

2011

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL TO MUSLIMS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF DIVINITY

BY
MAYA J. MORGAN

PORTLAND, OR
DECEMBER 2011



GEORGE FOX

EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

THESIS ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

Title: CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL TO MUSLIMS
Presented by: MAYA MORGAN
Date: December 15, 2011

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Master of Arts in Theological Studies.

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Abstract

Muslims are considered some of the least reached peoples in the world. As "Christianity" is often associated with Colonialism, the Crusades, and Western culture, traditional models of "casting the seed" have proven ineffective. Those seeking to share the goodness with Muslims must explore new contextual ways to communicate the message of Christ to the Islamic community. This thesis begins by defining and giving a brief history of contextualization. Basic methods of contextualization are explained, and issues of syncretism are addressed in chapter one.

Contextualization must be practiced when communicating the good news. Chapter two focuses on the aspects of cross-cultural communication that must be taken into account in order to communicate the gospel message effectively. Muslim worldview, social norms, and decision-making processes are addressed in order for outsiders to communicate the gospel message in ways that can be readily received.

Contextualization is also highly important when believers begin to develop forms of worship for the local community of faith. Those from the Muslim background are best able to determine which worship forms should be kept, and which should be reinterpreted or rejected. Chapter three explores Islamic worship forms, specifically focusing on the five pillars of Islam, and considers how local believers have chosen to contextualize these worship forms to their faith. Believers are not always in agreement concerning their contextual practices. In these instances, believers must approach one another with love and grace.

The final chapter of this thesis explores one of the most controversial issues among Muslim believers: if they should continue to identify as "Muslim" once becoming followers of Jesus. The major arguments in favor of and against keeping the Muslim identity are reviewed and the chapter ends with a discussion on whether outsiders should ever identify as "Muslim" to win Muslims for Christ.

Muslims are much more likely to receive the good news of Christ if they see that following Christ does not require them to give up their culture. Contextualizing the gospel to Muslims will open the door for greater numbers of people from the Muslim world to have their lives transformed through faith in Christ.

Introduction

Spanning from Morocco to Indonesia, Russia to Argentina, 1.58 billion people identify themselves as “Muslim”¹—an Arabic word meaning one who “submits” to God’s will.² Islam is the predominant religion in twenty-two countries in Africa and twenty-seven countries in Asia,³ nations with varying ethnicities, languages, and forms of government. In the last twenty years there has been a growing interest in sharing the gospel with Muslim peoples. Yet this increase still only amounts to 10 percent of all foreign outreach.⁴ This low number is due in part to the prejudice, fear, and ignorance people feel toward Muslims.⁵ Muslims are said to be a people group that is “resistant” to the gospel. Ninety-seven percent of Muslims are considered “unreached.”⁶ Yet many are discovering that “when a people seems ‘resistant’ it may only mean [the] approach has been ineffective.”⁷

Many today are working to find approaches of sharing the good news that are effective in the Muslim world. Contextualizing the gospel, defined as making the gospel feel “at home” in a culture, has been key to Muslims accepting the message of Christ. This thesis explores the efforts practitioners are making to contextualize the

¹Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation*, Completely Revised 7th ed. (Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2010), 2.

² Donald S. Tingle, *Islam & Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 7.

³ Mandryk, *Operation World*, 2.

⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 543-45.

⁷ Ibid., 543.

gospel to Muslims, in order to see greater numbers of Christ-centered, reproducing communities established in the Muslim world.

The first chapter presents a brief history of contextualization, explores the issue of syncretism, and shares current contextual practices used by practitioners to both share the biblical message and to build the local body. Chapter two then looks more in depth at how to communicate the gospel message cross-culturally. Using David Hesselgrave's paradigm for the seven dimensions of cross-cultural communication, this chapter seeks to understand Muslim worldview, social norms, and how Muslims prefer to make decisions. Once Muslims have accepted the message of Christ, the work of contextualization is not finished. Muslim background believers must then determine which Islamic worship forms should be retained, and which should be reinterpreted or rejected. Chapter three focuses specifically on contextualizing the gospel to Islam's five pillars: declaration of the creed, prayer, fasting, giving alms, and taking the pilgrimage to Mecca. The final chapter addresses the controversial issue of whether Muslims followers of Jesus should continue to identify as "Muslim," as a way to live contextually among their family and friends.

Interspersed throughout the paper are excerpts from interviews taken of thirty-five individuals living in the Muslim world. Some of the interviewees are Arabs, some Africans, and some are Westerners living in the Arab world. Some are from the Muslim background, others are from the Christian background, and all are interested in seeing the gospel spread throughout the Muslim world. All interviews were confidential, so names and specific locations have been withheld. In some cases translators were used for interviews, but and most of the time Arabs and

Africans conversed in English—a language they would not considered their primary tongue.

As will be discussed in this paper, the word “Christian” carries different meanings to different people. For the Western evangelical, “Christian” has a positive meaning and speaks of a spiritual conversion to following Christ. For many Muslims, “Christian” is understood as a political, ethnic or cultural classification.⁸ As a result, this paper will use the word “believers” or “followers of Christ” to refer to people who consider Jesus as their Lord and Savior, hold the Bible as the ultimate authority and guide for life, and bear fruit of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. “Christian” and “Muslim” will be used to refer to one’s cultural or political affiliation. On the other hand, “Christian background believers” or “Christian believers” will be used to refer to those who have surrendered their lives to Christ who come from a predominantly Christian culture. Some examples of Christian background believers include followers of Jesus from the Western world, and minority pockets of believers from the Muslim world who have historically referred to themselves as “Christian,” such as Coptic Christians in Egypt. In the same way, “Muslim background believers” or “Muslim believers” will be used to refer to those who have surrendered their lives to Christ, who come from a culturally Muslim background.

Even though Muslims come from a wide variety of countries, speak many different languages, and are ethnically diverse, there are enough similarities among

⁸ John J. Travis and J. Dudley Woodberry, “When God’s Kingdom Grows Like Yeast: Frequently-Asked Questions About Jesus Movements within Muslim Communities,” *Mission Frontiers* (July-August 2010): 26.

Muslims to speak of a Muslim worldview.⁹ This paper will address this overarching Muslim understanding of the world. Only general Islamic practices and beliefs are explored. Issues specific to any one nation or sect are outside the scope of this thesis.

Another limitation of this paper is that the focus is mainly on methodology and practices originating in the Western world. There are an increasing number of practitioners coming from the majority world. This will have a great impact on global outreach, as new partnerships and non-Western contextualization strategies are established throughout the world.¹⁰

Yet, the piercing question remains: "Are we serious about giving the [millions of] Muslims in the world a chance to hear the gospel in a manner they can understand and accept?"¹¹ This paper argues that contextualizing the gospel to Muslims is not only possible, but necessary to see large numbers of Muslim background believers come to faith.

⁹ Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism: Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 64-65.

¹⁰ Winter and Koch, "Finishing the Task," 544.

¹¹ Bernard Dutch, "Should Muslims Become 'Christians'?" *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17, no. 1 (January-March 2000): 23.

Chapter One

Contextualization

John Hayes, director of an organization that is seeking transformation in the world's slums writes, "The world doesn't need more words, not even more 'right' words. The world needs more words made flesh. The world needs more people to live the good news incarnationally, in a way that can be seen, heard and handled."¹ This was the example of Jesus. He spoke Aramaic, was a carpenter by trade, read the Torah, and was shaped by Jewish culture. In all respects, Jesus was a Jewish man—a Jew enfleshing the good news to a small corner of the Middle East. Through the incarnation, Jesus modeled contextualization.² Contextualization is sharing the gospel and building the church in a way that fits the customs and conventions of a particular people group. God chose to reach women and men through their culture and their language. God adapted to Jewish customs, and became accessible in a way that Jews could understand.³

Jesus set the example for what his followers were to do. Anthropologist Charles Kraft writes, "We are called to contextualize God's messages by living in such a way that [God's] witness comes across accurately through our lives."⁴

¹ John B. Hayes, *Sub-Merge: Living Deep in a Shallow World* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006), 113.

² Darrell L. Whiteman, "The Function of Appropriate Contextualization in Mission," in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005), 51.

³ Charles H. Kraft, "Contextualizing Communication," in *The Word among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, ed. Dean S. Gilliland (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 128.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 129.

Unfortunately, God's followers have often fallen short of incarnating the good news. At times Westerners have brought Jesus to a new people enfolded in their home culture, convinced that this cultural attire was the good news. They have too often come with a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other. The mistakes of the past have left lasting repercussions on our world today. Yet those wishing to share the good news can learn from the follies of previous generations. Although it is extremely difficult for people to separate the gospel message from their home culture, scholars and practitioners have made great strides in communicating and living out the gospel in ways that resonate with new people groups.⁵ This chapter will give a brief history of contextualization, discuss the issue of syncretism, and explore current practices of sharing the good news and building the body of Christ.

A Brief History of Contextualization

It was not long after Jesus' death that the Jewish followers of Christ began proclaiming adherence to their own culture in addition to the good news. Conflict arose when Jewish elders from Jerusalem traveled to Antioch to assess the state of the community of believers. They were convinced that Gentiles should adopt Jewish customs, namely circumcision and Jewish dietary laws, in order to be part of the body of Christ (Gal 2). Yet the Greek-speaking Jews could see that requiring Gentiles to adopt Jewish customs would create an unnecessary barrier to Gentiles accepting Christ. In fact, it was at Antioch that believers were first referred to as "Christians," because they were a community of multiple ethnicities. "Christian" became the new

⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 297.

designation to describe this band of believers. Although originally a derogatory term, “Christian” gave new language to describe these people who were more than simply a sect of Judaism.⁶

Until the fourth century believers in Christ were a persecuted minority. Yet after Constantine declared himself a “Christian” in 312 CE, he established the Edict of Milan, granting religious tolerance to “Christians.” Slowly he began establishing laws favoring those claiming to be “Christian.” Masses of pagans “converted” to Christianity in order to gain status in the Empire.⁷ The role of the emperor had always included overseeing religion, so it was natural for Constantine to take a position of authority over the community of believers. Regarding himself as the “Bishop of bishops,”⁸ Constantine presided over religious meetings, including the council of Nicaea in 325 CE. In this meeting significant doctrinal issues were hammered out, resulting in the Nicene Creed.⁹

Following Constantine’s lead, later emperors continued to assemble and preside over religious meetings. Matters decided in the ecumenical councils were immediately pronounced as law by the emperor.¹⁰ Church and state became inextricably linked. When Europe later divided into smaller nation-states, each

⁶ Dean S. Gilliland, "New Testament Contextualization: Continuity and Particularity in Paul's Theology," in Gilliland, *The Word among Us*, 54-55.

⁷ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 138.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Richard A. Todd, "Constantine and the Christian Empire," in *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, ed. Tim Dowley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 143.

¹⁰ Harlie Kay Gallatin, "The Eastern Church," in Dowley, *History of Christianity*, 248-49.

required religious as well as political allegiance. All people dwelling in that political boundary were to adopt the religious beliefs of that state.

With the rise of colonization, this enmeshing of church and state continued. Europeans conquered, colonized and “Christianized” new lands. Colonization was primarily done for imperial and economic reasons, yet carried religious overtones.¹¹ It was assumed that colonized peoples would submit to the religion of their new ruler.¹² Many believed it was their sacred duty to conquer and civilize the world.¹³ These Westerners viewed their culture as superior to any other culture and desired to mold the world into their image. They understood mission as “Introducing people from the East and the South to the blessings and privileges of the Christian West.”¹⁴ Linked with the Old Testament concept of being a chosen people, Manifest Destiny became an ideology of believers from Western nations. These followers of Christ concluded that God had chosen them to reach the ends of the world.¹⁵ Religious workers labored side by side with the colonial powers to “save” the “heathen.”¹⁶ As a result, colonized countries found it difficult to separate the gospel from colonialism, a sentiment that continues to this day.¹⁷

¹¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 275-76.

¹² *Ibid.*, 303.

¹³ Jacob A. Loewen, “Evangelism and Culture,” in *The New Face of Evangelicalism: An International Symposium on the Lausanne Covenant*, ed. C. Rene’ Padilla (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 180.

¹⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 389.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹⁷ Loewen, “Evangelism and Culture,” 181.

During this season of colonization, Western institutions such as schools, hospitals, and churches were used to “civilize” the “barbarians.” Natives were often viewed as children, their culture as worthless, and their religious practices as evil.¹⁸ On the other hand, religious workers from the West believed their culture epitomized “Christianity.” They made few attempts to express the gospel in new cultural forms.¹⁹ Native forms were often rejected and Western architecture, melodies, rituals, instruments, and symbols were used to ensure that the original spiritual meanings were preserved.²⁰

In the mid-1800s foreigners seeking to share the good news realized that some adjustments were needed to break down barriers to indigenous communities accepting Christ. This was a positive step toward contextualization. These Western leaders deemed that vestments, art, music, and architecture could be native in form as long as they were not contaminated by pagan religious values.²¹ Although a step in the right direction, in many ways these initial concessions felt paternalistic, as solely foreigners determined what changes could be made.²² Catholics expected new believing communities to import the ecclesiastical system of Rome, and Protestants demanded adherence to their denominational theologies and governances.²³

¹⁸ Charles H. Kraft, "The Development of Contextualizing Theory in Euroamerican Missiology," in Kraft, *Appropriate Christianity*, 15-16.

¹⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 427.

²⁰ Paul G. Hiebert, "Form and Meaning in the Contextualization of the Gospel," in Gilliland, *The Word among Us*, 103.

²¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 448.

²² *Ibid.*, 449.

²³ Kraft, "Development of Contextualizing Theory," 17.

Learning usually went one direction—from the West to the new community of believers—rarely the other way around.²⁴ Protestants referred to this new openness to local worship forms as “indigenization,” and Catholics entitled it “accommodation.”²⁵ Locals were often allowed to run the system, but in many ways it still was a Western system.²⁶

With time, Westerners sharing the good news began to realize that they had set up financial standards that were unsustainable in the developing world. New believing communities had been trained to need Western standards of money for buildings, equipment, and supplies and thus had become dependent on foreign aid.²⁷ During this time, strategists Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson advised that local bodies of believers should operate with greater levels of independence. They coined the language of the “three-selves,” encouraging native communities of Jesus followers to be self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating.²⁸ They hoped this new strategy would lessen dependence on the West and give more ownership to local believers.

Another shift happened in the 1940s. During World War II, many people who had been sharing the good news in foreign lands were forced to return to their home countries. They felt as if they were leaving fledgling communities of believers

²⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 449.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 295.

²⁶ Kraft, “Development of Contextualizing Theory,” 17.

²⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 295-96.

²⁸ Hiebert, “Form and Meaning,” 103.

as sheep without a shepherd. Yet much to their surprise they found that in their absence, local believers not only survived, but thrived.²⁹ The West was able to see that emerging bodies of believers could flourish on their own. The World Council of Churches was established at this time, giving recognition to these new Jesus-following communities, and a fourth “self,”—self-theologizing—was added as an important element for new communities of believers. This meant that new believing communities were free to explore how theology would develop in their own cultural context. Through their cultural lens, indigenous peoples had insights into the character of God, and how the community should live out their faith. These theologies were unique, yet complementary to Western theologies. As Bosch writes, “It was finally recognized that a plurality of cultures presupposes a plurality of theologies.”³⁰ Today there is growing recognition of theologies that have developed outside the Western world, such as liberation theology, black theology, Asian theology, contextual theology, *minjung* theology, and African theology.³¹

In the 1950s, Westerners began to think more anthropologically about missions, paying attention to the culture and customs of the people groups they wanted to reach.³² Anthropologist William Smalley said that indigenization and accommodation were not enough. He believed that institutions should not be

²⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 451.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 452.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³² Kraft, “Development of Contextualizing Theory,” 18.

imported, but that people groups should create new spiritual forms meaningful to their culture, through the power of the Holy Spirit.³³

Shoki Coe, director of the World Council of Churches Theological Education Fund,³⁴ first coined the term “contextualization” in 1973.³⁵ Coe emphasized the importance of discerning what God was currently doing in a culture, and partnering with God to bring about that transformation. At the International Congress On World Evangelization, held in 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland, many Westerners confessed that they had been blind to their own cultural hang-ups and had failed to appreciate cultures that differed from their own. Even renowned evangelist Billy Graham stepped forward and admitted he had often failed to separate the gospel from American culture.³⁶ An attendee from an African background confessed that he had not been deeply transformed to the ways of Christ but had simply made superficial changes to his life by becoming more culturally European. He had not been listening to the Holy Spirit, but to the Western leader who controlled the finances of the believing community.³⁷

At this same conference, Bruce Nicholls expanded the definition of contextualization to, “the translation of the unchanging content of the Gospel of the Kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate cultures and

³³ Ibid., 19-20.

³⁴ Choan-Seng Song, “Asia,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture*, ed. John F. A. Sawyer (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 170.

³⁵ Kraft, “Development of Contextualizing Theory,” 22.

³⁶ Loewen, “Evangelism and Culture,” 179.

³⁷ Ibid., 186.

within their particular existential situation.”³⁸ He believed that the biblical message could be translated, interpreted, and applied to any culture.

Catholics joined Protestants in a commitment to contextual methods. Pope John Paul II established the Pontifical Council for Culture in 1982.³⁹ This was an international group of priests, bishops, and laity that met to further the dialogue between faith and culture.⁴⁰

Today, the language of contextualization is commonplace. Dean Gilliland, professor of contextualization at Fuller Theological Seminary writes, “Contextualization, biblically based and Holy Spirit-led, is a requirement for evangelical missions today.”⁴¹ Many strides have been made to shed the gospel of its Western clothing and open the doors to local leadership and local theologies. That being said, Westerners have more work to do, particularly in putting their theories of contextualization into practice among indigenous people groups.⁴²

Contextualization has been challenging for many people wishing to share Christ for two reasons: First, they have not realized the extent to which they carry their own cultural values in addition to the gospel message, and second, locals have enmeshed the new teachings of Jesus with their traditional religious practices in

³⁸ Bruce J. Nicholls, "Theological Education and Evangelization," in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: International Congress on World Evangelization Lausanne, Switzerland*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1975), 647.

³⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 452.

⁴⁰ Bartholomew Winters, *Priest as Leader: The Process of the Inculturation of a Spiritual-Theological Theme of Priesthood in a United States Context* (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1997), 23.

⁴¹ Dean S. Gilliland, ed., introduction to Gilliland, *The Word among Us*, 3.

⁴² Kraft, "Development of Contextualizing Theory," 31.

ways that have compromised the biblical message. Both of these challenges are issues of syncretism. This next section will define syncretism and look at both foreign and native forms of syncretism.

Syncretism Defined

Bruce Nicholls, who spent many years of his life shepherding believers in India, describes syncretism as occurring when a community uses the symbols and religious practices of a culture in an uncritical way, leading to enmeshing biblical beliefs and practices to non-biblical ones. Nicholls refers to this as “cultural syncretism.”⁴³

Professor of Intercultural Studies Scott Moreau defines syncretism as replacing the essential truths of the gospel with the perceptions of non-believers.⁴⁴ Similarly, Paul Hiebert describes syncretism: “In one sense, syncretism is a message that has lost the heart of the Gospel. In another sense, it is moving in the wrong direction, away from a fuller knowledge of the Gospel.”⁴⁵

Kraft believes syncretism happens in two ways: foreign and nativistic.⁴⁶ Foreign syncretism is the result of a low view of culture.⁴⁷ Foreign culture is

⁴³ Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 31.

⁴⁴ A. Scott Moreau, “Syncretism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, Harold Netland, and Charles Van Engen (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 924.

⁴⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, “Syncretism and Social Paradigms,” in *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents*, ed. Gailyn Van Rhee (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2006), 44.

⁴⁶ Kraft, “Development of Contextualizing Theory,” 77.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

combined with the gospel message and these outside customs are practiced in addition to newfound allegiance to Jesus. Foreign syncretism is more difficult for overseas workers to recognize, as the outside elements added to the gospel are their local customs. It is much easier for foreign workers to recognize native syncretism. Native syncretism is often the result of a low view of scripture.⁴⁸ People combine their native religious beliefs and practices with the gospel. This next section will discuss foreign syncretism in greater depth.

Foreign Syncretism

Charles Kraft worked in eastern Nigeria for many years. The locals frequently asked him why the “Christian” god did not respect their elders by letting them speak first in church meetings, why the “Christian” god preferred Western music to their traditional music, and why the “Christian” god had no real power to make a difference their lives. These questions reveal how the gospel had been brought to these Nigerian communities in a Western wrapper. This situation is not unique. In fact, as Kraft points out, no matter where in the world a person travels, she or he can find a church service with a program similar to one found in the West, beginning with a welcome, followed by prayer, singing, reading scripture, a homily, and ending with a benediction. Songs might be sung in the local language, but the tune is often Western, and the homily given in an intellectual, Western style.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Morris A. Inch, *Doing Theology across Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 24.

⁴⁹ Kraft, "Development of Contextualizing Theory," 121-122.

This is the result of the ethnocentrism of early believers who traveled to new lands to share the good news. They assumed Western worship services were the universal way believers should gather for worship. They did not consider that their own culture influenced their practices.⁵⁰ These foreigners elevated their own culture and required those committing allegiance to Jesus to adhere to Western culture as well. Native customs were condemned in many cases and believers were forced to reject their heritage and social ties.⁵¹ Westerners assumed that if people were not Judeo-Christian, their whole culture was of Satan. Christine Mallouhi writes, "In those cultures, in order to follow Christ, [people] had to reject [their] religious beliefs, [their] culture, [their] family, and anything else connected to [their] past life."⁵² It was commonly understood that to be Christian was to be Western. In China, the adage was, "One more Christian, one less Chinese,"⁵³ and in boarding schools for Native Americans, where children were forced to convert to Christianity and Western ways, "Kill the Indian, save the man," was the motto.⁵⁴

Often Westerners heralding the gospel message were intolerant of other cultures, but failed to see how enmeshed their beliefs about God were with Western

⁵⁰ Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *Missiology: An International Review* XII, no. 3 (July, 1984): 288.

⁵¹ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 53.

⁵² Christine A. Mallouhi, *Waging Peace on Islam* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 323.

⁵³ Michael Pocock, "Response to Paul G. Hiebert 'The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization,'" in *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium*, ed. David J. Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 105.

⁵⁴ Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 171.

cultural ideals. One of the main cultural influences on the West was the Enlightenment. Professor of missiology David Bosch writes:

The Enlightenment...operated with a *subject-object scheme*. This meant that it separated humans from their environment and enabled them to examine the animal and mineral world from the vantage-point of scientific objectivity. The *res cogitans* (humanity and the human mind) could research the *res extensa* (the entire non-human world). Nature ceased to be “creation” and was no longer people’s teacher, but the object of their analysis. The emphasis was no longer on the whole, but on the parts, which were assigned priority over the whole. Even human beings were no longer regarded as whole entities but could be looked at and studied from a variety of perspectives: as thinking beings (philosophy), as social beings (sociology), as religious beings (religious studies), as physical beings (biology, physiology, anatomy, and related sciences), as cultural beings (cultural anthropology), and so forth. In this way even the *res cogitans* could become *res extensa* and as such the object of analysis.

In principle, then, the *res cogitans* was set no limits. The whole earth could be occupied and subdued with boldness. Oceans and continents were “discovered” and the system of colonies was introduced. It was as if previously unknown powers were unleashed. A tremendous confidence pervaded people; they felt that what was “real” was only now beginning to manifest itself, as if everything of the past was only a preparation or perhaps even an impediment. The physical world could be manipulated and exploited. And as scientific and technological knowledge advanced this became more and more possible.⁵⁵

This subject-object principle made it easy for Westerners to turn people into objects that were to be molded into Western cultural standards. It also allowed for Westerners to belittle foreign methods.

The Enlightenment also was the “Age of Reason” where truth was deduced through intellectual methods. Birth, death, illness, and storms all had scientific explanations. Questions of the mysteries of the universe were removed from the Western equation. Facts were considered indisputable, and no matter how one felt

⁵⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 264.

about those truths, they could not be denied.⁵⁶ Those from the West believed that rationalism trumped folk wisdom and Westerners often looked down their nose at the traditional beliefs of the locals.

Those in the Enlightenment also believed in freedom and happiness for the *individual*. People were free to act as they pleased and were not to impede others the same right. In the Western worldview, community took a back seat to the desires of the individual.

Another ideal that stemmed from the Enlightenment was that the world was an adventure to be discovered. It was believed people could succeed at whatever they put their minds to. All problems were solvable; the sky was the limit for what a person could do.⁵⁷ New territories were to be unearthed and possessed. This was the beginning of the colonial system, where Westerners believed they were to take their resources and knowledge to the ends of the earth. Bosch writes, “They had both the ability and the will to remake the world in their own image.”⁵⁸ The “undeveloped” and “backward” people needed to be “modernized” and “civilized.”

With the emphasis on rationalism, the scientific method, individualism, and development, believers from the United States and Europe came to new lands, toting both the Bible and Western culture. They arrived with confidence and initiative, relied little on anyone else, and looked down on others who did not operate with the same values.⁵⁹ Westerners prioritized written communication over oral, so they set

⁵⁶ Ibid., 264-66.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 266-67.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 265.

to work teaching people how to read and write. They developed school-based training, monologue-style preaching, and used Western style architecture, dress, and music.⁶⁰ Material success and secular power were seen as connected to spiritual salvation, and missionaries required lifestyles and possessions that locals could not afford.⁶¹

To say the least, this focus on Western values detracted from the gospel message. Whiteman, professor of Cultural Anthropology, writes, "When people are offended for the wrong reasons, the garment of Christianity gets stamped with the label 'Made in America and Proud of It' and so it is easily dismissed as a 'foreign religion' and hence irrelevant to their culture."⁶² As a result, some people have never had the chance to hear or take offense at the actual gospel. Instead they have rejected this foreign syncretism. The "good news" had at times sounded anything but good, and has been more reflective of Western culture than the gospel message of Jesus.⁶³

Native Syncretism

The other form of syncretism is native syncretism. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, native syncretism refers to the combining of native beliefs and practices with the gospel message. Some examples include continuing allegiances

⁵⁹ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 6.

⁶⁰ Kraft, "Contextualizing Communication," 130-131.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Whiteman, "Function," 55.

⁶³ Gailyn Van Rhee, "Syncretism and Contextualization: The Church on a Journey Defining Itself," in Van Rhee, *Contextualization and Syncretism*, 7-8.

with idols or spirits, and using drugs during worship.⁶⁴ Those from the Western world often forget that all cultures, including their own, have incorporated pagan elements from their past. Scholar and historian Ralph Winter writes, “All our backgrounds, in fact, are ‘sub-Christian’ and syncretistic.”⁶⁵ Those desiring to share the gospel with people from other cultures should be cautious of native syncretism, but not view it as any more dangerous than their own pagan roots. Those from the West are often shocked by the Christo-paganism that they see in other societies,⁶⁶ but are unaware of the pagan roots found in their own customs. Seeing the roots of European paganism can help Westerners perceive foreign pagan practices in a new light. This section will explore several Western practices, including Easter, Christmas, funerals, and marriage ceremonies to examine their pagan influences.

In the third, fourth, and fifth centuries, many people in the Roman Empire worshiped pagan gods. Those claiming to be “Christians” often divided their devotion between pagan gods and the “Christian” God and Pope Leo I had to rebuke believers for bowing to the sun god, *Mithras*. Many believed shrines and relics held supernatural powers and many had superstitious notions concerning relics.⁶⁷ Religious leaders made efforts to both squelch pagan worship, and reinterpret pagan practices.

⁶⁴ Kraft, "Contextualizing Communication," 132.

⁶⁵ Ralph D. Winter, "Going Far Enough?," in *Perspective on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 671.

⁶⁶ Loewen, "Evangelism and Culture," 183.

