Navigating the Constraints of the *Ummah:*
A Comparison of Christ Movements in Iran and Bangladesh

by Christian J. Anderson

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Discipleship to Jesus always takes place within the contours of particular social contexts, whether it fits smoothly into these social constraints, or rubs abrasively against them. For those following Jesus in the Muslim-majority world, religion is an essential and unavoidable part of this social context. Islam is rarely a privatized or compartmentalized set of beliefs—the practices of its "Five Pillars" are public. Muslim religion interpenetrates community life, not only intertwining with culture, but integrating with social and political structures. Yet missiologists have often overlooked this key socio-political dimension of Muslim context.

Structures (Not Just Culture) as Discipleship Context

In the long history and eventual decline of the historic Christian churches in the Muslim world across Asia, the limitations imposed by Muslim socio-political structures were fundamental to the working out of a public, witnessing presence.[1] Those constraints continue to be basic to the dynamics of how Christians living under Muslim governments in Asia and Africa congregate and witness. Yet with regard to Muslim-background Christ fellowships and discipleship movements within Islam, western missiology has preferred to focus on religion in terms of *cultural* contextualization, often neglecting Islam's social structures as an essential part of that discipleship context. It was anthropologist Charles Kraft's application of dynamic equivalence theory to the *cultural* forms that the church might take in a mission context that helped set the direction for the Insider Movement debates.[2] The concept of the "homogenous unit principle," developed by Donald McGavran and mission anthropologist Alan Tippett, focused on contextualizing the Bible and Christian witness within distinct "people groups," as delineated by language, ethnicity, and culture. Social structure was acknowledged only as boundaries defined by these local affinities, potentially isolating these groups—and any people movements within them—from one another in the spread of the gospel.[3] David Shenk, however, soon noticed the problems of over-emphasizing these ethnic delineations in the Muslim world with its larger sense of collective religious identity.[4]

When John Jay Travis introduced his important category of "C5" Christ-centered communities that remained "legally and socially" within Islam, it was still in a framework that emphasized *cultural*-religious appropriation. The *sociological* context of a C5 community of faith was obscured. Travis distinguished between types of believing communities that used religiously neutral language and cultural forms (C3), Islamic cultural forms (C4), and Islamic forms and aspects of Islamic theology (C5).[5] The important aspect of social identity in Travis' model has only been pursued more recently, with David Greenlee's edited collection *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between?* It is a book full of illuminating studies on how individual Muslim-background believers negotiate their personal identity within Muslim society and in relation to both Muslim and Christian communities.[6] But far less has been written focusing on Muslim *social structures* themselves, taking seriously their capacity to affect whole discipleship movements (not just individual identity). This deficiency reflects North American missiology's interaction with the social sciences, where anthropology has traditionally been more influential than sociology.[7] Clifford Geertz's anthropology of religion has been especially prominent in our missiology, and we more readily view religion as a set of symbols that evocatively communicate worldview meaning; we are less prone to accept Talal Asad's critique that wider social processes shape the meaning of those symbols,[8] or to use Peter Berger's analysis of religion and societal structure as mutually dependent.[9]

Two recent contributions may indicate a correction of this tendency to focus only on culture. Fuller Theological Seminary's 2016 Missiological Lectures were devoted to trying to understand the "Dynamics of Contemporary Muslim Societies" as vital preliminary work to any missionary engagement.[10] The other contribution is a recent article by John Jay Travis and Anna Travis in which they examine the "Societal Factors Impacting Socioreligious Identities of Muslims Who Follow Jesus."[11] They look at discipleship of Muslim-background believers through the lens of Muslim social structures and focus on a similar question to the one I wish to pursue: *"why* different groups of Muslim-background believers gravitate toward different types of fellowships."[12]

In analyzing 2007 data from 5,800 surveys completed by field workers across the Muslim world, the Travis research first pointed to a large distribution of Christ fellowships in their three categories of C3 (28%), C4 (37%), and C5/Insider (21%), with

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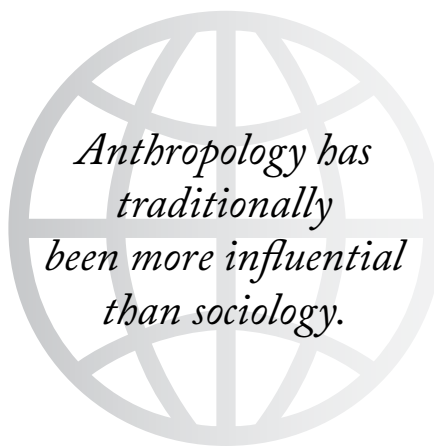
a further 8% in the C6 category of "secret believers." Why the different C-spectrum fellowships in different places? With the caveat that missionaries themselves may have influenced the kinds of fellowship that form, the authors then identify a string of on-the-ground factors, which include:

1. Political factors (including how Islamic law is enforced with conversion penalties)
2. Communal factors (at the family and neighborhood level where peer pressure occurs)
3. Religious, demographic, and cultural factors (including the history of Muslim-Christian relations and the strength of ethnic identities with respect to religious ones)
4. Individual factors (relating to the integrity and experience of Islam on a personal level)[13]

As I will demonstrate, these are very pertinent observations. But the factors listed are not ordered by importance nor arranged systematically. Since the authors are (understandably) reluctant to publish the names of the countries where certain types of fellowships have emerged, it is difficult to go further and connect particular societal factors with particular types of fellowship.

