What We Carry

July–September 2016

33:3

From the Editor's Desk

Islam and the Counterintuitive Francis

I n 1986 the little town of Assisi, the 12th-13th century hometown of the celebrated St. Francis, was chosen by Pope John Paul II to be the place for prayer with leaders from other world religions. His choice of venue reminded the world that during the violent Crusades at least one man displayed a counter-cultural approach to Islam.

If you have not heard the story, it goes like this. Between 1212 and 1219, Francis tried three times to make his way to Islamic turf. Shipwreck and disease prevented him twice, but in 1219 he finally landed in Damietta (Egypt). There Francis witnessed firsthand the horrors of crusading combat as Christian forces clashed with the forces of al-Malek al-Kamil. The future saint sought to convince the armies of Christendom to relinquish their violent approach to Islam. He failed. Francis then asked his commander for permission to walk across the demilitarized zone between the opposing armies in order to bring a Christian message to Kamil. His request finally granted, Francis and his traveling companion crossed that frontier. After being roughed up a bit, Francis found himself in the presence of the Sultan. Legend is mixed as to what actually happened next, but it seems the encounter was transparent and extended. Ultimately, we only know that Francis walked back across that zone to the Christian forces and then made his way back to Italy, never to speak of the encounter again. Contemporary historical accounts try to interpret what happened between Francis and the Sultan that day. In the end, we're forced to admit that Francis' approach did not succeed in its original mission—the Crusades continued. Still, we have the sense that a real Christian and a real Muslim met each other that day, and that this encounter probably changed them personally. But this type of encounter doesn't happen unless one has a different disposition towards Muslims.

Through the centuries we've derived some benefit from examining Francis' fresh approach to Islam in the medieval age. Radical, counterintuitive and politically-incorrect, his manner exposed the futility of force in achieving the mission of God among the Saracens. The Franciscan order that emerged in the wake of this story would continue to challenge the crusading spirit. In fact, fresh approaches to translating the Qur'an and new inter-religious apologetics had already emerged, for the failures of crusading armies had forced a deeper examination of the more common medieval predisposition towards Islam.

The views expressed in **IJFM** are those of the various authors and not necessarily those of the journal's editors, the International Society for Frontier Missiology or the society's executive committee.

The articles in this issue are also quite counterintuitive. They examine the presuppositions and attitudes we carry in any encounter with Muslims. We are very grateful that Ayman Ibrahim was willing to extend his interaction with Harley Talman on the matter of Muhammad's prophethood (see 116–35). This interaction, over two different IJFM issues, requires patience and is not for those who wish to automatically determine whether Muhammad is a false, fallen or "functional" prophet. Talman believes that a careful re-examination of Islamic textual sources may allow us to place Muhammad on a more nuanced spectrum of prophetic-type roles, and that this might improve Muslim-Christian dialogue. Ibrahim disagrees, and displays academic rigor in presenting the integrity of a traditional Christian interpretation of Muhammad as a false prophet. That said, he believes that his interpretation can inform an open and warm approach to our Muslim friends.

Mission scholar John Azumah applies an African sensitivity to Muhammad's prophethood in his response to Talman (108–13). We encourage you to get a hold of his more complete treatment of Muhammad at the 2015 Fuller Seminary lectureship.[1] While he diverges from the interpretation that Muhammad fits the bill of the anti-Christ in 1 John, he believes Talman's effort to place Muhammad in some kind of positive prophetic status will be rejected by Muslims as an imperialist missionary endeavor. The motives we carry are too easily suspect.

In his lead article, Bradford Greer explores our epistemological and theological starting points (93–100). and pushes us to examine our hidden missiological orientation in any encounter with Islam. Frankly, it's hard to dismantle our bias, to admit to certain predispositions, but Greer helps us understand what we transport into other religious worlds.

Evelyne Reisacher insists that we carry more than intellectual baggage; it's also a matter of attitude. She makes this clear in addressing the absence of joy in our witness to Muslims. Baker Academic has generously allowed us to publish a chapter of her new book (103–6), and we hope you'll purchase her entire study.

Evelyne writes with a scalpel, yet with sensitivity. Her ability to burrow into the psyche of our Christian witness to Muslims makes one feel as vulnerable as if one were lying on a surgeon's table. She, like the other authors in this issue, forces us to examine what we carry into relationships with Muslims.

In Him,

Brad Gill
Senior Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

[1] "Mission in the Islamic World: Making Theological and Missiological Sense of Muhammad" in *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness,* ed. Charles Van Engen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 197–214.

What We Carry

Starting Points:
Approaching the Frontier Missiological Task

by Bradford Greer

Engaging in frontier missions in a postcolonial world requires us to leave our first-culture and the ordered world we know and cross religio-cultural boundaries into an unknown world. Without realizing it, we unconsciously privilege the ordering of our own world. We then cross religio-cultural boundaries without the tools we need to reflect upon and challenge that privileged ordering of our world.[1] We, therefore, are ill equipped to reflect constructively upon the ways others order their world. We end up being ethnocentric and colonial in ways that we are often unaware.

Frontier missiology arose as an interdisciplinary academic discipline to help minimize this very real but implicit ethnocentricity and coloniality within frontier mission endeavors. It exposes us to key epistemological, theological, and missiological lenses that shape the way we perceive ourselves and others as we engage in the task of frontier missions (see the chart on the next page). In addition, frontier missiology draws from the rich resources of biblical theology and the social sciences in order to provide us with the tools we need not only to reflect upon but also to challenge the privileged ways we order our own world. It should also release us to enter, move about, reflect upon, value, and positively challenge another world that operates under a radically different ordering. In this article we will identify and explore how these different lenses shape the thinking and the task of foreign missions.

Nonetheless, as we work through these lenses it will soon become obvious why we cannot eliminate the disagreements that arise among us. The issues within frontier missiology touch upon some of our deepest and most cherished beliefs, assumptions, and values. Just by reading the current interaction between Ayman Ibrahim and Harley Talman regarding the Prophet of Islam,[2] one catches a small glimpse of how this is so. Though we will never eliminate disagreement (nor should we even want to), we can hopefully raise our level of awareness and increase our capacity for reflection and meaningful dialogue on these very sensitive and very significant issues.

Bradford Greer (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) has been working in Islamic contexts for over twenty years.

The Starting Point: Theology or Ideology?

Some sectors in the evangelical community question the value of using the social sciences to inform frontier mission engagement. Their reticence is due in part to how they view the starting point of frontier missiology. They assume that it begins with phenomenology rather than theology. This is because it seeks to be as "objective" as possible as it seeks to discover "what is" (phenomenology) rather than "what should be" (ideology). The reticent evangelical would rather assert that the starting place of all missiology should be theology.

In response, frontier missiologists point out that philosophers have demonstrated that all knowledge is situated in time and space, and thus, contextual. Knowledge is also limited in perspective; and no knowledge is one hundred percent objective.[3] The implication for theology is this: Every theologian and every theological system is situated in time and space. Consequently, all theology is contextual.[4] In addition, since each theological system arises from its own situatedness and perspective, no single theological system is one hundred percent comprehensive.[5]

In contrast, positivism (figure 1, Starting Point One) asserts that knowledge is objective, reliable, and trustworthy. When positivism shapes our view of theology, it places an undue confidence on our theological understanding, assuming it is accurate in description and can function transculturally as a standard for theologizing in other contexts. However, all systematic, dogmatic, and creedal theologies arose in given times and spaces. Thus, they are culturally bounded.[6] As a result, when the reticent assert that theology should be the starting point for missiology, they are actually referring to their privileged, culturally-bounded theologies as their starting point.

Positivism provides a wonderfully firm ground for those who stand upon it. However, as an epistemological position, many evangelical scholars recognize that positivism is not intellectually or phenomenologically sustainable.

Due to this realization, frontier missiologists tend to draw from the *biblical* theology movement (figure 1, Starting Point Two) as it provides a valid, evangelical alternative to traditional systematic, dogmatic, and confessional theologies. Biblical theology allows meaning to arise from within each book of the Bible, looking to the historical context to illuminate the text's meaning. It also allows other biblical texts (intertextuality) to inform the meaning of any given biblical text.

Yet, many evangelicals and missionaries persist in their epistemological positivism.[7] Such positivism creates problems in the realms of biblical interpretation and contextualization. People seek conformity to their position rather than allowing the Scriptures to speak to a given context. Grant Osborne highlights the problem positivism creates in biblical interpretation.

> People read Scripture within a reading paradigm dominated by the denomination of which they are a part. They don't seek truth but conformity to their assumed theological position. (Osborne 2006, 467).[8]

If allegiances to systematic, dogmatic, and confessional theologies already cause this problem in biblical interpretation in western cultural contexts, they surely will cause the problem in frontier missions.

Such allegiances cause significant sectors of the evangelical mission community to pejoratively view contextualization and local theologizing. The assumption is that there is no need for any further theologizing because the task of theologizing has been completed.[9] Addressing this, Melba Maggay writes:

> A longtime missionary in India, for instance, has asserted that one can only proceed from a "dogmatic contextualization," which he defined as "the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the Kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in the separate cultures and within their particular existential situation." The trouble with this definition is that it assumes that the task of contextualization is, at bottom, merely adaptation; it consists mostly of finding "dynamic equivalencies" for propositional truths systematized by theologies developed in the West and deemed universal…this is an unsafe

Figure 1. Framing Two Starting Points in Mission

Starting Point One	Starting Point Two
Positivism/Naïve Realism	Critical Realism
Dualism	Integration
Systematics	Biblical Theology
Dogmatics/Confessionalism/Foundationalism	Contextualization/Local Theologies
Exclusive Orthodoxy	Inclusive Orthodoxy
Ethnocentric Theological Discourse	Postcolonial Theological Discourse
Modality	Sodality
High Uncertainty Avoidance	Low Uncertainty Avoidance

assumption. It is true that there is an unchanging "deposit of the faith," but this comprises more than propositions. And while it may be said to be "supra-cultural," our knowledge and access to it is always culture-bound, and the theologies that arise out of the historic contingencies of a given context are always local. (2013, 6–7)

People in other cultures ask different questions than we do. They need answers to their questions, not just answers we have found for our questions.[10] Contextualization and local theologizing allow communities of believers to read the Scriptures with their eyes in relation to their own experiences. It allows them to articulate biblical truth in ways that make sense and bring order to their own complex world. Biblical theological methodologies facilitate people as they read the Scriptures in their context to interpret and apply the Scriptures in appropriate ways.

Alternatively, those who assume they are carrying out their missiological endeavors with a transcultural theology are actually exporting their privileged, culturally bounded theology, that is—in missional terms—ethnocentric.[11] As a result, their theology functions more as an ideology than as a transcultural theology.

That being said, the claim that frontier missiology begins with phenomenology and not theology is unwarranted. What is overlooked is that evangelical theology is the very basis and provides the operational framework for all evangelical frontier missiology. Evangelical frontier missiology grows out of the evangelical movement's four theological characteristics: biblicism (the Bible is the only authority for faith and life), crucicentrism (the cross is central to the faith), conversionism (personal conversion is the mark of the true Christian), and mission (the gospel is to be proclaimed through word and deed).[12]

These theological planks, with the addition of Christocentrism (Christ

*T*hose who assume they are carrying a transcultural theology are actually exporting their privileged, culturally bounded theology.

being the center of the believer's life, faith, and practice), are essential for all frontier missiology. Since all knowledge is situated and contextual, frontier missiology acknowledges its own situatedness—that it arises out of the 20th and 21st Century evangelical movement, which is also predominantly western in cultural orientation. Frontier missiologists recognize that their starting point is not neutral or comprehensive. Such neutrality and comprehensiveness can never be achieved. Missiologists are empowered to discover how the "Truth" of God's Word is unveiled when they acknowledge their situatedness and cognitive limitations, adopt a minimalist and yet essential theological core, and reflect on their own impact upon theology and analysis while engaging in other frontier mission contexts.[13] That frontier missiology can operate from this focused theological position demonstrates this is not a capitulation to "postmodern relativism."

Nonetheless, these fundamental differences in epistemology and in approaches to theology, at the outset of any frontier missiological endeavor, create a significant degree of discomfort for those first-culture evangelicals and missionaries who lean toward epistemological positivism. Even though frontier missiology is unashamedly Bible-centered, Christ-centered, cross-centered, and conversionist, such a focused evangelical theology is still not adequate for evangelical positivists.

Besides releasing contextualization and local theologizing, there is another significant benefit from holding to this more focused evangelical theology. In frontier contexts missionaries often find themselves working alongside Christ-followers from other cultures and from

many differing theological persuasions. Initially, this diversity causes friction; however, as these missionaries see the quality of the faith of the others on the field, and as they see the value in cross-agency cooperation, they move into an ecumenical space, a space that relativizes theological particulars. The result is that these workers return to their evangelical roots, having become bibliocentric, Christocentric, crucicentric, and conversionistic—all for the sake of the gospel.

Yet, this relativization of theological particularities and denominational identities can cause alarm in the missionaries' first-culture faith communities. An identity based on specific theological or denominational content is highly valued in first-culture contexts. Evangelical ecumenicalism sounds deviant. What is not recognized is that a communal identity based on particular theological/denominational content rather than on being "in Christ" is a luxury of living in a context where faith in Christ is held by many and can be expressed freely. It becomes altogether cumbersome when living in areas where mission workers are few and the countries are fairly restrictive.

This relativization also leads to a reordering of what is considered "orthodoxy." In the first-culture faith community orthodoxy can be viewed as a standard that excludes those who don't hold to specific content cherished by the community. I recently experienced this in the USA. Even though my wife and I have represented Christ in a conflict-ridden zone for over 25 years, we were not able to participate with the other congregants in taking communion. A note in the bulletin indicated who was permitted to partake and who was not; and we did not share their particular view of communion. I did not mind this at all. I understood their reasoning

and I was simply glad to worship the Lord with a Bible believing group. In contrast, in frontier mission areas where mission workers are few and denominational identities are less likely to surface, the lines for orthodoxy tend to be drawn more inclusively. The standards for orthodoxy are set so they can include various positions (majority and minority) held within the Church universal.

Exemplifying this tension between inclusive and exclusive approaches to defining orthodoxy, some may recall the stir John Stott created a few years back when he declared his belief in annihilationism. Some felt Stott's affirmation of annihilationism indicated that he had left the evangelical fold. In a 2011 online *Christianity Today* post Mark Galli indicated that J. I. Packer and others had a similar reaction. Galli wrote that

> [i]n May 1989, Regent College theologian J. I. Packer attacked the idea [of annihilationism] at the Evangelical Affirmations conference held at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In the discussion that followed, Reformed Seminary theologian Roger Nicole argued that annihilationism should be respected as a persistent and biblical minority position among historic evangelicals. Nicole's speech effectively defeated a motion that would have defined annihilationists as outside the evangelical camp.

This inclusive approach can create significant levels of tension in some first-culture faith communities; however, for those working in frontier contexts where the workers are few, being theologically inclusive is vital.

One of the impacts of this inclusivity is that it enables workers to better reflect upon and challenge the privileged ways they have ordered their world, and how they enter, move about, reflect upon, value, and positively challenge their host cultures, which operate under radically different orderings and worldviews.

In summary, frontier missiology is shaped by four fundamental evangelical theological commitments: 1) bibliocentrism, 2) Christocentrism,

3) crucicentrism, and 4) conversionism. Frontier missiology refrains from adding to these but rather adopts a critical realist epistemological perspective, acknowledging that all knowledge, theology included, is situated and contextual. From this evangelical theological starting point, frontier missiology then utilizes the rich resources of biblical theology and the social sciences to advance the kingdom of God in the unengaged and unreached areas of God's world.

Frontier Mission Engagement: God and Culture

Working out from this focused evangelical theological framework, the first

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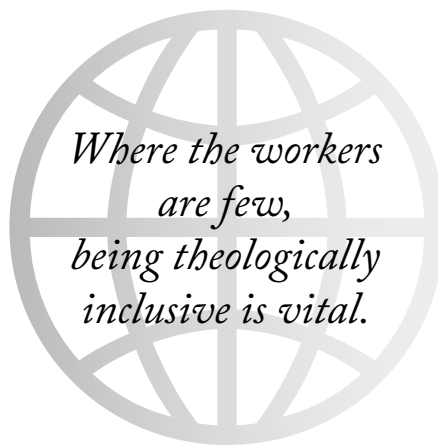
point of contact in frontier mission engagement is culture. A major point of agreement among all is that cultures exist in a fallen state. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). However, evangelicals influenced by positivism and frontier missiologists tend to view culture from two significantly different lenses.

Positivism tends to view life in a dualistic manner.[14] Dualistic terms such as non-Christian, pre-Christian and post-Christian are used with a significant level of frequency. If a culture falls into the non-, pre-, or post-Christian category, the tendency is to view much if not most of the aspects of that culture as deficient or evil and in need of transformation.[15]

The truth that all cultures are fallen and stand in need of transformation is used to validate this tendency. As a result, a common expectation is that when people turn to Christ they should adopt new norms, norms that are Christian.[16] Missionaries who primarily view their own first-culture through the Christian lens do not necessarily reflect analytically on the many norms which they have labeled Christian. As a result, this dualistic mindset and the labeling of other cultures as non-Christian open the doors for cultural coloniality at a number of levels.[17]

In contrast, theologically viewing God as Creator, Preserver, Revealer, and Redeemer opens the door for a different approach to understanding fallen, human cultures.

The Scripture indicates that God not only created the world, but he has stayed actively involved in the world ever since. It is not as if God created humankind and then distanced himself from humanity after the first couple sinned, leaving everyone to their own devices. Even after Cain's murder of his brother Abel, the Genesis 4 narrative indicates that Cain, his descendants, and even human civilization grew under the tacit preserving grace of God. This understanding arises from the account of the two births that begin and end the chapter. With both births Eve acknowledges the Lord's help in the bringing forth of the children. The theological implication from this is that it is due to the Lord's preserving grace than humankind is able to continue. The narrative of the flood and the subsequent covenant with Noah and humankind appear to confirm this (Gen. 8:20–9:17).

In this light Karl Barth writes: "God fulfills his fatherly lordship over the creature by preserving it" (1960, Vol. 3/3, p. 58). This preserving activity is why Paul could say in Romans 13:1:

> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. (NRSV)

Paul was working from the premise that God preserves humankind in part by forming and maintaining structures that promote social and communal order. Paul in Acts portrayed this preserving activity of God in very intimate terms, stating that the Lord is near to each and every one. In his speech in Athens he said: "indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts 17:27–28 NRSV).

This understanding of God as Preserver adds definition to our understanding of God as Revealer. God, being near, is not only actively preserving humankind, God is also actively working to reveal himself to each and every one. In doctrinal terms we refer to this as General Revelation. General Revelation, however, is often perceived as a static act where God placed knowledge about himself within the very fabric of creation. This is certainly one aspect of what God has done (see Rom. 1:20). However, we are also to understand God as continuously working in and among people so that they may turn to him. General revelation is a continual activity (Rom. 1:19 and Ps. 19:1–3). Why is God doing this? In order that he may be ultimately glorified in and through his Son in those he has made and redeemed (Barth 1960 Vol. 3/3, p. 58).

Thus, frontier missiology sees God as actively involved in all human cultures, fallen as they are, working to form within them that which can be labeled moral, wise, just, and good. God is doing this because he, as Revealer and Redeemer, is not only near to all but works to draw those within these cultures to himself, prodding them to "seek him so that they may find him" (Acts 17:28). Besides the unseen, inner workings of the Spirit, God uses that which can be labeled as moral, wise, just, and good to create cognitive and affective connections to the gospel, enabling people to view the gospel as plausible, and thus positively respond to it.[18]

The story of Jethro in Exodus 18 appears to validate this perspective. The narrative mentions fifteen times that

*F*rontier missiologists intentionally avoid devaluing other cultures. They seek to discover what God is already doing and build upon it.

Moses' father-in-law is the source of the advice Moses adopts. The narrative opens and closes highlighting the fact that Jethro is an outsider to the nation (Ex. 18:1, 27).[19] Moses' father-in-law is the one who points out that what Moses is doing "is not good" (Ex. 18:17), echoing the creation narrative (Fretheim 2010, p. 198), and it is Moses' father-in-law who gives the advice that helps to create structures that promote justice within the redeemed community. That this narrative occurs immediately before the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, and that Jethro beseeches Moses to look to God regarding this advice (Ex. 18:23), appears to demonstrate that it is due to God's working in his good creation that there is a degree of wisdom in his world, wisdom that is good and should be valued and utilized.[20]

Frontier missiology works from this theological understanding of God's active involvement within human cultures as Creator, Preserver, Revealer, and Redeemer. God's commitment to and involvement in human cultures finds its full revelation in the incarnation of Jesus. The incarnation is "an affirmation of creation and of God's deep involvement with it" (Zimmerman 2012, 61). As a result, frontier missiologists intentionally avoid devaluing other cultures. They seek to discover what God is already doing within each and every community and build upon it. The reason frontier mission workers are in these frontier areas is because of God's active involvement. God has brought them there so that they can meaningfully represent Christ, that the gospel be meaningfully proclaimed, and that communities redeemed by and centered in Jesus be established.

In summary, the gospel in the view of frontier missiology is meant to redeem

and release a transformation from within each and every culture, not to obliterate those cultures.[21] John's vision of the nations in Revelation 21:22–26 appears to be an affirmation that ethnic groups will retain their identities and cultural peculiarities in eternity. In stating this, frontier missiology does not lose sight of the cultural tension inherent within the gospel.

> The event of Christ, and Christ's renewing work, is not indigenous to any culture—not even to supposedly Christian cultures. In every case it has to be received as a crosscultural—indeed a countercultural—reality. (Dyrness, 2016)

Conclusion

First culture attachments create significant hindrances for those crossing religio-cultural boundaries in order to proclaim the gospel in a faithful manner, especially when the first culture is blended with the Christian faith. This blending sacralizes norms and elements of the first culture which have no direct connection with the gospel; yet, these cultural norms and elements are automatically identified as Christian and given a privileged status. Consequently, a culturally specific theological understanding of the gospel and Christian praxis is exported, resulting in a frontier missionary endeavor that is ethnocentric and colonial in character. All Christian communities (Western, Southern, Middle Eastern, Western Asian, South Asian or East Asian) face this same predicament whenever they try to cross religious, cultural, or social barriers.

Frontier missiology exists to help alleviate this problem. It seeks to provide frontier mission workers with tools that facilitate self-reflection on how their first culture has ordered and privileged their world and impacted their

theological understandings. These same tools also enable workers to enter, move about, reflect upon, value, and positively challenge other cultures that operate under a radically different ordering.

In addition, frontier missiology has a high view of God's activity in each and every culture. The incarnation reinforces our understanding of the inherent value, significance, and freedom of each culture. In this light, each and every community should have the freedom to read, interpret, and apply the Scriptures in its own context. This freedom will enable the Scripture to have the immediate relevance to each community that it was designed to have.

At the most fundamental level, the only thing that is truly transcultural is the Scripture. God's Word does not change. What changes is context. Since each context has its own particular needs, problems, and worldview, each community has to read the Scripture to learn how to address those needs and problems, and come to know God. This diversity in need, problem, and worldview will cause communities to focus on certain truths over others. With a critical realist epistemology such a difference in perspective is acceptable because no human body of knowledge is complete in and of itself. Consequently, applications of Scripture can be diverse because each community is ordered in different ways.

