Understanding Movements

Seeing Inside Insider Missiology:
Exploring our Theological Lenses and Presuppositions

by Leonard N. Bartlotti

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As a scholar-practitioner, when I hear reports of movements of "Muslim followers of Christ" who retain their socio-religious identity "inside" the Muslim community, I find myself rejoicing within a zone of ambiguity. Annoying questions sometimes pop the effervescent bubbles of excitement over Muslims "following Jesus." The cacophony of voices exuberantly affirming or stridently objecting to this "new thing" in the Islamic world suggests that I am not alone in my intellectual quandary.[1]

Part of my caution is based on my experience that some reports of insider movements appear to slide from the "descriptive" (what is, what appears, or what is said to be happening among Muslims *deus ex machina,* so-called "Jesus movements" attributable to sovereign acts of God) to the "prescriptive" (what could or should be modeled or allowed to happen elsewhere). Biblical, cultural, and historical rationales are then marshaled to defend, affirm, encourage, or endorse the rights and pioneering (some would say, aberrant, heterodox) practices and understandings of local believers and/or their defenders, promoters, and "alongsiders."

Counterbalancing these doubts is the fact that this is truly great news! New communities of faith are springing up within a religio-cultural sphere that historically has seemed impervious to biblical faith. Innovative expressions of what it means to follow Jesus are being forged on the edges of the Kingdom of God.

I began to ask myself, "Why, then, am I reacting to these reports?" "Why is it so hard to accept some of the legitimizing arguments and missiological rationale for insider movements?" "What is really going on here—in their thinking, and in mine?"

I am no stranger to the challenges of gospel contextualization and theologizing in a global context. My family and I served fourteen years in a sensitive Islamic context. I strove to overcome barriers and explored bridges to communication.

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This is because, on closer examination, insider missiology itself isn't saying one thing; it is saying many things.

I have seen firsthand the challenges and dangers Muslims face in "following Jesus" in communities of faith (fellowships, house churches) that aspire to both biblical *faithfulness* and cultural *fit*. I empathize with the desire to remain "inside" pre-existing social networks, and appreciate the gospel potential of what McGavran famously called the "bridges of God" (2005 [1955]).

Nevertheless, the way insider missiology has been framed and promoted raised unsettling questions in my mind. Finally, I realized that I was not reacting to one thing, but to many things.

This is because, on closer examination, insider missiology itself is not saying one thing; it is saying many things. Like a fiber optic cable, multiple theological "strands" have been bundled together to present what appears to be a singular case for biblical faith and Jesus community "inside" Muslim identity, networks, and community. This complicates theological assessment.

Similarly, for observers, one's own presuppositions function like ocular lenses, or visual and photographic filters. These, too, affect the intensity, color, and clarity of the light and the resulting image.

Thus, for proponents and critics alike, our presuppositions or background beliefs affect what they *say* and what we *see* when we assess insider movements or evaluate similar attempts to apply the biblical text to new contexts.

I realized that if we can identify these presuppositions—the background understandings on which insider missiology appears to be grounded, or by which it is being judged—we may be in a better position to examine each assumption from a biblical, theological, and missiological perspective. Rather than accepting, or rejecting, insider missiology outright or *in toto*, we can explore a range of possible understandings of each associated concept. Then, in a spirit of biblical truth-seeking and evangelical collegiality, we may discern truth and error, explore alternative understandings, and advance the theory and praxis of frontier mission.

What are some of the lenses, filters, and theological presuppositions that affect what we see when we look inside and evaluate insider movements?

This paper proposes that there are at least nine alternative lenses by which we can see "inside" insider movements and assess insider missiology and its nexus of associated theories and praxis. The beliefs and assumptions associated with each concept raise questions, highlight issues and problems, and provide an opportunity for biblical and missiological reflection and evangelical dialogue. The nine lenses are:

1. Ecclesiology
2. Authority
3. Culture
4. Pneumatology
5. History
6. Doing Theology
7. Other Religions
8. Islam
9. Conversion-Initiation

Admittedly, the nine subject areas are broad, and entire books have been written about each one of them. It will not be possible to explore these themes in any detail. We shall touch upon only those dimensions that shed light on diverse approaches to Muslim contextualization, and that suggest some additional lines of inquiry and dialogue to advance our understanding of insider missiology and insider movements.

Sincere Christians hold a range of views on each concept, and each functions as an evaluative criterion. Thus, viewed singly or taken together, the lenses or filters help us evaluate insider missiology along a spectrum—a decidedly biblical and evangelical (rather than deviant or heterodox) spectrum of faith and practice.

At the first Bridging the Divide Consultation (Houghton, NY, June 2011), participants were encouraged to reflect on their own position along the spectrum of understandings for each issue. They then discussed how their own position, ecclesiastical tradition, views, or presuppositions on each issue affected their critique, positive or negative, of insider movements. The presentation (humorously dubbed "Len's Lenses") drew an enthusiastic response, and more importantly, facilitated robust interaction.

The utility of this conceptual approach is itself based on three interrelated assumptions:

Assumption 1: There are boundaries of orthodox biblical truth, and sincere Christians can and do hold differing positions within these explicit or implicit endpoint boundaries.

Assumption 2: Believers and groups may be described as holding positions weighted to the right or left of a presumed mid-point on each issue. That is, the scale is not so much "1-10" (from least to most extreme) as "Plus 1-5" or "Minus 1-5" around a near-consensual midpoint: -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3 +4 +5

Assumption 3: Positioning oneself on the broad spectrum is first a reflective and descriptive exercise, not an evaluative one. The suggested starting point is not to judge oneself or another as right or wrong, but to understand how a given position affects how and what one might "see."

As you look at insider movements through each of the following lenses

or filters, consider how these lenses—your underlying beliefs about each issue—affect how you *see* insider movements and assess insider missiology: *"Where am I on the evangelical spectrum of faith and practice?"*

Lens 1: Ecclesiology

Word • Sacraments • Discipline • Order • Leadership • Pauline Emphasis

—or—

Word • Spirit • Two or Three Gathered • Simple Church • Synoptic Jesus Emphasis

A major theological presupposition of insider theory and praxis involves ecclesiology. Certain understandings of what it means to be and do "church" are used to promote or defend developing faith communities in Islamic contexts.

At the minimalist end of the ecclesiological spectrum, insider advocates emphasize the spiritual and ecclesial DNA within even the smallest communal structure: "For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst" (Mt 18:20 NASB). In this view of church, believers who gather around the Word and the Spirit of Christ have essentially all they need to grow and develop in faith, practice, Christlikeness, and witness.

This side of the spectrum values simplicity, freedom, informality, and a synoptic "Jesus style" somewhat removed from Pauline theologizing and complexities, but not removed from Pauline dynamics. Similar to the Radical Reformation as described by Haight (2005, 218ff.), the emphasis to carry the movement forward is on small voluntary groups, meetings in houses, diverse low-level leaders, and vibrant inner faith—rather than on superimposed concepts, structures, and organization. They share the vision of Roland Allen's *Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (1997 [1927]) and raise similar questions: *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (2010 [1912]).