I hope that this article will stimulate ideas for taking socio-political context seriously as we compare different Jesus-discipleship movements in the Muslim world. I want to give special attention to the Muslim ummah, that fundamental socio-religious structure of global Muslim identity. First, I will look at the ummah as a basic force serving to bind together Muslim society, a force with which all Muslim-background movements to Christ must come to terms. But I will argue that there are variations in the potency of the ummah's structural layers—variations which may help explain why a particular type of discipleship movement would more likely occur in one part of the Muslim world and not another. As evidence for this, I will then compare discipleship movements in Iran and Bangladesh.

The Muslim Ummah and Jesus Discipleship

The *ummah*[14]—the worldwide "Muslim community" that's experienced locally and perceived globally—has been held together by strong social and political bonds from its inception. The Qur'an uses the word "ummah" sixty-two times, with slightly different meanings.[15] While for the most part an ummah is a religious community to which God has sent a prophet, there seems to be a progression in the latter Medinan surahs,[16] where more often it

refers to Muhammad's community—those who have truly submitted to God under the prophet's teaching, and who have now become exemplary, "the best of all communities that has been brought forth."[17]

It was in Medina that Muhammad united Arabs across tribal lines into a single community, while rallying them to fight in the name of Islam against those from their own tribe and bloodlines. Ties to the ummah now trumped tribe and kin. But many characteristics of Arabian tribal life would be carried over: primary loyalty to the Muslim "tribe," religio-political headship, spatial territoriality, and impositions on non-members.[18] Muhammad saw the ummah as being a place of political and economic protection *(dhimma)* for non-Muslims willing to submit to its overall authority, evidenced initially in the monotheistic Jewish community's being allowed to exist alongside the Muslims with only hints of a lower sub-ummah status.[19] But as Muhammad's Medinan revelations became more legislative, theocratic pressures were exerted on the three Jewish tribes, two of whom were exiled and one attacked.[20]

A trajectory had begun where Mohammedan monotheism was to be inseparably intertwined with lines of social and political organization, and the whole would be referred to as the Muslim ummah. Although today there is no longer an overall political structure governing all Muslims, there is an ingrained Muslim belief in the ummah as a global society under one God and his *sharia*.[21] This global consciousness has taken on powerful social and legal flesh in distinctive ways in diverse Muslim societies. This is what I want to explore.

This socio-religious "oneness" of the ummah is the right starting point for seeing the challenging socio-political context for Muslim-background discipleship. It implies two pressures acting as a "forcefield" within which disciples of Jesus make their spiritual decisions: an inward acting bond

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based on Muslim religious confession and practice, and an outward exclusion of the non-Muslim who must be socially and legally separate from the ummah. These forces bring a range of related challenges for a fruitful disciple-making movement, which I associate with:

1. Faithful presence
2. Faithful distinction
3. Next-generation continuity

First, consider the difficulty of *faithful presence* alongside the ummah. These social forces may not allow Jesus discipleship a tenable "alongside" position. The ummah protects those within it and opposes those who depart with the zeal of wounded tribal honor. For the new Christ followers who do leave, they often forfeit family inheritance, employment networks, marriage prospects, even a home to live in.[22] Though such a sacrificial decision in Jesus' name can be initially a powerful act of witness, they must then join Christ communities that are cut off from former Muslim families and networks. Even when they can negotiate a degree of continuity in those relationships,[23] the challenge remains: How can they fruitfully disciple members of the ummah if it has shunned them?

Not surprisingly, the large 2007 study I referred to earlier indicated that Christ fellowships remaining in the ummah (C5) were more successful at seeing the gospel permeate and transform their existing social networks.[24] But to remain within the Muslim community brings another problem: that of *faithful distinction*. The inward pull of Muslim social structures is towards a religious unity around a Muhammad-mediated monotheism. How can disciples live within these structures and still, with integrity, uphold Jesus as God's supreme mediating authority?

