

# What do you do when *Islam* does not adequately describe the Muslims you know?

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Muslim Contexts

*Daniels and Farah, Editors*

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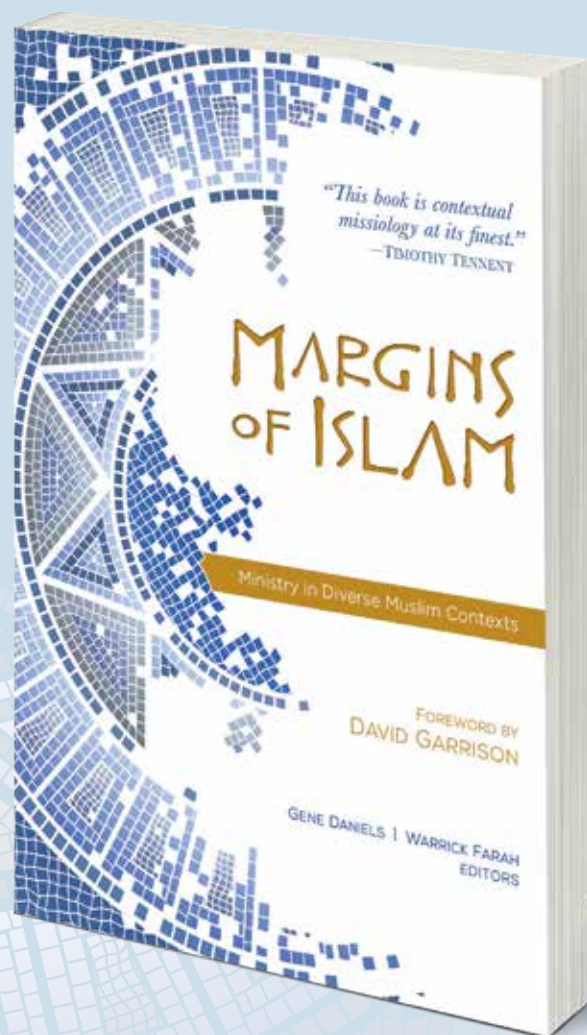
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Clarifying the Frontiers

# Adaptive Missiological Engagement with Islamic Contexts

by Warrick Farah

*Editor's Note: This article is a chapter from the 2018 publication, Margins of Islam: Ministry in Diverse Muslim Contexts, edited by Gene Daniels and Warrick Farah. Printed here by permission from William Carey Publishers.*

As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, developing appropriate missiology in a Muslim context takes wisdom, patience, and skill. So how can we, as practitioners who love Muslims, deal with the diversity of approaches to lost people in the New Testament, on the one hand, and the diversity of approaches to Muslims in the mission community, on the other?<sup>1</sup> Why does God seem to be blessing so many drastically different approaches to working with Muslims today, sometimes even in the same context? This chapter builds upon the blueprints for understanding Islam in the introductory chapters and the thirteen case studies in the book to propose an “adaptive” approach to mission. That is, mission in a world full of multifaceted challenges must adapt to the issues it faces within Muslim contexts, following the example of how Jesus and his disciples engaged complex situations in the New Testament. Adaptive missiology is a reflective process that enables us to deal with complexity while discerning gospel-centered responses appropriate for specific contexts.

## *Changing Understandings of Muslim Contexts*

Significant shifts in recent decades have influenced how we conceptualize Muslim contexts and approach reaching them with the gospel. Reactions against colonialism and the influence of postmodernism led to changes in anthropology and religious studies that have played a large and often unexamined role in how we as Christians understand our biblical calling to engage Muslims in Islamic contexts. This section offers a brief survey of these influences as they relate to missiology.

### **Postcolonial Studies: “The Muslim World” versus “The West”**

Several decades ago, Edward Said published a highly influential critique of Western scholarship on Asia titled *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (1994 [1978]). Even if Said’s arguments were at times polarizing (or if he, ironically, negatively stereotyped Western scholarship), he exposed the prejudicial and monolithic thinking of some Western scholars in their descriptions of the “Orient” during the colonial period. We cannot provide a full summary of his arguments here, but would highlight how persuasive he is in framing the way

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some European and American scholars describe Arabs, and especially Muslims, in a generally pejorative construct. The Orientalist narrative created a discourse in the West of a *civilized Western “us”* versus an *uncivilized Eastern “them,”* which was subsequently used to reinforce Western colonialism and imperialism over parts of Africa and Asia.

