

Proceedings of the ISFM 2004 Meeting: Insider Movements
**The Key to Insider Movements:
The "Devoted's" of Acts**

by Kevin Higgins

This paper seeks to contribute to the ongoing conversation among missionaries about *Insider Movements*, movements to Jesus that remain to varying degrees *inside* the social fabric of Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, or other people groups. Ours is a highly controversial topic, and emotions sometimes run high, no matter which side of the contextualization "aisle" we find ourselves on. While many of us differ (even strongly) on many points, we can do so knowing that we all serve the same Master and all desire to see the gospel of Jesus Christ received, welcomed and embraced by all nations, tribes and tongues! And in this we can rejoice!

I write as a "thinking practitioner" who has worked among Muslims in North America, East Africa, and South Asia. In South Asia I have been honored to be a part of an emerging movement to Jesus that is gaining significant momentum among four people groups. In my role I have made many mistakes and will continue to make more. But my mistakes have always driven me back to the Scriptures and prayer, to further reflection and readjustment.

So are Insider Movements just a missiological fad? Are our conversations about these movements simply about the appropriateness of certain pragmatic, tactical approaches to contextualizing the gospel? Or are they actually conversations about the nature of the gospel itself?

I believe that the debate about Insider Movements actually *is* a debate about the gospel, one as potentially earth-shaking as the Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Anabaptist reform movements of the 16th century. Those movements were driven by the recovery of basic, foundational biblical truths such as justification by faith, a gospel of grace, the priesthood of all believers, and the place of the Bible in the life of the church and of the believer. And they forced church leaders to re-evaluate church practice and doctrine.

Similarly, I see Insider Movements as fueling (and being fueled by) a rediscovery of the Incarnation, of a thoroughly biblical approach to culture and religion, of the role of the Holy Spirit in leading God's people to "work out" the gospel in new ways, and of an understanding of how God works in the world

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within and beyond His covenant people. And we may be forced to re-evaluate some widely held ideas and practices of our own.

Scope and Approach

This paper cannot address every facet of what I see as an emerging reformation. Nor is it my purpose here to defend or develop that thesis. Rather, I will focus on two basic issues that must be addressed in the discussion of whether catalyzing “Insider Movements” is an appropriate aim of mission effort in the first place. We will consider those questions from two perspectives:

1. **“Insider Movements” in the Bible?** Does Scripture provide any models and dynamics of healthy, vital movements to Jesus? This question forces us to articulate and address valid concerns about how such movements to Jesus develop on a foundation that is grounded in God’s word.
2. **Can a “movement to Jesus” be an “Insider Movement”?** What is the relationship between the emerging Jesus movement (and its biblical worldview and discipleship) and the worldview, religious life, and cultural context inside of which the movement is “moving,” so to speak? This question forces us to articulate and address valid concerns about how such movements to Jesus develop within the cultural and religious framework of their particular context. Here we need a biblical theology of culture and of God’s involvement in it.

Insider Movements: A Working Definition

Before addressing those two major questions, we need to be sure what it is we’re talking about. I know of no generally accepted definition for an “Insider Movement,” so I will try to define how I use the term. Let us begin with some background.

The question of whether “Insider Movements” are an appropriate goal of mission effort is actually part of an older missiological conversation.

The question of whether Insider Movements are an appropriate goal of mission effort is actually part of an older missiological conversation. In the second half of the 20th century, thinkers such as McGavran and Tippet began to popularize the idea of “people movements.” One assumption of the people movement concept was that people in many parts of the world made decisions *together* rather than as individuals, and that such “togetherness” included tribal, caste, and other types of unity.¹

As I use it, the phrase “Insider Movements” encompasses not only these earlier descriptions of people movements but adds “religion” to the above list of aspects of “togetherness” or unity. In other words, I suggest that followers of Jesus can continue to embrace at least some of their people’s religious life, history, and practice without compromising the gospel or falling into syncretism.

Indeed, I will attempt to show from the Scriptures that, at least in some sense, the gospel can actually fulfill or complete certain aspects of the religion of a people group. The exact nature of such fulfillment will vary greatly from context to context, and more specifically from religion to religion.

Now, let me offer a summary of the above points to serve as a working definition of the term “Insider Movement.”

Insider Movement: 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.

Such movements to Jesus will develop “church” forms, leadership structures, and theological work. The specific forms of community, leadership, worship, and theological discourse that develop within such movements will emerge as leaders within the movement discover biblical functions and express them by *adopting* and *adapting* existing cultural forms from within their culture and religion.

Part I: Jesus Movements in the Bible

Now, I want to begin to address our two major issues. First, what are the models and dynamics of a healthy, vital movement to Jesus?

Every movement to Jesus is in some way an Insider Movement. Every movement to Jesus is inside of some culture or some aspects of a culture. In addition, movements to Jesus, no matter what culture they are “inside,” are movements that bring families, tribes, groups, and individuals into a saving relationship and new experiences of community in Jesus.

But what exactly would that look like? How do we know there *is* a movement? What biblical model or models can we discover that describe healthy movements? Can the dynamics of such a movement be described in such a way that we can use the model to assist us in our own ministries among the unreached? Or to avoid “killing” such movements (by failing to develop them fully or by inadvertently squelching a key dynamic and thus not allowing an emerging movement to blossom)?

I believe the Book of Acts provides such a model, and gives us clear descriptions of the dynamics of such a movement. I refer to these dynamics as “keys” and see at least some of those keys in Luke’s use of the Greek word *proskartereo*.

Usually translated “devoted” in our English Bibles, this interesting word is used in a number of other ways. For example, in Acts 10:7, *proskartereo* refers to the devotion of one of Cornelius’ servants to Cornelius and could be rendered as “service.” The word can also have the sense of “continuing with” or “staying with” someone or something, as in Acts 8:13 where Simon is said to “continue with Phillip” following his baptism.

