

Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 “High Spectrum” Contextualization

by Timothy C. Tennent

Introduction

There has been considerable discussion in recent years concerning various proposals which might help the church to more effectively communicate the gospel to Muslims who continue to be the most resistant groups to the Christian message. The growing emphasis on “insider movements” often linked with “C-5” strategy calls for continued discussion and reflection among mission leaders today. The purpose of this article is to provide a more detailed analysis and assessment of the growing emphasis on encouraging ‘insider movements’ from within the Muslim world. The focal point of this article will be on Muslim followers of Jesus (*Isa*) who may continue attending the Islamic Mosque and who retain their religious identity as Muslims. How do these followers of Jesus relate to the rest of the global church? Can someone say ‘yes’ to Jesus and ‘no’ to the visible church? Are the Biblical and theological arguments made in support of this movement valid? These are some of the questions which this article seeks to answer.

C-1 to C-6 Spectrum

The most well known summary of the spectrum of Muslim background believers (known as MBBs) found in the Islamic world was published by John Travis in 1988 and has become the standard reference point for discussing contextualization in the Islamic context.¹ The spectrum is known as the C1 to C6 Spectrum. Significantly, the “C” stands for Christ-centered communities.² The various numbers reflect differences based on three main areas: the language of worship, the cultural and/or religious forms which are used in both their public life and in their worship and, finally, their self-identity as a ‘Muslim’ or a ‘Christian’. None of these designations represents a precise point along a line, but rather a general shorthand to help classify a range of more nuanced views. C-1 refers to a “traditional church using outsider language.” Outsider language refers to a language other than that used by the Muslim population. This would be a church which, for example, worships in English,

Timothy C. Tennent is the Professor of World Missions and Indian Studies at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He is also an adjunct professor of missions at the Luther W. New, Jr. Theological College in Dehra Dun, UA, India where he has taught annually since 1989.

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sits on pews and follows a Western liturgy. It could also refer to MBBs who have joined one of the many ancient churches in the Islamic world which predate the rise of Islam, use Latin or Greek, and follow an ancient liturgical rite. These believers all call themselves Christians.

C-2 refers to a “traditional church using insider language.” This refers to a church which worships in the language of the Muslim population, such as Arabic or Turkish, but otherwise is the same as a C-1 church. Travis argues that the majority of churches in the Islamic world are either C-1 or C-2, but only a fraction of MBBs have united with churches of either type.³

C-3 refers to “contextualized Christ-centered communities using insider language and religiously neutral cultural forms.” These churches adopt not only the language of the surrounding Islamic community, but they also embrace non-religious cultural forms such as folk music, dress and artwork. Nevertheless, a C-3 church would intentionally seek to filter out any religious forms which were specifically associated with Islam, such as keeping the fast of Ramadan or praying with raised hands, and so forth. Although members of C-3 churches continue to call themselves Christians, the majority of the membership is made up of MBBs.

C-4 refers to “contextualized Christ-centered communities using insider language and Biblically permissible cultural and Islamic forms.” These churches are like C-3, except that Islamic cultural and religious forms are adapted as long as they are not explicitly forbidden in Scripture. For example, using Islamic terms for God (*Allah*), prayer (*salat*) and the gospels (*injiil*) would all be accepted in a C-4 context. Likewise, a C-4 church would embrace outward practices normally associated as symbols of Islamic faithfulness such as avoiding pork, abstaining from alcohol, removing shoes when coming to worship or fasting during Ramadan. C-4 believers would normally not identify themselves with the term

‘Christian’ but would refer to themselves as ‘followers of *Isa al-Masih*’ (Jesus the Messiah) or members of the *Isaya Umma* (Community of Jesus) or other similar expressions.⁴ Despite the intentional contextualization, these followers of *Isa* are not regarded by those in the Islamic community as being Muslims.

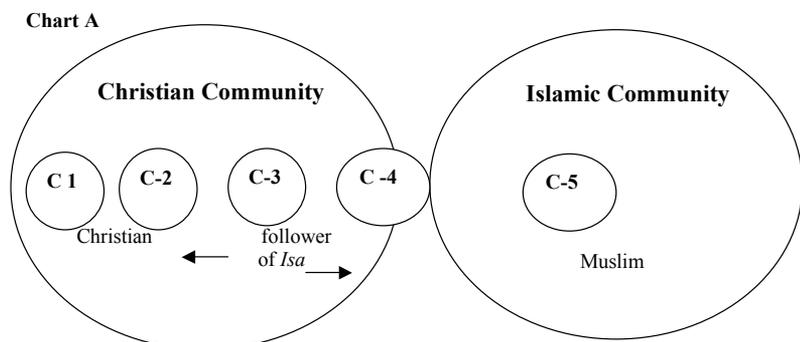
C-5 refers to “Christ-centered communities of ‘Messianic Muslims’ who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior.” These followers of *Isa* remain legally and socially within the community of Islam, referring to themselves as Muslims and they are, in fact, regarded by the Muslim community as Muslims. Features of Islamic theology which are clearly incompatible with Biblical faith are rejected or cleverly reinterpreted if possible.

Approximately half of these C-5 believers continue to attend the mosque, even if they also attend small gatherings of other C-5 believers.⁵ Sometimes these believers meet in mosques which are led by followers of Jesus, but are attended by the broader Muslim community. These are sometimes referred to as “Jesus Mosques.”⁶ Furthermore, the presence of these Christ-loving Muslims who remain fully embedded in the Islamic community and continue to attend the Mosque are often referred to as being part of an “insider movement.”⁷ These ‘insider movements’ have generated considerable discussion in missiological circles in recent years and articles have even begun to appear in non-mission journals and popular magazines.⁸ C-5, as with all the other designations, does not repre-

sent a precise point, but a range along a spectrum of practices. There are a wide variety of practices which are called C-5 and some which are called C-5 which actually fall more precisely on one of the other categories. As we will develop more later, the crucial and defining feature of C-5 is that of one’s religious identity.

C-6 refers to “small Christ-centered Communities of Secret/underground Believers.” This category refers to believers who are living under the threat of extremely hostile persecution and retaliation from the government or from their family or community if they were to reveal that they were followers of Jesus. Therefore, they worship Christ secretly. If discovered, C-6 believers would almost certainly face “a life of suffering, imprisonment, or martyrdom.”⁹ The C-6 category should be understood as an exceptional circumstance which is one of the tragic challenges to Christian faith in many parts of the world where public confession of Christ is tantamount to imprisonment or martyrdom. Any and all C-6 believers should be the subject of our prayers, not our analysis, so it will not be a part of this discussion, especially since all parties in the contextualization debate are in total agreement that C-6 is a regrettable state and we look for the day when open and free dialogue about religious affiliation in the Islamic world will make C-6 a thing of the past.¹⁰

The following chart (Chart A) will help to visually place C-1 through C-5 in relation to Christianity and Islam.



*Use of the Word
"Contextualization"*

Before I offer an evaluation of the C-1 to C-5 spectrum, I need to clarify how the word 'contextualization' is being used in this discussion. The C-1 to C-5 'spectrum' is often spoken of as moving from "low" contextualization at the C-1 end of the scale to "high" contextualization at the C-5 end of the scale.¹¹ This particular use of the word 'contextualization' is rather broad, referring to various ways groups have rejected or accommodated or embraced the particularities of a local context. In this general usage one could have "good" contextualization and "bad" contextualization. However, the word contextualization is also used more narrowly to refer to the *goal* of a process whereby the universal good news of Jesus Christ is authentically experienced in the particularities of a local context.¹² Thus, what is called "low" contextualization may, in fact, not be contextualization at all, but an expression of ethnocentric extractionism. Further, what is called "high" contextualization may not be contextualization at all, but an expression of syncretism. In this definition of the word, contextualization is the positive goal. In the evaluation which follows, therefore, we are simultaneously discussing various models of contextualization while, at the same time, searching to discover whether all, or some, or any of these models properly captures contextualization in the Islamic context. Phil Parshall seeks to accommodate the various uses of the term by creating a chart which allows for a "range" of appropriate contextualization to be found, but also acknowledges a point where it potentially crosses over into syncretism (see Chart B).

The advantage of the chart is that it demonstrates that even though contextualization is the 'goal' there may be various points along a spectrum whereby in a particular context the 'goal' of contextualization is achieved. MBBs from an urban, secular sub-culture in Iran might achieve legitimate contextualization at a point quite different from, say,

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an ultra-orthodox Wahhabi from Saudi Arabia.¹³ The shortcoming of Parshall's chart is that it fails to graphically show that just as "high" spectrum contextualization risks the possibility of syncretism, so "low" spectrum contextualization risks the possibility of extractionism. Parshall does note in his article that all must be "constantly cross-referenced and subordinated to biblical truth" but doesn't show on the chart what would happen if a particular example of "low" spectrum contextualization was proved unbiblical. Thus, the following chart will, I think, better help us to conceptualize a framework for evaluating the C-1 to C-6 spectrum (see Chart C).