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At the other end of the spectrum, traditional Reformation ecclesiology, and its Evangelical derivatives, values the Word rightly preached and the sacraments or ordinances (Lord's Supper and Baptism) rightly administered. Additional criteria include church order, discipline, and approved leadership (official, trained, certified, or ordained), within the more textured ecclesiology usually associated with Paul (e.g., 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians). Moving toward the pole, the "Eucharistic Ecclesiology" of Lutheran, Catholic, and Orthodox theology positions the Lord's Supper at the heart of the church; the Eucharist is the center of the Spirit's action for the transformation of both the elements and the people (McPartlan, 1995, 8-9).

There are many historical precedents linking gospel breakthrough with ecclesial tensions. The religious energy of the sixteenth-century Reformation resulted in new ecclesial structures, with their own views of church polity, doctrine, spirituality, practice, and engagement with society. According to Littell (1964), for dissenting Anabaptists, the real issue was not the act of baptism, but "a bitter and irreducible struggle between two mutually exclusive concepts of the church" (quoted in Haight, 2005, 223).

At the heart of the Wesleyan Movement was a desire to experience true spiritual transformation in Christ. Importantly, "perfect love" for God and others was to be worked out in community, leading to the classes, bands, or societies of early Methodism. The early nineteenth-century Restoration Movement advocated abandoning formal denominationalism, creeds, and traditions altogether, in favor of practices modeled solely on the pattern of the New Testament church.

As Benjamin Hegeman observes, *ecclesia* is used in six different ways in the New Testament; various models of church may be associated with differences in governance, models of worship, and "joints and ligaments" (Col 2:19) to hold it together: universal (Mt 16:18), global (Eph 3:10), national (Gal 1:2), regional (Acts 9:31), urban (Acts 8:1), and household (Rom 16:5). Hegeman notes that liturgical churches (following a "Temple worship" model) are least attractive to Muslim followers of Christ, but "ironically, new African initiated churches find that model most attractive" (Hegeman, personal communication, May 22, 2012). Yet churches in Iran and Algeria follow patterns that Western and Middle Eastern churches would recognize, such as styles of worship, buildings, home groups, and so on.

Whichever side we lean toward, our heritage, understanding, and experience of "church" may affect our assessment of "insider" communities of faith.

Lens 2: Authority

Scripture • Apostolic Teaching and Ministries • Outside Resourcing

—or—

Scripture • Local Believers • Local Decisions

A second lens through which to view and assess insider missiology and movements involves the related concept of authority. By this I mean the processes and influences by which decisions are made in a pioneer context. "Who decides?" and how are decisions made related to biblical faithfulness and cultural fit?

Theoretically, the answer is local believers. However, one need simply revisit the missiological discussions surrounding the words "contextualization," "indigenization," and "inculturation" to appreciate the nuances involved. Early literature on contextualization was faulted for overemphasizing the role of the missionary in the contextualization process. Today, there is welcome sensitivity to issues of *power* and *process*.

The current emphasis on insider dynamics and movements represents a pendulum swing in the opposite direction: the processes of biblical decision-making and local theologizing lie in the local community. Local believers make local decisions based on their own understanding, however limited at the time: "Give them the Bible and the Spirit, and leave them alone—they'll work it out!"

Those on the other side do not deny this as a goal, or diminish this expression of the "priesthood of all believers." All would recognize that local assemblies are in *process* toward maturation. But the *relationship* with missionaries, teachers, and other representatives of the wider Body of Christ, while not essential, is validated as biblical and "apostolic."

Similarly, Scripture is the final authority on both sides of the spectrum. But one side tends to emphasize the local *discovery and application* of biblical truth, and the other, the *discernment and impartation* of biblical truth by those who embody the teaching ministry of the church.

This is not a matter of mere pedagogy, for both approaches utilize discovery methods of teaching. In reality, the underlying presuppositions involve understandings of the degree to which, and the manner by which, the church in this generation, through its apostolate to the nations, functions as a faithful "steward of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1) and "contends earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude 3).

The other side of the spectrum draws its energy and very identity from apostolic mandates to "Command and teach these things" (Col 4:11), "Preach the Word … correct, rebuke and encourage … discharge all the duties of your ministry" (2 Tim 4:2-5). "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present every one perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy which so powerfully works in me" (Col 1:28-29).

Interestingly, in one Asian context, local believers responded indignantly to what they considered a condescending notion: that they did *not* need outside teaching and resources (e.g., books and teaching on the Ancient Near East, social background of the NT, church history, councils, doctrinal disputes, etc.). Outside resources were considered assets for growth and local decision-making about contextual issues.

In one Asian context, local believers responded indignantly.

In another context, a leader who works extensively with Muslim background believers described his experience at a recent meeting:

> As we discussed I began with the Apostles Creed. One leader said "this is wonderful, someone has already done this for us. When was this written?" I was overjoyed by his embrace but saddened that after so many years (of his) working with other expats and western agencies that this basic biblical and historical creed was not a foundation stone to his faith! He had never heard of it. We googled it together so he could understand its value and the importance of being tied to the historic faith.[2]

As we affirm Scripture as the final authority for faith and practice, to what degree does the local decision-making process involve elders in the faith as teachers *cum* advisers, and welcome the wisdom of the historic and global church?

Lens 3: Culture

Christ *against* •
Christ *over* or *in paradox with*

—or—

Christ *of* •
Christ *transforming*

A third lens by which to view insider missiology involves understandings of the relationship between the gospel and culture. Richard Niebuhr's seminal typology, *Christ and Culture* (1956), sets out five positions: Christ "against" culture, "over" or "in paradox with" culture, "of" culture, or "transforming" culture. He enriches the discussion with a range of historical examples from every period of Christian history.

While there are clear weaknesses in Niebuhr's schema,[3] for the purposes of this paper, the typology provides another useful way to view insider missiology. Insider followers of Christ—who talk or pray (in Jesus' Name) in mosques and wear a Muslim cultural identity—follow the Christ "of" culture who eats with "tax collectors and sinners" and who sparks what some advocates consider an "insider" Messianic movement when conversing with a woman at the well in Samaria. Insider proponents emphasize the *continuity* of socio-religious identity as one follows Christ and lives out biblical faith in a given context.

These kinds of "Jesus movements" are viewed hopefully as "salt and light" transforming culture—*including* the constituent socio-religious structures and/or social networks—from *within.* Gospel meaning can be ascribed to and co-exist within virtually any form, including religious forms, except those that specifically contradict Scripture. Meaning is negotiated by the local believer in his or her context.

The objective is for believers to remain in the social role and networks in which they were called and to transform this context from within. Using Acts 15 as a hermeneutical guide and paradigm, Gentiles do not have to be circumcised and become Jews. Rather, "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" (I Cor 7:20 KJV), sacrificially serving family and community. All become the best possible fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers, sisters, and citizens of their community, embodying not only biblical ideals, but also the highest social and spiritual aspirations of their people and culture—in Jesus' Name.

Critics of insider movements and missiology propose an alternative view of culture. They would not say that they are against transformation; nor are they unengaged with Muslims as people. Rather, their critiques emphasize the extent to which "false" understandings permeate every dimension of Islamic religion and Muslim culture. Sin and Satan have defiled and distorted the hearts and minds, understandings of God, social relationships, practices and structures of Islam—and every other socio-cultural and religious expression of humankind—at the deepest level. Properly understood on their own terms, Islam and biblical faith are simply incompatible.

