdom' denotes in the Synoptic Gospels (the redemptive order inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) remains conceptually dominant throughout the rest of the New Testament. Its dominance is evident not in spite of but precisely because of Paul's ongoing exposition of the redemptive significance of Christ's death and resurrection.

When this conceptual continuity between Jesus' teaching and that of the apostles is taken into account, the relation between "kingdom" and "church" comes into proper focus.<sup>243</sup> Although Jesus only mentions the church (Gk. *ekklēsia*) by name on two occasions in the Gospels (Matt. 16:18, 18:17), those two passages clarify that, by the proclamation of the apostolic word about Jesus, the resurrected Jesus will gather persons into a single people, a distinct society (Matt. 16:18).<sup>244</sup> This people is continuous with "old Israel ... the people of the covenant and of the promises."<sup>245</sup> And yet, the dawning of the Kingdom of God radically transforms this people.

The new thing is that this *ekklēsia* now comes into the light of the Kingdom of God. All earlier qualifications of the *ekklēsia* as the people of the election, of the covenant and of the promises, are sublimated in the Kingdom of God, are "fulfilled" as it says in the New Testament. When the Kingdom comes, the proper and *spiritual* sense of the Church comes

<sup>242</sup> Herman Ridderbos, *When the Time Had Fully Come: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 49. Ridderbos elaborates, "Paul as the witness last called stands behind the facts, notably behind the facts of Christ's death and resurrection. It is these facts that he is to preach and interpret as the culminating point of the Kingdom of God which has appeared in Christ, as the deciding acts in the divine, eschatological drama," p. 49.

<sup>243</sup> On this question, see especially Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom of God and the Church* (1903; reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1979); and Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1962), pp. 334-396.

<sup>244</sup> See the exegesis of this text at Vos, *Teaching*, pp. 77-80.

<sup>245</sup> Ridderbos, "The Kingdom of God," in *When the Time Had Fully Come*, p. 21.



into the light. But in the *extensive* sense, too, the *ekklēsia* acquires in the Kingdom new proportions and new relations. The *ekklēsia* is integrated in the worldwide power of the Kingdom: henceforth it is foregathered from all nations. This is the one great line connecting *basileia* (kingdom) and *ekklēsia*.<sup>246</sup>

Jesus explicitly associates the church (*ekklēsia*) with the kingdom (*basileia*) at Matt. 16:19. Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Weeds at Matt. 13:36-41 conceives the kingdom, in the period between his resurrection and his return, as "an aggregate of men," or "a body of men placed under the Messiah as their ruler."<sup>247</sup> Consequently, without saying that the visible church exhausts all that may be said of the kingdom—a proposition studiously avoided by WCF 25.2—we may nevertheless conclude that the New Testament consistently directs us to the visible church—and to no other—as *the* place where, in this era of redemptive history, we may behold the Kingdom of God. As Vos observes, "the church is a form which the kingdom assumes in result of the new stage upon which the Messiahship of Jesus enters with his death and resurrection."<sup>248</sup> Ridderbos can even speak of the church, so far as human beings are concerned, as "the soteriological goal" of the kingdom.<sup>249</sup> The visible church and the kingdom are distinguishable, to be sure, but they are inseparable. One may not claim membership in the kingdom without also claiming membership in the visible church.

#### **f. Insider Movements, the Kingdom, and the Church**

The topics of the Kingdom of God and of the church do surface in IM discussions. Three IM proponents in particular, Rick Brown, Rebecca Lewis, and Kevin Higgins, have given particular attention to Kingdom and church in their writings.<sup>250</sup> Before addressing what Brown, Lewis, and Higgins have said in these areas, however, a few preliminary, staging observations are in order.

*First*, as Sleeman has noted, it is striking to observe the frequency with which IM proponents appeal to Jesus' parable of the leaven as a "positive metaphor for

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>247</sup> So rightly Vos, *Teaching*, p. 82.

<sup>248</sup> Vos, *Teaching*, p. 86. Compare Ridderbos' similar but fuller statement in *The Coming of the Kingdom*, pp. 354-5.

<sup>249</sup> Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, p. 355.

<sup>250</sup> Doug Coleman has recognized the importance of the latter two individuals with respect to this question, *A Theological Analysis of the Insider Movement Paradigm from Four Perspectives: Theology of Religions, Revelation, Soteriology and Ecclesiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University Press, 2011), pp. 224-245. The discussion that follows was drafted independently of Coleman's treatment of Lewis and Higgins.

insider movements.”<sup>251</sup> This parable (Matt. 13:33) is undoubtedly a positive reference to the Kingdom of God.<sup>252</sup> It denotes the progress of the Kingdom by a “gradual” and unseen “power that permeates everything.”<sup>253</sup> The question must be raised, however, whether IM proponents have aptly employed this metaphor so as to do justice to the way in which the New Testament writers understand the visible church to be the Kingdom of God.<sup>254</sup>

*Second*, IM proponents are reticent in using classical theological terminology and categories to reflect upon the church. Explicit discussions, for example, of such ecclesiological matters as an ordained ministry, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline are rare. IM proponents have insisted that C5 believers do and ought to gather publicly for “prayer, worship, and reading of the Christian Scriptures.”<sup>255</sup> It is not true to say, therefore, that there is no corporate dimension to the church in IM writings. It is fair to observe, however, that a robust exposition of many dimensions of the government, discipline, and worship of the church is a striking lacuna in IM writings.

Some may say that that new believers must work out the structure of government, discipline and worship in their own culturally appropriate way, drawing from the Scripture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To propose any robust exposition on these topics on our part, the argument continues, would result in the imposition of our culturally determined beliefs and practices on these believers. Such a rationale, however, presupposes that these topics are culturally determined rather than biblically legislated. Because the Scripture is concerned to set forth normative principles regulating the church’s government, discipline and worship, it is not a cultural imposition to encourage believers in Muslim countries to order their lives according to these principles.

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<sup>251</sup> Matthew Sleeman, “The Origins, Development and Future of the C5/Insider Movement Debate,” *SFM* 8.4, August 2012, p. 536, citing representatively Stuart Caldwell, “Jesus in Samaria: A Paradigm for Church Planting Among Missions,” *IJFM* 17.1 (Spring 2000): p. 30; Charles Kraft, “Is Christianity a Religion or a Faith?,” in *Appropriate Christianity*, *op. cit.*, p. 92; Rebecca Lewis, “Insider Movements: Honoring God-Given Identity and Community,” *IJMF* 26.1 (Spring 2009): p. 19. To this list we may add John Travis and J. Dudley Woodberry, “When God’s Kingdom Grows Like Yeast: Frequently Asked Questions about Jesus Movements within Muslim Communities,” *Mission Frontiers*, July-August 2010, pp. 24-30; and Kevin Higgins, “Beyond Christianity: Insider Movements and the Place of the Bible and the Body of Christ in New Movements to Jesus,” *Mission Frontiers*, July-August 2010, p. 13.

<sup>252</sup> Sleeman rightly notes that Scripture predominantly employs the metaphor of yeast or leaven negatively, Sleeman, “Origins,” p. 536.

<sup>253</sup> Ridderbos, *Matthew*, Bible Student’s Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 264.

<sup>254</sup> So Sleeman, *op. cit.*, p. 536.

<sup>255</sup> William, “Inside/Outside,” p. 70.

1           *Third*, and at a more basic level, IM writings use the term “church” with  
 2 some infrequency, and prefer to employ such terms as “community” or  
 3 “movement.”<sup>256</sup> The “C” in Travis’ C1-C6 spectrum, for example, stands for “Christ-  
 4 centered community.” While C-1 and C-2 refer to groups that Travis terms  
 5 “churches,” C-3, C-4, C-5, and C-6 groups are not denoted “church” but simply  
 6 “Christ-centered community.”<sup>257</sup> Some prefer to speak of “Jesus movements within  
 7 Muslim Communities.”<sup>258</sup> Rebecca Lewis does speak of C5 communities as  
 8 “churches.”<sup>259</sup> In one recent definition of Insider Movements, however, Lewis sets  
 9 the word “church” in quotation marks, likely to avoid giving the impression that this  
 10 community is a “new parallel social structure” and that its members have severed ties  
 11 with “their socio-religious community.”<sup>260</sup> Finally, while J. S. William does refer to  
 12 C5 communities as “church,” and to the public worship of these communities as  
 13 “doing church,” his concluding and summarizing “set of commitments” refrains from  
 14 using the term.<sup>261</sup> William furthermore clarifies what IM proponents mean when  
 15 “they advocate the formation of ‘churches’—it consists of ‘encourag[ing] believers  
 16 to utilize existing social networks.”<sup>262</sup>

17  
 18           To be sure, the word “church” has in the minds of some non-Christians,  
 19 especially in the Muslim world, non-biblical and anti-biblical connotations. Some IM  
 20 proponents may be motivated by a desire to preclude or forestall the association of  
 21 these connotations with believing communities. While this desire is a laudable one, it  
 22 is important to recognize that the Scripture does use the word “church” of the body  
 23 of believers. Even as we are sensitive to the connotations of biblical terminology  
 24 among contemporary audiences, we must embrace and wisely employ the terms and  
 25 descriptions that God has supplied for his people in the Scripture.

26  
 27           These preliminary observations underscore the need to understand IM  
 28 reflections on the Kingdom and the church on their own terms. Care must be taken,  
 29 then, to avoid importing theological assumptions into IM uses of terminology and

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<sup>256</sup> Two notable exceptions to this trend are Kevin Higgins, “Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective,” *SFM* 5.4, August 2009, pp.74, 76-81; Rick Brown, “The Kingdom of God and the Mission of God: Part 1” *IJFM* 28.1 (Spring 2011): pp. 5-12; and Rick Brown, “The Kingdom of God and the Mission of God: Part 2” *IJFM* 28.2 (Summer 2011): pp. 49-59.

<sup>257</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, “Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 ‘High-Spectrum’ Contextualization,” *IJFM* 23.3 (Fall 2006): p. 101.

<sup>258</sup> Travis and Woodberry, “God’s Kingdom,” p. 1, *et passim*.

<sup>259</sup> Note Lewis, “Promoting Movements,” esp. fn. 1.

<sup>260</sup> Lewis, “Insider Movements,” p. 16.

<sup>261</sup> William, “Inside/Outside,” pp. 87, 70, 88.

<sup>262</sup> William, “Inside/Outside,” p. 83.

concepts. Once such a study is undertaken, we will be in a position to evaluate IM claims biblically and confessionally.

### (1) Rick Brown

Rick Brown, translation consultant for Wycliffe/SIL, has devoted considerable attention to the nature of and relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church.<sup>263</sup> Brown understands the Kingdom to admit of “stages” or “phases of development.”<sup>264</sup> He is clear that these stages belong to a single kingdom, not separate kingdoms altogether.<sup>265</sup> The Kingdom of God, then, runs from its inauguration at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry to its consummation at the return of Jesus at the end of the age.<sup>266</sup>

Brown understands the church to be in very close relationship with the Kingdom of God. He argues that the New Testament term *ekklēsia* denotes “local bodies of citizens of the Kingdom of God” as well as “the body of Kingdom citizens as a whole.”<sup>267</sup> The church, then, is hardly ancillary to the Kingdom of God. In fact, Brown argues, “the Kingdom community is both the result of God’s mission and a means for its blessings and expansion to all peoples of the earth.”<sup>268</sup>

Brown furthermore acknowledges the distinction between the church visible and invisible. He not only references in support such texts as Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43; 25:32; and 1 John 2:19, but favorably cites Calvin and Augustine as faithful exponents of this biblical distinction.<sup>269</sup> For Brown, this distinction entails two points. First, not every member of the visible church is a true member of the invisible church. Second, the invisible church consists of Christ’s “true sheep, whether in a visible fold or not,” that is to say, some of these true sheep may be “unchurched.”<sup>270</sup>

Given these definitions, how does Brown understand the Kingdom of God and the church to relate to one another? To understand Brown’s conception of this relationship, it is necessary to introduce a third category or set of categories

<sup>263</sup> Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 1,” and idem., “The Kingdom of God, Part 2.”

<sup>264</sup> Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 1,” p. 8; “The Kingdom of God, Part 2,” p. 49.

<sup>265</sup> Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 2,” p. 50.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid. Note especially Brown’s Figure 6.

<sup>267</sup> Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 1,” p. 10.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p.11. Note how Brown speaks of “folds” expressly in terms of social groupings; see ibid., p. 10, esp. Figure 1.

that Brown employs, that of “religion.” For Brown, “religion” includes not only non-Christian religions but also specific Christian denominations and Christian religious traditions.<sup>271</sup> What is “religion,” particularly within a Christian context? It is what defines or distinguishes a “Christian denomination” and sets that denomination “in competition with other Christian denominations and non-Christian religions.”<sup>272</sup> Examples of such defining or distinguishing features include “particular theological formulations, form of church polity, professional clergy, religious calendar, rituals, order of worship, denominational associations, style of religious buildings.”<sup>273</sup> These features, Brown urges, may be “useful” for Kingdom purposes, but are neither “ends in themselves” nor “mandate[d] ... for Kingdom communities (ecclesiae).”<sup>274</sup> After all, “Jesus did not found an institutional religion or commission his disciples to propagate one.”<sup>275</sup> What counts are not “religious rites and rituals” but “the Kingdom of God, living ‘in Christ,’ praising God, praying in one’s heart, and meeting together frequently as loving faith communities.”<sup>276</sup>

An added liability to “religion,” especially within Christian contexts, is that it promotes social conflict and struggle with other religions in order to “persuade ... people of other religions ... to convert to one’s own.”<sup>277</sup> The true struggle, according to the New Testament, is the spiritual struggle of the Kingdom of God against the kingdom of Satan. These two struggles differ inasmuch as kingdom struggle does not seek “to promote one religious tradition over all others,” but “to advance the Kingdom of God in all social groups.”<sup>278</sup> In order to achieve this end the apostle Paul “was polite towards Gentiles rather than polemical, drawing them towards the Savior.”<sup>279</sup> Jesus did not “condemn [Gentiles] religious traditions and institutions but revealed to them something far better: the Kingdom of God and the surpassing grace of the King.”<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 2,” p. 54. Examples of groups corresponding to “forms of Christian religion” that Brown offers include Roman Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Pentecostals, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Baptists, “Kingdom of God, Part 1,” p. 11.

<sup>272</sup> Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 2,” p. 54.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

In summary, Brown argues that what is necessary for “spiritual growth is that people (1) belong to the invisible ecclesia of God’s Kingdom and (2) be a part of a local ecclesia of fellow members of the Kingdom.”<sup>281</sup> It is not necessary that they leave “denominations” or “socioreligious groups” in order to affiliate with others.<sup>282</sup> “Kingdom assemblies” need not “identify with a form of Christian religion,” and Christians must allow “God time to develop these faith communities in the way he wants ... bringing them into maturity as Kingdom communities.”<sup>283</sup> One benefit of this approach, Brown argues, is that “the Gospel of the Kingdom” will “spread throughout [the] social networks” of which these Kingdom disciples are already part.<sup>284</sup>

Turning then to consider Brown's formulations: Brown correctly insists upon a single Kingdom of God within the teaching of the New Testament. Brown furthermore helpfully distinguishes the Kingdom of God from the church in such a way that yokes the two together in service of a common divine mission. Brown also grasps the importance of the distinction between the invisible and visible church, even if his particular formulation leaves unclear whether one may claim membership in the invisible church without affiliating with the visible church.<sup>285</sup>

Brown’s employment of the category “religion” particularly presents significant problems for his reflections on the Kingdom and the church. A couple of observations are in order. First, the term “religion” encompasses and unites two diverse entities—Christian denominations and non-Christian religions. To define “religion” in this fashion suggests a degree of parity or equivalency between Christian denominations and non-Christian religions. Brown does not understand the two to be equal in every respect. They are aligned in so far as they stand antithetically related to the “Kingdom of God.”

But is this alignment at all defensible? Brown categorically asserts but nowhere argues that such distinguishing features of Christian denominations as church government and “particular theological formulations” belong to “religion” and therefore stand against the Kingdom of God. But Presbyterians have long advanced biblical arguments for *jure divino* church government as essential to the well-being of the visible church. While Brown’s phrase

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>285</sup> Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 1,” p. 11. See our discussion above in connection with this reference.

1 “particular theological formulations” is an imprecise one, it is worth noting that  
 2 the apostle Paul understood his calling to “declare the whole counsel of God”  
 3 even as he went about “proclaiming the kingdom” (Acts 20:27,25). It is one thing  
 4 to express disagreement with a particular denomination’s understanding of  
 5 theology, polity, or worship. It is another matter entirely for Brown to suggest  
 6 that substantial ecclesiological reflection upon theology, polity, or worship is  
 7 antithetical to the Kingdom of God and therefore subversive of disciples’ maturing  
 8 in the faith. On the contrary, the Scripture’s teaching on these subjects is an  
 9 indispensable part of the biblical doctrine by which Christian disciples mature.

10  
 11 Second, the New Testament does not support Brown’s contention that the  
 12 Kingdom’s advancement does not entail confrontation of false religion. Jesus  
 13 was explicit in telling the Samaritan woman “you worship what you do not  
 14 know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). In  
 15 other words, Samaritan worship was false, and biblical (Old Testament) worship  
 16 was true. To claim that Jesus did not “condemn [Gentiles’] religious traditions  
 17 and institutions” is therefore not true to the biblical record.<sup>286</sup>

18  
 19 The apostles, furthermore, evidence confrontation with other religions as they  
 20 were engaged in the work of proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God.  
 21 Paul could tell the Lystrans that their religious ordinances were “vain things” in  
 22 contrast with a “living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and  
 23 all that is in them” (Acts 14:15). Paul challenged the Athenians’ conception of  
 24 “the divine being [as] gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and  
 25 imagination of man,” and urged them to “repent” (Acts 17:29-30).<sup>287</sup> Paul’s  
 26 ministry in Ephesus was widely and accurately perceived as a threat to the cult of  
 27 Artemis (Acts 19:21f.).<sup>288</sup> Paul’s first epistle to the Thessalonians, widely  
 28 regarded to have been drafted shortly after his evangelistic campaign in  
 29 Thessalonica, speaks of the Thessalonians as having “turned to God from idols to  
 30 serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9), a statement that surely presumes an

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<sup>286</sup> Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 2,” p. 55. One must also take into account the fact that Jesus was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt. 10:5). It was not the primary purpose of his ministry directly to engage Gentile individuals, much less non-Jewish religions. In light of the nature of Jesus’ mission, then, that Jesus did so engage one such individual on this particular question is telling.

<sup>287</sup> *Pace* Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 1,” p. 55.

<sup>288</sup> Brown understands the town clerk’s words in verse 37 (“For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess”) as evidence of Paul’s non-confrontational stance towards Artemis worship, but this is hardly the sole exegetical possibility, see J. A. Alexander, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1857), 2:217. Nor is it even likeliest exegetical possibility, C. K. Barrett, *Acts 15-28*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 2 (New York: T & T Clark, 1998), pp. 936-7, citing Chrysostom *Homily 42.2*.

earlier message of confrontation against pagan idolatry. In short, categorically to deny confrontation as a biblical means of advancing the Kingdom of God runs counter to the New Testament data. This is not to say that this kind of confrontation is required every time the word is preached. It is to say that Jesus and his apostles did not shrink from declaring false religions to be false, in the service of proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom.

## (2) Rebecca Lewis

Rebecca Lewis has defined “insider movements” as “movements to obedient faith in Christ that remain integrated with or inside their natural community.”<sup>289</sup> By “movement” she understands “any situation where the Kingdom of God is growing rapidly without dependence on direct outside involvement.”<sup>290</sup> This concept of “movement” owes much to McGavran’s description of “people movements” who come to Christ in the aggregate rather than individually, often without missionary witness. Thus, such “house churches” formed are “pre-existing social networks turning to Christ rather than artificial aggregate groupings,” and “retain” their “social identity.”<sup>291</sup> These churches “are not institutionalized, and the people in both movements share a new spiritual identity as members of the Kingdom of God and disciples of Jesus Christ,” although “this new spiritual identity is not confused or eclipsed by a new social identity.”<sup>292</sup>

Lewis argues that the “aggregate-church model”—the “gathering together [of] individual believers ... into new ‘communities’ of faith”—“works well in highly individualistic Western cultures (e.g., the US).”<sup>293</sup> This model, however, is ineffective and even counterproductive in “most of the world,” where people “live in cultures that have strong family and community structures.”<sup>294</sup> The model of the New Testament, rather, is the “*oikos* or household-based church, where families and their pre-existing relational networks *become* the church as the gospel spreads in their midst,” and “decisions to follow Christ are often more communal rather than individual.”<sup>295</sup> Thus, “the movement to Christ has ... remained inside the fabric of the society and community.”<sup>296</sup> The goal is to “remain in and transform” those “networks” with “minimal disrupt[ion]” to those

<sup>289</sup> Lewis, “Insider Movements,” p. 16.

<sup>290</sup> Lewis, “Promoting Movements,” p. 76, fn. 1.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 76.



1 networks. Therefore, “these believing families and their relational networks *are*  
 2 valid local expressions of the Body of Christ, fulfilling all the ‘one another’ care  
 3 seen in the book of Acts...”<sup>297</sup> This is the way in which, Lewis urges, that “the  
 4 gospel [will] take its course among the Muslims and Hindus...like yeast in the  
 5 dough.”<sup>298</sup> Our task in missiology, she argues, is to “see what God seems to be  
 6 doing and evaluat[e] that in the light of scripture (copying the apostolic process  
 7 in Acts 15).”<sup>299</sup> Lewis believes that she is describing the way in which the gospel  
 8 spread in the New Testament.<sup>300</sup> As the gospel infiltrated and permeated *oikos*-  
 9 networks in Acts—Lewis cites the examples of Cornelius, Lydia, and Crispus—  
 10 so also the gospel spreads today.<sup>301</sup> “Jesus movements within any culture or  
 11 religious structure, no matter how fallen, will be able to transform it.”<sup>302</sup>  
 12

13 What are we to make of Lewis’ paradigm, particular as it bears on the  
 14 Scripture’s teaching on the church? Lewis is certainly correct to say that the New  
 15 Testament provides normative guidance with respect to principles concerning the  
 16 extension of the church. She is also correct to identify Cornelius, Lydia, and  
 17 Crispus as examples of heads of household, through whom the gospel entered a  
 18 pre-existing social network. One must question her insistence, however, that  
 19 these examples in Acts are meant to supply the kind of biblical norm for which  
 20 Lewis pleads. Acts affords as many, if not more, examples of individuals coming  
 21 to faith in Christ through the public preaching of the word by the apostles (Acts  
 22 2:41; 4:4; 8:13; 8:26; 13:12; 17:14; 17:34). In these instances of conversion,  
 23 there is no indication of the presence, much less the mediating presence, of the  
 24 pre-existing social network that Lewis describes. Even more to the point, Acts  
 25 not infrequently depicts the positively disrupting effects of the gospel within  
 26 certain pre-existing social networks (e.g., Acts 13:42-52; 17:1-9; 17:10-14; 18:1-  
 27 2; 19:9).<sup>303</sup> Although Lewis is quick to dismiss what she terms the “aggregate-  
 28 church model” as ineffective in non-Western settings, and insinuates that it is the  
 29 by-product of Western culture, she does not give adequate consideration to the  
 30 biblical precedents for just such an approach.  
 31

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Dick Brogden, “On Religious Identity: Inside Out—Probing Presuppositions Among Insider Movements,” p. 35, note “o,” quoting Lewis.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 36, note “u,” quoting Lewis.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 33, note “a,” quoting Lewis.

<sup>301</sup> Lewis, “Promoting Movements,” p. 75.

<sup>302</sup> Brogden, “On Religious Identity,” p. 34, note “d,” quoting Lewis.

<sup>303</sup> A state of affairs tellingly overlooked by Rebecca Lewis in her discussion of how “pre-existing communities become church,” “Insider Movements,” p. 17.

Furthermore, Acts insists that those who profess faith are to be gathered into like-minded communities broader than the familial household. Therefore, while the New Testament writers can address certain Christians as belonging to a particular household (1 Cor. 1:16; Philemon 2; Acts 11:14; Acts 16:15; Acts 18:8; Col. 4:15), they can nevertheless identify an entire congregation or even the entire visible church in explicit ‘household’ (*oikos*) terms (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 10:21; 1 Pet. 4:17).<sup>304</sup> Such language hearkens back to Old Testament references to God's entire covenant people as "the house of Israel" (Exod. 16:31 is the first of many examples). Tellingly, while the New Testament arguably may speak of *oikos* at times in terms of what Lewis calls a pre-existing social network, the New Testament is clear that such households do not exhaust the term as that term is applied to the church.

Strikingly, Paul's use of the term *oikos* in 1 Tim. 3:15 surfaces in a discussion of the qualifications of the elder (cf. 3:5). This suggests that, for Paul, the *oikos* here is a unit ordered by a government distinct from that of the household or pre-existing social unit, and imposed by the apostles upon the whole church. The formation of a distinct and apostolic government for this *oikos*, or local congregation, suggests that Lewis's dichotomy between “artificial aggregate groupings” and “pre-existing social networks turning to Christ” is not true to the New Testament data.<sup>305</sup> Why would Timothy be instructed to appoint leaders for a community that already existed?

Furthermore, as Span has noted, Paul use of *oikos* at Eph. 2:19 (with v. 20) defies an understanding of the term strictly in terms of pre-existing social networks.<sup>306</sup> Gentile believers are “no longer strangers and aliens” but “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” To speak of church as a “household” is to speak of the church as founded upon the “apostles and prophets.” Again, Lewis's restrictive definition impoverishes and distorts the fullness of this New Testament term.

A more basic methodological objection may be raised against Lewis's paradigm. Lewis has chosen one biblical metaphor for the church (‘household’), but has failed to consider and to give comparable weight to other New Testament

<sup>304</sup> These passages are drawn from John Span, “Towards a Biblical Theology of ‘Oikos,’” *SFM* 6.1, February 2010, p. 245.

<sup>305</sup> So, rightly, Span, “Oikos,” p. 246.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*

metaphors for the church, including “flock,” “temple,” “bride,” “assembly,” “chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation, a people belonging to God,” “vine,” “saints,” and “field.”<sup>307</sup> In other words, a fuller biblical theology of the church, such as that intimated at WCF 25.2, is necessary to avoid not only a partial but also a skewed portrayal of the New Testament’s teaching about the nature and the extension of the church. From the standpoint of New Testament theology, to privilege the single metaphor of *oikos* to the exclusion of other metaphors, appears arbitrary.

### (3) Kevin Higgins

Another IM proponent who has provided extended reflection upon the church is Kevin Higgins. While approvingly citing Rebecca Lewis’s definition of IM noted above, Higgins offers his own definition.

A growing number of families, individuals, clans, and/or friendship-webs becoming faithful disciples of Jesus within the culture of their people group, including their religious culture. This faithful discipleship will express itself in culturally appropriate communities of believers who will also continue to live within as much of their culture, including the religious life of the culture, as is biblically faithful. The Holy Spirit, through the Word and through His people will also begin to transform His people and their culture, religious life, and worldview.<sup>308</sup>

How do these communities relate to the church? Higgins, following Lewis, argues simply that “pre-existing social structures can become the church.”<sup>309</sup> Higgins proceeds to reflect on the church, especially in light of criticisms that have been raised by IM proponents. He argues, first, that “the Church is made up of believers who have been saved by grace through faith. In one sense it is true to say that no one can join the Church. People are spiritually born into it by God.”<sup>310</sup> Second, the Church’s “primary strategy ... to fulfill its purpose” is “to multiply itself through functions such as those listed in Acts 14:21-28,” including “selecting and training and appointing elders in every church, and connecting with and participating with other churches in the ongoing expression of the

<sup>307</sup> This list has been drawn from the fuller list at *ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>308</sup> Higgins, “Inside What?” p. 75.

<sup>309</sup> Higgins, “Inside What?” p. 76.

<sup>310</sup> Higgins, “Inside What?” p. 77.

Gospel,” although Higgins stresses that “those same biblical functions can take place as an insider movement albeit with altered forms and vocabulary.”<sup>311</sup>

Higgins is also concerned to relate the church to the Kingdom of God. He argues that “the Kingdom of God includes the Church, but is bigger than the Church. The Kingdom refers to the whole range of God’s exercise of His reign and rule in the universe. This includes religions. The Kingdom paradigm acknowledges there is another kingdom as well, and takes seriously the battle for the allegiance and hearts and minds of people.”<sup>312</sup> Higgins understands “God at work in the religious life of mankind” to extend more broadly than the church. But what, for Higgins, does this precisely mean?

It means that “God is drawing people to Himself beyond the confines and boundaries we normally refer to as ‘His people’.”<sup>313</sup> These individuals may even be said to be “in relationship” with God, although Higgins stresses that to say this “does not necessarily imply that such a relationship is a saving relationship.”<sup>314</sup> Higgins sees his model as identifiable with neither exclusivism, inclusivism, nor pluralism.<sup>315</sup> Rather, we must “acknowledge some combination of all three elements,” and recognize that “no template can be applied to every situation in the same way.”<sup>316</sup>

Higgins’s statements about the church proper have commendable elements. He is correct to say that the church has a biblically mandated mission, and to acknowledge that certain details of her government are prescribed in Scripture itself. What is troubling is what goes unstated. Higgins’s definition of the church as “only those born from above and incorporated by the Spirit in his Body” not only neglects the covenantal nature both of the church and of membership in the church,<sup>317</sup> but fails to address both the sacramental dimensions of church membership (baptism) and the governmental dimensions of church membership (e.g., examination by the church’s elders; reception by profession of faith). It addresses, in other words, inward and invisible dimensions of church

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., p. 87. Coleman argues that Higgins’ statements here are “representative of, or at least consistent with” the Kingdom Circles approach of Rebecca Lewis and others, *A Theological Analysis*, p. 35.

<sup>313</sup> Higgins, “Inside What?,” p. 86.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>317</sup> Bill Nikides, “A Response to Kevin Higgins’ ‘Inside What? Church, Culture, Religion and Insider Movements in Biblical Perspective,” *SFM* 5.4, August 2009, p. 97.

membership, but it neglects to address certain outward dimensions of church membership—dimensions that the New Testament does not regard as unimportant or dispensable to a well-ordered church. It is not that Higgins sees no place for government within the church. We have noted above that he does. It is that he is not concerned to relate the functioning of the church’s government to his understanding of church membership.

Higgins’ statements about the Kingdom are troubling as well. Higgins understands the Kingdom to be broader or more extensive than the church. The area of non-overlap is a specifically religious area. This formulation is problematic for at least two reasons. First, Higgins’s definition of the Kingdom raises questions about his understanding of the relation of the church to the Kingdom of God. The precise New Testament relationship between the Kingdom and the church that our Confession articulates (WCF 25:2) and which we have sketched above cannot be sustained by Higgins’ definition. While, for Higgins, the church may be *a* manifestation of the Kingdom, nothing in his definition requires that the church be the single place to which the New Testament directs us to behold the Kingdom of God. Indeed, his definition appears to be crafted specifically to avoid such an implication.

Second and more importantly, Higgins’s understanding of the Kingdom cannot sustain the exclusivity of the Christian religion. To his credit, Higgins’ concluding remarks stress his desire to “reaffirm ... the conclusion that Jesus is the only way of salvation,” and that “the Gospel is unique.”<sup>318</sup> But how may one reconcile that affirmation with his subsequent statement that “If God is active in other religions, then to at least some degree His truth can be found and responded to within the context of those other religions”?<sup>319</sup> Higgins’s formulations concerning Kingdom and church, then, raise profound soteriological questions and have serious missiological implications.

#### **g. Some General Reflections on IM, the Kingdom, and the Church**

Stepping back from Brown’s, Lewis’, and Higgins’ proposals specifically, it is appropriate to offer some reflections and raise six reservations about IM proponents’ statements about the church and the Kingdom more generally.

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<sup>318</sup> Higgins, “Inside What?” p. 88.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

1           *First*, IM proponents offer statements about the Kingdom of God that may be  
 2 read as antithetically relating the Kingdom and the church. J. S. William favorably  
 3 cites John and Anna Travis: “Jesus’ primary concern was the establishment of the  
 4 Kingdom of God, not the founding a new religion.”<sup>320</sup> Rebecca Lewis argues that  
 5 “the new spiritual identity of believing families in insider movements is in being  
 6 followers of Jesus Christ and members of His global kingdom, not necessarily in  
 7 being affiliated with or accepted by the institutional forms of Christianity that are  
 8 associated with traditionally Christian cultures. They retain their temporal identity in  
 9 their natural socio-religious community, while living transformed lives due to their  
 10 faith in Christ.”<sup>321</sup> If the Travises and Lewis intend to exclude the church—its  
 11 government, discipline, and worship—from what they term “a new religion” or  
 12 “institutional forms of Christianity,” it is not evident from these statements.

13  
 14           Some statements by IM proponents about the Kingdom define the Kingdom  
 15 in decidedly, even exclusively, inward and invisible terms. John Ridgway,  
 16 summarizing Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom, declares that “the whole kingdom  
 17 lifestyle seemed independent of any religious structure.”<sup>322</sup> Furthermore, “at the  
 18 heart of the gospel from Genesis to Revelation is God’s desire to reconcile every  
 19 ethnic community...” This would happen, Ridgway continues, “not ... through  
 20 organized religion but through Jesus’ introduction of the Kingdom of God.” Such  
 21 statements rob the Kingdom not only of its biblical ties to the church but conceivably  
 22 to any normative form whatsoever. It effectively, as John Span, summarizing one  
 23 criticism of Ridgway, has observed, “pit[s] the spiritual against [the] physical,” and  
 24 thus constitutes a “problematic...dualism.”<sup>323</sup>

25  
 26           *Second*, a related dichotomy surfaces in some proponents’ discussions about  
 27 the church. In response to the question whether “Jesus-following Muslims [who] do  
 28 not join traditional Christian churches or denominations ... see themselves as part of  
 29 the body of Christ,” Travis and Woodberry reply that “the great majority of Jesus-  
 30 following Muslims view all people who are truly submitted to God through Christ,  
 31 whether Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, as fellow members of the Kingdom of God.  
 32 The presence of the Spirit of God in both born-again Christians and born-again  
 33 Muslims points to realities—the body of Christ and the Kingdom of God—that go

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<sup>320</sup> William, “Inside/Outside,” p. 79, citing Travis and Travis, “Appropriate Approaches in Muslim Contexts,” n.p.

<sup>321</sup> Lewis, “Promoting Movements,” p.76, quoted in Span, “Confusion of Kingdom Circles,” p. 83.

<sup>322</sup> Ridgway, “Insider Movements in the Gospels and Acts,” p. 79.

<sup>323</sup> Span, “Confusion of Kingdom Circles,” p. 85.

beyond socio-religious labels and categories.”<sup>324</sup> The unity for which Travis and Woodberry plead, in other words, is invisible and Spiritual but does not necessarily have ecclesiastical dimensions.

Similarly, in response to a question about the administration of the sacraments among “Jesus movements within Muslim communities,” Travis and Woodberry respond with respect to water baptism that, while “most Jesus-following Muslims” observe water baptism, some “do not yet practice outward water baptism” but “consider themselves to have been baptized spiritually because of their relationship with Christ, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>325</sup> Likewise, with respect to the Lord’s Supper, “it is a common practice, during a meal shared together, to remember the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins....”<sup>326</sup> Both examples are deficient in the same respect—they are alleged instances of the observance of Christian sacraments, but without the specific intention of observing the sacrament, without the elements of water, bread, and wine, without the lawful administration by a Christian minister, outside the context of the public worship of God (cf. *WCF* 27.4, *WLC* 176).<sup>327</sup>

*Third*, this discomfort with church, form, and order evident within IM literature is attended by IM proponents’ privileging of Jesus’ parable of the leaven, noted above. The Kingdom is said to spread secretly and inwardly, through pre-existing social networks, until the totality of the network or culture has been influenced and captured by the gospel. This understanding of the extension of the kingdom is without reference to the public preaching of the Word of God. At times public preaching does occur, but IM paradigms do not give it the primacy warranted by Scripture. This is a startling omission given the way in which Jesus identified preaching as the primary means by which the Kingdom would expand (Mark 4:1-20), a fact confirmed by Jesus’ own ministry (Matt. 4:23), his choosing of twelve disciples to proclaim the Kingdom in his own day to Israel (Matthew 10), and, after his resurrection, to the world (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23). In voicing this concern, we do not deny that the gospel may and does spread through pre-existing social networks. Neither do we deny that IM proponents advocate and promote the dissemination of the Word of God in Muslim contexts. Neither do we

<sup>324</sup> Travis and Woodberry, “When God’s Kingdom Grows Like Yeast,” p. 28.

<sup>325</sup> The authors provide a footnote, “This is the position held by Quakers and the Salvation Army.” This footnote suggests the importance to the authors of citing some sort of precedent for this position. Compare the sympathetic and similar reflections of Brown, “The Kingdom of God, Part 2,” p. 57, p. 59 fn. 26.

<sup>326</sup> Travis and Woodberry, “When God’s Kingdom Grows Like Yeast,” p. 29.

<sup>327</sup> While not all traditions share this confessional language, what we have in mind is the faithful biblical administration of the sacraments.

insist upon a particular style of preaching that owes more to Western convention than to biblical norms. We are saying, rather, that IM proponents have given insufficient attention and place to the New Testament's understanding of the public preaching of the Word.

The ministry of the apostles in the Acts, a ministry that is both centered upon the public and authoritative proclamation of Christ, and that is properly denominated a “kingdom” ministry, as we have argued, corroborates the data from the Gospels. The commands set forth by Paul in the Pastoral Epistles extend the same pattern into the period of time between the passing of the apostolic generation and the return of Christ. God has appointed an ordained ministry to proclaim the Word of God, by which sinners will be converted and saints will be edified. IM proponents’ reading and appropriations of the parable of the leaven reflect a general failure to grasp the broader pattern of Scripture’s teaching about the relationship between Kingdom and Church, and about the extension of the Kingdom through the authoritative proclamation of the Word.

*Fourth*, IM understandings of the church risk stunting the growth and maturity of real believers present in these “Jesus-based communities.” The regular ministry of the Word of God and the administration of the sacraments are “means of grace.” Christ has appointed these means in his church precisely in order to grow and to mature his people by the power of the Holy Spirit. The discipline of the church, furthermore, is intended for the spiritual welfare of the disciplined individual (1 Cor. 5:5). Any understanding of the church that justifies these means’ absence or that militates against their regular and ongoing administration in any appropriate setting can, therefore, only be to the detriment of true Christians in such situations.

*Fifth*, IM understandings of the church place outsiders in a particular quandary with respect to identifying the “Jesus-based communities” in question. On what basis might we recognize these bodies as churches? We have observed above how Reformed confessions and writers alike have pointed to the Word of God, particularly the preached Word of God as the defining mark of the church. It is not simply that these bodies lack officers whose calling it is to open the Word of God to them. It is that the IM understandings of Kingdom and church surveyed above evidence neither the urgency of nor even the necessity of introducing such officers into the church. IM methodology, in other words, does a disservice to these bodies by perpetuating a situation that is not conducive to outside churches’ desires to recognize, assist, and encourage bodies that may in fact prove to be sister churches.



*Sixth*, IM understandings of the church fail to evidence serious interaction with historical Christian reflection on the doctrine of the church and, back of that, the biblical testimony to the church. Most IM proponents are self-identified Protestants and are, therefore, heirs of a Reformational tradition that has devoted considerable attention to the Scripture's teaching on the church. But it is precisely such a tradition that IM proponents have failed to engage. This is not a complaint that IM proponents have failed to embrace and to propagate the fine points of Presbyterian polity. It is to say, rather, that discussions of such basic or fundamental matters as the marks of the church; the invisible and visible church; and the means of grace require considerably more attention than IM proponents have generally afforded in their writings. This is not to say, furthermore, that IM proponents are operating with no understanding of the church. They have, we have seen, definite understandings of the Kingdom, of the church in relation to the Kingdom, and of the progress and growth of the Kingdom. These understandings, however, require to a considerable degree more exegetical and theological articulation and exposition than they have thus far been afforded.

## 2. Covenant Identity

### a. Employing a Biblical Paradigm

Though the doctrine of the church is unsuitably muted within IM, discussions of *identity* feature prominently in IM writings. One's identity is a matter, in fact, which IM advocates and critics alike deem as a core feature of the debate.<sup>328</sup> Tim Green admits of the complexities involved:

Making sense of "identity" can be difficult. This is partly because different academic disciplines define identity in different ways. Psychologists focus on the private self-awareness of individuals, while anthropologists and some sociologists view identity as a collective label marking out different groups. Social psychologists describe "identity negotiation" between individuals and groups. So there is no universally agreed definition, and that is before taking theological perspectives into account!"<sup>329</sup>

<sup>328</sup> See, for example, the entire issue of *IJFM* 27.1 (January-March 2010); Tim Green, "Identity Issues for Ex-Muslim Christians, with Particular Reference to Marriage," *SFM* 8.4, August 2012, pp. 435-481; Henry J. Wolfe, "Insider Movements: An Assessment of the Viability of Retaining Socio-Religious Insider Identity in High-Religious Contexts" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011); Dutch, "Should Muslims Become 'Christians'?"

<sup>329</sup> Green, "Identity Issues," p. 438.

As seen earlier, Rebecca Lewis' definition of Insider Movements specifies that Insiders “remain inside their socioreligious communities, retaining their identity as members of that community while living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible.”<sup>330</sup> In order to analyze this definition for internal coherence, one must consider how identity relates to the Lordship of Christ and the authority of the Bible. First then, one needs a theology of “identity.” This proves no mean task, since the term “identity” appears not in the Bible, but in psychology and sociology texts which may not operate under biblically based presuppositions about the nature of man and his relation to self, the rest of creation, and Creator.

Even in the secular arena, no standard definition of “identity” reigns. In the words of Stanford University political scientist James Fearon, “Our present idea of ‘identity’ is a fairly recent social construct, and a rather complicated one at that. Even though everyone knows how to use the word properly in everyday discourse, it proves quite difficult to give a short and adequate summary statement that captures the range of its present meanings.”<sup>331</sup> Fearon traced current usage of the term “identity” to mid-Twentieth twentieth century psychologist Erik Erikson<sup>332</sup> and gave a variety of sample definitions from the literature, e.g., “people's concepts of who they are, of what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others.”<sup>333</sup> Such a definition, which leaves each person's identity strictly in his own hands to define, cannot be accepted uncritically by Christians. An alternative such as, “a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject”<sup>334</sup> at least admits the possibility for God to be one of the “relations engaging a subject,” and even the central such relation. But even then, one wonders what unbidden, unbiblical presumptions lie buried in the technical jargon. “[P]roblems accruing to the use of secular learning in Kingdom service are not easily resolved.”<sup>335</sup> From reading missiological works, including those in IM, however, it does appear that vast array of cultural anthropological assumptions for identity dominates the landscape.

In addition to the varied ideas associated with the term “identity,” an almost entirely neglected clarification is the distinction between *identity* and *sense of*

<sup>330</sup> Lewis, “Promoting Movements,” p. 75.

<sup>331</sup> James D. Fearon, “What is Identity (As We Now Use the Word)?” Unpublished paper, November 3, 1999, p. 2, <http://www.stanford.edu/~jfearon/papers/iden1v2.pdf> (accessed January 5, 2013).

<sup>332</sup> E.g., Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968).

<sup>333</sup> Fearon, “What is Identity,” p. 4, citing Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London: Routledge, 1988), page unknown.

<sup>334</sup> Fearon, “What is Identity,” p. 5, citing James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), page unknown.

<sup>335</sup> Hesselgrave, *op. cit.*, p. 582.

identity. So frequently presupposed are the cultural anthropological and sociological categories, the critical distinction between a person or group's *perception* and that which is true remains entirely neglected. Just like an adopted child may never personally know his/her genetic history, the lack of knowledge does not change the *fact* of that genetic history. Similarly, cultural and personal perceptions suffer human limitations, but divinely disclosed revelation (in Scripture) which explains individuals and societies, remains true—whether or not people believe it. Yet, the divine revelation concerning human identity can even unwittingly get relegated to tertiary status because of the sociological assumptions given a particular term like identity in contemporary thought. Furthermore, submission to biblical revelation actually requires that perception of one's identity yield wholly to the biblical concepts that govern it. Scripturally speaking, it is man's creation as the image of God (*imago Dei*) and man's *covenantal* relationship with God that properly shape identity.

The early Church considered Gen. 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" and concluded that "the human self was a mystery that could not be unlocked."<sup>336</sup> Even Augustine who famously made an analogy between the Trinity and the human mind's remembering, understanding, and willing (*De Trinitate*) confessed, "I find my own self hard to grasp."<sup>337</sup> John Calvin centered his understanding of true humanity in the human *par excellence*. In other words, proper understanding of the *imago Dei* comes only through what Scripture reveals about it and its renewal through Jesus Christ.<sup>338</sup>

Furthermore, while Western philosophy moved in the direction of defining what individual personhood meant, no such equivalent can be found in the biblical record.<sup>339</sup> In many ways reacting against the intolerable individualism of twentieth century rationalism, postmodern theology locates the self in "one's social group."<sup>340</sup> Yet even with the evangelical formally laudable move toward community, such paradigms such as those espoused by Grenz in which "the *imago dei* moves the focus

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<sup>336</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, "Biblical Humanism: The Patristic Convictions" *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, ed. Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 17

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>338</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.15.4.