Evaluation of C-1 to C-4

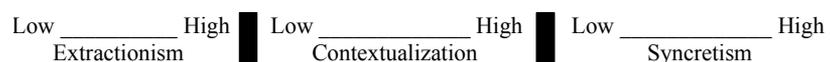
Generally speaking, C-1 and C-2 churches are considered to be overly biased towards foreign cultural and religious forms of Christianity. These churches, while serving the long standing historic Christians in the region, have not been successful at reaching Muslims with the gospel. It would be naïve to expect these churches to make any significant breakthroughs among Muslims.¹⁴ The reason is that these churches are, by definition, extractionistic in their attitude towards Islamic cultural forms. In contrast, C-3 and C-4 churches are clearly more effectively positioned to reach Muslims in culturally appropriate ways such that the gospel of Jesus Christ is not overly tainted by foreign associations. Indeed, both C-3 and

C-4 church planting strategies enjoy wide support throughout the missionary community and are regarded as both contextually sensitive as well as Biblically sound. In my view, most C-3 and C-4 churches would fall within the acceptable parameter of contextualization as depicted in the chart below. Nevertheless, there are some who find it troubling that C-4 followers do not use the term 'Christian' and wonder if this movement is actually but the beginning of creeping syncretism and, therefore, should be avoided. However, several points about C-4 will normally allay these concerns. First, avoidance of the word 'Christian' by C-4 MBBs should not be construed as a denial of their Christian identity *per se*, since they continue to clearly and publicly identify themselves as followers of Jesus. Second, although MBBs find the term 'Christian' offensive, published case studies about MBBs demonstrate that they acknowledge the common faith they share with all those who follow Jesus, even those who may follow Jesus in less contextually sensitive ways. Their unwillingness to use the term Christian, therefore, is not meant to distance themselves from either Jesus Christ or others who follow Jesus Christ, but is simply an acknowledgement that the word 'Christian' carries connotations which are offensive in their context and would actually obscure, rather than illuminate, their identity as a follower of Jesus.¹⁵ Finally, we should remember that the label Christian

Chart B



Chart C



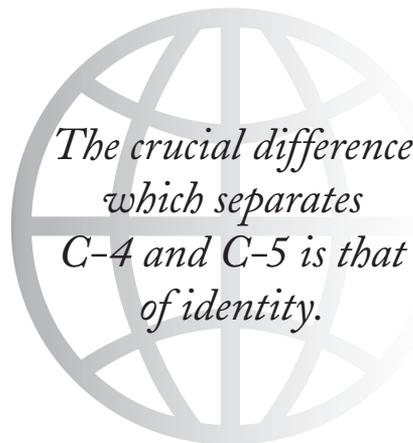
is not used for the followers of Jesus until the emergence of the first predominantly Gentile church in Antioch (Acts 11:26). In fact, it is probably originally a term given by opponents of the church since the term only appears twice in Acts and both times it is a title given to them by others.¹⁶ In fact, there is not a single instance of the Apostle Paul using the term “Christian” to describe the followers of Christ. The earliest believers preferred to identify themselves as belonging to “the Way” (Acts 9:2, 19:23; 24:14).¹⁷ Thus, there is simply no scriptural mandate which insists that those who follow Jesus must be called by a particular or common communal name.

Evaluation of C-5

Our case study in ecclesiology in the non-western world focuses on C-5. Thus, a more detailed analysis and evaluation will follow. A survey of the published literature concerning C-5 ministries in the Islamic world reveals two things of interest. First, most of the argumentation in favor of C-5 is decidedly ad hoc and is developed as a reaction against criticism which has been posed, rather than an independent case which biblically, theologically, historically and contextually sets forth the necessary arguments. There is currently no single source where a reader can find a complete case for C-5 which sets forth all of the evidence which is found in the literature.¹⁸ Second, when one closely examines the extensive argumentation in favor of C-5, the vast majority of the arguments are actually brilliant defenses of C-4 ministries and do not really get to the heart of what is required if one is to properly defend C-5 practice. For example, all of the evidence regarding the problems with using the word ‘Christian’ or the effective use of Islamic cultural and religious forms has already, by definition, been accepted by C-4 practitioners. Sometimes, even the case-studies provided as empirical evidence to support C-5 are actually case studies of C-4 ministries.¹⁹

The crucial difference which separates C-4 and C-5 is that of *identity*. All

of the major proponents of C-5 agree on this point. For example, Joshua Massey, one of the leading advocates of C-5 practice writes, “Who could have predicted 20 years ago that God would raise up still another group of missionaries who believe that God wants to take them beyond C-4? C-4 surely paved the way for C-5, whose major difference is one of *identity*.”²⁰ There are, of course, two sides to the question of identity. There is how *others* (in this case, Muslims) identify you and then there is your own *self-identity*. Admittedly, there is considerable contextual ambiguity



about how Muslims may identify followers of Jesus in the Muslim world. A C-1 Christian, for example, may be identified as an idolatrous fornicator. We have only limited control over how people from other religious communities may or may not identify us. The point is, all of the “foreign-type Christians,” (C-1 and C-2), the “contextually sensitive Christians” (C-3) and the “followers of *Isa*” (C-4) which form the spectrum from C-1 to C-4 are identified by Muslims as *not* part of their religious community. I am intentionally stating this in the negative because the fact that Muslims identify C-1 to C-4 believers as *not* part of their religious community, does not necessarily imply the positive corollary that they will always identify them as being part of *some* kind of Christian community. For example, if a Muslim has only been exposed to C-1 type Christianity and has never actually met a MBB from a C-4 context, it is likely that even

though he recognizes that they are not a part of his religious community, there is still no ready category to place the person in. That, of course, is one of the strategic advantages of C-4, according to the advocates of C-4 ministries. This is also why some of what is casually called C-5 in missionary practice is actually C-4. The crucial issue at stake is *self-identity*. C-5 believers are fully embedded in the cultural and religious life of Islam. That is why their presence in the Mosque is referred to as an “insider movement”, because they really *are* insiders. It is even inaccurate to refer to them (as they often are) as MBBs, because, for them, Islam is not in their *background*, it remains as their primary *identity*. Therefore, they should be called simply Muslim Believers (MBs), not Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). Some insist that they simply be called Muslims with no further descriptor. Therefore, the real “bottom-line” question before us is whether or not there is a solid case to be made for encouraging a C-5 “Muslim” to continue to identify himself or herself as a Muslim, fully part and parcel of the religious and cultural life of Islam, even after they have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

The Key Arguments for C-5 evaluated

All of the evidence offered in missiological literature which actually focuses on C-5 (not just C-4 argumentation embedded in C-5 literature) falls into three general categories. First, there are *Biblical and exegetical* arguments which are offered to provide scriptural support for C-5. Second, there are *theological* considerations which are vital to the very nature of what it means to even be called a follower of Jesus Christ as well as the theological implications inherent in the issue of identity which are directly and indirectly present in the C-5 literature. Finally, there are important *ethical* issues which are often addressed in the C-5 writings. I will systematically explore each of these three categories to determine whether or not the growing

interest in developing C-5 strategies should be encouraged.²¹

Biblical/exegetical arguments

The Biblical texts most frequently cited in support of C-5 strategy are as follows: Acts 15:19, I Corinthians 7:20, I Corinthians 9:19-22 and II Kings 5:18, 19. In addition to these specific texts, supporters of C-5 frequently make reference to the role Judaizers played in opposing the first century gospel which is recorded in various texts of the New Testament.²² As noted above, while several of these texts do seem to provide compelling support for C-4, the question before us is whether or not they provide support for C-5 and the issue of one's identity as a Muslim in continuity with the religious and cultural context of Islam.

Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council

The Jerusalem Council is a relevant text for consideration since it involves the first formal church discussion regarding the relationship between these two distinct cultural communities, Jewish and Gentile, who, quite surprisingly, were finding a common, new identity in Jesus Christ. Many of the Jewish leaders harbored deep suspicions and even prejudice against Gentiles, and found it quite scandalizing that they might now be welcomed by God as full and equal participants in the People of God on their own cultural terms. The Jerusalem Council was called to discuss this problem, which is best summarized by the opening verse which captures the heart of the complaint against these new Gentile believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Before examining the decision of the Jerusalem Council, it is crucial to understand that long before the advent of the New Testament there was already in place an accepted method through which a Gentile could become a full (if not always 'equal') participant with a Jew in God's redemptive plan. The Old Testament contains many verses which reveal God's heart for the Gentiles.²³

Supporters of C-5 frequently make reference to the role Judaizers played in opposing the first century gospel.