Of the seven uses of the word in Acts, six seem to describe dynamics of the emerging Jesus movement, and I will focus on those.² The various things or practices to which the early church was “devoted” describe, in my view, the key dynamics of a vital and healthy movement.

The First “Devoted”: Prayer

The word “devoted” first appears in Acts 1:14 where we find the 120 devoting themselves to united prayer as they wait for the promise referred to in Acts 1:8.

Indeed, in the movements to Jesus that we see exploding in Acts among the Jews of Jerusalem, Hellenized Jews, and Gentiles, devotion to prayer is a key dynamic. In fact it seems clear in Luke’s overall design that devotion to prayer was a lesson first learned by the disciples in their walk with Jesus Himself.

Biblically authentic Insider Movements are not primarily a missiological strategy or a program. They are a spiritual phenomenon driven by the Sovereign Lord through the prayers of His people. Prayer will be a major dynamic in authentic movements to Jesus.

In missions, we have increasingly and rightly emphasized intercession *for* movements to Jesus, but this

“devoted” refers to passionate and consistent prayer *by* people within the movement as well. Prayer is both a sign of an authentic movement, and a source of the spiritual vitality unleashed in such movements.

The Second “Devoted”: The Apostles’ Teaching and Fellowship

The English text of Acts 2:42 might lead us to assume there are four “devoted’s” in this one verse. However in Greek the word *proskartereo* is only used twice. First, the



church was devoted to “the apostle’s teaching and fellowship” and secondly, it was devoted to “the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Here we will deal with the first of those two “devoted’s.”

The early church in Acts was devoted to the teaching or doctrine of the apostles and to being in fellowship, or *koinonia*, with them. This refers not only to a commitment to apostolic truth, but also points to a relational partnership with the company of the apostles. It refers to learning from the apostles, joining with the apostles, and receiving from and sharing with the apostles’ ministry.

Authentic Insider Movements will be devoted to the apostolic witness to Christ as we find it in the New Testament. Insider Movements will develop leaders and tools to facilitate the process of plumbing the depths of Scripture so as to apply it to new situations in keeping with the message

*and example of the apostles and their writings.*³

This “devoted” includes a commitment not only to right apostolic doctrine, but also to right apostolic ministry. It is not only the message of the apostles that we’re to learn and embrace but also their method of ministry. How did they communicate the gospel, plant churches, and build leaders? Being devoted to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship means seeking to do apostolic work the apostolic way.

This also implies that Insider Movements will not be isolated from—and independent of—other movements to Jesus. Being in the apostles’ fellowship would seem to imply some sort of connection to other apostolic movements. This is certainly the pattern we see in Acts: a connection between the emerging Jewish and Gentile movements flowing respectively from Jerusalem and Antioch.

The Third “Devoted”: The Breaking of Bread and the Prayers

The second coupling in Acts 2:42 refers to the closely linked “breaking of bread” and “the prayers.” The context seems to support the interpretation that the former term refers to early celebrations of the Lord’s Supper, probably within the context of a real meal, rather than a separate and isolated religious ceremony apart from a meal (as is commonly practiced in the West and in western-influenced church movements around the world).⁴

That “breaking bread” is closely linked in the grammar of the Greek text with “the prayers” shows us the importance already being placed upon the Lord’s Supper in the early church. “The prayers” are best understood, not merely as a general reference to “prayer” as a spiritual discipline (private or corporate), but more specifically as prescribed prayers in the Temple. The early believers were devoted to expressions of worship that included the

They have argued from this passage and others that a biblical precedent exists for new believers from Islam to remain in the mosque.

Lord's Supper and Temple prayers, though clearly not in the same event or ceremony.

There is an important point here that could easily be missed. On the one hand, proponents of Insider Movements might point to this devotion to "the prayers" as a biblical model of a community of disciples that remains within the religious forms that shaped its life prior to conversion to Christ. Whether that is a right application is a question to which we will return below. This question involves the complex issue of how far the model of a movement that emerged within Judaism can authentically be applied within other religious contexts such as Islam or Hinduism.

However, the fact that Luke links "the prayers" with the Lord's Supper here shows us that even as the new community continued to embrace the Temple prayers, it also added major new emphases and interpretations. The early church was devoted to "the prayers" but in same breath reference is made to the radically reinterpreted Passover supper that had been inaugurated by Jesus Himself.

The practice of this meal by the early church transformed the Jewish rite in at least two ways. First, its meaning was dramatically altered. Second, the frequency of observance changed and eventually came to be a weekly event, rather than an annual Passover celebration.

We can draw an important conclusion from this. *Insider Movements, even as they continue to embrace old forms and expressions, also bring in radically new meanings and truths.*

The Fourth "Devoted": Meeting in the Temple and House to House

This "devoted" continues a theme introduced in "devoted" three. Acts

2:46 says that the early church was devoted to meeting in the Temple and from "house to house."

First, we will examine the issue of meeting in the Temple. In light of Peter's habit of going to the temple at set times for prayer (Acts 3) and the believers' devotion to "the prayers," clearly the best reading of Acts 2:46 is that the early church not only continued in Temple and synagogue worship, but they were "devoted" to this.

Proponents of Insider Movements, especially among Muslims, have pointed to possible parallels here. They have argued from this passage and others that a biblical precedent exists for new believers from Islam to remain in the mosque and continue to practice other religious expressions of Islamic life.

Oponents of this position argue that the parallel is ill conceived because Islam (or, say, Hinduism) does not occupy the same position in salvation history as Judaism. This debate cannot really be settled on the basis of the Acts texts alone.

