

# Clarifying Insider “Ekklēsia”: An Historical Review of Key Issues

by S. T. Antonio

*Editor’s note: This article is an excerpt from S. T. Antonio’s Insider Church: Ekklesia and the Insider Paradigm (William Carey Publishing, 2020), taken from chapter 4. Reprinted by permission.*

**I**n the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown, Ahmad was devouring the Word. By government orders, we were confined to our homes, so we started studying the Bible together on WhatsApp calls. Despite the poor internet quality, Ahmad persevered, discovered new truths about God, and committed himself to applying and sharing the story. As we were finishing, Ahmad interjected, “Hey, next time I need your advice on some things. How do Christians pray? And how do I fast? And should I stop going to the mosque? And how do I talk about my faith to people?”

Ahmad was wrestling with how his newfound faith should take shape for him in his Muslim milieu. The way that cross-cultural workers answer such questions—the advice given, the options presented—is shaped by our assumptions about what is (and what is not) helpful for disciples and emerging churches as they grow to maturity and fruitfulness. It is also shaped by our underlying theology of the nature of the church and how the church takes shape in various cultures.

The insider paradigm includes a particular set of assumptions and implications regarding the nature of the church. Some of these positively and creatively express the biblical nature of the church, while others undermine and fall short of it. A responsible approach to multiplying biblical churches among Muslims ought to learn from both the strengths and weaknesses of the insider paradigm.

To do so, however, requires an accurate understanding of the particular ecclesiological assumptions and implications of the insider paradigm in the first place. Too often the debate over insider movements has been driven by mischaracterization and straw-men arguments, increasing misunderstanding and suspicion and entrenching people more firmly into their sides. A better way forward is to recognize that as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ and fellow laborers in the Lord’s field, we ought to take the time and effort to listen and understand one another charitably and accurately. Then we will better understand whether we actually disagree, and if so, where precisely the points of disagreement are,

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enabling us to discern potential pathways toward mutual understanding and consensus. This is the intended spirit and purpose of this chapter (and the next) in describing and evaluating the vision of the church in the insider paradigm.

The insider paradigm broadly supports and affirms “insider” identity and movements, which typically refer to Jesus’ followers retaining or remaining in the “socio-religious” identity of their birth—i.e., identifying as “Muslim followers of Jesus.” In addition, the insider paradigm has often supported ongoing participation in key Muslim rituals, modifying and reinterpreting such participation in a way that is viewed as compatible with a vital faith in Christ (e.g., ritual prayer, mosque worship, Qur’an reverence, confessing prophethood of Muhammad).

In this chapter, I attempt to outline, as straightforwardly and fairly as possible, the ecclesiological outlook of the insider paradigm as described by its chief architects and leading thinkers in their prolific writings.<sup>1</sup> Insider advocates come from a variety of ecclesial backgrounds and perspectives, and they do not all agree on every aspect of ecclesiology.<sup>2</sup> However, decades of collaboration have given rise to a recognizable ministry paradigm, and this paradigm includes a particular set of commitments and perspectives on the nature of the church—a vision of ekklēsia for insiders—that challenges traditional perspectives in significant ways.<sup>3</sup> The present chapter describes this vision, while the next evaluates it in light of the biblical vision of the church.

The particular vision of ekklēsia in the insider paradigm will be outlined from the perspective of the following key issues, which have been addressed previously, and the next chapter will revisit each one to highlight its strengths and shortcomings.

Each of the following categories represents an important dimension of the nature of the church, and each provides a window into the unique contours of insider ekklēsia:

- biblical story and themes
- core essence of the church
- local and universal church
- visible and invisible church
- attributes and marks of the church
- relationship between the church and salvation
- relationship between the church and the world

### ***Biblical Narratives and Themes for Insider Church***

The insider paradigm highlights various themes and parts of the biblical narrative to undergird its vision of ekklēsia for insiders. The particular themes and passages emphasized, and the way they are applied to insider movements, are foundational to the insider perspective on the nature of the church.

### **Old Testament: Inside and Outside the People of God**

There are a few Old Testament themes that insider advocates appeal to in developing an ekklēsia for insiders. Charles Kraft argued that the Old Testament people of God, in the form of people “born involuntarily into extended kinship groups,” is a more suitable form for Muslims than the “voluntary association” form of the Greco-Roman church (1979, 115). Woodberry, on the other hand, suggested that the theme of “the faithful remnant,” first in Israel and then among the nations, holds potential for illuminating insider ekklēsia (2007, 26).

One commonly referenced theme relates to Old Testament figures who seem to worship the true God without joining the covenant community of Israel (Talman 2015c, Loc. 4583). The most cited individual is Naaman the Syrian, who converts to belief in *Yahweh* as the one true God, and yet returns to his homeland having received pardon (or permission) from Elisha for bowing before a pagan god when accompanying his master to the temple (2 Kings 5; Baeq 2010; Talman 2015c, Loc. 4596–4636).

Other examples cited are Melchizedek (Gen 14:18–20; Heb 7:1–10), Abimelech (Gen 20), Jethro (Exod 18), and the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1–13; Talman 2015c, Loc. 4583), considered Old Testament precedents of believers who worship God but remain inside their “socio-religious” community.<sup>4</sup> As such, they are seen as precursors to the “non-proselyte conversion” in the New Testament, as well as a paradigm to a church of insiders following Jesus within Muslim identity and community.

These Old Testament themes, however, are not as significant in the insider paradigm as the several New Testament themes used to undergird insider ekklēsia.

### **Insider Church and the Kingdom**

No theme is more pervasive in the insider paradigm than the theme of the kingdom of God. In many ways, a theology of the kingdom, and the kingdom parables, provide the overarching biblical and theological framework for the insider paradigm as a whole and for its vision of ekklēsia in particular.

Insider advocates see the theology of the kingdom as putting “church” in proper perspective. Jesus did not come to found the institutional “Christian church” or start a new religion; he came to inaugurate the kingdom, an expansive reality which transcends the established church and can spread in the midst of non-Christian religious communities.

The theology and parables of the kingdom are seen as reframing a traditional view of the church, offering a new “kingdom paradigm” of church planting. Whereas the traditional paradigm is framed by “conflict of religions” and denominationally “separatist” ecclesiology, a “kingdom paradigm”

understands the kingdom to transcend denominations and religious communities: “The Kingdom of God includes the Church, but is bigger than the Church. The Kingdom refers to the whole range of God’s exercise of His reign and rule in the universe. This includes religions” (Higgins 2009, 87; cf. Taylor 2015, Loc. 4371).

temple prayers at a time when temple leadership was officially opposed to faith in Jesus (Higgins 2015b, Loc. 5623). For insider advocates, this provides a clear biblical precedent for contemporary insiders who gather together with other believers and yet continue to pray in the mosque and identify as Muslims (Travis 2000, 53).

## The parables of the kingdom shift the focus from church planting to kingdom sowing. It represents a more dynamic, organic view of the church—“not so much a congregation as it is a movement, a life, an organism, a seed.” (Higgins)

The parables of the kingdom—especially the yeast in the dough—shift the focus from “church planting” to “kingdom sowing” in the insider paradigm (Travis and Woodberry 2010). The former represents a more Western, organizational, and institutional concept of the church and the latter expresses a more dynamic, organic view of the church:

The church, when understood from a Kingdom perspective, is not so much a congregation, as it is *a movement, a life, an organism, a seed*. According to Jesus’ metaphors, the church lives and grows amidst all sorts of other things: weeds, rocks, and dough. (Higgins 2015, Loc. 5404, emphasis added)

This organic view of the church, shaped by the imagery of the parables, is extended to imply that Jesus himself expected, and taught us to expect, an ekklesia which could take shape “within the religio-cultural world of the Muslim community” and would “include Islamic places and patterns of worship” (ibid., Loc. 5421).

This understanding and application of the “kingdom” theme will be evaluated in the next chapter, but there is no mistaking that it is a hugely influential component of the biblical framework for an insider church, reframing the nature of ekklesia as a community that can take shape within, and spread among, non-Christian “socio-religious” communities. Another critical building block for insider ecclesiology is the Jesus-movement as it unfolds among the Jews and Gentiles in the book of Acts.

### The Jerusalem Church as First Insider Church

For insider advocates, the first church was an “insider church.” The first Jewish believers in Jesus did not intend to form a separate religious community, but rather formed a sect within Judaism called “the Way” (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9). While they gathered with other Christ-followers, they still identified as Jews, followed Jewish laws, and continued in

This understanding leads to a reframing of the nature of ekklesia as “a movement within the social and religious life of the Jewish people” that “took structural or formal expression as it met in separate homes or public gatherings *and* as its members continued in the Temple and the synagogue” (Higgins 2006, 118; emphasis in original; cf. 2009, 78). Thus, “They did not cease to be the church in the Temple worship, and they did not cease to be Jewish in the home meeting” (ibid.). The dual identity in the first church is taken as a basis for affirming the legitimacy of insider ekklesia which combines ecclesial and “Muslim” identity, believing fellowships and mosque worship, as potentially reconcilable.

In addition to finding support for insider ekklesia in the early Jesus-movement among Jews in Jerusalem, the insider paradigm finds support in the Gentile church, particularly in light of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

### Insiders, the Gentiles, and the Jerusalem Council

Acts 15 plays a critical role in the biblical framework for insider ekklesia, and many parallels are drawn between the Jerusalem Council and the contemporary insider controversy. The inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s people was a new, surprising work of God initially resisted by the church, but eventually accepted through Spirit-led consensus and consultation. Similarly, insider advocates contend, it is important to recognize that God is doing something new and surprising in our day to include Muslims in the church “as Muslims.” Just as the apostles did not require the Gentile believers to be circumcised and keep the law and therefore become Jews, so today the church should not require Muslim followers of Jesus to become “Christians” or adopt a “Christian identity.” If Gentiles are able to be saved and follow Jesus by faith *as Gentiles*, without becoming Jews, then Muslims can be saved and follow Jesus by faith *as Muslims*, without “becoming Christians.”<sup>5</sup>

The result of the Jerusalem Council is a “bilateral ecclesiology” for Jews and Gentiles (Talman 2015, Loc. 6093)—or “multilateral ecclesiology” for all nations (Talman 2015, Loc. 6109)—with a Jewish church following the Jewish law and a Gentile church free from it. However, the fact that the council required Gentiles to follow a limited number of Jewish laws for the sake of unity with the Jewish church implies that insider fellowships may eventually need to adjust their practice of church in order to express unity with the wider body of Christ (Woodberry 2015a, Loc. 5978–5996).