In response to this, there developed an accepted protocol for how a Gentile could be accepted in Israel. A Gentile could become a Jewish "proselyte" by separating from his own culture, becoming circumcised, accepting all of the dietary restrictions of Judaism and fully accepting the covenantal obligations of the Torah. As Andrew Walls has noted, "to become a proselyte involves the sacrifice of national and social affiliations. It involves a form of naturalization, incorporation into another milieu."²⁴ Since this was the established procedure, it should not surprise us that these Judean believers were very angry when Paul and others were welcoming Gentiles who continued to live as full participants in their own culture, including diet and even remaining uncircumcised. The Jerusalem Council met to discuss whether any or all of these new practices which had started in Antioch and were later replicated by Paul should be accommodated, or if the whole thing should be rejected.

The Jerusalem Council opens with a statement almost identical to the one which opens the entire chapter. Acts 15:5 records that

some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses.'

After a heated discussion, Peter, Paul and Barnabas offer a series of testimonies which made it clear that God, through His giving of the Holy Spirit, was sovereignly accepting and saving the Gentiles (Acts 15:6-12) without their following the proselyte model and becoming dislocated from their own culture. James added further weight by quoting Scriptural support from the Prophet Amos. It is at this juncture in the Council that James makes the crucial statement which is frequently cited in support of C-5. James says, "It is my judgment, there-

fore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19). The application which is made by C-5 advocates is that asking a Muslim to separate from their Muslim identity is creating an unnecessary and "difficult" barrier. Indeed, to insist that a Muslim become a 'Christian' is to follow the old proselyte model. On the other hand, they argue, to allow a Muslim to stay fully connected and integrated with their existing Islamic identity is consistent with the new model posed by the post-Jerusalem Council.

It seems evident that Acts 15 does provide powerful and compelling support for C-4 strategy in the Muslim world since the Gentiles were not asked to sacrifice their social and national identity. However, in order for this text to be used as a basis for C-5, one must also argue that the Gentiles were not asked to abandon their *religious* identity. In my view, this is a difficult task. James goes on to recommend a list of four things which the Gentiles should be asked to avoid: food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, the meat of strangled animals, and from blood. The Council accepted these guidelines. However, it is important to note that they did not accept these four prohibitions as some kind of "add-ons" to Gentiles' faith, so that they were saved by faith plus a short list of duties which serves as a kind of Jewish-law-in-miniature. No! The Gentiles were being saved by grace through faith, without compromise or qualification. The prohibitions serve to visibly separate the Gentiles from their former *religious* identity as pagans, since all four of these prohibitions are linked to common pagan practices of the time. This, in turn, would enable the Jews and Gentiles to live out their common faith with a new identity which, remarkably, is linked to neither the Law (the Judean

proposal) nor pagan religious practices (the Gentiles' experience) but a new identity in Jesus Christ. Thus, Acts 15 represents a generous compromise—The church will retain multiple cultures and lifestyles, but there will always be only one body of Christ. Thus, Acts 15 does seem to provide compelling support for the proposal that Muslims be allowed to retain their cultural identity (C-4), but no support for the proposal that Muslims be allowed to retain their *religious* identity (C-5). Those who say that Muslims cannot separate religion and culture are ignoring over thirty years of successful C-4 contextualization throughout the entire Islamic world which has proved that MBBs' new identity in Christ is so powerful that it does, in fact, provide a new religious identity without one having to sever their former cultural identity.

Some readers might raise the question if it is fair to equate *pagan* identity with *Islamic* identity since Islam is far closer to Judaism than either is to paganism.²⁵ Would the Jerusalem Council have insisted that Muslims forsake their *monotheistic* religious identity the way they insisted that the Gentiles forsake their *pagan* religious identity? I think the answer becomes clear by posing two hypothetical scenarios—one from the “Jewish” side of the question (i.e. those who want to compare Islam to Judaism rather than paganism), and the other from the “Gentile” side of the question (i.e. those who longed for the Jewish believers to embrace them with as little dislocation as possible).

Scenario #1

If, hypothetically speaking, Judaism had accepted Jesus Christ as the true fulfillment of their own prophetic expectations in sufficient numbers so that faith in the deity and dignity, the person and work, of Christ became fully identified with Jewish *religious identity*, then there would be no reason whatsoever for a Jew to separate from their religious identity with the synagogue and Temple.²⁶ Indeed, this explains why the earliest Christians continued to worship in

the Temple for some time. They were there in the hope that their fellow Jews would see Christ as the proper fulfillment of their own Scriptural texts, as He truly was. After all, they had found Jesus *within* Jewish, religious identity. However, once they realized that the mainstream Jewish community was not going to accept the view that Jesus was the Lord and the Messiah of their own scriptural, prophetic expectations, then it became clear that they had to form a *new* religious identity; namely, the church, which would properly celebrate their identity in Jesus Christ.



How does this apply to our discussion concerning the religious identity of C-5 Muslim believers? It should be noted at the outset that it is difficult to fully compare the situation of Jews (who have the “Old” Testament) hearing the gospel with Muslims (who have the Qur’an) hearing the gospel because of the more profound continuity between Judaism and Christianity. Nevertheless, continuing with our hypothetical scenario, if the vast majority of Muslims were to miraculously recognize the true deity and dignity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, such that the Mosque became a place where Jesus was truly worshipped, then there would be no reason for a Muslim believer to seek a new religious identity, because the very religious identity of Islam would have changed. However, since this did not occur then there must inevitably be a separation at the level of religious identity, which is precisely what happened with the early Jewish believers.

It should be noted that encouraging a separate religious identity (*contra* C-5) does not mean that there are not points of *continuity* between one's former religious identity and their new religious identity. Indeed, the transference of religious identity does not necessitate a complete disruption or dislocation with the prior religious identity. The point is simply that the unique person of Jesus creates a new identity.

Scenario #2

The second hypothetical scenario seeks to discover if some minimalist list of prohibitions could be agreed upon which would allow a Muslim to retain his or her religious identity with Islam, *along with some qualifications* such that they could retain their status as a Muslim, but be viewed as a rather strange Muslim. The challenge is that the prohibitions would have to be strong enough to allow a Muslim follower of Jesus to be faithful to Christ and the gospel even within his Islamic religious identity, yet generous enough to allow a Muslim follower of Jesus to maintain his religious identity without falling into a life of constant lying and deception. In this hypothetical scenario, which I will call the Cairo Council, Gentile followers of Jesus (who are now the insiders!) met and after a heated discussion decided not to make it too difficult for these new believers within Islam, but to set forth the following three prohibitions which were sent to key leading Muslim followers of Jesus in the Arab world:

1. During the daily *salat*, refrain from saying the *Shahadah* unless you omit the second phrase, “and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah” and, instead insert “and *Isa* is the Eternal Word of Allah” or “and *Isa* is the Sovereign Lord.”²⁷
2. Acknowledge that only the Bible is the Word of God and that the Qur’an, while containing beautiful Arabic and important insights into Arab culture, has no authority over the Bible.²⁸
3. When you are reciting the 99 beautiful names of Allah with a *shubha*, add the following three: (1) God and

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (2) Holy Spirit and (3) Blessed Trinity (or Tri-unity).²⁹

It should be noted that there were several at the Cairo Conference who insisted that a fourth be added; namely, the “Risen One”. But, after much discussion the Council thought that Christ’s resurrection was sufficiently implied in the titles “Lord Jesus Christ” and “Blessed Trinity” (or Blessed Tri-unity) and so it was not necessary to add a fourth. The point is, the Cairo Conference really worked hard to be as generous as possible with these new Muslim believers. The question is this: Could a ‘Muslim’ disciple of Jesus Christ, as espoused by the C-5 strategists, maintain his or her *religious* identity with Islam even if the only adjustments they made were the above three minimalist prohibitions? The answer is most certainly not. These three strike at the heart of Islamic *religious* identity; namely, the prophethood of Muhammad, the sacred perfection and superiority of the Qur’an and a rejection of Allah’s Triune nature. The moment any Muslim discovers that someone claiming to be a Muslim has these particular beliefs in these three areas then they will automatically see that “Muslim” as someone with a religious identity in discontinuity with their own. Furthermore, the Muslim believer (MB) who is seeking to maintain his self-identity as a Muslim must also sense the profound ethical burden of living a life of integrity while knowing that his central core confession is in profound discontinuity with the core confession of Islam. Thus, while I find Acts 15 a compelling defense for C-4, I am less convinced that it provides a sufficient basis for justifying C-5.