<sup>339</sup> Michael S. Horton, "Image and Office: Human Personhood and the Covenant" *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

<sup>340</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Theology of the *Imago Dei* in the Postmodern Context" *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

from noun to verb,”<sup>341</sup> the notion of identity often suffers from cultural presuppositions rather than biblical ones. In the biblical world, however, identity came not through individual belief or action, nor did it come through one’s social context. Self-understanding came through what Michael Horton terms, “a biblical-theological effort to resuscitate selfhood (damaged by the fall) in the lived experience of the covenant and eschatology.”<sup>342</sup> In other words, it was our locating ourselves within the covenantal story that furnished us with religious and personal (though the two were not differentiated) self and corporate identity. In short, a proper grasp of identity in all of its contours must come from divine revelation, the covenantal revelation of God in Scripture.

At the core of the Bible’s thinking about human identity is God’s creative act in making men and women like unto himself. “Fundamental to Genesis and the entirety of Scripture is the creation of humanity in the image of God.”<sup>343</sup> He formed us out of created matter, just as he did the rest of the universe (Gen. 2:7). He then placed us in the Garden, emblematic of God’s temple or heavenly abode. In other words, he made us so that we would reside with God as children and stewards of creation (2:15), not as his equals but as loved recipients of his favor, enjoying all he had for them (2:9). As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, existing in perpetual self-giving love, God made man (Heb. “Adam”) in God’s image as a relational being, first in terms of his relationship to God. God created one human first, so that the initial relationship for human beings was one between God and human and then subsequently, God created “a helper fit for him” (2:18). The significance of this order cannot be overestimated. The first human relationship was with God, not other human beings. Therefore, our relationship to God primarily defines us, not our relationships to other humans. This, of course, is not to say that human relationship is insignificant but that it is derivative of the divine/human relationship.

In addition to the biblical and theological significance of the *imago Dei*, Scripture uniformly defines the worldwide human context as *covenantal*. In fact, the covenant serves as the core biblical paradigm for understanding mankind’s relationship with God. So central is this covenantal context that Scripture itself not only reveals the prominence of the covenant, but does so *as* a covenant document: “The documents which combine to form the Bible are in their very nature . . . covenantal. In short, the Bible *is* the old and new covenants.”<sup>344</sup> The Creator has not

<sup>341</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 2001), p. 162.

<sup>342</sup> Horton, “Image,” p. 179.

<sup>343</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 65.

<sup>344</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), p. 75.

only established the human context as *covenantal*, he has communicated with those in his image *covenantally*.

Recognizing this categorical and interpretive feature of Scripture, WCF 7.1 lays the covenantal foundation explicitly: “The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures [those made in God’s image] do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.” The vast gap between Creator and creature finds remedy in the covenantal condescension of God to relate to those made in his image. In view of the relational, religious, and social implications wrapped up in the biblical notion of covenant, it is here that we must begin to think about humans in relationship.

Because of the inescapable religious contours of the covenant and that Scripture exposes mankind as living *coram Deo* (before the face of God), covenantal accountability of man before God shapes the way in which to understand properly all peoples and all cultures of all ages. It is to this covenantal accountability we now turn, with an eye to discerning a covenant identity paradigm (CIP) that must serve to shape all other analyses of human and social identity—both *actual* and *perceived*. In the early argumentation of the great Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul exposes the comprehensive implications of the covenant.

## **b. True and False Religion**

Romans 1:18-3:20 grounds Paul’s argument for the necessity of Christ’s redemptive work for all peoples—Jews and Gentiles. His focus is the pervasive character of disobedience and corruption. Sin is neither a Jewish problem nor a Gentile problem; it is an Adamic problem and therefore a *human* problem (Rom. 5:12). “Paul shows that the whole world is deserving of eternal death. It hence follows, that life is to be recovered in some other way, since we are all lost in ourselves.”<sup>345</sup>

As descendants of Adam and active participants in his and our own disobedience, we have all fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). We are guilty, corrupt, and alienated from God. As sinners, we also willfully, actively, and

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<sup>345</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul, the Apostle, to the Romans*, (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 68.

1 persistently seek to suppress the voice of God, whom we personally and passionately  
 2 resist. “We *all*, born as we are into our sinful state and continuing in that state by  
 3 virtue of our wickedness, nevertheless *know God*,”<sup>346</sup> albeit with knowledge willfully  
 4 distorted by our hearts and minds. It is this knowledge, covenantally qualified by  
 5 God’s condescending kindness to fellowship with those made in his image in vital  
 6 covenantal communion (*WCF* 7), which defines human relationship to the creator  
 7 God.

8  
 9 Though fallen humanity has autonomously erected religious systems, “no  
 10 religion is genuine unless it be joined with truth.”<sup>347</sup> Echoing Paul, Calvin, in  
 11 describing the universal “*semen religionis* (seed of religion)” or “*sensus divinitatis*  
 12 (sense of divinity),” uniformly condemns false religion as idolatrous: “Since,  
 13 therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and the he is their Maker, they  
 14 are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honor him and to  
 15 consecrate their lives to his will.”<sup>348</sup> Substitute deities and substitute religious  
 16 practices supplant the truth, and indeed the idolaters who practice these false  
 17 religions do so to their own condemnation. “He who is not for me is against me,”  
 18 claims Jesus (Matt. 12:30).

19  
 20 The fall of human beings with Adam, the first covenant head, resulted in a  
 21 sin-perversion that created worshipful counterfeits. Nowhere does that fallenness  
 22 manifest itself more profoundly than in the substitutes we create for God and our  
 23 devotion to him. In the first place, mankind substituted faith in one holy God, ever  
 24 transcendent but ever immanent in the revealed Son and Holy Spirit, for following  
 25 after of the gods of the nations. Tantamount in this grasping for false gods was the  
 26 supreme enterprise of unbelief, the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). Adam and Eve had  
 27 been ejected from the Garden temple of the Lord God through our usurpation of the  
 28 divine prerogative. In Genesis 11, the peoples repeated the same sin in collaborating  
 29 with other fallen humans to achieve proximity with God. But, the result was the  
 30 same. Entry into the presence of God was barred to those who presumed to do what  
 31 only God was entitled to do. “He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of  
 32 Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the  
 33 way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24). In other words, human attempts at relationship  
 34 with God would forever be met with failure. Every attempt at human religion would

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<sup>346</sup> K. Scott Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith: Philosophy in the Service of Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), p. 133.

<sup>347</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.4.

<sup>348</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.3.1.

ultimately and forever only resemble its craftsmen, human beings. The end of this would always be death, chaos, and the dissatisfaction of the counterfeit.

Galatians 4 describes *any* other religion than that of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ as “elemental principles” (NEV) or “elemental things” (NASB)—*ta stoicheia* (cf. Heb. 5:12; Col. 2:8, 20),<sup>349</sup> demonically prompted vain religious or philosophical means for seeking self-redemption,<sup>350</sup> the folly of which revealed their utterly helpless condition. In whatever way we precisely define *ta stoicheia*,<sup>351</sup> Paul places Gentile religions and the corrupted version of Jewish religion—typified by a rejection of Judaism’s Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, under one rubric: “in slavery to powers utterly beyond their control.”<sup>352</sup>

With a sweeping assessment of history and penetrating look at the spiritual antithesis that characterizes sinful man and the righteous Creator, the apostle Paul insists all forms of impure religion to be false, and in overt defiance of the Son of

<sup>349</sup> This paragraph’s treatment of *ta stoicheia* summarizes David B. Garner, “Adoption in Christ” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2002), pp. 97-99.

<sup>350</sup> The meaning of *ta stoicheia* must be contextually determined, as its semantic range is vast. Depending on its context, it can reference either divine revelation (Holy Spirit) or false teaching (including the subterranean influence of evil spirits). The specific meaning of *ta stoicheia* has received extensive treatment, and involves considerable debate. See, e.g., Josef Blinzler, “Lexikalisches zu dem Terminus ‘Ta Stoicheia Tou Kosmou’ bei Paulus,” in *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholicus 1961*, 2 vols., *Analecta Biblica* 17-18 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), pp. 429-43; Clinton E. Arnold, “Returning to the Domain of the Powers: ‘Stoicheia’ as Evil Spirits in Galatians 4:3, 9,” *NovT* 38 (1996): pp. 55-76; Thomas H. Olbricht, “The Stoicheia and the Rhetoric of Colossians: Then and Now,” in *Rhetoric, Scripture and Theology: Essays from the 1994 Pretoria Conference*, JSNTSup 121, ed. S. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), pp. 308-28; David R. Bundrick, “Ta Stoicheia Tou Kosmou (Gal 4: 3),” *JETS* 34 (1991): pp. 353-64; Eduard Schweizer, “Slaves of the Elements and Worshipers of Angels: Gal 4:3, 9 and Col 2:8, 18, 20,” *JBL* 107 (1988): pp. 455-68; Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, trans. Henry Zylstra, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 153, fn. 5; Alan R. Cole, *Galatians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 159-60; J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes, and Dissertations* (London: MacMillan, 1902), p. 167; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. 165-66; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Rev. ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 442-43.

<sup>351</sup> James Scott points out that the ‘stoicheia’ are here identified with both the Torah and with non-deities of the pagan Gentiles. “In effect, therefore, Paul classes Judaism with polytheism as enslavement under the stoicheia!” James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of YIOUTHESIA in the Pauline Corpus* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992), p. 158. George Howard agrees with this conclusion, contending “that Paul looked upon that version of Christianity propagated by the judaizers as synonymous with paganism since it made Yahweh into the national God of Israel only,” *Paul: Crisis in Galatia: A Study in Early Christian Theology*, SNTSMS 35, 2nd ed., ed. G. N. Stanton (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1990), p. 66. Further, just as Paul groups Jews and Gentiles under ‘ta stoicheia’ (4:3), so also he views both groups as ‘hypo nomon’ (4:5). The unity of Jew and Gentile in the reception of ‘huiiothesia’ indicates contextually that both peoples were under the curse of the law. Furthermore, “Paul teaches elsewhere that the law condemns both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Rom. 3:9-20) and thus confines them (Gal. 3:23),” Scott, *YIOUTHESIA*, p. 173.

<sup>352</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Galatians*, NCB (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1969), p. 118.

God.<sup>353</sup> Prominent in Paul's developing thought in Romans, as in Galatians 3-4, is the redemptive-historical (epochal) transition wrought by the arrival and work of Jesus Christ (Gal. 4:1-6; cf. Rom. 3:21-26). The former epoch is characterized by curse and bondage, but the cosmically significant work of Christ inaugurates the new age of the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:15-17).<sup>354</sup>

The New Testament contends both for the authoritative revelation of God in the Old Covenant (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21) and the completing, teleological superiority ("the better word," Heb. 12:24) of the New Covenant revelation in Christ (cf. Heb. 1:1-2:9; 3:1-6; 12). In contrast to the notion of abrogation in Islam, in the Christian Scriptures, there is a *redemptive-historical* abrogation with *theological* fulfillment. On the stage of redemptive history, God delivers promise then fulfillment; while the type/shadow comes to an end in history, the theological significance of the type comes to eschatological fulfillment and never a contradictory reversal. Thus, the New Testament authors also proclaim the fulfillment of the Old Testament in the New, warning against any evil distortion of Old Covenant revelation which would deny its Christocentricity (John 5:39-47) and its eschatological realization in Jesus Christ (Gal. 1-3; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:19-22).

Judaism that denies New Testament fulfillment is a rejection of Jesus Christ *and* of the entire Old Testament revelation.<sup>355</sup> The Christian faith is the Abrahamic faith realized (Gal. 3:8-29; cf. Luke 24:13-52). Judaism without the gospel of grace in Jesus Christ in *any age* (Rom. 1:1-2; Gal. 3:8; cf. John 5:39-47) is *false* Judaism. This fact, however, underscores the *uniqueness* of the Jewish faith. The religious and worship regulations of Israel under the Old Covenant *come from divine revelation*, not ethno-centric evolution and adaptation. This is not to say that the Israelites did not adapt, and even at points corrupt, the revealed religion (Jesus and Paul are explicit about that problem). Rather it is to say that the religion, as revealed, was a divine gift and mandate that served as the theological and anticipatory context for the coming of the gospel in Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 3:7-29). The faith and practice of the

<sup>353</sup> Church history attests to regular response to aberrant teaching and heresy. Maintaining the pure gospel requires tireless attention of the church and its leaders (cf. Acts 20; 2 Pet. 2; Galatians 1-2), and depends on functional dependence upon biblical revelation. The confessional history of the church delivers a powerful attestation to the clarity of Scripture and the relevance of it in addressing untruth.

<sup>354</sup> "When Paul says that Christ appeared in the fullness of the time he implies that the great midpoint of history has arrived, that Old Testament prophecy has now come to fulfillment." Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 17.

<sup>355</sup> This non-Christian Judaism overlooks the heart and object of the covenant. The result is either a substitution of Moses for Christ, or, with Rabbinic/Reformed Judaism, the ascent of both rationalism and mysticism. To be covenantal is to have the covenantal source, covenantal route, covenantal destination, and covenantal empowerment. Biblical revelation proceeds to the fulfillment of the Old Covenantal promises in the New Covenant Christ.



Jews, insofar as they reflected biblical revelation, were the theological and historical grounds for New Testament faith in Jesus Christ. The Jewish faith then is not culturally parallel to its Gentile counterparts, but wholly unique historically and theologically.<sup>356</sup>

Living now in the age of the Spirit, revelation has come to its completion in work of Jesus Christ, the “guarantor of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22). What the Old Covenant believer anticipated and possessed in his proleptic participation in the work of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit, the New Covenant believer participates in by the Spirit’s application of the exalted Jesus’ work retrospectively.<sup>357</sup> Biblical revelation presents Jesus Christ as the Savior of his people of *all ages* (Heb. 9:26-28; 10:14; 11:39-40).

Since Gen. 3:15, the world has received redemptive truth, and it is *revealed* truth—gospel truth that centers on Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 24:13-52; 1 Pet. 1:10-12). Anything other than this revealed truth for redemption is false, deceptive, and damning. Scripture consistently bears out the uniqueness, exclusivity, and redemptive efficacy of God’s redemptive work on *our* behalf. Antithesis between belief in the pure, revealed gospel of grace and belief in any form of false religion—including unfulfilled, Christ-less Judaism<sup>358</sup>—stands out starkly.

In fact, it is the false monotheistic religions whose formulations ostensibly parallel biblical revelation that typify the most prominent delusion. All forms of monotheism that are not Christian monotheism (Trinitarianism) are false theisms. Formal similarity masks paradigmatic incompatibility, and false religion is persuasive precisely because of its illusive compatibility with true revelation. Despite any seeming sympathy toward biblical revelation, the advocates of imposter faiths move defiantly against the God whose voice they suppress and whose will they resist. Such defiance is at its core rebellion against the Son of God, the essence of which condemns the unbeliever.

<sup>356</sup> See David B. Garner, “High Stakes: Insider Movement Hermeneutics and the Gospel,” *Themelios* 37.2 (July 2012): pp. 257-67.

<sup>357</sup> “Taken as a whole the New Testament seems to indicate one fundamental difference between old and new covenant believers. That is the Spirit-worked *union* New Testament believers have with the *exalted* Christ, the life-giving Spirit, the Christ who is what he is, because he has suffered and entered into his glory. The covenantal communion with God enjoyed by Abraham and the other old covenant faithful was an anticipatory and provisional fellowship; it lacked the finality and eschatological permanence of our union with (the glorified) Christ, which is the ground and medium of our experiencing all the other blessings of redemption.” Richard B. Gaffin, “The Holy Spirit,” *WTJ* 43:1 (Fall 1980): pp. 71-72.

The religion of Islam therefore is false because it did not come from God's special revelation. It denies Jesus Christ as he is revealed in biblical revelation. Islam, in a certain sense, benefits from God's general revelation as well as from what it inherited (or absorbed) from Jewish and Christian traditions to which Muhammad was exposed. However, the theological corruption which suppressed the divine revelation belies the historical connections. The cumulative effect of Islam is to move people away from a genuine relationship with God, because its monotheistic formulations are not those of biblical Trinitarianism, but those of a false religion whose monotheism eclipses and suppresses the truth rather than comporting to it. "Mohammed's mission, whatever else it may have been or done, was a blindfolding of Jesus, an eclipse of the Sun of Righteousness by the moon of Mecca."<sup>359</sup> The Islamic edifice is a prominent manifestation of truth suppression, something which the Apostle Paul broadly considers in Romans 1.

### c. God, Covenantal Suppression and Idolatry

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Rom. 1:18-23)

Exposing the idolatry associated with such truth suppression, Romans 1 explicitly describes the nature of God's clear revelation in creation, the characteristics of unbelief in response to that perspicuous and authoritative self-disclosure, and the moral and intellectual antithesis that exists between the redeemed and non-redeemed. According to biblical categories, one's response to God (including those matters of worship and religion) manifests one's ultimate commitments. Paul's analysis of unbelief in Romans 1 prepares him to present the gospel of Jesus Christ, which alone addresses all forms of unbelief and redemptively untangles the binding cords of false religion that ensnare the heart. Redemptive

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<sup>359</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Glory of the Cross* (London and Edinburgh: Marshal, Morgan & Scott, Ltd., 1938, 41).

release in the gospel of Jesus Christ is cosmic, spiritual, categorical, transformative, and permanent.

#### d. Revelation and Suppression

##### (1) Clarity

Several features stand out in the Pauline analysis of human sinfulness before God. First, this revelation in creation—general revelation, as it is called—is plainly revealed (Rom. 1:19) and clearly perceived (Rom. 1:20). Speaker and hearer communicate with one another *in an understanding way*. This divine self-revelation is not abstract or even passive, but rather occurs because “God has shown it to them” (Rom. 1:19b; cf. Psa. 19:1-6). Revelation comes *personally*, as God himself is the personal agent who personally reveals himself in what he has made. Thus, revelation delivers substance, real content. In other words, what the recipient of revelation possesses is real knowledge of the one true God; by virtue of his self-disclosure, all men know “all the divine perfections.”<sup>360</sup> Grasping the “god-ness” of God comes not by discursive process; rather this understanding is “given to us, revealed to and in us, implanted in us, by the creative power and providence of almighty God the Creator.”<sup>361</sup>

In other words, what is known personally of God is his holy, mighty, just, and awesome nature. Such knowledge is embedded in us, so that to have consciousness is to have knowledge of the true God. Such knowledge delivers no redemptive understanding or benefit, and for this reason, the special redemptive revelation of Scripture serves as the only means of seeing God as Redeemer and Savior. Creation exposes mankind to God as Righteous Judge; biblical revelation exposes mankind to this same God as Righteous Redeemer (cf. Rom. 3:21-26).

To be clear, Paul makes here no allotment for generic theism or a mere abstract sense of God; the *sensus divinitatus* makes all cognitive activity occur with a prevailing awareness of the one true God. Man simply cannot think without reckoning with the One who created him and granted him cognitive function. Human thought is therefore necessarily a *religious, covenantal* act. While Descartes issued the oft-repeated, “I think; therefore I am,” the Scripture insists something personal and covenantal about our self-consciousness: “I think,

<sup>360</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 37. Scott Oliphint suggests that Hodge follows Calvin here. See Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith*, p.134 fn. 27.

<sup>361</sup> Oliphint, *Reasons for Faith*, p. 134, pp. 131-140; cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.3.3.

therefore I know the ‘I am’ (the covenant God of Scripture)” or “I think, therefore I know God.” Even the unbeliever knows the personal God personally, but not savingly. The unregenerate soul not only knows *about* the Creator, but rather consciously and clearly faces the Creator’s personal, covenantal communication. Even the unbeliever’s “knowledge is not only a knowledge about God, but a knowledge of God himself (Rom. 1:21).”<sup>362</sup> In the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2, the creation of mankind in God’s image is the creation of man as son of God (cf. Luke 3:38). The *imago Dei* and sonship are mutually explanatory concepts, framing the covenant relationship between man and God as familial.<sup>363</sup> Clear covenantal obligations roar within human consciousness because of the *imago Dei*. Mankind can no more avoid that covenantal context than a person can deny genetic identity, reneging his biological connections with his father and his mother.

As a means to express its personal immediacy, Paul frames divine communication to mankind in terms of Speaker and listener; the Speaker speaks clearly and the listener understands general revelation clearly. Paul can therefore insist with absolute epistemic certainty the clear, covenantal consciousness of all humanity, because “human life, even in deepest depravity, *does not stand out of connection with the revelation of God.*”<sup>364</sup>

## (2) Accountability

Second, on the basis of this certainty Paul speaks to the scope of accountability. The revelation and the understanding of that revelation have occurred since the beginning of time (Rom. 1:20b). Accountability extends to all people of all places, because the personal revelation of the Triune God of heaven occurs through the creation itself. In other words, the revealed knowledge is not an added component to be imported to creation, but rather is embedded in the creation itself.

Mankind dwells in covenantal relationship with the Creator. In other words, every human is in covenant with God—as either covenant keeper or covenant breaker. As descendants of Adam, all (before saving grace takes ahold) are covenant breakers, making the covenant relationship one of curse rather than

<sup>362</sup> Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p. 50.

<sup>363</sup> See Part One – Like Father, Like Son.

<sup>364</sup> Berkouwer, “General and Special Divine Revelation,” p. 16.

1 blessing. Such culpability before the covenant-making God is conscious to all, as  
 2 God's personal engagement in this disclosure efficaciously delivers immediate  
 3 accountability. The personal self-disclosure of God ("his eternal power and  
 4 divine nature"; Rom. 1:20) flows unremittingly because the living God has made  
 5 all things, including man himself, in such a way that proclaims God.

6  
 7 According to Scripture, this covenant relationship with the Creator God is  
 8 actual, historical, theological, and comprehensively critical. Covenantal  
 9 participation is not culturally or ethnically restrictive, as no human culture or  
 10 person is understood properly apart from this primary covenantal character of  
 11 human identity. Thus, valid contextual analysis begins with this comprehensively  
 12 determinative biblical paradigm—that of mankind in covenant with the Creator.

13  
 14 This paradigm, what we will call the Covenant Identity Paradigm (CIP), lays  
 15 out two parallel yet mutually exclusive options (Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 15):  
 16 Adam is the head of all unbelieving humanity, whereas Jesus Christ is the head  
 17 of his church—those who trust in him by faith (cf. Ephesians 1-2). Everyone is  
 18 defined by one of these two heads. One's covenant relationship, or more  
 19 particularly the specific covenant head to which he/she is connected, establishes  
 20 the inclusive biblical framework for identity. It is in view of this covenantal  
 21 relationship and the inescapable knowledge of the one true God—possessed by  
 22 every man, woman, and child—that Paul builds his case for comprehensive  
 23 accountability.

24  
 25 Rather than claiming an esoteric or abstract identity, Paul describes human  
 26 accountability with a view to the moral law itself. To be in God's image is to  
 27 dwell in unavoidable awareness of one's covenantal, moral obligation to God  
 28 (WCF 7). Even those who did not receive the Law of Moses face the "work of  
 29 the law" is on their hearts (Rom. 2:14-16). The righteous demands of God are  
 30 components of the *imago Dei*, making man's moral fiber coextensive with his  
 31 humanity. In other words, we cannot speak of man in a biblical sense apart from  
 32 this engrained moral and personal accountability. To be a descendant of Adam is  
 33 to be morally and spiritually accountable to the covenant of God and to the God  
 34 of the covenant.

### 35 36 **(3) Wrath Revealed**

37 Third, and most significantly, is the place of the wrath of God against the  
 38 revelation suppressors/idolaters. Seeming impunity in the practice of false

religion renders no affirmation of false religion or of those practicing it; instead it exposes the perseverance of God in the gathering all the members of his church. Delayed eschatological judgment does not infer absence of *current* judgment on unbelief (Rom. 1:18). As we will see below, permitted idolatry and increased truth suppression are not evidence of commendation but of condemnation.

Romans 1:18 begins its exposé on man’s resistance by describing God’s displeasure with the attempted revelational eclipse. In fact, the revelation of God’s wrath is the emphasis of this entire section of Romans, as the epistemological, moral, and doxological rebellion that characterizes sin’s aggressive action bring about divine wrath. Divine disgust with unbelief, according to Paul’s analysis here, results in divine release of unbelievers into further unbelief, further suppression of the truth, further darkening of the mind, and further moral corruption.

Three times in Romans 1, Paul contends that “God gave them up” (1:24, 26, 28) to their sinful acts and sinful thinking. In it all, professed knowledge delves with deepening intensity into willful ignorance. Self-proclaimed wisdom tragically and tyrannically manifests utter foolishness. “The human intellect is as erring as the human heart. We can no more find truth than holiness, when estranged from God; even as we lose both light and heat, when we depart from the sun.”<sup>365</sup> Albeit with incomplete success, unbelievers spend a lifetime seeking to silence the knowledge of their Creator whom they know, because as covenant breakers they know they must face his wrath. Yet rather than turning to him and seeking him for mercy, they turn away from him and suppress his revelation by false belief, false religion, and false practice.

In other words, humanly devised religion and religious practice, in whatever form they come, are the corporate manifestations of this truth suppression.<sup>366</sup> “They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Rom. 1:25) With variegated cultural sophistication and complexity, human religions flourish around the world—and all of them growing manifestations of truth suppression, divine wrath, and spiritual blindness. The creation and advance of these false religions degrade humanity, and the promotion of these depraved religious, moral, and intellectual claims intensifies religious culpability (Rom. 1:32).

<sup>365</sup> Charles Hodge, *Epistle to the Romans*, A Geneva Series Commentary (London: Banner of Truth, 1972), p. 45.

<sup>366</sup> These false religions are those all over the world, in the East and in the West; secular humanism is as culpably rebellious as are other formal world religions.

1  
2 People of all religions pray, and they operate according to a conviction that  
3 revelation validates their religious convictions and practices. They live by  
4 particular norms, moral values, and priorities, and their lives function with  
5 varying degrees of conscious commitment to these standards, which govern their  
6 lives. “In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbeliever,  
7 to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the  
8 image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). They remain inescapably bound to their covenantal  
9 orientation, yet as covenant breakers they seek to fill God’s call to covenant  
10 faithfulness with impostor covenant commitments—different gods, different  
11 rituals, and different practices or even similar practices imbued with different  
12 meanings. Despite the differences, commonalities exist: prayer, certain beliefs in  
13 afterlife, moral standards, and often even blood sacrifices. True and false  
14 religions ostensibly share certain strands of commonality.  
15

16 While he does not deny these formal<sup>367</sup> similarities between certain religious  
17 activities, Paul radically polarizes believer and unbeliever according to the  
18 spiritual, willful, and idolatrous orientation of the unbeliever on the one hand,  
19 and the receptive and humble condition of the regenerated believer by the Holy  
20 Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2:1-16) on the other.<sup>368</sup> Redemptive knowledge by the  
21 illuminating power of the Holy Spirit in the Word of God delivers the sinner  
22 from the bondage of religious rebellion unto the freedom of biblically defined  
23 religious obedience. Faith in Christ transfers one from one covenantal identity to  
24 another (Rom. 5:12-21; cf. Eph. 2:1-10) and therefore from one covenant  
25 allegiance to another.  
26

27 Unbelief then is epitomized by false religion—its existence, its practice, and  
28 its advocacy. Such unbelief includes secularism and nominalism, the peculiar  
29 sects and cults throughout history, and each of the world religions, including the  
30 sophisticated historic religions (like Islam) and the less formalized but no less  
31 virulent religions, like the secular humanism of the West. In Romans 1,  
32

33 the apostle sets forth the origin of that degeneration and degradation  
34 which pagan idolatry epitomizes, and we have the biblical philosophy  
35 of false religion. ‘For heathenism’, as Meyer says, ‘is not the primeval  
36 religion, from which man might gradually have risen to the

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<sup>367</sup> By “formal” we mean ostensibly and externally similar. A pagan praying may look very much like a believer in Christ praying.

<sup>368</sup> John Murray (“The Attestation of Scripture,” in *The Infallible Word, op cit.*, p. 51) notes that illumination is “regeneration on its noetic side.”

1 knowledge of the true God, but is, on the contrary, the result of a  
2 falling away from the known original revelation of the true God in  
3 His works.’<sup>369</sup>  
4

5 In fact,  
6

7 the most damning condition is not the practice of iniquity, however  
8 much that may evidence our abandonment of God and abandonment  
9 to sin; it is that together with the practice there is also the support and  
10 encouragement of others in the practice of the same. To put it bluntly,  
11 we are not only bent on damning ourselves but we congratulate others  
12 in the doing of those things that we know have their issue in  
13 damnation. We hate others as we hate ourselves. . . .<sup>370</sup>  
14

15 The creation and perpetration of religion which in any way suppresses revelation  
16 (by neglect, marginalization or outright denial) is comprehensively wicked and  
17 exposes moral culpability before the covenant God. Humanly contrived religion  
18 boldly cries out *opposition to God*, and requires his judgment.  
19

#### 20 **(4) Light and Darkness: The Spiritual Antithesis and the Gospel** 21

22 In fact, Paul describes the revelation of divine judgment upon unbelief by  
23 expounding God’s incremental permission unto greater disobedience *as* judgment.  
24 Paul builds the case for the categorical, covenantal antithesis between belief and  
25 unbelief, or more precisely between *believer* and *unbeliever*. In so doing, he sets  
26 up the covenantal antithesis that defines all mankind at all times everywhere. It is  
27 on the basis of this antithesis that Paul and the entire canon of Scripture in Old  
28 and New Testaments present the rich, radical, and powerful gospel.  
29

30 There is real darkness and real light. To those in the real spiritual darkness,  
31 real light comes only in and by the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God  
32 (Gal. 1:1-9). Fallen men and women, as they delight in darkness, will never come  
33 to the light *on their own* because they cannot and do not want to (Rom. 8:5-8).  
34 There is no salvation, therefore, apart from the Spirit of God regenerating/  
35 resurrecting the spiritually dead. Spiritual conversion, as an act of supernatural  
36 grace, is essential. The Lord sovereignly applies redemptive grace to the one  
37 dead in sins. “All those whom God hath predestined unto life, and those only, he  
38 is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word

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<sup>369</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1968; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 41.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.



1 and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace  
2 and salvation, by Jesus Christ” (WCF 10.1).

3  
4 While in one sense spiritual awakening is instantaneous (we did not see  
5 before and now by faith we see; we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but  
6 raised with Jesus Christ; Eph. 2:1-10), the convert’s grasp of divine grace  
7 deepens over time. In fact, the life of a believer in Jesus Christ involves a  
8 progressive deepening of understanding in the gospel and confidence in  
9 Scripture’s relevant authority in the face of temptations and pressures within and  
10 without. Hebrews 5:12-14 describes the life of a believer as exercise! “For  
11 though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you  
12 again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,  
13 for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he  
14 is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of  
15 discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.”

16  
17 Growth in grace therefore is a process, and Scripture makes this process  
18 abundantly clear. But this affirmation of spiritual maturity operates in the context  
19 of the formulaic spiritual antithesis, wherein the spiritually dead becomes  
20 spiritually alive by grace through faith. The seeds of truth are planted at various  
21 moments in one’s life, and while the work of the Holy Spirit can be (an usually  
22 seems to be) incremental, the nature of conversion is truly radical. Within God's  
23 perfect knowledge, every human soul is either in the kingdom of darkness or, by  
24 grace, in the kingdom of the Beloved Son (Col. 1:13). In biblical categories, there  
25 exists no grey, middle kingdom. Everyone is linked to one covenant head (Adam  
26 or Christ) and to one kingdom (darkness or light), though one’s understanding of  
27 God’s redemptive and gracious transfer grows in the conscious experience.  
28 Kingdom life is not defined first by human trajectory but divine transfer.

29  
30 Thus, Scripture portrays salvation in terms that are categorical, paradigmatic,  
31 ultimate, and wholly redefining. The move is from darkness to light, death to life;  
32 the biblical core of redemptive grace is union with Christ in his resurrection (cf.  
33 Eph. 1:16-23; 1 Corinthians 15) or, as described in John’s Gospel, new birth  
34 from above (John 1:12; John 3:1ff). The powerful call of God, as illustrated by  
35 Lazarus (John 11), is a matter of drawing one from death to life. This radical  
36 character of redemption and conversion simply cannot be overstated, and must  
37 categorically shape the way in which we speak about the uniqueness of the  
38 gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and his church. Scripture presents no spiritual  
39 common ground for gospel proclamation, and in fact, contends that it is the

absolute incomparability and uncommonality of the gospel that grants it value.<sup>371</sup>  
Bavinck captures both the theological concern and the practical outworking:

From a strictly theological point of view there is no point within pagan thought which offers an unripe truth that can be simply taken over and utilized as a basis for our Christian witness. If this is what is meant by point of contact, then there just is none. But, practically speaking, in actual missionary experience, we cannot avoid making frequent ‘contact’; no other way is open. But, we must never lose sight of the dangers involved, and we must ever endeavor to purify the terms we have borrowed of their pagan connotations. . . . What we preach is of an entirely different nature than what people ever could have thought themselves.<sup>372</sup>

Having shut up everyone in sin (Gal. 3:22), Scripture leaves no ground for religious neutrality. Naive appeal to general revelation and brute community consensus is inadequate, because any proper application of general revelation requires the *spiritually* enabled application of the “Christian prudence” and “the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”<sup>373</sup> In whatever manner and to whatever degree man’s cultural and religious practices do not allow special revelation to govern the application of general revelation, these practices constitute idolatry. In their formal obedience, they advance spiritual rebellion and face the wrath of the eternal Judge. True religion, by contrast, typified by heart-motivated mercy and holiness in word and deed (cf. James 1:26-27), then *cannot* originate from unregenerate man. There is no feature of man’s moral, religious, or cognitive capacities that remains untarnished by sin. Zeal then for humanly contrived religion and religious practice—in their often subtle yet permeating intellectual, epistemological, doxological, and moral rebellion—constitutes the culminating manifestation of unbelief.

Scripture speaks unequivocally. Every man, woman, and child is either a covenant keeper or a covenant breaker. It also makes clear that because of sin, all those in Adam are covenant breakers. Jesus alone is the great covenant keeper and it is in his work of covenant obedience that gospel hope resides. In view of Adam’s failure to keep the original covenant with God (and thereby made all

<sup>371</sup> Though the Spirit of God can surely use even false representations of Christ as part of the means by which he draws unbelievers to himself (sometimes the Qur’an’s references to Christ are Muslims’ first exposure to him). References to Christ from the Qur’an ought never be used in a manner that implicitly affirms the Qur’an as divine revelation or accepts its inadequate portrayal of Jesus Christ.

<sup>372</sup> J. H. Bavinck, *Introduction to the Science of Missions*, p. 140.

<sup>373</sup> WCF 1.6.

1 with him guilty), “the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the  
 2 covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by  
 3 Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and  
 4 promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit,  
 5 to make them willing, and able to believe” (WCF 7.3). It is the gospel of Jesus  
 6 Christ alone that confers covenant blessing, because as descendants of Adam, all  
 7 unbelievers everywhere dwell in covenant rebellion and are under the curse of  
 8 that covenant. Only those in Christ, those who have him by faith as their  
 9 covenant Head, receive the benefits of God’s grace. In Christ alone is true  
 10 religion.<sup>374</sup>

11  
 12 Thus the biblical CIP combats accommodation to all false religions, including  
 13 secular humanism and Islam. False religious faith systems, despite leeching upon  
 14 certain features of God’s truth in general revelation, are shaped by fallen  
 15 humanity and constitute strongholds of Satan. They, therefore, exert deceiving  
 16 influence upon those with whom they relate. Thus, Islamic belief and religious  
 17 practices cannot be treated with neutrality, any more than believers in the West  
 18 should treat their background in secular humanism as spiritually neutral.

19  
 20 As it relates to missions in the Muslim world, these factors should weigh  
 21 heavily. To be sure, a biblically directed application of Bavinck’s *possessio*  
 22 enables mature believers to discern which features of their culture can be  
 23 transformed by the Gospel and which must be rejected. Simultaneously the  
 24 biblical CIP will treat the sin of the unconverted heart with a full acceptance of  
 25 the moral, spiritual, epistemological and doxological antithesis presented in  
 26 Romans 1. Association with Islam, therefore, carries serious risks for any  
 27 professing followers of Christ, whether nationals or missionaries. Scripture  
 28 presents false religion as both false and deceiving, and no faithful missiology will  
 29 ever minimize the antithesis between biblical revelation and any other religion,  
 30 religious system, or faith system.

31  
 32 In view of the singularly pure gospel that comes by revelation of God in  
 33 Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:1-9), missions and missiology must give fullest attention to  
 34 these biblical analyses, as they comprehensively shape the contours of ministry  
 35 in *any* cultural context. The CIP grounds all human notions of identity, and  
 36 provides the biblical framework for interpretation of all cultures, societies,

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<sup>374</sup> “Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creature: and, since the fall, not without a Mediator; nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone” (WCF 21.2).

peoples, nations, and tongues. It is this paradigm as well, which shapes the way in which believers should think of themselves in the unbelieving world around them. Just as it did for Paul, the radical antithesis between belief and unbelief provided the very basis for bold gospel proclamation, wherein the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ by the work of the Spirit confronts and combats the deeply spiritual and relentlessly held commitments to unbelief and false religion. It is this gospel message that the Church must unrelentingly proclaim and teach with faithfulness.

Decisions about method of gospel outreach, how to discern proper social connections, and how to relate in the world of unbelief must begin with the CIP. Any other notion of identity – whether by personal perception or sociological analysis – must submit to the objective data of Scripture, which presents this universal covenantal framework for man’s identity, regardless of his cultural context. Cultural factors are not denied by the CIP; they are instead properly interpreted, explained and confronted. The practical outworking of the CIP comes to greater clarity in Paul’s treatment of the believer’s identity and life in an unbelieving culture. We turn now to 1 Corinthians for surveying these complex matters.

## **e. Identity and 1 Corinthians**

### **(1) Introduction**

IM proponents frequently appeal to passages from 1 Corinthians in order to provide exegetical warrant for insider methods.<sup>375</sup> Two texts receive particular attention in IM literature – 1 Cor. 7:17-24 and 1 Cor. 8-10. After surveying IM opinion on these two passages, consideration will be given to the bearing these passages have for the way in which believers ought to understand themselves in relation to Christ and in relation to those around them.

### **(2) IM Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24**

As noted above, Rebecca Lewis has argued that one must distinguish between the gospel and those cultural accretions that are said frequently to attend the gospel. It is the former and not the latter to which believers in all times and places are bound. She specifically cites 1 Cor. 7:17-20 in support of her contention that “Paul emphasized the importance of the gospel *not* being linked

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<sup>375</sup> For bibliography and a survey of IM discussion of leading passages from 1 Corinthians, see Sleeman, “Origins,” pp. 517-8.

1 to changing cultures, even religious cultures.”<sup>376</sup> Lewis notes that Paul is often  
 2 understood to say that “the Lord has assigned to each of us the family and people  
 3 group we are born into,” and that believers upon conversion ought “not remove  
 4 ourselves from that situation.”<sup>377</sup> Lewis does see this understanding of the text as  
 5 a valid one.<sup>378</sup> That point, Lewis contends, is nevertheless not the “crux of Paul’s  
 6 argument.” That crux is “that no one should consider one religious form of faith  
 7 in Christ to be superior to another.”<sup>379</sup> Therefore “as believers we need to be able  
 8 to look past differences in religious culture and see the Holy Spirit working in the  
 9 lives of our fellow citizens of the Kingdom”—this is “so crucial to the integrity  
 10 of the gospel” that Paul “laid it down as a rule for all the churches” (verse 17).<sup>380</sup>  
 11 Therefore, “if well-meaning Christians tell seekers that they must come to God not  
 12 just through Christ but also through Christianity, [we ought to] help the Christians  
 13 understand this requirement is ‘not in line with the truth of the Gospel (*sic*).’”<sup>381</sup>  
 14

15 What might motivate such persons to remain in their existing culture, a  
 16 culture that Lewis understands to be “religious” in dimension? Travis and  
 17 Woodberry have urged evangelism as one such motive and others, as Doug  
 18 Coleman has noted, undoubtedly exist.<sup>382</sup> Independently of considerations of  
 19 motive, Ridgway understands this text to be critical to the formation of the  
 20 insider’s identity. The insider has “spiritual identity,” which he defines as  
 21 “related to our second birth, when we become citizens of his kingdom. It has  
 22 nothing to do with our cultural and religious identity.”<sup>383</sup> But the insider also has  
 23 “physical identity.” This identity is “related to our first birth, when we were  
 24 assigned (1 Cor. 7:17) a place and time in history (Acts 17:26) that determines  
 25 our cultural, social, and religious identity.”<sup>384</sup> The believer is said, therefore, to  
 26 have two parallel and non-intersecting identities—the one spiritual, and the other  
 27 physical.  
 28

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<sup>376</sup> Lewis, “Integrity,” p. 46. Emphasis Lewis’.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid. In two footnotes, Lewis qualifies this statement by allowing for circumstances in which “people born into bad situations” may remove themselves to others, and in which Christians may “take on the missionary call to incarnate in another culture,” citing Paul as an example of the latter, “Integrity,” p. 48 fn. 9-10.

<sup>378</sup> So Lewis, “Promoting Movements,” p. 76.

<sup>379</sup> Lewis, “Integrity,” p. 46.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Lewis, “Insider Movements,” p. 19. In support of this statement, Lewis cites 1 Cor. 7:17-19 among many other NT texts.

<sup>382</sup> Coleman, *Theological Analysis*, p. 183, citing in support Travis and Woodberry, “When God’s Kingdom Grows Like Yeast,” pp. 25, 28.

<sup>383</sup> Ridgway, “Insider Movements,” p. 85.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

IM readings correctly grasp a core principle that is at the heart of this passage. Paul makes clear in verse 17 that he is speaking of a “life” that “the Lord has assigned to him,” to which the Lord “has called him” before he goes on to say that “this is my rule in all the churches.” So important is this point to Paul that he repeats it twice, in verses 20 and 24.<sup>385</sup> The Scripture’s presumption is that a new believer will remain in and serve the Lord in the context of his family, community, and vocation (1 Cor. 7:20).

IM readings of this text overlook two crucial statements in it. First, while “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” are, with respect to one’s standing and privilege in relation to Christ, matters of indifference, there is one matter that is not—“keeping the commandments of God” (v.19).<sup>386</sup> Second, when Paul addresses the analogous matter of slavery and freedom, he stresses that the slave is “a freedman of the Lord”—a freedom that always comes with the obligation to keep the commands of Christ (cf. Gal. 5:1), and that the freedman is “a slave of Christ,” that is under solemn obligation to serve Christ as Lord. In each case, then, Paul emphasizes the believer’s fundamental allegiance and obligation to Christ, precisely in the circumstances of family, community, and vocation in which the believer finds himself. These circumstances may change and are, in themselves, matters of comparative indifference. The factor that is both constant and non-negotiable for the Christian is his absolute and fundamental commitment to Christ’s lordship in those circumstances.

So strong is this commitment that Paul can even envision a situation in which a believer would need to alter his circumstances in order to be obedient to Christ (see 1 Cor. 7:36).<sup>387</sup> No believer is therefore in the position of maintaining the dual and non-intersecting identities, one spiritual and one physical, for which Ridgway pleads. Neither is Paul’s point in this text that one should not deem one “one religious form of faith in Christ to be superior to another,” as Lewis has argued. Tellingly, in drawing that conclusion, Lewis considers only verses 17-20. She does not take into account Paul’s discussion of slavery and freedom in verses 21-24. Paul, then, is not concerned to address issues specifically relating to a

<sup>385</sup> So Nabeel Jabbour, *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross: Insights From an Arab Christian* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2008), p. 240.

<sup>386</sup> So rightly Coleman, *Theological Analysis*, p. 187.

<sup>387</sup> Though at times remaining in such contexts involves persecution—financial, physical, social, and emotional, as attested by centuries of persecution in the life of the Church, the gospel can and often does spread through the faithful witness of the suffering church under persecution by their communities. Avoidance of suffering is not a biblical motivation even in the perceived service of evangelism, and concern about persecution or rejection should never take precedence over gospel fidelity in the lives of Christ’s followers.

“religious form of faith” or “religious culture.” Paul’s point, rather, is that wherever the Lord (Jesus) has called a believer to be, he must obey the Lord (Jesus) in those circumstances.

### (3) IM Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 8-10

IM proponents often appeal to 1 Cor. 9:19-23, a passage that is embedded within a much larger argument (1 Corinthians 8-10).<sup>388</sup> Woodberry, for example, speaks of both Jesus and Paul as “incarnating the gospel among people whose worldview was similar to that of most Muslims,” and Paul in particular as “liv[ing] out ... that model ... in different religio-cultural contexts.”<sup>389</sup> It is in this connection that he appeals to 1 Cor. 9:19-23. Woodberry proceeds to relate this passage to Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 11:1 (“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ,” and to Paul’s actions in circumcising Timothy (Acts 16:3) and taking “converts with him into the Temple to be purified” (Acts 21:26).<sup>390</sup> Because Woodberry understands “Islamic Law [to be] based on the Law of Judaism,” and because Paul is said to “teach adaptability even to a pagan culture like Corinth as long as one is guided by conscience and by the desire to glorify God and see people be saved (1 Cor. 10:23-33),” he understands both Paul’s principles and actions to have direct bearing on Insider paradigm methods and practices.<sup>391</sup>

As noted above in this report, it is mistaken to make direct application of this text to Muslim circumstances without accounting for the redemptive historical particularities of the texts in question. One may not, therefore, forge a close connection between the Mosaic Law and subsequent Islamic legislation and, on that basis, straightforwardly apply the text to individuals in a Muslim setting.<sup>392</sup> One is not at liberty, in other words, to substitute the word “Jew” in this text with the word “Muslim.”<sup>393</sup>

<sup>388</sup> In addition to the materials discussed here, see those cited at Sleeman, “Origins,” pp. 517-8.