Frontier missiology is comfortable with this diversity because this is the nature of intercultural engagement. Frontier missiology can be comfortable with this because it is confident that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is overseeing, actively involved, and fulfilling his covenantal purposes in this world. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Postcolonial theological discourses help us reflect on how we have privileged the ways we order our world. For a brief exposure to postcolonial theological discourses see Smith, Lalitha, and Hawk's *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Global Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (2014).

[2] See article, "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" and responses in *IJFM* 31:4, 169–190; *IJFM* 32:4, 202–207; and this issue, *IJFM* 33:3, 116–135.

[3] Jens Zimmerman writes: "Human knowledge is never neutral, dispassionate, timeless, or without perspective. Instead, it is always *interpretive*" (2012, 35, emphasis his).

[4] Grant Osborne states: "The act of interpretation itself is done within a cultural and theological framework" (2006, 467; see also Zimmerman 2012, 12). This is why Shaw and Van Engen conclude: "There is no such thing as pure theology; all theologies are local theologies" (2003, 47).

[5] See Osborne 2006, 489. This perspective coheres well with Paul the Apostle's words: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12 ESV). Paul Hiebert wrote about the impact of one's epistemology on mission engagement in his *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (1994, 19–51). For an excellent introduction to philosophical hermeneutics, see Merold Westphal's *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?: Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (2009).

[6] With regard to how systematic theologies are culturally bounded, see Osborne 2009, 32.

[7] Scott Moreau states that positivism was "the position of evangelicals in the past, and many continue to hold to it in some form" (2012, 79).

[8] Evangelicals not only seek conformity in doctrine, but also seek conformity in ecclesiastical practices. This leads to the problem Ralph Winter highlighted between sodalist and modalist church structures (Winter 1981, 178–190). In addition, registering high in the area of uncertainty avoidance exacerbates a community's desire for conformity. Those who register high in the area of uncertainty avoidance have a diminished capacity to tolerate and embrace ambiguity, difference, and change (with regard to uncertainty avoidance, see Hofstede 2001).

[9] The recent publication of Werner Mischke's book, *The Global Gospel,* demonstrates that this assumption is not valid (2015).

[10] Steven Hu addresses this need and writes: "In this globalizing world, where we have also witnessed the dramatic growth of the Two–Thirds World church, we cannot afford not to consider the multiple contexts in which theology begins. If our discourse continues to remain in the domain of the West, the resultant theology will

be powerless to address the issues of the global church" (2014, Kindle Locations 205–207). Hwa Yung concurs and observes: "Western theologies are the products of the histories, cultures and realities of the West. They cannot, therefore, adequately address the existential realities of the rest of the world because these differ so much from those of the West" (2014, Kindle Locations 214–216; see also Wright 2006, 39).

[11] In this vein, William Dyrness in his recent book, *Insider Jesus* (2016), writes: "To speak of a Christian faith that must be contextualized evokes a central question: who gets to define the Christian faith?" Interestingly, Christ himself pointedly did not describe the missionary calling as communicating the Christian faith, or even the good news. He urged his disciples to "go therefore and makes disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to *obey* everything that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19–20, emphasis added). Notice how the focus is on what is to be done, not what is to be thought. In evangelical missiology, this has come to include, at a minimum, the translation, teaching and dissemination of Scripture wherever missionaries have gone. But typically missionaries have supplied something else: their understanding of the beliefs that constitute the "Christian faith" that they have brought with them."

[12] David Bebbington identified these four as the characteristics of the evangelical movement (2005, 23).

[13] In this light, Darrell Whiteman states: "We need a theology that affirms the centrality of Christ in the world while also affirming the culturally diverse expressions that the body of Christ will necessarily take" (2006, 67).

[14] Zimmerman points out that Christians "should be wary of dualistic thinking because it fundamentally contradicts incarnational thinking about God and world" (2012, 11).

[15] Ida Glasser and Hannah Kay reflect this kind of categorization in their recent book, *Thinking Biblically about Islam.* They see Islamic cultures as an appropriate category as well as biblical cultures, though they clearly recognize that there is an undefined overlap of the two. They write: "Islam is understood and experienced by most Muslims as a whole way of life. So we could look at the role of Islam in forming the culture of Muslim societies. It lays down social codes and can determine all sorts of relationships, such as whom to marry, whose home to live in, which people of the

opposite sex to interact with, or employer-employee relations. It also forms the basis for aesthetics, governing what kind of art and architecture is an appropriate expression of belief in God. Where, then, is the overlap between these cultures and biblical cultures that will help us gain a biblical perspective on the cultural implications of Islam" (2016, Kindle Locations 388–393)? I find the category, biblical culture, to be a bit anachronistic as well as perplexing. How would Glasser and Kay define it?

[16] David Bosch described this perspective in this way: "mission as the transfer of the missionary's 'superior' culture" (1991, 5; see also J. Andrew Kirk 2006, 96–97).

[17] Bosch notes: "Surveying the great variety of ways in which Western cultural norms were, implicitly or explicitly, imposed upon converts in other parts of the world, it is of some significance to note that both liberals and conservatives shared the assumption that Christianity was the only basis for a healthy civilization; this was a form of consensus so fundamental that it operated mainly on an unconscious, presuppositional level" (1991, 296). Such thinking continues. As recent examples of this, two separate organizations conducted Leadership Development projects in the same frontier area. The workers conducting the projects were solidly devoted to the Lord; however, the content in these projects elevated western cultural leadership norms (implying that these were Christian) over and above the "defective" local norms.

[18] J. P. Moreland writes: "Individuals will never be able to change their lives if they cannot even entertain the beliefs needed to bring about that change. By 'entertain belief' we mean to consider the *possibility* that the belief *might* be true" (2010, 16). It is due to this working of God that local values provide a basis for meaningful communication and makes missionary elenctics possible (on missionary elenctics, see Robert Priest 1994; however, Priest appears to take a static view of the development of conscience, labeling it a natural faculty).

[19] Thomas White points out that "Jethro is a voice of natural reason or sound political prudence, a non-Israelite through whom God works to organize internally the people of Israel. The author of this portion of the Torah clearly means to underscore that gifts of natural prudential reason, even when they come from outside of the sphere of explicit revelation, are compatible with revelation" (2016, Kindle Locations 3324–3326).

[20] It is because of this that frontier missiologists have the freedom to draw from the social sciences.

[21] Anthony Taylor describes how the gospel, when framed within a kingdom perspective, can enter, preserve, and transform a culture from within (2015).

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What We Carry
Joyful Witness:
An Excerpt on Muslim-Christian Attachment

by Evelyne A. Reisacher

Enjoying Muslims

Through the years, I have taught numerous Muslim-awareness seminars in churches worldwide. Inevitably, participants would say, "We would love to connect with Muslims in our neighborhoods but don't know how." Given that joy is a primary attachment emotion, I recommend the obvious: first start to enjoy Muslims as human beings, to delight in them; this is how the bond will form, as it did when we first learned to attach to our caregivers as human beings. As joy is necessary in the formation of the bond in early childhood, so it continues to be important in the formation and growth of human bonds throughout life.

Unfortunately, I noticed during these same seminars that participants were primarily motivated to connect with Muslims not by delight but by fear, competition, or urgency of the task. Fortunately, compassion and love are now emerging motives, but joy still rarely appears, and as seldom among full-time missionaries to Muslims as among ordinary church members. If God enjoys his creation, does it not seem awkward that his children find no delight in those they evangelize? Furthermore, as joy is so important for healthy relations, it is inconceivable that Christians befriend Muslims for the sake of the gospel without feeling overwhelming joy toward them. When students share their experiences in the Muslim world with me or with their classmates in a class I'm teaching, I often ask: "What joy did you experience?" I put the same question to my readers: can you remember joyful interactions you had with Muslims? If you cannot, you probably never connected with them. If you can, you may agree with Henri Nouwen, who wrote, "True joy is hidden where we are the same as other people: fragile and mortal. It is the joy of belonging to the human race. It is the joy of being with others as a friend, a companion, a fellow traveler. This is the joy of Jesus, who is Emmanuel: God-with-us."[1]

Evelyne A. Reisacher (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is associate professor of Islamic studies and intercultural relations in the School of Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, where she has taught for fifteen years. She spent over a decade in leadership in L'Ami, a Paris-based Christian organization, facilitating relationships between churches and North African immigrants and developing courses, teaching tools, and seminars for sharing the gospel cross-culturally. She has trained Christian leaders and church members in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.

Exploration

Joy is an exploration-eliciting emotion. Have you noticed that when tourists are in a sightseeing mood, they display unique behaviors? Their bodies seem to be in starting blocks, ready to move forward, conquer new spaces, and engage with unfamiliar people. The cameras around their necks signal they are eager to capture new visual sensations. Their eyes are wide open. This allows them to marvel at the wonders they discover. They feel enthusiastic, full of energy, and harbor a huge smile. Neuroscientists would say that they are in a sympathetic drive[2] and high on dopamine. Words that come to mind are "seeking," "curiosity," "exploring," "awe," "anticipation," and "amazement."

When we engage with the Muslim world, having a similar attitude will help us greatly. In effect, interest plays a critical role in attachment. According to Schore, "The combination of joy and interest motivates attachments."[3] To connect with Muslims, we must show interest in them and a joyful expectation that we will learn new things from them. Unfortunately, the tourist analogy falls short when one realizes that tourists often connect better to a place than to its inhabitants. Rejoicing over objects and places can help us enjoy a culture but will not automatically cause us to enjoy its people. It is people, therefore, whom we must be interested in and excited about.

In order to form secure bonds with Muslims, we must participate in joyful moments with them. When Christians engage with Muslims, "positive emotions widen the available array of thoughts and actions, thereby facilitating flexibility, exploration, and play. These behaviors in turn promote social bonding."[4] Yes, joyful play associated with interest/excitement should become an integral part of meeting Muslims. Some of the best contexts in which to experience such feelings are ordinary encounters. I naturally connected with Muslim classmates at school, at sport, at work, or in leisure activities. Too often, Christians limit their interactions with Muslims to religious spaces. They forget there are many other ways to meet and enjoy others.

Genuine Joy

There are two kinds of joy. The first is cognitive, basically processed by the left side of the brain. It is often called social joy. The other is affective and is processed by the right side of the brain. Only the latter, being spontaneous and bodily based, fosters human attachment. Cognitive joy is sometimes used to mask negative emotions with a smile[5] or other playful behaviors for the sake of civility. This faked joy does not have the same infectious effect. For attachments to build, joy must be spontaneous—like

Joy is an exploration–eliciting emotion.

a gut feeling. Imagine seeing someone you enjoy and instantaneously feeling joy bubble up in you.

Unfortunately, mission practitioners sometimes approach Muslims with a fake smile. They use relationship building as a strategy to share the gospel with Muslims. Their so-called interest in the Muslim world appears more like an evangelistic marketing technique. When they see Muslims, they mask their negative emotions with a smile and pretend they are happy to see them. They offer to connect with them only because they want to witness. I am all for sharing the gospel, and I support civility, but misunderstandings may occur if Christians smile at Muslims only to evangelize them, because the latter may understand the smile as an invitation to deeper relations. Once a Muslim refuses the gospel, a Christian who has been thus motivated will probably rupture the bond, leaving the Muslim even more confused about the real reasons Christians engage with Muslims. I assume that Christians would be as bewildered if they discovered that Muslims became friends with them only to convert them.

An experience of social joy does not always guarantee that people will attach. Genuine, affective joy is the rule in attachment. This spontaneous and authentic joy is communicated via the right brain of one person and resonates with the right brain of the person to whom joy is being communicated. Right-brain joy is the key to attachment. True joy is not something you can just reason or figure out. One must experience spontaneous joyful emotions originating from a relational context. During interactions with Muslims, joy may suddenly pop up, unexpectedly. One cannot say, "Now I am going to find Muslims pleasant." No one can arbitrarily create happiness by being together with people from another culture (unless happiness is cognitively induced for social purposes). One has to personally be immersed in an unfamiliar environment and feel the spark of joy when it happens. No one can predict when it will happen. It is the path of discovering how one's right brain reacts to the sensory and verbal stimuli in the context of relationship with a Muslim. To those who want to feel the joy of the Muslim world, I can only recommend going and exploring Muslim societies and being open to the joy that will enable them to connect. It may start with a single encounter like the one I had with my neighbor when I was a teenager.

Facial expressions are important means to convey emotions. I remember walking on the beach when a teenager came out of the water where he had surfed, beaming with excitement. His face radiated with joy. As he walked past me, my face beamed with joy in return. His joy was infectious. I believe that at that moment

I experienced the right-brain-to-right-brain affective resonance that child and caregiver experience when they are together and feel nonverbal joy. The cultural display of joy did not matter in this circumstance. Facially communicated joy bypassed words, which was convenient because this teenager did not speak the same language as I do. Was our relationship strong at that point? No! Attachment is a long process that involves more than a one-time affective resonance. But this fleeting positive emotion could have become the springboard for subsequent moments of joy, which could have shaped a bond. I wonder how many of these experiences my readers have had with Muslims. When have our faces beamed with joy in their presence? Can we stop for a moment to recall these memories?

Unfortunately, these days, happy faces of Muslims in the media are in short supply. How can there be mutual sharing of joy if Muslims only get the role of villain in movies and if only their angry faces make newspaper headlines? Recently I googled the word "Muslim" and was shocked by the number of angry faces that appeared in the "image" section. This is strange, because Muslims can be as happy as anybody else on this planet. Unfortunately, most people are introduced to Islam through fearful faces.

Sometimes, at the beginning of a lecture or a church meeting, I ask Christians to think of Muslims and choose a facial expression. I show them a variety of emoticons. Very rarely is the smiley face chosen. That is quite unfortunate for relationship building, because happy faces are inviting, but angry or fearful faces lead to shame-based transactions such as we described earlier. How can someone build healthy relations with Muslims in a context of fear, anger, and terror when few people have memories of joyful encounters with Muslims? Usually relationships start with positive emotional experiences, even if later there might be stress or conflict. In such cases, repairing the relationship will be easier because of the memory of the joyful times of

The cultural display of joy did not matter in this circumstance. Facially communicated joy bypassed words…

the past. But when people try to initiate connections with Muslims, when all they hear about Muslims is negative, how will healthy relationships ever develop?

The intergenerational transmission of negative feelings regarding Muslims also makes it difficult for non-Muslims to form bonds with Muslims. Terror stories that have been transmitted over generations make it almost impossible to establish healthy bonds, since terror has traumatic effects on human relations. I grew up in France during the Algerian War of Independence. Most young men the age of my brother were drafted. I remember conversations I heard as a child referring to Algerians as enemies. I heard people say, "If you see an Arab, change sidewalks; they might kill you." How do you think this must have shaped my feelings as I resonated at an early age with the fear of an entire country? I was anxious and distant until I met an Arab Muslim girl, with whom I experienced some joy. These positive memories allowed me to form other bonds with Muslims until I was able to experience the entire attachment cycle of joy, shame, and a return to joy with Muslims. Therefore, today, when I speak with anxious people all around the world, I ask them, "Can you get a Muslim smiley?"[6] Besides the angry and fearful faces of terrorists, there are many other faces of Muslims who are like you and me, with no desire to harm Christians but instead are eager to develop friendships with them. You can form healthy bonds with Muslims. I regularly show my students a visual survey filmed in Dhaka, Bangladesh, over a week, in which researchers asked random pedestrians a single question: "Are you happy?" Scores of interviewees share about their daily joys and struggles, many with genuine and spontaneous smiles that are warm and welcoming. As was noted earlier, another video, called the "Happy British Muslims," surprises Christian audiences

when Muslims sing along with Pharrell Williams' "Happy." These infectious faces of delight, joy, and elation are often suppressed by communities waging war against each other, since they know all too well the power such expressions have to connect people with each other.

Dyadic Joy

Another important aspect of attachment joy is its capacity to be mutually shared. Self-happiness does not create bonds. Playing alone, enjoying a delicious meal alone, or even using recreational drugs alone—all these experiences eliciting joy that raise the level of dopamine may render life more pleasant but do not contribute to developing human bonds. Dyadic joy,[7] or joy shared with another human being, is what leads to attachment.

Dyadic joy is mutual. When for my doctoral research I interviewed North African Christians in French churches, I noticed that they were making many efforts to enjoy French Christians. But the latter did not always reciprocate. This is not the best recipe for a lasting bond. Both members of the dyad must feel joy. Therefore, when developing bonds with Muslims, we must identify mutually felt joys. Unfortunately, interfaith relationships are sometimes emotionally imbalanced. One person is trying hard to enjoy the other (trying to like her food, appreciate her customs, etc.), but the other is not. Immigrants who want to integrate often make greater efforts to connect in order to be accepted. But this does not necessarily lead to secure bonds, because both members of the dyad must try to find enjoyment in each other. When a relationship is positive for one person in the dyad, this does not mean the two have become securely attached. I have talked to many cross-cultural workers coming back from overseas and saying: "We had such a great time; we laughed with people; we

feel really connected; we have become friends." But the words "connected" and "attached" can have diverse meanings and do not necessarily mean securely attached. After their comments, I always ask them to tell stories of mutual joy to assess whether they formed an attachment bond. I then ask if they experienced shame and the return to mutual joy.

I have noticed that in times of cross-cultural conflicts, members of one group tend to forget that the opposite group has the capacity to share joy, laughter, and other positive emotional experiences. This is probably why peacemakers include times of common celebration and play to rebuild broken relationships after wars and conflicts. Joy is not meant to erase all the pain but is a necessary ingredient to repair broken relations. And peacemakers know that every culture has feasts and celebrations that can become spaces for experiencing mutual joy.

The use of the word "dyadic" in human attachment theory, referring to a relationship between two people, implies that attachment takes place one relationship at a time. In childhood, although entire communities can be involved in child rearing, children attach to individuals who are sensitive to their emotional regulatory needs. It is the same with Muslim-Christian relations in adulthood. Have you ever heard people say, "I love Muslims," or "I love the Saudis"? What does this really mean? Bonding occurs with individual people whom you can name. Why do I emphasize this? Because I have seen too many people say, "Oh, I love this culture. I think the people are fantastic!" But they have never even developed one single secure attachment with a person from that country or religion. Attachment takes place one dyad at a time until large networks of relations are formed. A friend of mine, born in a Muslim family, reports that a member of her church made derogative comments about Muslims, saying that she would never trust any. My friend replied, "But I was one of them! Why do you then trust me?" The person replied, "But with

you it's different. I have gotten to know you throughout the years." So much was her mind filled with negative images, this church member was not consciously aware that she liked a person from a Muslim background. Once she became aware of it, this changed everything. She realized she could develop bonds with other people from the estranged community. This example comports with my belief that to secure healthier relationships between Muslims and Christians we must start at the micro level, and more specifically with healthy dyadic relationships between Muslims and Christians.

But interfaith and intercultural affective transactions can prove challenging. Anthropological observations highlight that cultures and religions diverge in the

In cross-cultural conflicts, we tend to forget that the opposite group has the capacity to share joy and laughter.

ways and contexts in which they display and experience positive or negative emotion. For example, wedding celebrations in certain cultures can be perceived as funerals in others because outsiders don't see the same intensity of joy displayed. Likewise, it may be improper to scream and yell when meeting a friend in some cultures. Anyone observing people welcoming their loved ones in an airport can see differences in the way people from various cultures greet one another. When the intensity or display of joy does not match across cultures, relationships may rupture. There is no universal way to share joy in a relationship.

"Objects" of joy may also differ across cultures and religions. If I asked people from

different cultures what they do to enjoy a relationship, the responses vary widely. Some may say, "Going to a baseball game together." Other will say, "Taking a cruise together." And others will say, "Enjoying a meal together." This poses a problem for dyadic encounters. What if the joy that other cultures value is not joy to me? Am I ever going to experience moments of shared joy, or pleasurable moments that strengthen the bond? When I meet a person from another culture and want to develop a bond with her, I often try to find out what she enjoys doing. But doing what the other person enjoys will not bring a secure bond in the long run. Finding these cross-cultural or interfaith spaces where both members of the dyad can say that they truly enjoy each other is the key to developing healthy bonds. It often takes time. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006), 38.

[2] The sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system is called the energy-expanding branch. See Allan N. Schore, "Effects of a Secure Attachment Relationship on Right Brain Development, Affect Regulation, and Infant Mental Health," *Infant Mental Health Journal* 22, no 1–2 (2001): 7–66.

[3] Allan N. Schore, *Affect Regulation and the Origin of the Self: The Neurobiology of Emotional Development* (Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), 97.

[4] Disa Sauter, "More Than Happy: The Need for Disentangling Positive Emotions," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 19, no. 1 (2010): 3.

[5] Theorists call it a Duchennes smile.

[6] I try to encourage people to draw Muslim faces with a smile because there are many happy Muslims in the world (but media do not often depict "happy Muslims"). Thus, Christians have to be proactive and be able to imagine that a smiley can also represent a Muslim person.

[7] In social sciences, "dyad" is a technical term for a group of two.

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Article Responses

A Response to: "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?"

by John Azumah

Editor's Note: Talman's "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" appeared in IJFM *31:4. John Azumah has listened to and interacted with Harley Talman on the subject of Muhammad and given a short response here. He has also offered his own perspective on the role of Muhammad in his contribution at the Fuller Seminary lectureship in 2015. It is published as "Mission in the Islamic World: Making Theological and Missiological Sense of Muhammad" in the compendium entitled* The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness, *ed. Charles Van Engen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 197–214.*

I find Talman's piece very instructive and illuminating at several points. I fully agree with and endorse the spirit of Talman's approach, which is one of "seeking constructive dialogue with Muslims." I also concur with several of the points made in the article, including the unreliability of traditional Islamic sources and received narratives, the influence of Jewish Christianity and other variant Christian teaching on nascent Islam, and the fact that a number of early Christians did not demonize Islam or Muhammad but viewed it as a form of Christianity, albeit an aberrant form. I support Talman's point that the biblical and theological basis some Christians have used to question and reject Muhammad's prophetic claims does not stand up to serious exegetical scrutiny. Also, as a good Presbyterian, I fully share Talman's concern about upholding the sovereignty of God—i.e., that God has and does use whomever and whatever he chooses. Prophecy continues!

Furthermore, I take issue with those who latch onto the teaching in 1 & 2 John to portray Muhammad and Islam as fitting the bill of the Antichrist. I have heard this interpretation both in casual conversation and in sophisticated missiological forums. In fact, I attended a missiological forum in 2014 where the AntiChrist issue was raised in response to Talman's presentation. My main point on the AntiChrist argument is that the teaching in the Bible was primarily directed at false teachers from *within* the church. In my view, if we take the teaching

on the Antichrist to its logical conclusion—if we stretch it—billions of individuals who do not accept Jesus as Son of God would suddenly qualify as "antichrists." The Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God would thus catapult all Jews into the antichrist category even more than all Muslims—since Islam holds a very high view of Jesus and accords him various unique titles and names, as Talman underscores in his paper. To therefore single out Muhammad and Islam as embodying the Antichrist and his world philosophy is pure prejudice. It is important to remind Christians that Jesus occupies the highest possible office in Islam, that of a Prophet.

Having said all that, I think Talman has been rather selective in the choice of voices he cites to support his thesis. Talman quotes Patriarch Timothy's rather enigmatic statement that Muhammad "walked in the path of the Prophets" but fails to highlight the fact that John of Damascus, a contemporary of Timothy, denounced Muhammad as a false prophet and Islam as the Antichrist. In fact, some would say John's views on Islam were more accepted within Eastern Orthodox Christian circles than those of the Patriarch. Talman is equally selective in the leading contemporary Christian and secular scholars he cites as affirming Muhammad's prophethood with various qualifications. The problem with this approach is that one can easily come up with a string of equally respected Christian and secular experts who have arrived at opposite and more cautious conclusions. Jacques Jomier and Christian Troll are two leading Christian Islamicists whose inquiry into the topic leads them to more cautious conclusions.