Following Christ, then, involves a *radical break* with the past; regeneration and sanctification through the sacrifice and Spirit of Christ inevitably "rescue[] us from the dominion of darkness" and bring us "into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13-14).

The way forward is far more complex than either proponents or critics of insider missiology have acknowledged.

Importantly, this "rescue" has visible and dramatic *social* consequences beyond an inner conversion of heart and worldview or an ethical change, viz. a *new social identity.* As universally understood by social scientists, identities by definition are constructed, reconstituted, negotiated, and contested vis-à-vis the "Other." For insider critics, following Christ means a rejection, not retention, of Islam as embedded within Muslim cultures. Most markers of "Islamic" identity are eschewed, in favor of a new identity in Christ and with His people that is visible, if not always socially viable without persecution. "However, if you suffer as a Christian"—the word is a term of derision used as a socio-linguistic marker—"do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:16).

Fortunately, we do not have to choose one or another of Niebuhr's types. The way forward is far more complex than either proponents or critics of insider missiology have acknowledged. According to contemporary critiques, Niebuhr's construction of "culture" (as in "Christ against culture") lacks an appreciation of the multiple issues, dynamics and groups operating within cultural settings, and of the way individuals negotiate their own multiple identities and contest them within social groups.

Thus, D. A. Carson emphasizes, our understanding of the relation between Christ and culture is contextually shaped; and it depends, in part, on "the concrete historical circumstances in which Christians find themselves" (2008, 65). There is no single model. Christians shaped by Scripture, "who are taking their cue (and thus their worldview) from outside the dominant culture, not only shape and form a Christian culture recognizably different from that in which it is embedded but also become deeply committed to enhancing the whole" (Carson, 2008, 143-44).

Therefore, one agenda for insiders, observers, and alongsiders of "Jesus Movements" in Islamic contexts is a thoroughgoing exploration of biblical and historical models of the relation between the gospel and culture.

Lens 4: Pneumatology

Spirit-appointed Leadership • Sacraments and Channels of Grace • Disciplined Growth • "Wind"

—or—

Spirit-anointed Leadership • Sovereignty of Spirit • Spontaneous Expansion • "Rushing Mighty Wind"

A fourth theological presupposition of insider missiology involves an understanding of pneumatology, the work of the Holy Spirit. Advocates defend insider movements as a unique work of the Holy Spirit in our day. Sometimes Christian witness and teaching is not present. The Spirit is sovereignly using a variety of means to lead Muslims to Christ—from signs, wonders, dreams, and visions, to references to "Isa al-Masih" (Jesus Christ) in the Qur'an.

What we are witnessing, then, is a Spirit-inspired movement to Christ, the "rushing mighty wind" of the Book of Acts, resulting in the spontaneous expansion of the church. Yes, it's messy and may appear chaotic to outsiders, but give it time. Trust the irrepressible Lordship of the Spirit, and surely things will eventually work out. "The Counselor, the

Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26). "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

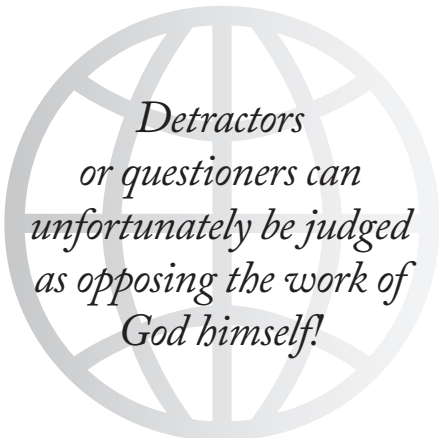
In this, as with early champions of the Charismatic movement in Roman Catholic and Conciliar denominations in the 1960s and 1970s, we hear echoes of the compulsion that took the Apostle Peter across cultural frontiers: "And the Spirit bade me go with them" (Acts 11:12 KJV). Indeed, one of the contributions of insider missiology is a strong, prophetic call for the church to discern, embrace, and rejoice in the "out of the box" and "out of the Temple" work of the Spirit of God in the hearts and lives of tens of thousands of our Muslim cousins in Abrahamic faith.

Confronted with indicators of true faith in Isa al-Masih in the lives of Muslims,[4] detractors or questioners unfortunately can be judged as opposing the work of God himself! Likened to Judaizers in the Book of Acts, these doubters are said to be hindering Gentiles from coming to Christ "by faith alone," apart from the religious accoutrements associated with "Christianity" as we know it.

The argument is that, if God is doing a new thing, then of course "we" (usually meaning anyone not directly familiar with the persons or situation involved) do not understand it and do not know "them." Thus, we do not have the right to criticize what is happening. Neither the "home base" nor any outsider should hamper field initiatives or innovation. Nor do we have the right to "impose" (the verb is pejorative, backed by sensitivities to and resentment of power dynamics) "our views" on "them" (who must remain anonymous for security reasons, and whom we must protect from outside interference).

Leaving aside the hints of independence and dysfunctional social dynamics in church-mission relations, other theological assumptions are at work. Concerned observers at the opposite end rightly emphasize that Spirit-appointed leaders are also "gifts" to the Body of Christ: "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12 NASB). Leadership and ministry are spiritual gifts given by God.

In this broad view of the Spirit's work, gifted leaders, sacraments (ordinances), and the variegated wisdom of the church through the ages, including the rich spiritual insights of non-Western churches, are channels of grace to every part of the Body of Christ.



Thus, insider advocates must also recognize that to minimize these potential avenues of spiritual growth is to risk "quenching" the Holy Spirit, the voices of prophets and teachers, and the "word of wisdom" through His people. The disciplines of 1 and 2 Corinthians and the "wind" blowing through the Pastoral Epistles are no less "spiritual" than the "mighty rushing wind" and rapid growth in the Book of Acts. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

At all points along the spectrum, believers are more or less comfortable with certain aspects of the workings of the Spirit. The challenge for everyone is to have "ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7).

Lens 5: History

Spirit Active throughout History
• Church's Wisdom (Theologies, Creeds, Councils) •
Faithfulness • "Faith Once Delivered"

—or—

Spirit Active Now in Local Context
• New Insights & Expressions •
Freedom • "A New Thing"

One's understanding of culture and the work of the Spirit are interrelated with Lens 5, presuppositions involving history. As suggested in Lens 4, insider proponents have an optimistic, open-ended view of God at work in human history by His Spirit.

The emphasis, however, is on the activity of the Spirit in the "now," in our day. Insider movements are thought to represent a *kairos* moment in two ways: (1) at the *macro* level, in the history of the Muslim-Christian encounter (usually contrasted with polemical, hostile, or hopeful but largely ineffective evangelistic endeavors of the past); and (2) at the *micro* level, gospel breakthroughs in specific local Muslim contexts (sometimes in contrast with decades or centuries of perceived unfruitfulness or resistance). New expressions of the faith are springing up in what was rocky ground.

Appealing again to the historic Jerusalem Council, advocates report insider movements as a breakthrough on par with the gospel breaking out from its Jewish soil into the Hellenistic cultural sphere. Here, too, Acts 15 is used as a template and "globalizing hermeneutic" (Strong and Strong, 2006) to argue that Muslim followers of Jesus should have the same freedom as Gentiles

to retain their socio-religious identity and live out their faith with minimal cultural imposition from other "Christians" (Judaizers?). "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:19).

