

The Jerusalem Council Applied

# A Humble Appeal to C5/Insider Movement Muslim Ministry Advocates to Consider Ten Questions

by Gary Corwin

with responses from Brother Yusuf, Rick Brown, Kevin Higgins, Rebecca Lewis and John Travis

## Gary Corwin: Introductory Comments

As a long-time participant in the *ISFM*, and a long-time reader of and occasional writer for the *IJFM*, I am exceedingly grateful to God and to the leaders of both entities for the attention being given to Insider Movements. It is difficult to think of a subject more timely and important as God's people move forward in the 21st century to make disciples among the least reached peoples of the earth.

I have been praying for a number of years now that the kind of dialogue we are having here in Atlanta in these days would soon happen. While it was happening to a limited degree in the pages of both *EMQ* and the *IJFM*, neither has been adequate to provide the kind of give and take that a face-to-face gathering with a broad representation of views can provide. I was also concerned that C5/IM (Insider Movement) advocates seemed to be traveling the world to talk to one another or to influence the uninitiated, but were not engaging as broadly as needed with their peers in the larger mission community.

On a personal level, over the last several years I have serendipitously enjoyed several hours each with a couple of the leading advocates of C5/Insider Movements among Muslims. While helpful in deepening understanding of concerns both for and against, these meetings only increased my sense of need for a broader discussion that was both thoughtful and thorough.

When in September 2005 *Mission Frontiers* published for its wide readership its issue on "Can We Trust Insider Movements?" I knew all sides of the discussion now would need to engage more publicly. Follow-up discussion and expressions of concern followed in the January 2006 *MF*, as well as related *EMQ* editorials in early 2006, and articles online in *St. Francis Magazine*.<sup>1</sup>

This brings us now to the recently released July–September 2006 issue of the *IJFM* and the detailed critique of C5/IM in Islamic contexts by Professor Timothy Tennent.<sup>2</sup> I concur wholeheartedly with Phil Parshall's praise for this "thorough, thoughtful and respectful"<sup>3</sup> treatment. Besides these virtues, the article has also made my job much easier than it would otherwise have been. Had he not so incisively treated the key biblical passages,<sup>4</sup> and the theological<sup>5</sup>

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*Gary Corwin is associate editor of the Evangelical Missions Quarterly and missiologist-at-large for Arab World Ministries, on loan from SIM-USA.*

### *Editor's Introduction*

This article, which was presented in an earlier form at the 2006 ISFM conference in Atlanta, was originally meant to be a standalone paper. However, because Gary's ten questions are addressed directly to advocates of "insider movement Muslim ministry," we at **IJFM** asked several such advocates to respond, and five sent in comments. For purposes of comparison, we also asked Herbert Hofer, whose expertise is in the Hindu sphere, for his comments. Since Gary's paper focuses specifically on Muslim ministry, however, Hofer's comments on the Hindu situation will appear separately on p. 21. We invite you, our readers, to send us your comments and perspectives as well.

### **A Word about Format**

We want **IJFM** to be more of a conversation, a dialogue (regular readers of **IJFM** may have noticed that in recent issues we have been including more responses). To avoid needless repetition and make it easier for you to judge the merits of our respondents' reactions to Gary's paper, we are embedding their comments within the text itself. We would appreciate your feedback on this experiment.

Readers who wish to get the flow of Gary's paper first (without all the intervening responses) can easily do so by reading just the text between the heading **Gary Corwin** and the first respondent's name (e.g., **Brother Yusuf**), then skipping down to the next **Gary Corwin** and starting the process over again.

### **Who Responded?**

The biographical information on each respondent is presented below, followed by any introductory comments the respondent may have sent.

#### **Brother Yusuf**

Brother Yusuf grew up in a respected and religious Muslim family in a traditionally Muslim country. As a young man he developed a desire to read all of God's books, and this led him to read the Bible and to discuss it with a missionary. After coming to faith in Jesus as his Lord and Savior, he fled his Muslim family and community and assimilated into a traditional Christian community. There he received further training and became a preacher and Bible teacher. This was thirty years ago.

With time Brother Yusuf saw the futility of extractionism, and he developed a vision for incarnational ministry within his community and the planting of biblical fellowships. Sensing God's calling to this vision, he and others returned to their community and started Bible study groups and house fellowships that retained a Muslim cultural identity and maintained a witness within the community. Since that time he has been one of the spiritual leaders of the insider movements in

his country. He and his colleagues have often endured persecution instigated by religious clerics, both Muslim and Christian.

On the 28th of September, Brother Yusuf was interviewed by Rick Brown, who presented him with Gary Corwin's ten questions. Brother Yusuf's responses are listed below. They have been edited slightly for clarity, and in some cases they have been abridged or summarized because of space limitations.

#### **Rick Brown**

Rick is a Bible scholar and mission strategist. He has been involved in outreach to the Muslim world since 1977.

Gary Corwin has raised some valid concerns and questions. They are valid because they derive logically from his premises. Unfortunately, some of the information available to him is faulty, and faulty premises lead to unsound conclusions. My responses are addressed to the questions and the information involved rather than personally to Gary himself, for whom I have full respect. Many of my comments have been informed by my interview of Brother Yusuf and from my interactions over the years with Messianic Muslims in various countries.

#### **John Travis**

John has lived for twenty years in Muslim communities and traveled extensively throughout the Muslim world. He has been heavily involved in two Bible translations for Muslim readers and assisted in a number of others.

I am happy to respond to some of Gary's heartfelt concerns. I have focused on only three of Gary's points and his closing statement.

#### **Kevin Higgins**

Kevin is the Executive Director of Global Teams and GT's acting Director of Pioneer Teams. Kevin developed a work in a majority Muslim country that has resulted in creative evangelism among eight language groups and emerging people movements in four of those.

At the meetings of the International Society of Frontier Mission in Atlanta (September, 2006), Gary Corwin asked those of us who are "pro-Insider Movement" to consider 10 questions he posed in his paper.

This is a very brief follow up to that request. My replies will be short, but I hope will address some of his concerns and in so doing, also address the concerns others may share. I do not claim to speak for all of those who advocate the "insider paradigm" as a viable and biblical model (among other viable and biblical models).

#### **Rebecca Lewis**

Rebecca is assistant professor of History and Islamic Studies at William Carey International University. She has worked with her husband Tim in Muslim ministries for 15 years, eight of which were spent in North Africa. **IJFM**

and ethical issues<sup>6</sup> related to C5/IM that he did, I would have felt considerable obligation to attempt the same, though I have little doubt that I would have done so much less effectively.

What I have chosen to do in an attempt to complement rather than unnecessarily duplicate Professor Tennent's article is to pose ten questions to C5/IM advocates that stem primarily from logical and historical considerations.

### *Ten Questions for Advocates to Consider*

Gary Corwin

**1** HAVE YOU CONSIDERED that in the almost 1400 years since the birth of Islam, no quarter of the church worldwide has pursued or advocated the approach to reaching and discipling Muslim peoples that you are advocating?<sup>7</sup>

**Rick Brown:** My first information about insider movements came from some of the participants at a multi-agency seminar in Africa in 1985 and at a global conference in 1987, as well as a subsequent conference, so there has not been an absence of discussion. The proceedings were not published, but that was to protect God's people. Communication is important, but publicity can be harmful.

There were differences of viewpoint at these conferences, but no one considered insider movements unacceptable. That does not mean, however, it was an easy concept to accept. Some people had difficulty adjusting to the fact that God was working in a new way with some Muslims, one that was outside the traditional box with which they were familiar and comfortable. One thinks of Isaiah 43:19 (NIV):

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.  
See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?  
I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.

For me, however, the challenge was to repent of my prejudices and learn to appreciate the many positive and acceptable customs of Muslim cultures and their members. These are customs that can continue with disciples: modesty, sobriety, chastity, hospitality, generosity, cleanliness, frequent mention of dependence on God, frequent thanks to God, frequent prayer, prostration in worship, memorization of Scripture, etc. In a sense, non-Messianic Muslims can be viewed as pre-believers who have not yet encountered the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**John Travis:** As far as I can tell, this indeed is a new way—but not the only way—that God is reaching Muslim peoples today. As globalization, mass communication and postmodernism continue to impact the world, and as the simple message of salvation through Jesus becomes increasingly known throughout the world, some Muslims, Jews, Hindus and others are encountering Christ for themselves and choosing to follow him without going through existing branches of Christianity. As these Muslims encounter the one they formerly knew as only a prophet, and as these Jews discover that Jesus is their long awaited Messiah, some new expressions of faith in *Isa* (Jesus) and *Yeshua* (Jesus) are emerging and growing in communities of peoples who are legally, culturally, and socio-religiously still a part of the religious community of their birth.

