The Five Pillars of the Insiders: A Collective Response to *Understanding Insider Movements*

Eight Southern Baptist missiologists (six in the United States and two elsewhere) join forces here to respond briefly to a new volume on Insider Movements (IMs). It is an initiative most of us had no intention of taking as little as three months ago, but feel compelled to take now. Quite frankly, some of us were surprised when we received a copy of the book in September 2015. We had rejoiced to see the movement of God as the gospel crossed all kinds of anthropological barriers in our changing world. However, that was not the same as endorsing IMs—or all their promoters claim for them. In fact, we believed that cogent arguments of respected evangelical scholars, against disturbing elements of IMs, had relegated them to the periphery of evangelical missions efforts. Unfortunately, we were mistaken. Advocacy for IMs, as exemplified in the book at hand, is alive and well.

It now appears that a major task lies before us. What we present here is simply a preliminary effort which we hope to supplement in months to come. It consists of an overview of the volume, five reflections of a biblical and theological nature, and two missiological insights. It is by no means the last word on the subject. However, as we offer this very limited response to some of the specifics in *Understanding Insider Movements*, we hope the reader will understand why we are concerned.

Ant B. Greenham
Ayman S. Ibrahim

An Overview of *Understanding Insider Movements*—and its Five “Pillars”

The long-awaited volume *Understanding Insider Movements* has finally been released. It defines an “insider” as “a person from a non-Christian background who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior but retained the socioreligious identity of his or her birth.” While the Church’s aim, as it appears in the New Testament, was never explicitly to encourage new believers to remain as deeply as they could in their original contexts, the Insider Movements (IMs) approach seeks to strengthen and advocate for such a paradigm.

The English idiom “don’t judge a book by its cover” is very true in this book’s case, as one of its most attractive elements is its outward appearance. With a colorful cover, nicely designed, some may expect a comprehensive rigorous understanding of the so-called Insider Movements (IMs). Unfortunately, this is not the case. Once readers take a close look at the Table of Contents, they will be disappointed, as they will realize that the vast majority of the articles are written by authors well known for their support and advocacy of the IMs trend. There is no article which raises or treats the many missiological and ecclesiastical concerns that several Christian leaders, such as D.A. Carson, Doug Colemen, Kevin DeYoung, Fred Farrokh, John

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2 This review was first published in a slightly edited form in TGC on Friday, December 18, 2015.
Piper, J. T. Smith, and J. Henry Wolfe, have voiced against the IMs paradigm. The volume, thus, is not actually about “understanding” the Insider Movements, but rather has the feel of propaganda, as it supports its anthropological discourses, advocates its missiological arguments, and promotes its ecclesiastical stances.

The editors of this volume, Harley Talman and John Jay Travis (pseudonyms), collected some 64 (mostly) previously published articles, particularly with the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*, in addition to three appendices and a glossary followed by an index. They, however, made a very strategic choice, as they included articles by renowned authors, such as Andrew Walls and Archbishop Gregoire Haddad, who are not necessarily addressing Insider Movements or advocating for them. This choice brings an authoritative flavor to the edited volume, though their articles had nothing to add to the core discussion pertaining to the theological, missiological, and ecclesiastical stance of IMs advocates.

The reader soon realizes that there is no significant contribution by Insider converts. In a 679-page volume on Insider Movements, the voice of Insider converts is absent; instead, solely the IMs proponents’ perspective is expressed. This is a serious matter that affects and speaks to the credibility of the work. Thus, regrettably, the book reverberates with a mono-tone melody, and, to my mind, one that runs a little off-key and results in both confusion among those Christians unaware of the issue and considerable dissatisfaction among those who sincerely desire to engage an in-depth, rigorous, biblical, theological, and missiological conversation with its proponents and advocates.

In a short review as this, one cannot engage each article or argument found in the lengthy edited work, but thoughtful Christian leaders and missiologists should diligently work on engaging at least five major erroneous theses argued and emphasized throughout the book. I call these theses the Five Pillars of the Insider Movements. They are theologically dangerous and missiologically incorrect. I traced them throughout the book, and will emphasize these falsities here below:

1) *The Prophethood of Islam’s Founder*: Some of the IMs advocates argue that Muhammad could be possibly identified as a prophet in the biblical sense or “as having had a prophetic message or function of some sort,” because “what a person says about Muhammad is of great consequence in the Muslim community.” Consequently, according to IMs, we should allow the possibility that proclaiming the *Shehadah*, including affirming Muhammad’s prophethood in some ways “does not inherently preclude biblical faithfulness” (Chapter 53; of course this is in addition to the simplistic argument that Allah is God in Chapter 54).