I Corinthians 7:20

The Apostle Paul declares in I Corinthians 7:20 that “each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him.” The context of the verse has to do with Paul’s heightened eschatological sense that the coming of Jesus has thrust us into the climax of the ages. In Jesus Christ, the age to come is breaking

Slavery and marriage, clearly relate to social status and could not reasonably be held to apply to a religious context.

in to the present evil age calling us to decisive action. The in-breaking of the Kingdom is so powerful and the gospel is such good news that Paul did not want the Corinthians to waste their time being preoccupied with their earthly status. You can sense the urgency in the text: If you are unmarried, don’t seek to get married (vs 27)! If you are a slave, don’t be troubled about it (vs. 21)! If you are uncircumcised, then don’t get circumcised (vs. 18)! The question before us is whether this text could, by extension, be construed to mean, “If you are a Muslim, don’t worry about becoming a non-Muslim!”

The central issue at hand is whether this text can apply to one’s religious identity. Two of the three examples which Paul gives, slavery and marriage clearly relate to *social* status and could not reasonably be held to apply to a *religious* context. The reference to circumcision is more interesting. For a Jew, the act of circumcision carries strong social, cultural *and* religious connotations. Being circumcised is clearly a part of their *religious* identity. So, could Paul be saying that Gentile believers should not worry about changing their *religious* identity? If so, then this text could be interpreted as saying, in effect, the time is so urgent, if you are a follower of Jesus in the Mosque, don’t worry about leaving the Mosque—stay there, because time is short and the Kingdom is at hand! However, since the whole purpose of this urgency is to help more and more people to recognize the true identity of Jesus Christ, it is highly unlikely that this kind of application can be made from this text since, as already noted, the Mosque is a place where the deity of Jesus is denied. The well-known text in Hebrews 10:25, “let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together,” is a reference to Jewish Christians who were starting to neglect their attendance at the

Christian assemblies and, instead, only attending the Jewish synagogue worship. The writer of Hebrews does not encourage those early Christians to “stay in the synagogue”, rather, he emphasizes the priority of their new Christian identity, even though they were ethnic Jews.

The text in I Corinthians 7:20 is most likely referring to Gentile believers who were wondering if they should follow the old “proselyte model” discussed earlier and be circumcised to gain full acceptance into the Kingdom. Their problem was actually just the opposite of that which is posed by C-5. These Gentiles who were showing interest in becoming circumcised are more like those cultural reactionaries who want to completely leave their cultural background and unite with a C-1 or C-2 church! Paul tells them that such a drastic change is not necessary. Once again, this provides possible support for C-4, but it is unlikely that this text, when quoted in its context, can actually be cited to confidently support C-5 strategy.

I Corinthians 9:19-22

A second text from I Corinthians is often cited in support of C-5 ministries. It is the text in I Corinthians 9:19-22 where Paul boldly declares his willingness to submit to and enter into the context of those whom he is seeking to reach:

“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the Law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.”

I think missiologists are in broad agreement that this text provides

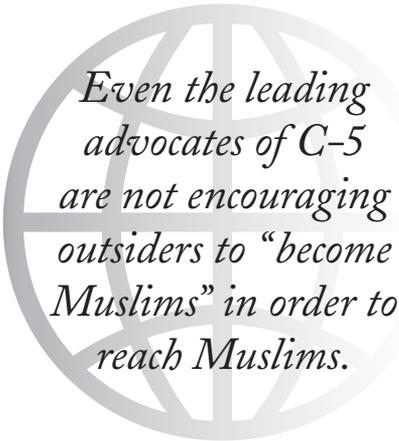
support for those who are engaged in incarnational, rather than extrac-tionistic, ministries. The first job of missionaries is to enter into the experience and life-view of those they are seeking to reach; the incarnation of our Lord is the greatest example of this. This text does appear to provide further support for C-4 ministries. Indeed, we must fully enter the socio-political and cultural world of those we are seeking to reach for Christ. However, does this text also teach that we should take on the *religious* identity of a Jew or Gentile—and, by extension, a Muslim in reaching them for Jesus Christ? It seems inconceivable to me that this could be presented as a reliable exegesis of this text. The very fact that Paul could become *like* a Jew in one context and *like* a Gentile in another clearly demonstrates that he is not becoming self-identified as a Jew or Gentile in the way that is required for C-5 advocates to quote this text to support C-5. Indeed, through the use of the two qualifiers, Paul clearly shows in the text that he is not fully identifying with them in this way. When he is with the Jew he lives as a Law keeper, but then he qualifies it by reminding the reader that in his actual identity in Christ he is not under the law. Likewise, when he is with a Gentile he lives like one without the law, but then he qualifies it by reminding them that our identity with Christ does not give us a license for antinomianism, a message the Corinthians certainly needed to remember!

In recent years this text has become even less relevant to this discussion since both of the leading advocates of C-5 contextualization, John Travis and Joshua Massey, have restricted C-5 to those who were brought up in Islam and become followers of Christ, rather than a prescriptive missionary strategy for outsiders seeking to win Muslims for Christ. In other words, even the leading advocates of C-5 are not encouraging outsiders to “become Muslims” in order to reach Muslims. For example, in *Messianic Muslim Followers of Jesus*, John Travis says, “I personally cannot endorse Christians claiming to be Muslims for outreach.”³⁰

This is a vital point to keep in mind as more and more mission organizations and large churches are discussing how C-5 may or may not be utilized in the development of mission strategy and policy decisions.

II Kings 5:18, 19

The final text to be considered in this survey of the key passages which are quoted by supporters of C-5 is found in the Old Testament. The text, found in II Kings 5:18, 19, is about a request made to the prophet Elisha by the mighty soldier Naaman just as he is about to return home to Aram.



Even the leading advocates of C-5 are not encouraging outsiders to “become Muslims” in order to reach Muslims.

Namaan says, “But may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive your servant for this.” In reply, Elisha declares, “go in peace.” Because Elisha did not sharply rebuke Naaman, this passage has been seized as an example of God’s grace for Muslims who continue to perform *salat* in the Mosque, but in their heart they are actually worshipping Jesus, thus providing legitimacy for the C-5.

It is difficult to fully evaluate the application of II Kings 5:18, 19 to a C-5 situation because of several contextual ambiguities in the text. We do not know, for example, precisely *why* Naaman’s master would be leaning on his arm as they enter the temple. Is it because of the frailty of the master and so the master physically could not bow down before Rimmon

without the assistance of his trusted commander? If so, then it is out of pure compassion for his master that he is assisting him in the Temple of Rimmon. Thus, we could perhaps make a case for a MBB who does not normally attend the mosque being forgiven if he, as an act of honoring his father, helps his ailing and feeble father into the mosque every Friday.

We also do not know if Naaman raised this issue before Elisha because he feared for his life if he did not accompany his master and bow down beside him in the Temple. Would his master have instantly executed him if he did not bow? If so, then this text could actually provide some encouragement for a C-6 believer who remains silent about his faith because of a very real threat of torture, imprisonment or martyrdom. The point is, there are sufficient ambiguities about the text to make it difficult to use in any proper exegetical way to contribute substantially to this discussion. The one thing we *do* know is that the context of the passage is about Naaman asking for *forgiveness* for doing something which they both knew was wrong, not the Prophet’s *blessing* for promoting any activity or strategy or self-identity of Naaman as a follower of Rimmon who actually worships Yahweh in order to draw other worshippers of Rimmon to the true knowledge of Yahweh. It seems clear that Naaman sees his bowing as a barrier to his effective witness rather than a stepping stone to a more effective witness.

We will conclude this Biblical section by reflecting on the frequent parallels which are drawn between the first century Judaizers who opposed Paul and the 21st century Christians who oppose the C-5 advocates. The Judaizers were Pharisees who came to Christ and maintained that no non-Jew could be saved without being circumcised and observing the law of Moses. In short, the Christian faith was seen to be a sub-set of Judaism, lacking the cultural translatability which proved so decisive in the gospel’s powerful penetration of the Hellenistic world. In our current discussion, the

Judaizers become symbolic of those who are skeptical and defensive about Muslims finding Christ on their *own* cultural terms rather than first converting to some “foreign” religion known as “Christianity.” Many of the writers who are promoting C-5 “contextualization” make use of this comparison, but none quite as extensively as Joshua Massey who adopts it as a major part of his important article, “*God’s Amazing Diversity*.” Massey writes,

C-5 practitioners insist that even as Paul argued tirelessly with Judaizers that Gentiles did not have to convert to Judaism to follow Jesus, Muslims do not have to convert to “Christianity” to follow Jesus.³¹

Massey goes on to set up a kind of dialogue between a C-5 opponent (the Judaizer) and a C-5 practitioner (Joshua Massey). The C-5 opponent argues, “how could anyone who identifies himself as any kind of Muslim be a genuine follower of Jesus? To call oneself ‘Muslim’ means they adhere to certain Islamic beliefs that flatly contradict Scripture!”³² Massey’s reply is as follows:

That sounds like the same argument Judaizers used against Paul since Gentiles were well known by all Jews to be unclean, uncircumcised, and mostly sexually immoral idolaters—all violating clear Biblical teachings. ‘How is it possible,’ Judaizers must have asked Paul, ‘to be both Gentile and a follower of Jesus? The two terms are mutually exclusive!’³³

The argument in a nutshell is that Gentiles did not have to convert to Judaism to follow Jesus; therefore, Muslims should not have to convert to “Christianity” to follow Jesus. We must begin by remembering that the choice is not a binary one between C-5 Muslims who are culturally and religiously identified with Islam and some shockingly extractionistic C-1 church plopped down into the middle of an Islamic country with wooden pews, an English liturgy, tall steeples, and stained glass windows! C-4 practitioners already agree that a Muslim does not have to convert to “Christianity” (read, *Western forms of Christianity*) to follow Jesus. As noted earlier, the

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most striking feature of pro-C-5 literature is that the vast majority of what is argued is actually reinforcing the good missiology of C-4 and remains largely silent about the actual religious identity question which is the central difference between C-4 and C-5.