While I fully agree with Talman that "the most widely accepted version of Muhammad, based upon Islamic tradition, is dubious," I struggle with how such a dismissive, reductionist and revisionist approach towards mainstream Islamic sources and teaching helps his efforts to seek "constructive dialogue" with Muslims. Talman even talks about rejecting parts of the Islamic revelation "that are in error." It appears to me that in order to accord Muhammad the status of a prophet of sorts, Talman has to "Christianize" or "convert" Muhammad into an anonymous Christian. Mainstream Muslim sources about Muhammad are rejected while marginal Christian sources are heavily drawn upon to arrive at his conclusions. In fact, what Talman has done with Muhammad is exactly what Muslims have done with Jesus. In order for Jesus to be a prophet in Islam, he is portrayed in an Islamic garb. Likewise for Talman, in order for Muhammad to qualify as a prophet, he has to be re-created in a Christian image. In effect, Talman succeeds in creating a Muhammad that many Christians will find difficult to accept, and no Muslim will recognize.

My main issue is with Talman's methodology, which Martin Accad alludes to as comparative, apologetic and missiological.[1] It's not that a "Christian Muhammad" is entirely without merit; in fact such a Muhammad could serve a very useful missiological purpose, as Talman points out in his paper.

*T*o take Muhammad out of the Islamic milieu or to seek to fit him into some kind of Christian worldview in order to accord him "some kind of positive prophetic status" will be rejected as part of the "imperialist missionary endeavor."

If that were his purpose, Talman should be more explicit about that instead of mentioning "seeking a constructive dialogue with Muslims." Talman's methodology of assessing Muhammad through a Christian lens is the same methodology used by polemicists to brand him a false prophet. The only difference is the conclusions and, one may add, the ultimate purpose of the assessment. I don't know exactly what Accad means when he talks about studying Islam "scientifically," but I share with him the conviction that any "Christian theology of Islam" has to engage Islam on its own merits from within its own traditions and mainstream texts.

There is no question that any serious scholarship of Islam should treat the Qur'an and the Hadiths with critical openness. However, a truly academic research has to endeavor to engage the internal logic of Islamic thought: that the human problem is ignorance, not original sin; that God does not reveal Himself but his will in the Qur'an as a guide for humanity; that the Qur'an is the literal, uncreated, dictated Word or Speech of God, not inspired; that Muhammad is the last vessel of revelation; and that Islam is the final and preferred religion of God. If one is to take the Islamic witness seriously, there are only two possible outcomes. Becoming a Muslim (not "muslim") or opting out of Islam. Whether talking about the prophetic office of Muhammad or the Sonship of Jesus Christ—these cannot be merely conferred or rejected rationally on the basis of propositional statements or texts alone. In the final analysis, Muhammad is not a prophet merely because the Qur'an says he is. He is a prophet because a community of believers, Muslims, confess him as such. There can be no prophet (or savior) without a body of believers. In other words, the offices of prophet and savior are conferred and validated by the *umma* in Islam and the church in Christianity.

In what is clearly a very thoughtful, well researched and carefully considered analysis, Talman offers no clear answer to the question "Is Muhammad also among the Prophets?" His answers come in the following statements: "we may be able to more *readily support his being a prophet* of the common kind—not the canonical kind (like the prophetic and apostolic writers of the Holy Bible)." And "we could *allow the possibility that Muhammad is a prophet* in the biblical sense." Also, "I believe there is biblical warrant for *considering the possibility of some kind of positive prophetic status* for Muhammad." He concludes:

> This paper has provided theological, missiological, and historical sanction for expanding constricted categories of prophethood to allow Christians to entertain the possibility of Muhammad being other than a false prophet. *He may be seen as fulfilling a prophetic role* … (all my emphasis).

These tentative answers are all in keeping with the spirit of humility Talman calls for. But there is no doubt that many Christians will regard these answers as frustratingly vague and possibly conflicting, while Muslims will reject them all outright as reductionist and insulting.

To take Muhammad out of the Islamic milieu or to seek to fit him into some kind of Christian worldview in order to accord him "some kind of positive prophetic status" will be rejected by Muslims as part of the "imperialist missionary endeavor," and rightly so. Thinking Muslims will wonder what use there is for anyone to affirm Muhammad as a prophet and to then reject the import of his mission. Prophets did not come to make fans. They came to gather followers (companions and disciples), people who would heed their message and change their ways of thinking and life in conformity with prophetic teaching. Thinking Muslims don't need any affirmation or validation of Muhammad's prophetic role from Christians just for the sake of it. That would amount to Muslims conceding to Christians the role of "final arbiters" in religious matters—a role Talman and other Christians of their persuasion seem to be claiming. All Muslims would reject this as a usurpation that is most condescending.

To be sure, Talman (and those opposed to his position) will argue that they are pursuing an internal Christian conversation aimed at making theological and missiological sense of Muhammad. It is one thing, however, to make theological *sense* of the other, and another thing to make theological *space* for the other. The latter could easily end up renouncing, revising, or downplaying orthodox doctrines on both sides.

A more helpful approach would be to take Islamic texts, traditions and claims seriously, debate and evaluate them rigorously and fairly *as is,* maintaining the integrity of both traditions as far as possible by drawing conclusions that the mainstream on both sides can recognize and live with. It is about respecting and preserving the internal logic and integrity of both traditions. Daniel Madigan is one who has reflected on the critical importance of understanding and respecting the integrity of the truth claims of Islam and Christianity. He emphasizes that for Muslims, Muhammad is not the Word made flesh but the bearer of the Word (as Mary is for Christians). Madigan believes that a firm grasp of this will prevent Christian responses to Muhammad from making the fundamental category mistake of assuming that Muhammad "is being proposed as a replacement [or supplementary] savior."[2]

Understanding and respecting the integrity of the respective mainstream teachings is vital in any discussion of a Christian theology of Muhammad and Islam. When I do

*O*ne student said he did not think Muhammad was a false prophet, but rather a fallen prophet. He added that nearly all the biblical prophets had their own weaknesses! This was closer to my own answer to the question.

that, I end up with a similar attitude, as did Talman, of humility. After teaching a class in a theological seminary in Ghana on the Muslim view of Muhammad, I posed the question: "What sayst thou of Muhammad?" In response, some students said, "He is definitely a false prophet"! But one student responded that he did not think Muhammad was a false prophet, but rather a fallen prophet. He added that nearly all the biblical prophets had their own weaknesses! This was closer to my own answer to the question.

Better still, rather than trying to fit Muhammad into a Christian framework in order to accord him some prophetic role, I view and respect him as *the Prophet of Islam*—a prophet whose mission transformed a polytheistic society into a monotheistic one; a prophet whose family life, devotional and spiritual experiences, and public life (in all their complexities and contradictions in Islamic traditions) have shaped the collective memories, identities and the trajectory of the religious orientations of multitudes over the centuries. To use an analogy, it is like asking me, a Ghanaian, whether Robert Mugabe is a president. My answer will be, of course yes. He is President of Zimbabwe! He is not president of Ghana and therefore not my president. It is in the same vein that I see Muhammad as Prophet *of Islam*. I take this view for the sake of the over a billion and half Muslims around the world—some of them fellow citizens, some neighbors, friends and acquaintances, and some family relations whom I respect and honor—without accepting or confessing Muhammad as Prophet (of Islam). In return I expect Muslims to honor and respect Jesus as the Lord and Savior of over two billion Christians in the world, even if they can't accept and confess him as such.

John Azumah, PhD, is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. John did his doctoral work with the University of Birmingham, UK, on Islam in Africa and Christian-Muslim relations. He is currently an associate professor of World Christianity and Islam at Columbia Theological Seminary, USA. Before that, John Azumah served as lecturer in Islamic and Mission studies and director of the Centre for Islamic Studies at the London School of Theology in the United Kingdom. He has taught in theological seminaries in India, South Africa, and Ghana and was a research fellow at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute in Ghana.

Endnotes

[1] Martin Accad's article in response to Talman in *IJFM* 31:4 (Winter 2014), 191.

[2] Daniel, S. J. Madigan, "Jesus and Muhammad: The Sufficiency of Prophecy," in *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Biblical and Qur'ānic Perspective,* ed. Michael Ipgrave (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), 90–99.

"Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?": A Response to John Azumah

by Harley Talman

I very much appreciate Dr. John Azumah's constructive interaction with my article. He is gracious and fair to highlight our many significant points of agreement (such as the inappropriate application of anti-Christ passages to Muhammad). However, Azumah also has points of concern and disagreement which will be the focus of my remarks.

Selectivity of Sources

Azumah correctly observes that I was selective in the choice of scholars that I mentioned. Although I did give some indications of this fact,[1] I might have stated my aim in doing so more clearly—namely, to demonstrate that my proposal is not a radical innovation, given the existence of some respected Christian theologians and scholars of Islam who argue for some type of positive prophetic role for Muhammad. At the same time, I did make note of some voices to the contrary, including John of Damascus.[2]

Thus, the sources and figures that I selected were designed to create space for consideration of my proposal. Because I have often seen and experienced such strongly negative reactions of Christians, I expressed the hope that "for those who cannot accept this, perhaps this study will at least reduce the level of indignation toward those who differ with them."[3] I am delighted that such a reaction was not reflected in Azumah's response.

Contribution to Constructive Dialog

The term "dialog" in some circles is still associated with the ecumenical efforts of theological liberals to advance an agenda of universalism. Instead, Azumah and I both seek "constructive dialog" that opens doors of opportunity for witness, removes barriers to hearing the gospel, and builds bridges of friendship, respect, and trust that can withstand the weight of biblical truth—so that Muslims might experience salvation offered by Jesus Christ. Such dialog is not confined to formal, public symposiums, but encompasses informal encounters as well. However, while Azumah affirms the value of my methodology for Christian missiology, he views that purpose and enhanced dialog as mutually

*R*ather than accepting the pejorative view of Muhammad that dominates Christian apologetics, I have examined our tradition in light of the scriptures, unnoticed voices in history, and alternative perspectives of modern thinkers.

exclusive (since my position differs so significantly from traditional Islamic notions). This indicates a lack of clarity on my part. So let me emphasize that my article is aimed firstly and primarily at Christians to spur us to rethink our missiology and theology—as I stated,

> This paper has provided theological, missiological, and historical sanction for expanding constricted categories of prophethood *to allow Christians* to entertain the possibility of Muhammad being other than a false prophet.[4]

Martin Accad correctly observes that the primary value of my reassessment of Muhammad is to create space for Christians to rethink our theology of Muhammad and Islam—not to offer a compelling apologetic to Muslims.[5] For as he emphasizes (and as I affirmed), the possibilities I explored differ greatly from typical Islamic views of Muhammad's prophethood.[6]

Nevertheless, I also envision my proposal as promoting more constructive dialog with Muslims, because it shapes our attitude toward Muhammad, and thus how we view Islam. And as Accad elsewhere states:

> Your *view* of Islam will affect your *attitude* to Muslims. Your *attitude* will, in turn, influence your *approach* to Christian-Muslim interaction, and that *approach* will affect the ultimate *outcome* of your presence as a witness among Muslims.[7]

Thus, the understandings of Muhammad and prophethood that I have set forth should have a positive impact on Christian-Muslim dialog by affecting our own attitudes as ambassadors. I am glad that Azumah's question has given me opportunity to clarify this point.

The last (and least impactful) contribution of my proposal is in direct dialog. Though it would not be readily accepted by Muslims, I do see my alternative perspectives on prophets as a potential step forward in discussions with Muslims—though certainly not resolving our differences. Despite dissonance with Muslim beliefs and the necessity of explaining unfamiliar concepts, is it not likely to be an improvement over traditional answers to the frequent Muslim query: "We accept Christ Jesus as a true prophet, why do you not accept Muhammad as God's prophet?"

The conventional Christian position that "Muhammad is a false prophet" is an affront to Muslims, and so for purposes of diplomacy or self-preservation, most Christians are compelled to hide their conviction. But Muslims familiar with Christianity have seen our true colors. Hence, there is reason to hope that my proposal may be viewed by many Muslims as a more conciliatory position on Muhammad.

Would not a Christian who says, "I respect Muhammad as having a prophetic role or mission, though I do not consider him a prophet the way that you do,"[8] find more favor with Muslims than one who says, "I respect Muhammad as your prophet, but we do not accept him as a prophet (and in fact deem him a false prophet)"? Moreover, whereas the former response does not mislead the Muslim, but rather leads him to ask for elaboration, the latter is unlikely to be uttered in dialog.[9]

Respecting the Integrity of the Islamic Tradition

Azumah emphasizes the need to engage Islam on its own merits. I appreciate his (and Madigan's) contention that it is important for us to respect Islamic texts and traditions. Certainly, Muslims need to see that we appreciate and have understood that which they hold so dear. Admittedly, my proposal challenges their tradition and therein lies the rub—we know that people naturally resist ideas that conflict with their religious traditions. The Pharisees of Jesus' time, for example, were more devoted to their traditions than to the word of God; but those with ears to hear could consider what Jesus had to say and reassess their beliefs in light of the word of God. Similarly, the opportunity for more fruitful dialogue that I envision is based upon working more internally with the Qur'an against Islamic tradition in order to reform that tradition.

This is not an uncommon or unreasonable posture even for many Muslims. Numerous Muslims scholars will acknowledge the problem of fabricated *hadith*, and are willing to reject those hadith that contradict the Qur'an. The dubious nature of the hadith collections (and rejection of Salafism) has led to growth in the number of "Qur'anists" (Qur'an-only Muslims), signaling the willingness of some to reform their religious tradition. (Another voice calling for reform of the Islamic tradition are those Muslims who seek to interpret the Qur'an and tradition in harmony with the previous holy books which the Qur'an insists it confirms, instead of interpreting it through later sources).[10]

Therefore, I deem it appropriate, if not always appreciated, for us to bring to their attention where the Islamic tradition seems to contradict the Qur'an. In such cases, "respectful engagement with the 'internal logic of Islamic thought'" does not necessarily preclude our challenging Islamic teachings. For instance, Azumah notes that Islamic teaching rejects the notion of original sin. But as Woodberry has shown, Muslims have overlooked Qur'anic verses and Islamic voices that align with biblical perspectives on this subject.[11] Can we not likewise challenge Muslims to attempt

I *do not offer a clear answer to the question posed in my article's title.... My purpose is to provide perspectives that can facilitate attitudinal change among Christians that will allow for re-examination of this issue.*

to harmonize apparent differences, given the multitude of verses in the Qur'an that command active belief in the prior scriptures and the impossibility of their corruption?[12] Of course as Christians, we are obliged to make the Bible our final arbiter—as also the Qur'an instructs us to do.[13]

One advantage of my proposal that reassesses Muhammad as prophet is that it allows us to model for Muslims that which we invite them to emulate, namely, our readiness to question our own religious tradition. Rather than accepting the pejorative view of Muhammad that dominates Christian apologetics, I have re-examined our tradition in light of the scriptures, unnoticed voices in history, and alternative perspectives of modern thinkers, calling for a reform of our tradition. We are merely asking Muslims to do the same with regard to their own tradition. For example, hadith accounts of Muhammad performing miracles directly contradicts the Qur'an which insists he performed no miracles (apart from the Qur'an itself). Moreover, the Qur'an insists it brings nothing new, but is a confirmation of the Scriptures (not abrogation of them); also the Qur'an (contrary to Islamic tradition) exalts Jesus above other prophets (including Muhammad). Are these not valid grounds for encouraging Muslims to re-examine their tradition?

Azumah asserts that Muslims would view an attempt to fit Muhammad into a Christian worldview as an "imperialist missionary endeavor." This is certainly a possible outcome, but it is not a necessary one; I believe it very much depends on our attitude. As Christians, we are compelled to align all that we believe and do with the Bible—including how we view Muhammad and prophethood—as the Qur'an likewise commands us to do.[14] We do not thereby imperialistically impose our view upon them, but in contexts of dialog, when Muslims complain against Christian rejection of Muhammad as prophet, we can humbly state positions such as mine as that which accords with our understanding of our scriptures.

Azumah surmises that Muslims will "wonder what use it is for anyone to affirm Muhammad as a prophet and reject the import of his mission." But this is little different from the Muslim position that accepts Jesus as a prophet, but rejects our understanding of his salvific mission. Surely half a loaf is better than none. Moreover, can we not challenge Muslims regarding what Muhammad's mission was? Numerous Qur'anic verses would argue that his mission was not to abrogate Christianity and discipleship to Christ.[15]

In addition, contrary to what Azumah implies, I do not see that I am claiming to be the final arbiter for Muslims—I am not even claiming to be the final arbiter for Christians,

since I am only making a plea for Christians to make room for proposals like my own. But my proposed position does allow us to accede more honor to Muhammad while remaining faithful to the scriptures. By putting Muhammad in a positive category of prophethood, Christians can now reply that they can accept Muhammad as a prophet in a way that is quite similar to how Muslims accept and honor Jesus as a prophet—they grant him many characteristics common to our understanding, but there are also fundamental differences.

Azumah's warnings about Muslim reactions to a "dismissive, reductionist and revisionist approach toward mainstream Islamic sources" are well taken. But confronting this sensitive issue is essential. Decades ago, Guilio Basetti-Sani asserted that Muslim exegetes must be persuaded to accept the application of principles of scientific and literary criticism (which has already occurred in biblical studies): "This is the first and most urgent condition for entering upon effective dialogue between Muslim and Christian."[16] Hans Kung likewise declared,

> We shall make no real progress in Christian-Muslim dialogue unless we come to terms on the notion of truth required for the use of historicocritical instruments … the distance between the modern approach to the Bible and the traditional approach to the Qur'an is at present enormous. But it is not, I would hope, unalterable and unbridgeable for all time and eternity.[17]

We bear many wounds from hostile encounters of the past—unfortunately, apologists and polemicists have not provided fertile ground for new approaches. But God can give us dialogue partners of good will and open mind, and if we are prepared in different ways, the outcomes can be much different.

Lastly, I must disagree with Azumah's assertion that if we take "the Islamic witness seriously," then we must either become a Muslim "or opt out of Islam." As I explained (in my article in *IJFM* 31:4, 185, first column), this is a false dichotomy; there are other options—and especially if we move beyond binary categories.

Indeterminate Nature of Muhammad's Prophetic Role
Azumah correctly observes that I do not offer a clear answer to the question posed in my article's title and that this may be frustrating to some Christians. But given that critical study of the Qur'an is still in its infancy so that revisionist historians have not achieved a consensus, it will be some time before we can agree on a more precise definition of the nature of Muhammad's prophetic role. My purpose at this point is

to provide perspectives that can facilitate attitudinal change among Christians that will allow for re-examination of this issue. Others before me have endeavored to do the same.[18]

False or Fallen Prophet?

In closing, Azumah states his preference is to recognize and respect Muhammad as "the Prophet of Islam." However, I should like to emphasize that despite his questions and concerns, Azumah's own position seems not far from my own. He seems to reject the "false prophet" characterization of Muhammad (aligning with the primary thrust of my article), acknowledging that his student's view of Muhammad as a "fallen prophet" is "closer to his own." To regard Muhammad as a fallen prophet is to remove him from the false prophet category and place him in an alternative category of prophet—the very thing I have argued for. Consequently, despite Azumah's disagreements and concerns, in the end it appears that we may be in agreement about my major point—the noises he made sound like music to my ears! **IJFM**

Harley Talman has worked with Muslims for over 35 years, including two decades in the Arab world and Africa, during which he was involved in church planting, theological education, and humanitarian aid. Talman holds a ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary and a PhD from Fuller Theologcial Seminary. He presently teaches Islamic studies at a graduate school.

Endnotes

[1] See Harley Talman, 'Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?'" *IJFM* 31:4 [Oct–Dec 2014]: "The above examples are sufficient to show that *some* prominent Christians have recognized or affirmed Muhammad as a prophet, albeit with various meanings of the term," 184; I acknowledged that regarding the controversial question "Is Muhammad also among the prophets" that "the majority of Christians would answer 'absolutely not,' some are more tentative or affirming," 169–170; also "none of the great Islamicists knew "quite where to land" on this issue" but my hope was that readers of my article "will appreciate the reasons why this challenge has been so perplexing for so many," 170; and again in the conclusion I state that "sincere and faithful Christians through the centuries have held vastly disparate viewpoints concerning the prophet of Islam—that may not change greatly," 185.

[2] Talman, 186, footnote 18: "John of Damascus reacted scathingly to the Islamization of the civil service in Syria. After the Byzantines lost political dominion to Muslim armies, the polemicist Nicetas of Byzantium [c. 842–912] vented the most vitriolic slurs against them and their prophet that he could concoct."

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 185, emphasis added.

[5] Martin Accad, "Towards a Theology of Islam: A Response to Harley Talman's 'Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?'" *IJFM* 31:4 (2014):193.

[6] Ibid. Accad states: "Despite Talman's conciliatory approach to Muhammad and Islam, his conclusions are by no means mainstream

from a Muslim perspective. So by suggesting that there may be some space in the Christian biblical worldview to consider Muhammad as *in some ways* a prophet, the author is not conceding much at all, and certainly not for the purpose of 'pleasing' Muslims. Harley Talman's work and conclusions are indeed more useful for Christians who are trying to make sense of Islam in their desire to reach Muslims with the gospel."

[7] Martin Accad, "Christian Attitudes Toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach," in Evelyne A. Reisacher, ed., *Toward Respectful Understanding and Witness among Muslims: Essays in Honor of J. Dudley Woodberry* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012), 31.

[8] We can state the *Injil* commands us to evaluate prophecy (1 Cor. 14:29) on the basis of the Bible, accepting that which is correct and rejecting that which is contrary to it (1 Thes. 5:20–22).

[9] At least in Muslim majority countries, they are unlikely to say that they hold Muhammad to be a false prophet.

[10] Surah 10:94 among other verses.

[11] J. Dudley Woodberry, "Different Diagnoses of the Human Condition," in *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, edited by J. Dudley Woodberry, 149–160 (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989).

[12] Surah 6:34,115; 10:64, 18:27, etc.

[13] Surah 5:47 "So let the people of the Injil judge by what Allah has revealed in it. Whoever doesn't judge by what Allah has revealed are unbelievers."

[14] Surah 5:47 (and also v. 43).

[15] e.g., Surah 5:48: "for each of you [Jews, Christians, and Muslims] we have made a law and a way" so that you will "compete with one another in good deeds."

[16] *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ,* Ron George (ed.), (Winpress, 2000), 96, is a reprint of Guilio Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam,* translated by W. Russell Carroll (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977).

[17] Hans Kung: "Muhammad and the Qur'an: Prophecy and Revelation," in *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism,and Buddhism,* Hans Kung, Josef van Ess, Heinrich von Stietencron, and Heinz Bechert, New York: Doubleday, 1986, 35–36.

[18] Basetti-Sani was willing to entertain the possibility of Muhammad's prophethood by interpreting the Qur'an through the lens of the Bible in the light of Christ.