One might ask if there are any other biblical precedents for movements to Jesus that remain in some way inside of another religious "skin." Of particular interest will be examples in which new believers remained connected to a culture within a religious context that was not Jewish. This discussion requires a slight excursus at this point to examine just two possible examples.

Excursus: Two Biblical Precedents Namaan and the Temple of Rimmon

In 2 Kings 5 we read the fascinating story of Namaan and Elisha. Namaan is the commander of the armies of Israel's enemy. He is a pagan Assyrian whose king worships the god Rimmon.

Relevant to our discussion is the interaction between Namaan and Elisha following Namaan's healing. The miracle convinces Namaan that the God of Israel is the true God. He wants to reward the prophet but upon being refused this honor he makes a twofold request instead.

First, he asks for two bags of dirt. Why Namaan makes this request is not clear from the text. It may be that Namaan still has a territorial understanding of the gods and thus, while he genuinely desires to honor Israel's God as the true God, he may see the dirt as a way of somehow "bringing God" with him to Assyria. If so, we have an example of a believer who is genuinely "converted," but is still undergoing the long process of having his worldview fully transformed by his new faith and experience.

Namaan's second request is even more directly related to our question about possible biblical precedents for Insider Movements. Namaan asks Elisha to forgive him because when he returns to Assyria he will accompany his king into the temple of Rimmon to bow down in worship there. Elisha's response? *Go in peace.*

Now Namaan is one "convert," not a movement. And Elisha's "Go in peace" is given in response to a request for forgiveness. But the text is an example of a follower of another religion who becomes a believer in the true God and yet continues to worship the true God within the religious life and practices of his prior religion. Not only is it a description, but also the text includes the clear blessing of the prophet upon the practice.

In this text we find at least one case where God blesses "remaining inside."

The Samaritan Woman and the Two Mountains

John 4 describes the familiar story of the woman at the well. I have written in greater detail about this in another article⁵ and will not repeat

the details here. But this story makes at least two relevant points.

The first point concerns the woman's question about worship. Jesus' answer to her question is rather shocking if we put ourselves in Jewish shoes. He replies that true worship will not be found in Samaria or in Jerusalem. Instead, He calls the woman (and us) to embrace the worship of the Father in spirit and truth.

But later in John we find Jesus Himself in the Temple. So, what of His statement that true worship would not be in Samaria or in Jerusalem? *Clearly His vision of "worship in spirit and truth" (that is neither in Samaria or Jerusalem) did not preclude Him from continuing to worship in Jerusalem, one of the locations He said would not be a place for true worship.*

And it is logical to assume that the Samaritans did the same after Jesus left their village. After their conversion recorded in John 4, they worshipped in spirit and in truth. But they did so in Samaria (in their prior place of worship) just as Jesus worshipped the Father in spirit and in truth in Jerusalem, in the Temple.

That this episode is an example of an Insider Movement is further suggested by a second feature of the passage. After Jesus spends two days in the Samaritan village, the villagers affirm that they now believe Jesus is the Savior of the world. Then Jesus leaves. What does He leave behind? A group of believers.⁶

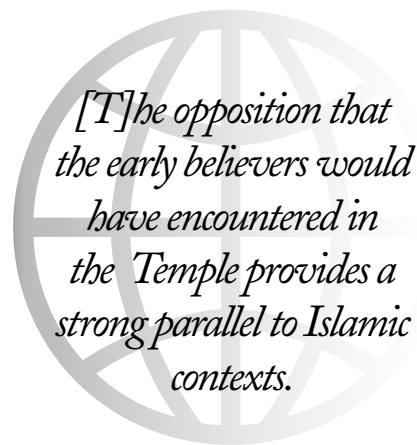
It is impossible to question John's intention in making that point. In the drama of his Gospel, John compares the response of the Samaritans (and later of the Greeks who seek for Jesus at the festival in Jerusalem) with the responses to Jesus from among the Jews. The Samaritans are examples of people who believe and accept Jesus.

The believing but "young" community Jesus leaves behind after only

two days will presumably continue in its prior Samaritan religious life with a major difference: Jesus' revelation of Himself has changed them.

Back to Acts and the "Devoted's"

As we have seen, Acts 2:46 is not the only example in Scripture where people came to authentic faith in the true God and yet remained in some way connected to their prior religious practices and culture. So, while I would grant that Judaism



is in fact a different case than, say, Islam, the parallel still holds. When we consider that the worship in the Temple was led by priests who did not follow Jesus (and in fact many of them had likely voted to condemn Jesus to death), the opposition that the early believers would have encountered in the Temple provides a strong parallel to Islamic contexts (more on that in the second half of this paper).

Not only did the Insider Movement of the early chapters of Acts meet in the Temple (where worship was not led by believers and was not supportive of the new community's faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Lord), it was also devoted to meeting in homes. So a new structure for fellowship and community and nurture emerged to sustain the believers in the movement.

The Fifth "Devoted": Leaders Devoted to the Word and Prayer

In Acts 6, we find the apostles wrestling with the problems of growth

within the emerging Jerusalem movement. Verse 4 shows that they clearly understood an important principle of their calling and of movements. They saw that for the movement to grow, *their* leadership would need to remain devoted to prayer and "the word."

In the context of Acts, "the word" refers not simply to the internal teaching of the word to believers, but to the spreading of the word to not-yet-believers. This is confirmed by Act 6:6, where the result of this "devotion" is that the word "grew" and "spread" (it is also worth noting that a great number of priests became obedient to the faith).