So, it *would* be a Judaizing tendency to try to pressure a new believer in the Muslim world to adopt all of our cultural accoutrements. But this does not provide much help in resolving the issue of Islamic *religious* identity. Because, from Paul’s perspective it was about neither “staying in” Judaism nor “staying in” paganism, but the recognition that both Jew and Gentile must together identify themselves as sinners in need of grace and together finding their new identity in Jesus Christ. The Judaizers were wrong, not so much because they saw the paganism in the Gentile world, but because they failed to see the wickedness in their own. The only hope is to find a new identity together as the redeemed people of God, made up of both Jew and Gentile.

In conclusion, this survey demonstrates that the key texts and the commentaries/expositions about these texts in C-5 literature fall into two general categories: 1. Texts and commentary which actually support C-4 and are not germane to the C-5 discussion. 2. A wide-spread use of proof-texting whereby a pre-determined conclusion has already been reached and then texts are found which provide some kind of vague support for the idea.

This study has tried to remedy this by focusing squarely on the key issue of one’s self-identity and then to honestly engage with the most often cited texts to determine if their original meaning could be used to support more aggressive methods of contextualization. My conclusion is that several of these texts *do* seem to provide strong support for C-4 but I remain unconvinced that

they have provided any substantial support to the proponents of C-5. However, there are several important theological and ethical matters which have not yet been addressed, and it is to them that we now turn.

Theological Considerations

Until recently, no published research has appeared on the theology of Muslim Believers (MBs) who follow Jesus (*Isa*) and yet retain their identity as Muslims.³⁴ However, in 1998 well known author Phil Parshall published a study performed by 25 teams who interviewed 72 key leaders from 66 villages who are all C-5 believers and are believed to represent 4,500 C-5 believers.³⁵ There were several very encouraging things which were revealed in the survey. For example, many of these leaders (76%) were quietly meeting with other C-5 believers for worship, Bible study and fellowship. A surprising 97% said that “Jesus is the only savior,” indicating that the exclusivity which is characteristic of mainstream Islam has been carried over into their faith as Muslim Believers in Jesus. Another encouraging sign is that there did seem to be a growing recognition of the limitations of Muhammad as compared with Jesus Christ. For example, 97% said that “they are not saved because of Muhammad’s prayers.”³⁶

Despite this good news, there was also some very disturbing news which the survey revealed. For example, 96% still believed that the Qur’an was one of four holy books from heaven, along with the Torah (Law), the Zabur (Prophets) and the Injil (Gospel). 66% even said that the Qur’an was the greatest of the four. A full 45% do not even affirm that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Trinity).³⁷ This is particularly disturbing since this represents the *leadership* of the movement which one should assume has the highest level of knowledge about the Christian faith. More research is

needed to determine if other acceptable ways of describing the Trinity might find a wider acceptance among these believers.

Phil Parshall is concerned enough about these findings to question whether Muslim believers in Christ who retain their Islamic identity can reasonably be expected to flourish as the church of Jesus Christ.³⁸ Joshua Massey, among others, downplays these theological problems by insisting that this is just another example of imposing what he calls “Greco-Roman Gentile categories of orthodoxy.”³⁹ Instead, he argues that we should focus on their personal faith experience with Jesus. He argues that C-5 advocates should be “more concerned about true Christ-centeredness than with conformity to Gentile Christian traditions and doctrinal codifications developed centuries after the apostolic era.”⁴⁰ Rick Brown also seems to downplay the importance of clear doctrinal affirmations which have given the church its shared identity when he asserts that “there is no verse that says one must understand the divinity of Jesus to be saved.” He goes on to say,

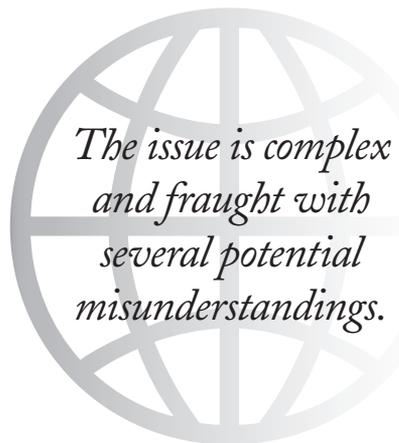
These doctrines about the deity of Jesus and his substitutionary punishment are wonderful parts of the Good News, and it is worthwhile discussing them with seekers, as Paul demonstrated in Romans. But the overwhelming Biblical witness is that although these doctrines are important for the disciple to understand, an understanding of them is not required for salvation.⁴¹

Brown does not expressly set out to demean the importance of the core doctrines of the faith, although the tone of his writing may initially strike the reader in that manner. Rather, his purpose is to make a distinction between what may be important to know in the long run as opposed to what is absolutely necessary to know in order to be justified by faith in Christ.

There are other mission organizations working among Muslims that disagree strongly with this and insist on certain basic theological understandings which must accompany faith from the outset. Some, for example, insist on belief in the authority of the Bible

and the Trinity. Others focus specifically on theological propositions which are related to the person of Christ, such as faith in his deity and His Resurrection.⁴² Who is right? This is obviously a crucial question for all evangelists and missionaries, but it seems particularly important for those contemplating a ministry among Muslims where certain unorthodox views about Christ (He is a Prophet, not God) and the Bible (It has been distorted and is inferior to the Qur’an) are already present in the “DNA” of Islam.

An evaluation of this problem must begin by acknowledging that this is



a long-standing issue in the church, which cannot be resolved easily. The issue is complex and fraught with several potential misunderstandings. Nevertheless, three crucial points of clarification must be made before any further light can be shed on this complex issue.

First, popular Protestant theology has tended to equate the doctrine of ‘salvation’ with the doctrine of ‘justification’. Biblically, the doctrine of salvation does include justification, but also includes the doctrines of sanctification and our final glorification.⁴³ This is why the Scripture speaks of salvation in all three tenses: I *was* saved (justification), I am *being* saved (sanctification) and I *will be* saved (glorification). This theological reductionism which equates salvation with justification is so common in popular Protestant writings that we often fail to recognize the far reaching implications this has on our discussions related to soteriology. The most

important implication is that it gives rise to a general minimalistic emphasis in this discussion. In other words, the question becomes what is the absolute bottom-line minimum an individual needs to know in order to be *justified*? Of course, when the question is put in these terms then the answer is almost self-evident—very, very little, indeed. How much theology did the thief on the cross know? What about the Philippian jailer or Lydia and her household? I think everyone can agree, as Dean Gilliland has correctly pointed out, that the Holy Spirit can still be active “in poorly informed, sometimes misguided believers.”⁴⁴ So, the issue needs to be re-framed, at least in part, by a broader, and more biblically informed understanding of the word ‘salvation.’

Second, popular Protestant theology has also tended to emphasize the faith of the individual rather than the collective faith of the community of believers. We are much more comfortable speaking about the faith of *individuals* than we are about the faith of the *church*. When Jude says “I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3) both of the words, ‘you’ and ‘saint’ are in the plural. Paul, in that great chapter on the resurrection in I Corinthians declares, “this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.” Paul saw his preaching in continuity with the apostolic preaching (*we* preach) and he declares this to the church (you, plural). It is important to recognize that Paul says “this is what you believed,” even though the very context of the passage reveals that there were *individuals* in the church who did not, at least on this point, believe along with the church. So, once again, how the question is framed tends to produce a particular answer. If you ask, “What is the minimal core confession of the church regarding salvation?”, then the bar is raised and we find the church far more articulate about the core of salvific faith. The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed are examples of the early church’s attempt to put down into a short list the most basic theological propositions which unite the *church* in

a common faith. The church did this even though they also must surely have realized, as we do today, that there are many ‘justified’ *individuals* who neither understand, nor fully believe, every single article of faith in these documents. This, after all, is why they are confessed week after week in the churches: to reinforce the faith of the church on all those individuals who claim to be followers of Christ. So, a technical re-wording of Rick Brown’s article, “*What Must One Believe about Jesus for Salvation?*” is actually, “What must an *individual* believe about Jesus for *justification?*”, for *that* is what his article actually addresses.