⁶⁷ Todd, "History of Christianity," 141-42.

The celebration of Easter is an example of a pagan festival that was redefined. *Eostre* was the Anglo-Saxon goddess of fertility, lust, and spring. The month of April was devoted to her, and a special feast was held in her honor on the vernal equinox.⁶⁸ Her symbol was the hare, as rabbits were known to be prolific animals.⁶⁹ One legend says that *Eostre* saved a bird with frozen wings by turning it into a hare. This bird-bunny could still lay eggs and became known as the Easter bunny.⁷⁰

Since celebrating *Eostre* happened at the same time of year that the followers of Christ commemorated the resurrection of Jesus, believers co-opted *Easter* as the name for this celebration. At the Council of Nicaea, it was decided that the holy day of Easter would be celebrated on the Sunday following the vernal equinox, the same day as the celebrations of *Eostre*. Also, as the egg was the universal symbol for birth and resurrection, it was not too far of a stretch for believers to incorporate the egg into their Easter celebrations.⁷¹ In this way, the pagan festival of *Eostre* was transformed into a celebration commemorating the death and resurrection of Christ.

Similar to Easter, the date for Christmas was set in alignment with Roman pagan celebrations. For two hundred years, followers of Christ did not celebrate the

⁶⁸ Bethanne Kelly Patrick, John Thompson, and Henry Petroski, *An Uncommon History of Common Things* (Washington D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2009), 54.

⁶⁹ *Panati's Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things* (New York: Perennial Library, 1989), 55.

⁷⁰ Patrick, Thompson, and Petroski, *An Uncommon History*, 54.

⁷¹ Jason Karl, *An Illustrated History of the Haunted World* (London: New Holland Publishers, 2007), 54-56.

birth of Jesus. No one remembered the date, nor considered it a celebration. In fact, it is likely that Christ was born in the springtime, as scripture recounts that shepherds were watching their sheep at night (Lk 2:8)—a practice that only happened during the lambing season in the spring.⁷² But from December 17th to 24th, Romans celebrated the deity *Saturnus*, god of agriculture and time. Homes were decorated with greenery, candles were lit, gifts were given, and the theme of caring for the poor and spreading “goodwill to all” was practiced. Worship of the Persian god, *Mithras*, also spread to Rome and became the official deity of the Roman Empire.⁷³ *Mithras* was the sun God, born on December 25th, who fought the powers of darkness, and was in heaven, watching over the earth until the time of his second coming. Followers of Christ chose this exact date to celebrate the birth of Jesus, as they wanted to draw people away from the pagan feast and point to Christ as the true “Sun of Righteousness.”⁷⁴

Another custom associated with Christmas in the West is mistletoe. This originally came from the Druids who burnt it as a gift to the gods, or hung it in their homes for good luck. Scandinavians also hung mistletoe in their houses in the winter. It was considered to belong to the goddess of love, *Frigga*, and thus became associated with kissing. Throughout the Middle Ages mistletoe was forbidden by

⁷² Panati's *Extraordinary Origins*, 68.

⁷³ Barbara Dee Bennett Baumgarten, *Teach Us to Number Our Days: A Liturgical Advent Calendar* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), 12.

⁷⁴ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 202.

ecclesiastical leadership and viewed as idolatry.⁷⁵ There was an ongoing tension among believers as to whether followers of Christ should refrain from or reinterpret pagan images, practices, and celebrations.⁷⁶

Another Western tradition with pagan roots is the burial service. Originally, wearing black to funerals was not done out of respect for the deceased, or to symbolize mourning. It was done out of fear that the spirit of the departed would come back and haunt the living. People would not only wear black, but also paint their faces black as a disguise. The widow would wear a veil for up to a year as added concealment. The deceased would be bound, their coffin nailed closed, and a heavy stone placed on top to keep them from coming out and haunting the living. Later this heavy stone became the tombstone.⁷⁷ Now, for most Westerners, wearing black to a funeral and using a tombstone are simply traditions without the added superstition.

Traditional wedding rituals have also continued from generation to generation while the underlying superstitions have faded into the past. Westerners at one time were terrified of the evil eye—a look of jealousy causing bad luck to befall a person who is happy. Babies and brides were said to be particularly vulnerable to the evil eye.⁷⁸ Bridesmaids, therefore, would dress exactly like the bride and were used as decoys to protect the true bride from the misfortunes of the

⁷⁵ Panati's *Extraordinary Origins*, 69.

⁷⁶ Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins*, 217.

⁷⁷ Panati's *Extraordinary Origins*, 36-37.

⁷⁸ Leslie Jones, Introduction to *Happy Is the Bride the Sun Shines On: Wedding Beliefs, Customs, and Traditions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), x.

evil eye.⁷⁹ The bride would also wear a veil for added concealment.⁸⁰ In addition, throwing rice at a newly wed couple as they left the church was a pagan symbol of fertility. The rice was a talisman, allowing the couple to bear many children.⁸¹ Daniel Kikawa, native Hawaiian comments facetiously about Western wedding rituals:

No good Christian should allow such heathen based practices to occur in the Christian church. The next time, good Christian, you see a wedding like this in a Christian church, take action! Push the bridesmaids out of the aisle, tear off the bride's veil, rebuke the bride, confiscate all the rice, and burn the rice outside. Sounds silly doesn't it? Well, this sort of thing was done to the precious native traditions of indigenous people around the world by Western Christians.⁸²

Kikawa's tongue-in-cheek humor draws attention to the fact that Western customs with pagan roots are practiced frequently without causing alarm to the believing community. The deeper question to ask when considering the local traditions of a culture is: Are these pagan practices moving the community away from a fuller knowledge of the gospel?⁸³

Cultures and customs are not to be torn down, nor are they to be championed uncritically. Bosch writes, "The philosophy that 'anything goes' as long as it seems to make sense to people can be catastrophic."⁸⁴ All cultures have elements that are good, neutral, and bad. The beliefs and customs that are harmful or evil must be transformed. Following Jesus can free people from the sinfulness

⁷⁹ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 189.

⁸⁰ Linda S. Watts, *Encyclopedia of American Folklore* (New York: Facts On File, 2007), 410.

⁸¹ Jones, *Happy Is the Bride*, 130.

⁸² Daniel Kikawa, *Play the Cross-Cultural Evangelism Game!* (Kea'au, HI: Aloha Ke Akua, 1997), 25.

⁸³ Hiebert, "Syncretism and Social Paradigms," 44.

⁸⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 455.

connected with their culture.⁸⁵ Yet the elements of culture that are neutral and good should be kept and celebrated.⁸⁶ How communities determine whether pagan practices should be rejected, accepted, or redefined will be discussed later in this chapter.

Kraft believes that there is no way to totally avoid syncretism, because it is a result of human limitations and sinfulness. He writes, "Our advice to national leaders...then, is to stop fearing syncretism. Deal with it in its various forms as a starting point, whether it has come from the receiving society or from the source society and help people to move toward more ideal expressions of their faith."⁸⁷

Contextualization holds in tandem two opposing elements: the gospel is alien to each culture and the gospel fits naturally in each culture.⁸⁸ The body of Christ is a "pilgrim people." Believers are called out of the world, but also sent into the world to incarnate the reign of Christ.⁸⁹ This next section will focus on contextual practices of those sent into other lands to share the good news of Jesus.

Contextual Practices In Sharing the Gospel Message

Before people even open their mouths to share the gospel message, they have already communicated a great deal. People must not underestimate how much their actions convey. Their behavior can make a person more or less receptive to hearing

⁸⁵ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 56.

⁸⁶ Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 14.

⁸⁷ Kraft, "Development of Contextualizing Theory," 77.

⁸⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 455.

⁸⁹ Baumgarten, *Teach Us to Number*, 373-74.

anything that comes out of their mouths. Theologian Stanley Jones received the following advice from Mahatma Gandhi on how to contextualize the gospel to Indian culture:

I would suggest, first, that all of you Christians, missionaries and all, must begin to live more like Jesus Christ. Second...I would suggest that you must practice your religion without adulterating or toning it down.... Third, I would suggest that you must put your emphasis upon love, for love is the center and soul of Christianity. Fourth, I would suggest that you study the non-Christian religions and culture more sympathetically in order to find the good that is in them, so that you might have a more sympathetic approach to the people.⁹⁰

Whether or not Gandhi became a follower of Christ, the witnessing community would benefit from listening to his critiques. As Gandhi's first suggestion implies, how a person behaves is key to communicating the gospel. As in many other nations, the actions of "Christians" tainted the name "Christian" for the Indians. It did not bring up connotations of the life of Jesus, but of oppression and Western culture.⁹¹ After eight years of work in India, Stanley Jones abandoned referring to himself as "Christian" because he had to regularly explain that by "Christian" he meant a person following Jesus.⁹² The actions of "Christians" had not communicated the gospel message.

Another important step in contextualizing the gospel is to become a humble learner of the culture. Jesus exemplified this by incarnating himself as a baby in Jewish culture.⁹³ Witnesses of Christ can follow the lead of Jesus by making every

⁹⁰ Stanley E. Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1925), 126-27.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁹³ Whiteman, "Function," 51.

effort to understand and appreciate the host culture. Kraft believes that living in a foreign way communicates foreignness. He believes locals might interpret the actions of foreigners, who continue to operate by their own cultural standards instead of adapting, as arrogant or greedy.⁹⁴

Missiologist David Hesselgrave believes that in order to communicate the good news in a contextual way, the gospel must be decoded through the following seven dimensions: worldview, cognitive processes, linguistic forms, behavioral patterns, communication media, social structures, and motivational sources. These dimensions are explained below.

1. Worldview is the way people perceive and understand the world. It is how they see themselves in the world, and how they view the world in relation to themselves. It includes their understanding of nature, humanity, the supernatural, and time.

2. Cognitive processes are the ways people think. People arrive at conclusions using different thought processes. Those in the West give higher priority to conceptual thinking and rationalization, those in the East to intuition and knowledge from inner experience, and those in tribal cultures to parables and analogies.

3. Linguistic forms are the ways people express ideas. Unfortunately, one language cannot be translated exactly into another language. Multiple words are sometimes needed to explain one term.

⁹⁴ Kraft, "Contextualizing Communication," 129.

4. Behavioral patterns encompass the way people act. This takes into account non-verbal communication. It refers to intonations, facial expressions, gestures, and a host of other forms of body language.

5. Communication media refers to the way people channel a message. This communication could be in pictures, drama, written in a textbook, or viewed on a television screen.

6. Social structures are the ways people interact with each other. It is how young and old people interact, how women and men interact, how adults and children interact, and how people interact with friends or mere acquaintances.

7. Motivational sources are the ways people make decisions. In some cultures decisions are made communally, in others, individually. In some societies, individuals make decisions only after reaching a certain age, but others can make decisions at any stage of life.⁹⁵

Although these seven dimensions have been identified separately for the purpose of this explanation, in reality, they are interrelated and enmeshed. The more a person grasps the worldview, cognitive process, behavioral patterns, and social structures of the culture they want to reach, the easier it is for them to make adjustments in their communication, so that their intended message is received.⁹⁶ Without taking into account these seven dimensions of communication, the essence of what a person is trying to communicate gets lost in translation. These dimensions of cross-cultural communication will be discussed in more depth in chapter two.

⁹⁵ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 165-68.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 163.

In addition to recognizing the complexity of communicating cross-culturally, a person also needs to understand three unique contexts in order to adequately communicate the biblical message: the biblical context, one's own context, and the new context.⁹⁷ This process starts with careful exegesis of what the original recipients of the biblical text understood. The message must then be contextualized into the new culture, with effort to de-contextualize the message from one's own culture.⁹⁸ Hesselgrave and Rommen write,

The interpreter's own enculturation leaves an indelible stamp on [her or] his thought patterns and will certainly affect the way in which [she or] he interprets a given message. But in spite of the limitations imposed by the interpreter's ethnocentrism, human language, and the distorting effects of sin, the student of the biblical text is able to gain a more or less accurate understanding of its author's intended meaning.⁹⁹

Awareness of one's own cultural lens and the cultural lens of the receiving culture can spur interpretations and applications of the biblical text that are insightful and relevant.

Effective communicators also look for customs and metaphors of the culture to use as a bridge to communicate the truths of scripture. In his book *Eternity in Their Hearts*, Don Richardson shares about looking for "redemptive analogies," (spiritual metaphors found in a person's culture) that can be used to communicate the gospel message.¹⁰⁰ For example, in Muslim culture there is a high respect for the Qur'an. Biblical stories that are also found in the Qur'an might work as a bridge for

⁹⁷ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 202.

⁹⁸ Kraft, "Development of Contextualizing Theory," 201.

⁹⁹ David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 202.

¹⁰⁰ Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1981), 61.

sharing the message of Christ with Muslims.¹⁰¹ One must also remember that the Holy Spirit is at work, preparing people to receive Christ.¹⁰²

Hiebert believes that keeping the message centered on Christ's life, death, resurrection, and call to discipleship is key to good witness.¹⁰³ Stanley Jones is in agreement. In his book, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, Jones comments that he initially came to India with an intricate message and spent a great deal of time defending the Western world, Christian culture, and the Old Testament. He soon realized that the important message was much simpler: "I found that when I was at the place of Jesus, I was every moment upon the vital. Here at this place, all the questions of heaven and earth were being settled. He was the one question that settled all others."¹⁰⁴ For doctrines do not save, but Jesus saves, and we get our beliefs from Jesus, not Jesus from our beliefs.¹⁰⁵ Jones writes, "In all the history of Christianity whenever there has been a new emphasis upon Jesus there has been a fresh outburst of spiritual vitality and virility."¹⁰⁶ Some believe that if only Jesus is preached, and not theological systems and ecclesiastical organization, all will be corrupted. Jones does not agree but comments, "Jesus can take care of himself."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 67.

¹⁰² Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 18.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Jones, *Christ*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 172;174.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 175.

So much of what people try to communicate does not translate well, “but Jesus is universal. He can stand the shock of transplantation.”¹⁰⁸

As revealed in this section, an important piece of successful witness is for the messenger to live like Christ. Bearers of the good news should enter another culture as learners and in humility work to understand the lifestyle, customs, and traditions of the people. Foreigners should make every effort to incarnate themselves into the new culture. They should also be thoughtful to distinguish the culture of scripture from their own culture and that of the new host culture, so that they can contextualize the biblical message with care. They should keep the message focused on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus instead of defending the Western world or complex theological doctrines. They should remember that it is the Holy Spirit who is at work changing people’s hearts. Once a community of new believers is established, contextual practices are also needed for local worshipping communities to grow. This final section will discuss contextualization practices for a growing community of believers.

Building Communities of Jesus-Followers Contextually

Contextualization continues to be important as a new community of believers is established. During this time, believers begin to ask vital questions about what it means to live out their faith. Paul Hiebert believes there are three different responses a community can take toward the indigenous practices of their culture. The first option is simply to reject all native practices and label them as pagan. The problem with this, as seen earlier in this chapter, is that foreigners overlook the fact

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 41.

that their own culture—even their own pagan practices—influences their “Christian” traditions. New customs are needed to replace the old customs, and often foreigners think their own traditions fill in nicely.¹⁰⁹ This is why one sees Africans putting up Christmas trees and celebrating the birth of Jesus on the winter solstice.¹¹⁰ These Western practices result in making the gospel message look like a foreign religion. When all native practices are rejected, witnesses to Christ then become the police, wagging their fingers at the locals for continuing their pagan practices. The community usually continues with their former customs, only in hiding. New believers often have no ownership of the decision to oust local customs, but are simply bowing to the wishes of the foreigners or ecclesiastical leadership.¹¹¹

A second response is to accept native customs uncritically. The problem with this response is that foreign and national believers turn a blind eye toward the sin in the local culture. They fail to recognize that Jesus demands all cultures be transformed.¹¹²

The third response, and the one recommended by Hiebert, is to critically evaluate cultural practices. As events come up, such as weddings, funerals, or local celebrations, the body of believers evaluates the traditional customs by studying the scriptures. All members of the believing community—not simply the church leaders—should be involved in the decision-making process. If the practice does not

¹⁰⁹ Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” 287-88.

¹¹⁰ Loewen, “Evangelism and Culture,” 184.

¹¹¹ Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” 289.

¹¹² Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 185.

clash with scripture, they should keep it, but if it is seen as ill-suited for the community of faith they should reject or modify the custom by changing the meaning to be appropriate for the believing community. In addition, foreign elements such as baptism or communion are sometimes incorporated into the new culture for the purpose of being in solidarity with the universal body of Christ.¹¹³ The community may also choose to create new symbols or practices meaningful to their faith.¹¹⁴

It is key that the people of the culture make these important decisions. Local believers must have ownership of the process and the decisions made.¹¹⁵ Outside views can help people see their biases, but locals are best at critiquing their own culture.¹¹⁶ The “expert” is not the outside theologian or even the local theologian, but the local community of faith.¹¹⁷ When decisions are made about specific practices, they can be broadened to include larger categories within the society.¹¹⁸ The larger believing community is then able to hold individuals accountable to becoming more Christlike.¹¹⁹ Even if the foreigner does not agree, or would make different decisions, she or he must trust that God is at work in the community. Ownership is a much more effective and less arrogant option than demanding

¹¹³ Ibid., 187-88.

¹¹⁴ Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” 291.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 293.

¹¹⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, “The Gospel in Human Contexts: Changing Perceptions of Contextualization,” in Hesselgrave and Stetzer, *Missionshift*, 99.

¹¹⁷ Gilliland, “New Testament Contextualization,” 26.

¹¹⁸ Hiebert, “Gospel in Human Contexts,” 100.

¹¹⁹ Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” 293.

obedience.¹²⁰ Contextualizing the gospel is an ongoing process, and the local body of believers should continue to evaluate their culture over the course of time, in order for the community to be transformed more and more into the image of Christ.¹²¹

In making decisions about whether customs should be kept, rejected, or adapted, the community should use the Bible as the final authority. The hope is that natives are translating scripture into their own language and that subsequent generations can continue to establish more accurate translations. Hiebert writes, "Scripture is the standard against which we measure all truth and righteousness, all theologies and moralities."¹²² The Holy Spirit is also at work in leading the community to truth. Dean Gilliland writes, "The Holy Spirit is an active guide in the life of every believer, and we must trust [the Holy Spirit] to speak directly to the regenerated human spirit."¹²³

The first generations of believers following the death of Christ developed structures and doctrines for the community of faith as they were needed. Today the body of Christ should operate with the same flexibility.¹²⁴ Locals should establish their own worship forms. Music, rituals, and fellowship meetings should fit the style and custom of the local culture.¹²⁵ Natives should also decide the best way to communicate the gospel to others.¹²⁶

¹²⁰ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 190.

¹²¹ Gilliland, "New Testament Contextualization," 12.

¹²² Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 17.

¹²³ Gilliland, "New Testament Contextualization," 16.

¹²⁴ Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 65.

New communities of believers should not be dominated by nor dependent on foreign countries.¹²⁷ Many Western evangelicals fear that a new believing community will view their local cultural ways as superior to the biblical text. Often what this really means is the Westerners fear their interpretation of the text will be downplayed or not seen. If communities only learn to exegete scripture from a foreigner, or a local trained in a foreign way, most of the population is cut off from using scripture. Foreigners need to trust that the Holy Spirit will guide believers into all truth.¹²⁸ Rolland Allen, who was an early advocate of local believers gaining independence from the West, considered it better for a new community to make many mistakes, than for them to feel they had no voice. Local bodies that were micromanaged by foreigners would often inherit foreign customs and foreign brokenness. He was confident new communities would create their own problems and did not need to inherit foreign problems as well.¹²⁹

When a believing community has grown over several generations, they then begin to establish their own theology. Scholars and practitioners are beginning to see that there is no universal theology. Hiebert writes, "All theologies developed by human beings are shaped by their particular historical and cultural contexts—by the languages they use and the questions they ask. All human theologies are only

¹²⁵ Loewen, "Evangelism and Culture," 188.

¹²⁶ Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 65.

¹²⁷ Gilliland, "New Testament Contextualization," 13.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹²⁹ Allen, *Missionary Methods*, 145.

partial understandings of Theology as God sees it. We see through a glass darkly.”¹³⁰

All theologies are marred by sin, but this does not mean that all cultures cannot grasp the truth of scripture. Although the finer details are hazier, the central message of creation, sin, and redemption is clear.¹³¹ The Druids from England who performed human sacrifices, and the Scots who practiced cannibalism have contribute to the story of faith. It is an injustice to assume other cultures cannot be trusted to interpret the gospel message as well. In fact, cultures that differ the greatest are likely to have the most to add in giving a fuller picture to the story of God.¹³²

Theologies need one another. They enhance, test, and influence each other. People from the West would benefit greatly by learning theology from the East and Global South and vice versa.¹³³ Every culture should be open to being examined by believers from other cultures.¹³⁴ If a community reaches the point where they cannot communicate with other believers, and they think their view of scripture is the only one that is true, things have gone awry.¹³⁵ A system of checks and balances creates a unity in diversity that is beneficial for all cultures, and for the refining of the universal body of Christ.

¹³⁰ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 198.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Jones, *Christ*, 204.

¹³³ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 428.

¹³⁴ Loewen, "Evangelism and Culture," 198.

¹³⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 456.

Summary

This chapter has focused on contextualization, defined as the gospel dressed in local forms without the encumbrance of unnecessary foreign elements. Unfortunately many Westerners from the eighteenth through the twentieth century did not operate with a contextual mindset, as they traveled by land and sea to reach the “heathen” in other nations. People were required to take on Western forms, in addition to following Jesus, in order to be considered “Christian.” Western values such as individualism, rationalism, dichotomistic thinking, and imperial control were linked with the gospel. As a result, much of the world saw “Christianity” as the religion of the West. Westerners were unable to recognize that there were pagan cultural elements enmeshed in their own culture, and were fearful of the pagan elements in other cultures. Eventually, however, many foreigners began to see that local music, clothing, art, and architecture were not inherently evil, and “allowed” native forms in worship services, as long as they were not connected with the pagan past. Catholics referred to these concessions as “accommodation;” the Protestants as “indigenization.” In the mid-twentieth century, foreigners began to see that cultures could create their own spiritual forms through the power of the Holy Spirit and the authority of scripture. Locals were then given the driver’s seat in determining whether local customs should be rejected, embraced, or altered to align with biblical values. People began to realize that all theologies are influenced by culture, and as one nation learns theology from another, both sides are enhanced and grasp more fully the nature and heart of God.

At this point it might be helpful to mention that Western culture is not inherently evil. Sometimes Western culture had a positive influence on surrounding people groups. Not all Western cultural assimilation was bad and locals accepted some Western customs with open arms.¹³⁶ It is also important to note that there have always been believers throughout the centuries who have realized that elevating their own culture and importing it in addition to the gospel was wrong. These witnesses made efforts to separate the good news of Christ from their own customs and contextualized the gospel message to the receiving culture.¹³⁷

Bruce Nicholls writes,

Because [humans are] God's creature[s], some of [their] culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because [humans have] fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic. The Gospel does not presuppose the superiority of any culture to another, but evaluates all cultures according to its own criteria of truth and righteousness.¹³⁸

God does not show favoritism, but desires to reach people from all cultures. As seen in this chapter, contextualization allows the message of Christ to be understood more clearly and received more readily. Yet in the world today, people have differing views on how contextualization should be carried out in any given culture. This is certainly true for contextualizing the gospel in the Muslim world. This next chapter will focus on communicating the gospel message to Muslims in a contextual way.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 297.

¹³⁸ Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 15-16.

Chapter Two

Communicating the Gospel Message to Muslims

Conflict, misunderstanding, and prejudice have characterized Muslim-Christian relations throughout history.¹ Even now there continues to be a great divide between Muslims and Christians who live side-by-side in the same nations. In the eleventh century, Muslim-Christian relations hit their all-time low with the Crusades.² Both sides believed they were fighting a holy war against the infidels.³ Crusaders, with the sign of the cross emblazoned on their shields, killed countless Muslims in the name of God. On Sundays they would lay down their weapons and worship, praying for God's favor to destroy their enemies. Phil Parshall, specialist in Islamic studies, writes, "At the end of the eight Crusades, antagonism between adherents of the two religions had cemented."⁴

Political Barriers. Some Muslims continue to see Western Christians as "Crusaders" in the ways they operate in the world—politically, militarily, and economically.⁵ Likewise, Christians in the West often look at Islam with antagonism,

¹ Andrea Gray and Leith Gray, "The Imperishable Seed: Toward Effective Sharing of Scripture," in *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), 34.

² Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism: Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 14.

³ Christine A. Mallouhi, *Waging Peace on Islam* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 83.

⁴ Phil Parshall, *Bridges to Islam: A Christian Perspective on Folk Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 114.

⁵ Patrick Johnstone, "Look at the Fields: Survey of the Task," in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 6.

seeing it as a violent religion that produces terrorists waging holy war. Christine Mallouhi, an Australian Christian who is married to an Arab Muslim and has lived in the Middle East for a good portion of her life, writes, “Christianity will continue to be suspect while the West sees the Muslim world as an enemy.”⁶ Joseph Cumming, director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture Reconciliation Program, believes an important question must be answered:

Is the Christian faith primarily a tribal identity? (We are the Christians, they are the Muslims.) Or, is the Christian faith primarily costly discipleship to Jesus Christ the Crucified?...If the answer is tribal identity, then we must fight for the survival of the Christian civilization. We must kill the enemies of our civilization before they kill us. But if it is instead about costly discipleship, then we lay down our lives in love of Muslims and share the good news of Jesus so they can know him.⁷

This animosity between Christians and Muslims is one of the greatest barriers to Muslims coming to know Jesus.

Another scar in Christian-Muslim relations is colonialism. From 1700 to 1945, Christian foreigners ruled 90 percent of Muslim lands.⁸ Many Muslims today lump Christian outreach with that foreign occupation, which they interpret as the desire of the West to control the world.⁹ In the wake of World War II, Muslims gained freedom from the imperial powers of the West, and national pride swelled in their hearts. Islamic culture and religion became linked to Muslim positive self-

⁶ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 171.

⁷ Joseph Cumming, “Toward Respectful Witness,” in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 319-20.

⁸ Parshall, *Bridges to Islam*, 115.

⁹ Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 141.

identity. Accompanied with this nationalism was a strong resistance to the gospel message as a “Western” institution.¹⁰

Moral Barriers. In addition to barriers due to past conflicts, there are current hurdles to Muslims coming to faith in Christ. One of these is the negative view Muslims have of the Western world. Many Muslims believe that Western culture exemplifies Christianity. Al Janssen, author of *Secret Believers*, writes:

The problem is that Muslims look at the West and think they are viewing Christianity, and they want nothing to do with it. In their minds, religion is not separated from culture and politics. So when the United States invades Iraq, most Muslims view it as Christianity attacking Islam. When they turn their satellite dishes to our media, they see and hear popular entertainers, often wearing big gold crosses while dressed in the most suggestive clothing and singing lyrics that promote violence and sex, and they think they are viewing Christian behavior. It doesn't matter if you or I protest that this isn't real Christianity.¹¹

If Muslims see Hollywood and MTV as synonymous with Christianity, it is understandable that they do not want to “convert” to such a religion.

Christian nationals also do not always have the best reputation in the Muslim world. One Arab Christian from a large Middle Eastern city admitted that it was the Christians in his country that were known for drinking alcohol, running the bars, and living immoral lives.¹²

Theological Barriers. A final barrier Muslims have in coming to Christ is theological. As mentioned in chapter two, Muslims and Christians have divergent views, particularly concerning Jesus. Phil Parshall writes, “The offence of the cross

¹⁰ Parshall, *New Paths*, 15.

¹¹ Brother Andrew and A. Janssen, *Secret Believers: What Happens When Muslims Believe in Christ* (Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 243.