UNDERSTANDING
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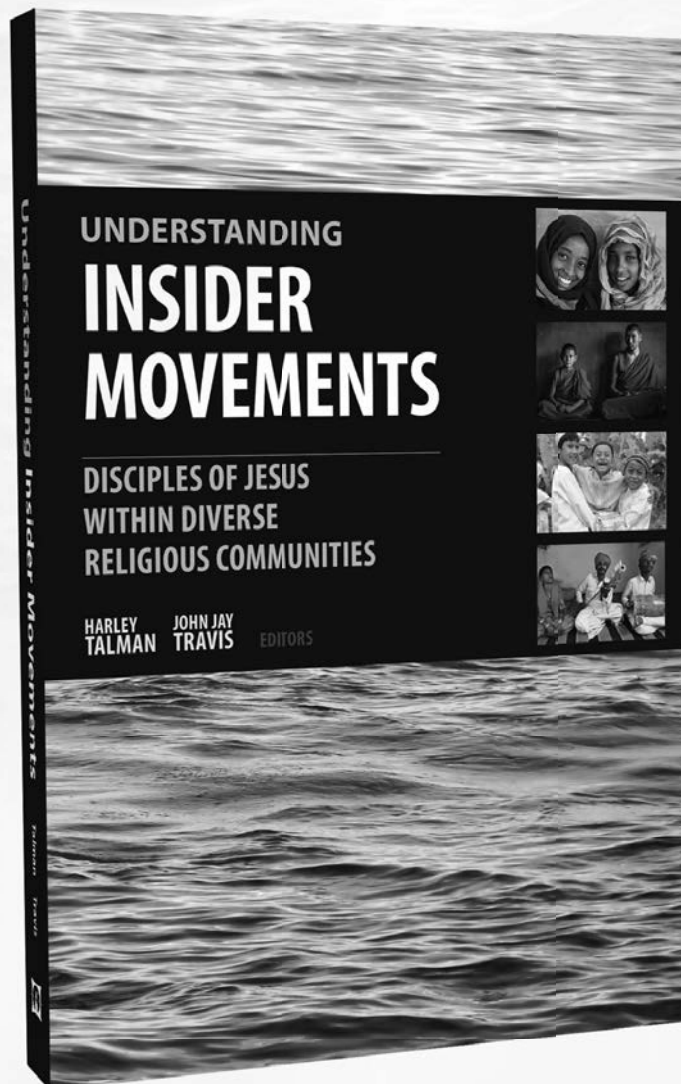
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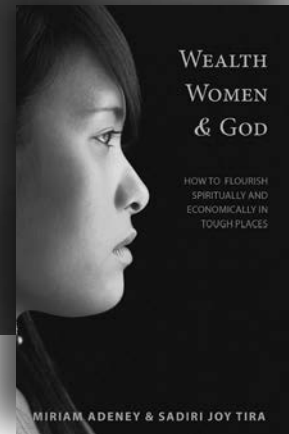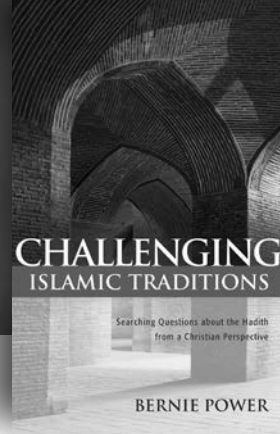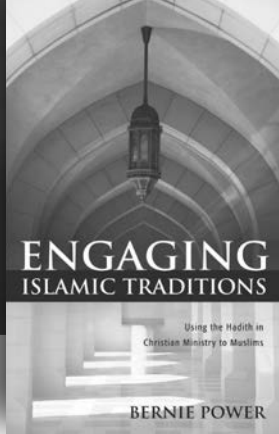
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Article Responses

"Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?": A Second Response to Harley Talman

by Ayman Ibrahim

Editor's Note: Talman's "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" appeared in IJFM *31:4. Talman and Ibrahim's first exchange of responses appeared in* IJFM *32:4.*

Harley Talman is very kind to respond to my five critical observations on his position concerning the prophethood of Muhammad. I am sincerely honored that he considered my response and took the time to offer his constructive feedback. His detailed response to my critique reflects his genuine heart and faithful desire to present a Christ-like attitude. My understanding of historical accounts and biblical authority does lead me to diverge with him on critical issues. But, I have no desire to reduce this exchange to two competing camps. We are simply having a fruitful discussion for the purpose of mutual edification. Fundamentally, I embrace him as a brother in Christ.

His response did touch every comment I addressed. However, throughout his response he seems to have used the same methodology he adopted in the initial article, namely, elevating the value of *selected* secondary studies above crucial primary sources, as well as avoiding interacting with works that oppose his thesis and arguments. Though I demonstrated in my first response how selectivity and heavy reliance on secondary studies can be misleading, his response to my article still used that exact approach. Having said that, and with full respect and gratitude, here I offer my critical comments on his response to my critique. I will demonstrate how his methodology suffers from an over-reliance on cherry-picked secondary works, how his application brings foreign concepts into the Muslim context, how his hermeneutics is severely reductionist, and how even the Qur'an refutes his claims.

I will begin by discussing the most important point (which comes in his last comment) concerning our witness to Muslims. He admits and agrees that "the possibilities [he] explored differ greatly from typical Islamic views of Muhammad's prophethood," but he still insists that his "proposal will find greater favor with Muslims than the common Christian contention that Muhammad was a false prophet." I fundamentally disagree. The proposal offered by Talman is *intentionally* misleading to Muslims. He states that he believes that Muhammad is not a "true prophet," yet suggests conveying to Muslims that their prophet had "a prophetic role, function or mission." Muslims do not have a "prophet in some form" category, or a "non-prophetic" prophet. They do not have a non-prophet with "a prophetic function," or a not-a-true-prophet with a "prophetic role of some other order." These are fanciful categories. Lacking even the biblical concept of prophecy as a spiritual gift, Muslims have only prophets, or not. They have categories only for prophets and the general population. If Talman seeks to achieve a "constructive dialogue with Muslims," it can hardly be done through creating such vague categories from outside the Muslim context. His attempts to "over"-contextualize brought him far beyond even the Muslim context itself and what Muslims can comfortably trust.

In my investigation of his proposal, I consulted with three Muslim friends: the Imam in my current city in the States, the Imam of Chiang Mai mosque in Thailand, and my dear Egyptian Muslim friend whom I have known since elementary school. I asked them all one question, repeating Talman's proposal and quoting him: what do you think of a Christian saying "I respect Muhammad as having a prophetic role, function or mission—even though I do not consider him a prophet the way that you do"? The answer was unsurprisingly simple: Are you playing a word game or trying to deceive me? Is he a prophet or not? What are you really trying to prove? Though I honestly expected this answer, I sincerely attempted to follow Talman's suggestion. In addition, I asked a Moroccan Muslim background Christian the same question, and he said, "This would be compromising the Bible and appears to be a clear lie." Thus, while these four individuals serve as a very small sample of people, it is telling of how Muslims may react to Talman's ambitious proposal. Can we find a Muslim who would accept that Muhammad had a "prophetic function," rather than being a prophet? Is there a chance of convincing a Muslim that the Qur'an actually suggests that Muhammad possessed a "prophetic role of some other order" but he was not a "true prophet" in some of his teachings? I absolutely find this fanciful, and wonder whether it is a mere semantic attempt to support an *argumentum ex silentio* or an argument based on poorly derived inference and analogy. In the final analysis, imagined reasons are hardly persuasive. The fact that this whole approach is useless should cause us to question the value of doing such strenuous "academic" work to craft new categories of thought which are unacceptable to Muslims and thus not even useful in Christian ministry.

In my judgment, the major flaw of Talman's approach is that we place the cart before the horse. Instead of examining the Scriptures and paying attention to what the texts

say on prophets and prophethood, especially after the advent of Jesus our Lord, we reverse the order: we begin by bringing a topic, suggesting an argument that fits our paradigm, and then we go digging into the Bible to see what can be made to support our argument—eisegeting instead of exegeting. This appears clearly in the difference between Talman's interpretation and mine concerning the "test" of 1 John 4:1–3. He did not engage the passage at all in his initial article, and when I brought it up as a crucial passage for the topic under study, he simply dismissed it as irrelevant. He cautions his reader against the significance and application of my interpretation, relying (again) on *selected* secondary studies that completely support his argument, and dismissing my comment as less than valid.

While I respect his mentioning several studies suggesting the context of the Epistle of John, these studies are simply an attempt to explain what the authors think about the religious and historical context of the inspired text. However, they do not invalidate the idea that a theological concept borne out of one context may be equally applicable in other circumstances. We cannot elevate the *context* above the *text*. The text is clearly concerned with the relationship between the Father and the Son (see also John 5:21–23). Do we need this text to mention Muhammad by name so that the truths inherent in it can be applied in this case? If the text is really a test against Docetists or against the Cerinthian heresy, as the secondary studies cited by Talman suggest, does this then instruct us that, by any means, we cannot apply it and its crystal-clear stance to other cases, particularly concerning the Father-Son relationship? If Talman insists that 1 John 4 cannot be applied to Muhammad because it can only be applied to Docetists/Cerinthians, then I suppose most of the New Testament is completely irrelevant because it addresses doctrinal and behavior problems that have no exact modern parallel. Conversely (and hypothetically speaking), if the text was indeed prophesying against Muhammad as the Anti-Christ, may we not still apply it to Islam along with its clearly spelled-out warnings about the Docetist and Cerinthian heresies?

Second, Talman (of course unintentionally) misrepresents both his article and specific areas in my response. He states that in my response I "allege" that he "attempt[s] to move Muhammad from the false-prophet to the true-prophet category." If I am wrong, then what does his calling to "allow the possibility that Muhammad is a prophet in the biblical sense" mean? In fact, he states, "If Christians were to accept Muhammad as a prophet in one of the ways posited above, then could we affirm this to Muslims without obliging ourselves (in their thinking) to become Muslims?" He then goes on to answer in the affirmative: "I think that Christ followers could do so and be faithful to biblical authority." If I am mistaken, then I completely apologize, and now move to his stated intention, as in fact there appears to be a change in his position between his initial article and his response to my piece. In his response to my critical review, he states that "The major thrust of [this] article was to move the discussion about the Prophet of Islam beyond such binary thinking about prophethood." But, this "thrust" does not easily harmonize with phrases which speak of attributing prophethood to Muhammad "in the biblical sense," and calling Christ followers to "affirm this to Muslims." This is confusing, ambiguous, and vague, at the very least. Does this suggest that we need to think about Muhammad and his prophethood in general in a "spectrum" sense? Was he a prophet at some point, and not-a-prophet at another? How on earth would we know, and who should decide the criteria for a so-called prophethood "of some other order"? Should we even contemplate a scale of prophethood? Was he divinely inspired in just a specific period? (This would lead to a whole different discussion on the inspiration of the Qur'an.) All these rhetorical, dialectical questions point to the *ambiguous* language of Talman's proposal with its confusing meanings and definitions.

I argue that for this discussion to move forward, and for others to understand his position completely, we need to be very clear on definitions. In treating the Prophet of Islam, it is very important to be absolutely clear on our positions, as particularities and differences essential to each religion cannot be set aside. There needs to be careful and extensive discussion of what we mean by "prophethood" in this case. This has not been done. In fact, Talman seems to be *intentional* about such vagueness and ambiguity, as he writes that it "is not necessary for us to conclusively determine the nature of this prophetic role [of Muhammad]." This is shocking—and theologically and missiologically dangerous. What is the point of avoiding clear definitions? Are there any really clear definitions? I doubt there are, as he seems to avoid stating them. Is the point simply language games for the sake of peacemaking? Or is it because the Muslims *might* like our discourse more if we use the word "prophet" about "the Muslim prophet" even though we do not at all mean what Muslims actually mean by it? Surprisingly, this

*W*as Muhammad a prophet at some point, and not–a–prophet at another? How would we know? Who should decide the criteria for a prophet "of some other order?" . . . His ambitious attempts will fail to convince.

*H*is methodology severely distorts biblical hermeneutics and misinterprets historical accounts. He is patently selective, relies heavily on secondary works . . . and avoids adequate engagement with counter arguments.

treatment reminds me of the questionable doctrine of *taqiyya* (concealment of one's beliefs) among some Muslims.

Third, in response to my rejection of his claim that "during the first century [of Islam], Christians did not seem to think of Muhammad as a false prophet," Talman kindly admits that my use of the primary source *Doctrina Jacobi* challenges his thesis. He actually writes that "at first glance" this source "would appear to refute [his] statement." However, he attempts to deal with it in order for his thesis to survive. Unfortunately, he does so by simply citing a secondary study that agrees and supports his claim and by downplaying the importance of the primary source, claiming that my reference is "essentially a footnote." While this is both incorrect and inaccurate, one may ask: so what? What is the problem with a footnote in a primary source? In scholarly research, as I am sure Talman understands, a footnote in a primary source is undoubtedly more significant and important than one in a secondary work. The reference is not a footnote, and actually refers to the Arab prophet as both false and antichrist (Hoyland 1997, 57).

The *Doctrina Jacobi* is a very important source as it was written in 634, only two years after the traditional Muslim dating of Muhammad's death (632). This is very significant. Although the earliest Muslim biography of Muhammad dates his death in 632, other "earlier and more numerous Jewish, Christian, Samaritan, and even Islamic sources indicate that Muhammad survived to lead the conquest of Palestine, beginning in 634–35" (See Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet*, 1–17, especially 2–3). If we consider the dating of these earlier writings, then *Doctrina Jacobi* is actually written in the same year of Muhammad's death, which makes this primary source of exceptional importance. The text of *Doctrina Jacobi* does not speak only of "the prophet who had appeared among the Saracens," but also clarifies, in the very same sentence, why he is "false" by questioning: "do prophets come with a sword and a war chariot?" (See *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati*, 5.16.11, 209). While some secondary studies have argued that this text does not identify Muhammad, one would ask: Was there a more famous "prophet" than Muhammad during those days in Arabia?

Fourth, Talman kindly admits that he was unaware of the critical reviews I suggested of the "proposed ecumenical movement [in early Islam] that first included Jews and Christians [as argued by Fred Donner]." He appears to *slightly* change his position. Although he treated the notion of the ecumenical non-confessional monotheist community led by Muhammad in his initial article as if it were a historical fact, here he states that he "would agree that it is debatable." Nevertheless, he still does not want to give up on this "ecumenical" notion, as it supports his thesis concerning Muhammad's prophethood. He insists that "although it cannot be *proven*, given the limited archaeological evidence, Donner's proposal is *at least consistent* with that evidence." What evidence? We are not told. How consistent? We are not told either. The fact is that even Donner himself is uncertain, as he writes: "But for those [ecumenical] Believers who were inclined to be sticklers on the question of God's oneness, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity must always have been a problem" (213, quoting Q 5:76). This demonstrates Talman's uncertainty of his own argument. What about the references I quoted from the Qur'an in my previous response to refute his proposal? No interaction from Talman. Even my reference to the Syriac document, the *Maronite Chronicle* (written in the 660s), was downplayed and simply dismissed without enough pieces of evidence from primary sources. I would refer the reader here to the earliest Muslim document, the Qur'an. It clearly commands that *ahl al-kitāb* ("people of the Book," presumably Christians and Jews) are to live in submission, or humiliation, as they pay the *jizya* (tax) to Muslims (Q 9:29). It accuses *ahl al-kitāb* of forgetting what was revealed (Q 5:13–14), or of twisting their description of the revelation (Q 3:78), or of hiding the truth (Q 5:15). Does this sound like an ecumenical movement led by a Prophet "in the biblical sense"?

Furthermore, what about Muhammad's message as set forth in the Qur'an? His message not only does not confirm the Gospel, it contradicts and distorts it. The Qur'an not only claims that Muhammad is predicted by the Torah (Q 7:157) and by Christ (Q 61:6), but accuses *ahl al-kitāb* (Christians and Jews) of falsifying their scriptures (Q 2:42, 59; 3:187; 7:162) even to the extent of fabricating divine scripture as they "distort the scripture with their own hands, then say, 'This is what GOD has revealed'" (Q 2:79). The matter would be even worse if we consulted the earliest Muslim commentaries on the Qur'an to see how they treated Christians and Jews.

Fifth, Talman claims that "the negative judgment of Muhammad put forward by [me] is based on a particular interpretation of the Qur'an [concerning the incarnation]." He then calls us to believe that "the Qur'an can be read as affirming the incarnation of the Word." This is a serious claim that needs adequate treatment. Although I was

initially "thrilled" to read about this "new" Qur'anic discovery, I was quickly disappointed. Talman never engages with Qur'anic verses that are crystal clear such as:

> They said, "GOD has begotten a son!" Be He glorified; never! (Q 2:116)

> They said, "GOD has begotten a son!" Be He glorified. He is the Most Rich. To Him belongs everything in the heavens and everything on earth. You have no proof to support such a blasphemy. Are you saying about GOD what you do not know? (Q 10:68)

> The Most High is our only Lord. He never had a mate, nor a son. (Q 72:3)

> Proclaim, "He is the One and only GOD. The Absolute GOD. Never did He beget. Nor was He begotten." (Q 112:1–3)

All these verses are against any understanding of the incarnation of God's Son. For the Qur'an, it never happened and it is a severe blasphemy. Again, we are faced with a huge, serious, and unsupported claim. It seems that Talman *wants* the Qur'an to affirm the incarnation. Unfortunately, it simply does not. Of course, Talman may treat these verses as if they are rejecting Christian heresies rather than mainstream Christianity to support his claims. But to do so, he has to rely on post-Qur'anic writings and has to intentionally avoid engaging invaluable, detailed studies by skillful scholars that oppose his views, as I mentioned in my previous response. (See Griffith 2008, 7–9; Reynolds, "On the Presentation," [2014]: 42–54.)

Instead of interacting with these crucial Qur'anic verses, Talman takes us on a bit of a distracting journey into Arabic. His Arabic reading is misleading and does not support his argument on the incarnation. He believes that it is "remarkable" that the Qur'an refers to the Word as *"ismuhu"* instead of *"ismuhā."* However, this is simply irrelevant and can never support that the Qur'an "affirms" the incarnation of the Son of God. In fact, Talman himself states a disclaimer, referring *in passing* to the more accurate reading (thus, I wonder why he added this point based on the Arabic language in the first place). The suffix in Q 3:45 refers to the son of Mary not the Word. Arabic speakers would not expect that the pronoun suffix used to refer to the son of Mary would be feminine. Thus, this was a bit of an ambitious move on Talman's part but led to a dead end. Nevertheless, I agree with Talman that the title "Word of God" is very significant in referring to the uniqueness and supremacy of Jesus. I do not understand, however, how he can see this as an affirmation of the incarnation especially in light of the four aforementioned verses.

I believe that the Qur'an in various passages grants a very significant and unique status to Jesus (see, for instances, Q 3:42; 19:21; 19:34; 3:45; 3:47; 3:45–49; 4:171; 5:110–113). However, Muhammad (as portrayed in the *ḥadīth, sīra, maghāzī*, and other literature) identifies Jesus merely as a prophet. In my first response, this is the point I made which was then rejected by Talman in his first response to me. He critiqued my contention that Muhammad regarded "Jesus as merely a prophet," by referring to the Qur'anic verses, although I specifically stated "For Muhammad, Jesus was merely a prophet." This differs from the description offered in *some* parts of the Qur'an about Jesus. In this sense, however, we both seem to agree that later Muslim writings depict Jesus differently, and more negatively. Nonetheless, I cannot support his position that the Qur'an "affirms" the incarnation.

He states: "As for the denial that Jesus is the 'son of God,' the Qur'an is rejecting the unbiblical notion of God sexually procreating with a human consort." That's fine, though I fundamentally disagree, and ask: How do we know it is a rejection of unbiblical sexual notion? Apparently, we have to consult extra-Qur'anic materials and post-Qur'anic writings? The absence of Qur'anic evidence is not evidence. In truth, the Qur'anic evidence completely refutes Talman's claims as one can see in the abovementioned four verses which insist that Allah has no son. It should be completely clear that if *Surat al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q 112) seems to reflect a creedal Islamic language focusing on the fact that Allah has no son, we should take it seriously as rejecting mainstream Christianity, rather than simply disallowing distorted pagan-Christianity thought that entails God and sex.

How much more do I need to explain to demonstrate the essential errors in Talman's argument? I am certain that his intentions are exceptional. I have no doubt about his desire to reach Muslims to Christ, and that is clear in his diligent attempts to find new and creative ways to interact with Muslims. However, in my humble estimation, the errors in his analysis and conclusions need sober attention. They elevate the most important figure among Muslims, Muhammad, granting him a biblically and historically unsupported status. A subsequent conclusion of authors following his conclusions would be to argue for the divine revelation of the Qur'an, at least some parts of it, and perhaps call Christians to believe that the Qur'an was actually eternally kept in a celestial tablet.

In conclusion, Talman takes on a very sensitive subject and insists on its validity despite the obvious biblical, theological, historical, and missiological gaps. His pursuit to create a new

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portrayal of Muhammad will fail to convince any religious adherents of either faith, as he himself admits, "the possibilities explored differ greatly from typical Islamic views." If the author himself admits so, then it is safe to deduce that the entire framework and conclusions of his arguments can hardly hold up. This cannot build bridges with average Muslims, who do not really believe or care much for a historical prophet leading a Jewish-Christian-Muslim movement through a non-binary spectrum of prophethood. This will hurt Christian witness, rather than advancing it, as Muslims may justifiably accuse Christians of being overly subtle—if not even deceptive—in their presentations.

Ayman Ibrahim, PhD, is a Post–Doctoral Candidate (2nd PhD) of Middle Eastern History, Haifa University, Mount Carmel. He is Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies, and the Director of the Jenkins Center for the Christian Understanding of Islam, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, KY.

Further Reading

How the Qur'an attacks mainstream Christianity, rather than Christian heresies: Sidney H. Griffith, "Syriacisms in the 'Arabic Qur'an': Who Were 'Those Who Said "Allah is Third of Three"' according to al-Ma'ida 73?" in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Medieval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an,* ed. Meir M. Bar-Asher, et al. (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2007), 83–110; S. Griffith, *"Al-Naṣārā* in the Qur'ān: A Hermeneutical Reflection," in *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān,* ed. Reynolds (2011), 301–322; Gabriel Said Reynolds, "On the Presentation of Christianity in the Qur'ān and the Many Aspects of Qur'anic Rhetoric," *Al-Bayān: Journal of Qur'ān and Ḥadīth Studies* 12 (2014): 42–54.

Compelling arguments on whether Christians welcomed Muslims in early Islam: A. Papaconstantinou, "Between Umma and Dhimma: the Christians of the Middle East under the Umayyads," *Annales Islamologiques* 42 (2008): 127–156; J. Moorhead, "The Monophysite Response to the Arab Invasions," *Byzantion: Revue Internationale des Etudes Byzantines* 51 (1981): 579–91; S. Griffith, ed., *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian encounters in the early Islamic period,* Collected Studies Series 746 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002); S. Griffith, *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008) particularly chapter 2, and his article "Disputing with Islam in Syriac: The Case of the Monk of Bêt Ḥālê and a Muslim Emir." *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000); J. van Ginkel, "The Perception and Presentation of the Arab Conquest in Syriac Historiography: How Did the Changing Social Position of the Syrian Orthodox Community Influence the Account of Their Historiographers?" in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam,* The History of Christian-Muslim Relations 5. eds. Grypeou et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006): 171-184; S. Griffith, "Answers for the

Shaykh: a 'Melkite' Arabic Text from Sinai and the Doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation in 'Arab Orthodox' Apologetics," in *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam,* eds. Grypeou et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006): 277-309.

Sound ways for Christians to handle the Qur'an: J. S. Bridger, *Christian Exegesis of the Qur'ān: A Critical Analysis of the Apologetic Use of the Qur'ān in Select Medieval and Contemporary Arabic Texts* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015). Biblical hermeneutical principles—particularly refuting Talman's views on special revelation: G. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral : A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007); K. Vanhoozer, ed., *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002); R. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, IL: Kregel Publications, 2010); W. Klein et al, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2004); G. Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2006).