Thus both the Jewish Jerusalem movement and the Gentile movement in Acts are taken as paradigmatic for insider ekklēsia, albeit in different ways. The early Jewish church is viewed as a paradigm for the *positive* idea of ekklēsia remaining in its natural “socio-religious” culture and community, while the Gentile church (and the Jerusalem Council decision) is taken to be a paradigm for the *negative* idea that biblical ekklēsia does *not* require adopting a foreign “socio-religious” identity and culture.

The paradigms in Acts of the early Jewish and Gentile movements are an important part of the biblical framework for insider ekklēsia, and the following chapter offers a critical assessment of their legitimacy. Now I turn to another important New Testament theme that undergirds insider ekklēsia, which is the theme of the household/oikos.

## An “oikos model” of church draws on a theme in the book of Acts, one in which the family network itself becomes the church, enabling new believers to remain within their community.

### Insiders in Household/Oikos Churches

The concept of “house/household” in the New Testament (oikos in Greek) has particular relevance in shaping insider ekklēsia. Drawing upon the theme of household conversions in the book of Acts, the insider paradigm promotes an “oikos model” of church in which the family network itself becomes the church. This is set in contrast to the “Western aggregate model” of church, in which ekklēsia takes the form of a conglomeration of individual believers gathered into a new society separate from (and potentially a threat to) existing family networks. With minimal disruption to the natural family, the household/oikos model enables new believers to remain within their community network, thus facilitating a potential insider movement, as well as fulfilling the Abrahamic promise of blessing for all families of the earth (Lewis 2007, 75–76; 2010, 34).

As later discussion shows, the oikos theme and family networks play a significant role in insider ekklēsia in ways that both contributes to and falls short of the full biblical nature of the church. In addition, the insider paradigm also draws upon the body of Christ theme in its vision for insider ekklēsia.

### Insiders and the Body of Christ

The “body of Christ” theme plays an important role expressing insider ekklēsia that is outside the existing Christian community and inside Muslim community and identity. Insider advocates highlight the way the “body of Christ” focuses on the spiritual connectedness of believers to Christ and to one another rather than membership in a particular ecclesial body (Travis et al. 2006, 124; Higgins 2006, 118–19; Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 117). Membership in the body of Christ does not require “joining a church,” identifying as “Christian,” or rejecting one’s membership in the Muslim *umma*. Rather, it is a spiritual identity effected by God when one believes in Jesus, and it can be expressed in fellowship with other believers as well as in other social and religious spheres of daily life (Higgins 2006, 118–19). These local insider expressions of the body of Christ can develop visible forms and structures for their community life, and their identity as members of Christ’s body does not exclude membership and participation in another religious community (Higgins 2006, 118–19). The body of Christ, like the kingdom of God, transcends religious communities (Travis and Woodberry 2015).

### Other New Testament Themes

A number of other biblical themes are occasionally referenced in the insider paradigm. One is the church as a *holy community of the Spirit*, which highlights “restored and restructured relationships” in the church that attract the outside world, without dividing the church from the world (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 120). Another theme is the *new creation*, which, along with the kingdom, is taken as central to God’s purposes for the world, while the church is secondary and instrumental in participating in God’s new creation project (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 150). The themes of garden, city, and temple can all be traced to a culmination in the new creation, when the church will be transformed into a new, unknown form, which makes all present ecclesial forms and structures provisional and temporary (ibid., 177–85).

The foundation of insider ekklēsia is a particular group of biblical themes and narratives given particular emphasis, interpretation, and application that creates the space for, and even encourages, insider expressions of church. This insider biblical theology, thoroughly evaluated in the next chapter, is foundational in shaping all remaining dimensions of insider ekklēsia discussed below, including the essential identity of insider ekklēsia.

## *Insiders and the Identity of the Church*

The question of the essential identity of the church is at the heart of the insider controversy. If insiders retain the “socio-religious” identity of their Muslim community, then what is the identity of the church, and what sets it apart from the Muslim community? Insider-ministry advocates articulate their answers both negatively and positively—what the church *is* and what it is *not*.

First, insider advocates emphasize that the core essence of the church is not to be found in Western church institutions, traditions, or cultural expressions (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 71–72). Some insider advocates avoid using the word “church” in favor of other terms such as “Christ-centered communities” or “biblical ekklesia” (Travis 1998b, 412; 2012, 241, n. 36). Higgins, who uses the word “church,” explains concerns about this English word:

I am convinced that hidden in the word “church” for many of us are concepts that are not entirely biblical, but are rather identified with our experience of church as independent, isolated, and self-contained congregations. We therefore run the risk of equating that experience with the essence of “church.” (2015a, Loc. 5381)

Higgins argues that many people import their own (Western) congregational experience of church, which must be separated from the essence of the biblical church.

Second, the insider paradigm affirms that a Christian “socio-religious” identity is not a part of the core essence of the church. An ekklesia does not need to identify as “Christian” to distinguish itself from its community, but can indeed retain Muslim “socio-religious” identity (Travis 1998b; Travis 2015a, Loc. 837). The “retaining of social and religious identity” is understood as “not leaving” one’s family or religious community in which one was born and raised, but remaining in one’s family *and* “socio-religious” community (ibid., Loc. 817–37). “Christian socio-religious identity” then, is clearly excluded from the essential identity of the church.

While insider-ministry advocates affirm that insider movements retain their “socio-religious” identity as Muslims, they also possess an “ecclesial identity,” which requires at least three things. First, an ecclesial identity requires a community or fellowship of people who believe and follow Christ—a “Christ-centered community,” the key constant for C1–C5 communities in the C-spectrum (1998a, 407; cf. also Parshall 1998, 405; Travis 1998b, 412). Duerkson unpacks this further in his article “Must Insiders Be Churchless?”

A church, according to the New Testament, is first and foremost a locally identified group of believers who are committed to following Jesus and his commandments, and to doing this together. . . . A church is, quite fundamentally, a *community* that follows the commands and example of Jesus, including expressions of baptism and communion. . . . In the New Testament this idea of community is often expressed through kinship language and practices. The church is a family whose members care for each other in familial ways. (2012, 162; emphasis in original)

Duerkson develops further the notion of the church as a community centered on Christ, in terms of a commitment to follow Jesus and his teachings together as a family. This is understood as the essence of the “ecclesial identity” of the church, which is to be distinguished from its “social identity,” which they continue to share with their Muslim family and community.

The ecclesial identity of the church for insiders is shaped by the kingdom of God.

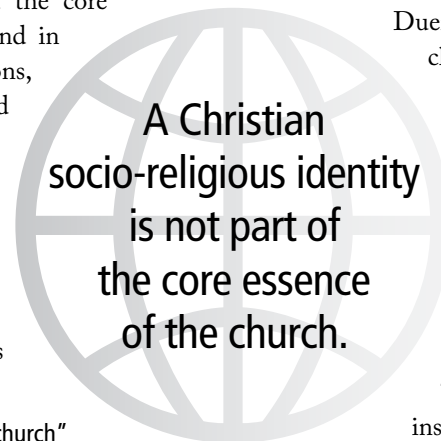
Rebecca Lewis highlights the essential identity of the church in her comparison between insider movements and church planting movements:

So the main differences between “insider movements” and “church planting movements” lie in the nature of the “house churches” (pre-existing social networks turning to Christ rather than artificial aggregate groupings) and the social identity of those involved (retained versus changed). In both movements the churches are not institutionalized, and the people in both movements share a *new spiritual identity as members of the Kingdom of God* and disciples of Jesus Christ. In the case of “insider movements,” however, this new spiritual identity is not confused or eclipsed by a new social identity. (2007b, 76, n. 1; cf. Lewis 2015b, Loc. 12528–47; emphasis added)

Insider churches and “CPM” churches differ in form and social identity, while they share an essential identity as members in God’s kingdom, which, significantly, does *not* require a new “social identity.”

The ecclesial identity of the church is also defined in terms of the body of Christ. Kevin Higgins, in response to Tim Tennent’s critique that insider movements fall short of a fully biblical ecclesiology, proposed the following definition of the essence of the church:

*The Church is the Body of Christ, and the assembly of believers who have been saved by grace through faith.* The Church is therefore a creation of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is not a human organization or institution, although clearly forms and structures do factor in as tangible ways in which this



community expresses itself visibly. No human being can "make" a church or join the Church and as such, is called to live out their membership in the Body of Christ, the Church, as a full time lifestyle in every venue of life. . . . *One's identity as a born again member of the Body can and does overlap with one's identity in other spheres of life, including one's religious life.* (Higgins 2006, 118–19; emphasis in original; cf. 2015c, Loc. 12730)

Higgins' definition continues the insider theme mentioned previously of distinguishing the essence of the church from organizations and institutions, emphasizing the church as the body of Christ, and therefore a creation of God, not man. Rather than people "making/planting" or "joining" the church, it is God who creates the church and incorporates people into it; and human beings are to live out their membership in the world "as a full time lifestyle in every venue of life," an identity which can "overlap" with other identities, such as one's religious identity. Higgins further elaborates a theology of church which creates space for insider expressions of faith:

I am suggesting here that the biblical definition of "church" does not necessarily refer to a "bounded" or "closed" set social grouping which prevents a member of His Body, the church, from also being a "member" of another social or even religious structure or expression. However, a clarification is needed lest I be misunderstood. On one side, I do see church as a closed set, for only those who are born from above and incorporated by the Spirit into His Body are members of the church! But as such, they are not thereby excluded from living in and among other social and religious structures as yeast in the dough. (Higgins 2006, 118; cf. Higgins 2015c, Loc. 12729)

Higgins argues that the theological boundaries of the body of Christ do not require believers to give up their membership in other social and religious structures; one can have dual membership. The essence of the church is found not in changing social and religious identity, but rather in the spiritual regeneration and incorporation of believers into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

One way the essence of the church has been defined is in terms of the special presence and work of God relating to a particular community in its cultural context. While all social entities emerge through the interaction of individuals to one another, ekklēsia comes into existence when people within a particular cultural context relate to one another and to God in a special way (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 71–72). The biblical metaphors that express the nature or "theological ontology" of the church are taken to "express the special way God is present and working in and through these communities, despite their very diverse cultural expressions" (ibid., 108). Therefore, when insiders relate to one another and to God in a particular context in specified ways, ekklēsia "emerges" in that context.