Whether pulled into the ummah or pushed away from it, Tim Green reminds us that discipling communities also face the issue of next-generation continuity.[25] For Muslim-background Christ fellowships that have pulled away from the ummah, the next generation is likely to pull further away from the possibility of discipling new Muslims: either they develop their own religious identity (if the Muslim-background community is large enough to marry into), or they join a Christian church. Christ fellowships that remain inside the ummah risk being reabsorbed back into a "non-Jesus following Islam," through the inexorable pressures of intermarriage, orthodox Islamic teaching in their socio-religious networks, and a weak connection to the global body of Christ. Green suggests that the most stable position might be as a tolerated sect within Islam, though finding a stable identity may be at odds with sustaining an outward-looking discipleship movement.[26]

However, discipleship does not take place merely against the backdrop of the ummah's singularity but also against its variation across contexts. Though it exerts a consistent and powerful socio-religious influence across the Muslim world, this unifying force is stronger in some places than in others, and the different institutional structures that hold the ummah together vary in strength. For the sake of conceptualization, I will try to simplify the ummah's complex socio-religious bonds into a set of three strata:

1. The individual level
2. The family and mosque network level
3. The collective and state level

By the use of this three-fold strata I am aligning with Tim Green's analysis

of personal identity negotiation among Muslim-background Christ followers, which he believes takes place at the levels of "core identity," "social identity," and "collective identity."[27] Here, though, I am more interested in analyzing the ummah's bonding influence toward the Muslim identity.

At each of these levels (i.e., individual, family/mosque, and collective/state) there are certain agents, patterns, rituals, and penalties which engender loyalty to the ummah. At the individual level, heart loyalty to the ummah may emerge from factors such as household upbringing, ongoing personal prayers, personal convictions about Muhammad and the truth of Islam, or conceivably from a demonic bondage.

Family and mosque network could reinforce Muslim loyalty to the ummah in a myriad of ways: mosque and festival participation, a particular imam's authority in social and religious matters, the requirement to marry another Muslim, the strong social and economic support extended to fellow Muslims, the withholding of this same support from non-Muslims, and the threat of banishment, physical punishment, or honor killing for those who attempt to leave Islam.

At the collective and state level, bonds to the ummah could be fortified by the joining of national/ethnic identity with Islam, laws of apostasy and intermarriage, pervasive legal and judicial bias against non-Muslims, the fixed religious status of citizenship cards, or by extra-judicial arrests and persecution.

Straightaway, it is obvious that different ummah structures will vary in strength and importance across different contexts. A spiritually disillusioned Muslim woman in Tehran and a proud Muslim Indonesian immigrant in London are both tied into the same universal ummah, but through different local structures. Even within a single country, the ummah's cohesion may vary significantly between regions and across an urban-rural axis.

Don Little's recent study into the obstacles faced by sixty Muslim-background disciple-makers in the Arab world demonstrates that the ummah presents different challenges in different church planting contexts, and Little also found it helpful to categorize them into Green's three levels of identity negotiation. He found that the three most frequently cited obstacles were at the level of social identity: pressure from family, from the religious community, and from economic vulnerability; also, frequently cited were personal fears at the core level, and at the collective level the challenges of marriage, child-rearing, and education laws.[28] But my point is that these are more than problems of individual identity negotiation. Each

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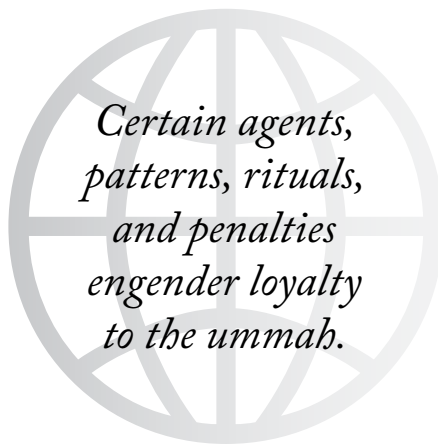
"obstacle" that Little identifies are features of a larger socio-political landscape in that part of the Muslim world. They are clues to the social contexts that shape and transform what "effective discipling" will look like.

A Comparison of Iran and Bangladesh

By taking a look at two Muslim-background discipleship movements in Iran and Bangladesh, I want to begin to test the hypothesis that fruitful Christ movements in the Muslim world will vary in form according to the strength and relative importance of the different structures of the ummah. For each of these locations I will describe the kind

of discipleship movements that are occurring, and then examine how their features interact with the strength of the ummah's ties at the individual, family/mosque, and state/collective level.