<sup>389</sup> Woodberry, “To the Muslim,” p. 24.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Woodberry, “To the Muslim,” pp. 24-25. Elsewhere, Woodberry, writing with John Travis, observes that “Christians have assumed varying degrees of Muslim identity in an effort to ‘become all things to all men’ to ‘win as many as possible’ (1 Cor. 9:19-23),” “When God’s Kingdom Grows Like Yeast,” p. 9. These writers hasten to distinguish this action from “the decision of a Muslim to *retain* socio-religious identity,” while refraining from explicitly criticizing such an evangelistic strategy. Ibid. (emphasis original).

<sup>392</sup> Compare the argument, similar to Woodberry’s, of Kevin Higgins, “Inside What?,” p.79 fn. 16. While Higgins does take some care to distinguish Judaism from Islam, he nevertheless concludes that “at a very practical level, the early Jewish followers of Jesus faced much the same situation as do Muslim followers of Jesus today,” *ibid.*

<sup>393</sup> As insinuated in the title of Woodberry’s article, “To the Muslim I Became a Muslim?”

What of Woodberry's other argument that Paul is counseling "adaptability even to a pagan culture like Corinth"? Woodberry is correct to highlight that the gospel and the interests of the gospel may entail that one surrender certain matters of cultural familiarity and comfort (1 Cor. 9:19-23, esp. v. 23). He does not, however, highlight with commensurate emphasis Paul's point that, in these endeavors, the apostle was never "outside the law of God but under the law of Christ" (9:21).

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10 amplify the importance of the principle that he articulates in 1 Cor. 9:21. Establishing an identity between the people of God under the Old Covenant and the people of God under the New Covenant (1 Cor. 10:1-4), Paul likens the circumstances of the New Covenant church to Israel in the wilderness (10:5-13) and against that background issues at least three commands. He expressly prohibits idolatry, "do not be idolaters as some of them were..." (10:7a), "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry" (10:14). He further warns them against "desir[ing] evil as they did" (10:6), and "indulg[ing] in sexual immorality as some of them did" (10:8a). To do these three things is to "put Christ to the test" and to subject the people of God to divine displeasure (10:9a, 10:9b-10).

Paul develops this analogy between the New Covenant church and Old Covenant Israel precisely because the sins that Israel committed in the wilderness were tempting and threatening the church in Corinth—evil desire, sexual immorality, and idolatry. Just as Israel sinned by compromising with the immorality and idolatry of the Moabites (Num. 25:9, cited at 10:8b), so the Corinthians are subject to compromise with the immorality and idolatry of the pagan culture around them (1 Cor. 5:1-2, 6:12-20; 10:14-22; cf. 8:1-13, 10:23-11:1). Paul fears a spiritually destructive complacency among the Corinthians with respect to these issues, and urges their continued vigilance against sin (1 Cor. 10:12-13).

Tellingly, Paul frequently appeals in his argument to the believer's union and communion with Christ as a guiding principle for negotiating the moral questions arising from Christian living in a pagan culture. Because we partake of the Lord's Table and the Lord's cup—which is participation in Christ's body and blood—we therefore cannot "drink ... the cup of demons" or "partake of ... the table of demons" (1 Cor. 10:16, 21-22). We are not only united to Christ and commune with him, but we are also in fellowship with one another as members of his body (1 Cor. 10:17). To this reality Paul makes direct appeal as he



counsels believers concerning whether they may buy in the marketplace meat offered to idols (1 Cor. 8:1-13).<sup>394</sup>

In short, Paul acknowledges in 1 Corinthians 8-10 the complexities of Christians living within a culture hostile to the faith. He does not counsel wholesale a categorical extraction and separation from the world around us (cf. 1 Cor. 5:10). Neither is he unaware of or indifferent to the genuine spiritual threats posed to the Christian attempting to live in the context of the culture in which the Lord has called him to live (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17-24). Paul's instructions to the Corinthians return to a fundamental guiding principle—the believer's identity in Christ is the covenant identity (CIP) by which all other decisions about relationships, partnerships, networks, and practices are to be made. That identity requires one to pursue holiness, whether within or outside of the social networks of which he was part when he became a believer (1 Cor. 7:17-24,36; 9:19-23; 10:1-22); and to exercise Christian freedom with the interests of the gospel in view, especially the spiritual welfare of both outsiders and weaker brethren (1 Cor. 10:23-11:1; 8:1-13). It is in this sense, therefore, that Paul became "all things to all men"—"he is willing to deny himself and do anything for the sake of the Gospel (*sic*) ... as long as it does not violate Christ's law."<sup>395</sup> Union and communion with Christ, obedience to his commands, fellowship with his body, and concern for the spiritual well-being of all those with whom the believer comes in contact—these are the biblical principles and realities that inform and ground Christians as they seek to serve Christ in the cultures in which they find themselves.

## 6. Conclusion: The Advance of the Gospel

In concluding the study and critique of Insider Movement principles, we return to three of the resolutions approved within Overture 9 at the 39<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the PCA in 2011, which remind us of the biblical grounding of missions. Both the motivation and method of missions stem from Christ Jesus as revealed in Scripture. With a view to Christ's lordship over all things, the Presbyterian Church in America

- Affirms that biblical motivations of all those who seek the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have never heard or responded to the gospel should be encouraged;

<sup>394</sup> Notice Paul's repeated description of the weaker individual as "brother" (8:11, 12, 13), specifically the "brother for whom Christ died" (8:11). To sin against him is to "sin against Christ" (8:12).

<sup>395</sup> Georges Housney, "Would Paul Become Muslim to Muslims?," in *Chislam*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

- Encourages PCA congregations to support biblically sound and appropriately contextualized efforts to see Christ's Church established among resistant peoples; and
- Calls PCA churches and agencies to collaborate with each other and the broader Church to discern and implement biblical authority in gospel contextualization.

With these important resolutions in mind, this current report seeks to aid the Church in biblical discernment for the proclamation of the gospel. Faithfully navigating cultural contexts does not happen effortlessly, and bringing biblical authority to bear comprehensively is demanding. It is also demanded. Faithful missions requires rigorous biblical thought, scrupulous biblical application, and tireless biblical recalibration. Indeed in the God-given calling to make disciples of the nations, the Church must deliver the pure gospel. Gospel *advance* must surely be *gospel* advance. The Apostle Paul does not mince words about the necessity for preserving the gospel *message* with the fullest integrity:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)

The New Testament also does not leave negotiable the call to active participation in the advance of the gospel around the world. The extraordinary privilege of carrying out the divine errand of mercy—proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the four corners of the earth, is indeed stunning. The responsibility for *faithful* witness is commensurately great. Just as the Apostle Paul never tired of preserving the integrity of the gospel message, he likewise never lost sight of the superabundant grace of God extended to him in the stewardship of active and relentless gospel proclamation, the end of which is the glory of God.

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:12-17)

Paul continues in the following section of this letter to Timothy to remind him of the sober stewardship that gospel proclamation requires: “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy” (1 Tim. 1:18a). Likewise in his final letter to Timothy, Paul reiterates this sobriety in view of the false teaching which surrounded them. “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:14). Gospel ministry is a ministry *according to* the Word of God and *in* the Spirit of God. Remaining faithful in gospel proclamation requires rigor and critical self-examination, ever testing our message and methods not first according to their perceived effectiveness, but foremost before the revelation of God in his Word.

The truth of the gospel, given by the revelation of God in his Word, is a message like none other. It is God’s message to the lost, and as heralds of that message, the Church must faithfully deliver the gospel. The stewardship entails obedience in two critical ways: gospel *advance* and *gospel* advance. The Church must consciously, deliberately, sacrificially and unrelentingly proclaim the good news. No matter what she may lose in temporal pleasures or gain, the storehouse of divine blessing for those diligently participating in the Great Commission overflows.

May the Church reclaim her vision and calling to preach the gospel and to reach the nations. May the body of Christ worldwide recalibrate its vision of Christ and the advance of the gospel according to Christ’s Word, so that a commitment to the gospel’s content will be matched by obedience to the gospel’s Master: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20).

May it be said of the Presbyterian Church in America what the Apostle Paul said of the church in Thessalonica:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10)

1       The implications of *gospel advance* in the world of Islam bear down with palpable  
 2 force. The Church must pursue faithful and effective gospel ministry to the Muslim world.  
 3 As it relates to Muslims, many in the West are guilty of fear and misperception, and need  
 4 correction in their views of Muslims and Islam according to Scripture. “We need to go  
 5 beyond mere tolerance of the Muslims in our midst.”<sup>396</sup> For the effective ends of gospel  
 6 ministry to Muslims, Bassam Madany urges the Church to develop an “adequate knowledge  
 7 of Islamics,” but warns against “two extremes that have manifested themselves during the  
 8 twentieth century”: attempting to evangelize Muslims “without any proper knowledge of  
 9 Islam” and oppositely, becoming “so fascinated with Islamics that [we forget] the main goal  
 10 of Christian missions.”<sup>397</sup>

11  
 12       The renowned “Apostle to Islam,” Samuel Zwemer (1867-1952), who, following his  
 13 work in Muslim missions from 1891-1929, taught missions at Princeton Theological  
 14 Seminary from 1929 to 1938.<sup>398</sup> A prolific author and careful thinker, he urged a biblically  
 15 discerning approach to Muslim evangelism. “We must become Moslems to the Moslem if  
 16 we would gain them for Christ. We must do this in the Pauline sense, without compromise,  
 17 but with self-sacrificing sympathy and unselfish love.”<sup>399</sup> Such statements by Zwemer have  
 18 been frequently misunderstood and misapplied, leading to a blurring of culture and religion,  
 19 and to indiscretion in apologetic and missionary methods. But the abuses on one side  
 20 (degrees of syncretism) have often been met with countering abuses—misunderstanding,  
 21 fear, and apathy. Just as success in Muslim missions will not occur by syncretism, it will  
 22 never occur by ignorance and apathy. Only by the obedient pursuit of the millions of people  
 23 blinded by untruth of Islam, who desperately need the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ,  
 24 the Son of the living God, will such people enter into the promises of God’s covenant of  
 25 grace in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, to every Muslim inquirer, Zwemer urges us to present  
 26 Christ according to Scripture, and trusting the Spirit of God to take the Word of God and  
 27 allow it to do its might work, to lead the inquirer to consider the person and work of Jesus.  
 28 His approach is as simple as it is compelling: “We should press home the question Jesus  
 29 Christ put to His disciples and to the world, ‘What think ye of the Christ?’”<sup>400</sup>

30  
 31       The Muslim world needs the gospel. We must deliver that pure gospel and deliver it  
 32 faithfully. May the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ enable us to that end.

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<sup>396</sup> Jabbour, *The Crescent*, p. 16.

<sup>397</sup> Bassam M. Madany, *The Bible and Islam: A Basic Guide to Sharing God’s Word with a Muslim*, 4th ed., (N.p.: Middle East Resources, 2006), p. 59.

<sup>398</sup> Cf. Part 1: 2.b.(1) above.

<sup>399</sup> Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ* (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), p. 183.

<sup>400</sup> Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ*, p. 185.

## **PART 3 – RECOMMENDATIONS TO CHURCHES**

### **Churches, Missions, and Missionaries**

1. Churches should strongly support the spread of the gospel among Muslims.
2. Churches should embrace their responsibility for reaching the Muslims that are around them and draw on the experience of the missionaries they support to identify and implement effective ways of doing this.
3. Churches should learn from the missionaries they support about the contexts in which they serve.
4. Churches have the right and responsibility to ensure that the work they support is faithful to scriptural principles, yet should not micromanage the work of the missionaries they support.
5. Churches should recognize the complex and varying challenges and dilemmas facing CMBs<sup>401</sup> and those who minister to them. Churches should respectfully seek to understand their missionaries' assessments of these challenges and dilemmas.
6. Churches should support their missionaries' efforts to faithfully and prayerfully discern and apply biblical principles regarding discipleship, including identity in Christ.
7. Churches should recognize the discernible overlap between Insider Movement paradigms and other mission strategies.
  - a. Churches should therefore as much as possible refrain from using the term IM to refer to specific practices and approaches and instead address them individually without this label.
  - b. Individual practices and approaches should be assessed on their own merits as they apply in specific contexts and should not be opposed primarily on the basis of apparent similarity to or association with IM.
8. Where approaches or practices of a missionary appear questionable, churches should seek to understand the missionary's rationale in light of Scripture and the principles outlined in this paper.
9. Should these approaches or practices still appear to lack faithfulness in some respect, the church should lovingly correct the missionary and assist in identifying adjustments/ adaptations that the church can in good conscience endorse.
10. Missions committees should pursue ongoing education concerning theology and missions to enhance their competency in evaluating missionaries.

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<sup>401</sup> Some prefer CMB (Christian of Muslim background) or even BMB (Believer of Muslim background) to MBB (Muslim Background Believer).

**Representative Questions that Churches Can Ask of Supported Missionaries**

1. What steps are you taking to ensure the ongoing discipleship and spiritual maturity of new believers?
2. How do you help new believers understand and express their membership in the church both locally and globally?
3. What challenges do you face in helping new believers understand their identity in Christ? How have you addressed those challenges?
4. What are some of the challenges you have faced in helping gatherings of believers mature in their practice of the marks of the church?
5. Describe the structure and functioning of the churches with which you work on the field.
6. How do the prayer, the sacraments, and public preaching of the Word operate in your ministry?
7. What is your sense of mission and calling? How does your answer impact your ministry?
8. Have you read and reflected upon the report – “A Call to Faithful Witness, Part Two: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements” – along with its Affirmations and Denials? What are your thoughts about them?

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- Musk, Bill. *The Unseen Face of Islam: Sharing the Gospel with Ordinary Muslims at the Street Level*, (Monarch Books, 1989). Folk beliefs grip many Muslims with fear of death, fear of the demonic, and fear of the Day of Judgment. Musk's book addresses well the issues of folk Islam including practical issues such as saints, charms, blessings and amulets.
- Parshall, Phil. *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization* (IVP, 2012). An updated version of his *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* (1980). Discusses field-tested approaches. The most recent revision includes issues related to Insider Movements.
- [www.answering-islam.org](http://www.answering-islam.org) addresses Qur'anic studies in depth and the nature of Islam.

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<sup>403</sup> The SCIM committee recommendation list does not indicate full endorsement of all that is written in each of these resources.



## Attachment 2: Analysis of Minority Report 2013

### ABRREVIATIONS IN ATTACHMENT 2

CR 2013 Committee Report 2013

MR 2013 Minority Report 2013

**NOTE:** All page references in this “Analysis of Minority Report 2013” are to the Minority Report **2013** (MR 2013) as numbered in the PCA GA **2013** Commissioner Handbook. For immediate access, the MR 2013 is included in the current (2014) Commissioner Handbook, with previous page numbers included in the footer of the MR 2013. To read MR 2013, see p. 2333 of this document.

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Minority Report Intends to be Supplemental, Simple, and Practical

TE Nabeel Jabbour submitted to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly a Minority Report (CH 2013, pp. 2265-2330). The intent of the Minority Report 2013 (“MR 2013”) was to supplement the Committee’s Report 2013 (“CR 2013”). It argued that the committee’s work “would be made more complete if the assembly would make both the Committee Report and the Minority Report” widely available for study within the PCA (p. 2265). MR 2013 claims to “concur with most of the Committee Report in how it addressed Overture 9,” and to offer “some supplementary material that attempts to fill in some of the gaps” perceived in MR 2013 (p. 2269, cf. p. 2270, 2272). MR 2013 also claims to differ from CR 2013 in another respect. While MR 2013 commends CR 2013 for its “solid theology,” it presents itself as “*simple and practical*,” worded in “understandable language to the laity” (p. 2270, emphasis original).

#### The Minority Report is Not Supplemental, Not Simple, and Not Practical

In point of fact, for two reasons MR 2013 fails to accomplish either goal: *First*, it is not properly supplementary to CR 2013. It diverges theologically from CR 2013’s reasoning and conclusions at critical points. MR 2013 is, therefore, an alternative not a supplement to CR 2013. *Second*, MR 2013 is neither simple nor practical. It fails adequately to define crucial terms and concepts. It makes assertions and claims without sufficient substantiation. Its central paradigm for identity (PQRS model) is inherently unstable and unclear. Its ecclesiology is similarly vague. MR 2013, furthermore, ill equips the reader to apply these paradigms to ministry in the Muslim world. *MR 2013 is lofty in its aspirations but vague in its applications.*

#### The Minority Report Is IM-Friendly

MR 2013 liberally offers anecdotes drawn from the author’s long and fruitful ministry among Muslims. These anecdotes do not serve to illustrate the claims and the models put forward in MR 2013. They really function as proof for those claims and models.

The PQRS model, to take one important example, stands on the foundation of MR 2013's author's observations and experiences in the Muslim world. *In this respect, MR 2013 shows kinship with IM writings – experience functionally supplants Scripture and confession as providing the norms and categories to address missiological questions.*

MR 2013 curiously ignores the very epicenter of the IM controversy – national churches in Muslim lands. It is these bodies that have been most vocal in bringing IM methods and practice to the attention of the broader church. MR 2013 hardly makes mention of these churches' biblical and confessional grievances and concerns with respect to IM. Far less does it weigh and grant those concerns. *On the contrary, MR 2013, while mildly critical of some IM methods and practices, adopts a posture of general sympathy towards IM proponents and bodies.*

## SOME SPECIFICS

The committee is grateful that MR 2013's intent was to complement CR 2013. It is equally grateful that MR 2013 sought to document specific matters where it believes that complementarity exists (p. 2272). It is the committee's position, however, that MR 2013 properly presents an *alternative* to CR 2013, rather than a *complement* or a *supplement*.

### CR 2013 and MR 2013 Have Mutually Exclusive Understandings of Identity

MR 2013 addresses how an MBB is to negotiate the question of his identity. According to MR 2013, a MBB need not "renounce [his] birth community and *social* identity" but his "*core* identity in Christ should *never be compromised*" (p. 2289, emphasis original; cf. p. 2296). MR 2013 distinguishes but never defines two of these three terms (birth community, social identity, and core identity; cf. p. 2319).

MR 2013 attempts to answer this question of identity through its "PQRS" diagram (pp. 2291-2310). *Unfortunately, in defining these zones, which are said to represent Christendom and the Muslim world, respectively, MR 2013 offers anecdotal illustration (pp. 2293, 2328) but no biblical and theological substantiation.* On the contrary, this construct leaves the reader with the impression that these zones are a reflection of the author's sociologically informed perception of both Muslims and Christians within the Islamic world. MR 2013's description of the interaction of Messianic Judaism and evangelical Christianity in terms of the PQRS diagram only lends further confusion to an already unclear and biblically unsubstantiated paradigm (pp. 2294-5).

How ought a new believer in the Muslim world relate to the culture around him? For MR 2013, "Muslims in Zone R who are on a journey toward Christ might have one of two

callings, both of which are biblical options: 1) Surrender fully to Christ and get integrated into Christendom, moving into Zone Q, or 2) Surrender fully to Christ and remain in Zone R as salt and light among their own people in their birth communities” (p. 2293). MR 2013 presumably understands its discussion of 1 Cor. 7:17-24 to provide biblical warrant for these two options. It fails, however, to relate these zones, and movement between these zones, to the text. As a result, MR 2013 offers the reader neither biblical nor practical guidance how to negotiate life as a Christian in these zones. An anecdote is offered to illustrate MR 2013’s point that movement from Zone S to Zone R is a “process” (pp. 2295-6). *Similarly, MR 2013 raises some pointed questions about the kinds of difficulties that many MBBs must address while living within the Muslim world (pp. 2297-8). It offers, however, no biblical guidance how to negotiate those difficulties.*

MR 2013 distinguishes between what are termed “sinful and non-sinful aspects within [sic] the birth communities of the Muslim world” (p. 2308). MBBs “who choose to live as insiders within the Muslim world can live only within non-sinful aspects of their birth communities (Zone R).” They will have to reject “sinful aspects of the Islamic culture and theology in Zone S, mostly rooted in the Medinan theology, that contradict the teaching of the Scriptures” (ibid.). They have inherited a “*first-birth community identity*” which is both “*non-sinful (Zone R)*” and “*sinful (Zone S)*” (p. 2319). In Christ, they have a “*second-birth identity*.” This new identity must “affect their *belief system*, their *values*, and their *relationships*” (p. 2319). *Other than appealing to the example of Daniel and his three friends, MR 2013 offers no biblical guidance how to discern what are said to be sinful and non-sinful aspects of the Muslim world (pp. 2319-21).*

MR 2013 presents its understanding of identity as an alternative to what are said to be two unacceptable options – the way in which some unnamed “IM proponents” “sugar-coat the tough texts in the Qur’an,” and the way in which some (also) unnamed “critics” of IM “demonize all or most of Islam and see no place for MBBs to remain as salt and light among their own people” (p. 2309). Positively, MR 2013 argues for “freedom within a framework,” that is, “flexibility and creativity within the framework of the non-negotiable” (p. 2302). While this is not all that MR 2013 says about the way in which an MBB is to remain biblically faithful within what is said to be Zone R, MR 2013 fails to give specific, biblical guidance concerning how this MBB is to live in such a context. When MR 2013 does address “Living in Zone R with No Deception” (pp. 2303-8) it proceeds to do so in terms of two admittedly revisionary and controversial understandings of Islam. It counsels living in accordance with a “core” of Islam – whether the “original” (versus the “folklore”) Mohammed, or the earliest stratum of Mohammed’s teaching, as determined by source criticism. *Neither of MR 2013’s understandings of Islam stands within the mainstream of Islamic theology. They have received as warm a reception in the Muslim world as the Jesus*

1 *Seminar has within evangelical Christianity. They are theoretically questionable and*  
2 *practically untenable.*

3 *MR 2013's approach contradicts the exposition of Covenant Identity set forth in CR*  
4 *2013 (pp. 2202-26). The Covenant Identity Paradigm (CIP) of the committee is drafted in*  
5 *explicitly and foundationally biblical terms. Its understanding of identity is specifically*  
6 *indebted to the way in which the Scripture speaks of human beings as "in Adam" and "in*  
7 *Christ." It explores the way in which Paul in Romans 1 depicts the religious activity of those*  
8 *"in Adam" in terms of idolatry and suppression. It underscores the spiritual antithesis*  
9 *between covenant keepers (in Adam) and covenant breakers (in Christ). It is on this*  
10 *foundation that CR 2013 proceeds to analyze Islam (p. 2220) and to formulate biblical*  
11 *principles regarding the believer's life in and engagement with culture (see the expositions*  
12 *of 1 Cor. 7:17-24; 1 Cor. 8-10, pp. 2221-6).*

13  
14 The approach of MR 2013, however, is not only inherently unclear and unstable, but  
15 is also not defined in explicitly and clearly biblical terms. It is in that sense not biblical. It is  
16 not clear to the reader that the way in which MR 2013 understands identity has been derived  
17 from the Scripture. MR 2013 overwhelmingly develops its paradigm of identity in terms of  
18 anecdotal illustrations and of the author's own sociologically informed perceptions of the  
19 Muslim world. *There is no indication that CR's understanding of covenant identity and*  
20 *spiritual antithesis has informed MR 2013's paradigm or discussion.*

21  
22 MR 2013 models the type of confusion which ensues when one's pre-formulated  
23 interpretation of culture/society is brought to the text of Scripture. Sociological factors  
24 interpreted by the missiologist's appropriated analytical tools (sophisticated or anecdotal)  
25 become the functional authority for both the biblical text and the contemporary situation.  
26 Yet this must not be so. Biblical authority must bear directly on *all* interpretive analysis,  
27 including the missiological, or it fails to remain functionally authoritative. Reaching the lost  
28 with the gospel often serves as the rationale for such an approach to contextualization. We  
29 dare not allow a Western culture grid to corrupt our cultural analysis, it is argued. Indeed  
30 that is true. But we do not properly avoid imperialism or cultural hegemony by substituting  
31 one cultural authority (or our sociological analysis of it) for another. The only way to avoid  
32 cultural hegemony in any analysis is to allow the self-attesting and self-interpreting  
33 authority of Scripture as received by the Church through the ages comprehensively to shape  
34 our analysis. Regardless of the seemingly commendable motive for doing so, trust in an  
35 imposed cultural analysis (PQRS or otherwise) is at the very heart of the IM paradigm,  
36 which CR 2013 report critiques. *Thus, albeit a soft version of it, MR 2013 is actually itself a*  
37 *form of IM which (unwittingly?) supplants historic biblical orthodoxy and confessional*  
38 *theology. MR 2013 author's PQRS paradigm serves as the functional authority for all other*  
39 *analysis, including that of the biblical text.*

## CR 2013 and MR 2013 Have Incompatible Understandings of the Church

MR 2013 defines the church in terms of the “*obvious* (established) church,” the “*hidden* (underground) church” and the “*semi-hidden* church” that stands between the former two (p. 2311, emphasis author’s). MR 2013 dubiously asserts that the “*hidden* (underground) church” is that of which the *BCO* speaks in *BCO* 4-5, “Christians whose lot is cast in destitute regions ought to meet regularly for the worship of God” (cf. pp. 2317-8). MR 2013 elsewhere identifies the “hidden church” with “C-6 people” on Tennent’s C1-C6 scale (p. 2313). These hidden churches, MR 2013 argues, should be permitted to influence the societies of which they are part, as yeast leavens the dough (p. 2314). They may be prevented from lapsing into syncretism when they are “mentored and coached by visiting leaders who are *gifted pioneer missionaries* and sensitive Christian leaders from that same culture whenever possible” (ibid., emphasis original).

In a section on “Ecclesiology,” MR 2013 proceeds to offer seven “essentials” or “goals” for a “healthy church in a Muslim setting” (p. 2315). It offers two paragraphs of counsel on leadership and the observance of the sacraments in these churches, appending Scripture references to this counsel (pp. 2315-6). It exhorts churches to maintain the balance between what is metaphorically said to be “centered-set and bounded-set thinking” (p. 2317). An anecdote from the author’s experiences in Egypt illustrates how MR 2013 understands these principles to work in practice (p. 2316).

MR 2013’s ecclesiology is problematic for several reasons. **1) It is vague.** It fails clearly to define terms. The closest MR 2013 comes to defining the church is in its seven “essentials” or “goals” of a “healthy church in a Muslim setting.” These “essentials” or “goals,” however, are so broad as to encompass many Christian societies other than the church. For this reason they stand in tension with CR 2013’s discussion of the marks of the church. The three-fold distinction between the “obvious,” “hidden,” and “semi-hidden” church is not developed or defended biblically, and MR 2013 neither asks nor answers the question how “C-6 people” can constitute a church. **2) For this reason, MR 2013’s ecclesiology is also impractical.** It offers lofty goals for church life, but no practical guidance how those goals may be realized within the Muslim world. **3) Finally, MR 2013’s ecclesiology is not evidently biblical.** It certainly reflects the author’s experiences and observations in the Muslim world and with Insider communities. It does not show serious engagement with either the Scripture or the Westminster Standards.

MR 2013’s discussion of ecclesiology stands in marked contrast with that of CR 2013. CR 2013 offers a biblical and confessional survey of the doctrine of the church – the church visible and invisible; the growth and extension of the church; the marks of the church; the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the church. On that foundation, it proceeds

1 to engage specific IM understandings of the Kingdom of God and of the church. *CR 2013 is*  
2 *specific where MR 2013 is vague. CR 2013 is practical where MR 2013 is impractical. CR*  
3 *2013 is biblical and confessional where MR 2013 is not evidently biblical and confessional.*  
4

## 5 **CONCLUSIONS**

6

7 In conclusion, MR 2013 has failed to demonstrate that it is a true supplement to CR  
8 2013. In fact, CR 2013 is properly presenting an alternative to MR 2013. There is a clear  
9 line of demarcation between the two reports. *CR 2013 answers the concerns of Overture 9*  
10 *biblically and confessionally. To the degree that it answers them at all, MR 2013 answers*  
11 *the concerns of Overture 9 anecdotally.* That is to say, MR 2013 leaves the reader with the  
12 distinct impression that author's own observations of the Muslim world, as well as the  
13 experiences of Christians within the Muslim world have played a leading role in informing  
14 MR 2013's paradigms and conclusions. This dynamic is evident in MR 2013's discussion of  
15 the church.  
16

17 Furthermore, MR 2013, particularly in its PQRS diagram, has imposed a sociological  
18 construct that functionally stands over, not under, the Scripture. *In doing so, MR 2013 shows*  
19 *its sympathies with the way in which IM proponents have asked and answered vital*  
20 *missiological questions. MR 2013 is a (soft) IM document.* While fully respecting the good  
21 work that the author of MR 2013 has done in a lifetime of gospel witness to the Muslim  
22 world, the committee believes that the approach of MR 2013 not only provides unacceptable  
23 answers to the questions of Overture 9, but attempts to answer those questions in  
24 unacceptable ways. *The only approach that will provide clear guidance to MBBs and*  
25 *Christian workers in the Muslim world is a thoroughly biblical and confessional one. It is*  
26 *just such an approach that the committee has presented to the church in its report.*  
27

## Attachment 3: Christians of Muslim Background (CMB) Input

Christians from a Muslim background are the foremost experts concerning both how to understand Islam and how insider movements are perceived in their various cultures. Here are some of their comments. The received comments have not undergone grammatical or spelling corrections. A “CMB” is a Christian of Muslim background; an “MBB” is a Muslim Background Believer. Though these labels are often used interchangeably, some Muslims who convert to Christ prefer one over the other.

### Questions

#### **Q. What do you think of the insider movement in your country?**

A. “I am totally against such ideas: that someone who has never been a Moslem and who does not fully understand the challenges faced by MBBs still wants to perscribe me how I should behave as a Christian. To give you as an example, why should I go to the mosque or call myself a Moslem if I am a secret Christian in Somalia? How can calling myself ‘a follower of Christ’ and going to the mosque open me doors to witness.” (Abdi Duale)

#### **Q. Should CMBs be encouraged to call themselves Muslims?**

- A. “Not only is this concept improper, it is like poison mixed into food. It is a great sin and clear hypocrisy [two-facedness] for a Somali Christian to say “I am a Muslim.” (Cabdisalaan)
- A. “Somali Muslims look on us as carrion, and this will only reinforce their mistaken idea of Christianity.” (Cabdisalaan)
- A. “The Muslims are saying, ‘If Christianity is right/true, then they would openly witness/display their faith and even be willing to die for it.’” (Cabdisalaan)

#### **Q. Should believers and the gospel penetrate Islam like yeast in the dough?**

- A. “Is infiltration idea biblical? We are not to infiltrate any religion, but totally transform and change. I agree with the Minority Report that IM is infiltrating into Islam. This is going into one’s culture and live therein by polluting it but not being set apart from it. So practically IMers are being infiltrated rather than infiltrating. The more they go backward the more they distant themselves from being salt and light for Christ.” (Edward Ayub)
- A. “Whether the MBB feels ‘called to stay relationally connected to their relatives and friends’ is almost a moot point. The community, not the MBB or missionary, determines whether the MBB will stay. If it is predetermined that the MBB must stay in good status

1 in the community, then he or she will likely need to remain a secret believer or deny the  
2 beliefs that warrant expulsion by the Islamic community-namely, the Incarnation,  
3 Crucifixion, and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Fred Farrokh)

4  
5 **Q. Can followers of Jesus have two identities: followers of Jesus and Muslims?**

6 A. “An IMer proves his or her sectarian identity on Islam by death – by how the  
7 Muslims view and accept him as Muslim and bury. This has become a huge issue of  
8 focus since many IM leaders are dying. They are proving to Muslims that they were  
9 real Muslims. So their funeral service and burial are conducted by the Muslim clerics  
10 in Islamic way. Two questions may arise here: First why do Muslims at least  
11 relatives try to bury in Islamic way? Conversion is to them a one-generation issue so  
12 the relatives want to kill the influence of the converted after death. In the Muslim  
13 majority countries, even the graveyards preach Christianity.” (Edward Ayub)

14 A. “My friend, the message of the Gospel offends Muslims. Don’t worry! I have never  
15 seen a Muslim convert to Christ who was *not offended* first before coming to the  
16 saving knowledge of Christ. We need to offend them by being very clear about the  
17 teachings of Christ!” (Fikret Bocek)

18  
19 **Q. Should followers of Christ enter the mosque?**

20 A. “To enter the mosque is to ‘reconcile/agree with Satan,’ to agree to work together to  
21 bury the cross, and God’s entire plan for which He intended the cross.”  
22 (Cabdisalaan)

23 A. “Church should be cautious in finding commonality between Christianity and Islam  
24 – Islam applied this strategy to reach Christians, the followers of already existing  
25 religion. Islam contextualised to win Christians. By learning and applying their  
26 strategy would be suicidal for Christian church. There is no common ground between  
27 Islam and our faith.” (Edward Ayub)

28  
29 **Q. Should followers of Christ revere Muhammad? (“Muslim background believers  
30 (MBBs) can live with integrity within the Muslim world by honoring Muhammad  
31 as a leader without revering him as a Prophet.”)**

32 A. “And for Somali Christians, let them say anything, whether ‘Muhammad was a leader  
33 or a skilful man,’ nothing beneficial will come of it.” (Cabdisalaan)

34 A. “The problem with this . . . is that honouring Muhammad as a leader but not a prophet  
35 is not an option in the Muslim world. Muhammad is not being presented as a leader,  
36 but as the final prophet whom the world must obey and emulate. In short, the [such  
37 an argument] is presenting an option that is not an option.” (Fred Farrokh)



**Biographical background**

**Rev. Edward Ayub**, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Bangladesh. MDiv, Presbyterian Seminary, Manila. Former Wahabi/Deobandi Muslim. Author of several books concerning IM. 25 years of experience dealing with IM in Bangladesh.

**Rev. Fikret Bocek**, Moderator, Turkish Protestant Reformed Church. MDiv, Westminster Seminary. Raised as a Sunni Muslim. Pastors Muslim convert church in Izmir, Turkey.

**Fred Farrokh**, Shia background former Muslim from an Iranian home. Completing PhD dissertation on IM. Executive director, Jesus for Muslims.

**Cabdisalaan Cali Daahir**. Somali Christian working for The Voice of New Life. Became a Christian 14 years ago and is a member of an Ethiopian evangelical church.

**Abdi Duale**, Somali former Muslim. Became a Christian after witnessing the martyrdom of his uncle in 1988. BS, Daystar University, Nairobi. Deacon in Reformed Church, Ghent, Belgium.

## Attachment 4: History of Modern Evangelicalism as Related to Missions

Reformation theology from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, reacting against a variety of errors in the Medieval Church, emphasized the role of right doctrine (orthodoxy) in conjunction with both right behavior (orthopraxis) and inward devotion toward God. True knowledge about God, derived from the Bible with the aid of human reason guided by the Holy Spirit, led men to trust and serve God. Evangelism, the spread of pure Christianity, assumed a prominent role, so that committed Protestants were known as "evangelicals."<sup>1</sup> John Calvin spoke against the attitude of "Nicodemites" who, in order to avoid the persecutions rampant in that day, remained within the Roman Church in name and in worship while privately professing evangelical beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

Christians initially saw Enlightenment philosophy as a tool to discover the workings of God's world. However, from the seventeenth century onward, the expanding claims of secular science posed a series of challenges to Christian doctrine itself, relegating Biblical truth to successively smaller areas of human experience. By the nineteenth century, theologians in the wake of the German scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher employed the tools of scientific "higher criticism" to challenge the divine unity and truth of the Bible itself, heralding the birth of theological liberalism. Christian faith was defined not in terms of orthodox beliefs, but in terms of a more generic "Jesus experience" which might even be found in those who professed a religious affiliation other than Christianity, or no affiliation at all. Fundamental Christian doctrines such as the deity and resurrection of Christ came under fire, resulting in academic responses<sup>3</sup> by a group of conservative scholars whose adherents became known as "fundamentalists." Despite such efforts, by the early twentieth century, liberalism had captured the main institutions of Christian scholarship in both Europe and America.

Doctrinally orthodox Christians pursued two strategies in response to this challenge: separatism, and rapprochement. The separatist strategy involved formal ecclesiastical separation, with conservatives abandoning liberal-controlled institutions and setting up competing organizations. In the 1920s, Princeton Seminary professor J. Gresham Machen, a minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA), led a group of ministers and students to found Westminster Seminary and the Independent Board for Presbyterian Missions. Upon his

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<sup>1</sup> Thus the "*evangelische Kirche*" ("evangelical church") spoken of by Martin Luther.

<sup>2</sup> David W. Hall, "Calvin and an Earlier 'Insider Movement': It's Deja Vu All Over Again," Johannes Weslianus, <http://www.weswhite.net/2012/06/calvin-and-an-earlier-insider-movement-its-deja-vu-all-over-again/> (accessed February 21, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> E.g., A. C. Dixon, Louis Meyer, and R. A. Torrey, eds., *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, 12 vols. (Chicago: Testimony, 1910-1915).

1 defrocking by the PC(USA) on charges of schism, he helped to found a denomination which,  
 2 after its own internal schism, was eventually known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

3  
 4 Other groups would leave the "mainline" Presbyterian denominations to form the  
 5 Presbyterian Church in America (PCA, founded 1973, with a "joining and receiving" of the  
 6 Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod denomination in 1982) and the  
 7 Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC, founded 1980, with another exodus of "New  
 8 Wineskins" PC(USA) churches joining in 2005-2012). The PC(USA) steadily lost members,  
 9 from a high of 4.25 million members in 1965 to its end-2011 report of 1.96 million  
 10 members.<sup>4</sup>

11  
 12 In contrast to separatism, the rapprochement strategy saw the training and  
 13 installation of conservative PC(USA) pastors as the best hope for renewed denominational  
 14 orthodoxy. Westminster graduate Harold Ockenga, supported by radio pastor Charles Fuller,  
 15 founded Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California for this purpose in the 1940s,  
 16 drawing its original faculty from conservative institutions such as Wheaton College, Moody  
 17 Bible Institute, and Dallas Theological Seminary.<sup>5</sup> Superficially the founding of a new  
 18 seminary followed a separatist course, but only to facilitate the training of new pastors who  
 19 would retain institutional and personal connections with the denomination of their youth (a  
 20 rapprochement value), infiltrating like yeast to leaven the whole with re-invigorated  
 21 conservative ideology.

22  
 23 With rapid growth, the need to placate wealthy board members, and a desire for  
 24 acceptance by the presbytery of Los Angeles came the pressure for doctrinal laxity in order  
 25 to fill additional faculty slots. Ockenga, though nominally the seminary's president, never  
 26 gave up his pastorate on the East Coast; nor did the busy Charles Fuller participate in day-  
 27 to-day seminary activities, contributing to a leadership vacuum on-site. Fuller's son Dan,  
 28 freshly returned from doctoral studies in Switzerland under Karl Barth, eventually took the  
 29 seminary's deanship. In line with Barth's neo-orthodox views, and unlike the original faculty  
 30 of Fuller Seminary, Dan Fuller denied the inerrancy of the Bible in historical matters.  
 31 Within a few years, the conservative founding faculty members had departed and would  
 32 become vocal critics of Fuller Seminary's new direction. By the 1960's, the "inerrancy  
 33 clause" had been excised from the school's statement of faith altogether,<sup>6</sup> and in the 1970's

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<sup>4</sup> "Summaries of Statistics-Comparative Summaries" Presbyterian Church (USA),  
<http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/2011-comparative-summaries-stats.pdf>, (accessed October 28,  
 2012).

<sup>5</sup> For details on the development of Fuller Theological Seminary, see Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*;  
 also Chapter 6, "The Curious Case of Fuller Theological Seminary," in Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, pp.  
 106-121.

<sup>6</sup> "In December 1962, 'Black Saturday' occurred at a [Fuller] faculty-trustee meeting in Pasadena. Here a  
 number of faculty and board members expressed that they did not believe in the inerrancy of Scripture."  
 Though the 1963-64 seminary catalog retained the statement on biblical inerrancy, "in the 1965-66 catalog this

1 a book by faculty member Paul Jewett had declared that some doctrines in the Pauline  
2 epistles were incorrect. This move by Jewett typifies a theological paradigm shift at the  
3 seminary, away from "Old Princeton" views on Scripture.  
4

5 Today, with over 3,000 full-time equivalents of students from a wide range of  
6 Christian backgrounds, Fuller Seminary remains a potent force in shaping evangelical culture.  
7 In summary, separatism preserved orthodoxy at the cost of decreased influence in historic  
8 institutions, while rapprochement retained some measure of influence at the cost of doctrinal  
9 drift.

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statement disappeared.” Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011, Kindle Edition), Kindle Location 358.

## ATTACHMENT 5: God and Allah

In 2007, a group of Islamic scholars issued "A Common Word Between Us and You,"<sup>7</sup> a document reflecting on perceived commonalities between Christianity and Islam as hopeful grounds for ongoing peaceable interactions. That document referred regularly to "God" as one of the commonalities. Scores of Christian organizations responded,<sup>8</sup> most notably in an open letter, "Loving God and Loving Neighbor," signed by hundreds of Christian leaders.<sup>9</sup> This response affirmed "love of God" as a common ground between Christians and Muslims.

Is such a stance well founded? Terminology frames and influences the outcome of any debate; therefore, terminology itself becomes a matter of debate. Recognizing the formal similarities and differences between Muslim and Christian conceptions of deity, such debates may seem akin to debating whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. Yet the answers to such questions uncover one's assumptions about language, philosophy, and religion. Is "God" a "common word" between Islam and Christianity? What is gained and what is lost by answering, "Yes," or by answering, "No"?

### Arguments favoring translation as "God"

#### 1. The etymological argument

Most linguists agree<sup>10</sup> that *Allah* derives etymologically from a family of Semitic words for deity including Hebrew terms such as *El* and *Elohim*, with a root emphasizing strength and authority. Historians point to the appearance of *Allah* and similar words for deity prior to the life of Muhammad, who, according to tradition, intended to point men away from polytheism back to monotheism, in particular the monotheism he perceived as shared by Christianity and Judaism. "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [i.e. "in submission"] to Him."<sup>11</sup>

As seen in Part One of this committee's report, Bible translators regularly face the need to adopt terms found in a target language, redefining them rather than rejecting them

<sup>7</sup> "A Common Word," <http://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/> (accessed December 13, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> A list of responses can be found at <http://www.acommonword.com/category/site/christian-responses/> (accessed March 6, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Available at <http://www.yale.edu/faith/acw/acw.htm> (accessed March 6, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> "The use of the term 'Allah' should be considered the same as translating the Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic terms as the English word 'God.'" *Divine Familial Terms: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions*, as updated on February 24, 2012, <http://www.wycliffe.org/SonofGod/QA.aspx>, (accessed December 13, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Sura 29:46.

outright. Some protest that the term *Allah* is hopelessly contaminated by past association with a moon god or some other false deity in pre-Islamic Arabia. Whatever the truth of such historical claims, that etymological fallacy would also forbid God's people to use Greek *theos*, English "God", Hebrew *El*, and other terms previously applied to pagan deities.

## 2. The reciprocity argument

Lamin Sanneh opens his article on "Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?" by posing the question, "Is the 'Allah' of Arabian Islam the same as the 'Allah' of pre-Islamic Arab Christianity?" . . . This is, I think, a better way to grasp the central issue, rather than asking if God and Allah are the same. The way it is traditionally posed all too easily derails the whole issue into a discussion about etymology. . . . [T]he word "Allah" *as used by Muslims* is now tied to a particular religious community that holds to the text of the Qur'an as sacred and revelatory. The exact same word "Allah" as used by Arabic-speaking *Christians* is also tied to their own religious community and traditions that hold the Bible as sacred and revelatory.<sup>12</sup>

This quotation from Timothy Tennent illustrates the general consensus endorsing the centuries-old practice in which Arabic-speaking Christians refer to *Allah* as the object of their worship, with context clarifying whether *Allah* should be understood with its Islamic meaning set or its Christian meaning set. If *Allah* serves both roles in the Arabic tongue, should not "God" serve both in English? And conversely, if Muslims do not "worship God" (that is, if the implied predicates applied to "God" are not in some degree culturally determined) then how can Arabic-speaking Christians conscionably say in their own tongue that they worship *Allah*, a practice at least as old than the European practice of worshipping "God"?

## 3. The argument from monotheism

If there is only one true God, then anyone who says he intends to "worship God" necessarily worships this one true God, since there is no other. Christian apologetics against Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, and other non-Trinitarian offshoots of Christianity generally refer to "God" as the object of worship in those faiths, even when the characteristics and attributes applied to that label grievously fail to capture biblical truth. Islam too has roots in Jewish and Christian concepts of deity, though heavily distorted.

## 4. The pragmatic argument

If the "Yes" and "No" arguments were philosophically and theologically at stalemate, pragmatic considerations might tip the balance in favor of the path of least resistance. Islam

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 32.

1 normatively conditions Muslims into a staunch monotheism that identifies *Allah* with the  
 2 God of the Bible, accusations of corruption in the Bible notwithstanding. Humanly speaking,  
 3 the evangelist has fewer hurdles to cross in redefining what a Muslim thinks God is like, if  
 4 he must not also convince the Muslim that, contrary to Qur'anic protestations, the God of the  
 5 Bible is a completely different being. Even considering a lesser goal of peaceful coexistence,  
 6 Miroslav Volf argues that if "Muslims and Christians worship the same God, albeit partly  
 7 differently understood, the love of each other for God will help them lives together and  
 8 make neighborly love easier."<sup>13</sup> Again, such pragmatic considerations should not operate in  
 9 the face of a strong theological objection against their pursuit, lest the end attempt to justify  
 10 the means.