2) *Retention of Religious Identity*: A very problematic argument set forth by IMs proponents insists that Muslims can be born again “without denying their identity as Muslims within their society,” as we are not necessarily “trying to change anyone’s religion.” In fact, according to the IMs paradigm, the meaning and nature of “religion” should be reconsidered and reevaluated to include “those who represent a combination of [various religious] lists” (Chapters 8, 21, 22, 37, 38, 39, and 55 and 58, especially 59, and to a lesser degree 20).

3) *The Quran as Scripture*: This erroneous thesis claims that the Quran still has a value for Muslim Insiders, and we should expect their communities to “include Islamic places and pattern of worship.” Furthermore, some IMs advocates argue that “no confrontational effort to replace
the Quran with the Bible is needed,” as the Quran accepts “Jesus as a messenger from God,” “the Gospel as his message,” and, thus, the pillars of Islam “are all adaptations of previous Jewish and Christian forms” in a “refurbished” form (Chapters 24 and 25 and 43, 45, and 58, see also 16).

4) Transformation of the Language of the Biblical Text: IMs advocates suggest that it would be best if we change some terms in the translations of the Bible, like the ‘Son of God,’ as they should “be communicated in the language of Muslims, including their religious vocabulary,” as we adopt “effective styles and forms [that Muslims] can accept,” and as we use a new “Jesus hermeneutic” of the Quran (Chapters 24 and 25).

5) No Church, No Christianity, but only Jesus: For IMs proponents the crucial matter is not a church or mosque, Christianity or Islam, as these are not the major concern: “churches are communities of Christ followers,” which could be found anywhere and even possibly “reside ‘inside’ a Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, or Buddhist cultural and religious community.” For IMs advocates, a church can “develop a distinct and Christ-focused ecclesial identity while at the same time affirming a Hindu/Sikh socioreligious identity,” as Christ’s body has invisible and visible churches (Chapters 19, 30, 38, 39).

These five theses serve as pillars, upon which the entire IMs paradigm seems to rest. They are dangerous not only in themselves, but specifically in their theological, soteriological, and missiological implications. While all these pillars have been addressed, debated, and even refuted more than once, the IMs movement continues to thrive in some missions circles.

Unfortunately, this edited volume demonstrates that the IMs advocates are still attempting to raise their voice apart from sound biblical interpretation and rigorous missiological and theological engagements, and despite cogent opposition. The decision to largely exclude the voice of IMs opponents and converts in this book is alarming, as it reflects the distorted and reductionist picture that the editors wish to portray. The sheep are in danger. Many Christians who are not well educated theologically or are unaware of sound Biblical hermeneutics may consider the IMs paradigm as a new revival or a reincarnation of the New Testament Church, as various IMs advocates seem to believe. Those who deeply long to see the lost won to Christ can begin to compromise sound Biblical interpretations to apply a distorted paradigm. It is my conviction that Christian individuals and groups should work diligently to produce rigorous studies and scholarly works that show the danger and errors embedded in such a volume. That work can then be used to train missionaries and young churches around the world, so that they may avoid this deep pitfall. The task is huge, but absolutely imperative.

Ayman S. Ibrahim

Communal Solidarity—or True Brotherhood?

In their chapter “Conversion in the New Testament,” Michael Roberts and Richard Jameson argue that NT followers of Christ stayed within their original socio-religious communities although they “had distinct beliefs and were different in character” to others in those communities (p. 202). Paul thus, according to Roberts and Jameson, encouraged believers in Corinth to remain in their social settings while separating themselves “from everything that is
not in harmony with Christ’s kingdom” (p. 209). So, the reader gains a first century vista (to be applied to contemporary situations) of conversion within one’s context, but not out of it.

