

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY ON THE EDGE



Talking Points in Christian-Muslim Relations
into the 21st Century

John Azumah and Peter Riddell (eds)



ACORN PRESS

Published by Acorn Press Ltd, ABN 50 008 549 540

Office and orders:
PO Box 282
Brunswick East
Victoria 3057
Australia
Tel/Fax (03) 9383 1266
International Tel/Fax 61 3 9383 1266
Website: www.acornpress.net.au

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry:

Title: Islam and Christianity on the edge: talking points in Christian-Muslim relations into the 21st century/
edited by John Azumah, Peter Riddell.
ISBN: 9780987132949 (pbk.)
Notes: Includes index.
Subjects: Islam – Relations – Christianity.
Christianity and other religions – Islam.
Islam – 21st century.
Christianity – 21st century.
Editors: Azumah, John.
Riddell, Peter G.
Dewey Number: 261.27

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Cover design: Andrew Moody, Blackburn VIC.
Text design and layout: Communiqué Graphics, Lilydale VIC.
Printed by: Openbook Howden Design & Print, Adelaide SA.

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FOREWORD

In the last years of the 20th and the early years of this century, the London School of Theology's Centre for Islamic Studies and Muslim-Christian Relations (CIS) has pioneered intensive research concerning Islam, relations between Christians and Muslims in different parts of the world, and Christian mission in these contexts. This book is largely the fruit of that work and it is my fervent hope that the work begun by the Centre will continue, perhaps now also in different parts of the world.

We are shown here the breadth and depth of engagement that is possible between the two great missionary faiths of our time. It is very important for us to understand not only the history of relations between the adherents of the two faiths but what irrepressible elements in the faiths lie behind this history and these relations. What is it that cannot be negotiated away? For Christians, this may well be about the uniqueness of Christ, the work of grace and the freedom of the Christian. For the Muslim, it may be the Sunnah (the practice of the Prophet of Islam) or the divine requirements of Shariah.

We are treated here to a lively exchange of ideas within each tradition and between them. Given the long history of interaction, there is quite a story to tell. Questions are raised, for example, about a theory of knowledge which springs from a comprehensive ideology, such as Islam claims to be, and the freedom required for innovation and scientific development. There is extended treatment of how conflict is justified in the two traditions. In my view, it is vital that further work is done in this area, perhaps jointly by Muslims and Christians, so that the international community can have moral resources to call upon when armed intervention may be required to prevent genocide, rampant injustice or threats to regional or world peace.

One of the important themes of this book has to do with a constructive, but also critical, approach to the foundations of faith, the sacred books and revered traditions. Christians, perhaps, are more used to taking this into account than are Muslims. We live, however, in a world where new technology will not exempt any faith from such scrutiny from both without and within. Such a self-critical view of the tradition is inherent in the Bible itself, and this is an important resource for Christians as they look at themselves, especially regarding their understanding of Islam and the quality of their relationships with their Muslim neighbours. How Muslims deal with criticism from outside and from within is one of the major issues of our day. Very little progress will be made if every critical approach is greeted with accusations of apostasy or blasphemy and attempts are made to suppress freedom of expression. History

has, however, shown that there is another way. Fearless Muslims have called for 'a reconstruction' of Islamic thought itself. They have argued for *ijtihad*, or a large-scale revision of Shariah in the light of contemporary circumstances, or, at the very least, they have pointed to the relationship between reason and revelation and illustrated this by the 'principles of movement' which exist in a number of schools of law in the Islamic world. According to them, such approaches can lead Muslims and Islamic nations towards greater freedom, justice and compassion.

How a critical approach of this kind is allowed to develop will not only determine how Muslim, and rapidly Islamicising, societies will organise themselves around ideas like democracy, the rule of law and equality, but also how Muslim minorities will find a way of 'being at home' in Western and non-Western countries where the majority is not Muslim.

Christian mission will, it is to be hoped, continue to focus on service, dialogue and witness, but, increasingly, advocacy of fundamental freedoms will be recognised as a significant part of Christian engagement with Islam and with Muslims. People should be free to believe, to worship, to express their beliefs and to change them, if they wish. The good news of Jesus Christ will have to continue being presented in ways that are not seen as alien but, at the same time, the challenge of the gospel regarding changed lives and transformed societies cannot be forgotten.

The editors have put us in their debt by bringing together the diverse matters that were addressed in the Occasional Papers of the CIS and much else besides. What they have produced will be an important resource for me and, I hope, for many others.

Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

7/7	7 July 2005
9/11	11 September 2001
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AFIC	Australian Federation of Islamic Councils
AFP	Australian Federal Police
ASIO	Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BNP	British National Party
CAIR	Council on American-Islamic Relations
CCBI	Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland
CEC	Conference of European Churches
CIS	Centre for Islamic Studies and Muslim-Christian Relations (London School of Theology)
CPA	Christian People's Alliance
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service (UK)
CUP	Cambridge University Press
EA	Evangelical Alliance
EDL	English Defence League
EMC	European Muslim Charter
<i>EMQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Missions Quarterly</i>
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IBMR</i>	<i>International Bulletin of Missionary Research</i>
<i>IJFM</i>	<i>International Journal of Frontier Missions</i>
IM	Insider Movement
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IVP	Inter-Varsity Press
KAS	Konrad Adenaur Stiftung
MBB	Muslim Background Believers

MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
NIV	Holy Bible, New International Version
Ofcom	Office of Communications (UK)
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
OIRR	Office of Inter-Religious Relations
OT	Old Testament
OUP	Oxford University Press
PAS	Parti Islam SeMalaysia
PBUH	'Peace be upon him'
RLC	Religious Liberty Commission
SOS	Supporters of Shariah
TJ	Tablighi Jamaat
SPCK	Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UIDHR	Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
WCC	World Council of Churches
WEA	World Evangelical Alliance
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

INTRODUCTION

The original intention in preparing this volume was to collate into book form the series of annual Occasional Papers published by the London School of Theology Centre for Islamic Studies and Muslim-Christian Relations (CIS) between 1999 and 2009. That series of Occasional Papers was produced during the periods of Directorship of the CIS by Professor Peter Riddell (1996–2007) and Dr John Azumah (2008–11).

The annual CIS Occasional Papers do indeed provide the core of this book.¹ Nevertheless, several additional chapters were commissioned² to plug gaps, as it were, while several of the original Occasional Papers were not included in this volume.

The subtitle *Talking Points* signifies a potential for diverse views and even active disagreement. Such differences can express themselves both between Christians and Muslims, as well as among Christians themselves. The topics contained in this volume are controversial; black and white answers are rarely available in such areas of discussion. To this end we have tried to incorporate a range of papers that present varied viewpoints. The contributors would not be unanimous regarding views presented in this volume. Indeed, the editors disagree both with some sentiments of some papers, and also at times between themselves. Nevertheless, we are committed to airing a variety of views in order to stimulate discussion and debate.