## 12 **Arguments favoring translation as "Allah"**

### 14 **1. The clarity of referentiality argument**

15 Terminology should clarify boundaries between competing ideas. When discussing  
 16 the distinctive ideas of Islam and Christianity, lack of distinctive terminology encumbers  
 17 debate. One can construct a bulky term (e.g., "The Islamic concept of deity") or neologism  
 18 ("Islam-God") or acronym (e.g. "I.C.o.D."). Or one can simply use a term already closely  
 19 associated with those ideas (e.g., *Allah*) without denying that such a term has other meanings  
 20 in other settings (for instance, when used by Arabic Christians). Covenant theologians speak  
 21 of "dispensations," and dispensationalists speak of God's "covenants," and yet the terms  
 22 "Covenant Theology" and "Dispensationalism" have acquired historical definitions flexible  
 23 enough to accommodate such overlapping vocabularies while minimizing confusion.

### 25 **2. The Christological argument**

26 ". . . [T]he one who rejects me [Jesus] rejects him who sent me." (Luke 10:16).  
 27 Exegeting this verse, John Piper argues that since Islam denies crucial truths about Jesus  
 28 taught in the Bible (his deity and eternal sonship, his atoning death and resurrection, *et al.*),  
 29 Christians do evangelism a grave disservice to treat Muslims as misled worshipers of the true  
 30 God and the historical Jesus, rather than as worshipers of a false deity. "Jesus is the litmus  
 31 paper as to whether or not we are talking about the same God."<sup>14</sup>

32  
 33 This argument assumes that Muslims do "reject Jesus." The application of this phrase  
 34 seems clear with respect to those who persecuted Jesus in the flesh, but how does it apply  
 35 today? Muslims think of themselves as rejecting false claims about Jesus, rather than Jesus  
 36 himself, but this does not mean that their self-assessment reflects God's assessment. Nor are  
 37 such thoughts exclusively Muslim; many a non-evangelical Westerner finds cause to praise

<sup>13</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), p. 36.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from a transcript of a video of John Piper released by Desiring God Ministries, available at  
<http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/a-common-word-between-us> (accessed December 13, 2012).

some aspect of Jesus while rejecting the biblical witness to the identity and work of Jesus. Is the Qur'anic character of 'Isa "the same person" as Jesus? The 'Isa/Jesus debate, briefly assayed in Part One of this report, mirrors the *Allah*/God debate in many respects.

## Mixed Data

### 1. The Historical argument

Early Renaissance churchmen split on whether to describe the Muslim conquerors of Constantinople as worshipers of "God." Pope Urban II spoke of "the Persians, an accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God, a generation forsooth which has not directed its heart and has not entrusted its spirit to God . . ."<sup>15</sup> Pope Pius II felt similarly, but Nicholas of Cusa, a future Roman cardinal, argued for rapprochement with Muslims based on the perceived worship of a common God which Muslim errors obscured but did not demolish.<sup>16</sup>

Martin Luther, criticizing the Turkish Muslims of his day as warlike, commented that they "think they are doing God service" and describes Muhammad's belief in the inadequacy of the Bible: "Therefore God has had to give another law, one that is not so hard and that the world can keep, and this law is the Koran."<sup>17</sup> In both cases, Luther used "God" (German *Gott*) to identify the object of Islamic devotion.

Unlike Luther, John Calvin denied the term "God" to the object of Islamic worship, and indeed to the object of all non-Christian worship, even that of contemporary Jews. Comparing Muslims to Jews who professed to follow God yet denied God's Christ, Calvin mentioned, "the Turks in the present day, who, though proclaiming, with full throat, that the Creator of heaven and earth is their God, yet by their rejection of Christ, substitute an idol in his place."<sup>18</sup> Similarly elsewhere: "Turks, Jews, and such as are like them, have a mere idol and not the true God. For by whatever titles they may honor the god whom they worship, still, as they reject him [Jesus] without whom they cannot come to God, and in whom God has really manifested himself to us, what have they but some creature or fiction of their own?"<sup>19</sup>

Samuel Zwemer's seminal volume *The Muslim Doctrine of God* (1905) explored the vast chasm between the biblical and Qur'anic conceptions of deity. Zwemer used the terms "God" and "Allah" interchangeably when speaking of the object of Islamic worship. Such

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in *The First Crusade: "The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres" and Other Source Materials*, 2nd ed., ed. Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Volf, *op. cit.*, pp. 45ff.

<sup>17</sup> Luther, *Works*, 5:115.

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, 2.6.4 (Beveridge translation of 1599), <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/calvin/bk2ch06.html#four.htm> (accessed December 13, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, section on 1 John 2:22-23.



usage, assumed as correct without a perceived need for defense, was common among missionaries such as W. R. W. Gardner, an early twentieth century missionary to Muslims in India, who used "God" in discussions of both Christianity and Islam while emphasizing that the two religions "have also so much in contrast—we might better say in contradiction—that there is no possibility of reconciling the two."<sup>20</sup> English versions of the Qur'an usually render *Allah* as "God," excepting that Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, a British convert to Islam, retained *Allah* in his translation of the Qur'an on the grounds that, "there is no corresponding word in English."<sup>21</sup>

## 2. The Biblical argument

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel  
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:  
"I am the first and I am the last;  
besides me there is no god [Hebrew *elohim*]  
Fear not, nor be afraid;  
have I not told you from of old and declared it?  
And you are my witnesses!  
Is there a God besides me?  
There is no Rock; I know not any."  
He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread.  
Also he makes a god [Hebrew *el*] and worships it; he makes it an idol and  
falls down before it. (Isaiah 44:6, 8, 15)

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)

Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. However, not all possess this knowledge... (1 Corinthians 8:4-7)

<sup>20</sup> Gardner, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, p. 46.

1           The scare-quotation marks around "gods" and "lords" in the ESV translations above  
2 make explicit a nuance implicit in the underlying Greek text of 1 Corinthians 8. In one  
3 sense, many "so-called" (Greek λεγόμενοι) gods exist conceptually, for men proclaim deities  
4 under many different names, or under the same name yet with different characteristics  
5 (hence "another Jesus" in 2 Corinthians 11). Yet in another sense, above those many  
6 competing conceptions of the divine, in reality only one God exists. Thus Isaiah prophesies  
7 in one breath that only one God exists, while in the next breath allowing that a carpenter can  
8 make a god which is an idol. Using the language of Romans 1, those who know God  
9 exchange his glory for that of an image resembling elements of creation.

10  
11           All Christians should exercise humility and forbearance in discussing complex issues  
12 of culture and language, keeping in mind that none of these divine titles derive from the  
13 name which God revealed to his covenant people during his mighty work of deliverance  
14 from Egypt, the name which appears over 6,500 times in the Old Testament: "God spoke to  
15 Moses and said to him, 'I am the LORD [Hebrew *Yahweh*]. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac,  
16 and to Jacob, as God Almighty [Hebrew *el shaddai*], but by my name the LORD [*Yahweh*] I  
17 did not make myself known to them.'" (Exod. 6:2-3)

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**MINORITY REPORT**  
**AD INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON INSIDER MOVEMENTS**

**REALITIES ON THE GROUND**  
**MARCH 19, 2014**  
**AN ADDITIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

MINORITY REPORT SUBMITTED BY  
PCA AD INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON INSIDER MOVEMENTS MEMBERS

TE Nabeel Jabbour  
RE Tom Seelinger

## PREFACE

More than anything else, we desire in this report (hereafter MR 2014) to present a tone of expectant faith that the gospel of Jesus Christ can and will spread and transform the Muslim world, just as it has done in other times and places. We are at a unique time in history: the gospel is already beginning to take root around the Muslim world,<sup>1</sup> and we rejoice in what God is doing. We hope and pray that the additional perspective in this report will provide practical help to PCA churches, assisting them in their broad sowing of the message of God's saving power through his Son and the building of his church throughout Muslim nations, "...that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations" (Psalm 67:2).<sup>2</sup>

After providing introductory context to this report, we will describe five realities faced by believers living in Muslim societies and treat four considerations that undergird and inform our approach to mission in the midst of these realities. A list of questions for use by missions committees with their missions partners is also included. An outline of our major topics follows.

### **Part One: Realities on the Ground Facing Muslim Background Believers (MBBs)**

- Reality #1: It is Important that MBBs Live Biblically within Muslim Societies.
- Reality #2: MBBs Can Live Biblically within Muslim Societies.
- Reality #3: National Churches within Muslim Societies Do Not Always Accept MBBs.
- Reality #4: Living within Muslim Societies Requires MBBs to be Vigilant to Avoid Syncretism.
- Reality #5: Growing in Christ within Muslim Societies Holds Significant Challenges for MBBs.

### **Part Two: Biblical Considerations for Facing Realities on the Ground.**

- Consideration A: Every Culture has "Good" and Evil Aspects.
- Consideration B: We Must Not Add Requirements to the Gospel: Principles from the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.
- Consideration C: We are Called to Live *in* the World But Not *of* the World: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 and its Context.
- Consideration D: We Must Not Participate with Demons in False Worship: A Warning from 1 Corinthians 10:19-20.

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<sup>1</sup> David Garrison, *A Wind in the House of Islam* (Monument: WIGTake Resources, 2014). In this newly released book there are nine chapters where Garrison describes the movements of the gospel in the nine main regions of the Muslim world, with a summary on page 18. The scale of movements to Christ in the Muslim world which he describes is unprecedented.

<sup>2</sup> Scripture texts are quoted from the New International Version unless otherwise indicated.

### Part Three: Additional Recommended Questions for PCA-Supported Missionaries in Muslim-Majority Contexts.

We wish to express our appreciation for the work presented in the committee report (hereafter CR) in providing vital, biblical foundations and principles toward the church's faithful obedience to the Great Commission. We also appreciate the theological critique of Insider Movement (IM) methodology and the provision of Affirmations and Denials that churches and missions committees can use in either planning or evaluating mission efforts. We submit this present report, "Realities on the Ground" March 19, 2014, as a perspective that is additional to that of the CR, and serves as a further aid to those encountering unfamiliar realities in the course of ministry to Muslims. We do not present this report as an alternative to the committee report for two reasons.

The first is that the majority has already done significant, able work with which we agree and which we need not reproduce. The second is that our contribution is of a different kind; this is a report that shares selected realities encountered in the course of pursuing gospel mission among Muslims. Along with these, we include additional reflections from Scripture related to those realities. We make no claim that our observations and reflections are comprehensive. However, we do believe they are significant and warrant attention on the part of those in the PCA studying mission to Muslims and insider movements. The PCA needs both to ground its mission efforts biblically and to be prepared for realities its mission partners will encounter in the course of doing mission.

We are grateful for our brothers and fellow members of the Study Committee on Insider Movements (hereafter SCIM), and express deep appreciation for the time the seven of us spent working together. Indeed, we believe the SCIM functioned at its best when working closely together as we did in producing the Affirmations and Denials (see Section B of the Committee Report for the full listing of the A's and D's, along with their introduction). The A's and D's from 2013 were the joint effort of all seven members, and we seek to demonstrate their importance in examining the realities on the ground. We are sure that the present paper would have been improved through input from others within the committee. Nevertheless, we hope that their influence is evident, as we have learned much from them. Some of our many affinities with them include:

- We hold to the Scriptures as our only authoritative guide to engaging in mission (cf. A's & D's 1a, 1b and 3b).
- We believe that both Scripture and our confession encourage believers to apply scriptural principles to the realities of everyday life, wherever they live (cf. A's & D's 13a, 13b, 14a and 14b).
- We believe that Christ ordinarily intends that his people will follow him in the context of their family, birth community, and vocation (cf. A's & D's 12b, 13a).

- In recognition of the comprehensive claims of Christ on the lives of his people, we hold that identity in Christ is wholly controlling in the life of the believer; we do not advocate or support voluntary, indefinite retention of Islamic religious identity by Muslim background believers (MBBs<sup>3</sup>) (cf. A's & D's 11a and 11b).
- We hold that disciples of MBBs should not encourage a disciple to remain within Islamic religious institutions<sup>4</sup> (cf. A's & D's 12c).
- We hold that every believer is a member of the church of Jesus Christ, and we believe in the central importance of every believer to be part of a local expression of church (cf. A's & D's 5a, 5b, and 7b).
- We hold by faith that Muslims are people made in the image of God, and that through Christ alone (cf. A's & D's 4c), people from Muslim majority countries will be among those represented before the throne of God (Rev. 7:9-10).

**Please Note:**

1. This report totally replaces last year's Minority Report (MR 2013), which we take off the table of discussion.<sup>5</sup>
2. The MR 2013 was the product of one author while "Realities on the Ground," March 19, 2014 is the consensus product of two authors.
3. We had hoped the Committee would have included this paper as an appendix to a unified report presented to the 42nd General Assembly.

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<sup>3</sup> Some believers of Muslim background prefer other acronyms in reference to them so as to emphasize their new life in Christ over their background. An example: Believer of Muslim Background (BMB). With respect to believers with other preferences, we utilize "MBB" in this paper as it is widely used.

<sup>4</sup> By "Islamic religious institutions," we have in mind places of corporate Islamic worship and prayer.

<sup>5</sup> In the Minority Report submitted to the GA in 2013, the author attempted to describe simply, via a diagram known as PQRS and its variants, the diversity that exists within the Christian world and within the Muslim world. Further reflection led to the realization that not only was the attempt to describe multi-dimensional realities (culture, religion, beliefs, practices, issues of the heart, lifestyle, identity and the practice of ministry) impossible to accomplish through such a simple diagram, but that the attempt to do so was both confusing and at points subject to broad misunderstanding. With regret for both the confusion and misunderstanding to which use of the PQRS model may have contributed, the author withdraws it and its accompanying written descriptions in hopes that "Realities on the Ground" (March 19, 2014) will more clearly and effectively communicate his concerns and their grounding in the Scriptures.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE 42<sup>ND</sup> GENERAL ASSEMBLY

With the previous comments as background, we, the undersigned members of the Ad Interim Study Committee on Insider Movements, bring the following motion as a substitute to the motion of the committee to the 42nd General Assembly of the PCA:

1. That “A Call to Faithful Witness, Part Two: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements” serve as a Partial Report (Part Two of Two Parts).
2. That the 42nd General Assembly make available and recommend for study “A Call to Faithful Witness, Part Two: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements” dated March 19, 2014, to its presbyteries, sessions, and missions committees.
3. That the 42nd General Assembly make available and recommend for study “Realities on the Ground” dated March 19, 2014, to its presbyteries, sessions, and missions committees.
4. That the 42nd General Assembly dismiss the Ad Interim Study Committee on Insider Movements with thanks.

We request that each of these recommendations receive separate consideration by the Assembly.

TE Nabeel Jabbour

RE Tom Seelinger

## ABBREVIATIONS

A's & D's	The Declarations: Affirmations and Denials
BCO	<i>Book of Church Order</i>
CR	Committee Report 2014
CR 2013	Committee Report 2013 (Revised) – <i>located in Attachment 1 of the Committee Report</i>
CIP	Covenant Identity Paradigm
GA	General Assembly
IM	Insider Movement
IMP(s)	Insider Movement Paradigm(s)
MBB	Muslim Background Believer
MR 2013	Minority Report 2013
MR 2014	Minority Report 2014
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
SCIM	Study Committee on Insider Movements
WCF	<i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>

## **REALITIES ON THE GROUND: THE 42ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONTEXT**

As members of the Study Committee, we offer a few prefacing comments regarding this paper's context. Both authors of the present paper signed Part One of the Committee's Report on translation issues submitted to and received by the General Assembly of 2012. One of us signed the Committee Report submitted to the 41<sup>st</sup> GA in June 2013, and the other expressed substantive agreement with it, while submitting a report intended to be complementary to it. No papers from the SCIM were acted upon by the 41st GA in 2013.

In presenting this paper, we are assuming that the commissioners to the 42nd General Assembly understand that the Insider Movement (hereafter, IM) discussion is highly nuanced; that is, there is a spectrum of practice advocated under the broad banner of IM. The Affirmations and Denials, developed in the CR, are designed to aid by providing a framework by which ministry can be assessed with regard to biblical faithfulness.

However, because certain ideas or methodologies find repetition in the writings of IM proponents, the CR also posits the existence of what it terms the Insider Movement Paradigm (IMP). Mention of the Insider Movement Paradigm, then, serves within the CR as a collective reference to the following patterns encountered within IM writing and methodology: advocating for retention of Muslim (socio-)religious identity, basing an argument upon anecdotal or experiential evidence, implicitly granting authority for mission strategy to anthropology and the social sciences, evidencing a weak ecclesiology, and appealing to Acts 15 or other passages while utilizing a hermeneutic with insufficient attention to redemptive-historical considerations.

Without questioning that the described elements are found in IM proponents' writings, we must ask: what constitutes appropriate use of the Insider Movement Paradigm? How much of the paradigm is actually uniquely descriptive of Insider Movement theory and practice? Further, and importantly, should the Insider Movement Paradigm be used as a substitute for careful application of the Affirmations and Denials? Is every instance of an element of the Insider Movement Paradigm an indication of syncretistic error?

We bring up these questions because we are aware that some view this report as subject to some of the same weaknesses in methodology as IMP proponents. For example, we feel free to tell a story to illustrate a reality on the ground, which some view as basing an argument upon anecdote. Such a criticism, we believe, evidences an overdependence on the CR's IMP as a standard for IM-specific critique and thus risks another kind of error: creating a caricature. Instead, we recommend careful application of the CR's Affirmations and Denials as a more reliable set of tools for evaluating ministry and ministry philosophy.



## 1    **Is There Biblical and Confessional Basis to Address “Realities on the Ground?”**

2  
3    The realities we raise usually describe or imply challenging realities faced by missionaries,  
4    all of which may properly be seen as a result of sin in the world. Is there any doubt that  
5    obedience to the Great Commission will result in our confronting many situations that have  
6    their root in sinful reality? Some may protest that such realities can be expected among those  
7    who do not believe, but that to raise such issues in relation to churches is in some way  
8    prejudicial against local churches. At this point we find it helpful briefly to review how our  
9    confession, as part and parcel of affirming a priority on biblical ecclesiology, both  
10    acknowledges and encourages engagement with difficult realities on the ground—even those  
11    occurring within the church.

12  
13    The Westminster Standards appropriately represent the *ekklesia*, the people of God, in the  
14    Old and New Testaments not only as the Wife (Hosea 2 and 3) and/or Bride (Eph. 5) but  
15    also in the real world as “sometimes more, sometimes less visible” and as “more or less  
16    pure” (*WLC* 23), and further saying that “the purest churches under heaven are subject both  
17    to mixture and error, and some have degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but  
18    synagogues of Satan” (*WLC* 24). Certainly ancient Israel and Judah reflected that “more or  
19    less pure” character, as well as the churches of the Apocalypse (Revelation 2 and 3), not to  
20    speak of the problematic young churches established by the apostle Paul that reflected the  
21    same characteristics. Yet the Lord still considered them “my people.”

22  
23    When one reflects on the “mixed multitude” that came out of Egypt with Moses, it certainly  
24    was true that many of them brought along with them a lot of “baggage” which exhibited the  
25    messy realities that churches manifest all over the world in every context. Some of these  
26    messy realities are exhibited in people who come to Christ from all tribes and nations,  
27    especially from cultures who have never heard of Jesus Christ as he is presented and offered  
28    in the Gospel. Without forgetting that Jesus taught us to take the log from our own eye,  
29    sometimes with Moses we are angry and ready to break the tablets. With Jeremiah we weep  
30    at the stiff-necked people, who are sheep without a shepherd. With Paul we deal gently and  
31    tenderly with young believers as a nursing mother cherishes her children. And with Jesus,  
32    the Lion of the tribe of Judah, we point out the shortcomings in the churches as well as  
33    commend the faith and achievements accomplished through the grace of God.

34  
35    Furthermore, there is a significant statement in the *WCF* 25.2 with which we need to reckon,  
36    i.e.: “The visible church ... is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of  
37    God, *out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation*” (emphasis added). This  
38    important phrase will be explicated later using the comments of Scottish theologian John  
39    Macpherson and A. A. Hodge in their respective commentaries on *The Confession of Faith*.

1 With the advent of anthropology and the social sciences, missiologists began to wrestle with  
2 appropriate incorporation of truth from these disciplines, truth which can be seen as  
3 “borrowed capital” from God’s truth, even though these disciplines often demonstrate an  
4 unbiblical bias.<sup>6</sup> It is indeed vital that we never adopt principles derived from the social  
5 sciences in such a way as to elevate culture, rather than Scripture, as our primary frame of  
6 reference. Nonetheless, over and over again Scripture urges the church toward practical  
7 obedience *within the fallen human context in which it is located*. Such obedience is  
8 demanded as a response of love, both to our God and for others made in his image.

9  
10 With that in mind, we now turn to specific realities that MBBs face in their journey of faith.  
11 We do this not as a substitute for biblically-founded methodology for mission, but rather as  
12 an acknowledgment that the same Scriptures which ground our understanding of mission  
13 will guide us in its practice in the face of whatever realities we encounter.<sup>7</sup> Examining the  
14 realities on the ground with a biblical framework is key for equipping PCA churches,  
15 missionaries, and partners to engage in ministry in the Muslim world.

## 16 17 **PART 1: REALITIES ON THE GROUND FACING MUSLIM** 18 **BACKGROUND BELIEVERS**

### 19 20 **Reality #1: It is Important that MBBs Live Biblically within Muslim Societies.**

21  
22 We propose two basic reasons why it is important for MBBs to live within Muslim societies.  
23 The first is that God receives glory as his people obey him right where they are. Such  
24 obedience will include gathering together with other believers and the formation of biblical  
25 churches within Muslim societies. Such churches will come about according to God’s good  
26 will as he hears his people pray the prayer of Paul for blessing beyond what we can think or  
27 imagine in Eph. 3:16-21 (cf. Reality #5 below). The second answer is that it is important for  
28 MBBs to live faithfully within Muslim societies for the sake of the advance of the gospel.<sup>8</sup> It  
29 is desirable, when possible, for new believers to remain relationally connected to their  
30 Muslim family, friends, and colleagues so that more and more Muslims may be given first-  
31 hand, personal exposure to life and hope in Jesus. It is to this second answer that we now  
32 turn our attention.

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<sup>6</sup> The historical development and current (as of late twentieth century) conflicts related to this engagement of missiology with anthropology are discussed by Reformed missiologist Harvie Conn in *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology and Mission in Trialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Some readers may benefit from first reading, “Part 2: Biblical Considerations for Facing Realities on the Ground,” found later in this paper, as biblical background for facing the realities which are described here.

<sup>8</sup> Faithful witness to Christ within Muslim society must be encouraged. The *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 6-7, compares numbers of adherents by religion globally in 1910 and 2010 as a percentage of total world population at the time. In 1910, Christians represented 34.8% and Muslims 12.6%. In 2010, Christians: 33.2%, Muslims: 22.4%

## 1    **The Gospel Moving within Households**

2  
3    Pre-existing families and social groupings have the potential of birthing fellowships of  
4    believers as they become followers of Christ through exposure to the gospel (cf. A & D  
5    13a). This is why Paul argues strongly in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16 that it is important for a  
6    believing spouse to remain in his or her family, so that they may come to Christ and as  
7    numbers increase, sprout into a new church (see the exegesis of 1 Cor. 7 that follows in  
8    Part 2). This pre-existing community has the potential to become the beginning of a church  
9    plant, and in light of Gen. 12:3 (ESV), where Abram is told, "...in you all the families of the  
10    earth shall be blessed," we have biblical confidence that God's promise extends to the level  
11    of families and clans.

12  
13    This happened in the household of Cornelius in Acts 10 and in the households of Lydia and  
14    the jailor in Acts 16. This is happening in Muslim settings when the *oikos* or the "household"  
15    is wide enough to include neighbors and friends and not only the nuclear family. Of course  
16    there are other instances in which people came to faith through gospel proclamation that  
17    occurred outside the family context (see Acts 4:4; 8:26, 35; 13:12; 17:34).

## 18 19    **Unintended Alienation**

20  
21    As will be illustrated shortly in the story of an MBB named Mustafa (under Reality #3),  
22    alienation between believers and unbelievers may have other causes than the believers' pure  
23    devotion to Christ; other historical and cultural factors may be at play. Thus, Peter teaches  
24    believers in persecuted contexts to live respectably within society and strongly warns them  
25    against behavior that will lead them into suffering and alienation caused by the wrong  
26    reasons (see 1 Peter 2:13-14, 20 and 3:17). Unfortunately, believers in Muslim-majority  
27    contexts can be persecuted by family or others in Muslim societies for perceived identification  
28    with a community (and history) that is immoral. For many Muslims, "Christian" and  
29    "Western" can be virtual synonyms, with all that is unbiblical and immoral in the West  
30    being attributed to Christians, including those in a local, traditional church community.  
31    Thus, if an MBB seeks to rid himself completely of his former culture and identify publicly  
32    with the "Christian" community, in practical terms others may view him as identifying with  
33    an immoral culture and thus distracting his family and friends from seeing Christ in him. For  
34    this reason, Denial 10b of the CR states, "**We deny** that 'Christian' is a mandatory label for  
35    followers of Christ in all times and places, since contexts exist where the term has been  
36    corrupted by associations foreign to its biblical and historic usage."

37  
38    In light of that reality, it should be easy to see why MBBs are often put in a very difficult  
39    position. If they seek to associate themselves with "Christian" culture—which to many  
40    Muslims does not fundamentally mean those who follow Jesus, but rather those who live

1 immoral lives, killed many Muslims in the Crusades, and so on—they could lose the very  
2 relationships that the gospel is designed to transform.

3  
4 On the other hand, maintaining those relationships within Muslim societies will result in  
5 pressure to conform to societal norms, as we will see in Reality 4. However, living out one's  
6 identity in Christ leads to transformation in every area of one's life and produces the aroma  
7 of Christ to some who are around him. This is the very kind of situation that Peter was  
8 addressing in 1 Peter 3:13-16:

9  
10 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should  
11 suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be  
12 frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to  
13 give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that  
14 you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience,  
15 so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may  
16 be ashamed of their slander.

17  
18 As outsiders, who simply don't live within these same complex realities in our home  
19 cultures, we need to demonstrate humility and patience, recognizing that MBBs are truly in  
20 a difficult position as they navigate the waters of integrating their identity in Christ and their  
21 desire to see family members come to Christ.

## 22 23 **Reality #2: MBBs Can Live Biblically within Muslim Societies.**

24  
25 As we reflect on MBBs remaining relationally connected within Muslim societies, it's  
26 helpful to be aware of social and relational dynamics that exist within many such contexts.

27  
28 Not all Muslims are the same. Many Muslims could attend mosque but don't. These are  
29 considered low-practice Muslims.<sup>9</sup> But are these not also Muslims? In fact, many of them  
30 consider themselves as "the real Muslims," and they see the rest as fanatics who are ruining  
31 the reputation of Islam.

32  
33 Muslims in Egypt, for instance, are going through an identity crisis concerning who is a true  
34 Muslim. Members of the Muslim Brotherhood have their answer to who is a true Muslim,  
35 while those who revolted against them have a completely different answer. Those disagreeing  
36 with the Muslim Brotherhood are advocating a form of separation between religion and  
37 state.

38  

---

<sup>9</sup> Low-practice Muslims do not go to the local mosques on Fridays and do not do the daily prayers, yet they might fast a number of days during the month of Ramadan to make up for their lack of religiosity.

1 Additionally, in most of the Muslim-majority countries in the world, legal identities are  
2 permanently established at birth: in some countries virtually all are declared to be Muslim;  
3 in others with recognized Christian minority populations, those born to Christian parents are  
4 declared as Christian. Each child inherits his religious identity from his parents, and legally,  
5 it is impossible to change one's religious affiliation, which is stamped on ID cards.  
6 Accordingly, even if a Muslim comes to believe in Jesus, in the eyes of the law, he is still a  
7 Muslim, regardless of his beliefs. While obviously we wish that there was more religious  
8 freedom in these countries, these are the current realities on the ground that we must  
9 recognize. This legal reality makes it clear that not every person who identifies himself as a  
10 Muslim does so because of his or her religious or personal beliefs. Thus for now, we must  
11 recognize this and walk patiently and carefully with our brothers and sisters who must learn  
12 to follow Jesus in places that force them to remain officially recognized as "Muslims"  
13 because government regulations don't allow them to change their legal identity.

14  
15 Thus, the Muslim world is not only about formal religion but is a broad social/political/  
16 religious community. It is inclusive of all Muslims in spite of the great diversity among the  
17 various Muslim people groups and sects, including Muslims who consider themselves to be  
18 atheists!

19  
20 At the same time, Muslim communities, even if they are secular, tend to exclude former  
21 Muslims who have abandoned their community and joined another religion or religious  
22 community. Their history as Muslims includes the Crusades, colonialism, and the history of  
23 Israel since 1948. This history has strongly contributed to their sense of identity, their sense  
24 of what it means to be Muslim and what it means to be Christian. Moving out from the  
25 Muslim community to another religion that has associations with the Crusades, colonialism,  
26 or Christian Zionism is often socially understood as high treason.

27  
28 These social and legal dynamics highlight the difficulties faced by those MBBs called to  
29 remain physically present within Muslim societies as they faithfully follow Christ, which in  
30 turn raises the issue of how such believers will identify themselves within the broader  
31 Muslim society.

32  
33 Here we turn to the helpful Affirmations and Denials of the CR. Two of the affirmations and  
34 a denial read as follows:

35  
36 12a) We affirm that true conversion to Jesus Christ involves a radical change  
37 of mind and heart, though discipleship is a Spirit-wrought process of growing  
38 in grace and truth.

39  
40 12b) We affirm that Christ ordinarily calls each believer to serve him in the  
41 context of family, birth community, and vocation.

1           12c) We deny that individuals may disregard Scripture’s teaching about idolatry  
2           of heart and practice, may misrepresent or compromise their new allegiance to  
3           Christ, or in any other way may dissimulate or disobey biblical teaching, in  
4           order to remain in their social context.

5  
6           These particular Affirmations and Denials are rooted in the section of the committee report  
7           on the Covenant Identity Paradigm (CIP).<sup>10</sup> We mention them because herein we give  
8           frequent attention to the principle in Affirmation 12b which states that Christ ordinarily calls  
9           believers to serve him in the context of their family, their birth community and their  
10          vocation (1 Cor. 7:20). And they are to do it (as balanced by 12a and 12c) in a way that  
11          displays, without compromise, the magnitude of what God has brought about in and for  
12          them in Christ.

13  
14          We share concern with the CR that a believer’s identity be purely and wholly fixed in  
15          Christ; that believers not identify both with Christ and false religion. Again, the  
16          Affirmations and Denials provide helpful guidance:

17  
18           11a) We affirm that a new believer’s grasp of his new unique and covenantal  
19           identity in Christ and of the implications of his new allegiance to Christ is an  
20           ongoing process of growth and maturity; and that the articulation of this  
21           identity is subject to refinement in keeping with Scripture even across  
22           generations of believers.

23  
24           11b) We deny that a believer prior to Christ’s return ever reaches a terminal  
25           point where his sense of identity and his understanding of his allegiance to  
26           Christ is no longer subject to this process of refinement.

27  
28          In brief, we understand that this Affirmation and Denial pairing (along with 12a-c above)  
29          biblically prioritizes a believer’s identity in Christ throughout life—far above all other  
30          allegiances—while acknowledging that a believer takes time to grow in his or her  
31          apprehension of who Christ is, what Christ has accomplished, and what his identity in Christ  
32          means. The missionary discipler’s role (whether national or foreign) is therefore to point  
33          believers toward onward growth in their disciples’ Christ-focused identity, not to promote  
34          the indefinite retention of a false religious or “socio-religious” identity.

35  
36          Therefore, we now prefer to re-orient the identity discussion as raised by IM proponents to  
37          what is clear from the Bible: that believers focus all of life, and therefore their identity, in  
38          Christ, right where they are.<sup>11</sup> We suggest another Affirmation and Denial pairing to express  
39          this:

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<sup>10</sup> See the 2014 Committee Report, Attachment 1 (the revised 2013 Committee Report), Part 2, Section 5.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. our treatment of Consideration C, further below.

1 We affirm upholding the pre-eminence of Christ in the life of all believers  
2 wherever they are.

3  
4 We deny that witness to Christ increases through the retention of any identity  
5 that is not Christ-focused.

6  
7 We thus acknowledge the social reality of diverse self-identification among Muslims with  
8 regard to Islamic belief and practice (i.e., there exist the religiously devout, atheists, and a  
9 spectrum in between). Nevertheless, however elastic the concept of Muslim identity may be,  
10 MBBs should be encouraged toward ever-growing faithfulness to Christ and identification  
11 with him while remaining within Muslim society. Unfortunately, this encouragement to  
12 remain within Muslim society does not always happen and is the subject of our next reality.

### 13 **Reality #3: National Churches within Muslim Societies Do Not Always Accept MBBs.**

14  
15  
16 While some Christian-background churches welcome MBBs into fellowship without  
17 requiring them to conform to extra-biblical cultural requirements, this sadly is not always  
18 the case in many Muslim-majority countries. Our intent is not to criticize national Christians  
19 or churches but to describe a reality some MBBs face. In some places, Muslims and  
20 Christians live in a state of long-term, proximate distrust between their communities, which  
21 can make it difficult for believers from these different backgrounds to enjoy fellowship  
22 together. It may help the reader to understand this situation by considering how similar  
23 dynamics are at work among Christians of differing races or ethnicities or cultural  
24 backgrounds within the USA, and how this can lead to unfortunate realities in the church.  
25 Christ has indeed broken down barriers to fellowship (Eph. 2:14), but we, his people, often  
26 have difficulty living in the fullness of what he has accomplished.

27  
28 Here we will illustrate this reality in the form of a fictional situation in which we portray a  
29 composite of real people. Imagine one character in the story, an Egyptian Christian young  
30 man and a true believer, living in Cairo, Egypt. Every Thursday evening, he goes to a  
31 Presbyterian church in downtown Cairo to attend the meeting for young adults. Because he  
32 was discriminated against by Muslims during his university days, he has a certain prejudice  
33 against Muslims. In Egyptian mass media, there are often articles written by Muslims  
34 attacking Christianity and the Bible. Furthermore, the Muslim equivalent of TV evangelists  
35 keep insulting Christianity.

36  
37 The other character in this story has the name Mustafa. He is a composite of many MBBs  
38 whom we have known intimately from various parts of the Muslim world. This parable will  
39 illustrate the on-the-ground realities of what happens when people are converted from the  
40 Muslim world to the "Christian" world.

1 Life is easy when considered in the abstract, but we live in a broken world. Here is how our  
2 young Egyptian believer describes the scene:<sup>12</sup>

3  
4 On a certain Thursday, I go to our weekly meeting at church. My friends tell  
5 me that we have a guest speaker tonight, a Muslim who has become a  
6 Christian. My response to the news is a mixture of pleasure and suspicion. Is  
7 he a genuine Christian, or is he playing a role in order to deceive us? When he  
8 enters the church, he automatically repulses me as I notice that he has a callus  
9 on his forehead, a hypocritical manifestation of a fake spirituality. Fanatical  
10 Muslims with the *zibeeba* (a callus on the forehead) attempt to communicate  
11 the message that they have prayed so many times, kneeling and touching the  
12 carpet with their foreheads, that they got that callus. Another thing that  
13 repulses me is the way he greets me. He says, “Assalamu alaykum” (peace to  
14 you). Only Muslims use that terminology when they greet one another.  
15 Perhaps he is not a true Christian. Something that repulses me even more is  
16 his name. How could he come to our church with the Muslim name Mustafa?  
17 Mustafa means “the chosen one” and is one of the names of their prophet  
18 Muhammad because they believe that he was chosen by God. I wonder what  
19 kind of meeting we will be having tonight.

20  
21 After the singing and the prayers, this man is introduced as a former Muslim  
22 who has become a Christian. I sit there wondering whether my friends who  
23 invited him were duped and trusted him prematurely. I need him to convince  
24 me that he has become a “real and true Christian,” just like me, and I am not  
25 an easy person to convince.

26  
27 When he starts sharing his story, I, like most of those in the church meeting,  
28 quietly listen to him to find out whether he is genuine. As he warms up and  
29 starts attacking Islam and ridiculing Muhammad and the Muslim faith, I start  
30 enjoying his story. From our laughter at his jokes about Islam and our  
31 agreeing with him about his attacks, he finds out how to win our approval. By  
32 the time he finishes, we are all elated and encouraged by his sharing, although  
33 we wish he were more polished like us and used our Christian terminology.  
34 But we know we need to be patient because this polish will come with time  
35 and practice. After the meeting, I, along with others, thank him for his sharing  
36 and congratulate him on his conversion. As people come and thank him, he  
37 feels as though he has finally found his place of belongingness in our church  
38 meeting because he is being treated like a hero with a halo around his head.

39  

---

<sup>12</sup> The following is taken from Nabeel Jabbour, *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 230–232.



1 I still do not like the *zibeeba*, the callus on his forehead. I hope that in the  
 2 future he will put cream on it in order to cover it up. During the informal time  
 3 at the end of the meeting, I follow him with the corner of my eye and notice at  
 4 one point that he is talking to my younger sister and to other women. When I  
 5 see him doing that, I begin to wonder about his motives. Is he coming after the  
 6 women? Why would a Muslim want to believe in Christ other than for  
 7 women, money, or a desire to go to America? So back at home, I warn my  
 8 sister and advise her not to get too excited just yet that he has become a true  
 9 believer. We will need to wait and see “fruit” before we trust him. I even  
 10 quote to her a litmus test: “By their fruit you recognize them” (Matthew 7:20).

11  
 12 When Mustafa returns the following Thursday to our church meeting, not as  
 13 the speaker but as an ordinary person, he finds that most of us respond to him  
 14 with plastic, artificial smiles. We keep him away at a safe distance because he  
 15 still greets us by saying “Assalamu alaykum,” and he still “smells” like a  
 16 Muslim. It seems I was not the only one from our church who preached to a  
 17 family member a little sermon about the need to avoid Mustafa until we see  
 18 fruit! So Mustafa starts wondering whether he has come to the right church.  
 19 Very soon he meets another Protestant Christian in Cairo, who invites him to  
 20 his church. The halo returns temporarily but does not last long. Then he gets  
 21 invited to another church and another, and in the meantime he learns how to  
 22 please the Christians: by making fun of Islam and by attacking Muhammad  
 23 and the Qur’an.

24  
 25 As the months pass, he begins to get more polished in his terminology. At the  
 26 same time, he ruptures every relationship he had with his Muslim family and  
 27 friends as he becomes openly critical of Islam. He even changes his name  
 28 from Mustafa to Peter when baptized.

29  
 30 Shortly afterward, he comes to our Thursday meeting again, this time to give a  
 31 testimony of how he is suffering for Christ. He is not Mustafa anymore, but  
 32 brother Peter. I never felt at ease by calling him “brother Mustafa.” Brother  
 33 and Mustafa did not mesh. He no longer uses the Muslim terminology he used  
 34 to, and he lifts up his arms in church during the singing and shouts,  
 35 “Hallelujah” and “Praise the Lord.” Now he has really become one of us; he is  
 36 inside our “fortress with thick walls” that protects us from the Muslims outside.

37  
 38 This composite sadly describes how some national Christians in Muslim countries, (in this  
 39 case, in the Middle East), have treated MBBs over the centuries. It is possible that the  
 40 wholesale rejection of his former culture encouraged by national or foreign Christians, rather  
 41 than preserving him from syncretism, will fail in training him to think critically about how

his new faith in Jesus affects each area of his life. Further, such wholesale rejection, as opposed to careful reflection guided by study of Scripture, may unnecessarily rupture his relationships with family and friends. And it may also make it difficult to develop deep relationships with other believers who have chosen to live out their faith within Muslim society.

#### **Reality #4: Living within Muslim Societies Requires MBBs to be Vigilant to Avoid Syncretism.**

Upon being born again, not every MBB believes God is leading him to transition from the Muslim world (community) to the culturally “Christian” world (community). Those MBBs who believe they are called by God to remain within the Muslim world, relationally connected to family and friends, face special God-given challenges in avoiding syncretism while remaining faithful to Christ. Like every believer on earth, they journey increasingly toward Christ and away from sin and syncretism as they go through the process of sanctification.

In the West, we routinely help new believers transition from wrong theology to biblical theology. We patiently extend grace to young Christians who have a hard time working through issues arising from associations with ungodly families, who struggle with figuring out how to identify with Christ in hostile contexts, or who have trouble making sense of the Trinity, or the union of Christ’s two natures. We extend grace to young believers who are having difficulty reconciling things they were taught in a secular/humanist education with the teaching of Scripture.

We need to extend similar grace to MBBs who have surrendered their lives to Christ and are now struggling with growing pains. Although they are a new creation in Christ with a new preeminent second-birth identity in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), these new believers are often relationally well-connected to their own people, among whom they used to be immersed in wrong theology. Mentors who come alongside new believers to facilitate their move away from wrong theology to biblical theology should primarily help them build a solid foundation on the Word of God, and warn them against the real potential of syncretism. They need help to develop a thoroughly biblical worldview and lifestyle. As with most of us, this process normally takes time.

#### **Key Questions**

MBBs in Christ who remain connected to family and friends will struggle with important questions regarding how to avoid syncretism and remain faithful to Christ. Some of these include:

- Should he fast during Ramadan with his extended family? Should he feast with them in the family gatherings after the fast? How can he do so without being deceptive?
- Is it possible for him to express respect for Muhammad as a civil leader who affected world history, without dishonoring Christ?
- Should he use the Qur'an as a bridge to discussion with his family about the Christ of the Bible? If so, how does he do that appropriately?
- How can he develop healthy relationships and mutual accountability with others in the Body of Christ?

### **An Important Guideline**

An important guideline is that while discipling should be carried out in the birth communities, disciples should not be encouraged to remain inside the Islamic religious institutions. While some IM advocates suggest disciples can remain within Islamic religious institutions such as mosques, we believe that there is too much danger of syncretism with Islamic religion in such an approach. The CR rightly states: "Islamic religious beliefs and practices cannot be treated with neutrality."<sup>13</sup> Some MBBs and some Christian missionaries feel free to stand behind the imam in the mosque and to synchronize with the forms of Muslim prayer while praying over texts from the Scriptures. Standing behind the imam while he is praying implies endorsing his prayer. Such a practice shows communal solidarity in Islamic religious belief and practice, which a follower of Christ should not do. Encouragement to do this from a Western missionary often comes from the Westerner's individualistic approach to faith.

However, transition from Islamic religious institutions in some cases is a process that could take time. Though regeneration takes place in an instant, sometimes from a human perspective, it can appear that the process of a Muslim coming to faith in Christ takes a long time. Evaluating when a Muslim comes to faith in Christ can therefore be difficult. Assisting him through spiritual growth as it pertains to avoiding syncretism with Islam can be just as difficult, and requires biblical, spiritual discernment.

Full surrender to Christ will eventually lead MBBs to renounce false Islamic belief held by their family and friends. How can an MBB be fully committed to Christ and at the same time believe that Muhammad is superior to Christ and that the Qur'an is superior to the Bible? This would be schizophrenia. MBBs who have come to know Christ must change theologically in order to adhere to biblical theology, in order faithfully to live and bear testimony within the Muslim world. While it is best if they can continue to be socially and relationally connected to Muslim relatives and friends, they must theologically shift away from their former identity in Adam (whether that was traditionally Islamic or modern and secular) to their new identity in Christ.

---

<sup>13</sup> 2014 Committee Report Section A.1.2, "Identity."

1 Regardless of what they do, some MBBs are rejected by their families and declared as  
2 infidels. Some are killed; others must flee for their lives to other countries.<sup>14</sup> Faithful and  
3 effective witness by word and deed on the part of MBBs is a process that may take years in  
4 order to bear fruit, but by God’s grace many will hear, believe, and persevere.

## 6 **The Question of “Allah”**

8 One question that comes up among Westerners as they think about the progress of the gospel  
9 in Muslim areas is that of the Arabic word for *elohim* and *theos* (in English, “God”). The  
10 following points address the issue from the perspective of Arabic-speaking contexts. Perhaps  
11 in other countries, where Arabic is not the spoken language, and other words for God exist  
12 in the native language, other points would need to be made. However, the following points,  
13 taken together, will hopefully provide some clarity on both the linguistic question (can the  
14 word “Allah” be used?) and the identity question (do Muslims and Christians worship the  
15 same God?)

- 17 (1) Muslims and Christians do not worship the same God, because Muslims who accept the  
18 Qur’an’s interpretation of Jesus do not believe in Jesus as their Savior.
- 20 (2) While similarities exist between our description of God, great dissimilarities exist as  
21 well (obviously including the preeminent difference that biblically, God reveals himself  
22 as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), such that we cannot posit on the basis of theological  
23 descriptions of God that we worship the same God.
- 25 (3) Because the Qur’an drew from oral narratives during the time of Muhammad, some of  
26 them deriving from the Old Testament and the New Testament, there are some shared  
27 historical narratives about God.
- 29 (4) Because there are shared (though not identical) historical narratives (for example, the  
30 story of God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son in Genesis 22 and Surah 37),  
31 when speaking with Muslims, there are times when we will both be pointing to the same  
32 historical referent, that is, the God who revealed himself to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and  
33 so on.
- 35 (5) Despite that shared referent, Muslims are not worshiping the God about whom they  
36 know some true stories. Only Jesus makes that possible (John 14:6).