This picture has missiological appeal. Reports of Muslims “turning to Christ in repentance, placing their faith in Jesus as King and Savior, and actively drawing others to Jesus through their personal witness within their socioreligious communities” (p. 211) are attractive. However, as we evaluate this alluring landscape, we must consider the wider NT panorama. Even though Jesus’ Jewish followers stayed in their communities, “differences in beliefs continued to surface” (p. 203), as Roberts and Jameson admit. Such differences were far from trivial and Stephen soon paid for them with his life. Despite this, the authors assert that his (and later, Paul’s) use of “brothers” when addressing unbelieving Jews, shows “they were [still] members of the same socioreligious community” (p. 203). Actually, by the time we reach Acts 9 (and contra Roberts and Jameson), communal brotherhood was a one-way-street. Stephen and Paul (and also Peter) rightly saw fellow Jews as brothers, and urged them to embrace their Messiah, Jesus. But for those who saw Jesus as nothing of the sort, “differences in beliefs” proved fatal. Stephen was stoned by his “socioreligious community” and members of that same community sought the deaths of Paul and Peter too. The essence of biblical Christianity was simply too radical for the unbelieving majority to keep the door to communal membership open.

Church history records the parting of the ways (between the Christian community and unbelieving Jews) but the NT itself shows it was simply a matter of time before parting was inevitable. Consider Jesus’ warning to his disciples that “a person’s enemies will be those of his own household” (Matt 10:36, ESV), Paul’s lament that fellow Jews had driven him out, akin to the treatment the new Thessalonian believers received from their compatriots (1 Thes 2:14-15), and John’s disturbing remarks on the verbal unbelief of neighboring Jews, which identified them as “a synagogue of Satan” (Rev 2:9). Investigating more of the NT evidence then, it seems that believers tried to stay with their communities, but all too often had to leave. To say with Roberts and Jameson that they were only “somewhat marginalized in their socioreligious communities because of their faith in and obedience to Jesus” (p. 204, my emphasis) is an understatement, to say the least.

One exception should be noted here. The authors argue from Acts 21:20 “that a Jesus movement had swept through Jewish communities” (p. 208). This verse certainly speaks of many thousands among the Jews who had believed, but it explicitly states they were “all zealous for the law.” That is a big problem. Their zeal led to Paul’s abortive attempt to demonstrate his Jewish credentials by joining (and paying for) four men who had taken a vow—but ended with a riot in the temple and Paul’s arrest. The problem here isn’t so much what happened to Paul, as what happened to the church in Jerusalem. One would hope that a “Jesus movement” would be characterized by zeal for Jesus. Instead, this one was characterized by zeal for the law, Paul’s costly failure to identify with his “socioreligious community” and then, silence. After his arrest, Paul faced Jewish hostility to the extent he was sent to Caesarea under armed guard and endured two years’ incarceration before leaving for Rome. Throughout this trying time, when opportunities to support the great apostle certainly presented themselves, the church in Jerusalem is conspicuous by its absence. In fact, while Acts notes different kinds of assistance, from Pharisees (23:9), Paul’s nephew (23:16-22), the Roman tribune (23:30), friends (24:23, 27:3) and
islanders (28:2), it says nothing about brothers helping Paul, until he arrives in Italy (Acts 28:14). It was then that “Paul thanked God and took courage” (Acts 28:15). It seems the church in Jerusalem accommodated their “socioreligious community,” but didn’t help their needy brother in any way.

So, while conversion certainly takes place within socio-religious communities, the NT obliges converts to prioritize Jesus—and share him with their communities—but not exchange him (or their believing brethren) for the deceptive zeal of communal solidarity. And holding that ground repeatedly leads to expulsion from one’s “socioreligious community,” whether in NT times or today.

Ant Greenham

Regrettable One-Sidedness

_Understanding Insider Movements_ helps one gain a positive perspective on Insider Movements (IMs). Unfortunately, one is left to guess why the editors choose to exclude dissenting viewpoints—despite alluding to them in the opening paragraph of the Foreword. Consequently, the curious reader wonders what is hidden from view, while the not-so-curious reader may well assume that the book's positive perspective on IMs is the generally accepted evangelical (and missional) one.

Allow me to point out a few examples of one-sidedness. Reading Chapter 40 (“Religious Syncretism as a Syncretistic Concept”) one gets the point that syncretism exists in Western Christianity. Accordingly, Western churches should deal with the plank in their own eye, not describe specks of syncretism in non-Western believers' eyes—in a pejorative way. However, this makes the purpose of the author's “A Way Forward” difficult to discern. If syncretism is not that negative, which at times the author implies, then there is no reason to move forward and remove it from the Western church. But if syncretism is negative and the Western church must deal with it, is the argument not the same for non-Western believers as well? The chapter could be much stronger if it called on all believers everywhere to deal with syncretism.

