

Islam, Once a Hopeless Frontier, Now?

Comprehensive Contextualization

by Harley Talman

It is nearly a quarter century since Phil Parshall challenged the traditional missionary approach to Muslims in his *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism* (1980). Most of his ideas are now accepted in principle by mainstream missions and are even regarded as passe by more radical approaches like C5. I recognize that I may be “preaching to the choir” of contextualization supporters. Nevertheless, it is my observation that on both organizational and field levels, many of the mission organizations we represent have devoted inadequate thought and effort to working through the practical implications and implementation of contextualization theory. I will speak specifically to Arab Muslim contexts (with which I am familiar with,) but those from other contexts may observe parallels to their own. In this paper, I would like to introduce ways that we can approach the task of contextualization in a more comprehensive manner, believing that this will enhance the development of Church Planting Movements among Muslims. Specifically, I propose that our contextualization agenda include (at a minimum) seven critical areas: Bible translation, language, evangelism, church planting, worship and music, theology and leadership training.

Poisoning the Bible

At every point we fail to fully contextualize translation of the Bible, we inject it with poison that renders it less appealing and weakens its power to penetrate Islamic society. Translations of the Bible acceptable to the existing Arab Christian churches prefer to use Syriac-based ecclesiastical terminology and names, rather than Arabic or Qur’anic ones. Consequently, Muslims often do not comprehend Christian Arabic or they may take it in a sense other than that intended. Along with other factors, this puts unnecessary barriers in the way of Muslims coming to Christ.¹ Furthermore, church planting cannot be contextualized without a translation geared to Muslims. Worship, prayer, hymns, preaching, teaching, Scripture memorization, and development of creeds and liturgy² all await a contextualized translation of the Scriptures.

Arab Christian churches seem to be the greatest opponents of a translation contextualized for Muslims. The apparent reasons for this include a need to preserve their distinct identity, resentment against Islam, fear of opposition

Harley Talman and his family served with Christar for 17 years in church planting and theological education in the Arab world. He has studied at Dallas and Fuller Seminaries and is a professor of Islamic, biblical and mission studies in Southern California.

from the government and fundamentalist Muslims, and fear that another translation would lend weight to accusations of corrupting the Bible. It is my judgment that even when Christian religious language is comprehensible to Muslims, the majority will continue to feel that the Bible is only for the Christians—not for themselves—until they read it in language they recognize as their own. Fortunately, the most recent translation aimed at a Muslim audience (*Al-Kitab Al-Shareef*) took a giant step forward in comprehensibility with its use of Islamic names and (some) terminology. But it still reads like a translation from a “Christian” source. Even so, it is still faces opposition from some Arab Christian quarters—even those involved in Muslim outreach! A major educational effort in missiological training of national Arab Christians is needed—and will be for years to come.

In spite of the Muslim friendly vocabulary of *Al-Kitab Al-Shareef*, I believe that another kind of translation for Arab Muslims is still needed—one that is stylistically Islamic, without being Qur’anic. I am suggesting not only the employment of Islamic terminology and idioms, but adoption of an alternative Arabic style. *Sirat al-Maseeh bi Lisan Arabi Faseeh* (The Life of the Messiah In a Classical Arabic Tongue)³, was a harmony of the gospels that mimicked the Qur’an’s style, making it quite controversial. Though it had great appeal to many Muslim readers, it provoked the ire of more fanatical Muslims as well as most Arab Christians! This seems to be what precluded its widespread use. However, the same Palestinian poet who composed *Sirat al-Maseeh*, later translated the four Gospels in simple, poetic prose that was stylistically appealing, without imitating the Quran.⁴ However, Christian names were favored such as *Yesua’* instead of the Islamic *Isa*. With that minor correction, such an approach could be followed in translating the entire Bible. Though pursuit of these goals may bring opposition, may we remember the commitment of John Wycliffe, ‘Morning Star of the Reformation,’ who sacrificed his life to give men the Scripture in their own language. May

each of us commit ourselves to seeing this happen with our people groups!⁵

Leaping the Language Barrier

It has been said that Americans and the British are “two peoples separated by a common language.” The language barriers which separate Arab Christian and Muslim communities are much greater. It usually does not take long to detect which of the two communities a stranger belongs to, because certain

*the earliest existing
Arabic translation of
the New Testament
routinely introduces each
book with ‘in the Name
of Allah the merciful, the
compassionate’*

greetings, idioms, phrases and vocabulary are used by one community and not the other.