Hopefully the resulting ‘conversation’ among the papers will provide many points of connection for a wide readership. To facilitate the dialogue, a number of the chapters have been grouped in pairs, where the topics lend themselves to a conversation between the two members of the pair.

All the contributors are practising Christians. Some readers may see this as a weakness, preferring a format that includes both Christian and Muslim authors. Such mixed volumes certainly have their place. But it is also important that both Christians and Muslims discuss the relationship between the two faiths within their own communities. This volume is designed with that in mind. To that end it is likely that the volume will primarily attract a Christian audience.

The volume is divided into three main sections. Part One chapters address foundational themes. This could of course constitute a significant volume on its own. Space only allows us to deal with four macro themes that crop up repeatedly in the context of Christian-Muslim interaction: the issue of

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1. Cf. chapters by Riddell, Cotterell, Lane, Thorneycroft, Cox & Marks, Redman, O’Mahony, Tidball and Nickel.
2. Cf. chapters by Small, Azumah, Power and Oliver-Dee.

contextualisation, scripture and textual variation, holy war and jihad, and diversity among Muslims.

Dr John Azumah leads off by giving attention to one of the most contentious debates preoccupying Christian missionaries to Islam today: the Insider Movement (IM). Dr Azumah surveys the debates about missiological methods that led to the emergence of the IM. He then assesses the movement, giving ample voice to both sides of the passionate debate, offering his own unique perspectives as a former Muslim involved in Christian thinking. Dr Azumah's conclusions open up important debates that all Christians engaging with Islam would do well to consider.

Dr Keith Small follows with a paper showing rigorous scholarship and helpful application. His chapter equips Christians to answer the charge from some Muslims of textual corruption of the extant Bible. Dr Small undertakes a careful comparative study of the textual history of both the New Testament and the Qur'an. He challenges some fundamental dogmas in the process, while at the same time enhancing the possibility for Christian-Muslim understanding.

The next two chapters function as a pair. In the first, Dr Peter Cotterell surveys the categories of war and the uniqueness of the terrorism phenomenon in the early 21st century. He considers various understandings of jihad in Islamic scripture and history, by consulting key Islamic writers and texts, in order to assess whether the civilian-targeted terrorism of the early 21st century can be reconciled with Islamic jihad.

Professor Tony Lane carries this theme further. He surveys the Bible and Christian history in order to identify views and practices relating to war. In the process he addresses the concepts of holy war, just war and pacifism, and argues that some justification for all can be found in Christian history and scripture.

In the fifth and final chapter in Part One, Professor Peter Riddell draws on wide-ranging Muslim voices to demonstrate the nature of diversity among Muslims with regard to key issues of the modern world. He uncovers the struggle taking place between literalist and moderniser Muslims to define Islam for the masses. This chapter also contributes to challenging two stereotypes: first that all Muslims are radicals, and second that Islam is a religion of peace.

The six chapters in Part Two address the encounter between Islam and the West, and associated topics.

The first two chapters appear as a pair. First, Baroness Caroline Cox and Dr John Marks identify the stark distinction between Western scholarly traditions, expressed in the academic mode, and an ideological mode which has come to characterise both Traditional Islamic and Marxist societies. Complementing this approach, lawyer Charlotte Thorneycroft explains the emergence and scope of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), in the process responding to cultural relativists who challenge its universal

relevance. She then measures traditional Shariah Law against the UDHR, finding the former wanting in various key areas relating to the UDHR's call for equality: the status of women, non-Muslims, apostasy and slavery.

Similarly, the next two papers appear as a pair. Dr John Azumah provides a challenging chapter in two parts. He initially undertakes a critique of the Islamophobia phenomenon, subjecting Western (especially British) society, as well as Christians, to a searching critique. He then examines the broader context, explaining the Islamophobia phenomenon and reminding readers that stereotyping is a two-way process, as well as offering guidance for formulating a Christian response.

Gerry Redman then takes the established criteria for measuring Islamophobia and applies them to Muslim media comment to assess the phenomenon of Westophobia and Christophobia among Muslims. He indicates several important caveats at the outset of his discussion, but provides compelling evidence to confirm Dr Azumah's conclusions that negative stereotyping is a two-way phenomenon. In order to be addressed, says Mr Redman, all parties need to take appropriate redemptive measures.

Dr Bernie Power then turns our attention to a particular corner of the West – Australia – where the encounter with Islam is at a relatively early stage, compared with Europe. He surveys the history of Muslim presence in Australia as well as key recent events. He then importantly addresses a number of areas where this encounter will be important for future relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians. In discussing these areas we hear clear echoes from other Western contexts, where similar discussions have taken place. As Australia considers the future relationship between its non-Muslim and Muslim citizens, it will do well to draw lessons from other Western societies such as Britain.

Dr Derek Tidball focuses on the European context by considering the fine balance between unity and diversity in that continent. He surveys the demographic profile of Muslims in Europe, and offers important reflections on how European Christians can respond to a religious landscape around them that is rapidly changing as a result of secularisation and growth in other faiths.

Part Three papers focus more closely in on the church and issues pertaining to the Christian-Muslim relationship.

Professor Peter Riddell considers Christian-Muslim dialogue in the 21st century. His chapter complements Dr Tidball's discussion of societal changes and their effects in Europe in recent decades, and draws in relevant developments elsewhere in the West, considering detailed specific case studies of Christian-Muslim interaction.

The next two chapters address more closely the European context. Anthony O'Mahony shapes the discussion towards the encounter between the church

and Islam, with a focus on Turkey, an aspiring candidate for full membership in the European Union (EU). He casts an eye backwards to earlier centuries when Christianity and Islam at times had a highly interwoven relationship. He then surveys the sometimes troubled history of Christianity in Turkey in the late 19th and 20th centuries in the final Ottoman years and under the Turkish Republic, a period which saw a sizeable exodus of Christians from Turkey. He concludes with a discussion of perceptions of Christians and Christianity in today's Turkey.

In his chapter, Dr Sean Oliver-Dee unpacks Dr Tidball's more macro-level discussion of the European scene by considering some of the detail of Christian-Muslim engagement, both in terms of interfaith dialogue and in terms of both Christian and Muslim inputs to issues of public policy. In this way Dr Oliver-Dee provides a snapshot of the state of Christian-Muslim relations at the end of the first decade of the 21st century.

The final four papers turn their attention to practical considerations in Christian-Muslim interaction, including issues of advocacy, dialogue, and key issues regarding methods of Christian engagement with Muslims.

Dr Peter Cotterell surveys references to apostasy and the consequences across a wide range of Islamic literature, giving particular attention to what he identifies as a core quadrilateral: Qur'an, abrogation, Hadith, and Shariah. He cites living case studies to show that the outlook for Muslims who leave their faith is bleak.