Movements to Jesus will remain "movements" if they embrace this principle of keeping key leadership focused on the spread of the word. If, as we nurture a new movement we neglect this important dynamic, we risk cutting off the flow of new believers, thus choking off the growth of the movement.⁷

The Sixth "Devoted": Relational Discipleship

In Acts 8, Simon, a new convert, is baptized. Phillip, himself a fairly new convert, has evangelized him. This, in and of itself, is a key movement dynamic. Phillip was appointed in Acts 6 to serve tables, then used by God to share with the Ethiopian, then whisked away and then used of God in Simon's life. Phillip has baptized Simon. And he has baptized him rather quickly.⁸

Note that this is a new convert baptizing another new convert. And the model of discipleship? Simon "continues with" Phillip (Acts 8:13), showing that the movement continued to follow Jesus' own highly relational model for making and multiplying disciples. New disciples make new disciples, including baptizing and mentoring them through a relational, "life-on-life" process.

So far we have identified six keys or dynamics of movements to Jesus in

the book of Acts. These six keys can be described and measured; they’re either happening in a movement or they’re not. In our work it has become a regular part of ministry evaluation and planning to occasionally ask ourselves whether we’re doing these things and whether we see others doing these things in the movement. To summarize, these six dynamics are:

1. Prayer
2. Apostles teaching and fellowship
3. Breaking bread and the prayers
4. Remaining in “the Temple” and meeting “from house to house”
5. Developing structures that keep key leadership focused on the spread of the word and prayer
6. Relational Discipleship.

In my own organization, Global Teams, we have been trying to find ways to describe movements and their dynamics in practical and tangible ways so that our work and prayers can be focused on doing the things that actually promote the kind of movement Acts describes. In several contexts we have been working with the following four “markers” of healthy and vibrant movements to Jesus:

1. *Self-Propagating*: Leaders from within the movement are planning and doing Evangelism, Church Multiplication, and Cross-Cultural Mission Sending.
2. *Self-Governing*: The movement regularly and intentionally multiplies its own leadership, and is responsible before God for all decisions concerning the work.
3. *Self-Supporting*: The movement, through the stewardship of its disciples and/or other enterprises governed by leaders in the movement, funds its own internal operations and ministries.
4. *Self-Theologizing*: The movement is actively engaged in the ongoing process of doing thorough biblical theology “in culture.”

The promotion of Insider Movements does not imply that the missionary or “insider” leader assumes everything in a culture is pleasing to God.

The above four markers describe insiders (people from within the movement) from the point of view of their actions, as well as the dynamics of a movement. The first three “selves” (borrowed from Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson) are an attempt to summarize the material from Acts, while the fourth marker or “self” describes critical contextualization carried on by insiders.

Drawing upon these four “selves,” we have developed a tool with more detailed descriptions of these four dynamics, which we incorporate into an annual re-examination of the ministry of each pioneer team.⁹

Summary: Part I

So far we have attempted to outline six dynamics or keys to healthy and vital movements to Jesus. We tried to show some of the biblical bases for such movements remaining, to some degree, within the religious context in which they are birthed and spread.

Now we need to examine the question of Insider Movements more closely from the perspective of the religious context inside of which we’re arguing that they take place. We need to engage the issue of how a biblical movement to Jesus can be in any sense also an Insider Movement.

Part II: Insider Movements: The Relationship to Culture and Religion

Let’s assume a healthy movement to Jesus is emerging among people “Z”. What is the relationship of the emerging Jesus movement (and its biblical worldview and discipleship) to the worldview, religious life, and cultural context inside of which the movement is “moving”? Can any of the culture (especially religious culture) be incorporated and kept? Beyond that, can any of the culture

be seen as in any way preparatory for the gospel, and thus in some sense “fulfilled,” when the gospel is embraced?

I would like to begin here by offering some introductory thoughts towards a biblical theology of God’s work in cultures and religion. In view of space constraints, I will focus on one passage: Acts 17.

A Theology of Culture and Religion in Acts 17:16ff.

First, let me attempt to dispel what I consider a “myth” about Paul’s visit to Athens in Acts 17. A widespread opinion seems to be that Acts 17 represents a sort of anomaly for Paul; that is, Paul experimented in Athens with a “contextualized” approach to presenting the gospel. Disappointed in the results, he returned to a straight and simple proclamation of the Cross, according to his own testimony in the early chapters of 1 Corinthians.

However, this viewpoint founders on two counts. First, Acts 17 is not an anomaly; Paul had used almost the same method of presentation in Acts 14 as well. Luke presents this as a method Paul used regularly, depending upon his hearers and his context.¹⁰

Second, the Corinthian correspondence itself contains the clearest and perhaps best known of Paul’s statements on “contextualization.” The famous “Jew to the Jew” and “Greek to the Greek” passage (1 Cor 9:19-22) is descriptive of Paul’s ministry “habit.”

In today’s western church culture we might refer to this as Paul’s vision and mission statement. His vision was to see all saved. His mission was to become all things to all men that by all means he might save some. Far from “rethinking” his approach in Athens, he seems to reaffirm it.

Now we turn to Acts 17.

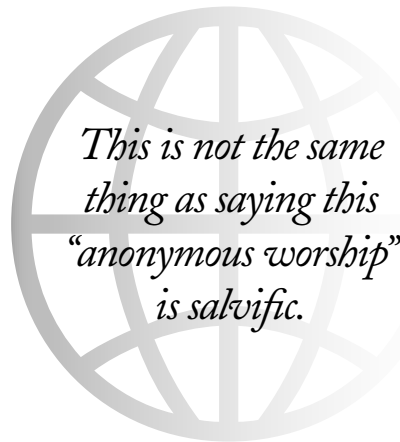
First, Paul is clearly disturbed by the religious worldview and life in Athens. Contextualization and the promotion of Insider Movements does not imply that the missionary or “insider” leader assumes everything in a culture is pleasing to God. Acts 17 forces us to wrestle with the issue of sin and darkness in other cultures and religions, including our own.