Iran

In Iran, there are now about 100,000 Muslim-background Christ followers—still a tiny portion of its population of 82 million, but growing rapidly from as few as 500 Muslim-background believers when the revolution occurred in 1979.[29] Duane Alexander Miller's research indicated that these new believers have decisively turned away from the ummah, and from the authority of the Qur'an and Muhammad, and are embracing an evangelical form of Christianity.[30] Forbidden by law to enter into established Christian churches,[31] they meet in small, secret home gatherings as regularly as security permits, and may not even use their real names.[32] According to Christian news sites, these are usually small groups of five to twelve people, and if they get any bigger, they will tend to form new groups.[33] Some of these groups are led via the internet by pastors who have fled the country, and many make use of Farsi Christian television channels broadcast from outside Iran.[34] Leaders appear to be quickly raised up; new converts frequently begin organizing their own house groups within six months, at which point they are likely to come under monitoring by the Iranian government.[35] The government's Revolutionary Guard have increased harassment strategies to prevent new Christ followers from progressing along a path from worship, to baptism, on to evangelism: they begin with warnings, but eventually proceed to imprisonment, flogging, or exile to remote parts of Iran.[36]

Let us take a step back and look at the three strata of the ummah as a context for this extraordinary movement of Iranian Muslims to Christ. At the *state/collective level,* the Iranian government takes strong measures to bind Iran as a nation to the Muslim ummah and

to violently repress any religious alternative. Nor is there a legal religious identity available to Iranian converts, since they are not allowed to associate with the official Christian churches (who themselves are prohibited from conducting services in Farsi).[37] Once found out, Muslim-background Christians also face bureaucratic obstacles to employment and education.[38] From what we have outlined, the threat of the state is arguably the dominant social context to which the dynamics of the Christ fellowships must adjust. The pressure to conform to the ummah is not coming from a senior family member or mosque leader, but from the regime above, leading to a dynamic of covertness, as distinct from insider-ness or an isolated invisibility (C5 and C6 on Travis' spectrum).

There is, however, another element that can weaken this state strata of the ummah in Iran: a collective sense of Persian identity that runs so deep as to rival Islam as a unifying force. The two corporate identities are competing "ethnocultural loyalties," according to Harold Rhode.[39] The Persian civilization long preceded Islamic conquest, and its history, language, and literature evoke pride even when it contradicts Islam.[40] The Muslim-background believers to whom Miller spoke were evidently ready to re-connect to this Persian collective identity.[41] It's quite conceivable that a future Iranian government could choose to bind national unity to Persian ethnicity instead of to the ummah.[42]

The ummah's "middle" identity level of *mosque and family networks* appears much weaker in binding people to the Muslim community. Mosque attendance in Iran is exceptionally low for the Muslim world: only 27% of Iranians

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go even once a week.[43] Compared to religious leaders in other Muslim societies, the Shiite clerics have had their own influence reduced by politicization from above.[44] Iranian reformist writers Abdolkarim Soroush and Muhammad Mujtahid Shabestari have objected to Iran's religious authority being concentrated in the hands of the government rather than in the hands of pious, independent religious scholars.[45] The apparent disconnect between Iranian families and local mosque authority may help explain how the Christ discipleship movement seems to spread so effectively through family and relational networks.[46] If Iran's family networks are inherently strong, but their ties to the ummah are weak, this would make it possible for whole groups to quickly shift allegiance to Christ.[47]

At the *personal* level, Iranians' ties to the ummah also appear very weak. Disillusionment with the autocratic tendencies of the Islamic Republic has contributed to a disillusionment with Islam itself.[48] The tendency for new believers in Jesus to do away with all Muslim forms of worship, especially when the state is not watching, indicates that house church members do not feel much loyalty to the ummah's devotional patterns of approaching God. Similarly, when Iranians have attempted to make a new start in Europe, many are quick to dissociate themselves from Islam and convert to Christianity, either genuinely or in order to increase their chances of asylum.[49] Collating these observations for Iran, we can then sum up the relative strengths of the ummah strata as shown in table 1 below.

Bangladesh

Moving from Iran to Bangladesh, we find another significant movement of people to Christ from a Muslim background, but who are remaining within the ummah, calling themselves "Isai Muslims"[50] *(isa imandars)*.[51] Isai Muslims in Bangladesh were first identified as "insider movements" in western missiology discussions in the 1980s.[52] Since then, the movement has grown: the World Christian Database estimates that by 2015, the majority of Muslim-background believers in Bangladesh were members of insider movements—100,000 out of 180,000.[53] Finding and publishing accurate information on *Bangladeshi* Isai Muslims in particular is not straightforward; those within the fellowships, and the cross-cultural workers who are in contact with them, want to keep a certain level of anonymity, so a lot of information must be included under a larger heading of "South Asia." (This itself says something about these believers' global sociological positioning: whereas Iranian underground churches have many advocates among migrants' groups, human rights' groups, and western denominations, Bangladeshi Isai Muslims only have obscure missionary voices, who themselves are treated with suspicion by many Christian stakeholders.) Tim Green, quoting a trusted informant in Dhaka, gives a helpful overview of how Isai Muslims fit socially into the Bangladeshi Christ-followers landscape:

> [i] The first group is made up of the ones we call "Christian." They are completely assimilated in the traditional church with its festivals, language and social relationships. They no longer have any contact with their Muslim relatives. [ii] In the second group are the ones called *"Isai."*[54] They mostly live in the Christian community but