¹² Interview with a Christian Arab, June 28, 2011.

and the divinity of Christ remain as major stumbling blocks to the Muslim. We should, however, be committed to reducing every unnecessary hindrance, both sociological and theological, to the Muslim becoming a follower of Christ.”¹³ Since there are already so many hurdles to Muslims hearing the true meaning of the gospel, those who share the good news must communicate the message with great forethought. To do this, one must understand the mind and heart of the Muslim. This chapter will look at the beliefs, customs, and way of life of the Muslim in order to communicate the message of Christ in the most appropriate way.

As mentioned in chapter one, David Hesselgrave developed a paradigm for understanding the different dimensions involved in communicating the gospel message from one culture to another. Hesselgrave writes, “All messages must pass through this seven-dimension grid. There is no way they can go around or otherwise escape it.”¹⁴ The seven dimensions are: worldview, cognitive processes, linguistic forms, behavioral patterns, social structures, motivational sources, and communication media. In order to understand how to best communicate the gospel message to Muslims, Islamic culture will be examined through each of these seven dimensions.

¹³ Phil Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque: Christians within Muslim Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 178.

¹⁴ David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 203.

Worldview

The way one understands God, the supernatural, human nature, and time are all part of a person's worldview. Worldview is at the very center of a culture and a person's behavior is determined by her or his view of the world. It gives an orientation for how to look at life.¹⁵ Once one understands the Muslim worldview, she or he can look for ways to communicate the gospel that engage the Muslim perception of the world. Author and lecturer Colin Chapman comments, "We want to see how far we can walk along the same road with the Muslim before we come to the fork where our paths diverge."¹⁶ Compared to Hinduism or Buddhism, the Muslim worldview holds much in common with the Christian worldview. As Christine Mallouhi points out, two-thirds of what Christians and Muslims believe is the same.¹⁷ However, to effectively communicate the gospel, one must not only look at the similarities, but also at the differences between the Muslim and Christian worldview. "Not to do so would invite misunderstanding and syncretism," writes Hesselgrave.¹⁸

Muslims have six articles of faith that provide a framework for understanding their worldview. They believe in God, the angels, the holy books, the

¹⁵ Parshall, *New Paths*, 63.

¹⁶ Colin Chapman, "The God Who Reveals," in *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989), 127.

¹⁷ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 231.

¹⁸ Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 205.

prophets, the Day of Judgment, and predestination.¹⁹ This section will compare and contrast Muslim and Christian views using the framework of these articles of faith.

God. Muslims believe there is one true God. The word for God in Arabic is *Allah*, a contraction of *al-ilah*, meaning *the* God, not *a* God. The oneness of God is of utmost importance to Muslims.²⁰ To make another equal with God is to commit *shirk* (blasphemy), the greatest of all sins.²¹ God was never created, but has always been and will always be. God also has never had any offspring. As creator of everything in the universe, God guides and sustains all of life.²²

The Qur'an reads, "Allah! There is no god but He! To Him belong the Most Beautiful names."²³ These names can be found in the hadith (the collection of the sayings ascribed to the prophet Muhammad). Although in different collections the names vary slightly,²⁴ they include the following:

Allah, The Compassionate, The Merciful, The King, The Holy, The Author of Safety, The Giver of Peace, The Protector, The Strong, The Compeller, The Majestic, The Creator, The Maker, The Fashioner, The Great Forgiver, The Dominant, The Bestower, The Sustainer, The Opener, The All-Knowing, The Retainer, The Enlarger, The Pleaser, The Elevator, The Honorer, The All-Hearing, The All-Seeing, The Judge, The Just, The Subtle, The Gracious, The Forebearing, The Mighty, The Forgiving, The Grateful, The High, The Great, The Preserver, The Protector, The Reckoner, The Beneficent, The Gracious,

¹⁹ Carl Medearis, *Muslims, Christians and Jesus: Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships* (Minneapolis: BethanyHouse, 2008), Kindle e-book, locations 219-99.

²⁰ Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Context: Past, Present, and Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 45.

²¹ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 221.

²² Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 78.

²³ Qur'an 20:8 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

²⁴ Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2000), 34.

The Watchful, The Responsive, The Vast, The All-Embracing, The Judge of Judges, The Loving, The Glorious, The Raiser From Death, The Witness, The Truth, The Trustee, The Strong, The Firm, The Protecting Friend, The Praiseworthy, The Counter, The Originator, The Reproducer, The Restorer, The Destroyer, The Alive, The Self-Subsisting, The Perceiver, The One, The Independent, The Capable, The Dominant, The Promoter, The Retarder, The First, The Last, The Manifest, The Hidden, The Governor, The High Exalted, The Righteous, The Relenting, The Forgiver, The Avenger, The Compassionate, The Owner of Sovereignty, The Lord of Majesty, The Equitable, The Gatherer, The Self-Sufficient, The Enricher, The Withholder, The Propitious, The Distresser, The Light, The Guide, The Eternal, The Everlasting, The Heir, The Guide to the Right Path, The Patient.²⁵

These names are in alignment with the Christian description of God, and almost all are found, at least conceptually, in the Old Testament.²⁶

Muslims and Christians have some differences in their view of God. Although the Qur'an states that God is nearer than their jugular vein,²⁷ Muslims are more comfortable with regarding God as transcendent.²⁸ Muslim scholars often emphasize the great divide separating God from creation.²⁹ God is said to speak "from behind a veil,"³⁰ and cannot be known. On the other hand, Christians believe that God is revealed through creation, the conscience, the Bible, and most

²⁵ Ian S. Markham and Christy Lohr, eds., *A World Religions Reader*, 3rd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 215-16.

²⁶ Parshall, *New Paths*, 141.

²⁷ Qur'an 10:16.

²⁸ J. Dudley Woodberry, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 1 (January 2002): 36.

²⁹ Donald S. Tingle, *Islam & Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 8.

³⁰ Qur'an 42:51.

importantly through Jesus.³¹ To Muslims it is unthinkable that God would come in human form to the earth.³²

Another difference between the Christian and Muslim view of God is that Christians believe Jesus came as an intercessor between God and humankind, and Muslims see no need for an intercessor. The repentant are simply forgiven because God is a merciful God.³³

Muslims also take offense at the Christian belief in the Trinity. Yet, it is important to note that the Trinity Muhammad rejected was the worship of three gods: Jesus, Mary, and God.³⁴ The Qur'an reads,

And behold! Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Did you say to men, 'worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah'?" He [Jesus] will say: "Glory to You! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it....Never said I to them anything except what You commanded me to say, to wit, "Worship Allah , my Lord and your Lord.""³⁵

Although orthodox Christians do not believe they are worshipping three gods, and do not think that God, Mary, and Jesus make up the Trinity, the orthodox understanding of the Trinity, as one God in three persons, is still rejected by most Muslim scholars. Parshall writes, "One plus one plus one can never equal one. The Muslim is amazed at the naïveté of the Christians in seeing mathematical,

³¹ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 253.

³² Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 580.

³³ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 228.

³⁴ Tingle, *Islam & Christianity*, 7.

³⁵ Qur'an 5:116-17. For all quotes from the Qur'an in this paper, words in parentheses are from the translator, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, and brackets are clarifications from the author of this thesis.

philosophical, and doctrinal unity in three discernible gods with separate functions. Thus, the religion of Islam takes as its rallying cry, 'God is One.'"³⁶

Even though there are disagreements between Muslims and Christians as to the nature of God, many scholars believe there is enough in common to say Muslims and Christians worship the same God. Chapman points out that in Acts 17, Paul used the Greek word *theos* when referring to "an unknown god." Paul seemed to think there was enough in common between the Christian concept of God and the pagan one to use the same name.³⁷ In addition, the word *Allah* is an ancient Syrian word that was used for God long before the time of Muhammad, and it continues to be used by millions of Christians in the Arabic-speaking world today.³⁸

The Qur'an also affirms that the Christian and Muslim God are the same: "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us [Muslims] and in that which came down to you [Jews and Christians]; our God (Allah) and your God (Allah) is One; and it is to Him We bow (in Islam)."³⁹ Parshall's experience has been that Muslims who have come to believe in Christ never thought they were previously worshipping a false god. He argues, "If a Muslim convert perceives the God of Islam and Christianity as one, then who are we to deny such a possibility?"⁴⁰

Angels. Muslims see angels as servants of God, who reveal God's will to the

³⁶ Parshall, *New Paths*, 76.

³⁷ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 236.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Qur'an 29:46.

⁴⁰ Parshall, *New Paths*, 142.

prophets.⁴¹ When Muhammad was in a cave on Mt. Hira, God's messenger Gabriel spoke to him. Muslims call Gabriel the "Holy Spirit."⁴² Initially Muhammad was unsure if the message he received was from God or from *jinn*.⁴³ *Jinn* are spirits with free will who are neither angels nor humans. Although they can be good or evil, most perceive of them as being evil. They are jealous of humans and try to cause them harm, illness, or even death. Many Muslims are afraid of *jinn* and go to a diviner or use charms to protect themselves from these spirits.⁴⁴

Even though the Bible speaks readily of angels and demons, the average Westerner does not visualize spiritual beings as operating in the earthly realm. In the Muslim worldview, the actions of spirits affect everyday life.⁴⁵ Those wishing to share the good news would do well to grow in understanding the spirit world in order to address the felt needs of Muslims. The follower of Christ can direct Muslims to the power of Jesus, instead of a diviner, in order for the Muslim to gain freedom from evil spirits. Theologian Bill Musk writes,

The biblical answer to the acknowledged reality of evil spirits, including jinn, is that cure from their oppressing and possessing of humans is available. Such cure comes, not by magical means, nor by formulas of exorcism, but by the word of power which Jesus speaks, and which he entrusts to his disciples.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 233.

⁴² Ibid., 114.

⁴³ Riddell and Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, 22.

⁴⁴ Bill A. Musk, *The Unseen Face of Islam: Sharing the Gospel with Ordinary Muslims at Street Level* (London: Monarch Publications, 1989), 38-40.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 16-17.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 44.

The holy books. The four holy books in Islam are the *Tawrat* (Torah), *Zabur* (Psalms), *Injil* (Gospels), and the Qur'an. The Qur'an, which in Arabic means "recitation,"⁴⁷ is considered the holiest book and God's final revelation.⁴⁸ Some Muslims believe that even though the Bible is a holy book, it is unnecessary because all the important parts of the Bible are included in the Qur'an.⁴⁹ The Qur'an says, "None of our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: don't you know that Allah has power over all things?"⁵⁰ Many Muslims take this to mean that later revelations supersede earlier revelations. This holds true both for verses within the Qur'an, and also for the Qur'an in reference to the other holy books.⁵¹

Some Muslims believe that Muhammad's calling was to bring the Arabs a scripture in their own language.⁵² In the Qur'an, Jews and Christians are referred to as, "People of the Book," as they already had their own scriptures. The Arabs became "People of the Book" as well when they received the Qur'an.⁵³

⁴⁷ Phil Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent: Understanding the Muslim Heart and Mind* (Waynesboro: Gabriel Publishing, 2002), 54.

⁴⁸ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 254.

⁴⁹ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 234.

⁵⁰ Qur'an 2:106.

⁵¹ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 258.

⁵² Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 85.

⁵³ Fouad Elias Accad, *Building Bridges: Christianity and Islam* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 36.

Muhammad's revelations are said to have come from God gradually over twenty-three years.⁵⁴ The Qur'an consists of 114 *Surahs* (chapters), ordered by length from longest to shortest—arranged similarly to the letters ascribed to Paul in the New Testament.⁵⁵ The Qur'an is said to have not changed over the last fourteen centuries.⁵⁶

Muslims believe the Qur'an reads as a direct dictation of the words of God and is not tainted with any of Muhammad's own ideas or feelings.⁵⁷ It is considered to be co-eternal with God, and is part of the "Well-Preserved Tablet," which is in heaven.⁵⁸ In this respect, the Qur'an is to Muslims what Jesus is to Christians—eternally existent with status equal to God.⁵⁹ In the same way Christians see Christ as the revelation from God, Muslims see the Qur'an as the revelation from God.⁶⁰ Every word and syllable in the Qur'an is considered divine, so no translation is regarded as God's word. Muslims view the Qur'an as the uncontested authority in theology, life, and law.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 84.

⁵⁵ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 474.

⁵⁶ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 85.

⁵⁷ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 136.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁹ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 65.

⁶⁰ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 84.

⁶¹ Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 136.

It is important to Muslims that they recite the Qur'an in its original language, as Arabic was the language God used to impart the Qur'an to Muhammad. Muslims memorize the Qur'an and recite it aloud, even if Arabic is not their native tongue.⁶² One Muslim from Africa commented, "The Qur'an is the most beautiful book. No human can write anything as beautiful as the words of the Qur'an. It is a miracle from God."⁶³

Most Muslims do not believe the Qur'an has any historical errors or mistakes,⁶⁴ but many do not hold the same view for the Old and New Testament. Some Muslims have trouble believing the Bible is the word of God when it is communicated in so many different forms: narrative, letters, poetry, prophecy, and law.⁶⁵ In fact, the majority of Muslims believe the Bible has been corrupted. Although much of the Qur'an aligns with the Bible, there are several discrepancies, and Muslims believe these show that the Bible has been distorted over time.⁶⁶

The Qur'an itself reads, "They [the Jews] change the words from their (right) places and forget a good part of the Message that was sent them....From those, too, who call themselves Christians, We did take a Covenant, but they forgot a good part

⁶² Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 88.

⁶³ Interview with a Muslim African, July 11, 2011.

⁶⁴ M. Coleman and P. Verster, "Contextualisation of the Gospel among Muslims," *Acta Theologica* 26, no. 2 (2006): 110.

⁶⁵ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 81.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

of the Message that was sent them.”⁶⁷ The Qur’an also states, “There is among them [the Jews] a section who distort the Book with their tongues.”⁶⁸

Some Muslims take this to mean that the Jews deliberately misinterpreted, or altered their text,⁶⁹ and that both Jews and Christians forgot the words of God. Some might argue with Muslims that, according to the Qur’an, it is not the *text* that has been changed, but the *people* who have altered the Word of God, “with their tongues,” and therefore the text itself has not been corrupted.

The Qur’an also claims that the words of God cannot be changed.⁷⁰ Therefore, some Muslims believe that all the holy books have a special protection from God that ensures people have not corrupted them.⁷¹ In addition, the Qur’an says, “If you are in doubt as to what We have revealed to you, then ask those [Jews and Christians] who have been reading the Book from Lord.”⁷² Hence, there is room not only for the interpretation that Christians and Jews do not have a corrupted book, but that they should be consulted if Muslims have any questions concerning the message from God.⁷³

⁶⁷ Qur’an 5:13-14.

⁶⁸ Qur’an 3:78.

⁶⁹ Riddell and Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, 74.

⁷⁰ Qur’an 6:34; 10:64.

⁷¹ Riddell and Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, 74.

⁷² Qur’an 10:94.

⁷³ Rick Brown, “Biblical Muslims” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 66.

In addition, the Qur'an tells Muslims that they are to believe the scriptures.⁷⁴ Fouad Accad, who was a Lebanese pastor and scholar, writes, "Both Muhammad and the Qur'an are on the side of the authority of the Bible. There are also passages stating not only that God wanted the Bible to exist but that the Bible has not been tampered with....The Qur'an is clearly on the Bible's side."⁷⁵ Discussion concerning whether or not the Bible has been corrupted may come up in conversations with Muslims. If a Muslim is to become a follower of Jesus, accepting the authority of the Bible will be a crucial step.

Prophets. Muslims understand prophets to be those appointed by God to guide people into the "straight path."⁷⁶ Of the 124,000 prophets, only a fraction of them are mentioned in the Qur'an.⁷⁷ Many of them are biblical characters, including Adam, Abraham, Lot, Noah, Joseph, Zachariah, Enoch, Elisha, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, Job, Jonah, Moses, Aaron, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, and Jesus.⁷⁸ There are four non-biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur'an: Hud, Shuayb, Salih, and Muhammad.⁷⁹ Of the prophets, the ones who have been given the holy books are considered to be messengers: Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad.⁸⁰ Prophets

⁷⁴ Qur'an 4:136.

⁷⁵ Accad, *Building Bridges*, 151.

⁷⁶ Hammudah Abdalati, "The Fundamental Articles of Faith in Islam," in *Encountering the World of Islam*, ed. Keith E. Swartley (Colorado Springs: Authentic Publishing, 2008), 100.

⁷⁷ Parshall, *New Paths*, 134.

⁷⁸ Diane Morgan, *Essential Islam: A Comprehensive Guide to Belief and Practice* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing, 2010) 39.

⁷⁹ Ibid.,

⁸⁰ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 325.

may hear from God through an intermediary, such as an angel,⁸¹ may fall into a trance, or may simply sense that God is giving them a divine revelation.

Muhammad is regarded as the “last and greatest prophet.”⁸² Muslims emulate him as the model for how to live in right relationship with God.⁸³ At the time of Muhammad’s birth, the Arab people were clusters of warring tribes. Muhammad united the Arab community under the worship of one God, and put an end to polytheism. Muhammad is known for improving the lives of the oppressed, specifically women and the poor, and is highly esteemed in the Muslim world.⁸⁴

Although Muhammad is considered the greatest prophet, Jesus is deemed the holiest prophet.⁸⁵ In the following passage from Surah 3, notice the characteristics of Jesus:

Behold! The angels said: “O Mary! Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah; He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous.” She said: “O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?” He said: “Even so: Allah creates what He wills: when He has decreed a Plan, He but says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is! And Allah will teach him the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel, And (appoint him) a Messenger to the Children of Israel, (with this message): ‘I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah’s leave: and I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah’s leave; and I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if you did believe; (I have come to

⁸¹ Parshall, *New Paths*, 135.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 39.

⁸⁴ Parshall, *New Paths*, 136.

⁸⁵ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*. 262.

you), to attest the Law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was (before) forbidden to you; I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord. So fear Allah, and obey me. It is Allah Who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is a Way that is straight.”⁸⁶

Among other traits, Jesus is described here as: the Word from God, Christ, righteous, born of the virgin Mary, honored, near to God, and a messenger to the Israelites. He creates, heals, raises the dead, and asks that people obey him.

Although Muslims consider Jesus one of the great prophets, they do not place much emphasis on him because they believe Christians have wrongly elevated Jesus to the status of God.⁸⁷ The deity and crucifixion of Christ are two concepts that many Muslims resist strenuously. Yet these doctrines of Jesus are central to the faith of Jesus-followers. For Muslims to place their faith in Christ, they must cross these two hurdles.

Judgment Day. Muslims believe the eternal destiny of humankind will be determined on the Day of Judgment. At that time, God will weigh the good and bad that each person has done to determine whether she or he will go to Heaven or Hell. Those whose good deeds outweigh the bad will go to Heaven. The rest will go to Hell—some for a short time to pay for their sins,⁸⁸ and the infidels (those who do not believe in the one true God) for eternity.⁸⁹ There are three groups of people who

⁸⁶ Qur'an 3:45-51. For all quotes from the Qur'an in this paper, words in parentheses are from the translator, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, and brackets are clarifications from the author of this thesis.

⁸⁷ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 261-63.

⁸⁸ Phil Parshall and Julie Parshall, *Lifting the Veil: The World of Muslim Women* (Waynesboro: Gabriel Publishing, 2002), 96.

⁸⁹ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 270.

are assured entrance into Heaven: martyrs, those under the age of accountability, and those on pilgrimage to Mecca.⁹⁰

For both Muslims and Christians, Heaven bears semblance to a seventh century paradise for desert-dwellers. It includes rivers, plenty of shade, and date trees. The Muslim Heaven has the added promise of beautiful women awaiting them in Paradise.⁹¹ The Qur'an reads,

And those Foremost (in Faith) will be Foremost (in the Hereafter). These will be those Nearest to Allah: In Gardens of Bliss: A number of people from those of old, And a few from those of later times. (They will be) on Thrones encrusted (with gold and precious stones), Reclining on them, facing each other. Round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness), With goblets, (shining) beakers, and cups (filled) out of clear-flowing fountains: No after-ache will they receive therefrom, nor will they suffer intoxication: And with fruits, any that they may select; And the flesh of fowls, any that they may desire. And (there will be) Companions with beautiful, big, and lustrous eyes, - Like unto Pearls well-guarded. A reward for the Deeds of their past (Life). No frivolity will they hear therein, nor any taint of ill, Only the saying, "Peace! Peace". The Companions of the Right Hand, - what will be the Companions of the Right Hand? (They will be) among lote-trees without thorns, Among Talh trees with flowers (or fruits) piled one above another, - In shade long-extended, By water flowing constantly, And fruit in abundance. Whose season is not limited, nor (supply) forbidden, And on Thrones (of Dignity), raised high. We have created (their Companions) of special creation. And made them virgin-pure (and undefiled), - Beloved (by nature), equal in age, - For the Companions of the Right Hand. A (goodly) number from those of old, And a (goodly) number from those of later times.⁹²

In contrast to Christians, Muslims have no atoning sacrifice that assures their salvation. Those who have put their faith in Christ believe that Jesus has made reparations for their sins by his death on the cross. They see works as an outpouring of their love and obedience to God. Muslims believe faith in God and good works

⁹⁰ Parshall and Parshall, *Lifting the Veil*, 96.

⁹¹ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 282-84.

⁹² Qur'an 56:10-30.

help them gain entry into Heaven. They are never certain of their eternal destiny until the Day of Judgment.⁹³ Most Muslims do not believe that Jesus died on the cross. They find it shameful to think God would allow one of the prophets to die a criminal's death. Muslims are certain they honor Jesus more than Christians because they believe Jesus was taken off the cross before being executed.⁹⁴

Predetermination. In the Muslim worldview, God has predetermined everything that happens in life. Nothing takes place outside of God's sovereign will. In some cases this results in fatalistic thinking and behavior, such as resignation, stoicism, and passive living.⁹⁵ Carl Medearis, an expert in Muslim-Christian relations, writes, "For a Muslim, the concept of freely choosing one's own fate seems to fly in the face of God's supremacy, and so the common belief is that things have been ordained for every creature."⁹⁶ Medearis goes on to tell this story:

One of my good friends, an American Air Force pilot, once told me that he'd flown on training sorties with his pilot equivalents in Saudi Arabia. At one time, while flying with a Saudi pilot, during an equipment malfunction, the jet appeared to be on a direct collision course with the terrain. While my friend busied himself with emergency procedures, he noticed that his Saudi counterpart was seated calmly with his hands in his lap, putting no effort into changing their course.

"What are you doing?" my friend shouted. "We're going to crash!"

"If so," replied the Saudi pilot, "it is as Allah wills."⁹⁷

⁹³ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 261.

⁹⁴ Christine A. Mallouhi, *Miniskirts, Mothers & Muslims: A Christian Woman in a Muslim Land* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2004), 140-41.

⁹⁵ Tim Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs: A Felt Needs Approach* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), 22.

⁹⁶ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 274.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 367-72.

In contrast, Tim Matheny, who grew up in the Middle East, believes fatalistic behavior is not a part of the Muslim worldview, but is rather connected to oppression, poverty, and political tyranny. Matheny believes that if these circumstances were different in the Muslim world, fatalistic tendencies would cease to exist. Matheny suggests a more appropriate understanding of Muslim predetermination is an extreme fear of disobeying God's will.⁹⁸

The sovereign will of God and free will of humankind are issues present in both the Qur'an and the Bible. Just as in Christianity, Muslim theologians are divided as to how much weight they should give to each concept.⁹⁹

This section has used the Islamic articles of faith as a lens to explore Muslim worldview. It has shown that there are many similarities between the Christian and Muslim views of God, the supernatural, the holy books, the prophets, Judgment Day, and Predetermination. Yet there are also some significant differences—most notably the incarnation, the credibility of the Bible, and the atonement of Christ. The common belief in one God, who created, sustains, and will one day judge the world, is a bridge for spiritual conversations with Muslims. This next section will address another dimension of cross-cultural communication: how people prefer to think.

Cognitive Processes

In order to effectively communicate to another culture, one must understand how people in that culture prefer to process information. In the book

⁹⁸ Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs*, 24.

⁹⁹ Riddell and Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, 49-50.

Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally, Hesselgrave mentions three systems of thinking: conceptual, intuition, and concrete relational. People use all three types of thinking, but depending on their culture, one thought process is more dominant. Hesselgrave writes, “We are all scientists, mystics and artists if one chooses to put it this way. Where we differ is in degree, or in the priority given to one approach over another.”¹⁰⁰ Conceptual thinking is intellectual and scientific; intuition thinking focuses on introspection and meditation;¹⁰¹ and the concrete relational thinking concentrates on parables, stories, and analogies.¹⁰²

Muslims as conceptual thinkers. Hesselgrave believes both Muslims and Christians use conceptual cognitive processes. This means that Christians and Muslims analyze, categorize, and decipher how different pieces of information work together. They then test these theories to see if they work out in practice. Hence, for Christians and Muslims, their beliefs are “true” because they “make sense” to them.¹⁰³

Educated Muslims may enjoy a good debate with their Christian counterparts, although neither side is easily convinced of the others’ logic. Hesselgrave writes,

A Christian is likely to view the representative of his own faith as the winner [of a debate], while the Muslim will tend to regard his fellow Muslim’s performance as superior....It may well be difficult to declare an obvious winner, but if carefully prepared and presented the debate may encourage a

¹⁰⁰ Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ*, 302.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 299.

¹⁰² Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 206.

¹⁰³ Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ*, 306.

more honest search for the truth.¹⁰⁴

Muslims as concrete relational thinkers. Matheny, on the other hand, might categorize Muslims as concrete relational thinkers. He believes Muslims respond much more readily to parables and illustrations. He writes,

[Westerners have] attempted to convince [Muslims] by using the same arguments [they] would use at home. But frequently an illustration is vastly more persuasive than a syllogism, and is more likely to secure [their] assent and win [their] allegiance. There are many similarities between the Semitic mind of the first century and the Semitic mind of the twentieth century. Therefore the parables of Christ become very relevant to the Arab.¹⁰⁵

Mazhar Mallouhi would agree. He believes that stories “are one of the most effective mediums through which to address issues of faith.”¹⁰⁶

Building trust first. Whether communicating with logic or illustrations, many seeking to reach Muslims believe that starting relationships with discussions about controversial doctrinal differences is not advisable. Emphasizing the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the inspiration of scriptures before developing a friendship may only antagonize the Muslim. “The historic consequence of this approach was that it became a head-on collision with the Muslim,” writes Matheny.¹⁰⁷ Carl Medearis elaborates on this, pointing out that attacking Muhammad or the Qur’an will not win any trust with Muslims. Conversations about the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, and the prophethood of Muhammad should be put on the back burner until one builds

¹⁰⁴ Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 238.

¹⁰⁵ Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs*, 156.

¹⁰⁶ Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path between Two Faiths* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), Kindle ebook, location, 2418.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

trust with her or his Muslim friend. Medearis believes the best conversational tactic is to bring the discussion back around to Jesus. He writes,

I believe that the most important question of all is found in the annals of the New Testament and was aimed at Peter. Jesus asked, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16:15-16). I believe that if we can introduce people to Jesus, he will take the responsibility of asking each person the same question. Jesus revealed himself to every person who earnestly sought him. Should we believe now that he has ceased to do so?¹⁰⁸

Yet eventually topics such as the divinity of Christ, the Trinity, and the crucifixion will need to be addressed. In order have fruitful discussions, a person must use words that get across her or his intended meaning. This dimension of communication has to do with linguistic forms, and will be addressed in the next section.

Linguistic Forms

Learning the local language. Paul Hiebert writes, "Words are emotionally powerful. We must continue to probe for appropriate linguistic forms to reach both the hearts and the minds of our Muslim friends."¹⁰⁹ One important way to do this is to learn the local language. People are most receptive to messages communicated in their heart language (meaning their mother tongue; the language they grew up speaking in their homes).¹¹⁰ People feel that their culture is respected and valued by foreigners who learn the local language.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 590-91.

¹⁰⁹ Phil Parshall, "Lessons Learned in Contextualization," in Woodberry, *Muslims and Christians*, 255.