It is clear that the insider paradigm presents particular ways of defining the core essence of the church that include insider communities as expressing the biblical church. These unique perspectives include clearly distinguishing the church from cultural forms and institutions, as well as separating the essence of the church from affiliating with a particular religious identity (Christian, Muslim, etc.). What is highlighted is the presence and work of God in creating the church by regenerating believers and uniting them to Christ's body, a reality which can take place among people who retain their "socio-religious" community identity as Muslims. These perspectives challenge our understanding of the church in positive ways, even as they raise some important concerns, both of which I will take up in the next chapter.

Besides the essence of the church, the insider paradigm has a unique perspective on defining the local church, as seen below.

### *Insiders in Local Ekklēsia*

From the beginning, insider advocates have affirmed the importance of local fellowships or "Christ-centered communities." Some defining features of local ekklēsia and "church life" can be discerned.

#### The Basic Features of Local Ekklēsia in the Insider Model

The vision for the local church in the insider paradigm can be summarized as follows: *a group of Muslims in a family/social network who commit to following Jesus together while remaining part of the Muslim community as "socio-religious" Muslims.* There are four key components of this definition: (1) belief in and discipleship to Jesus, (2) Muslim family/social networks, (3) ongoing participation in the Muslim community, and (4) commitment to one another.

Fundamental to the local insider church is *commitment to follow Jesus*. Insider fellowships consist of people who believe in and follow "Isa al-Masih" (the Muslim name for Jesus)<sup>6</sup> as their Savior and Lord (Higgins 2009, 77; cf. Higgins 2015 Loc. 12730). Various insider advocates and missiologists give firsthand testimony to encountering and experiencing the sincere faith of insiders from such fellowships (e.g., Travis and Travis 2005).

While only those who believe and are saved are part of the body of Christ (Higgins 2015, Loc. 12730), insider advocates do not advocate separating out believers from not-yet-believers, so as not to disrupt the family network by creating a competing "believers-only" community, which leads to the second component: *Muslim social/familial networks* (Lewis 2007, 75–76). Rather than "planting" churches as new social units, insider advocates seek to "implant" churches in Muslim social networks, preserving these networks to allow the gospel to spread in the community along the lines of extended family and close friends (Talman 2004b, 8).

This insider “oikos” model of church is contrasted with the prevailing Western model of church as a “voluntary society,” in which “people must be given freedom to join the community of Christ’s followers by their own mature decision and should decide for themselves as adults to receive baptism” (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 50–53). This model, also known as the “believers church,” is argued to have originated in the Anabaptist and free-church movements, having spread throughout the globalized world, and yet has been resisted in more communal-oriented societies, as those in Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist nations.

The insider paradigm offers an alternative, advocating an “oikos” model that seeks to avoid “aggregate churches” of strangers, extracted from their families in a separate church structure (Lewis 2007, 75; cf. Lewis 2015b, Loc. 12587). In insider churches,

Families and their pre-existing relational networks *become* the church as the gospel spreads in their midst. The God-given family and clan structures are thereby supported and transformed from unbelieving communities into largely believing communities. Decisions to follow Christ are more communal rather than individual.... The destruction of families and the creation of semi-functional, extracted, new communities of believers-only is thereby avoided, and the gospel continues to flow along preserved relational pathways. (Lewis 2015b, Loc. 12587)

The goal is to preserve, rather than disrupt, existing family networks. This means a different vision of *ekklēsia*, not as a competing community *outside* the family, but as a transforming community *within* the family:

In “insider movements,” therefore, there is no attempt to form neo-communities of “believers-only” that compete with the family network (no matter how contextualized); instead, “insider movements” consist of believers remaining in and transforming their own pre-existing family networks, minimally disrupting their families and communities. These believing families and their relational networks *are* valid local expressions of the Body of Christ, fulfilling all the “one another” care seen in the book of Acts. (Lewis 2007, 75–76)

Preserving and staying within Muslim social and familial networks is a key emphasis in this particular insider model of local *ekklēsia*.

In addition to seeing the church take shape in existing Muslim familial/social networks, the local *ekklēsia* for insiders includes a third component: *ongoing membership or participation in Muslim community identity and/or practices*. When Rebecca Lewis distinguishes local “insider” churches from those in “church planting movements,” she highlights two key factors: (1) remaining in family networks, and (2) remaining “Muslim” in terms of “social identity” (Lewis 2007, 76, n. 1). When local believing families come to

faith and become a local expression of the church, they do not renounce their Muslim identity or call themselves Christian. Rather, these local fellowships continue to see themselves as Muslims and identify as Muslims, remaining an ongoing part of the Muslim community, while also seeing themselves as part of the kingdom of God and the body of Christ (*ibid.*).

But maintaining a Muslim identity often requires ongoing participation in Muslim ritual practices (Travis 1998a, 411–15). Insider advocates have variously supported and defended one or more of the following practices: (1) ongoing participation in Islamic ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) at the mosque or at home, substituting biblical content for Qur’anic words (e.g., Uddin 1989, 267–72; Travis 1998b, 414); (2) affirming the full Islamic confession of faith (*shahāda*) that there is no god but God and Muhammad is the apostle (*rasul*) of God, reinterpreting Muhammad’s apostleship or prophethood in a more limited fashion (cf. Higgins 2004, 120–21; Brown 2006, 131; Talman 2014; Talman 2015b); and (3) retaining some ongoing ritual use of the Qur’an in private or corporate worship, reciting texts that support but do not contradict the Bible (cf. Uddin 1989, 267–72; Travis 1998b, 414; Brown 2006, 131; Travis and Woodberry 2015). Insider advocates do not argue that these are necessary to the insider paradigm, nor are they universal practices by all insiders. However, the insider paradigm has been used to defend these practices as biblically permissible ways for people to follow Jesus while maintaining Muslim identity.

**In addition to the church taking shape in existing Muslim familial/social networks, the local *ekklēsia* also includes ongoing membership in Muslim community identity and/or practices.**

In addition to the above elements, many insider advocates also include *commitment to one another* as a part of the core of the insider model of the local church. This can be seen in a number of the definitions of the local church by insider advocates, such as that of Duerkson:

A church, according to the New Testament, is first and foremost a locally identified group of believers who are committed to following Jesus and his commandments, and to doing this together.... A church is, quite fundamentally, a *community* that follows the commands and example of Jesus, including expressions of baptism and communion. (2012, 162; emphasis in original)



Part of the definition of the local church is togetherness and a common commitment to follow Jesus as a community. This same idea is expressed differently by Talman, who adopts a definition of church from the Ryrie Study Bible:

A local church can be defined as "a group of professing believers in Christ who have been baptized and who have organized themselves for the purpose of doing God's will." ... This shows us the need for contextualizing ecclesiology. Following Ryrie, I would maintain that the biblical absolute here is that of "organization to do God's will," but I would suggest that the form of that organization is not mandated... Hence not only would a "Jesus mosque" be acceptable, but so might a movement within the Muslim community that is not determined by its place of public worship. (2004b, 9, 12, n. 18)

Seeking to distinguish "local church" from a specific worship location, Talman zeroes in on "organization to do God's will" as the essential component of the local church, which implies a common commitment or togetherness of a community of believers. Dyrness likewise says that "an incipient ecclesial form" is present wherever the purposes of Ephesians 4:11–16—members being built up to maturity in Christ—are being fulfilled, even imperfectly (2016, Loc. 2731).

The core of the insider model of the local church is therefore one in which discipleship to Jesus spreads throughout a Muslim family such that the family network itself becomes an expression of the local church, committed to following Jesus together while remaining within the Muslim community as "Muslims." In addition to this core description of the insider model of the local church, it is also important to look at the nature of the gatherings and community life of the local church in the insider paradigm.

**The church is depicted as  
"church-in-process," a real and  
emerging church which contains  
aspects of the nature of the church,  
yet not fully expressing all the  
elements of the biblical church.**

### Local Church Life in the Insider Model

Local gatherings of insider fellowships have been affirmed in the insider paradigm from the beginning (Travis 1998a, 408; William 2011, 70), and insider advocates provide various profiles and descriptions of these gatherings which illumine the nature of local ekklēsia in the insider paradigm. Local gatherings are often described as focusing on Bible

study, prayer, and fellowship (Travis and Travis 2005; Dyrness 2016, Loc. 2731). However, such gatherings are not alternatives to prayers at the mosque, and the level of openness of such gatherings depends upon local circumstances, social skills of the believers, and response of the particular neighborhood (Travis and Woodberry 2015, Loc. 1481)

The majority of insider advocates affirm the importance of gathering together in local ekklēsia, but there are differences as to how structured and organized such gatherings should be. Some insider advocates, such as Rebecca Lewis, have suggested that the gathering of believers need not be planned and structured; it can be spontaneous and organic, as what happens in the course of natural family life. In the "oikos/household" model, believing families "do not need to adopt the meeting and program structures common in Western aggregate churches" (Lewis 2007, 75–76). Since the church simply *is* the family network, then the church can express itself in the context of the natural activities and relationships of family life.

The insider model of local church is depicted as a model of "church-in-process," an "emerging" church which contains aspects of the nature of the church if not yet fully expressing it (Travis 2000, 53, 59; Higgins 2006, 119). This emerging, in-process ecclesiology can be seen in the following definition of local ekklēsia from an insider perspective:

*Every local "church" body is an expression of the Church body. And every time believers meet together, they are an expression of the Body. Of course, not every gathering of believers contains all of the elements of all that the scriptures teach regarding "church." The primary marks of a mature expression of the Church include these functions from Acts 2:42–47: The church exists where there is apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking bread (both as real meals, and the Lord's Supper), prayer/worship, the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, radical generosity in community life, intentional gathering together (publicly in the "Temple," and as believers house to house), and the ongoing addition of new believers. (2006, 119; cf. Higgins 2015c, Loc. 12748; emphasis in original)*

Higgins affirms that insider gatherings are, on the one hand, a real expression of the church, the body of Christ; and at the same time they do not yet reflect all the elements of the biblical church, which he equates with "a mature expression of the Church" (taken from the profile of the early church in Acts).