This is relevant to us in mission studies because some traditional missionary discourse was a form of Orientalism (Swanson 2004, 108). Muslims were often described in a way that dichotomized the world into two antagonistic and incompatible realms—Christian and non-Christian.

Like Orientalism, missionary discourse traditionally has been aggressive, and derogatory in its treatment of Asians of other faiths, expressing attitudes that have frequently also included negative views of indigenous cultures. (ibid., 109)

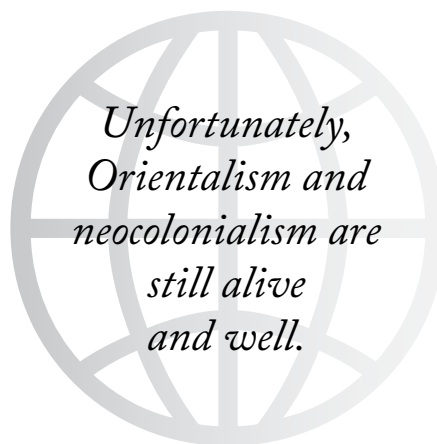
Said’s insights offer critical reflection upon our approaches to understanding Muslims, leading us to ask if we describe Islam in overly negative ways, failing to also see the problems in our own cultures as well (Matt. 7:5). When seeking to describe unknown and seemingly threatening contexts, do we resort to a simplistic “textual attitude” (ibid., 110) by cherry-picking our descriptions of Muslims from the worst texts found in the Qur’an and Hadith? Do we feel superior to Muslims? Or do we approach them with humility and with the attitude of a learner? This kind of missiological reflection is an important antidote for biased and injurious theologies of mission.

Another common assumption challenged by postcolonial studies is the very idea of a unified geopolitical entity called “the Muslim world.” This idea does not come from the Islamic teaching of *ummah*, but instead emerged in the nineteenth century.

Mistaken is the belief that Muslims were united until nationalist ideology and European colonialism tore them

apart. This is precisely backward; in fact, Muslims did not imagine belonging to a global political unity *until* the peak of European hegemony in the late nineteenth century, when poor colonial conditions, European discourses of Muslim racial inferiority, and Muslims’ theories of their own apparent decline nurtured the first arguments for pan-Islamic solidarity. (Aydin 2017, 3)

The “Muslim world” construct is a racial (racist?) product of the colonialist narrative and has been embraced by both Muslims and Westerners to homogenize “Muslims” and the “West” in (often antagonistic) political discourse. In mission, we can learn to recognize the phenomenon without being biased by this worldly understanding of Muslims.



Unfortunately, Orientalism and neocolonialism are still alive and well in some streams of missiology. Two recent articles published in the journal *Global Missiology* highlight this fact. For example, one author displays the objectivist, “textual attitude” to Muslims when he claims,

The one who rationalizes away jihad and other illiberal ideas from the Qur’an is also likely to rationalize away the virgin birth, the resurrection, and other key doctrines of Christianity. (Anonymous-Three 2017, 7)

He further states that only very liberal Muslims infected with Western rationalism will reject the true, violent nature of Islam, thus enforcing the

stereotype that faithful Muslims are incapable of successfully integrating into democratic societies. Placing himself in the seat of Islamic authority, he laments, “Who is going to tell our political leaders, as well as the general public, the true, classical nature of Islam?” (ibid., 9).

Another author advances this same totalizing rhetoric, saying,

Evangelical Christians must understand Islam “as it is,” not as they imagine it to be . . . a medieval and unreformable totalitarian religio-political system that masquerades as a religion. (Anonymous-Two 2017, 7–8)<sup>2</sup>

Michael Rynkiewich notes the tragedy of when this kind of thinking creeps into the mission world:

Unlike anthropologists, missionaries and mission scholars have been slow to be self-reflective and to rethink what missionaries are doing. Both anthropologists and missionaries have been entangled in colonialism, but missionaries have resisted admitting the entanglement, and slower to do something about it. (2011, 172)

While most current scholarship on Muslims and Islam have been able to move on from this simplistic and prejudicial thinking toward Muslims, some Christians, unfortunately, have not. If we cannot recognize this in our missiology, “We end up being ethnocentric and colonial in ways that we are often unaware” (Greer 2017, 93).