Chapter 5, “Myths and Misunderstandings about Insider Movements,” is particularly frustrating. This would have been the perfect opportunity to present differing viewpoints in the critics’ own words, but the authors do not cite (or even reference) the basis for the “Myths and Misunderstandings.” Why not let the reader discover the original criticism? In any event, an example is Misunderstanding #3: “Insider movements disregard biblical commands for holiness and separation from the world.” Much of the discussion here revolves around 2 Cor 6:17, which the authors take as a warning “against participating in idol worship with unbelievers” (p. 50). However, viewing the entire context of the passage (i.e. 2 Cor 6:14-7:1), rather than just one verse, shows that being “unequally yoked with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14, ESV) is broader than participation in idol worship alone.

Through an inner textual analysis of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 it can be seen that Paul admonishes the Corinthian believers not to be equally yoked with unbelievers or, in other words, not to yoke together things that do not go together. Ultimately, Paul warns against compromising
the faith by developing a relationship bonded with conflicting beliefs. According to DeSilva (2004), Paul was mainly concerned that the Corinthian church was preaching a different Jesus and a different gospel. Witherington (1995) further states that the purpose of 2 Corinthians was to bring about reconciliation between Paul, the author, and the Corinthian church. Witherington posits that reconciliation was particularly necessary because of their theological deviance from what he taught them. As a result, the identity of what it meant to be a Christian, as well as what the *ekklesia* looked like, was in danger. This is the heart of the matter found in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 and is applicable to the Insider Movement discussion. Essentially, Paul is not advocating isolation or a separation of casual contact, since this would contradict his other writings (as the authors of Chapter Five also point out). But Paul is warning against compromising the faith by developing a relationship bonded with others in false belief, thought or action. And by the same token, the opposite of this negative injunction is just as important: Believers should be harmoniously and equally yoked with fellow-believers (McDougall, 1999).

To conclude these brief reflections, it is unfortunate that the book’s final pages seek to discourage a diverse perspective. The editors’ “A Look to the Future” highlights two pieces by seasoned missiologists who give their personal perspectives on why they will effectively remain silent on Insider Movements. One can only wonder if these writings are meant to encourage the reader to take the same posture—to look the other way and be quiet, even if there are lingering doubts about the perspective presented in the book. Finally, the very last appendix is a criticism of a criticism of Insider Movements. It is revealing that just a few pages earlier the editors are subtly calling for those who disagree with Insider Movements to stop criticizing, and yet, they end with a piece that is critical of their critics. It also causes the reader to wonder why the editors did not include in their anthology the piece that they felt the need to criticize. So, one is left wondering whether the editors did not present another perspective in *Understanding Insider Movements*, because they feared the contrarian view might persuade the reader. At the very least, both sides should have been presented to have given the book integrity.


David A. Bosch

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3 Observation from Ayman Ibrahim and Ant Greenham: The editors assert that the final appendix is “a model of respectful scholarly dialogue over the IM issue” (p. 639). Written by Bradford Greer, it is a review of Doug Coleman’s Ph.D. dissertation. Coleman responded to this review and Greer refers to elements of that response in two footnotes. However, as David Bosch notes, the reader is given no opportunity to evaluate Coleman’s response on its own merits. In fact, in correspondence with us in December 2015, Coleman lamented Greer’s unwillingness to engage him on the biblical and theological issues. To give the reader greater insight on this, we have reproduced Coleman’s remarks in the brief section which follows.

My dissertation was an explicit attempt to focus on the biblical and theological issues associated with the Insider paradigm, taking the claims and positions of insider movement paradigm (IMP) proponents as a starting point. I chose this approach for several reasons: 1) cultural issues were already receiving significant attention in publications, 2) it would be impossible to adequately incorporate extended research on biblical-theological issues and field research within the scope of a single dissertation, and 3) perhaps most importantly, missiology should first be grounded in sound exegesis and theology. My aim was to draw attention to the need to focus the discussion on these areas. I found that IMP proponents were using biblical passages to support revolutionary claims while treating these passages in an astonishingly cursory manner, at least in their publications. I see similar tendencies in Bradford Greer’s review of my dissertation. Rather than engage in discussion about the meaning and significance of specific passages or theological concepts, Greer chose to suggest my dissertation, in the end, was essentially worthless for all sorts of reasons—*other than what I said about specific passages of Scripture*. In personal correspondence I invited Greer to engage in discussion on a passage of his choosing but he declined. To this point, Kevin Higgins seems to be the only IMP proponent who consistently demonstrates an interest in and willingness to engage extensively with Scripture in regard to basics aspects of the IMP. I am still holding out hope that this will change.