There is a personal challenge in the passage as well. Is my heart as sensitive as Paul’s? Do I care at a deep and passionate level about the people I am called to reach? How easy it is for our missionary call to descend to the level of a job, and our passion to settle into an intellectual interest in “truth.” Paul was deeply disturbed by what he saw, and it moved him to act.

Second, Paul takes this passion and inner turmoil, and communicates it in a very focused way. Here is a summary of the main points:

- a. Paul begins by affirming what he can truly and honestly affirm: “I see you are religious in every way . . . for you have an altar TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” (vss. 22, 23)
- b. But Paul goes beyond this. There is a sense in which he sees the altar to the unknown god as preparation for what he will say about the gospel. Whether this is mere pragmatism and opportunism remains to be seen. We will address that in a moment. For now we need to remind ourselves of what is really taking place. A Jewish monotheist (Paul) is using a pagan altar as a sign that the people he addresses are religious and that they have in fact been worshipping the true God without knowing it. This is not the same thing as saying that this “anonymous worship” is salvific. I am not arguing that, nor do I believe it. But Paul *is* assuming they have been worshipping the true God without knowing Him.
- c. From the altar Paul moves to creation. Here again Paul’s approach is not merely to affirm what he sees in the Athenians, but to point out areas that will need correction in the light of God’s truth. So, although he clearly sees the altar as *preparing* the Athenians for his message about the true God, he does not take that to mean that everything in their religion and culture is *preparation* that can be fulfilled. Some things will need to be corrected or discarded, polytheism being an obvious example.
- d. To support his creation arguments, he cites sources and texts from the Athenians’ literary background. One text is taken from a hymn dedicated to Zeus. But since it says something Paul knows is true about the true God, he uses it while changing its reference point.
- e. It is interesting to note that while Paul never cites Scripture directly in this encounter, he does speak biblical truth, using poets and writers to support the biblical truths he proclaims.
- f. Paul closes his argument by calling for a worldview change and repentance. In context this would mean accepting monotheism specifically and, minimally, accepting Paul’s general argument about a day of judgment and a coming Judge who has been raised from the dead (this Person is unnamed in this sermon, though Paul may be assuming his hearers will connect the reference to Jesus, whom he had named in Athens prior to being invited to the gathering of philosophers). It is almost like offering a “sample” to see if the Athenians want more. Some clearly did not, while others clearly did.
- g. Finally, we return to the question raised (but not addressed) under point “b” above, as to whether Paul’s use of the altar and the poets was merely a pragmatic move or was based instead on a deeper understanding of God’s ways in the cultures and religions of mankind. In these verses Paul argues that God has created every nation, every culture, “*pan ethnos*.” And not only did He create them, He also determined the *era* of history in which they would live and the geographical *area* they would inhabit. This is very careful, sovereign planning on God’s part, and encompasses, again, every nation and people. But there is a purpose for this careful planning and design; verse 27 makes this very clear. The purpose is so that they (the nations) should “seek God,” “feel after Him,” and indeed “*find* Him,” although in fact “He is not far from us.” This latter phrase includes the nations. Paul’s use of the altar and the poets is very logical outworking of his worldview, which can be summarized in this way: The true God has designed the cultures, seasons, and locations of the nations to further the process by which all peoples might seek after and actually find Him.

Based upon this reading of Paul’s message to the Athenians, it is biblical to speak of the gospel as a fulfillment of the “seeking, feeling and finding” process in every culture and religion. This is true not only in the Jewish religion (where we can point to direct Old Testament prophecies and “types” that are fulfilled in Christ) but also in a pagan religious culture such as that found in Athens.¹¹ Thus, Insider Movements can be said to relate to their religious



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context from this perspective of fulfillment, as well as from the perspective that the gospel will correct and change the culture.

The preceding is a brief and incomplete attempt to outline a biblical theology of religion and culture. A fuller treatment would need to examine texts and themes such as:

- a. The Bible's clear and steady stance against idolatry and polytheism as at least "empty" in some circumstances and as "demonic" in others.¹² This needs to be part of the discussion among those of us more disposed to approve of the idea of Insider Movements.
- b. God's jealousy for His people, which would need to be taken into account in any exposition of His work among other nations.
- c. The covenants or claims to "ownership" in relationship to non-Jewish people: Ishmael in Genesis, Edom and Moab and Philistia in Psalm 108, for example.
- d. The theology of "natural revelation" in Romans 1.
- e. John 1:9 and the light that enlightens every human being.

There is much more that needs to be explored in this important area.

A Look Back Before Moving On

Our first main question addressed the "movement issue." In that section we attempted to show biblical precedents for believers in the true God remaining within the cultural (and even religious) forms in their context.

My point here is to attempt to outline a framework for a biblical understanding of how a movement to Jesus could claim to be in some sense a fulfillment of the religion (or aspects of the religion) inside of which it remains.

At this stage it might be helpful to summarize what I think the implications of Acts 17 are for Insider Movements. I will focus on just three.

Implications for Insider Movements

First, Paul does not claim that all of paganism is a preparation for Jesus. He challenges the thinking of the Athenians and argues from inside of their worldview framework in order to change that framework.

Implication: An insider approach to Islam or any other religion will need to address the areas that must be transformed by biblical truth. The six keys from Acts outlined earlier are thus of critical importance in this regard. Those keys serve to keep an Insider Movement rooted in the canonical Scriptures. The "fourth self" is also largely dedicated to this end.

Second, Paul assumes that altars and poets and other such things will be found that agree with biblical truth, and he uses them freely, without trying to show that he is only using them because they show the Bible to be true. His theology sees God as the designer who has placed each nation in its era and area in order to find Him. Also, he is not afraid of being misunderstood and taken for a pagan simply because he uses pagan altars and poets to prove his point.