### Cultural Anthropology: Modern Essentialism and Postmodern Relativism

The influences of neocolonialism also call us to reflect critically on our models of anthropology in understanding Muslim contexts. The Bible teaches certain things about humankind and how we relate to God; in systematic theology, this is called anthropology (the study of humanity). Just as everyone has a framework for understanding theological anthropology, everyone also assumes a cultural anthropology—whether

consciously realized or not. One outdated understanding of mission (based on an outdated and inaccurate modernist cultural anthropology) assumed that the missiological task of communicating the gospel was a simple exercise like this: A messenger (evangelist) encodes a message (the gospel) to a receiver (an unbeliever), like sending a letter in an envelope. In this view, individuals within a culture are well integrated and nearly identical to other members of their culture. Thus, one simply interprets the gospel for the “others” in a static process.

This modernist model of anthropology taught that cultures were homogenous and that people in each culture were objectively understandable, basically spoke only one language, and were virtually unaffected by peoples around them. However, “Neither culture nor the missiological situation is like this anymore, and it seems questionable that it ever was” (Rynkiewich 2008, 33). Unfortunately, many missionaries are still attached to this outdated anthropology, and their missiology remains stuck in the 1960s (*ibid.*). Today we should realize that people in their contexts are much more complex and quite different from the simplistic way modernist anthropology often described them.

Postmodern anthropology developed precisely to correct the errors of modern anthropology, but it was an exercise in pendulum swinging and made many mistakes of its own. The objectivity and certainty of modernity was replaced by subjectivity and skepticism in postmodernity. If modernity is characterized by essentialism, then postmodernity is marked by relativism. Unfortunately, both modernity and postmodernity are insufficient for framing our understanding of mission. One way forward is “a post-postmodern missiology” (Yip 2014) that tries to handle the complexity of understanding contexts while rejecting the pluralist theology of religions. George Yip’s proposal for a

*People in their contexts are more complex and quite different from the simplistic way modernist anthropology often described them.*

polythetic and progressive contextualization<sup>3</sup> helps us deal with the variations and cultural exceptions that exist within religious settings, and especially the diverse manifestations of Islam, even within the same context.

### Religious Studies and the Fog of “Religions”

Related to this postcolonial reframing of how we understand the “other” and the challenges of our assumed model of cultural anthropology is the shift found in religious studies. The current consensus in the field is that there is no timeless, transcultural definition of “religion” that is not also a function of political power (Cavanaugh 2009), and that the ability to frame a distinct category in society as “religion” has more to do with the Enlightenment and Protestant Reformation than with how people understand themselves (Nongbri 2013). The “religious” category also fails to adequately tie together dissimilar ritualistic practices in different faith traditions.<sup>4</sup>

However, this critique of the concept of religion does not mean that religion is not real, only that religion itself is socially constructed—it would not exist if there were no people (Schilbrack 2010). Islam, as it is lived and practiced, repeatedly transforms to match the realities of different contexts. Classifying all Muslims (or Hindus, Christians, etc.) into a single category in the “world religions” paradigm obscures many of the most crucial defining characteristics specific to their respective contexts. Martin Accad proposes a way beyond this limitation:

The “world religions” approach has a tendency to view people of faith as prisoners of theological systems, whose every move can be predicted by their communities’ sacred scriptures. Whereas the “sociology of religions” approach offers a dynamic

vision of mutually-influential forces between theology and the practice of religion. I would argue that the latter vision offers us a far richer field of inquiry, engagement, and action than the former. From a missional perspective, therefore, it is far more useful, far more empowering and energizing; it invites us to new possibilities in terms of creative and constructive action required for the mission of God. (2016)

Therefore, as Christians who long for Jesus to be embraced as Lord and Savior in Muslim contexts, we desperately need to be alert to how we use the category “religion” in mission, because “missiology as a discipline has not yet adequately engaged discussions and controversies in the field of religious studies” (Richard 2014, 214).