Perspective on Christian-Muslim encounter during the early Muslim conquests: R. Hoyland, *In God's Path: The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); S. Griffith, "The Syriac-Speaking Churches and the Muslims in the Medinan era of Muḥammmad and the Four Caliphs," in *Syriac Churches Encountering Islam,* ed. D. Winkler (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010): 14–46.

The friendliness of Patriarch Timothy I and his views on Muhammad and the Qur'an: Griffith, "Answering the Call of the Minaret: Christian Apologetics in the World of Islam," in *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East Since the Rise of Islam,* ed. H. L. Murre-Van den Berg, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), where he concludes: "So we see that even the friendliest of Christian apologists who lived in the world of Islam in the early Islamic period stopped well short of accepting Muhammad as a prophet, in any canonical sense, and of accepting the Qur'an as a book of divine revelation" (124). In addition to *Doctrina Jacobi*'s translation by Hoyland's and Penn's see *Doctrina Jacobi Nuper Baptizati,* 5.16.11, edited and translated into French by Vincent Déroche, Travaux et Mémoires 11 (1991).

Rehabilitating Our Image of Muhammad: A Concluding Response to Ayman Ibrahim

by Harley Talman

My original article, "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets" appeared more than 20 months ago. Now Ibrahim and I are in a second round of responses to that article in which our focus has been on particular details of my proposal. This examination of the trees may cause readers to lose sight of the forest, the major thrust of my article that called for a reconsideration of (1) Muhammad and the Qur'an in Islam, (2) Christian theology of revelation, and (3) the biblical criteria for prophethood as a basis for (4) reconsideration of Muhammad's prophethood.

The first major issue my original paper raised was the question of identifying the real Muhammad—who are we talking about? I offered several possible views. The first is *the Muhammad of Islamic tradition* (or "Islamic folklore)."[1] Though the majority of the world's Muslims accept this portrayal of Muhammad, I, along with many others, believe that this notion of Muhammad is a legend, a myth that hundreds of millions of mistaken Muslims have accepted as truth. Though many Christians regard the Muhammad of Islamic tradition as a "false prophet," I think it more accurate to call this representation a "false Muhammad" because he has no real historical existence. To be sure, multitudes of Muslims venerate Muhammad in popular Islam to the point of idolatry. But, like other idols, this Muhammad is the product of human creation and is "not anything" (1 Cor. 10:19). Due to the scant biographical information in the Qur'an, we can know very little about *the Muhammad of the Qur'an* apart from his message. Based upon the non-Islamic historical documents and evidences that I cite, I believe that *the real historical Muhammad* is someone quite different from that of Islamic tradition. He is likely closer to some of the revisionist historians' understandings of him.[2] While I operate under the assumption that the Qur'an is attributable to Muhammad (aside from its editing),[3] I believe that many interpretations of it developed by later Islamic tradition do not accurately represent his message.

Among key points in my reconsideration of a theology of revelation and prophecy, I explained that the Bible does not reject the notion of divine revelation and prophecy after the close of the canon of Scripture. Any such revelation must play a supporting role to the Bible, is not necessarily infallible (and thus must be evaluated by Scripture), nor is it normative and authoritative for all believers everywhere. I emphasized that the biblical view of prophecy cannot be confined to binary categories, such as: (a) the only true prophets are those who gave us the books of the Bible as accepted by the church; (b) all other prophets are false prophets.

Ibrahim and I agree that Muhammad is not a prophet in the same way that Christians view the prophets of the canonical Scriptures (type "a" above). However, like other theologians and scholars who have not pursued more nuanced approaches, Ibrahim has difficulty in allowing other than black and white, binary categories of prophethood. But my article demonstrates the existence of various types of prophets in the Old and New Testaments, in church and mission history, and in religious discourse. My view is not unique, as I cited a number of eminent Christian scholars who hold that Muhammad can be regarded as a prophet in various biblical, theological, or missiological senses of the word.[4] While Ibrahim does not agree, he has not, in my view, provided any specific or convincing arguments to undermine my overall argument. Finally, my article dealt with a wide range of issues that supported my thesis, and Ibrahim's interaction has focused criticism on some of these particular elements. I will now reply to the points he raises in his second response above.

Is this a constructive contribution to dialogue?

Ibrahim insists that it is not. But as Martin Accad observed, the first and foremost purpose of my discussion of Muhammad and prophethood is as a contribution to Christian missiology and to a theology of religions. I do not seem to have made this clear enough, though I stated in the conclusion of "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" (*IJFM* 31:4):

> This paper has provided theological, missiological, and historical sanction for expanding constricted categories of prophethood *to allow Christians* to entertain the possibility of Muhammad being other than a false prophet. (185, emphasis added)

And as I stated in my previous response, this reassessment should in turn promote more constructive Muslim-Christian dialogue, because it shapes our attitude toward Muhammad, and thus how we view Islam—just as Accad maintains:

> Your *view* of Islam will affect your *attitude* to Muslims. Your *attitude* will, in turn, influence your *approach* to Christian-Muslim interaction, and that *approach* will affect the ultimate *outcome* of your presence as a witness among Muslims.[5]

Thus, the understandings of Muhammad and prophethood that I have set forth should have a positive impact on Christian-Muslim dialogue by affecting our own attitudes as ambassadors. I believe this is an important contribution of my article toward dialogue.

Though Martin Accad's assertion seems self-evident to me, Ibrahim does not agree that the above change of attitude can positively impact Muslim-Christian dialogue—I leave it to the reader to judge. In denying any positive value of my proposal for dialogue, Ibrahim focuses on its lack of acceptability

I *do not expect that Muslims would accept my proposal as an acceptable formulation of Islamic theology; it's just more acceptable (or less unacceptable) to Muslims than the view that he is a false prophet.*

to Muslims (which he seeks to demonstrate through his query of three Muslim friends). I admitted that I did not expect that Muslims would embrace my proposal as an acceptable formulation of Islamic theology; I only asserted that it will be more acceptable (or less unacceptable) to Muslims than the view that he is a false prophet—and this could be a step forward. When Muslims raise the issue of our rejection of Muhammad as a prophet, we can acknowledge that for centuries (for many and varied reasons), Christians have regarded him as a false prophet. However, many of us no longer think this is a fair or accurate view—even though we do not hold the same view of him that Muslims have (as I explain below). Communicating a more sympathetic and positive view of Muhammad should be a constructive step forward in the world of interfaith dialogue. In America where Muslims are searching for common ground with Christians, there is even more reason to expect that my proposal could be viewed as a helpful contribution toward bridge-building and cooperation.

As for Ibrahim's query of several Muslims, it is not "telling" us anything about my assertion. Ibrahim should have given his Muslim friends the choice of the two options as I presented them and asked:

> If a Christian were to express to you his position on Muhammad and his prophethood, which of the following do you find more acceptable or less offensive?
>
> a.   I respect Muhammad as having a prophetic role, function, or mission even though I do not consider him to be a prophet the same way that you do.
>
> b.   I respect Muhammad even though he is a false prophet.

But Ibrahim only asked for their response to the first; it is difficult to imagine that any Muslim would choose "b." over "a."

Moreover, Ibrahim clams that position "a" above is "intentionally misleading to Muslims." This baffles me. By saying "I respect Muhammad as a prophet (or having a prophetic role, prophetic mission, etc.)[6] even though I do not consider him to be a prophet the same way that you do" am I really misleading people—much less deliberately so?[7] On the contrary, I believe that such a proposal invites discussion and elucidation. (That Ibrahim's three Muslim friends did not understand or appreciate my proposal is not at all surprising given that Ibrahim himself does not embrace my proposal, and therefore could not explain it or provide biblical rationale for it. Furthermore, his assertion that Muslims only have two categories—"prophets and the general population"—is not accurate [see end note[8]]). I can envision that

an interaction like this might ensue naturally or could be facilitated:

> **Muslim:** What do you mean that you "do not consider him a prophet in the same way" that I do?
>
> **Christian:** I respect Muhammad, but you believe prophets are sinless. I do not. The prophets may be the best of mankind but they are still sons of Adam and therefore sinners;[9] only Isa the Messiah, the pure Word of Allah that was cast into Mary's womb, is without sin.[10]

Furthermore, Muslims tell me that Muhammad will intercede for them on the Day of Judgment,[11] but nowhere does the Qur'an indicate that Allah has given Muhammad permission to do this. But the Injil says, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5 ESV). It is to Isa al-Masih, Jesus the Messiah, that "all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).

Also, Muhammad is a prophet for Muslims, but that does not mean he is a prophet in the same way for other people of the Scriptures. Does not God in the Qur'an say "And how can they [the Jews] make you [Muhammad] their judge, when they have the Tawrah, which contains Allah's judgment?"[12] The Qur'an likewise states, "So let the people of the Injil judge by what Allah has revealed in it. Whoever doesn't judge by what Allah has revealed are unbelievers" (5:47). Other verses support this: "Truly believers, the Jews, the Christians, and Sabeans who believe in Allah and in the last day and do righteous deeds have their reward from their Lord, and won't fear or grieve" (Q 2:62; cf. 5:69).

Many, like myself, believe that God can use prophets from outside the people with whom he has a covenant in order to direct or correct them.[13] We see in the Qur'an that Muhammad rebuked and corrected the Jews for rejecting Isa the Messiah.[14] I esteem him greatly for that. He also warned people of the book not to "exaggerate" in religion by going beyond what is written in the Scripture.[15]

The Bible instructs me not to reject anything said by any kind of prophet, but to evaluate what they proclaim by the Bible, accepting whatever is true and good, but rejecting anything that is contrary to its teaching (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20–21).

Unfortunately, most Muslim clerics interpret and teach the Qur'an in ways that contradict some fundamental teachings of the Bible. As a result, most Christians completely reject the Qur'an. But I believe that if more Muslims would interpret the Qur'an in ways that affirm biblical teachings (which is what the Qur'an says its purpose is), then many Christians may begin to view Muhammad's prophetic mission much more positively (cf. Basetti-Sani and Wessels).

In what "biblical sense" could Muhammad be a prophet?

Surprisingly, Ibrahim says that I misrepresented my own article when I took him to task for his alleging that I *"attempt to move Muhammad from the false-prophet to the true-prophet category."* Unfortunately, there was a failure to observe what I wrote in my article:

> Ultimate greatness in a prophet is a function of his pointing people to Christ. Therefore, we could allow the possibility that Muhammad is a prophet *in the biblical sense explained in the preceding section,* and in the Qur'anic mode of being a warner to his people, without his performance of miracles."[16] (italics added)

Ibrahim repeatedly quotes from this, lifting out the words "in the biblical sense" without including the modifying phrase "explained in the preceding section." This is a serious misconstrual of my position. It has led some who did not read my article to think that I regard Muhammad like the prophets in the biblical canon (which I clearly do not) and has brought unwarranted backlash. Ibrahim gives no indication that he consulted the preceding section for clarification. The "preceding section" discussed the inadequacy of criteria like moral blamelessness, absence of hostility with Christians, or the performance of miracles, and instead clarified that "the most important issue is their attitude toward Christ and the Scriptures."[17] In other words, I merely said, "Therefore, we could allow the possibility that Muhammad is a prophet in the biblical sense" *of pointing people [back] to the Scriptures and toward Christ* [18] "and in the Qur'anic mode of being a warner to his people, without his performance of miracles." Neither confirming Christ nor being a warner to one's people requires the performance of miracles; hence, there was no change in my position, as Ibrahim asserts. I do accept his apology for doubting my expressed intent.

Should prophethood be viewed as a continuum?

Ibrahim continues his critique by skeptically asking, "Does this suggest that we need to think about Muhammad and his prophethood in general in a 'spectrum' sense?" That, of course, is the fundamental point of my article which makes a case for closing down the cultural and theological paradigm that treats prophecy exclusively in binary categories. Instead, I have argued that we should replace it with one that recognizes the variety of kinds and categories that my article "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets" finds in the Scriptures, history, theology, and missiology.

In place of strict binary categories, we need a more biblically nuanced perspective. I have noted previously that there were biblical prophets who did not write or give us Scripture.[19] What do we call this distinct office? Moses' office is distinct from other prophets of Israel. Elijah had a "school" of prophets that was distinct from the writing prophets. And as the introduction of my article noted, even Saul was "prophet for a day." Balaam served a different office of prophecy than all the prior-mentioned prophets. Paul recognized truth on the lips of pagan poet-prophets (Acts 17:28); Agabus erred on some details of his prophecy about Paul's future in Jerusalem or at least misinterpreted its application to the apostle; and the utterances of NT prophets require sifting.[20]

Despite these distinctions, Ibrahim does not agree with the implications of my discussion of the character (i.e., the mixed character) of non-canonical NT prophecy as Spirit-inspired, but potentially fallible and in need of "sifting" (as in 1 Cor. 14:29, 1 Thess. 5:19–21),[21] and of divine revelation to those outside the Jewish and Christian stream.[22]

The issues and perspectives examined in my article should force us all to re-examine our presuppositions as we discuss prophethood of diverse kinds and various senses of the word. Those needing further clarity on my position are invited to consult Bill Musk who sees Christians as falling somewhere on a broad spectrum between two extremes.[23] With respect to Muhammad, Musk (like myself) finds himself "in that uncomfortable, in-between area," approving of the position of the 1984 Conference of European Churches:

> Christians respect the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. It calls people to repentance in the service of the one God. It is unjust to dismiss Muhammad out of hand as a false prophet. Christians may recognize Muhammad as part of the same prophetic tradition, and in the past some have done so. We must nevertheless ensure that our Muslim friends understand the subtle differences between the two perspectives, for Christians confess that the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.[24]

Ibrahim repeats his sharp criticisms of what he considers to be my "ambiguous language."[25] I freely admit to qualifying some assertions with terms like "possibility," for I am

*T*his is a serious misconstrual of my position. It has led some to think that I regard Muhammad like the prophets in the biblical canon (which I clearly do not) and has brought unwarranted backlash.

I did apply the criteria of 1 John 4:1–3 to Muhammad—Jesus being "Messiah" and "coming in the flesh"—and found that both criteria align with the teaching of the Qur'an.

exploring new territory in which additional knowledge is prerequisite to higher levels of certainty (not to mention my sensitivity to the present anti-Islamic atmosphere in which I write). For example, the conclusion of my initial article pointed out:

> A major obstacle is our uncertainty about the actual details of Muhammad's life due to the great lack of personal information about him in the Qur'an and the complexities of the historical sources. Future historical studies may strengthen or weaken the case for Muhammad being regarded as a prophet. The outcome of critical scholarship about the Qur'an's relationship to the Bible (positive or negative) will also affect thinking.

Moreover, Ibrahim seems not to appreciate the need for nuance (as in the above paragraph on the prophetic office). He also lambasts my statement that it "is not necessary for us to conclusively determine the nature of this prophetic role" (once again cutting off its clarifying context that qualifies it: *"if* we apply Gamaliel's wisdom to this question" [italics added]). He even goes so far as to associate my treatment with dissimulation *(taqiyya).*

I am not at all opposed to clear definitions. However, the Christian scholars that I cited view the notions of prophet or the prophetic role somewhat differently. Can we not allow each of them to affirm a prophetic role for Muhammad according to the varied senses which they intend without insisting that only one of them is legitimate?

This allowance has implications for our previous discussion of how a continuum or "spectrum" view of prophethood can aid Muslim-Christian dialogue. When, like the Conference of European Churches stated above, we "recognize that Muhammad is part of the same prophetic tradition," it allows us to interact with the text of the Qur'an through the lens of our tradition and make contributions to the interpretative community. This is an important and legitimate role for us, since Christians were among the original audiences and recipients of the Qur'an's message—in fact, the Qur'an says it is an essential one for the sake of Muslims (10:94).[26] In addition, allowing for varied senses of prophethood makes possible a spectrum of contribution. Precisely where a Christian is situated on this spectrum will determine the nature of his contribution and his potential for influencing the Islamic interpretive community.

Was 1 John 4:1–3 applied to Muhammad?

Ibrahim says that I "simply dismissed . . . as irrelevant" the test of 1 John 4:1–3: "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God." This is hardly

the case and his ground for such a statement is baffling to me. On the basis of *sola scriptura,* I used the text of v. 3 itself (lit. "Jesus Christ is come in the flesh") against Ibrahim's personal inference about it. I was not "relying on . . . selected secondary studies," but simply backing up my position by listing the main interpretations of leading biblical scholars regarding the doctrinal content of the "test."

Ibrahim argues that the studies I reference "do not dismiss the idea that we can learn a theological concept." I agree completely—we can learn about the deity of Christ and the incarnation of the divine Word in John's epistles, but these things are learned more inferentially than explicitly. I am not discounting what has been learned or inferred, but we must uphold what God gave us to learn and infer from— the inspired text, being careful to adhere to the Scriptures, not inferences.

Ibrahim criticizes my hermeneutics, saying: "We cannot elevate the *context* above the *text,"* but is this not what he himself is doing by insisting on more than the criteria of the text? Granted, the "text is clearly concerned with the relationship between the Father and the Son," but v. 3 specifies what that relationship is: "Jesus" is the "Messiah" whom God sent "in the flesh" (cf. John 17:3). John is singularly focused upon making this the specific distinction when it comes to evaluating prophets, and Muhammad (of the Qur'an) actually satisfies this test.

Ibrahim also refers us to John 5:21–23 which speaks of the Father's purpose that all honor the Son as they do the Father). The Qur'an does not contradict this; it may well support it. In Q 3:45 Jesus is "honored" *(wajīhan)* in this world and the next. The only other instance of this word used this way is in regard to Moses (33:69). But the only person it is applied to in both this world and the hereafter is Jesus. Most significantly, it repeatedly occurs as an attribute of God,[27] referring to God's glory/honor and countenance/ face. As Moses' face shone with the glory of God (in this life, but not in the hereafter), the term infers that Jesus reflects God's glory and face—not only in this life, but also in the hereafter.

Then Ibrahim errs egregiously by asserting that I fail to apply the test of 1 John 4:1–3 to Muhammad, because he alleges that I limit its application to Docetists or Cerinthians. I am quite puzzled by such logic when in fact I have done exactly the opposite of what he claims. I examined various possible understandings of the doctrinal content of the "test" in I John 4:1–3 and then applied each to Muhammad. However, the point is that while scholars differ over the

identity of the people in the historical context of 1 John, in each case (Docetists, Cerinthians, or other), these people all failed to affirm 1 John's criteria of Jesus being "Messiah" and "coming in the flesh." I applied these criteria to Muhammad and found that both criteria align with the teaching of the Qur'an. Ibrahim then resorts to building a straw man argument, presented as *reductio ad absurdum,* suggesting that I would make the entire NT irrelevant because modern situations are not exact parallels. Again, I maintain that all that we should insist on is what the text of I John 4:2–3 demands—that Jesus is the Christ and he came in the flesh.

And even if John's test is stretched to demand affirmation of a fully developed orthodox Christian theology of the incarnation, the Qur'an need not be viewed as denying it. In contrast to Ibrahim's dismissal of this possibility, Basetti-Sani contends:

> For centuries now, there has been a very grave misunderstanding about the two principle Christian mysteries. Hasty interpretation, without proper and judicious weighing of the evidence, persuaded Muslim exegetes that the Qur'an condemns the doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity. Christian apologists fell into this same snare.... But those texts condemned a "tritheism" that has nothing to do with the formulation of the dogma of the Trinity. The same is true of the Qur'an's supposed condemnation of the Incarnation.[28]

The Qur'an does not undertake to express a formulation of these theological doctrines, but that does not mean it opposes them; the Qur'an respects the Bible and seems concerned only with censuring excesses (heretical notions). Moreover, contrary to Ibrahim's assertion, Jesus of the Qur'an is not "merely" a prophet (despite the efforts of Muslim clerics to reduce his status, rather than confirm the prior Scriptures). For example, 4:171 should be read "the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary is *certainly* [not *merely*] the messenger of God, his Word, whom he placed in Mary, a spirit from him." The conjuction *innama* should be seen as emphatic, not diminishing, for at least two reasons: (1) in its context this verse is proclaiming the exalted status of Jesus to Jews who reject his messiahship;[29] (2) it is nonsensical to say "*merely* God's Word." Jesus is here given exalted distinction as "his [God's] Word" (*kalimat*), a title the Qur'an gives to no one else in history!

It is important to note that Muhammad affirms Jesus as the Word of God (3:45) and this is almost certainly rooted in John 1:1. Though Ibrahim rejects my inference of the significance of *ismuhu* (the Word's name), others view it differently. Musk argues that the Arabic is "intimating that 'a word' does not refer to a simple word of language, but a person."[30] One of the premier Islamic authorities of today, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, acknowledges that Jesus' identification with the Word of God is "an idea that has clear resonance with the Gospel tradition, where Jesus is identified as the "Word" of God (see John 1)," but argues that this identification does not preclude the Muslim emphasis on Jesus' role as the "bringer of the Gospel, which like the Torah and the Qur'an, represents God's Word and message to humanity."[31] He explains that this does not necessarily reject the theological import ascribed to the title in Christianity:

> Some commentators interpret *His Word* here as the tidings Mary received of his miraculous conception in her womb or as an allusion to the Divine Creative Command *Be!* by which Christ was formed in Mary's womb . . . However, while all created beings are brought into existence through God's Word, Christ alone is specifically identified as "a Word from God." **Some might argue, therefore that Jesus, by virtue of being identified as God's *Word* somehow participates (uniquely) in the Divine Creative Command,** although this is not the traditional Islamic understanding of Jesus' identification as *a Word from Him* (3:45) [emphasis in bold mine].[32]

Furthermore, Q 9:31 points to the deity of Christ ("They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords *apart from God and the Messiah Mary's son*, and they were commanded to serve but One God; there is no god but He; glory be to Him, above that they associate." [italics mine])[33] Moreover, the Qur'an asserts that no one but God has the breath of life and is able to create (6:2, 38:71–72; 22:5, 73), a prerogative that it otherwise attributes only to Jesus (3:49; 5:110).

How did Christians initially view Muhammad?

It is unfortunate that what I expressed as a general statement (i.e., "during the first century Christians did not seem to think of Muhammad as a false prophet"), Ibrahim understands to be an absolute that can be refuted simply by citing an example to the contrary (i.e., *Doctrina Jacobi*'s denunciation of an Arab prophet).[34] Regrettably, Ibrahim takes too literally my comment about the *Doctrina Jacobi* reference being merely a footnote. To say it is a "footnote" is a figurative way of saying it was of extremely minimal importance within the text itself ("a mere cursory rejection of expedience" as I explained). Moreover, while Ibrahim argues that *Doctrina Jacobi* is an extremely important early witness, he seems to regard it as expressing the conclusion of some thoughtful scholar, rather than as the polemical anti-Jewish tract that it is. Rejecting the Arab prophet because prophets do not "come with a sword and a war

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*I*f the Qur'an represents Muhammad's message, it is certainly a prophetic message. That these Christians joined his movement indicates that they must have accepted his prophetic message and mission to a significant degree.

chariot" is hardly a studied theological conclusion from Scripture. It makes me wonder whether the Christian writer of the *Doctrina Jacobi* ever read the Old Testament or heard the stories of prophets like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and Elijah.