Dr Gordon Nickel focuses attention in his chapter upon the important 'Common Word' dialogue approach from Muslim to Christian religious leaders. This approach has at its centrepiece verse 64 of Qur'an Sura 3. Dr Nickel examines the history of Muslim interpretation of this verse, discovering in the process a difference between traditional Muslim understandings of this verse and the way the verse is being presented by the Common Word Muslim scholars. He also considers diverse responses to the Common Word approach from Christians.

In the final chapter, Dr John Azumah surveys Christian approaches to four faces of Islam: militant Islam, Islam as ideology, anti-Christian polemic and da'wa. He measures his statements throughout against the yardstick of biblical guidelines.

This volume offers a significant number of 'talking points' relating to Christian-Muslims relations. It is unlikely that any single reader will agree with everything presented in this volume. Indeed, that is not the purpose of the work, which is rather intended to air important debates and discussions that have been circulating within Christian and Muslim circles for some time, and thereby to search for answers that might contribute constructively to greater Christian understanding of Christian-Muslim interaction.

John Azumah and Peter Riddell
London and Melbourne

CHAPTER 1

ISLAM AND CONTEXTUALISATION: THE INSIDER MOVEMENT IN ISLAM

John Azumah

Introduction

Over the centuries, Christian missionaries have been baffled by the lack of success in converting Muslims in large numbers to the Christian faith. Muslims appear to be the single most resistant group to Christianity. From India to Africa, missionaries have complained and some become disillusioned that despite their best efforts and dedication, Muslims remain largely resistant to the gospel. Henry Martyn (1781–1812) dedicated seven years of his 31-year life span to ministry among Muslims in India. He preached, learnt the languages and translated the New Testament into Persian and Urdu and supervised its translation into Arabic. But all his efforts were rewarded with only one Muslim convert, Abdul Masih. An Anglican bishop, Timothy Olufosoye, writing about the missionary efforts in The Gambia exclaimed in a report: ‘we’ve toiled all night and caught nothing’, a favourite quotation amongst missionaries like Samuel Zwemer, who spent more than 38 years (1890–1929) as a missionary in Egypt and Saudi Arabia.¹

Naturally, missionaries had to find reasons for the apparent Muslim resistance to the gospel. Several reasons deduced over the years ranged from the fact that Christianity is too sublime and sophisticated for ‘untutored’ minds while Islam, being a sensual and materialistic religion, appealed to less unsophisticated minds.² For others, especially local Christian elites, the failure of Christian missions had to do with the negative and judgemental

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1. Martha T. Frederiks, *We Have Toiled All Night: Christianity in The Gambia 1456–2000*, PhD Thesis, University of Utrecht, 2003.
2. A.P. Atterbury, *Islam in Africa*, G.P. Putnam’s Son, New York, 1899, pp. 166–9.

attitudes adopted by Western missionaries towards local culture and world views. ‘Contextualisation’, ‘indigenisation’, ‘translation’ or ‘inculturation’ have since been identified missiological imperatives for the propagation of the gospel in non-Western cultures. The main purpose is first, to divest the gospel of the cultural trappings of the missionary (in most cases Western), and second,

to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture.³

Contextualisation became the *casus belli* of post-missionary African Christian scholarship.⁴

Islam and contextualisation

First intentional attempts at contextualising the gospel in an Islamic cultural setting have been traced back to an Indonesian Muslim convert by the name of Sadrach Surapranata (d. 1928). Sadrach’s innovations were roundly condemned by the Dutch Reformed missionaries who referred to his movement as ‘a new sect of Islam with a Christian color’ and denounced Sadrach himself as ‘the rock of sin’.⁵ However, from the early 1980s, Christian missionaries working amongst Muslims in Asia started experimenting with contextualisation. In the process, missionaries came to the realisation that divesting Christianity of its Western cultural trappings was as important as clothing it in local cultural ones, if not more so.

This came about as it dawned upon missionaries that in the minds of many Muslims, the term ‘Christian’ or ‘Christianity’ is not just synonymous with the West and the US, but the worst parts of these world views – for example, immorality, pornography, and skimpy and revealing dresses. For many Muslims, to become a Christian is to become a Westerner and to convert to Christianity amounts to acquiring a licence for immorality. Cultural

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3. Darrell L. Whiteman, ‘Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research (IBMR)*, January 1997, p. 2.
 4. African Christian writers who have championed this trend include E. Bolaji-Idowu, *Oludumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, Longman, London, 1962; J.S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), London, 1982; P. Turkson & F. Wijsen (eds), *Inculturation: Abide by the Otherness of Africa and the Africans*, Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H. Kok, Kampen, 1994; Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, among many others. Evangelical Christians were up in arms against the trend and Billy Graham wrote the preface to Byang H. Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Evangel Publishing House, Nairobi, 1975), condemning it.
 5. Phil Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism: Contemporary Approaches to Contextualization*, Gabriel Publishing, Waynesboro GA, 2003, pp. 59–61.

prejudices were thus identified as the main obstacles in Muslim evangelism even more than doctrinal differences and prejudices. In addition to the image problem, there is the issue of identity. For many Muslims, Islam is not just a faith for personal choice and expression, but a way of life and an integral part of culture and history that has shaped and gives meaning to their individual and collective identities. One Muslim Background Believer (MBB) is reported to have said, ‘our traditions are like a snail shell. If you find a snail outside its shell, it’s dead.’

C1 to C6 spectrum

In the 1990s, John Travis, a US missionary with many years experience working with Muslims in Asia, devised what has become known as the C1 to C6 scale, or spectrum, described in Table 1, as a way of describing the different levels of contextualisations in Muslim lands.⁶

C5 or Insider Movement

Of the above, the C5 model, also referred to as the ‘Insider Movement’, has become the most contentious in missiological circles. IMs are defined as ‘popular movements to Christ that bypass formal and explicit expression of the Christian religion’.⁷ An ‘insider’ is defined as ‘one who embraces Jesus, yet remains as a light in his “*oikos*” (household) so that as many as possible might be saved (Mt 5:15)’.⁸ Insiders are therefore encouraged or ‘urged’ to remain within the Muslim community and retain their socio-religious identity as Muslims.⁹ They regard Jesus as Lord and Saviour but remain ‘culturally’, ‘socially’, ‘religiously’, ‘officially’ and ‘legally’ (these are the different terms used by the advocates) Muslim. They observe all the rituals of Islam, revere and recite the Qur’an as the greatest of four revealed books and regard Muhammad as prophet. Some insiders require missionaries to adopt Muslim names, attend mosque worship, observe all the pillars but keep their Christian theology (secretly). John Travis admits that such practices are not in keeping with the spirit of the IM.