Implication: An insider approach can freely use religious and secular aspects of the culture to communicate biblical truth. This includes the texts and ceremonies of the religion one is seeking to reach. Missionaries should not fear that doing so might cause others to confuse them as being "Muslim" or "Hindu." The Athenians frankly were still not sure what category to place Paul in, and he did not seem to worry about that issue. This is not a lack of

integrity on Paul's part.¹³ I believe Paul was attempting to elicit among the Athenians what I would call a "hermeneutic of curiosity."

Third, Paul's teaching indicates that he believed God had actually designed the locations and times and indeed cultures in which people lived so that they could seek God and find Him. There was an intentional design on God's part. This design, in Paul's view, accounts for why the Athenians would have an altar to an unknown god. In the context of the scene in Athens, we should conclude that God's own hand was involved in the Athenians making that altar and that He did so in order that they would seek and question and someday find Him. This is in contrast to the idea that the altar was a convenient accident that Paul used. Paul's theology of culture as articulated in Athens shows us that the altar was no accident.

Implication: Missionaries among peoples of other religions can and should approach their work with the same expectations Paul had. I should expect, in my work among Muslims, that I will find in the Quran, the Hadith, worship in the mosque, and indeed in the Hajj itself the Islamic equivalents of "altars to an unknown god" and "poets" that I can quote to proclaim biblical truth. This is true of Islam generally, but would have additional "altars" and "poets" in each of the widely varying cultural expressions of Islam. These things are not accidents; they are there by God's design. They are, we might say, the fingerprints of God within the religions of the world.

One Final Question

Before concluding this section, we need to address one final question about Insider Movements. At the beginning of this section we raised the question of the relationship between Insider Movements and the religious context in which they emerge. So far we have focused our attention on developing a biblical

perspective for understanding culture and religion and how a movement to Jesus might relate to them or indeed be “inside” of them.

It is also important to ask whether it matters how *non*-believing members of the religion view the movement. For example, there will be Muslims who do not follow Jesus and are not part of the “Insider Movement.” If they do not accept the insider’s interpretation of the Quran or if they reject the so-called “altars” and “poets” the movement claims are fulfilled by the truth of the gospel, does this mean the Insider Movement’s claims are invalid? In other words, whose criteria, indeed whose hermeneutic, will determine the validity of the interpretation of the Quran or Hadith offered by a Muslim Insider Movement?

The simplest answer would be to ask another question. Whose hermeneutic of the Old Testament determined the validity of the Jewish Insider Movement to Jesus in Acts? It is clear that the apostles and Jesus Himself had a much different hermeneutic than the prevailing religious establishment when they read and taught the Old Testament.

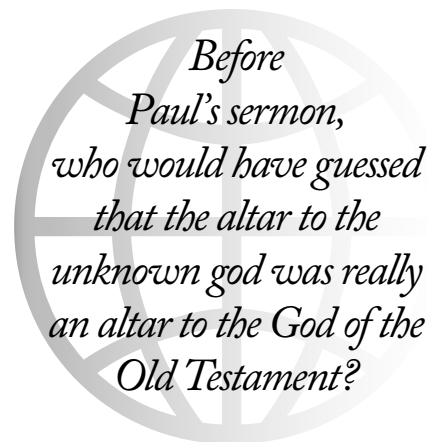
The apostles were using a new interpretive “key” to the Old Testament: Jesus Himself. In my view, prior to Jesus it would have been impossible to understand the meaning of the Old Testament passages as they were used in apostolic preaching.

In the same way, Paul used a different hermeneutic of the altar he discovered in Athens and of the poets he quoted. Before Paul’s sermon, who would have guessed that the altar to the unknown god was really an altar to the God of the Old Testament? And yet, in both examples, one can see the logic and the “fulfillment” after the fact once one accepts the hermeneutic.

Clearly not all of the Athenians who heard Paul did in fact accept this hermeneutic. But that did not cause

Paul to question his interpretation of the altar in Athens. Neither Jesus nor the apostles assumed that their hermeneutic of the Old Testament was invalid because the other Jewish leaders did not accept it

Similarly, the fact that not all Muslims will accept my reading of the Quran in the light of Jesus does not mean that my reading is wrong or invalid. I have a different starting point and a different hermeneutic, shaped by a worldview that has Christ at the center. Reading the Quran with Christ as my starting point and with the assumptions of



Acts 17 shaping my expectations, there will be many discoveries of “altars” and “poets.” This will be true for other Islamic writings, rites, and practices. This will be true in other religious contexts as well.

Summary

In this paper I began with a working definition of Insider Movements. I linked such movements to the wider conversation about people movements, but added the religious factor to the mix of what it means to be “inside” a culture.

I have attempted to wrestle with the Insider Movement issue from two major perspectives, each with its own questions. I will restate those perspectives and questions here:

1. **“Insider Movements” in the Bible:** What are the models and dynamics of a healthy,

vital movement to Jesus? This question forces us to articulate and address valid concerns about how movements to Jesus develop on a biblically grounded foundation.

2. **Can a “movement to Jesus” be an “Insider Movement”?**

What is the relationship of the emerging Jesus movement (and its biblical worldview and discipleship) to the worldview, religious life, and cultural context inside of which the movement is “moving”? This question forces us to articulate and address valid concerns about how movements to Jesus develop within the cultural and religious framework of their particular context. A major factor in this question will be the issue of developing a biblical theology of culture and God’s involvement in it.

In both sections I have focused my attention on the fundamental issue of whether Insider Movements can be called biblical. This involved us in a discussion of Acts to uncover the biblical dynamics of movements generally. We examined six keys in Acts based on Luke’s use of the word “devoted.”