Thus, the primary point I was trying to make was this: During the first century, Christians did not *characteristically* view Muhammad as a false prophet. C. Jonn Block's study concludes that John of Nikiu's position and

> the casual dismissal of Muhammad's prophetic status in the *Doctrina Jacobi* … seem the *only real rejections of the prophethood of Muhammad by Christians,* and these two authors seem among our sources the least exposed to the teachings of Islam, rendering their judgments solely based on the behaviors of Muslims.[35] (italics added)

Similarly, Martin Accad affirms, "there is strong evidence that Islam was initially viewed by Eastern Christians as some sort of variant of Christianity."[36]

Was Muhammad's original movement "ecumenical"?

Ibrahim introduced critical reviews of Donner that contest my contention that the original movement started by Muhammad was "ecumenical." Let me clarify—there are two main aspects of this term "ecumenical" that are being debated by scholars: (1) Did the movement include Jews and Christians? If so, what kind? (2) Was their primary self-identity that of a non-confessional monotheist community motivated by an ecumenical religious agenda (as Fred Donner argues)?[37] Given the limited archaeological evidence, Donner's thesis regarding aspect #2 of an ecumenical Arab movement cannot be "proven" (nor disproven); thus I granted that scholars are divided over this point. Nonetheless, I wrote, "what is important to the main thesis of my article is not what is the major focus of these criticisms, but what is consistent with Hawting's conclusion." Then I asserted that Donner's proposal is at least consistent with that evidence: Ibrahim says that I did not specify what evidence—Hawting's conclusion which was quoted and documented actually is evidence. And I will repeat further evidence that was mentioned: the participation of Christians in the conquests, as John of Sedreh and John of Phenek testified;[38] the minting of coins by Muslim rulers which bore Christian symbols; the inscriptions and papyri containing only the first half of the shahadah ("There is no god but God" with no mention of "Muhammad is the messenger of God"); the use of terms such as "believers" and "emigrants," and the absence of the terms "Muslims," "Islam," and "Qur'an"; as well as (Donner's analysis of) the self-identity

of the "Believers" in the Qur'an.[39] All of this indicates that Arab Christians did not find Muhammad's message to be antithetical to biblical faith or a barrier to their participation in it. If the Qur'an represents Muhammad's message, it is certainly a prophetic message. That these Christians joined his movement indicates that they must have accepted his prophetic message and mission to a significant degree. From what we find of that message in the Qur'an, we might view Muhammad's mission as calling the Arabs (Jews, Christians and pagans) back to the exclusive worship of the God of their father Abraham, pious living, and preparation for the day of Judgment.

Ibrahim states that Donner and I are both "uncertain" about our argument. Not at all. Neither of us doubts whether the "Believers" movement included Christians; our only difference concerns the kind of Christians. In endnote 29 of my original article on Muhammad and prophethood I indicated that "Donner thinks the Christians who joined this 'Believers Movement' were non-Trinitarian Christians, seemingly based on his anti-Trinitarian understanding of certain Qur'anic verses." I noted that my only difference with him is that I saw no reason to exclude Trinitarian Christians since I am persuaded that the Qur'anic verses in question were not aimed at Trinitarian Christians, but at followers of tri-theism and other heretical Christian views. This was confirmed by John of Phenek whose testimony I cited, "Among them [the Arabs] there are many Christians, some of whom are from the heretics, others from us."[40] Ibrahim ignores the testimony of this "primary source."

However, what is important to my argument about an ecumenical movement is aspect #1—that the movement included Jews and Christians. This seems unassailable given the testimonies of John of Sedreh and John of Phenek. Even *Doctrina Jacobi* (which Ibrahim heralds as tremendously significant) regards the attackers as one group comprised of Jews and Arabs. Therefore, the movement had to have been inclusive, even if the nature and prominence of religious motivations is debated.

Then Ibrahim asks, "What about the references I quoted from the Qur'an in my previous response to refute his proposal? No interaction from Talman." This assertion by Ibrahim is unjustified, unfortunate, and unbecoming. Although Ibrahim referred (in a very general way) to traditional interpretations of the Qur'an regarding certain Christian doctrines, he did not quote or give a reference for any Qur'anic verses in his previous response—not even once. But my response actually quoted 3:45 with some linguistic

analysis, cited 4:171 and 4:157, and referenced multiple sources that discuss the Qur'an's Christology (endnote 7).

Ibrahim asserts, "Even my reference to the Syriac document, the *Maronite Chronicle* . . . was downplayed and simply dismissed without enough pieces of evidence from primary sources." I responded to the data Ibrahim provided and cited Penn's evaluation of this source and his recognition that the *Maronite Chronicle* may have been written much later—and this would discredit Ibrahim's point (that removal of Christian symbols from coins one generation after Muhammad do not support Christian involvement in his movement). But even granting the early date (c. 660 C.E.) for Mu'awiya's removing the cross from coinage, this does not at all indicate that he or early movement was hostile to Christian symbols or Christianity as Ibrahim asserts. Ibrahim fails to note that the immediate context of the *Maronite Chronicle* records Mu'awiya's pious regard for sites associated with Christ's passion:

> Many Arabs assembled in Jerusalem and made Mu'awiya king. He ascended and sat at Golgotha. He prayed there, went to Gethsemane, descended to the tomb of the blessed Mary, and prayed there.[41]

Why would Mu'awiya sit at Golgotha and pray there if he was hostile to Christianity and the crucifixion? He was essentially performing rites common to Christian pilgrims. We should instead interpret the removal of the cross from coins as indication of Mu'awiya's humility in refusing symbols of exalted status; for the chronicler states in the sentence which immediately follows, "Mu'awiya also did not wear a crown like other kings in the world. He established his throne in Damascus but did not want to go to Muhammad's throne."[42] This also better accords with the fact, as I previously noted, that other Muslim coins continued to display Christian symbols for up to a century.[43]

Is Muhammad's message in the Qur'an anti-Christian and anti-Gospel?

Ibrahim also cites several Qur'anic passages as condemning people of the book and he thinks that this refutes the idea that Muhammad's movement included Jews and Christians. This issue of inclusivity matters because it directly affects our view of the prophetic place of Muhammad. If the movement that he founded was not anti-Christian, but called all Ishmaelites (Jewish, Christian and pagan alike) to exclusive devotion to the God of Abraham and the practice of righteousness, then we can more easily consider the possibility of according him a positive prophetic role (of some

kind). I think the case of Jewish and Christian participation has been sufficiently established above; nevertheless, I will respond to the Qur'anic verses that he cites as well.

Ibrahim cites Q 5:13–14 as accusing them of "forgetting what was revealed." Why is this a problem? The OT prophets said the same thing repeatedly. Moreover, 5:13 refers back to 5:12 which affirms that God made a covenant with the people of Israel but warns that "he among you who disbelieves after that has gone astray from the straight path." This is no general or categorical rejection of Jews here, but a warning for each individual not to stray from that covenant. 5:14 says the same thing of Christians: God made a covenant with them, too, but they forgot [to obey] part of it and the result was enmity and hatred among them (a fair assessment of the hostile relations between various parties in the Christological controversies of that era). The criticism of the people of the book for "hiding the truth" in v. 15 expresses another aspect of their disobedience.[44] But we should not take this as a categorical condemnation of all the people of the book. (Note the positive description of Christians in this same surah in v. 82). The Qur'an condemns Christian hypocrisy and apostasy, just as it also condemns Muslim hypocrisy and apostasy.

Ibrahim also says that Q 3:78 accuses them of "twisting their description of the revelation." Actually it says, "*Some* of them (*minhum*) distort the book with their tongues." The Qur'an declares that there are both faithful and unfaithful people of the book, as noted three verses prior:

> Some of the people of the book you can entrust with a huge sum, and they will return it to you. If you give others of them a dinar, they won't return it to you unless you remain standing over them. (3:75).

How can this be viewed as a position of general hostility to the people of the book?

Ibrahim says Q 9:29 requires Jews and Christians to pay the *jizya* tax, in submission or humiliation to Muslims. This is the "tax that is taken from the free non-Muslim subjects of a Muslim government; whereby they ratify the compact that ensures them protection."[45] There is no scholarly consensus about this verse requiring "humiliation."[46] As my original article indicated, readers of the Qur'an must recognize that verses like this apply to particular situations or people.[47] This verse does not apply to *all* people who were given the book, but only to those who do not believe in God and the Last Day—for the Qur'an maintains that many Jews and Christians *do* believe in God and in the

These Qur'anic verses apply to particular situations or people. There is nothing in them that would prevent pious "people of the book" (Jews and Christians) from participating in a Believers movement.

*D*ozens of verses in the Qur'an endorse the contents of the Bible. The few that speak negatively are unclear and require careful exmination of their context; they condemn specific misbehavior of some Jews, Christians, or their clerics.

Last Day (3:113-114, 5:82). An example of such a limited application of 9:29 would be the view that "those who don't follow the religion of truth among those who were given the book" speaks only to the Byzantine empire's planned aggression at Tabuq.[48]

Hence, there is nothing in these verses that would prevent pious people of the book from participating in a Believers movement. More importantly, we should recall a parallel situation in the gospel of John. Despite the gospel of John's negative portrayal and denunciation of "the Jews," the members of Jesus' movement were Jews. Similarly, my original article stated:

> In contrast to the imperialistic arrogance and cult of the cross of the Byzantines, the Qur'an viewed Christians in Arabia (primarily Monophysite, Syrian Orthodox, Nestorian, and Assyrian) as those "closest in affection" to Muslims, for their priests and monks were not proud (Surah 5:82). Thus, the Qur'an does not view Christians with hostility as a matter of principle...[49]

In addition, Ibrahim faults Muhammad's message in the Qur'an for claiming that the Bible predicts Muhammad. However, in 61:6, the reference to a "sent one" (*rasul*) makes better sense as referring to Jesus' foretelling of the Holy Spirit (the Advocate, Gk., *parakletos*) being sent from God (John 14:16–17), as some Muslims will grant.[50] Jesus is therefore describing the Holy Spirit (not Muhammad) as "*Ahmad*" (meaning "whose name I praise" or "whose name is more praised"[51]). Nowhere in the Qur'an is Muhammad called by this term. Instead of viewing "Ahmad" as a descriptor, Muslim tradition seems to have later developed it as an apologetic argument by making this term a name for Muhammad.[52]

Neither should the "unlettered" *(ummi)* prophet in Q 7:157 be understood as a reference to Muhammad. This interpretation appeared much later in the development of "Islam." The prophet referred to here is better understood as Christ Jesus who did not receive formal training in the Scriptures from learned men but was taught directly by God.[53]

Ibrahim also claims that the Qur'an contradicts and distorts the Gospel. While this is certainly true of Islam as it developed much later, this statement does not accurately represent the position of Muhammad in the Qur'an which respects the Bible (Tawrah, Zabur, and Injil). The Qur'an repeatedly attests to the truth contained in the previous Scriptures. Ibrahim also states that the Qur'an accuses Christians and Jews of falsifying Scripture, citing several verses as proof texts with little concern for their context.

Q 2:59 (and a parallel in 7:162[54]) says, "The wicked substituted a saying told them for another, so we sent a plague from heaven down on the wicked for their unbelief." This refers to the grumbling Israelites during their wandering in the wilderness. The Bible agrees with this assessment.

Q 3:187 refers back to v. 183 concerning the prophets of Baal who combated Elijah.[55] This is a common problem and biblical theme found throughout the minor prophets.

Q 2:42 refers to God instructing the children of Israel to fulfill the covenant and believe . . . and "don't cover truth with vanity or knowingly hide the truth." This has nothing to do with accusing them of textual corruption *(taḥrīf)*. However, the kind of accusations against Jews and Christians that Ibrahim was looking for I addressed in an endnote in my article (which it seems that Ibrahim overlooked):

> Muhammad's accusation against the Jews (and Christians?) of *taḥrīf* ("corruption" of the Word of God) did not charge them with changing the written text of Scripture, but with concealing the truth (Surah 3:71; 6:92), distorting its meaning as they read it aloud (3:78), composing their own texts and passing them off as Scripture (2:79), and forgetting the covenant (5:14, 15). On the contrary, he insists that no one can "change the words of God" (10:64, 6:34).[56]

The Qur'an does charge *some* Christians and Jews with "corrupting" their scriptures; but this refers to corrupting the meaning *(taḥrīf al-ma'na)*, not corrupting the text itself. Some leading scholars, both Muslim and Christian, have demonstrated that the notion of textual corruption became popular four to five centuries after Muhammad, largely due to the impact of Ibn Hazm in the 11th century.[57] Dozens of verses in the Qur'an endorse the contents of the Bible. The few verses that speak negatively are unclear and require careful examination of their context; they are better understood as condemning specific incidents of misbehavior of some Jews, Christians, or their clerics.[58]

Ibrahim asserts that Q 2:79 charges Jews or Christians with "fabricating divine scripture as they 'distort the scripture with their own hands, then say, "this is what God has revealed."'" He apparently is quoting a biased translation of the Qur'an. Upon closer examination, we see that the Arabic text only says, "Woe to those who write the book with their hands, then say 'This is from God' to purchase with it a little price."[59] It relates to the preceding verse where the *ummiyyun* (variously translated as unlettered ones, unscriptured, gentiles, or illiterate), who do not know the book apart from their own wishful thinking or desires, are just guessing or imagining. What is being written

are not the Scriptures but what is being peddled as the Scriptures for a small price. Hence, this verse is most likely condemning those Jews who wrote down alleged texts to sell as amulets and talismans (as is frequently done with Qur'anic verses even today) and/or to their selling Tefillin (phylacteries), the double prayer straps they wear with two boxes containing verses from the Torah.[60]

Concerning Ibrahim's reference to what the earliest Muslim commentaries on the Qur'an say about Christians and Jews, I believe they are irrelevant to our discussion on whether or not the original movement included Jews and Christians since they were written long after this movement ceased to be inclusive.

Does the Qur'an deny that Jesus is the "son of God" in the biblical sense?

Ibrahim is convinced that the Qur'an's rejection of Jesus as "the son of God" is not a rejection of the blasphemous notion that God cohabited with Mary to produce biological offspring, but rather a denial of mainstream Christian doctrine. He "fundamentally disagree(s)" with me: he asks, "How do we know it is a rejection of unbiblical sexual notion?" But he then cites 2:116, 10:68, and 72:3 which all use the Arabic "*walad*" for son, a word that means "to beget (by seed)" or "to bear (a child)" (i.e., beget a son biologically).[61] Moreover, sexual sonship is patently indicated in the internal content of a number of these verses. For instance, he cited 72:3: "He never had a mate *(ṣāḥibatan),* nor a son"—if God has no mate to procreate with, then neither did he have a son. Likewise, in 6:100–101: "How can he have a son when he has no consort?" And, in 4:171, the claim that "He is far beyond having a son *(walad)*" immediately follows an affirmation of the Virgin Birth, inferring that physical/sexual begetting is being rejected.[62] Other verses (19:93–94, 39:4, 4:171) reject that God adopted (has "taken" or "acquired" a son).[63] These last verses do not reject mainstream Christian doctrine, but rather the heresy of Adoptionism (namely, that Jesus was born as an ordinary human, but later became divine when God adopted him). Contrary to Ibrahim's assertion, none of these verses relates to the orthodox Christian doctrine of incarnation.

Ibrahim's charge that I "rely on post-Qur'anic writings" to support my contention that the Qur'an condemns Christian heresies is a bit audacious given that the Qur'anic verses themselves wholly substantiate my position by employing the words *walad,* "mate" and "consort." They are addressing something entirely unrelated to the language of the New Testament (son of God, begotten of God) that refers to God's promise to David. If Ibrahim is arguing that being "son" and "begotten" of God are physical, then we should be deeply concerned about his Christian theology.

This interpretation that the Qur'an is rejecting divine biological and adoptive sonship is not novel or unique to me; extensive support in both Muslim and Christian quarters can be found. Al-Ghazali, Islam's most celebrated philosopher and theologian, states the son-father relationship of Jesus and God in the NT must be viewed as a metaphor, not as physical/biological which the Qur'an rejects.[64] The reason for this rejection is that in classical Arabic the word "son" almost always conveys physical sonship when used in connection with a personal relationship.[65] (Christian orthodoxy agrees that NT usage of Father/Son for God/Jesus is metaphorical, but this in no way disavows their "metaphysical" or "ontological" existence from eternity). Even someone like Sam Shamoun, who has no praise for Muhammad or the Qur'an, after examining the Qur'an and leading Muslim commentaries, concludes: "the Qur'an nowhere condemns the historic Christian understanding of Jesus' Sonship."[66]

And finally, just for clarification, I did not say in my previous response that the Qur'an unmistakably "affirms" the incarnation, but only that it "can be read" that way—meaning it "allows" for such a reading. (I have mentioned various inferences to this in this response).

Does the Qur'an criticize Christian heresies or Christian orthodoxy?

Appealing to Griffith and Reynolds, Ibrahim rejects my contention (as supported by C. Jonn Block's research) that the Qur'an criticizes Christian heresies, not Christian orthodoxy. However, Ibrahim appears unaware of later interactions by the authorities and sources involved. In a work subsequent to that cited by Ibrahim, Griffith interacts with Block's research and rules out a number of possible heresies on the Arabian Peninsula as influencing the Qur'an.[67] He does not criticize this research, but instead acknowledges that it is "somewhat at variance" with his own theory. Clearly Griffith does not reject Block's findings (since in the same footnote he references both Block's research and his own article).[68] But regardless, it seems untenable to deny that some verses in the Qur'an are condemning, not Christian orthodoxy, but heresies (e.g., the rejection of the deification of Mary in a "trinity" with God and Jesus in 5:116).

*A*l–Ghazali, Islam's most celebrated philosopher and theologian, states the son–father relationship of Jesus and God in the New Testament must be viewed as a metaphor, not as physical or biological.

*I*brahim contends that I have elevated Muhammad to a position that has no biblical or historical basis. To the contrary, I have denigrated the legendary status given him by Islamic tradition by relying on earlier evidence.

Ibrahim cites Reynolds' "Presentation" which interprets these Qur'anic verses as attacking orthodox Christianity based on his theory of "rhetoric." However, Reynolds does not engage Block's more recent historical research which invalidates his theory.[69] Neither does Reynolds' hypothesis account for the dozens of verses that affirm (rather than attack) the previous Scriptures. It makes little sense for the Qur'an to repeatedly and emphatically insist that it confirms and authenticates the biblical Scriptures and at the same time reject their fundamental teachings (i.e., as expressed in orthodox Christianity). Furthermore, it has been argued that Qur'anic verses allegedly critical of Christian doctrines generally appear when addressing people in Jewish contexts, thereby indicating a correction of Jewish distortions and misunderstandings of orthodox Christian belief.[70]

Along with most Muslim theologians and Christian apologists, Ibrahim invokes Q 112 ("Say: 'He is One, the Eternal. He does not beget and was not begotten, and there is none like him'") as a denial of divine sonship. Seyyed Hossein Nasr states to the contrary,

> Attempts to link this verse to discussions of Christianity are thus somewhat tenuous, and it is best understood in relation to…the Quranic critique of the pagan Arab notions of Divine procreation, as in 37:149-53.[71]

Moreover,

> Such notions are distinct from the Christian understanding of Divine sonship in that the meaning of "son" in the phrase "Son of God" employed in the Christian creed is very different from the meaning of "son" in the Quran. For Christianity, the term "Son of God" refers to Jesus as the pretemporal, uncreated Word of God that is begotten of the Father before time. For the pagan Arabs, however, the progeny of God had a distinctly temporal and physical connotation.[72]

Ibrahim supposes Q 112:3 denies a Christian creed, but we must remember that begottenness language has been prevalent since the Cappodocian fathers and throughout the centuries statements similar to Q 112 have been made by great Christian theologians (e.g., John of Damascus, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin), affirming that the essence/being of God is one, eternal, unique, and does not reproduce. In fact, the exact wording of this surah appears in the Fourth Lateran Council's affirmation that the one divine essence shared by the three hypostases/persons of the Trinity "does not beget, nor is it begotten." Hence, Louis Massignon, the great French scholar of Islam, explained this verse as "an affirmation of the unity of the divine essence *(tawḥīd)*

rather than a statement of the unique personality of God."[73] Thus, it is not a rejection of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (which is not specifically addressed in the immediate or wider context of the Qur'an). Seyyed Hossein Nasr confirms this, affirming that in Q 4:171 and 5:73

> the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as three "persons," or hypostases, "within" the One God is not explicitly referenced, and the criticism seems directed at those who assert the existence of three distinct "gods," an idea that Christians themselves reject.[74]

Conclusion

In my initial article and two subsequent interactions with Ayman Ibrahim, I have offered a wide-ranging rationale for reconsidering some crucial issues: Muhammad and the Qur'an in original Islam, a Christian theology of revelation, and a biblical view of prophethood, as the basis for a positive prophetic role for Muhammad.

Ibrahim contends that I have elevated Muhammad to a position that has no biblical or historical basis. To the contrary, I have denigrated the legendary status given him by Islamic tradition by relying on earlier and more reliable historical evidence than is found in dubious later Muslim traditions. I have also given evidence from the earliest and primary Muslim source, the Qur'an, which repeatedly claims to confirm the Bible and not to contradict it (and thus we should seek to interpret it in ways that do that). Yes, the result is an understanding of Muhammad that is elevated well above the "demon-inspired false prophet" view that prevails among Christians today. But I have shown that such a view has a historical and missiological basis and is compatible with Scripture.

I maintain that the Bible does not reject the notion of divine revelation and prophecy after the close of the canon of Scripture. But such revelation and prophecy must play a confirming or supplemental role to Scripture; they are not necessarily infallible (and thus must be evaluated by Scripture); and they are not normative and authoritative for all believers everywhere. I especially emphasized that the biblical view of prophecy cannot be confined to binary categories—contrary to the commonly held that (a) the only true prophets are those who gave us the books of the Bible and (b) all other prophets are false prophets. In support of my argument, I gave examples of other kinds of prophets—both from Scripture as well as from mission history (e.g., William Harris whom Lamin Sanneh classes as one of Africa's "charismatic prophets")—and this was not refuted by Ibrahim.

Partly due to misunderstandings, Ibrahim asserts that I elevated some secondary studies above crucial primary sources, but my responses have shown otherwise. He introduced a number of secondary sources that I have interacted with and still sustained my thesis.[75] Ibrahim insists that the average Muslim on the street will automatically reject non-binary categories of prophethood, and therefore my proposals are not constructive (and even damaging to dialogue). A major factor in our differing perceptions is that the first audience in my mind for discussion of these issues would be Muslim scholars and intellectuals, primarily in contexts of interfaith dialogue which easily provide opportunity to explain the concepts that I have proposed. In contrast, Ibrahim is focused solely on the ordinary Muslim who he insists will reject my proposal out of hand and view it as subterfuge. Strategically, engaging first with open-minded Muslim religious leaders is ideal; for they can sanction new ideas that influence the average Muslim on the street. Nevertheless, even Muslims on the street can be engaged in ways that invite honest and frank explanation and elucidation of new concepts. (See the sample conversation in the beginning of my response above.) The fact is that paradigm shifts take time, effort and persistence in the face of entrenched ideas and opposition (e.g., belief in a flat earth); nevertheless, progress is possible.

I find it difficult to understand the fear expressed in Ibrahim's conclusion that those who accept my view might subsequently "call Christians to believe that the Qur'an was actually eternally kept in a celestial tablet." Perhaps this is indicative of a proclivity to binary thinking: either accept the false prophet view of Muhammad or you will be pulled to affirm the supposedly inane Muslim view of revelation.[76] Moreover, Ibrahim's "prophecy" that my proposal will "fail to convince any religious adherents of either faith" is a false one—for some have already given testimony to the contrary (e.g., the doctor who told me, "Your article blew my brains out of the back of my head."). Likewise, the alleged "biblical, theological, historical, and missiological gaps" in my treatment are not "obvious" to all—Martin Accad considers my work as "belonging to the field of missiology *par excellence.*"[77]

Despite the differences in our views, Ibrahim and I have mutual respect and appreciation as scholars, as well as love for one another as brothers in Christ. Readers, however, may wonder how evangelical scholars, equally committed to the authority of Scripture and the lordship of Jesus Christ, can be so far apart in their understandings. What factors lead to such disparate attitudes, interpretations, and assessments?