But history is a two-edged sword. Without imputing authority to tradition, cautious observers argue that the Spirit has been active throughout the history of the church, as represented for example in the historic creeds, confessions, and traditions of the Christian faith. Thus, even notoriously independent evangelicals retain the Nicene Creed as a plumb line of orthodoxy, while affirming with the Westminster Confession that Scripture is "the only infallible rule of faith and practice." Faithfulness to the "faith once delivered to the saints" is the primary evaluative criterion.

What is important to recognize is that both sides use history, but in different ways. One side of the spectrum uses history to argue that diversity, heterodoxy, and the danger of syncretism are *normal*—a natural consequence of the messy-but-mighty expansion of the Christian faith across cultural boundaries. The *fact* of theological heterodoxy, and its *cultural* roots, are justification for tolerance today.

The other side uses history to defend orthodoxy (as represented in the Western theological tradition) as *normative*—in the face of the slippery slope of syncretism, cultural relativism, and the dreaded "H" word ("Heresy") perceived in some of the principles and practices of the insider approach.

Bosch (1991, 485) summons us to humility:

> Humility also means showing respect for our forebears in the faith, for what they have handed down to us, even if we have reason to be acutely embarrassed by their racist, sexist, and imperialist bias. The point is that we have no guarantees that we shall do any better than they did ... We delude ourselves if we believe that we can be respectful to other faiths only if we disparage our own.

This shift has theological implications. No longer do Westerners sit alone at the theological table or dominate the discussion.

Lens 6: Doing Theology

Universal Truths • Western Theological Tradition • "Pilgrim Principle"

—or—

Local (Contextual) Theologies • Theologies from Majority World Church • "Indigenizing Principle"

A sixth lens for viewing insider movements is suggested by my earlier comments on the use of history, and perhaps is best encapsulated in the title of Timothy Tennent's book (2007), *Doing Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology*. Christianity is a global movement. Secularization, the decline of Christendom in the West, and the concurrent growth of the church in the non-Western world, have led to a shift in the center of gravity of Christian faith to the Global South, where the majority of today's Christians now live.

This demographic shift has theological implications. No longer do Westerners sit alone at the theological table or dominate the discussion. But as Tennent observes, "The Western church has not yet fully absorbed how the dramatic shifts in global Christianity are influencing what constitutes normative Christianity" (2007, xviii). "The universal truths of the Gospel are being revisited and retold in new, global contexts" (2007, 2). Tennent calls this process "theological translatability," which he defines as "the ability of the kerygmatic essentials of the Christian faith to be discovered and restated within an infinite number of new global contexts" (2007, 16).

Accordingly, some of the difficulty discussing matters of Muslim contextualization appears to arise from tensions in the way various parties conceive of "doing theology" in the twenty-first century. In the well-known words of Andrew Walls (1996, 7-9), the missionary movement in history involves a tension between two principles: the "pilgrim principle" and the "indigenizing principle." The pilgrim principle is the "universalizing force of the gospel," which provides a common "adoptive past" and identity that transcends the particularities of the local, associating them with people and things outside their cultural sphere. The indigenizing principle is the particular force of the gospel as it impacts and takes root within specific cultures, enabling followers of Christ to be at home with their group and context (see also Tennent, 2007, 1-24).

Those who lean toward the insider side of the spectrum seem more comfortable with the move toward "local (or "contextual") theologies" as one aspect of the inculturation of the gospel in particular contexts (see Schreiter, 1985, 1-21). Schreiter describes this shift from traditional theological reflection: "Rather than trying, in the first instance, to apply a received theology to a local context, this new kind of theology began with an examination of the context itself," and "a realization that all theologies have contexts, interests, relationships of power, special concerns—and to pretend that this is not the case is to be blind" (1985, 4).

Here's how one respected practitioner in the Middle East described the

process, in the context of discussing the translation of key terms:

> If we start with our denomination's theology, or a creed, etc., instead of the NT, we may be guilty of imposing our theology on people, instead of giving them the meaning of the NT words and allowing the Holy Spirit to show them how it applies to their culture. Theologies are developed to answer the issues of a certain culture in a certain time and are not necessarily relevant to other times and places. For instance, how many American seminaries teach courses on idolatry or witchcraft? It is not a major issue in our culture, so we don't develop detailed theologies to deal with it.[5]

This description—beginning with context, rather than the text—tends to make those schooled in Western seminaries very nervous, with their traditional curriculum of Systematic Theology, Historical Theology, etc. The latter have learned to contend for universal biblical "Truth" in the face of "Tolerance," cultural relativism, and the declining influence of Christianity in government, education, and the public square. Voices raised against the relativistic tide decry a kind of "anthropological captivity of missiology," and reaffirm the importance of doctrine, propositional truth, and the "transcendent message" of the gospel.[6]

For example, in a 2008 conference address, Dr. John MacArthur famously decried contextualization as "zip-code ministry":

> The apostles went out with an absolute disdain for contextualization. The modern drive for cultural contextualization is a curse, because people are wasting their time trying to figure out clever ways to draw in the elect. Contextualization is "zip-code ministry." The message of Jesus Christ, on the other hand, is transcendent. It goes beyond its immediate culture or sub-culture. It crosses the world, and ignores the nuances of culture. It never descends to clothing or musical style, as if that had anything to do with the message of the gospel.[7]

But as some respondents wryly noted, MacArthur's ministry is itself culture-shaped and zip-code based. All truth is expressed in cultural forms, from the language and literary structures of Scripture (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek; proverbs, poetry, epistles, law, treaties, genealogies, stories, parables, laments, curses, blessings, etc.) to the supreme paradigm of the Incarnation itself, when the "Word became flesh." The Son of God did not clock "hang-time" somewhere between heaven and earth, like a demi-god or jumping athlete. He taught and ate and left his footprints in Nazareth, Galilee, and the rural routes of Palestine. He suffered, died on a cross, and rose from a tomb left empty in the urban "zip-code" of Jerusalem. In the process, He dignified space and time, culture and creation.

This helps us situate insider missiology within the vestiges of the post-colonial project.

As a final note here, one detects in Schreiter's comments above, as well as MacArthur's, the nuance that local theologizing is taking place—must, should, will take place—in apposition to the real or imagined imposition of a "received theology" from the outside. The identity of local theologies is being constructed, contested, negotiated; local/contextual theologizing takes place vis-à-vis critique of (or by) the *perceived "Other,"* a universal, usually Western-ized church and theology. In the words of Kwame Bediako, "Western theology was for so long presented in all its particulars as *the* theology of the Church, when, in fact, it was geographically localized and culturally limited, European and Western, and not universal" (quoted in Vanhoozer, 2006, 88).

This helps us situate insider missiology and movements within the vestiges of the post-colonial project, as part of the Majority World church and the trend toward global theologizing, with all the attendant challenges and sensitivities involved.

Thus, the development of local theologies in Islamic contexts (represented by insider missiology—with more or less input from outsider "alongsiders") is taking place in an environment sensitized to issues of power, injustice, oppression, economic inequities, etc., as well as the troubled history of Islam and the West. If we add the post-9/11 steroids of prejudice, bigotry, hate, fear, mistrust and misunderstanding in relation to Islam and Muslims, we end up with a toxic brew that threatens to distort our visual acuity and poison our discussion of theological issues and the process of theological reflection.