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6. John Travis (a pseudonym), ‘The C1 to C6 spectrum: a practical tool for defining six types of “Christ-centered Communities” (“C”) found in the Muslim context’, *Evangelical Mission Quarterly (EMQ)*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1998, pp. 407–8.
7. David Garrison, ‘Church planting movements vs insider movements: Missiological realities vs mythological speculations’, *International Journal of Frontier Missions (IJFM)*, vol. 21, 2004, p. 151.
8. Jay Smith, ‘An assessment of the insider’s principle paradigms’, Project North Africa, viewed June 2009, projectna.com/2009/05/the-insider-movement.html. In order to avoid misrepresentation, Jay asked the proponents of the Insider Movement to frame the issues for him to assess.
9. J. Travis, ‘Must all Muslims leave “Islam” to follow Jesus?’, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly (EMQ)*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1998, p. 413.

Table 1: C1 to C6 spectrum of contextualisation in Muslim lands

<p>C1 Model Traditional church using foreign language and cultural forms in worship.</p>	<p>Christian churches in Muslim countries that exist as islands, removed from the culture. Christians exist as an ethnic/religious other, non-indigenes or immigrants. Many reflect Western culture.</p>
<p>C2 Model Traditional church using indigenous language.</p>	<p>Essentially the same as C1 except for language. Though local language is used, religious vocabulary remains distinctively 'Christian'.</p>
<p>C3 Model Contextualised Christ-centred communities using local language and religiously neutral cultural forms.</p>	<p>Styles of worship, dress, music, etc. are loosely from the local culture. Local rituals and traditions, if used, are purged of religious elements. The aim is to reduce foreignness of the gospel and the church by contextualising biblically permissible cultural forms. Majority are from Muslim background but call themselves Christian.</p>
<p>C4 Model Contextualised Christ-centred communities using local language and biblically permissible cultural and Islamic forms.</p>	<p>Similar to C3 except believers worship looks like Muslim worship, they keep the fast, avoid pork and alcohol, use Islamic terms and dress code. Community is almost entirely of Muslim background. Though highly contextualised, believers are not seen as Muslims but don't call themselves Christians either. They are 'followers of Isa Al-Masih', Jesus the Messiah.</p>
<p>C5 Model Christ-centred communities of 'Messianic Muslims' who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour.</p>	<p>Believers remain legally and socially Muslim. Aspects of Islam incompatible with the Bible are rejected or reinterpreted. Believers may observe all five pillars. C5 believers are viewed as Muslims by the Muslim community and refer to themselves as Muslims who follow Isa the Messiah.</p>
<p>C6 Model Small Christ-centred communities of secret/underground believers.</p>	<p>Due to fear, isolation, or threat of extreme government or legal action or communal revulsion and rage, ostracism and violent death in some cases, C6 believers keep their faith in secret, worship individually or meet in small groups in secret.</p>

In addition to the observance of the pillars of Islam, insiders form what they refer to as 'Christ-centred fellowships' in which they study the Bible, pray, and celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper. Jonas Jørgensen describes a typical meeting of one such group known as Jesus Imandars or 'those faithful to Jesus' in Dhaka, Bangladesh.¹⁰ The meetings are held in late afternoons on Fridays where mats rather than furniture are used. The meeting starts with a song (local folk song or translation of Western classical hymn); recitations from the psalms and epistles are done from a Bengali translation of the Bible which is placed on a wooden bookstand in veneration. The leader known as *imam* (prayer leader in Islam) will preach a sermon, which is then followed by common prayers said by individuals in the local language. Communion is celebrated with a reading from 1 Corinthians followed by the sharing of bread and fruit juice devoid of any of the colourful traditional Christian liturgical formulae. The imandars undergo public baptism 'which is spoken of as *turiqa* (binding) of oneself to Jesus'.¹¹

Theorists of the IM argue that it is an effective strategy which is bringing large numbers of Muslims to faith in Christ not just as individuals but as families and communities. John and Anna Travis claim that 'the largest movement to Christ among Muslims in the world today is C5 in nature, occurring in Asia'.¹² It has to be said, however, that due to the secretive and reclusive nature of the insider approach, statistics are hard to come by and claims of a 'movement' are disputed by missionary scholars with several years of mission experience in Asia. Insider proponents are nevertheless at pains to point out that the movement is the work of God. John and Anna Travis claim that

one way God is moving at this point in salvation history, is by sovereignly drawing Muslims to Himself, revolutionising them spiritually, yet calling them to remain as salt and light in the religious community of their birth.¹³

On that premise, insider theorists say they are only observing and *describing* what God is doing amongst Muslims.

One of the key arguments of insider proponents is that one does not have to change religion or convert out of one's religion of birth in order to be a

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10. Jonas Jørgensen, 'Jesus Imandars and Christ Bhaktas: Report from two field studies of interreligious hermeneutics and identity in globalized Christianity', *IBMR*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2009, pp. 171–2.
 11. *Ibid.* p. 172.
 12. John Travis & Anna Travis, 'Maximizing the Bible!: Glimpses from our context', *Mission Frontiers*, January–February 2006, p. 22.
 13. John Travis & Anna Travis, 'Contextualization among Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists: A focus on insider movements', *Mission Frontiers*, September–October 2005, p. 12.

follower of Christ. John and Anna Travis write that ‘salvation is by grace alone through relationship/allegiance to Jesus Christ. Changing religions is not a prerequisite for nor a guarantee of salvation’.¹⁴ Insiders point to similar phenomena within Hinduism (Yeshu Bhaktas) and Judaism (Messianic Jews). To ask for conversion or change of religion is simply putting an unnecessary stumbling block in the path of Muslims, the majority of whom ‘see Islam as a single fabric weaving together tradition, culture, and customs related to dress, diet, family life, morality, worship, and in some contexts, even economics and politics’.¹⁵

A further argument is that ‘in the Muslim context, the word “Christian” is now largely devoid of its original spiritual meaning in Acts. It now connotes Western culture, war (the Crusades), colonialism and imperialism’. Most continue to associate Christianity with ‘negative aspects of present day Western culture like immodest dress, sexual promiscuity, disrespect of elders, indulgence in alcohol, Hollywood violence, narcotics and pornography’.¹⁶ In search of biblical precedent and warrant for the insider strategy, proponents argue that Jesus never started a new religion, neither did he break from his Jewish culture. Rather, Jesus was the ‘perfect insider’. The arguments goes that Jesus taught in Matthew 5:15 that

New believers should not be extracted from their Muslim families (their ‘Oikos’). Matthew 5:15 says to shine as a light in one’s oikos. The dictum is actually ‘remain in’. The Holy Spirit will tell them some things that are okay. The point is that a believer is uniquely gifted by virtue of bloodline and upbringing to reach those of his natural Oikos. So our desire is to see this natural gifting used for the sake of the Gospel. The goal is for people to be salt and light in their ‘oikos’.¹⁷

The disciples and apostles were all ‘insiders’ because they remained within the synagogues and kept going to the temple for worship. During the Jerusalem Council meeting in Acts 15, after hearing what God was doing amongst the Gentiles, the Apostle James ruled that ‘we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God’ (v. 19).¹⁸ Dudley Woodberry (and many other insider proponents) argue that Paul was an insider and quote the following passage to support their thesis:

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14. Travis & Travis, ‘Contextualization among Muslims’, p. 13.