I would suggest that one contributor to our differences is the paradigmatic lenses through which we view the issues. Therefore, I asked Bradford Greer to write about these lenses through which we approach scripture, history and the religious phenomena of Islam. (His article, "Approaching the Frontier Missiological Task," is found in this issue of the *IJFM* on page 93). But, regardless, it is clear that we are not all going to agree on the nature of Muhammad's prophethood and the original movement that he founded. Looking at an analogous situation in Scripture, skeptics and critics might consider applying Gamaliel's wisdom to this question surrounding Muhammad. Gamaliel had some unanswered questions in his day; but though unconvinced that Jesus was the Messiah, he suspended judgment, allowing that the purpose and activity of the movement that Jesus started might be of God (Acts 5:34–39).[78]

From the outset I acknowledged this to be a complex and controversial topic and pleaded for greater tolerance of those holding differing positions. I had hoped that by the time Ibrahim and I reached the conclusion of our dialogue, the added clarity would have significantly narrowed the gap between our positions. Perhaps this will be the case for those who read our exchanges. If not, then let us ensure that our interactions avoid misrepresentation, exaggeration, and alarmism, so that we may endeavor to follow the ancient wisdom: *In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.*

Harley Talman has worked with Muslims for more than 35 years, including two decades in the Arab world and Africa, during which he was involved in church planting, theological education, and humanitarian aid. Talman holds a ThM from Dallas Theological Seminary and a PhD from Fuller Theolgcial Seminary. He presently teaches Islamic studies at a graduate school.

Endnotes

[1] This description, the Muhammad of "Islamic Folklore," is borrowed from Nabeel Jabbour.

[2] Moderate revisionists referenced in my original article include Fred Donner and Gabriel Said Reynolds; Robert Spencer speaks for radical revisionists.

[3] As Fred Donner observes, "Those of us who study Islam's origins have to admit collectively that we simply do not know some very basic things about the Qur'an—things so basic that the knowledge of them is usually taken for granted by scholars dealing with other texts" ("The Qur'an in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context,* edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds [New York: Routledge, 2008]), 29.

*T**he discussion of these issues would be with Muslim scholars and intellectuals, primarily in contexts of inter-faith dialogue which easily provide opportunity to explain the concepts.*

[4] Harley Talman, "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets," *IJFM* 31:4: section IV, 182-185.

[5] Martin Accad, "Christian Attitudes Toward Islam and Muslims: A Kerygmatic Approach," in Evelyne A. Reisacher, ed., *Toward Respectful Understanding and Witness among Muslims: Essays in Honor of J. Dudley Woodberry* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012), 31.

[6] While speaking of Muhammad's "prophetic role, function or mission" can be helpful in academia, elsewhere it may be clearer to just to use "prophet" with qualification (e.g. "I respect Muhammad as a prophet even though I do not consider him to be a prophet the same way that you do.")

[7] Of course, any fruitful dialogue will be based upon the establishment of relationships of sincerity and trust in which Muslims can recognize our good will, sense our conciliatory attitude and respect, and appreciate our efforts at finding common ground. It will not always be easy to overcome the suspicions and mistrust engendered by a millennium of adversarial culture in Christian-Muslim controversy where there is a permanent investment in the other side's falseness. (Like race car drivers who anticipate their competitors' "moves" in order to jockey for position, religious controversialists construct narratives in their minds of the other's beliefs that are limited to perceived weaknesses and "straw men" who can be excoriated and rejected as representative of the entirety of the competing religion).

[8] Muslims may distinguish *rasul* "messenger" from *nabi* "prophet," though some have a dual function as messenger-prophet. In Q 3:81 a prophet brings scripture and wisdom, whereas a messenger comes to confirm the existing scriptures. "Warner" *(nadhir)* is another qur'anic function that has overlap with them. It is not difficult to explain to a Muslim that in Christian theology we can use the term "prophet" to also refer to messengers, to warners, to those who are moved by God's Spirit to make predictions or to give direction or guidance (not necessarily infallibly), and even to those who proclaim the Scriptures.

[9] "Every son of Adam sins, the best of the sinners are those who repent." *Sunan al-Tirmidhi,* Hadith no. 2499.

[10] Cf. "Word of God" Q 3:45, "sinless" in 19:19 and in the well known hadith: "There is none born among the offspring of Adam but Satan touches it . . . except Mary and her child" *(Sahih Bukhari* 4.55.641).

[11] Cf. Muhammad Hisham Kabbani, *Encyclopedia of Islamic Doctrine,* vol. 4: Intercession (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1998).

[12] Qur'anic quotations unless otherwise noted are from *The Arabic-English Reference Qur'an: The First Translation of the Qur'an into Modern English with References to the Tawrah, Zabur, and Injil* [The Reference Qur'an Council, July, 2014], subsequently referred to as *Reference Qur'an.*

[13] The position of Tennent, Ledit and Aquinas in the article under discussion in Harley Talman, "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" *IJFM* 31:4: 183, hereafter referred to as "Talman."

[14] Guilio Basetti-Sani, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ,* edited by Ron George (Winpress, 2000, reprint of *The Koran in the Light of Christ,* trans. W. Russell Carroll, Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 44, 106, 111, 117, 120, 129, 148, 159, 161, 166 and elsewhere.

[15] e.g., Q 4:171.

[16] Talman, 181.

[17] Talman, 178.

[18] I showed how, at least from a "centered-set" perspective, Muhammad fulfilled this function which did not require performance of miracles. Moreover, I noted that Muhammad emphasized biblical themes "such as the resurrection, the return of Christ, and

reward and judgment that were so neglected by the Christians who were embroiled in Christological controversies," Talman, 180.

[19] Talman, 175.

[20] Re: Agabus, see D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 97–99.

[21] Cf. Talman, section on "Post-Canonical and Present day Prophecy," 175.

[22] Cf. Talman, section on "Special Revelation Beyond the Jewish-Christian Border," 175.

[23] Bill Musk, *Kissing Cousins?: Christians and Muslims Face to Face* (Oxford, U.K. and Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch, 2005): 78–83.

[24] "Witness to God in a Secular Europe," Conference of European Churches: Geneva (1985), 56, cited in Musk, 80.

[25] Ibrahim's first response denounces my "speculative terms such as 'possibility' and 'some kind,' repeating them over and over" *IJFM* 32:4, 202.

[26] "So when you are in doubt about what we have revealed to you, ask those who are reading the book that was before you" *(Reference Qur'an,* 241).

[27] Q 6:52, 13:22, 18:28, 28:88, 30:38–39, 55:27, 75:22, 76:9, 88:2 & 8, and 92:20.

[28] Guilio Basetti-Sani, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ,* Ron George, ed. (WinPress, 2000), 129. Reprint of Guilio Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977). Basetti-Sani views the Qur'an as rejecting Nestorian and Monophysite Christologies; others might agree that orthodoxy is not being condemned, but differ as to which particular Christological view(s) the Qur'an is criticizing. In contexts where the critiques are addressed to Jews, not Christians, it is presumably condemning distorted Jewish views of Christian theology.

[29] Ibid., 162.

[30] Musk, 342.

[31] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperCollins), 2015, 267.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Diacritical marks in the Qur'an are a later development. In light of the tortuously awkward word order with "apart from God" coming between "rabbis and monks" and "Messiah, it seems most probable that an accusative case marker was later inserted after "Messiah" to avoid his equality of lordship with God so as to conform to later Islamic theological position."

[34] Ibrahim is overly generous to himself saying, "Talman kindly admits that my use of the primary source *Doctrina Jacobi* challenges his thesis." What I actually said was, "At first glance, his citation from *Doctrina Jacobi* would appear to refute my statement. But my assertion conveys the conclusion of C. Jonn Block's analysis which I encourage readers to consult" ("Response to Ibrahim," 205). Cf. C. Jonn Block, "Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge: Historical and Modern Interpretations of the Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue with Special Attention Paid to Ecumenical Trends" (PhD dissertation, University of Exeter, U.K., 2011), subsequently published as *The Qur'an in Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Historical and Modern Interpretations* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[35] Block, 126. See his discussion for evidence that Christians generally did not seem to object to Muhammad as prophet in the first century.

[36] Martin Accad, "Towards a Theology of Islam: A Response to Harley Talman's 'Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?'" *(IJFM* 31:4): 192.

37 Fred M. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010).

38 Abdul-Masih Saadi, "Nascent Islam in the Seventh Century Syriac Sources," in *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context,* edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds (NY: Routledge, 2008), 218–220.

39 Fred M. Donner, "From Believers to Muslims: Confessional Self-identity in the Early Islamic Community," *Al-Abhath* 50–51 (2002–2003): 9–53.

40 A. Mingana, *Sources Syriaques* (Leipzip: Harrassowitz, 1908), 147, as cited in Saadi, 218.

41 Michael Philip Penn, *When Christians First Met Muslims: A Sourcebook of the Earliest Syriac Writings on Islam* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 58.

42 Ibid. I am indebted to C.D. Johnson for this insight and a number of valuable editorial suggestions to this article.

43 I quoted Penn: "Alternatively, it may be an anachronism based on the author's knowledge of 'Abd al-Malik's famous coin reform in the 690s. As a result, it remains uncertain whether the *Maronite Chronicle* was written in the mid-seventh century or simply comes from a later author well informed about the 660s," Talman 172.

44 The word is not "truth" but "the book"; this is the only verse Ibrahim cites where *ahl al-kitāb* is actually used.

45 Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Willams & Norgate 1863), Book I, 422.

46 Cf. attempts by seven different scholars to decipher its meaning in part 5 of Ibn Warraq, *What the Koran Really Says* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002): 319–371.

47 Talman, 184.

48 Cf. for example, Kaleef K. Karim, "Examining Quran 9:29 – Does Islam Sanction The Killing Of Christians & Jews?" https://discover-the-truth.com/2014/06/03/examining-quran-929-does-islam-sanction-the-killing-of-christians-and-jews/.

49 Talman, 184.

50 Nasr, 1366.

52 W. Montgomery Watt observes: "It is impossible to prove that any Muslim child was called Ahmad after the Prophet before about the year 125 A.H. On the other hand, there are many instances prior to this date of boys called Muhammad after the Prophet. The fact that Ibn Sa'd thinks it worth including three traditions to the effect that the Prophet's name was Ahmad is an indication that this had not always been obvious; there are no similar traditions about his name being Muhammad" ("His Name is 'Ahmad,'" *The Muslim World* 43 no. 2 (April 1953): 110, 113.

53 The Torah discussion in Luke 4 between young Jesus and the scholars illustrates this as does his teaching that amazed those in the synagogue ("Where then did this man get all these things?" Matthew 13:54, 56). Although I do not favor the spirit and tone of sites such as this, Sam Shamoun and Jochen Katz make a strong case for this view from the Qur'an, Bible and revisionist history in "The Quran and the Unlettered Prophet: Jesus or Muhammad?" http://www.answering-islam.org/Shamoun/unlettered_prophet.htm.

54 "The wicked among them substituted a different saying for what they had been told, and we sent a plague upon them from heaven for their wickedness" (7: 162).

55 "Allah made a covenant with those who were given the book, so that you would show it clearly to people and not hide it, but they cast it behind their backs and sold it for a small price. How dreadful is what they sell it for" (3: 187).

56 Ibid., 189, endnote 105.

57 Abdullah Saeed, "The Charge of Distortion of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures," *The Muslim World,* vol. 93:3–4 (Fall 2002): 419–436; and Martin Accad, "Corruption and/or Misinterpretation of the Bible: The Story of the Islamic Usage of *Tāhrīf,*" *Near East School of Theology Theological Review* 24 (2003): 67–97. We see some contemporary Muslim clerics returning to the early Islamic position, e.g., Sheikh Hasan Farhan al Malaki, "Are the Tawrat and Injeel really corrupted?" https://www.facebook.com/hasanalmaliki/posts/10153365960233001?fref=nf.

58 Cf. Al-Azhar sheikh Mustafa Rashid, "The Quran did not say the Injil or the Torah has been corrupted," http://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=297504; George, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ,* 116–119.

59 Fawaylunun lil-ladhīna yaktubūna al-kitāba bi-'aydīhim thumma yaqūlūna hādhā min 9indi Allāhi li-yashtarū bihi thaman-an qalīlan.

60 Heribert Busse thinks the reference is to Jews who made and sold Tefillin, Jewish prayer straps with phylacteries containing Torah passages (*Die theologischen Beziehungen des Islam zu Judentum und Christentum: Grundlagen des Dialogs im Koran und die gegenwärtige Situation* [Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt, 1988], 49). Some others think it may refer to the oral tradition of the Jewish Talmud (Basetti-Sani, 118). Among many Muslims there is opposition to profiting from the word of God and this attitude may be a concern of this verse as well.

61 My article (p. 174 and endnote 52) noted that the difficulty posed by the one passage (2:116–117) in the Qur'an that rejects Jesus being the *ibn* of God was resolved by C. Jonn Block *(Expanding the Qur'anic Bridge,* 126).

62 Ibrahim may consider arguments coming from a Christian apologist that the qur'anic rejection of "son of God" is in regard to Jesus being the physical son of God (Memsuah Mansoor, "The Son of God in the Bible and the Qur'an," http://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Memsuah/son_of_god_bq.htm).

63 Hence also in 4:171 is the Qur'an's rejection of three *(thalatha)* gods: God as father, Mary as mother, and Jesus as son. If the orthodox formulation of the Trinity was being condemned, then the Arabic term for Trinity *(thaluth)* would have been utilized instead of the number "three" *(thalatha).* Block demonstrates that the Arabic technical term for Trinity had religious currency in Arabia at the time and would have been used in this verse if the Trinity was being rejected.

64 Al Ghazali, *al Radd al-Jamīl lī Ilahiyat 'Īsa bi Şarih al-Injil.*

65 Abu al-Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al- Bīrūnī, *Alberuni's India,* translated from Arabic by Edward C. Sachau, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1910), vol. 1, 38, cited in Ungaran, "Son of God in Indonesian Christology: An Analysis of the Doctrine of Christ in the Indonesian Reformed Churches," International Islamic University dissertation, Malaysia, 2012. Rodney Cardoza likewise observes, "In classical Arabic both *ibn (son)* and *walad (boy* or *son)* were not used figuratively or metaphorically for interpersonal relationships. Instead they referred almost exclusively to biological offspring" ("New Paths in Muslim-Christian Dialog," *The Muslim World,* Vol. 102 [October 2013]:453–454).

66 Sam Shamoun, "The Quranic Understanding of Historic Christian Theology," http://www.answering-islam.org/authors/shamoun/rebuttals/dirks/islam_christiandoctrine.html.

67 Sidney Griffith, "'Syriacisms' in the Arabic Qur'an: Who were 'Those who said that Allah is third of three', according to al-Ma'idah 73?," in *A Word Fitly Spoken: Studies in Mediaeval Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān,* edited by M. M.

Bar-Asher, B. Chiesa and S. Hopkins, 83–110 (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2007); C. Jonn Block, "Philoponian Monophysitism in South Arabia at the Advent of Islam with Implications for the English Translation of 'Thalātha' in Qur'ān 4. 171 and 5. 73." *Journal of Islamic Studies* (2011): 1–26.

[68] Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the 'People of the Book' in the Language of Islam* (Princeton University Press. 2013), 28.

[69] Reynolds did not interact with Block's research in any of the sources cited by Ibrahim, probably because the former's article was in process of review during the interim. Thus, this scholarly source is out of date on this point and not useful for the purpose of rejecting Block's support for my position.

[70] Basetti-Sani, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ,* 162–164.

[71] So ask them, does your Lord have daughters while they have sons? Or did We create the angels female, while they were witnesses? Behold! It is of their own perversion that they say, "God has begotten," while truly they are liars. Has He chosen daughters over sons? (see also 39:2-3; 52:39).

[72] Nasr, 1580, references Q 4:171C as condemning this pagan notion.

[73] Basetti-Sani's quotation of Massignon, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ* (Ron George, ed.), 83.

[74] Ibid., 267.

[75] For example, Ibrahim cites Griffith as saying, "even the friendliest of Christian apologists who lived in the early Islamic period stopped well short of accepting Muhammad as prophet, in any canonical sense and of accepting the Qur'an as a book of divine revelation." But where did I ever advocate that Muhammad was a prophet in the "canonical" sense or that the Qu'ran is a book of "divine revelation" like the Bible?

[76] If this is his inference, then Ibrahim seems unaware of the fact that ancient Jews actually held this view in regard to the eternality of the Torah.

[77] Martin Accad, "Towards a Theology of Islam: A Response to Harley Talman's 'Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?'" (*IJFM* 31:4): 193.

[78] As noted previously, theologian Kurt Anders Richardson recommended applying the Gamaliel test to this issue.

An Afterword

by Ayman Ibrahim

One of the exceptionally positive results of my exchange with Harley Talman is that I got to know him better, as we talked over the phone several times and discussed various details of his thesis on Muhammad's prophethood. He is a serious scholar, diligent researcher, and thoughtful Christian. Another significant positive outcome is that in our printed exchanges he was skillfully able to explain and clarify several points of his proposal. Readers should grasp the details of his thesis more accurately to be able to discern whether it is actually valid in missiological circles, precisely in bringing the Gospel to Muslims. *IJFM* is to be thanked for graciously offering its platform for such a sophisticated exchange.

Jesus' deity is extremely fundamental for Christians, which makes it very important for Muslims to understand it, to discuss it and to ultimately insist on rejecting it if they are to remain orthodox Muslims. Similarly, Muhammad's prophethood is a pivotal belief in Islam—if he is not a prophet, Islam collapses. This is precisely, in my view, the main reason why Talman's proposal is very important to evaluate with scrutiny. He treats Muhammad's prophethood as a "non-essential" topic for faith that deserves *liberty,* while I view it as a significantly "essential" topic. He equates his proposal with the "unanswered questions" of Gamaliel's day, although the Church for the last fourteen centuries has not generally felt that this question is unanswered. He indicates that his thesis is like "a movement" that deserves time before judging it with scrutiny, while I view it as very crucial to our day-to-day missiological concerns in connecting with Muslims, especially as it raises unneeded ambiguity.

It is obvious to those who have been following this exchange that Talman and I disagree on fundamental issues. However, is it possible that he and I can agree on some level? Yes, I believe we can.

Talman and I agree that Muhammad is not a true prophet like the prophets of our canonical scriptures. However, while I am willing and completely comfortable to call Muhammad a false-prophet based on biblical and theological measures, Talman is unconvinced and reluctant to use such a term. He believes that there is a possible biblical space to assign Muhammad some kind of prophethood, especially if we distinguish between the different Muhammads, such as the one of Muslim tradition and the one of history. The crucial issue in my view is that we cannot actually establish a substantial "Muhammad" of history apart from the "Muhammad" of Muslim tradition. Talman disagrees and would be satisfied with a minimalist "historical Muhammad" confined to his message in the Qur'an.

*I*n dialoguing with average Muslims, it is hardly convincing to speak about the various Muhammads, the continuum of prophethood, let alone affirming the incarnation or the deity of Christ based on the Qur'an.

Talman and I agree that binary categories are clearly found throughout the Bible. However, he insists that binary categories do not actually apply when it comes to the issue of prophethood, even after Christ. This is one reason that he views Muhammad as neither a prophet nor a false-prophet, proposing that Muhammad fits in another category (e.g., "charismatic prophet"). By way of disagreement, I view Muhammad as a clear example of a post-Christ false-prophet, and, in a sense, one of the warned-against anti-Christs in the Johannine inspired writings.

Talman and I agree that we should bring the Gospel to Muslims because Jesus is the only Savior. We agree that Muslims need to accept Christ as Lord and Savior, and that Christians need to find every possible and creative way to communicate the Gospel to Muslims. However, we disagree on how Muhammad's prophethood would fit and should be used in such a Gospel proclamation. He respects Muhammad "as having a prophetic role, function, or mission," although he does "not consider him to be a prophet the same way [Muslims] do." On the contrary, I do not need to assign Muhammad any prophetic role in any sense to respect him. In fact, I mainly respect him because Muslims do, and I love them. In respecting Muhammad, Christians are never obliged to assign him any unmerited prophetic roles. It is unnegotiable that Christians should respect Muslims and treat them with esteem and honor. This is a part of our identity as followers of Christ. Nonetheless, the matter is different when it comes to Muhammad, especially as we consider what the Muslim traditions themselves report about his morality and ethics, and what the Qur'an as Muhammad's allegedly received revelation affirms about Jesus' deity and message. Consider this: I can love and respect Druzes, Buddhists, and Hindus, and find some points of contact that are true in their culture and sacred writings, but in no way am I supposed to support their religious claims.

Talman and I disagree that his proposal is relevant for reaching out to Muslims. While I acknowledge Talman's obvious diligence and absolutely value his painstaking research, I see his proposal as unhelpful in communicating truthfully with Muslims. Of course, his thesis could be quite interesting in some secular circles where researchers are only concerned with manuscripts, texts, and sophisticated debates concerning picky rarefied, obscure, or abstruse matters. However, in dialoguing with average Muslims, it is hardly convincing to speak about the various Muhammads, the continuum of prophethood, let alone affirming the incarnation or the deity of Christ based on the Qur'an.

My disagreement with Talman centers on methods and approaches that eventually have missiological consequences. It is my conviction that the Gospel is offensive. We do not need to deny or shy away from such a biblical truth. Paul interacted with both Jewish and pagan cultures. He was not only remarkably relevant to them, but also significantly offensive in his discourse and Gospel preaching. Christians should be concerned with creative and effective ways to communicate the uniqueness of the Christian faith and the supremacy of Christ to adherents of Islam who do not generally care about sophisticated terms or complicated definitions. In this exceptionally important mission, we do not need to make our faith appealing to Muslims by according any level of prophetic honor or biblical truth to Muhammad. This cannot create a common ground with Muslims. Nor can it make the Gospel convincing. **IJFM**

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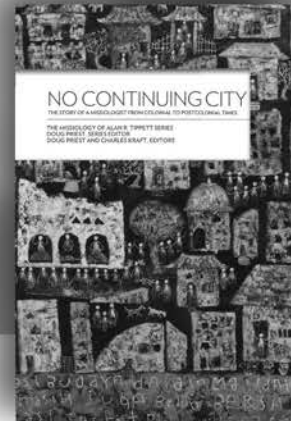
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Editors Charles Kraft and Doug Priest both knew Alan Tippett personally. Charles Kraft is Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Fuller Seminary and was a colleague of Tippett from 1969 to 1977. Doug Priest is executive director of CMF International. While at Fuller Seminary, Priest was a student of Tippett as well as his assistant.