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<sup>14</sup> See the story of an Egyptian MBB, Mark Gabriel (pen name) in Section I, “My Story,” in Mark A. Gabriel, Ph. D. *Islam and Terrorism* (Lake Mary: Front Line, 2002). Mark Gabriel is a former professor of Islamic history at Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt.

(6) Arab Christians, even before the time of Muhammad, used the word “Allah” to refer to the God of the Bible.

(7) At least in Arabic-speaking contexts, there is no other word to use for God.<sup>15</sup>

(8) Using the word Allah is therefore not only acceptable for believers in Jesus in Arabic-speaking contexts, but it is the established practice of Arab Christians, and other Christians must respect this. As in all contexts, this means that believers in the Arab world must carefully and powerfully explain who God truly is as he has revealed himself in his Son.

### **Reality #5: Growing in Christ within Muslim Societies Holds Significant Challenges for MBBs.**

Reality #4 acknowledged that MBBs face difficulties related to avoiding syncretism while living within Muslim societies. Reality #5 turns our attention to difficulties MBBs face while seeking to grow in Christ while living within those societies.

As with all of us, MBBs in Christ must determine how to live holy lives in a frequently unholy context. They need wisdom and discernment regarding living out their faith. Young MBBs still living at home, for example, must honor their father and mother. In doing this, they may seek, through their transformed lives, to take seriously the teaching of Jesus to let their light shine before men, “that they might see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” But the time will come when they must speak, for Jesus also says, “...everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32-33). Faith and wisdom are key, and can also require courage, patience, and prudence. Sometimes, first earning the right to speak by demonstrating a transformed life is critical. Yet fear keeps some from identifying with Christ in front of others; this is sin from which the kindness of God leads his people to turn (Rom. 2:4). His love will cast out fear (1 John 4:18). Obviously, the challenge is to stay focused on the love of God in Christ.

We have already mentioned in Reality #3 that national churches within Muslim societies are not always welcoming to MBBs. It is also true that not all MBBs within Muslim-majority countries want to become part of a minority church community. It could be that although they want to identify with Christ, they do not want to identify themselves with Western “Christianity” which the local Muslim mindset may have identified as endorsing the immorality evident in Hollywood movies, acceptance of homosexuality, and Christian Zionism. Starting a new church is not necessarily a rejection of existing churches in a city; new church plants may be motivated simply from a desire to reach an unreached part of a community.

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<sup>15</sup> Similar to English, there are other words like *ar-rab* (the Lord), but there is no other word that accurately translates the Greek *theos* and Hebrew *elohim*.

We do not here accept the false understanding of Christianity which many Muslims believe and propagate. We are simply acknowledging that MBBs who live within Muslim society face complex and difficult realities when they contemplate associating with a nearby church. A decision not to associate with a known local church may be motivated by the desire to show gospel love toward family and friends and willingness to walk that difficult path rather than being motivated by fear of others' reactions. Further, we have already mentioned that not all national churches within Muslim societies welcome MBBs. And sometimes Christians—or other MBBs!—have very high expectations of a new MBB in proving that his faith is genuine. These dynamics can all serve to demotivate a new MBB from joining an existing church.

A further clarification is necessary. We acknowledge that biblically faithful Christian churches within Muslim-majority settings (often as part of Christian minority populations) also face difficult realities. They too are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and in obedience to what the Scriptures teach we need also to honor them and partner with them in common obedience to the Great Commission as they and we are able. All believers live in mutual obligation to one another. *WCF* 26.1 states it well:

All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

Thus an important question remains: How will MBBs relate with one another and other believers as members of the body of Christ? To these questions we now turn.

### **Muslim Background Believer Ecclesial Expression**

The letters of the New Testament make it very clear that God deeply loves churches that are incomplete and have a lot of growing to do. Paul addressed the churches in Corinth and Colossae with very high regard, even though they were struggling churches. Even so, Paul invested in and encouraged them.

It is worth quoting from the *WCF* 25.2: "The visible church . . . is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, *out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation*" (emphasis added). In his commentary on *The Confession of Faith*, Scottish theologian John Macpherson comments as follows:

When we say that out of the visible church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation, we guard against the error of supposing that connection with the church as an institution necessarily secures salvation, and equally against the

1       notion that God regards the use of His own appointed means of grace as of  
 2       slight importance. By sovereign power He can work savingly apart from those  
 3       means, but ordinarily He does not. Cyprian said, ‘He who has not the church  
 4       as its mother has not God as its Father.’ *When the church is viewed primarily*  
 5       *as an institution, such a maxim leads to an ecclesiasticism at once formal and*  
 6       *exclusive.*<sup>16</sup>

7       Indeed, in his commentary on the *Confession*, A.A. Hodge says that this section similarly  
 8       teaches:

10       (3) The truth also that since the church is rendered visible by the profession  
 11       and outward obedience of its members; and since no class of men are ever  
 12       endowed with the power of discriminating with absolute accuracy the  
 13       genuineness of Christian characteristics, it necessarily follows that a credible  
 14       profession, as presumptive evidence of real religion, constitutes a person a  
 15       member of the visible church. By a credible profession is meant a profession  
 16       of the true religion sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently corroborated by the  
 17       daily life of the professor to be credited as genuine. Every such profession is  
 18       ground for the presumption that the person is a member of the true church,  
 19       and consequently constitutes him a member of the visible church, and lays an  
 20       obligation upon all other Christians to regard and treat him accordingly.<sup>17</sup>

22       One has to recognize that these statements by stalwart Presbyterians are clearly illustrated by  
 23       Jesus’ statement that “the men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment,  
 24       and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah” (Matthew 12:41). The  
 25       same holds for the Queen of Sheba in Matt. 12:42. And can anyone deny that the thief on the  
 26       cross was a member of the church? In all of these examples, faith (like that of many MBBs  
 27       today) was coupled with repentance and they were not denied entry into the church, the  
 28       kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

30       In summary, MBBs with a credible profession of faith who live within Muslim societies ought  
 31       to be viewed as members of the visible church of Jesus Christ, and treated accordingly.  
 32       Eminent Presbyterians have argued that such believers should be considered members of the  
 33       visible church. Our point here is not to assert that MBBs who remain within Muslim  
 34       society, even as they gather, always evidence the full marks we in the PCA associate with a  
 35       local expression of the visible church. Rather, we emphasize that we should embrace and

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<sup>16</sup> Rev. John Macpherson, *The Confession of Faith*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition (Boston: T&T Clark, 1881, 1951), 143. Note: the expression “ecclesiasticism at once formal and exclusive” is a reference to the Roman Catholic definition that no one outside the visible Roman Catholic Church may ever be saved. Hence, the caution for us is not to consider membership in an organized church, having received the sacraments, etc. as a badge of membership in the visible church. Emphasis added.

<sup>17</sup> A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (London: Banner of Truth Trust 1961), 313. Emphasis added.

1 esteem them as brothers with whom we desire to engage in mutual encouragement toward  
2 maturity in Christ (Prov. 27:17). Such encouragement should also motivate MBBs to gather  
3 in worship with other believers and together grow toward full biblical expression of the  
4 marks of the church, a church which itself acts as salt and light to the Muslim society in  
5 which it is located. Such a church should still understand that it is connected to churches that  
6 worship God through Christ around the world.

7  
8 If a PCA missionary or mission team goes to a Muslim country to plant a church, their goal  
9 is clear: plant a church that exhibits the marks of the true church. The Lord Jesus Christ gave  
10 an unmistakable mark when he said: "A new commandment I give you: love one another. As  
11 I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my  
12 disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). *WCF* 25.4 states: "This catholic church  
13 has been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members  
14 thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and  
15 embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in  
16 them."

17 Similarly, according to *Belgic Confession* (Article 29) the marks of the true church are: 1)  
18 the true preaching of the Word,<sup>18</sup> 2) proper administration of sacraments (Baptism and the  
19 Lord's Supper) and 3) faithful exercise of church discipline.<sup>19</sup> Further, the CR notes: "True  
20 churches are marked by biblical preaching, right administration of the sacraments, and  
21 proper administration of discipline. These functions assume a duly constituted church  
22 government, organized appropriately according to the size and circumstances of the local  
23 church."<sup>20</sup>

24  
25 In terms of fleshing out what this means practically, what will applying the marks of the true  
26 church to a young church plant in a Muslim setting look like? What are the spelled-out  
27 essentials for a healthy beginning of a church plant in a Muslim setting to which MBBs  
28 should aspire? Again, the ultimate aim is for groups to become full expressions of the local  
29 church. We rejoice at the existence of such groups of MBBs meeting within Muslim  
30 societies. Though they may begin humbly, each group is changing history.

- 31  
32 1. A minimum of two or three people meeting together on a regular basis (Matt. 18:20).<sup>21</sup>  
33 At first, this may be an informal group loosely organized which later becomes more  
34 formally organized (Heb. 10:25).

---

<sup>18</sup> According to Reformed theology, if there is true preaching of the Word, then it should result in commitment to Christ, depth in the Scriptures, obedience, prayer, fellowship, and reaching out to the lost.

<sup>19</sup> *WCF* 7.6; 25.4; *BCO Preface* 2.3; 2.2.

<sup>20</sup> 2014 Committee Report, Attachment A (Revised 2013 Committee Report), Executive Summary.

<sup>21</sup> Meeting in the same place is not an essential mark of a church. Moving around from one apartment to another for their regular meetings could protect them from being detected by the secret police.



2. As numbers grow and gifting becomes evident, leadership by elders who hold themselves and others accountable to right belief and living and a broader governance structure come into the picture.
3. People who are in Christ, and have surrendered their lives to Christ as their Lord, who desire to obey the Holy Spirit and worship the Father (Matt. 6:33).
4. People who accept the Word of God as the authority that shapes their lives, who preach it, teach it, study it, memorize it, and above all obey it (2 Tim. 3:16; Josh. 1:8).
5. People who truly fellowship with one another and love one another by helping and supporting one another (Jn. 13:34-35; Heb. 13:16).
6. People who reach out to the lost (Matt. 5:16; 6:44-48).
7. People are baptized into the fellowship of believers.
8. Believers remember Jesus' death and resurrection and practice the Lord's Supper on a regular basis.

These are high standards. They describe the ideal foundation for planting churches in Muslim context. Actually, many churches in the West fall short of manifesting some of these marks of a church. Yet the young church should focus on and aspire to these goals in order to lay a healthy foundation.

Leadership and discipline will be exercised when the numbers of believers increase and as biblically faithful elders emerge. Deacons will give servant leadership and the Lord's Supper will be practiced when brothers and sisters meet and experience together the presence of Christ as they remember his sacrificial death (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Believers should be baptized, but at the right time and for the right reasons.<sup>22</sup>

As we continue to consider how ecclesial expression among MBBs may happen as they live out their faith within the Muslim world, the following comment from the CR is helpful:

Christ-followers around the world should understand and describe themselves first and foremost as followers of Jesus Christ, and therefore members of the Visible Church, the body of Christ. Even "hidden Christians" in persecuted circumstances are still part of the Visible Church as defined in the Westminster Standards.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Mustafa (from the previous story) was baptized in order to convince prejudiced Christians that he was really one of them. That is not a biblical reason for baptism.

<sup>23</sup> CR 2014, Attachment A (Revised 2013 Committee Report), Executive Summary.

Recognizing that even “hidden Christians” under persecution are part of the visible church is important. Given how different that is to the PCA’s North American context, it is important to consider practically how the church may be manifested in other parts of the world. We often find at least three different nascent manifestations of the visible church in places such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Turkey. We consider the second and third as possible expressions of how legitimate, “hidden Christians” meet with the intent of becoming fully biblical expressions of the church of Christ. We make these informal distinctions in order to describe the reality on the ground while affirming that true believers, including those who meet in circumstances far different from our own, should be considered part of the church of Jesus Christ.

- 1) Most familiar to Westerners is the established or obvious (legally established) church; its Christian identity is obvious to the society in which it exists. At times the members of the obvious church are expatriates or belong to a different ethnicity.
- 2) A hidden or underground church can come about as the gospel spreads in a household (*oikos*),<sup>24</sup> as a result, it is sometimes known as a house church. The hidden church is not publically identified as a church in the place in which it exists. In the first century, the gospel moved from one *oikos* to another through relationships that were impacted by transformed lives. This movement of the gospel in the first century was effective in part because the *oikos* was the central social structure of the day. Many parts of the Muslim world have similar social structures today and are open to similar influences.
- 3) In the semi-hidden church, foreign missionaries and/or national Christians who are known publicly as Christians have discreet relationships with other believers from Muslim back-ground who do not openly identify with the obvious church. This semi-hidden church has the potential of either going underground or becoming an established or obvious church.

Members of hidden churches in hostile, dangerous contexts or destitute regions<sup>25</sup> often experience daily persecution for their faith from their families and society, but also see tremendous spiritual growth and conversions. Some in the West see the hidden church as defective and unhealthy, kept hidden because of fear of persecution. This is true in some cases. But hidden churches are sometimes healthier than openly established churches in their faith, their love, their practice of “one anothers,” and even their doctrinal purity. Underground churches should not be despised, but rather recognized as a fully valid expression of the church that in many ways look like the early church in the book of Acts, as well as other examples throughout history, such as China's recent history.

<sup>24</sup> This *oikos* may not be only be the nuclear family, but will normally be inclusive as well of friends and neighbors.

<sup>25</sup> As noted in BCO 4.5, “In like manner, Christians whose lot is cast in destitute regions ought to meet regularly for the worship of God.

1 Like yeast spreading through dough, the early church in the Roman Empire spread through  
 2 the society of that time with neither church bells nor fancy cathedrals. When yeast is at work  
 3 within the dough, its effect is not immediately evident. Similarly, we often only see the  
 4 impact of hidden churches at a later time as they grow within the society. Many examples of  
 5 this kind of impact are taking place today and are cause for great praise.

6  
 7 The church's covenantal identity exists through participation in the covenant of grace which  
 8 includes both Jews and Gentiles (*WCF* 7.5). God's people in the Old Testament were the  
 9 roots and the trunk of the olive tree, but with the new covenant, the Gentiles were grafted as  
 10 branches into that same tree (Rom. 11). God's people are to be the salt and light of the earth  
 11 as they are dispersed all over the globe. We are to be the yeast of the Kingdom permeating  
 12 the dough. We are sojourners or exiles (1 Pet. 2:12). We are not meant to live in secluded,  
 13 exclusive ghetto communities; rather, we are to be in the world, yet not of the world.

14  
 15 In Egypt, there used to be a recurring phenomenon: newlywed couples who were committed  
 16 Christians looked for apartments in buildings owned by other born-again Christians.  
 17 Sometimes every resident in the building was a believer. These believers tended to send their  
 18 children to Christian schools, go to Christian doctors, and work in Christian companies.  
 19 They lived their Christian lives in isolation, dreaming of one day emigrating to the West  
 20 when the opportunity opened up. Now some Christian leaders have started asking young  
 21 couples who have a strong walk with the Lord not to live such lives of isolation and  
 22 separatism. The slogan that they chose, "*manara bikul amara*," rhymes in Arabic. It means  
 23 "a lighthouse in every apartment building." Young couples who have strong relationships  
 24 with God are encouraged to look for apartments in buildings where Muslims and nominal  
 25 Christians live, rather than in buildings filled with Christian believers. If Christians are  
 26 persuading Christians to live boldly as believers in the gospel among Muslims, does it not  
 27 make sense to encourage MBBs who have a strong walk with the Lord to do the same?

28 A healthy church in the Muslim world is not just to be experienced and lived out on the day  
 29 of public worship in a church building for 90 minutes (Heb. 10:25). It is also lived out every  
 30 day of the week, as church members live their lives as salt and light among relatives,  
 31 workmates, classmates, friends, and neighbors. One of the clearest distinguishing  
 32 characteristics of a church is the "one another" aspect, taught throughout the New Testament  
 33 (Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Jn. 1:6-10).

34  
 35 To stay healthy and growing, church members should seek to have: 1) an intimate relationship  
 36 with God and to stay in the Word of God, 2) a strong relationship with one another as  
 37 believers, and 3) transformational relationships with the lost around them so that the gospel  
 38 can flow to others when they proclaim it.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> There is a remarkable change which has taken place among Christians in Egypt as a result of the past 3 years of "revolution". As Christians became co-belligerents with moderate Muslims politically to oppose political Islam (as practiced by the Muslim Brotherhood) the two communities became much closer. Now many

1 In the book of Revelation, John writes about his glimpse of the future that awaits us and  
2 gives us a description of the elect:

3  
4 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one  
5 could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before  
6 the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were  
7 holding palm branches in their hands. (Rev. 7:9)

8  
9 That scene describes the fact that among the elect there are and will be many MBBs from all  
10 over the Muslim world. We could argue that unless we see radical and unprecedented  
11 change in the Muslim world, a great many of those elect from Muslim backgrounds today  
12 will not be from the various expressions of the established churches, but rather will be from  
13 churches in destitute regions (*BCO* 4.5) hidden from our eyes. The *BCO* acknowledges  
14 ministry within “the destitute parts of the church” (*BCO* 8.6) along with mission and  
15 particular churches, always with a view toward becoming a mature church. “In like manner,  
16 Christians whose lot is cast in destitute regions ought to meet regularly for the worship of  
17 God” (*BCO* 4.5). And if Acts 16 is a guide, the Holy Spirit will put it on the heart of a  
18 pastor, a national Christian or a missionary to “go over to Macedonia” and help these young  
19 believers to live out a Christian life and witness within the destitute regions.

20  
21 Reports of growth in numbers of evangelicals from China and Iran (the figures for which we  
22 will not here seek to document) fuel a question which requires consideration: is it possible  
23 for us to accept that many from among the elect in Muslim societies now worship in various  
24 forms of the hidden or semi-hidden church?

## 25 26 **PART 2: BIBLICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FACING REALITIES** 27 **ON THE GROUND**

28  
29 The following biblical reflections undergird our understanding and strengthen our hope as  
30 we pursue Great Commission obedience and fruitfulness within Muslim societies.

### 31 32 **Consideration A: Every Culture Has Both “Good” and Evil Aspects.**

33  
34 Every man, woman and child on earth is made in the image of God. Yet every man, woman  
35 and child on earth is also deeply marred by the Fall. Human beings can compose beautiful

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Muslims feel free and welcome to visit churches and many Christians have more Muslim friends than ever before. It is a real “paradigm shift” resulting from both Christians and moderate Muslims having a common national goal and identity. Now there are believers in Christ in the parliament for the first time and they feel fully accepted. This will inevitably have gospel repercussions.

1 music and they can also shatter one another's lives. We dare not devalue another person, nor  
2 do we underestimate his capacity to sin. And when large numbers of people join together  
3 and create a culture, it is a very mixed bag. So how do we rightly think about culture?

4  
5 The doctrine of creation includes the principle that everything that God created is good.  
6 Moreover, God is the absolute Creator, and there is no one besides him. Evil people and evil  
7 spirits cannot metaphysically bring anything into existence. All that they can do is pervert  
8 and twist what God has created. This principle holds true not only with regard to created  
9 physical things, like animals and plants, but also with regard to institutions, like marriage  
10 and the family, and functions, like governing authority.

11  
12 The doctrines of the fall and redemption, when taken together, remind us that every person  
13 is either for God or against him. And those who are for him are only those who have been  
14 redeemed by Christ. Consequently, the corruption due to sin and its effects travels through  
15 all of human culture; even the aspects of culture we might see as good are thoroughly  
16 inadequate to save. And indwelling sin continues to operate in the flesh of Christians.

17  
18 This means that no human culture is pure; sin is present in and taints all cultures. The  
19 beliefs and customs of a particular culture are not neutral; everything which people do  
20 reflects either obedient submission to or rebellion against God. But there is another reality  
21 at work in culture, as well. The doctrine of common grace teaches that by the mercy of God,  
22 benefits are given even to unbelievers. Among these benefits are not only physical blessings,  
23 like rain and crops (Acts 14:17), but also intellectual and cultural benefits. We see fragments  
24 of truth and fragments of moral good, at least in external ways. For example, many non-  
25 Christian peoples now reflect obedience to the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12) better than  
26 "Christian" nations do, although this is not from a pure heart that honors the true God.

27  
28 Living within human culture (as we all do all of the time) calls for firm vigilance and  
29 penetrating critical analysis of corruptions that become manifest in cultures. Cultures are  
30 complicated, and sin takes subtle as well as gross forms.

31  
32 Natives to a particular culture are uniquely equipped to conduct this critical analysis. They  
33 know their own culture with a depth that an outsider does not, so they can understand many  
34 things that outsiders will never grasp. On the other hand, because they are native to the  
35 culture, they may also have blind spots to sins that are endemic to the culture. Therefore,  
36 within the body of Christ, there is need for cross-cultural engagement and exhortation.

37  
38 When we refer to culture in this paper, it is with the understanding we have just described.  
39 And when we refer to cultural insiders, we are simply referring to those who are native to a  
40 culture. When we mention cultural insiders who are believers, it is with appreciation of both

1 their unique place to critique their cultures of origin as well as their need for others to help  
2 them to see what they are blind to within their own cultures.

3  
4 A wholesale acceptance of culture ignores the inevitable presence and impact of sin. On the  
5 other hand, a wholesale rejection of culture ignores the principle of common grace. What is  
6 the solution? There is no simple, mechanical formula. We must be wise and discerning  
7 within our own culture as must any believing cultural insider within any culture. J.H.  
8 Bavinck wisely observed that what is needed is redemptive transformation of cultural  
9 practices (*possessio*), which involves preserving some things, rejecting others, and altering  
10 still others in a complex and creative way.<sup>27</sup>

11  
12 **Consideration B: We Must Not Add Requirements to the Gospel: Principles from the**  
13 **Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.**

14  
15 In Acts 15, the church was severely divided over “the Gentile problem.” Gentiles were  
16 coming to faith in Christ, but were not adopting Jewish practices such as circumcision  
17 (which is a synecdoche for all that is commonly called the Ceremonial Law). The church  
18 leaders convened a council to deal with this problem. Peter addressed the Apostles and  
19 elders who had gathered at what is commonly called the Jerusalem Council and outlined the  
20 problem. The result affirmed that which has guided the church ever since: that salvation is in  
21 Christ alone by faith alone, and none may add other requirements. We look now to the text  
22 to see if this indeed is so.

23  
24 In verses 7-8, Peter reminded the Council that in granting the Holy Spirit to Gentiles, God  
25 himself had given incontrovertible proof that the Gentiles were being saved, even though  
26 they had not been circumcised.

- 27     • Verse 9: As a result, Peter declared that there is no distinction between Jews and  
28     Gentiles.

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<sup>27</sup> Bavinck explains the term *possessio*: “The Christian life does not accommodate or adapt itself to heathen forms of life, but it takes the latter in possession and thereby makes them new. Whoever is in Christ is a new creature. Within the framework of the non-Christian life, customs and practices serve idolatrous tendencies and drive a person away from God. The Christian life takes them in hand and turns them in an entirely different direction; they acquire an entirely different content. Even though in external form there is much that resembles past practices, in reality everything has become new, the old has in essence passed away and the new has come. Christ takes the life of a people in his hands, he renews and re-establishes the distorted and deteriorated; he fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning and gives it a new direction. Such is neither “adaptation,” nor accommodation; it is in essence the legitimate taking possession of something by him to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth.” J.H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1960), 178-179.

- 1 • Verse 10: Peter then reminded the Jews that even they could not keep the law. So,
- 2 the notion that they should require Gentiles to do so was hypocritical.
- 3 • Verse 11: Finally, he reminded the Council that justification does not come through
- 4 keeping the Law, but is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

5

6 For Peter, the issue surrounding circumcision was not a matter of trying to make the gospel

7 palatable to Gentiles. Rather, it was a matter of orthodoxy. We face this same danger today.

8 It is possible for missionaries or churches to add to the pure gospel by adding extra-biblical

9 requirements. In Galatians Paul had very strong things to say about the dangers of

10 proclaiming such a “different gospel.” The questions before the Council were: what must a

11 person do in order to become a worshipper of God? Must he become a Jew? Peter's answer:

12 Simply have faith in Christ.

13

14 The matter was resolved in vv. 13-21, where James advanced Peter's argument by focusing

15 on God's mission. He noted that inclusion of Gentiles has been part of God's plan since the

16 beginning. James therefore concluded that the church should not trouble them by putting

17 unnecessary barriers or burdens on those who turn to God (while also advising that the

18 Council direct Gentile believers to follow four specific abstentions).

19

20 The events of Acts 15 marked an epochal change for how God's people in the history of

21 redemption are to understand their place among the nations. No longer would the old

22 boundary markers for God's people, such as circumcision, apply. Instead, the defining mark

23 of the people of God would be faith in Jesus Christ. This was further clarified and confirmed

24 by Paul in his epistle to the Galatians, where Paul clearly and emphatically deals with the

25 same concerns as the Council affirmed.

26

27 Clearly there exist implications from the Council's decisions in Acts 15 for how the gospel

28 reaches into cultures and people groups. Notably, rendering its decision about circumcision,

29 the Council addresses Gentiles (people of other nations) as believers and then was mostly

30 silent except for a few specific requirements. In light of that, here are some principles for

31 the way the gospel should express itself in different cultural settings.

32

33 *First, the Council modeled that none may impose requirements other than true faith in*

34 *Christ on another, including across cultures, for admission into the body of Christ. To*

35 *impose other requirements would be to add requirements to salvation, and so the*

36 *soteriological concern is closely connected to a principle of not imposing one culture's*

37 *practices onto another for purposes of admission into the church. Consider Denial 13b, “We*

38 **deny** *that believers must adopt particular patterns of behavior beyond those explicitly or by*

39 *good and necessary consequence mandated by Scripture.”*

1 Note further that the Council did not require the Jews to give up circumcision. Instead, at  
2 least at that time, Jewish Christians were allowed to be Jews while continuing the practice of  
3 circumcision, and Gentile Christians remained Gentiles (non-Jews) and were not forced to  
4 practice circumcision. These two results taken together are significant. If the problem was  
5 only that Jews were trusting in circumcision to make them right with God, then circumcision  
6 would have been forbidden for all. However, the Council does not do that. They implicitly  
7 allow Jewish believers to practice circumcision while not requiring it of the Gentile  
8 believers.

9  
10 Thus, while other passages will refine this understanding, it is important to see that in the  
11 immediate context of the Council decisions of Acts 15, both Christ-centered soteriology and  
12 the existence of faithful yet diverse religious/cultural practice is upheld. While there is no  
13 implication here that the continued practice of Christ-less religion is affirmed, the rest of the  
14 New Testament affirms the thorough redefinition of these communities via their identification  
15 with Christ above all else. God is reconciled to both Jews and Gentiles through Christ  
16 alone. Nevertheless each group retained social and cultural particularities.

17  
18 *Second, the Council tacitly recognized that some cultural practices are indeed sinful. So,*  
19 *when the Council instructed the Gentiles to abstain from things polluted by idols and sexual*  
20 *immorality (v. 20-21), they established the principle that all Christians are called to abstain*  
21 *from sinful practices of one's culture.*

22  
23 *Third, when the Council further required Gentiles to abstain from things strangled and from*  
24 *blood, they determined in principle Christians should be sensitive to the cultural sensibilities*  
25 *of their brothers for the sake of the mission and peace of the church. As Matthew Henry*  
26 *observes, "We must therefore give them time, must meet them half-way; they must be*  
27 *borne with awhile, and brought on gradually, and we must comply with them as far as we*  
28 *can without betraying our gospel liberty."*<sup>28</sup>

29  
30 We see this same principle illustrated in the following chapter. In Acts 16, immediately after  
31 Paul had argued that circumcision was no longer a requirement for inclusion among God's  
32 people, Paul circumcised Timothy. On the heels of Acts 15, this seems rather shocking, until  
33 one realizes Paul's motive. Paul circumcised Timothy, not because Timothy needed it, but  
34 so that Timothy could more effectively minister to Jews.

35  
36 Therefore, Acts 15, together with its application in Acts 16, teaches several important  
37 principles for gospel mission.

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean: Macdonald Pub., 1983), vol. vi. *Acts to Revelation*, 194. It is ironic that here the mature attitude of bearing with the weak is for newly converted Gentiles to bear with the immature spiritual understanding of the traditional people of God, the Jews.



- 1 1. When people believe the gospel, those same people are encouraged to continue living
- 2 faithfully within their culture.
- 3 2. Furthermore, as Christians interact with those who are culturally different, they should
- 4 be careful not to give unnecessary offense.
- 5 3. Yet, regardless of the cultural setting, Christians must observe the moral law of God.

6

7 In his commentary on Acts 15, John Calvin wrote, “We must beware first of this plague, that

8 some prescribe not a law to other some after their manner, that the example of one church be

9 not a prejudice of a common rule.”<sup>29</sup> According to Calvin, this passage not only signals an

10 epochal change from the Old Covenant, but also teaches that one church ought not to impose

11 its practices—other than those of the Scriptures—on another. For example, in many Muslim

12 cultures it is rude (or even illegal) to consume food or drink in public during the Ramadan

13 fast. MBBs may find it easy to continue to be sensitive and not cause unnecessary offense

14 within Muslim society by choosing not to eat or drink publicly. Is that loss of freedom

15 legitimate and constructive? Perhaps an MBB could decide to use that loss of freedom as a

16 reminder to pray for his family and friends.

17

18 These principles should govern the church’s mission in every setting, including its mission

19 to those living in the Muslim world.

20

21 **Consideration C: We are Called to Live *in* the World But Not *of* the World:**

22 **1 Corinthians 7:17-24 and its Context.**

23

24 The entire epistle of 1 Corinthians addresses the practicalities of what it takes to live a holy

25 life in an unholy culture—how to be “in” that culture without being “of” it. The city of

26 Corinth was known for being particularly immoral and given to pagan idolatry and

27 philosophies. Paul addressed the Corinthian believers as saints or holy ones and taught them

28 how to live in light of their new identity as holy ones in Christ.

29

30 “To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ

31 Jesus, saints by calling” (1 Cor. 1:2; See also 1 Cor. 6:1-2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor. 1:1; 8:4;

32 9:1, 12; 13:13). Paul addresses several issues facing the Corinthian Christians:

- 33
- 34 • Demonstrating the wisdom of the Spirit in a culture that venerated sophistry
  - 35 (chapters 1–3)
  - 36 • Following servant-leadership in a culture that loved and worshipped wisdom and
  - 37 power (chapter 4)
  - 38 • Living sexually pure lives in a culture that embraced gross sexual immorality
  - 39 (chapters 5-6)

---

<sup>29</sup> John Calvin, Trans. William Pringle, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprinted 1984), vol. xix, 34.

- Handling conflicts in a godly way in a culture that loved to take things to court (chapter 6)
- Preserving family relationships in a culture where families were broken (chapter 7)
- Maintaining social interactions in a culture where everything was laced with idolatry (chapter 8)
- Using freedom to serve in a culture that regarded freedom as a license to sin (chapter 9)
- Avoiding the temptations of idolatry in a culture where idolatry was normative (chapter 10)
- Learning to worship in a godly way in a culture where worship was an opportunity for self-indulgence (chapter 11)
- Using one's gifts to serve in a culture where one's strengths were used to serve oneself (chapters 12–14)
- Living based on the resurrection in a culture where the resurrection was regarded as foolishness (chapter 15)

These issues are, of course, very relevant for MBBs who are trying to follow Christ in the midst of their Muslim community.

In 1 Corinthians chapters 5-10 Paul dives into the difficult and perplexing practical realities on the ground in Corinth. Paul opens and closes this section by pointing to issues at stake when living as cultural insiders in the midst of an ungodly cultural context. He opened this section with:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. (1 Corinthians 5:9-10)

He closed this section with:

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. (1 Corinthians 10:31-33)

In the midst of this discussion of how to be in the world but not of the world, Paul addresses the issue of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. We might wonder how a chapter on marriage relates to questions about living faithfully within Muslim society, but Paul himself applies this principle beyond the immediate issue of marriage. Looking at the text in its immediate

context and its broader context demonstrate that the principles embedded and emphasized in 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 have important implications for one of the broad themes of 1 Corinthians: how to live a holy life in an unholy context.

### **The Immediate Context**

Paul starts 1 Corinthians 7 by addressing the value of remaining single. As Paul continues to address issues related to marriage, he comes to a sticky problem. What if a woman comes to faith in Christ and her husband is not a believer: should she divorce him? He answers by saying: “If a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.”

It could be that what was on Paul’s mind was for the believing partner to remain in the marriage in the hope that the other partner would come to know Christ. He was also concerned with the impact on the children of a believing and unbelieving spouse. This accords with his passion to see the gospel penetrate and transform families, and not only transforming individuals. To give his argument more power, Paul appealed to a broad principle that is one of the implicit yet foundational principles for his entire letter: the importance and implications of living a holy life in an unholy context. Here, Paul lays down a principle that not only applies to marriage, but to other contexts as well.

[17] Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. [18] Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. [19] Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts. [20] Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. [21] Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. [22] For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave. [23] You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. [24] Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to. (1 Corinthians 7:17-24)

As you read through this passage it should be obvious that his comments about circumcision vs. uncircumcision and living as a slave vs. living as a free man are intended to be applied beyond remaining married to an unbeliever. In verse 17, Paul says that remaining in the context in which a person was when God called him can be an assignment by God and a calling from Him. To put it another way, if one refuses to remain in the situation he was in when God called him, he risks abandoning God’s assignment and calling. Then Paul says

that remaining in one's context is a principle that he teaches and lays down in all the churches. Actually, he repeats this principle of remaining in context or retaining that place in life three times in this short text, in vv. 17, 20 and 24. This is the principle he lays down in all the churches.

Paul says that this principle not only applies to marriage, but also to the Jew-Gentile controversy and to the issue of status in society. To the Jews who have become believers in Christ, he tells them not to become Gentile Christians. To the Gentile Christians, he says not to get circumcised and become Jewish Christians. Being Jewish or being Gentile is nothing. What counts is surrender to Christ and retaining one's own situation for the sake of the gospel.

Paul then applies this same principle to the issue of status in society, evident in those days most starkly in the form of slavery. Today status in society has relevance to employment, citizenship, race, and social class. What Paul was addressing in his context (as exemplified in his letter to Philemon) was this: What if a slave comes to know Christ and his owner is a believer in Christ as well? Should the Christian slave demand his liberation? How does Paul address this issue? He tells the Christian slave:

[21] Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. [22] For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. [23] You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.

Paul is saying to the Christian slave that if he can gain his freedom, it will be great. But if he cannot, he should not indulge in self-pity, resenting his boss who is his owner. Paul reminds him that although he is a slave, he is a free man on the inside. Paul motivates him to focus on the freedom that he already possesses. Then he reminds him that the slave-owner, if he is a believer, is a slave of Christ after all. In other words, we live in an unjust and broken world, but as we stand before Christ, the ground is level. So he tells this slave, repeating the same principle for the third time, to retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him, and thus to embrace his circumstances rather than resent them. Real inner freedom is not shaped by circumstances, but in being able to choose the right attitude in the midst of those circumstances (1 Thess. 5:18).

Therefore, this basic principle—to remain in the status in which one was called—is applicable not only to marriage and to the Jew/Gentile issues but also to one's status in society. Of course, there will be important exceptions to this rule when Scriptural teaching is violated. One result of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was that Gentiles did not need to become Jews in order to be accepted as believers in Christ; they were free to work out their faith in their own cultural setting, without engaging in its sinful, idolatrous, and immoral

practices. Furthermore, Paul says that, for the sake of the church's mission, one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This applies not only to one's marriage status, but also to his status in society (slave or free), whether Jew or Gentile.

Paul does not encourage anyone to engage in sin. One must not continue to worship idols. However, in the very next chapter, Paul says that even committed Christians have liberty to still eat meat offered to idols. If a believer is told that the meat has been offered in sacrifice, he should not eat it – not because it is wrong to eat, but due to the conscience of the one who pointed out that it was sacrificial meat. So the cultural meaning must impact the behavior of a follower of Christ. The first priority is always love that does not cause others to stumble. This is a clear example of remaining in the world without being of the world. The CR rightly states: "In short, Paul acknowledges in 1 Corinthians 8-10 the complexities of Christians living within a culture hostile to the faith. He does not counsel a categorical separation from the world around us (cf. 1 Cor. 4:10). Neither is he unaware of or indifferent to the genuine spiritual threats posed to the Christian attempting to live in the context of the culture in which the Lord has called him to live (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17-24)."<sup>30</sup>

**Consideration D. We Must Not Participate With Demons in False Worship: A Warning from 1 Corinthians 10:19-20.**

When the Apostle Paul continues his argument about meats sacrificed to idols as being nothing, he adds a strong word of caution, indeed a strong warning, in 1 Corinthians 10:19-20, which states:

[19] Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? [20] No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.

Charles Hodge gives an excellent and helpful commentary on the last phrase as follows:

By fellowship or communion . . . we are said to have fellowship with those between whom and us there are congeniality of mind, community of interest, and friendly intercourse . . . In this sense the worshippers of idols have fellowship with evil spirits. They are united to them so as to form one community, with a common character and a common destiny. Into this state of fellowship they are brought by sacrificing to them; that is, by idolatry, which is an act of apostasy from the true God, and of association with the kingdom of darkness. It was of great importance for the Corinthians to know that it did not depend on their intention whether they came into communion with devils. The heathen did not intend to worship devils, and yet they did it; what would

<sup>30</sup> See the final paragraph of the 2014 Committee Report, Section A.1.2.

it avail, therefore, to the reckless Corinthians, who attended the sacrificial feasts of the heathen, to say that they did not intend to worship idols? The question was not, what their intention was, but what was the import and effect of their conduct. A man need not intend to burn himself when he puts his hand into the fire; or to pollute his soul when he frequents the haunts of vice. The effect is altogether independent of intention. This principle applies with all its force to compliance with the religious services of the heathen at the present day. Those who in pagan countries join in the religious rites of the heathen, are just as much guilty of idolatry, and are just as certainly brought into fellowship with devils, as the nominal Christians of Corinth, who, although they knew that an idol was nothing, and that there is but one God, yet frequented the heathen feasts . . . Whatever their intention may be, they worship the host if they bow down to it with the crowd who intend to adore it. By the force of the act we become one with those in whose worship we join. We constitute with them and with the objects of their worship one communion.<sup>31</sup>

There is a need for caution lest the MBB find himself in fellowship with demons if he participates in worship inside the Islamic religious institutions.

In 1 Corinthians 10:19-20, Paul was specifically talking about worship and this is applicable in Muslim contexts. A few verses later in 1 Corinthians 10:27, Paul is not at all forbidding social interaction and associating with unbelievers. Right discernment while maintaining relationships on the one hand (*associating*), and separating from false religion (not *participating*) on the other, may be a difficult process and will require wisdom and grace while practicing careful application of the Scriptures to the details of a particular Muslim context.

### Summarizing the Significance of the Four Considerations

These four considerations reinforce our biblical understanding that believers are encouraged to live faithfully within their existing cultures of origin, even if those cultures contain elements hostile to Christ. Salvation is a gift of God received by faith; credible profession of faith is the key means of discerning one's faith in Christ, and Scripture admits no other requirements for acceptance of believers into the church. Culture is not neutral, and thus MBBs living within the Muslim world, like believers everywhere, must exercise biblical discernment as they *participate* in their cultures. MBBs in cultures where a strong connection to false religion prevails will need to be especially careful about *participation* in cultural practices that would be harmful to themselves or the consciences of other believers while continuing to *associate* with unbelievers, without compromise, that the transforming work of the gospel would prosper.

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<sup>31</sup> Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 193-194.

### **PART 3: ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS FOR PCA-SUPPORTED MISSIONARIES IN MUSLIM-MAJORITY CONTEXTS**

The Committee Report provided a list of questions that will aid missionaries and churches as they consider how to serve well in Muslim-majority contexts. The following questions should be seen as supplemental and aimed at helping churches and missionaries think through the additional realities and considerations discussed in this report.

- How do the missionaries struggle with their own identities on the field? Do those around them see authenticity or deception regarding their identities? If deception, what do they need to do to remedy the situation?
- To what degree are they living among and spending time with Muslims?
- Who are the Muslim contacts for whom they are praying and with whom they are building relationships?
- Who are the MBBs they are discipling? What materials are they using in discipling, and why? Are these MBBs spending time with their Muslim family, friends, neighbors and colleagues? Are they sharing Christ with Muslims? Do any of them experience crippling insecurity and fear?
- What church do missionaries attend on the mission field? How do they communicate to their MBBs their convictions about Hebrews 10:24–25? How is their ministry leading to the establishment of faithful expressions of biblical church?
- How are they helping MBBs look to the Scriptures to find guidance for the difficult issues that they face? To what degree are they telling them their own answers rather than training them to find those answers in the Scriptures?
- Are the MBBs with whom they work focused on maintaining or developing strong relationships with family and friends in their birth communities? Are they earning the right to speak by demonstrating a lifestyle that has been transformed by the gospel? Are the MBBs becoming better students, better husbands, better wives, better employees as a result of their coming to know Christ? How?
- How do the missionaries encourage MBBs not to rupture their relationships with family and friends and yet at the same time not to live in deception?

### **PART 4: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

In this paper, we have sought to present five realities MBBs face while living in Muslim societies and four considerations that would undergird and inform our approach to mission:

#### **Realities on the Ground Facing Muslim Background Believers**

- Reality #1: It is Important that MBBs Live Biblically within Muslim Societies.
- Reality #2: MBBs Can Live Biblically within Muslim Societies.

- Reality #3: Churches within Muslim Societies Do Not Always Accept MBBs.
- Reality #4: Living within Muslim Societies Requires MBBs to be Vigilant to Avoid Syncretism.
- Reality #5: Growing in Christ within Muslim Societies Holds Significant Challenges for MBBs.

### **Biblical Considerations for Facing Realities on the Ground**

- Consideration A: Every Culture has “Good” and Evil Aspects.
- Consideration B: We Must Not Add Requirements to the Gospel: Principles from the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.
- Consideration C: We are Called to Live *in* the World But Not *of* the World: 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 and its Context.
- Consideration D: We Must Not Participate with Demons in False Worship: A Warning from 1 Corinthians 10:19-20.

We have seen that truly faithful and fruitful MBBs are those who are fully surrendered to Christ and who are called to bear witness within the Muslim world. They face the difficulties of living within Muslim societies without compromise. Out of love for their families, friends, neighbors and colleagues, they live as obedient witnesses to the gospel, recognizing that persecution will come. They willingly endure such persecution in the cause of serving Jesus Christ, and place no extra-biblical requirements on other believers as conditions of fellowship, insisting only on a common faith in Christ alone for their salvation. They are “cultural insiders” in their birth communities who do not commit syncretism through remaining within Islamic religious institutions. They are called to stay relationally (physically and socially) connected to their relatives and friends in their birth communities, focusing on developing relationships so that the gospel can spread rapidly and be honored (2 Thess. 3:1). At the same time, they actively seek fellowship with other believers, serving and loving them as Jesus commanded. And they worship God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with other believers, growing toward becoming full expressions of the church while celebrating their connectedness to the historic and global church.

Let us encourage and pray during these days of opportunity for those believers in Christ brought up in Muslim families, who desire to make the gospel available to others within their own communities. Let us pray that they would serve Him whole-heartedly, living a transformed life and proclaiming the gospel with increasing confidence. May the gospel infiltrate many communities in the Muslim world, and may God build his church there to his resounding praise around the world.



## MINORITY REPORT (2013)

**[NOTE: Page numbers at bottom right are from the 2013 Commissioner Handbook and are referenced in Attachment 2 of the 2014 Committee Report.]**

### **AD INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE ON INSIDER MOVEMENTS A PARTIAL REPORT (PART TWO OF TWO PARTS)**

With appreciation for most of what is in the SCIM Committee Report, I believe that the work of the committee would be made more complete if the assembly would make both the Committee Report and the Minority Report available for study to the presbyteries, sessions and missions committees of our denomination.

I, the undersigned, a minority of the Committee appointed to evaluate the Insider Movement and report to the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly, bring the following motion as a substitute to the motion of the committee:

**That the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly adopt the following recommendations:**

1. That “Part Two – A Call to Faithful Witness: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements” serve as a Partial Report (Part Two of Two Parts).
2. That the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly make available and recommend for study “Part Two - A Call to faithful Witness: Theology, Gospel Missions, and Insider Movements” to its presbyteries, sessions, and missions committees.
3. That the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly make available and recommend for study the paper in the Minority Report entitled “Addressing Realities on the Ground” to its presbyteries, sessions, and missions committees.
4. That the 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly dismiss the ad interim Study Committee on Insider Movements with thanks.

**ADDRESSING REALITIES ON THE GROUND  
WE LIVE IN A BROKEN WORLD**

Those who read this report are likely to be very busy. If you are not able to read the entire report, I suggest that you begin by reading the Executive Summary, the Introduction and Section 2. If you have more time, I suggest that you also read Sections 4, 6, 14, 20 and 22. Of course the maximum benefit will come from reading the entire report.

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## Abbreviations

15

16	<i>BCO</i>	<i>Book of Church Order</i>
17	MBB	Muslim Background Believer in Christ
18	IM	Insider Movement
19	CR	Committee Report
20	MTW	Mission to the World
21	PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
22	SCIM	Study Committee on Insider Movements
23	<i>WCF</i>	<i>Westminster Confession of Faith</i>

## Executive Summary

This Minority Report does not advocate for all that is represented as Muslim insider ministry, but it contends that there is a strong biblical basis for some aspects of insider ministries.

Approximately 2.1 billion people in the world today identify themselves as “Christian” in some sense of the word. Many of these are nominal, or cultural, Christians, many of whom do not attend church or personally follow many of the core teachings of orthodox Christianity.