One way the emerging character of insider communities is described is by analogy to the Catholic perspective on Protestant churches, which affirms that the true church exists fully only in the Roman Catholic Church, while also affirming the presence of ecclesial communities and (Protestant) churches with elements of "sanctification and truth" that are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church (ibid., Loc. 2678–94).



This developmental, in-process model of the church can be seen in at least two practical areas: sacraments/ordinances and elders. Many insider advocates affirm baptism and/or the Lord's Supper in their explanation of the local church: some have emphasized baptism (Talman 2004b, 9), some communion (Higgins 2006, 119), and some both (Travis 1998b, 414; Duerkson 2012, 162). Those who are aware of insider movements indicate a varied practice among various movements:

In some movements it seems to be a common practice to remember the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins during a meal shared together. Most Jesus-following Muslims practice some form of water baptism as well, not to indicate a change of religious affiliation, but as a sign of identifying with Jesus, who has opened the way for the cleansing of sin and for new life in Him. Some Muslim disciples of Jesus who do not yet practice outward water baptism consider themselves to have been baptized spiritually because of their relationship with Christ, who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. (Travis and Woodberry 2015, Loc. 1516)

The practice of these two rites is thus not yet universal among insider movements, and if affirmed as essential to the local church, express an emerging, "in process" character of insider *ekklesia*.<sup>7</sup>

The appointing of elders is another area where this developmental, in-process nature of the insider model can be observed. As with the ordinances, it appears that the appointment of elders has taken place in some, but not all, insider fellowships (Travis et al. 2006, 124; 2006, 119; cf. Higgins 2015, Loc. 12767). Some insider advocates emphasize appointing elders as essential to the nature or functions of a "mature church," with some churches not yet having arrived (2006, 119; 2009, 77; cf. Higgins 2015, Loc. 12767). Another perspective sees the "offices" of the church as reflecting functions of the church as a whole, which can develop into particular roles when the particular need arises; e.g., the ministry of *diakonia* (service), a function of the whole church, eventually required the development of particular roles in Acts 6:1–7 (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 126).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, we see that insider advocates generally affirm the appointment of elders as a biblical feature of mature churches, while also allowing time and space for emerging, immature churches to grow into mature, elder-led churches, allowing flexibility in terms of the timeframe and the particular style of leadership.

One key reason that the insider model provides considerable developmental space for local fellowships is because of the principled distance between insider movements and Christian

churches. Insiders, by default, are often isolated from national Christians or churches (if there are any); and cross-cultural workers, or "alongsiders," are generally very careful about how involved they are with the community, ideally limiting their involvement to mentoring relationships with key insiders in the movement (Travis and Travis 2015, Loc. 10561). This means that growth and development from an "emerging, infant" church to a community that fully expresses the elements of the New Testament church may be a gradual process.

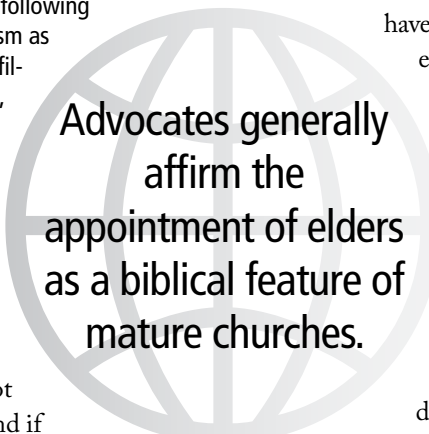
The contours of the insider model of the local church have now become clear. At its core, the church is envisioned as a group of Muslims in a family network who are committed to following Jesus together—expressing local church as a family/community, while continuing to participate in the Muslim community "as Muslims." The community life of local insider churches is one which seeks to gather together in ways appropriate to the context for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship, as they seek to gradually grow and develop under the guidance of the Spirit into a full expression of a mature, biblical church, led by elders and practicing the sacraments.

The question to which we now turn is the issue of the relationship of these local insider fellowships to the larger body of Christ, the universal church.

### *Insiders and the Universal Church*

By definition, Muslim insiders do not identify as Christians, and thus identify with the Muslim *umma*<sup>9</sup> over the "Christian *umma*," at least nominally (Talman 2004b, 8; Travis 2015a, Loc. 817). This raises the critical question of the role of the universal church in the insider paradigm. Insider advocates affirm the universal church as a *theological, spiritual reality*, while also acknowledging that insider churches face unique challenges in seeking to express this ideal in their context.

Insider advocates across the board affirm that insiders, and insider fellowships, are part of the universal church. All groups on the C1–C6 spectrum are affirmed as part of the larger body of Christ (Travis and Travis 2005, 402; Travis et al. 2006, 124). By virtue of faith in Christ, insiders are spiritually united by God to the body of Christ, making them members of the universal church (Higgins 2006, 118–19; cf. Higgins 2015, Loc. 12730). As Paul and Barnabas advocated for the Gentiles to be accepted by the Jerusalem church as full members of the church, so insider proponents advocate for insider believers to be accepted as part of the global family of God (Massey 2004; Bartlotti 2015, *UIM*, Loc. 2125).



Advocates generally affirm the appointment of elders as a biblical feature of mature churches.

It appears that many insiders, while not identifying as Christians, see themselves as a part of a larger community in Christ that transcends religious communities:

Based on comments from Muslim followers of Jesus as well as colleagues who know these believers well, we can affirm that the great majority of Jesus-following Muslims view all people who are truly submitted to God through Christ, whether Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, as fellow members of the Kingdom of God. The presence of the Spirit of God in both born-again Christians and born-again Muslims points to realities—the Body of Christ and the Kingdom of God—that go beyond socio-religious labels and categories. (Travis and Woodberry 2015, Loc. 1477)

Though Muslim followers of Jesus may distance themselves from Christians in name, they generally see themselves as spiritually connected with those Christians who are truly born again; and when Christians see the presence of the Spirit in the lives of insiders, they should similarly recognize them as part of the body of Christ. In insider ecclesiology, it is not religious affiliation that indicates whether or not one is part of the universal church; it is the presence of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer.

While affirming this spiritual reality, insider advocates acknowledge the practical limitations of insiders expressing the universal church visibly (Duerkson 2012, 165; Dutch 2000, 22), as connectedness and solidarity to one's Muslim birth community takes priority over visible identification with the non-Muslim believing community. Insider advocates acknowledge this shortcoming, while warning evangelical critics not to hold insiders to higher standards than what evangelicals themselves have been able to achieve, with their many denominational divisions and independent churches (Duerkson 2012, 165; Higgins, Jameson, and Talman 2015, *UIM*, Loc. 1716). For some, this deficiency is another part of the insider church's "emergent," in-process character (2016, Loc. 2746).

Some, however, argue that the visible expression of the universal church is not essential, arguing that the New Testament allows for a "one body, two communities" model of church with "two distinct categories for the body of Christ," Jewish and Gentile (Jameson and Scalevich 2000, 35). Although one body in Christ, Jews and Gentiles opted to be one "in Spirit" rather than in practice, remaining separate "in almost all aspects of everyday life" (*ibid.*, citing 1 Cor 9:19–20). As the Jews continued to follow the law, so many contemporary Muslims are finding it necessary to maintain their distance from the traditional Christian community in order to stay within their Muslim context. Christian dietary practices, dress, and worship styles make it difficult for Muslim believers

to freely fellowship with them. To do so would destroy their credibility in their own community, as it would have for first-century Jewish believers (*ibid.*).

Like Jewish believers, who were free to continue following the law and keep unclean Gentiles at arm's length, so Muslim followers of Jesus are free to continue following their traditions and remain separate from Christians, whom some Muslims consider "unclean"—for the sake of maintaining their witness to the Muslim community. While the universal body of Christ is affirmed as a spiritual reality, its visible expression through tangible fellowship is set aside for the higher priority of maintaining solidarity and connectedness to one's birth community for the purpose of witness.<sup>10</sup>

Several insider advocates, however, push back against this "one body, two communities" theology of the universal church, viewing separation as a temporary, pragmatic reality at best that should eventually move towards tangibly expressed unity with the wider body of Christ, which is the biblical norm (Dutch 2000, 22; Higgins 2009, 80). Insider communities, while adopting Islamic forms, ought to eventually adjust their community life so as to express their solidarity and connection with the universal body of Christ (Woodberry 2015b, Loc. 5978–96).

**Despite not being in visible  
communion with the Christian church,  
these Hindu insiders are united with  
them spiritually in the invisible church,  
sharing a common faith  
and life in the Spirit.**

Insider advocates report some examples of insiders expressing fellowship with the universal church in low-key and security-sensitive ways, including through friendships, interactions at mission staff conferences, regular consultation in sharing ideas and strategies in Bible correspondence schools, insiders sent to represent the insider church to the national church in other countries, and an "annual gathering that includes insiders from various countries and outsiders from multiple denominational backgrounds, meeting together for a week of Bible study and discussion" (Dutch 2000, 22; Higgins 2009, 80).

Another example is an insider movement with "low key but formal links with an international Christian denomination" with a "mutual recognition of each others' ministry and ethos, . . . the denominational leadership recognizes the ministry and 'ordinations' of the insiders" (*ibid.*). Such links are seen

as “a fruitful way forward, and a viable expression of a more faithful ecclesiology of the ‘glocal’ church, a church that is at once and in essence both local and global, both particular and catholic” (ibid., 80–81). Although expressing the universal church is a challenge, some insider proponents advocate for insider communities moving toward appropriate, low-profile ways to forge connections with the wider body of Christ.