Workers desirous of communicating Christ to Muslims need to learn the distinctively Islamic language for at least two reasons. The first is for identification. It would seem to me that even those who are calling themselves ‘Christians’ and identifying with the ethnic Christian community could at least be “as a Muslim to the Muslim” when he is in conversation with him. Many times, Muslims asked if I was a Muslim, simply because I was talking like one. My experience was that the Muslim appreciates the Christian who conveys respect for his culture and identifies with his heritage in this way. As a result, hearts were open and eager to hear my message. Secondly, as noted above, Islamic language is needed for clear communication. Many Christian words are unknown or unclear to the Muslim⁶ and use of Christian language can raise psychological and emotional barriers against the message.

In addition to exhorting and enabling expatriate missionaries to hurdle the language barrier, we must also assist Arab Christians. We can encour-

age their exploration of pre-Islamic Christian Arabic writings that have much more in common with the Arabic used by Muslims. (Arab Christians are astounded to discover that the earliest existing Arabic translation of the New Testament (Codex 151) routinely introduces each book with “in the Name of Allah the merciful, the compassionate,” while only three of its books use the Trinitarian formula ‘in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit’. Special emphasis should be given to the writings of earliest Christian Arab apologists to Muslims, such as Theodore Abu Qurrah.⁷

Exploring Alternative Evangelistic Approaches

Evangelistic efforts need to be appropriate both in strategy, as well as in presentation of the message. In the West we gear our strategy toward reaping individual decisions, processed in isolation from the family unit. We are so unaccustomed to the working toward multi-individual or group conversions that some are even skeptical of the validity of the concept. But as we should know by now, Eastern societies are much more group-oriented in their thinking and decision-making. Our evangelistic strategies should reflect this. Greg Livingstone mentions an example of this in *Planting Churches in Muslim Cities*. Ralph Neighbor’s use of a “man of peace” to penetrate his *oikos* (household and network of friends) provides some guidance as to how to plan for this.

In addition to our evangelistic strategy, presentation of the Gospel also needs to be contextualized. Many of our colleagues still employ “Four Spiritual Laws” type approaches in sharing our faith and have found they are not very effective with Muslims. Christ’s example encourages us to develop individualized approaches, starting with their particular felt needs and demonstrating His sufficiency to meet those needs. Note how he dealt differently with the Samaritan woman and Nicodemus.

In addition, other models for presenting the gospel should be explored. Presenting the concept of the kingdom of God has proved fruitful with some. An in-depth study could include its nature or meaning (the rule of God),

its importance, greatness, characteristics, entrance requirements, demands, king and citizens, mysteries, aspects (present & future), etc. A major advantage of this approach is that it relates well to a fundamental Islamic concept of submission—in this case to God and His appointed agent who mediates his rule. Also, we are calling Muslims to enter into God's kingdom, not change religions. Citizens of the kingdom include those of Christian, Muslim and even Jewish backgrounds. Furthermore, the kingdom of God is an Islamic concept, but little is known about it, as it appears only a very few times in the Qur'an. Hence, the topic is an item of curiosity to the Muslim. Some ground has been broken, but we need written and field-tested studies in local languages.