¹¹⁰ Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 206.

¹¹¹ Parshall, *New Paths*, 107.

Explaining terminology. Yet this is just a first step in communicating the intended message. It is important to realize that languages do not have a direct word-to-word correlation.¹¹² This is especially important when considering the differences between Arabic-speaking Muslims and Arabic-speaking Christians. In places where there is a traditional Christian community living alongside the Muslim community, these two groups often use the same terminology, with different meanings. Matheny exhorts, "It is imperative that the evangelist working with Muslims must become conversant with the religious vocabulary of Islam."¹¹³ According to Matheny, some of the words and phrases that have different implications include: "atonement," "endurance," "forgiveness," "grace," "inspiration," "mercy," "thankfulness," "redemption," "sin," "reconciliation," and "Son of God."¹¹⁴

Bible translations. This becomes significant when considering Bible translations. It is imperative to have a translation that specifically addresses the concerns of the Muslim audience.¹¹⁵ Some believe that there should be separate versions of the Bible for Arabs from a Christian background, and Arabs from a Muslim background, as Christian nationals have a different worldview and different linguistic preferences than the Muslim community.

One prominent linguistic difference between Christians and Muslims is that each group prefers to use different names for historic biblical figures. In many cases,

¹¹² Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 206.

¹¹³ Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs*, 70.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Eric Adams and Laura Adams, "The Gathering of Reproducing Fellowships," in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 143.

Arabic-speaking Christians use the Greek or Syriac translation of names, while Muslims use the Arabic designations for the same people. For example, those from a Christian background use the word *Yisu* or *Yisu'a* to refer to Jesus, while Muslims use *Isa*; and *Yuhanna* is the Christian name for John, while Muslims employ the Arabic designation *Yahya*.¹¹⁶

The most widely used translation of the Arabic Bible is the Smith-Van Dyke version, first published in 1866. This version, along with *Today's Arabic Version*, printed in 1978, and the *Living Arabic Bible* of 1988 use *Yasu'a* as opposed to *Isa* in reference to Jesus.¹¹⁷

In 1987, a group of Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic scholars attempted to present the gospel message using Islamic terminology and the style of the Qur'an. Though not a Bible, this book, called *Sira al Masih*, is a combination of the four gospels in thirty chapters. Similar to the Qur'an, it is written in rhymed prose, and each chapter begins with, "In the name of God the merciful and compassionate one."¹¹⁸ Mark Beaumont, director of Missions Studies at Birmingham Christian College, believes that *Sira al Masih* is "the most notable Christian attempt in the

¹¹⁶ J. Dudley Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims: Reusing Common Pillars," in *The Word among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, ed. Dean S. Gilliland (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 283.

¹¹⁷ Mark Beaumont, *Christology in Dialogue with Muslims: A Critical Analysis of Christian Presentation of Christ for Muslims from the Ninth and Twentieth Centuries* (Waynesboro: Paternoster, 2005), 175.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 174.

history of Christian-Muslim relations to view Christ from both Muslim and Christian perspectives.”¹¹⁹

On the other hand, Mazhar Mallouhi, a Syrian Muslim background believer, is not in favor of this rendering of the gospel message. Mallouhi believes the effort to mimic the Islamic style of the Qur’an is deceptive, since the original texts of the Gospels were not formatted in this way. Also, Mallouhi is not convinced this sort of contextualization will have a lasting effect on the Muslim world. Chandler, in his biography of the life of Mallouhi, writes concerning the *Sira*, “Just two years after its publication, it was condemned by the Muslim World League and the Islamic Research Academy in Egypt asked the then grand imam of Al Azhar to have it banned.”¹²⁰

Yet Mallouhi still desired to see the gospel presented in a way that would be embraced by Arab Muslims. He resolved to write a dynamic equivalent translation of the Bible, with the help of Muslim scholars. This undertaking led to the first translation of scripture spearheaded by a Muslim background believer.¹²¹ This translation, titled *An Eastern Reading of the Gospels and Acts*, is tailored to the educated Muslim. It keeps the integrity of the original texts, while using words and explanations that are accessible to Muslims.

Understanding the meaning of “Son of God.” When communicating the gospel, whether in oral or written form, people must work hard to explain what they

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 2380-85.

¹²¹ Ibid., 2390.

mean by the words they choose to use. One phrase that is typically misunderstood by Muslims and Christians alike is, “Son of God.”

Muslims are repulsed by the idea of God having a biological son. The Qur’an states plainly that God has never had a child.¹²² The Qur’an reads, “The Christians call Christ the Son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouth; (in this) they but imitate what the Unbelievers of old used to say. Allah’s curse be upon them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!”¹²³ Verses like this show that Muslims presume Christians believe in the biological sonship of Jesus. When Muslims hear people refer to Jesus as, “Son of God” or read “Son of God” in the Bible, they quickly reject the idea as blasphemous.¹²⁴

Rick Brown, international language consultant, gives helpful insights on how to understand this controversial title for Jesus. He asserts that in some languages such as Arabic, father-son terminology is exclusively used to refer to biological relationships. Therefore, in Arabic, if a king calls a person “son,” that can only mean that he is the king’s biological offspring.¹²⁵ This was not true for other Semitic languages. In the Ancient Near East, when a king wanted to expand his territory, he could make a covenant with a lesser king. The more prominent king was referred to as “father,” and the lesser king as “son.” This covenantal language was used to

¹²² Qur’an 6:101; 72:3; 112:3.

¹²³ Qur’an 9:30.

¹²⁴ Rick Brown, “The ‘Son of God’: Understanding the Messianic Titles of Jesus,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 41.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

describe the relationship between God and David (see Ps 2:7; Ps 89:27).¹²⁶ Brown writes,

This metaphor indicated both that the king's authority came from God and that his kingdom was a trust from God to whom he must give account....The divinely appointed king was not just a ruler; he was supposed to guide the people in accordance with God's law and save them by God's grace from crime, waywardness, and outside aggression.¹²⁷

Over time the Jewish understanding of the phrase "Son of God" became narrower. By the first century, "Son of God," was the title used exclusively for the anointed king who was to restore political power to the Jews. The Gospels record that several humans (and demons) refer to Jesus as "Son of God," or "Messiah." Both these titles were used interchangeably during first-century Judaism (see Mk 14:61; Lk 4:41; Mt 16:16).¹²⁸ Although others called him "Messiah" or "Son of God," Jesus chose to refer to himself as "Son of Man." This title avoided nationalistic connotations and proclaimed Jesus to be the king of all peoples, not simply the Jews.¹²⁹ Brown suggests this explanation of "Son of God" might provide a helpful apologetic when attempting to clarify the Christian position.

Understanding the meaning of "Son of Man." Muslims misunderstand the title "Son of Man" as well. They believe Jesus referred to himself as "Son of Man," as a way to deny his divinity.¹³⁰ This could not be further from the truth. Jews used the

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 45.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 48.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 43.

phrase “Son of Man” to refer to the heavenly ruler (mentioned in Dn 2 and 7) whom they believed would establish an everlasting kingdom over all the nations of the world. In the Gospels, when Jesus referred to himself as the “Son of Man” he usually followed it with descriptors of power and authority: the “Son of Man” had authority to forgive sins and heal (Mt 9:4-6); would come with the angels in glory (Mt 16:27); and would sit on the throne and determine who would inherit eternal life (Mt 25:31-46). Jesus’ own understanding of the title “Son of Man,” according to the Gospels, is one of heavenly kingship.

After the resurrection, it became clear that Jesus’ grand plan was not to create a political revolution. The disciples were no longer told to hold back from telling the world that Jesus was the “Son of God” or “Messiah.” They proclaimed this freely (Acts 9:20-22). Yet, with time believers began referring to Jesus as “Lord,” as this title was of greater significance to the Gentile audience.¹³¹ “Lord” was the title for the Roman emperor, carrying with it the implication of “ruler of the world.”¹³²

As shown in this section, using linguistic forms that clearly access the true meaning of the gospel can be very challenging. Those bringing the good news must not only learn the heart language of the people, but must also strive to elucidate words and phrases that might be misconstrued. For Muslims, titles like “Son of God,” and “Son of Man,” must be given supplementary explanation. In addition, it is important to use scripture translations that speak to the mind and heart of the Muslim reader.

¹³¹ Ibid., 48.

¹³² Ibid.

Behavioral Patterns

Christine Mallouhi tells the story of the Western pastor attempting to lead a Bible study for a small group of Muslims. The pastor rocked back and forth in a chair, with his legs crossed, and a Bible on his knees. Not a Muslim in the room heard anything he said because they were paying attention to his behavior. They felt the pastor was showing great disrespect for the Holy Scriptures by reading them in such a way.¹³³ Muslims treat their scriptures with reverence. They place the Qur'an on a special stand in an ideal location in their homes. They wash before handling it, and would never place it on the ground or in their laps.¹³⁴ This poor pastor missed the opportunity to reach his audience because he did not understand what his nonverbal communication was conveying. Hesselgrave refers to this dimension of communication as behavioral patterns.

Behavioral patterns are the ways people communicate with their actions. This includes what people convey by the clothes they wear, the gestures they use, and the facial expressions they make. It encompasses the intonations in a person's voice, the amount of eye contact a person gives, and how she or he greets others. People even communicate through how punctual they are to a meeting, and their expectations for how long meetings should last.¹³⁵ Understanding the behavioral patterns of the local culture will prevent outsiders from accidentally offending the

¹³³ Mallouhi, *Miniskirts*, 157.

¹³⁴ Parshall, *New Paths*, 133.

¹³⁵ Mark L. Knapp and Judith A. Hall, *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*, 7th. ed. (Boton: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010), 7-10.

community they are trying so hard to reach.

In the Muslim world, honor is the prime motivating factor behind why people act the way they do.¹³⁶ One of the worst offenses Muslims could make would be to bring shame on their family. Christine Mallouhi writes,

Who wears what and when, who opens the door, who serves the tea, who swims where and when, who sits where, what furniture is placed where and why—all have to do with honour and shame. Custom may be totally opposite in Muslim cultures in towns and cities, or different countries, but people will be operating on an understanding of what is right and wrong that is probably not evident to outsiders at first. There is even a proper way to hang washing on the line, which preserves the privacy of the family by not displaying underwear to neighbours or guests. Locals will probably make excuses for us when we blunder through these customs, but why not make the effort to treat people honourably in the way that feels honourable to them?"¹³⁷

Appearance. One way to honor Muslims is to have a respectable appearance—according to Muslim customs. Mallouhi writes, "Appearance is a way of saying who you want to identify with and where you want to belong."¹³⁸ A good rule of thumb is to pay attention to what the people of the culture are wearing. If they are not wearing something that is normal in a foreigner's home culture, it might be best to ask why, as there could be a significant reason. Mallouhi suggests dressing conservatively, according to the majority of people in the host culture.¹³⁹

For men, having hair that is inappropriately long or short might cause people

¹³⁶ Keith E. Swartley, introduction to "Lesson 5: The Everyday Life of Muslims," in Swartley, *Encountering*, 158.

¹³⁷ Mallouhi, *Miniskirts*, 158.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

to disregard them.¹⁴⁰ For women, wearing short sleeves or leaving the house without a veil might communicate that they are dressing like prostitutes.¹⁴¹ A

Western woman living in Morocco comments,

Repeatedly, I have also heard other neighbour women at parties telling guests about how I wear the head scarf and street veil. They also talk about my good deeds and kind, egalitarian attitude toward people. Although this isn't necessarily what we Westerners would consider sharing the good news, I've learned that for Muslims here, it is a great step forward in the right direction. They see our outward appearance first and then our actions spurred by faith... The scarf is symbolic of my modesty and my respect for conventions and fear of God.¹⁴²

Although there is no mandate in the Qur'an for wearing a veil, the Qur'an¹⁴³ does exhort women to dress modestly and cover their bosoms.¹⁴⁴ One Ukrainian was visiting the home of a Muslim family in a Middle Eastern city. The father of the family asked her why she was wearing short sleeves and not covering her head. He then asked, with a twinkle in his eye, "Don't you think it would be best to dress modestly, like the mother of Jesus?"¹⁴⁵

Some Muslim women think that Westerners greatly misunderstand the use of the veil. One Saudi woman asserts she wears a veil as a religious choice, and as a desire to be modest.¹⁴⁶ Phil Parshall writes, "Most Muslim women regard the dress

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 50.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁴² Ibid., 72.

¹⁴³ Parshall and Parshall, *Lifting the Veil*, 57.

¹⁴⁴ Qur'an 24:31

¹⁴⁵ Interview with a Christian missionary from Ukraine, July 3, 2011.

¹⁴⁶ Parshall and Parshall, *Lifting the Veil*, 64.

patterns of Western women as being simply a form of nudity which is utilized to cause men to lust after them.”¹⁴⁷ Some Muslim women have returned to more traditional dress as a response against what they see as the moral deterioration of the West. Instead of seeing the veil as oppressive, like some Westerners assume, Muslims see the veil as honor and Islamic identity.¹⁴⁸

Dressing in ways that are culturally appropriate can build trust with Muslims and pave the way for sharing the gospel. As Christine Mallouhi writes, “What can you know about spiritual issues if people think you look unkempt, or even immoral? If you don’t know how to look after your body, how can you look after your soul?”¹⁴⁹ Sometimes people’s actions speak louder than their words. By dressing appropriately the Westerner communicates respect for Muslim culture.

Greetings and personal space. Another behavioral pattern that will win trust with the locals is to greet and converse with people in an appropriate way. When interacting with the same sex, Muslims are affectionate and friendly.¹⁵⁰ Although varying from place to place, an appropriate greeting for members of the same sex might be to kiss on both cheeks.¹⁵¹ It is common to see two men or two women holding hands as they walk along the road. Arabs tend to be more demonstrative than Westerners. They will look each other squarely in the eye, will touch each other

¹⁴⁷ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 127.

¹⁴⁸ Mallouhi, *Miniskirts*, 74.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 46.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 99.

¹⁵¹ Margaret K. (Omar) Nydell, *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Westerners*, 3rd. ed. (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 2002), 54.

more often, and tend to speak in louder tones than Westerners.¹⁵²

When interacting with the opposite sex, Muslims are usually more reserved and distant. Often men and women do not touch. Instead, they will simply place their hand on their heart as a greeting. Some are willing to shake hands, but only if they see the other person is willing to do so.¹⁵³

Gestures. Middle Easterners are also known for using many gestures. Robert Barakat, a researcher of Arab nonverbal communication, writes, "[Arabs are] often accused of speaking with [their] hands and body as well as [their mouths]. So intimately related are speech, gesture and culture, that to tie [their] hands while [they are] speaking is tantamount to tying [their] tongue[s]."¹⁵⁴ Although gestures vary greatly from place to place, a right hand on the heart might be a polite way to decline a second helping of food,¹⁵⁵ and shaking one's forefinger from side to side might mean "no."¹⁵⁶ Learning to understand and use appropriate gestures can facilitate communication, and may prevent people from accidentally offending others.

Understanding nonverbal communication is vital to having successful interactions with people. Christine Mallouhi writes,

¹⁵² Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs*, 97.

¹⁵³ John Travis, "Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa: A Closer Look at C5 Believers and Congregations," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 57.

¹⁵⁴ Robert A. Barakat, "Arabic Gestures," *Journal of Popular Culture* 6, no. 4 (1973): 751.

¹⁵⁵ Avihai Shviti, "Language and Mentality: Politeness, Courtesies and Gestures in Palestinian Arabic," in *Verbal Festivity in Arabic and Other Semitic Languages: Proceedings of the Workshop at the Universitätsclub Bonn on January 16, 2009*, ed. Lutz Edzard and Stephan Guth (Leipzig, Germany: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 2010), 40-41.

¹⁵⁶ Nydell, *Understanding Arabs*, 57.

Muslims do not want to hear the theological beliefs of not-very-nice people. Neither would anyone. If by your non-verbal communication you told your Muslim friend that he or she is not important to you, and by your appearance and actions that you have few moral or spiritual aspirations, then there is no point in telling him or her about your faith that changed your life and made you a new creation. This new creation may not be looking so good! We embody the message. When Muslims do not believe our creed, nor understand our message, the truest witness is our lives.”¹⁵⁷

Social Structure

Cultures also have set rules for ways of relating between specific types of people. This section will address the social norms for Muslim interactions, focusing on: people and the state, rich and poor, hosts and guests, men and women, and members of families.

People and the state. During the days of Muhammad, a theocracy was established, and Muhammad became both statesman and prophet. There was no separation between religious life and politics, and the whole *ummah* (Muslim community) was to conform to Qur’anic law.¹⁵⁸ Generations later, the Muslim world is still very comfortable with there being no separation between religion and government. All of life is considered to be within the sphere of Islam, including politics, education, healthcare, and worship.¹⁵⁹ Often Islamic law is also connected to national pride, and some countries have become more orthodox in their beliefs and practices as a reaction against the secularism that they see in the West.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Mallouhi, *Miniskirts*, 178.

¹⁵⁸ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 71.

¹⁵⁹ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 40.

¹⁶⁰ Parshall, *New Paths*, 74.

Muslims place a high value on unity, and threats to Muslim solidarity are squelched.¹⁶¹ Conformity is rewarded and independence is viewed as deviant and dangerous. Even in places with no governmental regulations, clothing and housing often appear quite uniform.¹⁶² Mosques highlight the Muslim value for unity, as worshippers pray side-by-side while facing the same direction. Parshall writes,

The onlooker can almost feel the reality of *ummah* as Muslims line up in proximity one to another and bow to the floor in synchronized movement. They conclude their ritual by looking to the persons on the left and the right, greeting these fellow members of Islamic community with the words *Salam alaikum* (peace be upon you).¹⁶³

For the Muslim, Islam is not simply a religion, but a structure uniting and encompassing all of society.

Rich and poor. Although one may find rich and poor praying next to each other inside the mosque, anywhere else in society people from different classes do not readily mix.¹⁶⁴ Just as with Judaism and Christianity, Islam places a high value on equality between the classes, but in reality it is not always lived out.¹⁶⁵ Often those from higher classes are esteemed, whereas the poor are offered little respect. However, Islam does teach that the poor are to be cared for, so often the local mosque will provide the indigent with food and money. Yet it is difficult for those in poverty to improve their situation. Getting a better job requires connections and

¹⁶¹ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 179.

¹⁶² Parshall, *New Paths*, 66-69.

¹⁶³ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 39.

¹⁶⁴ Mallouhi, *Miniskirts*, 28.

¹⁶⁵ Parshall, *New Paths*, 72-73.

money, and the poor rarely have either.¹⁶⁶ In the Muslim world status is not earned, but assigned.

When expatriates ignore class hierarchy by befriending people across economic lines, locals may become suspicious. Christine Mallouhi writes, "Spies are known to gather information from varied sources by moving across all classes, asking lots of questions and trying to learn the local language well."¹⁶⁷

In addition, locals are skeptical of foreigners befriending those of a lower social status than their own. They may accuse the outsider of preying on the poor to lure them into changing their religion.¹⁶⁸ Phil Parshall suggests that in order to solve this problem those coming to share the good news should not give out aid. He illustrates how this has played out in his context:

In a village setting, a recent Muslim convert came to the home of a young Western missionary and requested warm clothes for his children. The cool night air and the shabbiness of the believer's own cloths confirmed the need. Immediately, the missionary realized he was being pushed into a no-win situation. If he consented, he knew all the Muslims in the village would say the convert became a believer only for financial gain. This would mean the end of a witness that was only in its initial stages. If the missionary refused, he would do so at the risk of totally alienating the convert.

After a quick prayer for guidance, the missionary explained the reasons he could not give the clothes. He then went on to promise to fast and pray for thirty-six hours that the Lord would provide for the needs of the children. He would express his empathy with the situation by means of self-deprivation. The convert went to his home and returned four days later. His face was beaming as he told the missionary that God had provided the clothes. This new believer in Christ had learned an unforgettable lesson of vertical rather than horizontal dependence. He went on to win many of his Muslim neighbors to Christ and is today the acknowledged leader of a small,

¹⁶⁶ Caleb Project, "Community and Customs," in Swartley, *Encountering*, 182-83.

¹⁶⁷ Mallouhi, *Miniskirts*, 29.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 29-30.

but dynamic, assembly of convert believers.¹⁶⁹

Parshall also suggests that relief organizations enter Muslim lands, but only as separate entities from those planting groups of Jesus-followers. This decreases the connection between outside aid and decisions to follow Christ.¹⁷⁰ Parshall admits that these ideas need to be tested.¹⁷¹ More work needs to be done to determine how one can care for the whole person and have her or his efforts correctly perceived by the Muslim community.

Host and guest. One thing that both rich and poor have in common is their lavish hospitality toward guests. Visitors are not allowed to leave a person's home unless they have received a drink or in many cases, a meal. Preparing only just enough food would be considered rude, so guests are supplied with an abundance to eat.¹⁷² Refusing to accept another's hospitality would be highly offensive.¹⁷³ If someone is on her or his way out the door to an important meeting and a person stops by, the host will delay her or his departure to entertain the guest. The person one is currently with is more important than the next appointment, and hospitality is given no matter how great the inconvenience.¹⁷⁴

A Western convert to Islam comments,

I'll never forget the first few times I was invited to dinner at Muslims' homes.

¹⁶⁹ Parshall, *New Paths*, 188.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 187.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 188.

¹⁷² Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs*, 18.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷⁴ Mallouhi, *Miniskirts*, 170.

The generosity was overwhelming. I was uncertain what to make of it all. They really seemed to put into practice the hadith, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be generous to his visiting guest."¹⁷⁵

Those wishing to effectively reach the Muslim community must learn how to give and receive hospitality. Life in the Muslim world is filled with visiting others in their homes as well as receiving guests in return.

Men and women. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there are specific rules for how men and women are to interact in society. In order to guard against sexual misconduct, men and women often live very separate lives. In many Muslim countries, men and women do not touch in public.¹⁷⁶ In some places, women are not allowed to be in the same room with men to whom they are not directly related.¹⁷⁷ A woman does not look at a man directly in the eyes, and avoids having an extended conversation with a man while out on the street.¹⁷⁸ In some places it is honorable for men to escort their female family members when they go into town; in those cities it would be scandalous for a woman to be found on the street alone.¹⁷⁹

Because of the strict separation of sexes, it is best for foreigners to develop friendships with those of the same gender. Respecting the rules for male-female interactions will go a long way in building trust with the Muslim community.

Family. A final important social structure is the family. In the Muslim world

¹⁷⁵ Martin Smith, "Fasting and Feasting" in Swartley, *Encountering*, 171

¹⁷⁶ Parshall and Parshall, *Lifting the Veil*, 27.

¹⁷⁷ Adams, and Adams, "The Gathering," 151.

¹⁷⁸ Mallouhi, *Miniskirts*, 107.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 115.

family is the highest priority. Children honor their parents, and the oldest son is often respected above the other children. The grandfather is also honored for his age and wisdom, and is sought after for advice. The extended family often lives nearby, and visits multiple times a week.¹⁸⁰ Resources are shared throughout the extended family, and everyone helps with household chores, cooking, and taking care of the children.¹⁸¹ Parents usually arrange marriages for their children, finding spouses who have a good reputation and are of a similar social status. No important decisions are made without consulting the family and the individual is expected to submit to the family's wishes.¹⁸² Communal decision-making is an important reality that will be addressed in the next section on motivational dimension.

Motivational Dimensions

Motivational dimensions refer to the ways people in a community make decisions. Westerners have misunderstood the value that the Muslim community places on conformity. The Muslim world does not see individualism as a positive trait.¹⁸³ Instead they value loyalty, authority, and honor. Muslims believe the welfare of the group is more important than the welfare of the individual. As a result, few important decisions are made without conferring with the whole group.¹⁸⁴

Family Groups. In Muslim families, children are always under the authority of

¹⁸⁰ Caleb Project, "Community and Customs," 177-78.

¹⁸¹ Parshall, *New Paths*, 69.

¹⁸² Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs*, 48.

¹⁸³ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 179.

¹⁸⁴ Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 121.

their parents, even when they reach adulthood. In fact, children would not want it any other way. They appreciate the security that comes from being tightly knit to their family. It is common for an individual to bring a decision before the whole family and submit to what the family decides.

Friendship Groups. This same value for group solidarity is typical among friendship groups as well. One Westerner found that in one-on-one settings women would not show any interest in having spiritual conversations. But, when she brought up the same spiritual topics with a group of women, they were much more likely to enter into dialogue. Being in the context of the group gave them freedom to ask questions and respond to each other.¹⁸⁵

Since Muslims prefer to make decisions as a group, placing an emphasis on one-on-one conversations may be counter-productive. Encouraging people to make decisions apart from the wishes of their family may lead them to be extracted from their home community. Many practitioners believe it is much more constructive to see whole family groups simultaneously come to faith.¹⁸⁶ Deducing the appropriate medium for sharing the message to these groups is another consideration, the subject of the next section.

Communication Media

Another important aspect of cross-cultural communication is the type of media that is used. Media refers to the way a message is channeled. Some examples

¹⁸⁵ David Greenlee and Pam Wilson, "The Sowing of Witnessing," in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 114.

¹⁸⁶ Parshall, *New Paths*, 71.

include reading a tract, listening to a sermon, or watching a movie.¹⁸⁷ This section will discuss various modes of communication, and how successful they have been in the Muslim community.

Television, radio, and Internet. One form of communication media is the use of the television or radio. In many places in the Middle East, these modes of communication have been restricted. The government has controlled what goes on the air, and materials about Christ have been off limits.¹⁸⁸ Yet with the growing digital age, government censorship has become much more difficult.¹⁸⁹ Through the Internet and social media, news of Christ has spread more freely throughout closed countries.

Printed material. Another form of communication is printed material, such as newspapers or tracts. In the Middle East pamphlets are viewed as suspect, and are not readily accepted.¹⁹⁰ Matheny believes that any printed material should be for the purpose of raising awareness and clearing up misunderstandings, as opposed to being used as a vessel for bringing about conversions. He believes that once someone's interest is piqued, person-to-person follow-up is the best option.¹⁹¹ Expert in Intercultural Studies David Greenlee agrees, believing that personal relationship is key to seeing people come to faith in Jesus. While in relationship with

¹⁸⁷ Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 208.

¹⁸⁸ Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs*, 89.

¹⁸⁹ "What Role Did Social Media and Capable Devices Have on the Ongoing Events in the Middle East?" *Engineering & Technology* 6, no. 7 (August 2011): 88.

¹⁹⁰ Gray and Gray, "The Imperishable Seed," 49.

¹⁹¹ Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs*, 90-94.

a believer, Muslims are able to see how followers of Christ behave and are able to observe and experience what a relationship with Jesus is like.¹⁹²

Ascertaining how the Bible is best received is also an important task. As discussed earlier in this chapter, it is critical to choose or develop a proper translation, with language that is accessible to Muslims. In addition to this, how a Bible is presented is also important. In the West, Bibles are often bound in black leather. To a Muslim, black is the color of hell. Green, on the other hand, is the color of paradise, and might be a better option for the biblical text.¹⁹³ Beautifully detailed Arabic calligraphy instead of a cross might also alleviate people's preconceived notions of the Bible. Chandler tells a story of a Muslim woman who simply saw the beautiful cover of the Gospel of Luke, and was immediately attracted to it. After reading the book she commented, "This is exactly what I have needed. It is the *Injil* with a Muslim feel to it."¹⁹⁴

Oral Communication. In many Muslim nations, the language that is written is different than the language that is spoken. Sometimes the spoken language is unacceptable in printed form. In these cases, using audio or video representations of the text might be more appropriate.¹⁹⁵

In some communities, illiteracy rates are extremely high, especially for

¹⁹² David Greenlee, "New Faith, Renewed Identity: How Some Muslims are Becoming Followers of Jesus" (paper presented at the Edinburgh 2010 Consultation on "Christian Mission among Other Faiths," Hamburg, August 2009), <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/study-themes/main-study-themes/christian-mission-among-other-faiths/hamburg-consultation.html> (accessed September 5, 2011), 3-4.