These monumental changes in postcolonial theory, anthropology, religious studies, and especially with Muslims themselves in our globalizing world demand that today’s cross-cultural worker reject one-size-fits-all strategies for working with Muslims and become able to adapt with the context. But how?

### *A Call for Adaptive Missiology*

The introductory chapters in this volume provide theoretical foundations to explain the diversity of Islam as it is found in various settings around the world, which is further exemplified through the case studies in this book. At this point, it is perfectly natural for us to disagree over the supposed “true nature” of Islam, both historically and ideologically. I do not pretend that we can adequately address that issue in a volume like this. Instead, the topic at hand is specifically about our *missiology of Islam*. That is, how should the church attempt to understand what Muslims in their context believe, love, and do? And how should that contextual understanding inform our



missional impulse, in light of God's mission in Christ to redeem all nations back to himself?

### Toward a Missiology of Islam(s)

Considering all that we have learned about "Islam," this book demonstrates that mission must deal with the plurality of Islams and the diversity of Muslims around the world. In the personal-missional encounter, Islam, simply put, *should be whatever our Muslim friend says it is*. This is not to deny that our friends could be further or nearer to what certain "mainstream" Muslims throughout history have decreed as authentic Islam. This is also not to deny that something called Islam exists, and that our friends could be somewhere on the margins of Islam. Instead, what this means is that we must primarily deal with how Muslims shape and use Islam in their context. This approach moves us closer to an appropriate missiology of Islam. If we don't begin with the local expressions of Islam,<sup>5</sup> we end up assuming something other than what our friends hold to be true, and therefore miss the vital and necessary connection for the power of the gospel to do its transformational work specifically in that context.

Furthermore, in mission through mass media or writing, it is important to be informed through cultural anthropology that there are great variations among individuals in cultures. Even when looking for the broad-based values in a people group, it is still doubtful that one could determine an approach that is properly contextualized for the "Egyptian culture," for example. Any approach focusing on a large grouping of people will have to acknowledge such inherent limitations. This is especially important at a time when the understanding of ethnicity is evolving and peoples are losing the sense of "groupness" in ethnic identity, which questions the very idea of "people groups" common in evangelical missiology (Gill 2014, 90). This further illustrates the need for adaptation.

Consider the biblical support for adaptation according to context. One important observation is that we have no records of Jesus nor his apostles defining and dealing with paganism or Judaism (which were both diverse in the first century), and we have no record of a biblical call to overthrow the Roman cult. Instead, Jesus engaged *people* in their situations. Moreover, concerning debating the true nature of Islam (or any other religious system) and quarrelling over whose understanding is the most accurate, mission historian Andrew Walls makes an important point:

Argument about which is correct, or the more correct, picture of "Hinduism" is beside the point in the light of Romans 1:18ff., for Paul's concern



here is not with systems at all, but with men. It is *people* who hold down the truth of unrighteousness, who do not honor God, who are given up to dishonorable passions. It is upon men, who commit ungodly and wicked deeds, that the wrath of God is revealed. (Walls 1996, 66)

Biblically-based ministry in the Islamic world is not about engaging Islam per se, but rather about engaging Muslims.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Walls continues that our message must not be a religious system in return, for it is "not Christianity that saves, but Christ" (ibid.). If it is best to view "Islam" as simply being what people who profess it actually believe and do (Bates and Rassam 2001, 89), then we begin our

missiological engagement by understanding their worldview in the light of Romans 1:18ff., not some supposed orthodox Islam. We should indeed be good students of Islam, but we should be even better students of Muslims.

To deal with the elastic concepts of religion previously discussed, one possible proposal is to be "supra-religious" in our missiological engagement (e.g., Accad 2012) and attempt to rise above the fray of worldly religiosity. This is not to say that religion is unimportant, but to ensure that we are gospel-centered in our approach instead of clouding mission with flexible concepts like religion. However, instead of bypassing religion in our missiological approaches, I propose that a more fruitful way of engaging Muslims is to deal with idolatry, which, depending on the context, may be a much more specific topic than Islam.