As Tennent (2007, 13) advises, we must find a "proper balance" between the universal and the particular, or (as Walls puts it) between the "pilgrim principle" and the "indigenizing principle"—affirming the universal truths of the gospel for all peoples in all places and times, while remaining open to new insights into gospel truth as the Word takes root and bears fruit in the soil of new hearts and minds and cultures.

Lens 7: Other Religions

Discontinuity • Exclusivism • Radical Disjunction

—or—

Continuity • Fulfillment • *Praeparatio Evangelica*

The seventh and eighth lenses are closely related: the seventh involves our philosophical approach to other religions,

while the eighth lens looks at approaches to *Islam* and Muslims in particular.

The New Testament clearly affirms the uniqueness and exclusivity of Christ as the only way to God and salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). There are different understandings, however, of the notion of "religion" itself, and different Christian attitudes and approaches toward non-Christian religions and faith communities (Bosch, 1991, 474-89). These are usually classified as three broad positions generally known as Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism (Wright, 2000, 951-53), or Exclusivism, Fulfillment, and Relativism (Bosch, 1991, 478-83). Bosch contends that "the two largest unsolved problems for the Christian church" today are "its relationship (1) to *world views which offer this worldly salvation,* and (2) to *other faiths" (1991, 276-*77, emphasis his).

In the debate over insider missiology, one issue is the continuity or discontinuity between religions and religious worldviews. On one end of the spectrum, Christian faith comes as the fulfillment of the aspirations of other religious traditions, and becomes what Scottish missionary J. N. Farquhar (1861-1929) called the "crown" (of Hinduism) (1913; see Netland, 2001, 33ff.). Insider missiology is clearly sympathetic to this perspective in relation to Islam. Elements of culture and other religions function as *praeparatio evangelica;* these prepare the way for the gospel (for the discussion related to the Islam, see Singh, 2010).

Thus, Lamin Sanneh (2003, 2009) argues that divine preparation for the gospel preceded the arrival of missionaries in Africa. The coming of gospel light "rekindles" the sparks "entrusted to all living cultures" into a "living flame" of faith. This provides a theological basis for translating the Scriptures into all vernacular cultures. He notes further that the response to Christian faith in Africa is linked to those societies where the indigenous name for God was used. Thus the notion that "Christ does not arrive as a stranger to any culture."

To what degree is public identification with the heritage and adoptive past of a religious community relevant to following Jesus?

The contrasting side is aligned with Kraemer's position (1947 [1938]), rejecting continuity and compatibility between Christianity and other religions and instead asserting radical discontinuity and a clear line of distinction (cf. Singh, 2010, 234). The differences, then as now, involve intense dispute.

In a separate but related argument, some insider advocates, following post-Enlightenment and contemporary Western critiques of religion (cf. Bosch, 1991, 474-76), use the terms "religion," "church," and "Christianity" in a pejorative sense, in juxtaposition to their preferred terms "Kingdom" and "Jesus-centered new movements." Analysis of their argumentation exhibits a method of defending insider missiology and movements by painting their critics as historically and culturally rooted defenders of the (Western) faith, whose now-reduced place in the global Christian movement serves to undermine the legitimacy of their claims to superior wisdom and insight.

The net effect is to allow for an escape from the burden of Christian history and the "common adoptive past" affirmed by Walls: Who wants to be left "holding the bag" in defense of "Christianity" and two thousand years of real or imagined Christian sins?

As E. Stanley Jones argued in 1925, perhaps more hopefully than presciently, "India can now take from Christ because she is able to disassociate him from the West.... [T]he centering of everything upon the person of Jesus clears the issue and has given us a new vitalizing of our work" (1925, 109-110). In a similar vein for Sunder Singh and N. V. Tilak, "the direct experience of Jesus" was foundational to their faith and led them to walk outside the boundaries of the organized church (Singh, 2009).

Granted, insider proponents argue that insider believers do, in fact, identify with the larger body of Christ. But this identity would appear to be largely in their hearts, in the meeting room, and with select individuals who, in effect, mediate that relationship. For *security* reasons, for *social* reasons, and now for *theological* reasons, Christian identity is not assumed or marked in public, or in the now globalized public square.

One major question, therefore, involves our understanding of "identity," one of the most complex and well-researched concepts in every branch of the social sciences today. To what degree is public identification with the heritage and adoptive past of a religious community—as it is commonly understood, even by the Muslim *ummah*—relevant to following Jesus?

There are pragmatic reasons for saying it is not. Certainly anyone with experience sharing the good news with Muslims wants to maintain distance from exterior religion, false or nominal Christians, and the historical and highly charged stereotypes associated with Christianity. The focus is on the Person of Jesus himself as embodying "the gospel."

But some insider theorists and practitioners are saying more than this. "Religious identity" is contrasted with "Following Jesus." The former is reified as a negative category, an idol of human fabrication (cf. the discussion of Calvin and Barth in Bosch, 1991, 478-79). It is reduced to historically conditioned human efforts, ethics, and cultic observances; and it is associated with identity in a largely Western, bounded social group (see, e.g., Medearis, 2011).

The boundaries associated with faith communities are also rejected. This reductionist generalization about "Religion" is contrasted with a "Kingdom"

ideal based on the New Testament, to promote and defend the emergence of Restoration-type movements to (and communities of) Jesus that retain and/or reframe their former "religious" identity within their faith community. In this view, according to Bosch (1991, 477), "What is really called for, however, is not just in*cultur*ation but in*religion*ization," the implanting of a new faith and spiritual center within an existing religious tradition, community and system.

Note in passing that in insider missiology, public identification with one faith community's socio-religious identity (Christian) is rejected, while the other (Muslim) is affirmed as necessary, or at very least acceptable, for the sake of a larger *telos* (e.g., rapid evangelization, church-planting movements, cultural transformation from within).

But really, this is nothing new. One again hears echoes from the past, for example, E. Stanley Jones' *The Christ of the Indian Road* (1925, 59):

> Christianity is actually breaking out beyond the borders of the Christian church and is being seen in most unexpected places. If those who have not the spirit of Jesus are none of his, no matter what outward symbols they possess, then conversely those who have the spirit of Jesus are his, no matter what outward symbols they may lack. In a spiritual movement like that of Jesus it is difficult and impossible to mark its frontiers. Statistics and classifications lose their meaning and are impotent to tell who are in and who are not.

For Jones, "Jesus told us it would be so," by describing Kingdom growth in two ways: (1) "outwardly," like a mustard seed growing into a tree, that is, "men coming into the organized expression of the Kingdom, namely, the Christian church"; and (2) "silently," like leaven permeating the whole: "this tells of the *silent permeation of the minds and hearts of men by Christian truth and thought* until, from within, but scarcely knowing what is happening, *the spirit and outlook of men would be silently leavened by the spirit of Jesus*—they would be *Christianized from within*. We see these two things taking place with the impact of Christ upon the soul of the East" (1925, 59-60, emphasis added; cf. Morton, 2013).

Few descriptions capture better the Christo-centric passions and dreams of insider practitioners. Jones' prediction is certainly true in the Muslim world that Christianity is actually "breaking out beyond the borders" of the church and is "being seen in most unexpected places." Jones raises a probing parallel question: "Will the Christian Church be Christ-like enough to be the moral and spiritual center of this overflowing Christianity?" (1925, 69).