Another relevant issue is the use of the Qur'an in witness. Though some have argued strongly against any use of the Qur'an, others have used it with great effectiveness. William Saul advises that since arguing from the Qur'an requires some expertise, it is not recommended as a main line of approach for beginners.⁸ But I would encourage each of us to learn 10–20 key Qur'anic verses. Furthermore, I would exhort a few workers from each field (who have good language ability) to learn Arabic well enough to be able to understand parts of the Qur'an. Translations of the Qur'an by Muslims often distort verses that support Biblical doctrines against traditional Islam. A number of evangelists use the Qur'an with great effect. A team member or national who is well trained in this regard can be a tremendous resource for others to introduce their interested contacts to. Although this will mean learning another language for those in non-Arab countries, this would reap dividends well worth the time and effort invested!⁹ Arabs Christians who are converted to contextualization could provide this expertise and be highly respected in non-Arab Muslim contexts.

Nevertheless, some object to using the Qur'an at all lest they lend credence to a "Non-Testament." It is instructive to observe how parallel situations were handled by the New Testament writers who refer to or quote from both Jewish and Greek non-biblical literature well

over 100 times, especially from the apocryphal writings.¹⁰ For example, in his witness in Athens, Paul quoted from a pagan poet (Acts 17:28), and Jude referred to non-inspired apocryphal *Assumption of Moses* in v. 9 and gave an exact replica of Enoch 1:9 in vv. 14–15. Merrill Tenney defends this methodology saying,

Traditionally we have reached those who are disillusioned or fed up with Islam or who are attracted to a Western or 'Christian' lifestyle.

Paul quoted the Greek poet Aratus to substantiate a point of his address because he knew it would carry weight with his audience, not because he regarded the Greek poet as inspired or authoritative in the realm of theology. In like manner the apocryphal works were sometimes used to illustrate certain principles for those who regarded them with reverence. In the early Christian church some of these were highly esteemed and were deemed profitable reading. Jude's audience must have been familiar with this literature, for he made extensive allusions to it, even apart from the express quotations.¹¹

Preventing Church Plant Rejection Syndrome

Traditionally we have reached those who are disillusioned or fed up with Islam or who are attracted to a Western or 'Christian' lifestyle, as well as those who are willing to become Christian proselytes—if they think that is what they must do in order to have Christ. We rejoice over their salvation! But they have historically experienced "transplant rejection syndrome,"¹² drastically reducing the impact they might have had.

Instead of "Judaizing the Gentiles" (by making Muslims into Christians), we need to encourage and enable believers to continue their identification with

their community as "Muslims," but express their allegiance to Christ in Islamic terms and forms. Unless we adopt such an approach, we will most likely only reach the fringes of Muslim society, rather than penetrating into its heart and reaping a larger harvest that could transform it for Christ. Listen to John D. C. Anderson's plea that we apply the Pauline principle:

'Everyone should remain in the state in which he was called' (1 Cor. 7:20). In Corinth his principle was applied to such states as circumcision, uncircumcision, slavery, freedom and even to wedlock to an unbelieving partner. Paul repeats himself, 'So brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God' (1 Cor. 7: 24). The value of this was that the converted man or woman might 'save' the unconverted partner, the Jew might reach his fellow-Jews with the Gospel, and the slave his fellow-slaves. Why should not the converted Muslim reach his fellow-Muslims in the same way, i. e. by not repudiating the 'state in which he was called'? Just as the old wineskin of slavery eventually burst, through being filled with the new wine of the Gospel, why should not the wrong things in Islam be similarly ousted, in time, from within?¹³

Planting bodies of believers who maintain their Islamic communal identity will likely mean that they will be not be openly identified with or incorporated into existing Christian churches. Rather, Muslim background believers should be gathered into structures that reflect Islamic culture. Perhaps an Islamic society (*jam'iyya*), a social club (*nadi*), or even a new Sufi order (*tariqa*) could be utilized. At least a cell group or house church could follow the lines of the extended family (including close friends). Depending on the local situation, Christian believers could be part of the group, but must participate on the Muslim believers' terms, crossing the culture gap, leaving their Christian religious culture at the door. Woodberry provides one model of how Christian workers can team up with Muslim believers for successful Islamic incarnational church planting that can even transform mosque worship.¹⁴