While this likely concerns some Christians for a variety of different reasons (some socio-political, some emotional, some theological), the fact is that it is happening and it is not under our control. At a fundamental level, the peoples of the world have the God-given right to interact directly with their Maker and the one whom he sent to earth to save them. They will read their Bibles differently at points, due to the different cultural glasses they wear, but we need to rejoice that the same Jesus we know and love is being found and cherished by others outside of our indirect or direct control. Jesus is an “equal opportunity Savior.”

**Kevin Higgins:** I wonder if this criterion is one that we should expect to apply to all new developments or ideas? Was there ever a strategy for reaching “whole nations” before the DAWN movement was launched? On the other hand, is this really true? It seems to me that there are a number of examples in history of missionaries working along “insider lines.” De Nobili, Ricci, and Sundar Singh come to mind. They are not examples of Muslim work, but they did to various degrees model attempts to work along insider lines.

Gary Corwin

*[Editor's note: The following is Brother Yusuf's response to Gary's endnote 7, repeated immediately below.]*

<sup>7</sup>Please note that I am not referring to MBBs choosing to continue in the mosque and to continue to perform public Islamic ritual for a season, both to sort things out in their lives and for evangelistic reasons, but I am referring to the C5/IM contention that it should be expected that this would (and should) be a permanent state.

**Brother Yusuf:** Contrary to what some people might advocate or imagine, we do not teach the brethren that they should go to the mosque or that they should refrain from going, and there is no expectation that either will be a permanent state. Some go because

# **H**ave you fully considered the enormous gulf that exists between Messianic Jewish churches and what you are advocating as Messianic Islam?—Gary Corwin

this has been their custom and they like to spend time praying in a house of prayer. Others go because it gives them an opportunity to speak to their friends there about the Lord Jesus.

## Gary Corwin

WHILE NOT IN ITSELF a disqualifier in that our God may indeed always do a new thing,<sup>8</sup> should it not have dictated a greater tentativeness and humility to what you are doing? Should not that, in turn, have been reflected in a more self-conscious pursuit of genuine peer review rather than advocacy seminars to recruit impressionable new laborers to your point of view?

**Brother Yusuf:** This question is addressed to outsiders, not insiders. The advocates and critics of insider movements will debate these issues, as is their custom. The real need, however, is for open-minded missiologists to visit with leaders of insider movements and find out what God is actually doing among them. Special venues, however, would be needed for such discussions.

**John Travis:** This is something new that God is doing and blessing in our day to draw all peoples to himself. Certainly much is unknown, and some tentativeness and reflection are called for. We must remain humble, prayerful, and in a learning mode so that we can discern what the Spirit of God is saying to the Church and to Muslims at this juncture in world history. This, of course, requires interaction and peer review as Gary suggests. Those I know who support the insider approach spend a lot of time both in reading church history and in interaction with peers, especially those who have experience working with Muslims. Gary's choice of words (recruiting "impressionable new laborers") is unfortunate, as it sounds as if pro-insiders spend their time running around the world trying to convince the inexperienced. I don't know where Gary gets that idea, as most of us live on the field face-to-face with Muslims, seldom having time to do seminars. More of our time is spent with peers and field leaders who are grappling with these issues.

Perhaps this insider phenomenon has not been processed as much as some would like, but it has been processed more than Gary thinks. The problem is that this is a sensitive topic because insider disciples walk a tightrope within their own community. Everything in print can

now be read by the whole world, so while some seminars have been held, they are not widely publicized. With all due respect, the same critique concerning the need for increased tentativeness and humility applies to those who are not in favor of insider movements.

The emergence of new "wineskins"—from Paul's ministry (and the early expressions of faith in Christ outside of Judaism) to Luther (and the eventual formation of communities of faith outside of Catholicism)—was met at times with fierce opposition and threats of death. In fact, some leaders of the Reformation were burned at the stake by the church of their day for teaching ideas such as salvation through grace or for producing translations of the Bible in local languages. All that to say that while caution and prayerfulness are necessary on the part of those supporting insider movements, it is equally important that those opposing insider work also show caution and prayerfulness. It could be possible in our day that some godly, well-meaning Christians might in fact be working against what God is doing through their opposition to the insider paradigm.

**Rebecca Lewis:** The earliest insider movements out there did not start because someone had a great missiological idea and said "Let's try starting an insider movement." As usual, theory is following observation. As in the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts, God is moving this way and we are trying to catch up by analyzing the phenomenon.

## Gary Corwin

**2** HAVE YOU FULLY CONSIDERED *the enormous gulf that exists between Messianic Jewish churches<sup>9</sup> and what you are advocating as Messianic Islam?* In those with which I am familiar, church is the primary identification for the former. Ritual established by biblical revelation that points to the coming Messiah is employed as a communication and emotional bridge. Messianic Islam, by contrast, grounds its identity in Islam rather than church and employs ritual that has its basis in the Qur'an and the Hadith, rather than in biblical revelation.

**Brother Yusuf:** There is no Messianic Islam. This is not even possible. I do not know of any Messianic mosques, and I do not agree with the concept. A mosque is simply a house of worship. It is not wrong for the dis-

ciples of Jesus to pray in a house of worship. It is a quiet and reverent place. This also gives them an opportunity to talk to others, especially in the late afternoon, when the heads of families sit around and talk. Reaching the heads of families is a key to reaching the community.

I don't really like the term 'Messianic Muslim' because it is not a term that insiders can use with members of their own community. The word for 'Messianic' in my language is the same as the word for 'Christian'. People would think we were saying we are 'Christian Muslims', but the word 'Christian' refers to people in a different ethnic community. It would be nonsense. In fact, we do not need any labels at all. When we visit a mosque, we just talk and behave like insiders to the culture, which we are, and people accept us. After a few visits, when we have gotten to know some people, we begin to talk to them about the Messiah.

We have *jamats* [house churches], where people meet for prayer, worship, Bible study, and discussion. People participate frequently, sometimes every day. Holy Communion is celebrated every month or two. Believers are baptized. These practices are based on the Bible. As for the participants, their identity is primarily that of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, and secondarily as members of the Muslim community.

**Rick Brown:** The real gulf is between the reality of insider movements, both Jewish and Muslim, and the images that outsiders have of them. Let's look at some realities: Messianic Jews belong to the Kingdom of God, but in terms of religious culture they maintain a Jewish identity. Some of them meet in Messianic synagogues and observe Jewish rituals. These rituals, however, have been established by Jewish tradition, not by biblical revelation. Messianic Muslims (or *Isawi* Muslims) belong to the Kingdom as well, and in terms of religious culture, they maintain a Muslim identity. But unlike Messianic Jews, they do not meet in "Messianic mosques" as some writers suppose. They meet in homes or other places, usually as a natural grouping of friends and relatives who follow Jesus. (One can see some home fellowships depicted in the "contextual fellowship" videos available from Create International.\*) When they are together, they follow patterns of activity exemplified in the New Testament. While in prayer they may kneel, bow, or raise their hands, but so did people in the Bible. In some cases they sit on mats, but this was common in Jesus' day as well. They may handle the Scripture with cleanliness and care, dress very modestly, and maintain a decorous distance between unrelated men and women, but most Messianic Jews do the same. And just as some Messianic Jews attend a synagogue and participate in

the Jewish liturgy, some Messianic Muslims visit the mosque and pray there in traditional ways.

