

Fruitful Practices: What Does the Research Suggest?

# Movements and Contextualization: Is There Really a Correlation?

by Rick Brown, Bob Fish, John Travis, Eric Adams, and Don Allen

*New empirical research reveals a correlation between contextualization and the emergence of faith movements among Muslim people groups.*

**A**t the Fruitful Practices Consultation held in Thailand in March, 2007, data was collected from 280 missionaries working across the Muslim world in a variety of teams.<sup>1</sup> One of the questions was the following:

Number of churches established through our team's ministry: \_\_\_\_

A total of 157 participants indicated that they had established at least one church. Participants who answered that their team had established one or more churches in their location were then asked to answer the two questions below with regard to their most mature "church":<sup>2</sup>

Currently, the community I work with can be described best by (choose one answer):

- We have contacts among Muslims who show interest in or are sympathetic to the Gospel message. They would not identify themselves as followers of Jesus.
- We are discipling individuals from a Muslim background who identify themselves as followers of Jesus. They do not yet meet together.
- We work with a gathered group of followers of Jesus, from a Muslim background.
- We work with a group of believers (Muslim background) who have their own leadership.
- The community has reproduced itself at least once locally.
- The community we are working with shows signs of becoming a movement.

One method that has been developed to describe how Christ Centered Communities ("C") relate to the surrounding Muslim population is called the "C" scale. Please choose one of the following statements relating to the "C" scale that *best* describes the communities of Muslim background believers that you work with (choose **one**):

- C1:** The community is a **traditional church** which does *not* use the daily language of the surrounding Muslim population. In some aspects of culture and lifestyle (e.g., diet, clothing, religious terminology, worship forms), the believers are quite different from the surrounding Muslim community.
- C2:** The **same as C1 except they *do* use the daily language** (although not necessarily the religious terminology) of the surrounding Muslim population.
- C3:** The community is **seen as Christian** by the surrounding Muslim community, yet it **retains many local cultural forms** used by the Muslims. Any

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*John Travis is the author of the C-spectrum. The other four authors are members of the Fruitful Practices Taskforce, which is a collaborative, multi-agency network of missiologists who are studying effective field practitioners and how God is working through them. Through this they identify and publicize practices that are demonstrably "fruitful" in facilitating faith movements among Muslim peoples.*

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cultural form which feels *religiously* Islamic, however, is rejected or modified.

- **C4:** The community **retains both Muslim cultural forms and Biblically acceptable Islamic religious forms** (e.g., perhaps praying with hands raised, using Islamic religious terminology, not eating pork or drinking alcohol, etc.). They would not, however, refer to themselves as being “Muslims.” They would likely call themselves, “followers of Isa” rather than “Christian.” Though highly contextualized, believers are **not seen as Muslims** by the Muslim community.
- **C5:** The community remains legally and socially within the Islamic community. (In some contexts, this may mean active participation in Muslim religious life and practice. In other contexts, this may entail little participation in Muslim religious practices. In either case, the **identity is clearly “Muslim.”**) Parts of Islam that do not fit with the Bible are rejected or if possible, reinterpreted. **Believers regularly meet in distinctively “Jesus Muslim” groups.**
- **C6:** This type of Muslim has accepted Jesus as savior, yet due to many factors (e.g., persecution, isolation, legal issues) has **no visible community.** He or she may at times meet with other believers, perhaps in underground groups, yet unlike C5, there is

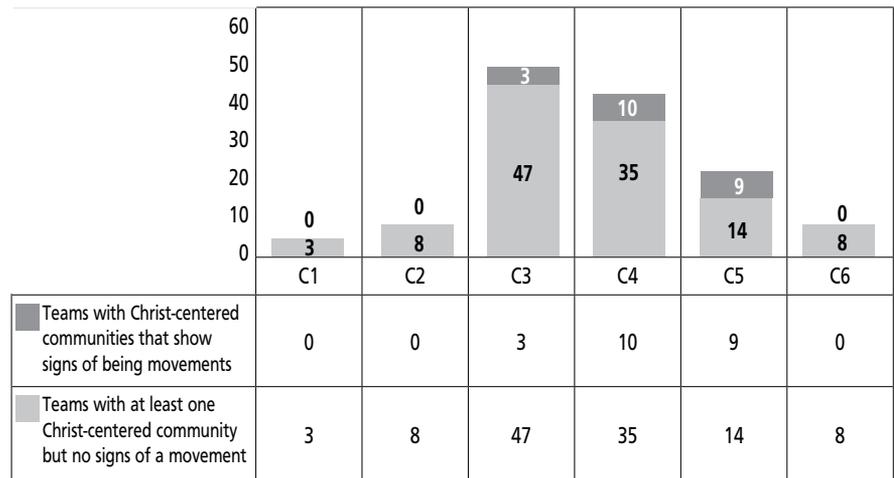


Figure 1: Movements as a function of contextualization.

no regularly meeting community of believers. No matter what forms are used in private or secret spiritual life, the surrounding community views the believer(s) as Muslim.