On the other hand, I know of one organization that declared, "we plant churches, not (Jesus) mosques!" This

seems to draw a false dichotomy between the two and confuses contextualization with construction. A local church can be defined “a group of professing believers in Christ who have been baptized¹⁵ and who have organized themselves for the purpose of doing God’s will,”¹⁶ whereas a mosque is a place of worship. Though the word ‘church’ is commonly used to refer to a building used for worship, when we speak of planting churches, we mean establishing bodies of believers, not constructing buildings. Furthermore, the particular word a local body of believers chooses to describe their meeting place is not itself a crucial issue. In addition, even the word “mosque” is used in the Qur’an, in classical Islamic and other sources, of a Christian sanctuary and a Jewish temple. Moreover, the underlying meaning of both “synagogue” and ‘church’ (*ekklesia*) is “gathering” as is the Arabic *jami*, a word that increasingly came to be used for mosques.¹⁷ To forbid the employment of Islamic cultural forms of worship (which are largely Biblical or of early Christian influence), would inhibit believing Muslim communities from expressing and living the Gospel in their own cultural forms even when Biblical truths and practices are maintained.¹⁸

Choosing Chanting, Not Cloning

Evangelical churches in the Middle East traditionally sing translated hymns with Western tunes, accompanied by Western musical instruments. Men sit in pews next to women whose heads are uncovered and they pray just as the missionaries modeled for them (with heads bowed, eyes closed and hands folded), following the same liturgy as the West. In short, the Arab Protestant churches are clones of the Western church.

Though we may be aware of this ‘cultural imperialism,’ I wonder to what degree we are breaking from this pattern. Most of us are well aware of the need to employ indigenous music and instruments to accompany locally produced hymns and songs, but are we actually doing so? Have we begun to employ chanting of Scripture or utilize other forms that are part of Islamic

culture? Do we teach women to cover their heads in the assembly? When living in the West many of us justify our non-practice of this command of Scripture with the rationale that a head covering is a culturally relative issue. How is it then, when we come to the East where it is culturally appropriate and understood, do we also neglect its practice?¹⁹

What about the matters of fasting and prayer? Many are still hung up over whether a Muslim believer can fast during Ramadan. Let’s keep a balanced perspective. Are we equally concerned about how the Christians in our home fellowships fast? Which is more Biblical: the fasting of a Muslim believer for Christ’s sake during Ramadan or the non-fasting of most Protestants for their own sakes during all twelve months of the year?! As for prayer, some of us reject the use by believers of Islamic prayer forms, all of which are found in the Bible. Instead we teach them (by example, if nothing else), to pray sitting in a chair—a form which is not found anywhere in Scripture!

As far as the place of music in Islamic contextual worship, it could be argued that chanting would be the most appropriate Islamic form. However, other genres of music play a key role in the Arab cultural heritage outside the mosque, and religious music is readily found in popular practices like the Sufi *zikr*. Thus it may happen that Muslim believers will seek to employ a musical form or style other than chanting. But all too often, we teach Muslims translated Western praise choruses, without even giving thought to developing indigenous religious songs.²⁰ The Western patterns of worship have become part of the culture of the existing Protestant churches in the Middle East. Are we going to perpetuate this pattern or will we contextualize worship for our Muslim friends? Though there seems to be growing interest in ethnomusicology, I do not see that it has impacted what is happening on the ground.

De-Hellenizing Theology

One of the most complicated challenges facing us is the need to contextualize

theology. All theologies are contextually conditioned, emerging out of a certain set of experiences or out of a particular historical situation.²¹ There can be no one form of systematic or biblical theology, because any theology is an interpretation of data from a particular point of view. Moreover, the particular questions or set of issues that the scripture must answer in any particular culture are unique. Therefore, Western theologies are incomplete and inadequate for the non-Western world.²²

Wayne Weld alerted us to a phenomenon of human culture, that unconsciously, when we enter a new culture, we try to indoctrinate others into our frame of reference, so that our message will make sense to them. This delays acceptance of the Gospel at best, but more often it will result in rejection of our message, because it is foreign or irrelevant. We need to enter into the *host’s* theological frame of reference. It was thus that theology was contextualized for the West in the early centuries of Christianity. Contextualizing apostles and theologians expressed Biblical truth in the vocabulary and frames of reference of Greek culture, even though that culture had some seriously erroneous ideas of God (*theos*). They resisted the natural inclination to impose Hebrew theology upon the Gentiles. On the contrary, Paul vigorously condemned the Judaizers who equated the true faith with Jewish culture.