Few descriptions capture better the Christo-centric passions and dreams of insider practitioners.

This suggests that the way Muslim followers of Christ understand and work out their new identity in Christ in a given context is not merely a local affair. How does this "overflowing Christianity" relate to the "moral and spiritual center" represented by the Christian church? The manner by which new identities are constructed, negotiated, or contested by others—in the national/regional/global Christian community, as well as in the Muslim *ummah*—is critical.

The reality is that the Christian faith is an historical religion like any other, with characteristics common to all. This enables us to speak of and understand other religions and their adherents without judgment (Singh, 2010, 230; cf. Smart, 1998), even as we invite them, with love and respect, to follow Christ.

To inform the ongoing discussion, we need to draw not only on mission field surveys, but also analyses from the fields of psychology, sociology, religious studies, church history, the history of religions, conversion studies, and other disciplines, including historical studies (e.g., the heated controversy over the theology of religions in the 1920s and 1930s). An appreciation for the church's diverse and "shifting perspectives" on other religions (see, e.g., Netland, 2001, 23-54) can broaden our frame of reference and foster much-needed patience, intellectual humility, and understanding in the contemporary dispute over engagement with other religions such as Islam.

Lens 8: Islam

"Islam" • Historically Essentialized • "Muslims" • Islamic Tradition

—or—

"islams" (lower case plural) • Culturally Embedded • "muslims" • "Which Islam?" "Whose Islam?"

Approaches to Islam (and Muslims) appear to move us to the heart of the divide. "The Nature of Islam" was chosen as one of three major topics at the Bridging the Divide Consultation 2012. This lens is influenced by the other lenses or filters, as well as by one's academic-*cum*-disciplinary perspective, each of which has its own favored methodologies, aims, scopes, and agendas (Marranci, 2008, 3).

One primary dichotomy here is represented by the contrast between Islam viewed as (1) a unifying *essence* across disparate social, cultural, intellectual, and historical realities; and (2) a *social* phenomenon variously embedded in local contexts.

The traditional approach of Oriental Studies tends to be textual (Qur'an,

Hadith), focused on Arabic, philosophy, theology, history, and related literatures (Persian, Turkish, Urdu). Islam is also viewed developmentally as an historical tradition and phenomenon. Dominated by Western scholars, Orientalism has suffered well-known criticisms for perpetuating stereotyped representations of Islam and Muslims.

In contrast, the social and anthropological approach to Islam emerged in the 1970s and 1980s utilizing social science methodologies (e.g., participant observation). The focus is not on an essentialized Islam, but on the anthropology of Islam and its unique regional and local expressions.

Geertz's seminal *Islam Observed* (1968), followed by el-Zein (1977), Gellner (1981) and Gilsenen (1990 [1982]), influenced a generation of anthropologists. Eickelman (1982, 1997 [1981]), Caton (1990), and Abu-Lughod (1986, 1993) carried forward the study of "Islam in local contexts," albeit primarily in the Middle East/North Africa.

In 1977, El-Zein proposed that there is not one "Islam" but many "islams" (lower case, plural). Esposito (2002) emphasizes that diversity in Islam is also affected by leadership, authority, and global forces. Thus, we need to ask two major questions: "Whose Islam?", that is, "Who decides, interprets, leads, and implements" reform in a given context (rulers, military, clergy, activists, intellectuals, etc.)?; and "What Islam?", that is, is the Islam envisioned "a restoration of past doctrines and laws, or is it a reformation through reinterpretation and reformulation of Islam to meet the demands of modern life?" (Esposito, 2002, 70-71).

Textured ethnographic studies of everyday Islam ("lived Islam") among Muslim people groups have enormous value; they are greatly needed if servants of Christ are to move beyond stereotypes, sterile generalizations, and surface understandings of Islam as a lived religion.

The focus is not an essentialized Islam, but on the anthropology of Islam and its unique regional and local expressions.

This challenge, and the studies cited above, inspired my own ethnographic research into Muslim identity and folklore in Afghanistan and northwest Pakistan (Bartlotti, 2000).

Anthropologist Marranchi (2008, 7) succinctly summarizes the shift: "We should start from Muslims, rather than Islam," and make the former our object of study. The emphasis is on understanding Muslims as people, what being a Muslim means to them, how Muslim identity is marked, and the distinct self-understandings, values, and emotions of Muslims in diverse contexts. The knowledge base is textured ethnographic studies.

Putting it another way, the dichotomy is between (1) "Muslims" understood as having a common way of believing, thinking, behaving, etc., despite disparities of culture, and (2) "muslims" (lower case) understood as cultural muslims, whose sense of religious identity is locally, ethnically, and culturally constructed. In a critical corollary for insider advocates, this leaves room for idiosyncratic expressions and constructions of Muslimness (viz. "Muslim followers of Christ").

The essentialism of the traditional approach tends to smooth out ethnographic particularities, leading to what Marranchi (2008, 6) calls "the fallacy of the 'Muslim mind theory.'" Generally, insider practitioners and advocates lean toward the other side of the spectrum.

The insider emphasis on particularities, however, risks overlooking historical influences, downplaying connectivities, and oversimplifying notions of causality. The local is sacralized.

In a globalized world, flattened lines of authority, multiple networks, transnational identities, economic migration, and social media add complexity to our understanding of identity and ethnicity (cf. Banks, 1996) and the often-exoticized "local."

Whether the focus is on the macro or the micro, the state or local-regional dynamics, Eickelman reminds us that the "universalistic and particularistic strains" of Islam are "in dynamic tension with each other" (1995, 342), and they have come to constitute an important area for study. Scholar-practitioners across the divide must learn to appreciate the "dynamic tension" and drill down into new pools of knowledge, while drawing upon a wide range of resources and insights available via multiple disciplinary perspectives.

Lens 9: Conversion-Initiation

Event •
Believing, Behaving, Belonging •
People of God • Bounded Set •
Clear In/out Markers of Identity

—or—

Process •
Belonging, Behaving, Believing •
Kingdom of God • Centered Set •
Moving toward Christ

A final lens through which to view insider movements is a sub-set of frontier missiology that may be called "Conversion Studies." In this case, I have chosen a broader heading based on the classic study by New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn (1970) on the baptism in the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. In the social sciences, the term "conversion" can refer to the complex of cognitive-emotional-religious meanings associated with personal change; "initiation" involves elements and behaviors related to recruitment, participation, and belonging to a new social group or movement.

Dunn shows that water baptism is one element in a "conversion-initiation" process. (In the phenomenology of Lukan theology, Luke is concerned not with the *ordo salutis,* but with visible markers of the age of the Spirit inaugurated by the Messiah.) Conversion-initiation in Acts involves five elements: repentance, faith, water baptism, Spirit baptism or the gift of the Spirit, and incorporation into the community of faith.

At issue, then, is the process of *how* people (Muslims) come to faith and begin to follow Christ as members of His people, and the biblical *markers* of change.

Traditionally, the truth encounter is in the foreground. Crisis conversion is followed by a discipleship process, leading to life change and incorporation into a (generally heterogeneous) group or church. There are clear markers of faith and new life, viz. public confession of faith, identification with the Christian community, water baptism, open witness, etc. Believers are to be bold in witness and renounce their former way of life. People know who is "in" or "out" of the family of faith.