Third, this debate tends to slip into the modern trap of putting the “personal” and the “propositional” at odds with one another. For example, some writers want to emphasize that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is all that matters; others want to make sure that certain historic propositions are affirmed. One side is accused of placing too much emphasis on defending the written words of Scripture and certain doctrinal formulations (rather than Jesus Christ). They argue, “What is the value of confessing a mountain of creeds and doctrinal formulations if, at root, we do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?” The other side insists that the only way we know anything about God which is distinctively and properly called *Christian* is because God has spoken to humanity in a free act of self-disclosure. In obedience to this revelation, God’s servants have faithfully recorded these words in the Bible. Without the Bible, they argue, how can we distinguish between the personal faith of a Muslim and the personal faith of a Christian?

Thus, we are put in the unenviable position of being forced to choose between God revealing Himself, or God revealing truths about Himself. A close examination of the articles related to C-5 reveals that this dichotomy is present in much of the discussion, although it is never acknowledged.

Hopefully the reader is now beginning to realize how important the relationship is between soteriology and eccle-

We cannot have a Christ-centered theology of mission which does not place the church at the center of Christ’s redemptive plan.

siology. On the one hand, the farther the doctrine of salvation is allowed to drift away from the church and closer to individualism the more likely a group will downplay the particulars of specific doctrinal formulations, because the focus is on the individual’s personal relationship with Christ. Also, it is far more likely that this group would tend to equate the doctrine of salvation with the doctrine of justification. On the other hand, the closer the doctrine of salvation is tethered to the life of the church through time (history) and space (around the world), then the more likely a group will emphasize our common faith and the importance of even a brand new believer realizing the ‘faith’ he or she is being united with. A new convert not only *has* faith, he or she is brought *into* a common faith. This group will have more of a long-term view of salvation, even if they still emphasize the importance of a particular point of conversion. They will also tend to emphasize that even if a particular MBB is the only Christian in a particular region or village, they should be made to understand from the outset their connection to other Christians or followers of Jesus who share a common faith. This understanding explains why para-church organizations that focus on “evangelism” often have very different views on this issue compared to “church planting” organizations. This is clearly seen, for example, in the article by David Garrison entitled “Church Planting Movements vs. Insider Movements”, which points out the need to connect the evangelistic energy of para-church sodalities with new dynamic models of church planting.⁴⁵

In conclusion, an examination of the current evidence of the theological content of C-5 believers in Jesus as well as the general theological framework of the advocates of C-5 reveals the following. First, C-5 writings tend towards theological reductionism by tacitly embracing a narrow, minimalistic view of salvation. If these new believers are

not encouraged to unite their fledgling faith with the faith of the church, then it is unlikely that these new believers will be able to properly reproduce the faith, which is the whole reason the C-5 strategy exists; namely, to reduce every possible barrier so that the gospel can more easily reproduce among Muslims. Second, the theological framework and analysis present in C-5 writings has been overly influenced by Western individualism and the privatization of faith which tends to keep the doctrines of soteriology and ecclesiology at arms length.⁴⁶ Joshua Massey concedes this point when he observes that

C-5 nomenclature was quickly adopted by those whose theology of mission is more Christ-centered than church-centered.⁴⁷

While Massey is quite correct in criticizing an ecclesiology which merely extends a Western, structural form of Christianity into the Muslim world, we must not forget that we cannot have a Christ-centered theology of mission which does not place the church at the center of Christ’s redemptive plan. Rejecting this old “proselyte-model” does not and should not necessitate a rejection of a proper ecclesiology. Indeed, as Lesslie Newbigin has pointed out,

true conversion involves both a new creation from above.... [and] also a relationship with the existing community of believers.⁴⁸

To encourage Muslim believers to retain their self-identity as Muslims and to not find practical ways to identify themselves with the larger community of those who worship Jesus Christ reveals a view of the church that is clearly sub-Christian.⁴⁹

Finally, the separation of the ‘personal’ from the ‘propositional’ in the Muslim world can only lead to a dangerous separation of the person of Christ from the church’s proclamation about Christ. This separation

fails to attend to the proper connection between our personal testimony (however thrilling and exciting) and the Apostolic proclamation of the gospel. This is not just a hypothetical concern, as this dichotomy has already begun to emerge in such articles as, "Proclaiming a 'Theologyless' Christ" by Herbert Hoefler, a leading proponent of 'high spectrum' contextualization. Hoefler writes,

Can we look upon the church as a house with many doors? It doesn't matter which door you use to enter. As you explore the house, you will come to the fullness of truth. The key to each door in the house is the acceptance of Jesus as Lord of one's life. How one explains that is a matter of freedom and creativity, in consultation with the others in the house.⁵⁰

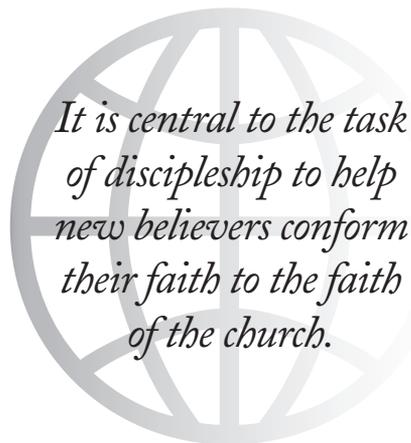
The unintended result of this view is that personal experience can be used to ignore the specifics of the Apostolic proclamation. Or to put it in the popular terminology of post-modernism, the Apostolic 'meta-narrative' takes a back seat to the personal narratives of those who come to Christ.⁵¹ However, our personal faith in Christ must be brought into resonance with the Apostolic proclamation *about* Christ. Undoubtedly, millions of people come to Christ every year with a deficient theology. But it is central to the task of discipleship to help new believers conform their faith to the faith of the church. Pragmatism and cultural accommodations can never be allowed to trump the theological integrity of the gospel message. This is not to raise questions about the justification of any of these new believers, but rather it is a commitment to make sure that from the very beginning we are committed to raising up believers whose personal faith resonates with the "faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3).

Ethical issues

This analysis of C-5 strategy began with an examination of the four main texts which are used to support C-5, along with an analysis of the usefulness of the Judaizer analogy which appears so frequently in the literature. Second, we examined a number of

theological issues such as the way the word 'salvation' is used, how one's personal relationship with Christ relates to the historic faith of the church, and the way the doctrines of soteriology and ecclesiology relate to one another. The third and final area necessary to completing this analysis of C-5 is in the area of ethics.

Several writers and field missionaries have raised questions about the ethics of the C-5 strategy. Is it ethical, they ask, to encourage followers of Jesus to remain embedded within Islamic community while still retaining their



Muslim self-identity? In reply, it should be noted that all of the leading advocates of C-5 are in broad agreement that it is both unwise and unethical for a person with a non-Islamic background to enter into a Muslim community and pretend to be a Muslim. As I understand it, C-5 is about someone *retaining* their identity, not someone taking on that identity. The real question is if it is ethical for a Muslim follower of Jesus Christ to retain their identity as Muslims even after they have become devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Joshua Massey argues that the negative associations with 'Christianity' are so strong that these new believers identify more with 'Islam' than they do with 'Christianity.' He points out that,

when C-5 believers compare themselves to C-1-C-2 Christians they say, 'I don't pray like a Christian, unwashed in a pew with my shoes on; I pray like a Muslim. I don't dress like a Christian, with Western pants and

collared shirts; I dress like a Muslim. I don't talk like a Christian with all their strange terms to describe God and his prophets; I talk like a Muslim. I don't eat like a Christian... eating *haram* meats....I don't have a Christian name, like John, Tom or Paul; I have a Muslim name.' Thus, C-5 believers are being entirely honest when they identify themselves as 'Muslim' followers of Jesus.⁵²

In response, it is not entirely clear how this actually addresses the ethical point under consideration since the C-4 contextualized witness would answer all of the above concerns. This would be an excellent defense against C-1 or C-2 Christians who were insisting that MBBs identify with some non-contextualized expression of Christianity. The real point which must be defended is the ethics of retaining Islamic *religious* identity, not just Islamic *cultural* identity. We must not lose sight of the fact that what distinguishes C-5 from C-4 is the *religious* self-identity as a Muslim, not the cultural identification which is at the heart of C-4.