Doug Coleman

Reflections on Harley Talman’s View of Scripture and Theologizing

Harley Talman’s chapter on the supremacy of Scripture in the process of theologizing begins with a defense of the Protestant Reformation’s foundational principle—*sola scriptura*. He notes that “the Bible alone is God’s inspired and authoritative word” and “the sole standard for Christian doctrine and practice” (p. 275). Talman goes on to charge in a quite sweeping manner that many Protestants pay mere lip service to the principle of *sola scriptura* and instead canonize various (unspecified) creeds and confessions. He asks rhetorically, “Is not the Bible enough? Are not Jesus and his kingdom enough?” (p. 275). In Talman’s view, the Bible is the “only supracultural authority for defining the faith” (p. 275) and any attempt to pre-determine one’s interpretation of it by interposing creedal or confessional doctrinal formulations is opposed to “authentic and effective theologizing” (p. 276).

Talman’s solution posits that Muslim background followers of Christ (i.e., “insiders”) begin with reflection on the Scriptures “in light of the immediate context (worldview, culture, and mission history) and personal experience of the local believers” (p. 276). If an “outsider” (presumably a Westerner, given Talman’s frequent critique of how unspecified Westerners—

generally a negative category in this chapter—conceive of theology) were to introduce the “theological reflection of the outside church” in the early stages, this would effectively “abort” the birth of “vital, indigenous, biblical theology” (p. 276). It is not, however, that Talman is against acquainting new believers with the teaching of those in the global church. He believes that they should be exposed to the historic creeds (though he doesn’t specify which ones) “at an appropriate time.” Ideally, this is “when the issues addressed in the creeds become real or pressing theological questions in their local context” (p. 276).

Talman’s chapter reminds us that all theologizing is culturally and historically situated, and that ultimate authority for theologizing rests with the local church. This is a point that most evangelical theologians and missiologists, whether Western or otherwise, would (and do) affirm. Nonetheless, there are a number of ambiguities in this chapter that are confusing. I will make three brief observations in this regard and raise several questions for advocates of the IMs paradigm.

First, though Talman seemingly defend[s] the principle of sola scriptura, one wonders to what extent he recognizes that this doctrinal principle itself is the product of a confessional statement, situated in a particular time and place. While all evangelicals affirm the transcultural authority of Scripture, the truth of sola scriptura has arisen out of the process of theologizing in a manner that Talman seems to repudiate. If all doctrinal formulations canonized in creeds and confessions are on the chopping block, why not sola scriptura? Why is this doctrinal principle/truth, articulated in Latin, transcultural, while others, whether articulated in Greek, Syriac, or Arabic are not? What is the mechanism at work in Talman’s thought that issues in this determination?

Second, though Talman maintains the categories of “orthodoxy” and “heresy,” he does so in a tenuous manner at best. On every page of his five-page chapter he references “biblical,” “historical,” and “extrabiblical” creeds and confessions yet fails to define his terms or specify what (or who) he’s referring to. At one point he states that “one of the most theologically sophisticated and orthodox Bible scholars I know has been falsely accused of heretical Christology” (p. 278). We don’t know who was accused or who did the accusing, but if Talman takes issue with the content of the historic creeds, such as Nicaea, or even their specific articulation, what is the measure of heresy and orthodoxy he’s using in his rebuke of the unspecified accuser? If so, how does he articulate it?

Finally, Talman fails to address the pre-understandings and doctrinal formulations that believers originating in majority Muslim contexts bring to their reading of the Scriptures. No context is neutral, but Muslim contexts are unique in the sense that many of the central beliefs of Islam subvert the grand biblical narrative and its story of redemption. Christians working among Muslims, be they Westerners, from the majority world, or otherwise, should be proactive in addressing these beliefs as they tell the story of “Jesus and his Kingdom.” All believers must root their beliefs in this story and engage in a process of critical appropriation of the broader faith history of God’s people. It is not a question of if but of how they go about appropriating this heritage. Talman’s approach leaves many of us who are critical of the IMs paradigm wondering how they foster leaders who tether faithful Bible translation and interpretation to a healthy theology—one that is both meaningful and faithful.
The Locus of a Believer’s Identity

The editors and various other authors of *Understanding Insider Movements* propose that “Muslim” means different things in different contexts so that it is often appropriate for a believer in Jesus to use this label. In “Read This First” the editors state, “While those who follow Christ in insider movements undergo transformation of their spiritual lives and theological beliefs, they retain much of their religious culture” (p. xxxvi). Then, in the defining of terms in Chapter One, we read that Insider means “a person from a non-Christian background who has accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior but retained the socioreligious identity of his or her birth” (p. 8).