The universal church is an important issue in the insider model of church. The insider paradigm affirms the universal church as a spiritual reality that transcends religious affiliation, encompassing all who have been incorporated into Christ’s body through faith, whether Muslim, Christian, or other. While most insiders see themselves as part of a larger community of faith, the nature of insider movements is such that visibly expressing their connection to the global church is superseded by the priority of maintaining connection to the Muslim family and community. While some insider advocates see this as a biblically legitimate option, others see it as a temporary necessity, with the ideal of insiders moving toward limited, low-profile ways of connecting with the wider body of Christ.

The challenge of visibly expressing the universal church relates directly to the next key topic, which is how the insider vision of the church relates to the visible and invisible church.

### *Insider Church: Visible or Invisible?*

One way to frame the insider debate is with the question: “Can someone say ‘yes’ to Jesus and ‘no’ to the visible church?” (Tennent 2006, 101). This raises the question of how the visible and invisible church shapes insider ecclesiology. Insider advocates reflect diverse perspectives on the concepts of the visible and invisible church that reflect different denominational backgrounds. However, the paradigm as a whole reveals a particular expression of visibility and invisibility in insider ekklesia.

Herbert Hoefler, from a Lutheran perspective, utilizes the visible/invisible church concepts in expressing an ecclesiology for Hindu insiders who refuse baptism and membership in the church in India. Initially referring to them as an example of “churchless Christianity,” Hoefler later reported that these believers had rejected the “churchless” moniker and affirmed that they *are* part of the church, even if they understand and practice it differently (Hoefler 2007; 2015, Loc. 6687–6705).

Hoefler believes that the visible/invisible church concept creates space for such believers who are not baptized or church members: “not everyone who is on the church rolls (the visible Church) is actually in the body of Christ through faith (the invisible church, known only to God). Likewise, there are people unknown to us in the visible Church, but known to God as His own” (ibid., Loc. 6705).

The visible church, for Hoefler, is especially connected with church membership, and this is the primary problem for these insiders (ibid., Loc. 6758–77). The reason they reject church membership is because it carries the cultural meaning of their abandoning family and community, with significant legal and social implications. In order to remain inside their family and culture as a witness, church membership is avoided. This does not mean that these insider groups (called *Jesu bhaktas*) have a problem with fellowship with other believers, which they seek in a variety of forms, as there are

new forms of faith communities evolving. The *Jesu bhaktas* do not despise fellowship with fellow believers; indeed, they desire it and are developing various ways to achieve it. They are doing this separate from the established church bodies: through pilgrimages, Christian *sanyasis*, mass rallies, Christian friends, standing outside the church on Sundays, joining in Christian worship, Holy Communion, Bible correspondence courses, Christian ashrams and internet discussions. These are forms of spiritual fellowship and accountability that are familiar and comfortable to them from their Hindu cultural background. (ibid., Loc. 6758)

These insiders pursue fellowship with other believers, but they do so outside the bounds of membership in a Christian church and in forms shaped by their cultural background.

For Hoefler, fellowship with believers is essential, but membership in the established Christian church is not. Luther’s *adiaphora* principle states that “any church practice or policy that does not compromise the gospel of salvation by grace through faith is a matter of *adiaphora*, a matter of indifference and freedom” (ibid., Loc. 6706). Since church membership is not essential to salvation, it should be considered *adiaphora*, says Hoefler (ibid., Loc. 6759). On the other hand, “Some form of fellowship is highly helpful for sanctification; however, the form that this faith community takes may differ from culture to culture” (ibid.).

However, despite not being in visible communion with the Christian church, these Hindu insiders are united with them spiritually in the invisible church, sharing a common faith and life in the Spirit (ibid., Loc. 6863). This may not express itself in organizational membership, but it should express itself in relational openness to the other and mutual edification and growth into Christian maturity.

However, other insider advocates are less comfortable with using “invisible ecclesiology” in the context of insider movements. Duerkson, from an Anabaptist believers church perspective, pushes back on Hoefler’s use of the visible/invisible church, affirming that the New Testament understanding of the church includes visible community as essential. While affirming the reality of “a wider and unseen Church,” Duerkson emphasizes that the New Testament “seems to

primarily understand church as *gathered groups of disciples* that are visible to the wider community" (2012, 162; emphasis in original). Therefore, "While it is possible to be a follower of Christ and not a member of a local church, Christ's ideal is for people to be committed to a local group of believers who together represent Christ to their context" (ibid.). The reality of the invisible church, says Duerkson, should not eclipse the necessity of visible community in a New Testament church.

Duerkson is not the only one who wants to preserve visibility in insider ekklēsia. Kevin Higgins affirms, in response to critics:

I believe in the visible church, that is, in a church made up of believers who meet and can be seen, touched, and heard. My definition refers to these as communities. The whole focus of the work I do and the training I have developed over the years is to see the extension and establishment of such communities of disciples, such churches. My view of insider movements is not inconsistent with the development of forms of church community and forms of church leadership that are biblical, and also fit the context of the culture. . . . Thus, the visible church and its visible forms are biblical concepts. Insider proponents believe in the visible church. (2009b, 70–71)

Higgins fully ascribes to the visible church, understanding it to refer to tangible, observable gathered communities of disciples, affirming it to be completely consistent with insider ekklēsia.

In the end, the emphases of Hoefler and of Higgins and Duerkson can be generally reconciled in the insider paradigm. While insider ekklēsia generally affirms the importance and necessity of visible community, understood as committed participation in local ekklēsia (the emphasis of Duerkson and Higgins), it also generally avoids official membership in the *existing, established* visible church (the emphasis of Hoefler). Furthermore, the existing "visible" church is encouraged to welcome insiders as members of the body of Christ even if they are not officially identifying with the existing visible church.

Thus, insider ekklēsia seems to be shaped by both the visible and invisible nature of the church in different ways. As regards the visible nature of the church, the insider paradigm envisions insiders not as secret believers (C6), but believers who openly live out their faith as Muslim followers of Jesus. We have already seen the concept of local ekklēsia includes visible, tangible communities of faith in Muslim social networks. Some are "underground" churches that meet discreetly with a lower profile, while others can be more open and public, depending on the context and social skills of the insiders (e.g., the case of "Jesus mosques"; Travis and Woodberry

2015; cf. Massey 1996, 151). At the very least, the ideal seems to be for gatherings that are at least visible enough to family members and friends to facilitate the spread of the gospel within the social network, leading to a potential movement.

Along with an affirmation and pursuit of the visible church, insider ekklēsia is also shaped by aspects of the invisible church. In response to what is perceived as an overly institutional ecclesiology, the insider paradigm affirms the unseen, spiritual nature of the church, such that the church is a spiritual creation of God, and all who are saved are united to the body of Christ by the Spirit. Therefore, insiders *are* part of the church, the body of Christ, prior to and regardless of any participation in any church structure or institution.

Another aspect of invisibility in insider ekklēsia is in the expression of the universal church. While visibility is strongly affirmed by some insider advocates, this is focused primarily at the local church level, whereas the universal church is allowed to be, by and large, a spiritual, invisible reality, as discussed previously. Insiders' spiritual bond with the wider visible Christian community typically is not visibly expressed, instead remaining mostly a hidden spiritual reality of the heart and mind. While some insiders have found ways to engage in fellowship with the wider body of Christ, such ties are not overly visible—not only for security reasons, but also to maintain an insider identity. If the goal is for the insider movement to retain its Muslim identity, then any ties to the visible Christian community must remain under the radar at best, if not functionally invisible.

In summary, insider ekklēsia is both visible and invisible. With respect to local gatherings of insiders in Muslim communities, insider ekklēsia is visible, if low profile. With respect to the universal Christian church, insider ekklēsia is functionally invisible. The next chapter examines the ways that a robust understanding of the visible and invisible church affirms and challenges this understanding.<sup>11</sup> Before doing so, however, it is also important to understand how the attributes and marks of the church are expressed in insider ekklēsia.

### *Attributes, Marks, and Insider Church*

The question of the attributes and marks of the true church provides another vantage point to illumine the unique ecclesiological vision of the insider paradigm. Overall, the insider ekklēsia engages more with the Protestant marks than the classical attributes, but ultimately emphasizes its own particular marks to guide the evaluation of churches and movements.

Some insider advocates argue that the classical attributes, as well as the Protestant marks, are historically and contextually shaped, responding to particular temporal concerns that are far removed from contemporary insider movements (Dyrness 2016, Loc. 2678; Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 34, 36).

Thus, it is not surprising that insider *ekklēsia*, by and large, is not significantly influenced by the classical attributes of the church (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic). Some exceptions exist, such as a lone mention of “catholicity” in the context of encouraging fellowship with the universal church (Higgins 2018, 27), and a reinterpretation of “unity” as a key marker of the biblical church (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 165).

More significant in the insider paradigm are the Protestant marks of the Word, baptism, and communion. Although not considered universal criteria for recognizing the true church, they are broadly considered important ecclesial practices, as previous discussion has made clear related to local *ekklēsia*.

Each of these practices, however, may be expressed and understood differently in insider contexts. In some insider fellowships, the study of the Word does not exclude a role for the Qur’an and the hadith as respected texts. The Qur’an and the prophethood of Muhammad may be “revalued” without being rejected; teachings in line with Scripture are affirmed, while Jesus and the Scriptures gradually supersede and relativize the Qur’an and the prophet (ibid. 2019, 141). Such a process has been compared to the way God revealed his truth in Scripture “against the backdrop of religious traditions and practices of local cultures” that “helped to illuminate” aspects of God’s truth (ibid., 141–42). All of this provides an insider “twist” to the ministry of the Word.

## While insider *ekklēsia* generally affirms the necessity of visible community—understood as committed participation in local *ekklēsia*—it also generally avoids official membership in the existing, established visible church.

It has already been noted that many insider movements among Muslims are reported as practicing a form of water baptism. A priority, however, is to express baptism in a way that is not “a ritual of social disruption” or of changing religious communities but rather as an identification with Christ and one’s new life in him (Travis and Woodberry 2015, Loc. 1516; Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 135). The practice of communion appears to be less frequent, though it has been described as “remember[ing] the sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins during a meal shared together” (Travis and Woodberry 2015, Loc. 1516).