15. John Travis, ‘Messianic Muslim followers of Isa: A closer look at C5 believers and congregations’, *IJFM*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2000, p. 53.

16. Travis, ‘Messianic Muslim followers’, p. 54.

17. John Travis and other insider leaders, in Jay Smith, ‘An assessment’.

18. See Kevin Higgins, ‘Acts 15 and the insider movements among Muslims: Questions, process, and conclusions’, *IJFM*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2007, pp. 29–40.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law (1 Cor 9:20–21).

Paul commends this model to the church by calling upon the Corinthian believers to 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Cor 11:1).¹⁹ Paul further states in 1 Corinthians 7:20 that 'each of you [should] remain in the condition in which you were called'.

Rebecca Lewis insists, therefore, that

Insider Movements are as old as James of the Jews and Cornelius of the Gentiles. This is *not* [her emphasis] a new phenomenon but a reaffirming of a New Testament pattern.²⁰

All of these, insider theorists argue, point to the fact that change of religion is not only a stumbling block to Muslim seekers, but unbiblical. The biggest concern of insider proponents therefore is 'extraction'. There is no biblical precedent, no theological warrant, neither is it missiologically prudent to extract new believers from their socio-religious and cultural environs.

Assessing the Insider Movement

A survey was conducted in 1995 of 72 key insider leaders. While their responses summarised in Table 2 may not be representative of what many or most members believe, it does indicate what, through a process of discipleship, this form of contextualisation can accomplish.²¹

Assessing the above survey depends largely on which side of the divide one stands. As far as insider theorists are concerned, we should give thanks to God for the fact that the bucket is half full. Critics focus on the fact that the bucket is half empty. The important point is that we can all agree that the bucket is not full; but where has there ever been a full bucket? The IM has attracted admiration and warm support from some leading evangelical missiologists as well as suspicion and criticism from others. Amongst the key critics of the IM are Phil Parshall, a leading missiologist and one of the pioneers of contextualisation in Islamic settings in the 20th century; Timothy Tennent, Professor of World Missions at Gordon-Conwell Theological

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19. See J. Dudley Woodberry, 'To the Muslim I became a Muslim?', *IJFM*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2007, p. 23.

20. Rebecca Lewis, 'Sharing the Gospel through open networks', *Mission Frontiers*, January–February, 2006, p. 23.

21. Parshall, *Muslim Evangelism*, pp. 69–70.

Table 2: Results of a 1995 survey of key Insider Movement leaders

The good news is ...	The bad news is ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 76% meet once per week in biblical worship. • 16% meet more than once per week for worship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% continue to attend mosque on Friday. • 31% attend mosque more than once a day, affirming Muhammad as God’s prophet.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 66% read or listen to the Gospels daily. • 21% read or listen to the Gospels weekly. • None study the Koran since they do not know Arabic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96% say there are four heavenly books (standard Muslim belief). • 66% say the Koran is the greatest of the four.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 55% say God is Father, Son, and Spirit. • 97% say Jesus is the only way of salvation. • 93% say Allah loves and forgives because Jesus gave His life for me. • 100% say people can be saved from evil spirits by faith in Jesus. • 97% say Muhammad’s prayers do not save them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45% do not affirm God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. • 45% feel peace or close to Allah when listening to the reading of the Koran (even though they do not understand Arabic).

Seminary; Gary Corwin, Associate Editor of the *Evangelical Quarterly*; as well as John Piper, Bill Nikides and others.

The title of Phil Parshall’s first article on the IM sums up his concerns: ‘Danger!’²² The main concern of Parshall, a strong advocate of contextualisation in Muslim contexts and chief advocate for the C4 model, is that the C5ers have crossed the line of legitimate contextualisation into dangerous syncretism. He sums up:

YES to C5 as a starting point, but always with a laser beam focus on going down the scale to C4 within an appropriate timeframe. And always with a focus on keeping MBBs maximally within their own sociological structures.²³

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 22. Phil Parshall, ‘Danger! New directions in contextualization’, *EMQ*, vol. 34, no. 4, 1998, pp. 404–10.
 23. See Parshall’s response in ‘Four responses to Timothy C. Tennent’s “Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 ‘High Spectrum’ Contextualization”, *IJFM*, vol. 23, no. 3, 2006, p. 125, and ‘Danger!’, *EMQ*.

Tennent on his part identifies the main difficulty with the IM as ecclesiological. He states that he does not question the *description* of IMs but its *prescription* as a missiological strategy. The question from Tennent's point of view is: 'Can a Hindu or a Muslim ... come to Jesus Christ, accept him as Lord and Saviour, and not unite with the visible church?'²⁴ Tennent answers the question by explaining that

We worship a triune God who is, by nature, a relational God. He made his relational nature fully public in the incarnation of his Son, which is reflected in the life of the church, which in turn is called his body. Our very doctrine of Christ thus demands that all believers, in all times, in all parts of the globe must seek – whenever possible – to form themselves into visible communities of faith. The visible communities may have to meet in catacombs or suffer great persecution or undergo cultural misunderstanding, as did the primitive church, but the early church did not forsake the assembling of themselves together. They understand that biblical conversion, by definition, implies community.²⁵

Tennent is of the view that the exegesis of the insiders is flawed and agrees with Parshall that C5 should at best be a transitory category with believers moving into C4 over time. By way of response, John and Anna Travis concede that they

will not contend that C5 is the best or only thing God is doing in the Muslim world today; indeed God is bringing Muslims to Himself in a great diversity of ways, some of which we may only understand in eternity.²⁶

In their earlier writings, however, insider proponents confused the issues by giving the impression that they were not just describing a phenomenon but prescribing a strategy. John Travis presented the C5 model as a strategy to which 'much of our missiological energy should be devoted to seeking a path whereby Muslims can remain Muslims, yet live as true followers of the Lord Jesus'.²⁷ Two things implicit in this quote are as follows: first, that C5 is a path brought about by the 'missiological energy' of the theorists. Secondly, it seems the retention of their religious identity as *Muslims* is the principal motivation rather than Muslims becoming followers of Jesus.