Table 1. Levels of Ummah Cohesion (Iran)

State/Collective (Ummah strata)	High (strength)
Mosque and extended family	Low
Personal	Low
Type of Discipleship Movement	Covert/Underground, outside the Ummah

preserve a little contact with their Muslim relatives, visit them at *Eid* and so on. They switch between Christian and Muslim terminology according to the group they are with…their Muslim relatives view them as heretical but not beyond the bounds of social contact. [iii] Next we have… *"Isai* Muslim." They are mostly in the Muslim community but they preserve a little contact with Christians. They use Muslim terminology…Muslims view them as an odd kind of Muslim, but acceptable within the range of Muslim sects. [iv] Finally we have those who follow Jesus but are called "Muslim." They remain within the Muslim community…[and] have no contact with Christians…[Some] Believers in this group meet for fellowship with each other…Others…do not meet up with other Jesus-followers.[55]

Even though Green's point is to show that there is a range of identity options for the Muslim who turns to Christ, we can still see a social gap between the first two options (outside the ummah) and the second two (inside the ummah), and hints that the gap is determined by their extended family. We get a more detailed snapshot in Jonas Adelin Jorgensen's field study, where he interviewed forty-four members of three Jesus *imandar* groups in Dhaka during 2002 and 2004.[56] Fitting into Green's third "Isai Muslim" category, these members have a small amount of contact with the Christian community[57] but meet as *jamaat* (community) fellowships, mainly in homes but sometimes in offices or slum areas, retaining Muslim forms and redirecting them to Jesus.[58] Most had been baptized.[59] Most continued to attend the mosque in some way, either regularly or when they visit their family in the village.[60]

Looking at Bangladesh's ummah structures as a context for the growth of *Isai Muslims,* we see that ummah ties at the *state/collective level* have a degree of slackness. The constitution is ambivalent:

> The state religion…is Islam, but the state shall ensure equal rights in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian…religions.[61]

That is, Bangladeshi national identity is not exclusively tied to Islam; there is a degree of religious freedom for Christians, and in theory, freedom for Muslims to convert to Christianity.[62] But there has always been a competition in Bangladeshi politics between a secularist Bengali national vision—represented by founding father Sheik Mujib's generation, who fought for independence against Pakistan in 1971—and an Islamic nationalism, which rose up after Mujib's assassination in 1975. While Islamic politics have gained influence in the last decade,[63] the government has not directly persecuted Christians (barring land displacement pressures in rural areas[64]). Unlike Iran, churches with Muslim-background believers do not currently face legal pressure.

At the *mosque/family network level,* the ummah bonds are far stronger. While weekly mosque attendance (53%) is only medium in comparison to other Muslim populations,[65] those in religious authority at the community level wield considerable influence. A study of communities in the Dinajpur district described a popular desire for moral order to be regulated at the level of the *samaj* (local or kinship community), with the mosque playing a key role.[66] It is *communal* rather than state violence that Christian churches have to fear. The U.S. State Department's 2016 report into religious freedom in Bangladesh highlights community violence against religious minorities, documenting fifteen of the year's worst incidents, in both rural and urban settings. This included the attempted murder of a Muslim convert to Christianity in May 2015, and 60 Catholics being beaten by sticks in June.[67]

Muslim Isai, too, face pressure from their families and local networks for their commitment to Jesus. Jorgensen's interviewees reported that their families treated the move with great suspicion, or even accused them of madness; one described how his village court had ruled that other villagers should sever social and business ties with them.[68] With community-level authority functioning to protect against even the Muslim Isai type of deviation, we can see these Muslim Isai as having developed a feasible but difficult social position—one that coheres with their faith in Jesus, and finds a place for it in a very taut, even claustrophobic, socio-religious setting.

At the *individual* level of the ummah, it is difficult to estimate how deep Bangladeshi loyalty to the ummah goes. In the 2012 Pew Survey, 81% of Bangladeshi Muslims said that religion was important to them, yet only 39% said they prayed several times a day.[69] A window onto Bangladeshi personal commitment to Islam is provided by Isai Muslims themselves. In Jorgensen's study, some of the interviewees are more enthusiastic than others with keeping the term "Muslim" as a self-description.[70] What does seem clear is that there is an appreciation of the Muslim worship forms (more than Muslim religious structures), and various levels of un-enthusiasm about the Christian churches and even "Christianity" as a religion.[71] The contrast here with Iranian converts is striking. With admittedly more research needed on this last stratum, we can surmise the following levels of ummah cohesion for Bangladesh, shown in table 2 below.