Some insider advocates have argued that it is the theological meaning only and not the form of baptism and communion that is normative. Baptism and communion were adapted from existing Jewish cultural rituals (a purification ritual and the Passover, respectively), and insiders (and others) are free to utilize existing cultural or religious rituals in their context that can be adapted to communicate the meaning of baptism and communion (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 137–38). In some contexts, such corresponding rituals can be found, but in other contexts, it is more difficult, which leads some insiders to de-emphasize these practices.<sup>12</sup>

In summary, the insider paradigm affirms, in various ways, the importance of the practices associated with the Protestant marks, and yet allows some flexibility as to the particular cultural form that these practices take so as to avoid “Christian” meaning which would signal a change in religious community. However, of these practices, only the ministry of the Word appears to be treated as a universal “mark of the true church,” while baptism and communion are simply important “ecclesial practices” through which God’s presence is manifested in a particular community.

Rather than focusing on the classic attributes or Protestant marks, insider advocates offer their own set of criteria that mark out true churches, marks which they affirm can be and are increasingly present in emerging “insider” communities. One example is the six “devoted” of the early church in Acts, taken as indicators of a healthy movement: (1) prayer, (2) the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, (3) breaking of bread and prayer, (4) meeting in the temple and house-to-house, (5) leaders devoted to the Word and prayer, and (6) relational discipleship (Higgins 2015b, Loc. 5507–634).<sup>13</sup> These marks of healthy movements are presented as fully compatible with fellowships that maintain a “socio-religious” insider identity, in line with the pattern of the early Jewish church.

Another set of marks that have been proposed to identify the “emergent reality of the church” among insiders includes: (1) hearing and obeying the story of Christ, (2) the formation of a community around the story, (3) response of the community to this story in prayer and praise, (4) living at peace with one another and with the wider community, and (5) witness of the community to Christ and the transformation of the Spirit. The first mark is an intentional revision of the Protestant mark of proclamation of the Word, while the fourth is an expansion of the classical mark of unity that affirms the church is not distinct from its community, but rather “yeast in the dough” seeking to bless its community in shalom (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 155–71).

In the following chapter, we will look at the strengths and weaknesses of how the insider paradigm “marks out” the true church. Here we note that the insider paradigm offers

a distinctive approach to the marks of the church. Largely bypassing the classical attributes, insider advocates affirm a modified “insider-friendly” version of the practices of the Word and sacraments, not as universal marks of the true church, but as ecclesial practices of varying importance. Furthermore, insider advocates have proposed their own set of marks of emerging churches that are understood to be fully compatible with insider churches.

Besides the marks of the church, the insider paradigm also offers a distinct approach to the question of the relationship between salvation and the church.

### *Salvation and the Insider Church*

One critique of the insider paradigm is that it reflects a contemporary evangelical tendency to bifurcate the doctrine of salvation and the doctrine of the church (Tennent 2007, 215). This raises the question, however, of how the insider paradigm actually does characterize the relationship between salvation and the church. A closer look at the writings of insider advocates reveals that they affirm salvation to be both *outside* and *inside* the church in different respects.

Insider advocates clearly affirm that salvation can be found *outside* the existing institutional Christian church, a point which by now is eminently clear. Significantly, this fact reflects a distinctively Protestant theological conviction, as insider advocates affirm unequivocally that salvation is by faith alone, not through membership in any church or religious community. Hoefler includes the Reformation principle of *sola fide* (faith alone) as one of his principles for developing an ecclesiology for Hindu insiders, asserting that church membership in the visible “Christian” church is not a requirement for salvation, and therefore *adiaphora*, or a matter of “indifference” and Christian freedom (2007).

However, insider advocates take a step further in their application of the *sola fide* principle. Not only can salvation be found *outside* the institutional Christian church; salvation can flourish *inside* a *non-Christian* “socio-religious” community. The Traveses argue that *sola fide* is a basis for the possibility of being “saved” and yet remaining part of one’s “original non-Christian religious community of birth” (Travis and Travis 2005, 403). Joining the “right” religious community is not necessary for salvation, and those who insist upon it are in danger of adding an additional requirement or “work” for salvation (Hoefler 2007). For this reason, insider advocates sometimes claim that the gospel itself is at stake in the “right” of insiders to remain in their religious birth community (Lewis 2015a, Loc. 6479–533).

While the insider paradigm clearly affirms salvation outside the church in terms of the institutional Christian community, it affirms salvation to be *inside* the church in certain ways.

The insider paradigm does not promote an individualistic view of salvation in which people come to faith individually without ever entering or expressing the body of Christ. In fact, the household/oikos model of insider churches envisions salvation and church formation as happening simultaneously; when a family comes to faith together, they experience salvation and immediately become an expression of church (Lewis 2007, 76; cf. Lewis 2015b, Loc. 12528–47).

Kevin Higgins likewise depicts salvation as closely linked to the insider church. Higgins affirms that salvation by grace through faith results in immediate spiritual incorporation into God’s church. As insiders come to faith, they are “added” by the Holy Spirit to the church, in a spiritual sense (2006, 119). In this sense, no one can “join” the church or apply for membership—it is an act of God that takes place at conversion (*ibid.*, 118–19). Once this happens, “membership” in the body of Christ becomes a part of insiders’ identity which should be lived out “as a full time lifestyle in every venue of life,” both in community life with other Jesus followers and in ongoing participation in Muslim religious life (*ibid.*; cf. Higgins 2015c, Loc. 12730). While salvation does not require connection with the institutional Christian church, salvation inevitably results in being incorporated into the church spiritually, which ideally will take shape in ecclesial insider communities or churches.

Salvation includes not only forgiveness and justification, but also spiritual formation/sanctification. Insider advocates acknowledge a role for the church in sanctification, though with varying levels of emphasis. Hoefler acknowledges that “some form of fellowship” is “highly helpful” for spiritual development of believers, which he understands broadly to include Bible correspondence courses, mass rallies, Christian friends, and internet discussions (2015, Loc. 6758).

Insider advocate Bernard Dutch uses stronger language, urgently arguing the necessity of biblical churches for the spiritual endurance and maturity of believers. After posing the question, “Can believers flourish and grow without a distinct identity and community?” Dutch’s answer is worth quoting at length:

When a community of believers is small and weak, it is difficult to meet together regularly and meaningfully. Individual believers then have difficulty retaining their passion for Christ. I have seen many believers fall out of fellowship and then lose all signs of spiritual life. . . . Where I live the spiritual battle is not so much for Muslims coming to faith in Jesus; it is for Muslim background believers forming themselves into local fellowships. I have heard similar comments from colleagues working with Muslims elsewhere in the world. Believers in the church have a collective strength for spiritual victory that individuals do not (Matt 16:18). I believe Satan knows this and opposes the formation of the church at every opportunity. This spiritual opposition confirms to me that forming local fellowships of Muslim background

believers is the right strategy... We must persist in prayer for breakthroughs in establishing the church among believers of Muslim backgrounds. We must continually encourage and teach them about the crucial role of the local church in God's plan for His Kingdom.... To reach significant numbers of Muslims, we need growing numbers of vibrant, Biblically based churches that remain in and relevant to Muslim society. The Muslim world will only be reached through indigenous church planting movements that explode far beyond what outsiders can direct or fund. (2000, 22–23)

Dutch's impassioned plea for biblical churches highlights the necessity of the church in the spiritual formation and perseverance of Muslim-background believers. Without the spiritual strength of a local church, new believers are in danger of succumbing to Satanic influence and backsliding into unbelief. In general, then, the insider paradigm affirms the importance of the church in the sanctification of believers, with various insider advocates falling somewhere on the spectrum between the church being "highly helpful" and "necessary" for sanctification.

The insider paradigm has a unique approach to the question of the relationship between salvation and the church. Salvation can indeed be found outside the institutional church and inside other (non-Christian) religious communities. On the other hand, salvation is closely related to the church, in that it results in immediate incorporation by God into the body of Christ and often immediate formation of a church if a whole family is saved together; furthermore, the development of church forms plays an important role in the spiritual formation of insider believers.

Before evaluating this perspective, along with those discussed in the other topics, I will look at one final topic which has great relevance to the question of insider movements: the relationship between the church and the world.

### *Insider Church in the World*

The insider paradigm expresses the church-world relationship in distinctive ways which are critical for understanding the shape of its vision. One aspect of the church-world relationship is the relationship between the church and culture, which brings us back to the issue of contextualization.

Insider advocates have reflected a variety of understandings and postures towards contextualization and its relationship to insider movements. Some of the earliest, most prominent insider advocates have defended insider movements and C5 fellowships as a natural outgrowth and logical outcome of biblical contextualization, based on the way that religion and culture are intertwined in Muslim societies. Hence, Travis has described insider movements and C5 as an example of high-spectrum contextualization (1998a), and Higgins has defined insider movements partly as movements that are "expressed within

as much of the culture as possible, including religious culture" (2004, 156). Furthermore, Travis acknowledges the danger of syncretism, giving several recommendations to avoid it in C5 movements (1998b, 414). Abdul Asad likewise distinguishes between "syncretistic C5" and "appropriate C5" (2009, 155–56).

Some insider advocates, however, have sought to separate contextualization from insider movements. Rebecca Lewis distinguishes contextualization (along with the "C-spectrum") from "insider movements," since insider movements focus upon the relationship between believers and their preexisting family/social network, not the language and cultural forms of the believers' worship (2007, 76). Duerkson and Dyrness argue that contextualization is not the best model for capturing the way the church is emerging in insider situations, proposing a new model of "reverse hermeneutic" and "emergence theory" (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 27–28; cf. Duerkson 2016, Loc.108).

**"Where I live the spiritual battle  
is not so much for Muslims  
coming to faith in Jesus;  
it is for Muslim background believers  
forming themselves  
into local fellowships." (Dutch)**

Those insider advocates who emphasize the contextualization paradigm include an evaluative element that is aware of the possibility of syncretism, arguing that insider movements avoid it. Duerkson and Dyrness' model, on the other hand, is more descriptive, emphasizing pragmatic evaluative criteria, related to practical positive and negative relational results. Rebecca Lewis avoids the issue of contextualizing altogether, at least explicitly, though even she herself is involved in contextualizing a form of church which is more relevant to communal societies—the household church model. Despite these different frameworks, the insider paradigm generally sees religion and culture as a unified whole that cannot be separated, affirming that a significant amount of religious culture and identity can be legitimately retained and expressed in the biblical church.