Gary Corwin and Bill Nikides are more forthright and scathing in their criticisms. Both see the C5 model as a Western, mainly US missiological

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24. Timothy Tennent, 'The challenge of churchless Christianity: An evangelical assessment', *IBMR*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2005, p. 171.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

26. Travis & Travis, 'Contextualization among Muslims', p. 12.

27. See Travis, 'Must all Muslims leave "Islam"?', pp. 414–15. It is in the same article that he writes of 'urging' new believers to stay within the Muslim community.

construct. For Corwin, the IM is 'more the contextualisation of Western missiology to Western values of success than it is a contextualisation of the gospel to the cultures of those being reached'.²⁸ For his part, Bill Nikides, who has had first-hand encounters and experience with insider missionaries, is in no doubt that

C5 is a reflection of intentional western missiology, western training, and often a great deal of western money. Mission agencies expend a great deal of effort to promote 'Insider' methods ... some I have had personal contact with use financial incentives to keep insiders inside. Others counsel less matured C5ers not to leave, even when they desire to or their conscience dictates that they must ... Missionaries and C5 national leaders have used seemingly every means (seniority, theology and sometimes money) to keep believers from leaving C5. C5ers are often not encouraged to attend seminars or other forums where alternative understandings might be suggested. Quarantine is imposed to prevent contamination of the movement.²⁹

It has to be said that in talking about the IM, one has to avoid sweeping generalisations, as these can be unhelpful and misleading. The IM is a very fluid phenomenon with practices and content of belief differing from group to group, context to context and amongst individuals within the same group. The same differences of opinion exist amongst Western missionaries who have become spokespersons and strong advocates of the insider approach. There are also differences in what Western theorists and the leadership say and what the practitioners themselves believe. In his studies of the Jesus Imandars, Jørgensen points out aspects of their beliefs that significantly depart from the characterisation given in the C5 model above. For instance, while the imandars agreed on mosque visits, they remained divided as to whether they identified themselves as Muslim. Roughly half said they no longer identified themselves as Muslim and the other half insisted that 'identifying oneself as Muslim is significant, even if it takes some historical and textual exegesis' of what that actually means.³⁰

Clarifications, questions and observations

Many of the observers of the IM have rightly pointed out that the issue at stake is not about contextualisation per se. Jørgensen makes the point that the debate revolves on the axis of 'authentic contextualisation' and

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28. Gary Corwin, 'Insider movement and outsider missiology', *EMQ*, vol. 42, 2006, p. 11.

29. Bill Nikides, 'Evaluating "insider movements": C5 (Messianic Muslims)', *St Francis Magazine*, no. 4, 21 January 2006, viewed 10 June 2009, www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/content/view/67/38/.

30. Jørgensen, 'Jesus Imandars', p. 172.

‘illegitimate syncretism’.³¹ The majority of observers are agreed on the need for contextualisation or inculturation. And one has to say that this near unanimity was not arrived at through systematic doctrinal formulations; rather, it was forced upon received Western orthodoxy by local experiences and expressions of the Christian faith in its encounter and interaction with different cultures around the world. One of the practices adopted by early Western missionaries in my country Ghana back in the 19th century was what became known locally as the *saalem* strategy. This was a strategy of extracting new believers and quarantining them away from the wider community to prevent contamination from the wider cultural milieu which was roundly demonised.

Needless to say this was as imperialistic as it was paternalistic, and it failed miserably as a missiological strategy. As an African reading about IMs and the involvement of Western missionaries, the passionate defence and fierce criticisms, all by Westerners, one wonders: is this the same old wine of paternalism and imperialism in new wine skins? The IM sounds to me like reverse *saalem*. An attempt by missionaries to quarantine new believers, only that this time it is out of fear of ‘contamination’ from the missionary’s own cultures! The present situation, where Western missionaries (outsiders) appear to be arrogating to themselves the powers to determine what they think is good for local people from within their own local cultures, is as flawed and objectionable as the past procedure, where Western missionaries gave the impression to indigenous believers that the Western culture was conterminous with the gospel and its natural harbinger. As David Bosch rightly observes,

In inculturation ... the two primary agents are the Holy Spirit and the local community, particularly the laity. Neither the missionary, nor the hierarchy, nor the magisterium controls the process ... Missionaries no longer go with a kind of Peace Corps mentality for the purpose of ‘doing good’. They no longer participate as the ones with who have all the answers but are learners like everyone else. The *padre* becomes *compadre*.³²

I share Tennent’s and others concerns about insider exegetical conclusions and their theological assumptions. On the issue of ecclesiology, insiders take a rather dim, pessimistic and dismissive view of the church, based upon the bad press that Christians, Christianity and the church are widely given in Muslim societies. One also wonders how much Western guilt complex and

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31. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

32. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Books, New York, 1991, p. 453.

the self-deprecation that has come to characterise certain sections of Western academia has to do with the rather dim view of the church and Christianity espoused in insider ecclesiology. One is not by any stretch of the imagination saying that there are no problems with the church. Neither are we in denial of the fact that Muslims generally have negative and stereotypical views of Christians and Christianity just as Christians do with Islam and Muslims. The problem is the way Muslim stereotypical views of Christians, Christianity and the Church are upheld and presented by insiders as fact and a justification for a revised ecclesiology.

The question is, what should form the basis of our ecclesiology and missiology? Muslim misperceptions or biblical and apostolic teaching? As noted above, there are many problems with the church and with institutional Christianity. Nevertheless, our understanding of the church as the body of Christ should be as follows: that the church – like the body of Christ hanging on the cross – may be bartered, bruised, broken and bleeding from internal division, strife and corruption. But even in that state, like the body of Christ on the cross, the church still radiates and reflects the glory and power of God. It was as Jesus hung on the cross, crucified, bleeding and broken, that the tough military guards and avowed enemies put on guard to make sure he died on the cross, looked at him and cried out ‘Truly this man was God’s son’ (Mt 27:54). Similarly, the church may be getting all the bad press in Muslim societies around the world, but empirical research shows that a large percentage of Muslims coming to faith in Christ around the world, are doing so as a result of direct influence of the witness of Christian lifestyles.³³

Polls conducted by the Pew Foundation in 2006 on global Muslim attitudes towards Christians cited by Philip Jenkins in his book, *God’s Continent*, reveal that in majority Muslim countries, small minorities held positive views of Christians. The most negative views towards Christians were found in Turkey and Pakistan. However, in Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim nation, 64% held favourable views about Christians. Amongst Muslims living in Western Europe, who experience Western immorality first hand, overwhelming majorities held favourable views about Christians: 91% in France, 82% in Spain, 71% in Britain and 69% in Germany.³⁴

In addition to taking a dim view of the church based on Muslim stereotypes, insiders reject Christian traditions as stumbling blocks to the salvation of Muslims. Travis writes:

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33. David Greenlee, *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way: Journeys of Faith*, Authentic Media, Milton Keynes, 2005.