In that section we also took a slight detour to discuss the issue of biblical precedents for religious insiders. We focused on both Namaan and the Samaritan woman as models for this phenomenon.

In the second section we sought to discuss the relationship of Insider Movements to their religious context. We examined Acts 17 and uncovered a theology of culture and religion that further supports the idea that a movement to Jesus can be an Insider Movement. This includes crucial assumptions based on Paul’s teaching in Athens, that such a movement will find areas to correct in the religion and culture, but also areas of fulfillment in the religion and culture. The latter become visible when we read a culture and religion through a new Jesus-cen-

tered hermeneutic for interpreting the texts and practices of the religion and culture.

If space permitted, the next logical step would be to outline some examples of such altars and poets from Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist or other contexts. In a future paper I would like to develop an exegesis of the Quran, for example, based upon a new “Jesus Hermeneutic,” and address the areas of correction and fulfillment that such a hermeneutic would surface in the text.

A new “Jesus” reading of the Quran is of course just one piece of what an Insider Movement would develop in its life and practice. There are many facets of culture and religion that are not a part of the official texts or forms of Islam. The same is true for Hindus and Buddhists.¹⁴ These too need to be addressed by the movement.

Conclusion

In my introduction, I said that I believe the issue of Insider Movements is as important a question as the rediscovery of certain aspects of biblical truth in the Protestant reformations. Let me conclude by explaining that a bit.

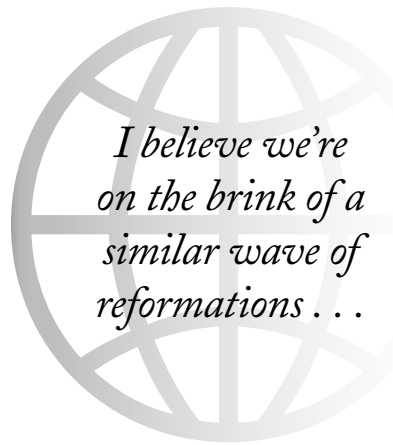
I believe that the Lord is enabling His people to rediscover gems of biblical truth that have always been in front of us but which we have not seen fully or applied consistently. The Reformations of the 16th century were fueled by a rediscovery of the biblical texts (and especially the biblical truth of justification by faith), then shaped by a consistent application of that biblical truth to church practice, polity, worship, and even Scripture translation. In the same way, I believe we’re on the brink of a similar wave of reformations¹⁵ that will be fueled by the rediscovery of a thoroughly biblical theology of culture and religion, one shaped by a consistent application of that biblical truth to mission practice and the movements that emerge among Muslims and

Hindus and Buddhists as a result of that reformation.

If I am right, then the mission movement will need to keep looking not only for better ways to recruit and train and send missionaries, but to acknowledge the need for a paradigm shift.

The harvest is indeed vast and the laborers too few. But we don’t just need more laborers; we also need a new paradigm of what we’re sending them into the harvest to do.

It is my hope that this paper has articulated some of the biblical bases for that paradigm shift and thus in a



small way helped to enable us, with God’s help, to catalyze new “Six Devoted” Insider Movements to Jesus. **IJFM**

Endnotes

¹ A good introduction to the people movement conversation is found in the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* under “People Movements,” an article contributed by David Hesselgrave.

² The reference in 10:17 might help us understand something of the range of usage, but it does not directly relate to a dynamic in the movement itself, so I do not include it as a seventh dynamic, as tempting as it would be to have seven keys!

³ I am suggesting here a radical departure from much of the theological education that is established in “the field.” Instead of attempting to teach correct theology (based on whatever school or books the missionary has been influenced by), I am proposing a model in which

emerging leaders within the movement are guided into a process of engaging Scripture and their culture in a “conversation” that leads to the long term goal of a thoroughly *biblical* theology in culture.

⁴ This is certainly the background of the Lord’s Supper as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 11. That this was a real meal is clear from the necessity Paul felt of reminding the Corinthians that they should not eat all the food before other members of the church arrived. Doing so, says Paul, means it is no longer the *Lord’s* supper. By separating the Lord’s Supper from the context of a real meal we eventually came to the logically absurd practice in the West of holding a “Lord’s Supper” in the early morning and thus having a meal that is not a “supper” in any but a symbolic sense.

⁵ In an article entitled “Jesus in Samaria: A Paradigm for Church Planting Among Muslims,” in *IJFM*, Vol. 17: 1, Spring 2000 under the name, Stuart Caldwell.

⁶ Since writing the article cited in footnote 5, my thinking has progressed. I would now put more emphasis now on the fact that Jesus clearly had thought long term about the Samaritan “mission.” For example, Luke 10 can be argued from the context to be an intentional and specifically Samaritan mission. I recognize the complex issues involved in dating events in the Synoptics and in John. But my assumption would be that John 4 took place before Luke 10, which could thus be said to be another step in the strategy of “church planting” or “kingdom sowing” in Samaria. Acts 1:8, when read in this context, shows that Jesus was still clearly intentional about further work in Samaria to follow up and “establish” what had begun in John 4 and expanded in Luke 10. However I would still defend my basic thesis that Jesus’ work in Samaria is a model and example of what we’re referring to here as an Insider Movement.

⁷ Acts 6 is often used by proponents of various church “polities” to support their particular viewpoint. But Luke is not giving us a once and for all structure. His intention is to show how the community was led to adopt and adapt new forms as needs arose in order to stay focused on their purpose.

⁸ That this is a common practice in Acts seems clear from Acts 2; the

accounts of the Ethiopian eunuch, Simon the Sorcerer, Cornelius, the Philippian jailer; and other examples.