Similarly, many of the 1.7 billion Muslims in the world are nominal Muslims<sup>1</sup> and secular Muslims<sup>2</sup> who do not attend the mosque and do not personally follow many of the core teachings of Islam. Still, they regard themselves as Muslims.

The issue is, how does a Muslim who receives Christ, and is thus in Christ, relate to the culture and religious context into which he was born?

In every culture, particularly in those where the gospel is breaking new ground, the relationship of the believer to his culture is challenging and often messy. That was true in the first century, and it is true today.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians regarding this kind of messiness: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world” (1 Corinthians 5:9–10).

Muslim background believers (MBBs) can live with integrity within the Muslim world by honoring Muhammad as a leader without revering him as a Prophet. Not all Muslims who come to Christ will have a clear conscience about this, but some do and are thus remaining in their context with the hope that the gospel will spread there.

True Muslim background believers who remain in their Muslim context are those who are truly born from above and truly in Christ, but who are called to remain in their cultural and relational context in order to bring the gospel into the heart of the Muslim world. That is, they are called to stay relationally connected to their relatives and friends in their birth communities so that the gospel will spread there.

---

<sup>1</sup> Muslims in name only.

<sup>2</sup> Muslims with liberal interpretation of certain doctrines.

1 It is vital that such insiders not compromise orthodox biblical beliefs or live deceptively.  
 2 This is not easy or simple, but it is consistent with Jesus' call for His followers to live in the  
 3 world but not of the world. This paper seeks to address some of the difficulties and  
 4 complexities that Muslim background believers must face if they are to live in the Muslim  
 5 world while not being of it.

6  
 7 -----  
 8 **Those who read this report are likely to be very busy. If you are not able to read the**  
 9 **entire report, I suggest that you begin by reading the Executive Summary, the**  
 10 **Introduction and Section 2. If you have more time, I suggest that you also read**  
 11 **Sections 4, 6, 14, 20 and 22. Of course the maximum benefit will come from reading**  
 12 **the entire report.**  
 13 -----

### Preface: Overture # 9

14  
 15 This report concurs with most of the Committee Report in how it addressed Overture 9 (June 10,  
 16 2011). The body of this report addresses some supplementary material that attempts to fill  
 17 in some of the gaps.

### Introduction

18  
 19 We live in a broken and messy world.  
 20 A certain Muslim background believer in Christ (MBB) was discipled by a Baptist  
 21 missionary in Israel. He had three wives when he came to Christ. He said to his American  
 22 mentor:

23  
 24 Don't criticize me for having three wives at one time. You Americans just  
 25 marry one right after the other after each divorce!" The missionary who knew  
 26 this man and his family well wrote: "The amazing thing was his first wife was  
 27 about to die from old age and child bearing. We prayed for her and she got  
 28 well! Most of her adult children became believers. His second wife was a  
 29 fundamentalist and she divorced him, but her daughter and son became  
 30 believers. His third wife became an evangelist to other women, and several of  
 31 her brothers and sisters came to the Lord. So, the Lord worked in that [messy]  
 32 situation in spite of the multiple marriages. It took some time for the gospel to  
 33 permeate the social fabric. Life is never easy, but God is faithful!"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Permission to use this quote was granted by the missionary. For the full story of "Barnabas" go to *Discipling Middle Eastern Believers* by Ray G. Register. GlobalEdAdvance Press, pp. 35-37 and throughout the book.

1 While this Minority Report is not advocating polygamy, this example illustrates how God  
2 works in situations that are outside of His design for how we are to live.

3  
4 With appreciation for most of what is in the SCIM Committee Report, this Minority Report  
5 agrees with most of what is in the Committee Report and differs at certain points as it gives  
6 more attention to the reality on the ground. With that it seeks to address certain gaps.

7  
8 The Committee Report has rich sections that lay the biblical foundation to the debate: the  
9 history, the divine speech, revelation, life is a religious reply, the Holy Spirit, and the visible  
10 church. The exegesis of Romans 1 is superb.

11  
12 The Committee Report has solid theology and is powerful on protecting orthodoxy in  
13 scholarly language. The Minority Report is *simple and practical* and deals with the insider  
14 movements in understandable language to the laity and to the missions committees in our  
15 churches. The Minority Report contributes a dimension on how the gospel can and is  
16 penetrating the Muslim world. In Matthew 16, we see an advancing church where the gates  
17 of hell cannot stand against it. The Minority Report presents a tone of faith that the Muslim  
18 world *can be penetrated with the gospel* just as the Roman Empire was penetrated in the  
19 first century. We are at a unique time in history: The gospel is already taking root in many  
20 parts of the Muslim world, and we need to be careful *not to miss out on what God is doing*  
21 because of our genuine concerns about the defense of orthodoxy. Both protecting orthodoxy  
22 and having a passion for the expansion of the gospel are important and should be in place.

23  
24 H.J. Bavinck, in *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (1960), addresses the difference  
25 between accommodation and the *possessio* principle:

26  
27 To what extent must a new church which has developed within a specific  
28 national community accommodate and adjust itself to the customs, practices,  
29 and mores current among a people?

30  
31 Bavinck goes on to address the power of the gospel in transforming the lives of people and  
32 impacting cultures. It is a description of a church in which the gates of hell cannot stand  
33 against it as it advances to possess the nations. This would be true as long as God's people  
34 are careful not go to the nations with a "possessio" conquering motive, but with a  
35 "possessio" expressed in meekness and humility following in the footsteps of Christ  
36 (Philippians 2:5–11). The reality of God's providential oversight over all of life and history  
37 cannot be neglected in considering cross-cultural mission work. There are wholesome  
38 features in aspects of all cultures, as recognized in the doctrine of common grace. Careful  
39 observation and a learner's attitude are thus essential to effective cross-cultural work. One  
40 must discern where God has already been at work, where people already have insights that

point toward deeper biblical truths. The gospel should not be presented as a total antithesis to existing life and culture; rather, it must resonate with the best in any cultural expression while calling for a new and total allegiance to the resurrected Christ. Bavinck continues:

‘Accommodation’ connotes something of a denial, of a mutilation. We would, therefore prefer to use the term *possessio*, to take in possession. The Christian life does not accommodate or adapt itself to heathen forms of life, but it takes the latter in possession and thereby makes them new. Whoever is in Christ is a new creature. Within the framework of the non-Christian life, customs and practices serve idolatrous tendencies and drive a person away from God. The Christian life takes them in hand and turns them in an entirely different direction; they acquire an entirely different content. Even though in external form there is much that resembles past practices, in reality everything has become new, the old has in essence passed away and the new has come. Christ takes the life of a people in his hands, he renews and re-establishes the distorted and deteriorated; he fills each thing, each word, and each practice with a new meaning and gives it a new direction. Such is neither ‘adaptation,’ nor accommodation; it is in essence the legitimate taking possession of something by him to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth.<sup>4</sup>

What Bavinck describes is perhaps what some insider movements are doing—taking existing socio-religious forms, terms and categories and filing them with new Christ-centered meanings.

### **Important Terminology**

Approximately 2.1 billion people in the world today, roughly 33 percent of the world’s population, identify themselves as “Christian” in some sense of the word. Many of them are nominal or cultural Christians who do not attend church. Historically, the term Christianity has referred to the Global Church, whereas “Christendom” has only referred to the regions of the world where Christianity had significant political and social dominance. “Christendom” was the portion of the world in which Christianity prevailed, or which was governed under Christian institutions. In this Minority Report, *for lack of a better term*, I will use the expression “Christendom” to describe the huge block of nations, peoples and cultures that are “Christian,” at least in name. When I speak of Christendom, I am addressing the socio/political/religious entity or community which is associated with Christianity. According to our terminology, Christendom includes all the various branches of Christianity, including folk Christianity and cults that claim to be Christian. We should bear in mind, however, that an unknown percentage of the 2.1 billion people that make up Christendom are included by physical birth only and not because they are born again or living according to the Scriptures.

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<sup>4</sup> J.H. Bavinck “An Introduction to the Science of Missions,” 1960, p. 169.

1 In this Minority Report, *for lack of a better term*, I will use the expression “Muslim world”  
2 to describe the huge block of nations, peoples and cultures that are “Muslim,” at least in  
3 name. When I speak of the Muslim world, I am addressing the socio/political/religious entity  
4 or community which is associated with Islam. We should bear in mind, however, that a  
5 high<sup>5</sup> percentage of the 1.7 billion people that make up the Muslim world are there by physical  
6 birth and not because they are practicing Muslims.

7  
8 The Minority Report *complements* the Committee Report on a number of issues:

- 9 • A missional interpretation of one of the main texts in Scripture regarding the  
10 insider model.
- 11 • A contrast between the two entities of Christendom and the Muslim world and  
12 how that contrast affects conversion.
- 13 • Identifying the existence of core, social, and corporate identities.
- 14 • Authenticity as insiders within the Muslim World without deception.
- 15 • The spheres of theological preference and spheres of theological tolerance.

16  
17 In summary, the Committee Report gives a great deal of attention to the absolutes of how  
18 things *ought to be*, and the Minority Report gives more attention to the *reality on the*  
19 *ground*.

20  
21 Other important questions will be addressed in this Minority Report such as: How do  
22 believers who remain in their birth community think of Muhammad and the Qur’an without  
23 living in self-deception and without deceiving others? What is Islam like for the majority of  
24 low-practice Muslims? Are there openings and fertile ground within the Muslim world  
25 where the gospel can take root and spread? Also, this Minority Report provides an  
26 international perspective and complements the Committee Report by adding balance and  
27 richness that come with a diversity of perspectives. On their website,<sup>6</sup> John Frame and Vern  
28 Poythress of Westminster Theological Seminary address the topic of the wealth that comes  
29 from the diversity of perspectives, describing their important understanding of  
30 Perspectivalism. They note,

31  
32 God’s knowledge is not only omniscient, but omniperspectival. He knows from  
33 his own infinite perspective; but that infinite perspective includes a knowledge of  
34 all created perspectives, possible and actual... One way to increase our knowledge  
35 and our level of certainty is by supplementing our own perspectives with those of  
36 others.

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<sup>5</sup> Percentages of high-practice Muslims will be addressed later in this report.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/>



1 There is a tendency for people to live in a bubble. Especially since 9/11, it has become very  
 2 easy for Christians in the West to surround themselves with people who have the same  
 3 perceptions about Islam and who agree with their assumptions and conclusions.

4  
 5 We know that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone and in Christ alone, yet at the  
 6 same time there is great value in understanding other religions, philosophies and cultures. In  
 7 the book *Power Religion*, Michael Horton wrote:

8  
 9 Indeed Paul had knowledge. Not only was he a well educated Pharisee, he  
 10 demonstrated a remarkable facility with secular literature and philosophy by  
 11 quoting pagan poets and writers from memory... Paul quoted from the Cretan poet  
 12 Epimenides, from the Cilician poet Aratus, and from the Hymn of Zeus, by  
 13 Cleanthes. This he also does elsewhere, to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:33)  
 14 and Titus (1:12). Notice that Paul took the time to become familiar with the  
 15 culture he was addressing (and quite possibly not simply for evangelistic  
 16 purposes), and yet he used that familiarity to bridge the communication, not  
 17 accommodation.<sup>7</sup>

18  
 19 Furthermore, Frame and Poythress address the richness in a variety of perspectives under the  
 20 lordship of Christ and the authority of the Scriptures, so no human is complete by himself.

21  
 22 It is not that we come to look at things from God's perspective rather than our  
 23 own. We are not God, so we cannot see things as he does. And we can never step  
 24 out of our own skin, so to speak, and set aside the perspective of our own thoughts  
 25 and bodies. But as we can enrich our perspective by looking at things from  
 26 different angles by consulting other people, and by observing other places and  
 27 cultures, much more can we enrich it by consulting God's perspective.<sup>8</sup>

28  
 29 Because of 9/11, and because of radical Islam and the many books written by Christians  
 30 about Islam, it has become easy for many Christians in the West to paint with *broad brush*  
 31 *strokes* and to *demonize* all of the Muslim world. Furthermore, a huge controversy occurred  
 32 regarding ministry models in *Bangladesh*, where a great deal of money was raised for both  
 33 sides in the opposing debate. This large shadow<sup>9</sup> should not color the conclusions regarding  
 34 all the Insider Movements (IM) everywhere in the world. Not all IM ministries are like the  
 35 IM of Bangladesh. There have been excesses in IM ministries that this report will strongly  
 36 disagree with, but we need to be careful not to let our unique historical context—post-9/11  
 37 and post-Bangladesh—color our lenses and consequently, with a broad brush, dismiss all

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Horton "Power Religion." Pages 329–330.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/>

<sup>9</sup> The Bangladesh situation is a complex one. While theological differences exist, other factors, such as unresolved personal conflicts, contribute as well.

insider ministries in the Muslim world. Our unique historical context should not unduly color our perception of reality.

*The Westminster Confession of Faith* was written in 1647 in a certain historical context. Centuries later when the context changed, certain changes were made to the *WCF*. For instance, in chapter 25 on the Church, the original text said in paragraph 6:

There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof: but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.

Centuries later a correction was made in chapter 25, paragraph 6: “There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof.”

The *principle* in this paragraph had to do with Christ being the sole head of the church. The *application* in 1647 pointed to the fact that the Pope at that time was perceived by Protestants as the Antichrist. When the *WCF* was revised later, the *application* was taken out, and the *principle* was maintained.<sup>10</sup> Our unique context of post-9/11 and post-Bangladesh could color our applications and recommendations. We need to be careful to focus on the principles that have lasting value.

### 1. The Straw Man vs. Reality

Some people assume that the biggest war taking place in the past decade was in Iraq or Afghanistan or even against al Qaeda. But the biggest war taking place in the world today is for the *hearts and minds* of the Muslim masses. Muslims today are about 1.7 billion people, and in a few years they will become a quarter of humanity. Perhaps about 20% of Muslims tend to be fanatical<sup>11</sup> and are sympathetic with the fraction of the 1% who are radical, militant Muslims. Perhaps 10% are secular Muslims. The remaining 70% are the silent majority, and most of them are indeed “silent.” However, many are being pulled in one of two directions: radical Islam and fanaticism on the one hand and moderation, modernity, and open-mindedness on the other. The moderate and open-minded need to be empowered so they will influence the rest of the silent majority and marginalize the radicals and the

<sup>10</sup> [http://opc.org/documents/WCF\\_orig.html](http://opc.org/documents/WCF_orig.html)

<sup>11</sup> Fundamentalists are driven by certain **doctrinal interpretations** and by a high **degree of commitment**. Fanatics, on the other hand, are driven by an **attitude** of self-righteousness, demonizing all those who disagree with them. The journey toward Christ starts with a movement from fanaticism to open-mindedness.

1 fanatics. The road to the gospel starts for many Muslims when they move through the  
 2 probing or prompting of the Holy Spirit from fanaticism to open-mindedness.

3  
 4 Since 9/11 there has been a resurgence of Islam and mosque-building in America. According  
 5 to a Pew Research study, by the end of 2011 the number of mosques in the United States  
 6 was 2,106,<sup>12</sup> and the number of high-identity Muslims who attend Friday at the mosques  
 7 was 349,525.<sup>13</sup> The study estimates that the number of Muslims in America is about  
 8 2,595,000.<sup>14</sup> Therefore the percentage of high-identity and high-practice Muslims in the  
 9 United States is about 13%. It would be wrong for us to assume that *all Muslims* are high-  
 10 practice like these 13% in America. Are not the remaining 87% low-practice Muslims<sup>15</sup>  
 11 actually Muslims as well? In fact, the Muslims who belong to the 87% see themselves as  
 12 “the real Muslims,” and they see the rest as fanatics who are ruining the reputation of Islam.

13  
 14 The 15-year civil war in Lebanon was between two different communities, “Christianity”  
 15 and “Islam,” with a long history of division based on their religious affiliation. Many people  
 16 died on both sides of the conflict. It was not a war between two theologies and two religions,  
 17 but between two cultural entities or communities. Would we Christians want to be represented  
 18 by the “Christian” Phalangists in Lebanon who were engaged in the Lebanese civil war and  
 19 were responsible for the massacre of thousands of Palestinian Muslims in the Sabra and  
 20 Shatila camps?<sup>16</sup> Of course not, and this is how the majority of Muslims feel, refusing to be  
 21 lumped with the Muslim fundamentalists.

22  
 23 *High-practice* Muslims are a very small percentage within the Muslim world. As a result of  
 24 al Qaeda and how it impacted the reputation of Muslims, along with the Arab Spring and the  
 25 revolution that spread in some Middle Eastern countries, many Muslims are going through  
 26 an identity crisis. Many Muslims see themselves as moderate or as practicing the best of  
 27 Islam while rejecting the excesses and distortions of what they perceive as the “true Islam.”  
 28 Some of these Muslims tend to see Muhammad the way average Americans see George  
 29 Washington or Martin Luther King, Jr. Furthermore, there are *openings* that exist within the  
 30 Muslim world, and the Ekklesia is penetrating it through these windows. These openings  
 31 include more than 90 verses in the Qur’an that talk about Jesus, Mary and Christians.  
 32 Another window is Sufism. Still another major opening is their fear of death, the demonic  
 33 and the Day of Judgment.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://features.pewforum.org/muslim-population-graphic/#/United%20States>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/The\\_Mosque\\_in\\_America\\_A\\_National\\_Portrait.pdf](http://www.cair.com/Portals/0/pdf/The_Mosque_in_America_A_National_Portrait.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <http://features.pewforum.org/muslim-population-graphic/#/United%20States>

<sup>15</sup> Low-practice Muslims do not go to the local mosques on Fridays and do not do the daily prayers, yet they might fast a number of days during the month of Ramadan to make up for their lack of religiosity.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/the-forgotten-massacre-8139930.html>

The Muslim world is not only a religion but also a socio/political/religious entity or community. The Muslim world as an entity or community is *inclusive* of all Muslims in spite of the great diversity among the various Muslim people groups and sects. This large entity includes Sunnis and Shiites as main divisions, which include numerous other divisions such as nominal Muslims, seculars, Sufis, moderate fundamentalists, salafis, radical Muslim fundamentalists, communists, and even atheists. They are all Muslims because they were *born into Islam*, and Islam offers them a *place of belonging*. At the same time, the Islamic community is *exclusive* of all non-Muslims. Their history, which included the Crusades, colonialism, and the history of Israel since 1948, all contribute to the exclusiveness. There are sharp boundaries of *who is in* and *who is out*. Some Muslims see Islam as a religion that was only to be practiced at the time of Muhammad and the first hundred years that followed. We can perhaps best understand these Muslims as the *alumni* of Islam rather than enrolled and dedicated Muslims.

## 2. The Contrast Between the Two Entities

In my book *The Crescent Through The Eyes of The Cross*, I addressed the contrast between the two entities of Christendom and the Muslim world.<sup>17</sup> Here is a vivid illustration of how these differences influence how conversions are perceived, how discipleship take place and how church planting gets colored by the interaction of those two entities. I witnessed the interaction closely in Lebanon and in Egypt as I lived among Muslims for fifty years. In my book I present, in the form of a parable, a *fictional situation* in which I portray a *composite of real people I knew*.<sup>18</sup> Imagine me being an Egyptian Christian, a true believer living in Cairo, Egypt. Every Thursday evening, I go to a Presbyterian church in downtown Cairo to attend the meeting for working men and women. Because I was discriminated against during my university days, I have a certain prejudice against Muslims. In Egyptian newspapers, there are often articles written by Muslims attacking Christianity and the Bible. Furthermore, the Muslim equivalent of TV evangelists keep insulting Christianity.

The other character in this *parable* has the name Mustafa. He is also a *composite* of many MBBs<sup>19</sup> whom I knew intimately from various parts of the Muslim world. Since there were no interviews of MBBs cited in the Committee Report, this parable serves to illustrate what happens when people are converted from the Muslim world to Christendom.

Life is easy in the abstract, but we live in a broken world. Here is how I describe the scene:<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Jabbour, Nabeel. *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross*. Navpress, 2008, pp. 230–232.

<sup>18</sup> Because of time and space limitations, the Committee Report did not interview Muslim background believers in Christ on the ground. This parable attempts to illustrate what is lacking in the Committee Report.

<sup>19</sup> Muslim Background Believers in Christ

<sup>20</sup> Jabbour, Nabeel. *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross*. Navpress, 2008. Pages 230–232.

1 On a certain Thursday, I go to our weekly meeting at church. My friends tell  
 2 me that we have a guest speaker tonight, a Muslim who has become a Christian.  
 3 My response to the news is a mixture of pleasure and suspicion. Is he a  
 4 genuine Christian, or is he playing a role in order to deceive us? When he enters  
 5 the church, he automatically repulses me as I notice that he has a bruise on his  
 6 forehead, a hypocritical manifestation of a fake spirituality. Fanatical Muslims  
 7 with the *zibeeba* (a bruise on the forehead) attempt to communicate the message  
 8 that they have prayed so many times, kneeling and touching the carpet with  
 9 their foreheads, that they got that bruise. Another thing that repulses me is the  
 10 way he greets me. He says, “*Assalamu alaykum*” (peace to you). Only Muslims  
 11 use that terminology when they greet one another. Perhaps he is not a true  
 12 Christian. Something that repulses me even more is his name. How could he  
 13 come to our church with the Muslim name Mustafa? Mustafa means “the  
 14 chosen one” and is one of the names of their prophet Muhammad because they  
 15 believe that he was chosen by God. I wonder what kind of meeting we will be  
 16 having tonight.

17  
 18 After the singing and the prayers, this man is introduced as a former Muslim  
 19 who has become a Christian. I sit there wondering whether my friends who  
 20 invited him were duped and trusted him prematurely. I need him to convince  
 21 me that he has become a “real and true Christian,” just like me, and I am not  
 22 an easy person to convince.

23  
 24 When he starts sharing his story, I, like most of those in the church meeting,  
 25 quietly listen to him to find out whether he is genuine. As he warms up and  
 26 starts attacking Islam and ridiculing Muhammad and the Muslim faith, I start  
 27 enjoying his story. From our laughter at his jokes about Islam and our agreeing  
 28 with him about his attacks, he finds out how to win our approval. By the time  
 29 he finishes, we are all elated and encouraged by his sharing, although we wish  
 30 he were more polished like us and used our Christian terminology. But we  
 31 know we need to be patient because this polish will come with time and  
 32 practice. After the meeting, I, along with others, thank him for his sharing and  
 33 congratulate him on his conversion. As people come and thank him, he feels  
 34 as though he has finally found his place of belongingness in our church meeting  
 35 because he is being treated like a hero with a halo around his head.

36  
 37 I still do not like the *zibeeba*, the bruise on his forehead. I hope that in the  
 38 future he will put cream on it in order to cover it up. During the informal time  
 39 at the end of the meeting, I follow him with the corner of my eye and notice at  
 40 one point that he is talking to my younger sister and to other women. When I  
 41 see him doing that, I begin to wonder about his motives. Is he coming after the  
 42 women? Why would a Muslim want to believe in Christ other than for women,  
 43 money, or a desire to go to America? So back at home, I warn my sister and  
 44 advise her not to get too excited just yet that he has become a true believer.

We will need to wait and see “fruit” before we trust him. I even quote to her a litmus test: “By their fruit you recognize them” (Matthew 7:20).

When Mustafa returns the following Thursday to our church meeting, not as the speaker but as an ordinary person, he finds that most of us respond to him with plastic, artificial smiles. We keep him away at a safe distance because he still greets us by saying “*Assalamu alaykum*,” and he still “smells” like a Muslim. It seems I was not the only one from our church who preached to a family member a little sermon about the need to avoid Mustafa until we see fruit! So Mustafa starts wondering whether he has come to the right church. Very soon he meets another Protestant Christian in Cairo, who invites him to his church. The halo returns temporarily but does not last long. Then he gets invited to another church and another, and in the meantime he learns how to please the Christians: by making fun of Islam and by attacking Muhammad and the Qur’an.

As the months pass, he begins to get more polished in his terminology. At the same time, he ruptures every relationship he had with his Muslim family and friends as he becomes openly critical of Islam. He even changes his name from Mustafa to Peter and gets baptized. Shortly afterward, he comes to our Thursday meeting again, this time to give a testimony of how he is suffering for Christ. He is not Mustafa anymore, but brother Peter. I never felt at ease by calling him “brother Mustafa.” *Brother* and *Mustafa* did not mesh. He no longer uses the Muslim terminology he used to, and he lifts up his arms in church during the singing and shouts, “Hallelujah” and “Praise the Lord.” Now he has really become one of us; he is inside our “fortress with thick walls” that protects us from the Muslims outside.”

These two composites sadly describe how national Christians in Muslims countries, especially in the Middle East, have treated MBBs<sup>21</sup> over the centuries. These are not unique phenomena but a sad reality in many Muslim countries around the world. Many stories like these could be told.

Does the Bible teach that Muslims, upon believing in Christ, should rupture their relationships with their Muslim families and friends and put on our Christendom culture as the parable portrays? What does the Bible require of them?

### 3. Doctrine vs. Missiology

What does it mean to be both strongly Reformed and strongly missiological? The Bible shows both the importance of sound doctrine and the importance of spreading the gospel. So the two belong together, and they should deepen one another. The famous passage in

<sup>21</sup> Muslim Background Believers in Christ.

Matthew 28:18–20 is clearly about spreading the gospel, but also speaks of “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (verse 20). This teaching includes what Matthew specifically records about Jesus’ teaching earlier in the Gospel of Matthew. But in addition, since Jesus commissioned the apostles and men like Luke to write the New Testament, it includes by implication all the teaching of the New Testament; it includes rich doctrine. Conversely, the doctrine is designed by God to nourish His people, and His plan is that more people will continue to be added. So the doctrine is for the discipling of the nations, not just for those who are already firmly established believers. Doctrine promotes evangelization, and evangelization includes discipleship and doctrinal teaching.

These two sides, doctrine on the one hand and propagation of the gospel and growth of the church on the other, go together. Yet in practice tension can arise, because these two areas are associated with different interests and different gifts within the body of Christ. Many Reformed people tend to think first of protecting the doctrine and therefore get nervous about contextualization. But contextualization should be understood as seeking ways of explaining the gospel that make most sense and that appeal most vividly to a particular culture. Of course, contextualization can go awry and lead to syncretism and the dilution of doctrine. But it also needs to be understood that all doctrine is formulated and understood in a context. Furthermore, God Himself came to be with us as a contextualized human being. The gospel will likewise necessarily come to concrete expression and be understood in particular contexts. This inevitability of contextualization should eliminate broad fears and worries and produce a focused study of various contexts and of the way the gospel is enhanced or compromised in various efforts at contextualization.

People who are strong on doctrine can also be nervous about church forms that outwardly differ from what they are used to. For example, among the Quechua Indians in South America, the preaching of the Word takes the form of alternation between the preacher speaking and the people turning and explaining things to one another, because that alternation is normal in their culture. But it looks weird to someone who grows up thinking that a monologue sermon is the only possible way to communicate the Word in conformity with scriptural principles. When a group of Korean Christians pray, they will often all pray out loud simultaneously, which looks weird to an American. People who are strong on doctrine also may be nervous about the gradual leavening of culture. They compare the beginnings of the gospel in people’s lives with the endpoint, and they may turn up their noses at the fact that they don’t see enough change in a culture to satisfy them. The starting point for the leavening is not tidy. That is, the starting point in a culture without previous contact with the gospel is likely to have many ideas and practices contaminated with idolatry. And when people first come to Christ they do not immediately experience the sanctification of a person who has been heavily trained and sanctified for forty years. It may therefore seem to the fastidious that the only way for their converts to be sanctified is to

1 have them “appear” to be sanctified in outward form by adopting Western culture as a  
2 whole. But that is superficial and unbiblical, just as it is superficial and unbiblical to ask  
3 Gentiles to be circumcised in order to be sanctified out of their former paganism.

4  
5 Conversely, missiologists tend to think first of all of getting the message out and starting a  
6 movement, and some can easily be pragmatic and minimize doctrine. Yet for them as well as  
7 the doctrinally focused people, the pastoral answer is the same: Focus on the direction in  
8 which believers are growing. Be patient. Work together toward maturity, learning together  
9 how best to express biblical instruction in each linguistic and cultural context. At the same  
10 time, work patiently and lovingly with small, hesitating, and confused beginnings. Don’t  
11 leave them merely where they are, pronouncing that they have become believers and so we  
12 are through. But being willing to work with and pray for those who are just beginning on a  
13 path toward maturity.

14  
15 Reformed missiology of the richest kind, such as was represented in the last century by  
16 Johan Bavinck, penetrated to see the profundities of change involved in a mission that  
17 encompasses all nations. Such missiology affirms both the *richness of doctrine* and the  
18 cultural *adaptability of missiology*; in fact, they are two sides of the same coin. Doctrinal  
19 depth recognizes the superficiality of circumcision and Westernization and the power of the  
20 gospel to penetrate the most powerful of idolatries, including sex, money, and power. On  
21 doctrinal grounds—such as the universality of the gospel, the universality of the reign of  
22 Christ, the universality of sin, and the universality of the image of God—it champions a rich  
23 contextualization, recognizing that doctrinal depth is always contextual. It understands that  
24 sanctification can be painfully gradual (leaven). So it does not rest after people first come to  
25 faith. Neither does it insist on complete sanctification and Western, philosophically refined  
26 doctrinal formulations when people first become believers. In fact, doctrinal depth  
27 encourages fresh understandings of the Scriptures and theology in light of the current  
28 context.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. How to Live “in” an Ungodly Culture Without Being “of” It

29  
30 The entire epistle of 1 Corinthians addresses the practicalities of what it takes to live a holy  
31 life in an unholy culture—how to be “in” that culture without being “of” it. The city of  
32 Corinth was known for being particularly immoral and given to pagan idolatry and  
33 philosophies. Paul addressed the Corinthian believers as saints or holy ones and taught them

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<sup>22</sup> Some readers distinguish between Insider Movement (IM) proponents and disagree with them yet agree with those who practice contextualization. In this Report we look at the diversity that exists within the Insider Movements, including contextualization. We will disagree with what is wrong, and we encourage what is balanced and biblical.



1 how to live in light of their new identity as holy ones in Christ: “To the church of God which  
2 is in Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling.”<sup>23</sup>

3  
4 This is, of course, very relevant for Muslims who are trying to follow Christ in the midst of  
5 the Muslim world. It is equally relevant for Americans trying to follow Christ in the midst of  
6 a materialistic culture. The Corinthians happened to live in a pagan culture in which they  
7 were facing these issues:

- 8
- 9 • Demonstrating the wisdom of the Spirit in a culture that venerated sophistry
- 10 (chapters 1–3)
- 11 • Following servant-leadership in a culture that loved and worshipped wisdom
- 12 and power (chapter 4)
- 13 • Living sexually pure lives in a culture that embraced gross sexual immorality
- 14 (chapters 5, 6)
- 15 • Handling conflicts in a godly way in a culture that loved to take things to
- 16 court (chapter 6)
- 17 • Preserving family relationships in a culture where families were broken
- 18 (chapter 7)
- 19 • Maintaining social interactions in a culture where everything was laced with
- 20 idolatry (chapter 8)
- 21 • Using freedom to serve in a culture that regarded freedom as a license to sin
- 22 (chapter 9)
- 23 • Avoiding the temptations of idolatry in a culture where idolatry was
- 24 normative (chapter 10)
- 25 • Learning to worship in a godly way in a culture where worship was an
- 26 opportunity for self-indulgence (chapter 11)
- 27 • Using one’s gifts to serve in a culture where one’s strengths were used to
- 28 serve oneself (chapters 12–14)
- 29 • Living based on the resurrection in a culture where the resurrection was
- 30 regarded as foolishness (chapter 15)

31 Thus, 1 Corinthians 7 is one of many chapters that addresses the costs and practicalities of  
32 remaining in a pagan culture and living a holy life there. That theme is highlighted in verses  
33 like these:

34  
35 1 Corinthians 5:9–10: “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral  
36 people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:2. See also 1 Corinthians 6:1-2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; and 13:13.

covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.”

1 Corinthians 6:12: “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

1 Corinthians 9:19–23: “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.”

1 Corinthians 10:23: “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”

1 Corinthians 10:31–32: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.”

In these key texts, there is a great deal of room for liberty and for the role of the conscience as the *WCF* states.<sup>24</sup> Insiders can find comfort and affirmation in the freedom that the Bible provides for them as they live as saints within their corrupt context.

The controversial text at hand, 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, is unique. It *transcends the chapter* because it has broader application.<sup>25</sup> Paul laid down a rule that applied not only to the *immediate context* of this chapter and the *broader context* of 1 Corinthians chapters 5–10, but also to the rest of the letters he wrote. It applied to all the churches: “*This is the rule I lay down in all the churches*” (verse 17). This text should also be seen in its *biographical context* of the patterned lifestyle of Paul as the author. I will address the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 7 shortly, but I would like to start by addressing those other contexts with more specificity.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul writes to the church on how to deal with and relate to an unrepentant brother who committed adultery. In 1 Corinthians 5:9–11, he says:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and

<sup>24</sup> *WCF* 20.2 “God alone is the Lord of the conscience...Requiring implicit of absolute obedience also destroys freedom of conscience as well as the free use of reason.”

<sup>25</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:17: “Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. *This is the rule I lay down in all the churches*”

1 swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But  
 2 now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls  
 3 himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer,  
 4 a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.  
 5

6 He is basically teaching these Christians how to be *in* the world and yet not *of* the world.  
 7 They need to associate with unbelievers and be in the world so that they can win them to  
 8 Christ. They should not associate with unrepentant believers as a form of discipline, so that  
 9 those unrepentant believers will repent and turn back to God. In chapter 6 Paul deals with  
 10 lawsuits among brothers and points to how shameful it is to become so worldly. Those  
 11 Corinthians were in the world and became *like* the world. They lost their distinctiveness as  
 12 God's people, and as a result, their testimony to the unbelievers suffered. He passionately  
 13 stirred them to flee sexual immorality and to live in purity.  
 14

15 In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul addresses the issue of how God's children can live well together  
 16 even when they disagree about their convictions over whether to eat or not eat meat sacrificed  
 17 to idols. There were those in the church, the stronger brothers, who did not have a problem  
 18 with purchasing at a more reasonable price meat sacrificed to idols. They wanted to enjoy  
 19 God's given freedom. There were others who came from a Jewish background, adhering to  
 20 the law of Moses, who were being caused to stumble by the freedom of others. Paul warns  
 21 the stronger Christians in verse 9 that they have the right to live in freedom, yet: "Be careful,  
 22 however that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak."  
 23 As for himself, Paul asserts in verse 13 that: "If what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin,  
 24 I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall." Unity of heart, in spite of the  
 25 diversity in convictions in the body of Christ, was of great importance to Paul—even at the  
 26 high cost of becoming a vegetarian for the sake of the weaker brother. This love *for one*  
 27 *another* in the body of Christ is a *testimony to the world* that the gospel has the power to  
 28 transform lives. Paul did not say to the stronger brothers that they were wrong.<sup>26</sup> He agreed  
 29 with them that they have the truth but asked them to extend grace and love to the weaker  
 30 brothers.

31 Paul continues in chapter 9 with how he gave up so many of his rights for the sake of the  
 32 expansion of the gospel. In this chapter, we see not only a broader context for 1 Corinthians  
 33 7:17–24 but also the *biographical context*; we see Paul's heart and driving passion. He  
 34 points out to those Corinthians that he is serving them free of charge because he is driven  
 35 with a passion to preach the gospel and not do only what he is paid to do. In verse 18, he  
 36 says: "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as  
 37 many as possible."<sup>27</sup> The expansion of the gospel was Paul's passion. He was willing to

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:4–6

<sup>27</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19

1 make every sacrifice to win as many as possible. To the Jew he became like a Jew to win  
 2 Jews. To those who had no law he became like one not having the law so as to win those not  
 3 having the law. To the weak he became weak to win the weak. He became all things to all  
 4 men so that by all possible means he might save some. His commitment to the expansion of  
 5 the gospel brought to his mind the discipline that an Olympian needs to be a winner for a  
 6 fading crown. Paul saw himself in a much more important race that would result in a crown  
 7 that lasts forever.

9 In chapter 10, Paul continues to give instructions to the Corinthians on how to be in the  
 10 world yet not of the world. He reminds them to learn from Israel's history about the dangers  
 11 of idolatry. Even though God's people were under the cloud, passed through the sea and  
 12 drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, God still was not pleased with most of  
 13 them. Therefore Paul warns the Corinthians not to become overconfident or arrogant and  
 14 end up arousing God's anger by drinking of the cup of the Lord and at the same time the cup  
 15 of demons. Paul then closes that section about how to be in the world and not of the world  
 16 by addressing freedom, concluding that "Everything is permissible—but not everything is  
 17 beneficial. Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive... Whatever you eat  
 18 or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (verses 23, 31).

20 The text often questioned is 1 Corinthians 7:17–24.<sup>28</sup> The immediate context of this passage  
 21 is 1 Corinthians 7, which addresses the topic of marriage. We might wonder how a chapter  
 22 on marriage relates to questions about Insider Movements, but Paul himself applies this  
 23 principle beyond the immediate issue of marriage. Looking at the text in its immediate  
 24 context, its broader context, and in its biographical context all demonstrate that  
 25 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 *transcends the chapter* and the letter and speaks not only to the issue  
 26 of marriage but very definitely to current issues of the time such as the Gentile/Jew and  
 27 slavery or status in society.

### 29 **The Immediate Context**

31 Paul starts 1 Corinthians 7 by addressing the value of remaining single. At times he sounds  
 32 very gentle and not forceful at all in his opinions: "I say this as a concession, not as a

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<sup>28</sup> "Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. 18 Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. 21 Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. 22 For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. 23 You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. 24 Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to."

command.”<sup>29</sup> As Paul continues to address issues related to marriage, he comes to a sticky problem. What if a woman comes to faith in Christ and her husband is not a believer: should she divorce him? He answers by saying:

If a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him.

Then Paul goes on to give his reasoning:

For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

A helpful cross reference to this text is 1 Peter 3:1–6, which I will address shortly. Then Paul goes on to say:

“But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?”<sup>30</sup>

It seems that what was on Paul’s mind was for the believing partner to remain in the marriage in the hope that the other partner would come to know Christ. He was also concerned with the impact on the children of a believing and unbelieving spouse. This goes with his passion to see the gospel penetrating families and not only transforming individuals. To give his argument more power, Paul resorted to one of his theological “nuggets” that fits, not only this chapter and letter, but with other chapters in other letters. The theological nugget is 1 Corinthians 7:17–24. Once Paul dealt with this issue, he carried on in the rest of that chapter and dealt with family life issues and the need to live in light of the *brevity of time* and the *expansion of the gospel*.

First Peter 3:1–6 is a very helpful cross reference because it talks about a wife who is a true believer while the husband is either not a believer or a mediocre believer.<sup>31</sup> Peter started out by defining the situation of the believing wife with her mediocre husband and suggested that she should submit to him in order to win him to Christ through the beauty of her life. Submission is not subservience. Submission implies being *aware of God* and His dealings in our lives. Being preoccupied with the person we are submitting to, rather than being aware

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<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:6

<sup>30</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:13–16

<sup>31</sup> 1 Peter 3:1: “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives.”

of God, can result either in subservience or in rebellion. Submission does not negate tough love. Both Peter and Paul say to a believing spouse, as much as possible, try to stay married to the unbelieving partner and seek to win him/her to Christ. Then Paul addresses 1 Corinthians 7:17–24.

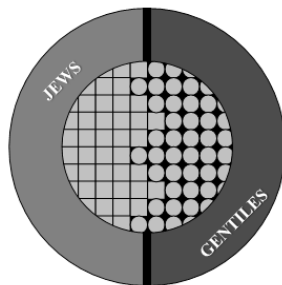
## 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 In Its Fuller Context

[17] Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches. [18] Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. [19] Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. [20] Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. [21] Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. [22] For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. [23] You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. [24] Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

In verse 17, Paul starts very forcefully. He is no more gently suggesting: “I say this as a concession, not as a command,” as he did in verse 6. In verse 17, he says that remaining in the condition and situation which a person was in when God called him or her is an *assignment* by God and a *calling* from Him. To put it another way, if one refuses to remain in the situation he was in when God called him, he is risking *abandoning* God's *assignment* and *calling*. Then Paul says that retaining that place in life is a principle that he teaches and *lays down in all the churches*. Actually, he repeats this principle of remaining in context or retaining that place in life three times in this short text, in verses 17, 20 and 24. This is the *principle* he *lays down* in *all* the churches; the repetition of this principle is strong evidence that *this text*, 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, has a certain uniqueness. It looks like Paul taught this principle in all the churches and could have included this text in the letter to the Ephesians or Colossians. Instead, the Holy Spirit directed him to include it in the chapter on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, because of the issue that was raised in 1 Corinthians 7:12–14 dealing with marriage.

Paul then goes into two areas of life, in addition to marriage, where this principle applies. It applied to the Jew-Gentile controversy and to the issue of status in society. To the Jews who have become believers in Christ, he says not to become Gentile Christians as we see in Ephesians 2:11–20. To the Gentile Christians, he says not to get circumcised and become Jewish Christians. Being Jewish or being Gentile is nothing. What counts is surrender to

Christ and retaining one's own situation for the sake of the gospel. In the diagram below, we see that what really matters is not whether the person is a Jew or a Gentile—or, as it were, a “square” or a “circle” as shown in the diagram. What really matters is that the person is in the inner circle, the Ekklesia, where there is no dividing wall (Ephesians 2:14–15). There is a dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles who have two distinct colors but not in the inner circle, the Ekklesia. Inside the inner circle the colors are pale in contrast to the outer circle.



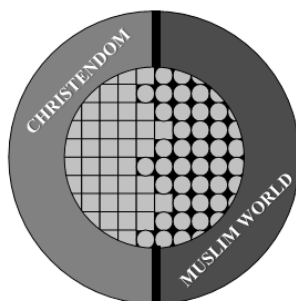
### Inner Circle is the Ekklesia

At the time of Paul, there were two categories of people: Jews and non-Jews or Gentiles. (The word Gentiles merely meant non-Jews). We cannot do an *identical* comparison of believing Jew-Gentile with believers within Christendom and the Muslim World, but *in general* there are similarities that make for useful comparison. Jews in New Testament times held various theological positions, some orthodox and some heterodox. Some were upright under the Law, others lived in violation of the Law. “Gentiles” referred to vastly diverse individuals and groups. Among both groups Jesus movements developed, and Jewishness and Gentileness were not abandoned. They were now theological concepts that didn’t “count,” like male and female, but still *real distinctions*, like male and female.

This is very similar to the situation, for instance, in Egypt today. Everyone in Egypt belongs either to Christendom or to the Muslim world. Even legally on an identity card, one must identify himself as either a Muslim or a Christian. There are no other options. Unlike in America where we have a variety of options, Egypt has only two. There might be a secular Muslim named Muhammad who is an atheist. He still belongs to the Muslim world because he was born into Islam. The Muslim world is his birth community. In the same way, whoever is born into Christendom, the minority Christian community, is called Christian. That does not mean this person holds orthodox Christian beliefs. He is “Christian” because that is his birth identity. In the same way, a person may have the birth-identity of “Muslim” and yet not hold orthodox Muslim beliefs. This reality is often ignored in writings on Islam, which tend to focus on *theological concepts* rather than *social realities*. Often when someone turns to Christ, the Muslim family is more concerned about “conversion” to the

often-unbiblical Christian community (Christendom) than they are about any change of theology focused on Jesus Christ.

Try this experiment as you read Ephesians 2. Replace the words *believers within the Muslim World* for *Gentiles* and *believers within Christendom* for *Jews*, and read it in the context of reaching out to Muslims with the gospel. Note some principles that emerge. You might find that all of a sudden the New Testament has a greater relevance to your context, as seen in the diagram below.



### Inner Circle is the Ekklesia

In the same church building in a certain city in America, there could be two congregations using the same facility, a congregation of Caucasians and a congregation of Korean believers. The Koreans and the Caucasians are brothers and sisters in the Lord, and they both belong to the inner circle of the Ekklesia, but somehow bringing the two congregations together every Sunday might not be helpful. Koreans prefer to listen to the sermon preached in the Korean language. They like to eat their own food after the church service and enjoy their distinct culture. That is why, in this diagram, the circles and squares stay separate at times. There can be *unity in spite of diversity*.<sup>32</sup> *Uniformity* is not essential for unity. The Koreans and the Caucasians should maintain unity and fellowship by meeting together and praying for one another even if the two congregations do not meet together for worship.

Muslims do not have to change their “circular” shape—their first-birth identity and legal status—by becoming “square shaped” in order to enter the Ekklesia. Muslims can enter directly into the Ekklesia without having to put on Christendom culture and become, as it were, “square shaped.” Cornelius, who was “circular,” did not need to become a Jewish “square” to enter the Ekklesia. Jew and Gentile are not an *identical* parallel to Christendom and the Muslim world, but there are certainly lessons to learn here. Truly, the unique role

<sup>32</sup> At a *leadership level* there was unity among the Gentile churches with the Jerusalem church as seen in Galatians 2:1–5.