Table 2. Levels of Ummah Cohesion (Bangladesh)

State/Collective (Ummah strata)	Low
Mosque and extended family	High
Personal	Medium
Type of Discipleship Movement	Isai Muslim prayer fellowships, inside the Ummah

Conclusion

I have laid out a way that we can take social context seriously as we consider what kind of fruitful disciple-making movements God is causing to flourish in the Muslim world. Tim Green, in calling for a reframing of the polarized debate over Insider Movements, remarks

> …the debate is *too generalized.* The socio-cultural contexts of such countries as Algeria, Iran, Bangladesh and Indonesia are very different from each other. Why, then, do we persist in homogenizing them all with the same lines of argument?[72]

In comparing contexts, I have argued we need to pay attention to the ummah as a fundamental socio-religious constraint operating at all levels of Muslim society, and thereby pulling on, or pushing against, any Jesus discipleship movement that occurs. By examining the strength of these forces on three different levels of social structure in Iran and Bangladesh, I have tried to show that there is a logic to the kind of discipleship movement that emerges and proves fruitful. I hope that others will engage with the initial model I've proposed, suggesting where it is either inadequate or useful, especially in its application to other Muslim populations—whether in the Muslim-majority world or outside of it. I believe it has predictive value, but we must see if that value extends to the further challenges which ensue in the social positioning of the second generation.[73]

No genuine follower of Jesus from a Muslim background chooses an easy path. In fact, those we have looked at in Iran and Bangladesh are willing to defy their most powerful ummah stakeholders (the state and the community respectively). Yet, they do it in ways that make sense in their socio-political context, ways that prove feasible for the gospel of Jesus to take root and flourish among Muslim peoples and their societies. **IJFM**

*T*hese Muslim Isai have developed a feasible but difficult social position that coheres with their faith in Jesus in a claustrophobic socio–religious setting.

Endnotes

[1] Samuel Moffatt, in the conclusion to his first volume of the history of Asian Christianity, says: "The church might better have withstood violence. Sharp persecution breaks off only the tips of the branches; it produces martyrs and the tree still grows. Never-ending social and political repression, on the other hand, starves the roots; it stifles evangelism and the church declines. Such was the history of the church in Asia under Islam." *A History of Christianity in Asia: Volume 1: Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1998), 504.

[2] Charles H. Kraft, "Psychological Stress Factors among Muslims," in *Media in Islamic Culture* (1974): 137–44; and "Dynamic Equivalence Churches in Muslim Society," in *The Gospel and Islam: a 1978 Compendium* (1979): 114–128. For a commentary on the role of Kraft's dynamic equivalence ideas in the historical development of the insider movement debates, see Henry J. Wolfe, "The Development of the Insider Movement Paradigm," *Global Missiology* 4, no. 12 (2015).

[3] Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990) 153–178. As one critic noted, "McGavran identifies 'a few typical elements of social structure' as: the unique self-image, marriage customs, elite or power structure, landrights, sex mores, people consciousness, geographical location and language. What is particularly surprising is *his omission of religion from his discussion of social structure.* As he acknowledges in *How Churches Grow,* the missionary requires knowledge of actual beliefs and practices in other religious systems. Religion in many non-Western societies, however, is an integral part of the social structure and must be understood within a particular social context." Wayne McClintock, "Sociological Critique of the Homogeneous Unit Principle," *International Review of Mission* 77, no. 305 (1988): 107–116, italics added.

[4] David W. Shenk, "The Muslim *Umma* and the Growth of the Church," in Wilbert. R. Shenk (ed.), *Exploring Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 151–152.

[5] John Travis, "The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of 'Christ-Centered Communities' ('C') Found in the Muslim Context," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34(4) (1998): 407–408.

[6] David Greenlee ed. *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, Or Somewhere in Between?* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013).

[7] Robert Priest, "Anthropology and Missiology: Reflections on the Relationship," in Charles Edward van Engen, Darrell L. Whiteman, and John Dudley Woodberry, *Paradigm Shifts in Christian Witness: Insights from Anthropology, Communication, and Spiritual Power: Essays in Honor of Charles H. Kraft* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

[8] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MA: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 43–54.

[9] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1967).

[10] These lectures have since been published as Evelyne A. Reisacher, ed., *Dynamics of Muslim Worlds: Regional, Theological and Missiological Perspectives* (IVP Academic, 2017).

[11] John and Anna Travis, "Societal Factors Impacting Socioreligious Identities of Muslims Who Follow Jesus," in Harley Talman and John Jay Travis, eds., *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2015); published in an earlier form as "Factors Affecting the Identity that Jesus Followers Choose," in J. Dudley Woodberry, ed. *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), 193-205.

[12] Travis and Travis, "Societal Factors," 600.

[13] Travis and Travis, 602–604.

[14] The Arabic word *ummah* comes from either the Hebrew *am* (nation) or the arabic *umm* (meaning 'mother' or 'the source' of something born). For a discussion on etymology, see Frederick M. Denny, "Meaning of Ummah in the Qur'ān," *History of Religions* 15, no. 1 (1975): 36–42, and Nadia Amin Rehmani, "Debating the Term Ummah as a Religious or Social and Political Notion," *Hamdard Islamicus* 33, no. 1:9, 2010.

