

# Editorial: Muslim Contextualization I

Phil Parshall and I meet in Manila, just a month after he publicly denounced the “C5” concept (also called “Messianic Muslims”) as syncretistic. After reading “The Amazing Diversity of God in Drawing Muslims to Christ” (see the first article) Phil says, “I don’t have any problem with what you have written.” Completely perplexed, I ask, “You don’t? Then why did you label C5 as syncretism?” Later on as we drive through a jungle of jeepney traffic and hash over the details of our apparent disagreement, it soon becomes clear that we are operating from very different definitions of who C5 believers really are.

The so-called “C5 missionaries” whom Phil had met advocate that it is okay to affirm Muhammad as a genuine prophet of God; that Muslim background believers should attend the mosque perpetually; and that Christians should consider legally converting to Islam to win Muslims as Muslims. “This is not C5!” I insist. “According to those who’ve described C5 to me,” Phil replies, “yes it is!” Stuck in a definitional stalemate, we decide to contact John Travis, the architect of the C1–C6 Spectrum (Travis 1998). John responds by email:

*There are few people in the world I respect more than Phil Parshall. He and Julie are wonderful friends and tremendous role models for my wife and me. He has spent decades studying Islam and living among Muslims. I have much to learn. Having said that, Joshua, the way I conceived the C5 category is basically the way you have described it. What makes a particular Muslim “C5” is that he has received Isa (Jesus) as Lord and Savior, meets regularly with other such believers, and yet is still seen as “Muslim” through his or her own eyes, as well as the eyes of fellow Muslims. A C5 believer will certainly have different beliefs from other Muslims (e.g., Isa did die on the cross, Muhammad is not a prophet in the biblical sense, salvation is in Isa al-Masih and not in works). However, C5 believers remain in the Muslim community (i.e., they do not officially become members of a traditional church), and they still participate in Muslim cultural and religious practices—except for those contrary to Scripture. The simple fact is, I know individuals who are truly born again and living for Jesus, yet because of their upbringing, ethnicity, or community, simply see themselves as Muslims who have found salvation in Jesus. I would be hard pressed to say by biblical definitions that they are not part of God’s Kingdom.*

The articles in this feature edition do not attempt to merely save the “C5” term from disrepute, but rather the people, whom the term attempts to describe, who love the Lord Jesus with all their heart. While Phil Parshall’s conclusion about C5 was unfortunately based on erroneous descriptions from alleged “C5 advocates,” each theological and methodological concern Phil raised in his “Danger!” article (1998) is crucially important for us to grapple with as we seek to extend God’s Kingdom in

the Muslim world. Parshall concluded his article with, “Let’s bring the subject out in the open and dialogue together” (1998:410). This Special Edition of the IJFM has purposed to do just that.

Our first article sets today’s C5 Messianic Muslim movement against the backdrop of several rather surprising blessings and assignments from God throughout biblical history. Yet another spectrum is introduced, helping us see that not all Muslims are the same, especially in their attitude toward Islam, and that God is therefore using a variety of approaches all along the C1–C6 Spectrum to draw Muslims to Christ. The implications of accepting or rejecting God’s diversity is discussed, along with the call to unite in cooperation and mutual support amidst varied philosophies of ministry, in order to complete the task of reaching all Muslim peoples with the Gospel.

Parshall is also concerned about C5 believers who sometimes only identify themselves as “Muslims” without immediately articulating their faith in Jesus. In response to this, Bernard Dutch has written a seminal article on the highly complex issue of self-identity among Muslim background believers (MBBs). Dutch’s phenomenal insight into the mind of MBBs comes from many years of experience in one of the world’s largest Muslim countries, where an incredible number of Muslims have already poured into the Kingdom.

## Editorial: Muslim Contextualization I

Stuart Caldwell lays an exegetical foundation for C5 Messianic Muslim communities in his superb exposition of how Jesus modeled contextualized church planting in Samaria. Caldwell further challenges us to seriously rethink how the time-honored metaphor of “church planting” may very well be sending us in the wrong direction. He offers fresh biblical and missiological insights for a powerful alternative.

Jameson and Scalevich show the remarkable biblical similarities between today’s Messianic Muslims and first-century Jewish followers of the Way. The first-hand case studies illustrating each point provide precious insight into how God’s approach to raising up of C5 Messianic Muslim communities is not as new as it may appear.

Rick Brown uncovers the critical biblical texts to help us not only explain Jesus’ ‘Son of God’ and ‘Son of Man’ titles to Muslims effectively, but also to understand it more fully ourselves. His poignant analysis with linguistic implications for contextualized translations will enrich both the missionary in training and the veteran mission practitioner.

John Travis, author of the C1–C6 Spectrum, and Andrew Workman give us an up-close look at C5 through several amazing case studies from where they minister. They also directly address several of Parshall’s concerns, articulating what C5 is, and what it is not.

Finally, Jonathan Culver completes our Special Edition with a fascinating treatment of the remote origins of Islam through the Ishmael promises. Culver then explores the contextual implications of God’s promise to Abraham for the worldwide Muslim community, both now and in the eschatological age to come.

You will notice that most every article omits geographic and people-specific references for obvious reasons. In accepting Parshall’s invitation to bring this discussion “out into the open,” anonymity is necessary for security—both for the missionaries themselves and for the C5 believers.

It became clear as we began to assemble this edition that we will definitely need to dedicate an additional IJFM issue to this same theme in the near future. Lord willing, respondents to the articles herein will carry this discussion to the next level in “Islamic Contextualization II.”

May God use the articles in this Special Edition to sharpen our vision and challenge our souls, equipping us to participate in what He is doing around the world to draw Muslim peoples to Himself. To God be all the glory!

*Joshua Massey*  
*IJFM guest editor*  
*March 2000*

Parshall, Phil. 1998 “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization.” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34(4):404-406, 409-410.  
Travis, John. 1998 “The C1 to C6 Spectrum.” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34(4):407-408.