Of course, the traditional missionary practice has been to require Muslim believers to renounce their religious cultural identity, to apostatize. This is not a great problem for some "angry young men" who have already rejected their society and left it before believing in Jesus, but for many Muslims (and Jews) who come to faith in Jesus, renunciation seems like a denial of their own cultural heritage and ethnic identity. They also know, as Woodberry points out (this issue, p. 25), that apostasy is viewed as a rejection of "religion, language, culture, politics, nationality, ethnicity, and family," as both a social betrayal and an unforgivable sin. Muslims also know that apostasy will bring disgrace and ostracism onto their family, and that the family and community may feel obliged to expel the renegade to save their honor and make peace with God. Worse yet, the family and community often take measures to prevent a repetition of this "tragedy." If they perceive that it was reading the Bible or visiting foreigners that led to this calamity, then they may try to ensure that no one else comes under these influences. One traumatic experience with an apostate can leave the whole community more closed than ever to the Gospel, whereas insider believers are often respected as godly and compassionate members of the community who study the Gospel and pray for others.

Nevertheless missionaries have persisted in this policy, on the assumption that there was no alternative. So it comes as a shock to discover that God might have another way. I had been a rejectionist, and it was hard for me to accept that God was blessing insider movements. It was threatening as well, as if the tradition of renunciation had been unnecessary, as if the disruption and suffering had not really been inevitable. One's natural defensive response is to deny the validity of claims that conflict with deeply held assumptions, and to reinforce this denial with a straw-man caricature of the claim. But as I worked with godly Messianic Muslims from different countries, it became evident that God was leading them and blessing them. And as I searched the Scriptures, I found justification for diversity and contextualization.

Missionaries who work with insiders have generally protected the movements by not publicizing them. Now, however, the movements are being publicly attacked, especially by local churchmen who see their foreign donors taking an interest in them. And they are being criticized in journals as well, but the critiques I have read are informed neither by participant observation nor by interviews with the leaders of insider

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movements. This issue, however, is important, and it warrants open-minded investigation and discussion rather than defensive objections. As Gary said, we need to approach this issue with humility. We need, in fact, to ascertain the many ways in which God is working and then be willing to support them all.

*\*Readers interested in obtaining VCD/DVDs illustrating several types of contextual fellowship can go to <http://www.createinternational.com/store> and click on the category "training."*

Kevin Higgins: I have a few thoughts. The psalms utilize non-Jewish forms and concepts, and "Yahweh-izes" them. Thus the Bible itself models this process for us. Some of the New Testament authors quote religious texts that were outside the canon, and do so to support their argument, thus using those texts as supporting authorities. This should encourage our respect for the fact that God is at work beyond the "canon," even as we uphold the singular and superior role of the canon as the "measure" of all truth (as the word canon originally meant). According to the footnotes in United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*, Paul quotes Aratus and Cleanthes at Acts 17:28, Epimenides at Titus 1:12, and Menander at 1 Cor. 15:33. Jude quotes 1 Enoch at vv. 14–15, and at verse 9 he refers to a story in the Assumption of Moses. The author of Hebrews mentions an event from the Ascension of Isaiah at 11:37. Similarly, God can and has used the Qur'an to set people on the path towards repentance and faith in Christ.

### Gary Corwin

**3** HAVE YOU CONSIDERED *that the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, far from supporting both cultural and religious contextualization, settles on a strong affirmation of the former combined with a strong stand against the latter?* While the grace-denying dogma of the Judaizers is clearly in view, the focus of the passage includes *all* that must not be added to the gospel, whether it comes from the transmitting culture or the receiving one. Tennent has dealt with this significantly<sup>10</sup> so I will say no more, but will offer another question to consider related to this passage.

Brother Yusuf: In Acts 15 it was decided that the Gentile believers did not need to follow the Jewish

forms of life and worship. They were not required to visit the temple or synagogue, attend the feasts, make the various sacrifices, or even be circumcised. So the Gentiles worshiped God in their own fashion. That sounds like some kind of religious contextualization. One has to wonder how the Apostles could set aside the law of Moses like that. The answer, of course, is Jesus. It is because of the work of the Lord Jesus that the Jewish Christians could accept as their brothers anyone whom Jesus accepted, even if he was not circumcised and did not worship as they did. Similarly we teach the brethren that they should love and accept everyone who truly believes in Jesus, whether they are associated with C5, C4, or C3 churches. We wish others would do the same.

The Jerusalem Council said the Gentiles should not eat meat sacrificed to idols. I presume that this was because it would be a form of idol worship. Similarly we teach people to serve God and worship him alone. We teach them to be faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rick Brown: Amos 9:12, as cited and interpreted in Acts 15:16ff., prophesies that there will be "Gentiles" who are called by God's name and included in the Kingdom of the Messiah (the tent of David). The significance drawn is that they will be in this blessed state while still being "Gentiles" rather than being proselytes, i.e., that proselytism is not necessary. So they were accepted as Messianic Gentiles, or to use the Greek term, as *Christianoi*. Far from following the worship customs of the Jewish disciples, these Messianic Gentiles adopted a traditional Greco-Roman form of worship, the *leitourgia* "liturgy", officiated by a priest or the like; they worshipped on Sunday instead of the Sabbath; and they ignored the Old Testament festivals while maintaining their Winter Solstice festival as a celebration of Christ's birth. With time, these Messianic Greco-Roman practices came to be seen as normative, although they are not taught in the Bible. We can see, then, that the Jerusalem Council did *not* insist on a religious uniformity. We can presume, however, that they would have expected the Messianic Gentiles to accept a biblical worldview, i.e., the beliefs and values taught by the prophets and by the Lord Jesus. To do otherwise would be syncretism. But I have discussed this issue fully in "Contextualization without Syncretism" in *IJFM* 23/3. (For further analyses of Acts 15, please see the articles by Woodberry and Higgins in this issue.)

## Gary Corwin

**4** HAVE YOU CONSIDERED *that it could be that the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, and the story of Cornelius in Acts 10 for that matter, rather than providing a theological and practical template for us to follow by analogy when introducing the gospel into new contexts, should perhaps be understood only as a one-time seminal event marking the final stage in the early church coming to fully understand that the old covenant and its requirements were fulfilled in Christ and that the new covenant was for all people and peoples, Jews and Gentiles?*

That, of course, would include all Muslim and Hindu peoples along with everyone else. The key point on this understanding of Acts 15 is simply that *no one* needs to embrace the old covenant in order to be saved, but that embracing the new covenant is not a license for idolatry, immorality, or holding unity in the gospel lightly. This is not to say, on the other hand, that there is no value in the record of these events as models to be followed in a more general way. Peter's obedience to God in Acts 10, even when it seemed to contradict all that he had known previously, and the constructive dialogue and decision-making process of church leaders in Acts 15 in the face of difficult and potentially divisive issues, is still worthy of our emulation. But that is different than saying that each new ethno-linguistic context, let alone each local socio-religious context, requires an Acts 15 event or process for that context.

**Brother Yusuf:** Are you suggesting that we remove these two chapters from the Scripture, or just ignore them? I do not believe that these verses have been abrogated.

**Kevin Higgins:** I think Corwin's question is actually begging *lots* of questions. He begins by *wondering* if Acts 15 is a one time event, but bases his whole critique on the truth of that (unproven) assumption. In the Atlanta meetings, Professor Tennent himself said to Gary Corwin that since all Scripture is given for teaching and correction, Acts 15 should not be seen as a one time event, but as a model for us in working in new contexts. I agree.

Acts 15 *by itself* would certainly not be enough to base an entire "insider methodology" upon. But it is not all we have, nor is it all that we have based our philosophy upon.

**Rebecca Lewis:** I believe one of the most instructive aspects of Acts 15 is not their conclusions, but the process they followed. They looked at what God had been

doing. They respected the fact that God "who knows the heart showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us." (Acts 15:8) They listened carefully to the case studies of Paul and Barnabas (vs. 12). They noted that the Scriptures pointed to the fact that God would redeem people from the Gentiles (vs. 17). Then they concluded they should not make it difficult for other people to turn to God (vs. 19). We can follow the same careful process they modeled. It was the Pharisee believers (vs. 5) who did not want to actually look at what God was doing but stand on the Law of Moses as a matter of principle.

## Gary Corwin

**5** HAVE YOU CONSIDERED *the implications of the fact that unlike Christianity or Judaism, in which heart commitment is central, Islam is to a much greater degree a religion of outward obedience and social conformity?*

**Rick Brown:** Is this really a fact? The tradition in Muslim cultures is that God accepts one's faith and worship only if they are intentional and sincere (called *niyya*), and that one should worship God as if one were beholding him, although one does not actually see him (called *ihsân*). Phil Parshall's book *The Cross and the Crescent* shows that a number of Muslims have a deep reverence for God and long to know him. This is why many of them are quite open to the Gospel, if it is presented in a pure and comprehensible form and is confirmed by the Holy Spirit. In addition, if we are honest we will admit that Christianity and Judaism are not immune to legalism, formality and externalism.