¹⁹³ Gray and Gray, "The Imperishable Seed," 37.

¹⁹⁴ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 2252.

¹⁹⁵ Gray and Gray, "The Imperishable Seed," 37.

women.¹⁹⁶ Many Muslims, even if they know how to read and write, actually prefer oral communication. Children often learn traditions from their parents by listening and then memorizing stories, so they are accustomed to learning orally.¹⁹⁷

As a result, Muslims have responded positively to memorizing scripture, especially narrative sections, and reciting them to others.¹⁹⁸ Two different strategies of scripture memory that have been used in the Muslim world are “Chronological Bible Storying,” and “Point-of-Need Bible Storying.” In Chronological Bible Storying, people are taught narrative passages with special consideration as to the order of biblical events. In this way, people have a sense of the flow of scripture and the bigger picture of the story of salvation.¹⁹⁹ In Point-of-Need Storying, memorized scripture narratives are used to address specific needs as they come up in people’s lives. Bible storying techniques have worked well both in communities that prefer oral communication, and in places where passing out Bibles is problematic or against the law.²⁰⁰

Using existing mediums. A final method that has been effective with Muslims is employing mediums already accepted in the culture to communicate biblical truth. For example, using local proverbs to speak about spiritual truths, such as

¹⁹⁶ Annee W. Rose, "Barriers to the Gospel," in Swartley, *Encountering*, 294.

¹⁹⁷ Caleb Project, "Community and Customs," 179.

¹⁹⁸ Gray and Gray, "The Imperishable Seed," 43.

¹⁹⁹ Jack Colgate, "Bible Storying and Oral Use of the Scriptures," in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 221.

²⁰⁰ John Becker and Erik Simuyu, "The Watering of Discipling," in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 133.

issues of laziness or pride, can be an effective way to reach the community.²⁰¹

Some believe that reading and knowing the Qur'an is a great inroad for sharing the gospel with Muslims.²⁰² "Feel free to read the Qur'an," writes Medearis, "It's not a bad book, and it mostly agrees with the Bible."²⁰³ The Qur'an refers to Jesus ninety-three times, all in positive and honoring ways.²⁰⁴ Muslims often feel honored and respected if they know that an outsider has read their holy book. This builds trust with one's Muslim friends.²⁰⁵ The Qur'an can also be utilized to encourage Muslims to read the Bible. Surah 4 reads,

O you who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and the scripture which He has sent to His Messenger [the Qur'an] and the scripture which He sent to those before (him) [the Bible]. Any who denies Allah, His angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Day of Judgment, has gone far, far astray. ²⁰⁶

Reading the Qur'an with a Muslim friend might be an onramp to conversations about faith in Jesus.

Summary

In this chapter we have seen that one of the main barriers to receiving Christ that Muslims have is their negative perception of Christians. The Crusades,

²⁰¹ Jeff Liverman, "Unplowed Ground: Engaging the Unreached," in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 128.

²⁰² Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 447.

²⁰³ Ibid., 1266.

²⁰⁴ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 244.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 325.

²⁰⁶ Qur'an 4:136. For all quotes from the Qur'an in this paper, words in parentheses are from the translator, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, and brackets are clarifications from the author of this thesis.

Colonialism, and the unwholesome parts of Western culture, are just a few of the reasons. As a result, many Muslims do not want to have anything to do with Christ. Because of this, those sharing the good news must take special care to make sure the Muslim community hears the true gospel message. This can only be accomplished by first understanding Muslim culture. This chapter has examined Muslim culture through David Hesselgrave's seven dimensions of cross-cultural communication. These dimensions include: worldview, cognitive processes, linguistic forms, behavioral patterns, social structures, motivational sources, and communication media. Understanding how Muslims see the world, how they interact with each other, how they prefer to receive information, and how they make decisions can help practitioners contextualize the good news more effectively to Muslim culture. This will lead to greater numbers of believers coming to Jesus.

Worldview. It is important to understand a people group's worldview because all of their behaviors stem from what they believe about the world. In this chapter, Muslim worldview was explored through the lens of the Islamic six articles of faith: God, angels, the prophets, the Holy Books, Judgment Day, and Predetermination. It was discovered that Muslims and Christians held much in common in their worldview, including the belief in one powerful God who created, preserves, and will one day judge the world.

Cognitive processes. The second dimension of communication, cognitive processes, refers to the ways people think. Hesselgrave believes both Christians and Muslim use conceptual thinking, defined as using reason and logic as their primary thought processes. Tim Matheny, on the other hand, believes Muslims are more

receptive to parables and illustrations. No matter what the conceptual process, Carl Medearis believes that the key is to continually bring the conversation around to Jesus. He believes Jesus will reveal himself to those who earnestly seek him.

Linguistic forms. The third facet of communication discussed in this chapter was linguistic forms. This refers to the ways ideas are expressed. It includes speaking in the heart language of the target group, as well as working hard to explain words and phrases that could be misunderstood. If vocabulary is not carefully explained and contextualized to Islamic terminology, Muslims may entirely miss the gospel message.

Behavioral patterns. Hesselgrave's fourth dimension of communication is behavioral patterns. This includes everything that is communicated nonverbally, such as appearance, greetings, gestures, and even one's view of time. Much observation is necessary to understand and adapt to the Muslim behavioral patterns, yet doing so will help outsiders communicate more clearly, and may prevent unnecessary offenses.

Social structures. The fifth dimension explored in this chapter was social structures. This pertains to the ways people interact with different types people groups, such as those of the opposite sex, elders, and guests. Following the proper protocol in social interactions will allow outsiders to win respect and develop friendships in the Muslim community.

Motivational dimensions. The sixth component of cross-cultural communication that was examined in this chapter is motivational dimensions. This signifies the way people in the culture make decisions. For the Muslim world,

decisions are made collectively. This is significant to note because with communal cultures sharing in a one-on-one context might be counterproductive. It might be more fruitful to share the gospel message with whole family groups at the same time.

Communication media. The last dimension discussed in this chapter was communication media. This refers to the way a message is channeled. In the Islamic community, personal contact is the best form of communication. There is simply no substitute for building relationships with Muslims.

Understanding how Muslims see the world, how they interact with each other, how they prefer to receive information, and how they make decisions can help people contextualize the good news more effectively to Muslim culture. This will lead to greater numbers of believers coming to Jesus. Yet properly communicating the gospel message is only the beginning. Once Muslims have placed their faith in Christ, it is important to use contextualized worship forms for the gospel to become rooted in the community,²⁰⁷ the topic of the next chapter.

²⁰⁷ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1802.

Chapter 3

Contextualizing the Gospel to Islamic Worship Forms

When Mazhar Mallouhi, an Arab from a Muslim background, decided to follow Christ in 1959, the local community of believers told him he needed to abandon his old life.¹ This meant changing his name, praying in a different posture, eating pork to prove he was a Jesus-follower, not going to the mosque, not attending religious celebrations with his family, not visiting with friends in coffee shops, and not fasting during Ramadan.² It even meant greeting people differently (saying “Good Morning” instead of “Peace be upon you”).³ He was encouraged to hate everything connected to Islam,⁴ and was told that if life was too hard for him, he should simply move to the West.⁵

To make matters worse for Mallouhi, his family and friends were angry with him for becoming a follower of Christ because they believed this meant he had rejected his culture and community.⁶ He had joined the enemy’s camp by becoming a “Christian.”⁷ In Mallouhi’s community, “Christians” were the ones who ran the bars

¹ Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path between Two Faiths* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), Kindle ebook, location 379.

² Christine A. Mallouhi, *Waging Peace on Islam* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 323.

³ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1590.

⁴ Ibid., 1165.

⁵ Ibid., 1595.

⁶ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 323.

⁷ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1165.

and prostitution rings, and were seen as unclean and immoral.⁸ Mallouhi's uncle nearly killed him in order to restore honor to the family name.⁹

Mallouhi was also never fully accepted among the local Christians and never felt at home in Christian culture.¹⁰ Other Muslims coming to Christ have felt the same way concerning the local believing community. Ahmed¹¹ was initially turned away when he visited a church. They told him that if he wanted to worship, he should go to the mosque.¹² Local Christians are often fearful of Muslim converts coming to their community. One Christian commented, "My church doesn't want any converts. We simply don't know what to do with them."¹³ Christians might get into serious trouble at the mere presence of a Muslim in their worship services. Christians might be questioned by the secret police, and in some places, Christians might be in danger of death if they baptize a Muslim convert.¹⁴ Some churches have been burnt down due to Muslims attending a worship service.¹⁵ Christians also sometimes fear that the Muslim in their midst secretly has evil intentions. He may be a spy, or a fraud attempting to marry a Christian girl and then return to Islam.¹⁶

⁸ Ibid., 327.

⁹ Ibid., 415.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1597.

¹¹ This is a pseudonym.

¹² Brother Andrew and A. Janssen, *Secret Believers: What Happens When Muslims Believe in Christ* (Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 15.

¹³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴ Ibid., 64.

¹⁵ Interview with a professor from a Christian university in the Middle East, July 4, 2011.

If following Jesus means renouncing one's culture, losing one's identity, and aligning oneself with a local Christian community that is not very welcoming, this is a very steep price for a Muslim to pay. The new believer is also not set up well to reach her or his community with the good news of Christ. Phil Parshall believes that this "extraction evangelism is an erroneous methodology and should immediately cease."¹⁷ He writes,

The convert from Islam to Christianity has often felt the full fury of the wrath of the *ummah* [Muslim community]. The norm has been for the apostate to Christianity to be expelled from the community and, in many instances, to suffer physical harm. The result of all this has been that very few Muslims have been willing to pay such a high price to follow Christ....There are no easy solutions to this age-old problem but it is one to which we must address ourselves. Until we do, it is likely we will see no more than a trickle of Muslims willing to cross the sociological, economic, political, and religious barriers necessary to become a Christian in an Islamic context.¹⁸

Many missionaries believe that there is another way. Muslims do not have to join a foreign community, but can follow Jesus within their own communities, using worship forms that are familiar, and being salt and light to their family and friends. This chapter will begin by showing the different levels of Christ-centered communities that are currently found in the Muslim world, by using a classification system created by John Travis.¹⁹ Next, this chapter will describe Islamic worship forms practiced in the Muslim world today, specifically focusing on the five pillars of

¹⁶ Brother Andrew and A. Janssen, *Secret Believers: What Happens When Muslims Believe in Christ* (Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 17. It is not possible that a woman could convert her spouse, as legally the woman becomes the religion of her husband. Phil Parshall and Julie Parshall, *Lifting the Veil: The World of Muslim Women* (Waynesboro: Gabriel Publishing, 2002), 151.

¹⁷ Phil Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque: Christians within Muslim Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 21.

¹⁸ Ibid., 136.

¹⁹ This is a pseudonym.

Islam, and will then explore some of the difficult questions believers from a Muslim background have had to wrestle with in order to contextualize the gospel to these Islamic practices.

C1-C6 Spectrum

John Travis, who has worked with Muslims in Asia for more than twenty years, designed a chart to portray different expressions of faith found among Muslim background believers. Each number on the spectrum represents a different “Christ-centered community.”²⁰ The C-scale describes what has already been happening in the Muslim world, rather than being a prescriptive tool.²¹ The communities are labeled C1 through C6 and are described below.

C1. This Christ-centered community is home to many foreigners from the West, as well Christian nationals who have been believers for generations.²² Whether Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant,²³ worship services for C1 communities are performed in English or another language considered foreign to the local community.²⁴ The customs, traditions, and terminology are strictly from Christian

²⁰ John Travis, "Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa: A Closer Look at C5 Believers and Congregations," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 53.

²¹ John J. Travis and J. Dudley Woodberry, "When God's Kingdom Grows Like Yeast: Frequently-Asked Questions About Jesus Movements within Muslim Communities," *Mission Frontiers* (July-August 2010): 27.

²² Joshua Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17, no. 1 (January-March 2000): 7.

²³ John Travis, "The C1 to C6 Spectrum: A Practical Tool for Defining Six Types of 'Christ-Centered Communities' ('C') Found in the Muslim Context," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (October 1998): 407.

²⁴ John Travis, "The C-Spectrum," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 665.

culture. Some examples of C1 communities include churches established by foreigners in British colonies, or some Coptic churches in Egypt. C1 communities identify themselves as “Christian.”²⁵

C2. Similar to C1 communities, C2 fellowships do not use any Islamic terminology or cultural forms. Yet unlike C1 communities, C2 services are given in the local language.²⁶ C2 communities also identify as “Christian.” Most churches in the Muslim world are C1 or C2.²⁷

C3. Groups of believers that have adopted the local language, music, dress, and art are considered C3. As long as practices are understood as “cultural” and not “Islamic,” they are accepted in C3 churches. Believers may meet in a church building or a place that is more religiously neutral. C3 communities also identify as “Christian.”²⁸

C4. These communities do not call themselves “Christian” because of the bad connotations that may be associated with that word. Instead they identify themselves as “Followers of *Isa*” or another equivalent descriptor.²⁹ C4 communities adopt Islamic worship forms, such as praying in a similar way as Muslims, fasting, avoiding pork and alcohol, and wearing Islamic clothing. They do not meet in church

²⁵ Massey, “God’s Amazing Diversity,” 7.

²⁶ Travis, “C1 to C6 Spectrum,” 407.

²⁷ Travis, “C-Spectrum,” 665.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Timothy C. Tennent, “Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 ‘High Spectrum’ Contextualization,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 104.

buildings, and most members come from a Muslim background. The Muslim community sees them as “a kind of Christian.”³⁰

C5. Muslims who remain culturally and officially Muslim while following Christ fit in the C5 category. They call themselves “Muslim followers of *Isa*” and are viewed by the Muslim community as “a kind of Muslim.”³¹ They see themselves as far more Muslim than Christian—according to the local definition of Christian. John Massey, a cultural anthropologist working with Muslims in Asia, describes how C5 believers see themselves:

When C5 believers compare themselves to C1–C2 Christians, they say, “I don’t pray like a Christian, unwashed in a pew with my shoes on; I pray like a Muslim. I don’t dress like a Christian, with Western pants and collared shirts; I dress like a Muslim. I don’t talk like a Christian, with all their strange terms to describe God and his prophets; I talk like a Muslim. I don’t eat like a Christian, consuming... *haram* meats (i.e., meat not butchered in the “kosher” way); I prefer *halal* meats, like a Muslim. I don’t have a Christian name, like John, Tom or Paul; I have a Muslim name.”³²

C5 believers use the same language and worship forms as other Muslims, however, they have divergent beliefs. Islamic theology that is contrary to scripture is reinterpreted or rejected.³³ Just as with the other communities on the C-spectrum, C5 believers maintain that Jesus is Lord, that he died on the cross and rose again, that he is divine, and that the Bible is the authoritative word of God.³⁴ These C5 believers may be banned from the Muslim community because of their theological

³⁰ Travis, “C-Spectrum,” 665.

³¹ Massey, “God’s Amazing Diversity,” 8.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

³³ Travis, “C-Spectrum,” 665.

³⁴ Travis, “Messianic Muslim,” 54–55.

deviance, but of their own accord prefer to remain in the local community.

Continuing to stay in the community feels more natural to them, and it gives them an avenue for reaching their family and friends.³⁵ Sometimes, when whole communities come to Christ, messianic mosques are established,³⁶ but often believers simply meet in homes, where they fellowship with other C5 believers.³⁷

C6. Secret believers who are not actively a part of a fellowshiping community fit in the C6 category. They identify as Muslims and are viewed as Muslims by others in the community. Unlike C5 believers, C6 believers are silent about their faith.³⁸

Even though most Christ-centered fellowships in the Muslim world are C1 or C2, there is growing acceptance for communities higher up the C-scale. Phil Parshall, who worked with Muslims in Asia, was instrumental in pushing the envelope for the acceptance of C4 communities.³⁹ Now John Travis, Joshua Massey, and Rebecca Lewis are advocating for C5 communities as a valid expression of faith. The difference between C4 and C5 communities is not their theological beliefs, but their choice to identify as Muslim.⁴⁰ This controversial topic will be addressed in the next chapter.

³⁵ Ibid., 59.

³⁶ Travis, "C1 to C6 Spectrum," 408.

³⁷ Travis, "C-Spectrum," 665.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity," 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Muslims are growing in their relationship with Christ all across the C-spectrum. The question those who are reaching out to Muslims are seeking to answer is which types of communities are more effective in drawing Muslims to Christ.⁴¹ Most new workers in the Muslim world today are taking the highly contextualized C4 approach.⁴²

Why Use Islamic Worship Forms?

As mentioned in chapter one, Paul Hiebert believes that contextualization involves: (1) accepting practices that are positive or neutral about the culture, and (2) reinterpreting or (3) rejecting practices that are counter to the gospel. Hiebert believes that the local believers are best able to make those decisions, as they are the ones who truly understand what local practices mean.⁴³ Phil Parshall addresses this issue specifically in the Muslim context. He writes,

In a country where most people are Muslims, this society is naturally impregnated with Islamic influence. This need not be evil or demonic. There should be an intelligent and rational evaluation process that defines areas of life which are in direct conflict with Scripture and those which are not. Some practices will be appreciatively retained while others will be quietly dropped.⁴⁴

In the past, foreign workers rejected all Islamic cultural forms and looked to changed behavioral patterns (such as people bowing their heads and folding their hands when they prayed) as evidence that the message of Christ had been received .

⁴¹ Travis, "C-Spectrum," 665.

⁴² Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity," 8.

⁴³ Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *Missiology: An International Review* XII, no. 3 (July, 1984): 293.

⁴⁴ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 215.

Hiebert believes that this sort of superficial change is a poor determiner of what is actually going on in a person's heart and mind.⁴⁵ He believes changes in behavior (such as abandoning immorality, hatred, and injustice) will come as a result of the lordship of Christ, but that merely a change in worship forms is a poor verification of inner transformation.⁴⁶

In fact, Rafique Uddin, a follower of Christ from a Muslim background, points out that the New Testament does not require believers adhere to any specific worship forms. He believes that for true Christian worship, the intentions of a person's heart are more important than the worship form.⁴⁷ Uddin goes on to say that he thinks there is a low danger for syncretism in using Islamic worship forms because Islamic worship is similar to Judaic and Christian forms.⁴⁸ Mazhar Mallouhi, another follower of Christ from a Muslim background, points out that the prostrating and bowing practiced in Muslim prayer originally came from the Syrian Orthodox Christian tradition.⁴⁹ Mallouhi writes, "If a Christian from sixth-century Byzantium were to return today, he would find much more that was familiar in the practices of Muslims than in a contemporary Protestant evangelical church."⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Paul G. Hiebert, "The Gospel and Culture," in *The Gospel and Islam : A Compendium*, ed. Don M. McCurry (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1979), 61.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁷ Rafique Uddin, "Contextualized Worship and Witness," in Woodberry, *Muslims and Christians*, 268.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 269.

⁴⁹ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1355-57.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1358-59.

Richard Jameson and Nick Scalevich also see many similarities between Muslim worship forms, and Jewish worship forms practiced during the days of Jesus. In Islam, there are five essential practices, often referred to as the “pillars of Islam.” They are: declaration of the creed, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and pilgrimage. In their article “First-Century Jews and Twentieth-Century Muslims,” Jameson and Scalevich highlight that of these five Islamic practices, three of them are mentioned in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: prayer, fasting, and giving to the poor. The other two practices have corresponding Jewish rituals: the Hebrew *shema* is equivalent to the Islamic declaration of faith, and the pilgrimage to Jerusalem parallels the Islamic trek to Mecca.⁵¹

Keeping similar worship forms can help new believers make a smooth transition to following Christ.⁵² The key is that meanings are changed, not forms.⁵³ Parshall writes, “The Muslim performs all these obligations as a means of obtaining merit. This, of course, is incompatible with the Christian message of grace. But what the Muslim needs is a change in focus (i.e., meaning) rather than a mere change in forms.”⁵⁴

As mentioned in chapter one, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the counsel of scriptures are key for local believers in making decisions concerning

⁵¹ Richard Jameson and Nick Scalevich, “First-Century Jews and Twentieth-Century Muslims,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 17, no. 1 (January-March 2000): 33.

⁵² Uddin, “Contextualized Worship,” 270.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁵⁴ Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism: Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 59.

contextualizing worship forms.⁵⁵ These next sections will describe the five pillars of Islam, and will look at issues local believers are taking into consideration as they seek to contextualize the gospel in their communities.

Declaration of the Creed (*Shahada*)

The core of the Muslim faith is the *shahada*: “I bear witness that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the prophet of God.” To become Muslim is to recite this with the intention to of submitting one’s life to God. The other four pillars are built on the foundation of *shahada*.⁵⁶ The creed is the first phrase chanted into a baby’s ear, is heard at weddings and funerals,⁵⁷ and is chanted at every call to prayer.⁵⁸ It is even written on the Saudi Arabian flag.⁵⁹ The *shahada* is the combination of two Surahs from the Qur’an:⁶⁰ (1) “And your God (Allah) is One God (Allah): there is no god but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful”;⁶¹ and (2) “Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.”⁶²

⁵⁵ Dean S. Gilliland, introduction in *The Word among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), 3.

⁵⁶ Donald S. Tingle, *Islam & Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 6.

⁵⁷ Phil Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent: Understanding the Muslim Heart and Mind* (Waynesboro: Gabriel Publishing, 2002), 64.

⁵⁸ Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 72.

⁵⁹ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 28.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Qur’an 2:163 (Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

⁶² Qur’an 48:29.

There is no god but God. The first half of the *shahada* is strikingly similar to the Jewish *shema*, which expresses the monotheistic heart of Judaism. The *shema* begins declaring, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."⁶³ Both the *shahada* and the *shema* are used at the beginning of every worship service, and as a confession of faith.⁶⁴ Even Jesus, when asked the greatest commandment, recited the *shema*.⁶⁵

As expressed in chapter two, the foundation of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity is the worship of one God.⁶⁶ Even views on the character of God are in alignment between the three religions, such as conveyed in the Islamic ninety-nine names of God.⁶⁷ Adherents to all three religions would have no qualms with reciting the first half of the Muslim creed. It is the second half that Jews and Christians might resist.

Muhammad is the prophet of God. Muhammad was born in the late sixth century. He was raised by his grandfather and uncle,⁶⁸ as his father died before he was born and his mother died when he was only six.⁶⁹ His first wife was Khadijah, a

⁶³ Dt 6:4 (NIV).

⁶⁴ J. Dudley Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims: Reusing Common Pillars," in Gilliland, *The Word among Us*, 287.

⁶⁵ Mk 12:29.

⁶⁶ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 277-78.

⁶⁷ Parshall, *New Paths*, 141.

⁶⁸ Carl Medearis, *Muslims, Christians and Jesus: Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships* (Minneapolis: BethanyHouse, 2008), Kindle ebook, location 106.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 85.

wealthy caravan trader fifteen years his senior.⁷⁰ It is likely that while traveling on caravan routes, Muhammad connected with many Christians and Jews, discussing issues of theology.⁷¹

At the age of forty,⁷² while Muhammad was in a cave, he heard the voice of God's messenger, whom he later determined was the angel Gabriel. Muhammad continued to hear messages from God, which he believed were for the edification of the whole Arab world. Muhammad recited these messages from memory, and taught them to others. After Muhammad's death they were transcribed, gathered, and formulated into the Qur'an.⁷³

Initially, most Arabs did not appreciate Muhammad's monotheistic message. At the time, more than three hundred deities were worshipped at *Kaaba* (the black stone shrine in Mecca).⁷⁴ So after twelve years,⁷⁵ due to severe persecution, Muhammad left Mecca for Medina, where people were more open to receiving his message.⁷⁶ He established the first Islamic state in Medina, and within a short time, the message of Islam spread through most of Arabia.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁷¹ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 189.

⁷² Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 96.

⁷³ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 114.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁷⁵ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 96.

⁷⁶ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 118-22.

⁷⁷ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 96.

Throughout Muhammad's life, he had twelve wives. Muslims believe God gave him special permission to marry more than four⁷⁸ (which was the amount God told Muhammad was permissible to every other man).⁷⁹ Christians consider Muhammad's marriage to Zeynab to be the most controversial of his marriages. Zeynab was originally married to Muhammad's stepson Zeyd, but when Zeyd saw Muhammad was interested in his wife, he divorced her and gave Muhammad permission to marry her.⁸⁰ Most Muslims would defend Muhammad's conduct, saying that he acted within the law, and married many widows who would otherwise have been destitute.⁸¹ In fact, Muhammad is known for taking a stand against injustice and advocating on behalf of women and the poor.⁸²

At first local Christians and Jews were receptive to Muhammad's message,⁸³ and Muhammad likewise was supportive of Christians and Jews, as well as their holy scriptures.⁸⁴ Yet with time, Muhammad began to have disputes with these "People of the Book."⁸⁵ Many Jews living in Medina looked with scorn on Muhammad and his message. Muhammad interpreted this response as the Jews turning away from

⁷⁸ Qur'an 33:50.

⁷⁹ Qur'an 4:3.

⁸⁰ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 256-57.

⁸¹ Ibid., 259.

⁸² Parshall, *New Paths*, 136.

⁸³ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 122.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 126.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

God,⁸⁶ and as a result of one disagreement, Muhammad changed the direction of Muslim prayer from praying with the Jews toward Jerusalem, to praying in the opposite direction toward his hometown of Mecca.⁸⁷ As Muhammad became more hostile toward the Jews, recitations in the Qur'an changed from acceptance to rejection.⁸⁸ It is likely that the Qur'anic passage "Allah's curse be on them: how they [the Jews] are deluded away from the truth,"⁸⁹ springs from this time.⁹⁰ Muhammad also had conflict with the Christians. He saw them venerating statues of Mary, and was repulsed by what he believed was the worship of three gods: Father, Mary, and Jesus. He tried to call them out of their idolatry.⁹¹

Muslims do not think that Muhammad was instigating a new religion. They see him as a reformer, leading a revival restoring the monotheism of Abraham.⁹² By the end of Muhammad's life, he had united the Arab people, successfully waged military campaigns, and was regarded by millions as the most highly esteemed prophet of all time.⁹³

Should a follower of Christ believe Muhammad was a prophet? A question that Muslim followers of Jesus will have to wrestle with is if they believe

⁸⁶ Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 75.

⁸⁷ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 408.

⁸⁸ Cragg, *The Call*, 75-76.

⁸⁹ Qur'an 9:30.

⁹⁰ Cragg, *The Call*, 75-76.

⁹¹ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 188.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 85.

Muhammad was a messenger from God. Some accept the prophethood of Muhammad. Muslim believer Brother Noah points out that a prophet is one who calls people to repent and turn toward God. He believes that Muhammad exhorted Arabs to do just that. He argues that Muhammad introduced people to Jesus as the “Word of God,” the “Spirit of God,” and a sign to the world. He writes,

Saying that Muhammad is a prophet does not mean that Jesus is not the Messiah and the Lord. It also does not mean that Muhammad is Messiah or Lord. Muhammad never claimed that. So someone can say the *shahada* and at the same time can believe in Jesus as his Savior and Lord.⁹⁴

Others regard Muhammad as one might view the Old Testament patriarchs, with their many follies. Like Muhammad, the patriarchs sometimes carried out wars in God’s name—even to the point of genocide, and lived unapologetically polygamous lives.⁹⁵ Phil Parshall writes,

With whom are we comparing Muhammad? Is his counterpart Noah as he laid drunk in his tent; or Moses as he stood over the Egyptian he had just killed; or David with multiple wives and concubines; or Solomon whose many foreign wives turned him from the true God....Or are we to compare Muhammad with our Lord Jesus Christ? Unequivocally we can and do declare Mohammad to be a sinner with no claims to deity or saviorhood. He simply is not to be categorized with Christ. But let us remember that neither the Quran nor Muhammad made any such claims.”⁹⁶

Muslim background believer Mazhar Mallouhi is ambivalent about Muhammad. He holds him in respect, but believes at the end of Muhammad’s life he

⁹⁴ Rick Brown, “Biblical Muslims,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 73.