34. Philip Jenkins, *God’s Continent: Christianity, Islam and Europe’s Religious Crisis*, OUP, Oxford, 2007, p. 20.

Christian traditions and creeds ARE later accretions by definition ... The point is that the Bible is our standard and not the traditions. Let the Bible be the creed and source of theology, rather than extra-Biblical terms like 'trinity', which are part of Christian denominations. Muslims don't have to go through Christianity, but Christ alone.³⁵

Travis makes an important point that this writer shares, that is, that no theology is eternal. I share in the view that orthodoxy is about the last man standing, and not necessarily about religious truth, as received wisdom in Western theology propounds. The doctrinal statements and creeds that have come down to us are *answers* to specific questions that were raised within specific historical and cultural contexts. And there has never been *one* Western theology but *theologies*.³⁶ As African, Asian and Latin American theologians have demonstrated, the church in the majority world reserves the right not only to self-governance, self-supporting and self-propagating, but also self-theologising. The reason is that local Christians around the world are confronted with different sets of questions and cannot afford to simply cut and paste answers from the past.

This does not on the other hand mean that the creeds and traditions are of no contemporary value. As an African Christian, I would like to believe that while the creeds and traditions should not act as the ultimate touchstones for African theology, they should serve as vital signposts in African self-theologising. Self-theologising and inculturation for that matter in any context should be carried out in dialogue with those from other contexts. This is what Bosch refers to as 'interculturalisation', where all theologies need one another to 'challenge, enrich and invigorate each other'.³⁷ I therefore take exception to the *sola scriptura* propounded by insider advocates. In taking that path, insiders are not only sweeping aside centuries of traditions and church history, but are also denying the *one, holy, catholic* and *apostolic* nature of the church. Even more importantly, the insistence to use only the Bible as the source of theology and disregard tradition shows a lack of appreciation of the fact that the Bible itself is a product of a tradition.

Insider theorists cite Acts 15 and Peter's counsel to the Jerusalem Council 'not [to] make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God' (Acts 15:19, NIV), to support their own arguments for giving Muslims coming to faith in Christ blank cheques to make their own decisions in doctrinal, moral and ethical matters quarantined from the apostolic traditions, Western Christian traditions as well as the local Christian community. Answering the question

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35. John Travis and other insider leaders, in Jay Smith, in 'An assessment'.

36. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 452–5.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 455–6.

whether there is anything at all in Islamic culture that Muslims coming to faith in Christ will have to give up, Kevin Higgins thinks that

In the Islamic context, the issue of concessions might take the opposite form from the one in Acts. Instead of asking Muslim believers to make concessions in matters of food for the sake of unity, it would seem more natural to ask the Christian background believers to make concessions regarding pork and *halal* foods. Other areas might include modesty in dress among females, separation of the sexes in some meetings, etc.³⁸

The apparent wholesale endorsement of Islamic socio-religious and cultural forms fails to take seriously the fact that all cultures are affected by sin and for that reason stand in need of redemption by the gospel. Islamic culture and law in particular has oppressive and dehumanising teaching on women and non-Muslims. To argue for Muslim women to remain in the condition or state in which they are in Islam after coming to faith in Christ is like telling African American Christians during the civil rights movements in the US or Black South African Christians in Apartheid South Africa that biblical teaching required them to remain in their condition. Apart from the oppressive and in some cases downright demonic tendencies inherent in all cultures, inculturation

suggests a *double movement*: there is at once inculturation of Christianity and Christianisation of culture. The gospel must remain Good News while becoming, up to a certain point, a cultural phenomenon.³⁹

Andrew Walls, a fervent and articulate proponent of inculturation, argues that along with the indigenising principle which makes the gospel to ‘feel at home’ in every culture and the new believer to ‘feel at home’ in the church, there is also the ‘pilgrim principle’ which whispers to the new believer that

He has no abiding city and warns him that to be faithful to Christ will put him out of step with his society; for that society never existed, in East or West, ancient time or modern, which could absorb the word of Christ painlessly into its system.⁴⁰

Lamin Sanneh on his part sees it as

the process whereby the Christian message is appropriated into existing local frameworks but still remains recognizably Christian, much like what the Greeks in places like Alexandria, Antioch, Athens and Ephesus did with the Jewish heritage of Jesus.⁴¹

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38. Kevin Higgins, ‘Acts 15 and the insider movements’, p. 35.

39. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 454.

40. Andrew Walls, ‘The gospel as the prisoner and liberator of culture’, *Missionalia*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1982, pp. 98–9.

41. Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 2003, p. 44.

While the concern about extraction is a valid one, insiders seem to be missing the point in some ways. The challenge facing Muslims coming to faith in Christ around the world has more to do with the *expulsion* by biological families and the wider Muslim community than extraction by the Christian community. More sadly, many MBBs find themselves rejected by their adopted family, the church. It is the challenge of this double rejection that needs to be addressed as part of discipleship and pastoral care for believers. This is exactly the experience that Jesus and the early disciples went through. Jesus and the early disciples were not extracted but rather expelled out of the synagogues and temple by their own Jewish communities. This is where the pilgrim principle kicks in, without which Christianity might have at best survived only as a heretical Jewish cult or sect.

The question of identity

Another important point made by insider proponents is that of identity. Muslims want to follow Christ but they don't want to do that as pseudo-Westerners. They want to retain the Muslim identity. Mazhar Mallouhi, an Arab Syrian and a 'Muslim follower of Jesus' writes:

A Muslim follower of Jesus is someone, like me, who comes from a Muslim family and chooses to maintain his or her culture after being irretrievably transformed by the saving power of our Lord. Being born in a Muslim family automatically makes one a Muslim and part of the Muslim community. I was born a Muslim, not a Hindu nor a Christian nor a Jew. I am a part of the Muslim community even if I do not practice or believe all of it. But the day I reject it outright, I disavow myself of my family, my community, and my people ...

Here is something that most people in the West may not understand: Islam is the blanket with which my mother wrapped me when she nursed me and sang to me and prayed over me. I imbibed aspects of Islam with my mother's milk. I inherited Islam from my parents and it was the cradle which held me until I found Christ. Islam is my mother ...

I am a Muslim follower of Jesus because I was born into a Muslim context and I don't wish to reject my heritage. Islam is my heritage and Christ is my inheritance.⁴²

This passionate plea for acceptance and respect of other cultures and identities has to be taken seriously. Thoughtful Christians couldn't agree more with Mallouhi on the need to be Christian without sacrificing one's

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42. Mazhar Mallouhi, 'A Muslim follower of Jesus', The Global Conversation, December 2009, viewed 3 November 2011, www.christianitytoday.com/globalconversation/december2009/response4.html?start=1.

roots. The issue, however, is to what extent one can remain *legally* Muslim and follow the Jesus of the New Testament? In Islam God reveals his will and not himself as in Christianity. Muhammad, the ‘illiterate’ Prophet, is the equivalent of the Virgin Mary in Christianity, through whom God revealed his will now contained in the Qur’an, explained and expanded in the Sunnah and delineated in detail in the Shariah or Islamic Law. Law therefore occupies a central place in Islam as theology does in Christianity. Law is the main identity marker in Islam, and every Muslim has to subscribe to one school of law (*madhab*) or the other. To be legally Muslim therefore means to be *totally* Muslim: believing in all the articles of faith, observing all the pillars and submitting to the legal and ethical dictates of one’s *madhab*.