## Gary Corwin

WHETHER ONE IS SAYING the Lord's Prayer while going through the motions of the *Salat*, or rationalizing the many meanings of the term "prophet" while one is declaring Muhammad is Allah's prophet in the *shahada*, the message communicated by the very action to all those around is a declaration of adherence to the doctrines of Islam.<sup>11</sup> Complex explanations based on the multiple meaning of words, or theological gymnastics that point out that only Allah knows man's heart, may at times win the day in defending oneself before unfriendly government tribunals.<sup>12</sup> It is hard to imagine, however, that they will not ultimately be viewed as deceit.<sup>13</sup> In light of the centuries-old accusation by Muslims that Christians are deceivers, at best it has to be considered a highly questionable strategy.

**W**hat we have found in actuality is that saying the *shahada* does not harm the believer's witness to Jesus. On the contrary, it gives him a hearing. It can also be a starting point to discuss our Savior.—Brother Yusuf

**Brother Yusuf:** What we have found in actuality is that saying the *shahada* does not harm the believer's witness to Jesus. On the contrary, it gives him a hearing. It can also be a starting point to discuss our Savior: Muhammad did a great thing in destroying the idols in Arabia. John the Baptist was a great prophet because he pointed people to the Lamb of God, in whom alone we can find salvation.

What one believes about Muhammad is of little consequence. Affirming Muhammad does not in fact affirm a body of doctrine. There are four main schools of Sunni Islam, in addition to various Shi'ite sects, and they have different sets of tradition and doctrine. Affirming Muhammad does not affirm any one of these. One can say the *shahada* without affirming any of them, as is the case with most cultural Muslims.

**Rick Brown:** From the beginning of Islam (see Qur'an 49:14), Muslim theologians have made a distinction between those who are Muslims in practice only and those who truly believe in Islam (called a *mu'min*). Muslims usually reckon the number of true believers to be small. Some Messianic Muslims say the *shahada*, but not all of them are true believers in it. Nominal Muslims say the *shahada*, but they are not true believers. Some of them are engaging in dissimulation—masking one's inner thoughts and intentions. That is not the same as deceit, which involves the manipulation or exploitation of others rather than mere social conformity or self-protection.

Deceit is wrong, but is dissimulation categorically wrong or can it be used as a last resort? If a man claimed he had come to slaughter a cow when in fact he had come to appoint a new ruler, that would be dissimulation. If a man pretended to be insane to avoid being killed by the authorities, that would be dissimulation. And if a man declared that he was not going to a feast, where people were looking to kill him, but later he went in secret, that would be dissimulation. In these cases, however, (1 Sam. 16:1–3; 1 Sam 21:12–15 with Ps. 34; John 7:1–10) the dissimulation was in accord with God's will.

Gary's questions reflect some confusion between the terms 'Islamic' and 'Muslim'. As Brother Yusuf said, it makes no sense to talk of "Messianic Islam" or to describe C5 fellowships as "Islamic." If something is "Islamic," then that means it is in conformity with the teachings of normative Islam. So in that sense there are no "Islamic" followers of Jesus Christ or "Islamic house

churches," because that is outside the box of normative Islam. The term 'Muslim', on the other hand, applies to the entire culture and all of its members, regardless of how Islamic or divergent their worldviews and practices actually are. Recently a Muslim psychologist, Wafa Sultan, was widely televised in a plea for more tolerance and modernity in Muslim societies. She made it very clear that she was a "secular person" who did not believe in the "supernatural," yet she repeatedly identified herself as a "Muslim" and a member of the "Muslim" community.

This is hard for Western Evangelical Christians to understand. They separate religion from the rest of life and view Christianity as a religion with a particular set of religious beliefs and values (i.e., as a worldview). They use the term 'Christian' to describe someone who holds this worldview (as well as being saved). They then assume that the term 'Muslim' is equally specific, and they tell Muslims that they must quit being Muslims if they want to be saved. This is like asking someone to quit being Jewish or Hispanic.

On the other side, Muslims wrongly assume that Christianity is a complete culture with rules and customs for every occasion. So when they come to faith in Jesus, they often assume that they must abandon their Muslim culture and live in a Christian culture with a Christian cultural identity following a body of Christian customs. There was a Muslim who had listened to evangelistic radio broadcasts. When he was visited by a missionary, he prayed to receive Jesus Christ. He then excused himself to go to the toilet, but stopped in mid-step to ask, "What should I say now when I enter the toilet?" He assumed that Christianity had a custom for every detail of life. So Muslims need to understand the difference between the one biblical faith and the diversity of cultures in the world. God values both.

**Kevin Higgins:** As much as I'd like to assume charitable intent on Corwin's part, I cannot help but sense in these lines a strong tone of cynicism and negative assumptions about the intentions of others. Condescending references to "going through the motions," "rationalizing," "theological gymnastics" do not promote the kind of open dialogue and respectful discussion that Corwin says he wants. The same is clear in his attitude toward Muslims; he paints them all with the dismissive brush of religious hypocrisy and outward conformity, with no heart for God. As in the West, this description is true for many, but not for all.



## Gary Corwin

**6** HAVE YOU CONSIDERED *the incongruity of asserting and/or leaving the impression that C5 approaches are the only hope to reaching Muslims in any significant numbers (a common occurrence<sup>14</sup>), and also arguing that we cannot know the extent of such insider movements because they are difficult to distinguish from unconverted Muslims?*

Beyond that, recent research efforts, as well as reports from reliable sources in the very same ministry areas of the two major focus nations of C5 ministry, really raise doubts about the relative numbers premise. There is some reason to believe that less controversial C4 approaches may not only have produced more fruit, but that C5 approaches in some areas have actually resulted in significant numbers of converts backsliding contextually and joining C1 communities because of their strong desire for a clearer identity. While pragmatism is a dubious argument for God's people in any case, there is little that is praiseworthy in arguing success by numbers and also that your numbers can't be determined, particularly when the evidence that is available seems to tell a different story.

**Brother Yusuf:** John Travis developed the C1–C5 scale, not to describe a range of strategies, but to describe a range of expressions of Christ-centered community. We do not promote C5 as the only strategy or even insist on conformity to it. We seek only to follow the Lord's leading. Some people in our movement say the *shahada* and some do not; some of them pray in mosques and some do not (and never did). This is an individual choice. Outsiders try to classify them as C4 or C5, but we do not make that distinction. What unites us is our commitment to the Lord Jesus and to our community. There are Muslim militants who want to drive us from our communities or at least isolate us from them by labeling us as heretics, and they are aided in this by militant Christians. We struggle, however, to remain inside the communities, where we can be salt and light to our friends and relatives.

In traditionally "Christian" communities it can be difficult to distinguish true disciples from nominal Christians and others, but this is not the case within insider movements. The disciples make no pretense of being ordinary Muslims. They stand out as the ones who talk about the Lord Jesus and who meet together in *jamats* to worship God and study his Word. They are known to have been baptized, and they are known as the ones whose prayers are answered. They are the ones to whom people go with

their prayer requests. They are also the ones who are persecuted by jealous extremists.

I agree that insider movements are not justified by numbers, although the numbers are a cause for rejoicing. What justifies the insider movements is the evidence of God's grace. It is God who opens hearts to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is God who grants grace to persevere and to grow in the fruit of the Spirit. It is God who answers the prayers of his people when they pray in Christ's name. When I hear about a Jesus movement in some village and I go there to check it out, it is the evidence of God's grace that I look for. I ask villagers whether God is doing miracles among them in response to the prayers of the followers of Jesus. If he is, then I take this as a sign that God has indeed started a Jesus movement in that village.

**Rick Brown:** God draws people to himself in a variety of ways, partly because people have a variety of predispositions and experiences, so all of these expressions of faith have a place in God's plan. Some Muslims are drawn to C5 and some to C4 or C3. Many who come to C5 move on to C4 or C3. On the other hand there are some mature MBBs who have gone from C3 to C5, and they are more comfortable than ever with their identity and their ministry. So all of these expressions of faith can be valid. The crucial thing is to seek God's will in each situation and to keep seeking his will, because he might lead a group into a change of expression.