⁹⁵ Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?: Understanding the Differences between Christianity and Islam* (Zondervan, 2002), 121.

⁹⁶ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 260.

did the opposite of what he initially preached. Mallouhi writes, “Personally, I see his greatest fault as leaving us with a mixed message about Christ.”⁹⁷

Parshall agrees with Mallouhi, and comments that he believes Muhammad has led many away from Christ through what he has said about Jesus and the Bible in the Qur’an.⁹⁸ He continues, “Although I can commend this religious reformer in many areas, I can only condemn the effect his message has had on solidifying opposition to Jesus Christ.”⁹⁹

Although Parshall does not believe Muhammad purposefully tried to lead people astray, he also is not comfortable calling Muhammad a prophet.¹⁰⁰ He concludes, “I personally cannot affirm him as a true prophet. If I did, I would be forced to accept his revelations as from God and therefore binding on all men. The Quran undercuts the biblical message in so many places. I cast my lot with the bible as God’s unique, final, and inerrant revelation.”¹⁰¹

On the far end of the spectrum are people who see nothing good in Muhammad. They view his message as heretical, since he denied the crucifixion and the divinity of Christ.¹⁰² Some even go so far as to say Muhammad was involved in occult practices and that his revelations were actually from evil spirits.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 2730.

⁹⁸ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 183.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 261.

¹⁰² Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 239.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

For those who are convicted that believers should not say, "Muhammad is a prophet of God," there are other options for what can be said for the *shahada*. Mazhar Mallouhi recommends that people make up their own *shahada*.¹⁰⁴ Other believers remain silent during the second half of the *shahada*, or substitute something else, such as "Jesus is the straight path."¹⁰⁵ Rick Brown believes that the second half of the *shahada* should be avoided and only said under duress, but comments,

As an outsider, I am not immersed enough in these situations to judge accurately what the impact of saying it would be. I know godly, biblical Muslims, highly blessed in their ministry, with 24-42 years of experience, who think saying the *shahada* has no negative consequence. Until I see a compelling argument to the contrary, I am inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt, especially when occasions that require the *shahada* arise only rarely.¹⁰⁶

Woodberry and Travis comment that saying the *shahada* is not a matter of importance among Muslim believers, as most do not feel antagonism toward Islam and Muhammad.¹⁰⁷ Brother Noah agrees. He notes, "Normally a Muslim will not say the *shahada* out loud at any time. A Muslim will not ask another Muslim to say the *shahada*. So this is not a Muslim question; it is a Christian question to a Muslim who believes in *Isa Al-Masih* [Jesus the Messiah]."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 2687.

¹⁰⁵ Travis, "Messianic Muslim," 56.

¹⁰⁶ Rick Brown, "Biblical Muslims," 73.

¹⁰⁷ Travis and Woodberry, "When God's Kingdom," 29.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, "Biblical Muslims," 70.

As shown in this section, most believers agree with the first half of the *shahada*: “There is no god but God,” yet there is much disagreement as to the second half of the *shahada*: “Muhammad is the prophet of God.” As a result, some believers make their own creed. Others remain silent or change the creed to something such as “Jesus is the Word of God.” Still others have no hesitation saying that Muhammad was a prophet, believing he led people from polytheism to the worship of the God of Abraham.

Prayer (*Salat*)

At dawn, mid-day, mid-afternoon, sunset, and after dark, those living in Muslim lands will hear the call to prayer echoing through the streets:

God is most great, God is most great, I bear witness that there is no god except God: I bear witness that Muhammad is the apostle of God. Come ye unto prayer. Come ye unto good. Prayer is a better thing than sleep [added to morning prayer]. Come ye to the best deed. God is most great. God is most great. There is not god except god.¹⁰⁹

This call invites Muslims to formal prayer or *salat*. In Arabic *salla* is the verb for “bow.”¹¹⁰ Muslims believe that if individuals consistently go to God in prayer, they will be transformed into people who are more honest, patient, and self-disciplined, and that whole communities will become more ethical and righteous. Chapman writes, “It is a system of spiritual, moral and physical training which makes [a person] truly obedient to [his or her] Creator.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Cragg, *The Call*, 26. There are slight variations in the number of repetitions, but often each line is repeated twice.

¹¹⁰ Woodberry, “Contextualization among Muslims,” 289.

¹¹¹ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 81.

The Muslim begins with ceremonial washing. The ablutions include washing the hands three times, rinsing the mouth three times, drawing water inside the nose and washing the tip of the nose three times, washing the face three times, washing the arms from wrist to elbow three times, running one wet hand over one's head and then both hands over the back of the head and neck, washing behind and inside the ears, and then washing both feet up to the ankles.¹¹² To pray while dirty would be improper and irreverent.¹¹³ Phil Parshall writes, "The washing of face, hands, arms, and feet is more than a mere physical ritual. There is a deep symbolism in these acts that link the external body to the internal purification of mind and soul."¹¹⁴

The Muslim is now ready to pray. Prayers can be done in the mosque, or simply by spreading out one's prayer mat anywhere. Kenneth Cragg, scholar of Muslim-Christian relations, writes, "Everyone's prayer mat is a portable mosque and wherever they choose to spread it they can find their *qiblah* [the direction of the *Kaaba* in Mecca] and worship God."¹¹⁵ Yet if possible, Muslims try to not miss Friday noon prayers inside the mosque.¹¹⁶

First Muslims stands on their prayer mat, facing toward the *Kaaba*, and express their intentions for prayer. For example stating, "I intend to say four *raka'as*

¹¹² Ibid., 72-73.

¹¹³ Cragg, *The Call*, 98.

¹¹⁴ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 93.

¹¹⁵ Cragg, *The Call*, 99.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

[sequences of the prayer ritual] of the dawn prayers for Allah facing the [*Kaaba*].”¹¹⁷

Mazhar Mallouhi writes of this sacred moment:

In Islam, particularly for prayer, [worshippers] must take time to dedicate [their] intent to offer God prayer. The prayer is not valid if [people do] not dedicate their intent beforehand. You cannot just rush into the house of God unprepared. So for me this is important in my spiritual life. When I pray I do this and focus on God, entering into [God’s] presence before I pray or meditate.¹¹⁸

After making one’s intentions known, Muslims then begin formal prayer. The following are the seven steps of a complete *raka’a*. Different sets of *raka’a* are prescribed for different times of the day: two at daybreak, four at noon and mid-afternoon, three after sunset, and four at night.¹¹⁹

1. Muslims raise their hands to the height of their ears and says, “God is most great,” then place their hands, folded right on left, on their chests or below their navels, and say, “O Allah, glory and praise are for you and blessed is your name, and exalted is your majesty; there is no god but you. I seek shelter in Allah from the rejected Satan. In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most kind.”¹²⁰

2. Muslims then recite the first Surah, known as the *Fatiha*, with hands open, palms up:¹²¹

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds; Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the Day of Judgment. You do we worship, and Your aid do we seek. Show

¹¹⁷ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 73.

¹¹⁸ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 2808-10.

¹¹⁹ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 201.

¹²⁰ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 73.

¹²¹ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 201.

us the straight way. The way of those on whom You have bestowed Your Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who do not go astray.¹²²

At this time Muslims may also recite other verses from the Qur'an.¹²³

3. Muslims then bow at the waist and say, "God is most great" and their place hands on their knees saying, "Glory to my Lord the great," and then stand again saying, "Allah hears those who praise him. Our Lord praise be to you."¹²⁴

4. Then lying prostrate on the floor, with both knees, both palms, foreheads, and noses touching the ground Muslims say, "God is most great. Glory to my Lord, the Highest."¹²⁵

5. Then they sits up saying, "God is most great."

6. Muslims prostrate a second time repeating the words from the first prostration, "God is most great. Glory to my Lord, the Highest."

7. Then they sit up saying, "God is most great."

This is the completion of one cycle of *raka'a*. Muslims may then begin again with step one to complete another *raka'a*. When the appropriate number of *raka'at* have been completed, the ritual prayer is then concluded by turning their faces to the right and saying "The peace and mercy of Allah be on you," then turning their faces to the left and repeating the same words.¹²⁶

¹²² Qur'an 1:1-7.

¹²³ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 74.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 73.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 74.

¹²⁶ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 74.

Once the ritual prayer has been completed, the Muslim may say other prayers, either memorized or unrehearsed. This type of prayer is called *du'a* and is more equivalent to the freestyle way most Christians pray.¹²⁷ In *du'a* prayer, people pray for their own personal needs or for the needs of others.¹²⁸ This type of prayer can be done anytime, at any location, and does not require ablutions.¹²⁹

Christine Malouhi writes of Muslim faithfulness to the five daily prayer times:

Most Muslims pray the morning prayer, but not all Muslims respond to the prayer call five times a day. Some Muslims told me they thought that eighty percent of Muslims don't pray at all. I believe this figure to be highly exaggerated. Others thought that maybe fifty percent prayed three times a day. The majority of Muslims I know in various places in the world pray three times during the day: at dawn, the middle of the day and the evening. However, I also know some Muslims who rarely pray even during Ramadan. Practice varies from country to country and also depends on how the state regiments religion. In Saudi Arabia, prayer times are enforced by the *muttawa* patrolling public places and forcing shops to close. However, in most countries life continues on unabated while the few faithful stop what they are doing in order to render to God what is [God's] due.¹³⁰

Comparing *salat* to Jewish and Christian prayer. The Qur'an only mentions three prayer times, but by Muhammad's death, the rhythm of five daily prayers was already in effect.¹³¹ This ritualized prayer is similar to Jewish prayer. Jews would pray at three set times each day, facing toward Jerusalem. Before praying, they

¹²⁷ Warren C. Chastain, "Should Christians Pray the Muslim Salat?," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 12, no. 3 (Jul-Sep 1995): 161.

¹²⁸ Parshall, *New Paths*, 201.

¹²⁹ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 207.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 203-4.

¹³¹ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 93.

would take off their shoes and perform ritual washing. They would then declare their intent to pray, and proceed with memorized, structured prayer.¹³²

Christians have also prayed in a liturgical way over the centuries. In the 300s, St. Basil established eight segments of prayer for the committed Christian, and some monks and nuns spent upwards of six hours in prayer daily.¹³³ Christians in the early church also stood to pray,¹³⁴ and in fact, there were no chairs in churches for the first one thousand years.¹³⁵ Even today, the Syrian church uses the word *salat* for their times of ritual prayer,¹³⁶ and they still pray formally, with standing, bowing, and prostration.¹³⁷

Phil Parshall claims "Muslims are more biblical in their worship forms than are contemporary Christians."¹³⁸ He points out that the Bible references worshipers falling on their faces (2 Chr 7:3), standing and spreading out their hands (1 Kgs 8:22), and kneeling in prayer (2 Chr 6:13).¹³⁹ There is even evidence in scripture of set prayer times and directional prayer: Daniel, for example, prayed three times a day while facing Jerusalem (Dn 6:10).¹⁴⁰ Parshall also indicates that there is no

¹³² Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 289-91.

¹³³ Keith Drury, *The Wonder of Worship: Why We Worship the Way We Do* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2005), 24.

¹³⁴ Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 291.

¹³⁵ Drury, *The Wonder of Worship*, 176.

¹³⁶ Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 289.

¹³⁷ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1355-57.

¹³⁸ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 96.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 97.

¹⁴⁰ Parshall, *New Paths*, 203.

reference in scripture to closing one's eyes, and the most common prayer position for evangelicals—sitting down—only occurs once in scripture (2 Sm 7:18, and repeated in 1 Chr 17:16).¹⁴¹

For many Muslims, the physical acts of standing, bowing, and prostration are linked with prayer and worship. In fact, many Muslims have assumed that Christians do not pray at all, since they have never seen them praying in a formal way, or in public.¹⁴² Muslims who have become followers of Christ must consider whether they should continue *salat* prayer in their worship of God.

Should a follower of Christ pray *salat*? One Muslim from North Africa shared that when he became a follower of Christ, he stopped ritual prayer, and felt very dissatisfied with his choice. He shared with Mazhar Mallouhi,

I feel so cheap. When I was a Muslim I gave God everything and totally dedicated myself to him in worship. Now as I pray I do not feel as dedicated. My whole being—body and spirit, is not worshipping God. This means nothing to me. I feel like I am cheating God. I should be giving God more and I am giving [God] less.¹⁴³

Mallouhi encouraged him to pray in whatever posture he preferred, and to chant scriptures, such as the Psalms, as part of his prayer life.¹⁴⁴

Uddin has also continued *salat* prayer and has encouraged that others do the same:

I personally participate in these forms and recite bible portions in five daily prayers. In almost all cases, I have found very positive response from the

¹⁴¹ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 96-97.

¹⁴² Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 435; 751.

¹⁴³ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1679-82.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1682.

other first-generation believers with whom I am acquainted. They indicate they are very happy that it is possible to use the old forms, sanctifying them in the name of Jesus Christ and using biblical statements in the vernacular.¹⁴⁵

Parshall believes that retaining *salat* prayer is beneficial not only for the Muslim who has come to believe in Christ, but for the Westerner as well. He writes, "Our evangelical prayer lives are often cold, listless, and irregular. Perhaps following a five-times-daily regimen of prayer would be beneficial for the convert to retain as well as for the Western Christians to commence."¹⁴⁶ Once, after leading a contextualized worship service in Malaysia, a believer approached Parshall and said, "Oh, that was wonderful! I feel like this is the first time I have really prayed since becoming a Christian twenty years ago."¹⁴⁷

Uddin also believes that praying ritual prayers is a way to witness to friends and family. He shares about how he invited five couples to join him in this endeavor:

They started offering *salat* five times daily. They faced west as is customary for the Muslims of their country, since they have to face some direction, even though the direction does not influence the prayers. They performed all of the units at all of the appointed timings. This resulted in the couples' acceptance by their relatives and by their communities, as persons interested in God.¹⁴⁸

Yet not everyone concurs that believers participating in *salat* is advisable. Warren Chastain, who has worked among Muslims in Asia since 1955, argues that facing Mecca is honoring a pagan shrine. He believes that facing the *Kaaba* is communicating solidarity with the wrong community. He writes, "No one can really

¹⁴⁵Uddin, "Contextualized Worship," 269.

¹⁴⁶ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 223.

¹⁴⁷ Parshall, *The Cross and the Crescent*, 99.

¹⁴⁸ Uddin, "Contextualized Worship," 271-72.

hold a dual membership [to the community of Muhammad and the community of Christ]. The act of *salat* is the primary and most pervasive daily declaration of unity in this 'anti-church' community."¹⁴⁹ He believes that "to revise true prayer and devotion so as to appeal and perhaps appease Muslims is to water down [one's] faith and [represents] an affront to...God."¹⁵⁰

An Arab from a Christian background living in a large Middle Eastern city is also against believers praying *salat* style prayer. He comments, "In the West there are numerous forms of worship. A Pentecostal church looks very different from a conservative Lutheran church. Yet Muslims have only one form of worship and they say, 'Don't steal our form.' I believe it is disrespectful to use the Muslim prayer form."¹⁵¹

Although not unanimously approved, many Muslims who have become followers of Jesus feel comfortable with, and some even prefer, *salat* prayer. Yet an even more controversial topic is whether those prayers should take place at the mosque. This next section will clarify some of the arguments in favor of and against believers continuing to worship at the mosque.

Should a follower of Christ worship at the mosque? Mosques are seen as the religious and social center of the Muslim community. Every mosque looks basically the same: unfurnished except for rugs, always facing in the direction of the *Kaaba*. The mosque is never closed. Groups of people will congregate at the mosque, and

¹⁴⁹ Chastain, "Should Christians Pray," 163.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Interview with an influential Arab Christian, July 7, 2011.

talk about many different religious and secular topics.¹⁵² Some Muslims go to the mosque regularly and others rarely attend.¹⁵³ When Muslims choose to put their faith in Christ, a question they will need to seriously consider is whether or not they should continue going to the mosque. The easiest decision just might be that of the Muslim who never attended mosque in the first place. Usually people who never attended do not start once becoming believers.¹⁵⁴

Phil Parshall does not believe that followers of Jesus should continue going to the mosque. First, he sees this decision as either compromising one's faith or being deceitful. He writes, "Although I advocate that Muslims remain an integral part of their community, I am forced to stop short of encouraging continued involvement in prayers at the mosque. The ritual is too closely connected to Islamic belief, theology, and religious practice."¹⁵⁵ Parshall believes that no matter what one is privately praying, to participate in *salat* at the mosque is to confirm the Islamic message.¹⁵⁶

A second argument Parshall has against continuing in the mosque is that Muslims would not approve. Parshall writes, "Muslims do not want [Jesus-followers] joining in the uniquely Islamic prayer ritual any more than we want Muslims

¹⁵² Parshall, *New Paths*, 159.

¹⁵³ Travis, "Messianic Muslim," 55.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁵⁵ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 184.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

partaking in the bread and juice of communion. We have an obligation to honor their religious convictions.”¹⁵⁷

Parshall’s third argument is that he does not think it right to use the mosque as a venue for witnessing, and comments that he thinks Christians would not be very excited about Muslims coming to church on Sunday morning in hopes of winning converts to Islam.¹⁵⁸ On this particular issue, John Travis has a different perspective. He comments that he would have no problem with Muslims attending a Christian service. Travis writes,

On the question of how Christians would feel if Muslims entered a church with the purpose of winning converts to Islam, I personally would not be fearful. Indeed for a variety of reasons, non-Christians often grace the doors of churches, and many in the process come to Christ!¹⁵⁹

Travis also tells the story of how in one community, a group of believers stopped attending the mosque, and by doing so, upset the local imam (the religious leader of the mosque). The imam then tried to put an end to the gatherings of the local community of believers. By returning to prayer at the mosque, they not only appeased the imam, but were also able to continue relationships with others in the mosque, whom they then invited to their house meetings.¹⁶⁰ Some believers prefer

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 184.

¹⁵⁹ John J. Travis, "Must All Muslims Leave "Islam" to Follow Jesus?," in Winter, *Perspectives*, 413.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 412.

continuing to go to the mosque because it provides for them this crucial connection to the community.¹⁶¹

One man working with Muslims encourages believers to return to the mosque. He is convinced that followers of Christ can practice 98 percent of Islamic worship. He comments, “When [Muslims come] to know Christ, [they] should be encouraged to go back to the mosque and be regular and say [their prayers] in the Spirit.”¹⁶²

Professor of Islamic studies J. Dudley Woodberry also believes that Muslims should continue in the mosque as long as they do not “say or do anything against their conscience.”¹⁶³ As mentioned in the section on *shahada*, followers of Christ who do not believe that Muhammad is a prophet of God can simply remain silent or change the words of the creed to something they affirm, such “Jesus is the Word (or Apostle) of God,” when praying in the mosque.¹⁶⁴

A third option for the Muslim follower of Christ is to continue attending the mosque for a temporary period of time while they transition out. Woodberry comments that in his experience, as time goes by, Muslims become less interested in

¹⁶¹ J. Dudley Woodberry, “To the Muslim I Became a Muslim?” (McClure Lectures, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 2008), <http://www.worldmissioninitiative.org/To%20the%20Muslim%20I%20Became%20a%20Muslim.pdf> (accessed September 19, 2011), 5.

¹⁶² Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 181.

¹⁶³ Woodberry, “To the Muslim I Became a Muslim?” 18.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

going to the mosque, as they are able to worship in new ways with other believers from the Muslim background.¹⁶⁵

Parshall is in favor of followers of Christ transitioning out of the mosque. He believes this should take merely weeks or months. Others, such as Travis, are of the opinion that followers of Christ should remain in the mosque as long as possible. Travis believes Jesus-followers should not initiate departure, but should wait until they are expelled from the mosque to leave. Travis points out that this mirrors the way first century Jews stayed at the temple until they were barred by the Jewish authorities.¹⁶⁶ For example, Paul continued to go to the synagogue until he was thrown out (Acts 19:8-9; 21:26-30).¹⁶⁷

In some places where whole communities have come to faith, they have continued using the mosque as the center of worship.¹⁶⁸ Others have constructed buildings that are similar in style to the mosque, and have conducted worship using familiar Islamic forms. Believers from the island of Java have done just this. Their buildings have no images or crosses in them, men and women sit separately, and the Bible is placed on a stand similar to how the Qur'an would be honored in a mosque.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁶ Travis, "Messianic Muslim," 59.

¹⁶⁷ Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 295-98.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 304.

¹⁶⁹ Abdul Asad, "Rethinking the Insider Movement Debate: Global Historical Insights toward an Appropriate Transitional Model of C5," *St. Francis Magazine* 5, no. 4 (August 2009): 147.

As shown in this section, believers are divided as to whether or not Muslims should continue going to the mosque. Those who are opposed believe that it compromises their faith, or is even deceitful. Those who are in favor think that attending the mosque provides an avenue for connecting with the Muslim community, and may even open opportunities for inviting others to their house meetings. A third option is that believers remain in the mosque for a transitional season. Some hold the view that believers should slowly step back from the mosque, while others think believers should remain until the Muslim community bans them from coming. In some cases, where the believing community has become substantial, whole communities have continued worshipping in the mosque, or a building similar in style to a mosque, for worship. Yet, whether or not believers from a Muslim background attend the mosque, most gather with other believers in house meetings, the topic addressed in the next section.

Contextualized house meetings. Eric and Laura Adams believe that house meetings are ideal for believers from a Muslim background. They believe some of the advantages to house fellowships are: they are not as expensive, they develop naturally in family and friend networks, and they are not as susceptible to persecution. Adams and Adams suggest that the more probable it is that a group will experience persecution, the smaller the house meeting should be.¹⁷⁰

Mazhar Mallouhi also believes it is best to meet in people's homes. He comments, "I do, however, love fellowship with followers of Christ, and wherever I

¹⁷⁰ Eric Adams and Laura Adams, "The Gathering of Reproducing Fellowships," in *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008), 157.

have lived I have started such groups—people meeting together to talk about Christ and grow together in our understanding of God. This is what ‘church’ is to me.”¹⁷¹

The following is a sample contextualized house meeting of an all-female group:

Tea and cookies are served during the fellowship time prior to the teaching. All then go to the prayer room. Shoes are removed and scarves placed on heads. The women stand shoulder to shoulder with uplifted hands. The leader calls out in Arabic, ‘God is Great. I testify that there is no God but God, and Isa is the word of God.’ Following this, the women are seated on carpets and give testimonies of how the Lord is working in their lives. They also begin to pray for personal needs, which include the salvation of spouses, needs for jobs, or healings for friends. After spontaneous intercession, the group recites the Lord’s Prayer together.

The meeting continues with singing worship choruses in Arabic tunes. All then commence to chant verses from the Bible. Since most of the women are illiterate, this is an excellent way to facilitate the memorization of God’s word. It is a ritual common to all Muslims.

Next, Bible teaching is shared with the goal of trying to make it both spiritually and culturally relevant. Local illustrations are utilized....Finally, the women recite the ceremonial words of 1 Corinthians 11 together as they break bread and share the Lord’s Supper.¹⁷²

Although house meetings can take many different forms, almost all agree that participating in house meetings are not only beneficial, but necessary for spiritual growth.¹⁷³

Giving to the Poor (*Zakat*)

The third pillar of Islam encourages social responsibility. Muslims are required to give 2.5 percent of their income to the poor. This is called *zakat*, which

¹⁷¹ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 2739-40.

¹⁷² Parshall and Parshall, *Lifting the Veil*, 255.

¹⁷³ Adams and Adams, "The Gathering of Reproducing Fellowships, 149-50.

literally means “purification.”¹⁷⁴ Muslims give money, jewelry, or precious metals directly to the mosque, and the proceeds are used to help the poor.¹⁷⁵ By giving, the Muslim is reminded that all she or he has comes from God.¹⁷⁶ In addition to *zakat*, Muslims may also give money directly to the poor. This is called *sadaqa*, which literally means “righteousness.”¹⁷⁷ Kenneth Cragg writes, “Islam demands economic justice and social neighborliness. *Zakat* want all to understand the sovereign principle: ‘To have is to share.’ Only giving cleanses keeping. Property is a trust.”¹⁷⁸

Comparing *zakat* to Christian almsgiving. There are many similarities between Muslims and Christians in their value to give to the poor. In the Qur’an, giving alms is described as giving a beautiful loan to God, and in Proverbs we read that whoever is kind to the poor, lends to the Lord.¹⁷⁹ Both the Qur’an and the Bible also say that giving is not to be done in order be seen by people,¹⁸⁰ and both the Qur’an and Bible make it clear that giving should be done with a good attitude.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 81.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Context: Past, Present, and Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 46.

¹⁷⁸ Cragg, *The Call*, 141.

¹⁷⁹ Qur’an 73:20; Prv 19:17.

¹⁸⁰ Qur’an 4:38; Mt 6:1-4. Although another verse in the Qu’ran states that it is permissible to reveal that one has given to the poor, but a better choice to give in secret (see Qur’an 2:271).

¹⁸¹ Qur’an 2:262; 2 Cor 9:7.

One area where believers might disagree with the Qur'an is that the Qur'an says charity can atone for sins.¹⁸² Yet before the reader becomes too critical, it is helpful to note that the Roman Catholic deuterocanonical books give this same teaching (Tb 4:7 and Sir 3:30).¹⁸³

To conclude, the giving of alms is considered a key value in Islam and Christianity.¹⁸⁴ Most followers of Christ from a Muslim background are of the opinion that it is biblical for new believers to continue showing compassion to the poor.¹⁸⁵

Fasting (*Sawm*)

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar.¹⁸⁶ *Ramz* is the Arabic word meaning "to burn," and the month is said to have this name either because it is the hottest month in the year, or it is the season when God burns away sins.¹⁸⁷ Muhammad's first revelations are said to have come during the month of Ramadan. Fasting or *sawm* is practiced for the whole month of Ramadan, and from sunup to sundown, Muslims abstain from food, alcohol, smoking, sexual relations, and any other worldly pleasures.¹⁸⁸ Muslims also read the Qur'an in its entirety during this month,¹⁸⁹ and tend to go to the mosque more frequently.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸² Qur'an 5:45.

¹⁸³ Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 300.

¹⁸⁴ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 400.

¹⁸⁵ Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 300.

¹⁸⁶ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 81.

¹⁸⁷ Parshall, *New Paths*, 208.

The fast is both an act of merit, and also a way of knowing God more intimately.¹⁹¹ It is said to keep the Muslim away from “selfishness, greed, extravagance, and other vices.”¹⁹² Muslims see Ramadan as a time of fasting for the eyes and ears as well as the mouth.¹⁹³ To fast at any time is said to be good, but fasting during Ramadan is said to be thirty times better.¹⁹⁴ The season of Ramadan has the same social significance as the Christian Christmas.¹⁹⁵

Comparing *sawm* to Christian fasting. Both Christians and Muslims view fasting as a time of repentance and preparation.¹⁹⁶ In this way, the Christian Lenten fast is similar to Ramadan.¹⁹⁷ Also, many Eastern Christians participate in a fast from sunup to sundown,¹⁹⁸ so both the form and intention of *sawm* can be found in Christian fasting.

Should the believer keep the fast? Parshall comments that he is in favor of believers keeping the fast, as long as it is understood that fasting is not to earn merit, but to create a hunger for God. Parshall believes that engaging in Ramadan

¹⁸⁸ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 81.

¹⁸⁹ Riddell and Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, 47.

¹⁹⁰ Cragg, *The Call*, 106.

¹⁹¹ Parshall, *New Paths*, 209.

¹⁹² Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 81.

¹⁹³ Cragg, *The Call*, 106.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁹⁵ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 197.