On the other side of the spectrum, closer to the insider view, the notion of *process* and the concept of faith as a *journey* are central. This is expressed in the now-familiar "belonging-behaving-believing" schema popular in the "emerging church" model in the West. Faith emerges in the context of an "Emmaus Road" journey to faith with others, involving a gradual discovery of the Person of Christ, His truth and way of salvation.

Hiebert (1994) introduced an analogy from set theory that is used to undergird this approach. He proposed viewing the church in terms of "bounded sets" versus "centered sets." In the former, the focus tends to be on who is "in" or "out," and there are clear boundaries to the faith community. In a centered set, the focus is not on the boundaries but on the center, viz. Jesus Christ; and the critical issue is one's movement toward, or away, from him.

The "process" side of the spectrum is comfortable with conversion-initiation as a long road without clear mile markers or what most people consider "religious distinctives" associated with a particular faith community. The length of journey, timing of regeneration, and the boundary lines are fuzzy, as are the progress markers; the direction, however, is not.

Centered set theory is nearly unchallengeable truth in some circles, and appears to be one assumption of insider advocates. Moving "toward" Christ approximates "following" Christ and His teaching. Movement in turn is equated with "true" faith = follower of Jesus = a real "Christian" (though not publicly so named). This contrasts with those who are so in name only, who are made to bear the weight of that maligned historical identity. The "distance" between various people and Jesus is reduced to a matter of personal contact or experience or degree of perceived obedience (not confession, regeneration, or baptism). The key issue is the direction of the arrow toward or away from Jesus—not the distance or relation to a boundary.

Centered set theory is nearly unchallengeable truth in some circles.

The conversion-initiation lens also focuses our attention on the theological issue of the *social* implications of spiritual *reconciliation* in Christ (e.g., between Jew and Gentile). As Constantineanu (2010, 209) demonstrates in his study of Pauline theology, reconciliation is an essential aspect of salvation and contains "an intrinsic, social, horizontal dimension" that cannot be separated from vertical reconciliation with God: the two are "inseparable … two dimensions of the same reality." The new identity believers share as reconciled people in Christ is "the basis for their sharing in, or living out, a reconciled life with others."

Can one argue for the liberty of Muslim followers of Christ (cf. Acts 15:7-11) to continue to identify with Muslims, but find it inconvenient for them to identify publicly with "Christian" brothers and sisters—due to the consequences or *social* stigma in the eyes of their own people? Peter tried it (cf. Gal 2:11-16) and was rebuked by Paul.

Relationships potentially *veil or reveal the reality of a redeemed humanity.* "The shared table was the acid test" (Walls, 1996, 78).

A concerted study of the complexity of conversion can shed light on critical issues. This includes field studies of conversion to Christ (on the order of Syrjänen, 1984), as well as Christian conversion to Islam, in various cultural contexts in the West and Global South. Manger's (1999) study of the Lafofa of Sudan, for example, shows that Muslim identity is a dynamic process; "being a Muslim" is contested through the manipulation of the meaning(s) of a changing set of diacritical markers (individual customs and traits) that become symbols of Muslim identity.

It is well known that conversion is a multifaceted process involving personal, cultural, social, and religious dimensions. Thus, studies are needed that include, but go beyond, surveys and interviews with converts and assumptions about causality. Buckser and Glazier (2003, 212ff.) suggest studies of the "contextual matrix of conversion" (e.g., the role of the family and others in the individual intrapsychic

process); the processes of conversion, including the subtleties of "first contact"; longitudinal versus synchronic studies, to explore the long-term consequences of religious change; the definition of "conversion" itself (what exactly is changed?); differences between outsider and insider points of view (epistemologically, phenomenologically); and the role of theology in the way the process is understood and framed (see, e.g., Kraft, 2013).

The disciplines of theology, biblical studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and historical studies—all offer possible perspectives through which to understand the multifaceted processes involved in Muslims coming to faith in Christ in diverse contexts around the world. There is no single way to understand conversion. There are multiple theoretical approaches, multiple "lenses." This brings us full circle.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that *multiple theological presuppositions* lie at the heart of insider missiology. These presuppositions consciously or unconsciously affect the way proponents have presented, and concerned observers have critiqued, insider movements and insider missiology. The nine interrelated assumptions or background beliefs discussed above—ecclesiology, authority, culture, pneumatology, history, doing theology, other religions, Islam, and conversion-initiation—comprise an array of "talking points" for further dialogue and critique.

The question, "Are you for or against insider movements?" has been shown to be simplistic in the extreme. An individual observer—whether an advocate, insider, or alongsider, or a critic, concerned Christian, or scholar-activist—may deem one of these theological/missiological lenses more significant than others in assessing insider movements.

The right-hand column of Table 1 (next page) summarizes the primary theological presuppositions associated

The question, "Are you for or against insider movements?" has been shown to be simplistic in the extreme.

with insider missiology. To date, most discussions of insider missiology have been complicated by the fact that advocates have braided these notions into one tight, multi-strand argument legitimizing or promoting insider approaches and movements. Likewise some critics have adopted a "zero-sum" approach that reduces the debate to winners and losers.

This analysis has shown that insider missiology is multivocal, not univocal: insider advocates are saying many things, not one thing. Thus, insider missiology must be assessed—and must be willing to be judged, and adjusted—accordingly. Each element involves critical theological issues.

How we view any single element in this set of interrelated issues influences what we "see" when we look "inside" insider movements, and affects our judgment of what is true, right, fair, and biblical in relation to one of the most contentious subjects on the current mission scene

Throughout this paper, my aim is not to defend or criticize a particular position, nor to argue for one approach over the other. I have taken the risk of over-simplifying and dichotomizing a set of immensely complex concepts in order to underline the point that there is a *spectrum of defensible and contested biblical positions* on each issue.

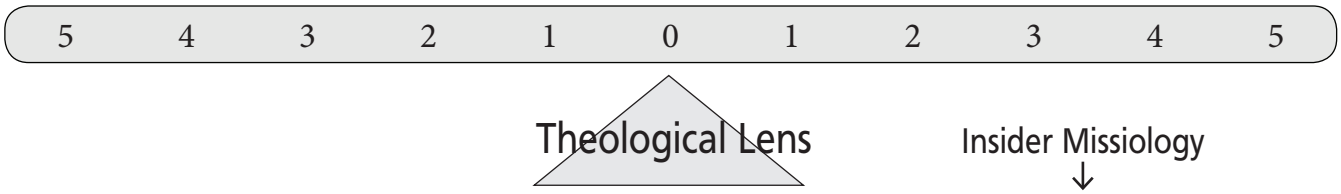
The doyen of Islamic Studies, Bernard Lewis, was recently described as someone who has always been "unusually alert to nuance and ambiguity; he is wary of his sources and tests them against other evidence."[8] Alertness to nuance, tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to test sources against other evidence, are difficult qualities to cultivate in the high-octane world of missions, where pragmatics ("what works?") can trump diagnostics ("what's really going on here?") and biblical hermeneutics can become the handmaiden of our own cherished presumptions.