⁹ To obtain a copy of this tool, please contact the author at:

kbiggins@global-teams.org

¹⁰ To counter this point, it could be argued that Paul does not use the same method again after Acts 17. However, Paul's letter to the believers in Rome, written after his ministry in Athens, lays a foundation in its opening chapter that is very much in keeping with the thought and assumptions in his sermon in Acts 17.

¹¹ I am not in any sense equating the Old Testament revelation with the work of God among the nations as described in Acts 17. I do not believe this argument places all other religions on the same footing as the Old Testament. I once heard a missionary whose work had been in a Buddhist context suggest that the teachings of Buddha could in fact replace the Old Testament *functionally* for Buddhists. This is not an uncommon suggestion in certain missiological traditions. I am not

making that argument here. I do agree that Paul uses the pagan culture and religion of the Athenians in the same way he uses the Old Testament among Jews and Gentile God-fearers. But that is not the same thing as suggesting a replacement for the Old Testament.

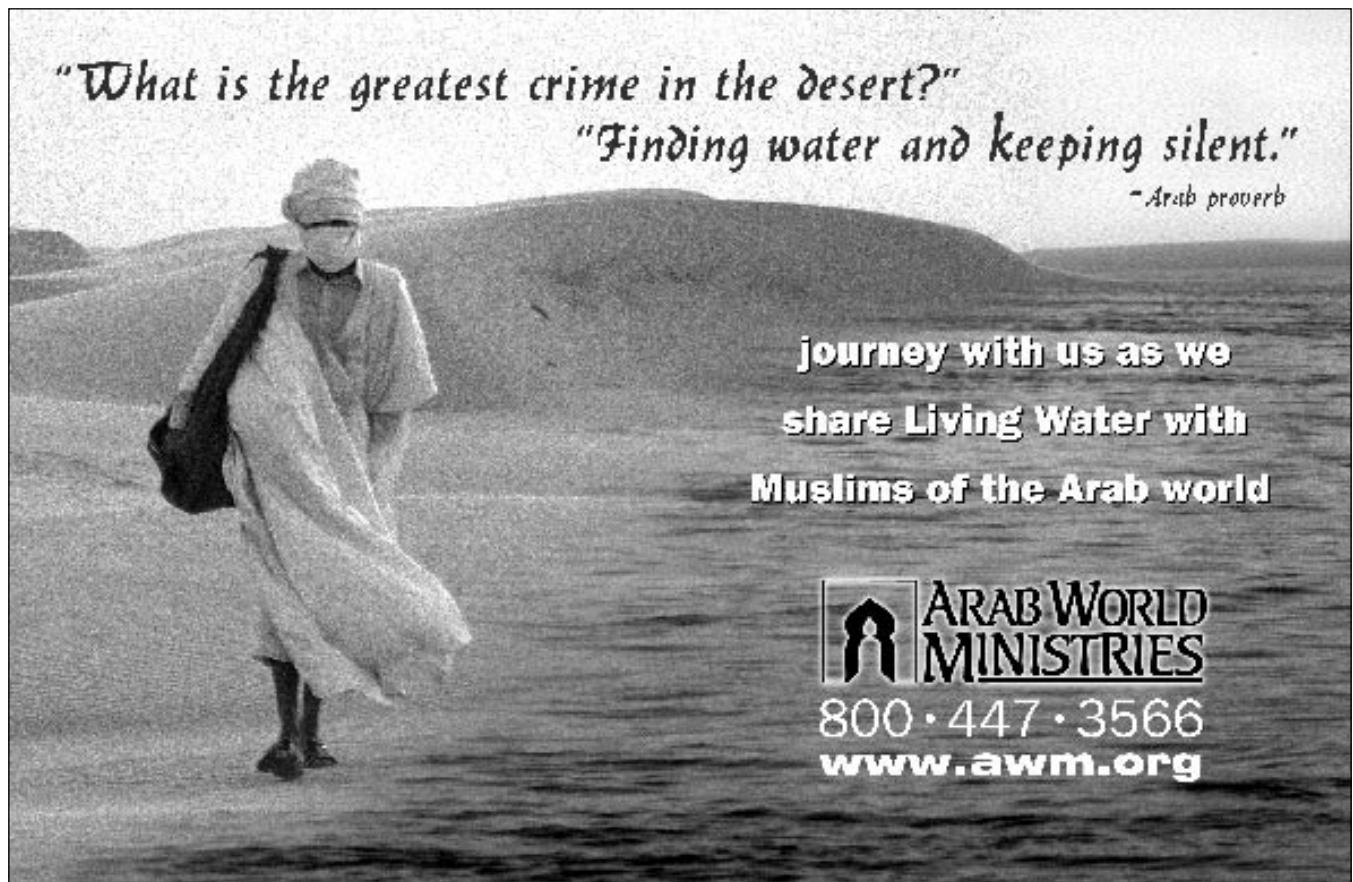
¹² Exegesis of each passage would be needed to determine when "empty" would best fit the author's intention and when "demonic" would best fit. Both are taught in Scripture.

¹³ This is a frequent accusation leveled at those who promote Insider Movements. Sometimes the accusation is aimed at cross-cultural workers who adopt the term "Muslim" for themselves (for example), or allow themselves to be thought of as Muslim. Sometimes the accusation is aimed at "insiders" who do not extract themselves from, say, Islam. The question of integrity and religious labels is worthy of a paper all its own.

¹⁴ And Christians!

¹⁵ While my focus in this paper is on the Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist contexts, the same recovery of biblical truth is seeding new thinking about

church planting among "post-moderns," among others. Hence, I refer to "reforms" in the plural.



"What is the greatest crime in the desert?"
"Finding water and keeping silent."
 - Arab proverb

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