The heart of the issue involves identity and meaning. Part Seven is all about Identity and this term seems to bring to the forefront the issues involved, more than the term Insider. It is all very well for outsiders to say what “Muslim” means and even an issue as to what “Muslim Background Believer” may mean. Far more significant seems the meaning given by the ordinary people in a particular context. What would be the response if we went to a number of particular Muslim contexts and asked the normal people what “Muslim” means? In other words, what does Muslim mean to these Muslims? This would surely be the commonly accepted meaning in that context. If any part of this commonly-accepted meaning suggests acknowledgement of, or embracing of the religion of Islam, then this raises serious Biblical concerns. A Biblical disciple of Jesus means one who holds to an exclusive Biblical faith.

A leader\(^5\) in missions to Muslims pointed out that when we consider contextualizing the Gospel to Muslims, our approach will be conditioned by whether our primary purpose is *comfort* or *clarity*. From an Anthropocentric position this raises all sorts of issues, such as the right we Western outsiders have to talk about the comfort of persecuted believers. We end up discussing what works in one context over that which works in another. From a Theocentric position though we allow the Holy Spirit to use us with the Bible in hand to teach new believers what their identity should be and how they clearly express this in their context. Are we burdened by the baggage of our own cultural identity and bias? Of course, but we have to acknowledge and deal with the tension (if not conflict) between the Anthropocentric and Theocentric positions openly.

Finally, Matthew 10:24–39 contains deep and challenging words from Jesus for those who see themselves as His disciples. Is this about our identity as believers? Will clearly following Jesus cause conflict with those around us and especially within our own households? Will our identities as followers of Jesus be so strong that we actually wear the label of strangers in our own culture? This passage would affirm these things to be so. There are also significant missiological implications involved, for the answers will indicate whether a believer and a believing community should identify itself in the middle of the culture or on the periphery. So, the measure is not what the church has done in the “Christian” world but what God has mandated in His Word. According to God’s Word, where do believers position themselves in the culture?

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\(^5\) Source protected.
Should any of us be insiders in any culture (where we retain the non-Christian religious culture)? The answer from the Bible seems to be a resounding “no.”

Dean Sieberhagen

A Report from the Mission Field

In November 2015, a missionary in Asia shared the following information from the field (and gave me permission to reproduce it anonymously here):

We mainly seek to reach Muslims, help them become followers of Christ, start churches, as well as work with local churches and train national believers, who do most of the evangelism and church planting. . . . There has been a lot of falling away it seems, with not so many who have persevered and proven genuine. Many, it seems, have fallen away because an older sibling or father has found out and made threats. Contact becomes difficult or impossible; they can't or won't meet again, etc.

A concern I have is that post-conversion (assumed), we don't seem to ask what these supposed converts believe about Christ. I have asked one of our most experienced church planter/trainers about this, and he admitted that he has never asked any of these would-be believers if they believe Isa is the Son of God. The contextual Bible here replaces the word for LORD as it relates to Christ with a term used with reference for Muhammad by Muslims, with the addition of a short phrase that means, “the one who is divine.” The result is more or less, “the glorious one who is divine.” Moreover, instead of saying “Son of God,” the contextual version expresses it, “the Son who comes from God.”

In my mind . . . what I wonder is, shouldn't we be asking these new followers along the way exactly “who do you say the Son of Man is?” in some way like Jesus did with His own disciples, as well as He did with others, and how the Gospel writers seem to want the readers to be asked. We might be asking them if Isa is more than a prophet, and to what extent. Based on the NT, not least John's Gospel and First and Second Letters, this would seem to be an important issue in determining if people have come to true faith or not . . . .

. . . [I also asked a colleague] whether he queries these new believers, and he said he does. He said many of them have embraced Isa as the Son of God, and have questioned him about that with reference to Matthew 28:18-20, as it relates to the Trinity.