[15] It refers at different times to followers of the prophet, a religious congregation, a minority religious population, a nation, or a species. Gabriele Marranci, *The Anthropology of Islam* (New York: Berg, 2008), 108.

[16] E.g., surah 2:128a: "Our Lord, and make us Muslims in submission to You and from our descendants a Muslim nation *[ummah]* in submission to You." See Denny "Meaning of Ummah," 43.

[17] Surah 3:110a. See Denny, "Meaning of Ummah," 34–35.

[18] For a description of some of the Arabian influences on Muhammad, including Bedouin clans, see Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 23–45.

[19] See discussion of article 25 of the Constitution in Frederick M. Denny, "Ummah in the Constitution of Medina," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 36, no. 1 (1977): 44.

[20] Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies,* 35–36.

[21] Sumaya Mohamed Saleh, and Shadiya Mohamed Baqutayan. "What is the Islamic Society?" *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, no. 2 (2012), 118. For a study in the pervasiveness of, but variations in "Ummah consciousness" across the Muslim world, see Riaz Hasan, *Faithlines: Muslim Conceptions of Islam and Society* (Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press, 2003), 84–105.

[22] Sufyan Baig describes how his own conversion to Christ as a young man resulted in his Indian father banishing him from his home and family business. His unprepared pastor could only send him to an orphanage: "One day I was living as a wealthy businessman; the next day, for the sake of food and shelter, I was cleaning toilets in an orphanage for street children." His research in India revealed many similar stories of leaving the ummah—and the frequent discovery that the church could not provide adequate community. Baig, "The Ummah and Christian Community," in *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between?* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2013), 72.

[23] See Green, "Identity Choices at the Border Zone," in *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah, or Somewhere in Between?* 59–61.

[24] Andrea Gray and Leith Gray, "Transforming Social Networks by Planting the Gospel," in J. Dudley Woodberry ed., *From Seed to Fruit,* 287–289.

[25] Green, "Identity choices at the Border Zone," 63–66.

[26] Green, 64.

[27] Tim Green, "Conversion in the Light of Identity Theories," in *Longing for Community,* 47–50, drawing these categories from Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *Prolegomena to the Psychological Study of Religion* (London: Associated University Press, 1989), 96–97.

[28] Don Little, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History and Seasoned Practices* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 136–139.

[29] Duane Alexander Miller, and Patrick Johnstone, "Believers in Christ from a Muslim background: a Global Census," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 11 (2015); Duane Alexander Miller, "Power, Personalities and Politics: the Growth of Iranian Christianity since 1979," *Mission Studies* 32, no. 1 (2015): 66–86; Jason Mandryck, *Operation World* (7th edition) (Colorado Springs, CO: Biblica, 2010), 465.

[30] Miller, "Power, Personalities and Politics," 69.

[31] US State Department, 2016 Report on International Freedom: Iran, accessed May 2018 https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269134.pdf.

[32] Mark Bradley, *Iran and Christianity: Historical Identity and Present Relevance* (A&C Black, 2008), 178.

[33] "Rapid Church Growth, How is it Happening?", Elam Ministries, accessed May 2018, https://www.elam.com/page/rapid-church-growth-how-is-it-happening; "Country Policy and Information Note; Iran: Christians and Christian Converts," UK Home Office, accessed May 2018. http://www.refworld.org/docid/58b42f774.html, citing an interview with Open Doors.

[34] "Many New Church Plants Thanks to the Internet," Elam Ministries, accessed May 2018, https://www.elam.com/Iran30/many-new-church-plants-thanks-internet; K. A. Ellis, "Evangelism, Iranian Style," *Christianity Today,* June 21, 2017.

[35] "Country Policy and Information Note; Iran," UK Home Office, accessed May 2018 http://www.refworld.org/docid/58b42f774.html, 16.

[36] "Country Policy and Information Note; Iran," UK Home Office, accessed May 2018 http://www.refworld.org/docid/58b42f774.html, 18–19, drawing on 2017 interviews with Open Doors and Elam Ministries.

[37] "2016 Report on International Freedom: Iran," US State Department, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269134.pdf, accessed May 2018.

[38] "The Persecution of Christians in Iran," Christians in Parliament, accessed May 2018, http://www.christiansinparliament.org.uk/uploads/APPGs-report-on-Persecution-of-Christians-in-Iran.pdf.

[39] Harold Rhode, "The Unending Battle between the Persian and Islamic identities of Iran," *Identities in Crisis in Iran: Politics, Culture and Religion* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

[40] In July 2000, after the death of Ahmad Shamlou (an atheist poet) 30,000 Iranians lined the streets of Tehran to pay their last respects. Mark Bradley, *Iran and Christianity: Historical Identity and Present Relevance,* 34.