In the West, Christians used terms and a conceptual framework of philosophy and law to construct theological systems that were technical and abstract. This worked well in the early centuries for the philosophically trained of the Greco-Roman world, but today even in the U.S., people no longer think in philosophical categories—how much less the non-Western world!²³ Therefore, theology must be contextualized for the Muslims of the Middle East. This involves at least three areas: doctrinal formulation, theological models and forms of expression.

Doctrinal Formulation

Our doctrines of the Trinity and hypostatic union of the divine and human natures of Christ are theologi-

Which is more Biblical: the fasting of a Muslim believer for Christ's sake during Ramadan or the non-fasting of most Protestants for their own sakes during all twelve months of the year?

cal formulations of biblical data that were the result of the Western (Greek) philosophical mindset and language prevalent in the early centuries of the church. Though I can accept these doctrines, they are scandalously incomprehensible to the Muslim mind. On the other hand, I have seen a consistently positive reaction when I have used an Eastern approach to the Biblical data concerning the Trinity. Fouad Akkad (following in the train of John of Damascus) asked the Muslim "which existed first: God, His Spirit, or His Word?" Though the instinctive response of the Muslim is "God," he explained that if God was at any time without Spirit or Word, He would be dead or dumb—hence imperfect and not God. God's Spirit and Word were with him from the beginning, and will remain with Him forever, yet He is One God.²⁴

Likewise, we should reformulate our Christology. We ourselves must first of all recognize that the sonship of Jesus is fundamentally a Messianic concept, not the primary proof of his deity.²⁵ If our doctrine of Christ is centered around the Word (Jn. 1:1,14), it builds on common ground (Jesus in the Qur'an is the 'word of Allah') and communicates much more meaningfully and accurately than does the title "Son of God." Also, if we set aside our theological formulation of the "hypostatic union" between Christ's two natures in favor of a product of theological speculation from the history of Islam, we may find greater acceptance by the Muslim to this enigma. The philosophers of Islam argued whether Allah's attributes were essential to His essence or were separate from it. Faced with a dilemma that they could not (or did not dare to) resolve, they concluded that "the attributes of Allah are not Allah, and are not other than Allah." This, we can explain, is what we believe about Christ, the Word of Allah. He is not Allah, in his humanity, and He is not

other than Allah, as the Spirit (Rom. 8:9) and Word of Allah (cf. Rom. 1:4). Furthermore, I believe that a theology for Muslims should be more theocentric than Christocentric in its perspective, emphasizing Jesus' functional subordination as Messiah and Servant (*'abd Allah*), instead of his ontological equality.²⁶

Theological Models

As opposed to the prevailing translation template (or model) for theologizing, we must encourage theological thinking that gives more consideration to Arab (or Islamic) culture. Building on the work of Thomas Schreiter, I offer the following specifics on how to do this:

1. Look within a culture for its dominant values, ideals, sources of identity, maladies, ways of behavior, "codes of conduct," and sources of power, and especially those cultural features that relate to the three theological concepts of creation, redemption and community.
2. Identify areas and ways in which Christ is already present in the culture. Arab Muslim culture can be viewed as having a great deal of very positive elements that manifest the divine presence due to its proximity to the biblical cultures and lands and because of Islam's heavy borrowing from Judaism and Christianity. A significant amount of biblical revelation has been preserved in the culture through Arab civilization's links to Ishmael and the wisdom tradition of the "sons of the east."²⁷ Thus we should identify, preserve or develop the many values, concerns, structures and meanings in the culture that are already present and are consistent with the Bible.
3. Consider three characteristics as essential for any cultural theory: holism, identity and

social change. (a) It should be holistic and evaluate all parts of the culture, "high" culture with its art, literature, and formal religious teaching, as well as "popular" culture (folk traditions, practices and expressions of religion). (b) It should address the factors that determine identity in a culture. It should "listen for" group-boundary formation and worldview formation as key categories. (c) It must address the issue of social change within a culture—changes in Christian identity, accepted behavior, doctrine, political and economic conditions, urbanization, communications, etc.²⁸

4. Select culture themes that will become the object of theological reflection. Begin with areas of strongest cultural tension and issues of the church's identity, such as its initiatory rites, metaphors that reflect its character or its experience of Christ, as well as issues needing to be connected to the universal church and needs for rethinking church ministries. Second are issues related to society, such as holistic discipleship, expressing the kingdom's presence into the culture and the predominate messages (justice, hope, love, peace) that will predominate in the religious sphere of society.²⁹

Viewing theology as wisdom (a Semitic model), rather than knowledge (the Greek model) pushes us to integrate life into a meaningful whole, while focusing on the inner life. It characteristically employs analogy, types, allegory, image, and the metaphor of the spiritual journey or path (*al-sabeel*)—like "the Way" of the first disciples in the book of Acts. Furthermore, it should be more concerned with manifesting the presence and power of God than with abstract intellectual issues. Muslim followers of Christ should reflect on their personal experi-

ence with Christ (through the lens of Scripture) as a foundation for theological understanding of truth—just as Peter gained insight by pondering what happened in his Cornelius encounter.

Perhaps the most crucial issues of a contextual theology would be identifying and confronting unbiblical worldview assumptions, values and allegiances, as opposed to items of doctrinal belief. Theologizing in Islamic contexts also demands that we speak to issues of social relationships. What does the Gospel have to promote social transformation in the realm of social ethics—including gender, identity, community and globalization. I feel that we need to offer an alternative political/economic ideology to the Islamic model of *shari'a*.

Forms of Expression

Rather than translating or even having Muslim believers writing new systematic theologies, theology should be expressed in more appropriate forms: commentaries, sermons, proverbs, stories, poetry, songs, anthologies, analogies, metaphors, drama and oratory. Historical theology would be more appropriate than systematic, and narrative theology more appropriate than propositional logic. Theology as spiritual transformation (spiritual pilgrimage)³⁰ can be taught through biographies of the saints—even some of the Muslim saints like al-Hallaj (who inspired the French orientalist Massignon to become a devout Roman Catholic).

Biblical theology (eliciting doctrines from the major themes of a biblical book) should be the primary approach to theologizing. I would recommend wisdom literature such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job be the entry point for theological study, followed by examination of the great narrative books of Old and New Testament. Semitic writers like James, Peter, John, and Jude (the General epistles) should receive more attention than Paul's epistles that were directed to audiences in the Hellenistic world.

The goal of all such theological endeavors is that rather than trying to convert the Muslim to our frame of reference, we attempt to discover and appropriate his. We must come to grips

with the reality that theology must be formulated locally if it is to be relevant and powerfully impact its hearers!³¹

Limbering Up Leadership Training

In the West, churches currently rely on formal institutions such as Bible colleges and seminaries to train leaders.

I would recommend wisdom literature such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job be the entry point for theological study.