### Idolatry and Mission

Any discussion of idolatry necessarily begins with the theology of God and worship:

As God eternally outpours within his triune self, and as we are created in his image, it follows that we too are continuous outpourers, incurably so. The trouble with our outpouring is that it is fallen. It needs redeeming, else we spend our outpouring on false gods appearing to us in any number of guises. Salvation is the only way our continuous outpouring—our continuous worship—is set aright and urged into the fullness of Christ. (Best 2003, 10)

In this concept of idolatry, as continuous and habitual worshipers in need of redemption, we find a missional hermeneutic that leads toward an adaptive approach to Muslims. In this sense, religion is of no redemptive benefit. No matter what religious identity people claim—Christian, Muslim, pagan, atheist, etc.—they are all lost apart from the gospel (Rom. 3:22–23), and are left clinging to various types of idols instead of Christ alone.

The central theological theme in the Bible is the refutation of idolatry (Rosner 1999, 21), yet expressions of it are quite diverse. In his seminal book *The Mission of God* (2006), Christopher Wright teaches that biblical monotheism is necessarily missional and biblical mission is necessarily monotheistic. The biblical concept that keeps people from honoring God as God<sup>7</sup> is not the wrong religion, but idolatry. Wright describes the motivations behind our idolatrous worship:

Having alienated ourselves from the living God our Creator, we have a tendency to worship whatever makes us tremble with awe as we feel our tiny insignificance in comparison with the great magnitudes that surround us. We seek to placate and ward off whatever makes us vulnerable and afraid. We then counter our fears by investing inordinate and idolatrous trust in whatever we think will give us the ultimate security we crave. And we struggle to manipulate and persuade whatever we believe will provide all our basic needs and enable us to prosper on the planet. (2006, Kindle 2216–19)

Biblically speaking, idolatry is a broad concept that plays a large role in our engagement with lost people. Unfortunately, this concept is often neglected in missiology. But this begs the question—What is the relationship between religion and idolatry?

The idea that religion can be separated from culture or simply reduced to a theological system is an assumption heavily influenced by the Enlightenment, not by biblical theology. Therefore, it is a mistake to assume that the totality of one's so-called "religious heritage" is something that must be "renounced" in all cases and times and contexts as disciples are made. This is akin to equating the ambivalent, modern concept of religion with the biblical category of idolatry. It also ignores some of the positive virtues that religion provides in structuring societies (Netland 2001, 329). It

**W**e can't assume that the totality of one's so-called "religious heritage" is something that must be "renounced" in all cases.

is critical to bear in mind that there are various dimensions to religious contexts, and religion is not monolithic (Farah 2015a; Smart 1996). So instead of "Islam," what should be abandoned, biblically speaking, are idols. Additionally, there are times when people need deliverance from demonic influences—this is true in every context (but too far afield from the topic at hand for us to explore further).

I am not defending Islam nor being naïve to the powerful influence of Islamic ideologies. There are indeed times and contexts in which Muslims who turn to Christ will need to reject the majority of their religious heritage. In that case, the supra-religious approach may be inappropriate and religious change may be a clear way to deal with idolatry. An example of this is that salvation for many Muslims is a "prophetological concept," meaning "the logic of salvation has everything to do with one's relation to the Prophet Muhammad" (Pennington 2014, 198). In this case, Muslims will indeed need to turn from Muhammad as an idol (as previously defined).

However, not all Muslim-background believers (MBBs) feel that they must categorically reject Muhammad, or that they must view him as some sort of antichrist.<sup>8</sup> MBBs who have come to faith have widely diverse opinions about Muhammad, just as they have different experiences of their religion. Some MBBs view Islam as a form of spiritual bondage, some as a culture or set of politics, with many others somewhere between these two poles (Farah 2015b, 73–77). Missiologist L. D. Waterman also testifies to the diverse spiritual experiences that Muslims have of Islam:

In the Bridging the Divide network,<sup>9</sup> through numerous case studies from scholar-practitioners with a wide

range of perspectives and experiences, we have learned of the incredible diversity of contexts within "the Muslim world." We have noted not only differences of social and political contexts, but also of diverse spiritual alignments and experiences among Muslims. Within these very different contexts, God is working in a variety of creative ways to shine the light of the gospel. (2017)

If we come to accept the varieties of the MBB experience with Islam, we can see that there are many diverse journeys on the one way to God, through Christ alone (Greenlee 2007). This strongly suggests that we do well not to assume that all Muslims must reject their "religion"—whatever that means to them. This is too vague to be meaningful, in many cases, and can also erroneously lead some MBBs to abandon their cultures and social networks.<sup>10</sup> Instead, we learn to exegete the context and be adaptive in our approach.