A closer look at the insider paradigm shows that, despite the varying postures towards contextualization, the insider paradigm offers a particular way of characterizing the identity of the church in relationship to the world—and especially the world's cultures, social structures, and religious communities.



As I show below, the insider vision emphasizes the positive value of cultures and religious structures as spheres in which God and his kingdom are at work, and which therefore should be retained and preserved rather than rejected or overturned by the church. The church-world relationship is envisioned in terms of the church as a change agent embedded within the world’s social, cultural, and religious structures, best expressed in the biblical metaphor of “yeast in the dough.”

The insider paradigm affirms a largely positive view of the social structures and institutions of the world as having God-given value. Family, government, courts, and other societal institutions and norms are divinely ordained to counter evil and sustain human society, and therefore should be preserved: “Especially in view of the power of sin in our fallen world, these structures must be guarded and secured or sin will run rampant and the world will self-destruct” (Hoefler 2007; 2015, Loc. 6744). The family structure in particular is viewed as having a special role in God’s salvific plan, based on God’s promise to Abraham to bless all “families” of the earth (Lewis 2010, 34; 2015, Loc. 6340). This framework undergirds the insider paradigm’s vision of a church which aims to avoid disrupting families, communities, and social institutions in its relationship to the world.

In addition to a positive view of social structures, the insider paradigm emphasizes the positive value of cultural and religious structures of the world as venues in which God is at work in bringing his kingdom. Human “religions” in particular are often included under the umbrella of God’s kingdom:

The Kingdom of God includes the Church, but is bigger than the Church. The Kingdom refers to the whole range of God’s exercise of His reign and rule in the universe. This includes religions. The Kingdom paradigm acknowledges there is another kingdom as well, and takes seriously the battle for the allegiance and hearts and minds of people. (Higgins 2009a, 87)

In comments reflective of the insider paradigm as a whole, Higgins emphasizes the universal scope of the kingdom of God, rejecting the idea that the kingdom is limited to the church.<sup>14</sup> Higgins does not expound upon how exactly God’s kingdom reign relates to human religions, but he is intent on including them in the scope of the kingdom, which creates the space for God’s presence and work in them.

The presence of God within the cultural and religious values and narratives of the world becomes a strong basis for preserving and affirming cultural and religious identities, rather than rejecting them. While acknowledging that God is present in

the church in a special way, “God is present throughout creation, and even in other religions” (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 71), which motivates us to find God in non-Christian cultural and religious traditions:

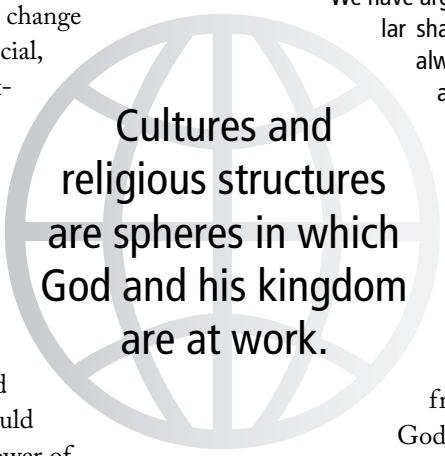
We have argued throughout this book that the particular shape a community of Jesus-followers takes always reflects a reverse hermeneutic, a situated reading of Scripture and the story of Jesus in terms this group can understand and embody. This process prompts us to be attentive to *the way in which God is in the midst of cultural and religious values, practices, and identities, seeking to affirm and not replace these.* (ibid., 172, emphasis mine)

Not only does the church read Scripture from its cultural and religious context, but God himself is understood to be present and at work within these structures in a way which preserves these structures and identities. While an element of transformation is acknowledged, the overall preservation of cultural and religious structures is emphasized:

This creates an emergent process whereby God enhances and transforms, but does not overturn, the community’s social customs and identities. Ecclesial practices like these are uniquely able to locate the community’s own cultural narrative within that of the gospel and in turn to identify *the presence of the gospel within the community’s historical and ongoing cultural narrative.* This dual movement—people locating themselves in the ongoing biblical story and recognizing *God’s presence and work within their own community’s narrative*—allows the emergence of new church communities that will be both in continuity with and distinct from their social context. (ibid., 146; emphasis added)

Duerkson and Dyrness’s model clearly assumes that both God and his gospel are already present in cultural narratives, a reality which can be recognized when churches develop worship practices shaped by their own cultural and religious milieu. The church’s relationship to the world, while acknowledging ways in which the church challenges cultures and religions, is shaped by an overall positive view of cultures and religions as spheres in which God is present and at work.

With such an emphasis on the positive value of cultural, social, and religious structures, the insider paradigm characterizes the church-world relationship primarily in terms of embedment: i.e., the church is a change agent *embedded* in the world, spreading through its cultural and religious structures. At times this is connected with an understanding that churches, like all human communities, are necessarily and inescapably embedded in culture (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 28).



Cultures and religious structures are spheres in which God and his kingdom are at work.

However, this is most clearly highlighted by the insider paradigm's favored image for depicting insider movements—the yeast in the dough. As mentioned previously, insider advocates widely utilize this kingdom parable as a lens through which to understand insider movements and churches, the yeast being the insider church/movement, and the dough being the Muslim social, cultural, and religious structures in which the insider church is embedded and through which it spreads (Travis and Travis 2005, 404; Travis and Woodberry 2015, Loc. 1353). Higgins explicitly applies this to the nature of the church and its role in the world, combining the yeast-in-dough image with that of seed-in-soil in another kingdom parable, depicting the world as the environment within which the seed or yeast of the kingdom—the church—exists, grows, and spreads (2015a, Loc. 5397). This results in a vision of church as embedded in the social and religious structures of the world with all its messiness of “weeds, rocks, and dough,” facilitating the growth and spread of the kingdom throughout these structures.

## This paradigm characterizes the church-world relationship primarily in terms of embedment, i.e., the church is a change agent embedded in the world, spreading through its cultural and religious structures—as yeast in the dough.

The embedment of the church within the cultural and religious structures of the world does not leave the “world” unchanged, however. The insider paradigm affirms the church as a change agent within these structures, which can be described in terms of kingdom “transformation” and “new creation.” While God intends to preserve and enhance local cultures and identities, he does not stop there:

We must be clear that God's purposes in the kingdom are not satisfied by simply making believers into better Americans and Kenyans or Japanese. Rather, God is always making things new (Rev 21:5). These emergent markers then represent ways that the gospel, the story of Jesus, by the work of the Spirit will create something new in and through the cultural values of any people group... all these offer ways for us to push back against our cultural situation—both affirming and transcending that culture. (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 172)

While their book mostly emphasizes the positive value of existing cultural and religious structures and identities, Duerkson and Dyrness here acknowledge that the kingdom

also involves God's “new creation” taking place “in and through” the culture.

In the end, the insider paradigm affirms the church as “in, but not of” the world, even if in modified fashion. When insider churches remain embedded in their Muslim religious communities, they are fulfilling their calling to remain in the world (Anna Travis 2015, Loc. 11904). However, insiders are born again spiritually through faith in Christ, they live according to the Bible as the Word of God, and God's kingdom reign is manifested in their lives (Higgins 2006, 118). Insiders will, over time, reject some Muslim beliefs and practices that are contrary to Scripture, while retaining and modifying others (Travis 2015a, Loc. 832–47), creating some degree of difference with the wider Muslim community (for example, in regard to the authority and purity of the Bible, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and salvation by grace rather than works (Travis and Travis 2005, 406–7; Travis and Woodberry 2015, Loc. 1426).

Higgins describes this process as highlighting the way the church is “in” but not “of” the world:

Kingdom sowing is incarnational, adopting the religious and cultural forms of our Muslim friends. A community of believers will remain in their world, though not of it. Many behaviors, customs, and values will be retained by a believing community, and will need to be adopted by the cross-cultural missionary. But unbiblical values will also be challenged and changed from within, by believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:13). (2015a, Loc. 5438)

Insiders do not simply absorb their cultural and religious context wholesale; Scripture will also challenge and change aspects of the context as well.

Another way the insider church is “in, but not of” the world is through its engagement with the kingdom of Satan which attempts to subjugate God's purposes in the world (Higgins 2009a, 87; Anna Travis 2015, Loc. 11918–32). The church's relationship to the world is characterized by spiritual warfare, not giving any place to the devil, and releasing people in the world from spiritual bondage and oppression, a special emphasis in places dominated by folk Islam (Anna Travis 2015, Loc. 11932).

However, the “otherworldliness” of the church is not seen as hindering the church from remaining embedded “in the world,” including its social and religious structures. Although the insider church indeed will reject and modify certain unbiblical beliefs and practices, it will also need to retain enough of the Muslim worldview and way of life to maintain membership in the Muslim community. Practically, this may mean that while certain beliefs will not be rejected outright, they will be reinterpreted or minimized (cf. Travis and

Woodberry 2015, Loc. 1426). Similarly, the church's spiritual origin is not taken to contradict with its status of being embedded within the religious communities of the world:

On one side, I do see church as a closed set, for only those who are born from above and incorporated by the Spirit into His Body are members of the church! But as such, they are not thereby excluded from living in and among other social and religious structures as yeast in the dough. (Higgins 2006, 118; 2015a, Loc. 12738)

Anna Travis applies a similar line of reasoning with respect to the dominion of Satan and the call of the church to remain in the world:

Praying for his followers, Jesus said, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). In the parable of the wheat and tares, Jesus describes the people of the evil one and the people of the kingdom as mixed together in the world; God's plan in this age is not to separate the two, since it could harm the people of the kingdom to do so (Matt 13:24–30, 37–43). Paul expects that Jesus' followers will continue to relate with people in the world (1 Cor 5:9, 10). John tells us that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one, but that Jesus protects those who are born of God (1 John 5:18, 19). (2015, Loc. 11932)

Citing a variety of texts, Anna Travis argues that the other-worldly identity of the church is not cause to disengage from the spiritual battle in the world.