It might be noted that although insider movements have come under the spotlight in only a few places, there are Messianic Muslims throughout the world. It is not always obvious, because the distinction between C6 and C5 believers is very fluid, as is the distinction between C5 and C4 believers. These categories are most definitely *not* separate and distinct as was depicted in Timothy Tennant's article<sup>RB1</sup>, but as noted by Woodberry (this issue, p. 23), they are ranges within a fluid spectrum. This is represented in the diagram below:

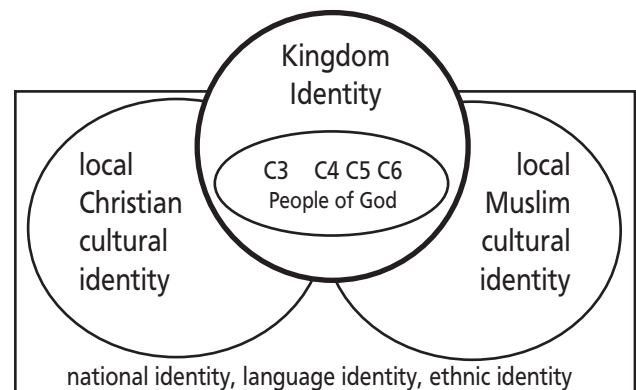


Fig. 1: Sources of identity and culture (Rick Brown)

*It is true that it is very difficult and potentially dangerous for some type of “researcher” to go poking around Muslim communities trying to count how many in fact know Christ.—John Travis*

The option of being a Messianic Muslim is one that many Muslims are willing to consider. If they know that this is an option, then many of them are willing to take the risk of reading the Bible and associating with believers. If they think the only alternative to the status quo is renunciation of their culture and expulsion from their family and community, then many will refuse to read or listen to the Gospel, fearing that they might “convert” or be extracted, or they stop reading the Bible as soon as they find themselves beginning to believe it. The Messianic Muslim option removes this fear and opens the door for Muslims to listen to the Gospel with an open mind and heart.

I agree with Gary that C5 is not the only approach or even the ideal approach. In some families and communities there is tolerance of Muslims moving to C4 and C3, and that is probably an appropriate thing for them to do. For many Iranians the Messianic Muslim option is not appealing, because they are disaffected with their Muslim identity and want a different one. In many sub-Saharan countries in which the cultures are only superficially Muslim, there is little Muslim identity. There is subsequently more freedom and more acceptance of conversion, and it is reported that large numbers of “Muslims” convert each year to a Christian identity, presumably C3.<sup>RB2</sup> And in any community there are some binary thinkers for whom the C4 and C5 positions are too complicated to handle, unless there is a mature fellowship to which they can assimilate.<sup>RB3</sup> But in communities where renunciation of one’s Muslim identity leads to execution or expulsion, it is hard to see how the C4 or C3 approaches can lead to sustained church-planting movements.

Being Reformed in theology, for me the important question is not “What works and does not work in Muslim evangelism?” or “Does this have adequate precedent in church history?” For me the important questions are “What is God doing in this community?” and “Am I in harmony with what God is doing or am I resisting it?” We will serve God better if we make it our focus to seek his will for ourselves and for each situation rather than applying the same traditional approach to every situation. God’s plan for one fellowship of believers might be different from his plan for a second. But if we insist on a traditional model of church for every situation, then we are following the idol of ecclesiastical tradition rather than

following the Lord Jesus Christ. For Christ “is the head of the body, the church, . . . that in everything he might be preeminent.” (Colossians 1:18 ESV). Jesus said “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18), so let’s let him build it and let him alone be Lord over every church in his Kingdom.

#### *Notes to Rick Brown’s Response*

<sup>1</sup>“Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, 23(3), p. 102. For more on this topic, see Rick’s article in the same issue, “Contextualization without Syncretism.”

<sup>2</sup>Figures were given by Sheikh Ahmad Al Katani, in an interview on Al-Jazeera television, but they seem inflated. The Arabic transcript was at <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/shareea/articles/2000/12/12-12-6.htm>. An English translation may be found at <http://www.formermuslims.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=972>.

<sup>3</sup>Binary thinkers perceive complex issues as simple holistic issues. They also evaluate them using a binary opposition: good or bad, true or false, all or nothing. For such people, the option is either to be a Muslim in every way or not at all. The binary opposition leads to a rejection of diversity as well, because for binary thinkers only one way/church/race/culture/viewpoint can be right, and all the others must be wrong. This leads to rejection of other expressions of faith and worship. It also leads to rejection of diversity in Bible translations, with one translation being perceived as “perfect” and the others as “wrong” or even “evil.” Complex thinkers, on the other hand, analyze complex issues into their parts and evaluate each part. They also evaluate along a scale rather than in binary terms. Thus they can recognize the good and bad points of a culture and evaluate them relative to one another, and they can recognize the different elements of a worldview and evaluate each one by the standard of Truth as it is revealed in the Bible.

**John Travis:** If advocates of insider movements have given the impression that this is the only way to reach Muslims, this is wrong. The fact is that Muslims are coming to faith in Christ in a variety of ways across the C1–C6 spectrum (as Gary mentioned, I pointed this out in a recent *Mission Frontiers* article). Regarding the second part of Gary’s question let me state first of all that we know numbers of insider followers of Jesus whose lives radiate a Spirit-filled quality that contrasts with the lives of their pre-believing Muslim neighbors and family members. However, it is true that it is very difficult and potentially dangerous for some type of “researcher” to go poking around Muslim communi-

ties trying to count how many in fact know Christ. If Muslims leave the Muslim community and join national Christian churches or Christian organizations that record membership statistics, it is easier and less dangerous to arrive at a count. But insider movements are led by the Muslim believers themselves, making counting difficult and potentially dangerous to the new believers. Furthermore, attempting to “count” the number of insider believers could be perceived as patronizing, giving the impression that we somehow have the right to examine, count them, and pass judgment on them.

**Kevin Higgins:** I am not sure which advocates are being referred to here. All I can say is that I have never claimed any relative “greater success,” or that “C5” is the only hope, or that there are no other viable options. I cannot speak for others, but this is not my position.

**Rebecca Lewis:** It is important to note that not all Muslim people groups are in the same category. There are significant Muslim people groups that are dissimilating from Arab culture and Islam. For example, the Algerian Berbers, among whom there is a people movement to Christ, are rejecting Arab and Islamic control, and rejecting the Arabic language in favor of French as their trade language. The Kurds of Northern Iraq, and some Iranian and Central Asian people groups are also rejecting Arab Islamic control. We would not expect people movements in these cultures to be C5. Muslim-background believers from these areas are often vehemently opposed to C5-type movements (as are those who were marginal to or dissimilating from their own cultures before becoming believers).

## Gary Corwin

**7** HAVE YOU CONSIDERED *that the biblical support for C4 approaches are identical to those offered for C5, yet the case is often made as if C5 is the only alternative to C1?* The response here is indeed a repetition, but well worth repeating. Phil Parshall probably sums this important point up best,

One of my frustrations has been that the Insider Movement uses the same arguments to bolster their position as C4 folk do, and then make it sound like it originated with them. We C4 missionaries, for 30 years, have been an Insider Movement—have always advocated MBBs remaining in their culture, job, family, and sociological circle. Our strong position is to avoid what we consider to be theological and/or ethical compromise. I do recognize that we come out on different sides of the fence as to what comprises compromise!<sup>15</sup>

John Travis, to his credit, in the recent letter to the editor cited above, makes a very beneficial suggestion to help correct this injustice:

By definition, C3 and C4 Christ-centered communities are attempts to stay and witness within one’s community of birth: in other words, to remain an ‘insider.’ Therefore, perhaps we need to find a better term like ‘cultural insider’ (for C3 and C4) and ‘religious’ or ‘socio-religious’ insider to describe C5. Whatever the case, since ‘outsider’ sounds negative and dismissing and may not in many cases reflect the reality of a Christian of Muslim background still living in his community, perhaps it is time we look for a new set of terms.<sup>16</sup>