Idolatry can take many forms. As we have seen through the chapters in this volume, potential idols in Muslim contexts (other than those discussed above) can include merit-seeking through good works to appease God, nationalism,<sup>11</sup> pride, intercession of saints, materialism, "prophetolatry," personal reputation, folk religious practices, strict adherence to ritual, or any combination of the above. (Christians are equally prey to such idols.) In the midst of the context-specific encounter with Muslims, adaptive missiology requires Christian workers to discern the form of idolatry in which they are entangled and then offer the appropriate gospel-centered response. Yet this is a dynamic process; we will frequently cycle between our response, the Bible, and the context.

Combating idolatry can take many forms. The Bible itself prepares us to

recognize that different approaches may be relevant in different contexts. Wisdom in mission calls us to be discerning and to recognize that what may be appropriate in one situation may not be so helpful in another. (Wright 2006, Kindle 2337–39)

Taking our cues from the previous discussion on postcolonialism and anthropology, and realizing there is more than one way to deal with idolatry, we recognize how unwise it would be to respond apart from relationships with those who know their own contexts far better than we do.

### Transforming Relationships

Adaptive missiology recognizes that all people everywhere who embrace the gospel experience both a continuity and a discontinuity with their past (Netland 2001, 327). Earlier approaches to contextualization taught that previous practices and beliefs can be either retained, rejected, or repurposed (Hiebert 1986, 188). This reflects how Paul saw his ministry of becoming all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:19ff.), while avoiding harmful syncretism (2 Cor. 6:14ff.). Yet there are clearly limits to the usefulness of contextualization when it is a one-sided exercise, done by the worker for the local community. In such cases, the valuable ways in which indigenous people contribute to the process and the ways in which God is already at work may be overlooked, even before the unique and sufficient message of the cross of Christ is proclaimed (1 Cor. 2:2).

Our focus should not be on envisioning what the church looks like in a context as an end result, and then prescribing a static mission praxis from that assumption. Instead, we need continual missiological inquiry into the nature of the dynamic relationship between ourselves, Muslims, and God revealed in Christ (cf. Shaw 2010, 209). Transforming relationships are key in this process, and will require us to be vulnerable in a postcolonial spirit while walking in humble confidence in the

authority of Jesus. It is, after all, God's mission, and we often get in the way.

The Bible shows that God's greatest problem is not just with the nations of the world, but with the people he has created and called to be the means of blessing the nations. And the biggest obstacle to fulfilling that mission is idolatry among God's people. (Lausanne Movement 2011, 145)

Adaptive missiology aims to get at the heart of how Jesus and the apostles approached "the other" in the New Testament. No single evangelistic address was identical, and they always took the context into account in their witness (Flemming 2005). By understanding the New Testament itself as a missiological document (Wright



2011), we can see Jesus and the apostles taking time to humbly reflect and give an appropriate consideration to their audience; they were continually adapting to the challenge of seeing lives and communities transformed by the power of God.

### Conclusion: An Apostolic Challenge for Our Day

The world adds another thirty-two million Muslims each year, mainly through high birthrates, but some by conversion. The numbers of Muslims coming to Christ in our time are indeed unprecedented, but we are only talking about *thousands* of new believers each year, while *millions* more

are born as Muslims. With all the great things happening in mission to Muslims today, the world is actually getting more and more unreached (Parks 2017). So not only do we need to do more, we also need to do better; and this requires fresh reflection on our missiology.

Yet, in this vein we also need to recover the apostolic spirit of Jesus and the apostles if we want to see our Lord receive the worship he alone deserves among Muslims. One way is to call the church to a renewed *apostolic imagination*. I use "apostolic" in two senses: 1) *extending* the kingdom, and 2) *innovating* in mission praxis.<sup>12</sup> The spirit of adaptive missiology is to take up residence among unreached Muslims in humble relationship and seek to discern how they use Islam, what their idols are, and what a pioneering Christ-centered engagement requires.