1 that Old Covenant Israel played in redemptive history gives unique features to the Jew-  
 2 Gentile frontier described in the New Testament scriptures. But the sociological dynamics of  
 3 following Jesus for Jews and for Gentiles in New Testament times certainly parallels the  
 4 sociological dynamics in Islamic societies and communities today. Jews and Gentiles joined  
 5 a new reality of “church” without ceasing to be Jew and Gentile. Members of Christendom  
 6 in Egypt join “church” while still being members of Christendom. Is it really necessary for  
 7 members of the Muslim world to renounce that birth community and social identity when  
 8 they come to Christ? This is the fundamental question of the Insider Movements discussion,  
 9 and members of the Muslim world have concluded that they do not need to renounce their  
 10 birth community and *social* identity; they do not see a biblical imperative for such an act.  
 11 Their *core* identity in Christ should *never be compromised*.

12  
 13 First Corinthians 7:17–24 addresses a third issue which must have been a burning one in his  
 14 day, namely, the issue of *status in society*, which appeared in those days in the form of  
 15 *slavery*. Today *status in society* has relevance to employment, citizenship, race and social  
 16 class. What Paul was addressing in his context was this: What if a slave comes to know  
 17 Christ and his owner is a believer in Christ as well?<sup>33</sup> Should the Christian slave *demand* his  
 18 liberation? How does Paul address this issue? He tells the Christian slave, starting with  
 19 verse 21,

20  
 21       Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if  
 22       you can gain your freedom, do so. [22] For he who was a slave when he was  
 23       called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man  
 24       when he was called is Christ’s slave. [23] You were bought at a price; do not  
 25       become slaves of men.

26 Paul is saying to the Christian slave that if he can gain his freedom, it will be great. But if he  
 27 cannot, he should not indulge in self-pity, resenting his boss who is his owner. Paul reminds  
 28 him that although he is a slave, he is a free man on the inside. Paul motivates him to focus  
 29 on the freedom that he already possesses. Then he reminds him that the boss who owns him  
 30 is, after all, a slave of Christ. In other words, we live in an unjust and broken world, but as  
 31 we stand before Christ, the ground is level. So he tells this slave, repeating the same  
 32 principle *for the third time*, to retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to  
 33 which God has called him, and thus to *embrace his circumstances* rather than *resent* them.  
 34 Real inner freedom is not shaped by circumstances but in being able to choose the right  
 35 attitude in the midst of those circumstances.<sup>34</sup> This basic principle is applicable not only to  
 36 marriage and to the Jew/Gentile issues but also to one’s status in society. Of course there

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<sup>33</sup> Letter to Philemon

<sup>34</sup> 1Thessalonians 5:18

will be important exceptions to this rule when scriptural teaching is violated, such as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood who surrenders his life to Christ.

Does Paul have anything to say in 1 Corinthians 7:21–24 to people who struggle with their economic *status*, their *race*, or their *citizenship*? Is he telling them to remain, to the degree possible, within existing relationships of obligation? It seems that Paul is saying to them that within these existing relationships of obligation:

There is nothing wrong with upward mobility or improving your situation. If you can improve your status by moving out from your context, that will be fine. But you need to embrace your *heritage*, your *race*, your *citizenship* and your *family* background. Do not focus on your *upward mobility*; focus instead on the *mobility and the expansion of the gospel*. Do not indulge in self-pity or a victim mentality, resenting your circumstances. Instead, thank God for your circumstances and make your life's focus *Christ* and the expansion of the *gospel*.

The situation in Egypt today has become unbearable for Christians. Christendom is shrinking as a result of the power that the Muslim Brotherhood gained through elections since January 25, 2011. Many Christians have moved out of Egypt to Europe, Canada, the United States, and Australia. Does Paul have anything to say in 1 Corinthians 7:17–24 to Egyptian Christians who do not have the means to immigrate or to those who have the means and are considering their options? Does this text address the issue of immigration? Absolutely.<sup>35</sup>

Some Muslims, upon putting their faith in Christ, want to detach from the Muslim world and from their birth community and be integrated into Christendom. This is a *viable* option, and it is their choice. Others might respond to a *calling* from God to remain in the contexts of their birth communities and work on representing Christ within their relationships with family, workmates and friends in the Muslim world. This is another *viable* option. As Christians, we should provide both options to the Muslims with whom we are sharing the gospel.

### 5. An Evil System Within the Muslim World

Islam as an entity, or the Muslim world, includes an *evil system that entraps people and holds them in bondage*, seeking to prevent them from putting their faith in Christ. That evil structure of power should be *identified* and *addressed* so that, when possible, new believers from a Muslim background can escape the social/religious bondage *without rupturing* their *relationships* with family, friends, and their community. Furthermore, there is demonic warfare that intensifies when it comes to ministry to Muslims, especially when Muslim

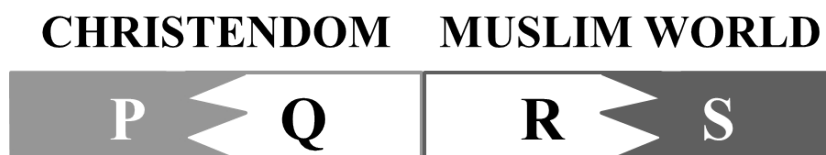
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<sup>35</sup> In the conclusion of this report, read the story of an Egyptian couple who decided to shred their Green Cards.

followers of Christ are immersed in that atmosphere. It is a difficult challenge to be in the world but at the same time be protected from the evil one. Training in spiritual warfare and putting on the full armor of God is essential.<sup>36</sup> Let us keep in mind that the same could be said about some branches of *Christendom that hold people in bondage*, seeking to prevent them the freedom to put their faith in Christ. That also is an evil structure of power.

## 6. Diversity Within Christendom and Within the Muslim World

Christendom and the Muslim world can be represented on this PQRS diagram.



The large rectangle (**P & Q**) on the left represents Christendom. The majority of those within Christendom do not know the truths contained in the Scriptures nor understand the gospel. They may have a theology of salvation by works, a veneration of Mary, or a legalistic understanding of a relationship with God. Those people who call themselves “Christians” yet do not know God personally are represented in the diagram as **Zone P**. Genuine Christians who understand the Scriptures and try to live according to their teaching are represented as **Zone Q**. The size and percentage of **Zones P** vs. **Q** vary from one country to another and from time to time. The diagram does not represent percentages.

The large rectangle on the right side in the diagram (**Zones R & S**) represents the Muslim world and includes all types of Muslims, whether they are Folk, Orthodox, Secular, Contented, Ambivalent, Mystics, Fundamentalist, Sunnis, or Shiites. They include high-practice and low-practice Muslims.

These various types of Muslims are differentiated by their theologies, degrees of commitment and their particular cultures. For the sake of this diagram, the distinguishing mark between Muslims is that fanatical Muslims<sup>37</sup> are those in **Zone S** who adhere to a theology that clearly contradicts the Scriptures, while those who tend to be open-minded Muslims are in **Zone R**.

Muslims in **Zone S** believe that the Qur’an is superior to the Bible because it contains the final and most accurate revelation. They believe that Muhammad is superior to Christ

<sup>36</sup> Ephesians 6:10–18

<sup>37</sup> Fundamentalists are driven by *theology and degree of commitment*, while fanatical Muslims are driven by an *attitude* of self-righteousness, demonizing all those who disagree with them.

because he is the “Seal of the prophets.”<sup>38</sup> Muslims in **Zone S** believe and are committed to the theory of Abrogation in how they interpret the Qur’an. This theory says that *later revelation* can abrogate, correct or delete *earlier contradictory revelation*. (See the Theory of Abrogation in Section 14). **Zone S** includes *fanatical Muslims* with *theological views* that contradict the Scriptures.

## CHRISTENDOM MUSLIM WORLD



In contrast, **Zone R** Muslims tend to believe that God is one, transcendent, the judge, merciful and compassionate, the provider. They believe that Muslims need to care for orphans and widows. They tend to be open-minded and can relate well to adherents of other religions. Some of them look for common ground that exists in Western values, human rights and the Qur’an. They see “Islam” as a *society*, a social, cultural, and political solidarity rather than as a religious system primarily.

As stated earlier, these **Zone R** Muslims are like alumni of Islam who have moved beyond what was instilled in them about Muhammad and the Qur’an. They recognize the parts of the Qur’an that agree with human rights as having *universal application*, while the parts that talk about militancy, the infidels, bad treatment of women, or slavery as having *served their transitional purpose* during the time of Muhammad and are no longer applicable. These Muslims tend to think, either consciously or unconsciously, that the earlier, purer revelation associated mainly with the Meccan Suras (611–622 AD) of the Qur’an can and should abrogate contradictory later revelation associated mainly with the Medinan Suras (622–632 AD)<sup>39</sup> that were literally applicable during the time of Muhammad. These low-practice, pragmatic Muslims *reverse abrogation* in their daily lives (see section 14) and reject fundamentalism. Some of them even go further and see the Qur’an as an ancient document that has no real binding authority over modern man.

For example, a missionary in a Muslim country wrote: “Most of my contacts here *reverse abrogation in practice*.” Most Muslims, whether in **Zone R** or in **Zone S**, have a strong sense of solidarity with the entity of “Islam”, which provides them with a place of belonging

<sup>38</sup> Surah 33:40: “Seal of the prophets” implies that he is the recipient of the final and most accurate revelation.  
<http://www.examiner.com/article/muhammad-saw-seal-of-the-prophets>

<sup>39</sup> Muslims believe that Muhammad received revelation in the city of Mecca from 611 to 622. He moved to the city of Medina in 622, and that became the turning point in the Muslim calendar. Muslims also believe that he received revelation while in the city of Medina from 622 until his death in 632. The Meccan and Medinan Suras (sections or chapters) are the contents of the Qur’an.

in their communities and in the Muslim world. This place of belonging serves as their defense against Western influences, such as gay marriage. Turning against the Muslim identity and their own people would be like an American who turns against or burns the American flag.

The type of Muslims that Jay Smith<sup>40</sup> encounters at the Speaker's Corner<sup>41</sup> at Hyde Park in London are mostly from **Zone S**, while the Muslims who are Carl Medearis'<sup>42</sup> friends, clearly are from **Zone R**. Here is a message from one of Carl Medearis' *Muslim friends* who is from **Zone R**:

Last July I was approached by old colleagues to run for the position of president of a 40-year-old academic organization. I have just been informed that I was elected as president by its members along with a new Board. I intend to use my position on the Board to push for reconciliation and to encourage Muslims to learn more about Jesus, whom I know and love, while encouraging Christians to learn more about the Qur'an and their Muslim neighbors. I feel that I was called to serve in this position, and with your help I will do my best to be a peacemaker. I will keep you informed, and I will need your prayers.

Please remember that this man is a Muslim. He is not one of the 13% of high-practice Muslims but belongs to the majority, the 87% of low-practice Muslims who see themselves as alumni of Islam.<sup>43</sup>

## 7. Mentoring on How to Handle Freedom

Muslims in **Zone R** who are on a journey toward Christ might have one of two callings, both of which are biblical options: 1) Surrender fully to Christ and get integrated into Christendom, moving into **Zone Q**, or 2) Surrender fully to Christ and remain in **Zone R** as salt and light among their own people in their birth communities.<sup>44</sup>

### CHRISTENDOM MUSLIM WORLD



<sup>40</sup> Jay Smith is an American missionary in England. He engages Muslims in debates and in apologetics.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/june/21.34.html>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovnTvqL-24w>

<sup>42</sup> Carl Medearis is the author of "Muslims, Christians and Jesus" and a minister of the Gospel with influential leaders in the Middle East. <http://www.carlmedearis.com/>

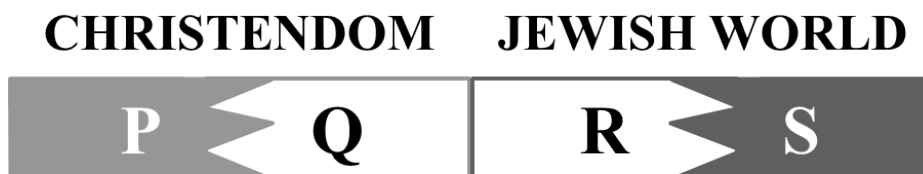
<sup>43</sup> Low-practice Muslims might fast some days in Ramadan with family and celebrate Muslim holidays. They will not go to the local mosques on Fridays, nor are they performing the daily prayers.

<sup>44</sup> Matthew 5:14–16

How *legitimate* is each of these callings and desires?<sup>45</sup> To what extent should Christian evangelists and mentors, on the one hand, foster their Muslim friends' freedom to make their own decisions as they study the Scriptures while following the leading of the Holy Spirit and their consciences<sup>46</sup> or, on the other hand, steer them consciously or unconsciously either to **Zone R** or to **Zone Q**?<sup>47</sup> The latter choice, in which the convert is *steered* either to **Zone R** or to **Zone Q** is not the best option. When the mentor proactively encourages Muslims to leave their families and social networks as part of following Christ, the mentor runs the severe risk of taking the place of the Holy Spirit. He seems to be violating the principle that Paul established in 1 Corinthians 7. Instead, mentors need to teach and train MBBs,<sup>48</sup> both those who convert to Christendom and those who remain in their birth community, how to handle freedom as they grow into mature disciples of Jesus Christ with the tools to think clearly and to understand the Scriptures.

### 8. Options for Jews Who Follow Jesus

The same issues arise in ministry to Jews. Can a Jew be fully surrendered to Jesus Christ and remain an *insider* within the Jewish culture? In other words, can a Jew be fully surrendered to Jesus Christ and call himself a Messianic Jew? Our immediate reaction to this question may be to assert that Judaism and Islam are fundamentally different, and they are fundamentally different. But there are important lessons to be learned by taking a closer look at significant parallels between the two. Judaism is explicitly the cradle of Christianity, whereas Islam claims to supersede and correct Christianity. But it is not as simple as that. This diagram might be helpful.



**Zone Q** is our comfort zone as Evangelicals. In the large rectangle on the right, there are two zones, **R** and **S**. The Jews in **Zone R** tend to be open minded and not prejudiced against

<sup>45</sup> The legitimacy of remaining in context is dealt with in section 4 on 1 Corinthians 7:17–24.

<sup>46</sup> WCF 20.2, 31.2

<sup>47</sup> WCF 20.2 “II. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.”

<sup>48</sup> Muslim background believers in Christ

Jesus. Messianic Jews<sup>49</sup> who are fully surrendered to Christ remain in **Zone R** like yeast in the dough. Messianic Jews reject the Talmud and the rabbinic teachings about Christ. They see the Old Testament in light of the New Testament as they remain inside the large Jewish entity and within their Jewish culture. In contrast, Jews who are theologically in **Zone S** believe that the Old Testament is to be interpreted in light of the Talmud and in light of what the rabbis teach about Jesus. All one has to do is Google the question “What does the Talmud<sup>50</sup> say about Jesus Christ?” to understand the difficulties a Jew faces when he or she surrenders fully to Christ. Jews who are theologically in **Zone S** *cannot* be Messianic Jews. They will have contradictory convictions regarding their beliefs about Christ. They must *move out theologically* to **Zone R**.

Similarly, Muslims who are theologically in **Zone S** and put their faith in Christ must move out theologically from **Zone S** because of contradictory beliefs and convictions. MBBs<sup>51</sup> who move to **Zone R** remain inside their birth communities. They are insiders. We Evangelicals in the United States, especially after 9/11, tend to be accepting of Insider Movements within the Jewish culture but are much more apt to reject it within the Muslim World.

For both the Messianic believer and the MBB who remain in their birth communities, what is at stake is obedience to God’s Word and the leading of His Spirit. In every situation, obedience to the Scriptures will demand confrontation with beliefs and culture.

## 9. Avoiding Syncretism

What about the shady areas, the zigzag line separating **Zone R** from **Zone S** in both the rectangles of the Muslim world and Judaism? The zigzag line portrays a *journey from syncretism* to sanctification, from **Zone S to Zone R**, which is a process whereby Jesus guides His followers into a fuller understanding of who He is. In the Jan/Feb 2013 issue of *Christianity Today*, an MBB who is a graduate of a Bible school and one of the leaders of ministry within the Muslim world<sup>52</sup> in East Africa describes the *journey out of syncretism*.<sup>53</sup>

Muslims know that Isa al Masih [Jesus Christ] did miracles and that he will come as the sign of the Day of Judgment. Even though they know all this, they are not intentionally thinking about Isa [Jesus]; they are thinking about Muhammad. But when we tell them the gospel, they begin to think about Isa

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/messianic-judaism>

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.angelfire.com/mt/talmud/jesusnarr.html>

<sup>51</sup> Muslim background believers in Christ

<sup>52</sup> IM proponents wrongly use this article as another illustration of the successes of the Insider Movement. The author of the article in *Christianity Today* added a correction that appeared in the next issue pointing out that the person interviewed was a *cultural insider* and did *not* have a *Muslim identity*. The quote here is used *only* to describe the *journey out of syncretism*.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/>

intentionally as the one who will save them from the Day of Judgment, from Satan, from antichrist, from death. At that point they mix Muhammad with Isa al Masih [Jesus Christ]. Before, Isa was not the issue. Muhammad was the issue. But when they hear about Isa, they start to bring Isa up to the level of Muhammad. Before, Muhammad was the one who controlled their life. But when they hear the Good News of the kingdom of God, they start to think about Isa. Now syncretism has started; before there was no syncretism... When people start to think about Isa intentionally, the Holy Spirit has room to lead them into all truth, even if they first mix Isa and Muhammad. The Holy Spirit through time will glorify Isa al Mashi in their lives.<sup>54</sup>

Mentors who help new believers transition from wrong theology to biblical theology need to be patient and extend grace while being faithful and persistent in leading Muslims to follow Christ fully. We extend grace to young Christians who have a hard time making sense of the Trinity, or the union of Christ's two natures. We extend grace to young believers who are having difficulty reconciling things they were taught in a secular/humanist education with the truth claims of Scripture. We need to extend similar grace to Muslims who have surrendered their lives to Christ and are struggling with growth pains. Those new believers are often relationally well connected to their own people and used to be immersed in wrong theology. They are now moving on a *difficult journey from syncretism*. Although they are a new creation in Christ with a new second-birth core identity,<sup>55</sup> most certainly they need now to move from wrong theology to biblical theology. The transition is a *process of sanctification*. Mentors who are facilitating the transition represented by the zigzag line in the diagram need to *dare to think out of the box*. Effective mentors should not fear this fine line and thus quickly steer new believers to **Zone Q** to shelter them from syncretism. Instead, they should take new believers into the Scriptures and help them build a solid foundation on the Word of God. Mentors should of course be very much aware of the dangers of syncretism in Insider Ministry or wherever it may be found.<sup>56</sup> We must approach the potential for syncretism with genuine humility, especially in light of the fact that the church in the West tends to be syncretistic, too, in how we view materialism, individualism, and nationalism.

In our Calvinism, we tend to see regeneration happening in an instant (the person is saved or unsaved). But the intellectual and spiritual transition is, at the level of phenomenal observation, often gradual. John 3:8 means that we do not know exactly when regeneration takes place in any one individual case. We cannot confidently evaluate whether someone is "saved" until they are well along in the transition. Unfortunately, the word "sanctification" suggests to those with Reformed theology that these people in transition are all already

<sup>54</sup> *Christianity Today* January/February 2013 page 27. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/>

<sup>55</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>56</sup> Discipling should be carried out inside the birth communities but not inside the Muslim institutions.



1 regenerate. We are not saying that. We are calling mentors to be realistic about their finite  
 2 point of view and not to make snap judgments. It is not our responsibility to look into the  
 3 heart and evaluate people's inward state in a way that only God can do. It is our responsibility  
 4 to share truth and with patience help them, wherever they may be in the process.

5  
 6 Insider Movement proponents need to communicate in humility the fact that no one has  
 7 entire answers for what might happen 50 or 100 years from now in their IM ministries. We  
 8 are all part of a learning process. While committed to our confessional standards, we also  
 9 need to learn together with believers who have not—either by choice or due to lack of  
 10 time—formulated their own ecclesiastically binding theological confession. In the meantime,  
 11 critics of the IM need to look at what God is doing in the world and pray for our brothers  
 12 and sisters in the IM, encourage them, and maintain a mutual accountability relationship  
 13 with those of them whom we know. We need to have an attitude of looking at the logs in our  
 14 own eyes before we attempt to help others with the specks in theirs.

15  
 16 Messianic Jews in the zigzag area between **Zones R** and **S** will struggle with some important  
 17 questions: Are there good parts of the Talmudic culture that I can continue to see as part of  
 18 my Jewish culture? Can I attend the synagogue meetings, although I do not agree with the  
 19 theology of the rabbi? How can I live with integrity by calling myself a Jew when in reality I  
 20 do not agree with the theology of **Zone S**, and most of the Jews I know define themselves by  
 21 their rejection of Christ? How can I practice the Shabbat, Jewish holy days, and the dietary  
 22 laws without getting into legalism? Does my loyalty to the state of Israel push me into the  
 23 eschatology of Christian Zionism? How can I make myself accountable to the rest of the  
 24 body of Christ if I do not see them or listen to them? Am I living in a bubble? Who are my  
 25 mentors? Are my mentors in the same bubble?

26  
 27 Muslim background believers in Christ who are living in the zigzag area between **Zones R**  
 28 and **S** struggle with similar questions: How do I determine what is sinful or non-sinful in the  
 29 Qur'an, *Hadith*,<sup>57</sup> Shari'a,<sup>58</sup> and the Islamic culture, especially in the disputable matters?<sup>59</sup>  
 30 Can I go regularly to the mosque and do the ceremonial prayers outwardly while inwardly I  
 31 am repeating certain texts that I have memorized from the Bible? Is this deception? How do  
 32 I fast Ramadan with my extended family without being deceptive? Can I live with a clear  
 33 conscience by quoting freely from the Qur'an in my evangelism, perhaps risking the false  
 34 impression that I am endorsing the Qur'an as a holy book? How am I different, for example,  
 35 from Jehovah's Witnesses in how they use the Bible in their evangelism if I load the Qur'an  
 36 with my own interpretations, which are different from how Muslims interpret these verses?

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<sup>57</sup> Life and teaching of Muhammad

<sup>58</sup> Shari'a is the moral code and the religious law of Islam. It covers secular law including crime, politics and economics as well as personal matters such as sexual intercourse, hygiene, diet, prayer and fasting.

<sup>59</sup> Romans 14:1–4

How can I make myself accountable to the rest of the body of Christ if I do not see them or listen to them? Am I living in a bubble? Who are my mentors? Are my mentors in the same bubble?

## 10. Use of the Qur'an in Evangelism

There are *several sources of the Qur'an*. The most important are: 1) The Old Testament,<sup>60</sup> 2) Rabbinical Jewish literature,<sup>61</sup> 3) The New Testament<sup>62</sup> and 4) Heretical Christian literature.<sup>63</sup> Muhammad was exposed to an *oral tradition* which included at least these four sources. He *assumed* that whatever he heard about the Jews came from the Old Testament, and whatever he heard about Christ and Christianity came from the New Testament. He probably was not aware of the Rabbinical Jewish literature or the heretical Christian literature that were impacting the oral tradition of the day in that region of Arabia. Because the Qur'an has about 90 verses that talk about Jesus, Mary and Christians, many people think it is a great tool for evangelizing Muslims. The Qur'an does acknowledge the virgin birth. It speaks about Jesus<sup>64</sup> healing the blind, the sick and those with leprosy.<sup>65</sup> It speaks of Him raising the dead. It says that He is now in heaven and will come back to earth on the day of judgment as the "sign of the hour." However, the Qur'an rejects the divinity of Christ and His crucifixion. His divinity is rejected on the basis of a false understanding of the Trinity.<sup>66</sup> The Qur'an rejects a trinity made up of God, Mary, and Jesus,<sup>67</sup> and we reject that trinity as well. As for Christ's crucifixion, the Qur'an claims that God did not abandon His beloved prophet. He intervened miraculously by taking Jesus to heaven, and God's enemies crucified someone else. It only "appeared to them" that it was Jesus who was on the cross.<sup>68</sup>

There are many Muslim background believers in Christ who were attracted to Christ and to the Bible because of the Qur'an. It is surprising, though, to hear of an American Caucasian

<sup>60</sup> An illustration is Leviticus 10:10 regarding the holy and common, the clean and unclean.

<sup>61</sup> In Surah 7:64 in the Qur'an there is a record about Abraham breaking idols. "The fight against idolatry begun by the Prophets (Biblical Prophets) was continued by the Pharisees. Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people, they taught, started on his career as an idol wrecker. In legends, parables and discourses, they showed forth the folly and futility of idol worship..."(Former Chief Rabbi J H Hertz from the "Book of Jewish Thoughts" Published by the office of the Chief Rabbi London 1942) <http://www.answering-islam.org/Quran/Sources/abraham.html>

<sup>62</sup> The virgin birth

<sup>63</sup> The Qur'an says that Jesus as a child made a bird of clay, breathed into it and it flew away. Surah 3:49.

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.letusreason.org/islam11.htm>

<sup>65</sup> <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/quran-jesus.html>

<sup>66</sup> [http://answering-islam.org/Shamoun/quran\\_trinity.htm](http://answering-islam.org/Shamoun/quran_trinity.htm)

<sup>67</sup> Surah 5:72-75, 5:116 & 4:171.

<sup>68</sup> Surah 4:157-158: "That they said (in boast), We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah, but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not, Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise."

1 man who was attracted to Christ because of the Qur'an. In April 2012 he wrote me an e-mail  
2 after reading one of my books.

3  
4 It is funny, because I was an atheist most of my life, joined the U.S. military at  
5 age 34, read the Qur'an multiple times, and because of all the references to the  
6 Bible finally picked up a Bible and just recently gave my life to Christ. I joke  
7 in my Church because I still say the Qur'an brought me to Jesus.

8  
9 A certain missionary who is immersed in ministry to Muslims in an Arab country knows  
10 how to use the Qur'an effectively in evangelism. He shares an interesting story. One of his  
11 friends, a Muslim background believer in Christ, was surprised by how much Islam is under  
12 attack these days by Christians in the West. He told the missionary:<sup>69</sup>

13  
14 You Christians come into our deep dark cave wanting to tell us about the  
15 sunlight outside since you have access to the truth through the Bible. All we  
16 have in the Qur'an is the light of a candle and it is of great value inside that  
17 dark deep cave. Do you have to snuff out our candle to convince us of the  
18 sunlight outside? Why don't you lead us out as we hold on to our candle in the  
19 dark?"

20  
21 It is one thing for MBBs who put their faith in Christ to quote the Qur'an in their evangelism  
22 to Muslims, but it is something else for Christian-background persons to quote the Qur'an in  
23 their evangelism, perhaps indirectly communicating that they endorse it as truth. IM  
24 proponents say that Paul quoted Enoch and other non-biblical literature without endorsing  
25 them as truth (Acts 17:28, Titus 1:12, and Jude 4, 6, 9, 13 and 14). Before using the Qur'an in  
26 their evangelism, Egyptian Navigators *make their position clear early in the relationship* by  
27 using this qualifying statement, "According to what you believe," before they begin to quote  
28 the Qur'an in their evangelism. This seems to be a more helpful way of using the Qur'an.

29  
30 A certain American Christian with a heart to reach out to Muslims introduced himself to a  
31 Muslim leader by saying: "I am a serious student of the four holy books, the Tawrat, the  
32 Zabur, the Injil and the Qur'an."<sup>70</sup> Perhaps this brother was trying to be respectful to this  
33 Muslim leader, but he knows deep in his heart that the Qur'an is not a holy book and should  
34 not be placed at the same level as the Bible. Is this a form of deception? Or is it only a  
35 strategy—to start with the Qur'an and transition to the Bible—and with time wean the Muslim  
36 from the Qur'an? My preference is to use a qualifying statement early in the relationship with  
37 Muslims, stating, "according to what you believe" before quoting the Qur'an.

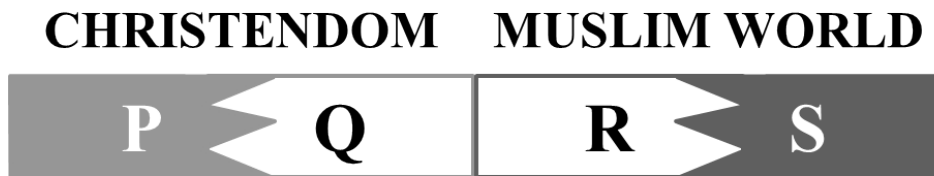
<sup>69</sup> The story has been modified slightly to fit this context.

<sup>70</sup> Tawrat, Zabur and Injil are the Qur'anic terms for the Old Testament and the New Testament.

## 11. Desired Outcome

It is *possible* and *desirable* for many MBBs who are fully surrendered to Christ to remain connected *relationally* with friends and family for the sake of the expansion of the gospel.<sup>71</sup>

It is possible and desirable for MBBs who have surrendered their lives to Christ to be *called* to remain within their birth communities in **Zone R**, provided there is neither deception regarding their faith in Christ nor incompatible formulations regarding the gospel or the Scriptures.



*Theologically* speaking, it is an *impossibility* for MBBs to remain in **Zone S** if they are fully surrendered to Christ. How can a MBB be fully committed to Christ and at the same time believe that Muhammad is superior to Christ and that the Qur'an is superior to the Bible? This is schizophrenia. MBBs who began in **Zone S** but have come to know Christ *must move theologically* to **Zone R** where they adhere to biblical theology in order to be effective insiders within the Muslim world. This report is not speaking about social *relationships* but about *doctrinal beliefs* regarding Christ, the Bible, Muhammad, and the Qur'an. They can continue to be *relationally* connected to Muslim relatives and friends whether they are in **Zone R** or **Zone S**. But theologically they need to move out from **Zone S** to **Zone R**.

With *fanatical* Muslims in **Zone S** who are driven by an attitude of self-righteousness, a different approach to ministry could be used. At times, a confrontational approach might be needed to shake them up. For instance, Jay Smith shakes fanatical Muslims at the Speakers' Corner in London who come to heckle him.<sup>72</sup> He shakes the foundations of Islam by questioning the historicity of Muhammad and the Qur'an. Father Zakaria Botros,<sup>73</sup> an Orthodox priest from Egypt who has a TV ministry in Arabic, shakes Muslims with an attack mainly on Hadith<sup>74</sup> through quotes that make no sense to rational Muslims. Some Muslims get so shaken that they begin to doubt. Doubting Islam could lead them to faith in Christ. Unfortunately, it could also lead them to atheism or drugs or even to the breakdown of the fabric of society in the Muslim world. Others feel cornered by his logic and reasoning and respond with rage, as we have seen in the Middle East and the Muslim world after the

<sup>71</sup> Matthew 5:14–16, 13:33 & 1 Corinthians 7:17–24

<sup>72</sup> Jay Smith is a missionary in England. He engages Muslims in debates and in apologetics.  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/june/21.34.html?start=3>

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.fatherzakaria.net/>

<sup>74</sup> Life and teaching of Muhammad

trailer of the film about Muhammad went viral on YouTube in September 2012. The trailer was removed from YouTube but not until the damage was done.

## 12. Comfort and Tolerance Spheres

As Evangelicals, each one of us should determine before God what is our *narrow sphere of theological preference* and what is our *wider sphere of tolerance*.<sup>75</sup> There are three assumptions and convictions that define a healthy sphere of preference. We should:

- Stand for theological formulations about Christ and the Scriptures that are consistent with biblical teaching.
- Not *demonize* Muhammad and the Qur'an.
- Not *sugarcoat* Muhammad and the Quran.

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My *wider sphere of tolerance* regarding MBBs who begin to follow Christ goes as far as to include a place of belonging relationally either in **Zone Q** or in **Zone R**. Some MBBs choose to integrate into Christendom and move to **Zone Q**. Others might be *called* to remain relationally connected and live in **Zone R** within the Muslim world, functioning as yeast in the dough.<sup>76</sup> Assuming that both types of MBBs, whether in **Zone Q** or **Zone R**, are fully surrendered to Christ, they should be given the freedom to make their own decisions and follow their own conscience.<sup>77</sup> The difficulty is with the grey areas represented in the diagram by the zigzag line. Our responsibility is to pray for those who are experimenting in the grey areas (with things such as what to call themselves) that they will remain deeply committed to the core doctrines of our faith as they increasingly know, love and become like Jesus Christ. It is our responsibility to encourage them and help them maintain accountability relationships with mentors who dare to challenge them when needed.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> In general, as PCA TE and RE our sphere of theological preference would be reformed theology, but our sphere of theological preference would go as wide as to include evangelicals from other denominations with whom we can fellowship and cooperate.

<sup>76</sup> Matthew 13:33

<sup>77</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:10–12; 10:25–29

<sup>78</sup> At the end of this report are suggested questions that Missions Committees can use to interact with the missionaries they support.

There is an organizational concept called “freedom within a framework.” Both key words, “freedom” and “framework,” are important. Freedom promotes creativity, contextualization, ownership, flexibility, and empowerment to do the ministry. When unrestrained, however, freedom can threaten the health of the organization. Effectiveness, focus, accountability and stewardship can be at risk with unrestrained freedom. Framework provides the structure to promote healthy freedom. There can be flexibility and creativity within the framework of the non-negotiable.

The expansion of the gospel should be our passion and calling.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, we as leaders need to encourage sound doctrine and to refute those who oppose it (Titus 1:9). It is good to be willing to live with a *tolerance of ambiguity* when it comes to working through the grey areas (the zigzag line) with the *disputable issues*,<sup>80</sup> yet at the same time we are grateful for the Church Councils<sup>81</sup> and the Confessions of Faith<sup>82</sup> that provide us with very clear examples of biblical articulations of faith. The councils and confessions provide essential guidance because our forefathers were often wrestling with very similar issues to those we face today.

There are two extremes when it comes to dealing with tradition. One extreme goes as far as making the confessions of faith as their primary lens. They see the Scriptures through the lens of the confessions of faith. Scripture is forced to play a supporting role rather than the other way around. On the other hand, there are people who deeply suspect tradition as embodying the sinfulness and worldliness of the church rather than its wisdom. J.I. Packer, in his chapter on tradition, says:

Tradition allows us to stand on the shoulders of the many giants who have thought about Scripture before us. We can gather from the consensus of the greatest and widest body of Christian thinkers from the early Fathers to the present an invaluable resource for understanding the Bible responsibly. Nevertheless, those interpretations (traditions) are never final; they need always to be submitted to Scripture for further review.<sup>83</sup>

The Scriptures in vernacular expressions are their own best safeguard of consistency with traditionally recognized formulations. Those who are working through these disputable issues in the grey areas are walking a tight rope *dangerously* and *courageously* for the sake of the expansion of the gospel. They need to keep in mind that the standards set by the

<sup>79</sup> Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:45–49; Acts 1:8; John 20:21

<sup>80</sup> Romans 14:1

<sup>81</sup> <http://www.dailycatholic.org/history/councils.htm>

<sup>82</sup> [http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster\\_conf\\_of\\_faith.html](http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html)

<sup>83</sup> “Power Religion” Moody Press. Chapter 12, pp. 288–289.

summary of doctrinal orthodoxy in the historic and worldwide church comprise their *safety net*. They should not be walking that tight rope without the safety net beneath them.

### 13. Frame of Reference

Those who are involved in an insider approach to ministry need to be careful not to make Islam and the Islamic system of reasoning their *frame of reference*. In trying to become all things to all men so that by all possible means they might save some,<sup>84</sup> there is a danger that they might lose their anchor. Our anchor should be connected to a solid rock with a strong metal chain and not with a rubber bungee cord. We need to be careful not to compromise our *frame of reference*, namely the gospel and the Scriptures. We should not *tailor our message* to fit the Islamic theology or its system of reasoning, thus potentially compromising the doctrine of the Triune God, which is a *mystery*. An extreme illustration of this loss of frame of reference would be to “endorse” verses in the Qur’an that say when Jesus was a child, He created a bird by God’s permission.<sup>85</sup> “Endorsing” such a teaching would be to endorse heretical Christian literature, which is the source of these verses in the Qur’an.

### 14. Living in Zone R with No Deception

Here are some key questions: *How can MBBs genuinely be fully committed followers of Christ with no deception as they remain in their birth communities within the Muslim world in Zone R?* In other words, how can MBBs stay within their birth communities and show respect for Islam without either compromise or deception? How would they relate to Muhammad and the Qur’an? There are two *reasonable ways* that Muslims on their journey to Christ can address the key questions of what they really think of Muhammad and the Qur’an. Both options can help those who are called to remain in their birth communities think on these difficult issues on their journey.

#### Option One

Jay Smith<sup>86</sup> researched and studied the teachings of Western Revisionists such as Patricia Crone<sup>87</sup> and John Wansbrough,<sup>88</sup> who examined the history of Islam using archeology and modern scientific research. According to the Revisionists, there are big question marks about the historicity of the city of Mecca, the dates of the *Qibla* orientation (direction of prayer), the dates of the canonization of the Qur’an, and the *Shahada* (Muslim statement of

<sup>84</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22

<sup>85</sup> Surah 3:49; Surah 5:110

<sup>86</sup> Jay Smith is a missionary in England. He engages Muslims in debates and in apologetics.

<http://www.answeringmuslims.com/2011/01/jay-smith-teaches-muslims-about-islam.html>

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.ias.edu/people/faculty-and-emeriti/crone>

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.amazon.com/John-E.-Wansbrough/e/B001JP2ZTY>

faith).<sup>89</sup> From Jay Smith's research and other materials, it can be concluded that there are two Muhammads. There was a "real Muhammad" who did not perceive himself as a prophet or as the Messenger of God but merely warned the Meccans that *God is one* and that *idolatry is evil*. Muslim historians claim that the Qur'an was canonized 20 years after the death of Muhammad (652 AD), while the Revisionists concluded that the Qur'an was probably canonized at least 120 years after the death of Muhammad. So the Qur'an that Muslims have today contains the "real Muhammad" as well as the "original material of the Qur'an," which is associated with that "original Muhammad." The Qur'an also contains the "folklore Muhammad" with all the veneration that was bestowed upon him over several generations. Imagine if we had a Bible that contained the 66 books as well as all the teachings on the veneration of Mary through several generations. To some extent, it can be deduced from the research of the Revisionists, that is what Muslims have today in their Qur'an. The Revisionists' account of Islamic history is based on archeology and scientific research and appears to be closer to the truth.<sup>90</sup> This means that the real reconstructionists are not the revisionists but are actually the traditional historians of Islam who accepted the folklore Muhammad as a real person without thorough historical research.

## CHRISTENDOM    MUSLIM WORLD



MBBs who are called to remain in **Zone R** may have high respect for the "original Muhammad" while rejecting the "folklore Muhammad." They would be perceived by their friends and relatives as Muslims who think out of box, or as some mystics who are known to love Jesus, like Ibn Arabi,<sup>91</sup> and others who have "strange" ideas. This line of thinking could help MBBs inside **Zone R** to live without self-deception, loving and respecting only the "real Muhammad," and rejecting the "folklore Muhammad." Like African Americans who highly respect Martin Luther King, Jr., MBB insiders who remain in their birth communities in **Zone R** could have a similar respect for Muhammad. They can adhere to the non-sinful aspects in their heritage and have a social identity within their birth communities.

<sup>89</sup> Shahada "There is not God but God. Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

<sup>90</sup> The Qur'an has not gone through the scrutiny of higher criticism by Muslim scholars like the Bible has gone through by "Christian" scholars like Bultman and others in the twentieth century. When MBBs are exposed to the Revisionists' perspective regarding Muhammad and the Qur'an, they need to learn of how the Bible has gone through the fire of scrutiny in the twentieth century and how it came out stronger than ever.

<sup>91</sup> A mystic Muslim who loved Jesus and in many of his poems declared his love for Jesus. He was perceived by Muslims as "strange," but a Muslim nonetheless. <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/>



## Option Two

A starting point for MBBs who are called to remain as insiders within **Zone R** is based on Mahmoud Taha's<sup>92</sup> book, *The Second Message of Islam*<sup>93</sup> and his disciple, An Na'im.<sup>94</sup> An-Na'im, who holds a PhD in Islamic law from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, is the best articulator of Taha's theology. Taha was a Sudanese theologian who developed a theory that reversed the theory of Abrogation. Both Taha and An-Na'im are included in the book *Liberal Islam*,<sup>95</sup> which was edited by Kurzman. Both men, Taha and An-Naim, are not considered heretical Muslims but are considered *liberal* Muslims, a highly significant distinction. Most of the open-minded Muslims who are trying to remain within the Muslim world and yet are trying to live and function in the 21st century tend to follow the same line of reasoning as Taha and An Na'im, although they may have never heard of them.

The *Theory of Abrogation* claims that later revelation can abrogate—correct or delete—earlier contradictory revelation. The problem with this theory is that, in general, tolerance in the Qur'an, Hadith, and Shari'a are associated with the Meccan (early) period in Muhammad's life (611–622), while militancy against other religions, bad treatment of women, and slavery are mostly associated with the Medinan (later) period (622–632). According to the theory of abrogation, militancy abrogates tolerance; this is the *heart of the fundamentalists' argument*. Mahmoud Taha believed that Muhammad was given a pure message in the Meccan period (611–622 AD), but because people were so primitive, they rejected that pure message and persecuted Muhammad. So Muhammad, along with his followers, ran for their lives to Medina in 622 AD. During that period in the city of Median, God, in his mercy, started giving him, through the angel Gabriel, a *diluted message* according to Taha. This message would be more understandable to the people of that time whose *hardened hearts* kept them from receiving the *pure truth*.<sup>96</sup> Under this argument, the militancy, bad treatment of women, and texts in the Qur'an that are critical of Judaism and Christianity have *served their transitional* purpose. Those texts, which exist in the Qur'an, *Hadith*, and *Shari'a*, and are associated with the Medinan period (622–632) according to Taha, were given to primitive people and are not applicable today.<sup>97</sup> Taha also asserts that the militancy texts have no universal application but were applicable only at the time of

<sup>92</sup> [http://www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/mahmoud\\_taha.html](http://www.martinfrost.ws/htmlfiles/mahmoud_taha.html)

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.amazon.com/Second-Message-Islam-Mahmoud-Contemporary/dp/081562705X>

<sup>94</sup> <http://www.law.emory.edu/aannaim/>

<sup>95</sup> <http://kurzman.unc.edu/liberal-islam/>

<sup>96</sup> Muhammad's core message in the Meccan period contained mainly the following: God is one. He is transcendent. He is the judge, therefore there is heaven and hell. He is merciful and compassionate. He is the provider. We need to care for orphans and widows. The message was a monotheistic message and a continuation of what was revealed earlier to Jews and Christians. If Jews and Christians follow their religions faithfully they would find favor with God and that religion was a matter of free choice.

<sup>97</sup> Mahmoud Taha's book "The Second Message of Islam"

Muhammad to help Muslims develop self-confidence. In contrast, the texts of the Qur'an that go back to the Meccan period (611–622), as well as the corresponding parts of the *Hadith* and *Shari'a* that contain the pure message, have a *universal* application. These are the parts of the Qur'an that are compatible with human rights<sup>98</sup> and with the 21st century.

Open-minded Muslims tend to follow the same line of thinking of Mahmoud Taha as they deal with difficult texts in the Qur'an related to militancy against infidels, slavery and bad treatment of women. Though they may not know of Taha or read the writings of An-Na'im, they may still possess this line of thinking. Some Muslims at the beginning of their journey to Christ will find reason to remain sincerely within their birth communities in the large tent of the Muslim world without taking on what is perceived to be its common beliefs and practices that are anti-biblical.<sup>99</sup> They would *start* from Taha's position, and as they put their faith in Christ, the Bible replaces the Qur'an as the *only* source of truth. Insider Ministries proponents point to this repeated phenomenon. As they come to know Christ, the Qur'an remains a "spiritual" book for them but certainly not equivalent to the Bible. Its Meccan parts would be informative and even inspiring, but not part of God's revelation.

How would a true reformation come about in Islam according to thoughtful and open-minded Muslims who are experiencing an identity crisis of how to remain within the Muslim world yet live in the 21st century?



According to Taha and An Naim, peeling the Hadith and the Shari's from around the Qur'an does not produce a true reformation within Islam. True reformation, according to those thoughtful and open-minded Muslims, would *not* come, as it were, through *Sola Qur'ana* (the Qur'an without the Hadith and the Shari'a) but through *Sola Meccana*. (For those Muslims, the Meccan section in the diagram has universal application. The Medinan section served its transitional purpose and is no longer applicable today). An-Naim states:

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.law.emory.edu/aannaim/>

<sup>99</sup> The story of Fatima in Chapter 4 in *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross* illustrates this point.



Unless the basis of modern Islamic law is shifted away from the texts of the Qur'an and Sunna [or Hadith, the life and teaching of Muhammad] of the Medina stage [622-632 AD], which constituted the foundations of the construction of Shari'a, there is no way of avoiding the drastic and serious violation of universal standards of human rights. There is no way to abolish slavery as a legal institution and no way to eliminate all forms of shades of discrimination against women and non-Muslims as long as we remain bound by the framework of Shari'a... The traditional techniques of reform within the framework of Shari'a are inadequate for achieving the necessary degree of reform. To achieve that degree of reform, we must be able to set aside clear and definite texts of the Qur'an and Sunna [life and teaching of Muhammad] of the Medina stage as having served their transitional purpose and implement those texts of the Meccan stage [612-622 AD] which were previously inappropriate for practical application but are now the only way to proceed.<sup>100</sup>

Muslims who are journeying toward Christ might feel called to remain as insiders in **Zone R**, reversing *abrogation* as An-Naim does. As they continue on the journey, they can become committed followers of Christ who have respect for Muhammad, as many people respect Gandhi, but they *do not believe* that he is a prophet.