**Brother Yusuf:** This is not our claim and it is not an issue for us.

**Kevin Higgins:** I am again not sure to whom Corwin refers here. This seems more and more like a “straw man” argument.

**Rick Brown:** It seems to me that the biblical argument supports both C4 and C5 and points in between. The question, then, is why the critics follow the argument as far as C4 but refuse to follow it to C5. Even more puzzling, if the angels in heaven are rejoicing over the many Muslims whom the Lord is saving, then why aren’t the critics rejoicing as well? The reality, however, is that discipleship to Christ is expressed in a broad variety of ways in Muslim communities. The terms ‘C4’ and ‘C5’ simply designate reference points in a spectrum, and the spectrum itself is multi-dimensional, not linear. It simply distorts the facts to treat these points as distinct and discrete groups of people. I’ve met Messianic Muslims who were indistinguishable in belief and behavior from C3 or C2 Christians, yet insisted that they were “Muslims” who followed Jesus. For them, the term “Christian” designated a traditional ethnic group that they neither belonged to nor respected. So are they C5 believers? There are also Messianic Muslims who identify themselves as Muslims and behave culturally as religious Muslims, yet they do not say the *shahada*. So does that make them C4? And there are ones whom I’ve known for years but whom I never thought to ask whether they say or would say the *shahada*. So where are they on the chart? And as for those who say the *shahada*, they represent a whole range of views with regard to what they mean by it, if anything at all. For some it is a belief which they have simply never questioned and so they accept both the Bible and the Qur’an as holy books. But for many Muslims, both Messianic and secular, saying the *shahada* is a social ritual that affirms one’s membership in the community. It is like responding in England to the toast “God save the Queen”: everyone joins in, regardless of whether they believe in God or salvation or the efficacy of such a prayer. If one looks at the members of a Messianic Muslim fellowship, one finds a range of positions, just as one would in an extended Muslim family. So for these reasons, it seems

*It seems to me that Messianic Muslims talk about the Lord Jesus more than the traditional Christians do, and they spend far more time studying his words in the Gospels.—Rick Brown*

preferable to me to use the term ‘Messianic Muslim’ to describe any disciple of Jesus Christ who maintains a Muslim ethnic identity.

Critics also confuse C5 movements among Muslims with “churchless Christianity” among Hindus. Messianic Muslims who are not part of a community of faith are closer to C6 than to C5. They do not, however, consider this a desirable state. Muslims are family and community oriented, and as a result, Messianic Muslims want to be part of a family of faith and a community of believers. They also want to be part of God’s global people (his *umma*, so to speak). But when traditional Christians reject Messianic Muslims as “heretics” and “hypocrites,” this impedes unity in Christ and fosters distrust and division.

#### Gary Corwin

**8** HAVE YOU CONSIDERED *that biblical and church history is consistent in its record and teaching that a believer’s identity and allegiance to JAHWEH and to Christ must be unequivocal and undiluted?*

While the case of Namaan in II Kings 5:18, 19 is often cited in support of C5, a much stronger case can be made for it as an argument for the principle long established in C4 circles as well, that God is not unsympathetic to the plight of new believers who because of their national and social context may be expected to do certain compromising things or face exceedingly difficult consequences. What is more surprising is the total lack of reference in C5 literature to the constant Old Testament theme that JAHWEH is a jealous God who abhors sharing the allegiance and worship of his followers, whether that be to Baal, a golden calf, or “the high places,” and which the book of Hosea compares to spiritual adultery. Likewise, the record of the New Testament and subsequent church history is that those mature in the faith would rather die than allow their testimony to cloud the message that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord and that the Triune God alone must be the object of our worship.<sup>17</sup>

**Brother Yusuf:** I have lived and ministered in both traditional churches and in house fellowships of Muslim believers. What I have observed is that the average level of commitment to God is far higher among the Muslim believers. The very word “Muslim” means submitted to God, and so it is a fitting description. What we find among most missionaries and churchmen, however, is a commitment to their institutions, to their programs, to their traditional practices, and to their codes of doctrine. Their commitment to Jesus Christ himself is less evident.

**Rick Brown:** I felt deeply ashamed when Brother Yusuf read this question in my presence. But he was gracious and did not raise an eyebrow or show the least resentment at being classed with Baal worshippers, spiritual adulterers, and cowards who bow the knee to Caesar.

It seems to me that Messianic Muslims talk about the Lord Jesus more than the traditional Christians do, and they spend far more time studying his words in the Gospels. The traditional churchmen and missionaries often study the Bible so they can debate their doctrinal and missiological differences, but the Muslim believers study the Bible so they can know God’s ways, obey his commands, and follow the examples of Christ Jesus and the Apostles. Many traditional Christian clerics have also come under the sway of Mammon, and some will go to any length to ensure that mission funds come to them and not to others. The lack of mission support for insiders has helped to spare them from this stumbling block.

When Muslims come to understand biblical truth, it is usually because they have been enlightened by God’s Word and been led by God’s Spirit, not because they have learned a body of doctrine. So it takes time for them to reach orthodox understanding, but when they do, it is their true belief rather than an assent to a denominational creed. It might be noted that people in one mission are developing materials to help explain the ecumenical creeds to leaders of insider movements. Work on the Chalcedonian Creed is particularly impressive and holds great promise for helping intellectual believers grapple with the dual nature of Jesus Christ. If this is successful, then many Messianic Muslim leaders will understand Christology better than many missionaries.

**Kevin Higgins:** Corwin is quite correct that there is a strong and consistent theme in the Old and New Testaments that condemns idolatry and upholds the jealousy of the Lord God for his people and his exclu-

sive worship. It seems however, that Corwin then draws a straight line from the idolatry condemned in the Bible to the worship and practice of C5 believers. He offers no evidence, nor does he describe why he feels there is a parallel. This raises more than one question.

First, what is idolatry?

Idolatry takes at least two forms. One is what I will call “ontological idolatry,” the very literal worship of a being, a divinity that is not the true God, the True Divine Being (hence my term, ontological). The other is the “functional idolatry” that elevates any object, goal, agenda, or desire to such a level of importance in one’s life that it becomes, in effect, a “god” (so, Paul refers to greed as idolatry in Ephesians 5:5).

As for the second type of idolatry (functional), of course *any* human being, indeed *any* follower of Jesus, is subject to this temptation. All of us need to hear and to heed the biblical word in this area and allow God to cleanse us.

But Corwin’s concern that C5 believers are guilty of ontological idolatry raises a second question. Is a C5 Muslim (I will stick to my own context here) committing idolatry? To put it more directly, do C5 Muslim followers of Jesus worship a different God?

It seems that Corwin’s assumption is “yes,” and thus he asks us to consider the biblical prohibitions of idolatry and the call to exclusive worship of the true God. The C5 movements with which I am familiar and/or directly involved teach that Jesus is Lord and Savior, that Jesus as God’s Word is also God, that he has become flesh and dwelt among us, and that there is only one true God.

Have I missed Corwin’s point? Is he perhaps concerned that C5 Muslims do not use the right name for God (since he repeats the reference to Yahweh twice)? Knowing what I do know of Gary, I do not think that could be his meaning. I am sure he knows the situation well enough to know that this is not an argument about whether using the word “Allah” is idolatrous in and of itself. I am sure he knows that for hundreds of years all Arabic-speaking Christians and Arabic Bibles have used Allah as the only possible word for God.

I can only conclude, then, that he is concerned that the C5 or “insider” paradigm is promoting the worship of a different god, in the ontological sense. Again, in the movements with which I am acquainted or involved, this is simply not the case.

## Gary Corwin

**9** HAVE YOU CONSIDERED *that most of the advocates for C5/insider movements seem to be outsiders, and that it seems to be MBBs (Muslim Background Believers) and other*

*believers intimately acquainted with Islam that find the concept of a C5/insider movement as an end goal most abhorrent?*

Admittedly, the evidence for this is anecdotal at best, but it is significant enough in this writer’s experience to at least give one pause. Knowing the experience of others on this point would be most instructive. The rejoinder, no doubt, is that mature Muslim believers capable of articulating C5 principles do not yet exist because of the relative youth of the movement; and, that those MBBs and others who find the concept most abhorrent are no doubt representatives further down the C-scale, or CBBs<sup>18</sup> from churches with a historic chip on their shoulders with regard to Islam. While there is no doubt truth in the first point, it is hard to imagine on the second point that those critical of C5 would not be coming from among those further down the scale; and CBBs in an Islamic context with a real heart for reaching Muslims, it would seem, ought to have at least as much say as outside western missiologists.