Thus, in addition to suggestions for dialogue and further study

interlaced with analysis throughout this paper, I would like to offer a few closing recommendations:

1. *Understand insider missiology and movements from within,* by talking with and listening to the voices of Muslim followers of Christ. In this, the emerging research and data from the field will play an important role in helping us move toward a "thick description"[9] of what following Christ means for these new believers and groups.
2. *Balance empathy with a sanctified hermeneutic of questioning.* Other voices must be heard as well. This recommendation applies particularly to sympathetic local workers, alongsiders, and researchers. In most insider contexts, we are dealing with cultures where interpersonal and intercultural communication are influenced by notions of honor and shame, patron-client relationships, economics, and power dynamics. Suspicion and intrigue are in the air. One mark of wisdom, understanding, and spirituality is the ability to distinguish the *outside* dimension (Arabic *zahir,* exterior, apparent meaning) from that which is on the *inside* (Arabic *batin,* hidden, inner, spiritual dimension). This applies not only to understanding the Holy Books and to spirituality, but also, importantly, to relationships. In the latter case, failure to question or discern inner intentions can be, in local eyes, both a sign of foolishness and patently dangerous.

Table 1. Theological Presuppositions of Insider Missiology and the Evangelical Spectrum



Word Sacraments Discipline, Order Leadership Pauline Emphasis	Ecclesiology/ Church	Word Spirit Two or three gathered Simple church Synoptic Jesus emphasis
Scripture Apostolic teaching & ministries Outside resourcing	Authority	Scripture Local believers Local decisions
Christ "against" Christ "over" or "in paradox with"	Culture	Christ "of" Christ "transforming"
Spirit-appointed leadership Sacraments & channels of grace Disciplined growth "Wind"	Pneumatology/ Holy Spirit	Spirit-anointed leadership Sovereignty of Spirit Spontaneous expansion "Rushing mighty wind"
Spirit active throughout history Church's wisdom (theologies, creeds, councils) Faithfulness "Faith once delivered"	History	Spirit active now in local context New insights & expressions Freedom "A new thing"
Universal truths Western theological tradition "Pilgrim Principle"	Doing Theology	Local (contextual) theologies Theologies from majority world church "Indigenizing Principle"
Discontinuity Exclusivism Radical disjunction	Other Religions	Continuity Fulfillment *Praeparatio Evangelica*
"Islam" Historically essentialized "Muslims" Islamic tradition	Islam	"islams" (lower case, plural) Culturally embedded "muslims" "Which Islam?" "Whose Islam?"
Event Believing, behaving, belonging People of God Bounded Set Clear in/out markers of identity	Conversion-Initiation	Process Belonging, behaving, believing Kingdom of God Centered Set Moving towards Christ

3. *Listen with discernment.* Alongsiders, analysts, and observers need to discern the full range of cultural, relational, economic, linguistic, and other dynamics at work in a given situation. The reality is that insider voices are generally mediated voices, due to security issues, language, and other factors. Sympathizers and critics alike bear a special responsibility to discern their own biases; to exercise discernment of spirits; to acknowledge the role of their own theological and missiological presuppositions; to recognize the line between description and prescription; and to speak with love and respect, boldness and humility. As a faculty at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, we used to challenge our PhD scholars to dig deeper into field realities by raising this one important question: "What's really going on when what's going on is going on?"[10]
4. *Ask the hard questions.* "Facts are friendly," one of my former colleagues used to say, quoting his doctoral supervisor. Let's not be afraid to ask critical questions, especially questions related to biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. The Word of God is our final authority. Notwithstanding the desire to be culturally sensitive and contextually relevant, we must discipline ourselves to think biblically and deeply about these matters. In this process, scholar-practitioners must resist the temptation to proof-text their case, or make hermeneutical leaps. This is a call for a deeper immersion in the Scriptures.
5. *Explore multi-perspectival views.* The same situation can be interpreted in different ways. A multi-disciplinary and multiple lens approach to insider missiology should be welcomed. This does not minimize or discredit more narrow disciplinary analyses. We must welcome expertise derived from Biblical Studies, Theology, Missiology, Islamic Studies, Anthropology, Linguistics, and other disciplines, and not dismiss the insights of those who may lack "field" experience. What is required is a Jesus-style of scholarship that (1) allows others to sit at the table and have a voice, even if we disagree, and (2) raises one's own voice with both courage and humility.

We used to challenge our PhD scholars to dig deeper into field realities by raising this one important question . . .

6. *Engage the ongoing process of "Globalizing Theology."* We need to hear again Hiebert's call for "metatheology," for local Christian communities to "do theology within their own local contexts but *in conversation with other Christians globally*" (Hiebert, 1994, 102-103, emphasis added). Netland (2006, 30) defines "globalizing theology" as "theological reflection rooted in God's self-revelation in Scripture and informed by the historical legacy of the Christian community through the ages, the current realities in the world, and the diverse perspectives of Christian communities throughout the world, with a view to greater holiness in living and faithfulness in fulfilling God's mission in all the world through the church."[11] Insider advocates in local settings bear a special responsibility to engage in both deeper theological reflection and a broader global conversation.
7. *Bridge the Divide.* The divide on matters of Muslim contextualization is both ideological and relational. Bridging the divide involves content and process, biblical interpretation and biblical fidelity, boldness of conviction and mutual respect, purity of heart and a Christ-like tone of voice. In the ongoing process, we must embrace the tensions and ambiguities, and persevere in love, listening, speaking, and learning with others in the worldwide church. Let us affirm evangelical unity, delight in (or at least tolerate) evangelical ambiguity, and create space for evangelical diversity.

Joyfully we can affirm that this process of seeking spiritual wisdom and insight from the Word of God now includes new brothers and sisters with a Muslim heritage. These communities of faith in Jesus Christ are singing praises to the Lamb of God, who reigns on high and in thousands of hearts within the heart of the Islamic world. **IJFM**

Endnotes

[1] For a discussion of current issues related to insider missiology and movements, see Haskell, Rob and Don Little, eds. "Insider Movements: Bridging the Divide." Special issue. *Evangelical Review of Theology* 37, no. 4 (2013).

[2] Email message to author, January 28, 2014.

[3] For a current critique of Niebuhr, see D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

[4] Some evidence is anecdotal; other evidence is based on surveys and a growing body of field-based research in progress.

[5] Email message to author, May 18, 2012.

[6] See the website BiblicalMissiology.com for representative samples of vocal opposition to Muslim contextualization, including the debate over Bible translation principles for Muslim audiences. See also *St. Francis Magazine* published online at http://www.stfrancismagazine.info/ja/.

[7] This text is from a detailed "summarized paraphrase" of MacArthur's message by Nathan Busenitz published in *Pulpit Magazine: A Ministry of Shepherds' Fellowship,* March 5, 2008. http://www.sfpulpit.com/2008/03/05/opening-session-%e2%80%93-wednesday-morning/.

[8] Eric Ormsby, "The Tale of the Dragoman," review of *Notes on a Century* by Bernard Lewis, *Wall Street Journal Online,* May 11, 2012. http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304743704577380390207004120.html/ (accessed May 16, 2012).

[9] A key term in the anthropology of Clifford Geertz, "thick description" of a culture goes beyond factual description to analyze the conceptual structures and complex layers of meaning and interpretation ascribed to specific contextual happenings. See Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

[10] I am grateful to Dr. Bernard Farr, Senior Residentiary Research Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, for this insight.

[11] Paul Hiebert, "Metatheology: The Step Beyond Contextualization," in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 102-103, emphasis added.

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