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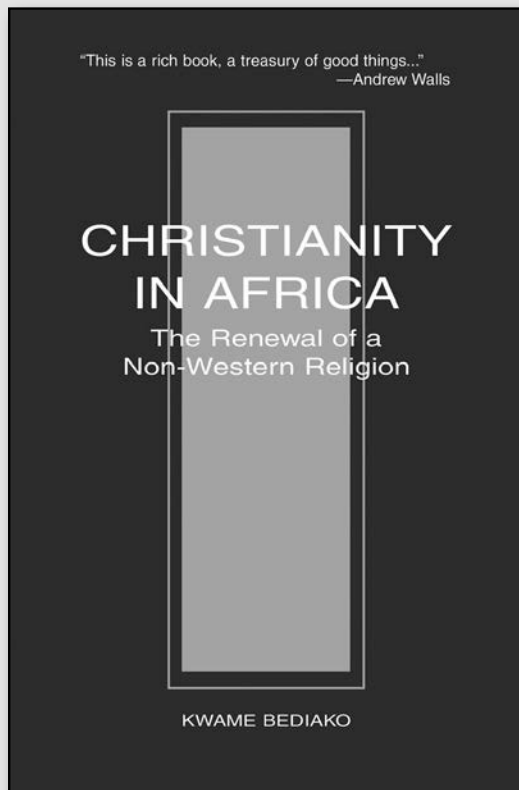### *History and Experience*
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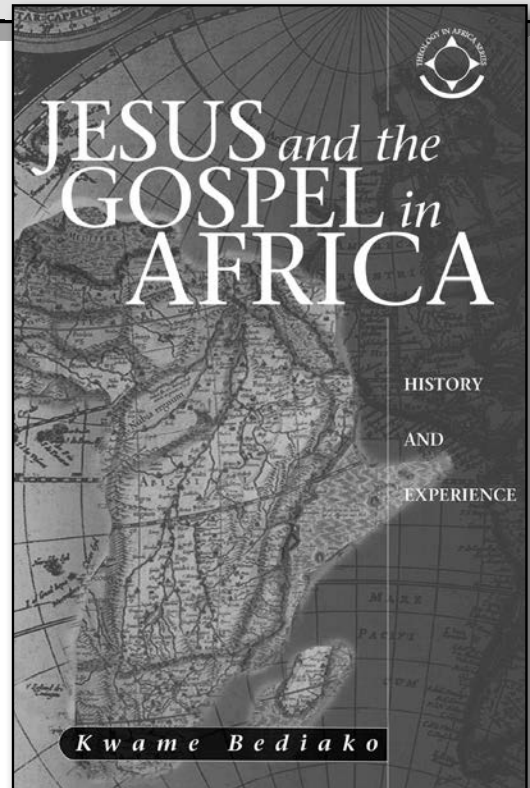
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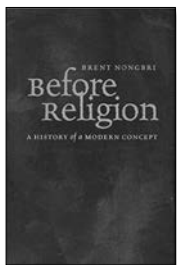
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Book Reviews

Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept, by Brent Nongbri (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013, pp. 275 + ix)

—*Reviewed by H. L. Richard*

This is an outstanding introduction to the development of the concept of religion, and how problematic a casual usage of the term can be. Nongbri's emphasis is on "ancient religions," but his data includes a focus on the development of the modern concept of "world religions."

Seven succinct chapters drawing on and documenting insights from many other scholars build a compelling case against "religion" as a universally valid category. As Nongbri says in his introduction,

> The idea of religion as a sphere of life separate from politics, economics, and science is a recent development in European history, one that has been projected outward in space and backwards in time with the result that religion appears now to be a natural and necessary part of our world. This appearance, however, turns out to be a surprisingly thin veneer that dissipates under close historical scrutiny. The following chapters are an attempt to offer such scrutiny. (7)

After a first chapter discussing modern usage of the term religion, Nongbri attacks the use of this term in translations from ancient texts. This amounts to a fascinating and insightful analysis of three terms, the Latin *religio,* the Greek *thrēskeia* and the Arabic *dīn.* Modern translations of these terms as "religion" are shown to be invalid from their original contexts. The discussion of "religion" in the Qu'ran should deeply impact current thought on Islam and insider movements.

The third chapter looks at four ancient developments that have been suggested as the origin of the concept of religion. These four are the revolt of the Maccabees, Cicero's analysis of Roman gods, Eusebius' Christian analysis of true and false beliefs, and early Islam. Nongbri's conclusion after analyzing these matters is that "introducing 'religion' into these discussions would seem to cause more problems than it solves, as ancient peoples had different ways of conceptualizing themselves and others" (64).

Chapter four considers "Christians and 'Others' in the Pre-Modern Era," which amounts to three case studies of how earlier Christians did *not* employ the modern construct of

"religion." The first is a study of Mani and Manichaeism, which is often seen today as a religion even though earlier Christians always categorized it as a Christian heresy. The second study is of Islam as another Christian heresy, particularly as seen in the writings of John of Damascus. Finally, there is the fascinating case of Buddha being treated as a Christian saint (as explained in the story of Barlaam and Ioasaph). Rather than conceptualizing a "Buddhist religion," Buddha ended up being inducted (with significant alterations) as a Christian saint!

Chapter five presents an analysis of European developments leading to the modern concept of "religion." The Reformation played a pivotal role here, along with the integral development of nation-states in Reformation and post-Reformation history. Jean Bodin and John Locke are then considered as key figures in turning the concept of "religion" into a private personal affair separate from the state. Nongbri quotes William T. Cavanaugh's analysis of the post-Reformation "wars of religion;" that calling "these conflicts 'Wars of Religion' is an anachronism, for what was at issue in these wars was the very creation of religion as a set of privately held beliefs without direct political relevance" (98, quoting from "'A Fire Strong Enough to Consume the House': The Wars of Religion and the Rise of the State," *Modern Theology* 11 (1995), p. 398)

Chapter six looks at "New Worlds, New Religions, World Religions." Brief discussions of "religion" in India, South Africa and Japan lead into the development of the concept of "world religions," a term that seems to have been used first in 1864 (125). Nongbri concludes that

> textbooks, departmental websites of universities, and the media tend to present the model of World Religions as a self-evident fact: these religions are "simply there," and classifying them in this way is a natural or neutral activity. I have shown, however, that there is nothing natural or neutral about either the concept of religion or the framework of World Religions. (129)

Chapter seven returns to ancient religions, and "The Modern Origins of Ancient Religions." How Greek and Roman data came to be considered under the category of "religion" and the development of the concept of ancient Mesopotamian religion are analysed. This leads to a discussion in the conclusion of the consequences of reading our modern ideas into other cultures. Nongbri does not argue for ceasing to use the term religion, nor is he opposed to referring to "religion as a second-order, redescriptive concept." When using the term religion he's concerned we're aware of what we are doing and that we "avoid giving the impression that religion really was 'out there' 'embedded in' or 'diffused in' the ancient evidence" (158).

This was a very easy book to review because the content is so well organized, so clearly stated, and so concisely summarized.

*T*he centrality of the topic of religion for modern missiology is obvious, and this text demands a paradigm shift away from "conversion as change of religion" to what is being called an "insider movement" approach.

Although the data on World Religions is only a small part of the text, this is the best book I have found for introducing "religion" and "world religions" and should be integrated into curricula dealing with those topics. The centrality of this topic for modern missiology is obvious, and this text demands a paradigm shift away from "conversion as change of religion" to what is being called an "insider movement" approach. Nongbri is not pioneering new ideas, but provides an excellent statement of the current consensus in the field of religious studies.

Living Among the Breakage: Contextual Theology-Making among Ex-Muslim Christians, by Duane Alexander Miller (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016, pp. 272)

—*Reviewed by Fred Farrokh*
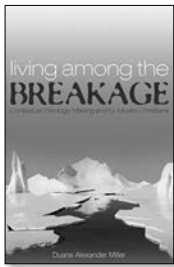
Introduction

Theology may be likened to great rivers such as the Nile and Mississippi, which run their majestic courses before splintering into their respective deltas. Christian theologians often focus on the splintering—the distinctives of their respective denominations. Yet, less attention is given to the streams and tributaries that feed the mighty theological rivers.

A new stream is flowing into global Christian theology, through the contribution of a new generation of Christians of Muslim background (CMBs). Duane Alexander Miller notes in general, "The study of CMBs is very much unresearched" (5). In *Living among the Breakage: Contextual Theology-Making and Ex-Muslim Christians,* Miller sets out to remedy this deficiency by considering how CMBs are developing their own practical theology, even if this may not yet resemble textbook-style systematic theology.

How Miller Sets Up His Book
It should be noted this book is based on Miller's doctoral dissertation. As such, it necessarily includes hypotheses testing and theory formation. Nevertheless, *Living among the Breakage* is highly readable.

Miller, an Anglican, begins this fascinating study by addressing contextualization, though not from the angle that some *IJFM* readers will likely expect. Instead of focusing on the often-controversial topic of contextualized cross-cultural communication, which Miller describes as "directed contextualization," he amplifies the contextualized, indigenous theology-making of the CMBs themselves. He describes this as "organic contextualization," a process which is inherently done *by and from* the local church. Miller credits the Taiwanese educator-pastor Shoki Coe with framing contextualization within an ecclesial parameter. Herein, indigenous Christians undertake the "double wrestle" with "God's Word" and "God's world."

The book's title, *Living among the Breakage*, comes from T. S. Eliot. Miller notes that we live in a time of breakage, described by Peter Berger as the "heretical imperative." Miller explains:

> Some people make choices that previously would have been unthinkable–whether that may be the Baptist lady in Oklahoma who converts to Buddhism or the Muslim sheikh in Mecca who converts to Christianity. (2)

While Christian readers may lament the decision of the Baptist lady in Oklahoma, missional Christians should not overlook the momentous times in which we live: Muslims are turning to Christ. Miller has done yeoman's work in accessing these CMBs and soliciting their perspectives.

Miller gives particular attention in this study to the concept of "power," employing Steven Lukes' theory of "Three Dimensions of Power." This angle may seem odd but by the end of the book the reader will consider it germane. Theology-making tends to be an empowering pursuit. CMBs are often persecuted and frequently powerless in the face of coercive forces around them, such as governments, Sharia legal constrictions, and even family members who consider them a "pollution" which must be eliminated.

Miller also includes a robust section on "conversion," which *IJFM* readers will recognize as a controversial topic.[1] The author recognizes that conversion may be a process rather than something that happens at a given moment in time; his CMB interviewees clearly indicate they embrace the identity of being Christian converts out of Islam. This choice by Miller essentially delimits his research to Muslim-background theology-makers who now identify themselves as Christians and part of the global Church.

Miller's Field Research among CMBs
Miller's introductory chapters set the stage for his field research among CMBs in three different contexts—a "Muslim-background congregation" in an unnamed Arab country, and two diaspora Iranian congregations, one in the UK and one in the USA. Miller has lived in the Middle East for nearly a decade, and speaks Arabic. The author thus

*T*he CMB theology–making chronicled by Miller demonstrates a depth which eclipses the textual fundamentalism of Sunnism, reaches deeper than the cathartic messianism of Shi'ism, and soars higher than the spiritual mysticism of Sufism.

has a contextual familiarity which allows him not only to find the dots but also to connect them.[2] He also embedded himself in these communities for long enough to observe their worship and take the pulse of their "double-wrestle." In all things, Miller is to be commended for bringing forth the perspectives of what the reader cannot but help to recognize as real people who face real challenges, even if pseudonyms are used.

How CMBs are Expressing their Theology

Though CMBs are not typically writing theology textbooks, Miller demonstrates the richness of the new CMB theology in their poems, songs and worship services. Miller also elicits their theological perspectives through personal interviews with laypersons and leaders. Miller by no means suggests that CMB thinking is monolithic. Chapter Five covers CMB theological output as manifested globally in their devotional poetry, testimonials ("conversion narratives"), and "wisdom literature" in dealing with real-life issues of persecution, reconciliation, forgiveness, baptism, and marriage. "Ayya" is a Muslim-background female lay pastor who features prominently in the Arab congregation, indicating that the willingness of CMBs to have women in leadership extends far beyond the Islamic paradigm, and may even surpass that of many Arabic evangelical contexts.

The Content of CMB Theology-Making

What exactly is the content of CMB theology? This is the heart of the book, and it could well result, if Miller so chooses, in a new missions primer or a number of missiological training articles. Suffice to say CMB self-theologizing does not simply mirror global patterns. For instance, CMB views of atonement emphasize less the penal substitutionary aspect of Christ's work, and more the manifestation of God's love poured out on the Cross.

Muhammad and Islam

IJFM readers have been exposed to the missiological discussion regarding the prophethood of Muhammad. As Harley Talman queries, "Is Muhammad also among the Prophets?"[3] While, it is no surprise that the CMBs in Miller's study take a negative view of Muhammad and the religion he founded, Islam, Miller includes a blunt observation: "I do not recall a single instance of any CMB ever telling me they had learned anything about ethics or God from Muhammad" (224). Readers who are not from a Muslim background may wonder if this is simply a knee-jerk reaction by new believers who feel Islam has not only bound them personally but also consigned all their deceased loved

ones to hell. How do these CMBs back up their position? The answers come within this erudite volume.

Love and Power

Miller's application of Lukes' power theory comes into focus by the end of the book. CMB theology-formation, notes Miller, is "Christo-centric." The material provided by Miller about CMBs is too emotive not to quote from it:

> In turning away from the Umma and Muhammad and the Qur'an, they have turned away from a loveless power they perceived there to Jesus, his Church and the Bible and a deity whose power is perfected in weakness and whose love is stronger than death. And from this experience of the deity's love-power some have endeavored to build a new identity from the breakage among which they have lived. (237)

In many ways, the CMB theology-making chronicled by Miller demonstrates a depth which eclipses the textual fundamentalism of Sunnism, reaches deeper than the cathartic messianism of Shi'ism, and soars higher than the spiritual mysticism of Sufism.

CMB theology includes a strain of liberation theology—a term Miller uses in the book. Yet, it is not the Latin, political liberation theology of decades past, though Islam is undeniably political. Instead, the liberation is a spiritual one. It is a liberation that includes union with Jesus, the All-Powerful One who once rendered Himself seemingly powerless.

Insider Movements and Ecclesiology

Here Miller observes:

> IM is indeed an open debate among American evangelical "scholars," but among the CMB's I met, it is of no interest. Rather there is a clear consensus that belonging to a local church, being baptized and, with only *possible* exceptions when faced with danger, using the label *Christian* and rejecting the label *Muslim* are indeed what God and the Bible require. That is *their* point of view—theology done by the ex-Muslim Christian. The centrality of the Church in this theology is not up for debate because for them, apparently, the Church is seen as *part* of the Good News of God revealed in his Messiah. (222)

These CMBs demonstrate some creative and brave strategies in dealing with community expulsion and persecution, including the use of safe houses. Ayya even visited the Muslim families of CMB women she mentored to try to rescue and restore these ruptured relationships.

Identity

Turkish CMB Ziya Meral has chronicled the plight of his fellow CMBs in *No Place to Call Home*.[4] The Arab CMBs

*C*MBs feel they no longer retain Muslim identity, yet the wider Muslim community refuses to confer upon them Christian identity. This results in a slow, incomplete identity formation which Miller describes as "liminal."

studied by Miller express a similar dilemma. They themselves feel they no longer retain Muslim identity, yet the wider Muslim community refuses to confer upon them Christian identity. This results in a grindingly slow, yet incomplete, identity formation process which Miller describes as "liminal." One Arab lay leader even "wondered if it would take an entire generation before a new (non-liminal) identity could emerge" (144). This daunting timeframe may challenge those who prioritize rapidity in missions.

Unfinished business

Though he is a leading researcher of this global CMB movement, Miller wisely asks his readers not to overstate or generalize his conclusions. For instance, Miller's interviews of diaspora Iranian CMBs cause him to conclude that they seek a purified Persian culture based on Christianity and shorn of the Arab Islamizing influence. While this may be true to an extent, many such congregations worldwide feature Afghans, Tajiks and other (non-Persian) Iranians worshipping side by side. Furthermore, many ex-Muslim Iranian Christians recognize the shortcomings of their own native culture, which may feature indirect and less than honest communication. An Iranian Christian brother once asked when we are going to take Jesus' command seriously to simply let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no." And Miller's choice of viewing CMB theology-making through the prism of power theory is a valid avenue, but it is not the only appropriate prism of study. While more research is needed, Miller has made an excellent contribution in this new field.

Concluding Thoughts:

Duane Miller has entered the world of ex-Muslim Christians. It is not a simple world, but a complex one of trauma and breakage, trial and triumph. Through his research, Miller must be commended for not only identifying the key issues facing CMBs, but probing the very pain and open shame that sets the backdrop against which CMB life is painted. Indeed, Miller has painted a picture of CMBs who share with Jesus both the fellowship of His sufferings and the irrepressible power of His resurrection.

For those willing to invest the time to read a book that is somewhat academic, Miller's *Living among the Breakage* will be well worth the while. For those teaching seminary or training classes on ministry to Muslims, adding this book to the "Required Reading" list will be a wise choice. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] See, for example, the entire *IJFM,* 30:1 (Jan-March 2013).

[2] Readers may also benefit from a recent wider global survey of CMBs which Duane Miller co-authored with Patrick Johnstone of *Operation World*: Patrick Johnstone and Duane A. Miller, "Believers in Christ from a Muslim Background: A Global Census," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion,* vol. 11, article 1 (2015).

[3] *IJFM,* 31:4 (Oct–Dec 2014): 169–190.

[4] Meral, Ziya, *No Place to Call Home: Experiences of Apostates from Islam, Failures of the International Community* (New Malden, Surrey, UK: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 2008).

In Others' Words

Editor's Note: In this department, we highlight resources outside of the IJFM: *other journals, print resources, DVDs, web sites, blogs, videos, etc. Standard disclaimers on content apply. Due to the length of many web addresses, we sometimes give just the title of the resource, the main web address, or a suggested search phrase. Finally, please note that this July–September 2016 issue is partly composed of material created later in 2016 and early 2017. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience caused by such anachronisms.*

Evangelicals Debate Refugee Policies

For an excellent article about worldwide repercussions to the travel ban's prioritization of persecuted religious minorities, see "Should America's Refugee Policy Put Persecuted Christians First?" (*Christianity Today* Jan 31, 2017). In it you will find thoughtful responses from four Christian leaders from several organizations including Open Doors and World Relief.

A Perspective from Lebanon

Lebanese Christians have seen the population of their tiny country of four million grow by over 1/3 in just six years due to an influx of refugees from Iraq and Syria. Martin Accad says this about their response:

> Numerous churches in Lebanon…have flung their doors open to refugees and demonstrated compassion to levels unseen before. Refugees, regardless of their religious backgrounds, have been flocking into church buildings, where they have found love, compassion, and community. No institution can understand and practice the compassion of God demonstrated in Jesus like the church can.

To read the rest of his blog, google "A Wake-up Call for People of Faith in the Twenty-First Century."

How to Love Muslims in a Polarized America

For a wonderful article giving ordinary Christians suggestions of how to not only love Muslims, but how to invite fearful friends and neighbors into relationships with Muslims, see Shane Bennett's latest in *Mission Catalyst* "Can Normal People Love Jesus, Muslims, and America—at the Same Time?" http://missionscatalyst.net/.

A Series of Blogs About the Book *Insider Jesus*

Warrick Farah in Circumpolar has begun a series of blog reviews of the new book *Insider Jesus* by William Dyrness, professor of Theology and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary. Farah's latest three blogs deal with the first three chapters of Dyrness' book and include extensive quotes as well as some of Farah's own thoughts. He invites readers to read the book along with him: http://muslimministry.blogspot.com/.

Status of the Unreached

Justin Long has a gold mine of resources at justinlong.org, including two posts that take a look at numbers that matter:

"Adding another 600 hundred million unevangelized by 2050" and "Why is the unfinished task not getting finished when…?"

Millennial Men Missing in US Missions

The number of young men joining the Catholic priesthood has fallen precipitously and some within the Catholic world are wondering if the requirement of celibacy is at fault. (See Erasmus "Why the Priesthood is in Crisis" in *The Economist* Jan 22, 2017.) Yet in US Protestant missions, the number of young men going into missions work has also dropped with no concurrent celibacy requirement. This gap has left thousands of young women missionaries facing an unwanted life of celibacy. For 2015 statistics see justinlong.org/singles-vs-couples.php. In December of 2016, John Piper asked "Why Are Women More Eager Missionaries?"

This brings us to the question: Is there something more profound that is happening to young men? In 2013, we mentioned the 2007 book *Boys Adrift* in which Leonard Sax contends that a full one third of men aged 22-35 are living at home and are more interested in playing video games five hours a day than in working or getting married. Have we in the missions world faced up to this loss of one third of a generation of young men? Is there something we can do to bring them back into a life of purpose? (see "In Others' Words" column in the *IJFM* issue 30:4).

The Contribution of Single Women

This is not to downplay the historic and tremendous contribution that single women missionaries have made. See Dana Roberts' excellent 2014 historical summary of Protestant women in mission: /New-World-Outlook-Magazine/New-World-Outlook-Archives/2014/March-April/0306womeninmission. Nor is it to overlook the unique opportunities single people can take advantage of. Here is an optimistic blog from the pen of a single Southern Baptist young woman missionary written late 2016: "The Missions Force is Incomplete without Single People."

Financial Tsunami in India

In late November, 2016, the prime minister of India, in an effort to rein in the black market and collect taxes on undeclared earnings, abruptly canceled the two highest value rupee notes, the 500 and 1000 notes (or 86.5% of all cash in circulation), according to "India's Currency Reform Was Botched in Execution" (see *The Economist* Dec 3, 2016). To make matters worse, the government had not printed nearly enough notes to replace them. ATMs promptly ran out of cash, banks were mobbed, and millions of the poor lost their meager life savings. People were only given until the end of the year to exchange their bank notes (worth $7.30 and $14.60 respectively) but all told over 22 billion notes were affected. Informed sources place the government's capacity for printing new banknotes at only 3 billion per month which means a huge number of notes could not be redeemed by the deadline. All this in a land where four fifths of the wage earners are paid in cash and 98% of all consumer transactions are in cash. **IJFM**
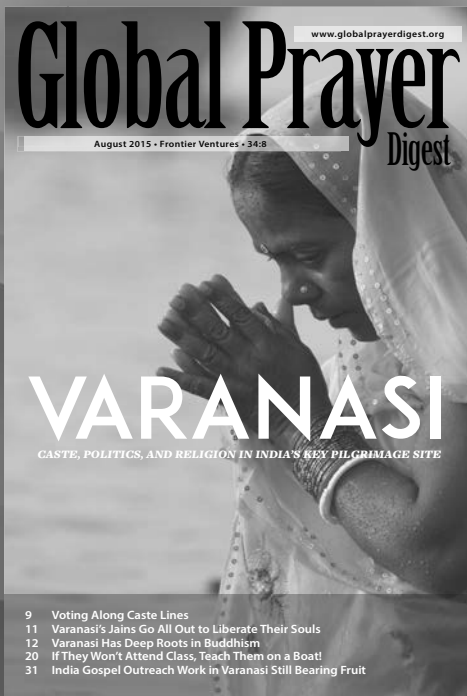
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Related Perspectives Lesson and Section

Articles in **IJFM** 33:3	Lesson 5: Unleashing the Gospel (B)	Lesson 6: The Expansion of the World Christian Movement (H)	Lesson 7: Eras of Mission History (H)	Lesson 10: How Shall They Hear? (C)	Lesson 14: Pioneer Church Planting (S)
Starting Points: Approaching the Frontier Missiological Task Bradford Greer (pp. 93–100)			X		X
Joyful Witness: An Excerpt on Muslim-Christian Attachment Evelyne A. Reisacher (pp. 103–6)	X			X	X
A Response to "Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?" John Azumah and Harley Talman (pp. 108–13)		X			X
"Is Muhammad Also Among the Prophets?": A Second Response to Harley Talman Ayman Ibrahim and Harley Talman (pp. 116–35)		X			X