**Brother Yusuf:** The truth is that the vast majority of missionaries and their disciples oppose insider movements and very few have supported them. As for the few friends we have from outside our culture, they are people who have seen what God himself is doing in Muslim communities and who have been willing to support it, in spite of criticism from other missionaries and opposition from acrimonious churchmen.

**John Travis:** It has long been the custom among cultural Christians to insist that Muslims who come to faith in Christ should renounce Islam and change their official religious identity. As a result, those who have renounced Islam and suffered the consequences continue to assume that this step is required for salvation and for acceptance into Christian fellowship.

In recent years, however, many Muslim background believers (MBBs) have started to consider the advantages of insider movements (C5 faith communities), as have many Christian background believers (CBBs), both nationals and foreigners. A growing number of MBBs and CBBs are now favorable towards insider movements, but few of them are able to attend mission conferences, discuss missiology in English, or write English-language articles. My understanding is that they support insider approaches, not because some missionary pushed the idea, but because they sense the Lord’s leading in this direction.

We have met a number of MBBs who say that if they had known, when they came to faith in Christ, that it

*As long as the movement to Christ is staying within networks of families, and is not pulling people . . . into new networks (no matter how contextualized), it should be considered an “insider movement.”—Rebecca Lewis*

was possible to retain their official religious identity, then they would have gone in that direction. Many of these Christian MBBs are now working in support of existing C5 communities or to help new ones be birthed.

We also know many national CBBs who are supportive of C5 communities. Some of them are influential church leaders who encourage Muslims coming to faith in Christ to feel free to remain inside Islam as participants in a C5 community. And those who follow this route have generally been quite positive about the results and become advocates of the approach. They feel they are as much a part of Christ’s Body as other true followers of Jesus, and they joyfully live out their faith within the Muslim community in fellowship with other insider believers.

On the other hand, there are MBBs and CBBs who prefer a C3 or C4 approach, and we believe that they should not be pushed in a C5 direction. Over the years, we have felt that the best policy is to encourage believers to consider the alternatives and to find the place of ministry that they feel God is calling them to, hopefully with the support of their leaders. Those called to C5 approaches should be free to carry out their ministries without interference from those called in a non-C5 direction, and those called to non-C5 approaches should enjoy the respect and support of those who are engaged in C5 ministries. With millions of Muslims in the world who sadly have not yet heard of salvation through Jesus, there is more than enough room for a variety of approaches and movements. It was for this purpose that the C1-C6 Continuum was formulated in the first place—to foster appreciation of the wide variety of expressions of faith found in Muslim contexts today.

In my personal interactions with a number of high level national Christian leaders in Muslim countries, I have found that many see the need to have an approach where Muslims are free to meet Christ and study his Word on their own, accepting him and congregating in their own ways without the involvement of traditional Christians and churches. I have also met quite a few MBBs who have told me that they would have remained insiders had they met other such believers and known such an option was a possibility at the time of their conversion.

**Kevin Higgins:** The assumption here is that “MBB’s and believers acquainted with Islam” are against the insider model. All I can say is that I know many who are in favor.

**Rebecca Lewis:** I believe that the term “insider movement” should apply to all movements to Christ where the believers are staying within where the culture is itself going, sociologically and religiously, and *not* be limited only to people groups that are staying in their original religious context. As long as the movement to Christ is staying within networks of families, and is *not* pulling people out of their networks into new networks (no matter how contextualized, e.g., Messianic mosques), it should be considered an “insider movement.” So any situation where becoming a believer requires a change in one’s identity to a new network would *not* be considered an insider movement, no matter how “contextualized.”

**Rick Brown:** From what I can discern, insider movements have sprung from the inside, not the outside. They are birthed by the study of God’s Word and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. In at least one case an insider movement was initiated in a vision of Jesus. (See the article “Brother Jacob and Master Isaac” this issue, pp. 41–42.) The most helpful thing that outsiders can do is to let Muslims know that this is an option, that it is not necessary for them to become proselytes and hence apostates.

Recently I was at a conference attended by CEOs of 22 missions and by representatives of several more. I had invited a 72-year-old Messianic Muslim as a special guest. He has 40 years of experience sharing his faith across most of the Arab countries. At one point he spoke from the floor and told a touching story of how God had used him to help lead people to faith at mosques. He described how the Holy Spirit himself had then convicted and enlightened those people and led them progressively towards orthodoxy and orthopraxy. His plea from the floor was this: “Would you missionaries please stop trying to be the Holy Spirit for us.” The response from the participants was a resounding ovation.

If Jesus can save the Muslims, impart his grace to them, and gather them into bodies, can he not guide them and lead them into all truth? The insider movements are committed to Jesus Christ as Lord, not to Caesar, nor to the Pope, nor to Luther, Calvin, Wesley, or Mammon. Let’s support that and not try to act as their lord in Jesus’ place. There is also much that we can learn from them. As Andrew Walls recently said, “Mission is not so much a matter of contextualizing the gospel as learning its truth through an entirely new way of life and thought” (Christianity Today 51/2 (Feb. 2007) p. 89).

Gary Corwin

**10** HAVE YOU CONSIDERED *the huge extent to which we western missiologists are influenced in these matters by our own cultural context?* Our cultural fetish with success and what is required to achieve it is so ingrained in us that we tend not to even think about it. We also tend to assume that a formula exists to achieve it in any endeavor. We simply have to discover that formula and execute its constituent parts. Please note that I am not saying that C5 advocates are inherently more prone to this than any other harvest laborers, or that they are pursuing pragmatic solutions at any cost; but I do think many are strongly influenced by church growth movement excesses which have pulled this direction in the post-McGavran period. It's frankly somewhat hard for me to make sense of the seeming elevation of experience above revelation in Scripture apart from some such explanation. It's fine to point out that the Jerusalem Council wanted to first hear the testimony of the Apostle concerning what the Spirit was doing among those he encountered on his journey before turning to the Scriptures. It's quite another thing to assert the same privilege for one's own ministry and to suggest that the perceived results are of equal standing with the Scripture. We are not Apostles (big A) and we have no right to assume that God is doing a new thing just because we want him to, any more than we have the right to deny that he is doing a new thing when all the evidence (scriptural and experiential) is in, and indicates that he is.

**Kevin Higgins:** I am at a loss to know how to reply. The Atlanta conference was precisely called to address biblical issues. Several cogent papers were presented offering solid biblical arguments for insider movements. Other works have done the same. To again paint with such a broad brush seems unfair to those who have in fact labored hard to mine the Scriptures to hear God's heart and mind. I personally hear very little church growth "talk" among pro-insiders. In fact, I find most of us to be rather skeptical and cynical about the church growth movement.

The insider movement paradigm, or the thinking that has led to insider paradigms, is not a result of the church growth movement. It is actually the fruit of deeper and deeper probing into the ministry implications of a number of biblical themes: the incarnation, Paul's cross-cultural ministry, God's "way" among

various *ethne* throughout the canonical books, etc. Also, there is no dichotomy between "insider movements" and "church planting movements" (CPMs). An insider movement will develop forms of fellowship among believers as leaders search the Scriptures and apply them (the Scriptures themselves will surface the issue of "church"). CPM advocates and insider movement advocates have in some cases already overlapped or embraced. We have much to learn from one another.

Gary Corwin

IN CONCLUSION, I would simply like to say that I think it is vitally important that the issues and questions related to Insider Movements be given the most thoughtful and prayerful consideration of which we are capable. The implications for the lost, the health and extension of Christ's Church, and the glory of the Triune God are simply that great.

I have often asked the question in various teaching opportunities, "Whose church is it anyway?" The answer I always hope to hear, but end with in any case, is that it is Christ's church first, and it is the church of the local believers second. The cross-cultural workers who may be involved are simply there to help make the bricks, that is to say, make disciples whom the Master Builder can use to build his church. Our job is not to lead or direct, but it is to point them to salvation in Christ and to the Word and prayer, and to teach them by example how to handle the Word well, pray in the Spirit, and to obey—to the glory of God and the joyous salvation of all whom God is drawing to himself. Let us never waiver in prayer that we will do it well.