I like this second option as a starting point of the journey out of **Zone S** and toward Christ. This second option could be very appealing to Muslims on that journey, giving them hope that it is *legitimate* to move out of **Zone S**. As they continue on the journey, they might end up with **Option 1** as they decide what to think of Muhammad and the Qur'an.<sup>101</sup> Early on the journey toward Christ, the Muslims in **Zone R** could look at those two options with these two perspectives in mind and perceive what in the Qur'an is compatible with Scriptures to be like a candle inside a dark cave.<sup>102</sup> Then with that candle they walk out of the cave to the sunlight of Christ and the Scriptures, where that candle is no longer needed. They continue to use that candle as they go back to the dark cave to persuade other Muslims to start the initial steps of walking out to the light of Christ and the Scriptures. Thus they continue to use the Qur'an in their evangelism. On this journey from **Zone S** to **Zone R**,

<sup>100</sup> Kozma, Charles. *Liberal Islam*. 1998. Section on Mahmoud Taha.

<sup>101</sup> Option one is covered a couple of pages earlier.

<sup>102</sup> The "candle" inside the dark cave could be the positive verses on Jesus in the Qur'an.

they know how to communicate with their relatives and friends about what they think of Muhammad and the Qur'an and thus they do not rupture their relationships with family and friends but focus on living for Christ without self-deception.

## 15. A Truly Transformed MBB

Muslim background believers in Christ must determine how to maintain a balance. They need to maintain balance between living transformed lives *before* articulating the gospel to family and friends, and at the same time not becoming fearful and living as *secret believers indefinitely before articulating the gospel*. For some it may be unwise to share verbally soon after coming to faith. Timing and wisdom are key. As MBBs seek to live a transformed life before they start to articulate the gospel, each believer must determine how long to remain a “secret” believer like Nicodemus<sup>103</sup> and Joseph of Arimathea<sup>104</sup> and when to openly identify themselves as believers who are unashamed of Christ.<sup>105</sup> Earning the right to speak by demonstrating a transformed life is critical. Fear keeps some from identifying with Christ; this is sin that should be corrected with repentance. For others, it could be that although they *want* to identify with Christ, they do *not want* to identify themselves with Western “Christianity.” In the minds of those around them, “Christianity” in America endorses Hollywood movies, homosexuality, and Christian Zionism.

## 16. Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Those who endorse this Minority Report live and function between a rock and a hard place. Some IM proponents lump this line of thinking in with the critics of the Insider model because it distinguishes between sinful and non-sinful aspects within the birth communities of the Muslim world. This report states that MBBs who choose to live as insiders within the Muslim world can live only within non-sinful aspects of their birth communities (**Zone R**). At some point they will need to reject, resist and confront some sinful aspects of the Islamic culture and theology in **Zone S**, mostly rooted in the Medinan theology, that contradict the teaching of the Scriptures. We need to remember, though, that all cultures include sinful aspects. The non-sinful parts, **Zone R**, are those parts that are not in any way in conflict with the teachings of the Scriptures. These include theological issues such as rejecting the evil of idolatry and the need to honor parents (Surah 17:23–24) and cultural issues such as Muslim art and architecture.

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<sup>103</sup> John 3

<sup>104</sup> John 19:38

<sup>105</sup> Mark 8:38

The diagram below depicts how some IM proponents in the past have perceived Islam. They saw the entire Muslim world rectangle as a potential place for insiders since the problem is only with a few tough texts in the Qur'an that are contradictory to Scriptures.



Those IM proponents saw that the problem was mainly with the Hadith<sup>106</sup> and the Sharia<sup>107</sup> but not with the Qur'an. They claimed that there are only a few texts in the Qur'an that caused a problem in evangelism to Muslims, and with proper translation and interpretation of those texts, the problems would be solved. This report disagrees with that assumption. According to the Qur'an, Muhammad is the "seal" of the prophets, the recipient of the final revelation, and therefore he is superior to Christ. This report considers those extreme IM proponents as *sugar-coating* Islam by sugar-coating the tough texts in the Qur'an.

On the other hand, some critics of the Insider model lump those who endorse this Minority Report with those sugar-coating IM proponents and assume that this report is compromising biblical convictions. Those critics tend to *demonize all or most of Islam* and see no place for MBBs to remain as salt and light among their own people. Because these critics start with the assumption that Islam is simply a "false religion"—rather than seeing that the label "Muslim" can also encompass the reality of social and cultural unity—they believe it is an impossibility for MBBs to remain within the large tent of the Muslim world as in the diagram below.



Seeing all or most of the Muslim world as only Zone S, they believe a new MBB must move out to Zone Q within Christendom. Rather than seeing the presence of MBBs within their birth communities as an *opportunity* for the gospel to penetrate Islam from within, they tend to see that as a *curse*. Some would even be willing to extend grace in terms of time even for several generations, but they believe that ultimately the MBB should move from the Muslim world to **Zone Q**. Perhaps this line of thinking comes as a result of the separation of church

<sup>106</sup> Life and teaching of Muhammad

<sup>107</sup> Shari'a is the moral code and the religious law of Islam. It covers secular law including crime, politics and economics as well as personal matters such as sexual intercourse, hygiene, diet, prayer and fasting.

and state in the West, and this influences how they judge issues. In Islam there is no such separation. So when a Westerner says, “You have to leave Islam and become a Christian” (meaning the false religious beliefs within Islam), the Muslim hears, “You have to commit high treason by coming out from the large tent of the Muslim world and give up your first-birth identity.” Christians who demonize Islam believe that those MBBs cannot remain connected to family and friends within the non-sinful parts of their birth communities (**Zone R**) in the Muslim world. So according to those critics, whenever the yeast of the gospel starts growing within the Muslim “pot of dough,” we need to scoop that yeast out and place it in the Protestant pot of dough,<sup>108</sup> and thus stop the yeast from permeating and transforming the Muslim pot. In many cases, some of those insiders get *pushed out by Muslims* to **Zone Q**, but some others who are called and willing to pay the price manage to stay as salt and light among their own people, winning their relatives and friends to Christ. Their presence is a sign of hope that the Muslim world in the coming generations can be penetrated from the inside with the gospel.

There are MBBs who are whole-heartedly living for Christ in both **Zone Q** of Christendom and in **Zone R** of the Muslim world. It is encouraging and amazing to hear testimonies of people even within **Zone S** who are coming to know Christ and are moving quickly to **Zone R** or to **Zone Q**. (Please see Attachment 2 to read the exciting journey of a mature MBB who is living for Christ in **Zone R**).



Before the January 25, 2011 Revolution in Egypt, Christians longed to see some cracks in the thick wall of the Muslim world that prevented Muslims from putting their faith in Christ. Recently, Egyptian Christians began to see some of these cracks as a result of the Revolution, which demolished the fear that has always existed in both Christians and Muslims. Christians, in general, used to be afraid to share the gospel with Muslims. Muslims used to be afraid to ask Christians about Christ and the Scriptures. Although there are no subtitles in English, please watch this short video and observe how Egyptian Muslims are attending Christian churches. Note specifically how the Muslim women respond to the evangelistic message given by the Orthodox priest.<sup>109</sup>

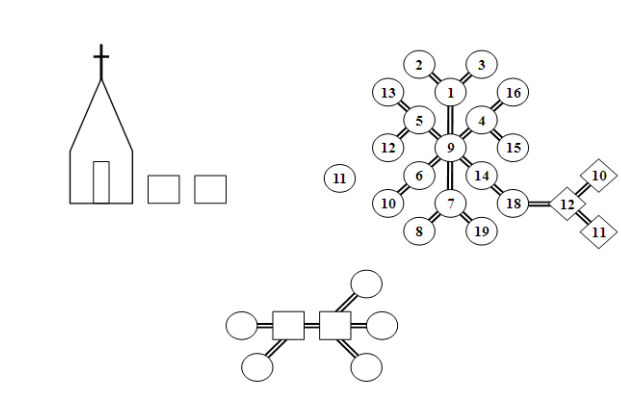
<sup>108</sup> Matthew 13:33

<sup>109</sup> I wept with joy the first time I watched this video clip.

<http://www.light-dark.net/vb/showthread.php?p=1040198211>

## 17. Diversity of Expressions of the Church

The diagram below presents three *expressions of the Ekklesia* in places such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, or Turkey. There is the *obvious* (established) church, represented by squares, and the *hidden* (underground) church represented by circles in which the gospel has penetrated a household (*Oikos*). Then there is the *semi-hidden* church in between the two, represented at the bottom in this diagram.



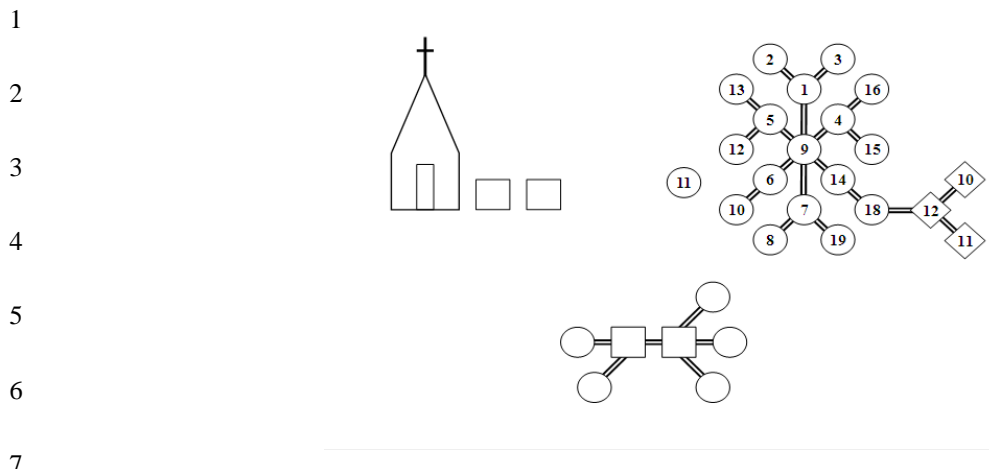
In the household or oikos, #11 is not strongly connected to his oikos, while # 18 is cross cultural and is connected to #12, a person from another (oikos) of “diamonds.” In the first century, the gospel moved from one oikos to another through relationships that were impacted by transformed lives. The circles in the circular oikos (household) are connected by parallel lines, indicating transformational relationships. When relationships were marked by truth, humility, grace, integrity and love, the gospel made a great impact. In the first century, the oikos was the *social structure of the day*; many parts of the Muslim world have similar social structures today.

The *semi hidden* church at the bottom of the diagram has the potential of becoming an *obvious* church (squares), or going underground and becoming a *hidden* or underground church (circles), leaving behind the two squares.<sup>110</sup> This hidden church has tremendous potential to penetrate a people group.<sup>111</sup> *The Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church in America acknowledges the existence of such a church.<sup>112</sup> This will be addressed in the next section on ecclesiology.

<sup>110</sup> The “squares,” the two missionaries or national Christians, could have “circular” hearts and could serve and encourage discretely the “circles” to be effective in their walk with God and in their outreach to their oikos.

<sup>111</sup> *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross*, pp. 222–225.

<sup>112</sup> *BCO* 4.5



Is the *hidden* or underground church in destitute regions to be *pitied* or to be *celebrated*? One of the three leaders of a completely *hidden underground church* in a strict Muslim country shared with me that if one week goes by without having new believers added to their church, they begin to wonder, “What is wrong?” The members of these hidden churches experience daily persecution from family members and society. At times, the persecution is for Jesus’ sake and comes as a result of carrying the cross, and that is to be expected. But at other times, the persecution is because of the zealous self-righteousness and obnoxiousness of the new believers. Preaching down at relatives and friends before they see a transformed life could result in unnecessary persecution, and that persecution is not for Jesus’ sake. One MBB woman from an Arab country came to know Christ many years ago. In her newfound zeal for Christ, she ruptured every relationship in her family. It took sixteen years to repair the damage before her family members were finally willing to listen to the gospel. Suffering for Jesus’ sake is one thing; suffering because of bigotry and self-righteousness is a completely different thing.

In a ministry in the Middle East that follows many of the principles of the Insider model, the missionary/mentor reported:

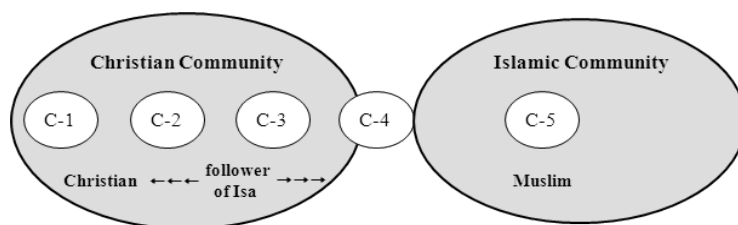
When a Muslim comes to faith in Christ, he or she is signing their death warrant. We have to prepare new MBBs not only to live for Christ, but to die for him... There is something about suffering inside the community which bonds believers to others in the community. Even their enemies are impressed, and some eventually come to faith... I do not advocate that MBBs deliberately seek persecution and martyrdom. I counsel them to be cautious in relating their faith to other Muslims, until they can know that their message will be received... It is important that MBBs be taught to memorize the Scripture in order to face persecution when neither the Bible nor believers may be present



to encourage them. The written or memorized Word of God is always present in their hearts to comfort and guide and to provide witness to their persecutors.<sup>113</sup>

This missionary intentionally trains MBBs to expect persecution and martyrdom and prepares them to be ready when it comes. They have had several martyrs in that ministry in addition to houses and cars being burned.

The C1–C6 scale of Christ-centered communities<sup>114</sup> is presented in an article by Timothy Tennent.<sup>115</sup> The scale is descriptive rather than prescriptive, yet it is clearly a *one-dimensional* tool. Tennent’s article appears as a chapter in the book *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, and the title of the chapter is “Ecclesiology.” Tennent accurately pinpointed *identity* as the key issue in evaluating the Inside Movement.



Tennent talks about C-6 people on the C1–C6 scale<sup>116</sup> (the *hidden, or underground* church) as if they are a *sad reality*. They are hidden because they are the persecuted church in very difficult Muslim countries, and the only way for them to survive is to stay hidden. It appears that Tennent assumed that a C6 church will “float” from underground status and become a “real church” only when it becomes an “established and obvious” church and when democracy sets its people free from fear and persecution. Does the *Ekklesia* of Christ need democracy? We do not see C6 anywhere in the diagram above. Are these underground churches a *sad reality*? Or are they to be *admired* and *celebrated* because in many ways they look like the early church in the book of Acts, as well as other examples throughout history, such as the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>-century “Hidden Christians” in Japan or the underground church in China?

<sup>113</sup> Ray Register, *Discipling Middle Eastern Believers*. GlobalEdAdvance Press, pp. 87–89.

<sup>114</sup> Attachment 1 contains a chart explaining C-1 to C-6 of the Christ centered communities according to the man who designed the scale.

<sup>115</sup> <http://international.sojournchurch.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Insider-movements.pdf>

<sup>116</sup> For a chart of the C1–C6 scale, see Attachment 1. For further detailed information about the scale, go to: Ray Register, *Discipling Middle Eastern Believers* where it explained in detail. GlobalEdAdvance Press, pp. 135–138.

The early church in the Roman Empire spread like yeast in the dough and infiltrated the society of that time with neither church bells nor fancy cathedrals. Yeast in dough does not make noise. When the yeast is at work, we cannot see it. We see the results of its impact at a later time as it infiltrates and impacts the society. What is taking place these days in Iran and Saudi Arabia could serve as an example. God has used committed-Christian domestic helpers from countries such as Sri Lanka and the Philippines who came to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries to work. Some of these women were Christ-like domestic helpers who planted the seed of the gospel in the hearts of many children who are growing up as a new generation of Muslims who are more open to the gospel.<sup>117</sup>

What will protect these hidden churches from syncretism is their openness and commitment to be mentored and coached by visiting leaders who are *gifted pioneer missionaries* and sensitive Christian leaders from that same culture whenever possible. These churches need mentors like Paul and his team, who visited new churches and wrote letters dealing with potential heresies. Paul instructed them in how to live by faith and obedience, growing in their knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, becoming more like Him as they matured.

## 18. Ecclesiology

If a PCA missionary team goes to a Muslim country to plant a church, their task is clear and obvious. They will adhere to the marks of the church. According to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the Marks of the Church are: 1) true preaching of the Word,<sup>118</sup> 2) the administration of sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) and 3) discipline.<sup>119</sup>

If, on the other hand, a certain mission organization team goes to a Muslim country to start a ministry, it will be a different situation if they are not familiar with the Marks of the Church. To start with, the members of the team could be made up of Anglicans, Baptists, Presbyterians, and others. The PCA missionary on the team has the freedom to practice his Presbyterian convictions in his personal life and family life. His children would be baptized as infants. His fellow team member, a Baptist, believes only in adult baptism and practices that in his family life. As a team, however, they have to agree on what is absolutely essential in planting a *healthy* church. These essentials have to be *biblical*, *generic*, and *inclusive* to all the members of the team.

<sup>117</sup> <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en//world-news/detail/articolo/kuwait-cristianesimo-christianism-cristianos-11709/>

<sup>118</sup> According to reformed theology, if there is true preaching of the Word, then it should result in commitment to Christ, depth in the Scriptures, obedience, prayer, fellowship and reaching out to the lost.

<sup>119</sup> WCF 7.6,

1 What are the spelled-out essentials for a healthy church in a Muslim setting that MBBs  
 2 should *aspire* to?<sup>120</sup> 1) A minimum of two or three people meeting together on a regular  
 3 basis in a place like an apartment.<sup>121</sup> 2) People who have surrendered their lives to Christ as  
 4 their Lord, who desire to obey the Holy Spirit and worship the Father.<sup>122</sup> 3) Accepting the  
 5 Word of God as the authority that shapes their lives, who preach it, teach it, study it,  
 6 memorize it, and above all obey it.<sup>123</sup> 4) People who truly fellowship with one another<sup>124</sup>  
 7 and 5) Who reach out to the lost.<sup>125</sup> 6) When the numbers grow, elders and a government  
 8 structure come into the picture. 7) People are baptized and the agape meal (the Lord's  
 9 Supper) might be practiced on weekly basis. These are very high standards; hardly a church  
 10 in the West measures up to them. These are goals that the young church should keep in  
 11 focus and aspire to.

12  
 13 Leadership and discipline will come when, for example, the head of a household exercises a  
 14 role like that of an elder, not only leading his own household but also having a heart to  
 15 encourage other households in that town or city.<sup>126</sup> Deacons will give servant leadership to  
 16 their own households.<sup>127</sup> The number of believers will naturally increase, and of course the  
 17 Lord's Supper or the *agape meal* will be practiced where these brothers and sisters  
 18 experience together a *special presence of Christ*.<sup>128</sup> Baptism *should be done*, but at the *right*  
 19 *time* and for the *right reasons*.<sup>129</sup> More than anything else, there is a great deal of abuse of  
 20 baptism in ministries in the Muslim world. When baptism is done at the right time and for  
 21 the right reason . . .

22  
 23 It is the decisive turning point for an inquirer or seeker to become identified as  
 24 an MBB... Those who have been baptized gather naturally into their family or  
 25 friendship groups. They protect each other and provide for each other's  
 26 physical and social needs. The timing of a MBB's baptism should be the  
 27 prerogative of the man or woman of peace who won them to the Lord and is  
 28 discipling them... Sometimes a Muslim's baptism is delayed until they can  
 29 lead other family members or friends to the faith and join them to establish a

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<sup>120</sup> BCO 4.5 "In like manner, Christians whose lot is cast in destitute regions ought to meet regularly for the worship of God."

<sup>121</sup> Matthew 18:30

<sup>122</sup> Matthew 6:33

<sup>123</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16, Joshua 1:8

<sup>124</sup> John 13:34–35

<sup>125</sup> Matthew 5:16 and 6:44–48

<sup>126</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1–7

<sup>127</sup> 1 Timothy 3:12

<sup>128</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:27–29

<sup>129</sup> WCF 28.5 & 7. See point 2, "The Contrast Between the Two Entities" for an illustration of a baptism taking place for the wrong reason. Mustafa got baptized in order to convince prejudiced Christians that he was really one of them. That is not the biblical reason for baptism.

believers group. In most cases, baptism gives new courage to the MBB and the Holy Spirit empowers him or her to grow stronger in their faith.<sup>130</sup>

So what is “church” to a group of evangelical missionaries from different denominations operating together as a mixed team in a Muslim country? The Ekklesia is the people of God who are called out of the world to glorify Him and to carry out the Great Commission to the elect, whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world. The Ekklesia has a *covenantal identity* with a covenant of grace to Jews and Gentiles.<sup>131</sup> God’s people in the Old Testament were the roots and the trunk of the olive tree, but with the new covenant, the Gentiles were grafted as branches into that same tree.<sup>132</sup> God’s people are to be the salt and light of the earth as they are dispersed all over the globe. They are to be the yeast of the Kingdom penetrating the dough. They are sojourners or exiles.<sup>133</sup> They are not supposed to live in secluded, exclusive ghetto communities; rather, they are in the world yet not of the world.

In Egypt, there is a reoccurring phenomenon: Newlywed couples who are committed Christians look for apartments in buildings owned by other born-again Christians. Sometimes every resident in the building is a believer. These believers tend to send their children to Christian schools, go to Christian doctors, and work in Christian companies. They live their Christian lives in isolation, dreaming of one day emigrating to the West when the opportunity opens. Some Christian leaders have started asking young couples who have a strong walk with the Lord to not live such lives of isolation and separatism. The slogan that they chose, “*manara bikul amara*,” rhymes in Arabic. It means “a lighthouse in every apartment building.” Young couples who have strong relationships with God are encouraged to look for apartments in buildings where Muslims and nominal Christians live, rather than in buildings filled with believers.

The Ekklesia in the Muslim world is not just to be experienced and lived out on the day of public worship in a church building for 90 minutes.<sup>134</sup> It is also lived out every day of the week, as church members live their lives as salt and light among relatives, workmates, classmates, friends, and neighbors. One of the most distinguishing characteristics of an Ekklesia is the “one another” aspect, taught throughout the New Testament.<sup>135</sup> To stay healthy and growing, church members should seek to have: 1) an intimate relationship with God and to stay in the Word of God, 2) a strong relationship with one another as believers

<sup>130</sup> Ray Register, *Discipling Middle Eastern Believers*. GlobalEdAdvance Press, pp. 60–61.

<sup>131</sup> *WCF* 7.5

<sup>132</sup> Romans 11

<sup>133</sup> 1 Peter 2:12

<sup>134</sup> Hebrews 10:25

<sup>135</sup> John 13:34–35; 1 John 1:6–10

and 3) transformational relationships with the lost around them so that the gospel can flow to others when they proclaim it.

In Australia, there is so much land that they do not need to build fences to keep the cattle in. Instead they dig wells, and the cows learn not to stray far away from the well. As the church moves forward, its people need to realize that they cannot be merely “well centered” or “centered-set” as this short video<sup>136</sup> says. Other churches focus so much on the “fences,” or the bounded-set aspects of who is in and who is out, that outsiders feel intimidated and hesitate to join. The history of this debate<sup>137</sup> goes far back, and there are many views.<sup>138</sup> The centered-set and bounded-set thinking need to balance one another. It is not enough to be centered set; there should also be bounded-set perspective where there is discipline, membership, and leadership. Government, boundaries, structure, and discipline are necessary as the church matures. Paul sent Titus back to make sure that a government structure (elders, bishops, leaders) was in place, and this could take years in a Muslim setting.<sup>139</sup>

### 19. The Elect in “Destitute” Regions

In the book of Revelation, John writes about his glimpse of the future that awaits us and gives us a decryption of the elect:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” That scene describes the fact that among the elect there are and will be many MBBs from all over the Muslim World. We could argue that most of those elect from Muslim backgrounds today will not be from the various expressions of the established churches, but rather will be from churches in destitute regions<sup>140</sup> hidden from our eyes. *The Book of Church Order* points out that the church of Christ includes what it calls “churches in destitute regions” along with missional and particular churches. “In like manner, Christians whose lot is cast in destitute regions ought to meet regularly for the worship of God.”<sup>141</sup>

In 1976 after Mao Zedong died, an article described the church of Christ in China. The article pointed out that before Mao took over, the number of Christians in China was about one million. With Mao’s suppression of the church, the church went underground. There was the

<sup>136</sup> <http://vimeo.com/2742653>

<sup>137</sup> <http://nextreformation.com/wp-admin/general/centered.htm>

<sup>138</sup> <http://www.tillhecomes.org/bounded-sets-centered-sets/>

<sup>139</sup> Titus 1:5

<sup>140</sup> BCO 4.5

<sup>141</sup> BCO 4.5

small established church that had the approval of Mao's regime, and there was the huge hidden underground church that multiplied over the years. By the time of Mao's death, the underground church increased to an estimated 40 million.

According to the International Religious Freedom Report 2004, the U.S. State Department estimates that there are 300,000 Christians in Iran, the majority of whom are ethnic Armenians and Assyrians. Yet modern reports about the church of Christ in Iran claim that the number is between 500,000 and one million. There is no way to find out the exact numbers. One thing is clear though, that the number is huge and most of these underground churches are in "destitute regions" and meet secretly in apartments. Such churches are quietly infiltrating the fissures of Islam. Here again is a key question: Are all the elect among Muslims today in the established churches where they can be seen and counted or are they in the hidden underground church? Life is easy in the abstract, but when we look at the reality on the ground things become messy and hard to put into our categories.

## 20. Identity

Timothy Tenennt pointed out rightly that identity is the key issue in our study of the Insider Movement. It is the key that allows MBBs to remain as insiders among their own people. Without that identity in place, it is impossible to remain as an insider. Register, in his ministry among Arabs in the Holy Land, describes what happens:

The individual Muslim receives his *identity* from his or her family, clan, and nation. Islam capitalized on the group cohesion... Group or clan loyalty requires total dedication. To leave Islam is to leave the family group which gives Muslims their *identity*. Islam maintains a tight control over its adherents through physical, mental and spiritual bonds. There is no back door out of Islam. To leave is to become a *murtad*, or backslider who has returned to paganism and gone astray. The only alternative is to return to Islam or face the death penalty. A system of scolding, threats, bribery, sexual enticement or deprivation, exclusion, job loss, and finally death by starvation, poisoning or stabbing has been devised to ensure that backsliders return to the fold. All of the above are good reasons to encourage MBBs to remain in their family or clan in order to quietly influence their spouses, children, relatives and friends to receive the gospel and be saved... There are cases where extraction cannot be avoided, but we are finding that most Muslims have trusted friends and family members who will quickly share the joy of their new faith in Jesus. If they remain respectful of their parents and spouses and leaders of their family and clan they can slowly influence many of them to read the Bible and discover personally the truth that they have found. Lifestyle changes cannot be hidden and this causes others to seek out the source of their new life."<sup>142</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Ray Register, *Discipling Middle Eastern Believers*. GlobalEdAdvance Press. Pages 59–60.

The Insider Movement does not fit into a C1–C6 scale.<sup>143</sup> It does not speak of our identity in Christ as the only identity. Perhaps the discussion could take on new depth if we look at the various levels of identities, such as the core identity, the social identity, and the collective identity.

When individuals are born into the Muslim world, they inherit their *first-birth community identity*. This first birth determines the individual's:

- Race
- Language
- Citizenship
- Ethnicity
- Religious background
- Culture
- Social and economic class, etc.

The first birth provides individuals with a *non-sinful* identity (**Zone R**) and a *sinful* identity (**Zone S**) since both the individual heart and all cultures bear the mark of the Fall. Upon an individual's rebirth in Christ, they receive a *second-birth identity*,<sup>144</sup> but they are still living in the world, socially and legally, with what they inherited from their first birth. They continue to be Egyptian, speaking Arabic, with Muslim names such as Muhammad and Fatima. They still feel a part of the Muslim world, which includes their Muslim relatives and friends. Legally, on their identity cards, they are Muslims, and that legal status *cannot* be changed in most countries. The challenge is how to let their new identity in Christ (the core identity) and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives affect their *belief system*, their *values*, and their *relationships*. The focus becomes living in integrity under God (doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly). Rather than seeing what was inherited in their first-birth identity as a *curse*, they could see it as an *opportunity* for the gospel to penetrate their existing relationships.

Two great periods in the Old Testament, the captivity in Egypt and the exile in Babylon, are great object lessons for us in thinking about the Insider Model.<sup>145</sup> The way Daniel and his three friends lived in Babylon provides a good illustration of an Insider approach to life and belief. Daniel and his friends lived in Babylon, learned the Babylonian language and sought the peace and prosperity of Babylon, while in no way compromising their relationship with

<sup>143</sup> For a chart of the C1–C6 scale, see Attachment 1. For further detailed information about the scale go to: Ray Register, *Discipling Middle Eastern Believers*. You can read about it in detail. GlobalEdAdvance Press, pp. 135–138.

<sup>144</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>145</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:1–6

Yahweh.<sup>146</sup> They even accepted Babylonian names. Abed Nego means the slave of Nego, who was a Babylonian god.<sup>147</sup> They were sojourners in Babylon.<sup>148</sup> In addition, we're told how God used Jeremiah to prepare the people of God to go into exile in Babylon with the *right attitude*. This attitude produced amazing results, impacting the nations from the inside.<sup>149</sup> In the Old Testament, it seems that the biggest impact of Israel on the nations was during the Babylonian Exile and the time that followed. *Penetration, infiltration* and *yeasting* in most cases is more powerful than *occupation*.

Humans have three basic core affinity groups: 1) family, 2) tribal identity, which often coincides with religious identity, and 3) nationalism. Most nations are built upon one tribal and/or religious group maintaining power so that nationalism and tribalism often overlap. In an August 2012 article<sup>150</sup> in *St. Francis Magazine* titled "Identity Issues for ex-Muslim Christians, with Particular Reference to Marriage," Tim Green addressed the complexity of how identity and community in a Muslim context are linked. The question facing a former Muslim is not only "Who I am?" but also "Who we are?" Green addresses three dimensions of identity: *Core Identity*, *Social Identity* and *Collective Identity*. He suggests that the IM debate looks at the issues in black and white perspectives with a one-dimensional approach. Some advise MBBs to exclusively join the new social identity of the *established church*, and others advise them to remain in the social identity of their birth community. These two options are pitched against each other in stark dichotomy as if they are the only two options. In the real life of the New Testament era, nearly all converts had to relate to the "world" as well as the "church." Green goes on to say that:

Witnessing Christians, and especially first generation witnessing Christians, inevitably have a dual social identity... Equal loyalty to both groups is not realistic. But to be a *member* of one group and simultaneously an *affiliate* of the other is often possible. This in fact is the solution many converts achieve: not always a comfortable solution, but survivable... It is by exploring different 'dual social identity' solutions, with all their ambiguity and their variety from context to context, that both sides in the Insider Movements debate can move beyond their stereotyped insistence on either of the extreme 'single identity' options... Much must be left unsaid about the fascinating but complex issues of *multiple identity* for Christ's followers from Muslim background, *hybrid identity* for their children and *collective identity* labels for their new communities. A good deal of research has been carried out on the analogous questions of how first generation immigrants learn to fit in with their new host community while simultaneously belonging to their old ethnic one, and on

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<sup>146</sup> Jeremiah 29:7

<sup>147</sup> Daniel 1:6

<sup>148</sup> 1 Peter 2:11–12

<sup>149</sup> Jeremiah 29:4–7

<sup>150</sup> <http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/SFMAugust2012-3.pdf>



1 why this creates ‘cognitive dissonance’ in some circumstances and not in  
 2 others. Studies also investigate how migrants’ children go on to *incorporate*  
 3 *elements of both social identities while transcending both*, to form a *hybrid*  
 4 *‘third culture.’* Parallels with TCKs (‘third culture kids’) are obvious  
 5 (emphasis added).

6  
 7 Green goes on to present the following clarifications:

8  
 9 Firstly, I am not taking sides in the Insider Movement debate, but am simply  
 10 proposing new tools to help the debate move beyond its present polarized  
 11 stalemate. Secondly, a *dual social* identity is more easily maintained than a  
 12 *dual core* identity. The latter is called schizophrenia and is not to be  
 13 recommended!<sup>151</sup>

14  
 15 We live in a messy and broken world. Differentiating between *core* and *social* identity might  
 16 provide a resolution to the issue.

## 17 18 **21. Uniqueness of the Gospels and the Book of Acts in History**

19 The events in the life of Christ as recorded in the Gospels, as well as the emergence of the  
 20 church in the book of Acts, describe a unique and unrepeatable time. When the Holy Spirit  
 21 descended upon the disciples in Acts 2:1–4, there were unusual manifestations, including  
 22 tongues of fire that came and rested on each of them, allowing them to speak in tongues. It  
 23 was a unique event because it was the beginning of an era, and it is unrepeatable. Yet when  
 24 Peter and his six companions<sup>152</sup> visited the home of Cornelius the Gentile and proclaimed  
 25 the good news of the gospel, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message, and they  
 26 spoke in tongues. Why did these similar manifestations of Acts 2:1–4 happen again in Acts  
 27 10:44–48 at the home of Cornelius the Gentile? Could it be that God wanted to convince the  
 28 Jewish church in Jerusalem to open their eyes to the *mystery* that the Gentiles who believed  
 29 in Christ and received the Holy Spirit, without becoming Jewish, were not second-class  
 30 citizens in the kingdom of God but fellow heirs?<sup>153</sup> We see another incident in Acts 19:7  
 31 with similar manifestations of speaking in tongues and receiving the Holy Spirit after Paul  
 32 prayed for the twelve men in Ephesus. Why did these manifestations take place? Could it be  
 33 that as Paul was pioneering among the Gentiles, similar manifestations to those in Acts 2:1–4  
 34 were needed so that the Jewish church would be convinced that Gentiles who believe in  
 35 Christ are fellow heirs in the Kingdom of God?<sup>154</sup>

36  


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<sup>151</sup> <http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/images/stories/SFMAugust2012-3.pdf>

<sup>152</sup> Acts 11:12

<sup>153</sup> Acts 11:17–18

<sup>154</sup> Ephesians 3:6

1 In pioneering among new people groups, and particularly when it comes to breaking new  
2 ground among Muslims, we often hear of unusual manifestations of signs and wonders.  
3 Could it be that God allows these “unrepeatable” manifestations to occur so that the existing,  
4 established church will realize these new believers are fellow heirs, even though they do not  
5 share our Christian culture? We should always appreciate the redemptive-historical  
6 significance of the first-century context, yet that does not mean we cannot glean principles  
7 that are applicable in our contemporary setting.

8  
9 Attachment 2 offers the powerful story of a mature MBB who is well known to two of us on  
10 the PCA Study Committee on the Insider Movement.

11

## 22. Suggestions to Mission Committees

PCA mission committees support not only PCA missionaries going to the Muslim world but also other missionaries that belong to a variety of denominations. Some of the following questions might be helpful in truly getting to know the missionary more deeply and finding out whether or not it is good stewardship of the church's resources to continue supporting that missionary. The questions are broader and deeper than just ministry approaches and strategies. Some of the questions apply to all missionaries, and others specifically apply to those working with Muslims.

### Questions for all missionaries

1. Do the missionaries have a consistent walk with God? Do they have a daily time in the Scriptures?
2. Is there fellowship on the team of missionaries? Are they getting along well with one another? (One of the biggest reasons missionaries leave the field is because they do not know how to get along with one another.)
3. Does the team of missionaries include those with gifting in evangelism and pioneering? If not, why not?
5. Are they living in purity? What guards do men have against addiction to pornography?
6. Are they struggling with the burden of raising finances? How can our church do more than just send them monthly gifts? How can we genuinely equip them?
7. What promises are the missionaries claiming for their lives and ministry? What vision is gripping their souls?
8. How are the missionaries doing as husbands, wives, and parents? What are the strengths, and what are the areas in which growth is needed? "How can we pray for you?"

### Questions for missionaries in Muslim ministries

9. Do the missionaries struggle with their own identities on the field? Do those around them see authenticity or deception regarding their identities? What do they need to do to remedy the situation?
10. Are they living among Muslims, or are they bunkering down in insecurity and spending a great deal of their time on the internet, escaping the responsibility of being in the world and not of the world?
11. What list do they have of Muslim contacts for whom they are praying and building bridges of relationships?
12. Who are the MBBs they are discipling? What materials are they using in discipling? Are their MBBs living among Muslims, or are they bunkering down in insecurity and fear?

- 1 13. What books are they reading this year? How do they agree and disagree with the various
- 2 authors?
- 3 14. What do the missionaries really think of Muhammad and the Qur'an? What do the
- 4 MBBs in their ministry really think of Muhammad and the Qur'an?
- 5 15. What church do they attend on the mission field? How do they communicate to their
- 6 MBBs their convictions about Hebrews 10:24–25?
- 7 16. Is there regular preaching and teaching, study, and obedience to the Word of God by the
- 8 team of missionaries and by the MBBs?
- 9 17. Have they read the *Westminster Confession of Faith*? What do they think of it? What do
- 10 they think of the usefulness of church councils and confessions of faith in ministry to
- 11 Muslims?
- 12 18. Are their MBBs focused on maintaining or developing strong relationships with family
- 13 and friends in their birth communities? Are they earning the right to speak by
- 14 demonstrating a lifestyle that has been transformed by the gospel? Are the MBBs
- 15 becoming better students, better husbands, better wives, better employees as a result of
- 16 their coming to know Christ? How?
- 17 19. How do these MBBs communicate with family and friends on what they really think of
- 18 Muhammad and the Qur'an when they are asked?
- 19 20. How do the missionaries encourage the MBBs not to rupture their relationships with
- 20 family and friends and yet at the same time not to live in deception?

### 23. Affirmations and Denials

21  
22 In general, the Minority Report is in agreement with the Affirmations and Denials and  
23 endorses them.

### In Conclusion

25  
26 The very influential MBB insiders are those who are fully surrendered to Christ and who are  
27 *called to penetrate and infiltrate* Islam. They are not insiders in order to avoid persecution.  
28 They are insiders because God calls them to stay as yeast within their birth culture, rather  
29 than being yeast that is scooped out from among their own people and placed in a  
30 “foreign”<sup>155</sup> pot of dough. They are *called to stay relationally connected* to their relatives  
31 and friends in their birth communities, focusing on developing relationships so that the  
32 gospel can spread rapidly and be honored (2 Thessalonians 3:1). These insiders may feel  
33 called to stay within the *non-sinful aspects* in the Muslim world, *in their birth communities*,  
34 **(Zone R)** and should transition out from the sinful aspects, be they theological or cultural, of

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<sup>155</sup> “Foreign” could be the established church made up of people who belong to Christendom, or a group of missionaries. It could be a ghetto church like the church of street sweepers in Pakistan.

1 the Muslim world (**Zone S**). These brave insiders ought to be motivated not by fear but by a  
2 *calling* to penetrate and infiltrate the Muslim world by being salt and light among their own  
3 people.  
4

5 A Christian couple from Egypt was visiting the USA in 2012. They have the means and the  
6 ability to emigrate to America, and they have Green Cards, as well. I asked them about the  
7 date of their move to the States since the situation in Egypt was deteriorating. Their response  
8 was astounding. They said that they decided to shred their Green Cards because they are  
9 *called* to Egypt and they *do not want to miss out on what God is doing* among Muslims, in  
10 spite of the bleak future for Christendom. It seems that the gospel, like yeast, is penetrating  
11 the Muslim society in Egypt, and God's people in all denominations are becoming united in  
12 an unprecedented manner.  
13

14 It will be counterproductive on our part, as Christians in the West, to try to *control* the  
15 movement of the Holy Spirit as the gospel penetrates Muslim communities. Perhaps we  
16 should watch and pray for those *true* insiders who desire to transform the Muslim world  
17 from within—that they would serve Him wholeheartedly, living a transformed life and  
18 proclaiming the gospel without fear. We hope and pray that the gospel would penetrate the  
19 Muslim society in Egypt and other parts of the Muslim world in a way similar to how it  
20 penetrated the Roman Empire in the first three centuries.  
21

22 Respectfully Submitted,  
23 Nabeel T. Jabbour  
24 Teaching Elder  
25 Rocky Mountain Presbytery

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### Recommended Readings

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- 13 *the Middle East crossfire.* ISBN 0-8007-1872-0
- 14 • Gilchrist, John. *The Qur'an, The Scripture of Islam.* South Africa: Mercsa, ISBN
- 15 0-9583905-2-5. <http://answering-islam.org.uk/Gilchrist/#qbs>
- 16 • Kuhn, Mike. *Fresh Vision for the Muslim World.* Authentic 2009. ISBN 13: 978-1-
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## Attachment 1: The C1 - C6 Scale

The C1–C6 Scale was developed by Johan Travis as a descriptive tool to show the various expressions of the Christ-centered communities.<sup>156</sup>

C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
Traditional church using a language different from the mother tongue of the local Muslim community	Traditional church using the mother tongue of the local Muslim community	Contextualized Christ-centered community using the mother tongue and some non-Muslim local cultural forms	Contextualized Christ-centered community using the mother tongue and biblically acceptable socio-religious Islamic forms	Community of Muslims who follow Jesus yet remain culturally and officially Muslim	Secret or under-ground Muslim followers of Jesus with little or no community

C1-C6 Continuum: Six Types of Christ-Centered Communities in Muslim World

## Attachment 2: The Journey of a Muslim background believer

If you are interested in reading the *confidential* journey of a MBB known to two men on the committee, please send an email to nabeel@nabeeljabbour.com and he will send you a PDF on the condition that it will not be forwarded or blogged because it is CONFIDENTIAL. Furthermore this document will be sent only to those who have carefully read this report.

## Attachment 3: “What do you think of Muhammad?”

A certain missionary in a Muslim country often gets asked the question, “What do you think of Muhammad?” His response:

“You know that Muhammad is not my prophet; he is your prophet. Although my beliefs about him are not like yours, I do respect him. Politically, he was a reformer, a statesman, and a national leader. Religiously, he warned people against idolatry and called them to worship one God. He also said many positive things about my Lord Jesus Christ. I believe each of these reasons makes him worthy of my respect.”

<sup>156</sup>John Travis and Anna Travis 2005 "Appropriate Approaches in Muslim Contexts" in *Appropriate Christianity*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.



#### Attachment 4: Allah and Isa

Are Yahweh and Allah the same God? The Committee Report addresses this issue in a comprehensive and scholarly fashion. Here I would like to address it very briefly and pragmatically as an Arab Christian and with a reference to the word Isa for Jesus which the Committee Report does not address.

Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Allah is the Arabic word for God. It literally means “The God,” while the word *ilaah* in Arabic means “a god.” *Dios* is the Spanish word for God, and *Allah* is the Arabic word for God. Bibles in Arabic in all translations are full of the word *Allah*.

There is only one God, and He is Yahweh, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the tendency of all human beings to bring down, as it were, that almighty God and to place Him in our little boxes. Those little gods that we tend to create are not the Almighty God. The Jews at the time of Jeremiah did it, although they gave him the name Yahweh. The Pharisees at the time of Jesus did the same thing, and they called him Yahweh. Yahweh, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, cannot be placed into a box.

Are Allah of the Arab Christians and Yahweh the same God? Yes, when we do not have a veil over our eyes and when we do not bring Him down to become our servant who is supposed to answer our prayers and do what we think He should do. Whenever I impose upon God my projection of Him, the image I create is no longer Yahweh, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are Allah of Muslims and Yahweh the same God? Yes, when the veil is lifted from their eyes and Muslims see Him as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Fine-tuning to see Yahweh as He truly is takes place through Christ.<sup>157</sup> Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

There is only one Yahweh, yet all people in all religions project their image of what He is like and assume that they are worshipping that Yahweh when in reality they are worshipping their own creations.

The Allah or God in Islam has 99 attributes, and we would agree with most of them. But the huge missing names are “Father of the Lord Jesus Christ” and “our heavenly Father.” Are there similarities between our God and their God? Yes, there are similarities, but there is a huge difference. Muslims are trying to connect with and worship the only true God, but there is a veil over their eyes, and the only way it can be removed is through Christ.

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<sup>157</sup> Colossians 1:15

Arab Christians call Jesus Yasou', while the Qur'an use the name Isa for Jesus. What is the background and why the difference? Imagine if someone came behind Jesus and His disciples and called out to Him using his English name "Jesus." Would He have responded? Would he have recognized his English or Spanish names? His name was Yashou' in Hebrew and Aramaic.

A pivotal moment in history is recorded in John 12:20–24. "Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.' Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.'"

It appears a bit strange that Jesus started talking about His coming suffering and crucifixion upon hearing the news that Greeks want to see Him. What is the connection? It seems that until the crucifixion and the resurrection, He was Yashou' because He came to the lost sheep of Israel. But after the resurrection, He became not only the Savior of Israel but also the Savior of the world. To the Greeks He became Yisus, to the Jews He continued to be Yashou'. To the Muslims He became Isa, and to the Japanese He became He-soos.

In the Arabic Bibles the name for Jesus is Yasou', and it came from His Hebrew name Yashou'. The only difference is an ssss sound in the middle rather than an shshsh sound. When the Qur'an was being written down in Arabic, Al-Masih (The Christ) for Christ was the same in the Qur'an and the Arabic Bible. When it came to the name Jesus, it was translated from Yesus to Isa in the Qur'an, which is derived from the Greek and Syriac languages rather than Hebrew. The same applied to names of Old Testament prophets in the Qur'an. The prophet Jonah is called Yonah in Hebrew and Yunas in the Greek Septuagint and Yunis in the Qur'an. The name of Elijah appears in the Qur'an as Ilyas<sup>158</sup> or Ilyasin,<sup>159</sup> which have no connection to the original Hebrew but to the Greek Syriac translations.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Surah 6:85; 37:23.

<sup>159</sup> Surah 37:130

<sup>160</sup> Gilchrist, John. The Qur'an, the Scriptures of Islam page 78.