But she takes this one step further, arguing that insiders do not necessarily need to immediately and publicly "renounce what we consider idolatrous practices associated with the religious community of their people" (Anna Travis 2015, Loc. 11948–64), since idolatry is "a matter of the heart" and "what is inside a person." What is most important, Travis says, is to claim in the mind and heart that "the evil one has no place—no claim or power over us" and "renounce and get rid of whatever the evil one has in us in order to live in victory over him in this world—in this evil age where he is still the ruler" (ibid., Loc. 11948–64). Being "not of" the world does not mean insiders cannot remain embedded within the religious structures of the world, even in spiritual warfare. In a variety of ways, insider advocates affirm that the church is "not of" the world, bringing about transformation and new creation within the world, and yet this fact does not preclude the church from remaining embedded in the social and religious structures of the world as yeast in dough.

The relationship between the church and the world is a critical facet of the insider model of the church. While acknowledging the presence of the kingdom of darkness in the world and the need for God's transforming work, the insider paradigm emphasizes the positive value of social and cultural structures and religious structures as either established by God or as spheres within which

God is present and at work. The insider church is envisioned as a community embedded within the social, cultural, and religious structures as yeast in the dough, a change agent which spreads the transformation of the kingdom and God's new creation within these structures without rejecting them or separating from them.

## Conclusion

The insider paradigm presents a particular vision of the church for insiders, a vision shaped by a variety of assumptions, themes, and perspectives on the nature of the church. Insider advocates appeal to an array of *biblical themes and paradigms* in Old and New Testaments, and especially in the Gospels and Acts, to argue that Scripture fully supports, and at times encourages, a church for religious insiders.

Standing on this framework, the insider paradigm affirms that insider churches express the *core essence of the church*, which is not to be found in affiliation with an institution, a particular cultural form, or a given religious identity, but rather in the presence and work of God in regenerating believers and uniting them to the body of Christ, something which can and does happen among insiders.

**The structures of the world are affirmed as worthy of preservation: cultural and social structures are God-given, and religious identities are spheres within which God and his kingdom are present and working.**

The insider paradigm envisions the *local church* taking shape as believing families and social groups come to faith together, becoming expressions of the local church while retaining their family ties and their Muslim identity. While insiders may continue to gather with Muslims at the mosque, they also gather together with other insiders for Bible study, prayer, and fellowship, hopefully growing into more mature expressions of the biblical church under the guidance of the Spirit.

The insider paradigm affirms the *universal church* as a spiritual reality that transcends religious communities, including both born-again Christians and born-again Muslim followers of Jesus in one body. Due to the commitment of insiders to protect solidarity with their Muslim community, the universal church is largely a spiritual reality for insiders that seldom finds visible expression, with some exceptions.

Despite diverse uses of terminology, the *visible and invisible church* shapes the insider vision in various ways. The insider paradigm affirms the necessity of visible community at the local church level, but rejects the necessity of officially joining the existing institutional church. The insider paradigm, furthermore, emphasizes the invisible, spiritual nature of the church as having theological priority over any human structures or institutions.

In terms of the *marks of the church*, the insider paradigm offers its own criteria for discerning the work of the Spirit in forming emerging, healthy insider churches. In addition, the insider paradigm affirms a modified version of the teaching of the Word, baptism, and communion, not as marks of the true church, but as important ecclesial practices which are fully compatible with insider movements.

The insider paradigm affirms that *salvation* can certainly be found outside the existing institutional church by those who remain in their non-Christian “socio-religious” community. Salvation leads to an immediate incorporation into the body of

Christ spiritually, and this can also lead to an immediate visible expression of the church when whole families and social groups come to faith together, which facilitates spiritual formation.

The insider paradigm envisions the church as embedded within the *world*. The structures of the world are affirmed as worthy of preservation: cultural and social structures are God-given, and religious structures and identities are spheres within which God and his kingdom are present and working. The church is envisioned as neither separate from nor undermining these structures, but embedded within them as yeast in dough, spreading the transforming work of the kingdom from within.

The contours of insider ekklesia are now clear. But how should we assess this vision? To what extent does it reflect a viable model for multiplying robust, biblical churches in Muslim communities? In what areas does it push us in helpful directions, and in what areas does it leave us desiring better solutions? To these questions, we now turn. **IJFM**

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> It is important to state that not every missionary who claims the insider banner practices the “insider” paradigm in ways which are consistent with the way the paradigm is articulated by its leading missiologists.
- <sup>2</sup> I’m grateful to both Don Little and Kevin Higgins for alerting me to this in personal communication. As just one example, Duerkson and Dyrness, authors of *Seeking Church*, hail from the Mennonite Brethren and PCUSA churches, respectively (2019, 2).
- <sup>3</sup> *Understanding Insider Movements: Disciples of Jesus within Diverse Religious Communities* is a case in point, a testimony to this collaboration and a standard resource for understanding the insider paradigm. Talman himself freely speaks of the “insider paradigm” in chapter 2 of *UIM*, entitled “The Historical Development of the Insider Paradigm.”
- <sup>4</sup> See Harley Talman’s “The Old Testament and Insider Movements” in *Understanding Insider Movements*, which focuses on the issue of an Old Testament theology of religions and non-proselyte conversion (2015c).
- <sup>5</sup> Talman sees this as the New Testament counterpart to the “non-proselyte conversion” in the Old Testament discussed previously (Talman 2015c, “Old Testament and Insider Movements,” Loc. 4780).
- <sup>6</sup> *Isa al-Masih* is “Jesus the Christ” in Islamic Arabic. Arab Christians, however, refer to Jesus as *Yasua’ al-Masih*; and most of the Bible translations, liturgy, and Arabic worship songs use *Yasua’*, not *Isa*. However, some contextualized Bible translations, as well as some contextualized movements in the Arab world, use *Isa*.
- <sup>7</sup> In his case study of an insider movement in East Africa, Ben Naja found that 80 percent of the believers had been baptized (Naja 2015, Loc. 3445). He did not ask about the practice of communion.
- <sup>8</sup> “What are normative, then, are not the contingent forms these offices took in their first century setting (or in their later setting in church history); rather, the offices or functions developed as needed for the health and growth of the body, whatever culturally appropriate (and contingent) form they might take” (Duerkson and Dyrness 2019, 126).
- <sup>9</sup> The original meaning of Arabic *umma* is “nation” or “people,” and it is primarily used to refer to the worldwide Muslim community—the “Muslim nation.”
- <sup>10</sup> Such a view appears to be found in a particular group studied and reported by Woodberry. A series of questions was to understand their attitudes toward traditional Christians, and a diversity of responses were found. Woodberry lists the following five responses:
  - “They are brothers of the same faith.”
  - “If we follow their traditions, we can’t work with our own people.”
  - “They eat forbidden (*haram*) food.”
  - “We don’t like them because of their behavior, dress, and food.”
  - “We must love them 100 percent, but in our culture we must stay separate.” (2005, 21–22)

At best, unity with traditional Christians is expressed in terms of being members of the “same faith” and giving/receiving love; however, cultural and physical separation is maintained. Another example is the case study cited by Duerkson and Dyrness from the southern Philippines, in which an indigeneous church movement has sought to intentionally reject and distance itself from practices associated with the Christian church, due to the historic oppression of Muslims by the Christian Filipino majority (2019, 102–3).

- <sup>11</sup>The insider paradigm has at times highlighted the nature of the church as a "mixed community," which recalls the basis of Augustine's original distinction between the visible (mixed) and invisible (pure) church. However, this concept is applied differently in the insider paradigm; rather than an argument for retaining fellowship with the institutional church, despite the presence of unbelievers (the point of Augustine and the Reformers), the concept is applied to support a church that emerges within Muslim community networks and exists as an open community that does not draw hard, visible lines between believers and not-yet-believers (Parsons 2006; Higgins 2015, Loc. 5421).
- <sup>12</sup>Duerksen and Dyrness note two contrasting examples in the southern Philippines. In the case of the Manobo people in Davao del Norte, there is an ancient ritual in which "the spirit priest drinks the blood of sacrifices on behalf of good spirits that offer protection against *busow*," who are malevolent spirits that "search for blood to satisfy their cravings." This caused great confusion in understanding communion, causing people to wonder if God was a *busow*, and whether they would be possessed by an evil spirit if they drank Christ's blood. Therefore, the churches in that area rarely practiced communion. On the other hand, in Bangsamoro, an ancient Moro ritual called *sandugo* involved people winding themselves and drinking one another's blood, "creating a new community of blood," and some believers in Christ have appropriated it in their communities as a ritual of Christ's love (2019, 138).
- <sup>13</sup>Another version of this list broadens beyond the "devoteds" to other aspects of the early church community, indicating a "primary marks of a mature expression of the church": apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking bread (both as real meals, and the Lord's Supper), prayer/worship, the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit, radical generosity in community life, intentional gathering together (publicly in the "Temple," and as believers house to house), and the ongoing addition of new believers (Higgins 2006, 119; cf. 2015c, Loc. 12748).
- <sup>14</sup>Another example is that of Herbert Hoefler, who supports his ecclesiology for insiders with a similarly expansive view of the kingdom: "The rule of God extends to more than the Church. God's love, concern and will are extended to all people, whether they acknowledge and serve him or not. John 3:16 says, 'God so loved the world.' God's prophets spoke not only to his people, but to the nations. . . . His kingdom comes wherever and whenever his will is done" (2007; 2015, Loc. 6744–58).

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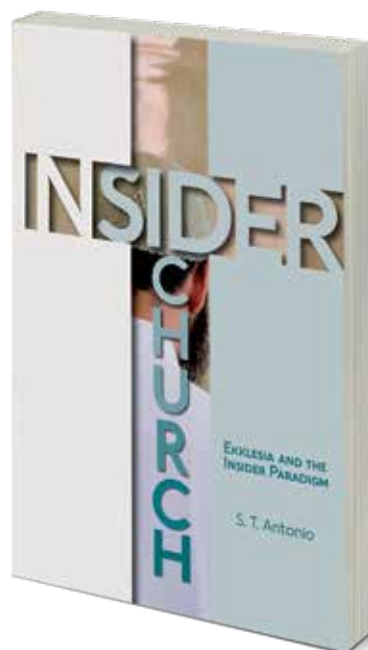
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