But full-time, in-residence training may not be appropriate for many situations. It can dislocate trainees culturally and remove them from their place of ministry. Also, such training may promote a clergy/laity distinction that may not be healthy. Transplanted curriculums rely on translated texts and this also works against contextualization. More appropriate training might be to follow extension models of theological training. Other options include the internet, interactive CDs, apprenticeship, discipleship and training in ministry. In any case, training should be flexible, in contrast to adhering to a canned curriculum; and it should give priority to current ministry needs of the trainee, instead of to possible future ones.³²

Conclusion

Contextualization is a complex topic and demands that many issues be considered on both theoretical and practical levels. I have presented seven areas that I suggest should be on everyone's contextualization agenda: Bible translation, language, evangelism, church planting, worship & music, theology, and leadership training. Though I have offered an assessment of the situation in the Arab world, I suspect that the case is much the same in other Muslim

contexts. Taking inventory of these seven areas should enable ministries to Muslims to be more comprehensive in their approach to contextualization. This, in theory, should help facilitate the launching of Church Planting Movements. I would value your feedback on what I have presented in this article (as well as in the endnotes) and offer your suggestions as to other areas that I may have overlooked. Please respond by email to ims@uscwm.org.

Endnotes

¹ See Abu Yahya, "Christian Arabic in Bible Translation: A Problem for Muslim Evangelization," *Seedbed* 1:4, 1986, pp. 50-56. Though recent translations used by Arab Christians have improved comprehensibility by using 'newspaper Arabic,' still the ecclesiastical vocabulary and names remain 'Christian' and the idioms and style are studiously unIslamic.

² Liturgy may be as simple as adding an Islamic-style Lord's prayer to the prayer ritual.

³ ABDO, Larnaca, Cyprus, 1987

⁴ Abu Al-Tayyib al Qudsi, *Al-Tarjama al-Qudsiyya lil-Anajeel al-Sinniyya*, privately published in Jerusalem, 1991. A Greek scholar of the Assemblies of God worked alongside Abu Al-Tayyib (a pen name). In 2001, I made repeated, but unsuccessful attempts to access the 15,000 copies that the AOG has had sitting in a warehouse in Russia. It seems that this most promising approach got put in mothballs—perhaps as a result of the ecclesiastical issues I have mentioned.

⁵ Undertaking contextualized translation of the Bible will ultimately require that we enlist the services of Muslim background scholars trained in Biblical languages and exegesis. Such training is now available at several theological training institutions in the Arab world.

⁶ For example, the most common Arabic Christian word for sin (*kbati'a*) may imply a not so serious moral deficiency to the Muslim—the word has the same root as the word for "a mistake." Other words could be employed which communicate a graver sense of moral culpability than this. Critical Christian words such as salvation (*khalaas*) and law (*namus*) are often misunderstood or meaningless to the unindoctrinated Muslim.

⁷ "The Dialogue of Abu Qurrah and Muslim Scholars before the Caliph al-Ma'mun". Mark N. Swanson's doctoral

dissertation *Folly to the Hunafa* at the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Rome, 1995, and expertise in this field are a valuable resource.

⁸ William Saul, *Reaching Muslims for Christ*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1991, pp. 77-80, gives a helpful survey various approaches to use of the Qur'an, but is overly cautious in my opinion.

⁹ Borden of Yale ought to inspire those who cower at such prospects. He came to Cairo, planning to study Arabic for two years before beginning study of Chinese in order to more effectively reach Muslims in northwest China.

¹⁰ The "Index of Quotations" in *The Greek New Testament*, 2nd edition, American Bible Society, NY: 1966, pp. 918-920, lists about 90 different extra-biblical sources, mostly from Jewish apocryphal writings. Some of these have multiple references in the New Testament.

¹¹ Merrill Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953, pp. 374.

¹² S. S. "Contextualization in Islamic Society: Issues and Positions," *Seedbed* 3, no. 1, 1988, p.4.

¹³ John D. C. Anderson, "Our Approach to Islam," *Muslim World Pulse* 6, no. 1, February 1977, p. 5.

¹⁴ J. Dudley Woodberry, "Contextualization Among Muslims: Reusing the Common Pillars," *The Word Among Us*, Dean S. Gilliland, ed., Dallas: Word, 1989, pp. 282-312.