The first pillar of Islam, the *shahada* (witness/creed) is regarded in Islam as the most fundamental marker of Muslim identity. Of all the pillars it is considered the most essential and runs as follows: ‘I bear witness/testify that there is no god but God/Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of God’. In his study of the Jesus Imandars, Jørgensen notes that when it comes to collective confession of the *shahada* during Muslim liturgical worship in the mosque, some imandars stop after the first half of the creed. ‘Instead of adding “Muhammad is the Prophet of God,” they silently add “Jesus is the Spirit of God.”’⁴³ Joseph Cumming rightly comments that ‘For the overwhelming majority of Muslims, the prophethood of Muhammad is non-negotiably essential to Muslim identity’.⁴⁴ If this is the case, can Muslim followers of Jesus still claim to be Muslim when they rephrase or remain silent on the second half of the *shahada*? Jørgensen concludes from his study of the Jesus Imandars that ‘the notion of Jesus being superior to Muhammad’ and their interpretation of Jesus’ death as ‘gift and sacrifice ... ultimately places the imandars outside the Islamic theological universe’.⁴⁵

Concluding observations

Reading about the IM in Islam, one is forced to wonder whether the phenomenon being described is really new in Islam? Is the IM a new way of Muslims coming to faith in Christ or localised manifestations of Islamic spirituality? That Jesus is highly venerated in mystical and popular Islam is a well-established fact.⁴⁶ Similarly, that several individual Muslims have held startlingly ‘Christian’ views about Jesus throughout Muslim history is also a

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43. Jørgensen, ‘Jesus Imandars’, p. 172.

44. Joseph Cumming, ‘Muslim followers of Jesus?’, The Global Conversation, December 2009, viewed 3 November 2011, www.christianitytoday.com/globalconversation/december2009/.

45. Jørgensen, ‘Jesus Imandars’, p. 172.

46. See Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2001.

well-established fact. And there is no shortage of Islamic groups, ranging from rationalists to mystics, harbouring and expressing Christological views that are out of step with 'orthodox' or mainstream Islamic teaching. As far back as the 8th century, a fringe faction of the Mutazilites, known as the rationalists of Islam, held views about Jesus as Lord who was above Muhammad. They apparently believed that

Christ is He who created the world, and He is the Lord of the first and last things, and He will be the reckoner for the people on the resurrection day, and he will be revealed to them; and it is He to whom the Prophet referred when he said, 'Ye shall see your Lord as ye see the moon.'⁴⁷

Into the 20th century, Turkish Muslims used crosses and other Christian icons for healing purposes. In the rural areas Muslim parents presented their children to Christian priests for baptism to ensure health and wellbeing. As late as 1912, a US archaeologist reported witnessing Muslims asking for baptism for the children as a form of a charm from all parts of Syria and Palestine.⁴⁸ The 'Alawis who are mainly found in Syria conduct a religious service which includes 'a mass-like ceremony, with a blessing, if not consecration, of species of communion, and even includes reference to "body and blood" which are "eternal life"⁴⁹ The Bektashis of Turkey is another group that has incorporated similar Christian elements into their rites, including celibacy.

Several Muslim mystics and theologians over the centuries across the Muslim world have made very daring claims about Jesus and always held him in the highest esteem. A leading Malian Muslim mystic/theologian, Amadou Hampate Ba (d. 1991) taught of a 'mysterious link which appears between the Qur'anic name of Jesus and the name by which God has named himself'. He then makes the following submission:

Whoever is enlightened by this secret stops being amazed when he hears that Jesus participates, in a certain way, in the Essence of the Divine Being. Are not the Word and the Spirit of a being inevitably a part of him? ... I could, without trouble, without prejudice or fear, set myself to listen to the Christian Path and to appreciate, for example, the depth of the Gospel according to John, notably in the first three verses of its prologue: 'In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with

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47. Laurence E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia: From the Time of Muhammad till the Fourteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press (CUP), Cambridge, 1933, p. 130.

48. Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – and How It Died*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York, 2008, pp. 204–5.

49. Cyril Glasse, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, Harper & Row Publications, New York, 1989, p. 31.

God, the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, without him nothing came to be'.⁵⁰

The point is that calling Jesus Lord, acknowledging his divinity and observing Christian rituals is not a new phenomenon in Islam. Such eclecticism is an integral part of mystical and folk Islam. Jørgensen's concluding observation of the imandars is instructive:

It is clear that [their] conceptualization of Jesus' significance to a large degree has counterparts in popular Bangladeshi Islam: the notion of prophethood, intercession, spiritual power, moral innocence, and mediation by a *pir* of the divine. For the imandars, to become 'faithful' refers to an Islamic theological virtue, and to become a Jesus imandar is a Bengali style of religiosity – but it has a Christian subject matter.⁵¹

Common characteristics amongst such groups include secrecy. All regard themselves as 'Muslims', they hold their own religious meetings in addition to attending mosque worship, the vast majority of the Muslim population tolerate them, while the purists regard them at best as heretics and at worst as apostates. Consequently, many have suffered and continue to suffer persecution for their beliefs. To make this submission is by no means to suggest that God is not working in the Muslim world. It is simply to caution that the IM may not necessarily be 'a new thing' in Islam. This writer also sees the debate around the IM as reflecting an age-old debate within evangelical circles between missionaries who place premium on strategy against theology and theologians who insist on the primacy of theology over strategy.

Having said all that, it is important to make the point that whatever questions we may have or conclusions we arrive at, our attitude should be guided by Jesus' caution to his over-enthusiastic disciples that 'whoever is not against us is for us' (Mk 9:38–40). To the opponents and critics, we must learn to let God be the arbiter in such matters. To the Western theorists and advocates, if the movement is the work of God, we should be careful in putting labels and drawing hasty conclusions on such matters. Theorists of the IM should therefore learn to assume their rightful place also as *outsiders* when it comes to what God is doing in the Muslim world. They should resist the temptation of playing the sheep dogs and guard dogs of God's flock, take their seats amongst other 'outsiders', and observe as God gets about what is God's business! It is of vital importance that we are careful not to be seen to be muddying the waters in which God is fishing.

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50. J.M. Gaudeul, *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*, II: Texts, Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica, Rome, 2000, pp. 158–9.

51. Jørgensen, 'Jesus Imandars', p. 172.