[41] "There is also the deep conviction I found in many of my interviews with Iranian Christians, that Islam is a form of socio-religious colonialism—that it was unjustly imposed by Arabs (an unaccomplished and uncultured group of warriors, in this view) on the rich and great culture of Persia. As one interviewee said, 'Islam was a step up for the Arabs, because they moved from fighting with each other to unity; but for Iran it was a step down.'" Miller, "Power, Personalities and Politics," 75.

[42] Rhode, "The Unending Battle between the Persian and Islamic identities of Iran," 17.

[43] Tezcur, Gunes Murat, Taghi Azadarmaki, and Mehri Bahar. "Religious participation among Muslims: Iranian exceptionalism." *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 15.3 (2006): 217–232.

[44] See Olivier Roy, "The Crisis of Religious Legitimacy in Iran," *The Middle East Journal* (1999): 201–216.

[45] Kathleen Foody, "Interiorizing Islam: Religious Experience and State Oversight in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 3 (2015): 599–623.

[46] Family networks tend to safeguard the house churches from government-aligned strangers joining. See Austrian Red Cross/Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation, "Iran: House Churches," June 2017 accessed May 2018, https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/975066/download, accessed May 2018), 7.

[47] Mark Bradley suggests that whole family networks have been known to convert together, but he does not provide evidence of it. *(Iran and Christianity: Historical Identity and Present Relevance,* 180).

[48] Miller, "Power, Personalities and Politics," 74–75.

[49] Koser Akcapar, Sebnem. "Conversion as a migration strategy in a transit country: Iranian Shiites Becoming Christians in Turkey," *International Migration Review* 40, no. 4 (2006): 817–853; "Iranian Refugees Turn to Christianity in the Netherlands," BBC, August 25, 2017 accessed May 2018 http://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-41040163/iranian-refugees-turn-to-christianity-in-the-netherlands; "Muslim Refugees are Converting to Christianity in Germany," *Independent,*

December 19 2016, accessed May 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/muslim-refugees-converting-to-christianity-in-germany-crisis-asylum-seekers-migrants-iran-a7466611.html.

[50] Tim Green, "Identity Choices at the Border Zone," in *Longing for Community*, 61.

[51] Jonas Adelin Jorgensen, *Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas* (Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang, 2008).

[52] Jeff Morton, *Insider Movements: Biblically Incredible or Incredibly Brilliant?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 113–115.

[53] Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill), accessed April 2018.

[54] "Isai" is the adjective related to the Arabic word, "Isa," or Jesus.

[55] Green, "Identity Choices at the Border Zone," 59–60.

[56] See Jorgensen, *Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas,* 136–141.

[57] Jorgensen, 137–138.

[58] Jorgensen, 142–144.

[59] Jorgensen, 155–157.

[60] Jorgensen, 160–161, 234–236.

[61] "2016 Report on International Freedom: Bangladesh," accessed May 2018, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269170.pdf, 3.

[62] Bangladesh Constitution Part 3: 41(1): "Subject to law, public order and morality—(a) every citizen has the right to profess, practise or propagate any religion; (b) every religious community or denomination has the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions."

[63] See, for example, Akhand Akhtar Hossain, "Islamic Resurgence in Bangladesh's Culture and Politics: Origins, Dynamics and Implications," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 23, no. 2 (2012): 165–198; Md Maidul Islam, "Secularism in Bangladesh: An Unfinished Revolution," *South Asia Research* 38, no. 1 (2018): 20–39.

[64] "2016 Report on International Freedom: Bangladesh," accessed May 2018, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269170.pdf, 11.

[65] Pew Survey 2012, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-2-religious-commitment/.

[66] Joseph Devine, and Sarah C. White, "Religion, Politics and the Everyday Moral Order in Bangladesh," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 43, no. 1 (2013): 127–147. The study noted that for a community to be without a mosque was a source of shame and even anxiety. There was also an openness to being taught a purer form of Islam by traveling members of the Tablighi Jamaat (140–142).

[67] "2016 Report on International Freedom: Bangladesh," US State Department, accessed May 2018, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/269170.pdf, 11–13.

[68] Jorgensen, *Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas,* 210–211, see footnote 337.

[69] "The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity," in Chapter 2: Religious Commitment, Pew Forum Report 2012, accessed May, 2018, http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-2-religious-commitment/.

[70] Jorgensen, *Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas*, 231–233.

[71] Jorgensen, *Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas*, 231–233.

[72] Tim Green, "Identity Choices at the Border Zone," *Longing for Community: Church, Ummah or Somewhere in Between?*, 65.

[73] If a community of Jordanian immigrants living in the United States, for example, had "High" strength ties to the ummah at the personal level, but "Low" at the communal and state level, what might we expect a fruitful discipling movement to look like from a social perspective?