**John Travis:** This insightful closing statement of Gary's is actually very much in keeping with the C5/Insider paradigm, and shows that in fact we may be closer in our perspectives and hopes than we think. The local *ekklesia* of Muslim followers of Jesus does not "belong to" the believers themselves, nor to the Pope, nor to the cross-cultural workers, nor to any denominational heads; it belongs to Christ alone (Mat 16:18; Col 1:18; Eph 1:22–23). Secondly, the role of outside cross-cultural workers is to proclaim Christ, teach people to obey the Word, and encourage them to live godly, Spirit-filled lives in community with other like-hearted, like-minded people (I Cor 3:5–9). We, like Paul, must then (ideally) commit them early on to the Lord (Acts 14:23, 20:32; Tit 1:5) and remove ourselves so that we do not end up, as Gary has said, "leading

and directing,” two things which spell disaster to any insider movement. We may for a season be a coach or “brick” maker but in time the Word of God and the Holy Spirit will guide them “into all truth” (Jn 16:13). Lastly, as stated above, let us “never waiver in prayer that we will do it well.” **IJFM**

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, a collection of articles under the heading “An Extended Conversation About ‘Insider Movements’” in *Mission Frontiers* (January–February 2006, vol. 28:1) 16–23; my editorials “Insider Movements and Outsider Missiology” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 42:1 (January 2006) 10–11 and “Connecting the Post-Modern Dots” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 42:2 (April 2006) 150–151; as well as Bill Nikides, “Evaluating ‘Insider Movements’: C5 (Messianic Muslims)” *St Francis Magazine*, Nr 4 (March 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, “Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 ‘High Spectrum’ Contextualization,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 23:3 (July–September 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Phil Parshall, “Response Two” of “Four Responses to Timothy C. Tennent,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 23:3 (July–September 2006) 125.

<sup>4</sup> Especially Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council.

<sup>5</sup> Especially the need for personal experience not to trump Apostolic proclamation as declared in the Scriptures.

<sup>6</sup> Particularly with regard to the rupture with one’s Islamic identity necessitated by identity with Christ.

<sup>7</sup> Please note that I am not referring to MBBs choosing to continue in the mosque and to continue to perform public Islamic ritual for a season, both to sort things out in their lives and for evangelistic reasons, but I am referring to the C5/IM contention that it should be expected that this would (and should) be a permanent state. See my “Insider Movements and Outsider Missiology” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (January 2006) 10–11.

<sup>8</sup> See Joshua Massey, “His Ways Are Not Our Ways,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* vol. 35:2 (April 1999) for an extensive review of “new things” found throughout the Scriptures, but note also Timothy Tennent, 114, that regarding the application of this to C5 situations “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.”

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that speaking of Messianic Jewish churches (which do exist and whose self-identification is Christian) is not the same as speaking of Messianic Judaism (an oxymoron religiously, as modern Judaism defines itself in terms of its rejection of Jesus as Messiah).

<sup>10</sup> Tennent, 105–107.

<sup>11</sup> And it must be remembered that historic Christian doctrine and historic Islamic doctrine are very much in contradiction in all the major spheres—the nature of God, and the nature of man, sin, the atonement, revelation etc. My good friend and veteran Middle East worker, MK, reminded me recently in correspondence of a lengthy conversation we had with a brother who is a staunch C5 advocate. His observations are telling on this point: “I wonder at

times if C5 advocates are prepared to jettison much of the historic understanding of our faith or else mitigate it with orthodox Islamic understanding (I remember our conversation with [our brother] relative to the pre-existence of Christ. He seemed very willing to subject historic Christian understanding to review). When Muslims adopt Christian positions on doctrine, they become infidels according to Islam. That’s not nice, but it is true. Praying in the mosque and reciting the *shabada* implicates the C5 person in hypocrisy or, at best, a massive redefining of the essential truths of Christianity. The implications for discipleship are mind-boggling.”

<sup>12</sup> Rick Brown in “Contextualization without Syncretism,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, vol. 23:3 (July–September 2006) 132 provides two such examples of legal victories for which we can all give thanks.

<sup>13</sup> Upon showing this paper to my friend MK, mentioned above and a fluent Arabic speaker, he wrote of this sentence: “Not only ‘viewed as deceit’, but given what we know of Islam, it is deceit. The Arabic word for these people is *munaafiqun*—hypocrites. Their outward actions conceal their actual belief, unless of course their faith is closer to Islam than it is to Christianity. I find that C5 pulls us toward an Islamic theological aberrance.”

<sup>14</sup> A recent in-print version of which I am aware is John and Anna Travis, “Maximizing the Bible!: Glimpses From Our Context,” *Mission Frontiers* (January–February 2006, vol. 28:1) 22. He says “Interestingly, it would appear that the largest movement to Christ among Muslims in the world today is C5 in nature, occurring in Asia.” Happily, a much more generous and accurate discussion of the subject can be found in a letter by Travis to the editor of the *Mission Frontiers* (September–October 2006, vol. 28:5) 7. It is worth reading in its entirety, but we must suffice with just a couple of short quotes here. First, “One of my colleagues is a consultant for C3 work, and he reported that while none of us has yet seen a people movement among this people group, the C3 and C4 groups are seeing a remarkable 8–12% numerical growth rate per year, something which is truly wonderful!” And even more directly to this discussion, “please let me revise my statement and say that at least there is a significant turning to Christ in a C5 way in one part of Asia, and there are a number of other movements happening as well (that are more C3 and C4 in character) in other parts of the world.”

<sup>15</sup> Parshall, 125.

<sup>16</sup> Travis, 7.

<sup>17</sup> See my “Insider Movements and Outsider Missiology” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (January 2006) 11, as well as any readable history of Christianity.

<sup>18</sup> CBB is shorthand for Christian Background Believers and is used most frequently to refer to those who have come to faith from among minority cultural Christian communities in larger Islamic contexts (e.g. the Coptic community of Egypt).



# Response to Gary Corwin from the hindu context

by Herbert Hoefler

I can react to some of the questions in the paper from my experience with C4/5 believers in the caste Hindu communities of India.

In regard to the question of participation in non-Christian religious rites (question 2), most of the “Jesu Bhaktas” (“Devotees of Jesus”), as they have come to call themselves, make a clear distinction between the religious and communal aspects of festivals. For example, a woman is typically responsible for arranging the religious rites of a family festival. If she is a Jesu Bhakta, she will typically carry out her family duty but then step back when the rites are being performed. There is no objection to her lack of participation, for she has carried out her family duty.

In Hinduism, it is not a matter of belief but of practice (“dharma”). You are expected to accept your role in the community and carry it out respectfully and faithfully. As long as you do that, you are included, no matter what your personal beliefs and other practices might be. The Jesu Bhakta has no problem participating in the communal aspects of the festivals, once the religious rites are concluded. In fact, whether a marriage rite or a family event or a community festival, usually only ten percent of the customs are religious.

It seems to me that Naaman in II Kg 5 (question 8) was participating in the religious events of his king in a similar manner. He was carrying out his social responsibility to be at the king’s side, but was making clear that his participation was purely communal, not religious. He had brought back part of the sacred land

to build the altar for his own worship at home. As long as he carried out his communal duty, there was apparently no objection to his personal religious practice.

As I have written in an upcoming *EMQ* article on “The Church in Context,” it is important that we address these matters in a comprehensive way theologically. One doctrine/practice of our faith must not violate or compromise any others, as much as possible. In this regard, our religious practice must not violate our practice of the “Orders of Creation,” our God-given responsibility to carry out duties in realms of family, marriage, government, courts, society, etc. We should be a respected community member, while at the same time carrying out our beliefs faithfully (cf. I Tim 3:7a).

Finally, I have found that we must be careful in considering the criticisms of “churched” national believers (question 9). Often there are ethnic and historic reasons for their criticisms of those who are not joining their community. Others who have undergone the suffering of ostracism and persecution often resent that others do not see this path as necessary or even God-pleasing. **IJFM**

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*Herbert Hoefler is a former missionary to India, having served from 1968–1983 with the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. He is currently professor of theology at Concordia University, Portland, Oregon.*