



Bridging the Divide 2015 Consultation Report

Finalized June 25, 2015

Over thirty of us gathered as brothers and sisters in Christ to discuss the critical issues before us. Participants included field practitioners and scholars from various contexts.

We gathered for the purpose of "Bridging the Divide" over the differences related to ministry practices in the Muslim world. In an environment of prayer, worship, Bible study, vigorous discussion and personal relationships we gathered together to listen to each other, to find areas of agreement and explore areas of disagreement.

A significant number of us were brothers from Muslim backgrounds. Hearing from them was an essential and vital gift in our discussions. We are continuing to learn from our interaction with each other how to relate graciously with one another, regardless of our very different personal experiences and convictions.

With help from gifted scholars, we focused on issues of integrity, ecclesiology, and Christology as they pertain to ministry to Muslims in different parts of the world.

At the end of our time together we reached broad consensus on the following:

General issues of agreement

- Trying to address these issues in simple ways almost always results in oversimplifying and misrepresentations. We need to accept the complexity and messiness and need for nuanced discussions.
- Given the complexity of the issues and the wide variety of contexts, a diversity of approaches is to be expected.
- Instead of 'copy and paste' approaches to ministry we need to adjust our strategy to each unique context.
- One of the values in which we continue to grow is modeling mutual respect while engaging in vigorous discussion and debate.
- We were enriched by the respectful debate between two scholars with differing views of appropriate interpretation and engagement with the Qur'an and other Islamic source documents.

- We were encouraged by a report from our Ethiopian brothers that potentially divisive translation issues had been very cordially resolved in a way that met everyone's concerns and enhanced the potential for evangelistic and discipleship progress going forward.
- We agree that our core identity is in Christ. We need to explore further the degree to which identity markers that distinguish a person as "inside" a given community and integral to it are socio-cultural as much as religious, and ways those markers may vary from one context to another.
- It is critical to address spiritual warfare and demonic issues in all local believing communities. We need further discussion of the spiritual powers that may underlie certain religious practices and their manifestations.
- Persecution and suffering for Christ are part of the calling and history of the church, and by his grace we should not compromise our faith as followers of Christ to avoid it. We also acknowledge that the Scriptures demonstrate, and our Lord said, that there are times to avoid persecution and flee.
- Women's ministry presents unique challenges in most Muslim contexts and requires greater attention by the local and global communities. We regret that women were under-represented at this year's gathering.
- Muslims from all peoples need a saving knowledge of and relationship with Jesus Christ. We are committed to discipleship toward mature biblical faith and Christ-likeness in community.

General issues of on-going differences

- We differ over the extent of the gap between Islam and biblical faith.
- We have different tolerances for ongoing ambiguity in our view of Islam and corresponding ministry strategy.
- Two years ago BtD participants came to consensus about the *Shahada*.
 - *BtD 2013 -- Shahada:*
 - --We do not encourage the recitation of the *Shahada* by followers of Christ, but we empathize with and offer prayerful support to those living under sustained pressure or duress.
 - --We discussed the harmful spiritual dimensions associated with any confessed allegiance in opposition to Christ.
- This year's interaction demonstrated that there is still a need for continuing discussion on how the *Shahada* is understood in certain contexts.
- We heard a scholar of Islamic studies strongly affirm that human beings could not be saved if it were not for the fact that Christ is both divine and human and that God is Triune. He also affirmed that these biblical truths are essential for spiritual growth and sustainability of movements. Some movements are struggling with understanding, embracing, and communicating these biblical teachings in their contexts. We need to pray, offer resources, and do further work together to address these concerns.

Consensus on issues related to integrity in ministry

- Before we suggest that certain practices lack integrity we should first seek to clarify through personal relationship, understanding of the context and the likely perceived meaning in the local community.
- Understanding the local context is essential in making financial decisions. Unwise use of outside resources has caused much damage to some emerging communities of faith. The best resource for appropriate accountability is trusted partners from within the local context.

Areas of on-going differences related to integrity in ministry

- Some perceive that there is a core Islam in the original documents and yet we observe that Islam has evolved into a variety of expressions. We differ as to which has greater weight.
- Does saying the *Shahada* always carry a dangerous spiritual covenant; can it be recited with integrity with a new meaning; or can it function as simply a respectful cultural practice in some contexts?
- We understand some words differently, such as “Muslim” -- to what extent are we using them as legal, theological, religious, or cultural terms?
- We understand the categories “culture” and “religion” in different ways.

Consensus on issues related to ecclesiology

- The issues involved in discipling new believers from Muslim backgrounds and their relationship to their social and religious context are complex. Discipleship often requires a lengthy process and assistance from the believing community.
- The church as the people of God is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God
- Having a clear idea of essential elements of a biblical *ekklesia* (church) greatly helps in integrating believers from Muslim background into the Body of Christ. An example being:
A biblical *ekklesia* is a group of Jesus’ followers having an identity as a church (*ekklesia*) who gather together regularly on an ongoing basis, with recognized leadership under the headship of Christ, to worship God and encourage one another in obeying all his commands including baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These local communities should be in communion with the wider body of Christ (local, world-wide and historical).
- The creation and nurture of networks is helpful for building unity between different expressions of church.
- For various reasons, congregations in diverse contexts are finding ways to identify themselves without using the common local term for “church,” but are still finding ways to relate to already existing churches.
- Ministries of compassion done by a “Jesus following” community are a sign of the kingdom of God and give glory to God.
- We agree that we need to draw on the history of the church as we build towards the future.