¹⁹⁶ Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 301.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1355.

has been a positive experience for those who have participated, and that Muslims look favorably on outsiders who keep the fast as well.¹⁹⁹ Parshall suggests the local believing community should determine if adhering to the fast is best.²⁰⁰ Parshall writes, "Dogmatism and legalism is not called for. Rather, there should be an open climate of freedom on the subject, unencumbered with any hypocritical value judgments toward either the doers or the abstainers."²⁰¹

Mazhar Mallouhi believes it would be honoring to one's Muslim family to keep the fast. He tells the story of a Muslim follower of Christ who contemptuously rejected the fast through the whole month of Ramadan. His sister would cook a meal for him every day at noon. Mallouhi asks, "Who was the better representative of Christ? The young man, or his Muslim sister?"²⁰² For Mazhar Mallouhi the important question to consider is, "Are we honoring the Muslim families among whom we live and with whom we share our faith?"²⁰³ If believers' ways are not viewed as honoring, maybe they should reconsider their actions.

Concerning fasting, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines, Parshall tends to side with keeping the spiritual discipline. He writes, "I have often protested the

¹⁹⁹ Phil Parshall, "Lessons Learned in Contextualization," in Woodberry, *Muslims and Christians*, 255.

²⁰⁰ Parshall, *New Paths*, 210.

²⁰¹ Parshall, "Lessons Learned," 255.

²⁰² Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1239.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 1240.

tendency for converts to feel liberated from Islamic legalism and thus end up Christians with much less spiritual discipline than they had as Muslims.”²⁰⁴

As with giving alms, fasting has a biblical precedent.²⁰⁵ If done with the appropriate motives, fasting can be a meaningful spiritual discipline for the believer.

Pilgrimage (Hajj)

All Muslims who are financially capable and able-bodied are to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in their lifetime.²⁰⁶ The trek takes them to the *Kaaba*—the black stone that is considered the House of Allah.²⁰⁷ Adam is said to have built this sacred shrine, and then Abraham and Ishmael rebuilt it after the flood.²⁰⁸ The pilgrimage is to be done during the twelfth month of the Arabic calendar,²⁰⁹ and nearly two million people make this journey every year.²¹⁰ The exact details of the pilgrimage differ depending on which school of Islam a person observes, but the following is a sample pilgrimage.

²⁰⁴ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 225.

²⁰⁵ Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 301-2.

²⁰⁶ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 81-82.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

²¹⁰ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 424.

1. Female pilgrims are covered from head to foot. Male pilgrims don simple white robes that leave the shoulder and right arm bare. They do not shave or wash, except for ablutions.²¹¹

2. They then make seven laps around the *Kaaba* while barefoot, during which time they kiss or simply touch the black stone located in the wall of the shrine.

3. Next, the pilgrims run between two specified points. This represents both Abraham evading Satan, as well as Hagar searching for water for her son.²¹²

4. On the eighth day of the month, the pilgrims set out for Mina (five miles from Mecca), and Arafat (thirteen miles from Mecca). On the ninth day, at Arafat, pilgrims stand listening to sermons from noon to sunset. The night is spent sleeping in an open field at Muzdalifah, which is en route back toward Mina.

5. The next day, pilgrims throw seven stones onto a large stone heap in remembrance of how Abraham expelled Satan.²¹³

6. A sacrifice of a camel, goat, or sheep is then given at Mina, and the men shave their heads.²¹⁴

7. The pilgrims return to Mecca, circle the *Kaaba* again, and bathe in Zamzam, (the holy well), and then relax for three days.²¹⁵

The *Hajj* is a time of spiritual transformation. The pilgrim asks for forgiveness and promises to no longer sin. If the pilgrimage is done correctly, it is

²¹¹ Cragg, *The Call*, 109.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

believed that a person's slate will be wiped clean, with no more sins to her or his name. The hope is that after performing the pilgrimage, a person will come back transformed, with a renewed desire to live for God.²¹⁶ After completing the pilgrimage, one is not thought to have "arrived," but to have entered into a new and more intense phase of following after God.²¹⁷

The pilgrimage also provides the unique experience of worshipping God with people from many ethnicities and nations.²¹⁸ There is also a sense of unity with the whole Muslim community, as across the world, Muslims offer sacrifices on the same day as those on the *Hajj*.²¹⁹ This commences the celebration of *Id al-Adha*, or *Qurbani Id*, where Muslims make sacrifices in memory of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son.²²⁰

Comparing the Hajj to Jewish and Christian pilgrimages. The *Hajj* mirrors the Jewish trek to Jerusalem. Most Jews actually made that trip three times a year, as opposed to the Muslim who makes the pilgrimage once in a lifetime. Jews would often circle the sanctuary, similar to how Muslims circle the *Kaaba*.²²¹ Christians also find it a great privilege to travel to the holy land, and walk where Jesus walked.²²²

²¹⁶ Mallouhi, *Waging Peace*, 214-15.

²¹⁷ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1524.

²¹⁸ Chapman, *Cross and Crescent*, 82.

²¹⁹ Cragg, *The Call*, 109.

²²⁰ Parshall, *New Paths*, 145.

²²¹ Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 303.

²²² Parshall, *New Paths*, 59.

Should the believer go on the Hajj? Although people of many different faiths make pilgrimages to sacred places, the Muslim believer in Christ has no reason to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Mazhar Mallouhi believes that the *Hajj* is a practice unnecessary to the follower of Jesus.²²³ Woodberry agrees and suggests that the pilgrimage be reinterpreted. He writes,

As Jesus told the woman of Samaria, worship will not be restricted to the specific locations (Jn 4:20-24). God, however, used pilgrimages to teach the people lessons concerning [God's] holiness and their unity as a people. We shall need to find ways to do the same.²²⁴

Believing communities will need to determine if and how the *Hajj* is best reinterpreted.

Participating in Muslim Feasts. As mentioned above, Muslims celebrate *Id al-Adha* or *Qurbani Id* during the season of the *Hajj*. Muslims sacrifice an animal at the same day as those on the pilgrimage. A question that the believer will need to think through is if it is appropriate for followers of Christ to participate in this feast, as well as in other Muslim celebrations. Parshall believes it is possible to reinterpret the meaning of this celebration in order to bring honor to Christ. Parshall points out that often in popular Islam, offering a sacrifice is linked with the sin offering practiced by Jews.²²⁵ This belief would need some reinterpreting. Parshall writes,

If Muslim converts have a clear understanding that the purpose of the [sacrifice] is not to receive forgiveness of sins but rather (1) to focus attention on the complete and sufficient sacrifice of Christ, and (2) to provide a continuing identification with Muslim people, would it not be acceptable to observe *Qurbani Id*? Might this not be a unique time of witness rather than

²²³ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 2808.

²²⁴ Woodberry, "Contextualization among Muslims," 303.

²²⁵ Parshall, *New Paths*, 145.

one more link in the chain of alienation that often widens the gulf between Muslims and Christians?"²²⁶

Participating in Muslim celebrations also creates another place of overlap with the larger Muslim community. This is a great way for believers to stay connected with family and friends and should be continued, if at all possible.²²⁷

Baptism

Although not one of the pillars of Islam, baptism is a final ritual that must be addressed by the believing Muslim community. Baptism was a common form of initiation used in the Near East in the first century.²²⁸ Even before John the Baptist began baptizing people in the Jordan River, people connected baptism with the rite of induction.²²⁹ There is even some evidence to support the idea that proselytes to Judaism were baptized, as well as circumcised, during their initiation.²³⁰ Since the beginning of Christianity, baptism has been an important initiation ritual for believers.²³¹ Yet baptism has taken on a different meaning for Muslims. It is understood as treason, and a rejection of one's community and heritage.²³² Because of the negative connotations associated with baptism, Muslim followers of Jesus must decide whether they should take on this ritual, and if so, in what way.

²²⁶ Ibid., 146-47.

²²⁷ Ibid., 147.

²²⁸ Charles H. Kraft, "The Development of Contextualizing Theory in Euroamerican Missiology," in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005), 87.

²²⁹ Drury, *The Wonder of Worship*, 48.

²³⁰ Ibid., 47.

²³¹ Ibid., 48.

²³² Cragg, *The Call*, 317.

Some have wondered if it might be more appropriate to simply look for an alternative to baptism that communicates the same message.²³³ Some have suggested that a verbal statement of belief, similar to the Muslim conversion by declaring the *shahada*, would suffice.²³⁴ Some feel it is enough to believe people have been baptized “spiritually.”²³⁵

Yet others are more inclined toward a literal water baptism, with the stipulation that when people are baptized, the leaders must clearly explain the meaning of baptism. Water baptism is not about forsaking family and friends.²³⁶ It is not about separation from the Muslim community or about treason, but is a declaration of surrendering one’s life to Jesus.

Some suggest that baptism should be delayed until there is a large number of believers who can be baptized together.²³⁷ Parshall comments that “premature baptism has often sparked off intense persecution from the Islamic community.” Others believe followers of Christ should be baptized in secret, far away from their homes. Some believers have gone to far-off villages to be secretly baptized outside their communities. Still others believe that Muslim background believers from the local community should baptize new believers in the presence of the local community. Parshall writes,

²³³ John Travis, Anna Travis, with Phil Parshall, "Factors Affecting the Identity That Jesus-Followers Choose," in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 201.

²³⁴ Parshall, *New Paths*, 195.

²³⁵ Travis and Woodberry, "When God's Kingdom," 29.

²³⁶ Travis and Travis with Parshall, "Factors Affecting the Identity," 201.

²³⁷ Cragg, *The Call*, 319.

We have suggested that a mature national believer do the actual baptizing of converts. No foreign missionary on our local team has ever baptized anyone. We have a strong policy in this regard. Usually the baptism takes place in an unobtrusive manner at a nearby river. No white people with their expensive cameras are present. It is an indigenous ceremony and celebration in response to a biblical command.²³⁸

Different Muslim communities have divergent views on the issue of baptism, and as Parshall exhorts, believers should seek to accept baptism practices that differ from their own and “trust the Holy Spirit to be active in the lives of the emerging body of Christ.”²³⁹

Summary

Many Muslims who have made the decision to follow Christ have been encouraged by the local Christian community to turn their backs on Islamic culture. Yet these Muslim believers never quite feel at home in the Christian community, as Christian culture is foreign, and Christians are often fearful of Muslim believers. In addition to Muslim followers of Christ feeling uncomfortable and unwanted in Christian groups, extracting believers from their Muslim communities does not allow believers to be salt and light to their friends and family. Many have come to the conclusion that allowing followers of Christ to remain in their local communities and to contextualize the gospel into Islamic forms is a more suitable option. The five essential Islamic practices: declaration of the creed, prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca have been explored as to their potential in being contextualized to Muslim communities of faith.

²³⁸ Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque*, 187.

²³⁹ Parshall, *New Paths*, 197.

Creed. It was concluded that the Christian convert would have no conflict agreeing with the first half of the creed (“There is no God but God”). But there was no consensus among believers for how to address the second half of the creed (“Muhammad is the prophet of God”). Some Muslims believed that it was better to simply change the words of the creed, replacing the lines about Muhammad with something about Jesus, such as “Jesus is the Word of God.” Other Muslims found it acceptable to simply remain silent for the second half of the creed. Some believers felt the *shahada* should be avoided entirely or that Muslim believers should create their own creed. Still others did not find fault with believers saying the *shahada*. They believed Muhammad could be considered a prophet, as he preached a monotheistic message, and drew pagan Arabs to worship the God of Abraham.

Prayer. As to ritual prayer, this chapter revealed that much of *salat* prayer mirrors practices done by Jews and Christians in the early church, such as ritual washing, and set prayer times. There is also a biblical precedent for each of the Muslim prayer postures: standing, bowing, kneeling, and prostrating before God, as well as for facing in a particular direction during prayer. Most believers agreed that *salat* prayer would be an acceptable practice for Muslim background believers. The more controversial issue was whether *salat* prayer should be practiced in the mosque. Some believed it would be best to stop going to the mosque. Attending the mosque could be interpreted as aligning oneself with Islamic theology, which would be deceitful or compromising. Others were of the opinion that it would be acceptable to go to the mosque as long as believers were not required to do anything that went against their consciences. Some were strongly in favor of

believers continuing in the mosque as a way to stay connected with the Muslim community. Others thought that mosque attendance should only be maintained for a brief time of transition. Some felt believers should remain until the Muslim community banned them from the mosque, similar to Jewish Christians continuing to go to the Synagogue in the early church. In a few instances, whole people groups have come to faith, and in those cases mosques have been used for the whole believing community. In most other places, believers gather for fellowship in houses.

Giving to the poor. Both Muslims and Christians have a high value for giving to the poor. Continuing this practice aligns with scripture, as long as one does not believe giving alms will atone for one's sins.

Fasting. Many Christians participate in a forty-day Lenten fast, similar to the Muslim Ramadan fast. Just as with giving to the poor, many followers of Christ believe the fast is worth keeping, as long as the one fasting realizes no merit will be earned from this practice.

Pilgrimage. Similar to the Muslim trek to Mecca, Jews and Christians have taken pilgrimages to Jerusalem throughout the years. There is nothing immoral about making a pilgrimage, but the Muslim believer will no longer have reason to make the trek to the black shrine in Mecca. For Muslims, the *Hajj* spurred pilgrims to pursue holiness and to recognize their connection to the multi-ethnic, multi-national Muslim community. Believers in Christ can transform the pilgrimage into another practice which addresses issues of holiness, and the unity of the believing community.

Baptism. Although not one of the five pillars, baptism is a traditional Christian ritual that Muslim followers of Christ must consider. Since baptism is interpreted by the Islamic community as an act of treason and a severing of relationships, some Muslims choose to replace the water ritual with a simple confession of faith. Others believe a literal baptism is preferable, and make efforts to clarify to Muslim followers of Christ that baptism does not equate severing of ties with the Muslim community. Some send new believers to a small, far-off village for baptisms. Others make baptism a local, but low-key event, with only other Muslim background believers in attendance.

As seen in this chapter, contextualization is necessary if we are to see more than a trickle of believers come to Christ from the Muslim world. Sobhi Malek, an Egyptian who is reaching North Africans for Christ writes,

God desires to meet Muslims without having them convert to another culture. [God] wants to use their own cultural traits as a vehicle to communicate [God's] truths more effectively. Muslims can accept the Lord, give their total allegiance to Jesus Christ, become authentically Christian and yet retain their Islamic culture. God is blessing these emphases today as increasing numbers are turning to Christ in faith.²⁴⁰

For the issues of contextualization that are most controversial, such as recognizing Muhammad as a prophet, worshipping inside the mosque, and participating in water baptism, believers must extend grace and understanding to each other.²⁴¹ The final chapter will address the most controversial issue among

²⁴⁰ Sobhi Malek, "Through Contextualized Forms," in *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, ed. J. Woodberry (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989), 213.

²⁴¹ Parshall, *New Paths*, 197.

Muslims who have come to follow Christ: Can believers continue to identify as Muslim and be followers of Jesus?

Chapter Four

Followers of Jesus Identifying as Muslim

Taufik considers himself a Muslim follower of Jesus. He reads his Bible everyday, sharing with other Muslims passages of the *Injil* (Gospels) and the *Zabur* (Psalms) that are meaningful to him. He recently invited his son and a friend to meet regularly to study the *Injil* with him.¹

Achmad also is a Muslim believer in Christ. He came to faith when Jesus appeared to him in a dream. Before coming to faith he was an Islamic shaman, but now he has ceased all divination. He attends a fellowship meeting with other believers from the Muslim background and shares his faith with others in his community.²

Another Muslim, who wishes to remain anonymous, does not see much difference between his faith in Christ, and the faith of believers from the Christian background. He believes that he is saved through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. He thinks that although there is some truth in the Qur'an, ultimate authority comes from the Bible. He writes,

Due to these similarities in faith, I am firmly sure that I am a citizen of God's kingdom. Some Christians have asked me where I belong and who my people are. To me, those confessing Jesus as Savior and Lord, that He is the Lamb of God and Messiah and that He is God, are my people. Moreover, my people are

¹ John Travis, "Messianic Muslim Followers of Isa: A Closer Look at C5 Believers and Congregations," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 56.

² Ibid., 57.

those who live their life in Jesus and who are obedient to the teachings of Jesus.³

According to John Travis' C-scale, the choice of identity for these three believers is congruent with C5 Christ-centered communities. These followers of Christ find that identifying as Muslim comes more naturally than identifying as Christian. Although they consider themselves culturally and officially Muslim, they adhere to the Bible as their authority for truth and reject or reinterpret beliefs or practices in opposition to the Holy Scriptures.⁴

Proponents of C5 communities would say that Muslim followers of Jesus parallel Messianic Jews. In Judaism, Jesus is not seen as the messiah, his death is not understood as atonement for sin, the New Testament is not accepted as the Word of God, and in Jewish festivals, such as Passover, Jews continue to await the coming Messiah. Messianic Jews, on the other hand, believe Jesus is the Messiah, believe his death atones for their sins, believe that the New Testament is the Word of God, and interpret Jewish festivals and formal prayers in light of their belief that Jesus is God. Messianic Muslims, in the same way, reinterpret or reject passages in the Qur'an that claim the Bible has been corrupted, or that Jesus did not die on the cross. They also may keep the Ramadan fast and pray formal prayers, but they adjust the meanings to of these worship forms to align with their faith in Jesus.⁵

³Timothy George, *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?: Understanding the Differences between Christianity and Islam* (Zondervan, 2002), 226-27.

⁴ John J. Travis and J. Dudley Woodberry, "When God's Kingdom Grows Like Yeast: Frequently-Asked Questions About Jesus Movements within Muslim Communities," *Mission Frontiers* (July-August 2010): 26.

⁵ Ibid.

This chapter will explore arguments in favor of and against Muslim background believers continuing to identify as “Muslim” and will conclude by addressing the issue of whether believers from a Christian background should take on the Muslim identity for the sake of winning people to Christ.

Arguments in Favor of Believers Identifying as “Muslim”

The name “Christian” is misconstrued. As mentioned previously, many Muslims understand the word “Christian” to mean “Westerner,” “Crusader,” and “Colonizer,” and people connected to this religion are seen as immoral, immodest, and unclean.⁶ Many believers do not want to be associated with these images.⁷ Even outside the Muslim world, believers have had concerns of their faith being misunderstood. Some believers in the United States are uncomfortable with being called “born again” because they do not want to be associated with televangelists they feel give that title a bad name.⁸ Some Catholics in Ireland, who have aligned themselves with Protestant beliefs, do not want to identify as “Protestant” because of how that word is perceived by their friends and family.⁹

Yet Dick Brogden, who has worked among Muslims in Sudan for many years, believes it is unfortunate that people “have surrendered terms rather than working

⁶ Paul-Gordon Chandler, *Pilgrims of Christ on the Muslim Road: Exploring a New Path between Two Faiths* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), Kindle e-book, location 411.

⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸ Bernard Dutch, “Should Muslims Become ‘Christians’?” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17, no. 1 (January-March 2000): 15.

⁹ Ibid., 16.

to correct misrepresentations.”¹⁰ He prefers believers call themselves “Christian” to reclaim the title’s appropriate meaning.¹¹ But Rebecca Lewis, who has also worked among Muslims for more many years, responds that “a thousand years of meaning attributed to a name is not easily expunged.”¹² She prefers that Muslim background believers identify as something different than “Christian.”¹³

Carl Medearis points out that neither Jesus nor Paul ever used the word “Christian.”¹⁴ In fact, it was people outside the faith who first to call believers “Christians” (Acts 11:26), and they were using it as a derogatory title.¹⁵ Believers of the day actually preferred to call themselves “Followers of the Way.”¹⁶

Ralph Winters makes the argument that there are millions of people who call themselves “Christians” who do not adhere to orthodox Christian beliefs, such as the Pentecostal Unitarians in Mexico, or those belonging to African Initiated Churches.¹⁷ He writes, “Whether believers in Jesus are called Muslims or Christians does not

¹⁰ Dick Brogden, “Inside Out: Probing Presuppositions among Insider Movements,” *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 36.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Rebecca Lewis, quoted in Dick Brogden, “Inside Out,” 37.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Carl Medearis, *Muslims, Christians and Jesus: Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships* (Minneapolis: BethanyHouse, 2008), Kindle e-book, location 998.

¹⁵ Ibid., 993.

¹⁶ Abdul Asad, “Rethinking the Insider Movement Debate: Global Historical Insights toward an Appropriate Transitional Model of C5,” *St. Francis Magazine* 5, no. 4 (August 2009): 151.

¹⁷ Ralph D. Winter, “Going Far Enough?” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 671.

make a whole lot of difference when it comes to precise doctrinal fidelity to the Word of God.”¹⁸

Christians and Muslims are viewed as two distinct cultures. Another reason some Muslims do not feel comfortable identifying as Christian is because in the Muslim world, Christians and Muslims are often viewed as two distinct cultures. An American who has lived in multiple cities throughout the Middle East for the last twenty years comments,

Christian and Muslim are two separate cultures. People from both groups may speak Arabic, but they use different words to refer to “Jesus,” the “New Testament,” and “eternal life.” They display different styles of art in their home, wear different clothing, and even buy different types of cologne. You can often tell if someone is Muslim or Christian by hearing their name, or seeing if they are wearing a gold or silver wedding ring [gold is worn by the Christians, silver by the Muslims].¹⁹

Muslims and Christians also often live in different neighborhoods. An African Muslim commented, “In my city, Muslims and Christians do not live together. You will not find them in one house. You will not even find Muslims and Christians living in the same area of town.”²⁰

One can have varying beliefs and still identify as “Muslim.” Woodberry and Travis point out there is also a broad spectrum of belief under those who identify as “Muslim.” Some Muslims are communists, agnostics, atheists, and secularists.²¹ There are mystical Muslims (Sufis), folk Muslims, liberal Muslims, and fundamental

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Interview with American living in the Middle East, July 1, 2011.

²⁰ Interview with a Christian African, June 28, 2011.

²¹ Travis and Woodberry, “When God’s Kingdom,” 27.

Muslims.²² All these people see themselves as part of the Muslim *ummah* (community).²³ Bernard Dutch,²⁴ who has worked in community development and church planting among Muslims for more than twelve years, proposes, “Surely there is room for Muslim background believers underneath this broad umbrella of Muslim society.”²⁵ Woodberry agrees, arguing that even the Qur’an calls followers of Jesus “Muslims.” Surah 3:52 reads, “Said the Disciples: ‘We are Allah’s helpers: we believe in Allah, and you bear witness that we are Muslims.’” Woodberry writes,

There is at least some textual rationale for disciples of Christ from Muslim contexts to continue to include ‘Muslim’ in their identity. However, because the word has developed in modern usage a more restrictive meaning, it would seem more transparent to use a designation such as “I submit to God (*aslamtu* in Arabic) through Isa al-Masih (the...title meaning Jesus the Messiah).”²⁶

Some, including those advocating for C4 communities, consider it best for believers to not take on either the identity of “Christian,” or the identity of “Muslim.” Instead some suggest believers create a new identity, going by a new name such as “Follower of Christ.” Yet Massey argues that most people are not satisfied with ambiguity, and will want to place people in either a “Muslim” or “Christian” box. He writes, “Like most Christians, Muslims do not have a religious category for Christ-

²² Joshua Massey, “God’s Amazing Diversity in Drawing Muslims to Christ,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17, no. 1 (January-March 2000): 11-12.

²³ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁴ This is a pseudonym.

²⁵ Dutch, “Should Muslims Become ‘Christians’?” 18.

²⁶ J. Dudley Woodberry, “To the Muslim I Became a Muslim?” (McClure Lectures, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 2008), <http://www.worldmissioninitiative.org/To%20the%20Muslim%20I%20Became%20a%20Muslim.pdf> (accessed September 19, 2011), 12.

followers who are neither Christian nor Muslim. You must be one or the other.”²⁷

This is particularly challenging in countries where the government requires people to identify by their religious affiliation.²⁸ C4 believers most often are categorized as “a type of Christian,”²⁹ which places them outside the Muslim *ummah*.

Faith in Christ is about allegiance to a person, not to a religion. Those in favor of C5 communities would say religious systems, such as Christianity and Islam, have little to do with the real issues of faith allegiance.³⁰ “I’ve just never seen a religion save anyone,” writes Medearis, “All religions are great at laying out some basic rules—dos and don’ts—that are good for our lives, but they don’t really provide hope or any kind of eternal security. It seems religions end up causing more trouble than solving anything.”³¹ According to Charles Kraft, religions are about adhering to a set of intellectual beliefs, whereas faith is an allegiance to a person.³² Kraft writes, “Christianity is often presented as a religious system in competition with other religious systems rather than a faith allegiance expressible through a variety of cultural systems.”³³ Medearis points out that religions often fight each other to “win”

²⁷ Joshua Massey, “Misunderstanding C5: His Ways Are Not Our Orthodoxy,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (July 2004): 301.

²⁸ Dutch, “Should Muslims Become ‘Christians’?” 18.

²⁹ John Travis, “The C-Spectrum,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2009), 665.

³⁰ Charles H. Kraft, “Dynamic Equivalence Churches in Muslim Society,” in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, ed. Don M. McCurry (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1979), 118.

³¹ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 1286.

³² Charles H. Kraft, “The Development of Contextualizing Theory in Euroamerican Missiology,” in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles H. Kraft (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2005), 90.

³³ Kraft, “Dynamic Equivalence Churches,” 118.

people to their side. He prefers to simply present Jesus Christ as the good news.³⁴

Christine Mallouhi agrees. She writes, "The motive for evangelism is Christ's love for every person, not to conquer or convert the world to our religion."³⁵ C5 believers see themselves as being converted to Jesus, not to the religion of Christianity.³⁶

Some believe the idea of people changing their allegiance to Jesus rather than changing their religions parallels Gentiles in the early church not becoming culturally and religiously Jewish yet following Christ. The following section expounds on this theme.

A biblical argument from Acts 15. In the early church, some Jewish leaders were convinced that Gentile believers needed to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses in order to be "Followers of the Way."³⁷ For Jews, following the Law of Moses was of utmost importance.³⁸ The Greeks, though, were mostly unfamiliar with the Law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas, who had been ministering among Greeks, did not believe it was necessary for the Gentiles to follow Jewish law in order to be included in the believing community. The elders and apostles met to discuss this important question.³⁹ Essentially what they were determining was if Greeks from a

³⁴ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 1155.

³⁵ Christine A. Mallouhi, *Waging Peace on Islam* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 30.

³⁶ Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity," 8.

³⁷ Acts 15:5 (NIV).

³⁸ Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism: Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 33.

³⁹ Acts 15:6.

pagan background were required to take on Jewish identity and religious traditions in order to be “saved.”⁴⁰

Peter argued that this was not necessary. He said,

God, who knows the heart, showed that [God] accepted [the Gentiles] by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as [God] did to us. [God] did not discriminate between us and them, for [God] purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.⁴¹

The council determined that those outside the religion of Judaism could be “saved.”⁴² Although free to not follow Jewish law, the Greeks were asked to “abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.”⁴³ Parshall believes the council established these food restrictions as a means of maintaining peaceful relations between Jews and Gentiles, as people eating unclean food were offensive to the Jews.⁴⁴ Timothy Tennent, a professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, believes the food laws were established for another reason. He proposes that restrictions were instituted because these particular foods were connected to Gentile pagan worship.⁴⁵ Yet no

⁴⁰ Rebecca Lewis, "The Integrity of the Gospel and the Insider Movements," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 43.

⁴¹ Acts 15:8-11.

⁴² Lewis, "The Integrity of the Gospel," 44.

⁴³ Acts 15:29.

⁴⁴ Parshall, *New Paths*, 34.