¹⁵ The possibility of contextualizing baptism is not up for discussion in most Christian circles. Most would agree that Spirit baptism is the reality whose meaning of identification, union and/or initiation into Christ is conveyed by the ritual form of water. However, even Charles Ryrie, a careful, conservative theologian, seems open to using other forms besides water to convey this meaning. He suggests the possibility that a believer could enter a closet with old clothes, change while inside, and then exit with new clothes.

¹⁶ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, Chicago: Moody Press, p. 1951.

¹⁷ Woodberry, p. 296.

¹⁸ 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. (This may explain why different denominations can cite scriptural support for differing forms of church governance). 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. (Recall that the first disciples worshipped in the same temple as Christ-rejecting Jews, but then also met privately in homes).

¹⁹ Ironically, the influence of our Western secular culture causes us to disregard the fact that the Scriptural rationale commanding the covering of a woman's head in worship is because of a theological principle and the unchanging order of creation (1 Cor. 11:3). This would indicate that it is not just a culturally relative practice. Moreover, our culturally individualistic approach to interpretation leads us to treat the matter as one of private interpretation; yet the Scripture commands that "if a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off" (1 Cor. 11:6). Could it be that some Westernized Christians who resist radical contextualization efforts as theological compromise to Muslim culture, are unable to see clearly due to the "log in their own eye?"

²⁰ Fortunately, in this last generation, Arab Christians, especially in Egypt, have been developing their own songs in a contemporary style of music.

²¹ Robert M. Brown, "The Rootedness of All Theology," *Christianity and Crisis* 37, no. 12, July 18, 1977, p. 170.

²² Wayne Weld "Contextualization," *Covenant Quarterly* 37, no. 1, February 1979, p. 33.

²³ Ibid., 33-34.

²⁴ Fouad Akkad, *The Seven Theological Principles*, Limassol, Cyprus: Ar-Rabitah, p. 15.

²⁵ F.F. Bruce notes the transformation of meaning of Christ as "son of God" in Hebrew thought was that of moral kinship (e.g. believers are sons of Abraham, peacemakers are sons of God, and Christ was uniquely so). But the Greeks tended to give "son" a metaphysical sense, focusing on His eternal being and leading to discussions of the "eternal generation" of the Son and his being "begotten" from eternity (*The Growing Day* (subsequently *The Spreading Flame*), London: Paternoster, 1951: pp. 119-120). I am in basic agreement with Rick Brown's "The Son of God—Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus" in *IJFM* 17:1, Jan 2000: pp. 39-52. Although he does not deal adequately with John's use of Son of God, I would suggest that the divine implications of Jesus as "son of God" in John's usage was a subsequent insight or theological development that revealed the hidden implications of Messiah's nature. One evidence that the

term "son of God" was not initially understood as a claim to deity is the fact that the Pharisees, the party of pious Jewish scholarship, had never conceived of the Messiah as more than human (Matt. 22:42-46).

²⁶ J. Christian Beker, *The Triumph of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990: xiii, states that post-Nicene and Chaledonian Christology resulted in a "Christocentrism that was intended to protect the sovereignty and unity of God but actually fostered a type of Christomonism, particularly within the construal of an imminent Trinity. A full immanent Trinitarian hermeneutic seems to compel an interpretation of Paul's Christology in ontological rather than functional terms and thus fuses God and Christ to the detriment of the coming final glory of God, to which, according to Paul, Christ is subordinate and for which he lived and died."

²⁷ See Tony Maalouf, *Ishmael in Biblical History*, doctoral dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary, 1998. A reader-friendly presentation of this research is now available under the title *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003.

²⁸ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985, pp. 42-45.

²⁹ Schreiter, pp. 73-74.

³⁰ Charles Van Engen, course notes, *Theologizing in Mission*, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 2002.

³¹ In practical terms, as we enter from the outside, we must attempt to develop theology as appropriate to the Muslim frame of reference as possible. As Muslims come to faith, they then must formulate theology for themselves. I would see the role of the skilled outsider as then serving more as consultant and less as theologian and teacher.

³² Weld, pp. 36-38.