My response to the missionary included the following observations:
In your context, it would seem matters aren't helped by the contextual Bible you're using. It seems to be right on the edge of what might be acceptable as a translation. A key

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6 A useful source on this important issue is D.A. Carson’s Jesus the Son of God: A Christological Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).
question here is what resource a new believer has in order to do theology in his or her context. While it is appropriate to use culture-sensitive illustrations in verbal communication or preaching (e.g. the church is Jesus’ “new tribe”), the line must be drawn at Bible translation. A local Bible must reflect the original languages as accurately as possible, and do so in a way which makes sense to the local people (whether their culture is amenable to what the text says—when it makes sense—or not; and in most cases it will probably be not). So, if the Bible a local believer uses is unclear on Jesus' identity, this will be reflected in the theology drawn from that Bible. And a weak Bible translation will inevitably lead to weak theology, or worse.

This is not a comprehensive evaluation of the missionary’s area of service. It simply suggests that falling away and doubts on the veracity of individuals’ conversions are issues of concern in that context (as they are in many contexts). Beyond those concerns though, even if one missionary, at least, conducts Trinitarian discussions with new believers, there is evidence of Christological uncertainty in the area concerned—and of a Bible which seems to lack clarity on Christ’s identity. As the reader will recall, this comes close to the dangerous fourth pillar of the IMS—transforming the language of the biblical text. Quite simply, enduring conversions to Christ must have a firmer foundation to rest on.

Ant Greenham

“Things Are Not What They Seem”: Islamic Insider Movement Paradox

Four stood and sang a story-telling song. The song spoke of a future when people could walk freely in Middle Eastern cities and hear the Minaret cry from the towers saying, “Yeshuaaa… Akbar!” The lead singer cried out like a Minaret caller using the Hebrew pronunciation of Jesus’ name instead of the Qur’anic Arabic term Isa. The conference was for those interested in sharing the Gospel with Muslims and these singers each were Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). They sang with glowing testimony to the life changing power of the biblical Jesus. The song’s lead singer-writer later told me why he chose the Hebrew term for Jesus; he looked at me, but somehow past me or through me to another place, and emphatically said, “Because I want it perfectly clear exactly for whom I am willing to both live and die!”

Insider Movement advocates encourage MBBs to present themselves sociologically as Muslims but privately and personally to know deep inside that they are Christ followers, all in order to remain connected to the Muslim community and hoping to share Christ. However, it’s unclear whether anyone else knows they believe in Him. Dual identities communicate using a form of double-speak. Confused communication results. This is a lifestyle paradox for MBBs

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7When referring to this practice within Southern Baptist circles, Ralph Elliott says, “Professors and students learn to couch their beliefs in acceptable terminology and in holy jargon so that although thinking one thing, the speaker calculated so as to cause the hearer to affirm something else.” Ralph H. Elliott, The ‘Genesis Controversy’ and Continuity in Southern Baptist Chaos: A Eulogy for a Great Tradition, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1992), 33.
and is tragically difficult to navigate. Some temporarily live on with their dual identity; others return heart and mind to Islam and hardly look back because sociological pressures are intense, to say the least.

In another way, the ethnic Hausa Isawa people of Northern Nigeria illustrate such confusion, due to double meaning of terms used differently. As early as the 1840s the Isawa formed, their notoriety being straightforward recognition of the fact that Isa (Jesus) of the Qur’an is, “simply greater than Muhammed . . . [due to] Isa’s virgin birth, his sinlessness, his miraculous power, his status as word and spirit of Allah, his illustrious character, and his return to judge the world.”

Observing their devotion to Isa, early Christian missionaries worked with them, mistakenly presuming they were MBBs. Eventually, the confusion surfaced and the Isawa leaders informed missionaries that they followed only the Isa of the Qur’an, not the one spoken of in the Bible. Hence, then, they were neither accepted by neighboring Muslims nor Christians. As far as the other Hausas were concerned, the Isawa were cultic, and the Christian missionaries were simply confused.

Sometimes things are not what they seem, intentional or not; at other times, we confuse things and falsify appearances. We may strategically and intentionally miscommunicate, thinking we are abiding by a missiological principle. The Insider Movement phenomena (there are varieties of them) seem more prone to miscommunication and disguised realities, perhaps even robbing new believing MBBs of their choice or right to know for whom they are willing to live or die.

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