⁴⁵ Timothy C. Tennent, "Followers of Jesus (Isa) in Islamic Mosques: A Closer Examination of C-5 'High Spectrum' Contextualization," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 23, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 105.

matter what the reason these laws were established, before the end of the New Testament era the only restriction that remained was sexual purity. The food laws were left to each individual's conscience (Rom 14).⁴⁶

As a result of this important Jewish council, Gentile believers did not become Jewish. They did not start going to the synagogue, join the Jewish community, change their names, get circumcised, or follow the Jewish purity laws.⁴⁷ Gentiles, whom the Jews had viewed as impure, uncircumcised idolaters, could be followers of Jesus. Being a Gentile and following Jesus were not mutually exclusive.⁴⁸

In the same way, proponents of C5 communities believe Muslims can have a change of spiritual allegiance without taking on the religion of Christianity.⁴⁹ Dutch argues, "Following the example of our early church fathers, we should not impose unnecessary changes to the cultural identity of Muslim background believers."⁵⁰

Advantages to believers retaining their Muslim Identity. Many believers feel identifying as Muslim fits them naturally. Yet this is not the only reason some believers are choosing to identify as Muslim. Another significant reason is that by remaining Muslim, they can be a witness to their family and friends. Many who declare themselves "Christian" will be extracted from their communities. Some

⁴⁶ Lewis, "The Integrity of the Gospel," 44.

⁴⁷ Dutch, "Should Muslims Become 'Christians'?" 18.

⁴⁸ Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity," 8.

⁴⁹ Rebecca Lewis, "Insider Movements: Retaining Identity and Preserving Community," in Winter, *Perspectives*, 675.

⁵⁰ Dutch, "Should Muslims Become 'Christians'?" 18.

might argue that Muslims are simply trying to hide their beliefs to avoid persecution, but this is not the case.⁵¹ The main reason Muslims remain in their community is to have the opportunity to be a witness. Dutch asserts, "We need growing numbers of vibrant, biblically based churches that remain in and relevant to Muslim society."⁵²

Yet some scholars, practitioners, and even Muslim background believers do not believe it ethical or wise for Jesus-followers to identify as "Muslim." The three main arguments against C5 communities will be explored in this next section.

Arguments in Opposition of Believers Identifying as Muslim

Islamic beliefs are incompatible with following Jesus. One of the main arguments against believers identifying as Muslim is related to the issue of doctrine. Dick Brogden holds the view that Islam is repulsive to God, so believers should break all ties with the religion. He writes,

Islam is abhorrent to God as a false religion. Islam is full of self-righteousness and lacks an understanding of sin as offensive to the nature of a holy God. Islam places Mohammed above Jesus. Islam teaches that religious duty grants favor with God. Islam rejects the divinity of Jesus and his sacrificial death. Islam, even in its gentler strands such as Sufism, is an effort to unite with God out of human strength. These attitudes and understandings permeate everything Muslims do and are the basis for their religious activities. These attitudes and understandings and practices are all aberrant; they are all abominable to God.⁵³

Chris Flint, who has worked for several years in a Muslim-majority country, and currently lives in London, agrees. He does not see religions as neutral, but as

⁵¹ Ibid., 23.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Brogden, "Inside Out," 35.

either accepted and true, or false and blasphemous. He believes that either God or demons are behind every religion. He writes, "Those espousing joint allegiance to the Lord and to demons are liable both to arouse [God's] jealousy, and to lead other believers into sin."⁵⁴ He points out that by Islam's own theology, core biblical truths such as the Trinity, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, are rejected.⁵⁵

One Muslim background believer living in the Middle East said he had never heard of believers referring to themselves as Muslim. He comments, "This would mean that you are adhering to Islamic things, and that is not a good idea."⁵⁶

Tennent asserts that believers lack integrity when they refer to themselves as Muslim while knowing their core confession is not in alignment with the core confession of Islam.⁵⁷ He believes that as soon as Muslims from the community become aware of the Muslim believers' unorthodox doctrines, the community will no longer accept them as Muslim.

Rick Brown, a proponent of C5 communities disagrees. He comments,

From a sociological perspective, Muslims are people who have a social identity as members of a traditionally Muslim community. They may be religiously observant or secularly nominal, but they are in the same socio-religious group, that of Muslims. For many Muslims, being a Muslim is an inseparable part of their self-identity, their background, their family, their community, and their cultural heritage, regardless of what they actually believe about God.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Chris Flint, "What Are the Advantages of Church Planting Movements over against Insider Movements," *St. Francis Magazine* 6, no. 6 (December 2010): 901.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 902.

⁵⁶ Interview with a Muslim Arab from a large Middle Eastern city, July 1, 2011.

⁵⁷ Tennent, "Followers of Jesus," 107.

⁵⁸ Rick Brown, "Muslims Who Believe the Bible," *Mission Frontiers* (July-August 2008): 19.

Travis also believes that being Muslim is understood more in cultural terms than as theological terms. He sees Islam as holistic, including one's ethnicity and lifestyle, such as diet, dress, and family life.⁵⁹ Inch also believes Islam is all encompassing. He sees it as a way of life, including cultural, political, and social activities, as well as religious thinking.⁶⁰ Mazhar Mallouhi, a Muslim background believer from Syria, is comfortable calling himself a "Muslim follower of Christ." He believes the two fit together nicely. Mallouhi comments, "Islam is my heritage. Christ is my inheritance."⁶¹

Conversely, Brogden believes culture and religion can be separated. He writes, "Great injustice to missiology is done when society and religion are lumped together. Missionaries must advocate for Muslims who follow Jesus to make every effort to remain in their society even as they abandon Islamic religion. This requires delicate surgery on some points."⁶² Tennent also agrees that culture and identity can be separated. He writes, "Those who say that Muslims cannot separate religion and culture are ignoring over thirty years of successful C4 contextualization throughout the entire Islamic world."

If being a Muslim is thought of as holistic, as Brown, Travis, and Inch believe, then having deviant theological beliefs is only a small part of what it means to be

⁵⁹ Travis, "Messianic Muslim," 53.

⁶⁰ Morris A. Inch, *Doing Theology across Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 73.

⁶¹ Chandler, *Pilgrims*, 1580.

⁶² Brogden, "Inside Out," 36.

Muslim, and followers of Christ could continue to call themselves Muslim with integrity. But, if religion and culture can be separated, a follower of Christ could continue to remain culturally part of the community, but theologically removed. With some people believing culture and belief cannot be separated, and others believing that culture and belief can be separated, it seems best to abide by the principle mentioned repeatedly throughout this paper: indigenous believers are best at understanding their own culture. As Travis writes, "How Muslim believers choose to view Islam [should not be] prescribed by outsiders, but left to them as they are guided by the Holy Spirit and the word of God."⁶³

C5 communities are in danger of being syncretistic. Another argument opponents have about C5 communities is that they border on syncretism. David Hesselgrave writes, "A contextualization that takes too high a view of culture and is overly dependent on predilections and conditions presented by receptor cultures and their peoples can be as dangerous as no contextualization at all. As a matter of fact, Islamic messianism not only runs the risk of syncretism, it may be syncretism already!"⁶⁴ Asad, in his article, "Rethinking the Insider Movement Debate," lists several of his concerns. He believes communities are in danger of syncretism if they continue to meet in the mosque, say the *shahada*, affirm the Qur'an as equal to the

⁶³ Travis, "Messianic Muslim," 53.

⁶⁴ David J. Hesselgrave, "Syncretism: Mission and Missionary Induced?," in *Contextualization and Syncretism: Navigating Cultural Currents*, ed. Gailyn Van Rhee (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2006), 85.

Bible, affirm qur'anic texts that do not align with biblical texts, and identify as Muslim with the desire of keeping their faith in Jesus a secret.⁶⁵

A professor of missiology living in the Middle East believes that syncretism is a concern that should be taken seriously. He shares, "Sometimes [proponents of C5] have led people to be better Muslims and they never truly get around to the message of Christ. If there is shallow teaching on the Bible and too much emphasis on the Qur'an, people are not hearing the true message. Sometimes people have chosen to communicate so slowly and carefully that they never get around to communicating the truth."⁶⁶

In 1983, seventy-three key C5 fellowship leaders from the Muslim background were interviewed to evaluate their beliefs and practices. They were said to represent 4,500 followers of Christ from a particular region of Asia, and that the entire believing community might be as numerous as 45,000 people. The results of the research showed that 100 percent of C5 believers prayed to Jesus for forgiveness of sins, 76 percent met regularly for worship with other believers, and 66 percent read or listened to their Bibles daily. These results were all fairly encouraging, but there were other results that made some nervous. Fifty percent of C5 believers continued to go to the mosque, 66 percent believed that the Qur'an was the greatest of the holy books, and 45 percent did not affirm God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁶⁷ Phil Parshall was alarmed by these statistics, especially since the

⁶⁵ Asad, "Rethinking," 155.

⁶⁶ Interview with a professor from a Christian university in the Middle East, July 4, 2011.

⁶⁷ Phil Parshall, "Danger!: New Directions in Contextualization," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (October 1998): 406.

community had been around for more than fifteen years, and the believers had access to the New Testament, as well as biblical training.⁶⁸ He was concerned these C5 communities were bordering on syncretism. He writes, "I am convinced that C5 missionaries are on very shaky theological and missiological ground."⁶⁹

Travis, on the other hand, sees the results from the study as more promising than disturbing. First, he is encouraged that there may be as many as 45,000 C5 believers in this part of Asia.⁷⁰ Secondly, since the churches are less than fifteen years old, and made up of brand new believers, he believes they are exhibiting a process similar to that of the early church, who were guided into truth by the Holy Spirit over time.⁷¹ Third, he believes that a more accurate picture of the C5 communities would need to include evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives, more than simply their theology.⁷² Lastly, he commends those reaching out to Muslims for such a great number of new believers. He asks, "Were it not for the C5 approach used in this church-planting ministry, would there be these many thousands of new believers to analyze in the first place?"⁷³

Travis agrees with Parshall in that he does not want to see C5 believers fall into syncretism. He created the following guidelines for discipleship with new

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 410.

⁷⁰ John Travis, "Must All Muslims Leave 'Islam' to Follow Jesus," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (October 1998): 411.

⁷¹ Ibid., 412.

⁷² Ibid., 412

⁷³ Ibid., 412.

believers to lessen the chances of syncretism. He believes discipleship with new believers should emphasize: (1) believing there is no salvation outside of Christ, (2) fellowshiping with other believers regularly, taking communion, and being baptized, (3) reading the Bible regularly, (4) renouncing occultism and folk Islamic practices, (5) understanding that spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and fasting, are done only as expressions of love and not as acts of merit, (6) reinterpreting the Qur'an and traditional Muslim theology in light of the Bible, and (7) bearing the fruits of the Spirit and actively praying for and witnessing to their friends and family.⁷⁴ Travis believes if new believing communities follow these guidelines, they will be less likely to become syncretistic.⁷⁵

C5 communities are separated from the local and universal Church. A third argument against C5 communities is that they are inappropriately separated from the larger church community. Iskandar Tee, who has worked many years among Muslims in Asia, believes C5 communities are remaining separate from the church because they are ashamed of the traditional church in the local community. Tee suggests a more appropriate response is for the believer to grieve and repent of the ways "Christianity" has dishonored the name of Christ before disowning the local church and starting something new. He writes, "Contrast this with a Moses or Nehemiah praying and confessing for their people, even for sins they have not committed themselves, an attitude similar to that which many Muslims have in their

⁷⁴ Ibid., 414.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

sense of being a brotherhood.”⁷⁶ Tee believes C5 communities should make more of an effort to be unified with the larger body of Christ.⁷⁷

Denis Green, who works for Asia Pacific Christian Mission, also believes C5 communities should be united with the universal believing community. He writes, “[Shielding Muslim believers from other groups of Christ-followers] may ultimately result in an isolated, culture-bound, immature, sectarian group which is unsure whether its true identity lies with Christianity or Islam”⁷⁸ Tennent agrees. He argues,

If these new believers are not encouraged to unite their fledgling faith with the faith of the church, then it is unlikely that these new believers will be able to properly reproduce the faith, which is the whole reason the C-5 strategy exists; namely, to reduce every possible barrier so that the gospel can more easily reproduce among Muslims.⁷⁹

Tennent also believes C5 communities have been influenced by the privatization of faith seen in Western individualistic ecclesiology. He believes C5 communities view an individual’s personal relationship with Christ as having greater importance than her or his connection with the universal body of Christ. He writes, “We cannot have a Christ-centered theology of mission which does not place the church at the center of Christ’s redemptive plan.”⁸⁰ Tennet sees it as “sub-

⁷⁶ Iskandar Tee, “Sidenotes on Insiders,” *St. Francis Magazine* 3, no. 3 (December 2007): 3.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Denis Green, “Guidlines from Hebrews for Contextualization,” in *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1989), 126-27.

⁷⁹ Tennent, “Followers of Jesus,” 111.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Christian” to not find practical ways to connect the local believer with the larger worshipping community.⁸¹

Phil Parshall, although not a proponent of C5, is in favor of homogenous churches. He believes that seekers and new believers need a safe place to learn about God. Going to homogenous churches, where worship forms are familiar and people are experiencing the same transformation and same struggles, gives Muslim background believers the spiritual support they need.⁸² Janssen agrees. He writes, “It’s hard for Christian background believers to understand the huge change in culture and religious thinking that happens when Muslims become followers of Jesus.”⁸³

Eric and Laura Adams, who have worked for more than twelve years among Muslims, believe that separate communities of Muslim background believers are preferable. They believe that if communities of Jesus-followers align too closely with the local Christian community, they will feel pressure to change to the worship practices of the traditional church, since the traditional church has been around longer and therefore must know the “correct” way to worship God. With these changes the Muslim community then begins to view Muslim followers of Christ as in

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Parshall, *New Paths*, 237.

⁸³ Brother Andrew and A. Janssen, *Secret Believers: What Happens When Muslims Believe in Christ* (Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 93.

alignment with the “infidel” culture. When this happens, the fellowship loses its ability to witness to the Muslim community.⁸⁴

Woodberry points out that although Muslim believers meet separately from the local church, they do see themselves as “brothers of the same faith” of Christians. Yet, Muslim believers recognize that if they follow the traditions of the Christian community, they will not be able to work with their own people group, since how Christians behave, dress, and eat is often offensive to the Muslim community. Many Muslim believers are of the opinion that they “must love [Christian background believers] 100 percent, but...must stay separate.”⁸⁵

Parshall points out that Protestants from the United States also consider it important to find a religious community where they feel at home. He writes,

An American may want to attend a church of a small denomination which has an outgoing, well-educated preacher; a pastor’s wife who is unobtrusive; a church covenant which denounces use of alcoholic beverages, makes no mention of movie attendance, takes a proinerrancy view of biblical authority, is eschatologically pretribulational, and it anticharismatic; a congregation made up of people in the upper middle class; a building with a lighted cross on top, well-kept lawns, and padded pews....Homogeneity is important to an American within his [or her] choice of community life. If he [or she] does not find a church that meets 75 percent of his [or her] desires, he [or she] will likely commute long distances so he [or she] can attend such a place of worship. If nothing is available, it is quite possible he [or she] will gather a like-minded group around him [or her] and start a new church!”⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Eric Adams and Laura Adams, "The Gathering of Reproducing Fellowships," in *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008), 148.

⁸⁵ J. Dudley Woodberry, "A Global Perspective on Muslims Coming to Faith in Christ," in *From the Straight Path to the Narrow Way: Journeys of Faith*, ed. David H. Greenlee (Waynesboro: Authentic Media), 22.

⁸⁶ Phil Parshall, *Beyond the Mosque: Christians within Muslim Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 160.

Although Parshall recognizes that the fragmentation of the universal fellowship of believers is not ideal and that worldwide unity of the body of Christ is a worthy goal, he also recognizes that this unity will likely take a great deal of time. He comments, "Even two Presbyterian or two Lutheran bodies negotiate for years before they can merge."⁸⁷

Woodberry believes that adjustments will need to be made on the side of the Muslim background community, as well as the Christian background community in order for there to be unity in the body of Christ.⁸⁸ Asad concurs, yet believes that the issue of unity in the universal body of Christ should not be addressed in the Muslim community until many Muslims have come to faith. He writes, "After scores of Muslims have subjected themselves to Christ in homogenous units, the process of discipleship should include an understanding of their relationship to other believers, not before."⁸⁹

Christian Background Believers Identifying as "Muslim"

A final issue of controversy is on the topic of whether or not outsiders should identify as Muslim in order to reach Muslims for Christ. Some have used 1 Corinthians 9 to argue that they should become a Muslim to the Muslims in order to win Muslims for Christ:⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁸⁸ Woodberry, "To the Muslim I Became a Muslim?" 18.

⁸⁹ Asad, "Rethinking," 141.

⁹⁰ Parshall, "Danger!" 404.

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.⁹¹

Yet most people who are sharing the gospel with Muslims, including those who are in favor of C5 contextualization, believe that it is not advisable for outsiders to identify as Muslim. Lewis writes, "No insider movement that I know of involves any Western Christians becoming Muslims, nor has ever recommended such practices."⁹²

The main argument against outsiders identifying as Muslim is that this can be seen as deceptive. Massey believes there is a difference between someone from a Muslim background becoming a believer and continuing to identify with the people of her or his heritage, and Christians assuming the identity of Muslim believers. Massey feels that outsiders should only identify as C4 (as "Followers of Jesus" who practice contextualized Islamic worship forms.) He believes that outsiders who identify as Muslim will look like frauds, or will mislead people into thinking they have converted to orthodox Islam.⁹³ A Westerner living in the Middle East who is married to a Muslim background believer comments, "I actually could legally identify as Muslim, since I am married to a Muslim man, but I do not feel that would

⁹¹ 1 Cor 9:19-23.

⁹² Lewis, "Inside Out," 37.

⁹³ Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity," 8.

be sending the right message. To say I am a Muslim would be interpreted as a conversion to all the rules of Islam. For my husband to declare himself Muslim is not making the same statement. He can say he is Muslim because he was born a Muslim."⁹⁴

Kevin Higgins, Executive Director of Global Teams, shares that he used to advocate for foreigners identifying as Muslim. He now rejects this idea, believing that it lacks integrity. When outsiders return to their home countries, they no longer identify as Muslim. They spend much of their time visiting Christian churches, and often receive their financial support from Christians. Higgins writes, "I do not think there are many non-Muslim-background Christians, whether western or national, who would pass the integrity test for claiming to be Muslim to Muslims."⁹⁵ Higgins also argues that Paul could say he was a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks because this was true for him. He was born a Jew, and he was also born into the Greek worldview, culture, and language. He could be a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks with absolute integrity.⁹⁶

Travis, who designed the C-Spectrum, comments that C5 was never intended to be an approach for foreigners.⁹⁷ He recommends the C4 approach for outsiders yet comments,

⁹⁴ Interview with a Westerner living in the Middle East, July 2, 2011.

⁹⁵ Kevin Higgins, "Encountering Muslim Resistance," in *Reaching the Resistant: Barriers and Bridges for Mission*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1998), 113.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁹⁷ Travis, "Messianic Muslim," 55.

I could imagine in some instances God may call uniquely gifted, well-prepared individuals, whose ministries are firmly backed by prayers, to C5 outreach and religious identity. These C5 missionaries would be Muslims in the literal Arabic sense of the word (i.e. “one submitted to God”) and their theology would, of course, differ from standard Muslim theology at a number of key points. They would have to be ready for persecution....If over time they made their beliefs clear, and the surrounding Muslim community chose to allow them to stay, should we not praise God for the opportunity they have to share the Good News in a place few would dare to tread?⁹⁸

Travis believes it is premature to condemn any effort to reach the Muslim world since relatively few Muslims have responded to the gospel message thus far. Yet, he feels converting to Islam has so many theological and cultural complications that this choice is unwise for the typical foreigner.⁹⁹

Summary

John Travis writes,

If perhaps the single greatest hindrance to seeing Muslims come to faith in Christ is not a theological one (i.e., accepting Jesus as Lord) but rather one of culture and religious identity (i.e., having to leave the community of Islam), it seems that for the sake of God’s kingdom much of our missiological energy should be devoted to seeking a path whereby Muslims can remain Muslims, yet live as true followers of the Lord Jesus.¹⁰⁰

A growing number of believers in the Muslim world are choosing to retain their Muslim identity as believers in Christ.¹⁰¹ This chapter has shown that many Muslim believers are uncomfortable identifying as “Christian” because of the unhelpful connotations that come with that title. Winters points out that identifying

⁹⁸ Travis, “Must All Muslims,” 413.

⁹⁹ Travis, “Messianic Muslim,” 55.

¹⁰⁰ Travis, “Must All Muslims,” 414-15.

¹⁰¹ Medearis, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus*, 964.

as “Christian” does not guarantee that a community has orthodox beliefs.¹⁰² The same is true for those who identify as “Muslim.” There is a wide spectrum of beliefs that fall under the category of “Muslim.” Some Muslims even consider themselves to be atheists. Dutch argues that there is space within such a wide spectrum of beliefs for Muslims who follow Jesus.¹⁰³

As shown in this chapter, the early church was dealing with a similar issue. In Acts 15, the Jerusalem council decided that Gentile believers did not need to become religiously Jewish in order to be followers of Jesus. They could remain culturally Greek and still be a part of the Kingdom of God. In the same way, the Muslim does not need to become culturally Christian in order to be a part of the Kingdom of God.¹⁰⁴

Yet not everyone is in favor of Muslim background believers retaining their Muslim identity. One of the main arguments against C5 communities is that Islamic beliefs are incompatible with allegiance to Jesus, and that it lacks integrity for Muslims to continue identifying as Muslim when their core confession is not in alignment to the confession of Islam.¹⁰⁵ Proponents of C5 fellowships argue that the Muslim community understands the word “Muslim” to be all encompassing of lifestyle, culture, and theology. To be deviant theologically is only a small piece of what it means to be Muslim. On the whole, Muslim believers see themselves as

¹⁰² Winter, "Going Far Enough?" 671.

¹⁰³ Dutch, "Should Muslims Become 'Christians'?" 18.

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, "Insider Movements," 675.

¹⁰⁵ Tennent, "Followers of Jesus," 107.

“Muslim,” even when their theology is aberrant.¹⁰⁶ Opponents to C5 are not in agreement. They believe that, although difficult, theological belief can be separated from culture.¹⁰⁷ It seems wise to allow Muslim believers to determine, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, how they would like to define “Muslim.”¹⁰⁸

A second argument against believers identifying as Muslim is that they are dangerously close to syncretism. Proponents of C5 communities agree that steps should be put into place to guard against syncretism. Some of these include emphasizing that there is no salvation outside of Christ, encouraging believers to meet regularly with other believers and read their Bibles. New believers should show signs of the fruits of the spirit and be actively praying, and witnessing to others in their community.¹⁰⁹

A final argument against C5 communities is that they are inappropriately separated from the local and universal fellowship of believers. They believe separation from the greater body of Christ may result in isolated and immature believers, and that unity of the body of believers should be taken more seriously.¹¹⁰ Proponents of C5 communities believe that although Muslim followers of Christ see Christian followers of Christ as their brothers and sisters, they should remain separate so as to create an environment that meets the particular needs of the

¹⁰⁶ Massey, "God's Amazing Diversity," 8.

¹⁰⁷ Brogden, "Inside Out," 36.

¹⁰⁸ Travis, "Messianic Muslim," 53.

¹⁰⁹ Travis, "Must All Muslims," 414.

¹¹⁰ Green, "Guidlines from Hebrews," 126-27.

Muslim background community.¹¹¹ Asad believes that issues of unity in the Church should only be addressed when large numbers of Muslims have come to faith.¹¹²

A last issue addressed in this chapter is whether or not Christian background believers should identify as Muslim. Most believe that this is not advisable,¹¹³ but Travis asserts that, in certain cases, God might use well-prepared individuals in such a way.¹¹⁴

Dutch believes that once there are large numbers of people from the Muslim background following Christ, issues concerning believers continuing to identify as “Muslim” will be irrelevant. He comments,

I believe...the Muslim background church will eventually grow so large and have such a powerful vitality that Muslim society will no longer be able to contain it. The early church could not be contained within Judaism; similarly the Muslim background church will eventually break out from Muslim society to form its own distinct community. When this happens, God will be seen triumphantly extending [God’s] reign among precious Muslim people everywhere. Concerns about the early believers retaining a Muslim identity will be a thing of history as we behold the greatness of God’s kingdom fully established among them.¹¹⁵

Until that time, it is likely that local believers will continue to grapple over the important issue of Muslim identity. As Travis writes, “C5 is neither the greatest nor the only thing God is doing in the Muslim world, but it is something about which we

¹¹¹ Adams and Adams, “The Gathering of Reproducing Fellowships,” 148.

¹¹² Asad, “Rethinking,” 141.

¹¹³ Lewis, “Inside Out”, 37; Massey, “God’s Amazing Diversity,” 8; and Higgins, “Encountering Muslim Resistance,” 113.

¹¹⁴ Travis, “Must All Muslims,” 413.

¹¹⁵ Dutch, “Should Muslims Become ‘Christians’?” 24.

must know, rejoice, and pray.”¹¹⁶ Yet as Massey points out, “Some, instead of praying for the protection and fruitful labors of those involved in C4-C5 [communities], judge them.”¹¹⁷ Alternatively, the believing community ought to do as Travis and Parshall suggest: “Let us...live out faith in Christ according to our own conscience and calling, blessing others whose calling may differ from ours. May we rejoice in all the ways God is calling Muslims to himself through Jesus the Savior”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Travis, “Messianic Muslim,” 53-54.

¹¹⁷ Massey, “God’s Amazing Diversity,” 10.

¹¹⁸ John Travis, Anna Travis, and with Phil Parshall, “Factors Affecting the Identity That Jesus-Followers Choose,” in Woodberry, *From Seed to Fruit*, 205.

Conclusion

Through the incarnation, Jesus entered the world, became flesh, and took on the language and culture of a specific people group. In the same way, as the gospel message has entered new parts of the world, it has taken on the “flesh” of each new nation.¹ This “enfleshing” of the gospel is known as contextualization. It is important that in the Muslim world, the gospel takes on Muslim “flesh.” This begins with contextualized communication of the gospel message.² Practitioners have discovered that

It is not the Gospel that has been rejected, for who could honestly reject the God of all creation taking on the form of a Servant to bear upon himself the penalty for our sins? Instead, it is the way the message is proclaimed or the culture in which the message is wrapped that prompts resistance....Effective practitioners keep looking for new ways to present the timeless Gospel, so that by all means they might save some.³

Once local Muslims respond to the good news of Christ, these national believers are the best resource for reaching the larger community. Bernard Dutch writes, “I believe that our best hope for reaching the vast Muslim populations of the world is to plant flourishing churches of Muslim background believers who remain culturally relevant to Muslim society.”⁴ It is these Muslim believers who will be able influence large numbers of Muslims to come to faith in Christ. They are the ones

¹ David Garrison and Seneca Garrison, “Factors That Facilitate Fellowships Becoming Movements,” in *From Seed to Fruit: Global Trends, Fruitful Practices, and Emerging Issues among Muslims*, ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008), 210.

² Ibid., 212.

³ Ibid., 218.

⁴ Bernard Dutch, “Should Muslims Become ‘Christians’?” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 17, no. 1 (January-March 2000): 15.

who can best communicate the good new to their family and friends.⁵ Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and scripture, local believers are able to naturally contextualize the gospel in their culture. It is the local community who is best equipped to determine the worship forms that “fit” in the Muslim world. The believing community might decide that praying formal prayers at set times during the day is an honoring way for Muslim believers to worship God. They might choose to use the Qur’an as a bridge to share the biblical message of Christ with their friends and family. The key is that the local community is active in making these decisions.

Then, as these small networks of unprofessional, unassuming believers live out the good news the Kingdom begins to grow, like yeast throughout the community. These local witnessing communities are the hope for the Muslim world. May this be the generation that sees large numbers of people from the Muslim background come to know the love of God and be transformed to the image of Christ.

⁵ Garrison and Garrison, "Factors," 213.

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