The retaining of one's *religious* identity within Islam after becoming a follower of Christ is, in my view, unethical. As Phil Parshall has pointed out, "The Mosque is pregnant with Islamic theology. There, Muhammad is affirmed as a prophet of God and the divinity of Christ is consistently denied." Parshall goes on to point out the sacramental nature of the ritual prayers (*salat*).⁵³ Lesslie Newbigin once wrote the following in response to a similar movement of churchless Christians in India, but which powerfully applies to the Muslim background believers as well:

The acceptance of Jesus Christ as central and decisive creates some kind of solidarity among those who have this acceptance in common. If it did not do so, it would mean nothing. The question is, what is the nature of this solidarity? It has always been understood to include the practice of meeting together to celebrate with words, songs and formal actions the common faith in Jesus...a man who is religiously, culturally and socially part of the Hindu community is a Hindu.

In short, one's religious identity with Jesus Christ creates a necessary rupture with one's Islamic identity or our identity in Jesus Christ would mean nothing.⁵⁴ It is unethical to pretend this discontinuity does not exist or to act as if it is merely a matter of cultural forms. Rather, as I have often been told by missionaries who work in the Islamic world, it is more like a 'fifth column' inside Islam which, when discovered by Muslims creates such a strong negative reaction that it inadvertently damages the credibility of Christians and feeds further distrust towards those who follow Christ. A more open witness in a straightforward, but contextually sensitive way seems to hold the greatest promise for effective and ethical Christian penetration into the Muslim world.

Reformation in Reverse?

This article has focused on a major debate in missions circles about the acceptability of the ecclesiology as espoused by the supporters of C-5. This article has put forth a range of objections to the proponents of a C-5 ecclesiology. I have highlighted several Biblical, exegetical, theological and ethical problems which must be addressed if this new ecclesiology which encourages a Muslim follower of Jesus to publicly retain their Islamic religious identity is to be embraced as a prescriptive strategy in the Islamic world. Nevertheless, no one can deny that, descriptively speaking, there are Muslims coming to Christ in some dramatic ways today. How should we respond to the genuine movement to Christ among these Muslims, many of whom have encountered Christ in dreams and visions?

I think that the best approach is to see C-5 as a temporary, transitional bridge by which some Muslims are crossing over into explicit Christian faith, hopefully to one of a C-3 or C-4 character. On the one hand, a wide number of C-3 and C-4 church movements have long and distinguished track records showing that they are sustaining faith in the lives of MBBs without major cultural disruption and yet maintaining historic Christian

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orthodoxy. C-5, on the other hand, does not have a long track record and there is, as yet, no empirical evidence to confirm or to deny that it will emerge as an independent movement in its own right, or if it will serve as a temporary, transitional bridge to explicit Christian faith and identity.

Could this be an example of the "Reformation in Reverse?"⁵⁵ In other words, our own Reformation history is the story of a people who saw themselves as Christians because they belonged to the formal, ecclesial "structure" of Christianity, i.e. they were members of Christendom. The Reformation was, among other things, the gradual recognition over several hundred years by "Christians" that they were, in fact, not Christians at all and needed to become Christians even though they were baptized Christians in the public, formal sense. In the Islamic context which we have been considering, could the exact opposite be taking place—a kind of Reformation in reverse? Could there be tens of thousands of people who belong to Islam in a public, formal sense who gradually over many years realize that they are no longer Muslims, but Christians? Could we see thousands of Muslim followers of Jesus who currently are wrongly trying to maintain their Islamic identity but who gradually come to see that their truest identity is with the people of God throughout space and time who also know, serve and follow Jesus Christ as Lord. In the New Testament, despite decades of hostility and suspicion, Jew and Gentile find that in Jesus Christ the "dividing wall of hostility" has been destroyed (Ephesians 2:14). There are not two bodies of Christ, one Jew and one Gentile, or one "Western" and one "Eastern". There is *one* Body of Christ throughout the world, culturally diverse, and yet the one church of Jesus Christ, against whom, the powers of hell itself cannot prevail. **UJFM**

Endnotes

¹ Travis, John 1998 "The C1 to C6 Spectrum"—*Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (4): 407-408. See also Parshall, Phil. 1998 "Danger! New Directions in Contextualization." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34 (4): 404-406, 409-410 and Williams, Mark. "Aspects of High-Spectrum Contextualization in Ministries to Muslims" *Journal of Asian Mission* vol. 5:1 (2003).

² Phil Parshall refers to the "C" as to "Cross-Cultural Church-Planting Spectrums." However, it is important in my later analysis of this spectrum to note that John Travis in both the text of his explanation as well as the article heading indicates that the "C" stands for "Christ-centered communities." This is confirmed in the numerous citations of the Travis scale throughout the literature.

³ Travis, 407.

⁴ *Isa* is the Arabic word for Jesus. *Umma* is the Arabic word for the global community of Muslims, although it is unclear how the *Isaya Umma* practically express their global catholicity with other Christians.

⁵ Phil Parshall, "Danger! New Directions in Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 34:4 (October 1998), 406.

⁶ See for example, Erich Bridges, "Of 'Jesus Mosques' and Muslim Christians" *Mission Frontiers* (July–October 1997) 19.

⁷ See, for example, *Mission Frontiers* (September–October 2005, vol. 27:5) which devoted the entire issue to insider movements. Also, the 2005 Conference of the International Society for Frontier Missiology was dedicated to the theme: Insider Movements: Doing Church Where There is No Church.

⁸ See, for example, Frank Decker, *Good News Magazine*, "When 'Christian' does not Translate", May/June 2005, or Barry Yeoman, *Mother Jones*, "The Stealth Crusade," (May/ June 2002).

⁹ Travis, John 1998 "The C1 to C6 Spectrum," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 34:4 (October 1998) 407-408. All of the headings are from the Travis spectrum and my summary of each of the headings largely follows the main ideas of his description.

¹⁰ It should also be noted that C-6 should not be viewed as a continued “extension” along the contextualization scale, since if allowed to express their faith these believers could, quite possibly, choose to worship anywhere along the C-1 to C-5 spectrum.

¹¹ See, for example, Mark S. Williams, “Aspects of High-Spectrum Contextualization in Ministries to Muslims,” *Journal of Asian Mission*, vol. 5:1 (2003) 75-91.

¹² For a fuller treatment of the meaning and uses of the word ‘contextualization,’ See “Contextualization” in A. Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) 225-227.

¹³ Joshua Massey has offered a M-1–M-9 spectrum showing the attitudes of various Muslims towards Islam, ranging from nominal Muslims to Ultra-Orthodox. See Joshua Massey, “God’s Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 17:1 (Spring 2000), 12.

¹⁴ Joshua Massey argues that there are a number of Iranian MBBs who are so disillusioned with Islam that they strongly object to any cultural or religious forms associated with their past and actually prefer C-1 or C-2 churches. However, rather than simply present C1–C-6 as all equally legitimate options as Massey does, we should recognize the vital catechesis needed to help these “disillusioned Muslims” to reject the religion of Islam, but not to reject their cultural and ethnic heritage. After all, extractionism occurs when *either* the missionary insists that a person leave their culture or when new believers on their own accord leave their culture because they think it is inherently evil and cannot sustain Christian faith. See Joshua Massey, “His Ways are Not Our Ways,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 35:2 (April 1999), 196.

¹⁵ Even in the West, the legacy of ‘Christendom’ has given rise to millions who call themselves ‘Christian’ but who still need to hear and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ. Thus, we must look beyond the outward descriptor in these situations. Many Muslims associate the word ‘Christian’ with people who drink alcohol, dress immodestly, supported the crusades and support the overthrow of Islamic regimes.

¹⁶ Acts 11:26 and Acts 26:28. The opponents also referred to them as a “sect” or “sect of the Nazarene.”

¹⁷ Christians among the Hausa in Islamic dominated Northern Nigeria refer to themselves as “*Masu Bi*”, lit. ‘those who believe.’

¹⁸ This is frequently true of missionary writings which are driven by field based realities which often do not afford the time or “luxury” of in-depth writing. This is why it is said, “missions at sunrise, missiology at sunset.” Those who are *doing* missions often do not have the time to do the necessary missiological reflection. Typically, missiological reflection concerning an issue arises about ten to twenty years after the field missionaries first start encountering the problem.

¹⁹ A classic example of this is found in John Travis’ case study about a MBB who “faithfully attends a weekly C-4/C-5 fellowship and may soon be appointed one of its first elders.” Clearly, attending a distinct fellowship which appoints elders is illustrative of an MBB in a C-4, not a C-5 context.

²⁰ Joshua Massey, “His Ways are Not Our Ways,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 35:2, (April 1999), 191, emphasis mine. This is also clear in the original publication of Travis’ scale where he notes that C-5 believers “are viewed as Muslims by the Muslim community and refer to themselves as Muslims who follow *Isa* the Messiah.” (*Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 34:4, “The C-1 to C-6 Spectrum,” 408).