Adaptive missiology, like this book, is a conversation and a communal exercise. We need each other. And new contexts need innovative approaches, not quick fixes. As ministers of the gospel, we must adapt to people in the complexity of their contexts. Our job is not to define Islam, but to make disciples. Though decontextualized approaches to Muslim ministry are commonplace, engaging people *as they are* requires embracing their complexity and the complexity of their contexts.

Although great things are happening in mission to Muslims these days, we still have not learned how to reach most Muslims with the love of Christ. Islam is perhaps the greatest challenge the church has ever faced. Yet it is not simply that we do not know the answers; we are also unsure of the nature of the problem. Through seeking to extend and innovate, adaptive missiology stirs up the church, in prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, to help Muslim communities discover God in Christ and to see him glorified, even "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). **IJFM**

## Reflection Questions

1. Describe adaptive missiology in your own words. In your view, what are some of the possibilities and limitations of this approach?
2. Integrating insights learned from this book, write out some practical and specific steps you could take to develop an approach to Muslim ministry in your Islamic context.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, “The ‘W’ Spectrum: ‘Worker’ Paradigms in Muslim Contexts” (Farah and Meeker 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Both authors are also unaware of the nuanced role religion plays sociologically in communities and could benefit from the “bottom-up” approach to understanding Islam discussed in chapter 2 in this volume, “How Muslims Shape and Use Islam: Towards a Missiological Understanding.”

<sup>3</sup> For more on polythetic and progressive contextualization, see <http://muslimministry.blogspot.com/2017/06/polythetic-and-progressive.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Evangelicals often reduce religion to a system of beliefs (e.g., Keller 2008, 15), yet one of the major problems in this approach is that “social and psychological research shows that people tend to hold a collection of contradictory beliefs that cannot be put together into a coherent system. In addition, research shows that people’s behavior is often based on something other than their beliefs” (Martin 2014, 7). Additionally, in Muslim contexts beliefs often take a back seat to practices: “For Islam, orthopraxy is more important than orthodoxy” (Ess 2006, 16).

<sup>5</sup> Studying the Qur’an and the history of Islam is also vital for missiology; beginning with our friends’ understanding will only enrich our understanding of the interpretations of the Qur’an and the diversity of Islam throughout history.

<sup>6</sup> I do not intend to imply that the scope of the gospel is merely individualistic, but that it is deeply personal in nature. Indeed, “The goal of God’s rescue operation, the main aim of Jesus coming and dying in the first place, is *the restoration and transformation of all creation*” (Wright 2015, 72).

<sup>7</sup> The related issue, “Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God?” is a fallacious and unanswerable question that creates many pseudo arguments in missiology. Instead, I argue that the “only way to know God is through Jesus. A genuine personal

relationship with God can only be Christological and Trinitarian. All other worship of God outside of Christ is ‘in vain’ (Mark 7:7). So, whether or not Muslims believe in a different God is somewhat of an irrelevant issue, because in fact no one knows God apart from Jesus. All conceptions of God, whether they are American, Muslim, Asian, Agnostic, Pagan, Mormon, or even ‘Christian,’ all of them are incomplete and inaccurate without the gospel revelation of the Son (Heb. 1:2)” (Farah 2010).

<sup>8</sup> Space prohibits more discussion on the understanding of Muhammad. But to share one approach, John Azumah tends not to characterize Muhammad as a “false prophet,” but more like a “fallen prophet.” He also demonstrates how various Protestant missionary attitudes in recent decades have “moved away from calling Muhammad an impostor or the anti-Christ to appreciating his positive and admirable qualities and sincerity as a religious figure” without also ascribing to Muhammad a positive “prophetic” role (2016, 211).

<sup>9</sup> <http://btdnetwork.org>.

<sup>10</sup> Space prohibits from going further, but I have previously argued that there are various dimensions to religious contexts, which different MBBs relate to differently (Farah 2015a).

<sup>11</sup> Olivier Roy argues that nationalism is a greater motivating force than Islamism in places like Iran and in groups like Hamas (2003).

<sup>12</sup> I intentionally mirror these two themes with Walter Brueggemann’s concept of biblical “prophetic imagination,” which involves both criticizing and energizing (2001).

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