Sixteen of these 157 respondents indicated on the first question above that their most mature current work was only in the first two categories, either engagement with contacts or discipling, but not gathering. It might be that they had established a faith community previously in another location and had moved on, but for the purpose of analyzing movements, it was decided to remove these 16 from consideration. Four of the remaining 141 respondents indicated that they were seeing signs of a movement, yet indicated that they had established only one church. It might be that they had interpreted the initial question to mean the number of churches that God had

established through them personally, rather than ones that God had established through reproduction, but to ensure the integrity of the analysis of movements, these 4 were removed from consideration. This left 137 reporting teams through whom God had established 3 to 99 churches. Of these 137 teams, 22 indicated that they were seeing signs of a movement. As seen in Figure 1, all of these movements, whether budding or mature, were in the C3–C5 range. Especially revealing is the ratio of movements to churches as a function of contextualization (see Figure 2).

In comparison to the size of the Muslim community worldwide (1.5 billion), relatively few Muslims have come to faith in Christ and very few churches have been planted. We have dozens rather than tens of thousands of case studies to analyze. With these limitations in mind, however, the analysis of this data does point to the following observation: All three levels of contextualization, C3–C5, correlate with the formation of churches, but higher degrees of contextualization appear more conducive to the development of movements.<sup>3</sup> Interviews with participants revealed that a significant factor in these results was that contextualization allowed the followers of Jesus to retain more of their culture and social identity. This in turn allowed them to remain in their

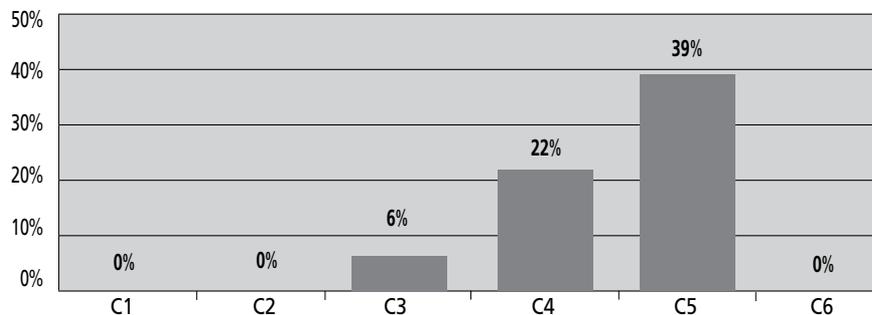


Figure 2: Percentage of reported church plantings that have indicators of a movement, according to their level of contextualization.

social networks as confessing followers of Jesus, enabling their faith communities to witness, grow and multiply along pre-existing lines of their social networks.<sup>4</sup> **IJFM**

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For analyses of much of this data, see Knowledge Stewardship Team, “Modeling the Relationship between Contextual Factors and Fruitfulness in Church Planting,” in J. Dudley Woodberry (ed.), *From Seed to Fruit: Supplemental Resources* (CD) (Pasadena: William Carey, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Note that these six options failed to account for situations in which a worker is discipling a group of people in a social network before all or any of them have made a faith commitment. These options also reflect a sharp division between engagement, discipleship and gathering into churches, a division which many of the respondents rejected in favor of a social network paradigm.

<sup>3</sup> This data should not be interpreted to mean that C5 communities are the ones mostly likely to multiply in all situations; there may well be situations where C3 and C4 are equally effective or more so. Different levels of contextualization might also have different degrees of appeal to Muslims of different sentiments, in which case the greatest multiplication would come from having both C4 and C5 movements in the same society.

<sup>4</sup> For a presentation and qualitative analysis of the interviews, see Andrea and Leith Gray, “Paradigms and Praxis: Part I: Social Networks and Fruitfulness in Church Planting,” in this issue of the *IJFM* (pp. 19-28). See as well the analysis by Rebecca Lewis of social networks as the foundation for church formation in her article “Insider Movements: Honoring God-given Identity and Community,” also in this issue (pp. 33-36).

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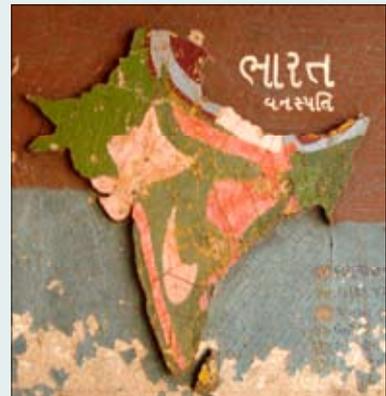
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