²¹ I am quite intentional about using the word “should.” There is no doubt that, *descriptively* speaking, there will probably always be Muslims who follow Christ in the Mosque. The concern of this chapter is whether or not this should be advocated *prescriptively* as a part of an overall mission strategy, as is common in the literature.

²² I am intentionally omitting the extensive Biblical case given by Joshua Massey which cites repeated examples throughout the Bible where God does things which are “unexpected” and go against our conventional expectations. While it is true that “God’s ways are not our ways” and that God may, indeed, be doing a sovereign work through C-5 which will surprise us, it could as easily be a movement which ultimately proves fruitless. The point is, it is a classic case of an argument from silence and cannot be offered as proper evidence. Such a line of reasoning could have been used, for example, to support the new, emergent Arianism of the fourth century.

²³ For a good overview of this see Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

²⁴ Andrew F. Walls, “Old Athens and New Jerusalem: Some Signposts for Christian Scholarship in the Early History of Mission Studies,” *International*

Bulletin of Missionary Research, vol. 21:4 (October 1997) 148.

²⁵ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the role of pagan practices in folk Islam around the world which further complicates the C-5 case, so—in the spirit of charity—we will focus on Islam at its best.

²⁶ It is difficult to fully imagine how the wide acceptance of Jesus would have changed the legal and ritual practices of faithful Judaism.

²⁷ Surah 4:171 extends the honorific title “Word” (of Allah) to Jesus, providing a contextual bridge to John 1:1. Phil Parshall rightly points out that “if one affirms the ‘prophet’ of the creed, doesn’t it follow that one must therefore believe his prophecy? And that prophecy, being the Qur’an, presents us with a major problem. . . . I cannot affirm the Qur’an as the Word of God.” See Phil Parshall, “Lifting the Fatwa,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, (Vol. 40, #3), 291. (288-293)

²⁸ It is true that the Qur’an is not nearly as offensive to Christian doctrine as is sometimes supposed. However, the only way MBBs have successfully been able to retain the Qur’an (or some portions of the Quran) is if the Bible is used as the hermeneutic to constantly re-direct, re-interpret and clarify various texts in the Qur’an. For more on this see chapter seven of my, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) 169-194.

²⁹ A *shubha* is a set of rosary-like prayer beads which are commonly used by Muslims to recite the 99 beautiful names of Allah. Since most Muslims use a *shubha* with only 33 beads, which they will cycle through three times, it was also practical to only add “three” names to the 99. It meant, practically speaking, adding only one extra bead. Although it should be noted that even when Islam and Christianity agree on a certain attribute of God, such as “power” (al-Muqtadir, one of the 99 Names of Allah), there may be striking differences on how it is understood. For example, Christians see God’s greatest power over Satan exhibited in the weakness and vulnerability of the cross. Muslims would not understand God’s power in such terms. Thus, all of the 99 names would require adjustments as they are conformed to the Biblical witness.

³⁰ John Travis, “Messianic Muslim Followers of Jesus,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 17:1 (Spring 2000), 55. See Phil Parshall, “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 34:4 (October 1998) 409 as well as John Travis’ “response” (411-

415). Travis agrees with Parshall's concerns about 'outsiders' becoming Muslims (see p. 413). See also Joshua Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 17:1 (Spring 2000), 5.

³¹ Joshua Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 17:1 (Spring 2000), 8. Even Ralph Winter invokes the Judaizer parallel in his editorial introducing the cover story, "Can We Trust Insider Movements?" (*Mission Frontiers*, vol. 27:5 (September–October 2005), 4.

³² Joshua Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 17:1 (Spring 2000), 8.

³³ Joshua Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 17:1 (Spring 2000), 8.

³⁴ This is mainly due to important security issues, as well as the limited access outsiders have to these insider movements.

³⁵ For a full examination of the results of this survey, See Phil Parshall, "Danger! New Directions in Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 34:4 (October 1998) 404–410. All of the findings mentioned in this section of the chapter are from this study.

³⁶ Although the Qur'an does not teach the efficacy of Muhammad's prayers, the Hadith does. Therefore, it is a widely held belief among some groups of Muslims.

³⁷ Phil Parshall, "Danger! New Directions in Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 34:4 (October 1998) 406. It gives me little comfort to hear someone quote statistics on the declining faith in mainstream, liberal Protestants where the content of faith might be even less than some of these C-5 MBBs. These liberal Protestants are living in disobedience to their own tradition which, despite their defiance and unbelief, fully affirms the historic creeds of the faith. These statistics represent the only published statistics I have found on the content of belief in C-5 movements. Clearly, these percentages would rise or fall based on which groups were being interviewed.

³⁸ Phil Parshall, "Danger! New Directions in Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 34:4 (October 1998) 406.

³⁹ Joshua Massey, "Misunderstanding C-5: His Ways are not our Orthodoxy," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 40:3, (July 2004) 297. In the full-text on-line version of this article, Massey clearly distances himself from historic Christian views of Christology. Massey, for example, does not

affirm the eternal pre-existence of Christ. For Massey, Christ is pre-existent only "in the mind, plan and intentions of God, before the foundations of the earth." He is supportive of those theologians who, in his words, "describe the incarnation not as the human birth of an eternally pre-existent Son within the Godhead, but as the self-revelation of God in Christ", (p. 4, on-line edition). Like the Arians of old, Massey affirms that Jesus is "far greater than any prophet, judge or former 'representative of God'" but Massey does not believe that Jesus shares the same essence with the Father. Massey provides a detailed survey of most of the major Biblical texts related to Christology and consistently demonstrates that he favors an Arian, rather than Chalcedonian explanation. Indeed, Massey regards Chalcedonian Christology as an expression of Greek arrogance rather than a careful study of the Biblical evidence concerning Christ. (See on-line version, http://bgc.gospelcom.net/emis/pdfs/Misunderstanding_C5.pdf) However, the precision of the Chalcedonian formula was necessary to defend against the Arians who denied his true and full deity and the Apollinarians who denied his true and full humanity. Massey has forgotten that the Arians were very good at quoting Scripture, but, in the long run, the church has not accepted the Arian position as the best answer for *all* of the Biblical data. However, to respond precisely to various proposals such as Monophysitism, Nestorianism and Arianism it was necessary to use the most precise language that was available to them. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 249.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁴¹ Rick Brown, "What Must One Believe about Jesus for Salvation," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 17:4 (Winter 2000) 14, 15.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴³ Louis Berkhof, for example, states that "God does not impart the fullness of His salvation to the sinner in a single act." It is only by distinguishing between God's "judicial" acts and his "recreative" acts that we can properly discuss the fullness of God's plan of salvation for us. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 416.

⁴⁴ Dean Gilliland, "Context is Critical in 'Islampur' Case," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 34:4 (October 1998) 417.

⁴⁵ David Garrison, "Church Planting Movements vs. Insider Movements: Missiological Realities vs. Mythologi-

cal Speculations," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 21:4 (Winter 2004) 151–154.

⁴⁶ For more on the relationship between 'conversion' and 'community' see my article "The Challenge of Churchless Christianity: An Evangelical Assessment," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol. 29:4 (October 2005) 171–177.

⁴⁷ Joshua Massey, "His Ways are not Our Orthodoxy," 300.

⁴⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ*, (London: SCM Press, 1969), 107.

⁴⁹ There is an inherent contradiction in the fact that all of the "Cs" in the C-1 to C-6 scale stand for Christ-centered community" and yet as long as the believer retains their self-identity as a Muslim, they remain in an Allah-centered community. (The term "Allah" in this context refers not to the generic term for God as used by Arabic speaking Christians, but in its usage by Muslims as a name for the God as revealed in the Qur'an who, by definition, is non-Trinitarian and does not have a "Son" to send into the world as redeemer).

⁵⁰ Herbert Hoefler, "Proclaiming a 'Theologyless' Christ," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 22:3 (Fall 2005), 98.

⁵¹ See C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York: Collier Books, Macmillan Publishing, 1952), 135, 136. Lewis makes the helpful analogy comparing a 'map' of the shoreline with a person who has actually experienced the shoreline. Lewis points out that although the person who walks along the shore has a more immediate experience, it should not take away from us the importance of the map based on previous and accumulated knowledge. The Apostolic tradition is an essential guide to our own individual experience.

⁵² Joshua Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ," 9. The word '*baram*' is defined by Massey as "meat not butchered in the 'kosher' way".

⁵³ Phil Parshall, "Danger! New Directions in Contextualization", 409.

⁵⁴ The same challenge is present for messianic Jews who remain in traditional Jewish Temples. It is essential that they find practical ways to demonstrate their identity not only with Christ, but with others who follow Christ, even if they continue to identify culturally with their Jewish community in all other respects.

⁵⁵ I am indebted to Jonathan Bonk, director of the OMSC in New Haven, CT for this insight.